
ON NEGOTIATIONS

Our approach to the issue of negotiations is informed by the following: that the apartheid state, together with its imperialist backers see negotiations as a way of pre-empting the realisation of the basic objectives and demands of our people;

- that the new international relations, based on the inter-dependence of the world community and influenced by the "new thinking" in the Soviet Union aimed at the peaceful resolution of the international and regional conflict, has an impact on our region;
- that no political movement, including us, can reject negotiations on principle without the danger of being isolated from its base and of divisions within its ranks;
- that a fighting movement must maintain the strategic initiative firmly in its grip in all spheres of struggle, including the sphere of negotiations;
- that, therefore, we approach the issue of negotiations as a terrain of struggle; and
- finally, that the liberation movement is not engaged in the struggle to push the apartheid state to the negotiation table, but is committed to the elimination of apartheid and the transfer of power to the people of South Africa. The need for an all-round mass offensive against the obnoxious apartheid system has never been more urgent.

1. THE APARTHEID REGIME:

The apartheid state is not committed to genuine negotiations involving the elimination of apartheid and transfer of power to the people. It sees negotiations as a means of preserving white minority control and ownership - the preservation of apartheid. When it talks of negotiations - the "great Indaba" - its objectives can be summarised as:

- to confuse and demobilise the struggling masses;
- to divide the forces fighting apartheid;
- to relieve international pressure.

In its practices and declarations the apartheid regime does nothing to show that it is committed to entering into any serious dialogue with the true representative of the people. It is instead committed to dealing with its apartheid puppets and underlings - the discredited and hated bantustan leaders and bantu councillors. Its brutal repressive strategy unleashed against the democratic movement has among its purposes the creation of space for these puppets to emerge and to be projected as leaders of the people. Its vicious attacks and propaganda against the ANC are part of a process that is attempting to :

- cause a split in the liberation alliance by demanding that the ANC distance itself from the SACP;
- sow rumours about divisions within the ranks of the ANC and MK;
- destabilise the frontline states in order to undercut their capacity for supporting the liberation struggle in South Africa

The reality of the popularity and the mass following enjoyed by the ANC and the recognition of its centrality to the resolution of the conflict in the country has defeated these attempts. The failure of the repressive strategy to destroy the united, determined mass offensive has led to a deep all-round crisis and growing divisions within the white minority and a growing loss of confidence amongst whites in the viability of apartheid. Added to these problems is the intensification of economic sanctions and international isolation. Talk of negotiations by De Klerk is a ploy to gain international and local credibility and to stem the tide of growing economic sanctions, particularly the rescheduling of the foreign debt. In short, the government is attempting to gain space and time to overcome the crisis of political legitimacy facing the country and thereby regain the strategic initiative.

It is tactically imperative that we expose the real nature of the apartheid state, the National Party and its leader De Klerk's true intentions through activities like the defiance campaign and the campaign for the non-rescheduling of the debt repayment. More importantly, we must deny him the space to project himself as a peacemaker committed to setting the parameters of the negotiation process.

2. THE IMPERIALISTS

The imperialist-backers of the apartheid regime have come to accept that apartheid can no longer secure their interests. The longer it exists, the stronger the forces for change will become and thereby endanger their long-term interests.

Having failed to sideline the ANC in the resolution of the South African conflict, they are pushing for immediate negotiations as they believe the democratic forces are not strong enough to back their demands with sufficient power at the present time. Their attempts to create a "third force" have crumbled with the growing unpopularity of the discredited so-called "moderate leaders". Their efforts to project the ANC as communist-dominated and their demands that it sever links with the SACP lie in ruins in the face of the wide acceptance and popular following of the ANC and its alliance with the SACP. Their campaign to declare the ANC a "terrorist organisation" also failed miserably.

It is in this context that Thatcher (staunch supporter of apartheid and anti-sanctions) has been given the mission to co-ordinate this venture - to pre-empt revolutionary takeover by the people. Her task is to set negotiations parameters that guarantee the protection of imperialist interests. If our movement rejects such an unfavourable process, she would then project us as not committed to peace and a stumbling bloc to serious and genuine negotiations. In this way, the liberation movement would be sidelined, lose international support and divisions would bedevil our ranks.

Towards this goal the imperialists are putting the Frontline states under great pressure to deliver the ANC into a negotiation process unfavourable to the realisation of the basic objectives and demands of our people. The recent history of the Lancaster talks teaches us that the Frontline states, because of their underdevelopment and dependency resulting from colonialism and sustained destabilisation, are unable to resist indefinitely this pressure and blackmail. We can never be insensitive to the plight of these states without the danger of losing their support. Nor can we be blind to the prospect of being forced into negotiations on terms and at a time which may not be of

our own choosing. Otherwise we lose the support, facilities and accommodation these states extend to us. We must be prepared for all possibilities, even negotiations!

It is these realities that impose on us the responsibility to maintain the offensive on the issue of negotiations. We must:

- maintain the initiative of setting the parameters and conditions of the negotiation process;
- maintain unity and support of all people committed to the elimination of apartheid - the international community, the Frontline states, etc.

3. MAINTAIN THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

The democratic forces both in practice and policy statements have remained committed to the peaceful elimination of apartheid - if and when conditions exist for such a process. It is the white minority that remains committed to the crime of apartheid. A climate for a peaceful resolution of this conflict does not exist. Conditions for genuine negotiations can only emerge once the apartheid regime is ready and prepared to create a climate conducive to a genuine negotiated settlement. It must:

- release all political prisoners and detainees
- unban all political organisations
- lift the State of Emergency
- withdraw the "security and defence forces" from the townships
- stop all executions and hangings

As far as the democratic movement is concerned only a sovereign body elected by all South Africans on the basis of one-person, one-vote, can draw up a democratic constitution for a new South Africa. Negotiations can never be conducted above the heads of the people!

Guided by the above, our negotiation concept and process demands that a negotiated settlement is directed at the elimination of apartheid and the transfer of power to the people. Developing such a concept and setting out its parameters is also a process of engaging in a new terrain of struggle. However, our strategic line remains the escalation of an all-round offensive on all fronts through the combination of the four pillars of our struggle: mass political mobilisation, political underground, the armed struggle and international isolation.

4. NEGOTIATIONS: A NEW TERRAIN OF STRUGGLE

For us, there is one "acid test" for any activity we engage in, including negotiations, and that is whether it will advance our strategic objectives or not. The activities and objectives of the ruling class around the issue of negotiations are clear. They see negotiations as a terrain of struggle - to pre-empt the realisation of our basic demands and ideals. Having failed to destroy our mass offensive through a campaign of terror and violence, the apartheid regime seeks to fight us by other means. Vlok said talking to the ANC was "a way of fighting them with another instrument". This also serves to remind us that talk of negotiations has been brought about by our own struggle: it is an open admission that the state has failed to destroy our determined offensive.

For the democratic forces, therefore, engaging in the process of developing a negotiation concept is not seen as an alternative or contradictory to the armed struggle and the imperatives of the escalation of the struggle. It is complementary to this urgent task.

It is from this perspective that the national liberation movement has submitted its negotiation concept for adoption by the OAU. That concept has become the OAU declaration on negotiations. The OAU has committed itself to:

- canvass support internationally for the adoption of this declaration world-wide;
- intensify international pressure against the apartheid regime
- work actively for the escalation of the mass democratic offensive against the crime of apartheid.

5. CONCLUSION.

For the democratic forces therefore, taking the initiative on the issue of negotiations must not mean the demobilisation of the masses nor the obscuring of our primary goal, i.e., the eradication of apartheid, the transfer of power to the people of South Africa and the establishment of a state of people's power. The key task remains the escalation of the struggle on all fronts.

QUESTIONS

- a. What does the democratic movement see as genuine negotiations
- b. What aims must, and can, be achieved by the democratic movement through negotiations?
- c. What is meant by the *strategic initiative* ?
- d. How does the democratic movement *maintain* the strategic initiative?
- e. What does the regime aim to achieve through negotiations?
“Talking to the ANC is a way of fighting them with another instrument” - Adriaan Vlok.
What does Vlok mean when he says this?
- f. In what way does Vlok hope that he will be able to do this?
What do the regime and the imperialists aim to gain by “fighting the ANC” in this way?