

History Is On Our Side

—Joyce Meking

The great concern showed by our oppressed and exploited people for their future is certainly one of the most important features of the political situation in our country today. The political battles which our people are waging in every major industrial centre as well as in the bantustans, battles which draw into the streets workers, the youth, women, church people, democratic whites, progressive intellectuals, etc, are the most vivid expression of this growing concern for the future. All this is happening against the background of a deep-growing crisis that is hitting the apartheid system. The combination of these factors hastens the process of the decay of this brutal system of national oppression and exploitation. This is accompanied by the worsening conditions of living for our people leaving no option before them except to fight not only for their survival but in fact to bring an end to their slave conditions once and for all. This situation opens great possibilities for the forces of national liberation in our country to make further advances towards the achievement of victory. In short, history is on our side.

It is with this understanding in mind that it becomes necessary to focus our attention on two important questions connected with the call made by the National Executive Committee of our ANC early this year: "Let this be the year of a great leap forward to the threshold of victory." The two questions we are referring to are:

- 1) What is the extent of the crisis that is presently hitting the apartheid system and
- 2) What possibilities does it open to our forces of liberation?

THE DEEPENING CRISIS

Since coming into power in 1948, the Pretoria fascist regime, acting in collaboration with the entire class of capitalist exploiters who own factories, mines, farms, banks, transport, etc., and their imperialist partners, has been devising scheme after scheme based on the apartheid ideology of domination and exploitation with an aim of perpetuating and consolidating this criminal system. The so-called 'Total War Strategy', a brain-child of Botha's strategists like Malan, which embraces every aspect of the regime's policy – political, economic, military, diplomatic, cultural, etc., – is the perfection of all the reactionary schemes plotted and implemented by Pretoria throughout its years of tyranny. The architects of apartheid believe that with this strategy for domination a formula for the survival of apartheid and the interests of the monopolies of USA, Britain, France, Japan and FRG has been discovered. History, however, follows its own course. This is exactly what the present crisis of apartheid system shows.

In his keynote address to the Second Italian National Conference of solidarity with the Peoples of Southern Africa which was held in Rome (26th to 28th February) Comrade President O.R. Tambo pointed out:



Comrade President O.R. Tambo Addresses the Opening Session of the Second Italian National Conference of Solidarity with the Peoples of Southern Africa.

"The African National Congress diagnoses the South African system as in a crisis. It is an organic crisis, one that cuts to the nature of the system. It is a crisis that could last some time, but the duration does not lessen the severity. For this is a crisis of authority, a crisis of power, which the apartheid system cannot resolve..."

"The economy faces a crisis of unprecedented proportions, which while not peculiar to South Africa, does have a number of distinct features. It is characterised by galloping inflation, sharp economic decline, severe dislocation and an ever-escalating rate of unemployment. And, in our country, all the unemployed are without exception black! Those sections of the population who previously battered on racial privilege now stand to lose and the masses of the oppressed who have been forced to bear the cost of the crisis have seen their burdens increase tenfold."

This is a crisis which is inborn in apartheid. It stems from the internal and basic contradictions on which the whole system rests. The economy of apartheid, its life-blood, is characteristically capitalist. It is the millions of the workers who produce all the wealth of the country while they live and die in abject poverty as is the case with their children who die of diseases caused by malnutrition or simply starvation. All this wealth is taken by the owners of the factories, mines, farms, transport, etc., who use it for their luxury, for further enriching themselves through exploitation of the workers as well as to maintain this naked system of robbery by stockpiling arms for shooting down hungry workers who demand bread and a place to live for themselves and their children. Worse still, this system of capitalist exploitation is operating through the brutal national domination of the indigenous African majority — workers, peasants, intellectuals, small businessmen, etc., — as well as their Coloureds and Indian compatriots. This enables the South African capitalist exploiters and their imperialist partners who have investments worth millions of rands in the apartheid economy to reap super-profits. The victims of this system, the black workers, who are prohibited even from demanding a living wage are practically condemned to slave conditions.

INSOLUBLE CONTRADICTION

Based on these insoluble contradictions, that are between the capitalist exploiter and the exploited worker, between the oppressive racist minority regime and the oppressed black majority, the apartheid system cannot survive eternally. What is more, for as long as it exists it will frequently be hit by dislocating crises and the effects of each new crisis

are more devastating than that of the preceding one.

These crises as well as the oppressed and exploited people's struggle which they result in are the factors which hasten the process of the decay of the whole system and will finally bring about its total destruction and replacement by a new system, a South Africa of the Freedom Charter.

To make matters worse the Pretoria regime is waging a campaign of aggression against the frontline states especially Angola because of their opposition to apartheid domination. By waging these wars of aggression the regime's policy-makers hope to preserve apartheid and secure the whole Southern African region for exploitation by the imperialist powers. Instead these wars have an exhausting effect on the apartheid system itself. They do not only affect the economy by depleting the regime's financial resources and by causing manpower shortages in those fields of the economy which are reserved for whites. These wars also affect the very regime's weapon of aggression as the steadily growing



A South African Soldier Killed during the invasion of the People's Republic of Angola.

discontent among racist soldiers shows. The white community on whose members the racist army largely depends for manpower is also affected and this is made worse by the fact that it is becoming clear that the Pretoria fascist regime will not always be in a position to afford the privileges with which it is bribing the white community as the current politico-economic crisis indicates.

The other point which must be made about the present crisis of apartheid is that while the Pretoria rulers will continue to step up their campaign of terror against our people in South Africa and the Namibian people as well as the frontline states, its massive sabre rattling is not a sign of strength. No! Rather it exposes the worsening failure of the Pretoria regime to cope with the situation inside South Africa and Namibia and the consequences of its aggression against the peaceful peoples of Southern Africa. The peoples of this region have not yielded to the pressure exerted on them by Pretoria. They continue to support the struggles of our people for national liberation under the leadership of SWAPO and the ANC respectively. The steps which are being taken by the Southern African states to end their economic independence on racist South Africa go a long way in putting these countries' unity against their common enemy on a solid basis. This is of great advantage to our struggling people. Looked at on a world scale the balance of forces favours the forces of peace and liberation and this is what the situation in our region reflects. The forces of imperialism and war can no longer bully the world around as they used to do in the past.

GREAT POSSIBILITIES

We have noted that apartheid, like all systems based on exploitation and oppression, is doomed to death. Apartheid contains within itself the ingredients for its destruction. At the same time it is clear that in addition to its inbuilt cancer, the actions of our people have played an important role to bring about the present state of the decay of the system. Similarly apartheid will not fall on its own. Even when this system has reached an explosion point, and this is unavoidable, it is only through our liberatory efforts that it shall fall never to rise. This is so because its perpetrators who benefit from it will do everything to prolong its existence. That is why it is not enough to recognise that apartheid is in the grips of a deep crisis. We must also be able to see the possibilities which are offered by the current situation such as we have briefly described and utilise it to our advantage.

In examining these possibilities we should take our bearings from the

main task of our liberation movement as contained in our slogan: 'To move forward we must attack, act in unity and unite in action'.

In the first place this crisis has more than ever before exposed apartheid for what it is — a monster which thrives on the starvation and deliberate murder of our people. The death of thousands of our people as a result of diseases caused by the appalling conditions under which they live and the complete disregard shown by the Pretoria regime to the medical needs of our people, the squandering of millions of rands in stock-piling of weapons of destruction at the expense of our people whose meagre wages are further reduced to meet these expenses, condemnation to a beggarly existence of the unemployed million. Condemnation to brutal torture, murder and hanging of opponents of the apartheid system both inside South Africa and outside as well as the massacring of the peoples of Southern Africa provide sufficient evidence.

ILLUSION

This state of affairs shatters whatever illusion that might have remained among some of the oppressed about the possibility of improvement of their lives within the confines of the apartheid system. As a result all the deceptive schemes devised by the Pretoria regime such as in the labour front, in education, the bantustan system, the so-called Presidents' Council, etc., do not diminish our people's opposition to apartheid domination. More and more of our people become convinced that their salvation lies only in fighting for the overthrow of the system.

This offers greater possibility for mobilising more of our people for the realisation of their basic demands which are outlined in the Freedom Charter — the only alternative to the present decadent system.

This crisis also offers the possibility of further convincing our people that apartheid cannot be destroyed without armed struggle. This is borne out by the fact that during times of crises when the apartheid system feels its very existence more threatened and thus is forced to further expose its violent and brutal nature. The victims of this brutality and even those who might still have been hesitant about taking to arms come to a realisation that it is better to die fighting the enemy bullet for bullet because this does not only make it possible to defend oneself but also to defeat the enemy. The examples of other peoples who have won their liberation by a political struggle which included the use of military force assumes practical meaning.

Those who preach non-violence which otherwise means surrender

in the face of enemy brutality lose all credibility. This is the point made by Dr Motlana when he said: 'People are fast becoming disillusioned with the leadership of those who say peaceful change is possible'. Even members of the ruling class like Pitman of the PFP, a party which differs from the Nationalist Party only on the methods of maintaining the oppression and exploitation of our people, expressed surprise at the existence among the oppressed of such shameless traitors like Gatsha Buthelezi – whether the surprise is genuine or not is another matter. Pitman said: "In fact, it is a miracle to me that we still have people in South Africa like Gatsha Buthelezi who do not believe in violent change." The more growing numbers of our people consciously and committedly participate in our People's War, a war which is fought through a combination of all forms of struggle, political and military, the more stronger our forces become and the closer our victory comes.

UNITY

The other very important possibility is that of forging greater unity among our people including the increasing number of democratic whites. The indiscriminate brutality of the regime and the untold suffering the whole crisis brings to every section of our people creates a more favourable situation of convincing all our people of their common interests and the absolute necessity of confronting the enemy as a united force on every issue. A few examples of this are the May 1981 campaign against the fascist republic celebration, the campaign against the South African



Soweto Women March to Council in Protest at Rent Increases.

Indian Council which rendered the mock elections to this dummy institution a complete failure, the country-wide expression of anger at the brutal murder of Dr Neil Aggett, the bold step taken by progressive trade unions in the face of intensified state repression and the worsening conditions of the black workers.

The courageous drive launched by our fighting women at reviving the South African Federation of Women is also of great significance in this connection. The possibility of strengthening the unity of all forces opposed to the apartheid system in a common and militant struggle also applies to the task of isolating the Pretoria regime in the international arena.

Finally it must be pointed out that it is in the actual field of battle that vanguard fighters as well as the entire fighting masses of people become more aware of new possibilities for advancing our freedom struggle to greater heights. It is in active struggle, too, that revolutionary forces gain more confidence in their ability to win and are able to display the greatest initiative. The process of the decay of the apartheid system has already reached an advanced stage. We must hasten this process to an explosion point through our mass united action – armed and unarmed. In this way we shall be setting the stage for the launching of the final offensive. This calls for the most skilful mobilisation of all our forces to fully utilise the existing possibilities to build the greatest unity in action and deliver more devastating blows at the enemy while strengthening our forces. Drawing lessons from the rich experience of the Vietnamese people who were always guided by an understanding that “revolutionary leadership lies in knowing how to win step by step in a judicious fashion”, let us advance one more giant stride to our certain victory.

The unity of all national and class forces interested in the overthrow of the fascist Pretoria regime, the destruction of the apartheid system and the reconstruction of South Africa as a popular democratic state with power in the hands of the people is a fundamental prerequisite of the victory of our revolution. The successful defence of that revolution and the realisation of its objectives will also require the maintenance and reinforcement of that unity. This confirms that this task is not of a tactical transient or temporary nature. Rather it is of strategic importance.

–O.R. Tambo