

SPECIFICS OF THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

ALEX LA GUMA



land
of ideas



The African National Congress has just celebrated its 68th anniversary. After nearly 70 years of uninterrupted struggle, we should reflect on what has been achieved, on how the ANC has managed to carry on its struggle and link it with the one being waged in the rest of southern Africa, on the enemies' characteristics in the present political situation — and, as a result, on what course the struggle should take in the future.

Alex La Guma, African National Congress leader and distinguished South African intellectual, followed this line of thinking in his press conference held at OSPAAAL headquarters on the 68th anniversary of the ANC's founding.

WHEN I came here this morning I thought it would be a normal duty on my part to present this talk, but suddenly I find it a most moving occasion. The congratulations I have received here come from many parts of the world and from many progressive movements and comrades. These greetings brought to mind the times when, on behalf of the African National Congress (ANC), I visited several of your countries. I remember the Andean mountains as a curtain in the sky above the city of Santiago, Chile; I remember the hundreds of bicycles in the streets of Hanoi — and many other occasions on which the ANC had the honor of being represented in various countries. . . .

Our movement has now reached its 69th year. The immediate reaction is to say: Well, we have been operating for a long time; when is the job going to be finished? To console ourselves, we ask: How long is history? So we take the liberty of saying that whatever we have done over 68 years has brought us nearer to the liberation of our people.

It is significant that the anniversary of the ANC was celebrated last week, in South Africa, by an attack on one of the police stations by our guerrilla forces. The newspapers were, of course, very

concerned to mention that the attackers used the famous AK-47 rifles. We have no intention of hiding the fact that we are supported by the socialist community: the Soviet Union, Cuba, the GDR and all the other socialist countries. But the attack on the police station inside South Africa should not be considered merely as an incident in the armed struggle which was launched in 1961; rather it should serve as an example of the type of struggle in which we are engaged.

Not just a nationalist struggle

The situation in South Africa is often compared mechanically with that in Namibia, Zimbabwe, or other areas where the anticolonial struggle is taking place. It must be remembered that the South African people are not fighting an invader, an outside aggressor or an occupation by some foreign country.

Historically, the minority white population came from overseas, but they have established themselves over centuries as part of the general population of our country. Neither are we fighting the classical war of other colonized peoples. What exists in South Africa is a ruling class which has developed from a

colonial occupation of more than 300 years and has set up a capitalist system in our country with all the machinery and structure for the exploitation of the population; and this local ruling class has allied itself with the economic power of the United States, the imperialist countries of Europe and elsewhere. It has also facilitated the development of a capitalist system whose trademark is racism and national oppression of the black majority of the people in South Africa. This system has reduced the African people to a status of colonial serfdom. In addition, the raw materials and natural resources of South Africa were seized from the indigenous owners and used for the benefit of the capitalist system and the foreign exploiters. So we have in our country a system which includes capitalist exploitation, national oppression and colonialism.

We believe that to ignore this picture is to fall into the trap of simplifying the struggle in South Africa into a mere confrontation between blacks and whites. What we are struggling against, of course, is the system which has created racism and racial antagonism. When we say that the black people must end white superiority, we mean that they must destroy the system of exploitation which created white privilege and the division between white and black people.

The ANC was founded in 1912 and developed into a mass organization of the oppressed black people. We all understand that national oppression affects and makes victims of all strata of the black majority population. Apartheid is

a devil that torments the whole black population. For this reason the national liberation struggle has become a reality in South Africa. This has made certain elements in and outside of South Africa come to the conclusion that the ending of racial or national discrimination is the only problem we need to solve. But one cannot view national and racial oppression without examining its class basis.

The class basis of national oppression in South Africa is the capitalist system. Capitalist exploitation is inextricably linked up with national oppression. So, inevitably, the national liberation movement has to oppose economic exploitation of black people as well as national oppression. We have to constantly study and examine the reasons for national oppression in our country and find the basic and fundamental cause of it.

The ANC has sent many students to Cuba, the Soviet Union, the GDR and other socialist countries. If we were a purely nationalistic movement, we would not be concerned with educating our young people in the Marxist-Leninist philosophy and Marxist economy; but, because the national liberation movement of South Africa is broader than mere nationalistic concepts, we understand that at the base of this oppression lies economic exploitation. For this reason we are anxious that our youth and students gain the most advanced scientific and philosophical knowledge so they can understand the goals of the revolution and how to reconstruct their society along new lines.

As an advanced capitalist country, South Africa has also produced an advanced working class. This working class has its own in-

dependent party, the South African Communist Party. Again, because of national oppression and the economic exploitation of the majority, this working class is essentially a black working class. If for no other reason than to preserve the principle of a nonracial working class, the Communist Party must seek to end racial discrimination and national oppression in South Africa. For this reason, the Communist Party has identified with the struggle for national liberation and is a staunch ally of the ANC — and vice versa. The Communist Party views the success of the struggle for a democratic revolution in South Africa as an essential step towards the creation of a socialist society. Thus, the advanced working class led by the Communist Party and the national population led by the ANC function together in this joint struggle for the national-democratic revolution in our country. So, on both fronts — the working class front and the national liberation front — the struggle in South Africa is directed towards ending, as the first strategic objective, the system of minority privilege and national oppression of the black majority. The strategy and tactics of the ANC envision that, with the national liberation of the black people there must emerge a situation in which no individual or single group shall control the wealth of the country. For this reason, the objective of our struggle is to seize power, not to participate in the existing structure or win formal democratic rights. Our aim is to wipe away this structure and create a new one.

The program of the ANC is the Freedom Charter. Therein are set down the objectives of the national liberation movement without which we cannot construct a new society. It is not a matter of going to the Parliament and getting a law passed that will give everybody this and that. The national liberation movement is based upon the immediate attainment of these objectives. From this base come the other things.

ANC President Oliver Tambo said last year, "The masses of the black oppressed people constitute the principal and central instrument of change in South Africa, and they are charged with the task of carrying out the struggle in all its forms." Considering the type of society I have tried to describe, the black working class plays an important role in this struggle. With their concentrated numbers, with their organizations and with their experiences, black workers form the backbone of the struggle for change in South Africa. But of course, under the circumstances existing today, the mass struggle must be turned into people's war. For this reason the armed detachments of the ANC continue infiltrating into South Africa, participating in the mass movement and strengthening it with their arms. They are there to educate and organize the people and to combine mass struggle — political struggle — with armed struggle. For this reason you will not find in South Africa the situation that has developed in other anticolonial wars, of liberation zones in which independent governments have been set up. No, South Africa



is not that kind of society. Social changes will take place in South Africa as a result of the mass struggle.

Right now, our guerrilla war is based on mobile groups that can move from one place to another and be in contact with the masses all the time to train, recruit and arm the people inside the country. Of course, tactics might change as time passes. But for these reasons, as I said earlier, the struggle in South Africa cannot be mechanically equated with what is happening in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Western Sahara or any other part of Africa. Obviously the racist ruling class and its allies, the imperialist countries, know very well that the success of the liberation movement will end their economic exploitation and their hold on the country.

The bantustans: the racists' neo-colonial maneuver

Considering what is happening in South Africa today, the oppressors are very anxious to find some way of frustrating or thwarting black aspirations for liberation. They know that a head-on clash will result in the destruction of their old system as it exists. So they are trying to get the black people to accept the same system but in another form. Today they talk about internal settlements which will resolve this problem of confrontation. In South Africa they have embarked upon what is called the bantustan scheme. They hope that, if they give each ethnic group a little territory of its own, that will satisfy everybody and they will stop fighting. At the moment, the South African government is handing out bantustans the way a gambler deals out cards. Every little region is suddenly becoming independent. But the government officials do not reckon with the mood and the advanced concepts of the majority of the people, who are not interested in this kind of independence. The



result is, of course, that all the bantustans are in a state of unrest and revolt. For example, in one of the newest bantustans, that of the Benda ethnic group, elections were held to select the leadership of this tribal entity, so-called government, and the opposition party — which was against the bantustan — won the elections. The result was that the government declared a state of emergency and suppressed the people.

Of course the bantustan is created on the basis of the appointment by the central government of the local administrators. Today, in the biggest, model bantustan of the Transkei, the leader of the opposition in the Transkei Parliament is under arrest for treason. He is charged with working to subvert the Transkei independent entity. So, the fact is that, no matter how the racist government tries to create these artificial bodies, it is meeting with no success at all. Of course, there is a tribal layer — the puppet bureaucrats and the police —

that benefits from this situation and plays along. But, basically, the African majority cannot accept this division within its own ranks. An example of African resistance to the bantustans is the fact that two million members of this so-called Transkei ethnic group are living outside the Transkei. The government demanded that all these people apply for citizenship in the Transkei region. Out of the two million, only 56 applied.

Even the government itself is in a dilemma, because, while it talks about bantustans and ethnic divisions, it cannot afford to transport all the millions of Africans who are living outside the bantustans into the bantustans, because the Africans in the so-called white areas are the labor source for enterprises there. The whole of the bantustan scheme is failing in South Africa, but the government is determined, at all costs, to carry it out.

In Namibia, in Zimbabwe, the colonialists are also trying to gain acceptance for this kind of settlement. They cannot afford the success of the national liberation struggle. So they hope that by these schemes they will get the African people to accept this second-class status. Of course, behind these schemes are not only the local white racists but the international imperialist forces as well.

Imperialist interests in southern Africa

The British imperialists were very anxious to have the Zimbabwe situation settled on the basis of agreement. Of course, there is a good

reason why they want it done this way. The British have more than ten billion pounds invested in the economies of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. These investments represent 55 to 60 percent of total British investments in southern Africa. The United States' investments have grown fourfold since 1961, and it now has \$4 billion invested in South Africa.

Five hundred monopolies are involved in the exploitation of southern Africa, including General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and General Electric, while 6000 smaller American firms and companies operate there.

The United States, Great Britain and West Germany have major



investments in the mineral resources of South Africa, Namibia, etc. According to the **Sunday Times** of South Africa, all the uranium processed in Britain comes from southern Africa. The Chairman of the British Atomic Energy Commission stated that Great Britain processes 10 000 tons of uranium a year. Most of this comes from the Rosing Mines, in Namibia. It is significant that the individual chosen to conduct the negotiations between Zimbabwe and the Patriotic Front was Lord Carrington, who is not only a politician but also the former Chairman of the Board of the Rio Tinto Mining Corporation. So you can imagine in whose interests he is conducting these negotiations.

In order to create this illusion of interest in the black peoples of Africa, imperialism talks today about human rights and the dignity of peoples and — particularly the United States of America — hopes to give the impression of being on the side of black people. Of course, we know differently.

Imperialist attempts to survive in southern Africa

I also wanted to point out that, as the colonialists and imperialists desperately try to prevent the liberation of the peoples of southern Africa, in many places, especially in South Africa, they are faced with strikes, demonstrations and unrest on the part of the black population. Daily there are clashes with the police. Daily there are trials of militants who have been seized. In the new situation there are such signs of panic within the ruling class in South Africa that its officials no longer bother about charging people

with murder or arson or sabotage; the general accusation of treason is now enough to warrant death. In November, a young militant was sentenced to death, not for killing anybody, but for being guilty of treason, which is a political crime. Moreover, the commentators in South Africa noted the significance of this first case of a person sentenced to death for political ideas and not for murdering anybody. This is what the panic-stricken white ruling class is doing, faced with the opposition of the masses. South Africa's Minister of Police recently told the press that the security situation in South Africa is still serious. And he told a public meeting that the South African people were not as peaceful as some believed.

The reason for this has been the continued development of the mass struggle and the armed struggle inside the country. The press frequently reports attacks on police stations, giving a long list of specific places attacked.

There is another aspect of the crisis in South Africa which is also developing. It appears that, in the white Army, especially among white youth, there is no longer a willingness to fight, so the regime is facing a new problem: many young people that are called up for national service are evading the draft. In 1976, 63 000 men were called up; 37 000 applied for exemption. If you open the newspapers in South Africa today you will find many cases of young men who claim to be conscientious objectors and do not want to take up arms in the strug-

gle. Many of these young people have been arrested, and scores of them have fled the country and gone overseas to avoid fighting in the war. A South African war resistance movement is developing in Europe today. But what is also significant is that many of these white youth that do not want to fight are coming to the ANC to find out what they should do now as the next step. The white youth in general are now beginning to question the white supremacy structure in South Africa. With the massacre of black youth in 1976 at Soweto, white university students demonstrated at the side of the black youth. In order to resolve this problem, the government is also engaging in a scheme to Vietnamize the struggle in South Africa; that is, to recruit black puppets to fight against the liberation forces. That is one more reason why the situation in South Africa must not be regarded as a mere confrontation between blacks and whites. What is taking place is a confrontation between those who are defending democratic ideals regardless of race and those who want to maintain a fascist and racist government.

Of course, under the circumstances, the black majority is still the main force in this struggle against imperialism, which is desperately trying to survive in the southern part of Africa and hold on to its positions and its influence in

the face of a major economic, political and moral crisis. Wherever possible it has sought to protect its interests. The United States of America, in particular, is using Israel, South Africa, the reactionary states of Latin America and other reactionary and warmongering forces combined in one front to defend imperialism. I won't go into the relationship that exists between these various regions. **Tricontinental** magazine no. 62, carried an interesting article on the relations between Israel, Latin America and South Africa. Here, I am trying to show a general picture of the front that exists against imperialism in South Africa.

New cracks in the system

New cracks are continuing to appear in the imperialist world. Recently a major crack appeared in Nicaragua. Before that, the people of Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau achieved their independence and started to create new societies. We are sure that, in South Africa itself, another crack will appear in the imperialist world. A great deal of its success depends on international solidarity: the solidarity of the socialist countries, the Soviet Union, Cuba and others, and the solidarity of the progressive forces in the capitalist countries and of the world antiimperialist movement, with which our struggle is identified. ■