

MEMORANDUM ON THE OCTOBER 26 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Following an analysis of state strategy and the popular response to the October 26 Municipal Elections¹, the following issues need to be discussed:

1. The shift to the right in the white electorate.

What implications does this shift carry for revolutionary strategy? Is it enough to argue that it is inevitable and expected and thereby to dismiss it from consideration in our everyday work on the ground (tactics) and more importantly, in our strategy? How should we treat its braking effect on the NP reform movement? Can we take at face value monopoly capital's analysis that the right-ward movement in white politics has peaked, and that their gains in the municipal elections were not as large as a first reading might suggest? Is its relationship to mainstream state repression complementary or contradictory (or both) and therefore, can there be any advantages for us? What are its disadvantages - i.e. closing even further the small space open to legal and mass action and its bloody potential to unleash mass annihilation of opponents through para-statal death squads, as has been the case in Latin America - and how will this affect open and semi-legal organisation?

Some pointers in this regard:-

- i. There is a rightward shift;
- ii. The issue behind whether it has peaked or not essentially concerns the potential danger the ultra-right vote poses for the NP in the next general election. But even if it has peaked (although there is no real evidence either way at this point) this is not as important as the general danger it poses to mass popular political activity;
- iii. Its relationship to mainstream state repression is both contradictory and complementary. At the level of reform policy, it contradicts and impedes the process, however it complements both the **policy and practice of repression**. On the one hand, large numbers of the SAP are involved in the ultra-right movement and on the other hand, similar state-sponsored black vigilante/death squad forces have been unleashed upon resisting communities and against anti-apartheid activists (e.g. Crossroads, Pietermaritzburg and Natal in general etc.). It, thus, complements a general

¹ The background to this memo is the DPE Document - THE OCTOBER 26 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

state - initiated destabilisation policy which aims to remove mass popular discipline and control of the struggle by eradicating the people and organisations which provide this leadership.

2. Parliamentary participation.

There are several dimensions to this issue.

2.1. The first is the decision by the FFF to "participate". How useful was this tactic? Did it actually win any sections of the white community over to the mass democratic movement or did it serve to hold off whites who would otherwise have shifted more radically. Were whites not encouraged to break ranks with the black majority, thereby legitimising the elections? The stance of independents, such as Van Eck, is significant in this regard, since as an MP, he used parliamentary privilege to convey the boycott call made by the MDM. It is one thing to encourage people who participate in the system to take a popular stand against it and quite another thing to encourage them to participate in the first instance. Our quarrel with the PFP is their long-held view that the system can be changed from within - which implicitly carries with it an acceptance that the white electorate can legitimately speak on behalf of a disenfranchised black majority.

2.2. This gives rise to the second and related matter of the shift in the PFP's constituency. It is not without irony that the argument for encouraging white voters to vote for anti-apartheid candidates stemmed from a concern for PFP and the white electoral "left", while the PFP actively extended its participatory politics into the black community. What implications does this shift carry for the popular stand against third-tier incorporation. Are PFP candidates not going to be discouraged from taking up their posts or rejecting these councils? Are people likely to (or should they) expect and demand more from them - that is, that they show some allegiance to the masses? Will they be able to produce any results given the essentially rubber-stamp nature of these bodies, other than to give the state's strategy legitimacy? Does that mean people should demand results from the councils or their incapacitation? Are there any lessons to be learnt here from the corrupting effects of working within the system - as is evidenced by the Labour Party, its "trial" participation and recent unanimous decision to continue participating in the tri-cameral system or the experience of collaboration in the various bantustan administrations?

2.3. There is also the question of political struggles within the NP itself.

Afrikaner academics are interpreting the reformist trend as a technocratic response to objective and subjective developments in the struggle. The question is, is there a disjuncture between apartheid "reform" and repression? Are the technocrats within the state repressive machinery (I think they are) or outside of it? And what response can be anticipated from the NP, given the rise of the "ultra-right", the alleged tension between the technocrats and the ideologues and now the demise of PW. How should we interpret the assessment made by some Afrikaans analysts that the NP is ready to jettison its historical base (the Afrikaans working class) in favour of one which is both narrower in class terms (middle and upper class), and wider in colour and "ethnic" terms (incorporating sections of the black majority as well as English- and other speaking whites)? What implications does such a shift in base, should it materialise, hold for the NDM?

3. NDM Strategy during the election period.

The NDM generally gave clear and directive leadership consistent with its analysis of the state's initiative as being one not to broaden and enhance democracy, but rather to broaden and entrench white minority power. Yet, several issues need careful examination. Firstly, the problem of participation of whites in the elections, as has been indicated above. Secondly, the extent to which the NDM monitored and examined shifts in state strategy over the months in the run up to the election order to more effectively counter its repressive and coercive actions. It is clear from a post-election analysis that the regime had a multi-pronged election strategy and therefore, that its actions were less in response to popular resistance and more in line with its overall approach. And thirdly, the confusion regarding what to do on October 26th itself. It is clear that the NDM called for national action of all kinds. But there was also a call for a national stayaway. Was there enough preparation for this to be effective? The relatively weak response to the stayaway suggests there was not. But nor was it the main aim, although the confusion served to divert attention from the real achievement- that is, an almost complete abstention by the black majority from participation in the elections, either as candidates or as an electorate. This was the real victory scored by the NDM.

4 Post-election strategy.

4.1. It is clear that despite a generally appalling turnout from the black electorate, the state is determined to press ahead with its

cooption/repression strategy (which extends well beyond the election campaign itself). It is, therefore, necessary to closely monitor changes and developments in its approach - especially to the so-called National Council or National Forum, its capacity to run and control third-tier black councils, township and housing upgrading etc. - in order to anticipate and counter its initiatives.

4.2. It is also essential that the NDM gives clear direction as to how the councils should be approached. Are they to be rendered useless, like their predecessors and are councilors going to be actively encouraged to resign, or are they going to be made to work in the interests of the communities, despite the fact that they are not representative of them. Much will depend on the nature of the councilors themselves, the actual situation in the community concerned AND the particular relation of the council to the JMC/RSC network. There is the grave danger that if they are rendered workable they will reinforce state strategy. As with 4.1. (above) there is a need for constant monitoring and analysis. We need to know and find out exactly who is on each of the councils and how they are working.

The importance of such a post-electoral analysis can't be overemphasized - in the immediate term to ensure that the NDM will be even better equipped to counter the imminent general elections, and in the longer term to move the struggle forward onto a higher plain, despite the intensity of state repression.

T.M.

15.2.1989