



# **APDUSA VIEWS**

**ISSUE No. 40**

**MAY 1991**

**CONSTITUENT  
ASSEMBLY CALL-**

**SALVATION OR  
SCAM?**

## **INTRODUCTION**

"Constituent Assembly!" These are the latest buzz words. They take their place alongside other leading buzz words like "Negotiations", "Interim Government" and "All Party Conference". These words constitute the main expression of a certain political outlook which seeks to assure the oppressed people that their salvation lies along the route marked by these words.

We consider it our bounden duty to the oppressed and exploited people to examine this outlook and to test it against our own political experience, against logic and reason' and against that experience we call history.

### **BETRAYAL OF STRUGGLES - A DOMINANT TREND**

A survey of liberation struggles, both recent and remote in time, shows that a majority of those struggles have ended in the betrayal of the poor and toiling masses.

Why does that happen? And who is responsible? While the answer to the first question involves in-depth analysis and narration of each struggle, which is not possible in a document of this nature, the second question is easily answered. The true student of history - the one who seeks to unearth the buried truth and who unravels fact from fallacy must come to the conclusion that blame in most cases can be placed truly and squarely on the leadership of the movement concerned.

### **PROCESS OF BETRAYAL**

Betrayal is never a simple matter because it contradicts and destroys promises and undertakings made by the leadership over many years. These promises and undertakings are usually contained in documents like the Ten-Point Programme of the Unity Movement, the Freedom Charter of the Congress Movement, and the Azanian Manifesto of Azapo/WOSA. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to these documents as a "Programme of Goals".

A Programme of Goals is betrayed by a series of carefully planned steps executed by a politically corrupt leadership. Regardless of the exact technique used by a betraying leadership, there are certain features common to most. These are:-

1. The Programme of Goals has to be erased from the memory of the people or it must be cast in the junkroom of the collective mind. Initially there is a reduction in references to the Programme. The time gaps between mention is constantly increased until the day comes when references to the Programme ceases almost altogether. If it is mentioned, it is done in anger or as a threat to the ruling class.
2. In place of the original Programme of Goals, the people are presented with substitutes each of which is diluted increasingly.
3. In place of the Programme of Goals, the people are fed with a collection of emotionally-charged slogans and catchphrases.

## **EXAMPLES IN HISTORY**

1. The words LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY which galvanized millions of French workers and peasants to demolish the walls of decaying but brutally repressive feudalism, came in the end to mean:

**LIBERTY** for the capitalist to exploit and profiteer freely and to own property without hindrance.

**FRATERNITY** to mean the brotherhood of the capitalists against their enemies. .

**EQUALITY** between the aristocrats and the victorious capitalists.

The French Revolution teaches us many lessons. One of the most important lessons is how the workers were used by the capitalists as the battering ram in the revolution and how in the end the worktlrs' organisations were systematically crushed by the very same capitalists.

2. In India, the uprising against British Imperialism by millions of workers, peasants and intellectuals was diverted from the revolutionary road by slogans like "Quit India" and "Swaraj" - meaning independence. The leadership of the Indian National Congress misled the Indian masses into believing that their poverty, exploitation and oppression by imperialism, the local capitalist, the moneylender and feudalism would all be removed if Britain were made to quit India. Britain did, indeed, quit India in 1947. India was left a country divided and torn by bloody strife.

Political independence in India has meant no more than a change in government. Oppression, exploitation and repression continues to this day. Britain's economic interests have been scrupulously safeguarded. Today, after 44 years of SWARAJ, the plight of the workers, peasants and the perpetual poor has not changed for the better. In fact, in some respects their plight has worsened.

3. In Kenya, the masses fought a guerilla war for land - the so-called Mau Mau uprising. Britain reacted with savagery in keeping with the "best" of British traditions. In the end negotiations did more to undermine the struggle than the military. The aspirations of the people were compressed into one word, UHURU. This word means freedom and became as meaningless as "freedom" which is left dangling in the air without definition and elaboration.

Jomo Kenyatta, adored by the people and praise-named "The Flaming Spear" was imprisoned for a number of years for being "head of the Mau Mau". It was his misfortune to have received his political training from the Stalinists.

Negotiation politics led him straight from prison to presidency. UHURU turned out to be void of socio-economic content for the masses. "The Flaming Spear" soon gained a reputation for being a cool moderate. His moderation was limited to his dealings with imperialism, since the revolt of the peasantry was mercilessly crushed by his government in 1964.

We can continue with historical examples of betrayals. Our point, however, has been made. Lack of commitment, absence of a Programme of Goals, slogans and catch phrases without political education are the main ingredients in the recipe for a betrayal of a people's struggle.

## **OUR OWN HISTORY**

In the very long decades of our own struggle) we, too, have witnessed the abandonment of political Charters and what appeared to be revolutionary positions. Here also, slogans have been used as diversions while a Programme was being strangled - to sort of drown the cry of "Betrayal!" Nor have we been spared that revolting phenomenon - the CULT OF THE INDIVIDUAL - the Great Leader whose mere presence amongst the oppressed renders unnecessary Programmes, principles, policies and such like things.

As a rule it will be found that where the slogan shouting is at its loudest and adulation of the Great Leader reaches ecstatic heights, political thinking is at its LOWEST.

## **NEED FOR A PROGRAMME**

The reader will now readily appreciate why we, of the New Unity Movement, have always insisted on the absolute need for a Programme of Goals, not as a adornment for a constitution, but as a living guide in our daily activities. One of the most important reasons for a Programme of Goals is to arm the people ideologically against their leaders who have thoughts of betraying that programme. It is also an indispensable tool for an understanding of what they are fighting for. The sacrifices they make must be justified by the goals they are striving for.

## **THE CALL FOR A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY**

Our political history has a super abundance of publicity stunts and acts of adventurism - The Atlantic Charter, Votes for All Assembly, the Doctors' "Unity" Pact, Passive Resistance. Non-Violent Defiance Campaign, Violent Sabotage, Motor Car Bombs, All In Conference, National Convention and so on.

The latest acquisition added to this long list is the call for a CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY.

The call for a Constituent Assembly is really and truly a gimmick. And that is putting it kindly. We are amazed at the intent manner in which the Constituent Assemblers are pursuing this goal. We cannot believe that the Assemblers have seriously considered the matter. They behave as if lessons from history on this very aspect are of no consequence.

The Constituent Assembly is held out to the people as some thing so potent that it will solve all their problems. Our task in subjecting the call for a Constituent Assembly to close examination is made all the more difficult because a people who are groaning under the yoke of intolerable oppression are prone to accept any scheme which has the approval of well-publicised leaders. Any lessening of the burden will be seized with both hands. In this environment charlatans carry on a flourishing trade.

## WHAT IS A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY?

If we were to be asked: "Define a Constituent Assembly", we would be faced with the same problem had we been asked to define a four-footed animal belonging to the genus or class EQUUS. No single picture will emerge which provides a satisfactory answer. The reason for this is that members of this class consist of various types - an Arabian steed, a zebra, a quagga, a mule, the much maligned donkey and so on.

Likewise with a Constituent Assembly. While its broad definition is a gathering of political organisations, parties and interest groups to draw a constitution which will establish the first new government to rule a country, it, like the class EQUUS, is a generic term. A generic term describes a group or class of things which have certain common characteristics. In examining various types of Constituent Assemblies, we will find that they, too, have their share of quaggas and donkeys.

Let us illustrate:

1. The Great French Revolution produced its Constituent or National Assembly. For most of the time of its existence, the Assembly was under the control of the bourgeoisie (capitalists). In the end, the power of the workers was completely taken away.

2. There was the Constituent Assembly of the Russian Revolution. Although the demand for such an assembly was a long standing demand of the Bolshevik Party, just prior to the assembly of the various organisations and parties, Lenin came out against the Constituent Assembly:

" . . . its clearly a mistake which can prove very costly.  
Let us hope that the revolution will not pay for it with its life."

The Russian Revolution almost did. On 5 January 1918, Sverdlov, the leading Bolshevik read a "Declaration of the Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People" to the Constituent Assembly. This document was written by Lenin. When Sverdlov asked that the proposals contained in the "Declaration" be endorsed by the Constituent Assembly, the proposals were defeated by a vote of 237 against and 136 in favour. To save the goals of the revolution, the Bolsheviks dispersed the Constituent Assembly at the point of a bayonet.

From this event it will be seen that a Constituent Assembly is no more than a mechanism or instrument. There is nothing sacred about it. If it does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressed and exploited, it must be discarded without ceremony. There is nothing inherently revolutionary about it.

3. There was the Constituent Assembly of People's China which went under the name of "Political Consultative Conference" (PCC). This Conference was the product and culmination of 25 years of revolution. It was a conference of a victorious people who had sent the reactionary Chiang Kei Shek scurrying across the sea to Taiwan (Formosa).

The PCC met on 9 September 1949 to draw a new constitution for China. The gathering was a democratic coalition of some 23 organisations, groups and parties. Of a total of 142 delegates present, 16 represented the Kuomintang led by Madame Sun Yat Sen; the China Democratic League had 16

delegates also. The Communist Party of China was represented by an unbelievable 16 delegates. Yet the Constitution of China was largely, if not entirely, the product of the Communist Party.

The lesson to be learnt is enormous. In theory, the Communist Party could have been defeated in the Conference by being out-voted. Yet their being out-voted would have counted for nothing if the issue involved was important. The Communist Party had under it the largest army in the world. In the end that would have counted for everything. Hence it is inconceivable that such a Conference could have passed a resolution restoring feudalism.

Apart from the Army, the Communist Party had hundreds of millions of people who would have supported its anti-feudal measures.

4. The latest example of a Constituent Assembly is the one designed by imperialism and South Africa for Namibia. The Constituent Assembly was designed in such a way that Swapo which enjoyed majority support was prevented from drawing up the Constitution for Namibia. Approval had to be obtained from Dinko Mudge's DTA. In return for approval, Swapo had to make concessions to the DTA.

We trust that these illustrations assist in removing the mystique surrounding a Constituent Assembly.

## **WILL THE GOVERNMENT AGREE TO CALL A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY?**

1. This question reflects a contradiction. A victorious people will not ask the consent of the rulers to convoke a Constituent Assembly. They will demand it! And more importantly, they will have the power to call for one to draw the new constitution whether the government likes it or not.

2. The ruling class spokespersons have stated on various occasions that the government will not agree to the calling of a Constituent Assembly. However, De Klerk, in his interview on television on 17 February 1991, stated that at the All Party Conference the matter of the Constituent Assembly will be discussed.

3. The ruling class's response may well depend on the nature of a Constituent Assembly, which the Assemblers can be made to agree to. The Assemblers may well agree to a donkey variety. In that case there is no reason why the ruling class should not agree. After, all it is not the name of the mechanism which is important; rather it is the composition of the Assembly, the groups in which the real power reposes and who control the Assembly.

4. If what is demanded is a truly democratic Constituent Assembly which would shove aside the interests of imperialism, the oppressors and exploiters and place in the fore the interests of the workers and peasants, then it is patently absurd to expect the ruling class to bow out gracefully. It has never happened before and there is no reason to believe that it will.

The process of negotiations has shown to the ANC that the ruling class has not heard of Camelot under Arthur and the ethos emanating from it. Our local rulers are the "groin kickers and eye gougers", to borrow a colourful but pertinent phrase from that great American revolutionary, James Cannon.

And what if the rulers refuse to heed the call for a Constituent Assembly? Who or what has the power to compel it to do so? We cannot think of an answer in spite of intense brain cudgelling. Perhaps those clamouring for a Constituent Assembly have an answer. We are anxiously waiting for it.

One thing, however, is certain. A march organised for a Constituent Assembly, or a dozen marches for that matter will not help. No matter how orderly the march, no matter how eloquent the memoranda, the ruling class will not budge. It has never been known to be overcome by charm and courtesy.

6. If the ruling class does agree to call a Constituent Assembly, then as the most powerful group among the negotiators, it will push through a constitution which will safeguard the interests of imperialism, the local capitalists, land barons and the privileged whites.

So, what will be new? Black faces in the ruling class!

## **THE POSITION OF THE ASSEMBLERS**

The Assemblers consist of four political groupings: the ANC, PAC, AZAPO and WOSA. Of all these groupings the one headed by the ANC has stated its position in clear and unambiguous terms.

The leading spokesperson of the ANC, Mr Nelson Mandela, has made certain policy statements from time to time. We quote from his first television interview which took place in February 1990:

"If you decide to settle problems through negotiations, then you must be prepared to compromise . . . A compromise can only be effective and properly understood if it relates to basic demands. Otherwise it is no compromise. . ."

Again:

"I have pointed out to you that everything is negotiable which is of importance. Otherwise we ought not to talk about negotiations. . ."

Those of us who have been reared in the traditions of principled politics and non-negotiable positions are outraged by these statements. But in their favour is their frankness, leaving no place for doubts and confusion.

The position of the PAC is that it has rejected negotiations with the ruling class but has joined in the call for a Constituent Assembly. The AZAPO position has been set out by its PRO Strini Moodley in a television interview which took place on 31 January 1991. He stated that the Constituent Assembly is the alternative to negotiations. It is the only peaceful way to democracy. On 2 April 1991, Dr Aubrey Mokoape, leading

AZAPO member stated in a symposium that the government of the day had to first resign and then a Constituent Assembly can be called. He gave no indication how the resignation of the government was to be brought about, especially if it refuses to resign.

WOSA is a group of intellectuals. A number of their leading members have had their training in the Unity Movement, and are therefore able to see the extreme folly of the other Assemblers. However, instead of levelling serious criticism against the folly, they conceal it by providing a political fig leaf. This takes the form of laying down certain pre-conditions for a Constituent Assembly. These include: one person one vote; proportional representation; equalising of resources and access to the media; security forces to be disarmed and confined to the barracks.

WOSA is saying the right things but at a hopelessly wrong time. WOSA knows full well that at this stage those demands are unenforceable. WOSA does not regard those demands as long term ones. Yet the liberatory movement is not in a position to realise those demands. Therefore, to persist in calling for a Constituent Assembly can only mean either another toothless Conference for a Democratic Future or asking the ruling class to set up a Constituent Assembly. But asking the ruling class to set up a truly democratic Constituent Assembly is done in the foolish hope and expectation that the ruling class will be content to surrender power voluntarily. In any event this means negotiating with the ruling class. In the end organisations which start off on the right road with a strong "NO NEGOTIATIONS" position get sidetracked by the seductive vision of a Constituent Assembly and thereby find themselves on the road to NEGOTIATIONS.

WOSA's fig leaf has been drained of all chlorophyll!

#### **AFTER CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY - WHAT NEXT?**

1. Let us assume for the sake of discussion that the ruling class does agree to the calling of a Constituent Assembly, the question is: What happens next? Whose Programme of Goals is going to form the basis of the new society?

Bearing in mind the present line-up of forces, such an Assembly will be dominated by the Nationalist Party, ANC/SACP, Inkatha and the Democratic Party. Since not one of these organisations is likely to have an overall majority, some compromise has to be hatched. What will the progeny look like? A monster most likely. But one thing is certain. The interests of the workers and peasants will be sacrificed. Equally certain is that there will be no socialist action with that crowd.

2. A Constituent Assembly will formally hand the reins of political power to the party with the majority following. But handing over the reins of power was precisely what took place in countries like India, Burma, Malaya, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and other former colonies.

The simple act of handing over the reins of power without disturbing the socio-economic structure is the very essence of NEO-COLONIALISM.

When imperialism was confronted with the tidal wave of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism sweeping the third world, there was a real danger to imperialism of that movement taking the road which was then being taken by



China and Vietnam. To avert that catastrophe, the stratagem of neo-colonialism was devised. Converting former opponents into sophisticated indunas (bailiffs) was a masterly stroke!  
Today, most of the former colonies are ruled by the persons who are loyal servants of imperialism.

3. A call for a Constituent Assembly WITHOUT COUPLING it with:

(a) A programme of minimum and therefore non-negotiable demands for complete democratisation of South Africa;

(b) Building and strengthening the organisation of the oppressed and exploited people in order to enforce those demands;

(c) Taking all necessary measures to defend and safeguard the achievement of rights which flow from the demands;

is in truth A CALL FOR NEO-COLONIALISM.

4. NOT ONE of those organisations calling for a Constituent Assembly as a short-term demand, has coupled that call with an uncompromising set of demands for the democratisation of South Africa.

5. The Constituent Assembly has thus become an END in itself. And what has become of those much-vaunted Charters and Manifestos?  
These have been discarded as garbage.

The MECHANISM or INSTRUMENT has become supreme. The original goal has become an embarrassment.

6. The manner in which the call for a Constituent Assembly is made leads an observer to believe that the Assemblers have just emerged from a battle in which the ruling class had been decisively crushed!!!  
Hence their complacency. They go about as if the ruling class is no longer a force to contend with. How does one explain this irrational behaviour?  
There are very powerful forces at work. This work is to exert unbearable pressure on the liberatory movement to accept negotiations.

When large organisations like the ANC, COSATU move towards negotiations, they have a magnetic attraction for smaller organisations. Organisations like the PAC, AZAPO and WOSA are in mortal fear of being left behind when "history is being made". The principles governing all one's activities turn out to be a hindrance to "flexibility". Hence principles are flushed down the drain.

But having rejected negotiations openly and publicly, these Assemblers cannot now do a somersault. That would be too blatant. So they follow the negotiators at a safe distance, but within sight. In this manner they become the camp followers of the negotiators.

The call for a Constituent Assembly provides the "No Negotiators" a respectable way to commence negotiations with the ruling class.

7. Those who so blithely ask for a Constituent Assembly must take the consequences for their demand. Whatever the outcome of the elections, organisations like WOSA are giving advance legitimacy to the new

government of the day, This legitimacy will apply to any government which assumes power. Is that what they want?

### **CONCLUSION**

We of APDUSA and the New Unity Movement will only recognise a government as being legitimate if that government carries out and realises the aspirations of the toiling masses, i.e., the workers and peasants. Any other government, no matter how it gets into power will be regarded by us as illegitimate.

As far as the Constituent Assembly is concerned, our attitude is at one with the Editorial of the New Unity Movement Bulletin (December 1990):

### **"WHO CAN CALL A DEMOCRATIC CA?**

Only the national liberatory movement which truly represents the workers and the rural poor. When can it call such a CA? When it has, through struggle, built the unity of the oppressed and their democratic allies, and when the movement has broken the power of the oppressing ruling class. Then political power will pass into the hands of the masses."

\*\*\*\*\*

Published by APDUSA (Natal), an affiliate of the NEW UNITY MOVEMENT, P.O. Box 8415, Cumberwood 3235, PIETERMARITZBURG, SOUTH AFRICA