

THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS -
75 YEARS OF STRUGGLE -
A WESTERN EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY
POINT OF VIEW
ANTIMPERIAUSTISCHES
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On behalf of the Telo'onroeenospeo
ANTI-IMPERIALIST SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA, ASIA AND
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The African National Congress is like a khaki bush, Helen Joseph wrote in her book "Side by Side", - a plant, widely spread in South Africa that can be attacked with an axe or with fire, but still continues to bring forth sprouts: "Like the khaki bush, the African National Congress has grown roots and has spread out; roots that reach into the underground of South Africa. They cannot be seen themselves, only their sprouts. And these keep growing and growing."1) 1

This metaphor is both simple and suitable. Like no other organisation on the South African scene, the African National Congress has, over three quarters of a century, despite defeats and setbacks, developed and kept awake the consciousness of the black about their own strength and national identity; like no other force, it today incarnates the historical continuity of struggle for resistance and liberation in South Africa.

During almost half a century of legal existence, and more than a quarter of a century of illegal struggle, the ANC became what it is undisputedly today: the leading force of South African liberation.
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Yet the ANC was, when it was founded in 1912 as African National
ion struggle. 1

Native Congress, nothing less than a revolutionary liberation movement in the modern sense. Comparisons may rather be made with early forms of the US American civil rights movement.

It were members of the small black middle class (teachers, members of the liberal professions, etc.) , and a group of tribal chiefs who joined under the slogan: "We are one people!". Black clergymen were strongly represented; the first ANC president was Reverend J. L. Dube.

The objectives were adequately moderate. The ANC strived after recognition by the British colonial government rather than for the overthrow of the system of British- Boeric domination which established itself in its specific form with the constitution of 1910 and the Land Act of 1913.

In accordance with this objective was a decidedly constitutional conception of policy which orientated towards exploitation of the pseudo-representations left to the Africans, the so-called Native Councils.

While the programme of demands stayed behind the threshold of full equality of rights for the black, or even national liberation, the forms of policy (with few exceptions) were limited to

formulating petitions, and sending delegations to the British Crown which, at that time, had formal sovereignty over the "South African Union".

Until the forties - encouraged by the experience of joint struggle against Hitler - fascism during World War II - the leading ANC
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politicians believed in the introduction of democratic principles of liberty and equality according to the British Westminster model. This changed only when, after the Boeric National Party had won the elections in 1948, its apartheid programme became the official government doctrine.

Under the influence of the ANC Youth League founded in 1944, a more militant black workers' movement (strike of the miners in 1946!), . and passive resistance campaigns of the Indian part of the South African population, the ANC adopted a new action programme in 1949 which was to become determinative for the development of resistance during the fifties. The action programme unmistakably proclaimed national liberation as the ANC's objective; it rejected all forms of apartheid and separate development and, for the first time, claimed the full 'right of self-determination' for the Africans. It orientated towards massive use of such forms of struggle as strikes, boycotts, and other acts of civil disobedience.²⁾ Thus, the fifties became a decade of militant, but strictly non-violent, mass actions against the apartheid regime in its various appearances. The national days of protest since 1950, the famous Defiance Campaign of 1952, the march of South African . women towards Pretoria against pass laws in 1956, the People's Congress Movement of 1955, nationwide campaigns for a minimum wage of 1 Pound Sterling per day in 1957, and rebellions in rural areas from 1958 to 1960 were the most important marking stones of a rise of mass struggle unprecedented until that time, and specifically stamped by the ANC.

At the same time, the ANC developped itself further in these actions. Within a short period of time, it became a mass organisation with more than 100,000 members, and developped with the Congress Alliance a broad, non-racial alliance, uniting under its leadership

the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) already founded in 1920, the South African Coloured People Congress (SACPC), the Congress of Democrats (progressive whites), and the only non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) created in 1955. But at the same time, the fifties were also a period during which the possibilities of the liberation movement became more and more limited by the repression policy of the apartheid state. The ban of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1950, which had played a prominent part (although sometimes handicapped by strategic-tactical mis-calculations) both in development and organisation of a class-conscious black workers' movement and within the ANC; more frequent ban decrees against ANC leaders since 1952; the staging of a high treason trial against the leading men and women of the Congress Alliance, as well as several waves of persecution during the second half of the fifties, and finally the ban of the ANC following the Sharpeville massacre (and of PAC which had split from ANC in 1959) marked this development, in the course of which eventually all ways of legal and non-violent struggle were exhausted. It has certainly to be stated that the ANC, at the beginning of the sixties, was as insufficiently prepared for the impact of criminalisation and illegalisation of its activities, as for the decisively resulting necessity to continue the struggle from the underground. This could clearly be seen in the desperate attempt to defeat the proclamation of a white "Republic of South Africa", meant to give the apartheid system formally a definitive image, with a nationwide general strike in May / June 1961 (which Mandela had already tried to organise from illegality). The more decisive became the fact that immediately after the general strike had failed, a nucleus of leading cadres of ANC and SACP came together and, with the foundation of "Umkhonto we Sizwe" (Spear of the Nation) prepared a strategic decision which has, until this day, substantially marked the development of liberation struggle in South Africa. Although transition to armed struggle, which became obvious in a series of sabotage acts beginning December 1961, was not undisputed within the ANC (because of its programmatic obligation to strict non-violence), although logistics of struggle were, in the first instance, very poorly developed, and the first wave of sabotage acts declined soon, although, in 1962, in the person of Nelson Mandela the first supreme commander and, in 1963, the entire

top leadership of Umkhonto we Sizwe were arrested, and altogether were sentenced to life-long prison in the Rivonia trial 1964, the appearance on stage of Umkhonto we Sizwe at the beginning of the sixties initiated a new period of development of liberation struggle still lasting in our days.

The more than 25 years that have passed since were, indeed, in no way characterized by a continuous, uninterrupted ascent of resistance activity; they rather show its complicated and very contradictory course under the condition of a continuously perfecting apartheid system. During the second half of the sixties and the first half of the seventies, the ANC seemed to have vanished from the (internal) political stage of South Africa almost without leaving a trace. Repression had created a political vacuum which was only filled again gradually, that is, in the first instance, not through organised resistance activity in the underground, but through spontaneously developed Black Consciousness, whose most prominent proponents, like Steve Biko, ideologically resumed ideas of the ANC Youth League of the forties, rather than the level of knowledge of the ANC of the sixties.

The Soweto uprising, which broke the "churchyard silence" that had lasted for almost one and a half decades (except for strike movements in 1973) was to be attributed essentially to historical merits of the BCM, which had again fanned the determination of the black to resist (especially young people), and had given them moral and psychological backing in the face of daily humiliation.

But still, for the black, as could be seen during the following years, the ANC remained to be the organisation to whom the movement owed the most. It retained, as the liberal British publicist writes in his new book, "its historical leading part as the oldest and most powerful liberation movement) and became - soon again unignorable to the outside - the most important hope for the blacks.³)

Thus, from the viewpoint of today, the period of time between

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have been 1965 and 1975/76 seems to be a subsequent political struggle which, with the resumption of armed resistance at the end of the seventies, and the reconstruction (restoration) of a militant and autonomous trade union movement, since 1984 resulted in the most successful and persistent mass movement in South African history of resistance. In a more long-term perspective, the accelerating cyclicality of the political movement manifested itself:

while it took 16 years from the

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Sharpeville unrests at the beginning of the sixties to the Soweto unrests, the regime was granted just half of this period of treacherous silence until the beginning of the latest mass uprisings.

The present revolt differs from earlier break-ups not only in an essentially higher degree of organisation and consciousness of 4 struggling, (although it must be warned to have exaggerated hopes for a quick victory), but also in the fact that a solution of the crisis cannot realistically be expected without the ANC participating in a prominent place (a perception meanwhile extending far into the ranks of those who had considered possible its elimination from the political process)

II.

If we now raise the question why 'profound reasons exist behind this excellent part the African National Congress is playing, and which factors underlie its ability to hegemonize the resistance front against apartheid, we have to mention, above all, three factors:

1) ANC represents the level of development adequate to present conditions, and therefore most progressive, within the liberation movement, as well as a high degree of strategic-tactical flexibility, i.e. the ability to develop ways of struggle.

2) ANC itself is already, in an elementary form, an anticipation of the future, liberated South African society.

3) ANC is, through a broad network of alliance relations, deeply rooted in South African resistance, and exploits this fact consistently to achieve maximum unity of all anti-apartheid forces.

Until this day the Freedom Charter, adopted during the People's Congress in Kliptown 1955, has remained to be the central historic document of the ANC, and its demands have become the most important focus of all discussions about the future of South Africa beyond the apartheid system.

Often misunderstood by "Anti-Charterists" as a programme of "liberal democracy", again and again condemned by propagandists of the Boer National Party as a programme for the establishment

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of a "communist dictatorship", the Freedom Charter begins with the both plain and provoking proclamation of a South Africa belonging "to all those who live in it, both black and white."

The various demands, or perhaps more precisely principles for a future South Africa, ranging from principles of political equality of all human beings regardless of their race, over social and cultural rights and measures, to demands for re-distribution of land property, nationalisation of 'natural resources', banks, and monopoly enterprises" as well as control over commerce and industry, fit together to form an exact counter-image of the present model of apartheid; but without anticipating in any way the course into a socialist society, as 'left' opponents of its authors have always claimed, and right opponents have alleged. .

It only shows the lack of imagination of Euro-centrist ways of i&kawjktwhen the ANC's programme is charged with a social-democrat character - as recently done by Howard Barel¹⁴) - a thesis which does not even gain any soundness by referring to a Mixed-Economy concept for the period after the overthrow of the apartheid regime, as it was recently emphasized by ANC leaders such as Oliver Tambo. It is a fact that enforcement of the Charter's prospects of future is imaginable, given the real conditions prevailing in South Africa, only as a process of national-revolutionary liberation. The Freedom Charter, as Nelson Mandela had already pointed out before, "is more than a mere list of demands for democratic reforms. It is a revolutionary document precisely because the changes it envisages cannot be won without breaking up the economic and .

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lies, if seen this way, in the political set-ups of present South Africa."

The Charter's secret of success'

fact that it proved to be a "dynamic and living instrument" (Mandela) which, on one hand, made it possible to mobilise all forces being objectively opposite to apartheid and, on the other hand, deliberately kept open the option for a social-economic perspective "after liberation" or, respectively, 'entrusted' same to the dynamics of further development and real struggles, perhaps confiding in the social structure of the liberation forces as a whole.

"Our broad movement for National Liberation", said Oliver Tambo two years ago, "contains , : nationalist as well as socialist

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elements. And the South African historian Tom Lodge is certainly right in observing: With the revival of political culture among

the masses following Soweto, a widespread antipathy against capitalism has developed. Should the ANC in its social and economical objectives turn further to the left, this will not be the result of manipulation of the movement in whichever manner by communists, but will rather reflect the spirit of a broader political culture, of which the ANC

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forms a part."

This "political culture among the masses" itself is still related to a considerable degree with the transition into action of strategy and tactics the ANC has developed, little by little, as a reaction of the defeats at the beginning of the sixties.

First above all, ANC's liberation concept was elaborated more precisely during the 1st National Consultative Conference in Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1969; that is in three aspects:

Proceeding from the strategical objectives of national liberation of the Africans as the main contents of the present stage, it is emphasized that the black working class represents the main force of liberation struggle; secondly, it is stressed that armed struggle is the most important means to achieve this objective, without considering it to be isolated from other forms of struggle — such as mass actions and strikes; on this basis, as the third point, the alliance concept of maximum unity of all forces opposing apartheid is emphasized, in relation to the opening of the ANC for members

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The far-sighted character of the statements made in Morogoro may of non-black population groups.

perhaps be appreciated when considering the fact that, at that time, (MSHQ South Africa, there was no resistance of a considerable degree, neither from the side of trade unions, nor armed struggle, and the Congress Alliance of the fifties, which had adopted the Freedom Charter, had — fallen in decay

It had later been elaborated more concretely that all this was to be developed again under changed conditions, that is, by the definition of four central elements, or main levels, of liberation struggle, without full development of which the overthrow of the regime will not be possible: Firstly, strengthening the — part ANC is playing in the underground, and building — necessary structures; secondly, development of political mass struggle on the broadest possible front, above all by the black working class; thirdly, development of guerilla activity by Umkhonto we Sizwe and, in the fourth

place, development of an international anti-apartheid movement in order to isolate the regime world-wide . 8)

As for each liberation movement, taking up struggle against a colonial or quasi-colonial regime out of a position of hopeless power-political inferiority , for the ANC, too, the ability to be victorious is not "correct" programmes, strategies, and tactics, only a question of

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but furthermore closely related to its 'inner structure', and the ability to develop permanent moral superiority over the adversary. 1 had From the very beginning, as Mandela pointed out in his famous defence speech, the ANC was "formed and built up, not as a political party with one school of political thought, but as a Parliament of the African people, V , T a accommodating people of various political convictions, all united by the common goal of national liberation." 9) sdH-eA-K'JO'J .

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More than 20 years later, Tambo gave reasons for the admission of non-black people into the leadership of the movement by stating that "the time had come to eliminate any form of racism in our practice." 0) Until this day, cooperation of various political, ideological, and conceptional tendencies within the ANC has remained to be a characteristic of this organisation.

This has always given reason for controversies in the spectrum of resistance, as has the fact that the ANC, during the decades, did not only seek cooperation with non-black groups, but also orientated its own organisational structure towards the guideline of a future non-racial South Africa.

The fact that communists hold leading positions in the ANC (the most frequently mentioned stumbling block) is definitely no result. "infiltration" but the result of their decade-long, of sophisticated

unselfish activity within the resistance movement, and the courageous acknowledgment of the ANC's leading part by the SACP.

The mere fact that ANC is open - even in its leadership - for white, Indian, and coloured opponents of apartheid makes it a provocation in itself for the Botha - clique, and a negation of apartheid society. on'l'Lt. amusbn 0

In Oliver Tambo's declaration the 75th anniversary of ANC of 7th January 1987, the following statement can be found:

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" We are fighting to have a people's government, elected by and accountable to the people. Our organisation must assume the same character. In our conduct, we must never seem to be acting contrary to the understanding of what the masses of the people see as their interests." 11)

This shows the high moral and ethic standards ANC demands of its fighters, and it is no coincidence that this proclamation is now repeated at a time (and with special attention to the youth in the townships) when it comes to reactions of uncontrolled counter-violence - like execution of informants by the "necklace", which may be understood in view of the background of daily violence of the ruling regime, which may, however, discredit moral credibility of the struggle. Since ANC has been forced to give up the principle of strict non-violence, it has strictly observed that human lives were not affected by its armed operations. And, when this principle could not be maintained anymore at a certain level of escalation of war, the Qoua5q%thof Umkhonto we Sizwe were strictly orientated

" a people's army must

to military targets. Because, so again Tambo, continue to distinguish itself from the apartheid death forces by the bravery of its combatants, its devotion to the cause of liberation and peace, and its refusal to act against civilians, both black and white." 12)

If the revival of armed struggle since the end of the seventies

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was a4gatter of escalation of 'sheer terror", as adversaries of the ANCEEllege, it could have hardly had this enormous psychological effect to the formation of the structure of mass resktance existing in South Africa today,-& kkkA-HL AiI \$thrkd ha VAaMh HEPeCfS-
In the United Democratic Front (UDF) founded in 1983,vthe principles of the Congress Alliance of the fifties, although in altered forms and under other conditions, have again been effective more powerfully than ever before. The Front's foundation, its popularity, and its adaptability and stability despite all reprisals show to which extent resistance has succeeded in creating a greater scope for mobilisation of aresistance potential articulating itself in the open.

With the formation of the trade union federation COSATU at the end of 1985, old traditions of militant trade union unity have une doubtedly been revitalised, even though not the entire trade union spectrum of South Africa could be integrated."_

The recent foundation of a united youth congress, SAYCO, finally shows that these experiences of vital significance of xaxnman common proceeding against apartheid are being taken serious by the youth _ movement of South Africa, too.

All (still?) legally operating organisations of resistance in South Africa agree in their conviction that, as it was formulated in a oint communique of COSATU, SACTU, and ANC in March 1986, "the basic problem kv/r our country is confronted with, the question of political power, cannot be resolved without full participation of the ANC, which is seen by the majority of the people in South Africa as the leader and true representant of the whole.." 13)

III.

How long will it take until this question of power can be resolved . in the interest of the suppressed majority?

The question itself escapes the criteria of a serious answer.

The African National Congress, in its 75th Xear of existence,

XNEXXHEXREXXXXXXEEXMEXEMEHIXXXXXXMHEXEXHKXXXXEKX and the resistance movement in its entirety have, on one hand, reached the highest level of Qower ever since! but still, on the other hand, nothing would be more groundless than overwhelming ogtimism or even triumghalism.

For libweration struggle in South Africa has again reached a critical point of its development, from which both setbacks and further ac-celeration of decay of white power are possible . (may follow)

Pretoria's counter-attack against the people's offensive during the last year has led to a new quality of repression everywhere in the k country, whichs extension and perfectioned forms are more and more . frequently compared with Chile after Allende or Taiwan and South Korea, where, through the state of martial law, old powers have been kept upright over many years. 6% the other hand, there is hopeful evidence of the resistance movement's adaptability to changed conditi- ons of struggle, which makes restoration of the "churchyard silence" seem unrealistic.

fesponded The ANC has reacted to the new situation with a self-critical appreciation of its progress achieved so far.

Above all, as far as strengthening ANC and Umkhonto inside the country is concerned, progresses made were not as they could have been, Oliver Tambo said at the beginning of this year. There is, in the long run, no alternative to strengthening underground structures of

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the ANC, and intensification of armed struggle. Also, building alternative structures of people's power, as expressed by the main slogan for the year 1987 'Advance to People's Power!', which is meant to fill the power vacuum in the townships and shift the balance of power further in favour of the liberation forces, and make it irreversible, is an orientation for a longer period of time, and cannot be resolved from one day to another. The level of trade unions' struggle and their degree of organisation, having to play a prominent part in the overthrow of apartheid in any case, is in no way sufficient despite all recent successes in mobilisation and growth; not to mention large disparities in resistance activities between urban-industrial and rural regions. At last, ideological quarrels with ah- albeit not dominating faction of the resistance movement reclaiming the tradition of Black Consciousness for itself, represent an obstacle for development of unity against apartheid.

In view of this long term perspective liberation struggle has to be prepared for, efforts aimed at acceleration of differentiation processes within the ruling class, and exploitation of contradictions within the white camp, will gain significance, as well as consolidation and further development of international reputation the ANC has won in the recent years, in relation with further progress in world-wide isolation of the apartheid regime.

The fact that some time ago, for the first time, it came to official contacts between the ANC-leadership and the US Department of State can hardly be underestimated in this context. But however successful efforts of this kind may be - for the people in South Africa "life in the interregnum" (Nadine Gordimer) is going on for the time being. They will need our unlimited solidarity more than ever before.

Remarks Annex

- 1) H. Joseph, 'Side by Side' London
 - 2) Text from: "Dokumente der sudafricanischen Befreiungsbewegung von 1943 bis 1976" (Documents of the South African liberation movement from 1943 to 1976) Bonn 1977, p. 31 ff.
 - 3) A. Sampson, "Black and Gold" London
 - 4) see Infodienst (Information Service) 1 /1987, p. 16/17
 - 5) N. Mandela . "The Struggle Is My Life" London, IDAF, 1978, p. 54
 - 6) A. Sampson
- Q
- 7) see "Strategie und Taktik des ANC (Strategy and Tactics of ANC) in : R. Falk, Sudafrica - Widerstand und Befreiungskampf (South Africa - Resistance And Liberation Struggle), Cologne 1986, p 96 ff acht Südafrika unregierbar . .
 - 8) See e.g. O. Tambo make South Africa Ungovernable), ibid. p 200 ff
 - 9) N. Mandela, Woer ich bereit bin zu leben und zu sterben (For What I Am Prepared To Live And To Die) in: R. Falk, Nelson Mandela p 236
 - 10) See Sampson
- Executive
- 11) O. Tambo, Statement of the National Committee of the African National Congress on the Occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the African National Congress, Lusaka 1987, p 8
 - 12) ibid. p 9 .
 - 13) see: R. Weiss / H. Oesterle, Mandelas zornige Erben . Kampf um die Macht in Südafrika (Mandelas Wrathful Heirs. Struggle For Power In South Africa) Wuppertal 1987, p 127 f
- All quotations except 5, 9, 11, and 12, re-translated from German.