

UNITED ACTION IS THE KEY

DAWN INTERVIEW WITH COMRADE JOE SLOVO



*Cde. Joe Slovo -
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DAWN: What are the main features of the current politico-military situation in the region, particularly in our motherland?

SLOVO: In general it can be said that today in Southern Africa we are witnessing perhaps one of the most intense and co-ordinated offensives by imperialism. The purpose of this offensive is clear: to destroy Angola and Mozambique because of the advanced social systems which are being built there, to delay Namibian independence and when it can no longer be delayed, to ensure the installation of a puppet regime; to destabilise all the surrounding states and make sure that they become dependencies of the sub-system of imperialism which is centred on South Africa; and above all to strangle the struggle led by our liberation movement.

This offensive shows itself in a number of ways.

There is the open aggression against Angola. We have seen the invasion of Lesotho with the massacre of ANC refugees and local Lesotho citizens; there are the Zimbabwe incursions. Apart from these acts of direct aggression there is aggression through the proxies of the South African racists and of imperialism generally. There is Unita in Angola, NRM in Mozambique. There is the preparation of vast numbers of ex-sellous scouts in various parts of South Africa. Some of these have already committed aggressive acts within Zimbabwe which could not even be hidden by the South African defence force. There is the encouragement, arming and support for the BCP based in South Africa which regularly makes raids into independent Lesotho.

Particularly sinister is the recent embrace by the Zairean government of the regime whose actions in the Middle East have horrified the world, i.e. the Israeli fascists. Recently Shamir visited Zaire with a band of 90 military advisers and it is clear that this is part of a plan to create another front against the embattled government of Angola and to give it no

relief even if there should be a settlement in Namibia. In other words, to create military forces for the purpose of lending more support for the old and discredited FNLA.

Apart from these open and direct acts of military involvement there is also the economic and diplomatic offensive by imperialism which uses its most important sector, i.e. racist South Africa. The purpose of this offensive is clear: to undermine the resolve of independent Africa in support of our struggle. We have recently witnessed the pressures and threats against countries like Swaziland, and there are many other examples. It is clear in general that imperialism has chosen Southern Africa as one of the zones of prime strategic importance in the world. And it is devoting its considerable resources to attempt to reverse the gains of the independence process and more particularly to destroy the new social systems that have emerged. In addition, amongst its main aims is to destroy the revolutionary movements like SWAPO and the ANC. Imperialism must not be allowed to succeed, and there is no doubt that it can be stopped. With the continued, growing and necessary support of the socialist world, of the progressive forces in the rest of the world and, above all, through our own struggle, the designs of imperialism can be frustrated.

CRISIS

Coming to our own country, one can say in brief that there is at the moment a serious economic crisis with the main burden of the crisis clearly falling on the Black people and in particular the Black working class. For a short time (about a year ago) the rise in the price of gold interrupted this decline in the economy. But now it is admitted on all sides that South Africa is in trouble. There is a negative growth rate, a decline in investments in the manufacturing sector and a growing deficit in the balance of payments. It had to be rescued recently by the International Monetary Fund which interestingly enough did not impose on South Africa the kind of conditions which it always attempts to impose on developing countries. It is only too ready to give South Africa an enormous loan without insisting on any of those conditions which we know usually amount to interference in the internal affairs of the countries who accept the loans.

In addition there is a decline recently in foreign investments. As far as the people are concerned, if one leaves aside these high-sounding phrases about growth rates, etc, it really adds up to one word: A growing misery. Unemployment is reaching the 3 million mark, the wage packets which people receive are buying less and less consumer goods, rents are rising, transport costs are rising, etc. In the military sphere I think it is obvious to all that what we are witnessing in South Africa is the militarisation of the whole state. The defence costs are rising, there is the increasing

influence of the military apparatus at every level of government, every white from the age of 16 to 60 is expected to answer the military call-up and in general one can say the influence of the military (as evidenced by the elevation of Malan to the cabinet) will continue to rise in a state which in the end, can really only depend for its survival on brute force.

Politically one can say the most important processes taking place relate to the new constitutional proposals. We know that these proposals are basically designed to split the growing unity of the black people. I think it is sad indeed that the labour Party which in the past has played such a positive role in the struggle against apartheid has become tempted to collaborate in what we can only describe as "this grand design" of apartheid. And it is interesting to note in this regard that no sooner was the decision announced from the Labour Party conference than Botha himself, the government press, the U.S. State Department, the British Foreign Office and other similar groups welcomed it with joy and celebration. We are confident that in the long run the Coloured people will not allow themselves to be used in this way. The only future of all the people, including the Coloured people, lies in Black unity.



Coloured people reject the P.C. proposals. A Labour Party meeting in Stellenbosch ends up an an uproar.

In general it can be said that there is no way the racists can maintain their rule in South Africa without Black collaboration. Their strategy of survival rests on this: to win the Coloureds to their side, to win the Indians to their side, to build the power of their African puppets in the Bantustans, to fill the army, the police force and their security

services with African, Indian and Coloured collaborators, and to win the Black middle class to their side by a few concessions.

Looking at the situation in South Africa one can say that it is the special irony of South African history that the perpetuation of the whole structures of white domination: economic, military, political; depends upon the very people who are oppressed and exploited by it. When this truth is fully realised by all the people, and acted upon, there can be no doubt that racist power will crumble like a structure which is built on sand.

DAWN: In the recent past we have witnessed the sharpening of contradictions in the ruling National Party of Botha and Malan and the white community including to a level unprecedented. What chances does this open to the forces of liberation?

SLOVO: Every serious revolutionary movement takes advantage of all divisions that may emerge within the enemy camp. For us too the divisions we have seen developing within white politics is an advantage and is something we have to take into account very seriously. As you have correctly said, important new divisions have recently surfaced in the National Party. What is at the bottom of these divisions?

There is no time to undertake a long analysis about this in the course of a short interview. In general one can say that some of the divisions have an economic cause. Although all classes within the white population benefit from white domination, they do not all benefit to the same extent and in the same way. Occasionally policies are advanced by the ruling class which may for example be to the disadvantage of the white working class or of other groups within the White power bloc, its appendages and its supporters.

There are other divisions which do not stem from purely economic factors and these are sometimes connected with the political power struggle which goes on outside and inside the ruling National Party. One could say much more on this but for us the really important question is whether we can conclude that within the sphere of white politics there is any hope of a fundamental change of course in favour of the people. I think the answer that we must give is an unqualified NO. There is no such prospect.

Let me make another point: to put it simply, our movement is trying to make a revolution. Ranged against it are forces who are trying to stop that revolution. Now we know that even within the ranks of the revolutionary movement we debate and we sometimes even disagree on how to make that revolution. But we are in one camp. We eventually reach a consensus despite the differences of emphasis which emerge from time to time as to what is the best way of advancing the revolution at a given moment.

And in a sense, from a reverse point of view, it is the same with the

enemy. There is basic agreement between them that they must try to stop that revolution. Whether it is Treurnicht, Botha, the Republican Party, or the PFP; the one thing which is common to all of them is that they belong to that group which is attempting to stop the achievement of our revolutionary aims. Of course there are differences between them (as there are sometimes in our ranks) on the best way of stopping that revolution and on the best way of maintaining white domination. And therefore much of the division within the camp of white politics relates to the very polemic, to the very debate; a debate on tactics, on how far they must go at every given moment in pursuit of something which is common to all of them, i.e. to stop the creation within South Africa of one united non-racial democracy. And there can be no doubt that every serious force in white politics has a policy which is based on that objective.

RIGHT WING

I want to add one more thing. The divisions we have noticed recently (the emergence of new political forces within the white community) points to a strengthening of right-wing rather than left-wing tendencies. Because of the split of the extreme rightists from the right-wing National Party, we can expect so-called verligtes like Botha to be increasingly tempted to move more and more in the direction of the right in order to maintain their support amongst their traditional groups in the town and countryside.

We can see this process taking place even amongst the so-called liberal parties within the white community. Even the PFP, which we have never regarded as a revolutionary force (but which has expressed some liberal and humane concepts in the past) is now being pushed in this direction. It was disgusting to read how their spokesmen praised the South African defence force murderers when they moved in to massacre men, women and children in Maseru. It is equally disgusting to read the recent columns of the Financial Mail. In the past it has projected itself as part of the liberal opposition and now is inciting the government to hunt us down like game and murder us wherever we are!

So to conclude; where there are divisions we must not ignore them, they weaken the enemy. Even divisions within the right weaken the enemy. But the dangerous thing would be for us to expect (as some people are sometimes misled to expect) that within the sphere of white politics there will be some kind of move or there is some kind of potential for a real advance in the direction of fundamental change in South Africa. That can only take place through our struggle and through our power.

DAWN: The ANC has declared 1983 as the Year of United Action. What is the connection between the tasks of this year and those of last year, a year that marked the climax of our three year programme?

SLOVO: In brief I may say that looking at the 3-year period you referred to, it was a period of perhaps the most amazing advance and achievement in the whole history of our organisation. It is true to say that it is during this period that the ANC was accepted as never before as the only serious opponent to the racist regime. It is regarded everywhere as a viable alternative, as an alternative force for future power; by the world, by Africa, and, even more importantly, by our own people.

This has happened not because people have suddenly come to understand what we are and the correctness of our policies. It has happened because people have seen what we have done in action. People have witnessed the calibre of our leadership inside the country; of the readiness of our cadres to sacrifice even up to the point of giving up their lives in the cause of liberation. It is this revolutionary practice and not just a revolutionary theory which has won for us this unchallenged place.

In the political field our underground has grown and has over the period more and more been able to provide guidance to the mass struggles. In the military field we have proved that there is no target beyond our reach; whether it be SASOL, Voortrekkerhoogte or nuclear power stations. And the connection between the tasks of this year and those of last year is that we have to build on these very achievements.

The slogan of united Action is appropriate and is the key because, as I have already mentioned, the enemy has, with greater intensity than ever before, embarked upon the policy of dividing the Black oppressed. Therefore the struggle against the Bantustans, against the new constitutional proposals, against the Community Councils, is inseparable and indivisible.

It is not enough to just keep on saying we are one people in one country. We have to ensure that we act that way. We have to ensure that the one people in South Africa, consisting in the first place of the Black oppressed, of the African, Indian and Coloured people, together with truly democratic whites act as one united force in the revolutionary struggle. It is the united action of these forces which is the key content of this coming period.



No target is beyond our reach. Part of the shattered Pietermaritzburg supreme court.

And in general, although it has been rephrased and reworded it remains basically a continuation of the tasks we set ourselves in 1982, only more so.

DAWN: One of the basic problems confronting our revolution is the organisation of the unorganised sections of our working class and the unification of the already existing trade unions. What are the prospects towards the realisation of this exacting task?

SLOVO: Like all projections into the future, the prospects depend upon our liberation movement. Left to itself, without the action, participation and leadership of our revolutionary movement we cannot expect great things from the growth in the organisation of the Black workers. I say this advisedly and let me explain why.

We know that there's been an enormous and unprecedented leap forward in the field of trade union organisation in the past few years. It is difficult even to catch up with the statistics. The last time I came across them there were already just over half a million Black workers organised into trade unions. I believe it is not being unrealistic or over-optimistic to say that within a year or two we can expect this figure to jump to over a million; an immense and tremendous organised force.

STRIKE ACTION

Also as a result of the deteriorating economic situation, to which I have already referred, there has been an enormous militant strike action. And I think we can also project in this coming year that this process will even be deepened because the economic conditions are going to continue to deteriorate, and the workers will of necessity be thrown into struggles to win back the wage rise which they have achieved in the past and which have now been eroded by inflation and other factors, and to improve their conditions generally.

So it is clear to everyone that all this creates an enormous potential for the advance of the revolutionary movement because we know (and we have said so over and over again) that it is the working class which is the backbone of the alliance of classes which constitute the liberation forces. It is the working class which is the only force that will guarantee that our victory will lead to real social emancipation, will lead to the abolition of that kind of exploitation which is at the foundation of racism, and not to a regime which will just replace the one set of exploiters for another, even though they might be of a different colour. So we all understand that the working class has this most profound and fundamental role to play.

But when we look at the figures of growth in trade union membership, or even the increase in strikes, we must understand the deeper meaning of what

is happening. There have been more strikes in the United Kingdom in the same period, and in France, than in South Africa. It has not led to any basic leap forward in the participation of the working class at the political level. The Social-Democratic trade unions in Europe are among the most powerful in the world. This in itself, has not led to a revolutionary advance of the working class or its ideology. So what I'm trying to say is that on its own a trade union movement does not spontaneously generate revolutionary politics. It does not necessarily lead to more advanced revolutionary action. The fact that it is there and it is growing, that the workers are organised, are embattled with the bosses, provides an enormous potential for the future.

But whether that potential is exploited or not depends upon the politics and ideology of trade unionism. And that in turn depends on our role as the revolutionary movement providing guidance and leadership in general to this mighty force which is emerging amongst the workers. It depends on our capacity to inject the right kind of politics and correct thinking into the working class. Our job is to help to make our working class understand that it must go beyond engaging in struggles for higher wages - which we of course support, or struggles for better conditions, which we also support. Such struggles can become schools for making the working class receptive to a deeper understanding of the workings of the system that they need to overthrow. But a trade union movement which is not motivated by correct politics can also become collaborationist, it can become part of the so-called reformist lobby in South Africa.



Jubilant Trident Marine workers after forcing, through unity, the bosses to an agreement outside the Industrial System.

Therefore it depends on you workers in South Africa, and especially on the advanced workers. It depends on our movement's capacity to connect the struggle that is going on, the organisation that is going on with the more long-term objectives of getting rid of the racist regime and the system it upholds. Finally, trade unionism which is divided (as Black trade unionism is in South Africa today) is trade unionism which can be more easily manipulated by the enemy for the very purposes I referred to. Therefore one of the additional fundamental tasks which faces all of us is to try to bring about a unity between what exists, to go forward in unity, and to create the kind of trade union movement in South Africa which will really mould the working class into a force which will prove to be unconquerable.

DAWN: Finally, how do you see the further unfolding of our people's war, particularly its military aspect?

SLOVO: I'm pleased you used the words people's war because it is these very words PEOPLE'S WAR that define our tasks in the further unfolding of the armed struggle: Our tasks are more and more to involve the people in actual participation and not just as sympathetic onlookers, not just as masses who welcome what we are doing, not just as people who cheer the brave actions of our cadres and who weep when any of them are caught and destroyed by the enemy. If we are talking in terms of a people's war (as we are) the tasks in the unfolding of the armed struggle is to make those words a reality. What we have done in the last few years has made this possible more than ever before. It has become possible to transform what we are doing into something which reflects much more closely the words "people's war".

I've already referred to some of our great achievements in the operations we have carried out. But in every revolutionary struggle we know that the very success of your actions (as a result of the use of a specific set of tactics) changes the situation and poses new tasks, and even the need for new tactics. Comrade President Tambo has spoken about this in the recent period. He has made it clear in recent speeches (one example is the funeral of our comrades in Maseru) that we are now entering a phase in which we will have to answer the enemy's murderous and terrorist tactics against civilians, against women, against children, against unarmed refugees, by more than just hitting their economic installations.

We have been very patient. It is very much part of the history of the ANC (which some have criticised) that it has a lot of patience. For the first 50 years of its existence it had the patience to organise the people in an attempt to bring about a change without illegalities, without violence. In the first phase of our armed struggle there has been the patience - and we have been praised for it also - to attempt to carry out our activities in a



A Martyr of the Maseru Massacre

way which minimizes the loss of innocent blood. Indeed this burden which we have imposed on ourselves has prevented us from doing even greater things. There is no example the enemy can point to when we have killed or murdered a white woman or a white child as they did in Maseru. There is no example that the enemy can point to when we have deliberately fired into residences being completely impervious about who is in there, even whether the people in there have anything to do with the enemy. We have never conducted ourselves in this way, and we will never repeal the enemy's barbarities.

But as the MK Manifesto says: "the people's patience is not endless," and clearly the time has come to raise our struggle to a qualitatively higher level, beyond mere attacks on installations.

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Women