

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

Summer 1985

South Africa

Divestment vs. Revolution

The Union of South Africa is on the edge of an all-out rebellion by the super-oppressed and super-exploited black working class. Protests, strikes and "stayaways" have steadily grown in intensity. Mass violence has been turned against black collaborators with the apartheid regime. And successful general strikes have shown the revolutionary potential of the black proletariat.

In late April of this year, the biggest single strike in the country's history took place in the gold mines of the Anglo-American Corporation, strong-

of black funeral marchers at Uitenhage on March 21st on the 25th anniversary of the infamous Sharpeville massacre in 1960, and there have been continued murders of black leaders in exile and in police custody.

The U.S. Anti-Apartheid Movement

In the U.S., anti-apartheid protests have grown despite Pretoria's liberal facade. Inspired by the South African liberation struggles and outraged by the regime's brutality, students at over 100 campuses took action against apartheid and the collaboration

In South Africa, AZAPO pickets condemned "capitalist Kennedy" visit. Despite political confusion AZAPO knows need to expose liberal imperialist fraud. For South African black workers it would be suicidal to believe that Kennedy's sanctions will sanitize capitalist apartheid. Divestment leaders here help peddle this myth.



hold of the "liberal" wing of South African capitalism that claims to oppose apartheid; 14,000 workers struck to protest the firing of four shop stewards. In July an even bigger miners' strike is in the works. As mass protests by blacks escalate, the racist regime offered concessions, cancelling the announced forced removals of 700,000 blacks to the "homelands." It also offered minor lower-level governmental rights and ended the apartheid ban on interracial sex and marriage. The regime is attempting to incorporate middle-class blacks through such reforms, but nevertheless they are gains won by the masses.

The regime's retreat, aimed also at public opinion in South Africa's imperialist allies abroad such as the United States, is meant to cover its bloody record of repression. One outrage was the slaughter

with it of college trustees and American corporations. There have been weeks-long sit-ins and blockades and numbers of arrests, including over 1000 at Cornell University alone. The campus militancy contrasts sharply with the pacifistic pre-arranged arrests staged by publicity-hungry politicians and trade union bureaucrats at South African consulates since the Democrats' electoral downfall in November.

While campus protests have adjourned for the summer, plans are under way for renewed activity and national coordination in the fall. The danger is that the movement will come under the domination of reformists dedicated to rebuilding the Democratic Party; they seek to limit the movement's politics and channel it into electoralism.

Liberals have sought to focus the protests on

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Divestment

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"divestment," a strategy which implicitly accepts capitalist rule in both the U.S. and South Africa. This actually encompasses several interrelated economic programs. The immediate level is institutional divestment, where colleges or local governments are asked to sell their investments in companies doing business with South Africa. This is first of all a symbolic gesture, since the mere transfer of ownership from one capitalist outfit to another does nothing to influence South African politicians or bosses, or in any way change the lives of South African blacks.

Moreover, the tangled web of capitalist ownership makes such divestment a fraud. One example is indicative. Recently Michigan State University divested its shares in Citicorp, IBM, General Motors, Ford, Pepsi-co, etc. -- only to buy stock in such anti-imperialist outfits as Gulf Oil, Dupont, Hughes Tool and Atlantic Richfield, according to a report by the American Committee on Africa (ACOA). If these companies have no direct holdings in South Africa at the moment, they surely hold stock in other firms that do; the Dupont family, for example, holds major shares of General Motors -- and Dupont, curiously, is listed by Columbia University as one of the companies it invests in that does operate in South Africa.

The fact is that this spring's wave of campus divestment action scored few tangible successes. Most of the victories won were at public universities, more subject to political pressure. And even the public universities' divestment resolutions are notably irresolute. The City University of New York trustees, for example, voted to divest "while protecting the financial stability of the University's investment portfolio." That is, they oppose apartheid as long as it won't hurt their pocketbook. Such is liberal devotion to a mass struggle.

From Divestment to Disinvestment

For most activists, campus divestment is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal, says the Student Anti-Apartheid Newsletter of the ACOA, is to "discourage U.S. corporate investment in South Africa": that is, to move from divestment to disinvestment.

Along these lines, Congress is passing bills aimed at economic sanctions against the apartheid regime. These would variously set up a trade embargo, forbid new bank loans or company investments, halt sales of Krugerrands (the South African gold coins), ban computer sales to government agencies, and end coal and uranium imports. The main bill is sponsored by liberal Senator Edward Kennedy and moderate black Representative William Gray. If a bill is adopted and even if Reagan is forced by public pressure to sign

it, you can be sure little will be done to enforce it. As if to show its real attitude toward the liberation struggle, the House of Representatives coupled its sanctions with a vote removing the ban on aid to the South African-backed "contra" outfit in Angola.

The South African government seems to have been wounded under the divestment pressure. It forbids any approval of divestment policies by South Africans, and has taken steps to insure the country's economic security if the campaign scores any successes. As it seems to have done. According to the South African Financial Mail (February 1):

"In one respect at least, the divestment forces have already won. They have prevented -- discouraged, dissuaded, whatever you call it -- billions of dollars of U.S. investment in South Africa."

Anti-Capitalist Capitalists?

Why are so many U.S. politicians never known for any hostility to capital jumping on what appears to be an anti-capitalist bandwagon? After all, the divestment strategy has been around for years and has garnered little support in the corridors of power until very recently. Has the politicians' relentless search for votes suddenly made them forget their real masters, the U.S. capitalist class?

We think not. These people are enemies; we strongly solidarize with the South African black demonstrators last January who protested Kennedy's well-publicized tour, denouncing him as an agent of capitalism and U.S. imperialism. Kennedy was subject to abuse because he is seen by the black majority to represent an America consistently on the wrong side of the South African struggle.

Kennedy and his fellows are trying to latch onto the movement, in order to reconstruct their base at home and refurbish the image of imperialism itself in South Africa. Desperate steps are necessary by the capitalist forces if they are to retain apartheid exploitation. For that is what is at stake. They will succeed only if the African masses are hoodwinked.

The capitalist politicians' concern for South Africa's oppressed is a lie. South Africa has been the U.S.'s chief commercial and military partner in Africa under both Republican and Democratic administrations. Investment in South Africa is aimed not to help blacks but to gain profits: "A 1983 survey suggested the rate of return in mining was 25% against 14% in the rest of the world, 18% against 13% in manufacturing industry" (Economist, March 30). South Africa is economically and strategically critical to world imperialism.

South African capitalists have a vested interest in describing recent losses as a result of American liberal sentimentality. They much prefer this to publicizing the real reasons, the increased demands of a fighting working class and the mortal impact of econo-

mic crisis. Investors are less scared of liberal pap than of black masses. U.S. politicians, of course, are not loath to filch moral credit out of other people's struggles; neither do they hesitate to benefit from South Africa's economic recession in conjunction with the advancing world depression. As the Economist magazine put it (March 30):

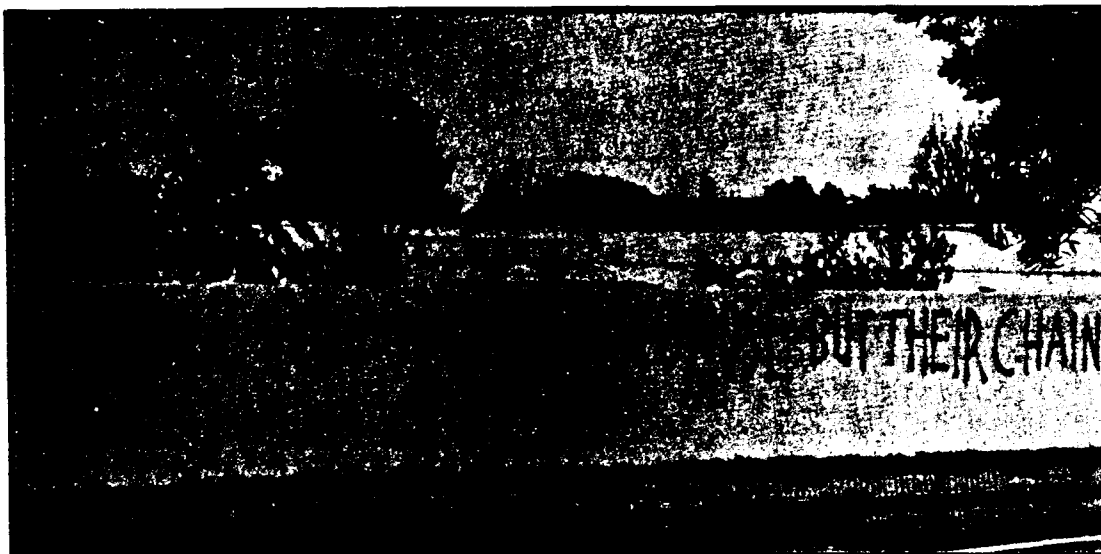
"Disinvestment pressure has come at a convenient time for many American corporations, as profitability in South Africa falls and the Far East looks a more attractive market. Since 1980, 30 American companies have left South Africa, against just 11 which have arrived. ... In South Africa at present, it is falling profitability that is the great disinvestor."

The corollary of this proposition, of course, is that when profits rise in South Africa or improve relative to the other low-wage regions, disinvestment

Journal advised, (April 30):

"... business executives believe at least some companies would find loopholes in any disinvestment laws to enable them to continue doing business with South Africa. One option would be to close South African operations and sell products through local distributors there. 'If forced to leave South Africa ... that would be one of the alternatives we'd look at,' says a spokesman for Hewlett-Packard Co. ..."

The South African government points out that other Western capitalists, not under pressure from black populations at home, would be happy to take over those American firms that remain profitable. As would South African capital, despite possibly increased costs. Indeed, it is futile to rely on capitalists or their political agents to carry out anti-capitalist work. It requires working-class action.



Downturn in South African investment is due to capitalist fear of rebelling black masses, not to divestment schemes. Black workers desperately need guns to prevent massacres, not stock swapping by U.S. college trustees.

will no longer be so convenient. Then the liberal politicians will suddenly discover how the black workers need American investment, how the toothless Sullivan principles ought to be minutely strengthened, etc. The flexibility of the bourgeois mind will no doubt be equal to the occasion.

What About Sanctions?

If a sanctions bill is adopted, then we will see a wave of evasions as never before. The capitalists have perfected the tactic of accepting embargoes in public while disregarding them in practice. They did this with white-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the past and with the current arms boycott of South Africa. Embargoes can be evaded through the good offices of friends like Israel, which is happy to ship and transship contraband to every reactionary regime on Earth. The IBM Corp. already "refuses" to sell computers to the South African police; yet the South African police have IBM computers. As the Wall Street

The boycott last fall of South African shipments by West Coast longshoremen showed the way forward. That was a real blow to apartheid that didn't wait upon Ronald Reagan's signature.

Divestment Is a Fraud

The anti-apartheid protest actions in the U.S. have called public attention to the complicity of American capitalists with the criminally racist South African rulers. But the long-term effort of liberal and reformist leaders to make divestment the chief issue has succeeded in retarding student awareness of capitalism itself as the enemy, not simply the most obvious corporations. It has bred illusions in the promises of trustees whose devotion to financial gain rules out real moves against apartheid. Nevertheless, the tenacity of the struggles themselves shows that many students are ready to learn the real lessons behind corporate resistance to demolishing apartheid:

1. Capitalism as a whole thrives off apartheid.

South Africa is not some uniquely abhorrent ulcer on the otherwise healthy body of world capitalism. It is an extreme form of the inevitably racist imperialist economy that condemns hundreds of millions to poverty and starvation.

2. No big corporation is free of South African ties. Capitalism is an integrated, intertwined, international system. Banks and corporations own each others' stock, share each others' directors, buy each others' goods. There is no such thing as an untainted capitalist investment.

3. Government sanctions by any Republican or Democratic government will be used only in the interests of U.S. capitalism, not to aid the African black struggle. Official boycotts mean one thing only: official evasions.

Big-Power Chauvinism

The chief lesson is the necessity for proletarian socialist revolution in South Africa and the United States. The divestment-disinvestment outlook reflects fundamentally reactionary notions rife in the U.S. middle class. De-industrialization is no answer to the plight of black people in South Africa. Apartheid will be overcome through the size and strength of the black working class, which needs industry not only for jobs and consumption now but as a basis for a powerful Azanian workers' state in the future. It is no accident that the Eastern Cape province is one of the bastions of black militancy and one of the most politicized areas of the country. Its industrial base has made it a stronghold of black workers.

The divestment focus also reflects a big-power chauvinism all the more dangerous because its practitioners are unaware of it. American firms' capital in South Africa is not "ours" to dispose of just because U.S. capitalists own it. It has been sweated out of the hides not only of Americans but of all workers, including South Africa's -- given the U.S.'s dominant imperialist role. By what right does this property belong to America to invest or divest? Only imperialist might justifies it. That is why we say, "Not Capitalist Divestment but Workers' Expropriation."

Arms for the Workers

Disinvestment proponents in the U.S. argue that removing American capital and consequently jobs from South Africa would not hurt the black workers significantly, since they are already oppressed and few are directly employed by U.S. firms. However, it appears less than noble for relatively affluent supporters here to sacrifice the morsels which keep near-starvation black workers from achieving true starvation. So the divestment leaders are quick to point to similar statements by spokesmen of the African National Congress (ANC), the dominant resistance group.

Tragically, class capitulation is a problem not

only in the U.S. but in South Africa as well, where it gravely endangers the black masses. Using them as sacrificial pawns is exactly the strategy of the ANC. Michael Calabrese of the reformist paper In These Times reported glowingly on his in-depth interviews with ANC leaders in the June 26 issue.

Calabrese notes that the ANC has decided "to pursue a strategy of decentralized, small-scale attacks" to be carried out by armed guerrilla bands. He then



Frontline backstab: Mozambique's nationalist Machel and South African butcher Botha toast Nkomati pact that betrayed anti-apartheid struggle.

quotes the second-ranking ANC official:

"Secretary General Nzo predicted that as the ANC leads young blacks into open rebellion in townships and begins killing white security personnel, the government will react with brutal reprisals that will, in the long run, alienate many moderate whites from the Nationalist Party and lead the international community to impose economic sanctions.

"Although most whites continue to support State President P.W. Botha's policy of incremental reform combined with forceful retaliations against township unrest, Nzo and other ANC leaders remain confident their scenario is unfolding.

"When we step up the violence, Botha will remove the cloak of being a moderate and move to the extreme right. He will then cut his nose as far as his international friends are concerned," Nzo said. He added that the ANC hopes that by provoking harsh repression by the government, the Reagan administration will be pressured by public and congressional opinion to abandon its policy of 'constructive engagement.'"

For years the ANC sought to channel the anti-apartheid struggle into lines acceptable to imperialism. Now it has been forced by the black upheaval and the bloody reprisals to deal with the masses' open rebellion. It even has to acknowledge the need for the black masses to arm themselves. But even now, the ANC calls for armed bands instead of armed masses. And as Nzo indicates, it believes that the increase of brutal repression by the regime in response to guerrilla attacks will pressure imperialism and local moderates to reform apartheid out of existence.

This conception is at best naive and at worst criminally manipulative. Reality will prove that moderation is not an option for the South African bourgeoisie and American capitalism. Central Americans today are learning in blood the lesson of relying on imperialism to liberalize itself.

ANC Challenged

The ANC's history of moderation has left it open to challenges by more radical black militants. The Pan-Africanist Congress broke away in 1959; like the ANC, it is today banned by the regime. The ANC's major rival now is the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), a group that grew out of the left wing of the black consciousness movement. In May, fighting broke out between ANC and AZAPO supporters, and several people were killed. The ANC, although it is apparently much larger than AZAPO, obviously feels endangered by forces that reflect the militant developments among workers and students.

AZAPO is a contradictory formation combining a radical nationalist program with very confused socialist rhetoric. It calls for working-class leadership in the struggle, but it has also defined every black person as a worker.

The chief difference between the ANC and AZAPO is usually said to be whether or not to include whites in the struggle. This is a dispute between integrationism and nationalism, both bourgeois strategies that must ultimately make peace with capitalism. The masses in action have shown that they understand that race in itself is not the key question: class is. The violent mass justice meted out to black councillors, cops and other collaborators with the regime (despite the entreaties of liberal heroes like Bishop Tutu) shows their understanding that the real dividing line is between allegiance to the system and loyalty to the workers and oppressed.

What Is To Be Done?

The ANC's callous policy of basing victory upon "provoking harsh repression against the masses" is only an analogue to the let-them-eat-less tactics of the divestment leaders in the U.S. Proletarian revolutionaries place no trust in the ANC or its strategy: we stand for arms to working-class organizations

in South Africa. As for the U.S. movement's response to the apartheid regime's violence, the pro-ANC leaders might lend some credence to their moral claims if they put aside their squeaky-clean divestment gambit in favor of an immediate campaign to arm the black masses. The fact that they don't is all the comment needed on the moral state of moralists.

The struggle in South Africa will certainly continue, and the workers and students there will always welcome any assistance they get from abroad. In the U.S., the strongest solidarity actions are in the hands of workers, especially organized workers who produce goods destined for South Africa or who handle shipments overseas. Labor boycotts should be revived and supported. We welcome the recent refusal by West Coast longshoremen to unload South African goods, but it would be dangerous to simply generalize this; it could become enmeshed with the chauvinist campaign against foreign imports. The stress must be on halting shipments of U.S. goods to South Africa, an inherently internationalist action.

On campus, it has to be understood that students and staff do not have the social power of organized production and transport workers. They can use their time and resources, however, to continue exposing the capitalist relations between U.S. corporations and slave labor. But they must learn not to depend upon actual divestment "victories"; most of those will amount to fraudulent evasions by campus officials and trustees. Expose not only the trustees and corporations but imperialism as a whole. Above all, support and publicize the South African black workers' revolution, the real destroyer of apartheid. Given the power, militant experience and explosive potential of the black proletariat, conditions are ripe for a proletarian socialist revolution.

In the working class, the League for the Revolutionary Party works diligently to re-create the proletarian revolutionary party. On campus our message is the same. Students can adopt the world-view of the working class and make a valuable contribution to the struggle for revolution here as well as in South Africa, a communist revolution that will end human misery, racial oppression and class exploitation.

**Victory to the South African Black Workers!
Arms to the Black Workers' Unions and Councils!**

Not Capitalist Divestment but Workers' Expropriation!

**Free All South African Political Prisoners!
Defend ANC, PAC, AZAPO, UDF
and All Anti-Apartheid Groups!**

**Smash Apartheid Through Socialist Revolution!
For a Workers' Azania
and the United Socialist States of Africa!**