

"The conference endorses the position of the African National Congress which declares that the people of South Africa, like those of Namibia and Zimbabwe are a colonised people. The conference further endorses the position of the United Nations declaring the Pretoria regime illegitimate. In doing so, it notes with satisfaction that the African National Congress, the vanguard movement spearheading the broad alliance of the indigenous people and other oppressed black people, including white democrats, recognises the fact that the white population in South Africa have severed ties with their respective metropolises, that they recognise South Africa as their homeland.

It is for that reason that the conference fully endorses and hails the ANC position, reflected in the Freedom Charter, which declares that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the majority of the people."

STATEMENT OF LISBON CONFERENCE - March, 1977.

The South African national liberation movement, the ANC and its allies, characterise the South African social formation as a system of "internal colonialism" or "colonialism of a special type". What is "special" or different about the colonial system as it obtains in South Africa is that there is no spatial separation between the colonising power (the white minority state) and the colonised Black people. But in every respect, the features of classic colonialism are the hallmark of the relations that obtain between the black majority and the white minority. The special features of South Africa's internal colonialism are also compounded by the fact that the white South African state, parliament and government are juridically independent of any metropolitan country and have a sovereignty legally vested in them by various Acts of the British government and state.

These juridical formalities should not be allowed to cloud the colonial content of the white supremacist state. The correctness of this position is clearly borne out by the historic evolution of the white South African state.

The Union of South Africa, which came into being on 31st May, 1910 by an Act of the British parliament, laid the basis of the South African state as we know it. In the run up to the creation of the Union, the political representatives of the African, Coloured and Indian people, organised into four African provincial Congresses, plus the Native Electors Association, the African People's Organisation and the Natal Indian Congress exerted every legal and constitutional means to ensure that the constitution of the projected Union would be non-racial and enshrine democracy. In 1909 Dr. Walter Benson Rubusana, later a co-founder of the ANC, led a deputation of African and Coloured political leaders to London, to have expunged from the proposed constitution "the colour bar clauses" whose intent was to exclude the black South Africans from the body politic.

In an interview with the British press, W.P. Schreiner, the only white parliamentarian who associated himself with our cause, described the proposed union as "an act of separation between the minority and the majority of the people of South Africa". What was the essence of this "act of separation"? The South Africa Act, passed by the British parliament in the teeth of eloquent and determined opposition by every quarter of black opinion in South Africa, was, a political sleight of hand. Its terms vested national sovereignty in a racially exclusive South African state, independent of the British colonial office, with its own officials responsible to their own parliament.

This was however merely a surface appearance. Beneath and behind this appearance of decolonisation, a much more significant process was occurring. Because the South Africa Act also abolished the franchise rights, which had until then been enjoyed by the Black electors of the Cape Province and relegated them to the position of mere voters without the right to sit in parliament. It entrenched the racially exclusive constitutions of the other three colonies - Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal which had never accorded blacks any political rights.

The South Africa Act thus institutionalised and statutorily defined black South Africans as a subordinate category of persons within their own country; it was a continuation and entrenchment of our status as a colonised people. It is this essential fact that, Africa in particular, must never allow to be hidden behind the apparent juridical independence of South Africa.

The subsequent evolution of the Union of South Africa, up to and including its transformation into the Republic of South Africa, conforms to and confirms precisely this pattern. Coupled with, and parallel to, every phase in the acquisition of greater local autonomy on the part of the South African state, the colonial status of the black South Africans has been entrenched. The decisive

statutes and measures comprising this process are the interlinked and interlocking franchise and land apportionment laws. Thus the 1910 Act of Union, establishing the principle of racism as fundamental to white South African law, was coupled with the Native Land Act of 1913 which forms the basis of the blatantly inequitable division of the territory of our country, placing the stamp of law on the military conquest and dispossession of our people.

The South African white supremacist state acquired greater independence from Britain in terms of the statutes of Westminster of 1931. Five years after this follows the second major step confirming our colonial status, the Hertzog and the Native Land Trust Bills of 1935. In terms of these laws Africans were completely dis-enfranchised and even the token vote we enjoyed in the Cape was abolished. Instead we were relegated to a communal voters roll, through which we could elect 6 white representatives and 2 white Senators to represent our interest in the South African parliament. The Native Land Trust re-affirmed the principles contained in the 1913 Land Act and placed a ceiling on any further land acquisition for Africans at 13% of the land area of our country.

The pattern continues into the 1950s and 1960s during which the Coloureds were dis-enfranchised in 1955. The creation of the Republic of South Africa in 1961 came with the abolition of even the white "Native" representatives in the South African parliament.

The linkages, in time, between the increasing juridical independence of South Africa and the consolidation of colonial domination over the black majority is neither accidental nor fortuitous. White supremacy, white overlordship, apartheid, separate development - or whatever other fancy name the racist ruling circles call it by - is the absolute negation of independence and the principle of national self-determination.

Colonialism is not monolithic. Within this region we have historically experienced differing forms of colonial domination, which though having a multiplicity of forms shared one central characteristic - the denial of the African people of their rights of national self-determination. The guises under which the colonial regimes implemented this policy are almost as numerous as there are countries in our region. With respect to Mozambique and Angola, for example, the Portuguese colonialists claimed that theirs was not a colonial empire but rather one national state comprising a European as well as overseas provinces, located in Africa and Asia. No one, except the most abject apologists for Portuguese colonialism, was taken in by this legal sophistry. Africa and the world, correctly insisted that the essence of colonial oppression should not be covered over with elaborate juridical alibis.

In the case of Namibia we have yet another variation on the same theme, where racist South Africa transformed that country from a trust territory of the international community into its own colony. The colonial power was, in this case, acting not only against the express demands of the colonised people, but also in open defiance of world opinion as represented by the United Nations.

The other instance was the former British colony of Rhodesia, where the racist White minority illegally seized power from the colonial state through UDI, creating the legal fiction of 'an independent Rhodesia'. This unilateral action did not in anyway change the essential truth that Zimbabwe was a colony whose people were being deprived of their legitimate rights of self-determination through this illegal stratagem.

In many respects the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 could be characterised as UDI with the consent of the colonial power. But, the fact of this connivance did not in any way alter the central question, which is the denial of self-determination to the black majority.

Nature of the South African Struggle

Flowing from this analysis of the South African racist state as essentially colonial, the South African struggle is an anti-colonialist national liberation struggle, which though differing from those waged in other countries, in its content has the same objectives and is motivated by the same aspirations.

The differing form of the South African anti-colonial struggle is derivative of the shared territory occupied by the colonised and colonizer alike. Consequently, the institutional mechanisms whereby the black majority is colonially oppressed, are also internal to the South African body politic and not located beyond its borders. This explains why we centre a large part of our political programme on the acquisition of political rights by the black majority.

Careful analysis of the struggle of other colonial peoples, would however shed light on the essential, rather than co-incidental, features of the South African case.

The anti-colonial liberation struggle centres on the demand for national self-determination or national sovereignty which are embodied in institutions of popular sovereignty. In most colonial liberation struggles, the means through which this objective has been achieved is the abolition of the colonial state and the transfer of power to a national government elected by popular suffrage. The institutional modalities by which national sovereignty is secured are however not the essence of the struggle, but incidental creations which in many cases have been changed, adapted and even abolished without in anyway jeopardizing the central achievement - national sovereignty.

Similarly, in the case of South Africa, the focus shall be on the central issue not on the incidental. Because the undemocratic - colonial - white minority state occupies the same territory as the people it

dominates, there can be no question of a hand over of power from an externally based colonial state and its agents to an internally located national government. The struggle of the South African people has therefore centered rather on the abolition of the colonial white state and the creation in its stead of a democratic state based on the principle of majority rule. Because of the special circumstances in South Africa, the constitutional modalities through which this can be accomplished necessarily entail the acquisition of political rights by the black majority, that is, abolition of the whites' monopoly of political power. What needs to be stressed however, is that national self-determination, here as in all other national liberation struggles is the decisive issue - to be secured through the institutional framework of a full adult suffrage, full civil liberties within a non-racial state. Black majority rule is thus merely the form through which the oppressed, colonised peoples of South Africa will achieve the content of their struggle for national self-determination.

The historical experience of the South African liberation struggle has at the same time, shown that the institutions of national oppression and colonial domination are linked to and derivative of the particular economic arrangements that obtain in our country.

It is a historical fact that the African people were dispossessed of their land with sword and fire in 200 years of wars of conquest. That on the ashes of the African societies destroyed in the process, was built a thriving capitalism, based on mining, commercial farming and secondary industry, dominated and controlled by the property owning class drawn from the white minority.

The institutions, laws and practices of apartheid, are basically extra-economic devices elaborated to secure the processes of capital accumulations and render the black majority an easily exploitable source of cheap labour power. Because of the total interpenetration of racial oppression and capitalist exploitation, the South African struggle also necessarily has a class dimension.

The national question in South Africa has been characterised as a land question. This formulation illustrates and underlines the historic injustice of dispossession of the people of their land. Conquest is the foundation upon which colonial domination was built. To redress this historic injustice requires that, as part of its immediate program, the national liberation movement, seize the land from its present owners and restore it to the dispossessed and exploited black tillers. This is why the ANC has always considered the two economic clauses of the FREEDOM CHARTER "THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH" and "THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONGST THOSE WHO WORK IT" - to be the very core of its revolutionary programme. These clauses envisage the seizure of economic assets, presently owned and controlled either by individual capitalists or capitalist companies drawn exclusively from the white minority or trans-national corporations.

The experience of the South African liberation struggle, therefore, demonstrates that it is impossible to separate these interpenetrative aspects of national liberation struggle.

Because of the foregoing and in spite of the specific features that set the South African struggle apart from the others in our region and the rest of Africa, in essence, the struggle of the South African people is inextricably bound up with and an integral part of the struggle to liberate the African continent from colonialism and racism.

From its very inception the ANC, its leaders and its rank-and-file have conceived of the liberation movement as having continental dimensions. Even before the creation of the OAU, the liberation movements of this region, and the independent states that emerged from our struggles, have accepted as a collective moral obligation the duty to support and assist, in whatever way possible, the struggle to liberate the continent from the last vestiges of colonialism, that are entrenched in this region. It is a universally recognised truth that it is the Frontline States who have borne the brunt of Africa's commitment

to liberation in the region. It was in order to enhance this solidarity that the concept of the Frontline States came into being.

For the past 20 years, all of us in Southern Africa have patiently and stubbornly endured the common sacrifices the cause of African liberation demanded of us. It was an option we chose jointly, in the full knowledge that it would entail grave and even mortal dangers. We would, however, make bold to say, that despite the high price we have all been called upon to pay, this was not a mistake, and it is a decision that does honour to Africa and its peoples, especially those of Southern Africa.

Since 1912, we of the ANC have considered ourselves and the fraternal peoples of Africa, as partners in a single, glorious enterprises - the liberation of our continent from colonial domination and servitude.

As partners and equals, bound by our commitment to the same objectives, our unity in the face of our common enemy is essential for victory.