

The current situation inside SA

All would agree that the vicious repression of the regime has caused a fairly considerable curtailing of mass, open protest and action since August or so 1986. From my particular vantage point I am not as pessimistic about the state of play as some commentators. I am not aware, for example, of any decrease in the mood of militancy especially of the youth. In the Natal region, although the energy of the community is concentrated around the conflict in the Pmb and peri-urban areas, the very longevity of the conflict is testimony of a refusal of the people to bow down to Inkatha/Pretoria, despite the massive losses that have occurred. Defence units still control and patrol regions. The most important feature of the conflict is that the geographic dispersal of activity and allegiance is fluid. Areas that are UDF controlled one week, may become Inkatha zones the next, but I would most likely have had to relinquish control of another area to which the UDF groups have moved, and vice versa. In discussions with people in BSS, and more recently with refugees and others from the Pmb district, I get the impression that we are going thru a stage of flux, when the movements are grasping new and different forms of struggle to face the new situation. During the height of the recent struggles, campaigns were organised around a large variety of issues - this was possible given the space in which people were able to operate. Now, however, with the restrictions/repression some people are thinking in terms of a more careful approach, ie selecting one issue, eg Group Areas, so that the diminished ranks of activists can be concentrated in one direction rather than spread ~~xx~~ over a whole range of things.

I think a fairly clear result of the detentions and intimidation of the SOE has been to cut links of communication and organisation between different regions. Thus incidents in Soweto are cut off visibly from actions on PE or the Cape. The state is correct to suggest that newspapers like New Nation "contribute to the atmosphere of resistance" because it is through these channels that people can most easily identify their struggles with those of other regions, etc

The clamp on news has had the effect of withdrawing this link at the personal level, and perhaps contributes to a sense of isolation. Having said this, however, the report of the Natal University delegation to the Sansco conference in December was positive, and although there was no underestimation of the powers of the state, there was an equal measure of absolute determination to seek new ways and means of bringing pressure to bear. Whilst some sectors of the press in SA classified the Arusha conference as something of a "non-event", this is not the interpretation of the people I spoke to. The issue of international solidarity is an important one, to the extent that Claudia Manning, ~~xx~~ an exec member of BSS at U.D recently prepared a paper on the subject, using in the main the UN Centre against Apartheid documentation on the subject that I have managed to collect for our Dept.

A good deal of the despondency - something we all suffer from at times at home - is carried through the pages of the English press. Even Howard Barrell's article on OR's statement of Jan 8 I thought was unduly pessimistic and gloomy, concentrating as it did with the aspects of the effects of repression. Having listened to the address on Radio Freedom, and compared notes with BSS secretary we agreed that a more positive interpretation could easily have been relayed. The Harrington case was followed closely, and the SA press's continued crusade for her was considered ludicrous in the extreme.

Even in the Eastern Cape, whilst there are clear signs of a reduction in activity, the reception of Govna Mbeki and the prohibition slapped on him and meetings was indicative of the potential resistance despite the emergency. At a formal level, I am not sure that the state needs the SOE, given the amendments to the Int Sec Act and the Police Acts that were pushed through the Pres Council in 1985, but the continuation of the E is indicative of their own lack of confidence. Whereas it appears that some RSC's have been successfully deployed in some areas, notably the east Tvl, there are still areas where the state's forces are still not able to effect a return to the status quo ante 1984. One such area is

Grahamstown. The townships there suffer the double repression on the police force and the concentrated might of an infantry army base just over the hill. I spent a few days there at the end of Dec, and on a trip into the township late one evening to visit an old friend no longer employed by the University, I was escorted by a contingent of one of the Defence committees. In conversation with them they assured me that the army still does not come into the township at night and during the day they only make swift patrols. I got the impression that one reason for the lack of activity is due to a policy of not unnecessarily confronting the forces of the state, a sort of strategic retreat in order to consolidate ~~xxx~~ what is left after the ravages of the detentions and deaths in the area. But the resistance certainly has not been stamped out, it has taken a qualitatively new form.

I suppose one question of importance would be: to what extent is it possible under the present circumstances to re-establish channels of communication between regions in order to coordinate a national resistance, or is it feasible to conduct a regionalised resistance against a national repression? Perhaps some answers could be found in the response of Sansco. Concerning unions, one area for concern is the vocal preponderance of people with workers' sympathies who urge a rigid unionism even during these times - invoking once again the notion that Sactu's links to Anc was the primary cause for its demise under state repression, and that it would have been better to remain separate and concerned with its matters - when the state itself is conducting an onslaught against "political unionism".