

# ANC-affiliated student group stages anti-Semitic stunts against South African retailer

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Shareholders aligned with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions South Africa (BDS-SA) movement protested at the annual general meeting of retailer Woolworths on November 26. Directors were heckled over Woolworths' sourcing of goods worth about R12 million (\$1.1 million) a year from Israel.

BDS-SA seeks through boycott campaigns to soften Israeli ruling class attitudes towards Palestinians in the occupied territories. Its heckling of the Woolworths annual general meeting is part of a campaign supported by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS).

In an anti-Semitic stunt in late October, COSAS dumped a severed pig's head in the meat section of a Woolworths store in Sea Point, Cape Town. It transpired that COSAS had mistakenly dumped the head in the halal section of the Woolworths Sea Point branch. Contact with pork products is forbidden by both Judaism and Islam.

In its response, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies said COSAS had chosen "to send an ugly message to the Jewish community... The SAJBD regards this incident as hate crime and is investigating its options in taking the matter further."

COSAS' web site lists the ruling African National Congress (ANC), the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), as well as the Young Communist League, the youth wing of the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP), as affiliates.

Together with the ANCYL, BDS-SA—which enjoys significant support from Muslims—criticised the COSAS action. National Coordinator Muhammed Desai said while they were convinced that COSAS's intention was to contribute to the boycott movement, BDS-SA did not find the exploit with the pig's head productive. He added, "We are against all forms of racism."

While reaffirming its support for BDS-SA, the ANC formally distanced itself from the Sea Point caper. A statement October 31 by Deputy Secretary General Jessie Duarte called the pig's head protest "misguided and extremely unfortunate." It urged "COSAS to desist from further engaging in such acts."

In the first week of November, COSAS responded by placing seven pig's heads outside the Woolworths head office. COSAS has since reluctantly opted to "suspend" the campaign that its partners wanted discontinued. "We'll look at other methods of protesting until we meet Woolworths... executives to find a resolution. If they don't come to the table, we will resume the pig head campaign," they said.

ANCYL provincial convener Muhammad Sayed responded by saying, "We respect COSAS's decision. They're not accountable to [the] ANCYL."

The ANC has aligned itself with the BDS-SA movement in an attempt to boost the party's credibility with the mixed-race Muslim

community in the Western Cape, a province run by the Democratic Alliance, the official bourgeois opposition party. Since it dismembered its Youth League as part of a faction fight between President Jacob Zuma and ex-ANCYL President and Economic Freedom Fighters founder Julius Malema, the ANC needs a force on which it can rely to mobilise support for it through visceral public issues.

COSAS was meant to fill this breach. However, its attempt to channel widespread public disgust against the war lately waged by the Israeli armed forces against the civilians of Gaza has instead politically embarrassed the ANC.

Woolworths has been targeted by the ANC and its rump youth league because it serves an affluent market with significant numbers of white customers. Businesses like Woolworths are seen as easy targets by organisations like COSAS. The SAJBD is reactionary in its unvarying support for Israel, but COSAS' appeal to anti-Semitism is also deeply reactionary and a political boon to Zionism.

The SAJBD in August pressed criminal charges against Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Provincial Secretary Tony Ehrenreich and reported him to the South African Human Rights Commission, after Ehrenreich posted a message on social media calling "for an eye for an eye" against the SAJBD every time "a woman or child is killed in Gaza." Ehrenreich said he would institute a counter-claim with the Human Rights Commission. "Further charges relate to [the SAJBD] sending money and young men to feed the Israeli war machine that is responsible for the massacre of Palestinians," he declared.

By invoking an eye for an eye, just what is Ehrenreich advocating? That every time a Palestinian child is dismembered by Israel Defense Forces bullets, a similar fate should befall a child in South Africa simply because that child is Jewish?

The ANC badly needs to adopt a popular pose of opposing Israel. The ruling party is incapable of making a social appeal to broad sections of the population thanks to its pro-business agenda. Its parliamentary majority in the May general election fell to 62.2 percent, the slimmest ever. Under these conditions, the ANC seeks to deflect growing anger against it, particularly in the Western Cape, in the process inflaming religious and national animosities.

The BDS-SA campaign is pro-capitalist, based on support for the creation of a bourgeois state in Palestine to be brought about by a settlement between the Israeli state, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. At no point do BDS-SA, COSATU or the ANC make any appeal for unity between the Israeli and Palestinian working class. The ANC and its allies all refuse to distinguish between the Israeli state and Israeli workers. According to these bourgeois nationalists groups,

the brutal Israeli elite equal the Israeli working class--and for COSAS, both, in turn, equal Judaism.

This non-class perspective found expression in the reactionary anti-Israeli academic and cultural boycott instigated by Professor Steven Rose of the Open University. The boycott ostracises workers from their global peers simply for being Israeli citizens. The same outlook has opened the door to the overtly reactionary stunts of COSAS in South Africa.

The Israeli state has many features in common with the old apartheid regime in relegating Israeli Arabs and Palestinians to the status of second-class citizens and was founded on the dispossession and oppression of Palestinians. From this premise, the BDS-SA campaign advocates dealing with Israel in the same way that the anti-apartheid movement dealt with white-ruled South Africa. The movement's leaders, reflecting the views and interests of upper-middle class social layers, think highly of the fact that the anti-apartheid struggle brought the ANC to power. This to the BDS-SA was the best of all possible outcomes.

Yet the coming to power of the ANC marked a successful effort to politically neutralise the revolutionary movement of the working class and oppressed masses that had been developing since the mid-1980s. With it came the closer integration of South Africa into the global production chain and unfettered imperialist exploitation which apartheid had complicated. This has been accompanied by an actual decline in the social position of the working class.

The allies of the ANC—COSATU and the SACP--aided this process. They purposely stymied the independent struggle of the working class by holding up the ANC as the only political party capable of satisfying the democratic aspirations of the people.

Today, BDM-SA and COSAS assert that boycotts and sanctions, almost on their own, were effective in bringing about the end of apartheid. In fact, by the 1980s, the sanctions movement had been ongoing for years with no major successes.

African American preacher Rev. Leon Sullivan, in the name of Western corporate social responsibility, promulgated the original Sullivan principles in 1977 in an attempt to get corporations to pressure the apartheid regime. The SACP and its international co-thinkers played the key role in subordinating the working class to the bourgeoisie through its insistence, based upon the Stalinist conception of a "two-stage revolution," that socialism could emerge only following the realisation of full democracy under capitalism.

Following the Durban mass strikes of 1973 and the Soweto student uprising of 1976, pressure on the National Party (NP) escalated. The administration of NP leader P. W. Botha responded in 1983 by adopting the Tricameral Parliament. This provided for the separate, limited political representation of Indians and the mixed-race population in legislatures of their own, while perpetuating the exclusion of the black majority.

The renewed defiance this ignited developed outside the control of the unions and of the banned ANC. The fundamental danger posed was that of a revolutionary struggle threatening to overthrow capitalism together with the white supremacists. To avert this, international and local bourgeois elements mounted a concerted push for the South African ruling class to accept a negotiated settlement with the ANC. The purpose was to disarm black workers and entrench their exploitation anew, under the auspices of a majority-black government.

The sanctions movement stepped up a gear following the emergence of this pre-revolutionary situation. The net movement of capital out of

South Africa only gained momentum from 1985 onwards. This triggered a dramatic decline in the international exchange rate of the rand. Inflation ran at rates of up to 15 percent a year, making imports and the servicing of foreign-denominated debt more expensive.

By 1990, talks between the ANC and the white South African elite had been ongoing for at least five years. As soon as the ANC and NP were certain they could collaborate to preserve capitalist rule, Botha's successor, President F. W. De Klerk, unbanned the ANC and released Nelson Mandela. The *World Socialist Web Site* wrote that Mandela's "political skills and personal courage" have never been in doubt. It added that he assiduously applied these skills "to stave off the threat of a social revolution in South Africa."

The global capitalist elite were sufficiently reassured that investment and trade with South Africa increased from the late 1990s onwards. Mandela became president following the country's first open elections in 1994. His administration, a tripartite coalition between the ANC, COSATU and the SACP, then relaxed foreign exchange controls and helped develop the greater control by the major transnational corporations and banks that has been responsible for the immiseration of black workers.

Barely concealed by the socialist rhetoric cynically employed by Stalinists like Jeremy Cronin and trade union officials like Zwelinzima Vavi and Irvin Jim, tripartite alliance leaders are today engaged in an orgy of self-enrichment through the policies of Black Economic Empowerment, preferential procurement and affirmative action.

South Africa's fate is a stark confirmation of the Theory of Permanent Revolution. Elaborated by Leon Trotsky in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, it became the basis of the political perspective that guided the October 1917 Russian Revolution. It insists upon the political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie in a struggle to win the leadership of the peasant masses on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective. It explains that in the epoch of imperialism, the democratic and national tasks confronting the masses in oppressed countries like South Africa can be realised only through a socialist revolution, the establishment of a workers' state and the spread of the revolution on an international scale.

The COSAS stunts—and the nationalist, anti-socialist program of BDS-SA—highlight the need for workers to build their own instruments political struggle. COSAS and BDS-SA proceed from the point of view that unity between Israeli and Palestinian workers is impossible.

In fact such unity is not only possible, it is the only way to defeat the Israeli ruling elite, as well as the despotic Arab bourgeois regimes who work hand-in-glove with Israel and the US to frustrate the revolutionary aspirations of the working class throughout the Middle East. South African workers, for their part, face the task of building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International to wage a revolutionary struggle for socialism.



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