

What kind of ANC does the SACP want?



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Anotherwise generally well-informed foreign correspondent in Johannesburg is betting a case of whiskies that the ANC and SACP will be splitting from each other by the end of this year. The correspondent is going to lose his whiskies.

But there is, of course, more than whisky at stake in this matter. It is not clear whether the chief government negotiator, Constitutional Affairs Minister Gerrit Viljoen, is quite as optimistic (and therefore quite as mistaken) as the correspondent in question. But Viljoen, too, is publicly speculating on an ANC-SACP divorce — at least over the next few years.

To ruminate openly about an impending rift in the way Viljoen has been doing is, obviously, primarily intended as incitement to the act.

In the context of this growing speculation, what exactly is the perspective on

the future of the alliance now emerging from the side of the SACP?

This question is intimately related to a second question: What kind of ANC does the party hope to see evolve over the next months, in the course of the crucial building of ANC branches and regions, through December's Consultative Conference and into next year's ANC Congress?

Ever sensitive to accusations of meddling and manipulation in the affairs of the ANC, SACP official statements and public pronouncements about the ANC have always tended to be somewhat circumspect. Interestingly, in the period after 2 February these statements have become slightly less circumspect. This suggests that, while the party is clearly not in any state of alarm or panic, it is also not simply taking the alliance or the character of the ANC in the new situation for granted.

Appearing a month after the unbanning of the ANC and SACP, the March

1990 edition of the party organ, *Umsebenzi*, carried an editorial which noted among other things: 'The ANC will undoubtedly remain the over-all head of the broad liberation front. The need to consolidate and advance the liberation process in the immediate aftermath of the people's victory may also justify a widening of the democratic camp in a variety of alliances.'

'We can look forward to an ANC of massive strength and every militant must help to make this a reality. In the process, some strata with their own agenda will undoubtedly find it self-serving to flock into its ranks and try to steer it away from its working-class bias. All in all we should be ready for an inevitable sharpening of inter-class ideological contest in the run-up to victory and in its immediate aftermath. It follows that the consolidation and growth of our party and the trade union movement - as independent contingents and as part of the liberation



alliance - is more imperative than ever.'

This perspective is certainly more forthright about the ANC than anything appearing publicly from the side of the party in previous years.

In the most recent issue of *Umsebenzi* (October 1990), under the headline 'No Retreat Now', the leader article takes the forthrightness several steps further. It expresses a clear concern that the strategic initiative is being lost to De Klerk. Although the article is careful to be self-critical of the tripartite alliance (ANC-SACP-Cosatu) as a whole, its criticisms obviously relate most especially to the over-all head of the alliance, the ANC.

The article goes beyond the earlier concern that the necessary broadening of the ANC may dilute its working-class bias. It addresses itself, by strong implication, to the current ANC leadership. It is critical of the fact that in the period after 2 February no 'effective formula' has been found for relating mass struggle

to the negotiations process.

It singles out three styles or modes which it says are coming to dominate alliance politics - working group technical discussions with the regime; an endless round of 'post-apartheid' future-gazing conferences; and the technical building of ANC structures (regional launches, branch launches, elections and AGMs). While all of these activities might be important in themselves, what has more or less totally disappeared, according to *Umsebenzi*, is ANC-led mass struggle.

This disappearance is all the more serious as it corresponds to the regime's primary objective in the present situation. Having been forced finally to recognise the ANC as its principal and inescapable antagonist, the regime is trying to change the character of the ANC by divorcing it from its militant mass base.

The implicit message in the October *Umsebenzi* in regard to the kind of ANC

the SACP would like to see developing is fairly evident. There is an obvious concern that too much time and effort is being expended on grooming the ANC as a future government, while too little effort is accorded to making it a democratically based organ of active mass participation and struggle. 'We need to balance all the talk about "when we are in power", "when we have an ANC government", with solid strategic planning about how we are going to get there in the first place'.

SACP leadership sources are quick to qualify some of this implied criticism. According to one member of the party's national Interim Leadership Group: 'Many of the difficulties and challenges the ANC is encountering relate to objective realities not of the ANC's own making. Organisational building and the consolidation of ANC cadres involves the welding together of exiles, released prisoners, comrades who have emerged out of the last 15 years of mass democratic struggle, and total newcomers. The party, in a smaller way, is encountering the same difficult challenge.'

'For the ANC, in particular, this complex organisational task is made all the more difficult by the extraordinary pressures of time and profile to which it is exposed. The regime has learnt from Zimbabwe and Namibia that liberation movements have inevitable difficulties coming out of the bush or coming out of the underground into a new open political role. And so De Klerk is putting on the pressure. If the ANC fails to respond quickly to initiatives from the other side it is presented, at home and internationally, as dragging its feet, as not being sufficiently committed to the peace process.'

'But if it moves too quickly it runs the constant danger of outstripping its organised mass base, which is still only emerging. Democracy, consultation, mass involvement in negotiations, all tend to fall by the wayside. While we need to be vigilant and self-critical, we also need to be realistic about the objective pressures we are all confronted with, but which touch the ANC in particular'.

SACP representatives also insist that their concern about the unfolding character of the ANC is not narrowly a concern with the future of socialism and of the party in South Africa. As the same spokesperson puts it: 'When Viljoen incites an ANC-SACP break he is not only trying to frustrate a longer-term transition to socialism. He is trying to

The fight for a fighting alliance

Lip-service to the process of consultation is causing strains between the ANC and its partners in the 'revolutionary alliance' - the SACP and Cosatu.

The alliance, formally established at a meeting between the general secretaries of the three organisations on 27 June, is based on the following principles:

- The overall objective is mass-based organisation around a common programme based on the Freedom Charter;
- the ANC is the leader of the alliance;
- the alliance will be a consensus alliance based on mandates from the component parts; and
- each component should be independent.

It was also agreed that a political committee consisting of representatives of each organisation would be responsible for overseeing the affairs of the alliance. The fact that the committee has not yet met is indicative of the difficulties plaguing the alliance.

Jackie Selebi, a member of the ANC's national executive committee, acknowledges that there are problems: 'So far the alliance has only manifested itself in meetings between the general secretaries. A concrete alliance on local and regional level has not yet been built', he told WIP.

Why is this so? Selebi explains: 'At present, the alliance, like the organisations from which it is composed, is in a transitional phase. In exile, when the alliance consisted of the ANC, SACP and the SA Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu), meeting together was easy. Now the ANC and SACP are busy establishing themselves inside the country and we are dealing with so many things on a daily basis that we have simply not had time to give attention to all the things that we need to'.

Cosatu press officer Neil Coleman agrees that there is discontent

within the federation at the lack of progress of the alliance. But, he says, there is also a recognition that it is not only up to the ANC to make the alliance work.

'The questions relating to the alliance don't simply involve questions of one-way consultation by the ANC. It is a reciprocal problem which needs to be discussed with the ANC and the party', he says.

'The key question is a question of a structured relationship - in other words, how people believe the problems are going to be ironed out. If the answers come up from the local and regional level the problems will be greatly reduced'.

There is also an acknowledgement, says Coleman, of the need for consultations within Cosatu itself on the alliance. 'Several issues have to be resolved', he says. These include:

- The question of independence within the alliance;
- what form the alliance should take at a national, regional and local level;
- what should happen if there is no consensus within Cosatu on a particular issue;
- the overlap of leadership between the organisations;
- what the relationship of the alliance should be to other organisations like the United Democratic Front, youth and civic organisations; and
- how the federation sees the alliance developing in a post-apartheid South Africa.

What of the third partner in the alliance, the SACP? Party spokesman Jeremy Cronin admits there is concern within the SACP about lack of consultation by the ANC. 'But I must qualify that', he adds. 'There is an understanding of the pressures operating on the ANC: the party is facing similar problems, although less sharply. The answer is less to shout at the ANC than to build the organisation up so that it functions solidly on the ground'. - Robyn Rafel •

change the character of the ANC itself.

'Never mind a future socialist project, Viljoen is trying to undercut the quality and depth of the impending national democratic transition. An ANC deprived of a mobilised mass base, and stripped of its SACP alliance, is not an ANC that will spearhead a meaningful democratic transformation of our country. Viljoen knows this'.

These comments, like the implied criticism in the October *Umsebenzi* are, of course, not saying anything that is not being whispered in corridors, mini-buses, and informally in the offices of a thousand and one popular organisations. But the fact that these views are now being voiced publicly and officially by party representatives and in official party organs is significant.

Part of their significance lies not just in the question of what the party hopes to see the ANC become, but to the related question of what the party's own future role and identity might be. And there are not easy nor obvious answers to this latter question. The SACP is having to come to terms with new realities after 40 years in the underground, and in a world where many of the received Marxist-Leninist orthodoxies are now openly questioned. Yet, despite disadvantages, the Communist Party is also launching itself publicly into the paradoxical situation where it has never been more popular, and where the mass support for socialism is riding relatively high.

At its launch rally on 29 July, the SACP set itself the dual task of being both a relatively mass party (general secretary, Joe Slovo mentions a figure of 'several tens of thousands by July 1991'), as well as being a vanguard party. Traditionally, at least in much Marxist writing, the concepts 'mass' and 'vanguard' party have been counterposed as alternative organisational options.

This is a point conceded by various party representatives. But they point to the particular situation in South Africa, and most especially to the existence of the ANC-SACP alliance. There is strong relatively large worker-based support for socialism, and, at the same time, there is a broader, revolutionary national liberation movement, the ANC, with overwhelming mass popularity. The strategic role of the SACP has to be carved out within the parameters of this relatively unique situation.

Apart from its obviously distinct, longer-term socialist perspective the SACP has set itself a number of present

tasks which relate to its endeavours to continue to play something of a vanguard role. In the first place, it is clear that the new forthrightness, a relative degree of independence of perspective within the context of the alliance, and a higher public profile than the party has had for four decades are part of a newly defined vanguard party role.

Another aspect of its vanguard role relates to cadre development. Spokesperson Jeremy Cronin said in a recent interview: 'There's a unique relationship between our party and the ANC, which allows a certain division of labour ... the party can focus more on cadre development, more on building quality, and in this way, although we hope to be relatively large we also hope to continue to play a vanguard role'.

This cadre development is intended to strengthen not just the party, but the ANC as well. The SACP continues to see the ANC as the major organisational vehicle for change in the present situation. In party publications and in interviews the necessity of ensuring the maximum working-class participation within the ANC recurs constantly as a theme.

John Gomomo, an SACP, ANC and Cosatu leader, recently said: 'Struggling for maximum worker involvement in the ANC, and the struggle to build a democratic, mass-based ANC are the best guarantees for a strong ANC and for a strong, ongoing alliance between the ANC, the party and Cosatu'.

Increasingly, at least in media speculation, the SACP's attitude towards the ANC is related to the question of future non-racial national elections for a constituent assembly or for a parliament. Would the SACP stand in opposition to the ANC?

'It's a question we've been asked a great deal in the last months', says Slovo. 'I have tended to say that it's too soon, and too speculative at this point.

'But there are two basic points of departure that could guide us. In the first place it is obvious that it is fundamentally under the ANC umbrella that democratic elections will have to be fought, and it would be short-sighted for the party to split the vote. On the other hand,



SACP general secretary Joe Slovo with Nelson and Winnie Mandela at the SACP launch earlier this year (top), and standard-bearing party supporters at an SACP rally (below)

I believe it is desirable for the SACP to actually test, democratically, its support on the ground. We need to look at various possible formulas. For instance, multi-member constituencies as in the Irish system'.

SACP Political Bureau and ANC NEC member Chris Hani recently expressed a similar perspective: 'We (ie the ANC and the SACP) could have the same candidates at elections. It might be decided that I should contest a particular seat under the banner of the SACP. However, I am sure there will be a common programme between the ANC and SACP because of shared priorities after a democratic transformation'.

But if the SACP needs the ANC at elections, does the converse apply? Viljoen, for one, thinks not: '...almost by way of divine dispensation, the discrediting of communism as an economic, political and social system has happened worldwide. I think the ANC must have noticed that they are becoming discred-

ited internationally by being virtually the only alleged pro-democratic organisation which is still in the anachronistic stance of supporting what was a very strong Stalinist Communist Party'.

Well, the SACP can derive some comfort from the fact that (dare we say it?) 'almost by way of divine dispensation' the party's popularity on the ground in South Africa is uniquely high. Moreover, in the words of one leading market researcher, 'the pattern of cross-alliances between the ANC on the one hand, and the SACP on the other indicate that considerable voter confusion could arise if the public association between these organisations broke down'. It might run against the grain of world trends, but here in South Africa, the ANC appears to need the SACP.

What about the longer term? SACP representatives and publications consistently note that the ANC is not a socialist organisation, and that it should be an organisational home for all democratic,

patriotic elements who accept its broad programme in the present, whether they are socialists or not. So what happens in the event of a longer-term transition to socialism?

The Sowetan recently posed this question to Hani: 'Surely at some point there will be a logical split between the two, even if they remain allies?' Hani's reply was typically direct: 'Correct. Those are the dynamics of the struggle'.

Other SACP spokespersons have offered a different potential outcome, Cronin points to the Cuban example: 'Fidel Castro and the band of guerillas who launched the Cuban revolution did not necessarily start out as socialists. They were essentially patriots and democrats. At first, the Cuban communists were rather peripheral to the guerilla struggle ... After the successful seizure of power, led by Castro's July 26 Movement, a new dynamic set in. The defence of the national democratic revolution, the deepening of its patriotic and democratic content led, in a straight line, towards a socialist transition. This in turn created the conditions for a successful merger of the July 26 Movement and the party'.

According to Cronin, a similar dynamic could develop in South Africa after a democratic transformation. 'One might find the evolution of the ANC into a broad mass socialist party, within which the party merges. This is rather speculative, but it is a possibility which I would favour'.

Whether they are speaking of the longer term, or of the more immediate situation of a developing ANC as it moves towards its national congress, one thing is striking: SACP representatives show very little interest in the kind of red head count that seems most to preoccupy much of the commercial press. One senior party member comments: 'Frankly, from an SACP perspective, it's largely irrelevant if we have 5 or 35 party members on the new ANC NEC due to be elected in June next year. The alliance between our party and congress was not built on boardroom manoeuvres in Lusaka, but on the ground over decades in mass struggle'.

'If the ANC is not sufficiently democratised, if it fails to lead active mass struggles, if the working class is not massively present within the structures of the ANC, then the ANC and our alliance are in serious difficulty - whether or not there is a high proportion of party members to non-party members on the incoming ANC NEC'. •

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