

From the archives: A programme of action for the South African revolution

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This article is the second of a two-part series by South African members of Workers' International first published in the UK in the weekly Workers Press as the apartheid regime crumbled. This programme mapped a course which could unite working people to overthrow capitalism in South Africa

[threecolumns]Fight for a workers government

The sustained offensive of the masses has thrown the political system of the racist rulers into disarray.

The community council system lies in tatters: only the worst kind of opportunist give the tricameral parliament any credibility; the surrogate regimes of the homelands survive only by brutal suppression; while within the racist state itself the ruling class is racked by indecision and dissent.

The struggle of the masses reflects their deeply-felt desire for a political system over which they have control and which is based on the will of the majority of people in South Africa.

Because of the integral links between apartheid and capitalism, nothing less than a workers government will be able to bring about the thorough-going democratisation of South African society.

The working class alone, as the most revolutionary class in

South Africa, can be relied on to lead the struggle. And as this class suffers most under apartheid, it alone can be trusted to destroy every last vestige of apartheid once it comes to power.

Advance the struggle for democracy!

Guided by the slogan: For a workers government and workers democracy we must begin mobilising for a mass united campaign which includes the following demands:

- * Universal suffrage for everyone from the age of 16 in a single, unitary and non-racial South Africa!

We must resist very strongly any idea that minority rights need to be protected in South Africa. The South Africa which emerges from the struggle for democracy must reflect the will of the majority of people.

- * An immediate end to the state of emergency, the release of all detainees, the unbanning of all political organisations, the lifting of all restrictions on people, political organisations and the media!

The absence of democracy in South Africa is shown most glaringly in the extreme, repressive legislation which the racist rulers use to keep apartheid capitalism intact.

As revolutionaries we have a duty to ensure that the class struggle takes place under the best possible conditions for the masses and that every attempt which the state makes to reverse the gains of the masses is vigorously opposed.

- * A unitary, non-racial and democratic educational system controlled by parent-teacher-student associations; and universal, free and compulsory education for all South Africans from pre-school to university!

The gross inequalities which characterise apartheid are nowhere more glaring than in the educational system. In few

other areas is the racist state so determined to maintain complete control.

The states heavy-handed response to the students struggle reveals just how crucial the educational system is to the perpetuation of apartheid-capitalism and how afraid the state is that the student struggle will grow over into a full-blown workers struggle.

Complete support must therefore be given to the struggle for PEOPLES EDUCATION but at the same time it is our duty to point out to the students that only a WORKERS GOVERNMENT will be able to ensure that this is achieved.

*** The abolition of the homelands system, migrant labour and single-sex hostels!**

The masses have no illusions about the homelands. They know they have not been designed to satisfy their democratic aspirations. They know from bitter experience that the true role of the puppet regimes in the homelands is to act as the executioners of the oppressed and exploited.

To these union-free zones the bosses are increasingly moving their factories, the better to be able to subjugate the workers. These state policies, which are aimed at weakening the ability of the working class to fight, and so driving them into submission, have to be strenuously fought against.

The system of migrant labour not only makes possible the ultra-exploitation of the working class but, together with single-sex hostels, is the principal means the racist rulers use to create divisions and foment tribal hostilities amongst the masses.

The National Union of Mineworkers demand for a commitment by the bosses to abolish migrant labour and its insistence that in the interim the induna (hostel guard) system of controlling the hostels (the main reason for faction fighting on the

mines, says the NUM) be scrapped and that democratically elected HOSTEL COMMITTEES replace it, must therefore be generalised throughout the country.

This must become the means whereby the tribal divisions and hostilities that the racist rulers are constantly trying to foster among migrant workers are resisted.

* The right of people to live where they choose, the abolition of influx control, and an immediate end to the uprooting and resettlement of people!

The acute economic crisis in South Africa throws increasing numbers of workers into the ranks of the unemployed. Fearful of the unemployed, fearful of the consequences of having a large army of unemployed in the main urban centres, the racist ruling class is increasingly using the homelands as dumping grounds for the thousands of surplus people.

Once in the homelands, these people are so driven to despair by the surrogate regimes of apartheid-capitalism, that many of them, out of sheer desperation and the seeming absence of any other alternative, join the vigilante squads of these hangmen of the working class and themselves become instruments of reaction and repression.

While struggling for the abolition of the homelands system, we have also to be struggling simultaneously against the states attempt to condemn workers to poverty and a merciless reign of terror in these concentration camps of apartheid capitalism.

* The unconditional right to strike and the unconditional right to picket!

The organ of rule of the bosses, the state, always acts to safeguard the interests of the capitalists against those of the proletariat. This is most glaringly shown in the many obstacles the state erects in the path of the working class to prevent them from being able to mount a serious challenge

against the exploiters.

The trade union movement must consistently fight against all attempt by the state to impose a system of compulsory arbitration upon it, and must also consistently fight to challenge the freedom of scabs to break strike.

Fight for a Constituent Assembly! No sell-out negotiations!

The struggle to smash the apartheid state places the call for a CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY foremost on the agenda of the struggle for democracy.

Such a sovereign body arises out of the struggle of the masses. It will be constituted on the basis of universal suffrage, with every delegate subject to recall. It will be convoked under conditions where the armed forces of the racist state have been disarmed and a workers militia formed. And it will draw up a new constitution for the country that expresses the true will of the exploited and oppressed.

Nothing less can be trusted with the fate of the revolution. Only by consistently agitating for the convocation of a constituent assembly will we make it plain that our aim is the victory of the masses and not the preparation of conditions for their betrayal through a sell-out settlement.

Capitalism is in its death-agony!

The struggle for democracy in South Africa takes place against the background of an economic system in its death-throes.

In its desperate struggle to survive, capitalism is heaping indescribable miseries on the working class. Between four million and six million blacks are unemployed: almost half of the economically active population.

No fewer than 40,000 jobs are wiped out each year as the crisis of capitalism deepens. It has been estimated that at least 80 per cent of Africans aged between 18 and 26 have

never had permanent employment. And all this while only 83 per cent of South Africa's productive capacity is being used and about one fifth of its factory space lies idle.

It is hardly surprising therefore that a member of the racist white parliament could warn that the plight of unemployed blacks in present-day economic conditions does not encourage them to support the free-enterprise system.

More and more black workers are being reduced to poverty and starvation as wages fail to keep pace with inflation and prices constantly rise. Even white workers who always believed that apartheid would guarantee them a secure livelihood are being forced to learn new lessons.

Inflation and recession know no colour bar and are incessantly gnawing away at the living standard of all workers.

Nor is the black petty bourgeoisie being spared from the ravages of decaying capitalism. Deep-seated recession and monetary instability lead to more and more small businesses being closed, with the banks only prepared to extend credit to the major conglomerates, which are considered to be safer investments.

Struggle on the basis of transitional demands

The rotten nature of the economic system makes it imperative that our struggle be guided by transitional demands.

These demands begin from the day-to-day struggles of the exploited and oppressed, but they are so formulated as to expose in consistent and revolutionary ways the true source of the masses' misery and impoverishment: the system of capitalism itself.

Work for all! For job-sharing without loss of pay!

It is our duty to ensure that it is not the working class who is made to bear the brunt of the decline of the capitalist

system.

Unemployment and pauperisation not only limit the capacity of the working class to engage their class enemies in battle, but it is also from these declassed sections of the masses that capitalism is often able to recruit the human dust for its vigilante squads.

Under dying capitalism our principal demand must therefore be the RIGHT to a job for all. If capitalism is the best of all possible systems, as the bosses never tire of telling the workers, then it must prove it by guaranteeing WORK FOR ALL! It must guarantee that there will be no retrenchments [redundancies].

Furthermore, it must guarantee that if a factory is no longer able to function at its full capacity there will be no lay-offs, but that instead the working day will be equally divided among the workers without any decrease in wages.

If the capitalist cannot provide the basic right to a job, then, as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has said: We don't want the bosses system.

For wages linked to inflation! For every price increase, a wage increase!

The working class has suffered sustained attacks on its standard of living. We must therefore raise the demand for wages which guarantee the workers a secure standard of living and, above all, which keep pace with the rate of inflation.

An old and favourite trick of the bosses is to take back quickly with the one hand what they give with the other. Built into all wage agreements therefore must be the proviso of automatic wage increases with any price increases.

We can best ensure that unions will not be caught off guard if we establish PRICE COMMITTEES to monitor the situation

constantly. These committees should be made up of members of all groups of the oppressed workers, unemployment, students, housewives, etc. and should become key organs of the united front, regularly providing the unions with information vital to a successful struggle against the bosses.

For worker control to end secret deals and the withdrawal of capital!

We must demand greater control over the workplace by workers themselves. With capitalism in its death-throes, the workers position becomes increasingly insecure.

Decisions to relocate factories or to form mergers are taken behind the backs of the workers, invariably leading to a worsening of their plight. We must therefore demand an end to all secret deals and an end to all business secrets!

The world-wide crisis of capitalism, coupled with the political crisis inside South Africa, makes the international bourgeoisie fearful for their investments in the country. They are constantly on the look-out for ways in which they can withdraw their capital, not because they want to isolate the South African government, but because they are beginning to lose confidence in the governments ability to guarantee the former high returns on their investments.

The sanctions and disinvestment campaigns have become useful pretexts for finance capital to withdraw large sums of money from the country. Those corporations which have left would of course have withdrawn their capital, sanctions or no sanctions, if their investments no longer proved profitable.

Withdrawing under the guise of sanctions gives them, they believe, a certain creditability which will stand them in good stead if a black petty-bourgeoisie nationalist government is installed in power.

We certainly have no wish to see the international bourgeoisie

remain in our country. They can leave if they choose but without taking any capital out of the country in whatever form. This is wealth that the South African working class has produced and it is the workers who must decide what happen to it.

We must therefore call for the establishment of FACTORY COMMITTEES, which monitor every aspect of the running of a company, and independently of which the bosses are not allowed to take any decisions. As a vital component of the united front, the factory committees will be able to translate into concrete reality the demand for greater workers control over the workplace.

The recent strike of the General Motors workers in Port Elizabeth who (after the fake pull-out of capital by the American parent company) demanded that worker representatives also serve on the board of the company, is testimony to the fact that the working class is learning from its own experience, that unless they have greater control over their bosses there is no guarantee of a secure future for them.

Win over the unemployed! Fight for a programme of public works!

Unless we take up the struggle of the unemployed in a serious and consistent way we shall see more and more of their number being recruited into the armed forces of the state, its kitskonstabels [special constables] and its vigilante squads.

But it is not enough to call for the establishment of unions for the unemployed. To win the unemployed over to the side of the class struggle means to convince them in practice that only by uniting with the rest of the proletariat is there any hope of a solution to their problem.

We must therefore take up the fight that the government begin a PROGRAMME OF PUBLIC WORKS! As an immediate priority the students need schools and the oppressed need houses. Such is

the sharp shortfall in only these areas that just to provide this will absorb hundreds of thousands of unemployed.

We must also never tire of pointing out to the masses the complete absurdity and wanton wastefulness of the capitalist system. Despite the fact that there is a chronic shortage of schools and houses for the oppressed, more than 27,000 jobs have disappeared in the building industry since 1982!

In the campaign to win over the unemployed, the establishment of LOCALS can play a crucial role. If all the exploited and oppressed unionised workers, non-unionised workers, unemployed, youth, housewives they can become the main organs which link the factory struggles with township struggles in a dynamic fighting unity.

What gives LOCALS such a special significance is that the strongest organisation of the working class, COSATU, has called for their formation.

Recognition of unions for farm labourers and domestic workers!

Among the different sections of the South African working class it is certainly the farm labourer and the domestic workers who are the least protected against their bosses.

The fact that their unions do not have legal recognition (in reality farm workers do not even have the right to organise), and that they are not covered by any minimum wage legislation, means that they are forced to eke out an existence on a starvation wage. Farm labourers and domestic workers also do not qualify for unemployment benefits or old age provision.

It is our duty to ensure that all members of the working class are always in the best possible position to conduct their struggle against their capitalist exploiters. By advancing the call for the recognition of unions for farm labourers and domestic workers we will not only create more favourable conditions for their struggle to be waged, but will also bring

their struggle into closer unity and harmony with that of the rest of the proletariat.

Women workers are proletarian fighters!

More than half of the South African working class is made up of women. Yet only a small percentage of women workers is represented in the organisation of the masses.

We must consistently strive to bring more and more women workers into the class struggle. This means ridding ourselves of our chauvinist ideas, promoting the formation of a womens section in the united front, and consistently agitating for the establishment of creches and child-care centres which will relieve women of the sole responsibility for child rearing and thereby free them in increasing numbers to take their place alongside the men workers as equals and comrades-in-arms.

To perpetuate the existing divisions between men workers and women workers is to weaken substantially the fighting potential of the working class and to delay for a long time the day of reckoning between the bosses and the proletariat!

Students and young workers are the battalions of the proletariat!

No one can deny the vanguard role that the youth have been playing in the struggle over the past few years.

Through their heroism and readiness for self-sacrifice they have acted as catalysts, drawing greater and greater numbers of the oppressed masses into the struggle.

Of all the sections of the working class, the young workers are always the most ready to do battle against the bosses. Their youthfulness makes them susceptible to new ideas, and while some older workers may still have illusions about the capitalist system more and more young workers are enthusiastically embracing socialism as the only alternative

to the system off wage slavery.

In their exuberance and boundless energy however the youth often run far ahead of the rest of the exploited and oppressed. Often too, they incorrectly interpret the caution of the older workers (gained from years of experience) as dragging of the feet and conservatism.

Certainly the youth must always strive to infuse the struggle with a greater militancy and must always be looking for ways in which to raise the struggle to a higher level.

But the youth must be made to realise that unless the working class as a whole leads the struggle, there is no hope that apartheid-capitalism will be overthrown. The task of the young proletarian fighters is therefore not to try to usurp the role of the proletariat but to harmonise their struggle with that of the working class.

Patience with older workers and less militant workers must replace the tendency to be dismissive. Careful and repeated explanation of the goals of the struggle must replace compulsion; young workers must show a readiness to learn from the older members of the proletariat; above all, joint and carefully drawn-up plans for the struggle must replace adventurism.

Given the role that the youth have been playing until now, there can be no doubt however that it is the youth who will form the main fighting battalions of the proletariat.

Build defence committees to protect the struggle.

The only way in which the racist rulers can sustain their vicious system of wage slavery is through the institution of a merciless reign of terror.

Suppression of the trade union movement, harassment and arrests of union officials, the beating-up and murdering of

workers (BTR Sarmcol, OK Bazaars, Gold Fields Ltd., etc.): this is the reply of bankrupt capitalism to the demands of the working class for a proper standard of living.

More and more also the racist state is using vigilante squads (of which Inkatha is the most prominent) in an attempt to beat back the offensive of the masses.

COSATUs call for DEFENCE COMMITTEES to protect the struggle of the working class must therefore occupy a central place in the programme of action. When workers are on strike, when they are picketing, when they are involved in a factory occupation or a sit-in strike, defence committees must be built as the fighting attachments of the united front.

At the time this is written, one of the most significant battles of the masses of the past two-three years stands in great danger of being drowned in blood.

The countryside rent strike, which has been a source of inspiration for all of the exploited and oppressed, is seen by the racist rulers as too serious a threat to allow it to continue indefinitely. They are hatching all sorts of plots to reverse the gains that the masses have made, and as soon as they detect any sign of weakness, they will not hesitate to bring the full might of the state to bear on the resisters.

To delay in building defence committees will thus mean making it easier for the racist state to succeed in breaking the resistance of the masses.

Prepare for insurrection! Organise towards the general strike!

While our programme of action must of necessity begin from defensive struggles, we must also realise that every forward march that the masses make is going to bring them into every greater conflict with the racist rulers.

Increasingly, defensive measures are going to give way to

offensive ones and more and more the struggle of the masses is going to assume the form of civil war as apartheid-capitalism is shown as not only unwilling to satisfy their demands but also incapable of doing so.

The role of the working class as the leading and most revolutionary class in South African society is going to be decisive in this coming battle. Only the working class will be able to provide the struggle with the weapon which can dislodge the racist rule from their seemingly impregnable position that is the GENERAL STRIKE.

To predict when the general strike will take place, or how many such actions will be necessary before the racist state is overthrown, is a futile exercise. Of more importance is for militants to be clear about the role that the general strike plays in the struggle!

The general strike places the call for INSURRECTION on the order of the day. Through it all the resources of the working class are marshalled for battle. It unifies the whole working class, gives it a concrete sense of its power and strength and, by drawing the rest of the oppressed masses behind the working class, creates the conditions for the masses to struggle for power.

A programme of action that stops short of placing such revolutionary tasks before the mass of workers will not be able to mobilise them even for defensive struggles.

Only if we present the masses with a programme which not only calls on them to make sacrifices for the struggle but also prepares them for victory, can we expect them to give it their full support.

No bosses sanctions but international working-class action!

We must reveal to the working class in South Africa who its true allies are the international proletariat.

The mass of workers must be taught to place their faith not in sanctions that are dependent on the goodwill of bourgeois governments, not on the conscience of finance capital, but on international working-class solidarity in action.

Militants in Britain and in other countries who successfully implement the trade union action against South Africa provided that this is done in harmony with the South African working class will be able to speed up the development of a truly revolutionary consciousness among the workers in South Africa.

The fraternal links that have been established between the NUM (Britain) and the NUM (South Africa) and the trip abroad of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWEUSA) representatives to secure international working-class support for the striking OK Bazaars works are the first promising steps in this direction.

The programme of action and the united front are demanded by the masses!

The longing for greater unity in the struggle is felt deeply and acutely by all of the oppressed and exploited. It is felt particularly sharply by those who are newly entering the struggle militant young workers.

But the older and more experienced layers of the masses are also becoming impatient with their leaders lack of clarity and sectarianism. They want to be given the opportunity to struggle in unity with all the oppressed and exploited.

To fail to provide the struggle with a programme or action to obstruct in any way the building of the united front which alone will be able to implement it is to desert the masses in their hour of greatest need.

The proletarian party alone can ensure victory!

The principal duty of the revolutionaries is to establish

communist cells in the mass movement and to fight conscientiously for the adoption of a revolutionary programme of action in the place of the ad-hocism and regionalism that now characterises the struggle.

They must also consistently agitate for and work towards the building of a united front to implement this programme.

Only if these revolutionaries at the same time fight for the building of a centralise proletarian party that is guided by the revolutionary theory of Marxism-Leninism, will the programme of action and the united front not only see the light of day, but also become the means for victory of the exploited and oppressed over the racist ruling class.

*** Forward to a workers government!**

*** Forward to a revolutionary programme of action for the South African struggle!**

*** Forward to international working-class solidarity with the South African revolution!**

*** Forward to the building of a Bolshevik-Leninist party in South Africa![/threecolumns]**