



On Coloured Marginalisation and the Fight for a Black-Centred Workers Government For a Leninist Vanguard Party, Tribune of All the Oppressed!

It is now 21 years into the “new” South Africa, and of the myths proclaimed in 1994, that of the “rainbow nation” today stands exposed as perhaps the most threadbare lie of all. To anyone with eyes to see, it is clear that today’s South Africa is anything but a paradigm of racial harmony. Indeed, in many important respects racial antagonisms have *increased* in recent years, and a real hardening of racial attitudes can be seen both among different oppressed racial groups and among the privileged white minority. Expressions of ethnic and racial exclusivism—like car stickers and t-shirts proclaiming “100% Zulu” and “100% Venda”, or pronouncements of being “Coloured and Proud”—have increased noticeably. Meanwhile, a survey released last year by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) revealed that only 52,8% of whites surveyed in 2013 agreed that apartheid was, in the words of the survey, “a crime against humanity”—down from 70,3% in 2003.

As Marxists, we understand that these retrograde developments at the ideological level are fundamentally a product of the brutally oppressive, racist *material and social reality* that continues to define life in South Africa. More than two decades after the end of the apartheid system of rigid, legally-enforced racial segregation and white supremacy, the vast majority of the country’s non-white masses still live in “Third World” misery, alongside a “First World” inhabited mainly by the white minority. Despite some moderate increase in socialising and other interactions across racial lines—mostly among the wealthy—the relationships between whites and blacks largely remain those of masters and servants. Racial oppression and degradation are the material basis for white racist ideology, as is clearly reflected in the numerous cases of white racist attacks on black domestic workers that get reported in the media. On a much larger scale, the 2012 Marikana massacre was a bloody reminder that the lives of black workers are just as cheap today as under apartheid.

The growth of racial, tribal and other divisions among the oppressed non-white masses is also a product of the racist neo-apartheid system, which the capitalist ANC-led Tripartite Alliance government is responsible for administering and maintaining. Far from delivering the “better life for all” that was “promised” in 1994, this government acts as enforcers for the superexploitation of mainly black labour by the same capitalist class that ruled under apartheid—now with a sprinkling of non-white faces. In order to deflect the growing anger at the base of society away from itself and the racist capitalist rulers, the ANC-led Alliance inevitably resorts to pitting different sections of the oppressed against each other.

Since the 1990s, we have repeatedly warned that if the seething discontent of the masses does not find expression along *class lines*, it will fuel and embitter every other kind of

division. The deadly anti-immigrant pogroms of 2008—in which 62 people lost their lives—and the smaller outbreaks of anti-immigrant violence that have become a grotesquely common feature of life in the years since are stark proof of this grim fact.

The goal of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), of which Spartacist/South Africa is a section, is the establishment of a *world communist society*. Only then will economic scarcity be eliminated as a result of the qualitative advance in production made possible by collectivising the wealth and resources of society in the service of human needs. In a communist society, all forms of racial discrimination and oppression—along with the very existence of race, ethnicity and nationality as categories of any social significance—will be nothing but memories of a barbaric capitalist past. But getting there requires a series of workers revolutions to sweep away capitalist rule, including especially in the imperialist centres. Combating the very real racial, national and other prejudices that today divide the working class is a crucial part of forging the revolutionary leadership—i.e., a Leninist vanguard party—needed for working-class victory.

Snapshots of Black-Coloured Divisions Under Neo-Apartheid

Racial tensions between the black majority and the coloured minority have various expressions and causes, but a big factor is feelings of coloured marginalisation in post-1994 South Africa. As one popular saying goes, many coloured people feel that “there’s no brown in the rainbow nation”. This marginalisation has served to reinforce anti-black resentment, as the bourgeois-nationalist ANC is perceived to represent the black majority and favour them at the expense of coloureds. The tensions and mistrust are, of course, stoked and manipulated by the capitalists, their political parties and media mouthpieces, who exploit them for their own benefit. While they are not always openly expressed, often smouldering beneath the surface, there are plenty of cases where these tensions break out in the open because of one thing or another that lights the spark.

A recent example is the conflict between black and coloured parents and teachers following the appointment of a black principal and two black deputy principals at Roodepoort Primary School, an integrated school with a majority of black pupils that is situated in the predominantly coloured neighbourhood of Davidsonville, Roodepoort (west of Johannesburg). Feeling that the appointments had snubbed the coloured residents and pupils, protests were launched in February 2015, led by the Davidsonville Community Forum (DCF), to demand that the three be removed and replaced

with coloured candidates. While the DCF and some protesters have tried to claim that their grievances are “not about race” but rather about alleged corruption in the appointment process, it is clear that they have everything to do with racial tensions. The DCF’s anti-black politics are revealed on its Facebook page, where in July an invitation was posted to “Anyone and any organisation that believes that Coloureds, Indians, Khoisan, Afrikaner and other marginalised minorities now needs [sic] to stand politically on their own” to attend the Gauteng launch of the Patriotic Association of South Africa in Davidsonville!

The protests had an unmistakable anti-black thrust, with parents demanding the school’s coloured pupils “needed a principal of their own race” (news24.com, 22 February) or complaining that it’s “only just black people that are ... making it violent” (702.co.za, 20 February). They have also been vitriolic in their denunciation of the teachers’ union SADTU, with a DCF statement accusing SADTU members of bribery and demanding a Hawks investigation into the union. The DCF also blames the union for the wretched state of education, denouncing it for having “no prospects or ideals ... other than focussing more on its growth and the protection of its members”.

As Marxists, we oppose interference by the capitalist state into the trade unions as a matter of principle. We have sharp political criticisms of the pro-capitalist leadership of SADTU, as well as that of the other unions. But our perspective is to replace these misleaders with a class-struggle leadership that would seek to strengthen the fighting capacity of the unions against the bosses. Calls like that of the DCF for state intervention are aimed at crippling the unions. Labour must clean its own house; this is not the task of the class enemy.

The racial polarisation in Davidsonville serves to undermine the conditions of *all* teachers, and inevitably makes it more difficult to fight against funding cuts and other attacks that will worsen the conditions of the pupils. Black teachers at the school have rallied around the principal (their boss), while coloured teachers boycotted class demanding her removal. In June, it was reported that disciplinary letters were handed out to 14 teachers. Amidst this nasty racial polarisation, the school was shut down more than once and at least one protest—where black and coloured parents faced off along racial lines—was brutally dispersed by cops with rubber bullets. In August, a petrol bomb was hurled at the principal’s car outside the school.

Another incident occurred in the Western Cape farming

town of Grabouw (east of Cape Town) in March 2012. It began with protests against massive overcrowding and lack of resources at the area’s Xhosa-language school, where some 1900 pupils were crammed in a building with a capacity of 600. According to *The Times* (20 March 2012), the protests initially included plans for black and coloured residents to travel to stage a protest in Cape Town. The night before that was to happen, black residents started burning tyres and setting up barricades in the street. During this protest, a classroom in a nearby Afrikaans-language school, where the majority of the pupils are coloured and roughly 40% are black, was set on fire. This triggered a tense standoff and a day of running battles between blacks and coloureds, during which racist insults were hurled back and forth and several people were attacked by mobs.

As is especially common in the Western Cape—the one province where the ANC is not in government, and where the coloured people are the majority—the tensions were fanned by the ANC and its bourgeois political rivals of the neo-liberal, white-dominated Democratic Alliance (DA), the ruling party in the province. Both parties were campaigning at the time for a by-election in the area, and sought to win votes by implicitly and explicitly mobilising racial antagonisms and prejudices (while, of course, cynically denying it). For example, then DA leader and Western Cape premier Helen Zille inveighed on Twitter against “education refugees” from the Eastern Cape who were supposedly overburdening the Western Cape—a transparent attempt to stoke racist anti-Xhosa sentiment.

The Times quoted a coloured woman in Grabouw who was part of the crowd that gathered at the Afrikaans school: “They, these blacks, came and burnt our children’s school. Why? We waited for this school for so long. They must wait their turn.” Indeed, at the root of most racial clashes among the non-white oppressed masses is the desperate struggle over a few wretched crumbs from the capitalists’ table. This is a basic part of how the bourgeoisie—a fabulously wealthy, minuscule minority amidst a sea of misery—maintains its rule. It is hardly unique to South Africa; in the 1800s, the notorious American “robber baron” Jay Gould once boasted, “I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half.”

For communists, breaking through these retrograde divisions is centrally about advancing the vital objective interest that black and coloured workers have in united struggle against their common enemy—the racist capitalist ruling class and its political representatives, which include both the ANC and the DA. This class unity is in no way an automatic outcome of growing mass discontent, but must be *fought for*. That means fighting against *all* manifestations of racial oppression and against *all* racial, ethnic and national prejudices.

A popular cliché to describe feelings of coloured marginalisation post-1994 is “First we weren’t white enough and now we’re not black enough.” Mohamed Adhikari, a coloured academic from the University of Cape Town who has written extensively on coloured identity, notes:

“A principal cause for Coloured dissatisfaction with the new order ... is that members of the Coloured community, especially the working classes, see themselves as having gained little, if

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any, tangible benefit from the new dispensation. ... In the Western Cape, the unwinding of distortions caused by the Coloured Labour Preference Policy is not only affecting the Coloured community adversely but is also perceived to be the result of government policy unfairly advantaging Africans.”

—*Not White Enough, Not Black Enough—Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Double Storey, 2005)

In many respects, the living standards of the coloured masses *have* deteriorated significantly since the early 1990s. To cite just a few examples, the number of coloured people living in poverty increased by 20% between 1996 and 2012; the incarceration rate among coloured people—who make up 18% of the prison population—is far higher than among other racial groups; and social ills like gang violence, drug addiction and alcohol abuse hit the coloured poor more severely than other communities.

On top of this, government ministers and other high-ranking officials from the ANC have periodically launched vicious anti-coloured diatribes that give the lie to the ANC’s charade of “non-racialism”. Sometimes these chauvinist rants retail the nationalist line that since coloured people were “privileged” under apartheid, their oppression was less real and they deserve to suffer more today. For example, Tokyo Sexwale once said he wanted to “vomit” when “others try to use (our) legitimate grievances” (*Cape Times*, 19 September 1994). Other times, they simply promote vile racist stereotypes of coloureds, like when Roderick Blackman Ngoro—at the time media advisor for the ANC mayor of Cape Town—railed in 2005 that coloureds would “die a drunken death” if they did not “undergo an ideological transformation”, i.e., vote for the ANC (not surprisingly, few heeded his directive).

It is crucial to expose and combat this nationalist filth as part of fighting the influence of anti-coloured prejudices among the black proletariat and poor. Black workers must be won to the understanding that they too have a vital interest in fighting against the capitalist ANC government’s attacks on the coloured people, as this fight is crucial to the integrity of the working class and its ability to wage class struggle against the common enemy. A particularly clear illustration was in 1997, when Sexwale’s ANC provincial government in Gauteng moved to begin collecting back rates and rent from tenants in the coloured township of Eldorado Park, justifying this with nationalist demagoguery about settling the score for coloured “privileges” under apartheid. Since then, the ANC government has launched the same attacks on tenants in black townships.

Coloured Sectoralism: A Dead End

At the same time that we combat the anti-coloured demagoguery of the ANC and other black nationalists, we also recognise that the “not black enough” cliché is an expression of *backward consciousness* in response to the very real marginalisation and continued oppression of coloureds under neo-apartheid. Though manifesting itself in various, often contradictory, forms, a feature of this false consciousness is pseudo-nationalist *coloured sectoralism*: the interests of the coloured people are seen as separate from (and, in many cases, antagonistic to) those of the black majority, and therefore coloureds supposedly need to “look out for their

own”. In practical political terms, this has in fact mainly translated into support for the DA and other *white* bourgeois parties as a purported “lesser evil”.

The politics of bourgeois lesser-evilmism are often accompanied by anti-black prejudices that play on racist stereotypes of Africans as inherently corrupt, violent, etc. For example, in 2003 award-winning coloured actor Anthony Wilson spoke at an arts festival forum on coloured identity, railing: “The Boers stole, but at least they budgeted and did not steal everything. They stole the cream, but the darkies are stealing the cream, the milk and the bucket. We swapped five million farmers for 34 million blacks” (*Cape Argus*, 2 April 2003). This poisonous anti-black racism would be music to the ears of the late P.W. Botha, who in the 1980s launched the Tricameral Parliament—offering a phoney franchise to coloureds and Indians, and excluding blacks—in an (unsuccessful) attempt to bolster white minority rule by promoting divide-and-rule.

Wilson’s rant was polarising, including among coloured political commentators. Cape Town radio personality Nigel Pierce sharply condemned the racist poison spewed by Wilson and others who promote the myth of *swart gevaar* (the “black peril”) and notions of racial superiority among the coloured population, saying, “If we go that route, we’ll marginalise ourselves.” In contrast, Rhoda Kadalie apologised for Wilson’s rant, saying it was “very encouraging, because I think people need to talk about it. ... Coloured people rightly feel that they have been left out of the pie, and that they get the crumbs.” This argument, like Wilson’s own attempt to justify his racist remarks by warning that “the oppressed should not become the oppressors”, plays on and promotes a widespread misconception that the racial hierarchy in post-1994 South Africa has somehow been inverted, and that coloured people are suffering because *blacks* are now on top.

This is a profoundly false picture of the nature of neo-apartheid capitalism. At an economic level, it is simply absurd. By almost any social measure—poverty, unemployment, life expectancy—it is blatantly obvious that the racial hierarchy that existed under apartheid remains intact, with whites on top, Indians and coloureds occupying intermediate strata, and blacks at the very bottom. For example, in 2012 the average household income of whites was 1,5 times that of Indians, 3,6 times that of coloureds and six times that of blacks.

Coloured sectoralists often draw an analogy between the ANC post-1994 and the National Party (NP) post-1948. This is just as false. Whereas the policies of the NP really did economically benefit the white population as a whole, eliminating any trace of white poverty and insuring that even less skilled whites got well paid jobs in the civil service, the ANC has obviously done no such thing for the vast majority of blacks, whose conditions have in many respects gotten worse since 1994. Nor could it be any different, for the main source of profits for the South African capitalists remains, as it has been for over a century, the superexploitation of black labour.

This heavy overlap between class exploitation and racial oppression is a unique product of European colonisation as it played out in South Africa. That overlap did not fundamentally change in 1994—otherwise there would have been no possibility of a negotiated settlement between the ANC and the white rulers. What changed is that the ANC-led Alliance was installed in government as *black front men* for

the capitalist rulers, who are (still) overwhelmingly white. To be sure, this has also resulted in the growth of a privileged black elite, including a handful of black capitalists like Patrice Motsepe and Cyril Ramaphosa, who have used their political connections to become exploiters in their own right.

The big lie—promoted by both the likes of Anthony Wilson and the Tripartite Alliance—is that the bourgeois government and the black elite are representative of the black majority. If anyone needed any proof that this is a lie, they got it with the Marikana massacre—including Ramaphosa’s role encouraging police action on behalf of the Lonmin board. Marikana starkly exposed that this government does *not* represent the interests of the black masses, but those of the South African capitalists and their imperialist big brothers.

Coloured sectoralism is a *dead end* that only serves to isolate the coloured oppressed from their best potential ally—the black proletariat—and tie them to their worst enemy—the racist white bosses. The clearest demonstration of this is the considerable coloured support for the DA and other white parties, particularly in the Western Cape, in the 1994 and subsequent elections.

Many leftists impressionistically believed that the collaboration between black and coloured anti-apartheid activists meant that racial divisions had been eliminated. For example, the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF), which led the campaign to boycott the Tricameral Parliament elections in 1984, had a mass base among the coloured population in the Western Cape. UDF and other leftist coloured activists promoted “coloured rejectionism”—the idealist notion that a distinct coloured population was simply an artificial invention of the white rulers—as a response to apartheid’s racist divide-and-rule.

These leftists were shocked when in the 1994 elections a majority of coloureds in the Western Cape voted for the National Party, who won the province in large part through a campaign of crude *swart gevaar* propaganda. As the ICL observed at the time, “The actual prospect of a black nationalist government, however liberal its ideological stance, opened up clearly visible fissures within the nonwhite population” (“South Africa Powder Keg,” *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12, February 1995).

The ANC gained control of the Western Cape in the 1999 and 2004 elections—albeit with a minority of the vote in both—as the NP went into terminal collapse and the DA was emerging as the main white opposition party. Since 2009, the DA has won the Western Cape with clear majorities, both by



Spartacist pamphlets: *Polemics on the South African Left* (40 pages, R2) and *Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacists* No. 1 (36 pages, R8)

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exploiting coloured disillusionment and resentment over the ANC’s attacks on the poor and anti-coloured demagogy, and by stoking anti-black prejudices with *swart gevaar* tactics.

One certainly doesn’t have to be an apologist for the bourgeois-nationalist ANC to recognise that the neo-liberal DA is (also) bad news for *all* the oppressed, including not least coloured people. In Cape Town and the Western Cape, local and provincial DA governments have meted out vicious cop terror to all who dare to stand up and fight against racial oppression and grinding poverty—from coloured fishing communities and backyard dwellers, to black shack dwellers, to black and coloured farm workers. State repression and union-busting provocations show the real meaning of the DA’s nauseating “open, opportunity-driven society” neo-liberalism: “open” season for untrammelled exploitation by the racist capitalists.

The DA dresses up its defence of white privilege by presenting itself as the saviour of “minority groups, fearful of majority tyranny and single party domination”, as Helen Zille put it in 2008. But what the DA racists stand for is just *one* (white) minority. Cape Town, which has been governed by the DA since 2006, is widely regarded as one of the most racist cities in the country. Media reports of white racist attacks were so frequent that the city government launched a bogus “Inclusive City” campaign in March 2015 to try to fix its image problem. It is not uncommon to hear stories of even black celebrities and politically well-connected members of the black elite being turned away from Cape Town’s “up-market” restaurants and hotels because they’re not white.

Some bitter lessons from the history of white minority rule are worth recalling for anyone with illusions that white bourgeois parties like the DA are some kind of “friend” of the coloured people. Beginning in the early 1900s, successive white minority governments pursued the tactic of aiming the most severe racist measures first at the black majority, only to later follow them up with similar attacks against other non-whites. An example was influx control and residential segregation. The 1923 Urban Areas Act provided for the compulsory registration of black Africans and gave local authorities the power to keep them out of urban areas and deport those deemed “idle and undesirable”. This and other laws were used to deport tens of thousands of blacks from the Western Cape, especially in times of economic downturn when the capitalists had less demand for cheap labour to exploit.

The white rulers cynically and demagogically passed off these measures as an act of benevolence for the coloured community, “protecting” them against competition from black labour. Petty-bourgeois coloured misleaders like Abdullah Abdurahman, president of the African Political Organisation (APO, later renamed African People’s Organisation), sometimes opposed these attacks on black Africans *in words*. But *in practice*, the APO and Abdurahman aided and abetted this racist divide-and-rule, for example by appealing to the government to merely exempt coloureds from residential segregation, or even calling on the white *baas* to replace black workers with coloureds. The APO’s right-wing opponents among the coloured political elite were even worse, openly embracing Barry Hertzog’s racist National Party.

The end result was only to weaken resistance to the white racist onslaught and sabotage the possibilities that existed at the time for common struggle by the black and coloured

oppressed. With apartheid, the system of racial segregation was taken to a whole new level, and even the limited concessions to coloureds, made to promote divide-and-rule, were scrapped. For example, following the 1950 Group Areas Act some 150 000 coloured people were forcibly evicted from their homes and communities in the Cape Peninsula between 1957 and 1985, most of them relocated to desolate coloured ghettos like the townships in the Cape Flats.

The Treachery of Black Nationalism

The DA's default response to exposures of racist outrages in the Western Cape is to point out that similar things are happening in the rest of the country, where the ANC is in government. Responding to the outcry over revelations that local police in Worcester were issuing a new "dompas" that black and coloured gardeners and domestic workers were required to carry in order to enter certain wealthy white suburbs, Helen Zille pointed out that the same system was being promoted in ANC-run Gauteng.

Indeed, in March 2015 the Gauteng MEC for "community safety" convened a "Rural Safety Summit" with representatives from the police and various farmers organisations—the African Farmers Union of South Africa, as well as right-wing white racist outfits like the Transvaal Agricultural Union and Agri SA. The summit adopted a plan for increased police repression in rural farming communities, including the directive that "farmers must hire legal and documented workers and create profile cards to be verified at local stations". This in fact reveals a lot more about neo-apartheid South Africa and the Tripartite Alliance government than Zille and the DA intend—namely, it is but one example of how, fundamentally, both the ANC and the DA defend *white privilege*. Obviously, they come at this from very different starting points, but in both cases it is a function of *administering the racist capitalist system*.

Going back to the ANC's founding days in 1912, its aim has always been to promote the development of a black elite to join in the exploitation of "its own" people. They didn't want to leave that to the Boers and the British. While at times adopting more or less populist rhetoric and militant protest tactics to mobilise the black masses behind this aim, the final goal never changed. And the path to this goal necessarily led to striking a deal with the white rulers and acting as their black front men. The anti-coloured chauvinist demagoguery of some ANC leaders—just like their promotion of anti-immigrant bigotry—is in large part designed to *conceal* this fundamental reality by scapegoating coloureds and other marginalised oppressed groups for the miserable living conditions of the black majority.

Black nationalism—the false view that all black people share a common interest standing above class divisions—is the key obstacle to revolutionary consciousness among the South African proletariat. It is the ideology through which the working-class base of COSATU and the SACP is subordinated to the bourgeois ANC and the capitalist exploiters via the Tripartite Alliance. Even with the enormous discontent and anger against the ANC and its Alliance partners, nationalism remains the dominant form of false consciousness among black workers. After the platinum belt around Rustenburg became a "no go area" for the ANC following the Marikana massacre and the massive wave of militant wildcat strikes by mineworkers in 2012, it was the

bourgeois nationalist-populists of Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) that gained the most in the 2014 elections.

The dominance of nationalist false consciousness among the proletariat is above all a product of the *overwhelming weight of national oppression* felt by the black majority. To address this burning issue and set the proletarian and plebeian masses against the nationalist misleaders, we have advanced a programme for proletarian leadership in the struggle for national liberation, encapsulated in the slogan of a "black-centred workers government".

We fight to win class-conscious coloured workers and other anti-racist coloured activists to this programme. This is based on the understanding that the fight for national liberation of the oppressed black majority is *the* strategic motor force for workers revolution to smash the racist neo-apartheid system that oppresses all of the non-white toilers. The oppression of coloureds (and Indians) is directly conditioned by the superexploitation of the black proletariat, and any meaningful fight to end this oppression necessarily means fighting for the national liberation of the oppressed black majority. Likewise, any meaningful fight for black liberation means an unyielding fight against black nationalism, which is riddled with anti-coloured and anti-Indian bigotry. This understanding is critical for building a racially integrated Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party that can intervene and fight for revolutionary leadership among all sections of the oppressed. Under a black-centred workers government, there would be an important role and full democratic rights for coloureds, Indians and Asians, and those whites who accept a government centrally based on the black working people.

Particularly in the early years of neo-apartheid, many South African leftists vehemently objected to our slogan, arguing that by acknowledging that there are differences and divisions among the non-white masses, we echoed the line of the apartheid rulers who constantly played divide-and-rule among the racial groupings and sought to promote tribal and ethnic identities. Instead, these leftists—including the New Unity Movement, the forerunners of the Democratic Socialist Movement/Workers and Socialist Party and the pseudo-Trotskyists who are now in the orbit of the ILRIG (International Labour Research and Information Group) labour think tank—embraced the ANC-promoted illusion of "non-racialism". In doing so, they ignored the real and dramatic expressions of division along colour, national and tribal lines in Mandela's neo-apartheid state. The nationalist fictions of the "rainbow nation" and "nation-building" were their means for *denying reality*, because their reformist programmes are fundamentally incapable of *changing it*.

Thus, in 1997 a Cape Town-based fake-Trotskyist outfit, the Workers International Vanguard League (WIVL, now renamed Workers International Vanguard Party) wrote us a 19-page "open letter" that was largely devoted to retailing the nasty slander, "The Spartacists promote racial divisions in South Africa". WIVL objected to our call for a black-centred workers government, because to them it meant "a workers' government in South Africa should have a racial guarantee worked into its very constitution". In our reply to WIVL (printed, along with WIVL's "open letter", in *Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacists* No. 1, July 1998), we pointed out that this "colour-blindness" was in reality a mask for WIVL's accommodation to coloured parochialism and a

denial of the structural racial hierarchy of South African capitalism with its special oppression of black Africans at the bottom.

In South Africa, *class exploitation is integrally bound up with national oppression*. Despite a sizeable coloured proletariat, especially in the Western Cape, and an urban Indian working class in Natal, the overwhelming majority of workers are black Africans. WIVL's attack on our call for a black-centred workers government was in fact an attack on Leon Trotsky himself. In his only substantive writing on South Africa, a 1935 letter to South African revolutionaries, Trotsky insisted:

"It is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

"Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change not only the relation between the classes, but also between the races, and will assure to the blacks that place in the state which corresponds to their numbers, insofar will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character."

—reprinted in *The Fight For a Revolutionary Vanguard Party: Polemics on the South African Left*, April 1997

Our recognition that proletarian revolution in South Africa is the supreme act of national liberation in no way entails the slightest political support to nationalism as an ideology or to the project of "nation-building". South Africa is not a nation but a colonial-derived state, encompassing diverse peoples and based on a brutal racial hierarchy. The boundaries of almost all African states, including South Africa, were drawn arbitrarily by the colonial powers and have no national legitimacy. A single tribe or people often were dismembered between two or more countries, while two or more historically antagonistic peoples were often forced together in a single state. A democratic, egalitarian and rational solution is impossible under capitalism. The fight for a black-centred workers government in South Africa is part of our perspective of a socialist federation of Southern Africa.

Combating nationalist ideology means confronting the prejudices and chauvinist stereotypes about coloureds that are common among black Africans, which the ANC, EFF and other nationalists promote. In many African languages, racially derogatory terms like *amaBoesman* ("bushman") are the standard—sometimes the only—words to refer to coloureds. There is also a widespread misconception that the coloured population simply arose from miscegenation between black and white people. This misconception is often accompanied by anti-coloured prejudices—that coloured people "don't know where they come from", are "unreliable", etc. It reflects an acceptance of the notion of "races" as inherent, fixed biological categories—a fallacy that has traditionally been promoted as part of racist pseudo-scientific attempts to justify slavery and black oppression by "proving" that blacks are "inferior" (for a debunking of these myths in the US context, see "The 'Bell Curve' and Genocide U.S.A.", *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12, February 1995).

Racial categories are a product of human *social relations*, not of genetics, which means that the corresponding racial identities, prejudices, etc., are shaped by the particular historical development of the society in which they exist. The coloured population is made up of various mixtures of the different peoples that have inhabited South Africa over the centuries—slaves from East Africa and South and Southeast

Asia; Dutch and other white European colonisers; the Khoikhoi, San and other native inhabitants.

While there was a complex racial hierarchy in the Cape Colony during the time of slavery, the consolidation of these diverse peoples into the coloured population as it essentially exists today—a race-colour caste of intermediate status in the racial hierarchy—was a later development. This process was intimately bound up with the formation of a modern capitalist economy in South Africa in the late 1800s. As Ian Goldin argues in *Making Race—The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (1987): "It was no accident that the period which saw the evolution of a distinct Coloured identity also saw a dramatic transformation of labour" as people migrated to the towns of the Cape Colony in search of employment. Goldin describes how this distinction emerged among the labour force in the 1890s, with employers on the docks, on the farms and elsewhere dividing workers into "Natives"—who they preferred to hire for unskilled and heavy manual work—and "cape boys" or "coloureds"—who were preferred for artisan jobs as carpenters, brick layers, etc.

Class Struggle and the Role of Communists

It would, of course, be wrong and extremely one-sided to think that the relations between blacks and coloureds are *only* characterised by antagonisms and mistrust. Besides the examples of racial clashes, there are also notable examples of struggle against the bourgeoisie's divide-and-rule tactics. Against those who promote racial stereotypes, it is important to stress that the coloured population is by no means homogeneous (nor is the black population, for that matter)—political and social attitudes vary widely between individuals, based on class background, personal experiences and other factors. Moreover, the prevalent attitudes among the coloured population are also not fixed, but vary with time and location. For example, there has generally been much less support for the DA among coloured working people in the rural areas—the agricultural regions of the Western Cape, as well as much of the Northern Cape—than in urban areas.

In terms of communist intervention, a key focus must be the industries where black and coloured workers are integrated *at the point of production*—for example, in auto factories in the Eastern Cape, as well as in agriculture in the Western Cape. The racial divisions between blacks and coloureds go against the basic material interests of the working class, and the very workings of capitalist exploitation compel the workers to organise collectively against the employers. Class struggle creates the objective conditions for combating and breaking through the racial and other divisions: every hard-fought strike inevitably poses the need for *class unity* against the capitalists.

Take the farmworkers strike of 2012-13 in the Western Cape. A focal point of the strike was De Doorns, which in 2009 was the site of violent anti-immigrant pogroms that forced some 3 000 mostly Zimbabwean immigrants to flee to refugee camps. According to some reports, these attacks were sparked by South African labour brokers, who, in an effort to eliminate competition from Zimbabwean labour brokers, incited the anti-immigrant mobs by blaming Zimbabwean workers for "stealing" jobs from South Africans. This and many other examples show how the white farm owners and parasites like the labour brokers play divide-and-rule in order to keep all of the different sections of farm labourers

viciously exploited, including by pitting men against women, permanent workers against seasonal workers, coloured workers against black workers, etc.

When the strikes broke out in 2012, the farm owners tried to use the same tactics to undercut the strike by sowing divisions, with support from the Western Cape government of Zille and the DA. But this failed to break the solidarity and unity of this militant strike across racial and national lines. One strike committee leader told Jesse Wilderman of Wits University: “The people were all united—Zim, Sotho, coloured, Xhosa speaking—everyone was united. ... The strike brought back the struggle culture [of] the 1980s and we were really united across the whole group” (*Farm Worker Uprising in the Western Cape: A Case Study of Protest, Organising, and Collective Action*, 26 September 2014). The strikers faced down extreme state repression and won a modest concession when the minimum wage was raised from R69 to R105 per day.

In response to even this incredibly meagre increase in starvation wages, the racist farm owners carried out a whole range of reprisals aimed at intimidating and scapegoating strike militants. The farmers have combined the reprisals with calculated provocations designed to promote divisions among the workers. Some farmers have brought in new foreign workers to get around the increased minimum wage, some are reportedly bussing in coloured workers from other areas to avoid hiring seasonal workers who were active in the strike, and others have evicted permanent workers who participated in the strike from on-farm housing. There are indications that these measures have succeeded, in some areas, in reviving the old reactionary national and racial divisions. Thus, Wilderman reports that one group of workers he interviewed in De Doorns threatened a repeat of the 2009 pogroms.

A key lesson from the strike and its aftermath is that while the economic struggles of the workers do *pose* the need for class unity across racial and other divisions, in and of themselves these struggles are not capable of forging this unity on a consistent and lasting basis. For that, a revolutionary workers party of the Bolshevik type is needed. As Lenin explained in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), history shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is unable to spontaneously generate socialist consciousness. That consciousness must be introduced from without, through the intervention of a vanguard party that has summed up the lessons of the history of class struggle internationally in a revolutionary Marxist programme. Such a party would not limit its intervention to the immediate economic struggles of the working class, but must act as a *tribune of the people*, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects.

The Bolshevik party built by Lenin fought vigorously for the democratic rights of all nationalities in the “prison house of peoples” of tsarist Russia. Central to Lenin’s attitude on the national question was the urgent need for proletarian revolutionaries to champion the struggles against national oppression and stand for the equality of all nations in the interests of clearing away the obstacles to working-class unity. In “Critical Remarks on the National Question” (1913), Lenin wrote: “Working-class democracy contraposes to the nationalist wrangling of the various bourgeois parties over questions of language, etc., the demand for the unconditional unity and complete amalgamation of workers of *all*

nationalities in *all* working-class organisations ... in contradistinction to any kind of bourgeois nationalism.”

Lenin and the Bolsheviks gained the political authority to fight for the unity of the proletarian vanguard across national divisions, because they were known as the staunchest fighters against Great Russian chauvinism and oppression of all national minorities. At the height of the 1905 Revolution in October, when the tsarist autocracy threatened to “drown the revolution in Jewish blood”, rumours of an anti-Jewish pogrom spread through Petersburg. Within a matter of hours some *12 000 armed workers* had been mobilised by the workers soviet (council) to repulse the reactionary “Black Hundreds” gangs.

There are important differences between the patterns of national/racial oppression in South Africa and tsarist Russia. Most significantly, whereas the majority of the workers that made the 1917 Russian Revolution were ethnically Russian—fighting against Russian exploiters who oppressed other nationalities—in South Africa, the overwhelming majority of workers suffer national oppression at the hands of a white minority. Moreover, the various peoples that inhabit South Africa do not constitute separate nations, as they are integrated into one economy. Despite these differences, the approach of Lenin and the Bolsheviks is very relevant for addressing the racial, tribal and other divisions among the oppressed here—especially with regard to the burning need to mobilise the proletariat in defence of immigrants.

The Controversy Over Affirmative Action

One flashpoint for racial antagonisms in recent years has been affirmative action. Controversy escalated in 2011 in response to proposed amendments to the Employment Equity Act that would have required employment targets and quotas to reflect national, as opposed to regional, demographics. This was justifiably seen by coloureds in the Western Cape as a racist attack on them, as it would mean that despite being a majority in the region, the employment targets for coloureds would be pegged at about 9%. The logic of the proposal is a racist programme of forced population transfers—one of the many reactionary directions that capitalist “nation building” can take. This was spelled out by Jimmy Manyi (then leader of the Black Management Forum and later a spokesman for the ANC government), who in multiple interviews railed against the “over-concentration” of coloureds in the Western Cape.

In a similarly nationalist vein, Manyi also decried the high numbers of Indians who had benefited from affirmative action and “Black Economic Empowerment”, implying that they should be excluded from both. While the proposed change in affirmative action was dropped from the final amendment following a ruling by the Cape Town Labour Court, there has been a sustained anti-Indian campaign in recent years, centred in KwaZulu-Natal and driven by black business associations trying to cut out Indian competition for state tenders and the like. This reactionary crap is supported by members of the ANC and Malema’s EFF. While the EFF today poses as “friends” of the coloured people and has gained some coloured support in the Western Cape, it should not be forgotten that in 2011, when they were leading the ANC Youth League, the current EFF leaders Malema and Floyd Shivambu were outspoken supporters of Jimmy Manyi.

These racist attacks on the coloured and Indian minorities serve to strengthen the racial divisions and drive the coloured and Indian working people into the arms of their worst enemies. Thus, the reactionary white-dominated trade union Solidarity was able to pose as the champions of the coloured minority by challenging the proposed guidelines in court. Solidarity's aim is scrapping affirmative action entirely, part of its broader purpose of defending white privilege, as clearly spelled out in an old entry (since deleted) on its website: "Because of the ideology of representation the masses do not benefit and whites are being seriously disadvantaged."

Solidarity's court case was on behalf of ten *prison guards* (nine of them coloured and one white), who had been passed over for promotion based on quotas using national demographics. It must be clear that *all* jailers—whether black, coloured or white—are the bitter class enemy of workers and the oppressed. Just like the police, their job is to mete out racist repression in defence of the capitalists. They have no place in the trade unions or other working-class organisations.

While we defend affirmative action against racist rollback and also oppose the racist attempts to exclude coloureds and Indians, the aim of communists is not to defend the miserable status quo under capitalism. Affirmative action is incapable of solving the pervasive, racist discrimination in employment and education, because it is premised on maintaining the capitalist system under which the oppressed are pitted against each other for a handful of jobs in a society with a massive level of unemployment.

For a Black-Centred Workers Government!

What's urgently posed is a political struggle within the trade unions for a new, class-struggle leadership. Such a fight must be waged against both the treacherous pro-Alliance leaders of COSATU and their reformist opponents like the NUMSA metal workers union bureaucracy. A class-struggle leadership would seek to unite workers—black and coloured, male and female, employed and unemployed, etc.—in common struggle, based on the understanding that all their interests are fundamentally antagonistic to those of the capitalists. As long as workers are pitted against each other in competition for a limited pool of jobs, the bosses will always play divide-and-rule to weaken the labour movement.

What's needed is a fight for union control of hiring, with special union-run programmes aimed at reaching out to and training workers from specially oppressed layers. This must be linked to the fight for jobs for all, demanding that the available work be divided at no loss in pay among all those capable of working. We need a class-struggle fight to smash labour-broking slave labour, mobilising the unions to fight for permanent jobs for contract workers, with equal pay for equal work, union conditions and full union protection for all workers. This includes fighting for full citizenship rights for all who have made it here.

The ANC's policy document "Affirmative Action and the New Constitution", written by Albie Sachs in 1994, makes it explicit that affirmative action was chosen as an alternative to the obvious solution to begin addressing the monumental injustices of white minority rule, which would have been to "confiscate the spoils of apartheid and share them out

amongst those who had been dispossessed".

This, of course, was *never* something the ANC was going to do, at bottom because of its commitment to maintaining capitalism. And this points to the issue that underlies the continued racial and tribal divisions among the non-white masses, like so many of the other burning issues of economic and social backwardness that are the racist legacies of imperialist domination and apartheid and cannot be resolved under capitalism. Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution uniquely points the way forward to the economic and social modernisation of countries of belated capitalist development. Its application in South Africa is encapsulated in the call for a black-centred workers government.

Adequate housing for the millions in the townships, squatter camps and villages, including racially-integrated housing, free quality education, the eradication of *lobola* and other traditional patriarchal practices oppressive to women: these desperately needed measures require the overthrow of neo-apartheid capitalism. A black-centred workers government in South Africa would *start* by expropriating the Randlords and their black front men, seizing the "spoils of apartheid" and the means of production. Under a workers government, these would be used not merely to redistribute wealth, but more fundamentally to reorganise and *expand* production on a socialist basis, which is what is really needed to bring about the economic and social modernisation so desperately needed.

The success of socialist transformation will depend crucially on the international extension of the revolution, particularly to the imperialist centres. Proletarian revolution internationally would mean the expropriation and centralised control of the productive wealth of North America, Europe and Japan. The full, rational utilisation of economic resources, particularly investment embodying the most advanced technology, will produce a quantum leap in labour productivity, moving rapidly toward a fully automated economy. The resulting vast increase in output will allow the massive transfer of productive resources to the more backward countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The victory of proletarian revolution on a world scale will, of course, not be an easy task. But it is the only alternative to capitalist barbarism. As explained in the ICL's "Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program" (1998), this victory

"would place unimagined material abundance at the service of human needs, lay the basis for the elimination of classes and the eradication of social inequality based on sex and the very abolition of the social significance of race, nation and ethnicity. For the first time mankind will grasp the reins of history and control its own creation, society, resulting in an undreamed-of emancipation of human potential, and a monumental forward surge of civilization. Only then will it be possible to realize the free development of each individual as the condition for the free development of all."

This is what Spartacist/South Africa fights for as a section of the International Communist League. We urge those looking for an alternative to the vicious racism and oppression of neo-apartheid capitalism to check out our revolutionary, internationalist Trotskyist programme. ■