

Foreword

Editors

Today advocates of evolutionary and peaceful change claim that South African capitalism has matured to the extent that it no longer requires the kind of racist policies which served it so well during the period of primitive accumulation. As proof, they point out that the holders of power in South Africa are revising their own racist policies and adopting pragmatic principles in order to accommodate the overriding needs of the economy. Representatives of capital in South Africa and in the metropolitan centers are all singing praises of Botha as a courageous leader "who has dared to violate some of the most sacred racial taboos of Afrikaner nationalism and is initiating changes that run counter to everything his party has stood for over the past forty years."

What exactly are the sacred cows that Botha is violating? He is establishing a new parliamentary system that would allegedly enfranchise the country's 2.5 million coloureds and 800,000 Indians. He is also, according to some observers, extending opportunities to expand and to accumulate wealth to some members of the black petty bourgeoisie; pursuing a strategy of dispersal and containment of the black urban working class by stabilizing one portion (the Section 10 exemptees) while forcing others into migrancy or marginalization in the Bantustans; and directly incorporating the monopolists into the state apparatus while strengthening the executive at the expense of other branches of the state.

What Botha is proposing is certainly not any kind of substantive change for the black majority. The attempt, pure and simple, is to construct a buffer force—in addition to the white minority—between the white ruling class and the black majority. However, since this kind of strategy is based on an antagonism between the ruling class and its subaltern stratum on the one hand, and the black working class stratum on the other, it will not lead to further reform, but to a hardening of the system. Resistance to a system such as this must take the form of an actual seizure of material assets, a

forceful repossession and dispossession, to force the ruling minority to submit to the popular will of the oppressed majority.

In addition to the pressure of the liberation forces, Botha is responding to the Afrikaner and English-speaking bourgeoisie and foreign investors, who need the improved mobility, productivity, skills, and stability of the African labor force. Dealing with these problems requires changes in some of the notoriously racist regulations that have been part and parcel of the racist apartheid system since its inception. But it also requires dealing with the resistance of white trade unionists who regard every advance by blacks as a threat to "super-privileges" that are enjoyed by white workers and the petty bourgeoisie. This contradiction between the South African ruling class and its erstwhile allies within the subaltern stratum is at the heart of the contradictions of modern South African society.

The Democratic and Peaceful Road

The practice of the South African state has been anything but democratic and peaceful. From July 1976 to July 1979, nearly 62,000 people were prosecuted for political offenses. There were a total of 264 detentions during 1982, including 107 school children and students, 30 trade unionists and workers, 17 political and community leaders, 11 clergymen, 10 lecturers, and 5 journalists.

These are just statistics, however. Mozambican President Samora Machel's comments at the 1983 meeting of the nonaligned countries place the apartheid regime in its correct historical context: He compared South Africa to Hitler's regime in Germany, which inspired the horror and outrage of people all over the world. Yet when the South African state launched military attacks against independent African states, there was only a guilty silence in the West.

President Machel points out that the regime has myriad ways to exert control over its people. For example, the homes of black families are arbitrarily turned into prisons and their bedrooms are turned into cells by a simple banning order. Citizenship and the right to residence can be withdrawn from blacks—they subsequently can be expelled from the cities and their homes razed to the ground with bulldozers. South African prisons are laboratories of torture that often ends in death and the subsequent issuing of a suicide certificate.

Could this be, President Machel asks, the same South Africa which presents itself as the defender and bastion of Western civilization in the region? Could it be the same South Africa that indiscriminately murdered demonstrators at Sharpeville, Guguletha, Langa, Soweto, etc.?

In fact, this is the same South Africa that recruits thieves, delinquents, drug addicts, murderers, and hoodlums, makes them part of the South African Defence Forces, and uses them to:

- Attack and burn down villages and steal food and livestock.
- Burn down schools, murder teachers, and kidnap pupils.
- Destroy hospitals and murder the medical staff.

- Attack and burn down stores.
- Blow up railways and mine roads.
- Attack passenger trains and buses.
- Cut down power lines.
- Destroy tractors, trucks, and other means of production.
- Attack economic development projects and kidnap foreign technicians from various countries.
- Spread terror among the people, cutting ears, tongues, and breasts.

South Africa's Friends

Because of its official status as an international outlaw, racist South Africa has few friends in the world. It has, however, had relations with Israel since the latter's founding in 1948. Trade and cooperation between the two countries increased significantly after the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, when black Africa severed diplomatic relations with Israel. In 1976, South African Prime Minister Vorster visited Israel and formed many joint projects, including the Ministerial Joint Committee for economic, scientific, and industrial collaboration. At root this is a mutual exchange of materials and military know-how. Israel has been primary in instructing South African military personnel in modern warfare and counterinsurgency techniques, especially in military electronics manufacture. It has also been reported that some Israeli troops fight directly against the liberation forces.

The most crucial support for racist South Africa, however, has come from the Reagan administration. Ostensibly as part of a policy of "constructive engagement," the Reagan administration has developed a number of incentives to motivate the South African government to reach a settlement with Namibia that is agreeable to the international community and to reform apartheid.

The alleged incentives include: 1) the loosening of controls on exports to the South African military and police; 2) increased nuclear exports; 3) high-level military and police visits; 4) political support in the U.N.; 5) approval of a \$1.1 billion IMF loan; 6) increased corporate investment; 7) the export of 2,500 electric shock batons; and 8) a new consular treaty establishing formal diplomatic ties.

"Constructive engagement" is of course a euphemism for this policy. With such encouragement, the apartheid regime has intensified the crackdown on domestic dissent; increased human rights violations quite drastically, with torture and death during detention on the rise; jailed and banned activists; targeted trade unions and church organizations; dramatically escalated destabilization attacks on Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Lesotho; and continued its illegal occupation of Namibia.

The "constructive engagement" policy of the Reagan administration is not a radical departure from past U.S. policy toward South Africa. Even during the Jimmy Carter/Andy Young human rights period, U.S.-based

transnational corporations played a major role in supplying the South African military-industrial complex. Without the support of the transnationals it is unlikely that the apartheid regime would be able to maintain and expand its military-industrial sector. By concentrating their African manufacturing investments in South Africa, U.S.-based transnational corporations have been able to transform South Africa into a regional subimperialist center. The only way that U.S. corporations could really play a constructive role in South Africa would be to withdraw.

Whether or not the U.S. is really encouraging reform (although it seems pretty clear that it is playing both sides of the fence), the attitude of the African National Congress (ANC) seems to be the correct one. Whites in South Africa will not discard a system that gives them one of the highest standards of living in the world until "their lives, property, and security are threatened." In line with this understanding and with the shift in the balance of forces, there has been a dramatic change in the nature of the military operations undertaken by the ANC. Previous ANC operations were across-the-border, hit and run type actions. The ANC is now trying to establish a permanent presence in South Africa—concentrating in the black homelands, which may eventually become the staging grounds for a rural-based insurgency, leading to the final defeat of the white minority regime. While armed resistance within South Africa itself is only getting under way, in the future we can expect Southern Africa (including Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana) to be a powderkeg: the fuse has been lit and it is only a question of time. If we are able to stop U.S. intervention in Central America, we can hope to ensure that black Southern Africa has a chance to liberate itself from the racist and imperialist policies of the present regime.

Given the U.S. domestic crisis and the crisis in Central America, it is all too easy for progressives in the U.S. to drop from our central concerns the abhorrent racism daily practiced in South Africa and the imperialist and aggressive actions of South Africa towards its neighbors, actions clearly taken with the support of the Reagan regime. While opposition to U.S. imperialism is presently most acutely directed at the situation in Central America, such opposition must also always include the struggles under way in Africa and the Middle East, for the posture of the Reagan administration is extraordinarily dangerous to *all* of the progressive tendencies and gains for liberation throughout the world. Therefore, we as American progressives must be opposed to CIA covert actions designed to destabilize popular democratic governments; we must be opposed to Reagan's military budget; we must be opposed to the use of direct military intervention. We can never forget that the devastating consequences of the Vietnam War started long before U.S. troops landed in Asia. We cannot be complacent just because there is an upcoming presidential election. We must never forget that Margaret Thatcher, Reagan's alter ego, started a war to save her government. The danger that Reagan might well do the same is ever present before us. The time is now and there is no time to waste.

Marlene Dixon and Rod Bush