

Workers Voice

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WOSA

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**Workers Organisation
For Socialist Action
Pamphlet**

The Politics Of Negotiations

**Including An Open Letter To
All Organisations Of The
Oppressed**

Issued and Published by WOSA P O Box 491 Salt River 7925

An Open Letter

To All Organisations of the Oppressed Comrades and Friends

We believe that some important questions need to be asked about the ongoing negotiations process. Should we participate in the Multi-Party Conference to discuss the drafting of a new constitution? Has government had a total change of heart and are they now willing to accept majority rule? Will they negotiate the transfer of power to a democratically elected government? Can the reforms they promise really change our lives?

We don't think so. We think that the rulers of South Africa are seeking ways to include yesterday's liberation movements in a **POWER SHARING** deal. Certain political leaders (ANC and Inkatha) will be invited into government to share responsibility for the transition to a post-apartheid South Africa. We believe that this controlled reform of apartheid from above is intended to ensure that a socialist revolution from below never occurs.

Apartheid laws will go but the social structures of apartheid and the capitalist market economy will remain. The farms, mines and factories will still be privately owned. The exploitation of the Black working class will continue along with mass unemployment. For the majority of the poor the social structures of apartheid - the segregated townships and schools, etc. - will still remain.

It serves government's purpose to present the changes now taking place as well-meaning reforms from above. But these

so-called reforms, like the lifting of certain apartheid laws, are a result of our mass struggles. They are not gifts from the oppressors.

Government uses talk of reform to demobilise mass anti-apartheid struggles. The Congress Alliance (ANC, SACP, COSATU) uses mass struggle as a threat to win further concessions from government.

How far can reforms go? Given the backwardness of apartheid some changes can and will be made, but these changes will benefit only a small layer of middle class Blacks. Yet, talk of negotiations has cruelly raised the false hope in very many people that reforms will bring relief to their daily hardships. It won't.

The promise of progressive reforms under market capitalism is false. Capitalism, in its greed for profit, will refuse to pay for the major changes needed to improve our lives. Reforms will therefore stop long **before** the living conditions of the vast majority are radically improved.

To win improvements at a mass level we will be forced to extend our political and trade union struggles to include making changes to the ownership of wealth. This means putting the demands for socialism back on the mass agenda.

We give our reasons, in the attached pamphlet "The Politics of Negotiations", for calling on organisations now involved to stop negotiating and return instead to the mass mobilisation of our liberation forces as the only way forward.

We also call for the formation of a National United Front of the oppressed and exploited to agree on a programme of action which will lead to the early convening of a Constituent Assembly.

We are NOT asking your organisation to accept our political positions. The National United Front could agree on a common platform around which we can mobilise to win the demand for a constituent assembly.

We do not believe that government has to agree to anything before this can happen. We are opposed to any formation other than a democratically elected Constituent Assembly deciding upon a new constitution. We should aim to constitute ourselves as an alternative social power capable of deciding our own future.

If you wish to further discuss WOSA's position we are prepared to send you a speaker on request.

Yours In the struggle for Jobs, Peace and Socialism

**No to VAT
No taxation without representation
GOVERNMENT MUST GO!
FORWARD TO A CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY
FORWARD TO A NATIONAL UNITED
FRONT**

The Politics Of Negotiations

The Purpose of Negotiations

The South African ruling class has decided, in conjunction with imperialism, that apartheid must go and that Blacks should be represented in a new government. They decided this in order to ensure a longer life for the capitalist profit-making system in all of Southern Africa.

We must look reality in the face. The ending of apartheid will extend some political rights to the Black majority and will bring them some social relief when the post-apartheid development programmes are implemented. If negotiations succeed the working people and the unemployed will be able to vote for a new government. We fear that their vote may not be free and equal.

De Klerk is trying to determine the shape of the new government by reaching agreement with participants in his planned multi-party conference. De Klerk is talking about a super-cabinet involving the leaders of the main major political parties. He is also prepared to consider other proposals.

We do not accept that such a government would be able to solve our social problems or grant all the rights we demand. The only chance for significant changes will be if a constituent assembly is won through mass struggle with the potential of becoming an alternative government in its own right.

Negotiations, we believe, is about De Klerk winning agreement from our liberation organisations that the transition to a new South Africa will be limited to removing apartheid laws and limited to introducing a reconstructed social system in which the capitalist market system could flourish.

If that happens, the political system of Post-Apartheid South Africa will be similar to, but not the same as, that of the USA where racial inequality still predominates. Working people will still be exploited by their bosses and the weak and the poor will still be deprived, simply because these are not matters that are changed by simply having the vote.

We dare not forget the lessons of independent Black Africa. They show that having the vote does not mean that we will have a job with decent pay, or that peace will come to our land, or that our housing, health and education needs will be met, or that our many other social demands will be realised.

Which way forward?

What is the overall strategy proposed by the Congress movement to get the best deal out of the reform process? What political goal lies at the end of the negotiations process?

Is it freedom, equality, democracy, jobs and socialism? Is it the minimum conditions as laid down in the Freedom Charter, the Azanian Manifesto and the Ten Point Programme? Will it satisfy the more radical demands raised during the upturns in our struggle? Or is there still another harder struggle to be waged later once reforms have run their course? What are the traps and dangers that need to be avoided?

The Strategy Of The Congress Alliance

Is this the way forward?

We believe that when the Congress/SACP leadership agreed to negotiate the sharing of power with government they understood the full implications of that decision. Their task now is to persuade their membership, and then the rest of South Africa, to accept their decision as a wise one. How they plan to do this is quite clear from the strategy they propose.

STEP 1

The Patriotic Front (PF) & All-Party Conference (APC)

Their first task is to appear as legitimate, as having the support of the popular majority and the endorsement of other liberation movements. To achieve this is the essential role of the Patriotic Front (PF) and of the All-Party Conference (APC).

The Patriotic Front, as Congress originally proposed it, was to call together the liberation organisations to seek a common platform which they would take forward, as a left-bloc, to a broader All-Party Conference. If not, as Cde Mandela made plain, the Alliance would go it alone with its other democratic allies.

However, the **Patriotic Front Conference**, as convened by the ANC, PAC and AZAPO, to meet in Durban on 25-27th October, 1991, has invited a very wide range of organisations, including the Bantustan parties and the Tri-cameral parties. Hope of finding a common position as a left-bloc is now virtually impossible.

Congress hopes to win support from the broadened PF

Politics Of Negotiations

Conference for its proposals on an interim government (IG) and a constituent assembly (CA). To date no other liberation organisation supports an IG (PAC seeks a form of interim authority). PAC and AZAPO are not in favour of an APC but the way the PF Conference has been called in fact substitutes for it in every respect!

The PF-bloc, now comprising an agreement between ANC, PAC and AZAPO, is supposed to tilt the scales leftward within the PF conference. But, given the bloc's response to the DP's threat to withdraw following AZAPO's letter, the tilt leftward can't go so far that the "democratic allies" of the Congress Alliance can no longer support it!

Government, for its part, has thus far refused to concede either an interim government or a constituent assembly. It plans to call a **multi-party conference (MPC)** to discuss the way forward for South Africa, to agree on terms for a constitution and to agree transitional government arrangements. This MPC will exclude organisations who refuse to negotiate a settlement.

The Congress Alliance intends participating in the multi-party conference. In view of this the Patriotic Front/All-Party Conference is clearly an attempt by the Congress Alliance to win broad support for the positions it intends taking into the government's multi-party conference. In this way it seeks to hook the other liberation organisations onto the negotiations bandwagon.

Just as it happened with the Peace Talks, these conferences (the APC and MPC) constitute a clearing ground for both Congress and government. Congress needs to look legitimate by bringing other significant organisations behind it. Government cannot de-legitimise state power by handing over rule to

some unacceptable authority. Yet both have to arrive at a point of common agreement. This is the purpose of the conferences.

STEP 2.

Interim Government (IG) and Constituent Assembly (CA)

The purpose of the APC/MPC is to lay down the ground rules for the IG and the CA. The APC/MPC will agree on a formula for selecting (not electing) the IG and will define the authority of the IG. The expectation is that the NP will stand down from single-party government on condition that it is included in the multi-party interim government.

This is where the sharing of power begins in a **formal** sense, although the many Joint Working Groups (between government and the Congress Alliance) are already a sort of dress rehearsal where Congress learns the rules of the game.

Congress doesn't expect the IG to last more than 18 months. Basically, its task is to supervise the constituent assembly, and then be replaced by a government of national unity elected under the new constitution. The IG will not make new laws nor abolish old ones - it will serve as a "neutral" supervisory body. In practice this means it will defend the status quo.

The interim government proposed by Congress is simply another version of the same class animal as the super-cabinet proposed by De Klerk. Although neither claims to formally constitute a new government, and projects themselves as a neutral form of civil administration, they will in fact have to rule the country.

Neither of them will be democratically elected bodies. Both of

them exist for the central purpose of supervising the legal (but not social) transition from apartheid-capitalism to a new form of racial-capitalism. Either form of interim government will do no more than supervise the army and police, administer the civil service, and enforce the laws of the land. It will carry out all the essential functions of a state.

The Interim government will serve as midwife to the birth of post-apartheid racial-capitalism and, in the event of any upsurge of mass worker struggles threatening stability during the change-over, will serve as caretaker of capitalism's interests.

The political purpose of the interim government is to preserve the legitimacy of the capitalist state while it switches over from its present undemocratic form, with its tri-cameral parliaments and bantustan outposts, to a more democratic state-form with a central parliament legally created by the CA.

Illusions of Power

Congress argues that the fairness and justness of both the CA and IG will depend on who is chosen to constitute the transitional government. This is the same kind of mistake as talk about De Klerk's personal integrity or the professionalism of the police!

In reality the political authority and form of the interim government will be settled once sufficient checks and balances are agreed between Congress and Government to convince the bourgeoisie that its class power is protected. Thereafter, who gets named to sit on the IG depends upon deals made in the PF, the MPC/APC and in the Joint Working Groups.

One politically sensitive difference between the interim proposals of Congress and that of De Klerk is that, under a super-cabinet, the NP doesn't have to pretend to stand down

from government - it simply absorbs Congress & Co. It is this degree of blatant co-optation that Congress can't accept, because it will lose too much credibility.

Congress needs a form of interim government to which the NP at least appears to be handing over power. The NP, for its part, can't appear to abdicate social power - that would raise the risk of social instability from the far-Right and Left. The shuffle board will therefore be very busy until a formula acceptable to both sides is agreed on.

Delusion of Power

Congress argues that if the PF and its allies in the APC become a majority, they would hold real power in both the IG and the CA - and later, through an electoral pact, a majority in a government of national unity.

This is a complete misunderstanding of what bourgeois parliamentary politics means. Its success depends upon convincing Black South Africans, whose experience with Bantustans has taught them otherwise, that the number of seats you hold in parliament is a reflection of real social power.

The numbers game Congress is involved in serves to legitimise what Congress is promoting - namely, that the oppressed accept less than the democratic programmes of our liberation movements because that's the best deal Congress can hope to get. The Congress argument amounts to this: **We must accept sharing power because we are unable to take power!**

The Logic of Power Sharing

When the Congress/SACP leadership entered the negotiations process they effectively gave up the revolutionary struggle in exchange for a government-led reform process which offered them a share in state power.

To carry their membership with them the Congress/SACP leadership had to disguise the enormity of what they intended doing. They tried to make people believe that government is negotiating from a position of weakness. The propaganda chorus began to persuade people that accepting only a share of power was an important first step.

The Congress/SACP leadership argued that by working from inside a new post-apartheid government they could gradually increase popular control until one day the workers would run the country. Some Congress/SACP people call this their hidden agenda, but neither government nor the bosses are fooled by rhetoric. They know that to share power means you can't govern as you choose.

What Congress can and cannot do will be settled during the negotiations process. Government will demand certain assurances from the Congress/SACP leadership, and will insist that they demonstrate their acceptance of the rules.

Already Congress has had to jump the loop. First they had to disband MK, then they had to disband the self-defence committees. Next they will have to curb mass political actions or reduce them to insignificant activity. If Congress/SACP refuses to accept the rules they will not receive the share of power now offered them.

We have always said that the bourgeoisie will never hand over power to the working class. At very best, and only under extreme circumstances, they will negotiate a deal with reliable partners who are willing to rule on their behalf in exchange for the trappings of public office. The bourgeoisie will only allow the executive of the state to be changed at elections if they are assured that the rules of the power game are well respected.

History has taught that the only way real power can transfer to the people is by them seizing it through popular revolutionary struggle. Whenever power has been shared its purpose was to block the transfer of real power to the people. The bourgeoisie make the people believe that when their leaders are allowed to take *office*, they are taking power.

The Power They Won't Share

As the whole of Black Africa discovered to their cost, real social power is about far more than being in parliament. It is about who owns and controls the means of production and therefore the creation and distribution of wealth in a society.

In South Africa today, De Klerk's government, like every government before it, rules the country on behalf of the bosses who own the mines, the factories, farms, and banks, etc. Ownership and control over the economy is the power the government won't share. Which is why they make such a fuss every time Mandela mentions nationalisation.

Another Road Forward

There is an alternative. If a United Front could be formed which is prepared to stand firm on key political issues, then the MPC/APC would be paralysed because "the democratic allies" will find our positions unacceptable. Negotiations would break down because they only work if both sides remain flexible and are prepared to yield. A United Front committed to promoting mass struggles rather than endorsing negotiations can shift the balance of forces.

We would then be on the road to a democratically elected government, not an interim government. But such a government won't come about without a serious contestation of power in the streets. One way of building that power is around a mass political campaign for a popularly based constituent assembly built from below. That is what WOSA proposes.

Politics Of Negotiations

Without such a mass campaign based on popular struggle the **constituent assembly**, if it happens, will be a concession from De Klerk to Congress, negotiated in exchange for checks and balances on class power during the period of IG. If this happens the CA becomes no more than a forum where a new constitution is written. Any notion that the CA can become the political focus of an alternative social power is excluded.

Unless a united front launches a militant national campaign out of which we build a popularly based CA, the new constitution will be written by lawyers and then circulated by Congress to the mass structures for comment. Without an active political base this is a futile and bureaucratic exercise.

The voice of Congress members, if they get a chance to express it, will be composited at local, regional and national level until it suits the needs of lawyers. Non-Congress members will only get a chance to express their opinion if they have some direct way of influencing an elected representative.

Unless the CA is built from below, it will be a hollow shell with the job of legitimising the negotiated settlement. It will become a site of negotiations where the interests of labour and capital, of oppressed and oppressor, will be compromised in a so-called constitution of national unity which the state will enforce.

This is why we say that the NP and other "democratic allies" will only endorse the new constitution once they are convinced that it protects their political, social and economic interests. The interests of the organised working class and of other oppressed could not possibly be accommodated by the bourgeoisie.

AZAPO, PAC and WOSA all support the call for a CA. WOSA

sees the CA as expressing the interests of an actively involved mass movement, with united front structures implanted all over the country to mobilise and to act as a guardian of our interests.

Arriving at a common position with Congress would be hard to accomplish. Finding agreement with opposing class parties like Inkatha, the Bantustan parties, the Labour Party or the DP and Nationalist Party would be impossible for WOSA.

WOSA will attend the Patriotic Front Conference to present its proposals for a Fighting Alliance of the Oppressed and Exploited based on a common platform and a programme of action. WOSA will propose the following principled basis for the national united front (NUF):

1. A democratically elected constituent assembly as the only acceptable means of arriving at a new constitution.
2. All members of the NUF totally reject the apartheid system. Organisations presently working within the apartheid system must resign from (and leave) these structures before they can become members of the NUF.
3. Because it is an alliance of the oppressed and exploited, no representatives of capital can become members of the NUF.
4. The NUF must be structured at grassroots, regional and national levels and will be based on a mass campaign for a constituent assembly. (The NUF is NOT a leadership forum.)
5. The NUF will seek to harness all the mass organisations of the oppressed and exploited, including trade unions, civic, youth, student, church and sporting organisations in joint campaigns.
6. The principles of public accountability of representatives and delegates to the structures of the NUF will guide the workings of the front.

Politics Of Negotiations

7. The agreements and decisions of the front will be the property of all our rank and file members and will thus be binding on all provided that such decisions are not in conflict with the unifying principles adopted by the front.
8. Over and above the unity achieved in the front, each component organisation has the fullest right to propagate its programme and slogans.

Where We Stand

To build a national organisation that will fight tirelessly for the establishment of a democratic socialist society where political and economic power will be in the hands of the working class i.e. where the means of production will be owned and controlled by, and in the interest of, the working class and for the benefit of society as a whole.

To build an organisation of disciplined members who will work within all progressive grassroots organisations where members have to ensure that working class demands are raised consistently and the struggle for socialism is seen as the only alternative to the present system of racial capitalism.

To strive to mobilise the working class around our political programme.

To organise, educate and strive to lead the working class in the struggle against racial capitalism and imperialism.

To fight all forms of oppression i.e. racism, tribalism and sexism.

To defend the interests of the working class against reformist initiatives that seek to compromise our struggle.

To implement the tactic of the united front so as to promote the widest possible unity of the oppressed and exploited in our struggle against capitalism, exploitation and national oppression provided we are able to propagate our programme.

To participate in and strengthen the mass organisations of the working class.

To oppose all narrow sectarian approaches to the struggle and to uphold the right of all progressive organisations to propagate their views.

WOSA

If you would like to know more about WOSA or would like to join us, please contact us at one of the addresses below:

P O Box 491 Salt River 7925 Cape Town

P O Box 31408 Braamfontein 2017

P O Box 905 Pietermaritzburg 3200

P O Box 2153 Upington 8800

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