



Neo-Apartheid State Stokes Anti-Immigrant Rampage

For Workers Defence Guards to Defend Immigrants!

13 SEPTEMBER—A new wave of deadly anti-immigrant pogroms is engulfing the racist hellhole that is neo-apartheid South Africa. In the first week of September, anti-immigrant mobs looted and burned the shops of foreign nationals in parts of Johannesburg and surrounding townships; numerous foreign truck drivers were attacked along routes from Johannesburg to Durban; and hundreds of immigrants were driven from their homes in places like Marabastad, where taxi operators fire-bombed a shack settlement inhabited mainly by Zimbabweans. In Katlehong, east of Johannesburg, one Zimbabwean man, Isaac Sithole, was beaten and burned to death by a mob that chased him and more than a hundred others from their homes, leaving at least one other burnt corpse in its wake. In Gauteng Province, conservative estimates are that twelve people were killed in the first week of September as a result of the anti-immigrant rampage. Hundreds of people from Nigeria, Mozambique and other countries are being repatriated.

Immigrant communities around Johannesburg, joined in some places by supportive locals, have been mobilising to defend themselves. We strongly support efforts to organise self-defence against the anti-immigrant mobs. What's urgently called for is the formation of workers defence guards, made up of class-conscious workers including immigrant, black South African, coloured, Indian and anti-racist white workers, to bring the social power of the trade unions to bear in defence of immigrants.

The xenophobic attacks not only are a deadly threat to immigrants, but also strike at the class solidarity of this country's mainly black proletariat, which is facing a major onslaught of union-busting and privatisation from the capitalists and their government. Forming workers defence guards based on the trade unions would cut through the murderous national, racial and ethnic divisions among the oppressed. Combined with a struggle to organise the unorganised, especially vulnerable layers like immigrant

workers, and for demands like jobs for all through a shortened workweek at no loss in pay, this could inflict a real blow against the racist capitalist rulers. Capitalism is the source of the hideous oppression, misery and desperation that are fertile ground for the reactionary anti-immigrant mobs. The workers movement has a vital and direct interest in taking up the fight for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants! No deportations!*

The bourgeois media and politicians try to portray the attacks as coming out of nowhere, or even absurdly deny that they are fuelled by anti-immigrant chauvinism. This cynical hypocrisy is aimed at wiping the bloody stains off the "Brand SA" marketed to international investors. In reality, anti-immigrant pogroms are as much a part of the "Brand" of neo-apartheid capitalism as is the brutal oppression of the black masses epitomised by the Marikana massacre of August 2012. Both are necessary parts of maintaining the class rule of the Randlords and carrying out the dictates of imperialist finance capital—the job of the bourgeois-nationalist ANC and its Tripartite Alliance partners. *Break with the Tripartite Alliance! For a black-centred workers government, part of a socialist federation of Southern Africa!*

In crying for the state to restrain the anti-immigrant mobs and restore the "rule of law", the capitalists' propaganda hacks are now trying to cover up the fact that it was the armed thugs of the bourgeois state—cheered on by the media—that gave the green light for the mobs to attack in the first place. Throughout August, a pogromist frenzy was whipped up by the main media houses and bourgeois parties, with the ANC and the white-racist Democratic Alliance leading the charge. The hysterical orgy of anti-immigrant demagoguery was unleashed on 1 August, when street vendors in the Johannesburg central business district (CBD)—many of them immigrants, but also including South Africans—succeeded in repelling a cop raid.

For Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

Instantly, immigrant street hawkers struggling to eke out an existence were proclaimed “public enemy number one”. ANC government officials spewed venom against “foreign nationals who want to turn our country into a lawless banana republic” (Faith Mazibuko) and denounced the CBD vendors as “terrorists” (Khumbudzo Ntshavheni). The ANC’s David Makhura (premier of Gauteng) revived the time-worn racist libel—previously vomited by the DA’s Herman Mashaba (mayor of Johannesburg)—that immigrants are carriers of “Ebolas” and other “funny diseases”. Meanwhile, the bourgeois media beat the drums with slanders about immigrants being “criminals”, “drug peddlers”, overwhelming public services, etc.

Backed up by this chorus of anti-immigrant vitriol, police minister Bheki “Shoot-To-Kill” Cele led a massive anti-immigrant dragnet through the Johannesburg CBD on 7 August. The aim, in Cele’s words, was “to stamp the authority of the state” on the CBD. The cops detained over 600 people, mainly foreign nationals, and confiscated truckloads of goods from small shops and street vendors. In many cases, police refused to even look at the detainees’ immigration papers, or simply confiscated them while carting them off to the police station. Hundreds of people were hauled off to the Lindela deportation centre. Accompanying the police dragnet was an anti-immigrant mob that rampaged through the CBD, smashing cars with foreign licence plates and looting shops while the cops mostly looked on approvingly. Within a week, further bouts of anti-immigrant looting began to break out around other parts of Gauteng, building to the pogromist wave at the start of September.

For Working Class Independence From the Bourgeois State

The cops who harass immigrants are the same neo-apartheid police force that regularly attacks striking workers, including infamously massacring black mineworkers in Marikana; that brutalises protesters fighting for basic services in the townships and rural areas; that beats and evicts landless squatters; etc. In short, together with the courts and the army, they are the core of the capitalist state, which as Lenin taught us is nothing but an organ of class *domination*, an organ of *oppression* of the working class by the capitalist class.

The natural response of class-conscious workers and other opponents of this racist, exploitative system was *cheer* the street vendors who managed to beat back the cops on 1 August. This was a blow against our common oppressor. But this elementary class consciousness has been trampled all over by the reformist misleaders of the working class, who have worked overtime to promote the suicidal illusion among workers that the neo-apartheid capitalist state is “theirs”. For example, Zwelinzima Vavi, general secretary of the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU), responded to the cops’ retreat from the Jo’burg CBD by railing against the informal traders for disturbing “law and order”, tweeting on 2 August: “What we saw in the streets of Johannesburg are acts of criminality. The state came under attack from criminals! The state must stop anarchy and lawlessness—full stop!”

This revolting reaction should come as no surprise. In 2012, Vavi and other COSATU/SACP misleaders denounced striking mineworkers in the same manner during the Marikana massacre. Vavi’s tweet expresses, in a concentrated way, the treacherous programme of class collaboration that has kept the militant black proletariat of this country politically prostrated before its own butchers, the racist capitalist exploiters and their state. Through the Tripartite Alliance, the working-class base of COSATU and the SACP

has been sold out and subordinated to the bourgeois ANC in a nationalist popular front whose whole reason for existence is to maintain and administer neo-apartheid capitalist misery on behalf of the Randlords. Though Vavi, along with the leaders of the metalworkers union NUMSA and other “dissident” affiliates, left the Tripartite Alliance after being expelled from COSATU in 2014, there was never any fundamental political break from the nationalist, class-collaborationist programme that made them an integral part of the wretched Alliance for over two decades.

In a 2 September statement, the SAFTU leadership condemns the anti-immigrant attacks and postures as opponents of “the capitalist system that divides and exploits the black working class”. This rhetoric is just leftist gloss for SAFTU’s whitewash of the bourgeois state, in order to better promote deadly reformist illusions in neo-apartheid. In the same breath, they whine that “the SAPS have their hands full as in any case they can’t protect ordinary South Africans from the rampant criminals on a daily basis”—as if “protecting ordinary South Africans” was the job of the bourgeois cops!

Over 200 truck drivers, mainly from neighbouring countries, have reportedly been killed in attacks since March 2018. Yet the tops of the COSATU-affiliated transport workers union, SATAWU, one of the largest unions in the sector, have done nothing to mobilise the union against this anti-immigrant terror, which ultimately threatens its own members. The leaders of COSATU, just like those of SAFTU and other union federations, have done nothing but pay lip service to organising vulnerable and immigrant workers into the unions. Instead, the COSATU and SAFTU tops promote reliance on the racist neo-apartheid police thugs, who they even recruit as members along with security guards and prison guards.

The fight to mobilise the power of the unions in defence of immigrants and other vulnerable layers is inseparable from the political struggle that must be waged against the reformist trade-union bureaucracy, centrally for the independence of the workers movement from the bourgeois state. *Cops, prison guards and security guards out of the unions!* It is during hard *class struggle* that workers have managed to break through the poisonous national and racial divisions. For example, during the 2012-13 wave of wildcat strikes in the Western Cape striking farmworkers had to confront not only violent repression from the cops but also attempts by the bosses and their government to drive a wedge between immigrant and South African workers.

With real unemployment close to 40 percent and economic growth close to 0 percent, immigrant workers and small traders from other parts of Africa and the Indian subcontinent are offered up as scapegoats for the wretched poverty and grinding national oppression that the black majority continues to suffer 25 years after the end of formal apartheid. This is the classic tactic of “divide-and-rule”, inherited from colonial/apartheid butchers like Cecil Rhodes and Hendrik Verwoerd. In neo-apartheid South Africa, capitalism is based on the superexploitation of the black proletariat, and the racial hierarchy remains fundamentally intact—with whites on top, Indian and coloured people in intermediary positions, and black Africans on the bottom.

Since the 1990s, we have repeatedly warned that if the seething discontent of the masses does not find expression along *class lines*, it will fuel and embitter every other kind of division. Under neo-apartheid, the aspirations of *all sections* of the oppressed continue to be bitterly frustrated. As happened during previous anti-immigrant pogroms, the current wave of xenophobic attacks has been accompanied by violence along tribal and racial lines targeting South African citizens. During the police raid of the Jo’burg CBD

on 7 August, two women of mixed-race background were also caught up in the anti-immigrant dragnet by bigoted, chauvinist cops who decided that they “smell Ethiopian and they look Ethiopian too”. As one of the women bitterly remarked, “The hatred for foreign nationals is appalling and the fact that they discriminate by just looking at people, it is exactly like the apartheid era.”

Among the ANC’s bourgeois political opponents, only the nationalist populists of the Economic Freedom Fighters posture as opponents of divide-and-rule. For example, EFF leader Julius Malema tweeted in early September: “Our anger is directed at wrong people. Like all of us, our African brothers & sisters are selling their cheap labour for survival. The owners of our wealth is white monopoly capital; they are refusing to share it with us & the ruling party ANC protects them.” But the EFF, no less than the ANC, is committed to the maintenance of the very capitalist system that is at the root of both the oppression of the black masses and the murderous divisions among the oppressed. The main difference is that the EFF is not (yet) in power, and so can afford to make populist promises about forcing white monopoly capital to “share” some more of the wealth. To obscure the bourgeois class interests they pursue, the EFF takes advantage of the oppression of the black majority to peddle the nationalist lie that all black people share common interests that trump class divisions. At the same time, the EFF promotes its own brand of divide-and-rule, seeking to re-direct the anger of black South Africans toward *Asian* immigrants and South Africa’s Indian minority. Like all bourgeois parties, its “principles” are extremely flexible: the EFF has not let the noxious racism and anti-immigrant raids of Jo’burg mayor Herman Mashaba and the DA prevent its councillors from installing and keeping Mashaba’s DA-led local government in power since 2016.

For our part, we fight for a black-centred workers government to expropriate the bourgeoisie. This is the only way to put an end to the racial, ethnic and tribal divisions among the non-white peoples, all of which are endemic to South African capitalism. To combat the murderous divisions among the oppressed, communists put forward a programme to advance the vital objective interests that the various sections of the working class have in united struggle against their common enemy—the racist capitalist ruling class. Thus, we link the calls for workers defence guards against the anti-immigrant mobs, for full citizenship rights for immigrants and no deportations, to demands that highlight the burning needs of the working class as a whole: for organising the unorganised; for smashing the parasitic labour brokers; for jobs for all through a shorter workweek at no loss in pay; for massive wage increases to combat inflation; for free, quality healthcare and affordable, quality, integrated housing for all.

For a Leninist-Trotskyist Vanguard Party!

As the current attacks grimly highlight, the class unity of the proletariat in South Africa is not going to magically arise out of growing mass discontent—it must be *fought for*. This means in particular fighting *politically* to draw the lessons from past defeats, particularly from the betrayals of the workers’ leaders who continue to prop up neo-apartheid. Chief among these lessons is the absolute necessity for the political and organisational independence of the proletariat from all bourgeois forces—ANC, DA or EFF. This means fighting to break working-class militants from nationalist false consciousness and win them to a genuinely revolutionary, internationalist programme.

Many of the reformist leftists who previously supported the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance are now trying to cobble

together an alternative popular front. For example, the leaders of SAFTU complain in their 2 September statement about the weakened state of the trade union movement, only to call for unity of “all progressive political formations of the left”—a class-collaborationist “broad church” that could easily include the EFF.

In fact, it’s the likes of SAFTU leader Vavi, NUMSA leader Irvin Jim and Co., who bear primary political responsibility for the demoralisation of the working class. As loyal servants of the bourgeois Tripartite Alliance, for two decades they did their utmost to sabotage and betray countless workers struggles. Today, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) of Irvin Jim makes abstract calls for workers to unite instead of turning on each other, and even proposes defence committees to defend immigrants. But the SRWP, whose chairperson Jim is also general secretary of NUMSA, the largest union in the country, has done nothing to mobilise this potent social power, and in fact doesn’t even mention the existence of the trade unions in their statement! This is no oversight, but reflects the fact that the leadership of the SRWP upholds the same class-collaborationist programme as when they were in the Tripartite Alliance. The SRWP campaign for the May general elections left open the possibility of entering government coalitions with bourgeois forces like the ANC and EFF, and the SRWP leadership refused to respond to our 23 April Open Letter requesting that they clarify their position on such coalitions. For this reason, we of Spartacist/South Africa held that there was no principled basis for giving their campaign any support, however critical.

Our perspective is forging a racially integrated vanguard party, rooted in the black proletariat, that can intervene and fight for revolutionary leadership among all sections of the oppressed. We have consistently fought to raise the proletariat’s consciousness of its vital interest in defending the oppressed, particularly immigrants. Our model is the Bolshevik Party that, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, led the working class to power during the 1917 October Revolution. This party was built through an unceasing political struggle to *break from* the opportunists and conciliators of the bourgeoisie. Lenin fought for the strict independence of the Bolsheviks from all bourgeois forces, while simultaneously forging the closest possible unity among the proletarians of the different nationalities. The importance of this was highlighted by the Russian proletariat’s response to anti-Jewish pogroms, which in tsarist Russia had been one of the chief weapons in the autocracy’s repression of the revolutionary vanguard. At the height of the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Tsar threatened to “drown the revolution in Jewish blood”, unleashing

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the pogromist Black Hundreds mobs. Within hours, the Petrograd Soviet mobilised some 12 000 armed workers to defend the Jewish minority.

For a Socialist Federation of Southern Africa!

The borders between the countries of Southern Africa, as in the rest of the continent, were not determined by the natural development and sentiments of the tribal and ethnic groups inhabiting the region, but by the schemes of imperialist looters and mass murderers like Cecil Rhodes. These borders dismember whole peoples, such as the Ndebele, Tswana, Sotho, Ovimbundu and many others. The hysterical frenzy of the ANC and other demagogues about “our borders” is yet another testament to the utter incapacity of the bourgeois-nationalist forces to put an end to the national oppression brought by colonisation. To do that requires the leadership of a different class, the proletariat.

The proletariat of South Africa—which the workers of neighbouring countries have been inextricably woven into

ever since the beginnings of the migrant labour system—is the key to liberating not only the downtrodden masses in this country, but those of the entire region groaning under neo-colonial misery. Immigrants from countries throughout the region working and/or staying in South Africa represent the potential human bridge connecting the proletarian revolution against neo-apartheid capitalism to revolutions throughout the region. There *is* an alternative to the dog-eat-dog world of murderous divide-and-rule under imperialist domination. The fight for a socialist federation of Southern Africa, combined with the necessary struggle to extend socialist revolution to the advanced capitalist countries and establish a collectivised, planned world economy, points the way to lifting the masses out of neo-colonial misery and creating a society in which there will be genuine liberation and equality for all the myriad peoples of the entire region. This is the Trotskyist perspective of Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). ■

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