

South African Communist Party 1977

The Way Forward from Soweto

Source: extract from political report adopted by the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party, April 1977.

Transcribed: by [Dominic Tweedie](#).

The key to the future of the whole of Southern Africa and, indeed, the whole of our continent, is the liberation of South Africa itself. It is this question which dominates the thinking and actions of Vorster, and of world reaction which stands at his side. Their tactics in the sub-continent are undoubtedly guided by the desire to 'save' South Africa for the west; and today they work more urgently than ever to block any revolutionary advance in this main citadel of imperialism on the African continent. They do so, however, against the background of improved prospects of internal struggle brought about by changes in the Southern African situation and by the stirring events of the past year inside our own country.

The minority regime in South Africa faces a crisis of considerable magnitude, which found dramatic expression in the upsurge which hit the world headlines in June 1976. The Soweto and connected events clearly demonstrate the new mood of revolutionary militancy which grips the mass of our people. Our youth have shown unambiguously their readiness to sacrifice and, if need be, to die in the struggle against the minority regime. Our strong and experienced working class responded magnificently to calls for political general strikes which involved about a quarter of a million workers since June 1976 and inflicted great damage on the economy. In the Cape the Coloured youth and workers joined hands with their African brothers at a time when the regime is trying desperately to drive a wedge between them.

A most significant feature of this upsurge is the persistence with which the youth in particular maintained their revolutionary buoyancy in the face of the regime's response to the Soweto revolt, which was perhaps more vicious than any in our modern history of struggle. The mass killings on the streets, the torture and murder in the jails, and the administrative actions against all forms of opposition, have been more intensive than in the post-Sharpeville and post-Rivonia periods. Yet the terror has not, on this occasion, created a mood of defeatism or submission; on the contrary all the signs show that the spirit of defiance and the search for ways of hitting the enemy continue.

THE ROAD TO SOWETO

The events in what has become known as the Soweto revolt are not isolated happenings; they have their roots in the crisis which has been building up at every level of the socio-economic structure. South Africa has suffered not only from the general crisis of the imperialist west, of which it is part, but also from the special contradictions inherent in the Apartheid framework.

Inflation is rampant, but it hits the overwhelming black majority with an especially vicious effect. Unemployment is rising, but its scale among the oppressed majority is vast, with estimates of two million black unemployed by the end of this year. Developments in Southern Africa put at risk South Africa's supply of foreign contract labour for its mines. Industry suffers from a shortage of skilled and semi-skilled labour, which arises directly from the historically-based restrictions on black entry into most levels of skilled operations. Vorster's aggressive aims in Southern Africa and the mobilisation of greater force against the

liberation movement, continue to bleed away economic resources into military expenditure, this year increased to over one thousand six hundred million Rand. Periodic rises in the adverse balance of trade, falls in the financial reserves, and a dangerous slowing down in the rate of economic growth, are all symptoms of serious economic instability. And, as admitted by the regime, the political crisis since June has, in turn, reacted back on the economic situation to further increase the regime's difficulties.

From the early 1970s the Black working class responded to deteriorating economic conditions and to the growing gap between white and black incomes by strike action in every part of the country, involving hundreds of thousands of workers. Long before Soweto, the youth engaged in sporadic acts of defiance in the schools and in the universities. And in the country areas many acts of resistance were recorded against the regime's population resettlement policy, which empowers it to remove settled African communities from one part of the country to another.

The intensity of the Soweto events reflects the development over the years of these basic people's reactions to the growing crisis of Apartheid. At the political level, unbroken efforts by our Party and the whole liberation movement, headed by the ANC, maintained that spirit of resistance, and helped lay the foundation for the growth of the heightened revolutionary mood which is in evidence. And, amongst large numbers of the new militants thrown up by the activities, there is a growing awareness of the liberating ideas of Marxism-Leninism and a search for the correct politics of social revolution.

SOWETO ASSESSED

What happened in the streets of South Africa from June 1976, including industrial supporting actions by large sections of the workers, is relatively well known.

There is no doubt that, taken as a whole, the Soweto events have opened a new chapter in the history of the revolutionary struggle.

As always, during popular upsurges, the people themselves 'provide an astonishing amount of new material for an appraisal of the slogans of revolutionary parties' (Lenin, *Selected Works*, p.457).

The inventiveness and ingenuity of the youth in particular showed boundless revolutionary imagination. Throughout the period, tactics were varied and new forms of maintaining the pressure were found. At the beginning, the children of Soweto simply faced police bullets and flushed away the tear gas with water, or bravely hurled back the canisters. Later, more sophisticated actions were evolved.

The youth soon learnt the folly of facing Vorster's terrorists in the open streets in large numbers and they switched to operating in small groups under the cover of darkness. Many police vehicles and 'Hippos' were ambushed and destroyed. Barricades were erected to slow down the enemy and to provide cover in time of attack. Home-made incendiary devices were quickly in evidence. The people also turned their attention to the government collaborators amongst them and to the police informers. The organised destruction of property which symbolised the racist system of oppression was carried out by well-planned actions of small organised units.

There was an early recognition by the youth that to succeed they needed to mobilise the support of their parents and the mass of the workers, and this culminated in the three stirring solidarity strikes by the working class in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The young demonstrators learnt to use the tactic of subterfuge to take the struggle out of the black township and to show the people's anger right in the heart of cities like Cape Town. There, the whole population had a taste of the savagery and brutality of the racist armed forces. This tactic was quickly taken up by the youth of Soweto who, despite the ubiquitous BOSS network, secretly assembled at strategic points and marched on John Vorster Square, taking the police by surprise.

There were periods during the upsurge when the racist law-enforcement agencies were partly paralysed, making pass raids and rent collection impossible, and making it dangerous for Bantu Administration officials, isolated groups of policemen etc, to walk the streets or to have any contact with the people.

Soweto closed the debate about the legitimacy of resorting to the armed struggle.

It made it abundantly clear to the world and the racist regime that our people have reached a stage where they are no longer prepared to behave like sheep led to the slaughter house; they are no longer prepared to let other people decide their fate as if they were inanimate objects.

Like the Angolan intervention, the Soweto revolt exposed the vulnerability of the South African ruling clique. Whilst Angola destroyed the myth of the South African military invincibility, Soweto demolished the myth that the government's security forces are able to destroy the people's revolutionary spirit

An indelible mark has been made on the revolutionary and political consciousness of our people by the Soweto events. They raised the level of the people's preparedness and willingness to sacrifice to a higher level, enhancing enormously the striking power of the liberation movement.

SOWETO — SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

But it is necessary to assess carefully the significance of these events, and to deal with certain questions which are relevant to the future conduct of our struggle.

Who organised and led the upsurge? Was it only a youth revolt or did it involve wider class forces? What was the role of the ideology of Black consciousness? Why did the organised liberation movement not arm the people and so transform the street confrontations into effective insurrection? Were the conditions ripe for a successful nationwide revolutionary assault, needing only the element of more effective revolutionary leadership? These are the questions being discussed both inside and outside our movement, by some who seek to learn from the experience of the events, and by others who wish to use them only to smear and belittle the liberation movement.

Yet it is our duty to face and answer these questions without any defensiveness against reactionary snipers, black or white. We must be on our guard, too, against emotional and immature approaches which confuse analysis with propaganda and which avoid a frank discussion of some of the objective and subjective limitations of these events, for fear that such a discussion will diminish the scale of the people's heroism and sacrifice and

underestimate their potential for future revolutionary advance. On the contrary, we believe that an awareness of these limitations will equip us all the better to channel and increase the intensity of the new revolutionary energies which have undoubtedly emerged.

We have already said that the conditions which triggered off the Soweto events had their roots in a growing socio-economic crisis. But it is necessary to be clear on the magnitude of this crisis and to be more precise on the extent of the people's responses to it. It is important, then, to note the following inter-related factors:

(a) Despite the difficulties experienced by the enemy's law enforcement agencies in a few of the townships, the enemy and the organs of the state power were not in such a state of collapse or disruption that the capacity of the ruling class to act cohesively and to contain militant actions, had been broken. The actions of a revolutionary movement, however well-organised, are not sufficient *on their own* to create a classical revolutionary situation. This, as Lenin has said, comes about through the maturing of special objective and subjective factors.

(b) The actions themselves although widely spread were neither altogether nation-wide in character nor did they involve the mass of the rural people. In two of the major urban centres, those around Johannesburg and Cape Town, the workers responded in large numbers, but primarily as an act of solidarity, without raising any independent demands on the issue of state power. The relatively weak response from the countryside reflects a very low level of rural liberation organisation. In the towns, too, the limited response in many areas (Natal, Eastern Cape and the OFS were relatively quiet) suggests an urgent need to improve levels of political and economic organisation, and of mobilisation, especially at the point of production.

(c) The people remain unarmed, and this fact obviously reduces the possibility of transforming the demonstration into an effective assault on state power.

(d) The political general strike has a prime place in our revolutionary tactics. It is, however, fallacious to believe that, in the absence of general insurrectionary conditions, the working class can be expected to 'starve' the ruling class into political submission by protracted withdrawal of labour. We remain convinced that in the appropriate conditions, generalised industrial action will be one of the most decisive factors in the struggle for people's power.

The question remains: why after sixteen years in which we have prepared for armed struggle, was the armed wing of the liberation movement unable to arm the people, or to ensure that the popular demonstrations would be combined with effective armed activity against the regime's army and police force?

The movement of which we are part has never been shy to examine critically its weaknesses, mistakes or failures. In previous analyses of the history of our attempts to begin armed struggle, we focussed attention on these weaknesses some of which continued into the recent period and undoubtedly limited our movement's ability to rise more effectively to the occasion. But mistakes apart, it is clear that the most serious obstacle to this aspect of our policy has been the extremely difficult and unfavourable internal and external conditions in which we have been forced to operate.

We have already stressed that radical changes in Southern Africa have substantially altered the geography of our struggle. This factor, together with the qualitatively new mood of

defiance and resistance within our country, has undoubtedly created radically new and more favourable conditions for armed activity. But such activity cannot arise simply through overnight response to a changed political situation. Perhaps this problem can be more clearly understood if we recall that it was only its own experience in the Soweto and post-Soweto events themselves which taught the new generation of fighting youth the need to become part of an organised national liberation force, the need to create well-organised underground networks, and the need to learn the skills required if the enemy is to be dealt with effectively. To translate all this into new levels of revolutionary practice needs new effort and preparation by our liberation movement. In this sense the Soweto events have become an important launching pad for raising the struggle to a new level.

The events could not, in themselves, have been transformed into a successful all-round armed uprising even if adequate stocks of weapons had been available. We must not play with the idea of an armed uprising by treating it as a question only of logistics and organisation.

Nor could the slogan 'Arm the people', which has such a revolutionary ring, have had real meaning in the absence of prior preparation of organised liberation-military structures within the country. The absence of these structures *in sufficient strength* when Soweto erupted is not the result of ineffective planning; it is more closely connected with the adverse conditions in which such planning had to take place in the pre-Soweto decade.

Peoples' armed conflict is a protracted process. Even though conditions now exist for the struggle to be extended enormously, we must not be tempted by the passion and excitement of the moment to spread a dangerous and damaging illusion that it will be short and swift. The enemy backed by imperialism still possesses considerable strength and resources. There is no doubt, however, that the new situation has brought closer than ever before the possibility of an effective beginning to the armed struggle. And there is already public evidence that units of Umkhonto we Sizwe have begun to act against the enemy.

SOWETO AND OUR LIBERATION MOVEMENT

What was the link between the Soweto upsurge and our liberation movement, and its long traditions of sacrifice and resistance? On the one hand, the regime has repeatedly claimed that the demonstrations were manipulated by 'agitators' connected with the ANC and our Party. On the other hand, some critics of our movement totally deny the influence of its organised underground and its ideology on the events.

The demonstration of June 16 was called by SASM, a national school-student organisation which had been campaigning for some years on the issue of Bantu Education. But it is clear that what started as a protest by school students against the government's educational policies, soon extended to broader sections of the people and advanced wider demands. Although it remained essentially a youth revolt, it would be wrong to see it in purely generational terms, as if youth constitute an independent social force separate from the basic line-up of national and class forces. Such an approach is neither factually correct nor does it help to understand the role of the students in the coming struggle for people's power. Already, some are insisting that this new force of 'student power' will lead the people to victory. This same kind of theoretical confusion was spread after the 1968 French events when it was claimed that students now stand in the vanguard of the revolution and that a contradiction exists between the 'revolutionism' of the students and the 'conservatism' and 'moderation' of the older generations including the working class.

The overwhelming majority of those who organised and took part in the demonstrations came from working class homes and they were encouraged in their actions by their parents. Many of the teachers played an important supporting role. Amongst those who participated in the street confrontations from the very beginning were substantial numbers of non-students including thousands of unemployed working youth. Figures provided by the Johannesburg State pathologist on those killed by the police between 18 June and 18 August in the Johannesburg-West Rand area showed that approximately 50 per cent were over 20 years of age, and 20 per cent were over 30 years of age. A major high point of the action was the three protest strikes in the six weeks between August and the middle of September. When the full saga of Soweto can be recorded without concern for security, it will be shown that soon after the initial demonstration, the whole Soweto community became involved in the ferment.

SASM itself was at all times an independent organisation. Although SASO influenced its formation, it was not run by SASO, the BPC or our liberation front, even though the ideological influences of all three organisations were present amongst its leaders. We have already noted that what started as a successful protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction soon expressed some of the broader aims of the national democratic revolution. The placards and slogans began to reflect the basic questions of race oppression and peoples' power. The ANC's slogan of *Amandla!* became an important password to distinguish friend from foe in the streets of struggle. From the early stages there is evidence that some of SASM's leaders turned to known activists of the ANC for advice and co-ordination. Since then, many more have joined the ranks of the liberation movement and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. During this period the ANC, through its propaganda apparatus and in other ways, helped mobilise supporting actions including a call in support of the strikes.

This brief outline is not advanced in order to suggest that the ANC organised or led the upsurge. Indeed, as it developed, the revolt showed the marks of all popular upsurges which usually combine organised actions with others which are spontaneous and semi-spontaneous. Nor is it intended to claim that our underground had achieved such a peak of strength that it was able to provide the necessary leadership at all the points of eruption. But it is clear that, both historically and in the more immediate sense, the ANC-led resistance movement was an important cornerstone of the upsurge. Its leadership in the immediate future will be the key factor in consolidating and advancing the revolutionary energies which have emerged. Certainly, Vorster and his allies have no illusions on this score. And this explains the heightened campaign of terror against the ANC underground and the increased attempts to isolate it externally.

THE ROLE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

We have, in a previous document, emphasised that the term 'Black Consciousness' does not, in itself, express a coherent programme or a strategy of struggle, still less a systematic ideology. Those who claim to be its adherents do not belong to a common organisation and they express a wide range of conflicting definitions of its content. Its very vagueness, organisationally and ideologically, makes it difficult to give complete answers about its impact on the Soweto upsurge

But vague as it is, Black Consciousness undoubtedly acted as an inspiration to some patriots who understood it as a general assertion of national identity, pride and confidence, as a healthy response to the insulting arrogance of the white supremacists, and as a contribution to

the psychological liberation of the African people. Understood in this way, it expresses an approach which was pioneered by the African National Congress and our Party and developed in the course of revolutionary practice. The mobilisation of the national energies of the black oppressed remains an indispensable weapon in the hands of the liberation movement. In this sense Black Consciousness is a vital constituent of the ideology of our liberation struggle.

It certainly acted as a 'conscientising' agent and contributed to the revitalised surge of national feeling, especially amongst the youth.

But as a substitute for scientific social analysis, and as an alternative to the ideology of our liberation front, it becomes a harmful demagogic cliché. (Who is a patriot, Matanzima or Bram Fischer?) Those who apply the concept in this way, see the forces ranged against one another in our struggle only in colour compartments and they ignore the special character of the economic and class basis of South African racism. They fail to provide any guidelines for a real strategy of social change, on the fundamental nature of the forces (including black forces) from whom the enemy hopes to win collaboration, and the character of those classes and groups which can be neutralised or mobilised in favour of the liberation struggle. Used in place of genuine revolutionary doctrine, Black Consciousness is a misleading ideology and weakens the cause which it purports to serve — the cause of national liberation. Recent events in Southern Africa — in Angola and elsewhere — have shown once again that merely paying lip-service to black nationalism is not the same as advancing the national cause and it is often a camouflage for those whose actions serve the enemy. The Savimbis and the Robertos trumpeted very loudly about their 'black nationalism' in their efforts to discredit the MPLA's principled adherence to non-racialism.

An ideology which proclaims colour as its sole foundation can more easily obscure the real issues because of its highly charged emotional content. For this reason Black Consciousness cannot appropriately express the vigorous revolutionary nationalism of our liberation movement.

BLACK COLLABORATION

The internal situation continues to be a political powder-keg. The sustained resistance and the people's militant mood are aggravating the political and economic difficulties of the ruling class which is searching for ways of diverting the revolutionary pressures. The primary weapons against the people and our liberation movement remain brute force and administrative terror. But there is also an attempt to take measures and to use language which give the appearance of a retreat from aspects of race discrimination whilst leaving undisturbed, and even reinforcing, the main framework of race and economic exploitation.

In this way, the ruling class hopes to reduce external pressures and, in the language of counter-insurgency, to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the people. But the enemy's strategy is not confined to sweet talk and petty reforms -both of which have so far made little impression. It hopes also to win the collaboration of groups amongst the oppressed whose economic and social status give them an interest in preventing a genuine revolutionary change.

A key element in this strategy is the creation in the Bantustan neo-colonies of an administrative elite and a class of petty capitalists entirely dependent on the racist state and

its exploitative designs. In so-called white South Africa, whilst the massacres in the streets continue, a number of 'liberal' concessions have been made to win the support of the black middle class. Some restrictions on the business operations of Indian and Coloured traders have been eased. The government has promised more facilities for African traders in the black townships. An Indian bank and an African bank have been established, both in partnership with existing banking institutions. Certain of the limitations on black home ownership have been lifted.

The various black Chambers of Commerce have established close links with their white counterparts. At the political level institutions have been created — the Coloured Persons' Representative Council, the South African Indian Council, and lately, the Inter-Cabinet Council — which aim to involve upper-crust blacks in Apartheid administration. The purpose of these measures was clearly spelt out by the Transvaal Chamber of Industries in a memorandum to the Prime Minister on August 27, 1976:

'The urban Black middle class must be won over to the side of the Whites in order to contain, on a long-term basis, the irresponsible economic and political activities of the blacks who are influenced against their real interests from within and without our borders.'

These views were echoed in a speech by a leading African trader at a recent business conference. He appealed for the lifting of existing business restrictions against blacks and stated that if the government did so,

'The black community will see the emergence of a middle class which will serve as a bulwark against any political uprising in our country.' (*SAIRR Survey 1976.*)

It is from within the Black middle class that the ruling class seeks support for the 'responsible' alternative to the radical policies of our liberation movement. Apart from economic concessions, it has also sharpened its ideological campaigns to detach this middle class from the mainstream of our national movement in the hope that its influence and status will be used to win over other black classes for reformist rather than revolutionary policies.

The attack on the social aims of our liberation front has become more intense and is designed to spread the distortion that the small black middle class has more to lose than to gain from genuine peoples' power in a United South Africa.

On its own, the crude anti-ANC, anti-Communist and anti-Soviet propaganda of the Vorster regime can find little response. Its record of racist brutality is so clear that even the most right-wing black quislings find it embarrassing to be caught in the act of open collaboration with it. But the strategy of our ruling class is advanced not only by the actions of its state apparatus, but also by some who pose as liberators and as champions of black freedom. They use all the nationalist catchphrases such as 'Black Power', 'one man one vote', 'majority rule' etc., but advocate policies which objectively serve the enemy. The ruling class has been joined by these elements in a campaign to weaken the influence of the ANC and the liberation front which it heads, and to prevent an effective assault on racist power. The meeting point between enemy strategy and the activities of these elements is illustrated by the following examples.

Recently the US State Department announced that it was preparing scholarship places in US educational institutions for the hundreds of young militants who escaped from South Africa

to find new ways of continuing the struggle. Shortly afterwards, Tsietsi Mashinini, one of the young Soweto militants, toured the United States and made a similar appeal for educational places, claiming that such training was necessary to make Africans fit for majority rule. He then went to Botswana to recruit young exiles for US academic institutions and appealed to them not to join the ANC's armed wing for military training. (*World*, 21.1.1977) Drake Koka, the general secretary of the Black Allied Workers' Union, in an interview with *Free Labour* (January-February 1977) the organ of the ICFTU, when asked, 'what is your attitude to Young's statement that the US will launch a programme for training South African blacks to fit them for majority rule', replied that it was an 'excellent project' because 'responsible leadership' was needed in South Africa. Koka claims inspiration from the ideology of Black Consciousness.

Buthelezi uses the same language of white liberalism which searches for change without people's power and which rationalises its fear of genuine liberation by claiming that the masses are not yet ready to run the country. He warned publicly that

'The very same powers which will destroy Apartheid will create a situation of ungovernability in post-Apartheid South Africa',

and

'We will not do anything in the name of liberation which will result in the defeat of Apartheid but at the same time reduce South Africa to an ungovernable conglomerate of conflicting interests. It is too high a price to pay for liberation'. (*Sunday Tribune*; 23 January, 1977.)

At the height of the Soweto disturbances in August 1976, the leaders or representatives of all the Homeland governments, except the Transkei, met to discuss the situation. After the meeting the convenor, Professor Hudson Ntsanwisi of Gazankulu, issued a joint statement to the press. 'Whilst understanding the impatience of the youth', it was stated, 'the Homeland leaders could not condone the wanton destruction of property'. (*SAIRR Survey*) 1976, p.26.)

In October 1976 a meeting was held in Soweto attended by Bantustan chiefs Buthelezi, Ntsanwisi and Pathudi with fifty leading African politicians, civic leaders, trade unionists, professional men and women, student leaders and representatives of the Black Consciousness movement'. The meeting elected a steering committee under the chairmanship of Dr S.M. Nyembezi with aims which included the establishment of a 'disciplined black community and to work for the emergence of a true black leadership'. (*SAIRR Survey*, 1976.)

The racists undoubtedly welcome this kind of language. After all, they have been warning incessantly about the 'irresponsible' black leadership, about the chaos into which South Africa will sink if the ANC and its allies gain power, and about how unready the blacks are for majority rule.

On the question of our armed strategy for struggle this 'responsible' black leadership also plays into the enemy's hands. In our situation the argument against armed struggle is an argument either for no change at all, or for the kind of change which will guarantee continued domination by the ruling class in a new form. Harry Oppenheimer showed that he clearly understands this argument when he warned the London Stock Exchange (May 15th, 1976) that the basic question is the survival of 'private enterprise' and that,

'It is quite wrong to suppose as is often suggested that all that is at issue here is whether the same solution is to be reached by peaceful means or by bloodshed. The important point to bear in mind is that any peaceful solution would be an entirely different solution from any solution that is imposed by force.'

It is this 'entirely different solution' which is being worked for in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa by the Carters, the Owens, the Smiths and the Vorsters. And, in our case, reaction's efforts are reinforced by those within the black communities who either misguidedly or deliberately work against our liberation front's policy of combining mass political action with armed struggle.

THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS — ITS ROLE IN OUR STRUGGLE

Despite the fact that most of these compromising gestures have come from members of the black middle class, we believe that the majority of this class can be won over for the aims of our liberation. Indeed, those of its members who continue to support and join our struggle cannot, for obvious reasons, openly identify with it) nor are their views publicised by a press controlled by the oppressors. During the Soweto events numerous traders, teachers and other professional groups sided with the people.

But in any case, the more fundamental question is whether the objective economic and social position of the black middle class as a whole will lead the majority of its members to become permanent allies of the ruling class. Posed in another way, the question is whether the aims of our national movement continue to represent the aspirations of all the main classes within the ranks of the oppressed — workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie. To this question we give a positive answer.

The main content of the present phase of our struggle continues to be the national democratic revolution to destroy internal colonialism. We believe that the achievement of this aim is in the interest not only of the black workers and peasants, but also of the black petty bourgeoisie.

But, like the petty bourgeoisie everywhere, it tends to vacillate between the ruling and exploited classes, depending partly upon the strength of the main antagonists in the struggle. The heightening by our liberation movement of confrontation with the ruling state will thus also help win over sections of the middle class.

We should bear in mind, too, that the middle and upper classes amongst the black groups (those already in existence and those in the process of formation) are not of exactly the same mould. For example, it is necessary to examine separately those in the Bantustans and those outside, and even within each group, to distinguish the strata which are more closely dependent on white patronage. There is already evidence that in the Bantustans the black upper crust is becoming an institutionalised instrument of the people's exploitation by the ruling class, and is progressively driven into the enemy camp. In the rest of South Africa the black petty bourgeoisie consists mainly of small businessmen, professional groups, those occupying minor administrative posts and low-level business executive positions, and so on. Each of these groups is, in different ways, torn between the complex of contradictory economic and political pressures, resulting in inconsistent responses to the regime. But they will, more often than not, find themselves at loggerheads with the ruling class whom they can serve only in an auxiliary capacity. Even when their economic position has improved, colour

still determines the outside limit of their economic growth. In their daily life they will still come up against all the humiliations which every black experiences. Unlike the petty-bourgeoisie elsewhere there is a total racist bar against their entry into the higher political and economic preserves of the privileged minority

The consolidation of a broad liberation unity — cutting across simple class lines — does not imply that we ignore the different levels of commitment and degrees of consistency of the various class forces within the alliance.

It is clear that the dominant force in this alliance must be the working class and it is their supremacy in the new state form which will emerge after victory, which will prevent our revolution from grinding to a halt at the point of a formal political take-over

THE WORKING CLASS AND OUR PARTY

In the coming struggle for power the working class has a special role to play. The economic struggles of the past few years and the recent successful political strikes, have provided it with new confidence in its organised strength. This strength must be used to press home the demand for the right to strike, the right to free trade union organisation, and above all, to advance the aims of the national liberation struggle.

In alliance with the working class and poor peasants in the countryside, the black proletariat is the most uncompromising enemy of race and class oppression and the most powerful force for national liberation. The working class gains nothing but misery from the Bantustans which are used as an excuse to deprive it of all rights and to hound it in the cities built by its labour. It has nothing to gain from the kind of liberation which gives a few blacks the opportunity to share in the people's exploitation. For the black working class, the biggest and most exploited section of the oppressed majority, there is only one way out — the complete defeat of racist supremacy and the creation of a people's government which will put South Africa on the road to socialism. There is little meaning in a liberation which does not destroy the economic power of the ruling class and the state apparatus which protects it. To ensure this kind of liberation requires a strongly organised working class with a special role in the alliance of political forces against the minority dictatorship.

The black working class must be on its guard against attempts by the white trade union movement to control the growth of black workers' organisations in industry. There can be no collaboration with those who side with the ruling class to ensure the maximum exploitation of the black workers. We believe in the true unity of all workers — African, Indian, Coloured and White. But there must be real equality and majority control. It is only when the white workers stop collaborating with our class enemy and act as part of a united working class that they will be welcomed as brothers.

The only trade union centre which has stood for genuine democracy and non-racialism in the trade union movement is the South African Congress of Trade Unions. Despite SACTU's formal legality, its principled adherence to the policies of the ANC-led liberation front has made it a target of intense persecution which has seriously interfered with its efforts to develop its organisational strength. It is necessary to search for ways of overcoming these obstacles. The tasks of building SACTU, strengthening genuine trade unions and creating effective factory organisation need special study. It is, for example, necessary to examine more closely the use that can be made of the factory and liaison committee system, depending

on actual conditions in the specific industry and factory. The building of legal trade unions in fascist conditions calls for a flexible application of general policy. This aspect of our policy is dealt with in greater detail in a separate document.

OUR PARTY AND THE LIBERATION ALLIANCE

The struggle of the black workers cannot be separated from the wider struggle against racist oppression. The indivisible link which exists between class and national oppression in our country explains the need for a strong Communist Party and a well-organised trade union movement as part of the liberation alliance headed by the African National Congress. As already emphasised, this alliance is not only in the interests of the working class but also of all patriots; any attempts to weaken it will damage the prospects for revolutionary change in South Africa. Our Party has no immediate political aims separate from the aims of the national liberation movement headed by the ANC.

We stand united by the immediate and foremost task — the destruction of racist domination and the achievement of the aims of the National Democratic revolution whose main content is the liberation of the African majority and other oppressed black groups. We share, too, the belief that there can be no true liberation in South Africa without the destruction of the political and economic power of our ruling class and without people's control of the basic means of production.

Experience has proved, over and over again, that in our revolution collaboration between our two organisations has raised the level of the struggle and has been a mutually reinforcing influence. The two fundamental streams of revolutionary consciousness — national and class — have made an important impact upon one another and have enriched the indigenous application of the universal truths of revolutionary ideology.

Our claim that we are a vanguard party of the working class is in no way diminished by our close association with the national liberation front headed by the African National Congress. A Communist Party does not earn the honoured title of vanguard merely by proclaiming it. For example, a working class Party does not exercise its vanguard role in relation to trade unions by capturing them or transforming them into wings of the Party, but rather by proving that the Party and its individual members are the most ideologically clear and the most devoted and loyal participants in the workers' cause. The same principle applies to a situation such as ours in which the main immediate instrument for the achievement of the aims of our national democratic revolution is a mass movement capable of galvanising all classes in an assault on racist power. The African National Congress *is* such an instrument and our loyal participation in the liberation front which it heads is in the best interests of the class whose vanguard we claim to be. This collaboration is not, as Vorster and some of his black collaborators allege, a ploy to 'capture' the other bodies which are part of the alliance. We have always fought, and shall continue to fight for the complete independence and organisational integrity of the mass movements. Those of our members who have earned positions as mass leaders of the national movement have proved over and over again their devotion to, and respect for, the decisions of the democratically elected collectives of which they have been part.

In the same way we continue to assert the absolute right of our Party to exist as an independent organisation and to continue to exercise its public role as the advance vanguard of the working class. In the period under review our Party underground has been strengthened

and has continued to provide a flow of propaganda and agitational material both in support of the immediate aims of the liberation front and to spread the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. Amongst these activities have been the regular circulation of an illegal edition of the *African Communist* and a special internal cyclostyled theoretical journal *Inkululeko Freedom*. We have also circulated basic Marxist classics (some translated into African languages) and, following on the decisions of our last Central Committee meeting, a special message to The Workers of South Africa from our Party was widely distributed. It is obviously not possible in this document to elaborate fully the organisational tasks facing our Party in the internal situation and the measures required in order to carry them out. These have been reviewed and appropriate decisions have been taken.

THE WAY AHEAD

Despite the regime's mobilisation of greater and greater force, the mass killings and the increasing use of terror and torture, the people remain unbowed. Indeed, they stand ready, as never before, to respond to a lead which will raise the struggle above the level of street confrontation which, on its own, cannot lead to victory. Such a lead can only come from our liberation front, headed by the ANC, which is accepted by friend and foe alike as the most serious threat and challenge to racist oppression and exploitation. We have earned this honoured role because of a long history of dedication to the revolutionary cause. Even during the difficult days when little seemed possible we continued to stand up to the enemy and to keep the flame of resistance alive. The heroism and sacrifice of our militants, especially during the recent struggle-filled decades has added a new dimension to the long saga of the South African freedom struggle.

It is our movement which ushered in the new era of organised armed resistance and created its chief instrument, Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Despite vicious hounding, our revolutionary cadres have maintained and even strengthened our underground which has once again begun engaging the enemy in direct actions and has stepped up its political mobilisation of the people.

It is no accident that the Vorsters and the Krugers select the ANC and our Party as the chief targets for attack. They have taken note of the fact that since Soweto, of all the movements who claim an underground presence, it is only ours which was able to strike at the enemy at all and to play an important part in mobilising political support for the youth upsurge. They know, too, that the majority of our youth in search of an underground capable of leading them both militarily and politically, are finding it in our liberation movement.

Above all our movement is feared because we are committed to an ideology which aims to destroy not only every part of the framework of national oppression but also the foundations of economic inequality and exploitation on which that framework has been built.

At the beginning of the 1960s the people taught us that it was necessary to break with the strategy of the previous decade and to begin preparing conditions for combining political resistance with armed actions. The recent upsurge has emphasised that, given effective organisation and leadership, the revolutionary energies of the people have a limitless potential. Through their own experience in the recent struggles the people have begun to understand, more clearly than ever before, both the necessity and possibility of a

revolutionary way forward in which victory will eventually be theirs through a combination of mass political resistance and organised armed struggle.

Failure on the part of our liberation movement to respond effectively during the coming period will put at risk the present high mood of militancy and lead to a demoralisation which will make it easier for the imperialist alliance to implement its plans for Southern Africa and for Vorster to successfully divert the formidable pressures which have built up inside our country.

Our liberation front clearly faces a historic challenge, and our Party, as part of this front, is called upon — as never before — to mobilise all its strength to help meet it.

<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/1977/way-forward.htm>