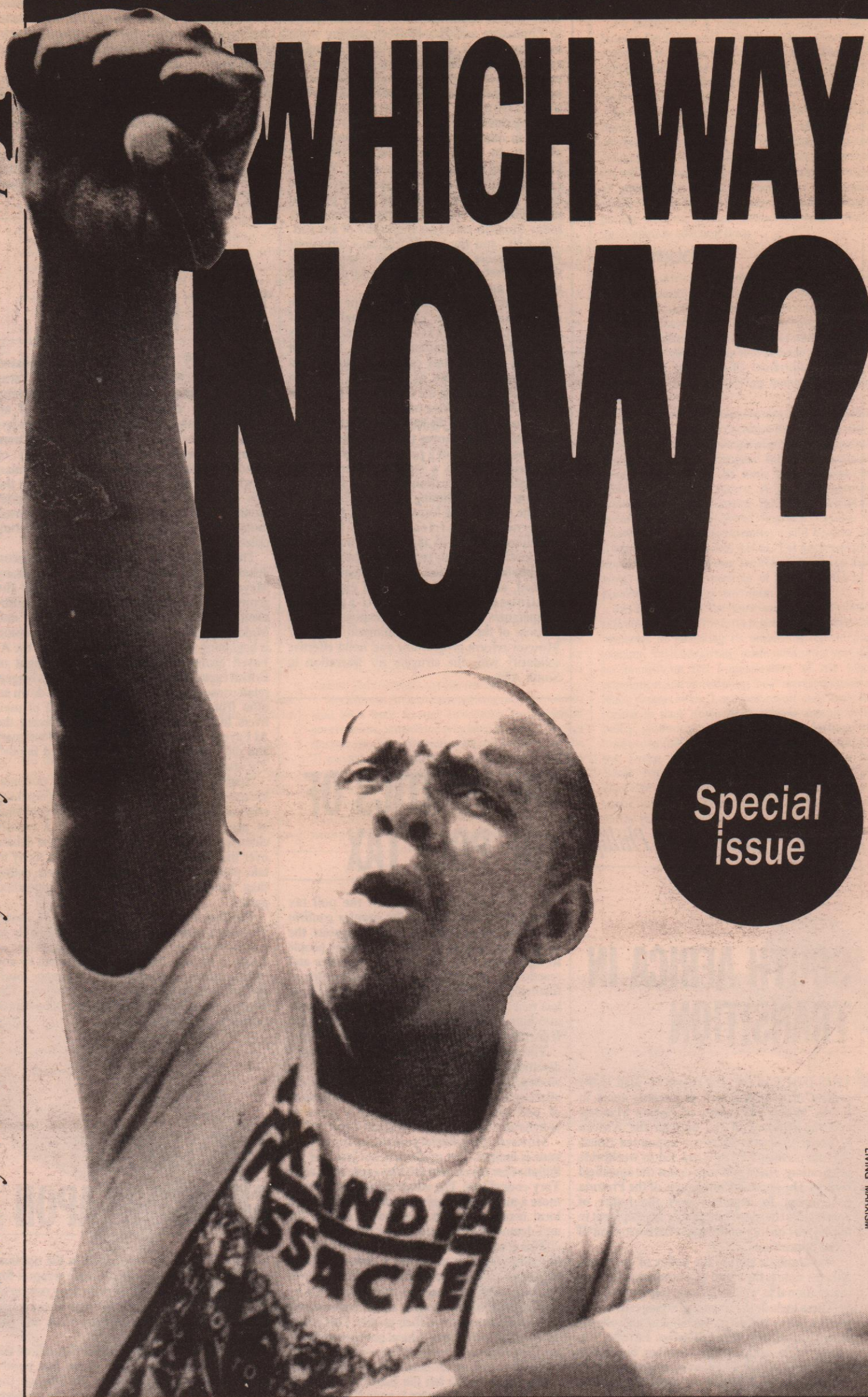


the next step

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THE STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

WHICH WAY NOW?



Special
issue

LIVING MARXISM

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Editor: Joan Phillips

SOUTH AFRICA IN TRANSITION

THIS ISSUE of the next step is devoted to the process of transition now proceeding apace in South Africa. The release of Nelson Mandela and the removal of the ban on the African National Congress by newly appointed South African premier FW de Klerk led to worldwide celebrations among all who detest the apartheid regime. The apparent willingness of the Pretoria government to negotiate over the future of apartheid is the most remarkable development in the 40-year history of this most barbaric form of racial oppression.

The dramatic shift in the policy of the South African state is the result of a number of factors, international as well as internal (see pages 4 and 5). These include the impact of changes in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. The success of the settlement in Namibia, negotiated with direct US and Soviet involvement, also gave Pretoria new confidence to press ahead with talks closer to home.

The decline in the military capability of the ANC, partly a result of the withdrawal of Soviet backing, was another factor. The wave of repression conducted under the state of emergency has also succeeded in containing domestic opposition for the first time for a decade.

De Klerk's plan is to pursue negotiations with key black representatives, including Mandela, while stepping up measures to fragment resistance from the mass of the black population.

Behind the programme of democratic reforms lies a strategy of intensifying divisions within and between black communities (see page 3).

Can the Pretoria regime succeed in following other African countries from Algeria and Kenya to Zimbabwe and Namibia in replacing white minority tyranny with a more stable system of capitalist rule? In some ways its problems seem much greater than in these countries. It has a much bigger and more entrenched white population and a much stronger black working class.

Yet in other ways the South African ruling class is in a stronger position than its predecessors were elsewhere in Africa. Whereas earlier liberation movements were inspired by the Soviet model of socialism and given practical and diplomatic support by the Eastern bloc, today Moscow offers no alternative of any sort. The ANC and the South African Communist Party are more inclined towards compromising with the Pretoria regime than towards leading resistance against it (see page 7).

While the mass movement is on the defensive as a result of the changing balance of international forces, the regime enjoys unprecedented international backing. The main effect of the sanctions campaign has been to strengthen the hand of the major Western powers in influencing the terms of the transition process in South Africa (see page 6).

For most people in the West the release of Mandela and the moves towards talks seem to offer the possibility of a peaceful transition from apartheid terror to a stable democracy. But negotiations in a situation where one side is in a position of overwhelming power can only mean that the other side is forced to accept its terms.

Throughout Africa the post-colonial 'solutions' imposed by the Western powers and their local allies simply reorganised the structures of capitalist domination. Mass movements were crushed, activists slaughtered and exploitation continued unhindered. Anti-apartheid campaigners in Britain must expose the real purpose of the Pretoria/Washington/London/Moscow reform programme and build effective solidarity with the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

THE POLITICS OF THE POLL TAX

THE ANGRY protests against the poll tax outside town halls around the country confirm the depth of popular resentment against the government and the willingness of many people to fight back. The poll tax is a regressive and reactionary imposition. It shifts the burden of financing local services from the wealthy to the less well off. It allows council officials to intrude into homes and to intensify official surveillance. It discourages people from registering for the vote.

The poll tax has become a focus for a range of dissatisfactions with the government. At a time when prices, mortgage rates and interest rates are all rising, the government's inept underestimation of poll tax levels has provoked a wave of indignation, not least among loyal Tory voters.

However, the political potential of the poll tax issue is limited. The problem is not just that the initiative for the current protests came from rebel Tory councillors. The whole campaign is much more a middle class revolt against the burden of local taxation than it is a protest against the anti-democratic character of the poll tax.

This is an important distinction. The poll tax, like other taxes, is ultimately a deduction from the surplus-value appropriated by capitalists. Whereas workers can compensate for higher taxation by pushing for higher wages, small businessmen have to pay taxes out of their profits. This is why the Conservative Party in local government grew out of 'ratepayers' organisations—and why such campaigns have never been a focus for the left.

For many on the left the 'broad' character of the anti-poll tax campaign is an indication of its strength. In fact it reveals its political diffuseness and explains why ultimately the government can shrug it off. The list of opponents of the poll tax includes the Police Federation and the Engineering Employers Federation. It is obvious that linking up with these bodies against the poll tax can only confuse and weaken workers confronted by their erstwhile anti-poll tax allies across the picket lines.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has not been in the forefront of the recent campaign

against the poll tax. This is not because of any reluctance to confront Labour councils or the police, or because we are concerned by the red-baiting of the media. It is because our experience in campaigning against the poll tax in Scotland and elsewhere (notably in west London) last year showed that it had limited potential for politicising those who became involved.

We fully support protests against the poll tax and defend those involved against police and media attacks. We condemn Labour (and Scottish Nationalist) councils for their complicity in implementing this iniquitous charge. But we prefer to devote our campaigning energies to issues which have more potential for clarifying and strengthening working class politics.

TORY BLUES

MARGARET THATCHER has dismissed rumours of her resignation as 'poppycock'. Yet at a time of nightly poll tax riots and growing apprehension about the likely impact of an unpopular budget on the Mid-Staffordshire by-election and the local elections, the rumours were enough to send jitters through the City of London. With Peter Walker joining Norman Fowler and Nigel Lawson in rediscovering the joys of family life, the prospect of Margaret joining Denis at the Dulwich fireside caused momentary excitement among the chattering classes.

The reopening of the Thatcher succession debate so soon after the despatch of Anthony Meyer's pre-Christmas challenge reflects the growing insecurities inside the British establishment. While Heseltine and Hurd, Baker and Major jockey for position, the slide into recession is beginning to accelerate. The scandal of the Al Fayed brothers cruelly exposes the plight of British capitalism. It reveals that Britain's biggest retail consortium cannot afford to turn down an offer from men with carrier bags full of used fivers. In the eyes of the British establishment, the Al Fayed's offence was that they were foreigners and did not come from an 'established family'. The shame of imperial decline!

Neither Thatcher nor any of her potential successors has any answers to the deepening crisis of the British economy or to the problems of negotiating Britain's position in a rapidly changing Europe. Yet it is clear that the debate over the future of British capitalism is likely to take place within the Conservative Party, rather than between the Tories and the opposition parties.

The Tory crisis offers little comfort to Labour. Thatcher's political career is still more likely to end in voluntary retirement than in defeat at Kinnock's hands. Nor is her replacement by any of the current contenders likely to change much in the direction of government policy. The urgency of building a real opposition in British politics is greater than ever.

THE TORIES' SECRET WEAPON

LABOUR MAY be way ahead in the opinion polls but the Tories have a failsafe weapon for dealing with the opposition in the long run-up to the next election. Over the last few weeks it has completed extensive preliminary trials and the results were promising.

Tory Party chairman Kenneth Baker fired the opening salvoes in response to the first rowdy anti-poll tax demonstrations. He blamed the Militant Tendency for organising the protests and listed 28 Labour MPs who supported non-payment of the tax in defiance of the law. He called on the Labour leadership to clamp down on the left. True to form Neil Kinnock dutifully denounced Militant and the Campaign Group and set about stepping up the long-running witch-hunt of the far left, now virtually an endangered species in the new eco-sensitive Labour Party.

The result: a situation in which the Tories were on the defensive over the poll tax was transformed

into one where Labour was on the defensive over Militant. Direct hit.

Only days later, Margaret Thatcher herself joined in. As police attacks on the poll tax protests intensified, she demanded that Kinnock denounce the violence of the protesters. Kinnock leapt to his feet to 'agree with everything the right honourable lady had said'. Another direct hit, and Labour is not just on the defensive but on the run.

Kinnock's response to the scurrilous media allegations against miners' leader Arthur Scargill was another indication of the same spirit of deference. The press barons attack a left-wing union leader—and the first response of the leader of the Labour Party is to join in and call for blood. Kinnock believes that this servile behaviour will convince the British establishment of his fitness to rule. In reality it merely exposes his spinelessness.

We can expect much more of this as the election draws near. Whatever happened to those three Militant MPs during all the poll tax furore? Has the gutter press decided to go along with the MP's own desire for a life of anonymity on the backbenches? Or are they just saving them up for a day closer to the election, when they can expose the reds under Kinnock's bed and demand that he takes action against them? Kinnock's response is predictable—but will it help him at the polls?

HOW TO LOSE A STRIKE

THE DECISION by ambulance workers to return to work by a majority of four to one was the final result of the disastrous strategy pursued by the union leadership. The dispute provided a textbook illustration of how to lose a strike.

The unions had everything going for them. Their members were united in their determination to win a decent pay deal. There was overwhelming public support for the crews. The government was in the midst of a crisis, beset by problems, divided over the handling of the dispute and stumbling from one banana skin to the next. But the union strategy served only to isolate the crews and relieve the pressure on the Tories.

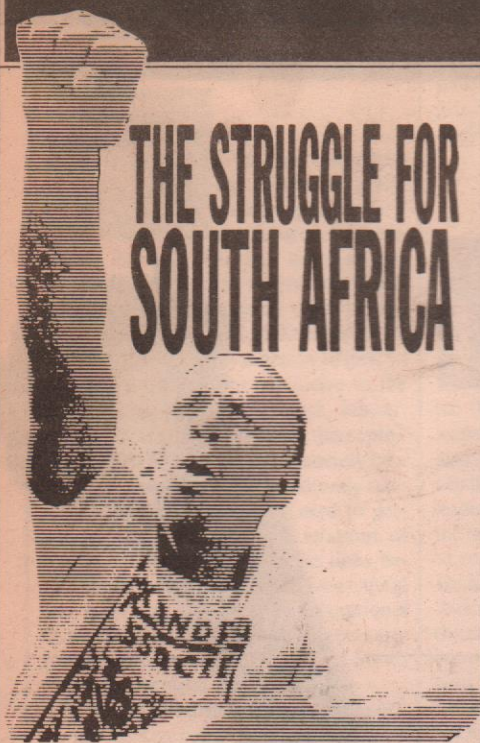
The union argument that ambulance workers were a special case created divisions between the crews and other health workers. The bureaucrats' desperation not to alienate public opinion ruled out any action which might have put pressure on the government. In the end the unions relied on nothing more than Roger Poole's PR smile to see them through. The result was to give the Tories some breathing room and enable the government to stick it out.

The final settlement gives the government virtually everything it wants. The pay rise is almost exactly the same as management offered nearly a year ago. There is no permanent pay mechanism or comparability scheme. And the deal allows management to create new divisions by enforcing differential pay for paramedics and creating a framework for local deals.

The strike could have been won if the dispute had been fought like an industrial war rather than a PR exercise. If rank and file members had taken matters into their own hands, confronted the divisions in their own ranks, gone all-out to win solidarity from other health workers and taken the action necessary to bring the Tories to their knees, then we could have been celebrating a famous victory today rather than mourning another defeat.

This is a special two-week edition of the *the next step*. The next issue will be out on Friday 30 March.

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THE STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

DE KLERK'S FIVE YEAR PLAN

DIVIDE AND RULE

Jenny Graham reveals how Pretoria's reform programme depends on intensifying divisions within the black population

wants to consolidate the ethnic and cultural divisions which have already been enforced through the homelands policy. And third, he hopes to establish a political system based on 'group representation' rather than on universal suffrage. The object of the whole exercise is to effect a transition to secure capitalist rule over a black population atomised by diverse economic and political forces, rather than through the naked coercion of apartheid.

The government's urbanisation programme aims to create a stable home-owning elite in the cities, while marginalising the majority of black people in informal settlements on the fringes of the townships. At the same time anti-squatting legislation introduced in February 1989 aims to curtail 'rapid unorderly urbanisation'. According to the National Campaign Against Removals, 1.2m settlers in the Eastern and Western Cape, greater Durban and Witwatersrand face removal as a result.

Township discipline

In townships where anti-government protests have taken place, the government has made funds available for 'upgrading' services. The object is to incorporate informal settlements into local government structures, by giving 'legal squatters' votes in municipal elections and by patronising local landlords or 'shacklords'. This strategy allows the authorities both to fragment further black communities and to use squatters to maintain discipline in the townships. One report has noted that 'these communities, with their mafia-style leadership and local bully boys, have become the cornerstone for maintaining law and order in the black townships' (*Surplus People Project Annual Report, 1988-89, p10*).

Government-sponsored patronage and corruption is at the root of much of the recent communal strife in Natal and the Western Cape.

Crossroads, once the centre of squatter resistance, was the first area in the region to be 'upgraded'. In 1986 many of its residents linked up with the state security forces to destroy neighbouring squatting communities.

The government has no intention of providing squatter settlements with decent services. While state

funds are used to foment communal tensions, between six and eight million South Africans—one in six of the population—are effectively homeless. In black urban households up to 22 people can share an average four-roomed house. The government strategy is clearly not intended to improve the living standards of the black masses but to create a more sophisticated method of township discipline.

The South African government's determination to preserve the homelands, territories artificially designated as the home of particular ethnic groupings, has provoked a series of recent revolts. The government wants to define ethnic or regional groups even more precisely so that it can make a distinction between South African and non-South African (homeland) blacks.

Unique democracy

Previously the authorities pursued the homelands policy by forcibly removing black families from their homes and settling them in the Bantustans. Now the government seeks to 'incorporate' more black people into the homelands by redrawing their borders. The government hopes that incorporation will induce homeland leaders to accept formal independence and thus take their peoples out of any future national South African electorate.

Incorporation, however, has provoked even fiercer resistance than forced removals. South African citizenship may not mean much to black people, but life in the homelands is even worse. Living standards are lower, services worse and repression more ferocious. Residents of independent homelands are aliens who cannot move freely in South Africa, and cannot work without special permits.

Black South African citizens living on incorporated land have been treated atrociously by homeland governments. Some have even been evicted as foreign trespassers. The communities of Moutse in the Transvaal and Botshabelo in the Orange Free State successfully fought court cases to invalidate their incorporation into KwaNdebele and Qua Qua. However, the government has now introduced new legislation to circumvent restrictions on its ability to incorporate land into non-independent homelands.

For the De Klerk government, democracy South African-style means not individual voting rights but group representation.

To justify such a policy, South Africa's rulers point to the 'failure of Westminster-style democracy' elsewhere in Africa. In fact group representation is simply a device to ensure that the votes of the white minority continue to enjoy disproportionate influence in the new South Africa.

In May 1988 Chris Heunis, minister of constitutional development and planning, said that the government was aiming for a single parliament and cabinet. He envisaged a 'unique' democracy in which the will of the majority would not be the key principle of government. Instead participation in national affairs would be carried out in racially defined groups, and the groups themselves would decide upon matters affecting them.

New model

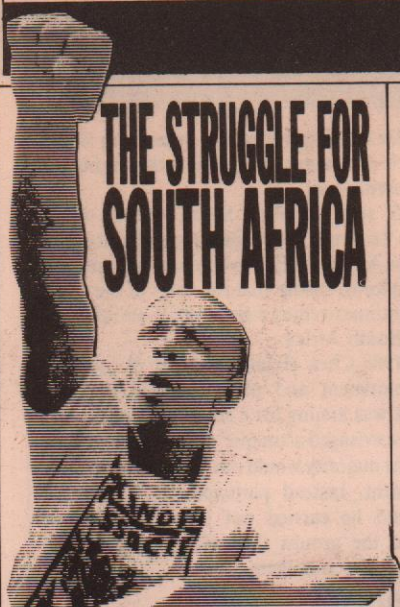
The South African government has already created the administrative structures which could provide the basis of such group representation in the future. In metropolitan areas the authorities have established regional service councils made up of white and black local authorities. The aim is to provide a bit of extra funding for the virtually bankrupt black local authorities by transferring some funds from white areas.

This structure introduces the idea of a metropolitan as opposed to a racially exclusive planning process—while maintaining the principle of group representation. 'Co-government' at regional and even provincial level could provide the basis for a federal-type government in the future. A previous abortive attempt by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's KwaZulu government and the Natal Regional Council to establish a joint administration could become the model for the new South Africa. The government is apparently reconsidering the Natal *Indaba* (a Zulu word meaning the meeting of tribal chiefs) as a possible blueprint for federalism.

In the townships, the homelands and in its constitutional plans, the Pretoria regime faces formidable obstacles to achieving its ambitious reform programme. Yet it has already made substantial progress in intensifying the fragmentation of the black population and in coopting local representatives of black communities. Localised revolt may force the regime to back down on particular aspects of its policy, without prejudicing the whole package. As long as capitalist domination can be secured through the diverse mechanisms outlined here, then the South African ruling class will be prepared to dismantle the apartheid system in favour of a more subtle form of tyranny. Whether it succeeds depends on the mass movement.



Behind De Klerk's reforms apartheid terror continues



THE STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

1

The release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and of other organisations, and the new climate of negotiations signifies that South Africa may well be undergoing important political changes. Ever since the general strike in Natal in 1973 and the Soweto uprising in 1976, the Pretoria regime has sought to contain the mass movement not simply through repression but also through reform. The strategy of South African president FW de Klerk is at root a response to the revolt of the black masses, which began to threaten the system in the early seventies and which has continued at varying levels of intensity to this day.

However, although mass resistance is the ultimate cause of the Pretoria regime's reform strategy, the specific timing of Mandela's release and moves towards negotiations are due to other factors. It is necessary to recall that since 1987 the mass movement has experienced a downturn. Although it remains robust, it has been significantly weakened in comparison to the early eighties. Indeed it appears that the timing of De Klerk's moves was motivated by the belief that the Pretoria regime has consolidated its position, and that the government can now negotiate from a position of strength with the representatives of the black majority.

SEVEN THESES FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY

WHERE IS SOUTH AFRICA GOING?

We print seven theses from the Revolutionary Communist Party explaining developments in South Africa

It is important not to fall into the trap of wishful thinking and mindless euphoria. The Pretoria regime has *not* been forced to negotiate; compared to the years 1982-1987, the balance of forces favours the government. Moreover it appears from the available accounts that De Klerk's initiative has been carefully planned. Far from being a panic response to pressure from below, it represents a sophisticated attempt to work out a neo-colonial solution for South Africa.

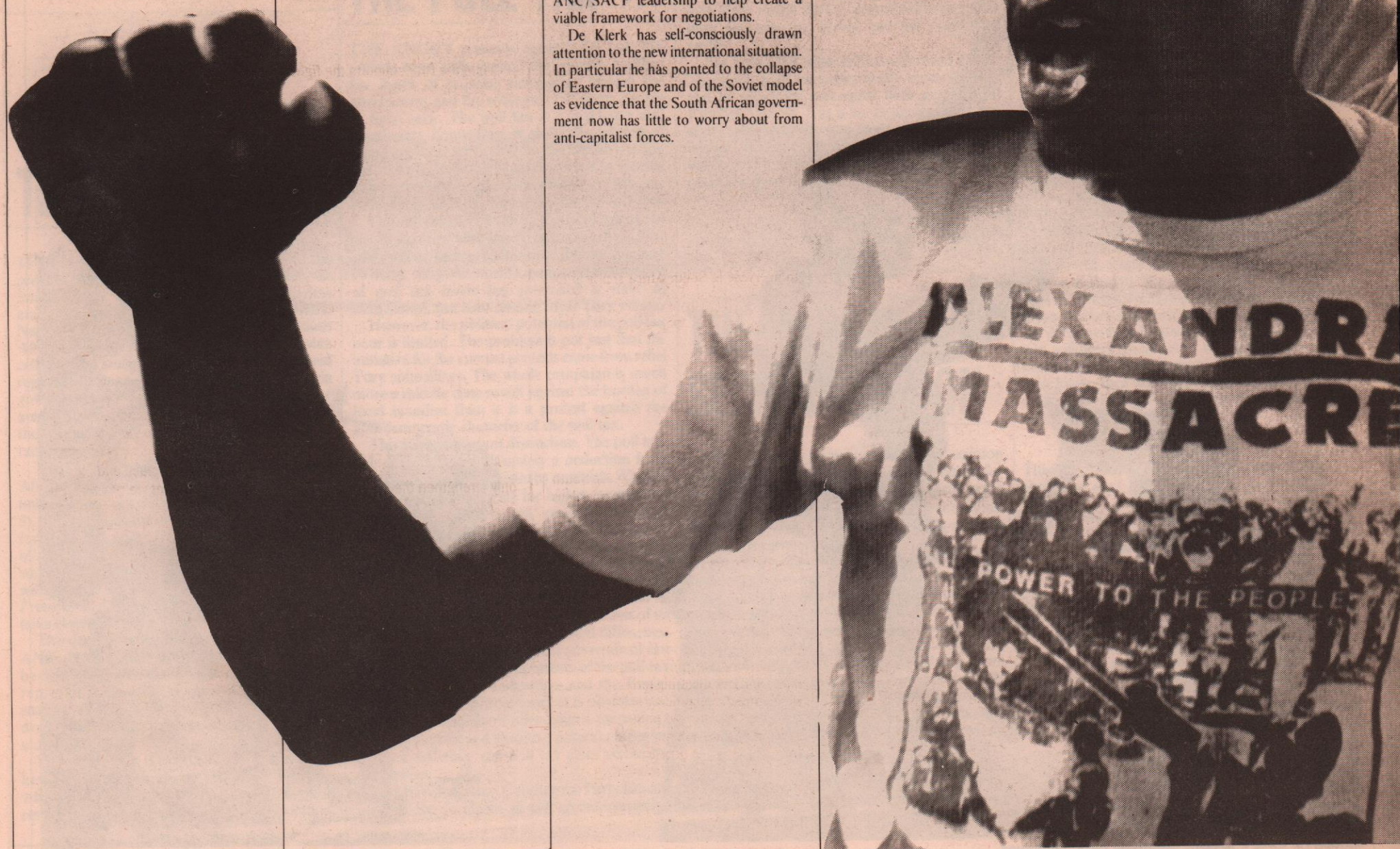
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De Klerk's initiative must be seen in the wider context of the international consolidation of the forces of imperialism. Although the Soviet Union has never played a progressive role in the third world, its very existence as an alternative ally for third world movements limited Western imperialism's room

for manoeuvre. With the effective withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the third world, Western imperialism has succeeded in improving its position. The fall of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the neo-colonial solution imposed in Namibia are just two examples of the present pattern of development. Pretoria has certainly seen the Namibian experience as a dry run for its experiments at home.

It is now clear that Moscow and Pretoria have been discussing the future of South Africa for at least three years. During the past 20 months Gorbachev has become increasingly cooperative with the apartheid regime. Moscow's 'new thinking' has been imposed on the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Soviet diplomats have called into question the role of the armed struggle and have insisted that the ANC/SACP accept some of the realities of the apartheid system. Since Moscow has been the most important backer of the ANC/SACP, its advice to the leadership of this movement has obviously been influential. It is also likely that, behind the scenes, Soviet diplomats have worked on the ANC/SACP leadership to help create a viable framework for negotiations.

De Klerk has self-consciously drawn attention to the new international situation. In particular he has pointed to the collapse of Eastern Europe and of the Soviet model as evidence that the South African government now has little to worry about from anti-capitalist forces.



3

How does the changing pattern of international relations affect the domestic scene in

South Africa? Marxists have always argued that the systems of apartheid and of South African capitalism were closely linked. Apartheid and its framework of oppression and discrimination helped to create an environment conducive to the intense exploitation of black labour. Within the system of apartheid, this exploitation and the domination of society by a white minority regime were mutually reinforced. Apartheid was thus used to perpetuate the socio-economic relations of South African capitalism. The links between apartheid and South African capital are still very close. But international developments afford a new opportunity for rationalising the institutions of South African capitalism.

With the collapse of the Soviet model, South African capital can feel confident that it will not face a challenge to its economic system. Since the South African capitalist class feels that it is no longer threatened by an alternative system, it can be more relaxed about how it supervises its affairs. It now has the option of attempting to preserve capitalism through deregulating race relations and relying more on the market to defend the status

quo. In such circumstances, at least in principle, the possibility that apartheid could be reformed cannot be excluded.

4

The strategy of the South African ruling class is straightforward.

It hopes to neutralise the liberation movement by drawing the leadership—or at least sections of the leadership—into a protracted process of negotiations. Its aim is to moderate the leadership of the black majority. To this end the regime is prepared to make concessions to cooperative African nationalist leaders. De Klerk expects to draw a section of the African leadership into a relationship with the state, while isolating those who prove immune to compromise. The carrot will be used to reward moderation while the stick will be used to repress and isolate militants.

De Klerk's strategy of reforms is designed to divide the black population both economically and politically. The orientation is towards the formal and informal separation of blacks in the homelands from those elsewhere. Reforms in education, housing and the Bantustans can go some way in changing the political map of South Africa. It will not mean that South Africa becomes non-racial, simply that the differences between white and black are reproduced through the market and more subtle means of domination. Dividing blacks along ethnic lines is another policy already being promoted by the regime.

What are De Klerk's prospects of success? There are many obstacles to realising his objectives. Ultimately it depends on the overall balance of forces. More specifically it depends on whether an accommodating group of black representatives can deliver their constituency. The key obstacle is the mass movement. Will those who have struggled for so long accept the results of negotiations which are not in their interests, or will they take independent action in defence of their cause?

5

The state of the mass movement now and in the period ahead is crucial in determining the future of South Africa. Black resistance remains a decisive factor, and there is still

an impressive level of popular participation, if not on the level of the 1982-87 mobilisation. One particular problem is that the black working class and trade union movement has been weakened through the repressive measures imposed under the state of emergency.

The ANC/SACP probably exercises more influence over the mass movement today than at any other time. This influence is primarily political rather than organisational, although the SACP has succeeded in strengthening its hold over the trade union movement.

Ironically, despite its influence the ANC/SACP faces a crisis of identity. The decline of Stalinism in Eastern Europe has obviously shaken up the SACP. It is worthy of note that SACP leaders have gone further than Nelson Mandela in making conciliatory gestures towards South African capital. Some SACP leaders have indicated that the policy of nationalisation is negotiable. In contrast the ANC leadership still pays lip-service to this objective, for fear of losing control over its constituency.

It appears that despite internal differences the ANC/SACP leadership is ready to negotiate and compromise with De Klerk. If the deregulation of race relations can be packaged in some kind of democratic form then the ANC/SACP can be expected to make a deal. Obviously the danger of a grassroots revolt is a problem that can stall the success of negotiations.

Although the ANC/SACP are not the only genuine representatives of the black masses, they are by far the most influential. Stalinism and its failed strategy of two-stage revolutions remain the dominant influence over anti-apartheid forces. The development of independent working class politics has thus become crucial. Otherwise the bitter experience of Namibia, Zimbabwe and Kenya could be repeated; and given the significance of South Africa, such an outcome would have devastating consequences for the whole continent.

6

The role of negotiations is not only to integrate a representative black leadership.

It is also to internationalise the South African question. Protracted negotiations, which have the approval of the major international powers, create an environment for the successful implementation of controlled change.

The campaign for sanctions has done little to hurt South African capital. But it has taken the initiative away from working class action and has endowed capitalist governments with moral authority on the grounds that they fought apartheid. The sanctions campaign has ironically served those who want to maintain the existing socio-economic relations in South Africa. It has provided a pretext for Western leaders to intervene in South Africa and help De Klerk 'reform' apartheid so as to protect capitalist power. The internationalisation of negotiations provides the most obvious framework for imposing a neo-colonial solution on South Africa.

7

The struggle in South Africa faces tremendous dangers. Its fate hangs on whether the masses

are prepared to accept De Klerk's neo-colonial strategy. It is evident that in the present climate there can be no genuine negotiations. De Klerk retains the initiative. The state of emergency remains intact. The Pretoria regime still has its military forces and its power to coerce. Negotiations can thus mean little more than De Klerk dictating terms in private, while some democratic-sounding formula is worked out for the public. The mass movement must remain vigilant and be prepared to act to protect its own cause. In Britain and the West, those who oppose apartheid must fight to expose the internationally orchestrated operation designed to betray the oppressed of South Africa.

NEW READERS START HERE

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR

THE WORKING CLASS in Britain and throughout the West has suffered a series of setbacks in recent years. These setbacks have strengthened those who argue for moderation, 'realism' and a strategy of defensiveness. The Revolutionary Communist Party takes a different view.

We believe that these setbacks are the responsibility of the old parties and union machines of the official labour movement. In Britain the Labourist tradition has exhausted itself and can no longer relate to even the most modest aspiration of the working class. The exhaustion of Labourism in no way undermines the potential of the working class to change the world.

The RCP is committed to the construction of an independent working class movement. Only a movement which recognises that the interests of the workers are irreconcilably opposed to those of the employers can fight effectively in the struggles ahead.

For the RCP, working class politics cannot be reduced to trade unionism or the affairs of the workplace. Workers must take a stand on every issue and express an independent point of view if we are to liberate ourselves. The fatal flaw of British Labourism is that it restricts workers' horizons to economic matters, while it allows the employer class to monopolise political debate. Workers must define every problem from our point of view and fight for the rights of every section of society if we are to constitute a politically independent class.

While the RCP supports the fight for real reform or improvements in the lives of the working class, we believe that no durable gains can be won within capitalism. The RCP argues that the overthrow of capitalism provides the necessary precondition for the liberation of the working class and of society as a whole.

The British state exists to protect the wealth and privilege of the capitalist class. The RCP aims to destroy the state, which maintains the conditions for exploitation. We believe that the state cannot be used for progressive ends. Any attempt to use the 'soft' side of the state, such as local government, inner-city partnership, or police authorities, lends legitimacy to the entire state apparatus. It can only strengthen the authority of the capitalists' coercive machine.

The RCP believes that workers have no nation. British workers share the same interests as the exploited in other countries. British workers have nothing in common with the employers and must resist the appeals of patriotism and chauvinism. As internationalists we recognise that the enemy is at home. Since Britain remains an imperialist power around the world, the only international role it can play is that of the oppressor.

The class struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle against imperialism. The RCP supports all anti-imperialist struggles. Workers who live in the imperialist heartland

have a special duty to back those fighting against the British oppressor. Thus we fight for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and for Irish self-determination. We opposed Britain's colonial war in the South Atlantic, and support the return of the Malvinas islands to Argentina. We oppose British and Western interference in the Middle East. We support the destruction of the Zionist state in Palestine and of the apartheid regime in South Africa. We uphold the same principles in every struggle against imperialism. The RCP is a fervent opponent of all forms of British militarism, nuclear, and 'non-nuclear' alike.

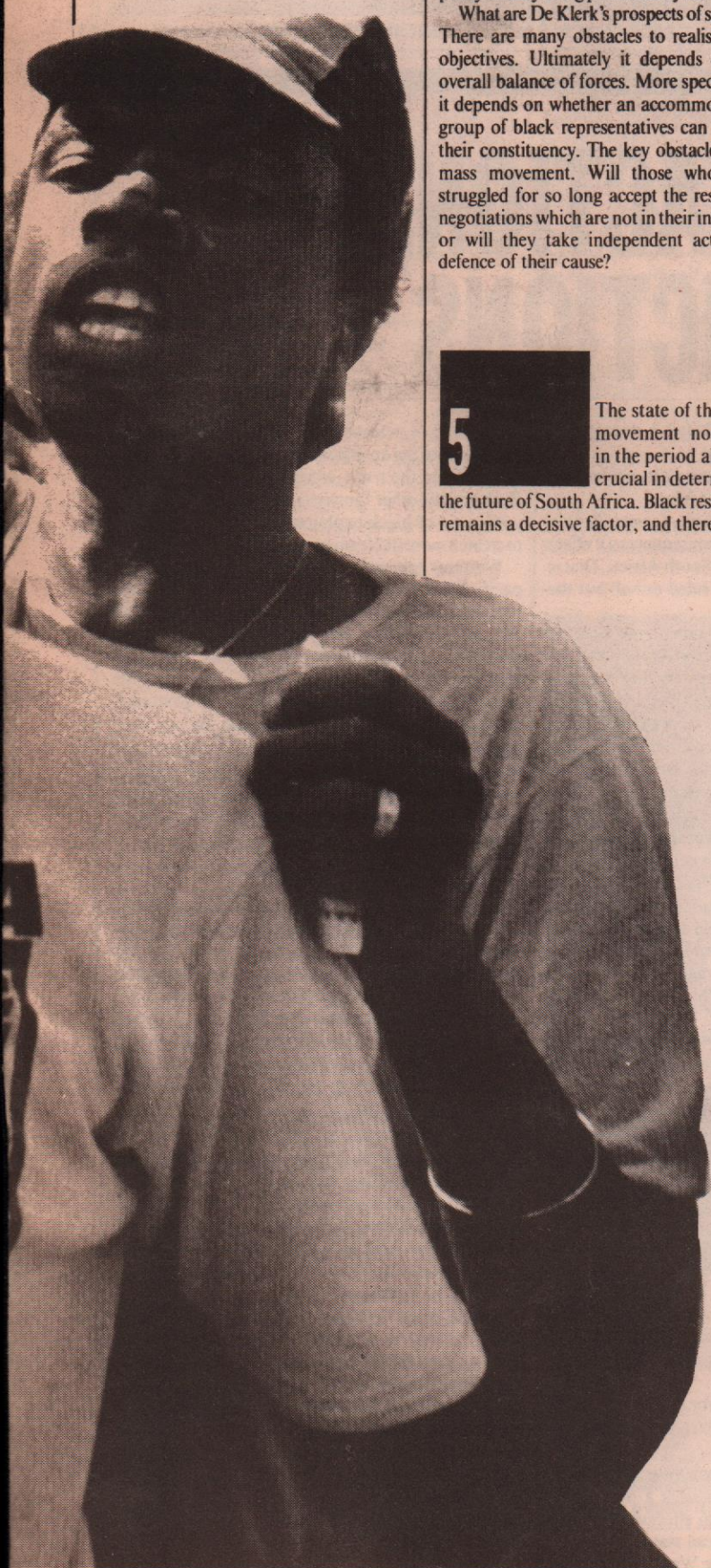
The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Workers must defend the oppressed if we are to fight for our own liberation. This is why the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism. The struggle for the emancipation of women is another fundamental issue for the working class. We unreservedly oppose any form of discrimination against lesbians and gays and call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Workers must take a stand on these issues, not out of altruism, but because it is in our class interest to fight for the fullest extension of democratic rights.

Workers need combat organisations capable of defending our interests. The existing organisations of the labour movement are singularly unsuited for this task. The RCP believes that the Labour Party is a bosses' organisation that should be fought and exposed. Despite its working class constituency the Labour Party has always followed the dictates of the capitalists. Whenever Labour has been in office, it has always betrayed the hopes of workers. The RCP is against giving any electoral support to Labour. Workers need a party that is 100 per cent our own and only responsive to proletarian interests.

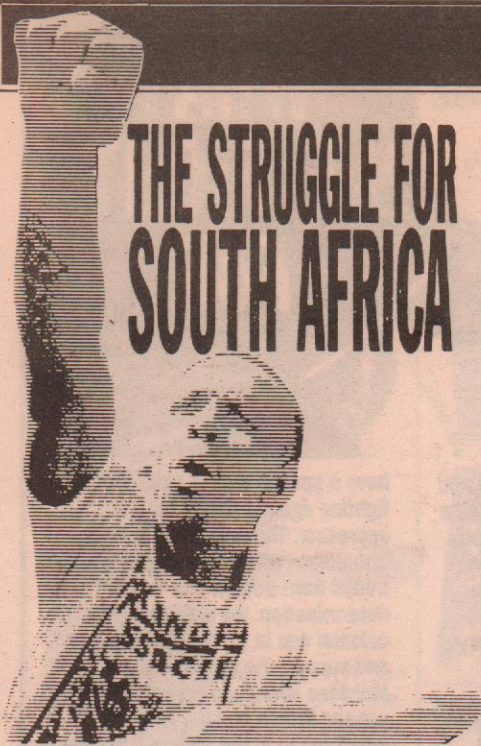
The existing trade unions are heavily bureaucratised and incapable of representing the aspirations of their members. The RCP argues that rank and file trade unionists should fight to take control of the movement. Trade unionists should organise across the workplace and industry and demand that we run our own affairs. Rank and file committees organised on an industry-wide basis could ensure that the unions truly belong to their members.

The RCP's aim is social revolution in Britain and internationally. We believe that this perspective is no less essential in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union than in the West. Only the working class has the capacity to liberate humanity. Our job is to contribute practically to the realisation of this objective.

If you would like to discuss these issues further, please write to: RCP, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (01) 375 1702.



LIVING MARXISM



THE STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Kirsten Cate explodes the myth that Western sanctions can promote black liberation

Nelson Mandela had barely stepped out of Victor Verster prison before Margaret Thatcher announced the lifting of British sanctions against the apartheid regime. Thatcher's unilateral stance has provoked an outcry of liberal opinion in the West. Many argue that sanctions have forced South African president FW de Klerk to negotiate with the African National Congress. They insist that by maintaining international pressure the regime can be forced to abandon apartheid. Most left wingers give whole-hearted support to the US and EC policy of keeping sanctions in place until South Africa introduces democratic reforms.

The left's campaign for sanctions is dangerously misguided. It is in the interests of neither the liberation struggle nor the international working class.

Western cynicism

The campaign for sanctions carries three dangers. First, the call for sanctions hands over the initiative for change to the Western imperialist powers. By giving the Western powers a stake in the talks between the regime and the black masses it introduces an international dimension into the negotiations. Thus the sanctions campaign provides the imperialists with a lever with which to interfere in the liberation struggle.

Second, the sanctions campaign creates the illusion that the imperialist powers could be a force for progress in South Africa. Finally, the campaign absolves the British labour movement of its responsibility to support the struggle for black liberation. Let's take these points in turn.

The sanctions campaign gives legitimacy to the cynical scheming of the Western powers.

American and European leaders have no interest in promoting the liberation of the black South African masses. Their sole consideration is to stabilise the regime and thus to safeguard their interests in the region. The West's use of the sanctions weapon ensures that any negotiations over apartheid are not a purely South African affair. The talks may be carried out between ANC leaders and representatives of De Klerk's government. But the imperialist powers are the ultimate arbiters of a South African settlement.

Why is the West so concerned to influence the outcome of the negotiations? The answer lies in the political and economic interests at stake in southern Africa.

Progressive Bush?

Over the past few years, the USA has maintained one of the most vocal sanctions campaigns against South Africa. In 1986, under the Reagan administration, congress enacted a comprehensive package of sanctions which banned new investment and loans and embargoed numerous South African goods. Under Bush, congress has removed tax incentives for US companies investing in South Africa. But the needs of the black masses have played no part in persuading the US government to take such action. As the peoples of the third world from Panama to Libya to Lebanon have learnt, the US authorities are not in the habit of paying much regard to their welfare.

The measures against Pretoria are primarily motivated by the desire of the US government to increase its influence throughout southern Africa and to appease protectionist lobbies at home.

Sanctions are a very small price to pay: South Africa accounts for less than one per cent of US world trade. But the political spin-offs from the pro-sanctions stance have been considerable.

On the domestic front, successive US admini-



Left wingers like Dennis Skinner are wasting their time pleading with British capitalists to back the black liberation struggle

HOW TO ISOLATE APARTHEID

WORKING CLASS ACTION, NOT IMPERIALIST SANCTIONS

strations have been able to turn the demand for sanctions to good effect. Protectionist groups from the major American export industries, such as coal, steel and textiles, have gained from the introduction of bans on rival South African imports. The government has scored electoral points against the Democrats by showing off its own anti-apartheid credentials.

The most significant US gains from sanctions, however, have come in the foreign policy arena. The USA has been able to exert considerable pressure on Pretoria to restrict its activities in the frontline states—to America's advantage. Last year, for example, the USA stitched up a deal which gave South Africa free rein in Namibia, but excluded it from oil-rich Angola, where Washington now wields considerable influence. In future, the USA can use the sanctions weapon to ensure that South Africa does not attempt to restrict the growth of American interests in this mineral-rich region.

France would also like to play a role as power-broker in southern Africa. It has introduced additional sanctions over the EC guidelines in order to extend its influence in the region. As with the USA, French support for sanctions is purely pragmatic. French investments in Africa are largely located in its old colonies. Hence Paris is anxious to maintain good relations with the black regimes which now give free run to French interests. Sanctions are a cheap and convenient method of currying favour with black African governments.

Thatcher's reward

Even the less influential imperialist powers have swung their weight behind the sanctions campaigns. Canada and Australia (which until the sixties operated its own 'white Australian policy') now play a prominent role in promoting sanctions inside the Commonwealth. At last year's Commonwealth summit in Kuala Lumpur, both countries were involved in an acrimonious debate with Britain over its refusal to support further measures against Pretoria. But, again, their motives are far from altruistic. Both countries realise that effective international sanctions against South African gold, uranium and other minerals would open up important new markets for the declining Australian and Canadian mining industries.

Only Britain has held out against sanctions. Why? Because Britain is the largest single investor in South Africa, accounting for nearly half of its total foreign investments. These huge multi-billion pound assets

account for eight per cent of Britain's investments overseas.

The beleaguered British economy is heavily reliant on its lucrative assets in South Africa.

Unlike the other major Western powers, Britain would suffer serious economic consequences if effective sanctions were imposed on South Africa. That is why the Tory government has ruled out all but the emptiest gestures.

Thatcher's intransigence over sanctions could also pay political dividends. Like the other Western leaders, Thatcher is keen to ensure that a South African settlement does not damage Western interests. But she has adopted the carrot, rather than the stick, in dealing with the Pretoria regime. Now she is seeking preferential treatment for Britain from the white regime as a reward for her stance against sanctions. As a South African newspaper points out, Thatcher is well placed to take advantage of the changing political climate in the country:

'As the only international leader likely to appear on the South African stage while a resolution of the country's racial and constitutional problems is being negotiated Thatcher stands to reap substantial political rewards.' (*Weekly Mail*, 19-25 February 1990)

As the Western powers jockey for position in the coming negotiations over apartheid, it is becoming increasingly clear that sanctions are nothing more than a device for safeguarding Western interests in the region. There is nothing progressive in Washington's use of sanctions to carve out a new sphere of influence in southern Africa, in the concern of France to appease black leaders in former colonies like the Ivory Coast and Senegal, or in Australia's attempts to undercut the South African gold or uranium mining concerns. Western leaders have cynically promoted sanctions as a humanitarian measure designed to initiate reform in South Africa. But this is nothing more than a cover for their desire to pacify resistance and pursue their own national interests in the region.

This is why it is so dangerous for the left to uphold Western sanctions as a positive step towards reform in South Africa.

The left's support for sanctions gives the cynical manoeuvres of the imperialist powers a progressive image. It acts as a diversion from effective solidarity action with the black South African masses.

Many activists believe that the Western establish-

ment could, if petitioned and pressed hard enough, put an end to the apartheid regime. Nothing could be further from the truth. Margaret Thatcher, George Bush and the other Western rulers have no interest in getting rid of black exploitation. They simply want to create a more stable environment for its continuation.

Western demands for reform are designed to pacify black resistance, which has always been the most serious threat to Western investment in South Africa. The West's concern is to create a more stable framework for profitable exploitation. Far from wanting to contribute to black liberation, the imperialist powers are as committed to preventing it as the staunchest South African racist, though their methods may be different. The left's support for sanctions can only give radical credibility to measures which are in reality survival strategies designed to uphold American or European capitalist interests in South Africa.

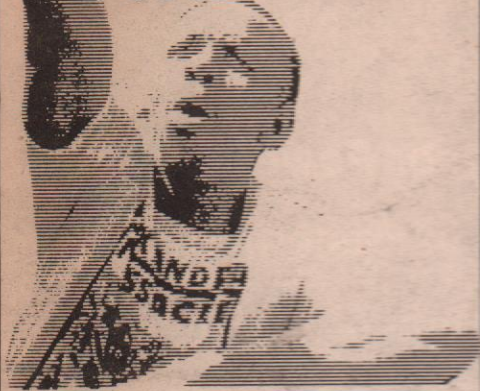
The ultimate blow

The campaign for sanctions has also demobilised the working class and diverted activists from organising real solidarity with the black freedom movement. For years, opponents of apartheid have wasted precious time appealing to British capitalists to cut their own throats in South Africa. It's about time we appealed to the only group in British society that does not have a vested interest in the continued exploitation of the black masses—the working class.

Unlike the British establishment, most people have no investments in gold, no shares in the diamond mines and no stake in the further exploitation of black workers. Their only interest is in getting rid of the rotten system propped up by the British ruling class in South Africa. A campaign to cut off Britain's lifeline to the apartheid regime offers far greater solidarity with black South Africans than appeals to the tyrant in Number 10.

Instead of lobbying the Thatcher government to impose sanctions, the left should be organising the working class to take real solidarity with the black liberation struggle. Direct action by British workers against British firms and the British government is the only sort of solidarity action that could make a difference in South Africa. In the process, we can build a bridge between the South African masses and British working class and create a movement strong enough to deliver the ultimate blow against the rulers of both regimes.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA



THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

WHAT PRICE NEGOTIATION?

Kim Monks assesses the factors behind the ANC's willingness to enter into negotiations with Pretoria

Communism, March-June 1989, p84). Since then, Moscow has leaned on the ANC to abandon the armed struggle and seek a negotiated settlement.

Given the Soviet Union's role as their most important ideological and military backer, the new thinking has had a significant impact on the Communist Party and the ANC.

The impact of the collapse of Stalinism in the Eastern bloc on the movement's leaders is evident in their attempts to distance themselves from the failure of socialism and to identify with a pluralist democratic system. Communist Party leader Joe Slovo has gone furthest in indicating a readiness to abandon anything but the most rhetorical commitment to a policy of nationalisation.

Military limitations

Another factor influencing the trend towards negotiations has been the declining military capacity of the ANC. Even before it came under greater pressure from Moscow, the ANC was experiencing difficulties sustaining the armed struggle. For the ANC leadership, the concept of armed struggle only ever meant a campaign of sabotage which has never seriously exercised the state security forces. Today, it is not possible to talk about an abandonment of the armed struggle, because that struggle ceased to exist at even the most elementary level some time ago.

The ANC has been excluded from every frontline state in southern Africa and forced to operate from bases in Zambia and Tanzania. The Nkomati Accord between South Africa and Mozambique in March 1984 cut off the movement's transit facilities in Mozambique; and after the settlement between Angola, Cuba and South Africa, the ANC was given no option but to withdraw from camps in Angola in January 1989. At a meeting of the ANC's national executive committee in January, general secretary Alfred Nzo admitted the movement's military weakness: 'Looking at the situation realistically, we must admit we do not have the capacity within our country to intensify the armed struggle in any meaningful way.' (*Times*, 19 January 1990)

After 1985, the ANC acknowledged the logistical problems of launching counter-insurgency operations over lengthy distances. Accordingly, it changed its strategy to one of local recruitment and training of guerrilla auxiliaries in the use of grenades, limpet mines and automatic rifles. The number of attacks rose from less than 50 in 1984 to the recent total of 250-300 a year since 1986, which is admitted to be the limits of Umkhonto we Sizwe's existing capacity. Spectacular operations such as the attacks on two Sasol oil-from-coal plants in 1980 and on the

Koeberg nuclear power station in 1982 have been abandoned. Most attacks have been of a minor nature, but several have involved civilian casualties. In August 1988, this prompted the ANC national executive committee to issue an instruction to its supporters to cease attacks on civilian targets.

As the ANC's military limitations have become more exposed, so its willingness to contemplate a negotiated settlement has increased, and the advocates of insurrection have lost influence within the organisation.

From January 1986, ANC leaders began indicating that their main objective was not to inflict a military victory on the regime, but to force Pretoria to the negotiating table: 'We are not talking of overthrowing the government but turning so many people against it that it would be forced to do what Ian Smith had to do.' (T Lodge, 'People's war or negotiation?', in G Moss and I Obery (eds), *South African Review* 5, 1989, p4) In October 1987, the ANC's national executive outlined the steps the government would have to take to create a climate conducive to negotiations. Since many of these demands were met by the regime earlier this year, the movement has revealed its preparedness to forsake the armed struggle in favour of negotiations.

Ruthless repression

Finally, there is another factor which has encouraged a perspective of negotiations within the ANC. Since 1987, the mass movement which exploded in the townships from the mid-eighties has experienced a downturn. Black resistance has certainly not been eliminated, but it has been contained temporarily as a result of the major state crackdown undertaken by the apartheid regime.

From 1984 onwards, the uprisings spread like wildfire, affecting rural as well as urban black townships. The back of the resistance was broken by mass detentions, bannings and the occupation of the townships by the police and the South African Defence Force. This was combined with intimidation, violence and assassinations on a massive scale, carried out by special constables, municipal police and state-sponsored vigilante squads. Between 1984 and 1989, more than 4000 people died as a result of political violence.

In June 1986, the state of emergency which had been imposed in 36 magisterial districts a year earlier was extended nationwide. By early 1987, an estimated 30 000 people had been detained under emergency regulations. In February 1988, the government reinforced political repression with an order banning 17 organisations, including the United Democratic

Front, and severely restricting political activity by the major trade union federation Cosatu. In addition, the state introduced stringent new anti-labour legislation.

Despite the government crackdown, unrest continued throughout 1988. By 1989, however, it was at a much lower level. The number of people detained fell steadily in the second half of 1988 as the state asserted control; the number dropped dramatically between February and April 1989 as a result of a nine-week hunger-strike by detainees against detention without trial. Opposition continued in 1989, but this involved more symbolic mass mobilisations and acts of civil disobedience than any concerted grassroots organisation.

The government's success in containing the resistance movement has put further pressure on black opposition leaders to enter negotiations.

It is against this background that we should assess the current balance of forces inside South Africa. For its part, the government is confident that the threat posed by the black opposition movement and its external backers has receded. It should be borne in mind that official apartheid policy towards the opposition has always been shaped by the perceived threat of a total communist onslaught on South Africa. The notion that the liberation movement has been part of an orchestrated conspiracy to destroy the capitalist system hatched in Moscow has been a guiding principle of government in South Africa. With the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the setbacks imposed on the liberation movement, Pretoria is now prepared to countenance negotiations with the ANC.

Towards compromise

Moscow is using all its influence to achieve a negotiated settlement in South Africa. At the moment, it looks as if the Communist Party and the ANC are prepared to move in the same direction. In this situation, there is a danger that a moderate section of the black leadership will negotiate a compromise deal with the regime.

Today, the ANC's popularity and influence among the black population are greater than at any time since the fifties. This means that the moderate leadership of the nationalist leadership has some room for manoeuvre in any negotiations that do take place. However, there is already some disquiet among sections of the movement about the course of events. The possibility of a grassroots revolt cannot be ruled out, especially among the militant youth who are impatient for radical change and will not easily be sold a shabby compromise deal.

Since president FW de Klerk issued his invitation to the black opposition to negotiate with the government, events have moved with extraordinary rapidity in South Africa. It appears that the African National Congress is now committed to a negotiating perspective. Such a development would have been inconceivable only a few years ago at the height of the mass uprisings in the townships. However, a number of factors have increased the pressure on the black opposition movement to come to an accommodation with the regime. Contrary to most assessments, the government rather than the opposition has the upper hand in the negotiating process which is now getting off the ground.

First of all, the ANC's willingness to countenance negotiations with the apartheid regime must be seen in the context of the changes in Soviet foreign policy. For several years, Moscow has been striving to establish better relations with Pretoria as part of its diplomatic orientation towards the imperialist powers under Mikhail Gorbachev. The Soviet Union has collaborated with South Africa and various Western powers to achieve negotiated settlements to regional conflicts in southern Africa. In Namibia, Moscow exerted considerable pressure on the liberation movement to compromise with imperialism, resulting in the imposition of a neo-colonial solution to the conflict there.

This pattern has been replicated in South Africa, where Moscow has long sponsored the close alliance between the South African Communist Party and the ANC. Over the past few years, Moscow has been having talks on the quiet with the government in Pretoria about the future direction of Soviet policy in the region. By March 1989, when Anatoly Adamishin, the Soviet minister responsible for African affairs, met the South African defence minister Magnus Malan openly in Brazzaville, he made clear that Moscow was prepared to reconsider its interests in southern Africa.

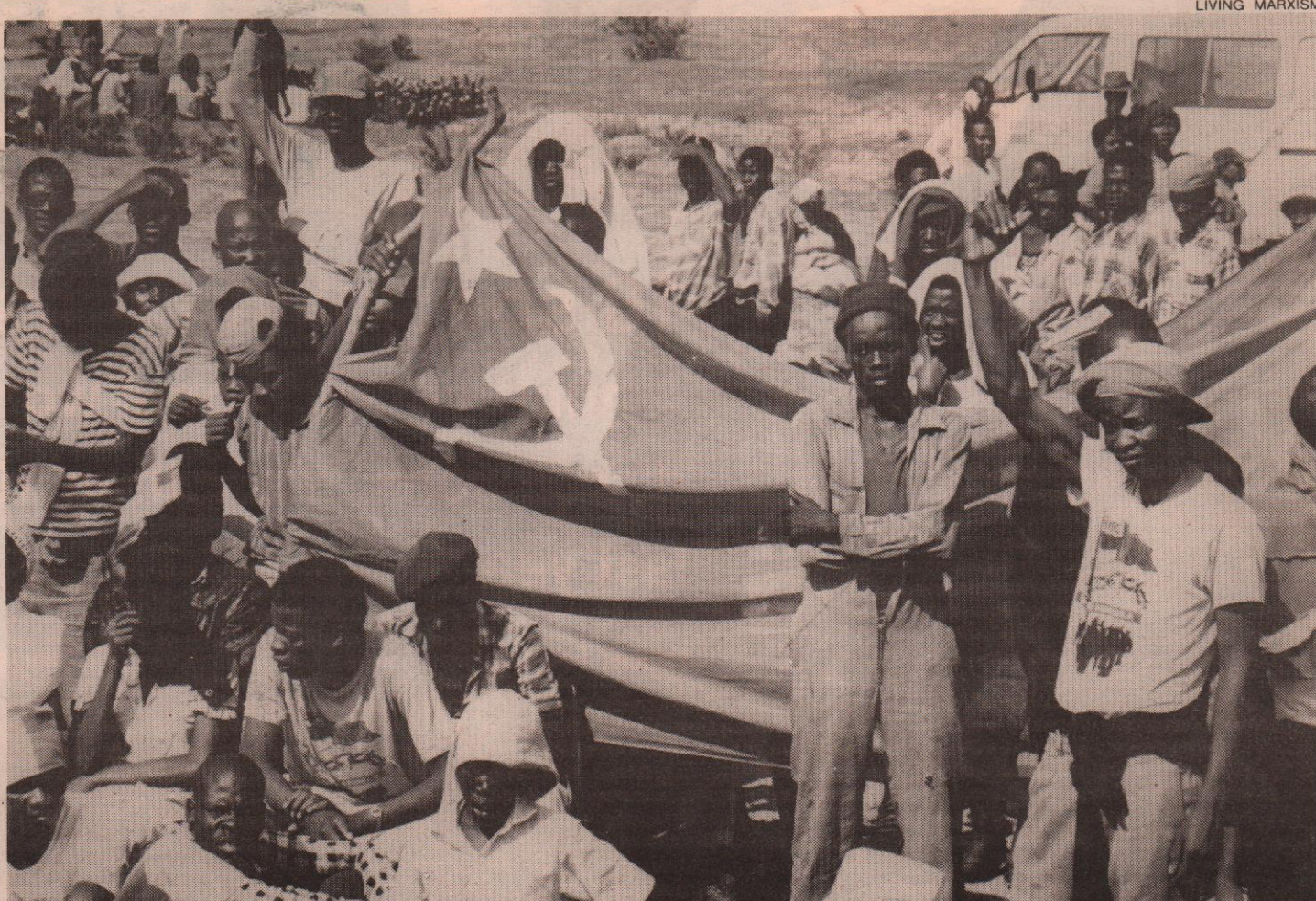
Moscow retreat

From the mid-eighties, the Soviet Union began to step up the pressure on the South African Communist Party and the ANC. As early as 1986, Gelb Starushenko, the deputy director of the African Institute in Moscow, stressed the need to abandon the insistence on 'a broad nationalisation of capitalist property'; other Soviet commentators have insisted on the necessity for the prolonged existence of a substantial private sector within a mixed economy.

Moscow has proposed that the rights of minority groups be protected in a new constitution as a means of reassuring whites. Starushenko called on the ANC to issue a broad extension of 'comprehensive guarantees for the white population' in order to strengthen the liberals and placate the conservatives. He recommended a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiations between the government and opposition (P Vale, 'The Soviet Union, southern Africa and sanctions', in M Orkin (ed), *Sanctions Against Apartheid*, 1989, pp161-2).

A year later in June 1987, Starushenko's colleague Victor Goncharov went further in a paper delivered at the Conference on Regional Security in Southern Africa in Zimbabwe. He criticised those who 'put before the national liberation movement now the task of socialist revolution....If they will insist on putting forward the ideas and principles of the socialist revolution before the settlement of problems of national liberation, they will lose their allies in the population' (ibid, p162). This was a transparent call for the black opposition to make concessions in the cause of facilitating talks with the government.

In an interview published in a South African opposition publication in summer 1987, Goncharov was even more direct. He noted that Soviet perspectives on South Africa had grown more flexible and realistic and that while the USSR would not attempt to dictate to the ANC, it would like to see that organisation develop greater flexibility and abandon 'dogmatic formulations' (quoted in *Problems of*



Moscow's retreat has forced the black masses to fight alone

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