



South Africa, one of Africa's richest countries, lives beneath the cloud of racist apartheid ideology, which has a great defender in Prime Minister Balthazar Vorster.

Following the fusion of the four South African provinces—Cape, Natal, Transvaal and the Orange Free State—in 1910, the subjugation and exploitation of Africans was reasserted with the establishment of a society of British mine owners and white Boer farmers.

At the time the Nationalist Party (white) took power in May, 1948, apartheid was legally defined and reached new heights. For South African racists, the African "is a being essentially different and immutably inferior."

This regime, based on the exploitation of races considered inferior by another race, limits the Africans to 13% of the land area. Thirty-two percent of the African population lives in bantustans. In order to ensure a source of cheap manpower, the racist regime has enacted labor legislation preventing an African from going into any

## apartheid's prisons

city unless he is steadily employed there; he must have a permit stamped on his pass-book and another permit to leave his place of origin.

Due to this abominable system, numerous Africans are arrested for failing to have a pass-book or for not having his papers in order, and sent to areas where there is a manpower shortage. Most of the time their families hear nothing from them for months.

Repression is the main weapon of the apartheid regime: raids, imprisonment, persecution, bans and tortures are the means used to silence all those who dare to fight back or rebel.

Since the Sharpeville massacre of March, 1960, the number of political prisoners has increased shockingly. During the state of emergency that followed the massacre, a rising wave of mass arrests engulfed the country. That same year, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) were outlawed. This served as a pretext for additional arrests. Any organizations—even the so-called liberal ones—which were



not intrinsically in agreement with the policy of apartheid or which tried to bring about any change whatsoever in the system was outlawed or forced almost out of existence.

This process began in 1950 with the passing of the "Suppression of Communism Act" and the outlawing of the Communist Party. Ever since then, the racist government has been brutally persecuting the non-white nationalist organizations, including some political groups that showed sympathy for the Africans.

In view of the fact that the national movements are illegal and that any policy against racial segregation is viewed with disfavor, any pretext—even the most insignificant and preposterous one—is good enough to arrest and convict people.

No definite evidence is necessary to make an arrest. An African may be arrested on the slightest suspicion and imprisoned for months without having any charges brought against him.

During his stay in prison he is submitted to physical and mental tortures. Others may have to wait years before their case comes to trial.

Racist laws give the courts full authority to convict and sentence at whim. Thus, an African defendant who has attended a meeting of the ANC and made a small contribution to the organization, may be convicted on four charges:

- 1) for being a member of the ANC;
- 2) for attending an illegal meeting;
- 3) for supporting the activities of the ANC, and 4) for contributing to the ANC funds.

Political prisoners can be sure that in most cases they will not be released, even after serving their terms. Nationalist leader Robert Sobukwe, after serving his term, was arrested again under a clause of the Amendment Act that stipulates that the imprisonment may continue as long as the racist regime considers it convenient.

Most of the political prisoners—whether Negroes, Mestizos or Asians—are imprisoned in Robben Island, a "devil's island" located seven miles off Cape Town. Conditions are miserable there. About 60 to 80 people are crowded into each cell. Barefooted, they work at hard labor six days a week.

On Sundays they remain locked up in their cells and come out only to get their food—which is, of course, insufficiently cooked and cold. While working, prisoners are exposed to the elements. The only language used is that of the whip. In addition, they are deprived of food for one or more days for the slightest reason. Visitors and mail are only allowed once every six months. Prisoners are considered as savages and treated as such.

On Robben Island, prisoners are divided into two separate groups: leaders and rank and file members. In the leaders' section are the famous convicts of the Rivonia trial: Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Malaba, Aluned Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni and many others.

Nelson Mandela, a lawyer, the main defendant at Rivonia, was serving a five-year sentence for "inciting to strike and leaving the country without a permit or passport" in April 1964, when he asserted, during his self-defense, that he was unequivocally one of the founders of the Umkonto We Sizwe (The Nation's Spear), the armed branch of the African National Congress.

The son of an African chief of the Tenibu nationality, Nelson was born in Transkei in 1918 and was one of the creators of the ANC Youth League. In 1952 he was elected president of the movement's section in Transvaal and was the main organizer of the "Challenge Campaign." Afterwards, the racist regime forbade him to participate in meetings and denied him the right to speak in public, also limiting his movements to Johannesburg for a period of two years.

After the so-called High Treason Trial, during which every human right of the defendants was grossly trampled on, Mandela was elected president of the National Action Council in a conference that took place in Pietermaritzburg. The strike that followed this

campaign was countered by the government with an impressive display of police force. All civil liberties were suspended. Men and women were arrested indiscriminately on the slightest suspicion of having participated in the organization of the strike. In order to escape the racist police, Mandela went underground.

During that time he attended the conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECSA) in Addis Abeba and took that opportunity to meet with various African heads of state. Discovered and arrested upon his return to South Africa, he was sentenced for inciting African workers to go on strike in March, 1961, and for leaving the country without a permit or passport.

In 1964 he was taken from prison to the court house as the main defendant in a trial for conspiracy to overthrow the racist regime by means of a revolution and by force of arms. He and other defendants in the Rivonia trial were sentenced to life terms on Robben Island.

Up until the Sharpeville events, the African nationalist parties tried every means of peaceful struggle. But the South African government is a violent tyranny that responds to this peaceful struggle with increased repression. Convinced that it was useless to go on as before, the ANC reorganized its ranks so as to fight under the most difficult conditions.

Years of continued effort are now bearing the first fruits: the joint guerrillas of the ANC and the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU and ZANO), following a coordinated strategy, are at present courageously fighting against Ian Smith's illegal and racist regime in Rhodesia and are demonstrating that the revolutionaries of the southern tip of Africa are fully aware of the role that they must play in the history of their countries.

Quoting Nehru, Nelson Mandela once stated: "The road of freedom is not an easy one and many of us will pass through the valley of the shadow of death over and over again before we reach the summit of our aspirations."

The road opened in Rhodesia and leading to South Africa is not a smooth one, but it is the only way that leads to definitive victory.