

# **Who Rules South Africa?**

**An Anarchist/Syndicalist Analysis of the ANC, the Post-Apartheid Elite Pact  
and the Political Implications**

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2012 is the centenary of the African National Congress (ANC). The party that started out as a small coterie of black businessmen, lawyers and chiefs is today the dominant political formation in South Africa. It was founded by the black elite who were marginalised by the united South Africa formed in 1910, and who appeared at its Bloemfontein inauguration “formally dressed in suits, frock coats, top hats and carrying umbrellas”.<sup>1</sup> Today it is allied via the Tripartite Alliance to the SA Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

Can the ANC be a vehicle for fundamental, progressive, social change in the interests of the black, Coloured and Indian working classes (proletariat), still mired in the legacy of apartheid and racial domination? This is what Cosatu (and the SACP) suggest.

But to understand this issue, we need to understand how the ANC fits into the current South African social order and its class character. This paper addresses these issues using an anarchist/syndicalist, red-and-black framework and considers some of the political possibilities that arise.

## **ANC as Bourgeois-Bureaucratic-Nationalist**

This paper argues that the ANC is a bourgeois-bureaucratic black nationalist party; that is, that it represents primarily the interests of both the emergent black capitalists and of the (largely black) state managerial elite: top officials and politicians, judges and military leaders.

The term “bourgeois-bureaucratic” is to be preferred to the term “bourgeois nationalist”, as the latter ignores the state elite’s specific class nature. Its black nationalism entails, first, the ideological myth that all blacks, regardless of class, have a common interest; second, a practical stress on the primary interests of the black elite, through a concrete programme of elite empowerment.

As the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin recognised, this sort of postcolonial elite is simply a “new bureaucratic aristocracy”, drawn from the former heroes of national liberation: the “iron logic” of their position makes them “enemies of the people”<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the myth of common black interests, the black elite is anti-working class, as shown by the ANC’s embrace of neo-liberalism, its support for elitist “Black Economic Empowerment” (BEE) deals for black capitalists and the racism of more than a few ANC leaders.

The elite interests represented by the ANC, which are centred on the state, are largely convergent with those of the private corporate elite, centred on the big private conglomerates. This balance was created in the multi-party Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) negotiations of the early 1990s – yet Codesa was in other respects a “massive advance” for the masses.

## **State + Capital = Ruling Class**

At the heart of the New South Africa is a balance between two ruling class sectors based on mutual dependence: the (largely black) state elite and the (largely white) private corporate elite, allied against the (largely black) working class (as well the Coloured, Indian and white working class). The state elite needs capital accumulation to fund and arm itself; the private elite needs

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<sup>1</sup> P. Walshe, 1970, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the ANC 1912–1952*, C. Hurst Company/University of California Press, pp. 33–4

<sup>2</sup> M. Bakunin, [1873] 1971, “Statism and Anarchy,” S. Dolgoff (ed.), *Bakunin on Anarchy*, George Allen & Unwin, p. 343

the state's power to maintain capital accumulation. For classic anarchist theory, the ruling class has two wings: private capitalists centred on means of production in corporations, and state managers, centred on means of administration and coercion in the state. The two are bound by common interests, but neither the mere tool of the other.

Each wields highly centralised resources, via the state bureaucracy, including state companies on the one hand and large private conglomerates on the other. In South Africa, by 1981, the state and eight private companies held 70% of the total assets of the top 138 companies; today, 10 companies control 50% of Johannesburg Securities Exchange (JSE) capitalisation<sup>3</sup>, matching state monopolies in electricity, rail and so on.

Both ruling class sectors benefit from neo-liberalism, although promoting it for slightly different reasons: for the state elite, it funds the project of state sovereignty and territorial domination in the competitive interstate system<sup>4</sup>; for the private corporate elite, it enables accumulation and exploitation in conditions of capitalist crisis and globalisation. Thus, state and capital are “inseparable concepts ... bound together”, as anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin stressed<sup>5</sup>.

So “inseparable” are they that the corporate elite uses its private wealth to access state power, and the state elite uses its state power to access private wealth. Both ruling class wings share lives of privilege and power: for example, the top 15 earners in South African state companies got R103 million annually (2010), in a country where 50% of the people get 8% of national income<sup>6</sup>.

It is simply incorrect to argue, like the SACP, that “We Need a Massive ANC Victory, so that the People, not Big Business, can direct the Economy!”<sup>7</sup>.

Firstly, the ANC government is allied to big business, and secondly, the state elite does not represent “the people”, but its own class interests. The ANC is part of the problem because it is enmeshed in the state and private elites; it is not the whole problem, since any party in government will end in the same situation.

## 1994 – a “Massive Advance”

Yet the social order created in the Codesa transition was also a “massive advance”: exploitation and oppression still exists, obviously, but legally entrenched white racist rule and a highly authoritarian political system (in which even anarchist texts were banned) has been replaced by legal equality and criminalisation of racial discrimination<sup>8</sup>. Thus, for Bakunin, an “imperfect republic” is a thousand times better than an authoritarian regime, as it means less repression<sup>9</sup>.

Only the most abstract, misleading posturing can present the current system as “white supremacy”<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> R. Southall, 13 February 2012, “South Africa’s Fractured Power Elite,” WISER seminar, University of Witwatersrand, pp. 10–11

<sup>4</sup> Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy” p. 343

<sup>5</sup> P. Kropotkin, [1912] 1970, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” R. N. Baldwin (ed.), Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, Dover Publications, p. 181

<sup>6</sup> Southall, “South Africa’s Fractured,” pp. 12–13

<sup>7</sup> Cover, *African Communist*, 2009, no. 177

<sup>8</sup> WSF, 1995, “1994 Elections: A massive advance for the struggle in South Africa,” *Workers Solidarity: Voice of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, no. 1, p. 1

<sup>9</sup> Bakunin, [1871] 1971, “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,” *Bakunin on Anarchy*, p. 144

<sup>10</sup> By e.g. *Quest for a True Humanity: Selected Speeches & Writings* — Mosibudi Mangena, 1996, Bayakha Books, pp. 47, 56, 65–66, 69, 93–95

In addition to these crucial changes, there is also a powerful, wealthy black elite centred on the state, wielding an Africanised army and police; and the state bureaucracy, perhaps 30% of the economy through the state, which owns banks, Eskom, harbours, rail, transport, mass media, the weapons industry and South African Airways, plus 25% of all land (including 55% in the provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape).<sup>11</sup>

## **Black (and White) Power (for Some)**

The black elite also has a growing corporate presence.

For despite (white) corporate hesitancy on BEE, around a quarter of JSE-listed company directorships are held by people of colour<sup>12</sup>, with the proportion of senior managers in the private sector at 32.5% (2008)<sup>13</sup>. The top 20 richest in South Africa (using disclosed share data) include old white money, like the Oppenheimers, and new black money, like billionaires Tokyo Sexwale, Cyril Ramaphosa, Patrice Motsepe and Lazarus Zim<sup>14</sup>.

Combined with the 25%+ of the economy under state control, it is clear the black elite is far from economically powerless, and it is a myth that the “means of production” are all in white hands, or that the ruling class is mainly white<sup>15</sup>. The ruling class is more than just the capitalists, and not all capitalists are white.

However, as the JSE figures show, the private sector remains dominated by white capitalists, just like the state sector remains dominated by black state managers. This is the basic division in the ruling class, generating secondary contradictions (see below).

## **Class + Race**

Not every black is poor; not every white rich. Class is the fundamental mediator. Cost-recovery is enforced in basic services in poor black areas (see “Municipalities, Service Delivery and Protest”, p. 36). Services and housing here are of very low quality, yet very expensive; grants are small, and their expansion reflects not ANC generosity, but an escalating unemployment crisis affecting 50% of blacks<sup>16</sup>, 25% of Coloureds, 18% of Indians and 7% of whites.

Obviously all whites – including the white working class – benefited from apartheid, and this has had long-term effects. But white South Africa was (and is) deeply divided by class, often violently: consider the strikes of 1913, 1922, 1942, 1979 ... Meanwhile, under apartheid there was a powerful, if subordinate, black elite with state power, notably through the homelands: consider Lucas Mangope of Bophuthatswana and Bantu Holomisa of Transkei.

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<sup>11</sup> M. Mohamed, 29 Feb 2012, “Blacks ‘Own more Than 13% of Land’”, The Citizen

<sup>12</sup> 951 out of 3450 posts: M. Sibanyoni, 10 Oct 2010, “Black Directors Arrive on JSE,” City Press

<sup>13</sup> R. Southall, 2010, “Introduction: South Africa 2010 – Development or Decline?” New South African Review 1, 2010, Wits University Press, p. 11

<sup>14</sup> Southall, “South Africa’s Fractured”, p. 12

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Malema quote, 2009 congress of the SA Students’ Congress: B. Naidu & S. Pliso, 21 Feb. 2010, “How Malema made his Millions,” Sunday Times

<sup>16</sup> Source: NUMSA, Aug 2011, Central Committee Meeting 15 – 19 August 2011, D 1.1

Today, hundreds of thousands of poor whites live in squatter and trailer camps<sup>17</sup>, while state-led BEE means that a small black elite trades on its race “as a means of justifying entitlement”<sup>18</sup>. Unless we take class seriously, it is impossible to explain simple events, such as large-scale white worker participation in the state sector strikes of 2007 and 2010.

No country, not even South Africa, has ever featured universal white privilege and universal black oppression<sup>19</sup>.

## **Incomplete National Liberation**

The ANC state, despite its talk of national liberation, is an obstacle to the full emancipation of the working class.

Why? Because, first, the state/corporate elite can only exist through the domination/exploitation of the working class in general, through perpetuating poverty, subordination and authoritarianism.

And because, second, the conditions of the black, Coloured and Indian working class are deeply marked by an apartheid/colonial legacy in education, housing, health, transport and land that cannot be removed within capitalism or the state system, but only through a new order based on self-managed, participatory, planned production and distribution for needs, not profit and power, and the abolition of social and economic inequality.

That is, the black elite have achieved their national liberation with the capture of state power; it is now an obstacle to the complete national liberation of the black, Coloured and Indian working class – and of the full freedom of the white working class too.

This is the complicated terrain upon which class struggles operate: the gap between classes in black South Africa opened by the 1990–1994 transition. It must be formulated as incomplete national liberation, with a class character.

## **National Liberation Struggle versus Nationalism**

Black nationalism, the official ANC ideology, speaks of a single black interest; it covers the reactionary black elite in the flags of suffering and of struggle. It is mistaken to keep reverting to the easy (but always flawed) black nationalist politics of the 1980s to try and understand the 2000s. Black (like white) nationalism was always flawed, was always an obstacle to completing the national liberation struggle of the black, Coloured and Indian working class.

Two periods of association with nationalist struggle must be distinguished, according to the Chinese anarchist Ba Jin (Li Pei Kan).

Ba argued that in the period of struggle against a nationally oppressive state apparatus, the anarchists are with the nationalists against the regime, but against the nationalists’ programme: they know it cannot deliver complete emancipation, because it maintains class, and so, they “simply want to go even further”.

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<sup>17</sup> Beeld, 6 July 2010, “Wêreld sien Wit Armoede

<sup>18</sup> S. Zibi, July 22–28 2011, “Non-racialism and the Untouchables,” Mail & Guardian

<sup>19</sup> For a general critique of this fashionable American theory: L. van der Walt & M. Schmidt, 2009, *Black Flame: the revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*, AK Press, pp. 303–305.

Then, when the nationalists are in office, the anarchists are against their so-called “good government”, and with the “revolutionary torrent” of the popular classes, as struggles based on unsatisfied demands and needs go beyond the aims the nationalists permit<sup>20</sup>.

## Racism and the ANC

To apply this: if the ANC before 1994 was basically progressive, from 1994 it has become a force for reaction, as has been shown above. To continue to use nationalist politics is disempowering, confusing and positively harmful. It ignores class, creates illusions in the ANC and disguises the true nature of the black elite.

And most dangerously, it easily translates itself into direct racism against the minorities – Coloureds, Indians, whites and immigrant blacks – who make up at least 25% of the population<sup>21</sup>, especially when it is used to deflect blame or promote factional agendas. Endless xenophobic statements by officials, like Julius Malema’s insulting of whites (see “Get Rich or Lie Trying, p. 28), and former government spokesperson and Black Management Forum head Jimmy Manyi’s anti-Coloured racism, are all examples of a deadly tendency (They contradict official ANC policy, that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white”, but show a racist current exists in the ANC).

BEE, being based on a crude racial preference system, continually fosters a climate of racial rivalry.

## Victim Theory

Let us tackle here another problematic approach. While Cosatu and the SACP think that the ANC can somehow serve the people, not big business, some Trotskyists claim the opposite: the ANC government is the tool of big business, either by being bribed (the “sold out its principles” theory), or by having no choice (the “victim” theory).

The “sold out” theory’s flaw is that the ANC has never been anti-capitalist, nor for radical change; it has betrayed nothing. Made illegal in 1960, it turned to armed struggle – but a liberal with guns is only an “armed liberal”<sup>22</sup>. Its aim was only the end of apartheid, not socialism; it wanted “the development of a prosperous non- European bourgeois class”<sup>23</sup>, waging a “basically national” struggle with a vague notion of “economic emancipation”<sup>24</sup>.

Reality is the test, and the ANC in power has shown that “economic emancipation” depends on your class: the “prosperous non-European bourgeois class” forges ahead through BEE and state power, but the black working class lives in slums and clashes with the ANC government’s police in the endless series of “service delivery” protests and strikes.

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<sup>20</sup> Ba Jin/ Li Pei Kan, [1927] 2005, “Anarchism and the Question of Practice,” R. Graham (ed.), *Anarchism: a documentary history*, vol. 1, Black Rose, pp. 362–366

<sup>21</sup> At least 20% excluding immigrant blacks, up to 30% depending on estimate of latter.

<sup>22</sup> S. Christie & A. Meltzer, 2010, *The Floodgates of Anarchy*, PM Press, second edn., p. 92

<sup>23</sup> N. Mandela, in A. Callinicos, 1988, *South Africa: between reform and revolution*, Bookmarks, pp. 64–65

<sup>24</sup> Morogoro statement, 1969, at [www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za)

## Autonomous Power

The victim theory's flaw is that the ANC state wields enormous power through its control of the armed forces and state bureaucracy. It is precisely because of its autonomous power base that it enacts measures (violation punishable by law) like affirmative action/tendering and other BEE measures, and defies private corporate opinion on a host of issues such as foreign policy.

Ongoing criticism of ANC policy in the private media reflects precisely the fact of autonomy – that it is a means to effect change indirectly.

But when the ANC makes concessions, it does so on its own terms. On core issues, like BEE, it will not budge, because it is committed to using state power to grow the prosperous non-European bourgeois class. The ANC often blames “globalisation” for unpopular choices when speaking to the unions, but let us not conflate useful alibis with the facts. States, not anonymous “markets”, enable globalisation through policy reform: the ANC state is no different (see below).

Besides, these conflicts are secondary contradictions, for despite disagreements on BEE's scale and pace, Zimbabwe sanctions and so on, the mutual interests of the two ruling class sectors are profound. They are concretely expressed in a shared programme of South African expansionism, working class containment and neo-liberalism, exemplifying the primary contradictions between the ruling class and the working class.

## Neo-Liberal Autonomy

Every single ANC economic policy in office (not election manifestoes, which are always empty promises) has been fundamentally neo-liberal, including the RDP White Paper (1994), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR, 1996), the Accelerated Growth Initiative – SA (Asgisa, 2006) and the New Growth Path (NGP, 2011). (see “All Geared Up for a New Growth Path, p. 13.)

Again, these show the autonomous power of the state elite – and its proud, active embrace of neo-liberalism.

In 1993, the ANC brokered the country's first deal with the IMF in a decade<sup>25</sup> and adopted World Bank prescriptions in its 1994 election manifesto<sup>26</sup>; note that the country then had no debt crisis (due to its economic strength), nor even IMF/World Bank loans (due to sanctions). The ANC signed the 1994 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on free trade, and then cut tariffs on auto components, clothing, telecommunications and textiles far below the level required<sup>27</sup>. It was the ANC, not the old National Party, that removed the key capital controls, enabling local conglomerates like Anglo-American and Sanlam to become truly multi-national. By 1999, the ANC also removed 75% of exchange controls<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> H. Marais, 2001, *South Africa: limits to change*, Zed/UCT Press, revised ed., pp. 109, 133–134

<sup>26</sup> Notably, the Bank's Rural Restructuring Programme: S. Kariuki & L. van der Walt, 2000, “Land Reform in South Africa,” *Southern Africa Report*, vol. 15, no. 3, p. 20

<sup>27</sup> H. Marais, 1998, *South Africa: limits to change*. Zed/UCT Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 114–115

<sup>28</sup> Marais, 1998, p. 116



## Neo-Liberal BEE

At one level, BEE contradicts neo-liberalism by imposing racial regulations in the supposedly open market, and it is resisted by local (mainly white) conglomerates. Yet, this contradiction is partially resolved by the fact that many neo-liberal measures can be used for BEE: the most obvious is privatisation, especially through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), with awards of massively inflated tenders to the well connected (the “tenderpreneurs”). This also takes some pressure off private corporations.

Such compromises work. There has not been any serious attempt by the corporate sector to sponsor a rival party.

Cosatu suggests that the ANC is the party with a “working class bias” and the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) a party of “big capital”, but the ANC openly backs “big capital” and its leaders include billionaires like Ramaphosa and Sexwale, and multi-millionaires like Malema and Jacob Zuma. Moreover, “big capital” contributes heavily to the ANC coffers because, as Zuma admits, “investing in the ANC ... is good value for your money”<sup>29</sup>. The DA is really a coalition of minority voters, small business and white conservatives, with no serious buy-in by “big capital” outside the Western Cape.

## Malema and Elite Factions

The ANC itself is undeniably full of factions, as illustrated by the recent crushing of the noisy but weak Malema faction by the entrenched Zuma faction; an earlier Zuma-Mbeki clash is another case.

But these conflicts have nothing to do with real political divisions or principles; they arise from vicious elite competition for access to the wealth and power provided by high state office itself, like access to tenders. Given the powerful hold of (largely white-run) conglomerates in the private sector, naturally the emergent black elite must rely primarily on state office for enrichment and accumulation. But the state has only so much space – thus the viciousness of the conflicts, paralleling the viciousness of corporate clashes. The ANC is key to getting office, so this translates into a struggle within the ANC.

Marginalised from this “gravy train”, the Malema faction used radical rhetoric and crude racist African nationalism to recruit desperately poor African youth to its side, so as to build a significant base in the ANC. His faction also rewarded rich allies with tenders and bribes. But Malema has now been crushingly defeated, and by the ANC, not whites. (see “Get Rich or Lie Trying”, p. 28.)

The real tragedy is that Malema was able to use the terrible suffering of African working class youth, the direct victims of ANC policies (not least Malema’s family’s shoddy housing and hospital contracts)<sup>30</sup>, to rally support for the ANC and for an ANC faction; that is, for their oppressors. Meanwhile Malema supported crackdowns on the poor: the ANCYL “does not approve of violence and destruction of infrastructure” and is “inspired” by Zuma’s responses<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> SAPA, 19 Sept 2010, “Zuma: ANC donations pay off,” Fin24.com

<sup>30</sup> Naidu & Pliso, 21 February 2010, “How Malema made his Millions”

<sup>31</sup> ANCYL, 6 Aug 2009, “National Working Committee Media Statement,” [www.politicsweb.co.za](http://www.politicsweb.co.za) 32. L. Chilwane, 27 Nov 2008, “Economic Policies to Remain, Zuma Tells US Business,” Business Day

## Illusions of Polokwane

The ANC is not, then, a space that can be contested from within to change state policy in a pro-working class direction, as Cosatu keeps insisting, but is an elite formation manipulating working class movements for elite purposes and factional agendas. We can speculate whether the ANC could have been captured by a radical left in the past, such as the syndicalists like TW Thibedi in the late 1910s. (see “Black Stars of Anarchism”, p. 45.) But that time has passed: the ANC today is not a mass liberation movement, but an integral part of the state machinery, run from above by ruling class cabals.

This is illustrated perfectly by Zuma’s 2005–2007 rise. Cosatu supported Zuma against incumbent president Thabo Mbeki, who it blamed for the ANC’s neo-liberal “1996 class project”. But in office, Zuma acted exactly like Mbeki on policy, in terms of squashing corruption charges, self-enrichment, suppression of community protests and so on. And he stated: “We are proud of the fiscal discipline, sound macroeconomic management and general manner in which the economy has been managed. That calls for continuity.” [32]

The system generates the ANC factions, and the factions are no threat to the system: these are tertiary contradictions, equivalent to boardroom fights in private companies. And because the ANC is a top-down party, run by small cabals of the rich and powerful with enormous state and corporate resources, the prospect of Cosatu calling them to account is less than zero.

## ANC Alliance versus Class Unity

Rather than Cosatu using the ANC to extend working class control over the state, the ANC uses Cosatu (and the SACP) to extend the power of a hostile state against the working class itself. Measures to undermine the working class include the direct co-optation of leaders into top ANC government positions, institutions that systematically bureaucratised the unions like the corporatist National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) and political manipulation through a pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric that presents the ANC as a movement of the black poor.

Two examples suffice: former Cosatu general secretary Sam Shilowa rocketed through the ANC to become a wine-collecting multi-millionaire<sup>32</sup>; SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande was rewarded for his Zuma support with a ministerial job, immediately buying a R1.2 million German luxury car.

Direct consequences of Cosatu’s alliance include a culture among many activists of aspiring to emulate Shilowa and Nzimande, Cosatu’s painful absence from almost every single township struggle against neo-liberal, shoddy state services over the last 15 years and massive working class disorientation.

Recently, the ANC proposed a Media Affairs Tribunal (MAT) and Protection of Information Bill, basically to shield the BEE tenderpreneurs from press leaks by disgruntled rivals and to limit public spats with the conglomerates. Cosatu has officially criticised the MAT and the bill, but the SACP leadership (which has a huge role in Cosatu) has been co-opted to claim the private media is the “greatest threat to democracy”<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> e.g. interview: J.T. van Zyl, Nov 2008, “Mbhezima Shilowa,” Wine: a taste of good living

<sup>33</sup> S. Grootes, 18 Oct 2010, “Blade Nzimande’s Ever-increasing Loneliness,” Daily Maverick

## Working Class Bias”?

The ANC has no “working class bias”, as Cosatu insists to justify the Alliance, but as a party of the ruling class, has nothing but a “class bias” against the working class.

Yet the ANC retains a mass working class base; let us have no illusions, nor engage in the fantasy that widespread township protests over the last 10 years are a “general urban uprising” against the government<sup>34</sup>.

These myths generate severe misreadings of the social terrain.

True, total, audited ANC membership is only 700 000<sup>35</sup>, compared to five million in unions, and true, only 25% of the eligible voting age population votes ANC<sup>36</sup>.

However, the ANC faces no serious political rivals. Low votes are mainly due to people not voting in ANC township strongholds, not widespread political opposition. Where leftwing movements run candidates, like Operation Khanyisa Movement (OKM), these are regularly defeated: merely one out of 109 Johannesburg Metro councillors (2006, 2011) is OKM, despite vast efforts.

## Ideas Matter

So long as the political subordination of the working class to the ANC, and therefore to the ruling class, continues, the working class is trapped. The working class struggle, including the struggle for the national liberation of the proletariat, cannot be waged through the ANC.

Notions of an imminent rupture in the Alliance are dangerous delusions. Many people are suffering, and many even fight against ANC policies and councillors, but they do not reject the ANC as such – usually only corrupt councillors, long housing waiting lists and etcetera.

A real break requires an ideological break with ANC symbols and myths. Without the widespread influence of alternative ideas, like anarchism/syndicalism, the situation cannot change.

It is necessary to reject the notion that spontaneous and militant actions are inherently radical, or that a revolution can happen spontaneously. This is not true.

As Nestor Makhno noted, unless the masses have a revolutionary vision, they will simply “repeat the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters”<sup>37</sup>. That is precisely why Malema could use the poor’s frustration to promote an elite agenda, precisely why Zuma could ride Cosatu frustration to the presidency.

No revolutionary ideas, no revolution<sup>38</sup>.

## “Proletarian National Liberation”

However, any application of anarchism/syndicalism to South African conditions must be deeply rooted in recognition of the absolute centrality of the national question. That is:

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<sup>34</sup> e.g. P. Bond, 2010, “South Africa’s Bubble Meets Boiling Urban Social Protest”, *Monthly Review* vol. 62 no, 2, pp. 17–28

<sup>35</sup> P. Naidoo, 23 Sept 2010, “Cosatu in Numbers: membership dwarfs ANC”, *Financial Mail*

<sup>36</sup> J. Saul, forthcoming, “A Poisoned Chalice: liberation, ANC-style,” *Amandla* magazine

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in “Land and Freedom”, *Scottish Anarchist*, number 3, 1997

<sup>38</sup> Bakunin, “The Programme of the Alliance,” *Bakunin on Anarchy*, pp. 249, 250–251; P. Kropotkin, [1909] 1986, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1793*, Elephant Eds., vol. 1, pp. 22–23

1. The profound racial divisions in this society (including within the working class); and
2. The persistence of the national oppression of the African, Coloured and Indian working class through the apartheid legacy.

This is a legacy that cannot be eradicated under capitalism and the state in present conditions.

The SACP and Cosatu hope that the ANC can solve the problem through a “national democratic revolution” based on an ANC-state-led reform of capitalism, and a “patriotic” alliance between the working class and the progressive elite, as a stage towards socialism. Evidently, this does not work.

Historically, an alternative approach was developed by the most sophisticated wing of the anarchists/syndicalists, in China, Cuba, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, South Africa and elsewhere<sup>39</sup>. It may be summarised as the programme of proletarian national liberation, which fuses the struggle against capitalism and the state with the national liberation struggle of the popular classes.

## Black Working Class Pride

This includes: non-racialism and class struggle for the abolition of national oppression, and replacement of hierarchical and colonial elements of cultures with libertarian, humanistic ones. It includes engaging the libertarian elements of African (and Coloured and Indian) cultures (for instance, ideas of communal ownership) and meeting the psychological impact of apartheid and colonialism with an affirmation of black working class pride. Such is part of the project of constructing self-management, equality and freedom, a participatory planned economy, and a South African working class republic<sup>40</sup>, as part of a “great universal and international federation” of humanity<sup>41</sup>. **Footnotes**

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<sup>39</sup> van der Walt & Schmidt, 2009, Black Flame, chapter 10, section on “Imperialism and National Liberation,” looks at this position and the rival “liquidationist” and “purist” approaches

<sup>40</sup> The International, 22 February 1918, “Industrial Unionism in South Africa”

<sup>41</sup> Bakunin, [1871] 1971, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State,” Bakunin on Anarchy, p. 270

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