

THE POSITION OF THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT ON PARTICIPATION IN INSTITUTIONS OF MINORITY RULE IN THE OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES

All indications are that the democratic movement will oppose any form of participation in the October elections and will campaign for a boycott of these elections by the masses of our people. The approach of the democratic movement to elections in the white areas is more open-ended, given the recognition that the character of elections in the white areas is qualitatively different from the character of elections in the oppressed communities.

To fully understand why the democratic movement will campaign for a boycott of elections in the oppressed communities we have to understand how and why the strategy of boycotting institutions of minority rule has developed in these communities. We have to understand how this strategy flows out of the character of these institutions as institutions of minority rule, the relationship of the masses of our people to these institutions, and the role that struggle against these institutions has played in the struggle for liberation, particularly in the last 12 years.

More immediately, we need to understand the boycott strategy in the context of the state's objectives in holding the municipal elections, conditions under which the democratic movement is operating, and the dangers and possibilities which the elections pose for the democratic forces.

It is helpful to look schematically at these questions, in order to introduce more clarity into waters which have become very muddied by all sorts of inaccurate speculation, by academics and the media.

The position of the democratic movement boils down to a number of basic propositions:

1. THE BOYCOTT BY THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT OF INSTITUTIONS OF MINORITY RULE IN THE OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES IS ESSENTIALLY A STRATEGIC BOYCOTT. This must be distinguished from a tactical boycott on the one hand, which would be ad-hoc and specific in character, and the principled boycott, which would be totally fixed and general in character.

The boycott of institutions of minority rule is understood as a strategy in that it is a coherent ongoing form of opposition designed to isolate these institutions to render them as ineffective as possible. Ever since 1976, these institutions have been identified as the weak link in apartheid rule, in that they rely for their effectivity on a degree of support from the oppressed community. On the one side the apartheid system was turning more and more to these institutions to preserve itself as it went deeper into crisis. In particular it was attempting to generalise the system of bantustan rule which had proved so effective by extending something similar to the urban areas.

On the other side the intensification of struggle, the advance in mass consciousness, mobilisation and organisation made it increasingly possible to isolate these institutions totally from the masses, and ultimately make it impossible for them to function. This cracking of the most immediate and weakest shackle of

apartheid rule created the possibility of building alternative centres of people's power.

This strategy flowed from the essential character of these institutions - oppressive, undemocratic, unpopular, divisive, and designed to get sectors of the community to implement apartheid measures on the masses. Under these conditions a unifying, blanket boycott was seen to be both necessary and most effective, and history has clearly proved this judgement correct. This needs to be distinguished from a tactical boycott which assumes an ongoing participation in an institution, interrupted by the use of a boycott as a limited weapon designed to achieve specific ends, in specific areas, for a limited period of time. An obvious example here would have been the use of tactical boycotts in the schools.

A principled boycott would involve the fixed universal boycott of all institutions which violated particular principles e.g. "we'll boycott apartheid institutions because they are racist, undemocratic etc". The fact that violations of these principles are focussed on by the democratic movement in our boycott of the black local authorities doesn't then mean that the boycott is a principled one. We can identify a whole series of apartheid institutions which are racist, undemocratic etc which have not been boycotted by the democratic movement (including for example the decision by the democratic movement that to boycott last year's white elections would be strategically unviable ~~to do so.~~)

PROPOSITION 2: A BOYCOTT STRATEGY OF A PARTICULAR INSTITUTION, CANNOT CO-EXIST WITH A STRATEGY OF PARTICIPATION IN THAT SAME INSTITUTION. Suggestions by academics and the media that the democratic movement has been "experimenting" with participation in institutions, which we had previously boycotted are totally incorrect and out of touch. To say that the democratic movement has never ruled out forms of participation in principle, is different from saying that we have abandoned our strategy of boycott for a strategy of participation, either in general or in specific instances.

As the democratic movement has grown and penetrated all areas of the country, the strategy of boycotting specific institutions has if anything become more comprehensive and far-reaching. Since the advent of the UDF, we cannot think of a single instance where the democratic movement has initiated the taking over of institutions of township, bantustan or tricameral rule through participation in that institution. Wherever the democratic movement is organised, these institutions have been effectively boycotted with the support of the community.

In fact, the only attempts in recent memory to use such institutions as bases for the democratic movement have backfired disastrously, and had a profound effect on the attitude of the masses and the democratic movement on the question of participation. The failure of the liberation movement's attempts in the 70's to encourage Buthelezi to build Inkatha as a progressive structure, using the space opened by his participation in KwaZulu, had particularly serious consequences which are still being felt today. The other example which springs to mind is

that of the Labour Party, which anti-apartheid elements attempted to use despite its participation in the CRC to "destroy the system" from within. We know what happened with the Labour Party.

These painful experiences have indelibly etched themselves on the consciousness of the masses and the democratic movement. Any suggestion of participation in these institutions, of even the most limited kind is treated with enormous suspicion, a suspicion justified by these failures and the concrete negative experience by the people of those who have participated in these institutions, irrespective of promises to "use" these structures "to fight apartheid" etc.

Before the development of the democratic movement, and in its early days, a few progressive individuals did enter these structures and attempt to fight for the masses. Well known examples of these were Msizi Dube of Lamontville and Hennie Ferries in the Labour Party. This was however more of a infiltrationist strategy based around individuals; a tactic which reflected the relative weakness of the democratic movement at that time. The general tendency was where those sympathetic to the masses, participated in these institutions, they left those structures and went over to the democratic movement, once alternative structures had been created, or once they had reached the limits of the institution. By this point the institution had been thoroughly discredited, and invariably the masses would boycott the institution in favour of their own alternative democratic structure. Nowhere has a mass-based organisation taken a decision to participate in these structures.

Finally, in certain instances contradictions develop in these institutions and individuals or groupings come to play an ambivalent role in relation to the state and masses and in some cases tend towards a progressive position. An example of this would be the contradictory role played by Mabuza in Kwangane. The fact the democratic movement recognises this situation and attempts to exploit these contradictions to the advantage of the people, is simply a recognition that the situation offers certain possibilities. It doesn't mean that the democratic movement has approved of, say, Mabuza's role in the bantustans. Neither Mabuza or anyone else has won the approval of the democratic movement to participate in these structures.

3. VARIOUS INSTANCES OF THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT ENGAGING THESE INSTITUTIONS FROM THE OUTSIDE SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT PARTICIPATING IN THESE INSTITUTIONS FROM WITHIN. In the course of struggles against the black local authorities, civics have entered into negotiations around rent increases, evictions, upgrading etc. As with struggle in all other phases, struggles at the civic level involve engaging the state, at one point or another. This is in no sense the same as participating in these structures. In fact the approach of the masses and their organisations to e.g. negotiations in the townships has been to conduct them in such a way that all legitimacy is denied to the councillors, by insisting on talking to white officials. This might at first glance appear to be a principled boycott of councillors, but in fact is consistent with

the strategic approach that councillors must be consistently isolated and exposed as toothless puppets lacking legitimacy in the community. Entering into direct negotiations with them, on the other hand, could have the effect of giving them unnecessary credit for whatever is negotiated in favour of the residents. But even negotiations with the councillors wouldnt imply participation in these structures. This is largely a tactical question determined by conditions in each area.

Likewise the approach of civics in certain instances that they will not boycott schemes which have been initiated by the councils or even the JMCs where these bring about real improvements in peoples lives; is based not on a decision to participate in these institutions or to support them, but on the understanding that it is the struggle of the masses led by their organisations outside and against these institutions which have resulted in these improvements, and they must be claimed as people's victories. Insofar as there are problems, dangers, or limits these will be exposed and campaigned against, but the mass organisations arent embarking on a blind rejection of everything that comes from the state, even their own victories! This approach of engaging the state in a way which benefits the masses ^{which} no serious mass-based organisation can exclude. This in no way contradicts the boycott strategy, although as in all political struggle there are dangers and contradictions which constantly need to be identified and strategised around.

4. THERE IS NOTHING IN THE CURRENT SITUATION WHICH SUGGESTS THAT THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT SHOULD RECONSIDER ITS BOYCOTT OF COUNCILS IN THE OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. If we look at the following factors we can see that the need for a boycott is if anything more critical than ever before:

- * the aims of the state in holding the elections;
- * the current position of the BLAs;
- * the challenges and dangers facing the democratic movement.

5. THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS ARE ONE PART OF THE MUCH BROADER COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY BY THE STATE WHICH IS ENFOLDING FROM THE LOCAL TO NATIONAL LEVELS. Without going in details this strategy has a number of components, with the municipal elections playing an important role in several respects:

* the state is attempting to create local alternatives to the democratic movement using a combination of socio-economic, repressive and political measures. To achieve this it has to reinstate local structures with some credibility and influence in the communities. The three critical structures are the local councils, the RSCs and the JMCs. The councils are to be far more than institutions of local government, but are to be an integral part of the regime's total counter-revolutionary onslaught. If these institutions arent thoroughly isolated and deprived of legitimacy there is a serious danger that they can become entrenched as powerful anti-democratic institutions, serving the same function as bantustan structures have in the past.

* the municipal elections are the first step in a plan to create a counter-revolutionary political centre in the oppressed communities, starting at the local level, then moving to the regional level, and finally to the national level. This is clearly spelt

out in Botha a latest proposal where the local apartheid structures are seen as the most critical and clearly defined institutions in the plan to rescue minority rule. The regional structures are far less clearly spelt out, with talk of elections for regional authorities having a hazy definition. The structures proposed at national level such as the Great Indaba or National ^{Council} are totally vague and open-ended. This is no accident, the intention being to build fragmented fiefdoms and spheres of influence at the local and regional levels, with the expectation that the influence of the democratic movement will be drastically eroded and the national political challenge broken. Simultaneously the power of these structures will greatly increase, leading to the possibility of constructing some sort of national political solution on the state's terms.

* Thus the boycott of the October elections is an acid test of the ability of the democratic movement to stop the state's schemes in its tracks. Far more is at stake than in the 1983 council elections. The state hopes to create a network of "moderate" leaders and institutions which will lay the basis for their own version of a "Muzorewa solution" - i.e. a negotiated settlement which leaves the power of the white minority intact in all its essentials. Integral to this strategy is the attempt to break the unity of our people, to isolate out the radicals from moderates, and to fragment and divide the democratic movement, pulling in elements of our organisations wherever possible. This goes a long way to explaining why the state clamped down on our organisations when it did. The unshakable unity of our people and clear political leadership from the democratic movement thus become more indispensable than ever before.