



Apartheid, Your Days Are Numbered

The word to describe the upsurge in South Africa during the last few months is "unprecedented." upheaval and fighting with police on an unprecedented scale, unprecedented use of the army against the Black masses, unprecedented political strikes against white rule.

Although white rule in South Africa has faced increasing problems, still both a moment of what passes for calm there and the exigencies of the international situation had led the apartheid government to take some steps to stabilise the situation. Concretely this meant an election scheme to establish two impotent legislatures, one for those the government labels "coloureds" (of mixed African and European ancestry) and the other for the comparatively small number of people of Indian descent. This was designed to neutralise some of these elements and perhaps more importantly to create a political situation in which the western bloc could further reinforce white rule over the immense Black majority while pointing to

apartheid's putative "progress." Even this tiny mask of "democratic" rule which was never intended to provide even the charade of democracy for the vast majority of Africans was itself ripped apart when "coloureds" and Indians mounted successful boycott campaigns against the elections in August.

In a number of Black townships crowds surrounded and drove out the local Black government stooges. There was a spiraling series of confrontations in September and October between Black youth and police when the authorities tried to repress anti-apartheid high school boycotts, which drew in unemployed workers and others in the Black townships as well.

By November the government was forced to send the army into the Black townships, especially in the industrial areas. This was the first time the white regime has been forced to resort to such measures. The army occupied Tembisa, a shantytown for Black workers near Johannesburg, and

Sebekong, 40 kilometres south. Not even during the 1977 Soweto uprising was the fighting against the government so fierce on such a broad scale.

These actions drew in a large number of the Black industrial and service workers on whom South Africa (and imperialism) depend. Very successful strikes shut down many townships. On November 5th and 6th, a general strike was called by the two largest trade union federations, one legalised several years ago by the government in an attempt to separate the question of apartheid from union issues and the other associated with the anti-apartheid Black Consciousness Movement born out of the youth upsurges of the late seventies. These were among the first effective strikes of any kind in recent South African history. In the midst of the strikes there were further army occupations across the Transvaal industrial belt and a number of important violent confrontations. ■