

# THE BOAT, THE TAP AND THE LEIPZIG WAY: A CRITIQUE OF SOME STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS IN OUR RANKS

by Jeremy Cronin

[Please note - this is an individual contribution. It does not represent the views of the SACP, the ANC or any section of these formations.]<sup>1</sup>

## PART ONE

### Introduction

The ANC-led alliance has not developed an adequate strategy for struggle in the post-February 1990 situation. In place of a single, clear strategy there have been several inadequate and conflicting approaches. These approaches have not themselves ever been fully elaborated for the new situation. Instead they have tended to exist as more or less implicit strategic assumptions that reveal themselves in conflicting tactical interventions and confusing signals that we send to our constituency (and, indeed, to the other side).

In criticising these various strategic positions, I am not trying to suggest that they represent, in any way, organised, ideological factions or platforms within our ranks. On the contrary, most of us at one time or another, and often in the course of the same political intervention, drift now into one, now into another of these strategic frameworks.

In order to begin to develop an adequate strategic approach to the post-February 1990 situation, it is essential to render more visible and then critique these conflicting assumptions. It is this double task that I undertake in the first part of this paper.

I want to argue, a little schematically (but I hope usefully), that there are at present basically three kinds of strategic outlook informing our national liberation movement. Each of these outlooks answers in its own way the core question in the new situation: "How do we democratise South Africa?" or, as it is often put, "How will the transfer of power to the people be effected?"

### STRATEGIC OUTLOOK ONE: "DON'T ROCK THE BOAT"

Whether this position is actually held by anyone within our movement is itself the subject of controversy. Since the purpose of this paper is not to conduct an ideological witch-hunt I prefer to leave the question open.

Let us just say, for the moment, that this kind of strategic outlook is constantly being proffered to our movement as advice (and dangled as a temptation). The position has recently been developed with great coherence by Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert in his book, *The Quest for Democracy. South Africa in transition*.

<sup>1</sup> Part one of this paper was originally presented to an extended central committee meeting of the SACP. I've made a few, largely minor, alterations to the original. Part two is an attempt to go beyond the critique of other strategic positions, by way of offering some tentative perspectives on what I believe to be a more adequate, revolutionary strategy for the present.

Essentially this strategic position sees the path to democratisation as depending primarily upon negotiated pacts between elites. Elites "deliver" their constituencies. The job of constituencies is "to be delivered". The greatest threat to democratisation comes from "radicals" to the right and left. It comes from "irrational fears" on the right, and "unrealistic expectations", "utopian dreams" that confuse democracy with equality on the left. This latter is what Slabbert describes graphically as "the burden of democracy".

Mass action, in this strategic framework, obviously belongs to the category of "rocking the boat". This perspective is grounded on the assumption that there is essentially a strategic convergence between responsible leaders on the side of both the regime and the national liberation movement. This "moderate centre" must be allowed to congeal, it must be given the space and time to get on with the task.

This perspective doesn't argue that there are NO differences between these elites - but the differences are essentially competitive differences. They can be resolved through rational "bargaining".

Clearly this strategic outlook is thoroughly elitist. It is also thoroughly reformist, believing that the differences between the capitalist-oriented ruling bloc and the national liberation movement are essentially non-antagonistic. It is a competition between different constituencies that can be ameliorated through elite bargaining and reforms dispensed from above.

There is, of course, a sliver of truth in this position, otherwise all negotiations would be futile or merely a trick either on their or our part. There is, indeed, an extremely limited strategic convergence of interest between leading elements of the ruling bloc and the liberation movement. The all-round crisis of apartheid has finally forced leading elements in the ruling bloc (and they have carried with them for the moment a significant constituency - see the white referendum) to undertake the risky business (for them) of moving away from constitutionally entrenched white minority rule.

We share this objective. But, as Raymond Suttner puts it, while both sides want to move away from X, We want to get to Y, while the regime wants to move to X<sup>1</sup>. The strategic convergence is confined, then, strictly to the need to move away from X. There is no common vision on the direction and character of the move. There is a small consensus on departure, but no consensus whatsoever on destination. It is this extremely limited strategic convergence that nevertheless provides us with an important window of opportunity. If we fail to engage actively with this opportunity, using an all-round strategy, we risk allowing the regime to steer the process to X<sup>1</sup>, to a new point of stability for them. X<sup>1</sup> would be a point of stability that entrenches existing powers and privileges in a new constitutional form.

But in actively engaging on the terrain of negotiations we must never fall into the illusion of strategy 1. If we imagine that there is a more substantive convergence of interest, the end result is inevitable. We will converge on the regime's destination (X<sup>1</sup>).

This "don't rock the boat" strategic outlook has already been extensively criticised (Ben Molapo, "Manufacturing a reformist ANC", *The African Communist*, Second Quarter, 1991). However this critique failed at the time to notice the differences and limitations of other more militant positions being advanced within our movement in opposition to strategy 1. The importance of making these latter distinctions has now become much more apparent. This brings us to:

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## STRATEGIC OUTLOOK TWO: "TURNING ON THE TAP"

This second strategic outlook is, in effect, a militant version of the first. Like the first it tends to conceive of elite negotiations as the royal road to "the transfer of power to the people". But, unlike the first, it doesn't rule out militant struggles, including mass struggle. However, struggle is essentially envisaged as a weapon "to bring the other side to its senses", "to produce a change of heart". In other words, struggle is unleashed in order to achieve what the first strategy assumes to be already unproblematically the case (the other side shares the same strategic outlook as us). Struggle in strategy 2 is not about the self-empowerment of the working masses. Instead, struggle is rather more narrowly seen as empowering the negotiators so that they can bestow upon the people their liberation.

Struggle, including mass struggle, is then essentially a tap to be turned off and on according to perceived progress or otherwise at CODESA. "We have deadlocked at CODESA therefore we are launching mass action". "Mass action will continue until our demands at CODESA are met".

This kind of strategic outlook has, incidentally, a long lineage within our movement (and the original Molapo article should therefore have been more vigilant in this regard).

Throughout the course of our armed struggle, for instance, this kind of strategic assumption (the armed struggle is designed to "bring the other side to its senses") co-existed contradictorily with other strategic perspectives (the armed struggle as one component in a general strategy to build popular power for the overthrow of the regime and for the ensuing process of national democratic transformation).

In criticising the "turning on the tap" outlook we are not arguing that it is wrong to co-ordinate mass struggles so that criticising is strategy 2's elitist and instrumentalist (the masses as a tap) conception of struggle. What is more, it is liable to have reformist consequences, not least because it continually disempowers popular struggles particularly when the tap is supposed to be off (see our recent experience with Border region's anti-Ciskei campaign). This disempowerment means that each time the tap is turned on again it is liable to be less and less effective (and more and more resentful).

It is possible, perhaps a little mechanically, to map onto strategies 1 and 2 assumptions about the unfolding character of the national liberation movement. For strategy 1 the ANC is, essentially, a government in waiting (with some emphasis on the word "waiting", albeit impatiently). The temptation of strategy 1 is, therefore, likely to be particularly alluring to some in our ranks who are beginning to see themselves as future bureaucrats. If and when the ANC becomes the government, the proponents of the "don't rock the boat" line will become even more vociferous.

Strategy 2, for its part, is often significantly linked with the argument that "mass action is justified in the present because the majority of our people do not yet have the vote". This points forward to the kind of medium term conception of the national liberation movement that is implicit in strategy 2. It begins to suggest that soon the national liberation movement must transform itself narrowly into an electoral machine. Once more, mass action will be confined to periodic spurts, this time in elections - yet another version of turning the tap off and on.

## STRATEGY THREE: "THE LEIPZIG WAY"

This third position, unlike the first two, is NOT in our view flawed in principle. It does not (at least not necessarily) have an elitist and therefore ultimately reformist conception of struggle.

Essentially this is the perspective of a mass uprising that builds dual power, that overthrows an incumbent regime and replaces it with the emergent organs of popular power. It is a perspective in which the people transfer power to themselves in an insurrectionary moment. This strategic position received its clearest elaboration in the Party's 1989 programme (The Path to Power).

At least as a strategic inclination it has never entirely disappeared in the post-February 1990 period from the consciousness and hopes of our broad NLM activist ranks. But it is now enjoying a significant resurgence of popularity as a result of utter dissatisfaction with the preceding two strategic outlooks, particularly after the deadlock at CODESA.

As we have said, we have no principled objection to this third outlook. The critical question is: **How realistic is this option?**

The question is not a question about preferences. It is a question that belongs not to the domain of "politics as the art of the possible" (a phrase that reformists and revolutionary romantics both seize upon in their own way). It is a question that must be confronted from the perspective of "politics as the science of the probable".

This means that we must deal with South African insurrectionary prospects in terms of the dynamic balance of forces (international, regional and national). We will not attempt to do that here in any elaborate form, we will simply make some general observations.

Comrades have been invoking the 1989 examples from eastern Europe of massive and ongoing city centre demonstrations (in Leipzig, Prague, and elsewhere) which acted as the engine for the rapid demise of regimes. It is entirely valid to be invoking these examples:

- \* to underline that those who are presently condemning mass action in our country were the first to salute it when it occurred in eastern Europe; and
- \* to illustrate the capacity of mass action to play a role in sweeping regimes out of power **when** the balance of forces is favourable, and also if incumbent regimes are sufficiently sensitive to questions of legitimacy and popular support (i.e. actually have a heart that can be changed).

This last assertion points to a major qualification that needs to be made immediately in regard to the Leipzig and Prague examples:

The examples are often evoked in our own present situation from a basically insurrectionary perspective. But were the mass 1989 demonstrations in these cities insurrections? I do not believe that they were. They belonged much more to the domain of symbolic "protest" (rather than "power") politics.

What dramatically changed the balance of power in these societies was, of course, the external factor, the crisis in the Soviet Union and the abandonment of the Brezhnev Doctrine (a doctrine "justifying" Soviet armed intervention in eastern Europe). With the exception of events in Romania, the mass gatherings were largely symbolic demonstrations of the illegitimacy of the incumbent governments. They created the space for elites to bargain over transitional processes.



Unlike Petrograd in October 1917, for instance, these were not mass acts of popular self-empowerment. Events post-1989 in Germany, in Czechoslovakia, etc., amply underline this point.

In short, although comrades here in South Africa are invoking these events with a strategy 3 perspective in mind, the examples belong, if anything, to a strategy 2 framework.

But, leaving aside the debate over how to understand events in eastern Europe in 1989, can we make and (just as important) can we defend and sustain the gains of a real insurrection here in South Africa in the foreseeable future?

It was never going to be an easy task. In the decade of the 1990s it has become immensely more difficult for us, and this has to do primarily with the impact of external factors upon our own internal situation.

Internationally, as we know, there has been a very rapid and absolutely radical change in the balance of forces. It was essentially this fundamental change that allowed mass demonstrations in Leipzig and Prague to act as catalysts for the rapid demise of governments. But the world balance of forces that encouraged and sustained mass propelled negotiated transition there, is more or less an entirely unfavourable balance for us here.

Within South Africa the single greatest obstacle to a successful popular uprising remains the relatively coherent and relatively powerful repressive machinery of the apartheid regime. Above all, in its commanding heights and in its overwhelming numbers (in the case of the SADF) it remains an essentially white repressive machinery. The prospects of strategic sections of the repressive machinery coming over to the side of a popular uprising in significant numbers remains remote.

However, in the second half of the 1980s within the wider regional terrain of struggle significant strategic trends manifested themselves. A notable shift in the balance of conventional forces began to occur, specifically in southern Angola. Cuban forces acquired air superiority. Suddenly the conventional armed force equation began to take on a very different character. There were some prospects that the SADF would become bogged down, overstretched, and that increasing white citizen force losses would effect its morale and coherence. It was against this immediate background that the Party elaborated its 1989 programme.

But political progress since then, notably the settlement in Angola and Namibia, has paradoxically relieved the pressures on the SADF. Today, there are almost certainly more guns in the hands of the popular masses of our country than ever before. But we are further (and we were arguably never that close) from insurrection now than we were three or four years ago.

I am sure the objective is certainly not to spread demoralisation or to argue for less militancy. On the contrary, I believe that there are very real prospects for a major breakthrough, opening the way for a continuous revolutionary process of national democratic transformation, a process of ongoing transfer of power. But such a breakthrough also requires a clear strategy based on a realistic and revolutionary engagement with the new terrain on which we are struggling. This is a theme that will be developed in the second part of this paper.

In concluding my critique of what I have called strategy 3, I would like to make two final points:

1. We must be careful not to fetishise mass insurrection, or see it as the only possible revolutionary way (on this see Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism an Infantile Disorder). While

this form of revolutionary breakthrough may well be the most decisive, a mass uprising that successfully overthrows an incumbent regime in no way guarantees that power will be transferred to the masses who rise up. (I will come back to the point in a moment).

2. Our present political situation is neither on the brink of an insurrectionary moment, nor is it blocked (which is not the same thing as being static) as it was through much of the past three decades. We are now living in an extremely fluid political conjuncture. In this situation there are particular dangers and weaknesses in propagating a strategy whose medium term success is at best uncertain. It does not help us to engage effectively, as revolutionaries, with the present. And for this reason it fails to provide an effective strategic counter to the elitist and reformist strategies we have labelled one and two above.

In this regard, we should perhaps distinguish between a couple of variants of strategy 3. These variants are distinguished by their time-frames:

- [A] A fairly widespread grass-roots activist version sees insurrection as just around the corner. "Give us one more push", "to hell with the Peace Accord, to hell with CODESA, and to hell with suspension of the armed struggle". At a leadership level we sometimes encourage this perspective without perhaps so intending or believing. With this version of strategy 3, a version that sees insurrection as forever always just six months away, we end up doing exactly what strategy 2 does. Strategy 2 oversees what is "just about to emerge from CODESA" (and in similar fashion it will oversee what will emerge from elections). Strategy 2 and the insurrection-is-just-around-the-corner version of strategy 3 both constantly wind the masses up, only to disappoint them every six months.

- [B] There is a more open-ended version of the insurrectionary perspective. This is the view that it is hard to predict when it may occur. An accumulation of factors can result in a sudden insurrectionary moment. We must conduct struggle in such a way as not to close off this option. We must be maximally poised to exploit it.

Advocates of this open-ended version often refer to Lenin's well-known assertion that insurrections are not narrow conspiracies. But Lenin's statement (he borrows it from Marx) needs to be located in its proper context. Lenin was essentially defending himself (in September 1917) against those who were accusing him of "Blanquism" - that is approaching the revolution as a tight, elite conspiracy (more like a coup than a mass uprising).

A point is that the conditions in which an insurrection might be successfully carried through cannot themselves be planned. He had in mind massive social dislocations, a huge wave of mass uprisings, a generalised paralysis of the incumbent regime and favourable international circumstances. All of these factors were beginning to be present in September 1917 in Russia. But at the same time, and this is the real thrust of his polemic here, Lenin is scathing about those who see insurrection as entirely spontaneous, as something that can just be left to the whims of history. Once the conditions for an insurrection exist, he writes, "to refuse to treat insurrection as an art is a betrayal of Marxism and a betrayal of the revolution." Marxism and Insurrection. A letter to the central committee of the RSDLP(B), September 13-14, 1917. Selected Works, vol.2) Lenin certainly never neglected the critical planning component of the insurrection, indeed the Bolshevik party that Lenin led in October 1917 was a relatively efficient and seasoned conspiratorial machinery. It was Lenin who had fought, in an earlier period, to greatly improve its affectivity, as a formation of "professional revolutionaries".



In our present strategic debates, the second, open-ended time frame approach to insurrection may well not be wrong. Its open-endedness (like many religious beliefs and certain brands of Trostkyism) makes it hard to say quite when, if ever, it could be proved wrong. But it is this very open-endedness which makes it unhelpful in sharpening tactical and strategic choices in the present.

This points to the greatest danger inherent in strategy 3 in general (whether in its A or B versions). Because insurrection is improbable in the short to medium term and because an insurrectionary logic tends to be one of disengagement from the negotiations process, it is liable to open the way to the regime and reformists of all kinds steering the process of transformation. In other words, this, the most militant of the three strategies we have considered, is liable to end us up in exactly the same place that strategy 1 will take us - X1, the regime's desired objective.

Some of the dangers and weaknesses are exemplified, in our view, by the record of the youth sector over the past 18 months or so. Some of the key leadership in the youth sector has held systematically to the strategic perspective of an indefinitely prolonged, general strike. This strategic orientation has, as it happens, coincided with the dissolution into the unitary structure of the Youth League of numerous grass-roots township and regional youth congresses that evolved in the late 1970s and through the 1980s.

The impact of this unification process on the youth sector has been similar to the process on the wider canvas, where the dissolution of the UDF has contributed (unintentionally) to a certain winding down of numerous sectoral and localised mass democratic struggles. The way in which this winding down has in turn favoured "head office" politics in the form of strategies 1 and 2, turning the popular masses into passive spectators or, at best (strategy 2) active fans has been remarked upon in the past.

Less remarked upon has been the way strategy 3 has also sometimes become part of this "head office" dynamic.

I think we can see some of this tendency in the youth sector. The preoccupation amongst key youth leadership (it is largely a theoretical preoccupation) with a prolonged general strike has contributed to (and been reinforced by) a major organisational stagnation in the youth sector. The insurrectionary orientation has itself tended to become an elite, conspiratorial fixation at the expense of developing a broad-based, grass-rooted, multi-pronged (including culture, sport, etc.) youth programme of action.

## THE ZIG-ZAGS OF THE ANC-LED ALLIANCE SINCE FEBRUARY 1990

It is the unresolved co-existence of three inadequate strategic outlooks within our national liberation movement that accounts for many of the problems that we have experienced since February 1990.

In the first part of 1990 it was suggested that we were negotiating with the regime because De Klerk was "a man of integrity" (a strategy 1 kind of perspective). Inevitably the situation on the ground (particularly with violence from August of that year) disproved strategy 1. In the eyes of the communities directly affected by the violence this disproving was never very plausibly argued away by invoking a "third force" (which implied De Klerk didn't really know). In the eyes of affected townships and the majority of our grass-roots cadres the violence was widely and correctly seen to be low intensity warfare waged against our people by the FIRST force itself.

Our cadres and supporters blamed the August suspension of the armed struggle for their sense of defenselessness and tried to counter-pose a more or less spontaneous strategy 3 type of view (particularly at the December 1990 ANC consultative conference).

In April 1991 the ANC leadership issued an open letter ultimatum to De Klerk to end the violence, to release political prisoners and ensure the return of exile or face a suspension of talks about talks. The ultimatum was well received by the majority of movement activists and it was generally only a few of those inclined to strategy 1 who were unhappy (it "rocked the boat"). The ultimatum temporarily helped to resolve the growing rift between the rank and file and the negotiators. But it was never clear whether the ultimatum was part of a strategy 2 outlook, or part of something different.

Despite the ultimatum and the non-fulfillment of its preconditions, within months the tug of negotiations proved too strong.

So, in July 1991 the ANC NEC elaborated the "strategic shift" - that is, the violence, the non-release of prisoners were all subordinated to the bigger question. It was not this or that particular precondition that was the immediate obstacle to change but the regime itself. And so it was back to negotiations. We were going to move to an interim government as quickly as possible.

Whatever its own inherent merits or otherwise, this "strategic shift" also served to paper over the division between the three strategic outlooks within our movement. Proponents of all three positions welcomed the "strategic shift", and each interpreted it in their own way. The proponents of strategy 1 breathed a sigh of relief that negotiations were once more "back on track". "Good sense" had prevailed, the negotiations should never have been suspended.

Proponents of strategy 2 saw themselves going back to the negotiating table strengthened ("you see what a bit of pressure can do"). In this case it was not so much mass pressure, as psychological pressure on the other side that was deemed to have done the trick. Like strategy 1 proponents, proponents of strategy 2 now tended to be over-optimistic about the possibilities of rapidly negotiating an interim government.

For their part, supporters of strategy 3 welcomed the July 1991 shift, and read into the statement that "the regime itself is the immediate obstacle" insurrectionary intentions.

Needless to say the apparent unity of July 1991 quickly evaporated under the pressure of reality itself.

I will resist the temptation here to catalogue the ongoing impact of these conflicting ideological tendencies on our movement over the past months. The essential point is that we need a real unity of strategic purpose not an apparent unity. Only a realistic, revolutionary, mass based strategy can serve to do this. The three strategic outlooks I have critiqued in this paper fail, in differing degrees and in different ways, in this respect.

## PART TWO

### SOME NOTES TOWARDS A MORE ADEQUATE STRATEGY

It is easier to criticise than it is to elaborate a coherent strategy. What has already been said, however, begins to underline, by contrast with the positions I have tried to criticise, the key



features that must be embodied in a correct strategy for the present situation. I believe that such a strategy needs to have three essential features - it needs to be able to combine a REVOLUTIONARY perspective and practice with an active and effective engagement on the terrain of NEGOTIATIONS; and it needs to orient us correctly in regard to our ORGANISATIONAL tasks.

It is important to stress the need for a revolutionary approach, not because it is part of popular rhetoric to do so, but because, as we have often said, national liberation requires a real national democratic REVOLUTION. Moreover, in a period in which negotiations loom large, reformism is an ever-present danger.

But what, then, do I mean by "revolutionary" in our present context?

A revolutionary approach must be based on the perspective that:

1. A successful national democratic transformation will essentially be a process of self-empowerment by the popular masses spearheaded by the working class. The process of transformation must be one that is propelled, monitored and defended from the base.
2. While partial and limited areas of consensus may occur between the national liberation movement and the ruling bloc (making negotiations possible), there is a fundamental, long-term, antagonistic contradiction between the primary class forces on the respective sides.

On the basis of these two basic principles it follows that, while the concrete situation might be one in which a more or less total and rapid transfer of political power is not (unfortunately) feasible, this does not mean that the process of national democratic transformation has to be conceived in a narrow reformist terms. On the contrary, a narrow reformism will simply block and undermine national democratic transformation. Such a transformation process cannot be approached as a slow, incremental winning of partial reforms. That would be to try to climb a greased pole. For every desperate inch we move up, we would forever be sliding two feet down. The pole itself has to be transformed.

Put another way, while a struggle for reforms is not in itself wrong or necessarily reformist, a strategy based on the simple accumulation of reforms is. The process of transformation must be one of both reforms and qualitative breaks, significant if (alas) still partial ruptures. What will be critical in this process is our ability to actively and energetically use the platform of each of these breaks (eg. phase one interim arrangements, or constituent assembly elections) to develop our mass striking capacity and to deepen the momentum towards our fuller objectives.

Related directly to this is the fact that the actual detail of negotiated arrangements, as important as it may be, is less important than ensuring we carry a mobilised, organised mass constituency into and through the process of constitutional negotiations, and onwards. A far-reaching negotiated arrangement that leaves the broad masses confused, demoralised and alienated in the longer term is actually worse than a less adequate negotiations arrangement in which our people remain well organised and mobilised. The ideal, of course, is to achieve both a significant negotiations breakthrough and maintain mass momentum.

This means achieving a difficult balance between effective mobilisation to achieve at least partial breaks, while not raising unrealistic (and therefore ultimately demobilising) expectations about what any particular breakthrough might deliver.

Mass struggle. But how is this to be achieved? To answer this question we need to understand more clearly the nature of mass struggle. In the first place, there is a tendency to think of mass struggle simply as organised events - a march or a rally. As important as these can be, we need to remember that mass struggle is not simply the invention of political organisations or activists. To survive from one day to the next in a township, on the factory floor, in a village in the devastated countryside, requires struggle. Struggle is the bread our people eat daily, often, of course, in individualised, incoherent an of political and democratic sectoral organisations, not to invent struggle, but to organise and collectivise it, to give it purpose and direction.

In giving purpose and direction to the daily struggles of our people it is crucial that we find the correct balance between bringing our mass power to bear directly on the developing negotiations process. In other words, Strategy 2 (turning on the tap) is not wholly wrong. It is indeed critical that we co-ordinate our principal weapons - mass support (plus other factors like international solidarity) - so that we bring them to bear effectively upon the negotiations process. But we must not confine or inhibit mass struggle to this purpose. Instead we need to encourage and facilitate a thousand and one local initiatives, local struggles against the numerous injustices our people suffer.

It is this continuous, unabating mass struggle on the ground that will provide an ongoing momentum through the ups and downs, from one partial breakthrough to the next. It is this kind of dual approach to mass struggle (strategically and nationally directed on the one hand, rolling and relatively spontaneous on the other) that we are beginning to develop more adequately in the current tripartite programme of action.

I have tried to develop a perspective on the transfer of political (and of course other) power as a process (rather than an event). It is a process marked by a series of partial but significant breaks. After the first elections under a new democratic constitution, the newly elected national assembly with its executive and the people at large will still have to deal, in struggle, with other networks of political power. I am thinking, for instance, of the hugely problematic security forces and bureaucracy that will be inherited from the apartheid state and which will not simply change their character because there has been a democratic election. The cultural, economic and social legacy of decades of apartheid and centuries of colonialism will require an even more protracted mass struggle.

#### Organisational requirements

To grasp these realities is to understand the kind of organisational strategic orientation we require right now. It is not wrong to prepare the ANC to govern, and to govern effectively. This imposes numerous organisational demands upon us - in particular policy development and the training of future administrators, future defence force officers, future managers of public sector enterprises, and so on.

It is also not wrong to give considerable attention to the ability of the ANC to contest elections effectively. We have much to learn on this front, and very probably not much time.

But it would be absolutely wrong to prioritise the government- in-waiting role, or the election-machine role for the ANC over and above what remains its absolutely central task: namely, to be a broad, mass-based national liberation movement. Unless the ANC is first and foremost an effective liberation movement, leading struggles on the ground over the next twenty years and more, it will fail as a government and it will ultimately lose its base and subsequent elections.



The struggle for national liberation, for national democratic transformation, is not just a struggle against an incumbent, apartheid regime. We need to move away from an understanding of mass struggle as simply opposition to an undemocratic government. When we have a democratically elected government, mass mobilisation will be just as essential, but now, amongst other things, to enable the implementation of its popular mandate.

The struggle against illiteracy, for instance, if we are to learn anything from the enormous achievements of the Cuban Revolution on this score, will require mass mobilisation and mass campaigning. In the struggle against illiteracy we will need to deploy all our hard-earned campaign skills - good slogans, leaflets and banners, mass mobilisational rallies, and the deployment, for instance, of tens of thousands of students into the rural areas during their vacations. There are countless other examples of areas where we will need mass mobilisation in the post-apartheid period - a predictable one being the struggle to defend democratic economic policies against the International Monetary Fund.

To make these points in 1992 is not an irrelevancy or a diversion from our main organisational challenges, as some comrades argue. To understand what we are pursuing and what we are up against, should tell us what kind of liberation movement we are trying to build, right now.

A further organisational implication of this is that, apart from consolidating our national political formations (ANC, SACP), we need also to rebuild and reawaken the web of relatively independent mass democratic formations and struggles that characterised the 1980s. It is here that the tendency to throw everything into the preparations for an insurrectionary "moment" is unhelpful, however well intentioned. The revolutionary perspective before us demands an ability to be able to sustain, over a long period, mass struggles and mass mobilisation. If we neglect wider areas - like culture or sports - if we demobilise or lose contact with civics, or youth organisations, in favour of tighter insurrectionary structures we will not sustain mass struggles.

Representative and participatory democracy. This organisational point brings me directly to the kind of democratic dispensation we should be trying to build. It was one thing for the Bolsheviks to make errors in their heroic and pioneering revolution. We cannot allow ourselves to simply and unthinkingly repeat those errors. The particular error I have in mind was the identification of "representative" democracy with "bourgeois" democracy, and the contrasting of it with "direct" (i.e. "soviet") democracy, which was held to be "proletarian".

With this logic it was perfectly natural for the Bolsheviks to dissolve the Constituent Assembly, a form of representative democracy after all. (I am not suggesting this was the only or even the principal reason for the dissolution of that particular Constituent Assembly). It was also not illogical that a one-party system should be installed. But the outcome of these developments was not the withering away of the state and the flowering of popular power, as Lenin had hoped. The outcome was the exact opposite. The bureaucracy flourished, and popular power withered. The single party, the state bureaucracy and the soviets, which had originally been dynamic, grass-roots, multi-party organs of popular struggle, all collapsed into each other. Or rather, the bureaucracy swallowed the rest.

It was Rosa Luxemburg who, at the time, made the point that without multi-party, representative democracy, the vibrancy of the institutions of direct (or participatory) democracy, namely the soviets, would wither away:

"In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of the labouring masses. But with the repression of

political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element." (Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor 1961, p.71 - first published 1917/8).

The kind of democracy that we should be struggling for in a future South Africa is one that combines:

- **representative democracy** - the demand for which has, after all, been a longstanding tradition within our struggle - "One person one vote". It is also central to our key demand in the present situation, namely for an elected Constituent Assembly; with
- **participatory or direct democracy** - which, again, has emerged as a powerful tradition within our struggle, particularly in the course of the 1980s. Organs of direct democracy include our various sectoral formations (trade unions, civics, youth, women, educational and religious mass democratic formations, etc.). Such organs also include street committees, self defence units and locals.

But it is for a combination, not a confusion, of these two forms of democracy that we must struggle. In other words, we should not confuse democratic civics with democratically elected local government. We should not confuse self defence units, which must continue to exist, and which must be given public funds and training in a future South Africa, with a democratically accountable, non-racial and therefore fundamentally restructured police force. We should not confuse the democratic managers of public sector industries with the trade unions operating in these industries.

A future democratic government should include, then, democratically elected representatives at national and local level and a state machinery that is answerable both to the elected representatives of the people AND to the various formations of participatory democracy.

At the local level, to borrow just one example from a recent proposal by Thozamile Botha, elected local government representatives would have to put their policy suggestions before "local people's assemblies" at the core of which would be the civics, or, in rural areas, village committees.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

I have tried to show in both Parts 1 and 2 how the way in which we approach the immediate period of transition is deeply intertwined with our medium and longer-term strategic perspective on the character and content of democratisation itself. And, in turn, these two questions inform the other critical strategic question: what kind of organisations do we need to build right now?

On this last question, once more, and by contrast with the position I have just elaborated, we find a paradoxical convergence among the three strategies I critiqued in Part 1. All three have a tendency to fall into one or another variant of statism.

<sup>2</sup> Thozamile Botha, "Civil society: The case of civics as autonomous organs of grassroots participation", in *Local Government and Planning for a Democratic South Africa*, CDS, UWC, 1991.



Strategy one tends to over-invest in the ANC as government (that is, bureau-crazy-) in-waiting. Strategy two is likely to over-invest in the ANC as an electoral machine, that is to conceive of national liberation as essentially a parliamentary task. Strategy three falls into another statist deviation, it tends to conflate:

- mass democratic and sectoral formations (that is, popular formations within civil society);
- political party and national liberation structures (structures that are intermediary between civil society and the state); and
- future representative and administrative/repressive state structures. The recent article by Blade Nzimande and Mpume Sikhosana, ("Civil society and democracy")<sup>3</sup> epitomises this kind of conflation. It is a conflation in which all three levels are stirred together into one stew and called "organs of people's power". Of course, all three "levels" do not exist in real life independently of each other. But the fact that they are all dialectical moments within a single social formation is no reason whatsoever to confuse them either organisationally, tactically or strategically.

Unfortunately, as with the other brands of statism, experience suggests that this kind of conflation has a habit of transferring power to a bureaucratic stratum, and not to the people at all. Not that I believe that we are about to give birth in South Africa to a Stalinist state bureaucracy (as Pallo Jordan seems at times to warn).<sup>4</sup>

The objective chances of a Stalinist state bureaucracy emerging in our country are more or less remote, which is not to deny that there might be Stalinist tendencies or aspirations around, but that is a different matter. A much more real danger lies in the formation of a neo-colonial (of a special type, no doubt) state bureaucratic stratum. This would be a stratum that, pursuing Strategy 1 to its fullest, would use access to state structures and its ability to "deliver" a majority constituency, to negotiate with local white and international capital a place in the sun for its own factional interests. This might well happen, but it is not pre-ordained.

In August 1992, in South Africa, we stand on the threshold of what is potentially a significant transitional process of democratisation. There are some important factors in our favour. Many of these relate to the semi-peripheral position of South Africa within the world system, and the consequent contradictions that flow from our grossly uneven development. We have a ruling bloc in deep crisis, unable to rule in the old way. We have, like a number of other semi-peripheral social formations, a large industrial proletariat, which actually constitutes the largest class force in our country. We have a broad popular movement that, however confused and misled it might currently be, has more than 15 years of continuous mass struggle immediately behind it. We have tens of thousands of revolutionary cadres developed in this period.

We can throw away our advantages in strategic confusion. We can disarm ourselves. But we certainly do not have to!

<sup>3</sup>The African Communist, no.128, 1st quarter 1992.

<sup>4</sup>Pallo Jordan, "Has Socialism Failed? The South African Debate", in Southern Africa Report, January, 1992, p.11-16. Actually, Jordan tends to conflate the problem of neo-colonial state bureaucratic strata, typical of many post-independence African societies, with the quite distinct phenomenon of a Stalinist state bureaucratic stratum. The former is a very real danger in our situation (see Strategies 1 and 2).