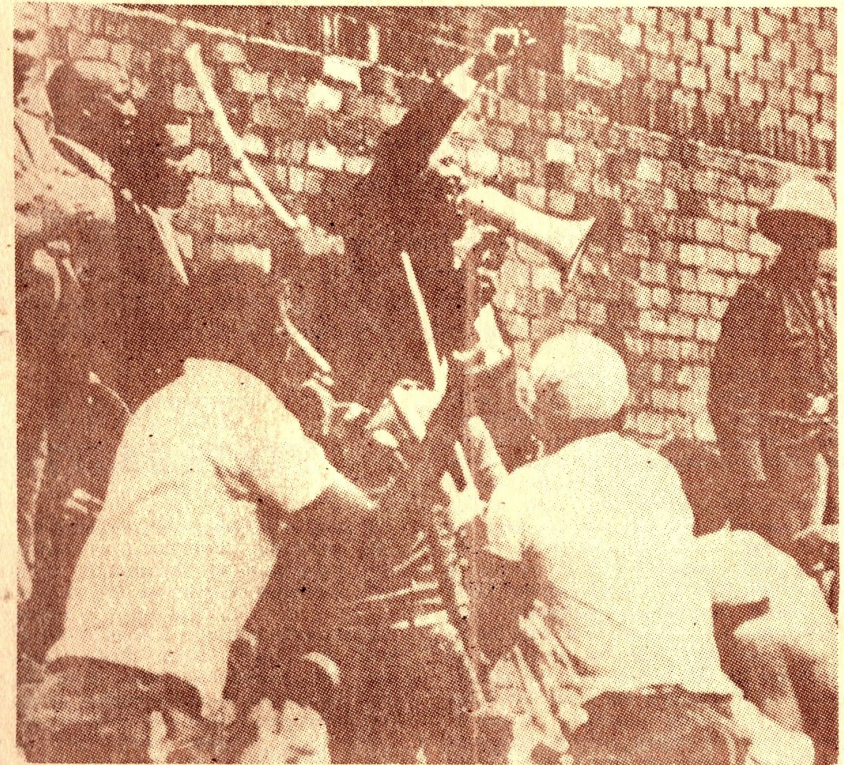


# South Africa: Act I Of The Revolution

by Glenn Wolfe



Black workers at a strike meeting in Natal. The new wave of black resistance has spread since illegal black unions won wage increases in 1973. These workers represent the revolutionary future of South Africa.

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# South Africa: Act I Of The Revolution

On June 16, 1976, the black township of Soweto, South Africa exploded, touching off a new era of struggle in the Republic of South Africa. That uprising, with the dozens more that have followed, is the first act of the South African revolution.

Since 1960 the combination of heightened repression and economic growth brought stability to South Africa. But, that's all changed now.

The ultimate victory of the freedom struggle depends on the black working class taking the leadership and turning the growing fight against oppression into a conscious struggle for national liberation and socialist revolution in South Africa.

## I. A RACIST SETTLER STATE

The developments necessary to bring the revolution to a successful conclusion can best be understood by examining the nature of the monster it confronts, the Republic of South Africa.

South Africa is a minority, white-settler regime which bases itself on the exploitation and oppression of the majority, indigenous black population. The white minority, less than a quarter of the total population, controls the state, industry, the land, the media, most of the professional and skilled jobs and over four-fifths of the national income.

This vicious racist structure began when Dutch settlers (today called "Afrikaner") arrived in 1652. Since then it has been consistently strengthened by the white minority under a number of different political regimes.

Over most of this century this structure has been written into law. The land the white settlers stole from the black population, 85% of the country, was made white territory by law in 1913. The "color bar," excluding blacks from almost all skilled jobs, was established in the 1880's and has been extended ever since.

Even the marginal rights of representation held by a tiny minority of black and "Colored" (African people of mixed ancestry) of the Cape province were formally abolished in 1948. Finally the current "Bantustan" or "African homeland" policy eliminates even formal

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citizenship for blacks in the white 85% of the country.

### PROFITABILITY

This system of apartheid—enforced segregation, rigid racial barriers and the subjugation of the black majority—and the incredible exploitation that flows from it, gave South Africa the profitability to become the first ranking industrial nation in Africa. This began with gold and diamond mining in the 19th century, the modernization of agriculture along capitalist lines in the first half of the 20th century, continuing with the development of manufacturing and processing industries in the 1930's and 40's and finally, South Africa's great boom or "economic miracle" of the 1950's and 60's.

The key to South Africa's status is the exploitation of the black masses and the massive input of foreign investments. The relationship is clear. It is apartheid that provided the cheap labor to attract the foreign investment necessary to make South Africa a powerful industrial and manufacturing nation.

The myth that US corporate investment and loans in South Africa created conditions for liberalization is convenient for American businessmen who've worked very hard to perpetuate it. George J. Vojta, President of Citibank (which has pumped over \$500 million in loans into South Africa this year alone), testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "By contributing to the creation of a pluralistic marketplace, we think we assist in the development of a more pluralistic system."

The whole country became a vast machine for turning black people's misery into gigantic profits. Far from undermining the system that oppresses blacks, as some liberals dreamed it would, the economic development has increased that oppression.

So, with all their liberal rhetoric, the aims of General Motors, Union Carbide, ITT and close to 500 other US corporations in South Africa are the same aims as the South African government. Keeping profits up, preserving the wage structure and the labor control system, means denying the black majority the most basic rights including the right to subsistence

level of wages or even the right to live together in families and communities.

The crazy logic of the South African system of apartheid has meant the introduction of separate homelands and pass book laws, all designed to hinder the development of a stable working class. But the contradiction is clear. The needs of modern industry require an advanced working class that is stable. Hence the white South African ruling class, despite all its plans to the contrary, has created the force that will inevitably destroy their profitable apartheid system.

It is precisely this understanding—not some deep and inexplicable malice—that leads the government to spend 17 times more money per child on white education than it does on black education.

And it also explains why South Africa's rulers are now trying to deny even the very citizenship of black workers by setting up supposedly independent "separate development republics" like the Transkei, on the Bantustan reserves in certain small and barren areas of the Republic.

## II. IS SOUTH AFRICA FASCIST?

The openly repressive, racist and totalitarian nature of the regime in relation to the black population, not to mention the willingness of the ruling Nationalist Party to use elements of Nazi ideology, has led many people to label South Africa as a fascist country—"the South African Reich".

But this label is misleading. While apartheid is no less vicious than fascism, labelling South Africa "fascist" misses a whole dimension of how the system works.

South Africa's prosperity derives from its partnership with European and American capitalism; apartheid does not require a reign of terror over the whole population or even the whole working class. In fact, the white settlers—including the white workers—do not face the same totalitarian oppression that is used against the black masses.

This has important implications. In a fascist state, the revolutionary strategy focuses on building a united struggle of the whole working class against fascism. But in

South Africa, to make unity of black and white workers a strategy for revolution would be a hopeless utopian dream.

The white trade unions are—and have been, for the most part, since the 1880's—a conscious part of the apartheid structure. The job classification laws, which gives white workers guarantees that they will always occupy the privileged and highly paid skilled jobs, has successfully bought white workers' loyalty to the system. White unions have rights of collective bargaining and picketing, while black workers can be shot on the street for any strike action.

White workers wages average 12 to 16 times that of black workers. In fact, most white workers occupy managerial positions of supervisors and foremen over black workers. Many also have black servants in their homes.

The overwhelming majority of white South African workers will always see their interests as being those of the white settler regime, not those of the black majority. There are important individual cases where white workers, union organizers and intellectuals side with the black struggle. However, individual acts of solidarity do not point toward the unity of the whole working class.



Workers learn about the killing of 12 miners by police at the Western Deep Level Mine at Carletonville, in 1973. In 1976, over 1200 blacks fighting for freedom have been killed. But these Gestapo tactics cannot stop the struggle.

## NATIONAL LIBERATION

Thus, the question of unity in South Africa is not unity between black and white workers, but unity of the masses of black people through the leadership of black workers. South Africa's revolution is not only a class struggle of workers, but also a

national liberation struggle—a struggle to unify and win the national freedom of the black masses. This requires a breakdown of tribal barriers, divisions between urban and rural blacks, between men and women, between industrial workers, students, service workers and the unemployed.

## MAJOR LOANS TO SOUTH AFRICA BY U.S. BANKS—1976

Borrower	Amount	U.S. Banks
Escom (Electrical Supply Commission)	\$200 million	Citibank Chase Morgan Manfrs. Han.
ISCOR (Iron & Steel Corp.)	\$80 million	Chase Citibank Orion
Richard Bay Minerals (Consortium: IDC (S.A.) 20%, Union Corp. 30%, Quebec Iron & Titanium Corp. 40%, S.A. Mutual Life Assurance 10%)	\$138 million	Citibank
South African Railways	\$75 million	Morgan
Foskor (Phosphate Development Corp.)	\$30 million	Manfrs. Han.
S.A.B.C. (South African Broadcasting Corp.)	\$20 million	Citibank
South African Gov't	\$110 million	Citibank Morgan Bank of America
S.A. Airways/Railways (for Boeings)	\$99 million	European Bank- Corp. (linked to European American Bank- ing Corp. U.S. headquarters in Chicago)
Industrial Development Corp.	\$25 million	Chase and Export- Import Bank
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$777 million</b>	

Note: These loans, totalling \$777 million, have been granted to the South African government or government-controlled corporations in the first nine months of 1976 alone -- an astronomical loan growth rate for a "high risk" borrower.

Compiled by American Committee on Africa/LNS.

The rapid spread of the struggle that began with students in Soweto, and spread to general strikes of workers in widely separated sections of the country, shows this process is already underway. The fight for national liberation is beginning alongside the class struggle of black struggle of black workers.

For revolutionaries in America, the fact that South Africa is a highly oppressive settler regime rather than the type of regime Marxists have usually called fascist, has real implications for their work in support of the South African Revolution.

American corporations are not the passive benefactors of apartheid. They are, in fact, full partners with the South African ruling class. They can never be convinced to use their vast power on the side of the black population.

Our job is to cripple these "partners in crime", to get them out of South Africa and do everything we can to undermine the filthy system of which they are the very foundation.

## III. DOLLARS FOR APARTHEID

Today, more than ever before, it is totally accurate to say that American and other foreign corporations are the foundations of apartheid. This explains a large part of the recent concern of the US government and American press with South Africa. And it is why Henry Kissinger is maneuvering desperately to save as much of the status quo as he can.

The state sector is the strongest part of the South Africa economy and includes many of the most modern industries such as iron and steel, electrical supply and phosphate development among others. This sector has been largely financed by foreign loans and now encourages joint participation by foreign firms.

The private sector as well includes plants of many of the largest European and North American companies. Even so-called South African companies are deeply intertwined with western capitalism.

To take one example: The South African DeBeers corporation, which has a virtual

monopoly on world diamond production, is owned by the Anglo-American corporation. Anglo-American controls a vast network of other so-called South African businesses in mining, investment, industry and transportation. But, Anglo-American itself, as the name indicates, is dominated by a consortium of European and American (Morgan Guaranty, First National City) banks.

## BANK LOANS

At this time, however, it is not only investment, but even more critically needed bank loans from US banks that are keeping apartheid above water. To date, US banks and their overseas branches currently have some \$2 billion in loans to South Africa. Most were for South African government corporations involved in specific development projects.

The largest single loan was made to the Electrical Supply Commission (Escom), a government corporation which supplies most of the country's electric power. Another loan has gone to the Iron and Steel Corporation, and several to companies involved in mineral extraction. These are aimed at increasing the South African exports, and thereby improving its balance of payments.

One particularly interesting loan has gone to South African Airways for the purchase of Boeing airplanes from the US. These planes are an example of the "dual purpose" items which South Africa is eager to purchase—as they can be used for military as well as civilian purposes.

Many of the private US banks are hoping to guarantee their loans by the US Export-Import Bank. In the past the Export-Import bank has denied loans, but all that seems to be changing now. Perhaps the strongest indication of US willingness to grant Export-Import support has come from President-elect Carter. In the November 5 *Financial Mail*, a major South African business magazine, when asked if he would "free up American investment through the Export-Import Bank loans and otherwise encourage an increase in private American lending and corporate activity in South Africa.," he answered an unequivocal "Yes, indeed." Carter quickly went on to tie the increased investment to US efforts to bring "peace" to southern Africa.

Hence, it's clear that the struggle for national liberation is totally tied to the fight against imperialism in South Africa.

## IV. THE END OF THE MIRACLE

The conditions, both internally and externally, economically and politically, are ripe for the start of the South African revolution. This does not mean that the powerful South African state is about to collapse. Like the Portuguese revolution, the other front-runner in the new world revolution, it may well take some years for the process to unfold to its conclusion.

But the process has begun—and revolutionaries in every other country must provide their maximum support. The struggle in South Africa is part of a worldwide struggle for freedom and liberation against an enemy, world capitalism, that oppresses us as well. Victory will not only liberate workers in South Africa, it will bring our own liberation one step closer.

The 1950's and 60's, the decades of South Africa's "economic miracle," were also the years in which the Nationalist Party consolidated its power and crushed a whole generation of black resistance to apartheid.

The Nationalist Party, the political machine of the growing Afrikaner section of big business, as well as the entrenched Afrikaner landowners, took over in 1948. Since then the Nationalist Party constructed a fantastically efficient and brutal police state, destroyed all meaningful white opposition, and made apartheid the unchallenged official philosophy and ideology of the country.

The English-speaking capitalists have recognized the effective monopoly of the Nationalist Party over all real political power, in return for guaranteed security and expanded profits for English, Afrikaner and foreign capitalists alike.

The Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, when 69 unarmed protesters were shot dead in a demonstration protesting pass-book laws, ended the traditional protest movements

which aimed at reforming the apartheid state through mass pressure.

### BLACK RESISTANCE

Now over 10 years later, as the economic growth is winding down, a new and very different kind of black resistance movement has begun, and not just in Soweto. In the province of Natal, the illegal black unions were successful in their strikes of 1973, and that movement has spread to other provinces since.



South African Women fighting Apartheid.

In Johannesburg, workers have tested their collective power with successful bus boycotts against fare increases and in solidarity strikes. And, for the first time in many years, the appearance in court of arrested African leaders has given rise to large and militant demonstrations in the white downtown areas of the twin capital cities, Pretoria and Cape Town.

It's becoming pretty clear that the Gestapo tactics of the South African security forces can do no more than slow this movement down. In an off the record interview with *Newsweek Magazine* (October 25, 1976) "key officials" of B.O.S.S. (Bureau of State Security)

admitted as much: "South Africa must therefore come to grips with reality and make drastic internal changes...(it must) transform the policies of separate development (apartheid)...Vorster (South African Prime Minister) must ignore the wishes of his own right-wing or face political collapse within two years...(he must) change South Africa's present suicidal course."

Time to make changes is running out for the South African government. The economic boom of the sixties has given way to the economic crisis of the mid-seventies. Economic growth is at a stand-still and unemployment is rising at a rate of 250,000 per year. In addition, because of the apartheid "color-bar" which preserves the privileges of the highly paid, generally skilled white working class, industry faces a growing shortage of skilled labor.

The foreign loans which have financed apartheid for decades have threatened to dry up. So, as inflation continues at double-digit figures, *Business Week* (November 16, 1976) reports that Finance Minister Horwood "...has to be highly relieved...with the signing of a \$110 million Eurodollar credit...even though the money is expensive and falls far short of the \$3000 million he is after."

And, while South Africa's income is declining, the total cost of South Africa's imports has doubled since 1972 to over \$9 billion in 1975. The current estimated deficit is over \$2 billion a year. Further, government spending is up drastically—44½% higher for the April-June quarter of the current fiscal year over last year.

Military spending has increased 42% over 1975 because of the independence won by Angola and Mozambique, and the opening of national liberation wars in Zimbabwe and Namibia. With the recent black uprisings throughout South Africa, the war budget is certain to expand even more rapidly.

Indeed the very dependence on world capitalism, which sustained South Africa for so long, is now dragging it down. Over the past year the price of gold has declined severely. This further undermines the economic and political stability of South Africa given its massive dependence on the production and sale of gold for the world market. No matter how much success they

have with their American TV campaign to sell Krugerrands, the South African government remains in deep trouble.

## V. SOUTH AFRICA AND PERMANENT REVOLUTION

As we have shown, the nature of the South African regime means first of all that every resistance struggle by black workers is inextricably bound to the anti-imperialist struggle. Secondly, the nature of apartheid regime means that even the most basic economic and political reforms can be only won and maintained by blacks in South Africa if power is seized from the white ruling class. The government's own response to this summer's uprisings proves this.



**Young Blacks in Soweto are the spearhead of the new wave of resistance.**

The Soweto rebellions began around the limited issue of the use of the Afrikaans language in black schools. Within a matter of days this political struggle was transformed by the reaction of the government into a movement which challenged the whole basis of the apartheid system.

Not only did police repression fail to limit the agitation to a single issue, it could not be contained geographically either. In a situation in which all organization has to take place underground, in which mass arrests of leaders at every level takes place as soon as there is any open activity, it took only a little over a week to spread the agitation to all four provinces and most of the major cities of South Africa.

The response of the white regime was clear. Prime Minister Vorster told the western press that there would be absolutely no significant modifications of the racial structure, the Bantustan policy, or the total white monopoly of political rights.

And it is obvious that the regime cannot grant any change in the fundamental structure of the system. It is this structure that keeps 80% of the black working class below the poverty line. It is the wage structure, the barracks housing of the townships and the mines, the ban on black workers' union activity and strikes that brought western investments to South Africa in the first place!

In short, winning basic human rights for the black masses of South Africa requires the complete destruction, root and branch, of the system the white settlers and western investment have created.

### PERMANENT REVOLUTION

The struggle against apartheid will become a struggle for socialism. This is what Marxists call a "permanent revolution."

First, as we have seen, the national unification and liberation of the African masses is part of the same struggle as the wave of black workers resistance that began in 1973. Secondly, the wealth and power of the South African economy means that its liberation will lay the basis for socialism throughout southern Africa.

Third, and most important, the key to this whole process is the black proletariat of South Africa. Only the black working class, which has grown enormously in the manufacturing and industrial booms of the last 40 years, has the collective power to overthrow the whole system.

And, a working class, in South Africa or anywhere else, which takes over the whole system does not restrict itself to merely making a series of reforms. The black South African working class will not just set up a system of democratic elections, abolish the secret police and pass book laws—even though these in themselves would be revolutionary changes.

They will not leave intact the system that robs them daily. They will take over the factories and the mines, seize the capitalists' assets and turn them into the collective property of the black masses of South Africa, Angola, Mozambique and the rest of southern Africa. The struggle will not stop halfway. It will become a struggle for socialism.

### BUILDING THE PARTY

The development of a conscious revolutionary workers' party is needed to seal the doom of the white racist regime. The whole of capitalist history demonstrates that workers cannot seize and retain power without the organizational and political leadership of a mass revolutionary party. The growing movement in South Africa today is not such a party. It is composed of a fairly loose alliance of student, community, workers and defense organizations which are all more or less unstable.

Alongside the Black Consciousness Movement, however, two older stable organizations operate: The African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC). The ANC is the smaller of the two, has the strongest roots in the working class, but is dominated by the bureaucratic South African Communist Party. The PAC, on the other hand, while larger, and containing various socialist currents within it, is for the unity of all African classes and calls for "natural African socialism" based purely on nationalism.

However, it is clear that the current upheavals have brought about real advances in the politics, militancy and confidence among the urban workers and the radicalized students who are leading the Black Consciousness Movement. It is also clear that in this process the students have built strong links with a large section of the urban workers and this creates the potential for a much higher level of organization.

Forces are now coming into play as the revolution unfolds which can bring about the establishment of a conscious workers' party in South Africa. It is the duty of revolutionaries here and around the world to support every manifestation of the black struggle and resistance and to help in the process for laying the foundations of a mass revolutionary workers party. The development of serious working class solidarity with the South African revolution in countries like America and Britain will play a small but vital and constructive role in that process. The I.S. will not shirk this international duty. □

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

**For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa** by Hilda Bernstein. 1975 International Defense & Aid Fund, London. \$1.00

**Divide and Rule: South Africa's Bantustans** by Barbara Rogers. 1976 International Defense and Aid Fund, London. \$1.25

**Apartheid Quiz** 1975. International Defense & Aid Fund, London. 50c

**Zimbabwe Quiz** 1975. International Defense & Aid Fund, London 50c

**Rhodesia - South Africa's Sixth Province** by John Sprack. 1974. International Defense and Aid Fund, London. 80c

**Angola: The Struggle for Liberation** 1976. International Socialists. 25c

**WOMEN IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES ABOUT WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA 1977.** International Socialists. 25c

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