

Apartheid, Imperialist Monster

Alex La Guma

1971, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly as the "international year of struggle against racism and racial discrimination," is, paradoxically, and thanks to the interests and ambitions of the Western powers, the year in which the racist South African regime will begin to produce its own weapons and ammunition, will launch a modern air force, and will have the facilities to produce atomic weapons, so that the little more than three million whites can keep the 17 million blacks, mulattoes and Asians in virtual slavery.

With a policy entitled "development of races through separatism" and the creation of black republics and the bantustans, the bastion of apartheid seeks to divide the natives, and avoid global revulsion and the heretofore innocuous political and military sanctions recommended by different international organizations.

This article comes from Alex La Guma, a South African intellectual who has collaborated with *Tricontinental* on other occasions. Here, one sees the colonialist-imperialists' hidden motives as well as the intransigent decision of the African peoples to be free.

THE SOUTH African Government celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Republic on May 31 this year. In 1960 a referendum had been held, but only whites were allowed to

vote and by a majority of 52.3% of these voters (the pro-republican whites) the racist republic was

born. It was proclaimed in 1961 amid the jubilation of the racists and a general strike by the nonwhite people. The 10th anniversary celebrations hardly received any support or recognition from the oppressed people; in schools, universities and other institutions of apartheid, the nonwhite people made it known that they had nothing to celebrate. In spite of massive intimidation, repression and terror, the people continue to show their abhorrence of the system of racism, violence and blatant exploitation.

Racism in South Africa — the ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority — was born with the invasion of our country by white settlers in the 17th century. The capitalists and traders of Europe, dissatisfied with the pillage of their own people, sought new sources of wealth in other parts of the world. By armed force, fraud and intrigue they plundered the people of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Australasia. The settlers came to South Africa as the henchmen of the Dutch East India Company.

Jan Van Riebeeck, leader of the first Dutch settlers, referred to the Khoikhoi people, the aboriginal people of the Cape, as "dull, stupid, and lazy," and described them as "a stinking nation." Thus justified, the settlers organized commandos and hunting parties to shoot adult members of these people. They shot as many as they could and took the younger ones as slaves and cattle herders. Predatory raids against these people who owned large herds of livestock resulted in rich booty for the settlers. Because of inferior weapons the aborigines naturally lost the battle against colonization.

White settlers gradually penetrated the interior of the Cape and drove the indigenous people from the best farmlands. Slaves were also imported from the East Indies and other parts of Asia and Africa to reinforce the decimated labor supply. The pattern was set for the ruthless colonial exploitation of the country, the expropriation of the land, the enforced harnessing of the labor power of the blacks.

When in 1806 the Dutch colony was seized by the British, the pattern did not change substantially. The British colonialists mounted a series of savage campaigns against the Amakhosa in the Eastern Cape and the Zulu people in Natal. They imported more white settlers from Britain and extended their conquest further through Bechuanaland, Basutoland and later into Zimbabwe, which they called Rhodesia.

However, as the ranking capitalist country of that time, Great Britain was opposed to direct chattel slavery. When this type of slavery was abolished, large contingents of Boers (farmers, descendants of the original Dutch settlers) who wanted to maintain chattel slavery, left the Cape on "the Great Trek" and advanced into those areas later named the Orange Free State and Transvaal, and into Natal. In the course of these advances the Boers conducted repeated aggressive wars against African tribes who owned the land of those regions. The Boers seized these lands, established the Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, based upon white domination, the exploitation of the black populations, and the principle of "No equality in church and state." The spirit of the white slave-owner remained as the core of their outlook.

The discovery of diamonds and then gold had profound and far-reaching effects: more foreigners flocked into South Africa: British and European financiers exported vast sums of investment capital to South Africa. In order to gain complete control over the gold in the Transvaal, British imperialism invaded the two republics and brought them into the British Empire; but no change in the conditions of the African people followed. Their colonial status and subjugation continued and was in fact intensified. The mining interests were now masters of the country and they had only one interest as far as the black inhabitants were concerned: to force them into labor in the mines at the minimum rate of pay. The British found the harsh colonial and racist policy of the Boer republics well suited to this purpose. Taxation, the pass laws and land-grabbing followed.

New Colonialism

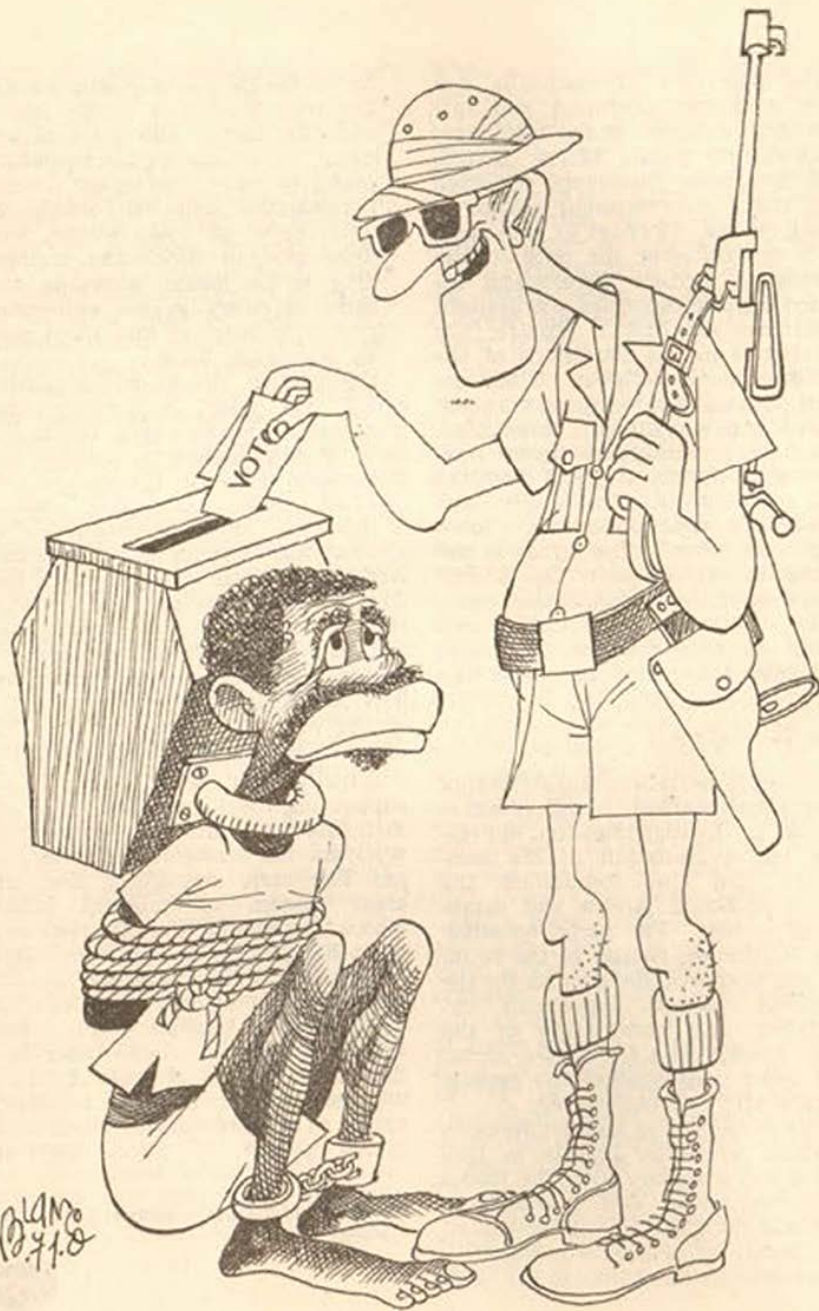
British imperialism and Afrikaner (Boer) nationalism found common ground in the dispossession, oppression and exploitation of the non-whites. On this foundation the Union of South Africa was established in 1910. The racist constitution legitimized racism in the country and prepared the ground for the legalized national oppression, exploitation and humiliation of the black masses, and for all the atrocities committed against the people, individually and collectively.

The conceding of independence to South Africa by Britain in 1910 was not a victory over the forces of colonialism and imperialism. It was designed in the interest of imperialism. Power was transferred not into the hands of the mas-

ses of the people of South Africa, but into the hands of the white minority alone. The evils of colonialism, insofar as the nonwhite majority was concerned, were perpetuated and reinforced. A new type of colonialism was developed, in which the oppressing white nation occupied the same territory as the oppressed people themselves and lived side by side with them.¹

Controlling the all-white parliament, the Boer landowners and imperialist mine-owners combined in a brutal alliance to extract the last ounce of cheap labor out of the African people. The first assault of the new Union of South Africa against the African was the Land Act of 1913. This law prohibited the African from owning land outside the "reserves," which constituted approximately 13% of the country. The whites seized the remaining 87% of the land, which was naturally the best and most fertile. The reserves, being insufficient and agriculturally poor, were incapable of supporting the population; thus the men-folk were driven by hunger to work for the white-owned enterprises. The state developed the contract system of migrant labor, which separated the wage-earner from his family, so that the bosses would not have to pay for the upkeep of the worker's dependents. The reserves became nothing less than reservoirs of cheap labor and the burial ground of those Africans who worked themselves to death under the semi-slave conditions which prevail in mines and on

¹ Program of the South African Communist Party, 1962.



farms.

The cooperative basis of the old tribal societies was broken down, and the entire African people transformed into a community of impoverished peasants and underpaid forced laborers.

Today the stratum of "white South Africa" is characterized by all features of the advanced capitalist state in its final stage of imperialism: highly developed industrial monopolies and mergers of industrial and finance capital; agriculture pursued on capitalist lines, employing wage labor and producing for local markets and export. South African monopoly capital is likewise closely linked with British, United States and other foreign imperialist interests in South Africa and they jointly share in the exploitation of the nonwhite peoples and uphold the racist apartheid policy.

Foreign investment clearly plays an important role in the economy of South Africa. In 1963, the total of foreign assets in the country was estimated at \$6418 million. The principal creditor countries were the United Kingdom, whose holdings were the largest, accounting for more than half of the total, and the United States. The two countries combined represented about 70% of the total value of foreign investments in South Africa at the end of 1963. There were much smaller, nonetheless significant, investments on the part of international organizations, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland and several other countries. Among the major industries, foreign investments concentrated primarily in mining and manufacturing, though they were also of impor-

tance in South African finance and trade.³

The alliance between local capital and foreign imperialists naturally has developed internal conflicts. These are represented in the main white political parties and groupings, but they find common ground in the continued colonial-type subjugation of the nonwhite peoples.

South African monopoly capitalists also export capital, especially in Africa, and their expansionist character is plainly reflected in the inroads made by the regime into South West Africa, the open threats to African states to the north, and the political and economic interests in former British "protectorates" and Rhodesia, Malawi, etc. The recent news that South Africa is now also capable of developing the atom bomb is the latest manifestation of the racist republic's imperialist ambitions.

The white workers, on the whole, form the "aristocracy of labor." The ruling class has granted numerous concessions to them. They have the monopoly of the best-paid work and are invariably given positions of authority over nonwhites. They go regularly to the polls and vote for apartheid or racism in one form or another. The high standard of living and remuneration enjoyed by the whites come from their share in the superprofits accumulated by the capitalist class from the exploitation of the nonwhites.

The progression of white economic privilege is shown in the wid-

³ Foreign Investment in the Republic of South Africa, Department of Political and Security Council Affairs; Unit on Apartheid; United Nations, NY, 1970.



ening gap between recent black and white wages. For example,

...in 1945-46 the ratio of white and African wages in private industry was 100:26. By 1957 it was 100:18. Statistics for 1970, which include mining and construction in addition to private industry, show a ratio of 100:12. Figures reveal that a white miner earns 19 times as much as a black miner; a white worker in industry gets five times as much as the black worker; and a white worker in the construction industry over six times as much.³

Together with economic privilege and political superiority the white population is systematically indoctrinated with the creed of white supremacy and regards itself as part of the ruling class; thus it willingly acts as a tool and accomplice in the maintenance of colonialism and capitalism.

The lower strata of "black South Africa" exhibit all the characteristics of a colony. The indigenous population is subjected to extreme forms of national oppression, exploitation and poverty, lack of democratic rights and the domination by a group advocating its "European" or "Western Christian" character and "civilization." Characteristic too of imperialist rule is the reliance upon brute force and terror, the army and police, and the encouragement of the most backward of tribal elements and institutions.

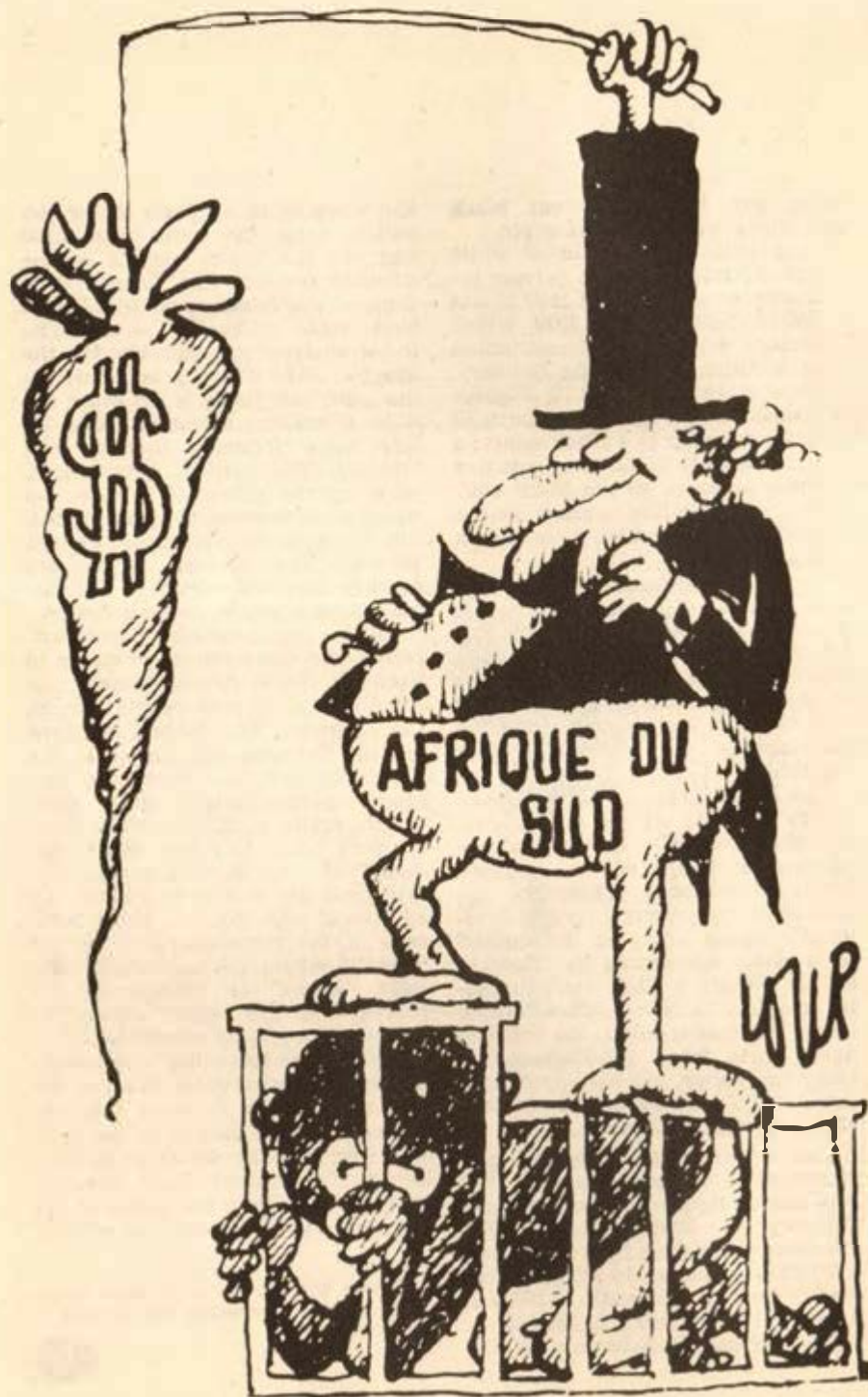
The African people today constitute 69.7% of the population. The 1970 census figures disclosed by the Ministry of Statistics give the following population figures: whites, 3 799 000; Africans, 14 893 000; Coloureds (mixed descent), 1 998 000; Asians, 614 000. Total, 21 282 000.

The African inhabitants, living

and working in all parts of the Republic, form the basic population and are the main victims of the colonial system. The former divisions of the Africans on tribal lines have steadily broken down. The tribal system was suitable for the simple, self-sufficient economy of the past, but there is no place for it in a modern economy based on large-scale industry, mining and farming. The present government, pursuing the policy of "divide and rule," is attempting to revive tribalism, but these attempts cannot succeed. The African people are moving inevitably towards the formation of a single modern nation.

Under its so-called "Bantustan" policy, the Government proposes to partition South Africa. Nearly one third of the African people live on the reserves. The largest of these are the Transkei and Ciskei, in the Cape Province, and there are also others scattered widely in the other three provinces. All these the Government hopes to make the "homelands" of the African population. But these are unable to sustain the additional population — those Africans in the remaining 87% of the country, whom the authorities consider "aliens" or "temporary sojourners" in the "white" areas. The reserves are grossly overcrowded already and far too small to maintain the present population. Most of the Africans in the reserves are not independent peasants or do not have sufficient land by which to make a living. To support their families most of the men in the prime of life are away working for the whites.

³ "African Workers and the National Struggle." *African Communist*, No. 44, 1971.



"More than 40% of the economically active men in the reserves are absent at any given time, working in the mines, factories, farms and homes in the white areas."¹ "About 46.5% of the Africans live in the 'homelands,' the remainder live in the so-called white areas."²

Likewise, soil exhaustion and lack of opportunity for crop rotation and intensive scientific farming is a feature of all the reserves which are the most backward and undeveloped areas, typical of colonial Africa. In spite of its boasts, "the number of jobs created in the past ten years for Africans in industry in the 'homelands' is about 2000."³

The South African Government presents the "Bantu Homelands" scheme as a concession to the growing freedom struggle among the African people and to world opinion but it has been rejected with contempt by freedom-loving Africans and even by those who had approved of the racist-colonialist plans. In any case, the regime has no intention of conferring any genuine independence on any sector of the nonwhite people.

The special character of colonialism in South Africa and the appropriation by the white minority of all those opportunities which in other colonial countries have given rise to the growth of a national capitalist class, have strangled the development of a class of African capitalists. All positions of economic power and influence are held by members of the white group alone. There are very few Africans who make profits from the exploitation of labor power, since most of them are wage-earners in agriculture and industry. A few independent farmers own holdings, usually so small

that they can only be cultivated by the farmer himself and his family. There are a few African traders and shopkeepers who have to contend with numerous color restrictions; and their capital is so small that their businesses are rarely profitable. The professional groups, mainly teachers, do not as a rule receive better salaries, nor do they live better, than their fellow Africans.

The colored people live mainly in the Western Cape Province and comprise workers, farm laborers, professional people and small businessmen. The Asian community, mainly people of Indian origin, are descendants of indentured laborers brought in the last century to work the sugar plantations. The majority of them are industrial and agricultural workers and they have also developed a considerable merchant class. Both these nonwhite minority groups are subject to the various racist laws and restrictions.

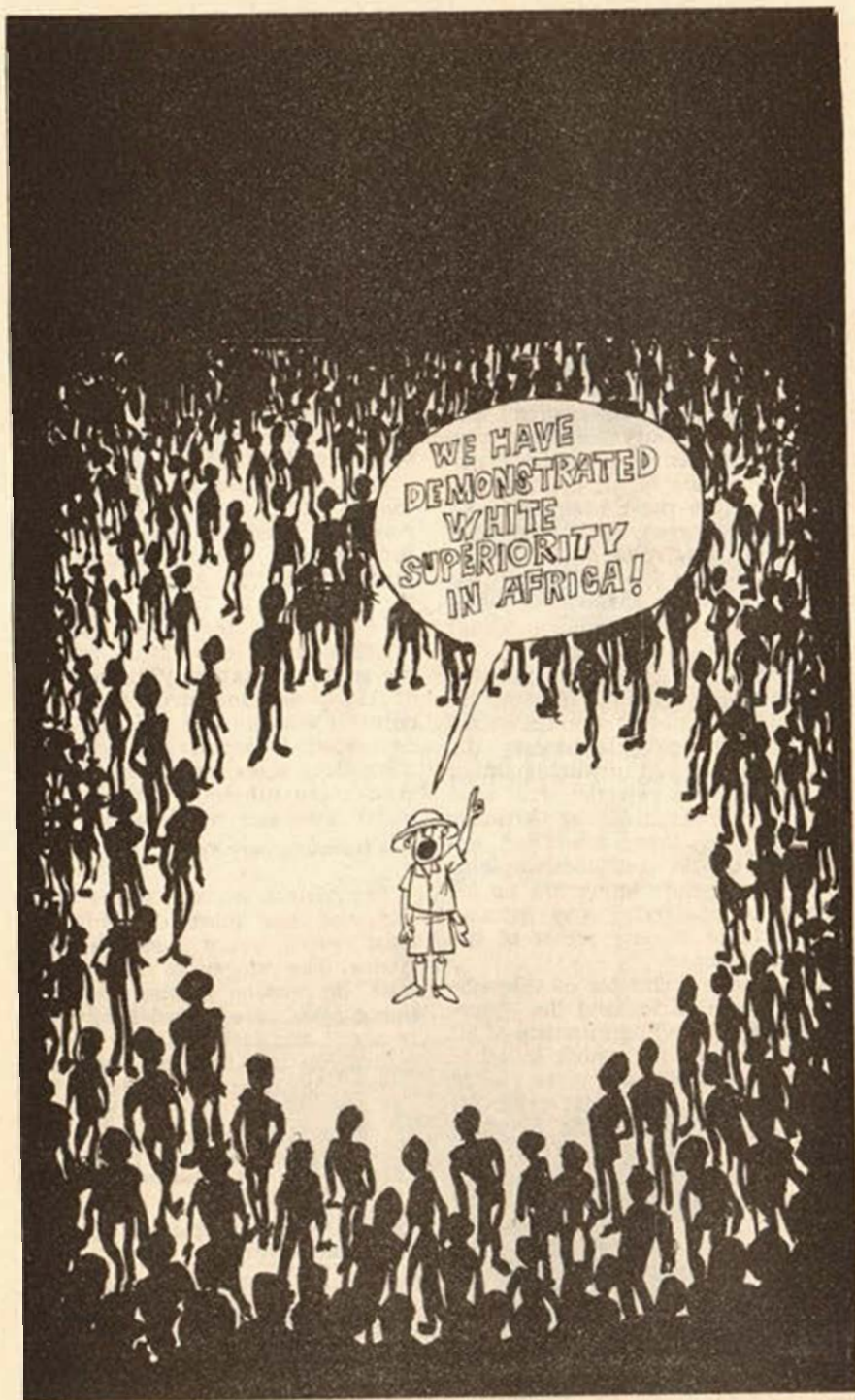
The Revolutionary Force

The African workers in the towns comprise the most dynamic and most revolutionary force in South Africa. The wages of urban Africans, in relation to the very high living costs, are scandalously low. In shops and factories they are relegated to the heaviest and least rewarding forms of labor. Pass

¹ P. Smit, Head of the Department of Geography at the Africa Institute, reported in *The Star*, Johannesburg, July 12, 1962.

² House of Assembly Debates (Hansard), September 25, 1970.

³ J. A. Goolbsz, General Secretary of the Trade Union Council of South Africa, quoted in *The Star*, February 18, 1970.



laws and urban-areas regulations make the terms of their work and residence precarious, and they are subjected to never-ending raids and persecutions by the police. African trade unions are not given recognition and it is illegal for an African to go on strike. But despite this, this class, the most numerous and experienced working class on the African continent, has time and again shown that it is in the forefront of the struggle of the African people. It has experience in organization, it is devoted to the cause of African liberation and to workers' unity on the continent and throughout the world.

The system of colonialism and racial oppression in South Africa will be overthrown by the unified struggle of national liberation and working class movements that have grown in experience and maturity and become steeled in many years of difficult struggle.

The crisis in South Africa springs from the fundamental contradictions of South African society between the oppressed people and their rulers; between South African colonialism and the worldwide movement against imperialism and colonialism; between the working class and the rural masses, together with the middle classes, on the one side, and the handful of monopoly capitalists on the other.¹

This deep-seated crisis will only be resolved by a revolutionary change which will overcome these contradictions by putting an end to the colonial oppression of the African and other nonwhite peoples; a national democratic revolution to overthrow the colonialist state of the white minority and establish a genuine people's democratic state in South Africa.

In a report on "Strategy and Tactics of the South African Revolution," the African National Congress (ANC), the main force for national liberation in South Africa, states:

The main content of the present stage of the South African revolution is the national liberation of the largest and most oppressed group — the African people. This strategic aim must govern every aspect of the conduct of our struggle. . . . It demands in the first place the maximum mobilization of the African people as a dispossessed and racially oppressed nation.

Similarly, the program of the Communist Party says:

The main content of this revolution is the national liberation of the African people. Its fulfillment is, at the same time, in the deepest interests of the other non-white groups, for in achieving their liberty the African people will at the same time put an end to all forms of racial discrimination. It is in the interest of the white workers, middle class and professional groups, to whom the establishment of genuine democracy and the elimination of fascism and monopoly rule offer the prospect of a decent and stable future.

The African National Congress in the report quoted states further:

It is a national struggle which is taking place in a different context from those which characterized the early struggles against colonialism. It is happening in a new kind of world — a world which is no longer monopolized by the

¹ Program of the South African Communist Party.

imperialist world system; a world in which the existence of a powerful socialist system and a significant sector of newly-liberated areas has altered the balance of forces; a world in which the horizons liberated from foreign oppression extend beyond mere formal political control and encompass the element which makes such control meaningful — economic emancipation. It is also happening in a new kind of South Africa... in which the independent expressions of the working people — their political organization and trade unions — are very much part of the liberation front. Thus our nationalism must not be confused with chauvinism and narrow nationalism of a previous epoch. It must not be confused with the classical drive by an elitist group among the oppressor in the exploitation of the mass.

The primary aims of the South African democratic revolution are defined in the Freedom Charter which is the joint program of the national liberation organizations of the various nonwhite peoples. The Freedom Charter is not a program for socialism.

It is a common program for a free, democratic South Africa, agreed upon initially by the mass Congress of the People in 1955, attended by thousands of the people's representatives, socialist and nonsocialist alike. However, in order to guarantee the abolition of racial oppression and white minority domination, the Charter calls for distinct economic changes: drastic agrarian reform to restore the land to the people; widespread nationalization of key industries to break the

grip of monopoly capital; radical improvements in the conditions and standards of living for the working people.

Armed Struggle

Neither the national liberation movement nor the Communist Party has ever adopted the theory of violent struggle or guerrilla warfare as the only possible road to freedom in South Africa or any other country, irrespective of conditions and circumstances. As is well known, the movement, for many years and particularly during the fifties, sustained prolonged campaigns of mass political and trade union activities, embracing hundreds of thousands of people, making the widest possible use of militant but nonviolent struggle. The policies and campaigns in that period were fully justified and correct. It has always been the view of the movement that a revolutionary policy should be that which holds out the quickest and most fundamental transfer of power from one class to another. But in real life such radical changes are brought about not by imaginary forces but by those whose outlook and readiness to act is very much influenced by historically determined factors. To ignore the true situation and to entertain imaginary forces, concepts and ideals is to invite failure. The art of leadership consists in providing leadership to the masses and not only to its advanced elements.

The militant actions and resultant persecutions also purged the South African movement of opportunists, waverers and careerists and gave it its revolutionary character. These struggles convinced the masses of the people and all their honest leaders and spokesmen that

there is no other road towards the achievement of their aspirations than that of revolution. Furthermore, the victory of the anti-imperialist forces in World War II, and the tide of independence in Africa, Asia and Latin America, combined with the struggles within South Africa in the past 50 years, created in the beginning of the sixties the possibility and feasibility of the turn in the direction of armed struggle in South Africa.

The establishment of the Spear of the Nation, the military wing of the ANC, in 1961 was recognition that from then on the liberation movement would have to achieve its goals not only by traditional political methods, but also by means of armed struggle, by answering fascist violence with revolutionary violence.

"The molding of mass political consciousness reached a new intensity," states the ANC report quoted above. "The response of the authorities was such that the overwhelming majority of the people, through their own participation in the struggle and confrontation with the state, recognized that in the long run the privileges of the minority will only be wrenched away from it by armed combat."

In a New Year's message in 1963, Oliver Tambo, Acting President General of the ANC, declared on behalf of the South African liberation movement: "For centuries the white oppressors of our country have lived by the sword. Now they shall perish by the sword. For decades white supremacy has been maintained by the gun. Now freedom shall be achieved by means of the gun."

Since the launching of the armed struggle in South Africa, the guer-

rilla detachments of the freedom movement have clashed with the racist troops of Vorster and those of Ian Smith in Rhodesia. The Battle of Wankle in the Zambesi Valley in 1967, between combined ANC and Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) forces and the white troops was a beginning of hard and serious battles still to come. Reports from South Africa indicate that guerrillas and armed political cadres are now infiltrating into the Republic after training abroad.

In an illegal broadcast made by means of tape recordings placed at vantage points in several South African cities, the ANC called on the oppressed people to prepare for armed struggle.

The ANC calls on all the oppressed to organize and struggle and fight in the town and countryside.

We fight a guerrilla war. A guerrilla war is not a war of big armies. We have no big army. We organize ourselves into small groupings. We attack the enemy suddenly, when he is not expecting us. We kill him and we take his guns and disappear.

The countries of Southern Africa have yet to break the chains of colonialism and racism which hold them in oppression. In the Portuguese colonies, South West Africa (Namibia), Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and the Republic of South Africa, white racists and fascist regimes maintain systems which go against the current of the African revolution and world development. But the war of national liberation is on and it will develop and be fought to the finish.

Victory or Death!