

Mandela government sends more troops to Lesotho

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An additional 750 South African troops have been sent to Lesotho by the government of Nelson Mandela, bringing the total deployment in the tiny mountainous country to 3,500. The troops will remain indefinitely, maintaining in power the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili.

Military forces from South Africa and Botswana were first sent to Lesotho on September 22 to crush the mounting opposition to the rigging of last May's national elections. The military action had approval from the South African Development Community (SADC), a regional coalition of 14 countries in the southern part of the continent.

In August a recount of the vote revealed widespread election fraud and found that the Lesotho Congress for Democracy Party won only 12 seats, less than a third of the total. A coalition of the three main bourgeois opposition parties, the Basotho National Party (BNP), the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) and the Maramatlou Freedom Party (MFP), organized following the election, pressed for the resignation of the government and new elections.

As tensions mounted, with sections of the army mutinying and threatening the ruling regime, South African troops were sent in. This military intervention, the first by South Africa since Mandela and the African National Congress came to power in 1994, demonstrates that the ANC rules in the interest of the South African banks and big business. The army used their guns and tanks to shore up a corrupt regime, protect the royal palace of monarch King Letsie III and defend other strategic buildings.

As a result of the invasion extensive damage was done in the capital Maseru, 70 people died and 4,000 have been displaced. While the capital was being looted, army troops joined in, filling their vehicles with various goods to take back to South Africa. Hundreds of mothers marched in Maseru following the invasion condemning soldiers who raped young women and used excessive force on civilians.

Lesotho, while nominally independent, is surrounded by and economically dependent on South Africa. Aside from water, the country has no substantial natural resources

except its population. The principal concern of the South African government was to protect the Katse dam project. Privately owned by a consortium consisting of Italian, French, South African and German capital, the dam is a \$4 billion international undertaking providing water to dry industrial areas in South Africa.

An examination of events leading up to the invasion raises serious questions about the role of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki and sections of the South African government in preparing the military intervention. The action was not approved by the South African parliament, as required by law, but carried out secretly under Mbeki's authority while Nelson Mandela was on a foreign tour. The intervention has been criticized in the African press and by a number of human rights organizations.

The timing of the invasion strongly suggests that secret deals are being worked out between bourgeois nationalist regimes in the region, behind which are definite sociopolitical and economic aims. After initially opposing military intervention by Angola and Zimbabwe in the civil war raging in the Congo, Mandela reversed himself last month and gave his backing to the effort to support Congo President Laurent Kabila. In return, Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe gave his support on the SADC to a South African-led intervention in Lesotho.

The background to intervention

Following the Lesotho elections in May, in which the LCD claimed an overwhelming victory, serious questions were raised about the legitimacy of the vote and a campaign was undertaken by opposition parties to force new elections.

The protests reached their height in August when workers and students held nightly vigils at the palace calling on King Letsie III to dissolve parliament and form an interim government. On August 14 the South African Development Community appointed representatives from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana to work under the direction of Justice Pius Langa of South Africa to investigate the charge

of election fraud.

An interim report issued by this committee on August 26 confirmed irregularities and recommended the elections be declared null and void. The LCD rejected these findings as unacceptable. South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who chaired the meeting, refused to make the report public, insisting that it first be shown to Nelson Mandela, Robert Mugabe and other leaders from the SADC.

South African press reports claim that a secret meeting was held September 13, involving Nelson Mandela, Robert Mugabe and other members of the SADC, with Prime Minister Mosisili present, to doctor the Langa report and minimize its findings.

On September 17 all opposition parties met in Maseru to discuss the report which by this time did not show outright fraud, pointing instead to a few irregularities. As tensions mounted, with the opposition continuing to call for new elections, Prime Minister Mosisili requested the intervention of the South African army to prevent a coup.

After securing the palace, the army then took control of the two main military bases and began disarming mutinous soldiers.

Once the country was under its military control, Mbeki organized a meeting on October 2 of all opposition parties at the UN House in Maseru. He announced that the LCD would remain in power until new elections were held in 15 to 18 months, but with no firm date being set. Upon leaving the meeting one opposition leader commented that he had lost confidence in South Africa taking a lead in the resolution of Lesotho's crisis. 'They are already biased and I have lost trust, especially in Thabo Mbeki.'

An editorial appearing in the October 6 *Zambia Times* warns that military intervention in areas where elections are being disputed sets a dangerous precedent on the continent. 'SADC leaders should not delude themselves that the Lesotho intervention is an isolated case,' the newspaper said. 'The net import of the brazen military action against civilian protesters and mutinous soldiers is that the same standard should be applied to other countries faced with similar political disputes.'

Crisis in South Africa

Here it is necessary to point out that it will not just be interventions across national boundaries, but within countries whose political regimes have no solution to the growing social crisis, that military action will be employed, above all against the South African working class, the largest section of the proletariat in sub-Saharan Africa.

The action by South Africa's military takes place under conditions of a growing social crisis. The ANC government,

totally subservient to South Africa's ruling class, has been unable to solve the pressing problems of the South African masses. Despite four years of rule, 22 million people still live in third world conditions, with one-quarter of the country's population having no electricity. Declining commodity values, particularly the fall in the price of gold, are having a major financial impact on the country.

A recent report issued by Andrew Levy and Associates points out that strike action in South Africa, with workers demanding pay hikes and opposing layoffs, has reached its highest level since just before the elections in 1994 which brought Mandela and Mbeki to power.

Workers throughout the continent of Africa, and particularly those in South Africa who greeted the regime of Nelson Mandela four years ago, are making bitter experiences with this government, one that is supported by the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

Significantly, COSATU has not opposed the invasion, refusing all comment on the grounds that they have been unable to reach trade union officials in Lesotho to consult them, while the SACP openly supports the military action.

A commentary in the SACP's newspaper declared, 'The SADC troops are now a factor for stability, and their continued presence in Lesotho for the present must be supported.' The Stalinist party dismissed reports of destruction, looting, rape and violent assaults by the South African National Defense Force, writing, 'The courageous and generally human and restrained way in which most SANDF troops conducted themselves must also be acknowledged.'



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