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Anarchism & the ‘new’ South Africa

An interview with the South African WSF

Kevin Doyle

1997

Q. Most readers of *Red and Black Revolution* will be familiar with the main organisations on the left in South Africa, such as the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Can you tell us something about the tradition of libertarian ideas and struggle?

A. Anarchism and Syndicalism do (or at least did) have an important place in South African history, although this is typically hidden or obscured by official and “radical” versions of the past. Before the founding of the SACP in 1921, libertarian ideas were common on the revolutionary left. A section of the US syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World, was established here in 1911, growing out of an organisation called the Industrial Workers Union. The Industrial Workers Union, in turn, was set up by the conservative craft-dominated (and, one must add, racist) Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council (WTLC) at the behest of Tom Mann, the British revolutionary, who visited South Africa in 1910. The IWW (SA) was aligned to the Chicago (anti-parliamentary section)

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of the IWW (US), and the Voice of Labour — a radical local paper with which it was closely associated — carried articles by American anarchist-syndicalists like Vincent St. John. The IWW (SA) mainly organised amongst unskilled poor Whites (and also among groups like the bookmakers). They launched several strikes but collapsed in or about 1913. Some syndicalists were also active within the WTLC, although it must be stressed that they opposed that organisation's racist politics — for example, they organised amongst Black miners as well as White.

With the outbreak of the First World War, a number of revolutionary socialists, including anarchists and syndicalists, came together to form the International Socialist League, a body which opposed the pro-war stance of the Second International (represented in SA by the racist Labour Party). Although the International Socialist League (ISL) is typically seen as a Marxist party, and as the forerunner of the SACP, its internal politics were far more complex. For example, the ISL's paper carried advertisements for Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread* and other non-Marxist socialist writings, yet none for works by Marx or Engels. The dominant position in the ISL seems to have been "DeLeonite", that is syndicalism which supports both revolutionary trade unionism and participation in parliament. This sort of chameleon-like ideology probably provided a basis for unity amongst the ISL's diverse membership, which included a vociferous anarchist-syndicalist grouping which opposed all involvement in capitalist elections. Between 1917–8, the DeLeonites and anarchist-syndicalists took the initiative in organising the Industrial Workers of Africa (initially called the IWW) which was the first Black trade union in South African history.

The remnants of the Industrial Workers of Africa played an important role in the Black worker struggles of 1919–20. In about 1918 or 1919, the anarchist-syndicalists left the ISL and set up the Industrial Socialist League, which was mainly based

Q. How do you feel about the current situation? Are you hopeful?

A. Yes we are hopeful for the future and we believe that Anarchism has great potential to grow within South Africa, and Africa in general. The WSF, as you know, emerged out of the Anarchist Revolutionary Movement in the early part of 1995. We consider ourselves to be anarchist-syndicalists and are committed to the tradition of class struggle anarchism. We strongly believe that the workers and the poor should lead the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the state through democratic means. In place of the grotesque capitalist system and government, which thrive on exploitation and oppression, we wish to see the implementation of an anarchist society.

Q. What assistance can anarchists and socialists outside Africa give you?

A. In our first year of existence we concentrated on internal education and drawing up our position papers. This year we have made substantial progress and have learnt a lot about the practicalities of organising and recruiting members. We would greatly appreciate the assistance and the support of other anarchist and socialist organisations. In particular, there are very few anarchist materials and resources available within South Africa such as books and magazines and due to the exchange rate (for example, one Irish pound costs about R7.80 in our currency) it is very difficult for our organisation to buy or import anarchist material from overseas. We would like to make a special appeal for donations in the form of anarchist books, pamphlets, tapes and videos. Financial donations would also be welcome. We are setting up a resource centre and would appreciate all possible help.

tiny splinter unions because the masses prefer to join large, established unions. Small groups of revolutionaries working inside established unions can achieve impressive results. For example, the main French (CGT) and Argentinean (FORA) union federations were won over to anarchist-syndicalism in this way in the early twentieth century. We think in terms of two strategies to reach our goals in the unions:

1. work alongside other militants of various political stripes to build a rank-and-file movement in the unions that fight the union bureaucracy as much as the bosses, and
2. build anarchist affinity groups in the unions which aim to win the battle of ideas, and which are part of an anarchist political organisation with theoretical and tactical unity.

Q. Anarchists stress direct action and not parliamentary activity as the key way forward. This must have a lot of resonance in a country where so much was gained by direct struggle? The defeat of Apartheid was one of the great victories of recent times.

A. Definitely. For centuries the Black working-class has only had mass struggle as a way to win anything from the ruling class. And it has won victories. This tradition, and the confidence generated by many small gains, means that people have a high level of faith in mobilisation as a tactic. Of course, this doesn't mean that there aren't illusions in parliament and the like, but it does mean people are willing to go onto the street to secure their demands. This is seen as a major problem by the new managers of the State — for example, the new Labour Relations Act places a heavy emphasis on promoting mediation and penalising 'un-procedural' strikes, whilst consistent attempts are made to either repress or co-opt militant struggles elsewhere (such as in the universities).

near Cape Town. The Industrial Socialist League seems to have had some success organising amongst non-White workers in this area, and it maintained an office in the ghettos of the Cape Flats. In Durban, syndicalists were involved in a successful attempt to organise workers of Asian descent. Ironically, despite its libertarian politics, the Industrial Socialist League renamed itself the Communist Party of South Africa in 1920 and applied for affiliation to the Third International, as did the ISL. However, the Industrial Socialist League failed to accept the Third International's conditions for membership which included a willingness to engage in electoral activity and work within reformist unions. The Industrial Socialist League eventually merged (a few militants excepted) with the ISL to form the official SACP.

Once the SACP got established in 1921, Marxist ideas came to predominate on the revolutionary left, although echoes of the older libertarian movement could still be found. For example, the 1925 constitution of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (a massive Black trade union that dominated the political scene in the 1920s and which incorporated the remnants of the Industrial Workers of Africa) adopted the famous IWW preamble that a struggle must go on between the working class and the employing class until the workers seize the means of production through their industrial organisations. This is not to say that the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union was anarcho-syndicalist, it was not. The Union was dominated by a clique who used it as a platform for their nationalist politics and capitalist aspirations (and activities) and who expelled all Communist Party members in 1926 (after a campaign of 'white-baiting'). As far as we know, it was only in the 1990s that anarchist and syndicalist ideas re-emerged in an explicit and organised form in South Africa.

Q. So let's talk about the 1990s. What was your attitude to the elections in 1994? Did you see them as a landmark in South African history?

A. Definitely. It was Bakunin who said, “It is true that the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy, for at least in the republic there are moments when, though always exploited, the people are not oppressed, while in monarchies they are never anything else”. Bakunin’s statements are as relevant to the South African today as they were over a hundred years ago when he wrote them. Under apartheid the black working class and poor were always oppressed. Since the April 1994 elections, we are able to experience moments of limited freedoms. While we consider the current government to be an improvement on the racist apartheid regime, as anarchists we also realise that as long as we are ruled by governments and capitalists, the working class and the poor will never be free; they will remain enslaved. Bakunin went on to say, “But whilst giving preference to the republic we are nevertheless forced to recognise and proclaim that, whatever the form of government, whilst human society remains divided into different classes because of the hereditary inequality of occupations, wealth, education and privileges, there will always be minority government and the inevitable exploitation of the majority by that minority.” That is the situation in South Africa today.

Q. The official result of the election was a resounding win for the ANC — they obtained 63% of the vote. There must have been high hopes at the time?

A. Yes. The high voter turnout (estimates say that 96% of people voted!) indicated a great degree of confidence in the vote to bring about change in South Africa. When the election results were announced, massive parties were held to celebrate the political changes. Perhaps of more significance, the move towards a democracy greatly increased the confidence of the black working class. In the month following the election, South Africa was rocked by a strike wave which effected just about every section of the economy from mining to communications, transport, clothing, food, commercial, and the public sector. In

reformist union cannot be totally ‘incorporated’ into capitalism because capitalism cannot satisfy the needs of workers.

This is not say that the unions as they exist now are perfect — far from it. To a greater or a lesser degree, most have a strong bureaucracy of paid officials and leaders. This group is better paid than ordinary workers and has many privileges. Because of these conditions they develop different interests to ordinary union members. Ordinary workers need to take action to improve their conditions, but bureaucrats want the unions to avoid struggles and spend their time negotiating with the bosses. We oppose the union bureaucracy because it undermines union struggle and because it is a threat to union democracy.

But the existence of a bureaucracy is not inevitable. The Spanish CNT had a million and a half members but only two elected full-time officials. The argument that the unions cannot be changed makes the false and very dangerous assumption that the trade union bureaucracy is invincible, when it is not. This anti-union view in fact begs the question of how we are ever going to beat the bosses if we supposedly cannot even defeat conservative officials within our own class organisations. Practically all unions today are also dominated by backward reformist ideas, such as the notion that capitalism and the State can be changed to look after the needs of the workers and poor. We reject these ideas. As we see it there are two issues: union bureaucracy and reformism.

We must do two things if we want the unions to play a revolutionary role. First, get rid of the union bureaucracy and make sure that the unions are controlled by the membership. Second, win the union membership over to anarchist-syndicalist ideas. As we see it we must work within existing unions to achieve these goals. Leaving the mainstream unions to form new “pure” revolutionary unions has serious consequences. It withdraws militants from the unions, leaving them at the mercy of bureaucrats and reformists. It isolates militants in

into restructuring the capitalist economy (something which can only be done at the expense of ordinary workers). This will further demobilise and demoralise rank-and-file union members. We believe that the unions must remain autonomous of all corporatist and tripartite arrangements. A large section of rank and file workers remain loyal to the ANC. However, this has not necessarily dampened their militancy. Workers have consistently showed a willingness to fight the bosses and the state, even when their unions do not support their strikes. There are also various socialist currents operating in the unions, although it must be admitted that the SACP commands incredible influence and is playing a leading role in tying workers to the ANC and to the union leadership's corporatist agenda.

Q. In a general sense anarchists are split on the issue of involvement in a union such as COSATU. What position does the WSF take?

A. As we see it the trade union question is a key one for revolutionaries, and it is often dealt with in a very problematic way by libertarian revolutionaries. Many anarchists take a wholly dismissive attitude to the existing unions, and propose that we build brand new revolutionary unions. This is based on the idea that the unions are irredeemably reformist and bureaucratic.

What this argument misses is the class nature of the trade unions. The unions were built to defend and advance the class interests of the workers and the poor. Even the most bureaucratic and reformist union must defend its members' interests or it will collapse. The unions have massive potential power because they can disrupt production, the source of the bosses' wealth. They promote class consciousness, solidarity, and confidence because they organise people to fight as working and poor people against the bosses and rulers. It is incorrect to say that the unions 'serve' the bosses or capitalism. Even the most 'progressive' boss will oppose the unions because they are a challenge to his exploitation of workers. Even the most

most of these strikes workers clearly displayed that were unwilling to accept racist practices on the shop-floor such as wage inequalities and racist supervisors.

Q. How did the Government respond to such optimism and direct action?

A. Well, to take the Pick n' Pay strike as just one example. The police shot at striking workers, let their dogs loose into the crowd, and heartily beat workers without any provocation. There were also reports that the police tortured some of the women workers. The police attacks on workers were backed up by court injunctions against the union. And then there were mass arrests on charges of trespassing!

Q. An argument is often made – at least over here, anyway – that the ANC has had its hands tied in terms of opting for any real 'radical solutions' to the problems of South Africa. For instance, it is said that the ANC has no option but to obey the 'financial markets' and that if it doesn't there will a run on the South African Rand and so forth. What's your response to this?

A. The problem with this kind of argument is that it suggests that the ANC has some sort of radical programme of redistribution which has had to go on the back-burner because of this or that constraint. But the ANC cannot claim that 'the economy made them do it'. The ANC was not, and is not, anti-capitalist or anti-business. In fact they are ardent free marketeers. As Thabo Mbeki 'joked' at the launch of a recent macro-economic plan: "call me a Thatcherite" !! Another example of this is that the ANC government is implementing GATT policies faster than the GATT actually requires the South African government to do so.

Q. Yet Nelson Mandela was talking about 'transforming' South Africa if he won the election. Clearly he had something else in mind – maybe it was electricity transformers!

A. It is necessary to consider to what extent the ANC planned to redistribute wealth in the first place. The ANC historically called for some welfare measures, but never claimed to be anti-capitalist. At its most “radical”, the ANC was in favour of nothing more than a mixed economy. In the 1950s, Mandela countered claims by anti-communists in the ANC that the Freedom Charter was a “socialist document” alien to African nationalism by stating that while “the Charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature it [was]... a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis”, and that the dispossession of the “mining kings” and “land barons” would open up “fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class” who will for the “first time... have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mines and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before.”

Q. What was your attitude to the ANC during the anti-apartheid years?

A. While the ANC was still a fighting mass movement, we defended it as a progressive force but we never had illusions in it — we see the need to build an independent political alternative to the ANC tradition. It is important to note that the hard-line anti-communists in the ANC later went on to form the Pan-Africanist Congress, often seen as the militant wing of the anti-apartheid movement!

With reference to the ANC’s lack of delivery in terms of the provision of housing, land and job creation, the ANC does argue that it is constrained by the massive legacy of apartheid and economic conditions. It also continually stresses that global economic competitiveness, foreign investment, and economic growth, are important pre-conditions for being able to address inequality and poverty, and raise the standard of living of the poor and working class.

National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) which is loosely linked to Africanism/ Black consciousness, and the Federation of South African Labour (FEDSAL), which is mostly white and organises white collar workers. Outside of these you find centres like the South African Confederation of Labour (SACOL), which is the rump of the old racist White-only trade union movement , and the United Workers Union of South Africa, the industrial wing of the reactionary tribalist Inkatha Freedom Party. However, SACOL and UWUSA, with about 50,000 members each are dwarfed by the larger federations: NACTU has about 350,000 members, FEDSAL about 300,000 and COSATU has a massive 1.6 million members. In addition, COSATU is typically much better organised than the other centres, and its affiliates have reasonably strong shop-steward structures.

It is true that COSATU leaders are tied to the ANC . However, these leaders do not necessarily toe the ANC’s neo-liberal line and have adopted a more social democratic approach. COSATU leaders have also been critical of some of the ANC ‘s policies and have called for mass action against the policies that they disagree with. There are, however, indications that COSATU is becoming more bureaucratic and the leaders more reformist. One example of this, last year, was when COSATU backed down on its threat to call a general strike against privatisation when the government made some vague promise to consult the trade unions in its “restructuring” of public assets. Needless to say, privatisation has gone ahead anyway. This sort of compromise reflects partly the innate conservatism of paid union officials as a distinct stratum. It also reflects the dominant politics within the unions — COSATU favours a corporatist strategy, a social contract in which it will work alongside the bosses and the State to reconstruct the economy.

Q. Sounds awful but very familiar.

A. It is a recipe for disaster, as it will not only drastically increase bureaucratisation in the unions, but it will also tie them

A. A 24 hour general strike was held on the 30th April (May Day is a public holiday) in protest over the attempt to include the bosses' "right" to lock-out and because of a clause protecting private property in the new constitution. The lock-out is a strategy that bosses use to undermine workers' power by locking striking workers out of the factory/ plant/ shop and hiring scabs. While the right to strike is included in the constitution, workers felt that it was unfair if the lock-out was also included. The "right" to lock-out, further extends bosses' power by directly undermining strikes.

In the case of the property clause, workers felt that as long as private property was protected under the constitution, land re-distribution would be undermined as land would have to be bought on the market or the owners compensated at a market price. It has been estimated that up to 90% of workers in some areas participated in the strike, which demonstrates organised workers' continued willingness to take up the fight against both the bosses and the State (itself a large employer). While workers won their main demand for the lock-out clause to be dropped from the constitution, they lost their demand for the private property clause to be dropped.

Q. What are your impressions of rank and file militancy in South Africa at present? Much of the COSATU leadership are tied to the ANC — I realise that — but what is the grass-roots organisation like?

A. The unions and union federations, especially COSATU, continue to be one of the most powerful forces, apart from the State and capital, within South Africa. This is despite a concerted media campaign portraying organised workers as 'an elite'.

Just to give some background: There is a high level of unionisation — about 60% of the workforce (outside agriculture) are unionised. There are five main union federations in South Africa, the most important of which are the ANC aligned Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU); the

However it needs to be noted that since the start of the 1990s, the ANC has shifted from a welfarist mixed economy position to an increasingly blatant free-market or neo-liberal position. Its main idea is that if we all participate in making the economy grow, by, for example, accepting low wages and unsafe working conditions, the bosses will get richer, and a few crumbs will eventually fall to the poor and the working class. On several occasions Mandela himself has told workers to "tighten their belts" in order to facilitate economic growth. Therefore the ANC-led government blames limited economic growth, the country's inability to compete globally and low worker productivity for their failure to deliver.

Q. So lots of promises before the elections but little of any substance afterwards? It sounds familiar.

A. There has definitely been a lot of disappointment on the ground. The RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) is a bit of a joke, and the politicians have gone to pains to stave off criticisms that nothing has happened. They point to a few projects here and there where there has been electrification or the like.

Unfortunately, disappointment does not always translate into anger. Instead, there is a definite tendency towards demoralisation and political apathy on the part of the working-class. Struggles do continue to break out — that is inherent in a racist-capitalist system — but these are often fragmented, and also often trapped within the symbols and traditions of mainstream organisations like the ANC. This reflects the absence of a clear ideological alternative.

Q. How have the South African Communist Party reacted to the ANC's imposition of austerity measures and to the lack of wealth re-distribution?

A. The SACP remains a very loyal partner to the ANC. In fact they have argued that they are the left wing of the ANC and boasted at their 75th anniversary that their policies are the same as those of the ANC "only five degrees to the left"! But in

practice the SACP has accepted a two stage theory of socialism since the 1920s. They consider the ANC government to be in the process of the so-called “National Democratic Revolution” which is seen as a necessary step towards socialism. As a result the SACP does not really offer any fundamental criticism or alternative to the ANC. SACP members on the whole are fairly demobilised and direction-less at present; when they are active, it’s basically to support ANC reforms which are seen as inherently progressive and as laying the basis for more radical change later.

As for socialism itself? The SACP lacks any clear vision of a non-capitalist society right now. Its latest policy documents claim that there will be no rupture between capitalism and socialism — one will just sort of slide into the other through the “deepening of democratic reforms”. Clearly, the SACP has moved from a Stalinist position to social democracy (although of course it denies it!).

Q. It would seem from what you are saying that the position of the large majority will probably worsen in the coming years. Even relatively minor reform appears to have stalled.

A. We have no illusions that capitalism is going to help the workers and the poor out — that must be emphasised. Capitalism, in its racist apartheid form, was the main cause of the conditions that the majority of the population live in. Capitalism in South Africa was built on the genocide, enslavement and super-exploitation of the Asian and African people of this country. It is impossible to deal with the massive inequalities within South Africa through the market, that is, without radically transforming society. It is only with an economy geared towards people’s needs, rather than profit, that we will be able to solve poverty, the housing shortage, and the supply of essential services, etc. Capitalism and the State are the main cause of racism, and they always create new forms of racism: for example, there are current attempts to whip up a tide of xenopho-

An important exception to these trends has been the student movement in universities and technical colleges. They have remained very militant and students have consistently fought for the transformation of tertiary education. Black students, who are committed to democratic and equal education for all, have not hesitated to take up mass action against the authoritarian university and technical administrations. In the last year, we have again seen students from all over the country take up the battle against on going racism on campus, financial exclusions, and increasing fees. This sort of activity took a very advanced form at the University of Durban Westville (UDW) where students joined with workers and staff in protest against unfair dismissals. The highest point of the UDW struggle was when workers and students successfully expelled the university management and ran the university for 48 hours.

While the ANC claims to recognise that tertiary education needs to be transformed, they have condemned these student protests. Despite this, the South African Student Congress (SASCO), the spearhead of the militant and progressive student struggle, remains very loyal to the ANC. As a result, there are indications that the SASCO leadership is becoming more reformist and that it has accepted the ANC’s reasons for the lack of change within tertiary institutions. For instance, the SASCO leadership have accepted the Education Department’s argument that the government will not be able to provide free tertiary education because there are not enough resources.

The WSF believe that as long as SASCO remains tied to the ANC these reformist tendencies within SASCO will continue to grow. We favour the formation of a broad Black- centred student union by progressive student organisations in place of student structures which function as party wings on campuses.

Q. On May Day last year there was a general strike against the ANC government’s attempts to introduce some laws that would have curbed trade union power. What has been the outcome of this confrontation?

addition, the subsidy is likely to be targeted towards wealthy black farmers and peasants as they are generally regarded by the decision makers as more skilled etc. And land sold on the market will in any case tend to be low quality.

The third, and last, aspect of the land reform programme is “tenure reform”. Basically, what this means is that labour tenants and traditional communities will have more secure rights to stay on the land. While more protection for tenants against the constant threat of evictions is clearly a good thing, this kind of reform does nothing to deal with the basic problems of land redistribution, poverty and women’s oppression.

The WSF believes the land reform policy will deliver almost nothing to the working-class, although it is quite in line with the interests of White farmers, chiefs, and Black capitalists. We need mass organising on the land to fight for better living and working conditions, and to secure land redistribution.

Q. The youth and school students were very militant over the years in the fight against apartheid. How have they dealt with the lack of real change, and with the disappointments of the last three years?

A. Ever since the 1976 Soweto uprising, school students were most certainly a very militant section of the broader working-class and its struggle against apartheid. Unfortunately, the high school student movement has experienced a deep crisis since the elections, and high school organisations, such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the ANC Youth League, are very weak and direction-less today. For example, there are hardly any strongly organised ANCYL branches operating in Soweto today. The student and youth movements are not therefore in a position to adequately respond to the lack of changes. There are some cases of mobilisation and struggle, for example around issues of racist schooling admissions (when joint actions have been organised with teachers’ unions), but compared to previous periods, the overall level of action is minimal.

bia against immigrants from other African countries. Clearly, the solution to this situation is a revolutionary class struggle by the Black working-class and that minority of white workers who adopt progressive positions against the ruling-class, which now of course includes the emerging Black bourgeoisie. That is why we raise the slogan, “Black Liberation Through Class War”.

Q. As a matter of interest how large are class differences within the various colour groups?

A. Class divisions are immense within each race: the richest 20% of African households increased their real incomes by over 40% between 1975 and 1991, whilst the incomes of the poorest 40% of African households decreased by nearly 40% over the same period (These figures come from the Mail and Guardian). A similar decrease in incomes was reported for the poorest 40% of Whites. According to another estimate, the wealthiest 10% of African households have incomes over 60 times those of the poorest 10%, compared to ratios of roughly 30 times amongst Whites, Coloureds and Indians (SA Institute of Race Relations 1996). The idea that all Black people share the same interests and conditions is a myth peddled by the nationalist leaders and the bourgeois press.

Q. What about Cyril Ramaphosa, the former head of the mineworkers union and COSATU? He’s in business now, isn’t he? How has news of this been received in the townships? It must make for a lot of cynicism!?

A. No, there hasn’t been much cynicism concerning Cyril Ramaphosa’s move into business. Ramaphosa has justified his move into the business sector as a step towards “black empowerment”. The notion of “black empowerment” is generally accepted as a means to overcome the apartheid legacy and is broad enough to incorporate a number of different interpretations. The illusions in “our own” bourgeoisie operating in the best interests of the masses are fostered by nationalist politics which claim that race, rather than class is the key division in so-

ciety. His move into business (heavily sponsored by White capital, it should be said) has not been problematic. Like the rest of the rapidly emerging Black bourgeoisie, Ramaphosa claims that his own enrichment is part of Black liberation, and that it will benefit Black working and poor people.

This is nonsense, of course. Capital accumulation can only benefit the few at the expense of the many who produce the wealth in the first place. The WSF is against “black empowerment” which is reserved for black people in the middle and upper classes. This kind of “empowerment” is built on the exploitation of the majority of the Black population – the working-class. “Black empowerment” should mean an improvement in the lives of the majority of black people – that is the poor and the workers. And “black empowerment” for the working-class can only come about through the abolition of capitalism and the State and the establishment of libertarian communism/ Anarchism.

Q. Just to conclude on this particular area. How has the largely White business sector taken to the changes since 1994? I’m talking about the big mine-owners here – the Oppenheimers and so on.

A. The White-dominated business sector love the ANC and Mandela. There was and is a ridiculous illusion amongst parts of the left that capital favoured the historically white political parties and feared the ANC. This is nonsense. The ANC is the party of capital in the very real sense that , firstly, its policies promote business interests and, secondly, a substantial number of ANC leaders (like Ramaphosa and Winnie Mandela) are busying themselves accumulating capital.

Q. Before we go on, you mentioned the land question earlier. Can you tell us a little about this?

A. The land question is a key one. Since 1652, the colonial and apartheid governments have dispossessed the indigenous people of the land in favour of rich White farmers. The bulk of the land, at present, is owned by about 120,000 White farmers.

At the same time, 68% of the rural population (mainly African and Coloured working-class people) live in extreme poverty. Conditions on the farms for the working-class and for other exploited categories such as labour tenants, sharecroppers and the remnants of the peasantry are abysmal. Labour control is extremely violent and unions rare – in fact, unionisation was illegal in the agricultural sector before 1995!

Unemployment in rural areas is also very high, and getting worse as machines are used to replace workers. In the old homelands – now integrated into the rest of the country – land is controlled by chiefs – so-called “traditional authorities” – who use this power to extract labour and taxes from working and poor people. They use their connections with the government to enrich themselves and enforce their rule. Women are denied access to land on the grounds of so-called tradition. And heavy use of chemicals on the “White” farms, and land shortages in the reserves, have led to massive environmental degradation.

Despite these terrible conditions, the ANC’s land reform policy promises to deliver very little. It is totally inadequate. The land reform policy has three main elements. The first is the establishment of a Land Claims Court to allow people dispossessed by racist laws or “corrupt practices” after 1913 to try to claim their land back. The problem with this plan is that about 90% of the land had already been stolen by this point! Also, many people dispossessed after 1913 are scattered across the country and lack documents to prove their claims. Even worse, the government has promised to buy-out the farmers who lose out in the Land Claims Court.

The second element of the reform programme , ironically called “land redistribution”, is based on the so-called “willing-buyer-willing-seller” approach. This means land must be bought on the market when it is available. The State will provide households with a R15,000 subsidy to help buy land. This figure is ludicrously low and will mean that only the emerging Black bourgeoisie will be able to obtain land. In