

DEATH TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION



The growing call for a National Convention will reveal many sellouts. The People's Movement however needs to be even more vigilant against vipers in our bosom.

practical positions. We need not be hoaxed by those whose paternalistic feudalism is covered in a see-through dress of "participatory democracy" in liberal envisaged non-racial and multi-racial society. The colonisers and colonised, and specifically "labour and capital may be partners in theory, but they are enemies in fact".

Those who believe that the Black oppressed and exploited have a stake in the present system of colonialism and imperialist pursuits are placing irrational hope in the rising indignation of international imperialists on development in this country. They forget that imperialists and their agents know no other interests but of their own.

Those who believe in the legendary round table, holds that a National Convention can result in "co-operation and compromise" between the colonised and the coloniser. A National Convention is therefore for a national conspiracy of "all who share in the common objective of creating a peaceful and prosperous country with equal opportunity for all". Joyce Harris pointed out in a lead-in paper presented to the 1975 Black Sash Conference in Cape Town that the call for a National Convention was first made by the Black Sash in 1956 (Black Sash, November 1975). *In fact a similar call was made earlier.*

The issues raised in the lead-in paper are quite revealing. Fearing an explosive situation (total liberation of the Black people) a National Convention was seen to provide an "immediate and positive measure to defuse it and to create a climate favourable to peaceful change". The concerns for a National Conven-

tion were emanating from the fact that:

"There is *too much* inequity. There is *too much* discrimination — now euphemistically called differentiation. There is *too much* resentment and *too much* of its inevitable concomitant fear. There is *too much* abuse of power"

"And there is *too little* justice, *too little* regard for the rights and dignity of the vast mass of the people, *too little* attention paid to their valid demands" (Black Sash, November 1975 — emphasis mine).

The primary concern of the National Convention proponents is therefore, extending bourgeois democratic rights to the Black masses. The question to be asked is what is the basis for such concern. There is an unfounded argument that the country's capitalist system can under a benevolent management team satisfy the needs of the Black working class. Nothing is further from the truth. In a capitalist society private ownership of property (by the few) and a brutal pursuit of profit through the exploitation of workers is the ideal of the system.

As recent as 1980 the Black Sash co-sponsored "A Convention Movement" which had the goal "to demonstrate on as wide a basis as possible, grassroots support for the idea of holding a national convention where a new and acceptable constitution can be negotiated". The Convention with no pre-conditions, was proposed demanded a pledge in a belief in negotiation. **When was the question of negotiation and confrontation settled one may ask the authors?**

There is an agreement that the country is undergoing a crisis. What is dismaying is that there is no clearer perception of such a crisis. Various attempts are being made by various analysts to shed light on the state of developments and there is an increasing expectation of change among some of them. The subject of change and crisis is both wide in scope and topical and the danger in handling the subject "might generate more heat than light".

The liberal over-optimism of the past is rearing its ugly head again as P.W. Botha, the Executive President, of the country increases his tempo of making promises and concessions. Such over-optimism and baseless hope would in the end be proved wrong and dangerous to the destiny of the Black people in this country.

In the backdrop of P.W. Botha's "sophisticated hypocrisy" a growing list of political "blueprints for change" is being made by various academic mercenaries and elements whose interests are tied to the status quo — white supremacy and continued white settler colonialism. We hope the old anecdote of the Hundred Years' War in Europe should not be fulfilled in our country: "when the parties finally got together for peace negotiations nobody could remember what the war was all about or how it had began — and furthermore, whatever the original issues, they were now irrelevant to peace negotiations".

The real issues need not be clouded or mystified. Oppression and exploitation in our country are based on class, race, and national oppression and **the character of the struggle is therefore, a national liberation struggle whose principal contradiction is between the colonised and the colonisers, the exploiters and the exploited, the anti-imperialist and the imperialist and their local agents.** There is a convergence of the national liberation struggle and the class struggle. **The exclusion of Whites in this struggle is, therefore, non-negotiable.**

In essence "the national struggle" should be the point of departure. All indicators point towards a socialist revolution and reconstruction. A coalition of different social classes of **the colonised in the struggle should adopt correct theoretical and ideological positions in order to contend with the historical, economic and social reality of the country.**

The lesson in the words of Jesus Christ: "He that is not with us is against me" should inform our theoretical and

The debate on the confrontation or accommodation dispute cannot be resolved by those in disagreement on the actual nature of the struggle. The alternatives available in prosecuting the national liberation struggle in line with the aspirations and interests of the Black majority in the country is yet another field of dispute. There is no doubt that the "employment of certain sort of consideration (on the struggle and available alternatives) in itself, already support either the confrontation or accommodation oriented thought", there is no middle course.

The brutal lesson gleaned or supposed to have been learnt by the proponents of negotiation is that irrespective of arguments, on the contrary all White political parties which wish to accommodate Blacks would only allow it provided it would not deprive them of their (Whites) control. **There is no way in which those in a position of advantage and privilege can voluntarily engage in a process which must necessarily and typically take the form of a transfer of power to the African population.**"

Power sharing talk is the smoke-screen aimed at hiding the concentration of power in the hands of the representatives of White settler colonialism in the country. Kwame Nkrumah's words of the caution to his countrymen are decisive in this context: **"We do know that never in history has self-government been handed to a colonial and oppressed people on a silver platter. . . the dynamic must come from us"**. All other "humanitarian" or "benevolent" gestures by the oppressor and the exploiter will only make us "half slaves and half free". The success of such measures rests on bribery and corruption, both moral and factual, of the forces against White settler colonialism and the mankilling remnants of imperialism in the country. Reform and concessions by the for-

At last, they've given each other a chance...



ces of oppression and exploitation is a strategy which knows no law beyond its own interest and it is natural that despite the pretensions of the agents of imperialism to justice and fair play, they always seek their interests first.

The ideological and psychological basis for the proponents of "the politics of the possible" was almost won when the rulers distorted and misrepresented the historical reality of the Black people in the country. The White settler colonialists argues that Black people are foreign to the Azanian soil. That Black and White people are fellow colonisers of Azania and thus the land belongs to *all*, Black and White. This mischievous school textbook argument has already been tried elsewhere in Africa with no measure of success. White colonialists in Zimbabwe tried to tell lies about the origin of the Zimbabwe ruins but new light by day is refuting all their ideologically motivated "archeological and historical findings". **The land is the Black man's inheritance and all those who remain on the land must face this reality.**

Proponents of economic determinism theories are inclined to believe

that the status quo can destroy itself. Without struggle they tend to suggest that apartheid can be reformed by various economic pressures made to bear on it. We are not naive to underestimate the ability of the system to adjust to such pressures in order to facilitate and maintain itself. We thus cannot assume that the present economic crisis facing the country has rendered the rulers incapable of employing "all measure of political violence and suppression at his disposal, and to withdraw into an armed laager or 'garrison state' in the face of the threats from inside and outside our borders".

Those who are genuinely interested in more than mere change should interrogate all the relevant facts around Reagan's imperialist influence in the region, the March 1984 Nkomati Accords, and related deals with "independent" neighbouring countries. One must admit that such accords and deals which have been entered into reflects power and its consolidation in favour of the White settler colonialists.

Who has bewitched the liberals and their careerist Marxists? Their call for or guarded support of the "National Convention Movement" is made in the backdrop of increasing warning from some sources that **"the National Convention will amount to a criminal betrayal of the working class in its struggle for a democratic South Africa free from exploitation and oppression"**. This is an echo of what was clearly spelled out by comrade George Wauchope in 1981 when he said: **"There can be no negotiation between non-equals"**. Joyce Harris and her fellow-travellers need to take her observations seriously. How does one interpret the following words: "Talks between strength and weakness are unsatisfactory and degenerate into appeals, demands, complaints on the one side, and acceptance, rejection, discrimination on the other". The most recent warning to be taken seriously too was spelled thus: **"Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts"** (RDM 11-2-85).

Preconditions that various groups have laid down for a National Con-



An aerial view of the Zimbabwe ruins. All that remains of an extensive city built between the 12th and 14th centuries. It was the centre of a highly organised and developed civilisation

Implicit in the NFC's standpoint is the fear that a national convention might actually arrive at a formula for SA's future that would differ from the organisation's dreams and aspirations. That alone might be good enough reason to convene one.

vention are all steering clear from the question of "transferring complete power and the land to the indigenous owners". The Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) has been the uncompromising exception in this regard. AZAPO warned that a National Convention based on terms by various groups is "an exercise in futility".

In a broad-based summit of the National Forum in 1984 where the issue of the National Convention was raised, delegates agreed that a Convention or accords can only serve the interests of the rulers and exploiters of the Black people. They hold the prospects of deflecting, diverting, and subverting the national liberation struggle into mere civil rights. The way ahead was seen as lying in a constituent assembly to let the people decide for themselves. The concept still begs further discussion and clarification if it were not to be abused and vulgarised like the other concept "National Convention" which is based within the Apartheid framework of national states, the United Party's racial federation, and the so-called geographic federation of the PFP.

Reagan's constructive engagement is inspired by the notion held by the proponents of the accommodation/negotiation approach of struggle. They both share an opinion that the South African Government can be encouraged and persuaded towards change, adaptation, tolerance, and a committed acceptance of the new, and employing the new to one's own advantage. This approach is based on rejection of principle in favour of a compromise strategy. It is not surprising that as early as 1970 President Felix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast was quoted as saying "there is only one weapon — negotiation. We hope to succeed by dialogue". The President went on to argue that threats encouraged South Africa to accumulate more arms, together with a defensive reaction which would be vented against the Black States to the north. Dr Busia of Ghana argued against the policies of force and isolation in dealing with South Africa. In December 1970 he questioned the wisdom of maintaining these policies, and he indicated that a policy of dialogue might be more successful. The Lusaka Manifesto, adopted in 1969 also expressed preference to negotiation irrespective of its support for the liberation movement.

This harsh reality exposes the fact that other countries see the great

potential of material benefits — the trade, financial and technological for their own countries and people. It is therefore clear that these countries are unlikely to endure continuous hardship in support of a protracted liberation struggle in Azania. Evidence suggests that these countries would be quick to counsel that ours is a "hopeless struggle" and thus urge for the redefinition of the purpose of struggle. Intervention by a foreign country in our favour is a misplaced and dangerous delusion.

One observer of the South African scene concluded that "Afrikaner power in South Africa excludes and aims to prevent the politics of negotiation on a basis of equality". The Afrikaners will not engage in any genuine exercise to transfer power and land to Black people without being confronted by equal forces who would leave the Afrikaner with no other option than suicide.

The above has been stated only to show that the long-held hope in the influence of external pressure on South Africa has its limitations and demerits. It can influence our strategies and tactics in a most fundamental manner. The downfall of the ICU's leadership in the 1920's can precisely be traced to the disproportions reliance on outside pressure than the essential organisation of the people inside the country. International allies shall never be the backbone of the national liberation struggle essentially because freedom and emancipation can never be imported and for that matter it can never fall from the sky.

The fact that our organisational base ensures our strength, the enemy shall do everything in the textbook to divide and rule the oppressed and exploited in Azania. Co-optation is increasingly used by the system in order to cushion itself from the angry and determined blows of our people. The emerging Black middle class as well as the working class and its organisations should do well to guard against the economic lures. The co-optation strategy tends to exploit the tendency and inclination among the oppressed towards immediate material needs.

In the midst of all arguments, the oppressed and exploited have a challenge and a task to confront a people who can still at this age declare: **"We have no guilt complex about land which are supposed to have taken, injustice which we are supposed to have committed, a feeling of temporariness, and urge that other people must decide about our future"** (Die Vaderland 8-1-82). The road ahead is long and the connection and tension existing between principles and facts of the national liberation struggle should be kept in its proper perspective. We have to uphold the principles and moral basis of our struggle and simultaneously take cognisance of essential facts which form the struggle.

In conclusion we must point out that the latest concessions made by P.W. Botha in his parliament are "nought for our comfort". It would be dangerous to interpret recent trends as channels leading out of the wicked grip of the White settler colonialism. There is nothing new in making empty promises to the colonised of this country. The optimism of the 1920's which was based on limited advances flowing from conferences organised by the Dutch Reformed Churches, unofficial joint conferences, and other government-sponsored conferences and committee hearings suffered a rude and painful fate in the years following 1948. Deals among various elites, "consociational democracy" and other elite theories of the rulers should be properly understood as a modernised strategy to maintain the savage system of national oppression, exploitation, and white supremacy in the country. There is an urgent need for the liberation struggle to transcend the limitations which led to one political analyst to state: "The harsh reality is that while blacks limited themselves to constitutional protest, to isolated industrial struggles, to civil disobedience, they did not manage to present a serious challenge to the *status quo*". **It would be sad if the "armed protest" or guerilla struggle should be designed to meet challenges limited to the narrow objectives of a National Convection.**

