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ZPC UNIT DISCUSSION PAPER:

THE CONFLICT WITHIN THE RULING CLASS

The fundamental driving force in the politics of any exploitative society is the antagonistic contradiction between the owners of the means of production and the exploited classes. Within the system of apartheid colonialism, the ruling class and its allies find themselves confronted with a whole array of classes and strata which stand to gain from the democratic revolution.

Black workers are at the head of the national democratic revolution - which is, in content, an anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist struggle.

In relation to these antagonisms, ruling class contradictions are mere quarrels within one family. Nevertheless they have a bearing on the development of our struggle. The movement in formulating strategy and tactics, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy, has to identify the forces at play within the ruling class and find ways of deepening their contradictions.

For a revolution to succeed, all the classes must be "arrayed in such a way that all the classes that are hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads with each other, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength..." Conflicts within the ruling class are inevitable. Their root cause is the very exploitative system they maintain and the popular resistance to which it gives rise.

Contradictions within the ruling class do not, on their own, constitute a mature crisis of the ruling class. The contradictions should be the result of, or trigger off, popular revolt. That is why revolutionaries should bring news of such conflicts to the people, explain their causes and urge the masses into action to defeat the enfeebled ruling class.

Today, apartheid colonialism is experiencing a general crisis. All the factors that are directed against it are converging and thus making it impossible for the system to extricate itself. Since 1976, the ruling class has experienced many tremors within, some of them quite serious, eg in 1976 when the generals planned a coup in protest against Vorster's approach to the political crises within the country and in relation to Southern Africa. Other conflicts such as the "Information Scandal" and the 1982 split in the Nationalist Party were partly the after-effects of this crisis.

The "radical" bourgeoisie agreed with the general direction of Botha's reform policies. They were integrated into the state committees and commissions formulating the 'reform policies'. Such was the strength of the tendency of "unity at the top" that "consensus politics" became the ruling class catchphrase. Even the PFP predicted a decade of realignment, with "integrationists" (MP, PFP, etc) on the one side and "separationists" (INP, the newly-formed Conservative Party, etc) on the other.

Big business supported "the strong government"; they sought to emphasise the sense of urgency with which the issue of "change" had to be addressed. Fortunately, total strategy has, in the broad sense, collapsed. The historical initiative is shifting into the hands of the people. The attempt to exercise political and ideological hegemony over the objects of the colonial system has met with an organised and conscious force which is challenging the very legitimacy of the regime.

Differences within the ruling clique have not been eliminated. Panic within the white community is increasing, especially since the encirclement of about 9000 racist soldiers in southern Angola.

Big business is therefore involved in a multi-pronged gamble. Their apparent defiance of the regime when they went abroad to meet the ANC in Lusaka was also an attempt to placate South African and world opinion that they are at last distancing themselves from the ruling clique and are actively working for the dissolution of apartheid. Yes it should be seen as a form of pressure on Botha, so that he should act in the way they want; or at least an attempt to strengthen the voices of those within the leadership of the NP who share their views.

The crisis in the "middle ground" is dramatically demonstrated in developments in respect to the PFP. Faced with Botha's reform rhetoric which has wide appeal within its support base, PFP found itself tailing behind the regime, demanding "more" rather than introducing something "new." The emergence of a strong mass democratic movement - the UDF, JODAC, ECC, etc - resulted in steady demarcation between those who supported "reform" and those who called for a fundamental restructuring of society. The PFP was faced with differences among its members and also had to contend with the spectre of losing support to the "right" and to the "left".

The 1984-87 mass upsurge in our country, combined with armed struggle and international action, drove the ruling class into an unprecedented "organic" crisis. This crisis resulted in many soul searching by a wide range of political forces, from Gavin Relly, Slabbert, Stellenbosch academics, Wits and Western Cape University, DPC-Afrikaners, Wynand Malan, NUSAS, etc. It is the role of the revolutionary forces that causes this soul searching. In 1986, the once strong South African rand was worth only 35 US cents, the stock exchange was closed and Gerhard de Kock went around the imperialist capitals arranging a suitable repayment of debts. The crisis had hit hard.

The first and the most important effect of the eroding cohesion of the power bloc has been the growth of far right reaction. They generally hanker after the "golden days" of apartheid and fear that even minor adjustments to the system will result in the undermining of their privileged position in it; in addition to these, the far right now also draws support from certain categories of the English-speaking petty bourgeoisie. The emergence of a far right faction within Afrikaner nationalism had already been evident under Vorster. This came with the breakaway of the Hestigte Nasionale Party in 1969.

With the coming to power of the Botha regime and the implementation of the "reformed apartheid" programme, the far right influence grew. This finally culminated in the breakaway of the 18 MPs and the formation of the Konserwatiewe Party (KP) in 1982.

The KP has now established itself as the major party political organisation of the far right. The HNP, although still drawing some support, is in decline; its bid for hegemony having been defeated by the KP. The HNP lost its only seat in parliament in the May 1987 white-only election and is now facing defections to the KP, the most prominent being that of its former Secretary General and sole elected MP, Louis Stofberg. The KP, significantly, has recognised the potential support which it has among certain social categories in the English-speaking community. Unlike the HNP, it does not push on Afrikaner exclusivity and is, for example, committed to maintaining the existing official language policy.

The Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) led by Eugene Terre'Blanche has currently emerged as a major extra-parliamentary force. The AWB has proved that it is able to mobilise large numbers of supporters at rallies, demonstrations and the like and has won several tests of strength when the NP has

attempted to hold meetings in its strongholds. The ANB allowed its own political party - the Blanke Volksesterat Party (BVP) registered in 1980 to become virtually moribund. Considerable numbers of ANB members joined the KP and ANB influence within KP is considerable. In addition to its general ideological/political influence, the ANB also has some military or para-military power - called the Stormvalke. There is evidence of significant far right support within the SADF and SAP.

After the ANB broke up a NP meeting at Pietersburg due to have addressed by R F Botha in May 1986, the Minister of Manpower, P du Plessis, publicly accused the police of taking sides with the far right. He said Terre'blanche had "actually entered the building escorted by police" and that the police did nothing to stop Botha's meeting being disrupted.

A number of prominent personalities who held high rank within the "security forces" were nominated as KP candidates in the May 1987 white general election. They included Gen H J van den Berg, the former head of BOSS and Brigadier Theuns 'Rooi Rus' Swanepool, the former chief interrogator of the Security Police. Swanepool, who stood against Foreign Minister R F Botha, described his goal as being to root out the "communists in the government."

The far right has proved over the years that it has a definite relatively secure constituency among those strata of the white electorate identified above. In the May 1987 elections, the KP increased the number of its parliamentary seats from 18 to 22 and displaced the PFP as official opposition in the white House of Assembly. The percentage of the total vote cast going to the far right nearly doubled from 15,5% in 1981 to 29,5% in 1987. In numerical terms, the far right is estimated to have the potential support of up to 400 000 members of the white community.

The menace posed by the far right is likely to become more pronounced the closer we move towards a transfer of power and, indeed, any serious move towards democracy would seem to be dependent on the physical neutralisation of or defeat of the far right forces.

While the growth of far right reaction has been one important effect, there has also been a growth of forces within the white community looking towards solutions which reach beyond the parameters of racist minority rule. This growth has been fuelled by the failure of the Botha regime's "reformed apartheid" strategy.