

# South Africa: Sixty Years Anniversary of the Freedom Charter amid Release of Commission Report on Marikana Massacre

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*Events that took place on June 25-26, 1955 in Kliptown, South Africa represented a turning point in the national liberation struggle in that apartheid-dominated state.*

A meeting of several thousand known as the Congress of the People was held bringing together a broad alliance of oppressed groups. Africans, Indians, Mixed-race persons and progressive whites reiterated their determination to rid the country of institutional racism and economic exploitation.

The gathering drafted a program which would carry the struggle for forty years leading to the ascendancy of the ANC to power in 1994. Known as the Freedom Charter, the document called for a transferal of power from the white minority to the African majority through democratic rule and the nationalization of land and natural resources.

This event was held within the context of broad-based struggle against apartheid and settler-colonialism in South Africa and across the continent. In 1949 the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) drafted a “program of action” calling for mass dissent against the system of racist rule.

Later in 1952 women initiated anti-pass demonstrations which expanded into a “Defiance Campaign Against Unjust Laws.” In 1954 the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW or FSAW) was formed bridging the gaps between the African, Indian, Colored and labor movements.

The Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter emboldened the South African masses to continue their struggle for total liberation. The following year on Aug. 9, 1956, 20,000 women marched on the capital of Pretoria demanding the abolition of the dreaded pass laws and other forms of apartheid.

Fearing a more militant and organized movement paralleling other struggles taking place for independence throughout Africa, the racist regime arrested 156 leaders of the Defiance Campaign charging them with treason. A trial lasting for four years failed to win convictions, however, the repression of the state intensified.

In 1960, 69 people were gunned in Sharpeville after burning pass books outside a police station leading to the declaration of a state of emergency. By late 1961, the then banned ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) opened up a campaign of sabotage against governmental infrastructure.

Leaders of the revolutionary movement were driven underground with many leaving the country for neighboring states and countries abroad. It would take another three decades for the release of political prisoners and the ascendancy of the ANC to power in 1994.

### **South Africa Celebrates While Commission Issues Report on Marikana Massacre**

This anniversary was commemorated in South Africa the same week that the Farlam Commission issued a 600-page report on the Marikana massacre of Aug. 16, 2012 illustrating the ongoing contradictions in the post-apartheid society and the role of the working class.

An article published by News24wire in South Africa reported that “The ANC commemorated 60 years of the Freedom Charter on Friday (June 26), less than 24 hours after President Jacob Zuma released the final report on the shooting at Marikana more than two years ago. The event was held at the same site where the Charter was adopted on June 26 1955 in Kliptown, Soweto.”

This same article continues saying “ANC members and supporters gathered in a white tent at Walter Sisulu Square to celebrate the anniversary with some of the party’s top officials and stalwarts. President Jacob Zuma received a rousing welcome from the party faithful, most dressed in ANC T-shirts, who waved and cheered as he made his way through the tent.”

Zuma had announced the release of the Farlam Commission study the day before which criticized the role of the police in the massacre of 34 miners engaging in a work stoppage at the Lonmin Mining facilities in Marikana located in the North West Province. Additional criticism was leveled against the platinum magnate and mention was made that National Police Commissioner Riah Phiyega could be subjected to a criminal investigation.

The president also cited the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), formerly the largest union in the country, for not exercising proper control of its members. Another rival labor organization, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), was challenging the NUM, an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and ally of the ruling ANC, for dominance among workers. Since 2012, AMCU has gained a majority in the labor representation of workers at Lonmin in Marikana.

Vice-President Cyril Ramaphosa, a co-founder of the NUM and COSATU, was not held responsible at all for the incident even though his involvement in business partnerships with Lonmin during 2012 was a focus of concern during the crisis of 2012. Ramaphosa is poised to become the next president of South Africa after Zuma exhausts his second and final term in 2019.

### **Freedom Charter Still Relevant in 2015**

Some sixty years later the goals of the Freedom Charter have still not been completely realized. Although South Africa overthrew the political rule of apartheid, the national wealth of the country largely remains in the hands of the capitalist ruling class and their allies in the imperialist states.

Lonmin, a British-based platinum firm, was at the root of the unrest in 2012. The workers were demanding decent wages, living conditions and an improvement of the environmental

conditions surrounding the mining facilities.

A struggle for total liberation cannot be achieved without the construction of socialism which would seize control of the mines, factories, land and infrastructure for the benefit of the African majority. The capitalist relations of production in South Africa have stalled any widespread efforts to enhance the economic development of the country.

High unemployment, low wages and a declining national currency has prompted a nationwide debate over the proper course for the country's future. This debate has sparked political divisions within the ANC and COSATU, although the ruling party maintains a comfortable majority within the parliament and most provincial and local governmental structures.

Nonetheless, until the rule of capital is replaced by workers and farmers control of the economy, the problems of underdevelopment, xenophobia and labor unrest will continue. Drawing on the heroic historic traditions of the South African people, the movement towards revolutionary democracy and socialism can be achieved through relentless class struggle and mass political education in conjunction with the unity and consolidation of Africa as a whole.

*Note: This writer participated in a program honoring the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter which was held in Providence, Rhode Island on June 26. Azikiwe provided an analysis of the historic developments leading up to the adoption of the Freedom Charter and its continuing significance for the struggle today in South Africa and inside the United States as well.*

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