

COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

US State Department Report to Congress

SUMMARY

The following report is in fulfillment of section 589 of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of October 2, 1986, which requested that the President transmit to Congress a report on the activities of the Communist Party in South Africa, the extent to which communists have infiltrated black and nonwhite South African organizations engaged in the fight against the apartheid system, and the extent to which any such communist infiltration or influence sets the policies and goals of the organizations with which they are involved. The President's Executive Order (No. 12571) of October 27, 1986, delegated to the Secretary of State the authority to complete this report.

The South African Communist Party, banned since 1950, lacks a mass following but has exercised considerable influence through its alliance with the African National Congress. The SACP continues to view its historical alliance with the ANC as its main hope for winning power in South Africa, although its ultimate agenda for South Africa - rule by a Marxist-Leninist party loyal to the Soviet Union - goes far beyond the Freedom Charter.

The strong influence of the SACP within the ANC began during the civil disobedience campaigns of the 1950s and thus antedates the current near-total dependence of the ANC on the Soviet bloc for military assistance. Party members are strongly represented in the ANC hierarchy.

At the same time, the SACP is only one element, although a very important one, of the coalition of interests represented in the ANC. The ANC and SACP are also far from being in a position to control the growing political and trade union activity within South Africa.

SACP interests are served by an inflexible South African attitude towards negotiations with the ANC, by isolation of the ANC from contacts with western governments, and by the ANC's focus on increasing military pressure on South Africa. Should broader options become available for the ANC leadership, the question of the extent and direction of SACP influence could become a major issue.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The South African Communist Party (SACP) has been banned since 1950, shortly after the current National Party government took power. It has

since maintained an underground cell organization, but most of its members, especially since the crackdown on opposition organizations after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, have lived in exile. The clandestine existence of the SACP for almost four decades has made solid information on its activities and following inside South Africa difficult to obtain.

The SACP was formed in 1921 as a breakaway from the Labour Party, a socialist party with predominantly white members. During its early years the party viewed the South African situation in an orthodox Marxist framework of class conflict. The SACP championed the rights of white workers against big business - and against attempts to replace them with cheaper black labour. However, the party moved gradually, under prodding from the Comintern, toward a political program that placed priority on fulfilling black nationalist demands and ending white supremacy, while retaining the ultimate goal of a classless society led by a vanguard party. The SACP's increasing involvement in organizing blacks into trade unions and in recruiting black party members (1500 by the time of its 1950 banning), many of whom also joined the African National Congress, reflected a skillful tactical reorientation of party strategy to advance its goals by capitalizing on black dissent. The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), though not formally subject to the party, in practice functioned as its labor arm.

The African National Congress, founded in 1912, was during the early years of its existence an essentially moderate organization dominated by established members of the small black middle class. It was not until the founding of the ANC Youth League in 1944 that a more activist generation of leaders, including communists, joined the ANC. The Youth League stood for a new African nationalism still largely middle class in orientation but impatient with the conservatism of the old ANC. The current old guard of the ANC, including Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, entered political life through the Youth League. Their nationalist instincts led them initially to suspect ANC members affiliated with largely non-black organizations like the SACP. Thus Mandela and Tambo joined an effort in the mid-1940s to remove SACP members from the Youth League.

The coming to power of the National Party in 1948 polarized the country racially and politically, overshadowing differences between African nationalists and communists. The 1952 election as ANC President of Chief Albert Luthuli, later to win the Nobel Peace Prize, made collaboration more feasible, despite Luthuli's strong conservative and Christian orientation. The ANC under Luthuli deemphasized African nationalism in favour of multi-racialism, to be promoted by the moral impact of a peaceful campaign of civil disobedience. The SACP, working clandestinely since its banning in

1950, began to exert significant influence over the ANC, not only through individual party members, but also through the ANC's alliance with SACP-infiltrated colored, white and Indian organizations, such as the Coloured People's Congress, the Congress of Democrats, and the South African Indian Congress, respectively. These essentially front organizations, despite their numerically small followings, were given equal representation with the ANC in an umbrella coordinating council, the Congress of the People, formed in 1954. They were thus able to determine in large measure the course of deliberations leading to adoption of the 1955 Freedom Charter, which to the present day remains the program of action for the ANC and affiliated groups.

SACP members played a significant role in drafting the Freedom Charter, which dovetailed with the Party's longstanding strategy of promoting African liberation as the prerequisite to advancing the socialist cause. The SACP, in adopting the Charter as part of its short-term goals in 1962, stressed that it would only be the first step toward creating a true socialist society. Thus, although some critics of the SACP have accused it of having a hidden agenda behind its opportunistic alliance with the ANC, the SACP has made little effort to hide the fact that its ultimate goal is a Marxist-Leninist state.

The Charter was well designed to appeal to a broad range of people. Its insistence on multiracialism and the full participation of non-blacks in a liberated South Africa appealed to non-Marxist white opponents of apartheid and also to the largely white and Indian members of the SACP who hoped to transcend racial conflict through the class struggle. The Freedom Charter held no brief for an orthodox Marxist revolution. It is a nationalist manifesto focused on the issues of self-determination. Mandela interpreted the Charter's call for nationalization of the banks, gold mines and the land as essential to opening up economic opportunities for the black middle class. In this, it resembled nationalist policies elsewhere in Africa.

The SACP's network of contacts in the labor movement, coordinated through SACTU, remained largely outside the scope of its relationship with the ANC. The tight organizational interlocking between the ANC and SACP that became evident after 1960 had not yet developed, despite the prominent role of individual SACP members in ANC policy-making.

There is no evidence that during the 1950s the SACP tried to recruit new members on a large scale. As a banned organization, on constant alert against police attempts to infiltrate informers, the SACP has long eschewed efforts at mass organization in favor of a strategy of influencing and directing other groups.

A small elitist SACP allied to a larger and more diverse ANC fits the

Soviet conception of how to influence events in South Africa. An ideologically pure SACP loyal to Moscow is a more readily controllable instrument for Soviet influence in the ANC than a SACP with pretensions to a mass following. Moscow long has shared the SACP's assessment of the ANC as the major potential catalyst for political change, and it hopes to steer the ANC in directions favourable to Soviet interests. However, the Soviets also are aware of the broad range of views in the ANC. Moscow has learned that it will be no easy task for the SACP to gain ascendancy in such a diverse organization as the ANC.

SHARPEVILLE

The influence of SACP members was decisive at another turning point in ANC history, during the period of banning and incipient guerrilla activity in 1960-63. A police massacre of black protesters at Sharpeville in 1960 unleashed a three-year cycle of violence and repression. The ANC and other black nationalist organizations were banned, and a nationwide state of emergency was imposed for the first time in South African history.

The SACP hoped to profit from the situation. In 1962, in its first public statement after its 1950 banning the SACP called on its followers to work within the Congress Alliance for the first stage of a two-stage revolution. The party also took the lead in organizing an armed resistance movement, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), into underground cells throughout South Africa to undertake sabotage and bomb attacks. The Umkhonto leadership was at first overwhelmingly drawn from the SACP and its affiliated trade unions. Although Nelson Mandela also played a role in its founding, the actual direction of armed resistance was carried out largely by SACP members with little involvement by the ANC leadership.

Effective integration of Umkhonto and the ANC developed only years later, after the police had either detained their leaders or driven them into exile.

POLITICS OF EXILE

Twenty-six years after its banning, the ANC leadership contains many of the same people, and many of the same ideological and strategic issues remain contentious. Oliver Tambo, a former law partner of Mandela who also rose through the ANC Youth League became Chairman and later President of the exiled ANC, maintaining the continuity of the leadership. The position of non-black SACP members was regularized by a 1969 ANC decision to admit them to membership though not to executive positions.

Key issues facing the ANC were typical of those facing any exiled guerrilla movement with no immediate prospects of returning home. It had to

avoid becoming irrelevant to developments within South Africa, maintain channels of communication to sympathizers, reconcile its military and political pressures on the government, seek international recognition, and deal with the role of SACP members and other non-blacks.

The usefulness of the SACP in facilitating ANC access to Soviet-bloc arms supplies and funding grew steadily during the exile years. In addition to military aid to Umkhonto, the Soviet connection assured the ANC a favorable reception by a world-wide network of front organizations that were in many instances well placed to influence international public opinion.

The ANC also began to cultivate 'fraternal' relations with several African 'liberation movements' that also received funds from the Soviet bloc. Some, such as the Angolan MPLA, had the characteristics of a Marxist vanguard party, while others, such as the Rhodesian ZAPU, did not. The ANC also developed links to the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity, and became dependent on Tanzania (and later Zambia) for bases and facilities, independent of its SACP-Soviet ties.

The ANC-SACP alliance was troubled by a strong undercurrent of African nationalism, which in some instances was focused on resentment of the prominence of non-blacks in the ANC; in other instances it took the form of rejection of communism as a non-African ideology. Such feelings played a part in the 1959 breakaway of a faction that formed the rival Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Similar tensions and attempted breakaways continued to trouble the ANC in exile. The most serious unrest, in 1975, resulted in the expulsion or defection of eight leading ANC officials who protested the prominence of non-blacks in the ANC. It is significant that several dissidents in this group had themselves been black SACP members.

As noted, the SACP has adhered to a long-term tactical decision taken in the 1950s to align itself with the ANC as the most promising means of organizing a mass movement against the Pretoria government. Its continuing tactical commitment to Freedom Charter principles is a price it pays for this alliance. Old-guard ANC leaders repudiated indiscriminate terrorism against civilians as repugnant to Christian-ethical principles. Most SACP members also rejected such methods as damaging to its multiracial alliance strategy for transforming the struggle against apartheid into a war against capitalist oppression. Pressure from within ANC ranks for indiscriminate terrorist tactics comes primarily from a younger generation of black militants.

CURRENT SITUATION

The decade following the 1976 Soweto riots has led to new growth oppor-

tunities for the ANC and also led to a gradual and complex shifting of relationships within the ANC-SACP alliance.

The 1975 establishment of MPLA rule in Angola under the protection of Cuban forces for the first time provided a secure regional base for Soviet-bloc military assistance to liberation movements in Southern Africa. Training camps with Cuban and East German trainers were set up in Angola for Umkhonto We Sizwe recruits. Visits to the region in 1977 by Soviet Vice President Podgorny and Cuban President Castro demonstrated their commitment to increase military support for the ANC. The Angolan camps also opened just in time to accommodate many of the South African youths who began to flee the republic in 1976. These developments sharply reduced the value of military aid and facilities provided by the OAU in Tanzania and other African states and reinforced the predominance of SACP members and Soviet/Cuban advisors in the ANC's military councils.

A direct result of the sharply increased scale of military support was a new phase in the ANC guerrilla campaign, beginning about 1980 with a series of spectacular attacks on strategic targets and military personnel. These attacks - e.g., on a nuclear power station outside Cape Town and on military headquarters in Pretoria - gave a badly needed boost to ANC prestige.

The ANC was well positioned to take advantage of the groundswell of black protest - which arose largely on its own - against the 1984 constitution, which undermined continuing South African determination to exclude blacks from central political institutions. This groundswell coincided with the upsurge of black trade union growth in the early 1980s and also resulted in late 1983 in the creation of the United Democratic Front, an umbrella organization including several hundred local groups. UDF leadership included a large contingent of former ANC members, and the government began almost immediately a series of showcase trials of UDF leaders intended to prove that the organization was nothing more than a front for the revival within South Africa of the banned ANC.

SOUTH AFRICAN VIEWS

The position of the South African government with regard to the ANC and SACP has fluctuated, partly on tactical considerations. Pretoria, in justifying suppression of the ANC emphasizes alleged SACP domination. This is for instance, the case with the present state of emergency and accompanying security measures. South African officials have also at times emphasized the supposed conflict of interests between a SACP subservient to Moscow and an 'authentic' African nationalist wing of the ANC.

This second line of the South African government was particularly promi-

ment during 1984-85, when rumors were rife of South African feelers to elements of the ANC. The SACP reacted with alarm. A typical reaction was that of Joe Slovo, a leading white military strategist of the ANC. In a June 1985 speech to the Angolan MPLA Congress, he accused Pretoria of spreading disinformation in order to wean the ANC from its 'unbreakable' alliance with the SACP. The sensitivity of the SACP indicates genuine concern that a more flexible approach by Pretoria could find a favorable reception by elements of the ANC.

CURRENT SITUATION IN THE ANC: ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGY

The ANC's National Executive Committee, at a July 1985 conference in Zambia, began to reassess the new situation created by the unprecedented levels of unrest that erupted in South Africa in late 1984. Several NEC decisions had important implications for the position of the SACP.

The conference admitted non-blacks to full membership, including the right to hold NEC positions. This legitimated the long-standing prominence of many SACP officials in the ANC alliance. The conference in fact elected five non-blacks, all SACP members, to NEC membership.

The conference also acknowledged the working class as the 'ideological lodestar' of the liberation struggle and called for unity within the trade union movement - key elements of the SACP perspective.

The ANC also rejected negotiations unless they were firmly tied to discussing a transfer of power - quieting SACP worries that elements in the ANC might cut a separate deal with the South African government.

The NEC lineup after the 1985 conference gives a rough indication of the extent of SACP influence. Roughly half the 30 members are known or suspected SACP members. Known or suspected SACP members dominate the leadership of Umkhonto we Sizwe and SACTU, but evidence of SACP membership is not conclusive in several cases. Moreover, African nationalism is a strong competitor with orthodox Marxism in ideological appeal.

ANC/SACP LINKS TO THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT (UDF)

Although the SACP has firmly linked its future in South Africa to the fortunes of the ANC, its interests would be enhanced by gaining influence in other groups that work more or less closely with the ANC. These include principally the UDF and the black labor unions that have sprung up in the 1980s, largely without reference to or support from the exiled SACTU structure.

The South African government has charged that the UDF is a front for the ANC and, by extension, for SACP subversion. It also places great importance on countering alleged efforts by SACTU to infiltrate the labor move-

ment.

There is little reliable evidence on the extent of SACP influence within the UDF. This is largely due to the disparate and fragmented nature of the UDF, which has been further disrupted by thousands of detentions since its founding. A number of well-known UDF officials have longstanding ANC affiliations. A clandestine SACP network of probably modest dimensions is believed to exist in South Africa alongside a parallel but distinct network of ANC supporters. Its influence on UDF groups undoubtedly varies from place to place - as does the ANC's. But in general the UDF is characterized by an even wider range of views than the ANC.

The Indians and coloreds who are prominent in the UDF organizations in Natal and the Western Cape appear in many instances to have links to the SACP-oriented groups that played an important role in their ethnic communities before the ANC was banned. SACP influence is probably higher among these groups than elsewhere.

To the extent that a generalization can be made, the influence of the UDF in the ANC tends to weaken SACP influence.

COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

The SACP sees itself as the Leninist vanguard of the working class. However, the labor movement in South Africa has in recent years developed without it. In fact, after the passage in 1979 of the Industrial Conciliation Amendment which gave legal standing to blacks in the government-regulated labor relations system, the SACP-allied SACTU in Lusaka opposed the registration of black unions. Although trade unionists initially also had misgivings over registration and concerns about government regulation and control, black unions now participate fully in the industrial relations system and have grown in size and influence within the constraints of existing law.

It was inevitable that the politicization sweeping the townships should infect the labor unions, despite their leaders' concern to avoid steps that could invite government repression. The formation in late 1985 of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), with UDF blessing and ANC approval, hastened this politicization process.

COSATU is a federation of 33 unions. Its smallest numerical component in worker membership (about 10 percent of COSATU) was from 19 unions closely linked to the UDF and heavily staffed with ANC sympathizers. These unions are mainly general worker unions (not organized on industrial lines) which were expected to dissolve themselves over time, as COSATU affiliates all adopted the industrial union model. The so-called UDF unions have yet to dissolve, and some are widely considered to be a possible conduit for SACTU

influence in COSATU. At present, these UDF unions appear to have influence within COSATU disproportionate to their membership strengths.

COSATU's two largest components are the member-unions of the former Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). FOSATU brought into COSATU a well-trained cadre of unionists, including a number of non-black intellectuals who hail generally from a strain of South African socialism that has evolved away from the SACP loyalties associated in the 1950s with the unions then affiliated to SACTU. On the other hand, certain leaders of the 250 000-strong NUM, COSATU's largest member, share SACTU's hostility to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The NUM has established friendly relations with the International Miners Organization, the Soviet-sponsored alternative to the ICFTU-oriented Miners International Federation.

Many observers divide the COSATU leadership into two factions, a numerically dominant 'workerist' faction (mainly in the FOSATU unions) that favors the continued independence of trade unions and places trade union interests above political activism and a 'political' faction that favors close cooperation with the UDF and the exile liberation movements. Such a tidy division of COSATU factions probably corresponds to a complex reality no more closely than a dichotomy of Communist and non-Communist elements in the ANC. Most COSATU members likely are subject to competing pulls toward political activism and economic unionism.

The question of SACP-SACTU influence on COSATU cannot be resolved by examining the personal affiliation of union leaders. Radical UDF elements, possibly in concert with the SACP or SACTU, have put pressure on COSATU executive members to take positions more extreme than they might prefer. Township radicalization has also resulted in pressure and intimidation exercised against leaders of the other major black labor federation the Congress of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), which has steered clear of overt affiliation with the UDF or the ANC.

Powerful moderating forces - including the fear of police repression, but also the concern of the union rank and file that excessively radical union activities could threaten their economic gains - will continue to weigh against COSATU's links with the ANC.

Broadly speaking, SACTU's goal is to steer South African unions away from affiliation with Western labor organizations. However, SACTU is far from control or even significant influence over the internal affairs of COSATU or most of its member-unions.

PROSPECTS

The SACP continues to view its historical alliance with the ANC as its

main hope for winning power in South Africa although its ultimate agenda for South Africa - rule by a Marxist-Leninist party loyal to the Soviet Union - goes far beyond the Freedom Charter.

The ANC is deeply beholden to the SACP and the Soviet Union (as well as the Soviet-backed MPLA regime in Angola) for the arms and training that made possible the upsurge in guerrilla activity that has boosted its prestige in South Africa in recent years. Dependence on Moscow for military assistance will continue to entrench Party influence in the ANC and its strong representation in the ANC hierarchy.

Both the old-guard ANC leadership, led by Tambo, and the SACP/SACTU leadership will be replaced gradually by the younger generation. The influence of militant young blacks in Umkhonto we Sizwe is likely to grow, but the SACP will not necessarily reap the benefits of this growth, given its lack of a mass base and the widespread nationalist feelings that tend to increase black's suspicions of a party with such close ties to a foreign power. On the other hand, if the prospect for negotiations remains bleak and if a new generation of leaders increases the emphasis on armed struggle, the ANC will likely become still more dependent on Soviet-bloc assistance.

The SACP appears to have little or no influence on political and labor groups inside South Africa. This lack of popular support gives non-communist leaders of the ANC considerable counterleverage against SACP efforts to dominate the group. Nevertheless, SACP members may be able to operate through its ANC connections on groups inside South Africa, over which the party has otherwise little influence, in directions favourable to SACP objectives. Such goals may include pressures on union leaders to concert their activities with UDF militants and to curtail relations with Western labor organizations.

The future role of the UDF and the labor movement in shifting alignments within the ANC alliance remains unclear, but on balance is likely to contribute to diluting SACP influence.

If Pretoria reconsiders its opposition to negotiations or if ANC relations with Western countries (and hopes for recognition by them) continue to improve, serious policy differences could surface within the ANC. The internal stability of the ANC and its main political tendency will be shaped by the extent to which Pretoria tests - or fails to test - its shaky cohesion. If the South African government pursues a purely repressive policy, the ANC will be able to enjoy the luxury of postponing or avoiding the real issues in its own ranks.