
South Africa

ANC-led strikes: a dangerous power play

by Uwe Friesecke

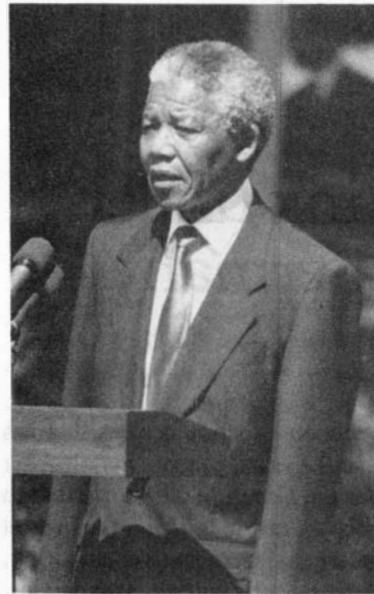
On Aug. 3-4, the three-way coalition composed of the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Cosatu trade union federation, organized what was, from their standpoint, a highly successful mass strike, in which an estimated 4 million workers took part. The high points of the strike were the mass demonstrations in the big cities of Capetown, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. In Pretoria, Nelson Mandela, the symbol of the ANC's struggle, exactly 30 years after the day of his arrest, led 70,000 supporters up to the steps of the Union Building, in which President F. W. de Klerk was meeting with his cabinet.

The three-way coalition clearly intends to strengthen its position for the next round of negotiations of the Covenant for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa). Already, information has come to light about the discussions within the de Klerk cabinet, to the effect that the government is ready for far-reaching concessions. It could lead to elections in November of a constitutional assembly consisting of only one house. The government will drop its previous demand for veto power.

The strike was not a general strike, which would have established the ANC as the sole representative of the black population of South Africa. It was more a precisely calculated action on the part of the top leadership of the three-way coalition, intended to weaken the positions of their political rivals, particularly de Klerk's National Party and the Inkatha movement of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and to strengthen their own position at the center of power.

It is quite interesting to note that the country's gold and platinum miners did not join the strike. The real power center of South African society, the Anglo-American Corp. and its junior partner, the British firm Lonrho, were therefore not affected. This feeds the long-circulating speculation about whether Anglo-American and Lonrho do not have considerable material and political influence over the leadership of the ANC, and thereby play an important role on the chessboard of South African politics.

The Anglo-American establishment is not interested in really overcoming apartheid, but more in creating a destabilized political situation in which existing ethnic conflicts, as for example those between the Xhosa and the Zulu peoples,



Nelson Mandela, symbol of the struggle of the African National Congress, during a visit to Washington in June 1990.

could prevent any strong, development-oriented government from emerging.

Looming tragedy

The future of South Africa portends a tragic development, in which an explosion of social and ethnic conflicts could lead to civil war, if a process of economic reorientation is not set into motion. For that, there must be a break with the policy of the international financial institutions. South Africa's economy is forced to pay annual debt service of Rand 17 billion, and the government has been forced to implement a restructuring program which has led to a loss of 110,000 industrial jobs in the last two years. The finance minister now plans to raise the value added tax from 10% to 15%. This austerity policy will prevent any peaceful solution of the South African constitutional crisis.

Neither in the ANC nor in Inkatha nor in the National Party do the leading political forces appear to recognize this danger. All the groups seem to be playing out their own roles in the chess game.

When President de Klerk took office at the end of 1989, it very quickly became clear that he would only be given limited room for action. In the middle of 1990, there began a murderous wave of violence among the opposing black political groups, whose background to this day has not been clarified.

So the political conflict in South Africa will continue, and with actions like the June 17 massacre in Boipatong township. The tension and destabilization of the political negotiations will intensify, while at the same time, the three-way coalition of the ANC, Communist Party, and the trade unions influenced by them, will come closer and closer to taking power.