

Notes on the current situation

A memorandum was circulated in the democratic movement shortly after the February crackdown "banning" the UDF and 16 other organisations and restricting COSATU. We reprint this brief analysis as a basis for discussion. In the next edition, we hope to print a more detailed analysis of the current situation.

The banning of 17 organisations and the restrictions on COSATU's activities as well as threats of financial clampdowns are a culmination of the state's attack on the mass democratic movement and the people of South Africa.

The clampdowns pose new strategic and tactical challenges to all democrats. We cannot allow these moves to demoralise and defeat us. We should use this opportunity to evaluate, re-strategise and rethink the way we have been operating as activists and in our organisations. Perhaps it is appropriate for us to think seriously about introducing our own "glasnost" and "perestroika".

THE EFFECTS OF THE EMERGENCY

To understand the effects of the emergency, we need to have a sober and scientific analysis of the objective conditions. This is necessary if we are going to accurately chart our way forward.

If we look at the effects of the emergency, generally it has not brought positive results for the state. However this does not mean that the emergency has not weakened us.

Firstly, there are areas where the state has managed to crush progressive structures, reinstall puppet bodies and has regained the political initiative.

Secondly, there are areas where there is a stalemate - where the state has weakened our structures but has not managed to re-establish their own structures.

Thirdly, there are areas where the initiative remains in the hands of the people. These include areas where the rent boycott continues or where the people can call off the rent boycott on their own terms. In Cradock, recently, the rent boycott was called off after the puppet structures agreed to wipe off rent arrears.

In Soweto, Tembisa, the Vaal, several Eastern Transvaal and Eastern Cape townships the rent boycott continues despite the detention of local leadership and large scale evictions.

WHY THE BANNINGS?

1. While the state has managed to introduce JMCs, vigilantes, mass detentions and terrorisation of the local population by municipal police, these strategies have not managed to pacify, divide and win our people away from the mass democratic movement.

The state may have introduced schemes such as upgrading and building of more houses but this has not brought them and their local lackeys the political support of the people.

Instead we have seen ongoing militancy and the resilience of our organisations under very trying conditions. This has frustrated the state and thus they had to resort to more direct and desperate repressive measures.

The regime hopes that its latest onslaught, will crush once and for all the rent boycotts, stayaways and all visible opposition. They hope that this will enable them to reinstall puppet structures and implement their reform programmes, particularly the National Statutory Council.

2. If we look at organisations and individuals most affected, we realise that they come from those areas where the initiative is still in the hands of the people - where our structures were fighting and winning against the forces of reaction and where we have the moral high ground.

For example in Pietermaritzburg, the initiative around the talks was largely in the hands of the progressives. Because of the way in which the democratic movement was conducting itself, we were gaining support. The state was therefore forced to intervene on behalf of Inkatha - hence the bannings and detentions of the people and organisations involved in the talks.

3. It is also widely acknowledged that the state banned our organisations to pave the way for the October municipal elections. The success of the elections is crucial for the state's attempts to reinstall puppet structures in the townships and to gain credibility for their constitutional dispensation. By holding white, coloured, Indian and African elections on one day, the state hopes to convince the world about "seperate but equal" participation in the affairs of the country.

4. The state of emergency is costly in terms of the regime's international image and financial resources. For these reasons the state is forced to consider lifting the state of emergency in the long term but can only do so, if opposition has been completely wiped out.

5. The imperialists are putting a lot of pressure on the regime to negotiate even with the progressive movement. The state is not prepared to negotiate with a united, strong and coherent democratic movement. Before it will entertain entering into serious negotiations, the government is determined to wipe out the democratic movement inside and outside the country. The war in Angola, support for Renamo, destabilisation of Zimbabwe and attempts to force the frontline states to stop their support for the ANC, should be seen within this context.

6. The state has banned our organisations also because they want to pacify the white right wing. If we look at the timing of the attacks on us, we can conclude that they were attempting to influence the election results in the Standerton and Schweitzer- Reineke by-elections.

THE WAY FORWARD

There is a short and long term response to the situation. In the short term, we need to show our anger and disgust at the banings. We need to respond in ways which are appropriate to the local conditions and circumstances in our areas and sectors. Where the mood of the masses dictates a particular response, we must not hesitate to call for an appropriate action. Interim structures may be needed for immediate requirements.

In the long term the tasks of the democratic movement remain the same. We must look into how different areas, organisations and sectors can most effectively take the struggle forward at this point.

1. Rebuilding of mass structures remains the priority. This can often be most successfully achieved by taking up local issues rather than depending on national initiative. Thus we need to concentrate on building local structures and leadership.

Our struggle has always moved forward when we have taken up campaigns. That tradition must continue.

We need to direct resources and manpower to those organisations and areas that have been hard hit by repression. Continuous repression has had a debilitating effect on a number of activists. However we should draw inspiration from the fact that the masses have not shifted their support from the progressive movement.

2. We must continue to build the broadest possible unity against apartheid. This involves working in alliances with groups which are anti-apartheid but do not necessarily accept the Freedom Charter.

In the townships and villages this means that we should extend and deepen our co-operation with the churches, traders associations, taxi-drivers, burial societies and other peoples structures which are as yet not incorporated in the national democratic struggle. We need to ensure that these structures become part of the broad democratic movement. Let the state's onslaught be met with

a united people organised in a solid front of opposition embracing every sector of the community.

In the white areas we should not hesitate to engage with a wide range of anti-Nationalist forces. These groups and individuals might not agree with everything we stand for but in so far as they realise that the government can't solve the crisis in this country, they can be mobilised into anti-Nationalist fronts.

3. In times of crisis our usual way of working is put to severe test. We need to adapt to these conditions and still ensure that democratic practises are adhered to.

BUILD THE UNITED FRONT!

**DOWN WITH THE FORCES OF
COUNTER-REVOLUTION!**

FORWARD TO PEOPLES POWER!

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think the regime banned our organisations on 24 February?
 2. What are the other methods being used by the state to (i) reverse the gains we had made by 1986, and (ii) impose their own counter-revolutionary schemes and structures?
 3. What is the state of struggle in our areas particularly (i) the state of our organisations, (ii) the level of mass mobilisation, and (iii) the level of mass consciousness?
 4. How do we move forward under these conditions?
 5. What challenges do the October municipal elections pose for the democratic movement?
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