

THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE ROLE OF THE PARTY

Comrade chair and comrades:

My task is to analyse the current situation and put forward some ideas as to what I think are the tasks facing our party. I have elected to deal more with the latter part of my task because I think we have done a lot of analysing in the previous ILG meetings.

It is generally taken as given that we are living in a period that holds out much promise with our all-round struggle having forced the de Klerk regime into acknowledging that there are no prospects of political stability without it finding some kind of accommodation with the African National Congress and its allies. Indeed, the fact that we are today in a period of transition which is characterised mainly by the process of negotiations in which the ANC and the regime are the key players, cannot but mean that our country has reached a crucial crossroads.

However, it is also becoming increasingly clear that this period is perhaps the most disquieting in history. For since the unbanning of the ANC, the SACP and other organisations, acts of violence directed against our people in the oppressed communities have increased eight fold. Not only has this violence jeopardised the negotiating-environment, but also, it has undermined the prestige of the liberation alliance and its capacity to ground its obvious popularity on organisation. It is also evident that the regime, together with its allies, has not abandoned its project of fragmenting the liberation alliance, and in the ultimate analysis, peripheralising the South African Communist Party.

Comrades will recall that in the face of the violence which is currently gripping our country, our people demanded an intervention from the liberation alliance - the sort of intervention which would equip them with the capacity to defend themselves. In an attempt to address this problem, Umsebenzi carried an article which asserted the legitimacy of our peoples' right to self-defence. The response which came from the "Ministry of Law-and -order" was calculated to create an impression that, a la Operation Vula, our party was once more trying to shoot down the negotiations process. The resolutions adopted at the ANC Consultative Conference have clearly shown that the Umsebenzi article was articulating the feelings of our people on the ground.

Comrades, I am citing this example which is just but one amongst others, to show that the imperatives of the current situation have immensurably enhanced the responsibility resting with our party for ensuring that the masses of our people are not demobilised. Even amongst our own members

and potential members, there exists a lot of confusion as to what our position is in relation to what is going on. By our own conduct, we are objectively marginalising ourselves - thereby walking directly into the enemy's designs. To date, our role in the negotiations process has been limited to explaining agreements reached between the ANC and Nationalist Party delegations. For what it is worth, there is nothing wrong with explaining those "Minutes", but our input should certainly go beyond that. February the 1st will mark the beginning of a programme which is aimed at releasing the pulse-beat of our people. Amongst the hundreds of thousands of people who will be marching throughout the country, there will be members and supporters of our party. We can only ensure that this reality is reflected, if we consciously take Party banners and placards to those demonstrations - to be hoisted alongside those of our allies. Whilst this will have the effect of projecting our separateness, it will also have the effect of cementing the alliance.

In the previous ILG meeting, we agreed on the need to involve the alliance as whole, more directly in the process of strategising around the negotiations process. The Joint Political Committee meeting took the same view. What we have not seen to date, is an attempt to give practical effect to these agreements. I would suggest very strongly that we need, as a matter of urgency, to establish an ANC-COSATU-SACP committee which will be charged with the responsibility of ongoing strategising on matters to do with negotiations. All future Summit meetings between the ANC delegation and the regime, including those at Working Committee level, must have the benefit of inputs from such a committee.

Our own propaganda work should not wait for meetings between the ANC and the regime. We must continue through our propaganda work, to generate debate on the process of negotiations - even if it means being critical of how we conducted ourselves in the past, in relation to this process. The alternative would be to create an impression amongst our people that this process of negotiations has a life of its own, above and away from them.

When the prospect of us entering into this process started looming ahead of us, we put forward the perspective of the need for us to build a broad patriotic front which we thought (and I hope we still do), would narrow the social base of those political circles which serve the enemy's interests and facilitate the hegemony of the liberation alliance in society as a whole. Today we are calling for the convening of an "All Party Conference" without even explaining how it fits into our strategic projections. It does not even appear that we have clarified our minds on the implications this will have for the alliance in the medium

and long-term. Adding to this confusion is the fact that our attempts at winning over forces like "Bantustan leaders" appear to have taken precedence over the organisational and political work we have to do amongst our people. Our starting point seems to be to persuade our people to accept that these Bantustan leaders are moving closer to our positions rather than to organise and mobilise our people so as to force the Bantustan leaders to find it difficult to remain in the service of the other side.

To come back to the idea of the All Party Congress and its possible implications for the alliance: If participants at that conference will be, all the political parties which can prove that they enjoy substantial support, does this mean that the SACP will have to prove its independent support base and stake a claim to participate in the conference independently from the ANC? If the Parties at Conference are expected to agree on establishing and participating in the Interim Government to oversee the process henceforth, does this mean that our participation in the IG will be on the basis of us being separate political parties? This question is also relevant in relation to the Constituent Assembly.

In our attempt to address these questions, it will be important to remind ourselves that we are committed to a Tripartite alliance which includes COSATU, an organisation which does not dream of becoming a political party. Besides COSATU, there is a whole range of democratic formations like civics, students organisations and so on. Is the process of leading to the All Party Congress going to take place in the quiet or is it going to be a participatory one? If it is going to be a participatory one, what role do we envisage for these mass democratic formations in it?

Comrade chair, having spoken at so much length about those general questions, I propose to deal briefly with some of the thorny problems internal to the Party. Recently a survey carried out by a very conservative national newspaper showed that our Party took third place in the popularity poll conducted throughout the country among Blacks. Another recent poll among urban Blacks showed that 70% of them opted for a socialist future. The display of support for our party at the public launch in July last year and in Port Elizabeth recently, leaves us in no doubt that we are one of the few countries where support for socialism is not in decline. However, our own records will reveal that we are amongst the many countries in the world where the size of the Communist Party (organisationally speaking), is pathetically small.

If we are indeed a revolutionary party which enjoys such a prestige amongst our people, then we need to take a critical view of ourselves. Although we have made some progress with

regard to establishing regional and branch structures of the party, we have not yet achieved a qualitative improvement in our work to meet the especially stringent demands which are being made today to organisational, ideological and political work. This has to be visited much more seriously than we have done so far. Whilst it is important for our cadres to work in fraternal organisations, we cannot continue to do this at the expense of building the Party. We still have a very small number of full-time party cadres. To most of our cadres, Party work remains sometimes incidental to serious work they are doing in fraternal organisations.

We have made a declaration of intent to build a mass party of high quality. We have also said that the party will have no secret members. It appears to me that a substantial part of the little we have by way of high quality, remains buried under fraternal organisations. Comrades who had the opportunity to go to Party schools abroad have become an investment for which our emerging structures are realising no returns. Those comrades have to be deployed into regions to ensure that as regional and branch structures are being set-up, collectives which will attend to the area of the ideological training of our cadres are also established. The type of questions that often get put to comrades in the regional interim leadership structures point to a dire and urgent need for this. Our inability to give satisfactory answers to these questions can only serve to bring the viability of what we trying to do into questions. Certainly, ongoing ideological and political discussions within our structures will serve to fortify our cadres' strength of dedication to the cause of the Party, their firm militant resolve and revolutionary enthusiasm.

I see this area of work as crucial because not only will it enhance the capacity of our cadres to build the party, but also, it will guide them in their work within fraternal organisations. We need to cultivate a culture whereby party branches will become structures in which cadres account for their work in the fraternal organisations. We need to subject our work to the scrutiny of our own comrades in the structures of our party. Only in this way can we realise a rise in the ideological maturity of our cadres and therefore of our party.

On International Communist Solidarity

(Below we reproduce extracts from Maxime Gremetz's speech during the 27th Congress of the French Communist Party.)

THE only efficient way to change national and international realities so that they meet the demands of the peoples, is to set the people in motion—consciously, widely and determinedly.

Any endeavour to find a short-cut, to dodge obstacles in people's minds will turn out to be an illusion and in some cases end up in tragedy.

What is important is to get hold of their common will to prevent escalation, their will to impose negotiations, to respect the right of the peoples concerned, of all of them.

Our contribution is great to the success of events initiated by the ad hoc group "Ca suffit comme ci" which brings together very different people who have adopted the proposal that the Third World debt should be cancelled, a proposal we have been putting forward for quite a long time.

We will be taking the movement further towards enlarging it nationally and internationally.

Is there not another field, that of the defense of national independence and sovereignty, where it is possible to be active together with others?

Let us waste no time and turn boldly to all who hold as well do, on the basis of their beliefs and thinking, that the independence, the freedom and dignity of France are not negotiable and who, like us, stand for a great Europe of cooperative and sovereign nations.

The same applies to solidarity which has always been a tradition of our Party from its very beginnings and is today a universal requirement and a worldwide need as illustrated by the presence of 109 delegations of parties and movements and guests from every continent.

By assuming our responsibilities in this field, we shall truly and better show that we are unyielding defenders of liberties, of human rights wherever they are threatened, unyielding defenders of the rights of the peoples, of all peoples, freely to choose their destiny.

Helping these separate struggles to converge is to give them the strength and dynamism which is needed if they are to succeed.

This is one more reason why we must strengthen and enlarge all such convergences, both regionally and internationally.

It is both possible and necessary, through the intervention of the peoples, to change the balance of forces, to oblige the forces of capital to withdraw, and to impose solutions more consistent with the interests of the peoples concerned.

That we should contribute to the Communist and revolutionary movement acquiring a second breath has been welcomed almost unanimously in the course of pre-Congress debates. It also meets

definite worldwide requests.

I therefore believe we must, as has been said in the report, ask the revolutionary parties what they think of these proposals, while of course fully respecting their diversity: is it not desirable that we should exchange our experiences and opinions informally, and with no prior conditions, and examine the conditions under which our struggle takes place and in what way each of us can contribute, each in his or her own way, to change the situation and make it more favourable to the interests of the peoples?

In another field, we have just received a request from Joe Slovo, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party.

At a time when the Twelve have just decided to begin lifting sanctions, while the ANC is asking for them to be maintained in view of the continuation by the Pretoria regime of its policy of apartheid and increasing violence and repression against ANC members, the Communist Party of South Africa is asking us to create the conditions that would enable it to meet in Paris with the Communist Parties of the EEC countries.

The aim is to make known the difficult conditions of the South African people's struggle and the solidarity that is required.

We of course are only too glad to give a

positive answer to this request.

Together with our South African comrades we will invite all Communist Parties concerned and will be happy to welcome Joe Slovo.

Lastly, Comrades, we want to work to reinforce solidarity with the Cuban people; many Communists have said so during the preparation of our Congress.

After the campaign "Hands Off Cuba", which we supported, why should we not consider a major initiative which we would launch in France and call all progressive forces in Europe to support?

After consultation, it appears that we could launch a great initiative of political and material solidarity, a "Ship for Cuba", loaded with the oil which the Cuban people so badly need.

It would also be a symbol of our action against the economic blockade operated by the United States and other countries, among them France, to which Cuba is victim.

Clearly, I have not mentioned here all the questions deserving attention and action in the sphere of international concerns.

The Intifada youths, and more generally, the Palestinian people, the Saharawi people, the Turkish, Kurdish, Moroccan, Irish democrats, the men and women prosecuted for their opinions in Eastern Germany and in Central Europe, the courageous people of El Salvador, all those whose rights and liberties are endangered anywhere in the world, in whatever country, can rely on our solidarity.