

# THE CITY CENTRE — A TERRAIN OF STRUGGLE

One of the major new elements in our struggle has been the wave of massive demonstrations in town and city centres. Hundreds of thousands have marched into major cities and into small dorps.

What is the value of these town centre marches? The regime, it is true, is trying now to transform our struggle into mere protest, into peaceful processions. It is also true that these town centre demonstrations must not become an excuse for ignoring the crucial organisational task of consolidating our townships as mass revolutionary bases.

**But the short-term gains, and the enormous strategic long-term implications of these marches, must never be overlooked. Not for one minute!**



In the first place, the marches have been practical demonstrations of the broadest, anti-apartheid unity. Young lions from the townships have marched shoulder to shoulder with white mayors. Apartheid has divided us into separate communities, but town centres present different possibilities. For instance, when white anti-conscription campaigners have marched through city centres in recent weeks, they have quickly felt the solidarity of black workers and shoppers. Everywhere, tens of thousands of formerly a-political people, black and white, have been mobilised together.

The marches have also been demonstrations of mass public support, not only for the ANC, but also

for the SACP. This support for our Party has sent deep shock-waves into the imperialist camp. Why? It has underlined that the revolutionary alliance between the ANC and the SACP is not based on manoeuvre and caucusing in some hidden leadership structure. For that very reason our alliance can never be undone by imperialist counter-manoeuvres and disinformation campaigns. **Our alliance is rooted in the masses themselves.**

Most important of all, these marches carry with them major long-term strategic implications. In Lenin's words: *'Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its ability, clarifies its mind, forges its will'*.

Since 1976 our people have collectively built up an enormous store of localised revolutionary knowledge. In every township of our country there are hundreds of seasoned fighters who are able to marshal mass power within their communities. The achievements of our last high point of struggle — 1985-86 — were built precisely on this great store of mass collective knowledge gained over ten years of struggle.

But the struggles of this past period suffered from one major strategic weakness. We were generally unable to carry our organised mass power **from** our township bases **into** the industrial, administrative and commercial nerve-centres of the regime. Our victories were localised.

Because they were localised, the enemy has often been able to hit our popular township demonstrations with extreme savagery, out of sight from the broader national and international public eye. We must never forget the many strategic advantages offered by town centre demonstrations. **There are a great**

number of historical examples, among them the mass city centre demonstrations in Iran in 1979, in which wave upon wave of such mass marches have led to the downfall of regimes.

Now in South Africa we need to learn collectively how to operate, not just within our township bases, but in the enemy's nerve centres themselves. This is not abstract knowledge. It can, in the end, only be learned in practice. And indeed, in the last weeks we have begun to learn how to assemble large masses of people in town centres.

We have begun to ask questions like: which marching routes have the most potential for drawing in bystanders and for putting the enemy off balance? Is there an adjoining industrial zone? How do we effectively discipline and marshal our forces for maximum effort?

In learning the answers to these and a thousand other questions we are beginning — just beginning — to address the question of how we use our organised mass power to defeat the regime where it really counts — there within its very citadel. In our mass demonstrations let our slogans now focus more clearly on the question of **power** itself.

**But we must remember that these mass marches occupy a special place in our tactical armoury. They should avoid the kind of provocations which will make it easier for the regime to act against them.**

