

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Understanding and knowing how to assess accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the state, means that we possess a necessary condition for victory. Understanding and knowing how to assess our own forces and their position in the field of struggle means that we possess another very important condition for victory. This discussion paper is an attempt to get to grips with the present conjuncture. It is an endeavor to correctly grasp the political moment so as to inject into the arena of struggle a decisive push that will bring liberation day near.

In the past few years the political situation in Southern Africa in general and South Africa in particular, has been in a state of flux. The balance of forces and the position and posture of the different actors in the politico-military field are changing with such rapidity that the need to constantly assess, re-assess, analyse and re-evaluate the situation is always imperative.

OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

A. *INTERNATIONAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN SITUATION*

The Southern African situation can be summed up into four major areas. Firstly the battle of Cuito Cuinavale has changed the political and military map of the region.

Fidel Castro said that the history of Southern Africa will be written before and after Cuito Cuinavale. What this means is that the battle of Cuito Cuinavale is a watershed in terms of tilting the military scales to the side of the frontline countries. For years South Africa has been dictating terms to her neighbours because of its military dominance. The defeat at Cuito Cuinavale has brought about the following scenario:

1. The myth of South Africa's invincibility has been squashed
2. South Africa was forced to negotiate and agree to implement the U.N.'s resolution 435 and consequently Namibian independence.

3. Serious schisms are coming to the fore within the ruling bloc and within the Nationalist Party
4. A significant number of white people are beginning to question the morality of defending apartheid
5. The morale of those who fight for freedom in South Africa and the black population in general has been tremendously raised.
6. There are contradictions between the military and the foreign affairs.
7. The hawks have (temporarily) been upstaged by the verligtes within the Nationalist Party.

Secondly the ability of the other Southern African states to frustrate South Africa's aggressive incursions into their countries is redefining the balance of forces. The recent announcements that Zimbabwe is in a process of purchasing some of the most sophisticated fighter planes has sent cold shivers down the echelons of apartheid edifice. The arrests of South African agents in Botswana and Zimbabwe is also a blow to South Africa's war-mongering.

Thirdly, hopes that South Africa was on the brink of a major diplomatic offensive in Africa and Europe have been dashed by the steadfastness of people like Mugabe and the National Party's inability to bring about far-reaching changes in the country. Their diplomatic adventures have not won them any new friends.

Fourthly, the move to lessen economic dependence on South Africa seems to be progressing. There are still major hurdles to be passed like South Africa's destabilisation and sabotage campaign and the availability of the necessary finances. In the general international sphere, the ANC is recognised by more countries than the South African government. The more the ANC's stature and influence grows, the more South Africa's legitimacy is eroded.

B. ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

One of the most potent weapons by the international community against apartheid has been the sanctions campaign. Sanctions hit both the ruling group and the ruling class where it hurts most - in their pockets. The Mass Democratic Movement needs to comprehend fully this area of our struggle.

The brief points touched below are inadequate, but could serve as a point of departure in our discussion of the issue.

Forms of investment

We usually talk about capital investment which takes different forms:

i. Investment of physical assets

This means that the investor brings into the country the capital for the establishment and building of factories. This form of investment will obviously create jobs.

ii. Financial investment

This may be in the form of loans to banks, government and multinationals. This kind of investment does not necessarily create jobs. The recipients may use the money for projects that do not create jobs. The government may use the money for military and other repressive measures.

iii. Investment for Technological advancement

In this case the investor will use the capital to replace obsolete equipment with technologically advanced equipment. Capital could also be used to replace workers with machines and robots. Clearly, this means that workers will lose their jobs. More and more employers have resorted to this measure to cut down in the long run on costs. We should remember that machines don't go on strike.

Different forms of sanctions

Sanctions may take the following forms:

1. Trade embargo
2. Disinvestment
3. Divestment

Trade embargo

This is a situation where South Africa's goods are prevented from entering or being sold in countries abroad. The trade unions have been the most reliable on this campaign. Most countries are unwilling to embark on a trade embargo. If, for instance, gold which has been keeping the South African economy afloat, was to be embargoed, there will be serious economic and political ramifications in this country.

Disinvestment

Sanctions have mostly taken the form of disinvestment. This is a situation where investors withdraw their capital and technological know-how from a country. The American people, through their congress, have been the most persistent and consistent of disinvestors. They have, at every turn fought with the republican administration which always tries its damndest to prop-up the apartheid regime. As a result most disinvestment has been from the American firms.

Divestment

This is a situation where the investors sell their investments to local business people. Some investors use local front companies to stay in the country, while pretending to have disinvested.

We must strengthen sanctions

For us to help bring the day of liberation closer, and minimise a blood-bath in this country, we should strengthen and expand the sanction campaign. This should not be misconstrued to mean that we are trying to elevate the international struggle to a higher level than the other pillars. On the contrary, we see the international struggle not in isolation from the other areas but as part and parcel and as a significant way of putting pressure on the ruling bloc to abandon apartheid. It is not enough to always assert that we support sanctions because we are prepared to suffer for our freedom. While this is true, it is not necessarily the main reason for our support of

sanctions. We support sanctions because we know that they weaken the state's resources to an extent that ripe conditions are created for a decisive blow that will throw apartheid into the ash-heap of history for ever.

C. STATE OF ORGANISATION

The objective conditions in South Africa are ripe for a great leap forward. To elucidate this point, we should look into the mood of the masses, state of our organisations, the contradictions within the ruling group, the economy, the middle ground forces, as well as the international situation.

At the time of our banning last year, we summed up our organisational capacity in the following way:

Firstly, there are areas where our structures have been completely wiped out. These areas, particularly in remote and small towns, did not have the necessary organisational infrastructures to withstand heavy repression. The jailing and driving out, in some areas, of the most experienced and dedicated cadres created conditions where our structures collapsed. In these areas the system managed to re-install their structures which were crushed during the 1984-1986 period.

Secondly there are areas where our organisations have been weakened but are still in existence. The state has re-introduced their structures but are unable to assume dominance. In some of these areas there are massive upgrading schemes through which the state hopes to tilt the balance of power in its favour. But this has failed because our people see upgrading schemes as a victory for our struggles of the past few years. So, instead of giving credit to the state and its functionaries, they see this as positive results of struggle and sacrifice. It is important to note that in situations of this nature, the state may manage to win support if we don't constantly highlight the fact that upgrading schemes are a victory for the people.

Thirdly, there are areas which became stronger during the State of Emergency. This was possible because our organisations embarked on sustained campaigns like rent boycotts even under heavy repression.

The situation, as observed last year February, is still prevalent today. Summarising the national situation based on the above analysis and also because of last year's successful campaigns, we can conclude that the repressive strategy of the State has failed to resolve the situation to the regime's favour. Our people have refused to shift their political support away from the Mass Democratic Movement. This was clearly demonstrated by last year's stayaways and the low percentage polls in the October 26 elections.

Having said the above, it is imperative to point out that while we have survived the heavy onslaught of the state, our organisational capacity particularly to co-ordinate, embark and sustain campaigns, has been weakened. This situation was gradually becoming worrying after the February 1988 bannings, but it became acute towards the end of the year. Added to this, is the declaration of the UDF as an affected organisation which has had a debilitating effect on our ability to co-ordinate and launch campaigns.

What is facing us today is the need to adapt to repressive conditions. This means we should have the ability to combine semi-underground activity and above-broad work. The need to adopt a semi-underground posture should not be divorced from the need to fight at all times for legal space. Coupled with this is the fact that because a significant number of our structures as well as the UDF itself cannot receive funds on account of the bannings, we should seek creative ways of overcoming this serious obstacle.

I believe we have the will and the character to survive this repressive onslaught. We should be mindful of the fact that we have faced similar situations in the past (though of different proportions).

In August 1984 when the state acted against us, co-ordination at a national level was destabilised. But that was for a brief period. Soon after that, co-ordination was re-established, and we were able to have a successful national conference in April 1985 - just eight months later.

Soon after the conference there was another clampdown in May 1985 when people like Terror, Popo and Moss were detained. Later in July-August many more NEC members were detained including the National chairperson and

others. Once again, co-ordination was disrupted. However, by the end of 1985, we had re-grouped and were able to convene the inaugural conference of the National Education Crisis Committee and our structures at the local level were able to co-ordinate campaigns.

So, we can say that we have had numerous occasions when the democratic movement was attacked at both regional and national levels and on each occasion we recovered. It is this experience which makes one optimistic about our ability to recover.

D. MASS DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

In order to evaluate the Mass Democratic Movement, we need to define the Mass Democratic Movement, what comprises its perspectives and content and what style of leadership guides it.

i. What is the Mass Democratic Movement?

It is a movement with a *mass approach* to issues and is manifested through organised formations.

Over the past six years or so important national formations emerged - formations which have an organised grassroots membership and are therefore mass in character. These include the UDF, Cosatu and the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC). The South African Council of Churches has begun to participate in mass campaigns with the above formations.

These organisations are guided by the concept of *unity in action*. There are many other groupings which are responsive to the programme of the mass democratic movement and act in unity within its broad perspective. There are also a diversity of forces that come under MDM's influence but are not necessarily under its discipline.

The organisations within the MDM interact with each other in a hundred and one formal and informal ways. For many grassroots members of these organisations, there is little difference between one or the other. However,

what is of greater significance is the growing commonality in the strategies and tactics of these structures. The origins of this can be traced back to the Campaign for National United Action launched in September 1986 by Cosatu, UDF and the NECC.

ii. What is the perspective of the MDM?

The perspective of the MDM is a non-racial democratic and united South Africa. This perspective is both an expression of the grievances of the masses which propel them to action as well as an expression of the solution to the problem that gives rise to these grievances.

iii. What is the content of the MDM?

The content of the MDM is to give the broad working masses of our people control over their daily lives. This is accurately expressed in the first clause of the Freedom Charter: The People Shall Govern. This means that our people must participate in all areas of their lives, be it schools, factories, townships, regional structures, national structures, etc. We already see the manifestation of people governing themselves through street, block and area committees as well as shop steward councils. Thus, ensuring that the working masses are a dominant and determinant force in our struggle is the content of the MDM.

iv. What is the style of the MDM leadership?

The MDM is a movement which is guided by a collective rather than an individual style of leadership. The leadership should always be democratic and accountable to its constituency in particular, and the working masses in general. It is the leadership which participates and engages in campaigns and action with the masses against oppression and exploitation.

v. Brief assessment of the MDM

While in the past few years the Mass Democratic Movement consisted of the UDF and trade unions, today the situation has changed drastically. The Mass Democratic Movement has grown tremendously since the state of emergency

was declared. The churches, which some few years ago were reluctant to take up political issues (save for a few priests) have now taken a defiant stand against apartheid to an extent that we believe they have reached a point of no return.

Some organisations like the CTPSA, Tasa, Inyandza and others have adopted the Freedom Charter and are working closely with us. Others like Lawyers for Human Rights, South African Soccer Association, National Soccer Association, Black Management Forum, Sabswa and many more, see themselves as allies of the Mass Democratic Movement.

More middle-ground constituencies, groups and organisations have either moved closer to or joined the Mass Democratic Movement in the past two years than in earlier years. Groups like Nafcoc, which was a breeding ground for town councillors and other collaborators, are today close allies of the MDM.

The politics of the Mass Democratic Movement have spread far and wide. Bantustan leaders such as Mopeli of Qwa-Qwa and Ramodike of Lebowa are making the demands of the Mass Democratic Movement a pre-condition for participation in the National Council. Some parliamentarians are also taking their cue from our structures. In a nutshell, the chipping away of many important elements from the edifice of the regime to our side is growing. The ranks of those who are fighting for freedom has increased. It is important to note that in all these developments both the Front's affiliates and Cosatu have played a crucial role and in the process won themselves the mantle of centrality in the anti-apartheid struggle.

E. THE STATE

The South African government has since 1985 abandoned reform in favour of repression. The aim of the state is to crush opposition and create a political wasteland where there will be no voice of the mass democratic movement. This is clearly demonstrated by what is called the low intensity conflict approach. The state is also bogged down by indecision, lack of political solutions to the problem and divisions within its ranks. These divisions are a result of pressures of the struggle both locally and internationally.

The government is in a state of inertia as a result of lack of political resolutions. The introduction of the State Security Council, dominated by the military intelligence and police organs means that decisions are taken outside the cabinet. Elected representatives of white people are not the ones who take crucial decisions of the country. This has caused serious rifts between those who have been entrenched in the State Security Council and those outside it.

More and more whites are losing confidence in parliamentary politics because the legitimacy of parliament has been eroded by the fact that the major decision making process has been shifted to the State Security Council. In addition whites are using the MDM as a reference point because of its influence and clear vision of the future.

At the level of the oppressed people, the local organs of the State Security Councils viz. Joint Management Security Councils (JMSC's) have tried to infiltrate, coerce and smash popular organisations. This has been successful in some areas, but a failure in others.

The reasons why the JMSC's have failed in a number of areas are:

- For JMSC's to be effective, they need a lot of resources - the government is unable to provide those resources.
- JMSC's need widespread support of the people to be able to infiltrate and disrupt organisations. This is very difficult in areas where organisations are strong and entrenched.
- JMSC's may be effective if the living standards of the people improve. This is unlikely in the present economic climate.
- People are reluctant to be involved in government structures, given the 1984 - 86 period.

The state's attempt to win the support of the people through puppet structures has failed. The National Council is a non-starter. Further, the

state is unable to come up with any meaningful reforms because they fear a backlash from the white electorate, but most importantly, because they still cling to old racist stereotypes.

F. THE ECONOMY

The South African economy is shrinking. This is firstly because of the amount of money spent on the war in Namibia and Angola, the destabilisation campaign of the frontline states, as well as the overspending on the SADF and general repression. Secondly, the overspending of the bureaucracy, with every sector like education, welfare, etc. having 13 departments encompassing the bantustans as well as the tri-cameral parliament. Thirdly, sanctions are beginning to have a devastating effect on the economy. The South African government and their supporters seem to be running out of steam in trying to stem the tide of sanctions. At the moment, the state is desperately trying to negotiate the re-scheduling of loans which expires next year. This is a very sensitive area for the regime, because if anything goes wrong inside the country, like a hunger striker dying in detention, the international community may be unsympathetic to their request for re-scheduling the loans.

G. STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

Those objective conditions are not taking place in a vacuum, nor did they arise on their own. They are a result of our struggles and sacrifices. The net result of these struggles and sacrifices is that the strategic initiative has shifted to the liberation movement. But we need to explain what we mean by the concept strategic initiative.

By strategic initiative I understand the terms or terrain of activity and struggle and the course of events which are determined by a broad programme, framework or theoretical thinking. Initiative in this sense is different from a campaign. A campaign becomes a tool for realising the strategic initiative. I will give examples to clarify this point. In South Africa the strategic initiative has for hundreds of years been in the hands of the colonialists. When the National Party took power in 1948, they inherited that initiative from their predecessors.

In the 50's, 60's and better part of the 70's the Verwoerdian approach was the framework which dictated the course of events. In other words the Verwoerdian approach was the form which the strategic initiative took. Concretely, this meant the establishment of the bantustans, the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act, Immorality Act and a host of other racist laws. These issues were the terrain of struggle - which was chosen by the state. The response of our organisations was largely determined by what the state was doing within their broad programme.

When PW Botha took over, the strategic initiative took the form of a reform process. This approach has dictated the terms of struggle till 1984. The terrain of struggle, most campaigns and the formation of the UDF itself, were largely shaped by the reform politics of the National Party.

However, from the beginning of the 80's the National Party's monopoly of the strategic initiative was beginning to be challenged by the liberation movement. In 1985 the initiative was grabbed by the liberation movement. Now, the big question is what is meant by this? This means that from 1985 the course of events in this country or the terrain of struggle and activity have been largely determined by the concept of a non-racial, democratic and united South Africa. This is concretely manifested through the struggle in the 1980's. The struggle for community control of schools, the fight against dummy institutions and for their replacement with people's structures like block and street committees, as well as the struggle against puppet unions and the emergence of democratic ones, is the living embodiment of the demand for people to govern themselves.

These demands, were accompanied by the highest level of unrest ever seen in South Africa and, as we said, it was at this juncture that the strategic initiative shifted from the NP to the liberation movement.

To the demand and the struggle for adequate housing and the proper maintenance of the townships, the government and big business are responding with the upgrading of townships and other measures. To the struggle for democratic structures at the township level, they have responded by attempts to revamp the town councils. To the demand for people to

govern, the state responded by coming up with the idea of a National Council and the October elections. So the government is forced to do certain things because of the programme and the pressures of the liberation movement.

There are many other examples of South Africans responding to the initiatives of the liberation movement. The many treks to the ANC, the growing interest in the Freedom Charter by a cross-section of South Africans and the positive response to the Anti-Apartheid Conference initiative indicate who dictates the terms of activity.

The mistake which we often commit is to try to assess the strategic initiative in terms of what the UDF and Cosatu have done in a matter of months. The fact that we failed to perform certain tasks at a particular moment, does not necessarily change the fact that our orientation and objectives are dictating the terms of struggle at this particular historical phase.

We must also not make the mistake of reducing strategic initiative to a campaign. Campaigns are important for a movement to keep the strategic initiative to itself, but the two are not synonymous.

TASKS FACING THE MASS DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

In the last few years the MDM has made many important advances. As we have shown, the size and influence of the MDM has grown tremendously. We need to take up more campaigns to keep the pressure on the regime. We should identify tasks which are appropriate for local, regional and national situations. Conditions at the local and regional level will determine the tasks facing us. As the national level we have identified the following tasks:

1. Peace among our people in Natal

We must spare no effort in achieving peace in Natal. Many lives have been lost. Every patriot should seek ways of stopping the fighting in that region. This task is not facing the people of Natal alone, but all the people of this country. Let us build a movement for peace in Natal.

2. Anti-apartheid coalition

Our efforts to isolate and neutralise the most dangerous elements within the ruling bloc need to continue. We should evaluate efforts made last year to unite all the anti-apartheid forces, and on the basis of that, continue with that process. The AAC is part of our on-going struggle and must be incorporated into our daily campaigns.

3. Campaign against repression

a. Unite against Labour Relations Amendment Act

The resolutions taken at the Workers Summit in March must be made known within the ranks of the MDM. All activists need to be part of the efforts to unite workers and fight against the Labour Relations Amendment Act.

b. Organise against the State of Emergency

The recent hunger strike has shown that our determination can bring about the necessary changes in this country. The MDM must take up the fight against the SOE. Detainees have done their bit, now is the time for the rest of us to engage the state on this issue. Most of our able and experienced activists are under severe restrictions and therefore we must launch a campaign to have restrictions removed.

c. Mobilise against apartheid hangings

A significant number of our activists are on death row at the moment. These are the young patriots who fearlessly took on the might of the apartheid regime. They have been sentenced to hang because of their love for a free, non-racial, democratic South Africa. A diversity of forces must be mobilised into a movement against apartheid hangings. A concerted international campaign should be launched to save these patriots. Ways need to be sought to strengthen the Save the Patriots Campaign. We must not let them hang.

4. *Release of Political Prisoners*

Our struggles, campaigns and pressures have pushed the state to a point where it has released some of our leaders and is about to release more.

Having pushed the state so far, we seem to be lacking ideas of how to utilise their releases to the benefit of our struggle. Mbeki, Gwala, Mandela, Sisulu and the others are not the leaders of the MDM alone, but of all the people of South Africa. We need, therefore, to involve people from all walks of life to be part of a campaign for the release and welcoming of our leaders. This campaign must build structures at all levels - local, regional and national.

5. *Struggle against bodies of minority rule*

The struggle against the bodies of minority rule has strengthened most of our structures, particularly at the local level. The state had hoped to use the October Elections to revamp the ailing puppet bodies - but it was a big flop. Our propaganda needs to make it clear to every resident in the townships that upgrading schemes are a result of our struggles and therefore a victory for the people. We should further ensure that we don't lose the initiative on the question of the rent boycott, especially in Soweto and the Vaal areas, where town councils are trying to use our demands to gain popularity.

6. *Build local campaigns*

There are many local issues around which we can build campaigns. In the Transvaal, the fight against petty apartheid should be strengthened. The struggle against removals is another area of struggle where our people have shown determination. We need to find new ways of organising the rural areas to ensure the building of strong structures that will withstand heavy repression. Let us re-organise our structures, rebuild our street, bloc and area committees, strengthen our shop steward councils and restructure our students democratic SRC's.

CONCLUSION

The balance of forces is now in our favour! Conditions are ripe for a qualitative advance, which means that the time is right for an all round onslaught on all aspects of oppression and exploitation. The campaigns we have identified above, as well as strong, democratic, grassroots structures can ensure that we don't lose the strategic initiative. We must always be mindful of the fact that the state and the imperialists will try to regain the initiative.

In order to take a great leap forward, we will have to instil discipline within our ranks, build ideological cohesion and develop a democratic leadership style appropriate to our structures.

The interaction between the different components of the MDM, should be turned into a true fighting alliance, guided by unity in action, as well as spreading our political and moral influence to all sections of our people.