

Pretoria's Praetorians

Notably absent from the coverage of the continuing upheavals in South Africa by the international "revolutionary" press is any serious consideration of exactly *how* the apartheid state apparatus, overwhelmingly drawn from the ranks of the privileged white minority, can be destroyed. This omission reflects the predisposition of most of what purports to represent Leninism in our time to leave such difficult questions up to the workings of the supposedly inexorably revolutionary "dynamic" of history.

Alex Callinicos, the foremost spokesman on southern Africa for the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), provided an example of such head-in-the-sand "Marxism" when he spoke in Toronto last October. He began by sharply criticizing the class-collaborationist schemes of the African National Congress and pointing to the necessity for workers revolution to smash apartheid. This was all very well, but in the discussion period which followed his presentation he off-handedly dismissed the proposition, put forward by a speaker for the Bolshevik Tendency, that a revolutionary party in South Africa would have to win the allegiance of at least an element of the white population to be able to defeat the South African Defense Force (SADF) in the inevitable military confrontation which would result from any attempted insurrection.

Callinicos suggested instead that the army could be split along race lines, with black soldiers turning their guns on the white officers and ranks at an opportune moment. Would that it were so easy; Callinicos, who has written several competent books on southern Africa, surely knows it is not. The reason he is not prepared to say as much is that this unpleasant fact doesn't go down well in the radical/liberal "solidarity" milieu. The British SWP, which originated as a split from the Trotskyist movement under the pressure of the Korean War, has long been known for its willingness to tailor its politics to what it thinks will "sell."

The white rulers of apartheid have devoted enormous resources to constructing a powerful military apparatus. South Africa is one of the most militarized economies in the world, with "defense" consuming approximately one-sixth of the country's gross national product. The SADF has some 84,000 men under arms, including 53,000 white conscripts. Counting reserves, the SADF can field a modern and well-equipped army of 400,000 on short notice. The SADF has been constructed for the express purpose of defending white

supremacy, and its racial composition reflects this. According to one expert "The black component of the total SADF military personnel...appears to approach only 2 percent of the total Permanent and Citizen Forces" (K.W. Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics: Blacks in the South African Armed Forces*, 1983).

By most estimates blacks make up nearly half of the police force, but they are almost entirely concentrated in the lower ranks. Black policemen have limited access to small arms (all arms are dispensed from white-controlled police stations) but heavy infantry weapons, armoured cars, riot trucks and police aircraft are accessible to whites only.

Those blacks who join the police (or the military) generally do so because of the relatively high wages. A black cop can expect to make four to eight times as much as a black miner. In both the police and the military the regime carefully screens all applicants. More importantly, African, "Coloured" and Indian military personnel are traditionally assigned to support duties as drivers, guards, stretcher-bearers, cooks and storemen. One study of the South African military concluded that "non-Europeans form an infinitesimal part of the armed forces. They are given the most unattractive tasks (such as acting as trackers in territory where liberation forces are operating), but they do not have arms, nor do they operate in numbers which could in any way represent a risk to whites" (A. Eide in *The World Military Order: The Impact of Military Technology on the Third World*, 1979). In a potentially revolutionary situation the racist officer caste of the SADF is hardly likely to let black military personnel within sight of the Centurion tanks or Mirage F-1 fighter-bombers.

Paid at about half the rate of whites, frozen in the lower ranks, isolated in battalions that can be deployed far from the barricades, limited in training and access to arms, blacks in the SADF are a marginal component of the repressive apparatus of apartheid. The least that one could expect from any organization purporting to offer a Marxist strategy for the overthrow of the white laager is that it recognize reality. In the present situation—barring a massive and powerful military intervention from outside the borders of the apartheid slave state—the SADF can only be defeated with the active collaboration of at least a fragment of the white conscripts. And this can only be achieved by a revolutionary party built on a program of *class* struggle, in opposition to every variety of class-collaborationism and nationalism. ■