

THE elevation of the African National Congress (ANC) from an underground revolutionary movement to the ruling party in South Africa is undoubtedly one of the main events of the second half of this century, indeed of modern history. It stands in the same pre-eminent category with the great revolutions of the last 250 years: The French American, Russian, Chinese and Cuban Revolutions. In the context of world history the coming to power of the ANC and its leader, Nelson Mandela, ranks higher in importance than other earth-shaking events like the Portuguese Revolution, the Iranian Revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union and former socialist regimes of Eastern Europe.

But the significance of the South African event lies not simply in the "constitutional" overthrow of an entrenched minority regime which had prescribed a millennium for itself.

All revolutions worth celebrating are of such character. The significance of the event lies in its peculiarities as a revolution, as well as in its timing. We shall first isolate some of these peculiarities, and then describe the timing.

* *The character of the society which the revolution is committed, and is expected, to transform.* The South African society is not just racist. It is also capitalist. There are thus two social hierarchies: The capitalist hierarchy and the racial hierarchy. The blacks who have now been elevated politically stand at the bottom of both hierarchies. It is the combination, or aggregate, of these

The South African Revolution

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two hierarchies — and not simply the racial hierarchy — that is called apartheid.

In the American Revolution, the white colonists overthrew the English colonial authority and established a capitalist state where native Indians and black slaves remained subjugated and chained. It was a white supremacist revolution. In the French Revolution, the rising bourgeoisie overthrew feudalism — the impediment to capitalist development — and established a bourgeois state where the working class and peasantry — who had played a crucial role in the revolution — remained subjugated. In the Russian Revolution, the working class and the peasantry overthrew feudalism, imperialism and nascent capitalism, dissolved the Czarist Empire and established a workers' state. A similar overturning of class hierarchy took place in the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions.

But in South Africa where class and racial oppressions indissolubly combined to produce apartheid, the latter cannot be dismantled without a "double overturning"—class and race — taking place. For apartheid is not just racism. Apartheid is capitalist racism. Any dream of preserving the capitalist structure/hierarchy by "expanding" the capitalist class to include more blacks will produce another upheaval which will again be the focus of world attention. To dismantle apartheid in reality, and not

simply on paper, capitalist structures must be dismantled. One of the first tests of the validity of this proposition will come over the land question: Land for the dispossessed. This is one of the issues that has set the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) apart from the ANC.

The South African Revolution is also different from the classical national (anti-colonial) liberation revolution, like the Algerian Revolution. The colonising power in South Africa was not a foreign power, but an *internal caste*. The colonisers are South Africans. If comparisons are to be made, the South African Revolution can be likened to the Zimbabwean and Namibian Revolutions. But in the former case the "colonial" power rested strategically on the South African apartheid regime and in the latter, the South African apartheid regime was the coloniser. In both cases the coloniser was an external force which simply withdrew to its "home base," South Africa.

* *The character of the revolutionary movement.* The main liberation movement in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC), was not a formation or coalition put together for the purpose of seizing power. It was formed 82 years ago, in 1912, with the initial name, African Native Congress. The ANC's main ally, the South African Commu-

nist Party (SACP), was formed in 1921, that is 73 years ago. It is the oldest Communist Party in Africa and one of the oldest in the world. It was a member of the Third International, or Communist International (Comintern) formed after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

The ANC is thus older than Nelson Mandela, its present leader; and the SACP is older than Joe Slovo, its current National Chairman. The parties are not like Kenneth Kaunda's party, or Mobutu's party, or Kamuzu Banda's party or Nigerian national parties which were formed by, and around, individuals who led them to victories. On the contrary, the ANC and SACP produced the leaders who have now assumed office as state functionaries. When the leaders were in prison, or in exile, the organisations, nourished by a fighting people, produced other cadres to continue the struggle. The organisations have a history of fighting the apartheid machine as well as dealing with treachery in their ranks. The indications are that they will continue to do so.

The point here is that whereas the nationalist parties in other parts of Africa became transformed, after independence, into reactionary instruments of the leaders' personal powers, the ANC and SACP are not likely to be so transformed. The ANC, an 82-year old fighting organisation which produced a historic figure like Nelson Mandela, and others, cannot be so

transformed. The SACP, an armed organisation, committed not only to fighting capitalism but also to fighting white domination — even when its membership was only white — cannot be so transformed. The only possibility is the transformation of their leaderships. In that case the organisations will either split or throw off its leaderships and produce new ones. The implications are clear.

We now come to the timing of the Revolution. Like the Cuban Revolution, the victory of the liberation movement in South Africa broke the stalemate in the revolutionary struggle in the underdeveloped world, especially in Africa. The Cuban Revolution indicated the way forward after the imperialist powers had dashed the hopes of universal liberation raised by World War II. In the same way the South African Revolution comes at a time when the exploited and oppressed peoples of the world are searching for a way out of the consequences of the global events of the last five years.

From the peculiarities and timing of the South African Revolution issue both the problems which face the new nation-state and new perspectives for revolutionary transformation of Africa. The revolution marks a new stage in the history of Africa, and of the world. In political terms, as well as psychologically, it is more than a counter-weight to the catastrophe in Eastern Europe.

* *Next week: South Africa's victorious alliance.*