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DISCUSSION PAPERS

ZIMBABWE INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Imperialism, Apartheid
And The White Minority in
South Africa

A.M. Rukobo

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DISCUSSION PAPER

Number 10

**IMPERIALISM, APARTHEID AND THE WHITE
MINORITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

ANDRIES MATENDA RUKOBO

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ZIMBABWE INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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LIST OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THE RISE OF APARTHEID.....	4
Ascendancy of the Afrikaner	6
THE DIMENSIONS OF APARTHEID	9
WESTERN INTERESTS.....	14
CONCLUSION.....	17

INTRODUCTION

The situation in South Africa continues to attract extensive world wide attention. Certainly, no day passes without the mass media throughout the world highlighting the events within South Africa. Most of these daily events have to do with the brutality of the apartheid regime against its defenceless black population and its destabilisation activities of independent African countries in the region. These events have increased in tempo and intensity over the last two decades. With the escalation of the conflict, condemnation of the apartheid regime has become louder and clearer.

Yet despite this focus and world-wide condemnation, the racist regime defiantly and desperately clings to power and continues to deny the black majority basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. Instead blacks are shot, maimed, killed and imprisoned for no reason other than that they demand their inalienable right to democratic rule. Though the whole world has condemned apartheid, governments in the west have tended to be circumspect in their attitude to the regime in South Africa. In particular, they have been fundamentally ambiguous with regard to the questions of armed struggle and the imposition of sanctions. In a sense, the west have connived with apartheid, preferring to condemn only the excesses of apartheid and not the entire system. Just how and why the whites in South Africa have come to dominate the blacks and why the Western countries acquiesce and connive with the apartheid regime is the main task of this paper. The paper therefore seeks to highlight the coincidence of interests between the West and the South African regime. Many explanations have been advanced concerning this relationship, in particular the 'kith and kin' syndrome which is regarded as critical in influencing and shaping the perception of events within South Africa by the Western countries. The root cause here, it is therefore argued, is racism the sympathy of the west with the white race in South Africa. It is argued here that while this maybe true, this indeed is a partial explanation. On the contrary it is argued herein that imperialism is the root cause of the symbiotic relationship that has historically developed between the west and apartheid South Africa. Clearly, too, the continued existence of apartheid in South Africa has been facilitated by imperialist interests. In other words, South Africa does not exist outside the realm of imperialism, but is an extension of it. It is part and parcel of the world capitalist system, and therefore logically an adjunct of that system.

However, it may be worthwhile to note very briefly some of the theoretical approaches that have been used to explain the South African situation. Among the dominant explanations are those related to theories of race relations. South Africa and, until most recently colonial Zimbabwe, were considered typical cases of race relations situations in Africa because of the domination of the African majority by a white minority. Political

relationships within such societies is then viewed primarily in terms of intergroup relations. Such analyses tend to use the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity' to explain the process taking place in South Africa. This approach approximates the kith and kin syndrome already alluded to above.

During the 1960s and part of the 1970s the approach which gained currency and deeply influenced future analyses was the 'pluralist school'¹ exemplified, among others, by Leo Kuper² and Van den Berghe.³ However, the weakness of most of these studies is that they 'have been a theoretical and a historical'.⁴ They fail, in the main, to look at the totality of the situation, but take race and ethnic hostilities as inherently and psychologically imperative. The economic base of hostilities between groups is largely ignored. More critically, it is argued here, in order to analyze race relations it is important to take account of the development of racist ideology and its roots in the historical development of capitalism. Crucial historical developments in the development of racist notions and doctrines include slavery.⁵ It is slavery which led to what has been termed the 'African diaspora,' scattering people of African origin in regions far and wide. When slavery ended racism continued to play the role of justifying the exploitation and political and economic oppression of former slaves.

The other historical development, as already referred to above, contributing to the rise and consolidation of racism world-wide is colonialism and the system of exploitation and oppression that it put into place. In many cases the system created by colonialism and its economic, social and political relationships persist even after the demise of formal colonialism. Those relationships have a direct bearing on the future pattern of relations between the erstwhile colony and the metropolitan countries. Formal colonization may end with political independence, but unless the relationship between the former colony and the colonial power is changed, this may result in a new relationship of dependency. This dependency takes the form of economic, cultural and diplomatic domination of the former colony by the metropolitan country. Dependency, then, ensures that the newly independent country does not pursue an independent path of socio-economic development. Internationally, a dependent country is forced to assume political and diplomatic postures which in substance do not differ from, or contradict, those of the metropolis. This is the phenomenon that has been described in the social sciences as neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is a form and manifestation of imperialism. It is colonialism, in essence, minus direct political and military involvement of the

1 It is not being argued here that the 'pluralist school' is the only one, or a potent one currently, but that variations of the approach have continued to hold sway in social science analysis. At any rate, the race relations postulations continue to be important in the analysis of societies.

2 See Leo Kuper "Sociology - Some Aspects of Urban Plural Societies". In Robert A. Lystad (ed) *The African World: A Survey of Social Research*. Frederick Praeger (1965) pp 107-130; "The Heightening of Social Tension". In P.L. Van den Berghe (ed). *Africa, Social Problems of Change and Conflict*. Chandler (1965) pp. 237-47; and "Plural Societies: Perspectives and Problems" In L. Kuper and M.G. Smith (ed). *Pluralism in Africa* Los Angeles (1969) pp 7-26.

3 See for example Pierre L Van den Berghe: "Towards a Sociology of Africa" In P. L Van den Berghe (ed) *Africa, Social Problems of Change and Conflict*. Chandler (1965). pp 77-78; "Pluralism and the Polity: A Theoretical Exploration". In L Kuper and M. G. Smith (ed) *Pluralism in Africa* op. cit. pp. 67-81, and *Integration and Conflict in Multinational States*. *Social Dynamics* Vol.1, No. 1,(1975)

4 Sami Zubaida: "Introduction" In S. Zubaida (ed) *Race and Racialism*. London (1970) pp 1-16.

5 For this explanation see for example: Michael Banton *Race Relations*. Basic Books, New York (1967); Oliver Cromwell Cox, "Race and Exploitation: A Marxist View". In Paul Baxter and Basil Samson (ed) *Race and Social Difference* Penguin (1972) pp 205-220, and Raymond S. Franklin and Solomon Resmil: *The Political Economy of Racism* Holt, Reinhart and Winston (1973).

imperialist power in the neo-colony. Only when the anticolonial struggle is premised on a clear programme and agenda to create instead, a progressive socio-economic system can meaningful change be brought about. The point, therefore, is that racism is simply a manifestation of a broader and more fundamental phenomenon, that of capitalism. From a policy point of view, and with particular regard to the future of South Africa after independence, this point is critical. Similarly, in considering the development path of our region the primacy we attach to race or capitalism dramatically alters the specific socio-economic policy options that we choose, and in consequence the programmes that are pursued.

At the heart of the South African situation is imperialism. For the colonial history of Southern Africa is essentially a history of capitalist penetration and imperialist consolidation. It is also in the region that imperialism has, in the physical sense, made the last and most desperate attempt to maintain a direct stranglehold in Africa. Whereas most African countries had become politically independent by the mid 1960s,⁶ Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia only became independent as a result of armed struggle after a decade and beyond.

South Africa is, more than ten years after Zimbabwe's independence, despite the current practical things and framings still in the throes of popular unrest because of the apartheid regime's unwillingness to relinquish power. Part of the explanation for the current situation in South Africa can be found in the pattern and character of colonialism in the region which took the form of direct white settlement as opposed to indirect rule which prevailed in most other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In South Africa, and in Zimbabwe before independence, white settlement politically translated itself into settler governments. From 1923 Southern Rhodesia had what was regarded as limited internal independence. How far 'limited' this internal rule was or was intended to be, came into serious doubt with the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) by the Smith regime in 1965. South Africa itself is legally regarded as an independent and sovereign state. The interesting point about South Africa and Zimbabwe, therefore, is that we are dealing with clear cases of imperialism in the political and economic sense.

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Though there are many definitions of imperialism, for the purpose of the present discussion, imperialism is defined primarily to imply monopoly capitalism. Monopoly capitalism itself is taken to mean the "passage of capitalism from its earlier stage of more or less free competition to one in which giant firms, trusts and cartels dominate the market."⁸ In the context of the current situation in South Africa, the role of monopoly capital in the form of Multinationals (MNCs) is of crucial importance in explaining the coincidence of interests between the regime in South Africa and the Western countries. Indeed, the development of South Africa since white settlement has been inextricably linked to the penetration, spread and consolidation of monopoly capital. Even though apartheid was constructed and is nurtured by and is promoted whites within

6 One is aware, of course, that though most African countries became politically independent by the mid 1960s, they did not necessarily become economically independent. Political independence in many instances led to the phenomenon of neo-colonialism throughout the greater part of Africa. It remains a fact, however, that imperialism had a more direct political and economic presence in the Southern African region and that, as a result, South Africa is not yet independent.

7 See, for example, the collection of essays on this subject by Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (ed). *Studies in the theory of imperialism* Longmans (1972).

8 Tom Kemp, "The Marxist theory of imperialism" In Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (ed) *Studies in theory of imperialism* op. cit. 22.

South Africa, Western support to the apartheid regime has to do more with its economic interests and less with the fact the whites rule in South Africa. Naturally, at a psychological level, the governments of the Western countries can justify their political support for the apartheid regime among their people on the basis of race. If, however, the West had no direct economic stake it is doubtful whether they would have the energy to continue to support apartheid.

As already alluded to above, the development of monopoly capitalism and the colonization of South Africa are intertwined. Certainly, the intensification of the acquisition of colonies in Africa was in part related to the rise of monopoly capitalism. True, there were political and strategic reasons which also motivated the process of colonialisation and the 'Scramble for Africa'. But the imperial glories alone, which had in the past propelled nations to conquest had, however, now been overtaken by economic gains that attached to colonialization. In this respect the argument advanced by Tom Kemp is worth noting, that is:

the countries of advanced capitalism, those in which structural changes characteristic of 'finance capital' and 'monopoly capital' were taking place, in which the pressure to find new markets and sources of raw materials, to open up wider investment fields, was building up, a keener interest began to be taken in an active foreign and colonial policy. Although colonies were still acquired and held for 'old' reasons, political and strategic, and were often economically disappointing, colonial expansion was only one part of the outward thrust in which the big banks and large scale industry in the advanced countries engaged.⁹

In a sense political developments in South Africa illustrate this point.

The Cape was, of course, strategically important for naval and military purposes and as a sea route to India. But large scale settlement in South Africa was to take place much later, when its economic importance was established beyond doubt. The discovery of diamonds in 1867-8 and gold a few years later dramatically changed the political economy of South Africa and the whole region. It marked the earnest beginning of the penetration of capitalism and its consolidation in future years.

Given the scope of this paper an attempt will be made to demonstrate why the West has worked hand-in-glove with the local whites in excluding the blacks from any meaningful form of political participation. It is argued here, that because South Africa is an extension of imperialism, the West has primarily behaved in the way it does because of its economic interests and the whites are the local representatives and custodians of those interests.

Clearly, the countries most unwilling to see any meaningful social and political change in South Africa, namely the United Kingdom, United States, Federal Republic of Germany and Japan are also the ones with the greatest economic interest in the country. This correlation amply supports the argument being advanced here.

THE RISE OF APARTHEID

Apartheid has many dimensions having been constructed to provide the framework for the political, social and the economic life of the people of South Africa. These dimensions and ramifications have been sufficiently documented in the literature. It suffices here to give a brief statement of what apartheid means in real life for the people

⁹ Ibid, p. 25.

of South Africa. Apartheid effectively segregates the people of South Africa on the grounds of colour and race into Whites; Asians, Coloureds and Africans. South Africa centres on the whites; it is they alone who own and are entitled to occupy 87% of the land in South Africa; and it is they alone who have the right to live in South Africa. African people must live in the 'Homelands' or the Bantustans. Though Africans, Asians and Coloureds are subjected to different forms of racial discrimination, they are all victims of oppression and suppression. But the impact of apartheid is felt beyond the boarder of South Africa.

Though its policy of destabilisation, apartheid affects the neighbouring independent African states of Angola, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. With the collapse of colonialism and the attainment of political independence by these states, South Africa has adopted a policy of political and economic disruption against these states.

This policy is aimed at disrupting the social, economic and political infrastructure of these countries for four reasons, among others:

- to make them economically and politically fragile and weak and therefore dependent on South Africa
- to intimidate them into withdrawing all forms of support to the liberation movement.
- as an internal morale booster, particularly for the white population, that the apartheid regime is invincible and alive and kicking and
- to divert attention from the internal situation by internationalising an essentially national problem.

Politically apartheid is bolstered by the Nationalist Party which initially had its mainstay in the Afrikaner community. Though the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948, the conditions for its doing so had been gradually laid, particularly since the latter part of the Nineteenth Century. In particular, the discovery of diamonds and gold, already referred to above, marked the turning point in the history of South Africa. Apart from racism providing legitimation for white rule, diamonds and gold required a large labour force. The locally available force was predominantly black. For a number of reasons, however, African response to entering the labour market was rather sluggish. Racism was therefore convenient in coercing the Africans into menial jobs in the labour market and in making them work under conditions of semi-slavery. Typically, a series of colonial regulations were introduced to coerce Africans to willy nilly join the labour market. Two, however, are important: taxation and land alienation. Taxation was imposed in order to force the head of the household to join the labour market to earn the tax which had to be paid in cash. On the other hand, in order to undermine the economic viability of peasant agriculture, so that peasants could become workers, a process of land alienation was put into motion culminating in the Land Act of 1913 which placed Africans in reserves constituting only 13% of the total land area. Another reason for weakening the peasant economic base was to obviate any form of competition in agriculture between the African peasants and white farmers.

Among the consequences of this forcible eviction of Africans from their land two were important: firstly a process of rural poverty with all its consequences began and secondly, Africans were compelled to join the mines and white farms as workers.

However, as significant members of Africans entered the labour market, however, fear and anxiety began to be expressed by the white workers, particularly the Afrikaner who

felt educationally disadvantaged compared to the English-speaking workers. Hence these white workers, sought a protected and privileged position in the labour market. The economic boom related to diamonds and gold mining also produced other contradictions which reinforced racism.

In the first place when diamonds and gold were discovered it was not the white settlers who immediately benefited but European and American adventurers. However, these mining activities and the growth of the labour force on the mines created steady and new markets for the settler farms, which facilitated the ploughing of profits into expanded agricultural activities. Consequently the more prosperous farmers began to acquire more land, while the less successful farmers who were in the main Afrikaner were pushed off the land into the cities.

As referred to above this produced the phenomenon of poor whites with no education and skills. These whites clamoured for 'colour bar' and formed the future social basis of apartheid support. The demand for colour bar was to eliminate competition for jobs with blacks some of whom were better educated and skilled. In the meanwhile the gold prices had remained low thus forcing major companies to maintain profitability by keeping wages low. In 1920 black workers went on strikes demanding higher wages and the scraping of colour bar. Predictably the strike was ruthlessly crushed. Against this background, and the promotion of a few blacks into skilled jobs previously preserved for whites, the white workers struck two years later demanding, among other things, exclusion of blacks from all but the most menial jobs. Though the strike was also crushed, the colonial regime quickly, and once and for all, restored the colour bar. One of the principal reasons for this was to ensure that the black and white workers did not ever unite in their demands vis a vis capital.

Restoration of the colour bar not only forever effectively disunited the workers, but more significantly it created two classes of workers. While the white workers were generally protected and privileged, the black workers toiled under insecure, semi-slave conditions.

Ascendancy of the Afrikaner

European settlement at the Cape dates to the Seventeenth Century. Most of the settlers were of Dutch, French and German origin. Though these early settlers came from different countries, they had a common background because they were Protestants and the Dutch language was apparently widely spoken among them. In time, then, an identity developed among them rooted in the feeling of "gradual psychological disengagement from Europe" so that by the eighteenth and nineteenth century they had "come to see themselves as an indigenous ethnic group with a distinctive national character".¹¹ Having settled at the Cape before the British, they had also developed a common bond in opposition to British control and domination. The arrival of the British, and their attempt to take charge of things, thus, produced resentment and tension. Combined with isolation, administrative neglect, and economic policies principally meant to promote Company interests, the settlers ceased regarding

10 See Neva Makgetla and Ann Seidman: *Outposts of Monopoly Capitalism: Southern Africa in the Changing Global Economy*, Lawrence Hill and Company (1980), p. 61 ff.

11 Herman Giliomee, in the Chapter "The Growth of Afrikaner Identity" in Heribert Adam and Herman Gilcombe. *The Rise and Crises of Afrikaner Power*. David Philip, Cape Town (1979) p.96.

nee with a company which neglected them, and the British who wanted not on] porate them, but to dominate them culturally, politically and economically.

entieth century therefore ushered in an era of Afrikaner bid for power. Th 1 of the Union of South Africa was not well received among Afrikaner nationali:

In the first place they were opposed to South Africa being part of the Britis , In the second place they regarded political power as a prerequisite to economi

It has, however, been argued that for mainstream white South Africa, th 1 of the Union of South Africa was a compromise between English South Africa¹ o maintain connection with Britain and Afrikaner aspirations. Hence it has bee that;

outh African Party, which held power from 1910 to 1924, and the United Party, which ruled 1934 to 1948, were imbued with this spirit of compromise. Although the background, interests, utlook of their members were highly diverse, the parties tried to integrate the white population nation consisting of the two language groups. They were prepared to diaphysis distinctions en these groups and strove towards greater homogeneity and mutual understanding.¹²

jr, Afrikaner nationalists led by General Hertzog and Dr Malan saw thing itly. They asserted Afrikaner nationalism and therefore rejected the concept c together in one stream. For them the future of the Afrikaner and, indeed hi , lay in Afrikaner control of South Africa. Afrikaners had, after all, 'found' Sout The English had come to reap where they did not sow, to the disadvantage c kaner. For the Afrikaner nationalist the solution to this lay in control of politics 0 the primary advantage of the Afrikaner. At the end of the day, however, th and principles advocated by Afrikaner nationalists were to the benefit of whit African society as a whole and international capital.

jid by its very nature created propitious conditions for the extraction of surplus exploitation of the mainly African working class. The Afrikaner might put thei)re crudely and behave in a somewhat uncouth manner: yet what they desire c trol of South Africa, was essentially what monopoly capital desired. What wa int for the hard-core Afrikaner nationalist was that he must be assured of a plac :heme of things in South Africa. Certainly he was not prepared to play secon rhe victory of the Nationalist Party at the 1948 elections consolidated the proces ad been in motion over the last four decades. Analysis tends, as pointed ou to argue that the Nationalist Party victory was essentially a victory for th er. It was their victory in only one sense: that the Afrikaner took his place wit outh Africa in enjoying equal access to privilege and economic activities. Th ers were not opposed to imperialism; what they wanted was equal and fu] ation in creating capitalism and enjoying its fruits.

he Afrikaner were opposed to British imperial domination, once they hai 1 their identity and interests, their perception of things coincided with that of th

English. Similarly, English speaking whites in South Africa might complain about the way the Afrikaner went about oppressing blacks, but they are not opposed to that oppression or the privileges they enjoy. Equally, the Afrikaner were afraid of African nationalism because majority rule would mean the end of their privileged position. As has been argued,

A profitable marriage between Afrikaner farmers, privileged white workers and the British mining entrepreneurs had long since been cemented. It ensured that white South Africans, whatever their antecedents, enjoyed living standards amongst the highest in the world. They might engage in internecine warfare, but most were anxious to present a united front against black demands for freedom and equality.¹³

The ascendancy of the Nationalist Party to power coincided with the expansion of transitional capital in South Africa. According to Makgetla and Seidman,

Firms from all the core capitalist countries played a complex role in transforming South Africa's mineral based economy into a modern, industrial increasingly militarized state. The forms their penetration took varied, combining direct investment, mobilization of international credits, provision of technology and managerial assistance.¹⁴

The authors further point out that during the first two decades after World War II three times as much foreign capital was injected into South Africa as in the entire pre-war period. Rapid investment by transitional capital was particularly noticeable in the manufacturing and finance sectors. As a result by 1973 the two sectors accounted for a third and a quarter of total foreign investment respectively.¹⁵ Transnational capital also invested in the country with South African State as well as local private capital. This relationship between transnational capital and South African capital serves to bolster the commonality of interests between the two to ensure that the status quo persisted.

One point needs to be made about the behaviour of monopoly capitalism in South Africa and the Third World generally. Transnational have characteristically a tendency of supporting undemocratic and dictatorial regimes whether this be in Africa, Asia or Latin America. There are a number of reasons attributable to this behaviour. Amidst mounting radicalisation of the labour movement in the advanced capitalist countries, the Third World serves as an important avenue for reaping profits and therefore ensuring that the working class in the west has some modicum of comfort. In other words, the exploitation of the working class in the developing world is necessary to cushion off the working class in the West against the harsh effects of capitalism.

It is in the interest of transnational capital to support the *status quo* in South Africa through the present apartheid regime so that the interests of capital are promoted and consolidated. The policies of the Western countries in relation to the situation in South Africa amply reflect the interests of transnational capital.

Democracy and democratic participation of all the people of South Africa in the affairs of their country, and in the determination of its destiny run counter to the interests of imperialism. This is particularly pertinent if the dismantling of apartheid would result in a political dispensation with the objective of establishing an independent path of socio-economic development and delinking from the imperialist orbit.

13 Neva Makgetla and Ann Seidman: *Outposts of Monopoly Capitalism* (1980) op. cit.; p. 63.

14 *Ibid*; p. 57.

15 *Ibid*.

16 It is not necessary to document cases, but there is ample evidence of imperialist intervention in support of unpopular regimes in South Korea, South Vietnam, as well as in many countries in Latin America and Africa. By the same token the US has been involved in destabilising a number of regimes in these continents, usually through the medium of the coup.

THE DIMENSIONS OF APARTHEID

When the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948 it swiftly moved to institute measures which would consolidate white privilege and facilitate the domination and oppression of blacks for the foreseeable future. There was nothing novel about these measures. The Nationalist Party simply perfected those instruments and practices which had evolved throughout the history of white settlement to assure white domination culturally, socially, politically, and economically. However, the net consequences of these measures was to create one of the most ridiculous monstrosities in the world. Socially, the policies sought to erect strict barricades separating the different races. Separation of the races ensured that white South Africans internalized superiority, feared the non-whites and defended apartheid both because it gave them privileges and because of the psychological fear that the system induced in them about non-whites. On the other hand the dehumanisation and brutalization of non-whites was meant to deal a telling blow on the latter for them to accept subjugation for all time. Segregation was meant to make it clear to all concerned that whites and blacks had different paths to walk in South Africa.

Among some of the more ludicrous pieces of legislation enacted to fortify the social aspects of apartheid include: the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) which prohibited marriages and sexual relations across the colour lines respectively. The Population Registration Act (1950) introduced the notorious "pass system", an identity certificate showing the race of the holder of the document.

To effectively prohibit racial interaction, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953) introduced segregation in post offices, stations, trains, park benches, hospitals, toilets and indeed almost everywhere. This, combined with the fact that races lived in separate residential areas decisively segregated the different races.

Likewise, education was not spared. The new policies had a severe and deep impact on the system. Like in most other African countries, African education in South Africa had largely been run under the auspices of state-assisted missionary schools.

Although white schools generally enjoyed significantly higher standards, hitherto the syllabi pursued in the African schools were similar in many respects to those followed in white schools. Things changed in 1954, when the government took control of education in virtually all respects.

The regime's intention in controlling African education "was explicitly to provide Africans with education for a subordinated position in South Africa as a whole, with opportunity for a small number to qualify in professions to serve reserves - 'Bantu areas' - only.¹⁷ Indeed this view was clearly stated by the Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrick Vervoerd in the House of Assembly in 1954 when he said: "the much greater number of Natives.... should have a training in accordance with their opportunities in life."¹⁸ These opportunities were, of course, determined by the apartheid regime. The point was Africans had to be trained to serve white South Africa. They were to be consigned to a life of semi-slavery and bondage, in the land of their birth.

The bantu education policy as it was called, had the following salient features, all meant

17 Monica Wilson, "The Growth of Peasant Communities" in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (ed) *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. II, 1870-1966, Oxford at the Clarendon Press (1975) p. 78.

18 Quoted in *Ibid.*

to effectively bar Africans from meaningful participation in the society and economy. Firstly, the mother tongue became the medium of instruction up to Standard Six. The introduction of the mother tongue was not the main issue, *per se* the problem related to the fact that South Africa insisted on competence in English and inability to command it effectively meant disability. Secondly, important subjects such as mathematics were generally neglected. The role of the African as a servant in South Africa did not really require that he learn mathematics seriously. Thirdly, where in the past only one 'official' language was required, under the new system a knowledge of two official languages, namely English and Afrikaans was a requirement. Finally the bantucisation of education saw the designation of schools along ethnic lines. A school could only enrol students from one particular ethnic group as a way of engendering racism and tribalism. This practice extended to University education.

The concept of 'reserves' was further refined to 'homelands', the Bantustans of today in a bid to completely exclude Africans from South Africa. This policy, premised upon separate development was the result of two major considerations: one, and most important, that white South Africa and international capital have, or should have, exclusive right over the exploitation of the resources of South Africa and, two, and less important, that Africans properly belong to their traditional homelands. The later consideration is advanced primarily to frustrate all forms of national unity for the struggle for majority rule in South Africa, as opposed to any inherent belief that Africans must be given an opportunity to live an African life in their homelands. In other words because the regime in South Africa has created a monstrosity it has a mortal fear of the popular sentiments of the African people. Therefore, anything that can be done to prevent their coming together should be done. Certainly, the fact that a tiny minority has arrogated 87% of the land for its own use while the majority remain on 13% of the land makes nonsense any other argument. In latter years these homelands could graduate and qualify for "independence". With the connivance of self-seeking traditional 'leaders' 'independent' homelands, essentially enclaves of poverty, hunger and disease, have been created. Stooges, in the guise of traditional leaders, are being used to oppress the African people.

By creating homelands based on language and imposing pliable chiefs as leaders, the regime hopes to encourage tribalism and frustrate African national identity. At the same time the system promotes the practice of migrant labour not only within, but from African countries as well.

A worker from a Bantustan works at the sufferance of apartheid; working in South Africa is a privilege, not a right. This insecurity on the part of the workers is intended to inhibit them from confronting apartheid and capital.

These measures were introduced in the background of mounting nationalism not only in South Africa, but throughout Africa as a whole. Despite these archaic and retrogressive measures the apartheid regime had to deal with increasing popular and massive uprisings in the 1950s and 1960s. The blacks in South Africa demanded democratic rule. Characteristically, the regime saw a solution in politically repressing the blacks. Nationalism, particularly African nationalism, and the articulation of African interests had passed through a chequered path from somewhere during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The formation of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1912 decisively marked a watershed in the development of African nationalism. However, this is not to imply that nothing happened before 1912; a lot, in fact, happened. In the early days of nationalism in South Africa, like elsewhere in Africa, the main outcry

was for reform and the accommodation of Africans, particularly the elite, into the social and political dispensation. The status quo itself was not the subject of much question. Africans wanted fairness. Articulation of interests by the African elite, therefore, did not include demands for majority rule, but incorporation into the *status quo*. The interests were sectional and limited in scope. Access to privilege and the opportunity for accumulation were paramount in the perception of things. The proponents of segregation could not accept this position. Africans were there to serve the whites and not to be equal. The obstinacy of white thinking altered the way in which the Africans saw things.

In the 1940s, and particularly after the victory of the Nationalist Party, the nationalist movement threw up a new leadership whose perception of things and the way South Africa should go were getting closer to the demand for majority rule and one man one vote in South Africa. The nationalist Party was, after all, making it clear that white power, privilege and oppression would constitute the framework for the future South Africa. It was becoming clear too, that apartheid was not in the least interested even in accommodating the black people in its scheme of things. Stated differently the victory of the Nationalist Party meant that the battle lines had been clearly and boldly drawn. What has happened between 1948 and today is all recent history; a history, never the less, which needs to be remembered all the same.

Efforts to free South Africa are amply documented, and it is not necessary for us to give details here. Within the scope of this paper we can only delineate very briefly the trends in the African response to national oppression. The resistance of the African people to white settlement dates to the occupation of South Africa by foreigners. This took many forms: armed and violent resistance until conquest initially, to the politics of seeking to be accommodated in the *status quo* by the rising African elite. Between the beginning of the twentieth century and 1948 many fundamental social and economic changes took place in South Africa. Because of the dispossession of Africans from the land as a result of the Land Act of 1913 and the growing poverty in the rural areas, a process of urbanisation among the Africans began to take place. With urbanisation came proletarianisation. South Africa was almost going through an industrial revolution and Africans were participating in that process. Industrialisation produced new conditions and the workers like everyone else in society were moulded by those developments. The harsh realities of urbanisation and the brutality of poor working conditions, slave wages and apartheid generally produced a new breed of people. The proletariat uprooted from the rural setting could no longer look back to the village for sustenance, he had to confront urban life and capital for solutions to his life. To the urbanised African the rural area was of historical importance only; it had no immediate relevance to his existential circumstances.

These developments had their own momentum and logic. The problems that the urban population and mineworkers faced required specific solutions. These solutions resided in organised and collective action. The regime in South Africa was not always amenable to African demands. It was not in the nature of things for the regime to negotiate.

Strike action and trade unionism became the weapon and forum for getting grievances attended to. By 1948 the African urban population was increasing phenomenally and white South Africa declared apartheid. The coming into being of apartheid removed whatever illusions there might have been of the long term intentions of those awarded to apartheid. The blacks, and those committed to democracy had to positively respond to these developments. As a consequence, the African National Congress (ANC) and

the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) adopted a Programme of Action in 1949. In 1952 the two organisations launched the historic Defiance Campaign.

Urbanisation, and industrialisation and the consequent socio-economic changes referred to above, produced the conditions for struggle in the 1950s. The impact of urbanisation during the pre-1948 period is captured in the following statement,

The number of Africans in industry rose from 156,000 in 1939 to 245,000 in 1945. In Johannesburg alone, the African population increased by 57 per cent between 1936 and 1946. Yet no additional housing was provided for them, which led to the growth of atrocious slums. In 1944 thousands of families seized unoccupied land and erected their own dwellings out of corrugated iron, packing cases, and whatever makeshift building material they could lay their hands on.¹⁹

The shortage of housing and the squalid conditions under which people had to live as a result, created a serious social crisis. It became a rallying point. The African National Congress had been unprepared for this situation. As a result, the struggle for housing fell on the initiative of spontaneous community organisations. In part this contributed to the formation of the Youth League in 1943. Apart from championing the struggle for housing, the Youth League also questioned the rationale of Africans participating in World War II which was essentially a European war to determine spheres of domination by Europeans. The Youth League was, therefore, beginning to address wider social and political issues beyond the community.

The period before 1948 was also characterised by strikes. Despite the War Measure 145 of 1942 which prohibited strike action by Africans, there were altogether 304 strikes involving 58,000 Africans, Coloureds and Indians. The strikes culminated in the 1946 mine workers strike organised by the African Mine Worker's Union (AMWU). The strike was ostensibly over the demand by workers for a wage increase of 10 shillings, an issue which the management and owners intransigently refused to discuss. As a result 75,000 gold miners on the Witwatersrand went on strike. The strike did not alter the position of the authorities. With the connivance of the Chamber of Mines the government responded typically by use of force. Two thousand armed police were dispatched to the Witwatersrand to break the strike and force the workers back to work. When this failed police opened fire killing hundreds.²¹ The strike was suppressed.

Though force was a significant factor in the suppression of the strike, equally contributing to the debacle was the lack of effective organisation among the workers themselves. The strike had been called in an ad hoc fashion to respond to immediate social crisis. No longterm options for sustaining the strike in the likely event of reprisals by the authorities had been devised. Clearly this pointed to the need for a cohesive, ideologically clear organisation capable of withstanding the brutality of apartheid.

It was in this context that the Programme of Action came to be conceived and put into place in 1949. The cardinal objectives of the Programme of Action included freedom from white domination, attainment of political independence and the right to self determination. The demand for majority rule indicated a change in perception of the oppressed. The apartheid dispensation had clearly pointed to the fact that only the dismantling of apartheid could bring about democracy in South Africa. What was important during this phase was the coming together of the political organisations representing Africans, Coloureds and Indians under the umbrella of the Programme of

19 Bernard M. Magubane: *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, Monthly Review Press (1979) p. 292.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 293.

21 *Ibid.*, p.294

Action. This marriage of the oppressed people was to develop in future years to embrace progressive and liberal whites in common solidarity for majority rule and in opposition to oppression. A series of activities followed which included a demonstration by workers on 1 May 1950 and a countrywide strike on 26 June. The Defiance Campaign was launched in 1952 amidst increasing oppression by the apartheid regime.

Between 1953 and 1954 mobilisation was around a number of issues: first, there was mass action to protest against Bantu education; and second, a local campaign organised against the Western Areas Removals Scheme in Johannesburg. Efforts centered also on the mobilisation of people in different parts of the country for them to identify and articulate their grievances. These attempts and activities were aimed not only at translating the people's grievances and concerns into national ones, but into moulding a national consciousness regarding the oppressive nature of the apartheid regime. On such a basis could a truly nationalist movement emerge. The principal objectives of such a movement would be to struggle for majority rule and democracy in South Africa. These activities led to a changed political atmosphere and a new consciousness among the non-whites. The culmination of these campaigns was a National Convention which met in 1955 at Kliptown near Johannesburg. Attended by more than 3,000 delegates from all over the country, on 26 June 1955, the major outcome of the Convention was the now famous 'Freedom Charter'.

The Freedom Charter came to be recognised worldwide as a basis upon which a democratic South Africa could be created. The aftermath of the convention was increased and sustained political mobilisation and activity, while at the same time the regime mounted arrests, imprisonment and torture with equally increased ferocity. In 1960 the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) which had been formed in 1958 purportedly over ideological differences with sections of the ANC leadership were banned. Their banning marked a turning point in the situation within South Africa.

It became clear that the apartheid regime was least prepared for peaceful change. Most of all, it became sufficiently evident that apartheid was most unwilling to concede majority rule and democracy. Only one option was open as far as the oppressed people of South Africa were concerned: Armed struggle. From the 1960 therefore, the people of South Africa have been engaged through their Liberation Movement in an armed struggle to dismantle apartheid, and hopefully on the ruins of apartheid and oppression create a free and democratic society, in which all the people of South Africa can flourish and chart their own destiny.

Despite increasing brutalization, oppression, killings, arrests, imprisonment and torture, the masses within South Africa have valiantly and relentlessly continued to hold high the banner of freedom. Through their political and mass organisations, trade unions and other platforms the people within continue to defy and fight apartheid. Peasants, workers, youth and other democratic and progressive elements within South Africa stand united on one fundamental thing: that apartheid must be destroyed. Not only must apartheid be destroyed, it must be replaced by a democratic rule of the majority of its people.

In spite of this clear and loud clamour by the people of South Africa that apartheid must be destroyed, the regime remains steadfastly defiant against national and international opinion. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Non Aligned Movement, the United Nations and other international organisations have stridently and consistently

condemned the apartheid regime and demanded the dismantling of apartheid, to no avail. The regime is adamant that apartheid must continue and prevail. Peaceful demonstrations have invariably invited violent retaliation by the regime.

This, therefore, means that the armed struggle is an important if not principal, component of the process for change in South Africa.

At the same time some Western countries while ostensibly critical of apartheid, have opposed measures meant to force South Africa to heed international opinion. These countries have, of course, behaved that way because of their imperialist interests. South Africa, as a sub-imperialist centre maybe politically condemned; but nothing must be done to jeopardise the interests of capital. True, certain characteristics and aspects of apartheid have outlived their usefulness and, equally the apartheid regime itself is outlandish in its behaviour. But that perhaps is an issue of minor importance; critical to the drama in South Africa is that the West must maintain its hold. This explains the behaviour of the leading Western countries at the United Nations. Resolutions meant to seriously bring South Africa to book have been vetoed the Security Council of the UN. In terms of practical action against the apartheid regime, leading Western countries have been most reluctant to impose comprehensive mandatory sanctions.

The struggle by the people of South Africa is essentially a struggle against imperialism. It would be naive, therefore, to expect the Western countries to wholeheartedly support the African people's struggle. They might be opposed to the archaic forms of the South African socio-economic system - racism - but they will not support democracy and fundamental socio-economic transformation. Of paramount importance to the West are their investments; that is the crux of the matter.

WESTERN INTERESTS

Argued herein is that South Africa operates hand in glove with western countries in maintaining apartheid in the country. Similarly, the premise of this argument is that the west in so doing acts out of self interest. The west is interested in preserving its strategic and economic interests not only in South Africa, but in Africa as a whole. Quite logically, therefore, it is not in the best interests of the west to encourage any fundamental change in the country, let alone radical socio-economic transformation.

True, the apartheid regime has its own interests: those of the perpetuation of a social, political and economic system they have assiduously constructed over decades. It is a system that has entrenched privilege, comfort and high standards of living for the whites. As masters they are not prepared for a situation in which they could be equal to the blacks. After decades of privilege, comfort and power, the prospect of losing these, or having to compete equally with blacks tickles hostility and fear in whites. That, to them, would be tantamount to playing second fiddle. In assigning racism second place in this analysis, the intention is not to minimise the psychological fear that the prospect of majority rule incites in the white mind. This fear relates to the possibility of blacks treating whites in the very same manner that the latter have treated the former, in other words the application of racism reverse. It is also a fear springing from the psychological and social adjustment that comes with independence and democratisation of society. These fears are real and are deeply rooted in the racist nature of the South African Society.

In laying emphasis on imperialism, therefore, we are arguing that racism is an outgrowth

of capitalism. Thus it is imperialism which should be combatted in order to destroy racism. Racism can only be removed by the attainment of majority rule and the democratisation of all institutions of society. That is, when all avenues, opportunities and institutions are wide open to all the people of South Africa, the very basis of racism collapses and is nullified. Capitalist exploitation, which includes imperialism, are incompatible with true democracy. There lies the problem. Similarly in arguing that the apartheid regime gets its sustenance from the western countries, we are saying the regime is convenient for the west for it provides a good environment for imperialist exploitation.

Apartheid as a system has, particularly in recent times, become an embarrassment to the western countries. The attempts to persuade South Africa to 'reform' apartheid clearly illustrate this point. If ways could be found to bring about political change, while capitalism especially foreign capital, is maintained in south Africa the west would be happy to see the introduction of cosmetic changes.

The quandary facing the west, however, is the recognition that things may have been left too late. 'Reform' and cosmetic changes could have appealed to the blacks before 1948, not in 1989. Only independence, and democratic rule are acceptable.

- uncompromising attitudes between the blacks and whites makes the position of the west ambiguous. Hence Secret Memorandum 39 prepared by the US National Security Council in 1969 under Option No Two states,²²

The whites are here to stay and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence, which will only lead to chaos and increased opportunities for the communists. We can by selective relaxation of our stance towards the white regimes, encourage some modification of their current racial and colonial policies, and through more substantial economic assistance to the black stages (...) help draw the groups together and exert some influence in both for peaceful change. Our tangible interests from a basis for our contacts in the region, and these can be maintained at an acceptable political cost.

As a sub-centre of imperialism South Africa was, and is seen by the United States of America playing a vital role in consolidating imperialist interests in the region. The Memorandum above was written in 1969 before Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were liberated, and when they directly and politically constituted part of the sub centre. It is interesting, however, that despite the independence of these countries the US as reflected in its policy of "Constructive Engagement" has not shifted from 1969. The US, and indeed the other Western countries do not enunciate a policy which accepts the inevitability of a rule by the majority. The West is more interested in accommodation of blacks and removal of racism and segregation.

The fear of radical change in South Africa and, indeed in the region is manifested in the expressed fear of Communist or Soviet influence. Though the western countries' apprehension is usually presented in the crude form of Soviet expansionism, what the west are saying is they are opposed to the independence of the African people in the sense of their charting an independent, self-sustaining and progressive path which would lead to the development of socialism. Equally, too, the west is opposed to anti-imperialist struggles by the African people because this threatens their interests. Political freedom and democratic rule in South Africa can, therefore, only be at the expense of economic independence. Stated differently the west is apprehensive of

22 Secret Memorandum 39" quoted in Ann and Neva Seidman: South Africa and US Multinational Corporations. Lawrence Hill and Company, Westport, Connecticut (1978) p.73.

change on the terms of the majority of South Africa. Change must be on the express terms of the west. The most important agenda for the west is primarily theirs and not that of the African people.

The bogey about communism, at any rate, is an insult to the people of South Africa and the region. In their anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles the allies of the people of the region have been the socialist countries. History bears testimony to the fact that it is socialism which stands on the side of justice, while imperialism stands on the side of oppression.

The strategic importance of South Africa to the west particularly the sea, is a long standing one. As long as South Africa remains an integral part of imperialism, the west is assured of control over the sea. Control of the sea is important for commercial and military purposes and therefore must firmly remain within the ambit of their influence. It is also generally acknowledged that Southern Africa is richly endowed with a variety of minerals, some of them of strategic, military and economic importance.

Economically, the interests of the west are deep. South Africa provides essential raw materials for European industries. It is also an important market for manufactured goods. Trade figures and other statistics clearly demonstrate the strong relationship between South Africa and the Western countries. For example the figures for 1984 reveal that the main origins of imports into South Africa were: West Germany (18.4%), USA (18.3%), Japan (15.0%), United Kingdom (13%) and France (4.4%). Similarly, South African exports to these countries were high: USA (14.3%), Switzerland (12.3%), UK (7.8%), and West Germany (7.2%). The West, therefore accounted for 68% and 57% of imports and exports respectively. Notably, these figures do not adequately reflect trade in arms and oil since these are not fully disclosed.

There is also heavy involvement of foreign capital in South Africa. For example;

British-based multinational banking interests provided most (about 80 per cent) of the direct foreign central government and banking sector capital available to South Africa. Western Europe provided an important amount of short-term capital in this sector. It is perhaps most significant that the International Monetary Fund was still, in 1972, providing almost 60 per cent of all short-term non-direct investment funds available to South Africa from the central government and banking sector.²⁴

Because of the presence of Western foreign capital, the providers of this capital bring pressure to bear on their governments to ensure that the policies pursued promote and protect their interests first and foremost. Therefore, the foreign policies of these countries reflect the interest of private capital who have heavily staked in South Africa. This point is fundamental; for foreign policy naturally arises from specific socio-economic conditions of a given country. The interests of Transnationals are related to business; their concern is not only finding markets and sources of raw materials, but equally important a propitious environment for investment. Countries also seek allies on basis of real or perceived interests. South Africa scores favourably on all these points. Because it is repressive, it is favourable for capitalist exploitation and it is a dependable ally of imperialism.

Consequently, apart from providing moral, diplomatic and political support for apartheid, the West also supports South Africa militarily by supplying arms and expertise. In supplying these arms to South Africa, the West is making certain that its

²³ Economics Intelligence Unit 1984 p.2.

²⁴ Ann and Neva Seidman, South Africa and US Multinational Corporations (1978) op. cit. p.75.

economic interests are protected, and protected by force if necessary. These arms are used to internally suppress the black people of South Africa as well as to intimidate the frontline states who both support the liberation of South Africa as well as want to disengage from it economically. Interestingly, therefore, the West uses South Africa as an entry point into, and to maintain its hold over, the region. In turn South Africa apart from direct aggression uses agents of destabilisation like UNITA, RENAMO, and other renegade bandit groups within the region to ensure (a) that these countries do not disengage from South Africa, (b) that through disruption of their economies they do not pursue social and economic policies which undermine capitalism and (c) that there is an atmosphere of perpetual political instability.

CONCLUSION

South Africa is, as has been argued, an extension of monopoly capitalism. The consolidation of white power in South Africa resulted from the need for imperialism to find a foothold in the country. Though the ruling class in South Africa, as exemplified by the Nationalist Party, have their own interests within the country, these are not contradictory to those of imperialism.

Apartheid in South Africa has survived this long because this is convenient for imperialism. The relationship between the West and the whites in South Africa though a complex one, is primarily determined by the nature of the interests of the West in the country and in the region.

Apartheid as a system of national oppression is a reality. People's opportunities and destiny in life are determined and shaped by their race and skin colour. The whites are a privileged social group because apartheid decrees this should be the case. Non-whites suffer oppression, brutality, poverty, hunger, deprivation, malnutrition and disease because they are not white. That, in essence, is South African society in reality. Only the insane can attempt to deny that racism is a fact of life in apartheid South Africa.

The point being made in this paper is that the historical factors that brought about apartheid are important in explaining it. Whites settled in South Africa because of social and economic circumstances which were determined by the development of societies in Europe. In responding to the socio-economic developments in Europe the whites came to settle in South Africa. They were adventurers, in search of economic opportunities in the sun. The logic of the development of capitalism after the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa caught up with them, confronted by capitalism, the whites conceived apartheid as a survival mechanism. Monopoly capital exploited the resources; white South Africa provided the state machinery necessary for the orderly and efficient exploitation of these resources. How the state machinery maintained this order was not important.

Consequently South Africa, particularly black South Africa, was brutalised in the promotion and protection of capital. The West did not need, especially in the twentieth century, to maintain its physical presence in South Africa. The apartheid regime could provide adequate physical, military and psychological power for the smooth operation of imperialism. The West would, of course, make certain that apartheid received the necessary support for its survival. The fact that the destinies of South Africa and the Western countries are intertwined forms the firm basis for the support that the West

gives to South Africa.

This paper has also given prime importance to imperialism because of the implications that it has for a future South Africa and the region. As the struggle in South Africa is a national as well as an anti-imperialist one, it is necessary that the struggle be considered as one not exclusively against apartheid. Anti-racism is one level of the struggle. It requires that all progressive elements in South Africa be mobilised to fight against racism and for the national liberation of South Africa. Simultaneously the struggle must also confront capitalism for progressive socio-economic transformation. It would be a grave pitfall to think that the dismantling of apartheid would lead to any fundamental change in South Africa. As Harry Magdoff²⁵ has argued,

It would be wrong to say that modern imperialism would have been possible without colonialism. And yet the end of colonialism by no means signifies the end of imperialism. The explanation for this seeming paradox is that colonialism, considered as the direct application of military and political force, was essential to reshape the social and economic institutions of many of the dependent countries to the needs of the metro-politan centres.

Indeed the struggle of the people of South Africa is part and parcel of the struggle of the people of the region against imperialism. Angola and Mozambique are, more than a decade after political independence, engaged in intense and fierce struggles against physical intimidation by puppets of imperialism.

The destabilisation policies of South Africa against its neighbours are committed in the name of imperialism. The future of the region and the liberation of South Africa are dependent upon the successful defeat of imperialism, and in its place the creation of conditions for socialism. That alone is the path open to Southern Africa.

It is unfortunate that the Liberation Movement itself, particularly the ANC and the PAC, had been disunited. This lack of unity has been a general drawback to the struggle in South Africa.

Indeed, the unity of the oppressed people is paramount not only to free South Africa, but to ensure that imperialism does not continue to hold sway. This is the challenge not only for South Africa, but for the whole region.

25 Harry Magdoff, "Imperialism without colonies" In Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliff, *Studies in the theory of imperialism* op. cit. p.164.