

South Africa

Apartheid in its Death Throes

The mass struggle in South Africa today stands at the forefront, challenging US imperialism's global strategy for reversing the tide of history.

«The people had lifted the ban on the ANC and imposed on our situation their own system of legality.» - This is the ANC's evaluation of the escalating mass struggle inside South Africa, as presented by President Oliver Tambo in the Political Report of the National Executive Committee to the National Consultative Congress in June 1985. In these words lies much of the explanation for why Pretoria's most recent, pervasive and brutal state of emergency has failed to harness the masses' struggle for freedom.

Quite the opposite, the state of emergency has served to expose the depth of the apartheid regime's crisis. The movement for sanctions against South Africa is gaining ground daily, displaying the dialectical relationship between the oppressed masses' militant struggle and international solidarity. In all this, the ANC is playing a key role, guiding the struggle and coordinating its multiple aspects, inside and outside South Africa.

On June 12th, Pretoria imposed a state of emergency, ostensibly to prevent mass commemoration of Soweto Day and attacks on the apartheid system planned by ANC revolutionaries. It is quite clear that the masters of apartheid fear the occurrence of an all-out insurrection. Yet the extent of the draconian measures imposed shows that the reactionary, racist regime's aims were more pernicious than quelling unrest. The police are empowered to make arrests without charges, and search without warrants. In this way, approximately 4,500 persons were detained within three weeks (some estimates run at 8,000). In most cases, their families were not informed; only after a month was the way cleared for a fraction of the detainees to see a lawyer. Reports of torture are rampant.

The detainees include trade unionists, social workers, schoolchildren, women, students, teachers, clergymen, journalists, community leaders and anti-apartheid activists, especially from the mass organizations affiliated to the United Democratic Front. Their composition reveals that the aim of mass detentions was not only to paralyze the organized mass struggle, but to silence the voice of all those qualified to speak out against apartheid's crimes. This is

only one of many indications that the state of emergency was intended to permit the regime to use the most brutal methods, not excluding mass murder.

In South Africa today, the police and army may use any amount of force to move people. Any place can be designated an 'unrest area', authorizing the regime's forces to use extraordinary measures. To hide real and potential atrocities, press censorship is near total. Reporting on the actions or deployment of the security forces is forbidden, as is mentioning the names of detainees. Reporters are banned from the Black townships, many of which are under nightly curfew. Press offices are raided and newspapers seized. Indoor meetings are banned (outdoor meetings

were already illegal). About 120 anti-apartheid groups are banned from issuing statements, publications or posters. Foreign teachers, clergymen and journalists have been expelled.

Under these conditions, people are shot down on the whim of a police officer. Whole church congregations were arrested on Soweto Day. Babies were teargassed when police raided a township, as were one thousand people in a mosque in the Western Cape. Government bulldozers were sent to flatten the remains of KTC squatters' camp near Cape Town, while thousands of homeless were ordered out of refugee centers. Under the cover of the state of emergency, vigilante groups and death squads increased their attacks on anti-apartheid activists and centers. These atrocities and others, that may still be unreported to the outside world, led Oliver Tambo to charge that Pretoria aimed to create a situation where it can massacre tens of thousands. This is the ultimate logic of apartheid. The white minority regime, which presides over the interests of international capitalism in resource-rich South Africa, is prepared to enact a genocidal policy to maintain the oppression and exploitation of the vast majority. ▶

