The writing is on the wall

South Africa’s Hope

1987 celebrates a 75-year record of struggle for self-determination by the African National Congress (ANC). Founded in 1912, the ANC was the first indigenous political organisation of resistance to colonial conquest on the African continent; it is one of the ironies of South African history that here, where politically organised national resistance first began, liberation has yet to be won. Yet the long history of the movement places it today in a unique position from which to challenge an increasingly polarised minority white regime. Mature and consolidated, with a broad popular base, the ANC looks, in 1987 more than ever, like the next government of a free, democratic, non-racial South Africa. Below Joanna Coakley presents a factsheet on the history of the ANC and a diary of forthcoming events.

1910 Act of Union between the British and the Boers
1912 The ANC is formed by black professionals and intellectuals, together with the chiefs of the main tribal groupings, to continue the 250 year struggle against conquest. Overwhelming British military superiority means that armed struggle has to be replaced by political and cultural struggle.
1913 The Native Land Act leaves Africans only 13% of the total land mass while retaining 87% exclusively for whites. This, and the threatened introduction of pass laws for women, becomes the focus of ANC activity.
1921 Formation of the South African Communist Party. This joins the issue of class to that of race and begins a long association between the party and the ANC.
1940-48 Increase in union activity and radical politics. Peaceful compliance gives way to a more militant stance. Foundation of the ANC Women’s League and Youth League. Largest ever strike called by miners.
1948 National Party takes power on a ticket of anti-communism and apartheid. White minority power is entrenched and apartheid institutionalised.
1950 Suppression of Communism Act closes down all avenues of political protest. Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign brings together the ANC and the Indian and coloured congresses.
1955 ANC adopts the People’s Charter. This remains today the blueprint for a new order in South Africa.
1956 Women’s March in Pretoria. 20,000 women converge on the union building.
1960 Sharpeville Massacre. 69 people on a peaceful anti-pass law demonstration shot dead and 178 wounded. ANC goes underground.
1961 Acts of sabotage organised against government installations. Emergence of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC.
1963 ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, captured and, after a four year trial, sentenced to life imprisonment. Rivonia Trials used by Mandela as a platform for the ANC.
1976 Soweto massacre. 900 schoolchildren killed in the biggest protest ever. Disturbances spread nationally.
1984 Beginning of the present unrest. The 1980s have seen a tremendous upsurge of black resistance, with a state of emergency being declared by the regime in 1986. The government is being engaged on all fronts – through the trade unions, with the women’s campaign and the school boycotts, in religious organisations, in the rural areas, the Bantustans and the townships – under the ANC umbrella. If their call to isolate South Africa by sanctions succeeds, and is coupled with internal efforts to create instability and insecurity, un gov ernability will, they assert, finally give way to people’s power.

Isolating Apartheid

It has long been argued that economic sanctions and divestment would seriously damage the present regime in South Africa. Yet Margaret Thatcher insists that ‘trade and economic sanctions would only serve to entrench apartheid, increase the risk of bloodshed and inflict severe hardship on black South Africans without bringing a settlement any closer’.

British trade unions are in the forefront of the campaign for the imposition of sanctions and for divestment. At the Transport and General Workers’ Union conference general secretary Ron Todd called for mandatory sanctions, but also encouraged his members to take the matter into their own hands.

The June conference of the General Municipal & Boilermakers Union passed a special motion condemning Britain’s disgraceful sabotaging of international efforts to isolate South Africa economically, and calling for a trade union ban on South African gold and fruit products.

South Africa’s own biggest labour federation, COSATU, has adopted a new strong stand on economic pressure for political change and called for an international embargo on foreign loans.
A Symbol Of Resistance

The ANC emblem has been redone for the 75th anniversary of the movement and now represents in symbolic form its history and central tenets. It incorporates the ANC flag, coloured black for the people, green for the fertility of the earth, and yellow for the mineral wealth beneath. The device of the wheel dates from the drawing-up of the Freedom Charter in 1955, with the four spokes representing the four main national groupings, and its motion, rolling to freedom, symbolises the ANC's goal of a united people developing a new South African nationhood in the process. The fist signifies a fighting people. The spear and shield recall earlier wars of resistance, a tradition continued into the present by Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the people's army founded in 1961.

The Long Road To Pretoria

For 75 years the African National Congress has led the struggle for national liberation in South Africa, and women repressed and exploited by apartheid, have made an important contribution to its work. Today women defy the presence of troops in the townships to demonstrate against continuing detentions, and stage strikes in protest at sexual harassment and the way police ignore the activities of rapists, yet arrest children; they build up alternative structures in women's committees and street committees, to sustain rent and consumer boycotts, and protect communities from state vigilantes.

The ANC Women's League, established in 1943, was a key element in building the ANC as a mass-based popular movement in the 1940s and 1950s, and, as the largest organisation in the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), led the campaign against the imposition of passes on African women, which reached its high point in the march of 20,000 women on Pretoria on August 9 1956, a day commemorated ever since inside and outside the country as South African Women's Day.

The FSAW drew up a women's charter, some of whose clauses were incorporated into the Freedom Charter. When the ANC was banned in 1960 it was impossible for the Women's League to organise openly. Some of its leading members were detained, banned or forced into exile. Within the external mission of the ANC the women's section continued to campaign against apartheid and for the emancipation of South African women.

The mass democratic women's organisations inside South Africa, which have continued into the present by Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the people's army, founded in 1961.

Calendar Of Events

Sunday August 9: South African Women's Day All day festival in Finsbury Park, London N4, 11am onwards, with Angela Davis from the USA, ANC Women's Committee members from Africa. Creche, stalls, live music, food, bar, videos, entertainment. Admission £2. Details 01 881 3000 x3286.

Wednesday August 26: Namibia Day Anniversary of the launch of SWAPO's armed liberation struggle in 1960.

Monday 7 - Sunday September 3: Sasis Week of Action Events around the country to draw attention to increasing apartheid. Key dates are:

Thursday September 10: Save the Sharpeville Six. Date of the appeal by Theresa Ramashamola and her five companions against their death sentences in South Africa.

Saturday September 12: Tenth anniversary of the murder in detention of Steve Biko. Memorial service in London on Sunday September 13, Westminster Cathedral Conference Centre, Margaret Terrace, SW1, followed by a vigil for the Sharpeville Six. For full details contact Chive Nelson at AAM. Tel: 01 387 7966.

Friday September 11: Local authority seminar on Namibia, Edinburgh. Hosted by Edinburgh district council for the national steering committee on local authority action against apartheid.

September 14: International Week of Action on Shell Special emphasis on the role of local authorities in the Shell boycott, with demonstration outside Shell House on Wednesday September 13.

CONTRIBUTORS

Malcolm Rutherford is assistant editor and political analyst of the Financial Times.

Mike Davis is an editor of Year Left: American Socialist Yearbook.

Eric Hobsbawm is a member of Marxism Today's editorial board.

Hywel Francis is a member of the Communist Party and Marxism Today's editorial board.

Genista McIntosh is senior administrator at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Esther Saraga and Mary MacLeod are both senior lecturers in the Department of Applied Social Studies at the Polytechnic of North London, and have recently established a Child Abuse Studies Unit there.

Peter Glotz was until recently general secretary of the German SPD.

Donald Sassoon is the author of Contemporary Italy (Longman) and is currently working on a book on the European Left for IB Tauris.

Robin Cook is Labour MP for Livingston. He has recently been elected to the Shadow Cabinet.

Marge Piercy is a novelist.

Maxine Margolis is a postgraduate student.

Ralph Pigden is a journalist and critic based in Edinburgh.

David Edgar is a playwright and a member of the National Theatre's editorial board.

Richard Eyre takes over as director of the National Theatre next month.

APARTHEID Don't Buy it!

‘Sanction Pledge' signatures will be presented to MPs at a lobby of parliament. Details from Dave Cook. Tel: 01 251 4406.

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Saturday October 24: AAM national demonstration for sanctions, London. Assembly 12 noon Embankment. March to Hyde Park for 3pm rally. Chief speaker: Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO. Details 01 387 7966. Wales AAM support demo in Cardiff, contact 0222 499/769 for details.

Official dates of the Women's Day.

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