POSSIBLE POLICY POSITIONS

THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY ON LAND REFORM:

A PERSONAL BRIEFING FOR RAY SIMONS

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I Background

1. Land Reform is a key part of the process of transition to democracy by negotiated reform, rather than by the revolutionary process. Unless Land Reform meets a minimum level of popular acceptance, then the strategy of negotiated transition will lose popular legitimacy. All political parties in South Africa which subscribe to a negotiatory process therefore have a duty to ensure that this level of acceptance is achieved.

2. It is not as yet clear what this minimum level is. The facts of the matter are that the people in South Africa have been undergoing rapid urbanisation over the past decades, and this can be expected to accelerate dramatically in the next five years. South Africa is not Asia, and its agricultural resources are generally speaking totally unsuitable for the development of a mass of small farmers and peasantry along the models of the Asian land reforms. There can be no doubt that the future of the rural poor lies mainly in the major conurbations, and in the small country towns.

3. But the demand for the land has become central to the language and ideology of the political struggle, as the Freedom Charter shows. Land alienation is also fresh in the memory of many groups around the country. The distinction between Land Reform as an historic political platform, and Land Reform as a set of pragmatic and workable policies, therefore needs to be observed and handled very carefully.

4. The Party, by accepting the leadership of the ANC, is committed thus far to the negotiatory road. If the negotiatory process is derailed, and the Party is seen to be linked indelibly with compromises which cannot be sold to the masses, then there is a great risk that the Party itself will experience a heavy drain of support which could prove to be fatally damaging.

5. It must also be recognised that the interests of the Party on the land question will increasingly be different from those of the ANC and other regionalist parties which reflect primarily nationalistic or ethnic interests. This is a complex question: historically, as a vanguard party, the SACP has championed the people's rights in the struggles over land, and it is right that it should continue to fulfil this role. But the Party's long term interests must be that of representing the people first and foremost as workers, and the issue of land rights as such must be subordinate to this perspective.

6. There is potential for contradiction arising from these different aspects and significances of Land Reform. It is essential that the correct line is identified, and solidarity built around it. Comrades must be alerted to the potential difficulties, invited to explore these through democratic processes of internal debate, and required to adhere to a common position.

7. The purpose of this briefing document is to suggest a way ahead on this.

II Policy Levels

1. It is suggested that the Party should approach the issue of Land Reform at a number of levels. These may be as follows:

* At the level of the politics of negotiation:

* At the level of internal relationships with political partners in the broad democratic struggle:

* At the level of substantive policies towards the land.

III The Politics of Negotiation

1. Negotiation will require compromise. The Land Reform proposals by the State represent what may be conceived of as being what the State considers to be the maximum it can give away, and the minimum it has to give, without critical loss of support from its contemporary political base on the one hand, and the people on the other.

2. The role of the Party here is quite clear. In the spirit of the negotiatory politics to which it is currently committed, the main aim must be to push the State to give more.

3. This cannot be an open-ended requirement. The Land Proposals have an obvious weak point in that they are totally vague on the commitment of money and land for land reform. The Party must establish quantified estimates of what it sees as the necessary minimum, from the point of view of its constituency, of what it requires at the bargaining table in respect of financial support for land reform, and the level of land acquisition this will entail. These must be supported by rational arguments, and take account of the trade offs of expenditure in this sector with other sectors of the economy.

4. There will inevitably be differences of opinion over what the precise deal that may be acceptable between the Party and other political organisations in the movement. These need to be clearly distinguished from demands which are based not on the need for negotiation and compromise, but on the basis of the historic platform.

These matters must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

IV Fraternal Political Relationships

1. Specific account may need to be taken of the problem of the ANC being outflanked by the PAC on the land issue. The danger is that the PAC will exploit compromises by the ANC to whip up grassroots support, on the basis of unrealistic and unrealisable demands which nevertheless may command a great deal of popular support.

2. The role of the Party here should be to promote the interests of a negotiatory process, and to defuse those who mount a purely ideological rejection of negotiated Land Reform, with pragmatic arguments which are nevertheless consistent with basic Party policies. It is essential that the PAC should be discredited.

3. It will be very helpful in this if the Party can develop a set of powerful demands relating to the land question which can provide a much more satisfactory basis for the establishment of a political platform than is represented by the now clearly dated demands of the Freedom Charter. The latter have now been overtaken by the march of history, and it is the duty of central leadership to prepare Party members for a forward move.

4. The Party will however have to anticipate the eventuality that the ANC is prepared to accept a deal on the land which represents a compromise which the Party feels is not in accordance with the Party's view. The options here are

(a) to dissolve the Party, and allow the ANC to develop as a political party in its own right;

(b) to draw the Party completely apart from the ANC, either as a reconstituted body, or under a new name and structure; or

(c) to establish covert structures within the ANC which can live to fight another day on this and other fundamental issues.

V Pragmatic Policies

1. The first step is to develop a set of pragmatic policies which, within the context of an agreement to abide by the politics of negotiation, may provide the basis for powerful demands to be made across the negotiating table.

2. The accompanying document, a confidential briefing paper prepared for the ANC Economic Department at the request of Cde Max Sisulu by the Economic Policy Research Project at UWC, provides a useful starting point.

3. A number of additional points may be made to this, from the point of view of Party policies:

(a) insufficient attention is paid to the development of farmers'cooperatives, and other more collective forms of tenure;

(b) insufficient attention is paid to the acquisition of urban, as opposed to rural land;

(c) the issue of multiple land ownership is not addressed.

4. Multiple land ownership is the most significant omission. Most historic land reforms have attacked the power of landlords and major landowners by

attempting to reduce the absolute amounts of land which any one individual may own. The EPRP document argues for breaking up largescale units by reviewing Minimum Farm size legislation, but this does not go far enough.

5. legislation restricting multiple ownership is an obvious way ahead here: the only problem is that in the vast majority of cases where this has been attempted, it has failed to work. It is far too easy for land to be re-registered, and the beneficial ownership otherwise disguised. The amount of time which would elapse between the announcement of such legislation, and bringing it into actuality, would allow ample scope for such rearrangements of title to be made.

6. The best alternative is a land tax. This would have much the same effect of penalising speculatory land holding, and the legislation could also be framed in such a way as to provide for higher levels of taxation of those holding land above a certain ceiling, which would have the effect of bringing more land to the open market for acquisition on a 'willing seller' basis by the Land Bank, for the purpose of smallscale farming, as provided for by the Rural Development Corporation in the recommendations of the EPRP document.

VI Summary

1. Land Reform is a central issue of the negotiations. If the compromises made by the ANC are too great, then the Party should prepare measures now to minimise the political damage to itself.

2. In the meanwhile, the Party should do its best to ensure that a powerful and effective set of arguments on the Land Reform proposals are prepared, and should assist in every possible way to prevent the attack on an agreed negotiation on this issue by PAC, AZAPO, etc.

3. The Party should support a set of pragmatic policies on land reparations and land reform, for which the confidential briefing document prepared by the Economic Policy Research project of UWC may be a starting point.