

Extracts from

'THE POSITION OF THE OPPRESSED MAJORITY IN APARTHEID  
SOUTH AFRICA'

ANC Document Presented to the CAD in March 1980

The people of South Africa have never acquiesced to the white man's rule, have never accepted the rape of our land, the seizure of our mineral wealth, the extraction of vast fortunes

from the soil of our land for the benefit of foreign investors, bankers, industrialists, and all those

others who benefit from the ravages of imperialism in our country.

We, the people of South Africa, fought relentlessly and without cessation against the foreign

invaders who, by the use of violence and superior armaments, expropriated our land until eventually we were left with little more than one-seventh of the total territory. It is a certifiable

historic fact that our people in the Cape, who took the first shock of resistance to the invaders,

fought no fewer than ten distinct wars in defence of their territory between 1779 and 1877. It is

similarly noteworthy to mention that the last war fought by our people against the white oppressors

took place in Natal in 1906 when our people, under the generalship of Bambata, rose in armed

struggle in defence of our land and people.

Our Struggle

The formation of the African National Congress took place shortly afterwards in 1912. under

the pressure of continued dispossession and denial of our legitimate claims to participate in a

decision-making process under a democratic form of government. The British made a constitution

which ushered in the Union of South Africa in 1910, denied franchise rights to the black majority

of three provinces, while retaining in the fourth, the province of the Cape, voting rights that have

been granted to all persons irrespective of race as far back as 1883. In response to this monstrous

piece of discrimination which doomed our voteless people to perpetual slavery, the fathers of the

African nation met in solemn conclave to devise ways and means of uniting the people of South

Africa in defence of their interests and for the achievement of their national objective of equal

participation without colour bars.

This was a keynote of our struggle for the next half century; throughout this period the leaders

and people protested, agitated, demonstrated, resorted on occasion to strikes and civil disobedience for the principle of equality before the law, for fundamental human rights, for the

abolition of colour bars and national oppression.

Britain, by the Act of Union, had divested itself of political responsibility for our country and for

the voteless black majority. Colonial power was transferred to the white minority under the

constitution that enabled it to perpetuate its supremacy at the expense of our people. Although the

South African state was made sovereign in terms of international law, it retained all the characteristics of a colonial power vis-a-vis the black majority. Let us not be mystified by legal

jargon and constitutional technicalities. We assert that the white minority occupies the position of a

colonial power in relation to our people and therefore our struggle is, in essence, a struggle for

national liberation. We shall now proceed to demonstrate the factual basis of our analysis.

Against Colonial Domination

A universal characteristic of colonialism is a discrimination exercised by the white settlers against

the indigenous population, an institutionalised system of inequality that denies them access to

education, skills, employment, social welfare, health services and equal terms with the colonial masters.

The cornerstone of this edifice of inequality before the law and in substance is a deprivation of political rights suffered by the indigenous people. All power is concentrated in the hands of the

settler community acting in conjunction with the imperial power. Apartheid and racism in South Africa are the products of the colonial conquest of our country and people, used by the enemy as a rationale for the perpetuation of the colonial status of the black majority, and can therefore be eliminated by force of arms.

Was it not against this colonial system that African peoples revolted? What is meant by national

liberation other than the rejection by the colonised people of the inequalities and injustices forced

on them by foreign rule in the form of colonialism? And it is not against such a system of

oppression that we, the people of South Africa, are engaged in mortal combat?

We therefore claim with reason that our struggle against racism and white autocracy is, in

substance, identical with the liberation movement fought throughout the continent during the past

fifty years. There is a difference: our brothers and sisters in Africa fought against an external enemy

- the imperial states of France, Belgium, Britain, Portugal, Spain, Italy. Our enemy has always

consisted of the combined forces of British imperialism and internal colonialism. That situation,

that combination of forces, remained unchanged when Britain, the imperial state, relinquished its

direct control of South Africa in the same way as it had done for Canada, Australia and New

Zealand.

We repeat that the legal and constitutional forms did not change the situation when Britain

delegated the responsibility for government to the white minority. It retained the substance of

power in the form of ownership of the mines, factories, commerce and much of the land. Even a

superficial examination of the social structure reveals the extraordinary stranglehold that at Western

countries, the US and Japan maintain over our economy. This economic dependence is not

unique. It exists in many other politically sovereign states. In our case, however, that state of

dependence has a vital significance for our struggle because the white minority draws on the

imperial states for support in terms of investments, trade, technical skills and armaments. For these

reasons, we claim full justification for the contention that white South Africa exhibits all the

trappings of a colonial power in relation to our people.

For Self-Determination

The African National Congress in 1912 called on our people to unite in defence of their interests and for the realisation of their legitimate rights. Then, as now, we were divided into

chiefdoms by language and custom and the maintenance of traditional forms of polity. This demand for unity was far more than a sentimental cry, or an imitation of similar appeals made

elsewhere to members of a divided nation. The objective conditions that followed the wars of

conquest, expropriation of land, and dispossession of our people were such as to make unity an

imperative. '

Nothing would demonstrate this need for unity more than the acts of the first all-white Union

Parliament. In 1910 it adopted a Defence Act which excluded blacks from national service.

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it introduced a Native Labour Regulation Act which imposed a pass system, compulsory registration of workers and criminal penalties for breach of contract on the African working

population. In 1912 it enacted the Mines and Works act under which regulations introduced colour

bars excluding Africans from skilled work in a wide range of industrial occupations. In 1913 it

passed the Native Land Act which segregated the African population in reserve areas comprising

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only 13% of the country's surface area. The legal and constitutional framework of South Africa's

industrial revolution was impregnated with race laws and colour bars, such as existed and could

only exist under colonial capitalism.

Our leaders, the founders of the African National Congress, included members of the learned

professions, peasants, workers and chiefs of high standing. One and all recognised that separate,

isolated acts of resistance by individual communities would fail to stop the advance of the racial

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juggernaut. Their only hope of survival, the only prospect of obtaining their just demand, was to unite into one nation.

In this respect we differed in no way from the rest of the continent. Colonialism was a rapacious system which denied basic human rights, trampled rough-shod over nationalities, drew boundary lines arbitrarily and without regard to the identity of language, groups and ethnic communities.

Nevertheless, and with few exceptions, the national movements that proliferated during the course of the century accepted the colonial boundaries as given and obtained independence of the states artificially carved out by the imperialists. Nowhere in Africa have independent countries agreed to fragmentation into separate ethnic states. Any attempt to secede by civil war has been resisted with the full force of the majority. Africa lightly rejects the principle of secession when it is applied or when ethnic communities within a state demand it as a right for themselves.

In our case, however, partitioning has been imposed on us from above the white autocracy. We have not been consulted, no referendum was organised to test our opinion. Arbitrarily and in its own interests, the white autocracy has proceeded to dismember the common society, to establish tribal states, the so-called homelands or, as it is contemptuously called by our people, the bantustans. This system of tribal nationalities which the rest of Africa has rejected has been imposed on us by force with the consequence that we, the original owners of the land and the sole occupants, have been turned into foreigners by legislative decrees. And when we enter so-called white South Africa, comprising 87% of the total land, when we enter these developed regions in search of employment, we are required by law to take out passports, residential permits, because in terms of the white man's law we are foreigners in the land of our forefathers.

We demand, and have demanded since 1912, the right to determine the form of our nationalhood. This is why the African National Congress was formed and this is what it has struggled to achieve throughout its existence. 'But the white autocracy, a racist minority, denies the right of self-determination even to the extent of prohibiting our organisation and all other forces that reject partitioning into bantustans and demand the right to form one nation. Is this not national oppression? There is no difference between the white man's ban on us and the action taken against national movements in other parts of Africa during the struggle for independence. With these reasons we maintain that we are victims of national oppression in the same way as the peoples of Africa who rose in revolt against foreign domination and colonial rule.

The Independence of Zimbabwe

The case for recognition as an authentic national liberation movement has stood the test of time.

The OAU, the UN and progressive forums throughout the world have never challenged our contention that we are fighting a genuine war for national self-determination against an autocracy which exercises the powers and imposes the oppression characteristic of any colonial system.

- ' we welcomed and supported as best we could the demand of Africa for freedom from imperialist domination and colonial rule. It was and remains our conviction that our case will be strengthened by the liberation of other parts of Africa. Therefore we welcomed and drew comfort from the tide of liberation that spread across Africa from the West to the East and from the North to

the South. And when that tide was brought to a halt along the Zambezi we supported, physically and morally to the limits of our capacity, the struggle for the emancipation of the colonised people in the sub-continent. When Mozambique and Angola were liberated we rejoiced and our people reacted positively as in the case of the black consciousness movement and the Soweto Uprising.

The defeat of Portuguese colonialism brought added confidence to our people, raising the level of political consciousness, and accelerated the maturing of the revolutionary situation in our country.

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The authenticity of the liberation struggle was not called into question when the people of Mozambique and Angola liberated themselves. On the contrary, our allies recognised that these historic feats of liberation had deprived our enemy of the protection afforded by the buffer states along the borders, and opened new fronts for our onslaught on the bastions of white supremacy. The liberation of Zimbabwe has brought about a situation where another buffer state has fallen to the triumphant advance of the African cause for freedom from foreign rule and white domination. The defeat of the rebel regime and its Western allies in Zimbabwe is a glorious victory for the people and also for the whole of Africa. We are confident that the success of the patriotic forces brings us closer to our objective of marshalling the resources of Africa and the international community for the final assault on the last bastion of colonialism and imperialism on our continent - the South African apartheid regime.

Illegitimate Transfer of Power

We have already pointed out that our struggle against white domination and colonial invasion goes back to the early days of white settlement and continued in different regions and under varying circumstances throughout the succeeding 330 years. Our enemies were both British imperialism and Afrikaner nationalism. After the defeat of the Boer Republic in the war of 1899-1902, Britain transferred political power to the white minority in defiance of the pre-war protests of our people. To illustrate, we cite some of the outstanding features of this protest, such as the petition organised in 1903 by the Transvaal Native Union asking for a common voters' roll throughout South Africa. In February 1909, another Congress was held in the Orange River Colony, and in March similar gatherings took place in the Cape, Natal and Transvaal. The only issue was the draft South Africa Act. The 1910 constitution confined the black vote to the Cape, prohibited blacks from sitting in Parliament and based the number of parliamentary seats on the white adult male population to the exclusion of the black majority. V

Every Congress passed resolutions condemning the colour bar clauses and demanding the extension of the franchise to Africans, coloureds and Asians in the north. From these regions came 60 elected delegates who met in a South African Native Convention in 1909. It, too, rejected the colour bar clauses and resolved: 'All persons within the union shall be entitled to full and equal rights and privileges subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike to all citizens without distinction of class, colour or creed'.

Recognising that the racist minority regime would ignore our people's legitimate claims, the National Convention sent a deputation to London to lobby the British Parliament for an amendment of the draft Constitution in favour of a non-racial franchise irrespective of race, colour or creed. The delegation put a responsibility for the entrenchment of white hegemony on the British Parliament, the author and source of the legislation. This and other forms of pressure failed. Britain was then committed to unifying the Afrikaners and English whites in a solid front as a price of appeasement for the violence used against the

Afrikaners in the Anglo-Boer War and as a means of reinforcing the imperialist interests. Parliament therefore passed the draft Act with its colour bar clauses intact. The only achievement of the delegation was the exclusion from the Union of the High Commission territories of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Out of this agitation and because of this failure the African National Congress emerged in 1912, dedicated to the struggle for the removal of the colour bars and the creation of a non-racial society open to all South Africans. , Considered in this historical context, and with due regard to the substantive issues we have no hesitation in contending that the South African Act of Union was essentially of the same order as the UDI by rebel Rhodesia in 1965. The power that the rebel Ian Smith seized illegally in 1965

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' . was conferred by a British Act of Parliament in 1910. In both cases a racist minority acquired absolute power over a black majority. Let us not be taken in by legal subterfuges or the outward look of things. The substance of our case is that Britain, by force, deprived us of our legitimate rights in 1910. If there had been at that time in existence the Organisation of African Unity or the United Nations, "it would have undoubtedly condemned the violence perpetrated against us by Britain in the same terms as it condemned the violence perpetrated by the Rhodesian rebels against the African people in 1965.

#### Forms of Struggle

The new situation brought about by the unification of 1910 demanded of our people new forms of struggle. For more than 250 years our forefathers had taken up arms against the white invaders, but had done so in separate encounters organised by individual chiefdoms or coalitions of chiefdoms. It was not possible during this whole period to achieve maximum unity based on the growth of national consciousness, which would embrace all ethnic communities, all tribes and clans. As part of the development of a national consciousness, the African National Congress provided the subjective factor, utilising common experience and living conditions of common oppression and identity of suffering to combat narrow tribalism and inculcate in all sections of our people the concept of a single nation born to be free and fighting for emancipation; and in its formative years it resorted to constitutional means such as deputations, petitions, demonstrations, industrial actions, anti-pass campaigns and protests of all kinds.

The conditions for armed struggle came into being for three primary reasons:

" The coming into power in 1948 of the Afrikaner National Party, the creator of apartheid and the most vicious exponent of a tyrannical racial order.

it The shift in the balance of forces in Africa resulting from the defeat of imperialism and the abandonment of colonial rule after World War Two marked, among other things by the formation of the OAU, which gave a universal shape and ideology to the strivings of African peoples for self-determination, the right to secede from imperialist constellations, and the achievement of sovereign powers of government.

1 The change in the balance of world forces resulting from the defeat of racism and fascism in

Hitler Germany, both of which were deeply entrenched in our own country. Without the unqualified and generous support of Africa, the non-aligned and socialist countries we, together with other liberation movements, would not have been able to obtain the military training and receive armaments required for an armed struggle.

These were the underlying structural reasons for the decision to take up arms. But the immediate occasion was the ban imposed on our organisation. That prohibition closed the door to

all possibilities of political action within the structure. If we as a nation were to survive, we had no

option but to take up arms against the enemy

Single Struggle Against a Common Enemy

Seen in its historical perspective, the war against white racism has been an ongoing struggle

. throughout the entire sub-continent. The conflict has shifted from one country to another and from

one area to another within each country. In spite of national differences between the armies of

liberation and also between the forces of oppression, it is historically, politically and strategically

correct to see us all as being engaged in the single struggle against a common enemy. That enemy

is imperialism and its offshoots of colonialism, racism and fascism.

Therefore the struggle will and must continue until the entire sub-continent has been lib

erated.

This concept is in strict accord with the basic principles of the OAU's policy towards national

liberation in the sub-continent; a principle which has been repeatedly stated in resolutions adopted by the, OAU since its inception. It. is one struggle against the common enemy who has dominated a great part of our continent. By means of hard and tenacious fighting involving enormous sacrifices; destrllction of life and property, the peoples armies have stormed and taken possession of one bastion after another of white supremacy. There remains one citadel, one fortress in South Africa and Namibia. That is the last stronghold which we are determined to occupy in pursuit of our historic mission which is to bring about the complete liberation of Africa from the last remnants of colonialism, fascism and racism.

\_The enemy isoformidable but it is not invincible. There 'is irrefutable evidence that in proportion to advances made by our political and military campaigns, the enemy is compelled to adopt defensive strategies which are having the immediate effect of raising enormously the level of fire and coercive measures. The enemy seeks to the same extent to sustain the political, economic, social and moral basis of his regime. Like any wounded beast of prey, the enemy is vicious and capable of inflicting injury and destruction on those within his reach. This is no reason, however, for abandoning the struggle against the best of prey. He has to be destroyed if we are to safeguard the live  
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and interests of our people and those of the peoples in the neighbouring states  
VICTORY IS CERTAIN!