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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE

ANC/SACP/COSATU Discussion paper.

This paper arises from the Alliance Strategy meeting of 26/7 May 1993. The views expressed do not represent the final position of any section of the alliance. The paper is nevertheless submitted for consideration by all of our structures. Please submit your comments and suggestions to regional and national structures so that these can be considered in a subsequent draft.

15 June 1993

Around the time of February 2 1990 two things happened more or less simultaneously. Both called for a rethink of our perspective. On the one hand there was the collapse in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Not only the SACP but all sections of our liberation movement had been influenced in various ways by the approaches and the existence of the Soviet bloc.

On the other hand, February 2 presented us with a new national terrain on which we had to interact, for which we had to develop new strategies or adjust a great deal strategically and tactically. Failure to make such an adaptation would obviously have disarmed us. We had to read the situation accurately and develop the correct approach in order to realize our goals.

Our attempts to adjust tactically and, to some extent, strategically, to the new situation have often been creative and innovative, enabling us, in very difficult circumstances, to maintain and/or seize or regain the strategic initiative, inside our country.

But these tactical and strategic adjustments have been uneven and confusing.

For our broad membership and constituency, these adjustments are widely perceived as a 'sell out', a 'right wing shift' and 'abandonment' of our basic aims. Many of these fears relate to the rapidity with which political relationships have moved from pure confrontation to confrontation and engagement between the forces of liberation and the regime and other conservative forces. Some have read these changes in our interactions with the regime as also substantially modifying our goals.

But are the necessary adjustments (and some of them are major adjustments) necessarily in contradiction with our basic National Democratic Revolution goals?

What is our basic NDR position?

The clear position of the National Liberation Movement, pre February 1990, was that we were engaged in a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) the object of which was the emancipation of the black people in general and the African people in particular. This revolution would inaugurate a system of people's power. The revolution would be under the overall leadership of the working class. It would entail national liberation from Colonialism of a Special Type. It would involve fundamental political, social and economic change, transferring of that power into the hands of the people. The Freedom Charter's broad demands best summarised the overall goals.

These goals have generally been encompassed within the phrase 'Transfer of power to the people'

We need now to elaborate (not abandon!) much more thoroughly what we understand by 'transfer of power' to the people. The need to elaborate more fully is based, not so much on a difficult internal and external balance of forces, but because some of our earlier assumptions about transferring power to the people were limited.

In particular, despite the Freedom Charter's call and economic perspectives, we tended to have a statist (that is, state-centred, tending to pay insufficient attention to other power relations) approach to the NDR). The NDR would come about when an ANC -led National Liberation Movement (NLM) smashed the apartheid regime, assumed state power (= 'transfer of power to the people') and then implemented its programme.

There are many theoretical limitations to this perspective. But there are also practical limitations. If February 2 1990 had seen, not the present transition process, but a radical overthrow of the apartheid regime-what kind of ANC would have led that process? The ANC of February 1990 and the ANC of mid- 1993 are quite different in terms of formal composition, elected leadership, relative strength of regions, subregions and branches.

There are many problems in terms of internal democracy. How much greater would they perhaps be if the ANC of February 1990 had simply gained state power?

In the new situation, a statist or even electoralist/constitutionalist version of the NDR has been highlighted by our own particular balance of forces. Let us elaborate this statist/electoralist version of the NDR as scenario I

Strategic objectives/Scenario I [i.e Statist/Constitutionalist/Electoralist culmination to NDR]

An electoralist or constitutionalist version of NDR would see the revolution as completed with the winning of an election or the creation of a new democratic constitution.

This approach would see the realization of the NDR as occurring at a decisive moment, in particular the holding of the first democratic elections or the achievement of a democratic constitution or the inauguration of a democratic, ANC- led government. It is expressed in the theme slogan of an ANC regional Conference last year entitled: 'Elections-the last step to freedom'.

Obviously there are details that may vary. In some variants the decisive event may occur after the end of the Government of National Unity period when there is 'true majority' rule. Some may see the elections as key, the government as key or the constitution as key.

The main thing is that a key historical moment of governmental/constitutional rupture with the past is identified as the culmination of the NDR. Of course, we must not underestimate the significance of a constitution made from below in a country whose history has no such precedent. Every constitution has been thrust down the throats of the people and whatever the limitations of the present process, a constitution resulting from elections would entail a crucial historical advance.

Our strategic objective according to this version is realized through an ANC victory, through transfer of power to the ANC(standing for the people)

Under this version it is irrelevant whether all organisation is collapsed into government, whether every ANC and (in its most extreme form) Civic leader and Cosatu leader go into national government or parliament or regional or local government or the civil service.

As with Eastern Europe the vibrancy or even existence of civil society is not an important element of the approach. It is the government that is to deliver, which is expected to provide the fruits of the revolution. The masses are passive spectators. It is the government that is the embodiment of people's power and what it delivers is taken to be the realization of popular aspirations.

Under this model, reconstruction may be a stated aspiration, but it does not entail the type of ANC or alliance or MDM organisations whose strength is required to realise them. We may have reconstruction policies in education, health economy etc, but it is not necessarily part of the model to have the organisation that can realize these goals

Strategic objectives: scenario 2

In the second model one would see the national democratic revolution as a continuing process, broadening and deepening its national quality, its democratic and its general revolutionary character.

Within this revolution, elections would, as in the first model, be a decisive moment in a continuing process. Within this revolution, a new constitution would represent a historic rupture with the past, the first time that the people themselves have started to govern.

But insofar as the process would not end there, the participation of the masses, the empowerment of the masses, the self-empowerment of the masses would not be taken as fully realized by having the vote.

The vote would be a historic victory, but by no means a culmination of the democratic process and the completion of the victory that is sought. The emancipation of men and women would not be realized through that act.

This model would envisage continuing participatory and direct democracy. Participatory democracy may be entailed through involvement in various forums such as those concerning education, the economy, but also SRCs PTAS shopsteward structures increasing worker power over managerial decisions etc etc.

There would also need to be direct action of the people in support of their demands e.g. to ensure the achievement of a basic human right or in support of a reconstruction demand that may be the policy of the government, but resisted by one or other sector. It may take very radical forms e.g. land seizure without prior governmental sanction, but advancing popular aspirations.

In some cases such action may be directly aimed at affecting a governmental decision. In others it might be independent action affecting other centres of power or empowering people in relation to one of a variety of facets of their environment.

This question of mass intervention in every aspect of their lives, the meaning of direct democracy as a form of empowerment and self-empowerment in the South African context must be elaborated on the basis of our own experiences in the past and now.

This approach means the need to develop a strong organisation that can carry through the democratic goals of the ANC enshrined in the Freedom Charter. It requires in the first place an ANC that empowers ordinary people to demand and defend their rights inside and outside of government.

To achieve these tasks the ANC would remain a broad national liberation movement. Despite all the unsolicited advice we are receiving to convert into a political party, this is the form of organisation best suited to achieving these tasks.

It needs to be an ANC that would encourage initiative at branch level. Branches would not only rely on directives and plans and programmes of action emanating from the national or even the regional offices.

It would necessitate an ANC government that recognises not only the need to tolerate popular, mass-based, sectoral organisations but one that encourages their existence and flourishing. This would be necessary to represent distinct interests and ensure that these are realized within any programme of reconstruction.

It would be a government recognising pluralism as a reality but a reality that needs organisational expression.

The driving force within these organisations comprising the national liberation movement would have to be a strong tripartite alliance. In scenario 2 the reconstruction element of the NDR is inseparable from the democratic element.

The Reconstruction programme must be understood as a core component of the NDR

And the reconstruction process underpins the continuing nature of this phase of the NDR. It is a crucial element of the strategic basis of the alliance, creating an interdependence between the distinct elements. That makes commitment to reconstruction more than a political pact.

What is the role of the SACP within this scenario, within the process of continuing NDR, involving thoroughgoing reconstruction? The SACP will have to play a decisive role in ensuring the leading role of the working class within the NDR and Reconstruction, something that is crucial for its realisation.

The ANC is a cross-class organisation, which is correct. But possible negative resistance to social reconstruction may need the counteraction of a working class party. This in the case of the SACP, is nevertheless within the framework of a strategic commitment to strengthening the ANC and broad-based NLM. The SACP while committed to the broad liberation aims of the NLM as a whole, led by the ANC is specifically there to represent the political interests of the working class.

Within this phase the ANC in government, should be able to rely on and indeed needs the mass democratic movement as a whole, in order to achieve the democratic programme. In this it would have the crucial support of Cosatu in a programme around industry and the economy. The process of deepening the NDR would be immeasurably strengthened if civics and other such organs were to come into the process. Equally for the civics, the realisation of the demands of their constituency would be advanced by participation in such an alliance programme.

Surrounded by such an alliance the ANC would be strengthened in its relations with capital and the International Financial Institutions (IMF etc), whose cooperation will be required to finance elements of a programme and whose hostility to any of its elements would need to be limited.

This broad agreement also prevents vacillatory policy swings which could create differences between allies (particularly the potential ANC government and its allies) and thus impede stability.

Within this tripartite alliance, in the phase of reconstruction, Cosatu could negotiate restructuring within an agreed framework addressing a wider range of socio-economic issues, reducing stark wage conflict. But Cosatu needs the ANC to be a government that creates the institutional framework and legislation to effect such restructuring.

Any restructuring based on market forces alone would be very detrimental to labour and force it into conflict with a future government. But for Cosatu to take an alternative path it needs a government that backs it.

The Second Strategic objective, now being presented makes such a positive interdependence possible. The first scenario or some form of neo-apartheid choice would, in contrast, place the tripartite. A strong alliance under strain and probably lead to its collapse. The second approach is therefore basic to the existence of the alliance. The alliance is likewise essential to the realisation of any reconstruction programme.

But the process needs the involvement of the mass democratic movement as a whole.

The masses are needed in organised formations in order to realize this programme but not only for that reason. The masses and mass organisation are needed to realize their own interests as expressed in social and economic reconstruction

But we are also speaking here of a specific conception of democracy embraced in this model. I think we need to elaborate this model but its elements must include:

- continuing mass action taking a variety of forms

- continuing organisation on a variety of sectoral fronts to cater for and advance the range of interests that affect our people and cater for their various interests and capacities-health, culture, women etc

Central to all the elements of a future democracy, whether in its representative, participatory or direct aspects, is the empowerment of people in the sense that they develop their capacity to influence their own destiny-sometimes, indirectly through their representatives in parliament, or other forums that affect power relations, sometimes directly in grass-roots formations in townships, schools, and places of work direct action for example, occupying land, sometimes through striking, consumer boycotts etc etc

We are speaking then of an understanding of democracy that is in line with a national democratic revolution whose scope is continually deepened and broadened.

Within this model we need a balance between preparing to govern , governing itself and continuing to struggle. The need to continue to struggle is not some knee jerk response. The new democratic governmental policy goals will not be realized unless we also have the organisational capacity to take forward our demands. In some respects this organised power may be directly in support of the government e.g. in relation to international finance institutions. In some situations it may be against recalcitrant sections of capital. In some cases it may be direct action initiated independently of the government. It is of course also quite conceivable that where the government fails to meet popular aspirations, direct action may, under certain circumstances be against that government itself.

Even at the level of conventional representative democracy, this approach means looking carefully at the operation of the existing parliamentary system -do we inherit it uncritically? Does it serve our purpose?

These questions are raised because there is a tendency on the part of some 'experts' to suggest that a successful transition ought to go along a particular path. To the extent that the ANC 'regrettably' deviates from such a path, these experts predict failure of our transition.

We must not allow ourselves to be seduced by this pseudo-expertise. Success must be measured in our terms, that is a transition that ensures the continual enrichment of the lives of ordinary South Africans, a transition that makes SA truly belong to all who live in it. It must be a SA where the people govern, albeit in a multiplicity of ways, every single day of their lives.