THE 1988 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

In the past three years, the government has announced several
plans for changes in local government in South Africa. These
plans come at a time when there have been many tensions and
conflicts surrounding local authorities. These have resulted in
the collapse and resignation of councillors in some townships.

Among the plans which the government now has, is to hold
municipal elections for all race groups in October 1988. This
paper gives some background information on what these elections
will involve and why they are being held.

But first, we need to understand something about local government
in S.A.

What is local government?

In South Africa, there are three levels of government responsible
for carrying out the different functions of running the country:
the central government, provincial government and local
government. What is common to all three levels of government is
that blacks are excluded completely from the decision-making
process.

The central government is responsible for formulating and
implementing general policies and the laws of the countries
around matters such as labour, finance, defence and security.
Parliament is the seat of government and power, and it is
presently controlled by the National Party.

Whilst the central government is responsible for general
policies, it devolves some of its duties to the provincial
government. For example, the central government may see to

railways and national roads, whilst the provincial authorities may be in control of major inter-provincial roads, as well as administration of health services and parks and conservation.

In 1986, a law was passed, abolishing the white-elected provincial authorities .Now, provincial authorities are all appointed by the Nationalist government. At the same time, development boards, which administer the afairs of African people at the local level, were also abolished, and their staff and functions were transferred on an interim basis to the provincial administrations.

The third level of government is the local authorities. There are different local authorities for different race groups in South Africa.

The city or town councils elected by whites , are responsible for the administration and provision of state services at a local level, e.g the Durban City Council, the Pietermaritzburg City Council.

For Indians and coloureds, there are the local affairs committees or management committees. These bodies have only advisory status to the city or town councils, and no powers to make or implement decisions and laws. They have been overwhelmingly rejected by the people.

In African areas, there are community councils and the black local authorities. Their functions include administration and control of housing, control of squatting, refuse removal, sewerage, drainage and electricity. However, because these local authorities are expeted to generate their own funds, and because of the totally inadequate serevices they provide, they have been rejected by communities. Elections for these bodies have been boycotted, and many of the unpopular community councillors have been forced to resign and flee from angry township residents.

STRUGGLES AGAINST LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Since 1976, resistance to thegovernment's township policies has been a major focus of opposition to apartheid. Communities throughout the country have mobilised against the structures which have controlled their lives in the townships. Whilst the SAP and SADF have been called in to quell township unrest, the government has also sought a "political solution" by trying to create structures which have the support of the people. But because the structures have had no real power, they have been rejected, leaving the crisis of local government unresolved.

It is in the context of this crisis that the government has decided to hold municipal elections in 1988.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESTRUCTURING

What are the changes the government is introducing at the local

government level, which will form the basis for contesting the municipal elections?

A number of measures have been taken to ensure that the new system of local government works effectively:
a)A council for the coordination of local government affairs was established in 1983, and now includes reps of all race groups concerned or involved in local government.

b)The government has started moves to introduce a uniform electoral system of local government bodies for all race groups, and the procedures and conditions for African local authority elections have been brought into line with those for other race groups.

c)In addition, new ordinances have been passed by provincial executives,which give some of the powers currently held by provincial administrations, to local authorities.

d) The Local Government Training Act provides for the training of staff and councillors for local government bodies for all race groups. This move can be interpreted as being to ensure that the new municipalities work smoothly in carrying out central government designs at the local level.

e) The government has increased the financial incentives for candidates in the municipal elections. Allowances for members of all local authorities have been reworked according to a new system of grading. All local authorities have been graded on a scale from 1-15, depending on their size, income and other factors, and councillors' allowances will be linked to their grading.

In some cases, especially among Indian and coloured local authorities, members are also MPs, earning a minimum of R64 000. In addition, councillors will now get pensions in terms of the new Pensions Benefits for Councillors of Local Authorities Act. This means that successful candidates in the municipal elections will be earning very large sums of money.

e) The regional services councils are also a very important part of the government's designs for local government.The RSCs are local government structures responsible for the coordination of bulk community services (e.g. water supply, sewqerage, electricity, etc) on a regional basis. The RSCs are to consist of racially exclusive local authorities and management bodies of all race groups. Each will have the power to vote and take decisions according to the amount of services that it buys.

The RSCs have been rejected by community organisations because:
- they are based on a system of racial local authorities;
- they place a tremendous financial burden on communities:
financial clout will be the basis for representation on the RSCs, as representation and voting poweres will take place according to the services bought by a local authority from the RSCs.

Even among the white community, the RSCs are a controversy, as
they intend to impose unpopular new levies on businesses, racial
representation and a very indirect way of representing residents'
interests. The RSCs will operate under the provincial executive
committees, which are themselves not democratically elected.

The RSCs in Natal

The future of the RSCs in Natal is not clear. Even the KwaZulu
government is refusing to have anything to do with the RSCs,
because it says, it was not consulted when the legislation was
drafted.

One of the complications preventing the government from simply
imposing the RSCs, is its own laws. The National States
Constitution Act of 1971, which made KwaZulu a self-governing
territory , says that no law passed thereafter can infringe on
KwaZulu's rights. Amongst these 'rights' of KwaZulu is the
provision of services within KwaZulu.

The RSC Act gives the right regarding the provision of services
to an RSC. To allow an RSC to ooperate within KwaZulu territory,
the National States Constitution Act will have to be amended.
Also, KwaZulu will have to pass a regulation, allowing its local
authorities to enter into contracts with the RSCs. To date, such
a regulation has not been passed by KwaZulu, which rejects the
RSCs.

THE FORTHCOMING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

The government has announced that it intends holding municipal
elections for African, Indian, coloured and white local
authorities in October 1988. According to the government, a total
of about 7 100 seats will be filled in the October elections.
 The date being proposed for all elections is 26 October 1988.
This
 follows unhappiness by some bodies about an earlier government
decision to hold the elections on separate days for different
groups. The reason the government had given for the earlier
decision was that it would not be able to provide proper SAP
securuty or personnel at all the polls on the same day for
nationwide elections, unless the SADF was called in.

PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS

Already, various political parties, e.g. the Labour Party, UDP,
NPP, PFP, NP and CP have made it clear that they intend to
contest the elections on party political lines. It appears as if
they realise that power at the local level will mean greater
leverage at the level of the RSCs.

Participants in the LAC system (e.g the Southern Durban LAC) have
said that they will participate in the elections. However, they

seem to be worried about how they will fare in these elections. The SDLAC has complained to the provincial authority about the lack of powers vested in the LACs and their treatment by the DCC. The LACs now realise how little credibility they have and are urging the government to give them more powers if the municipal elections are to be of any signficance . The SDLAC has also said that it is opposed to autonomy for Indian areas presently represented by the LACs , because these areas do not have the financial stability to be self-supporting.

All this is very much in contradiction to the SDLAC's recent request to the DCC for a sum of R50 000 to produce a glossy brochure commemorating 20 years of its existence in October 1988.

Liberal political groupings have been exploring the possibility of alliances to defeat the NP in the elections. A 10-point "urban charter" is being spoken about, as forming the basis of opposition coalitions at the local and regional levels. The charter, currently being discussed behind the scenes, was apparently drawn up by individuals in commerce, industry and urban government. It is likely to receive the support of the PFP, the Independent Movement and others.

Whilst elections are set to take place in Indian, coloured,African and white local authorities, millions of Africans will in reality be exzcluded from the municipal elections - because they live in areas outside the set boundaries of local authorities, or do not qualify to be included on the voters' roll.

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND AFRICAN AREAS

Over 200 African local authorities have been established in South Africa. These areas now fall under the control of the four provinces. Municipal elections will take place in all these local authorities, including those which have collapsed as a result of popular pressure.

A large number of other townships will be excluded from the elections however. The government has said that homeland towns and settlements will not be involved in the October elections, including the 'self-governing' homelands like KwaZulu. Therefore, all KwaZulu townships, e.g Umlazi and KwaMashu will be excluded. Note that the population of the bantustans (both independent and self-governing) is approximately 15 million and all these people will be excluded.

In addition, towns and settlements controlled by the S.A. Development Trust, and administered by the Department of Development Aid, e.g Inanda and Edendale, will not be included.

Also excluded from the municipal elections will be the millions of people living in illegal shack settlements outside the borders of designated local authorities, and the thousands living

in white areas.

The status of people living in informal settlements within the designated areas is still uncertain and will only be known during the coming parliamentary session.

ISSSUES FOR DISCUSSION

What is the scenario against which municipal elections will take place for local authorities?

The black local authorities and the community councils which will take part in the elections in African areas, are severely discredited. High rents and poor facilities have been the cause of an extensive rent boycott, which is costing the government R1 million a day.The authorities have responded with a heavy hand - through rent evictions, and the use of the 'kitskonstabels' in trying to break the boycott.

After five years of political turmoil in most African townships, the government finally introduced the State of Emergency in an attempt to create a climate conducive to implementing government policy.

In addition, the government has introduced other measures intended to cripple the rent boycott. The Promotion of Local Government Affairs Amendment Bill provides that employers must act as debt collectors on behalf of local authorities. The bill also says that local authorities can attach the liquid assets (including wages) of an individual owing rent. There would be stiff penalties on employers who fail to comply with the regulations. Already, businesspeople, trade unions and community organisations have rejected the bill.

Whilst it is clear that a vast number of African people are excluded fron the municipal elections, it would be foolish to ignore them. In Indian, coloured and white local authorities, the elections are set to become a site of fierce political battles. In a situation where it is being constantly challenged at the local level, the government needs to assert control at the local level.

For this reason, it can be predicted that the elections will be held under the State of Emergency, and that the government will use its emergency powers to ensure that no campaign against the elections is waged.

This poses a challenge to those who believe genuinely in non-racial and democratic structures at all levels, to expose the content of the municipal elections for what it really means.