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# national democratic struggle

The resistance of 1985 was not a new development in South African politics. In its slogans and demands, in its symbols and flags, and in its proclaiming of Nelson Mandela and the Freedom Charter, the 1985 resistance reflected an ongoing tradition of resistance in our land - the tradition of the national democratic struggle. The national democratic struggle unites all sections of the oppressed together with white democrats in the struggle to destroy apartheid and replace it with a democratic state. To understand why ours is a national democratic struggle, we must look at our society.

Our society is capitalist, and many argue that we will only be truly liberated by socialism. Why then are we fighting a national democratic struggle? The answer to this question lies in the type of capitalist society we have in South Africa. Remember there are (and have been) many different types of capitalist societies : Nazi Germany, 'democratic' America, Chile's military dictatorship, France under a 'socialist' government, etc. In each situation we would use different strategies to fight to remove capitalist exploitation. These strategies come from the concrete conditions of each society - what kind of state does

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it have? Would a parliamentary strategy be possible? Who are the allies of the bourgeoisie. Who are the potential allies of the working class? Lets look at the concrete conditions in South Africa.

## white ruling bloc and the oppressed

All black South Africans are oppressed. They are ruled by a white minority and a small group of black collaborators. The black oppressed majority have no political rights. At home, at work, at school, in all areas of their lives they feel the oppression of apartheid. Unemployment, low wages, high prices and high rents burden their lives. Lack of political rights means that people live all their lives with these problems. The African majority bear the heaviest national oppression. They are forced to carry passes, and always face the threat of being sent to starve in the 'homelands'. The fact that all black South Africans are oppressed by apartheid gives them all an interest in destroying it.

On the other hand, the system of apartheid has benefitted all white South Africans. All whites have a stake in the system. Although they have different ideas about how best to maintain the system, the white population is generally united behind some form of minority rule.

So in South Africa we generally have two political forces confronting each other : the oppressed black majority and the white ruling bloc.

This does not mean that all whites support apartheid

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or that all blacks oppose it. The Carter Ebrahim's and Hendrickse's and Sebe's are proof that there is a small group of collaborators among the oppressed who have thrown in their lot with apartheid. On the other hand, there have always been a number of whites who have rejected apartheid and joined the people's struggle.

Recently this group has grown dramatically as more whites realise that there will never be peace under apartheid. But whites who reject minority rule are still a minority in the white community.

The white ruling bloc and the oppressed are not classes. They are composed of different classes with different interests. In the white ruling bloc we find big capitalists, small capitalists, small farmowners, middle strata and even a small group of workers, who have defined their interests with white minority rule. Among the oppressed we find workers, small peasants, traders and middle strata, but they face a common racial oppression. They share an interest in destroying apartheid and replacing it with a democracy.

## understanding south african capitalism

National oppression (as outlined above) is a key aspect of South African capitalism. This is because capitalism was brought to our country by imperialism, the age when European capitalist countries were seeking to exploit the colonies to raise their profits. In Europe capitalism had not followed the same course. In France, for example, capitalism developed out of the revolutionary overthrow of the feudalists by the workers, serfs and bourgeoisie. A democratic state was established which gave everyone

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the vote. This meant that socialists in France have been able to use parliament and elections as part of their strategy.

In South Africa it was different. Capitalism was brought by the colonialists. The colonialists have disrupted the lives of our people. Our people were forced off their land. They were charged taxes to force them to go work in the mines. They were denied any political rights. Our people fought back heroically, but they were eventually overcome by the guns of the colonialists. These were the conditions under which capitalism came to South Africa. It was imposed on our land as part of a system that was resisted by all black South Africans.

Capitalism did not bring democratic rights (as in France), because it was imposed against the will of the people. If they had been granted democratic rights, the people would have used them to throw out capitalism and the colonial system. Instead, capitalism consolidated the system of white minority rule. In 1910, the Union of South Africa was founded. It gave democratic rights to all whites, and excluded all blacks from any power. This unified the white ruling bloc. The system of white minority rule has remained basically unchanged since 1910. Blacks are still excluded from real political power. Capitalism developed the pass laws and the migrant labour system, to ensure cheap labour for high profits. Apartheid laws have hampered the workers and people of South Africa from uniting to challenge the bosses.

Capitalism in South Africa has been built on the foundations of national oppression and apartheid, and it still rests firmly on those foundations. This is why the national democratic struggle is the programme we follow in South Africa.

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# understanding the national democratic struggle

1. The national democratic struggle (NDS) is the struggle of all the oppressed people and white democrats to destroy minority rule and build a democratic state.
2. The NDS is a national struggle. This is not only because it is fought in all parts of our country, but because it unites South Africans across the divisions of apartheid. By bringing together all the oppressed people and white democrats to struggle for democracy, we are also building a new nation. The NDS tells us that we are a single nation, an African nation, and that we demand to govern our land.
3. The NDS is a struggle for democracy, for the right of the people to run this country. This means that political power must be in the hands of the people, and that all the country's resources must be in their hands. This idea is contained in the Freedom Charter which sets out the demands of the NDS: the Charter states that the people shall govern and share in the country's wealth, and that the land shall be shared among those who work it.

In the NDS we are fighting for democracy. The different classes among the oppressed may have different ideas on how much democracy we need. The working class will always fight for the fullest democracy, where the people control all aspects of their lives.

4. The NDS is not a civil rights struggle; it is a national liberation struggle. This means that we are not struggling for white minority rule to reform itself
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and meet some of the demands of the people. We are struggling to end the system of minority rule itself. We are struggling for the majority to decide the country's future - a right they have been denied since the colonial period began.

## classes on the road to national liberation

It is very important that we recognise that all classes among the oppressed have an interest in the destruction of apartheid and white minority rule. Only a small and unrepresentative clique have gone into the tricamerals and community councils. At the same time, we must not forget that there are different classes with different interests among the oppressed. While they are united around the immediate task of destroying national oppression, their long-term interests are not identical. For example they do not all look to socialism as the solution to our problems. Nor are they all able to engage in the struggle in the same way.

The 1980 meat strike is an example: the black butchers supported the boycott by refusing to sell red meat. This showed their unity with the working class in the face of oppression - the white butchers certainly carried on selling red meat even though they come from the same class as black butchers. At the same time, the black butchers started selling meat again after a few weeks, while the boycott continued for more than two months. While standing together with the working class, the black butchers were not prepared to go beyond their long term class interests (butchers would go out of business if they refused to sell meat indefinitely). This does not make the butchers into traitors - it should however make us aware of some of their limitations.

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The working class is the most dependable class in the struggle for national liberation, and this is why we say the working class must lead the struggle.

When we say the working class must lead the struggle, this does not mean that we try to drive all other interests out of the struggle. It is always important that we strengthen the liberation struggle by drawing in all sections of the oppressed. A very important part of working class leadership is that the working class should lead other sections of the oppressed.

A good example of this principle is last year's tricameral election campaign. The regime was clearly trying to co-opt the Coloured and Indian middle class through Botha's reforms. We could have said that the middle class will be won over by the reforms, and the working class will have to fight alone. This would have allowed the state to gain an ally, while we would lose an ally. Instead we went out to counter the state's attempt to win over these elements; and we were successful. While Hendrickse, Rajbansi, etc. are certainly middle class blacks, the bulk of the black middle class rejected Botha's reforms and boycotted the elections. Botha's reforms have not really changed the system of national oppression, and the objective basis on which the black middle class is maintained.

The August 1984 elections are a good example of how the working class should set about leading other classes in the liberation struggle. It demonstrates how the working class must show these other classes that their interests lie with the national democratic struggle, not with apartheid reforms. This principle is also illustrated in the Freedom Charter - the demands of the liberation struggle. The Charter does not only contain demands of the working class. Nor does it contain only middle class demands. The Charter contains some demands specific to the middle class, some demands to the working class and some demands common to both.

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In the liberation struggle the working class will fight for the fullest democracy, and that will enable the building of socialism. At present our most dangerous enemy remains the apartheid regime, and our most immediate task is to unite all the oppressed and the democratic whites in the liberation struggle.

## questions for discussion

1. Are black collaborators acting in the interests of the black middle class, or are they betraying those interests?
  2. Do you think capitalism could survive in South Africa without apartheid?
  3. How does the Freedom Charter express the interests of the different classes in the liberation struggle?
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