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Lucien van der Walt
South Africa after Apartheid
November 1997

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It is crucial that anarchist militants intervene in these struggles to promote the anarchist idea.

The ANC's rapid capitulation to such policies reflects a variety of factors.

Foremost here would be the integration of the ANC leadership into the structures of ruling class power in South Africa. The ANC always regarded the State as an instrument of progressive change, failing to recognize that the State by its very nature can only defend and entrench privilege. As State functionaries, ANC leaders are now acting to maintain capitalism in South Africa, and are subject to pressures from international institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund…) and local monopoly capital to implement neo-liberalism.

But it would be a mistake to think that the ANC has simply been forced to adopt such policies against its will. The ANC has long been committed to the capitalist economic system, and its leadership and officials have long been a central part of the growing Black bourgeoisie. As such, they identify with the class interests and privileges of White capitalists. They do not suffer from the exploitation of the working class but instead benefit from it.

WAY FORWARD

In this situation, progressive social change must be the task of the Black working class, which has nothing to gain and everything to lose under the current social relations. A consistent struggle requires a break with the united front of both Black and White bourgeois, in favor of a program of mass struggle and workers autonomy. Ultimately, it is only a social revolution that can break the shackles of racism and capitalism. Only international libertarian communism can uproot racism and capitalism, and usher in a reign of equality and self-management.

Resistance to the neo-liberal assault has already begun, with student protests, two general strikes in 1997 against "flexible" conditions, and street battles against electricity cut-offs.

Historically, South Africa epitomized the poverty and oppression associated with capitalism and racism. The first non-racial elections to parliament in April 1994 gave many hope for the redress of the injustices of the past. The holding of elections open to all people, and the replacement of racist laws by basic democratic and civil rights was a big victory for the struggle in South Africa. But the new government of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) has consistently failed to address the demands of the Black working class for equality and the redistribution of wealth.

INEQUALITY

In South Africa, 47% of Black African households live on, or below, the poverty line. Yet the ten richest South African families are together worth R18 billion. In South Africa there is an unemployment rate of 30%, but managers in big companies earn up to R900,000 per year. 5 big companies control 80% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and 120,000 (mainly White) farmers own 87% of the land.

Inequality in South Africa does not only follow racial lines. While most poor people are Black, not all Blacks are poor. Over the last twenty years there has been the rapid expansion of a Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This expansion has accelerated since the April 1994 non-racial elections. Between 1975–199 1, the richest 20% of Black African households increased their real incomes by over 40%. At the same time, the poorest 40% of Black African households' incomes fell by nearly 40%. A similar decline in the incomes of the poorest 40% of White households also took place in this period.

These patterns of race and class inequality indicate that the Black working class – the majority of the population – is the chief victim of South Africa's heritage of racism and capitalism. It is only

this mass which can sweep away the causes and beneficiaries of exploitation in South Africa.

APARTHEID-CAPITALISM

The suffering of the Black working class has its roots in South Africa's specific form of capitalist development: "apartheid-capitalism". Apartheid was not just the product of fanatical racism, as is claimed by the bourgeois media.

Instead, the forms of social control of Apartheid laid the basis for capitalist development in South Africa. The pass laws, the migrant labor system, the lack of the most elementary political rights, the ban on Black trade unions, the housing of workers on barracks– these created a very cheap and vigorously controlled labor force to service the mines, farms and factories of South Africa. In many cases, such mechanism's allowed workers to be paid wages below the level of subsistence. Racist ideology justified this oppression,

END OF APARTHEID

Apartheid began to collapse in the 1970s due to economic stagnation and the massive revolt from below of the workers and the poor.

Charged with anti-capitalist sentiment, the resistance also often exhibited forms of self-management. For example, mass trade unions based on shop-floor organization and committed to socialism were established, and in the Black townships there were attempts to replace the rule of the State with the rule of democratic and participatory community-based "civic associations".

It was against this background that the Apartheid regime chose to negotiate a new political dispensation with African National Congress -aligned moderates in the 1990s.

NEO-LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

These negotiations led to the holding of the first non-racial democratic elections in April 1994. For the first time in 300 hundred years all Black people got the right to vote, freedom of speech and free association. However, this political advance has not led to improvements in the material circumstances of the Black working class.

Although the ANC campaigned under the slogan "A Better Life For All" in 1994, it has now firmly committed itself to a neo-liberal form of capitalism in the form of the "GEAR" ("Growth, Employment and Redistribution") macro-economic strategy released in June 1996. GEAR calls for the privatization of State assets, the liberalization of international trade and capital flows, a flexible labor market, and a minimal role for the State in economic activity.

More concrete examples of the ANC's commitment to neo-liberal policies include

- current moves to privatize State assets such as water
- a land reform program based on the principle of land being redistributed through the market
- cuts in spending on many universities
- the "Masakhane" ("Build Together") campaign to enforce payment for electricity and water in the townships
- closures and downgrading of "non-economic" hospitals

WHY?

Across the world, such neo-liberal policies have exacerbated the sufferings of the poor, leading to falling wages, unemployment, cuts in social spending and attacks on workers' rights.