

BUILDING POST-APARTHEID LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

- * Most people in South Africa have no say in how the country is governed. Most people also have no say in how their city or town is governed

This means they have no say in decisions relating to their daily needs, such as health, housing, water and electricity provision etc

- † The government set up management committees, community councils or liaison committees. But these have been rejected by the people, because they are not a substitute for real, democratic local government

- * These puppet bodies tried to raise rents to get money to pay for services and to upgrade the townships

- † All over the country, people have gone on rent and service charges boycotts, for two reasons - to protest at increases, and to protest at having no say in local government

- * The government has been forced to make new proposals on how the cities should be governed

THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW PROPOSALS

The THORNHILL COMMITTEE made new proposals in May this year to the government. It proposes:

- † LOCAL OPTION

Each town and city must hold a 'local indaba' to decide how it should be governed in the future

- * NEW ACT

A new Act will be passed which will include general rules for all towns and cities, including rules on their powers, duties and how they are financed

The Act will also say what the boundaries of each city are - what areas are to be included

- * LOCAL CHARTER

The agreement reached will be made law by the Provincial Administrator, through granting a 'local charter' to that town or city.

LOCAL OPTIONS

- * separate local authorities where viable in terms of economic, functional and political criteria; with redistribution
- * a local services council with a joint administration; autonomous local authorities
- * a joint local authority made up of neighbourhood management committees on a non-racial, geographical basis
- * simple majoritarian model, with or without protection of minorities
- * any other locally negotiated model that is the result of local negotiations and complies with the act

INSTITUTIONAL OPTIONS

- executive authority
- committee system
- forms of representation, wards etc

CRITIQUE OF NEW PROPOSALS

State's intention: a pre-emptive strike

- to separate local issues from national negotiations
- to 'rule' from the grave by preserving local level apartheid after transfer of power at the national level
- to end its responsibility for financing local authorities and the legacy of apartheid

Local option:

- permits apartheid local government to be maintained
- is a national strategy to divide communities
- will exploit weak, unorganised areas

THORNHILL: ANC SUSPICIONS

The Thornhill committee's proposals for a new local government system may face a hostile reception from civic associations sympathetic to the African National Congress. A draft discussion document on the proposals by the Centre for Development Studies, an ANC/"Mass Democratic Movement" think-tank, is sharply critical of the proposals.

In informal discussions, ANC and other anti-apartheid activists express similar objections to the proposals to those in the CDS document.

They insist that a "local option" which allows some cities to retain racial local authorities is unacceptable. They say that a single, non-racial, local government system must be introduced.

Indabas Rejected

The CDS document, which is intended to stimulate discussion only, also criticises the "local indabas" including all interest groups proposed by the Thornhill report.

It fears that all organisations in a city, regardless of their support, will have an equal say in designing a new system. This, it says, would allow minorities as much say as the majority. It implies that a local "constituent assembly", in which all residents elect those who design the new system, is preferable.

The document accepts that the report is a major shift in government thinking because it acknowledges that racial local government will have to go. This is a "victory for the MDM".

But it alleges that it is also an attempt to defuse demands for immediate local government reform by placing the responsibility for change onto individual cities.

"Local option", it says, "will allow Conservative Party apartheid" to be perpetuated in some areas.

CDS says a new local government system must stipulate that all local authorities must be non-racial, democratic, and encourage redistribution of resources. Within that, cities could choose their own local government forms.

It also rejects the Thornhill suggestion that "neighbourhood committees" have some municipal powers because this will give wealthy areas the power to take decisions which should be taken by the elected local authority.

Informal Talks

Although the CDS response and the Thornhill proposals seem wide apart, the gap may not be unbridgable.

CDS and "civics" still favour informal negotiation over new local government systems in particular cities – outside the framework proposed by the Thornhill report. Some government spokesmen say that it will not insist that local negotiations are channelled through its framework – informal talks will not be obstructed and, if they produce agreements, the government might allow these to be implemented.

If this becomes the government view, the way may be open for some cities to negotiate and implement new local government systems.

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE OF THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT ?

To respond effectively, we must consult the grassroots

- * Each region is holding workshops to discuss these issues
- * The results of these discussions will be taken to a National Conference in October

WHAT DO WE NEED?

- * We need a national response which takes into account regional differences in conditions and strategies
- * We need to make sure that the issues of local government are part of NATIONAL constitutional negotiations
- * We need to demand that the Group Areas Act and the Illegal Squatting Act are scrapped before local government can be reformed
- * We need to demand a single tax base for each town or city - the rates paid by factories, offices and shops to the council is created by all who live in the city and should be shared by all
- * We need to draw up national principles for post-apartheid councils, e.g. non-racial, democratic and accountable
- * We urgently need to do our own research into how to democratise local government

WHAT RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE DONE?

We need to study and discuss issues such as:

- * how can we make local government accountable and democratic?
- * how should people be represented on city councils?
- * how can we make RSC's and the CPA more democratic and accountable?
- * how should the boundaries of 'one city' be drawn? which areas should be included?
- * how should towns and cities be financed? will a 'single tax base' be the answer?
- * is there enough money to meet everyone's needs for housing and services?
- * if there isn't enough money, where should we find more money? what things need to be funded first?
- * what should be the central government's role in financing local government?
- * what should we be doing to prepare ourselves to govern our towns and cities?

HOW SHOULD CIVICS DEAL WITH PRESSURES TO NEGOTIATE?

MAKE INTERIM AGREEMENTS ONLY:

- * local negotiations can and must continue, and can help to deepen dual power, but nothing PERMANENT should be agreed to

LEARN FROM OTHER STRUGGLES

- * lessons from local negotiations should be shared and fed into national strategies

SET PRECONDITIONS

- * civics can demand that mancoms and community councils are scrapped before agreeing to talk
- * civics can demand that local issues, such as stopping shack demolitions or scrapping rent arrears are addressed before agreeing to talk

DONT BE PRESSURED INTO QUICK RESPONSES

- * civics can demand time to consult umbrella structures before having talks
- * the law does not allow non-racial councils yet, so what is the hurry?
- * civics can demand to have their experts present at all meetings with the council

BUILD UNITY

- * develop civic structures across 'racial' divisions
- * dont have separate talks

WORKSHOP

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. what is happening in our region? are there lessons we can share?
2. what preconditions should be set before civics talk to white councils?
3. what ideas do we have for democratising local government in our town/city?
4. what calls or campaigns could we take up over local government?
5. how should the democratic movement respond to the Thornhill proposals?
6. What is the role of SAMWU in democratising local government?