

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICA

Statement of the African National Congress of South Africa on the recent Black Labour Reforms Commissions in Fascist South Africa.

The struggle for the genuine and total liberation of the oppressed peoples of Southern Africa is rapidly moving to its triumphant climax. In its frantic attempts to postpone the collapse of the racist regime and the seizure of power by the people, the enemy is resorting to many strategies, diversions and deceptions.

The present phase of the struggle is marked by a growing momentum of the liberation forces characterised by both combat on the battlefield within South Africa and in the international arena through direct political and diplomatic confrontation. To meet this offensive, the regime relies on a crushing burden of armaments, a militaristic policy of unprovoked aggression against neighbouring States, the employment of fascist techniques of police terror involving executions by hanging, the shooting down of unarmed demonstrators and strikers, the torture and detention without trial of political opponents, and the wholesale imposition of prison sentences, bannings and house-arrests.

But no matter how ruthlessly the racists seek to defend their monopoly of power, they cannot hold back the swelling tide of freedom or put a halt to the victorious march of a people determined to be free. The enemy's defiance of world opinion and his despicable attacks on the people's rights and freedoms reveal the state of desperation to which he has been reduced.

Isolated by the international community, ostracised by sportsmen and artists everywhere, threatened with economic sanctions and rejected by the African continent, the ruling class is desperately attempting to hide its despotism behind a conciliatory mask of pseudo-reforms. Like a commodity that remains unchanged while being sold under different labels, apartheid has many names: baaskap (white supremacy) became trusteeship; segregation gave birth to apartheid and Bantustans; then followed separate development, which was succeeded by pluralism and now, in the terminology of current cant, co-operation and development. What remains constant is the contents of the package of repression and discrimination.

The most recent attempt to provide the racist structure with a new look takes

the form of the notorious Wiehahn and Rieckert Commissions on labour legislation and manpower requirements. They serve many purposes. One is to divert attention from the scandal of corruption and fraudulent mismanagement of public funds in the uppermost circles of government, including the State President B.J. Vorster. Another is to give the regime's trading partners, the industrialists, bankers and multinational corporations, of Western Europe, United States and Japan, a plausible pretext for resisting the growing pressure for boycotts and sanctions against the apartheid state. Thirdly, the regime hopes that promises of reform will cool the anger of the exploited and suffering workers whose maturing class and national consciousness is rapidly reaching boiling point. A fourth dimension is provided by the stagnant economy, mass unemployment, persistent inflation, an acute scarcity of skilled workers, a low rate of economic growth, a decline in living standards of Black workers and peasants, and the reduced profitability of important sectors of industry and commerce. Fifthly, there is unrest and deep discontent not only among working people but also in business circles, which urgently need a free labour market, access to markets in Africa and large inputs of capital and technology from Western countries.

These circumstances have led to the appointment of the two labour commissions and their efforts to provide relief without changing the basic structures of apartheid and white minority domination.

Three recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission which receive major publicity are concerned with the highly contentious issues of African trade unionism, job reservation according to skin colour, and racial segregation at places of work. These are visible areas of gross discrimination that have been attacked most critically by international labour organisations, the World Council of Churches, anti-apartheid movements and the friends of the liberation struggle.

In all three cases the Commission has recommended reforms with a fanfare of trumpets. In each instance, however, the proposed reforms are so hemmed in by restrictions as to render them largely nugatory. Under the proposals, and with the Government's declared approval, white workers' unions will continue to be race-bound, segregated organisations, agitating for discrimination against Black workers and free to act as strike-breakers when Africans lay down their tools in the struggle for a living wage and decent conditions.

To qualify for registration, African unions will have to comply with stringent requirements and obtain the approval of white officials serving the interests of the present white minority ruling group and the racist minority in general. Unregistered unions will be outlawed, a measure that will severely curtail the

scope for labour organisations which, according to the Commission's finding, are in receipt of aid from international trade union and political bodies.

Of grave significance is the decision of the government, acting against the Commission's recommendations, to exclude 'migrant' workers from trade union recognition. This means that trade unionism will be denied to workers from the neighbouring States, the labour reserves in Bantustans, and eventually the bulk of urbanised Africans who have had foreign citizenship forced on them by reason of their compulsory affiliation to the so-called Bantustans.

Such are the realities behind the Commission's brave proposal to allow workers full freedom of association in trade unions of their own choosing. While the majority of Africans will continue to remain without legitimate, recognised unions, white workers will be free to bar from membership any person because of his race, colour or sex. This licence to discriminate will enable the white workers, operating a closed shop clause, to deny Africans access to jobs set aside by law or custom for whites only.

The Commission frankly admits that statutory forms of job reservation, introduced by the ruling National Party in 1956, have lost their value and do more harm than good at home and abroad. Colour conscious white labour leaders protest angrily against the proposed repeal of even this useless legal bar to Black advancement. It is not the statute, however, that denies Africans equality of opportunity, but the entire structure of white domination, the collusion between government, employers and white workers, and the total exclusion of Black people from the political process.

Such measures as may be adopted to remove structural obstacles to an intensification of exploitation of labour and the maximisation of profits will further alienate the people and hasten the necessary process of struggle for liberation from the all-white parliament, bureaucracy, armed forces and judiciary.

The so-called labour reforms are another device to sell apartheid under a different label, deodorise and keep alive the decaying mess of institutionalised inequality and gross discrimination against the descendants of men and women who owned the land and all it contained before the advent of white settlers, colonial armies, and international capital.

The reforms will not dismantle the 'ugly side of apartheid', as the Western allies of the regime has urged it to do in order to make it acceptable to the

international community.

The Black working class, backbone of our national liberation movement, has been steeled in decades of class combat on all fronts. It is a class which recognises an historical mission to overcome colour bars, remove racial barriers that impede progress, and lead the struggle for the overthrow of white autocracy and the apartheid system. It is a class whose decisive role in the battles of the past justify expectations for the future.

The African National Congress and its ally in struggle the South African Congress of Trade Unions - authentic voice of all workers in South Africa - is a movement that rejects hypocritical promises of reform granted by a white parliament and its bureaucratic agencies. Our objective is to achieve liberation through the seizure of political power by the people. No reforms, manoeuvres or intrigues will be allowed to divert us from our life's purpose.

Only when the African working class is represented in a people's parliament representing all South Africans regardless of race and colour will it be possible to eradicate the last vestiges of colonial domination and racial discrimination. Only then will genuine liberation have been achieved. In that struggle, victory is certain.

The struggle for liberation continues unabated, ever moving to higher levels of intensity and maturity. South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe under the vanguard leadership of the ANC, SAAFO and the Patriotic Front must and shall be free.

Liberation and freedom are the only guarantees for lasting peace in Southern Africa.


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Secretary General

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