

## THE STRUGGLE IN PERSPECTIVE - SOME IDEAS

- The contradictions in South African capitalism which, for so many years, have been under relative control, are currently producing a severe crisis for the ruling class. The economy is in tatters with a loan boycott threatening the very existence of many enterprises, rampant inflation, a negative growth rate, increasing unemployment, declining profitability, increasing numbers of bankruptcies (and so on and on) - and limited knowledge as to how to re-establish the viability of the manufacturing sector in particular and the economy as a whole. What attempts there have been to re-establish profitability have been largely made at the expense of the working class - retrenchments, increases in GST and personal tax, cuts in wages, increases in productivity with a smaller workforce, cutting government subsidies on basic commodities, increasing rents, decreasing welfare spending, freezing government spending on housing, and much more.

However, these measures have largely led to an increase in the intensity of that crisis. The severity of the measures have provoked some defensive measures in the ranks of the working class. On the factory and mine floors this includes strikes against retrenchments, against an increase in the pace and intensity of work, and for higher wages to meet the spiralling costs of inflation. Still on the factory floor, this struggle of the working class has forced capital - in its own defense - to attack the strength of the unions through, among other things, refusing to bargain at factory level (as in the case of SEIFSA and the Chamber of Mines), in retrenching shop stewards or firing them during strikes while allowing other workers to return, in provoking strikes and taking on scab labour, in provoking strikes and holding out until the union is forced to give in, and so on. Indeed, various 'industrial relations' have recently become expert in handling these situations, and sell their skills for enormous prices. And these defensive/ offensive moves by capital have sparked further strikes and resistance from workers. The Metal and Allied Workers Union, for example, has threatened a national industrial strike should SEIFSA refuse to concede the right for shop floor bargaining. The Sarmcol workers in Pietermaritzburg fought a bitter fight against the importation of scab labour. And the National Union of Mineworkers struck after some mining houses refused to give in to their demands, despite the weakness of their position.

In the townships, the so-called austerity measures have provoked bitter conflicts. Again, from a defensive starting point, the unemployed and the working class have been forced into many battles against increases in rent and transport fares, decreasing standards of accommodation with increasing numbers of people per house, the lack of facilities and maintenance in the townships, increases in the price of basic commodities, G.S.T., petrol and transport. Still in the townships, the government was forced - in

its own defence - to strike out at these struggles. First, it was through restructuring the local controls in the townships by developing the power of the local authorities which had been rejected a year previously. Then it was through stepping up removals of so-called illegals from the townships. It tried evicting prominent activists from their homes, removing others from their home townships, and stepping up detentions. Then it tried revamping site-and-service schemes and encouraged capital to spend money on building houses (at a time of profitability crisis!). And throughout, it sent in its repressive forces when township resistance became too much of a challenge to 'law and order'. But, such was the desperation of the working class and the unemployed that they started to take more affirmative action. The Local Authorities were destroyed, as were other symbols of institutions of control. The police were resisted at every turn of a street corner. 'Illegals' returned regardless of the consequences. And the spiral of resistance and counter-resistance assumed a dynamic of its own.

The emphasis in both spheres, however, is on the defensive nature of the initial resistance - the working class, initially at any rate, was defending the erosion of its already low standard of living. To put it bluntly, the working class and the unemployed were waging a battle for their very physical survival in the face of severe economic pressures. Many of the struggles - dating from the Ciskei bus boycott onwards - had their roots in the economic struggle for survival. This is important to remember, for reasons that will soon become clear.

Some of the established ruling class controls are now under threat. Various institutions of political class rule - such as the local authorities, the tri-cameral parliaments, the homelands, the bantu education system - as well as some of the administrative mechanisms of that rule, are no longer functioning effectively, and some not at all. Whilst the challenges to the tri-cameral parliaments in particular and the education system (to a certain extent) have had little to do with economic forces, many of the struggles against institutions of apartheid domination drew their impetus from the economic woes which the working class has faced.

But the implications of these essentially economic - but some 'political' - struggles has also put the legitimacy of the present form of apartheid rule in question. Hand in hand with the destruction of some of the apparatuses of control has come the rejection of the functions which underlie them. And with that has come a further questioning of the entire system of apartheid on the one hand, and the division between rich and poor on the other. However, at this moment, the link between apartheid and capitalism is not explicit and wholly understood.

Forms of resistance reflect this dichotomy. The rejection of apartheid institutions and their functions has led to their systematic destruction when they are within reach of the people (for example, the local authorities' representatives and offices,

the labour bureaux in the townships, transport systems, and even the police and army) as well as boycotts of local authorities elections and schools. On the other hand, the rejection of wealth at the expense of poverty has led to numerous strikes, consumer boycotts, the destruction of shops, looting, refusal to pay rents, bus boycotts, etc. In some instances and areas these two 'different' enemies have been linked together in people's consciousness - and the strategies have reflected this. The best examples are the stay aways in the Transvaal and Port Elizabeth; the Simba chips boycott; the consumer boycott in the Eastern Cape; and the consumer boycott in Pietermaritzburg.

At this point it is the exception rather than the rule that capitalism and apartheid are seen as two sides of the same coin - with a relationship that is mutually dependant and reinforcing. As such it is the exception when people are conscious of the task of ridding South Africa of the two at the same time, rather than one at a time (or of one only). In other words, while most people are aware of the necessity of ridding themselves of the structures of oppression, only some (although they are increasing in number) are aware of the necessity of destroying the structures of exploitation at the same time. There have, of course, been times when both exploitation and oppression have been challenged in effect, rather than on purpose. But that is the crucial element - purpose. The people who are most aware of this purpose are - logically - the factory and mine workers. A consciousness of that purpose is what is meant by class consciousness.

Because the situation at the moment has such a ripe interplay between political issues of domination and apparently economic issues of exploitation, there is vast potential to develop this consciousness of understanding and purpose. The economic root of much of the working class woes is being revealed for what it is - an issue of class struggle. That is, through engaging in both 'political' and 'economic' issues, the working class is increasingly seeing that, without class domination, there can be no class exploitation. And that it is upon the base of exploitation which this domination rests. Without the institutions of control, exploitation is not ensured. And, without exploitation, there is the possibility of setting up structures of rule which do not have as their aim class domination.

It is when the unemployed youth, the students and township residents (who, in general are fighting at this time the forces of oppression rather than exploitation) combine with the factory workers in an organised form, that the link in the dichotomy has most successfully been made. The Sarmcol workers in Pietermaritzburg have been the most recent leaders of joint strategies against both structures of exploitation and repression in an organised form. Other examples have already been cited: the joint student-worker stayaway in the Transvaal with joint demands; the joint resident-student-worker stayaway in Port Elizabeth with joint demands; and so on.

The link in strategies, the link between different spheres, the link made in demands, the link between exploitation and oppression is being made more and more often. This is extremely encouraging and phenomenally important. But, realistically, it must be said that these links are not yet made often enough or explicitly enough. Neither are they being made nationally. In each example where they have been made, they are local or regional in character and form. Sometimes the content of it is national, but this has never been translated into nationally co-ordinated organisation, and never a national strategy (only Cosas has been an exception). Within sectors of organisation this is fundamental to winning meaningful demands, and between all sectors the development of this capacity is a fundamental prerequisite to the achievement of power through which an end to exploitation and oppression and their replacement with democracy, peace and justice could be ensured.

The single exception has been the schools struggle, where Cosas (now banned, of course) co-ordinated joint student demands and promoted common tactics in the struggle to achieve those demands. However, levels of national co-ordination did not go beyond promoting common demands and the boycott weapon. While this was a remarkable achievement in itself, it must be acknowledged that Cosas did not manage to develop the necessary levels of resources, communication, structures and leadership required to cross the threshold to a more flexible, strategic, powerful and co-ordinated organisation with a clear programme of action and with a more even level of regional development. This, of course, cannot be 'blamed' on the current or past Cosas leadership - they all did remarkable jobs in keeping the organisation strong in the face of some of the most severe harassment ever aimed at a single organisation.

Rather, the level of development Cosas reached represented the threshold at which the progressive movement as a whole now finds itself, or which many sectors will soon find themselves. Cosas reached that threshold before any other sphere. And if it had been another sector the result would probably have been much the same. To cross that threshold requires a far more combined development of the progressive movement as a whole. For, if one sector is to take the brunt of state repression (as Cosas did for nearly two full years) it cannot possibly last the pace. At the least the situation demanded that other organisations and sectors come to assistance and protection of the students. Only after eighteen months of boycotts, systematic detentions, killings and harassment and pitched battles with the police and army, did other sectors start combining sufficiently with Cosas to offer it the support and protection it needed. The Transvaal stayaway is sufficient testimony to this - not only was it a highly successful strategy, but the 'consequences' were remarkably less than when Cosas acted alone. The combined forces were just too strong to challenge for capital and the government (to be worth it, at that point).

In addition to resisting repression, a single-sphere national struggle has a limited potential to realising its demands (except, perhaps, in the trade union movement). Progressive students argued that a single, non-racial, democratic, free and compulsory education system can only be achieved through the liberation of South Africa as a whole. That everyone would accept. They were, however, also arguing for an end to corporal punishment, the end to sexual harassment, the upgrading of schools and teachers, etc, etc. Despite the heroic efforts of the students, and incredible determination, these demands have not been won. Why? What more must - or can - be done to win these limited demands? Surely we would expect the students to have won these by now, given their level of activity. That they have not won those demands reflects the structural weakness of their position.

Students boycotting do not have the same effects on South Africa's ruling class, or the maintenance of relations of exploitation and domination, as does a work boycott or a national general strike. That is not to say that the students have not played an important role in breaking down one of the important structures of control on which exploitation rests. They have indeed mounted a very clear challenge to the structures of exploitation and oppression - as well as an essential impetus for other struggles. But the point remains: take all students out of school and Oppenheimer yawns. Take all the workers out of the factories and mines and Oppenheimer will stand up and take notice - very close notice. (This is not to say that Oppenheimer & Co's reactions are the only yardstick by which to measure great success or limited success.) But there is little doubt that joint national struggles will give the different sectors of the progressive movement the most strength - and the most chance of winning demands. And there is also little doubt that it is the organised working class - organised in the factories and townships - which will ultimately provide the backbone of the progressive movement.

Coincidentally enough, the only other sector where there is immediate potential for national co-ordination and strategising is in the labour sphere. With the emergence of the Federation in November this year, most of the labour movement will come under a single umbrella body, with its constituent parts being industrial unions. While this is, of course, only a national labour movement in form, the content is still to be worked out. Clearly, there will be a certain degree of ideological struggle taking place to determine this content, it will be years before a single 'line' emerges (if ever) and this is one of the most important reasons why all progressives should take part in the Federation.

In the meantime, however, the Federation will provide the industrial working class with co-ordination, united strength and the potential to wage struggle against exploitation and oppression on a national scale. Demands can be formulated nationally and fought for at the same time in every part of the country. Already some unions have used the national strike within

particular sectors very successfully (for example, the S.A. Chemical Workers Union against AECI management in demand for an increase in minimum wages) and the Metal and Allied Workers Union is planning to use the national strike for the right to win plant-level bargaining rights. Think how effective a cross-industry national strike could be in winning demands! Or how essential it is to develop that potential if the working class majority is to seize control of South Africa!

With the development of a working class 'with purpose' - a working class conscious of the necessity of destroying the system of exploitation and oppression and replacing it with something completely different - this Federation has incalculable potential, particularly if it were linked organisationally and strategically with other sectors of the progressive movement - unemployed youth, retrenched workers, women, working class children in the schools, residents and democrats from other sectors of the population.

But, before that point can be reached, the progressive movement has several hurdles to clear. Not least of which is the fact that the progressive movement is currently under systematic state attack. The aim of this attack is to:

- i. Stop the armed resistance in the townships
- ii. Prevent progressive organisation from developing a firm and organised base of people's power.
- iii. Re-establish the control of the ruling class over the working class.
- iv. Create the conditions wherein government 'reforms' can be carried out in the manner, to the extent, in the form and to the ends which the rulers wish.
- v. Bring to an end the development of a revolutionary movement which could threaten class rule through crippling all organisations involved in the uprisings.
- vi. Develop the conditions in which the counter-measures to the falling rate of profit can be applied and ensured.

Various means are being employed by the government and the security forces to achieve this end. Amongst others are:

- i. Preventing the co-ordination of struggle of different sectors.
- ii. Removing the leadership of the organisations, who are giving coherence and direction and exerting discipline over the general membership on a local level via detentions, arrests, killings or whatever other means.
- iii. Removing all national coherence and preventing the emergence or maintenance nationally of a single, articulate and ideologically powerful and well-organised, co-ordinated progressive movement.
- iv. Systematically undermining the production and distribution networks of progressive ideology. This would include removing key national figures; breaking up activist networks; and disorganising the means progressives use to disseminate information and analysis - such as media, research, meetings (both mass - through banning funerals - and local - through

urfews, etc) and daily organisational work.

v. Establishing water-tight control over access to information collection and distribution.

vi. The severest of repression on ordinary people taking part in or considering taking part in - mass demonstrations, street fighting, the destruction of symbols of apartheid control, consumer boycotts, etc. This is being carried out according to the principle of 'prevention is better than cure' or, in other words, preventing people from gathering together in large numbers, preventing people from moving freely, preventing people from considering themselves strong enough to take on the repressive forces and win, preventing situations where mass education can take place, etc.

While the repressive forces are being used to crush popular resistance, the government and the ruling class are considering ways and means of restructuring capitalism and apartheid to ensure their long-term survival. Amongst the more important initiatives are:

i. The President's Council proposal on doing away with influx control, and its replacement with 'controlled urbanisation'. This has a two-way motivation: to rid the statutes of one of the most criticised aspects of racial discrimination; and to provide a stimulus for the flagging economy.

ii. The government's plan to set up the Regional Services Councils from January 1st, with R1,5 billion coming into them from June 1st. These will provide for the deracialising of municipal rule, and a vehicle by which the wealth of the white cities will supposedly be redistributed to the African areas, and through which 'moderate' blacks will be drawn into the governing structures.

iii. The granting of South African citizenship to all, despite people's citizenship of so-called homelands.

iv. The establishment of the Convention Alliance under the chairmanship of Jules Browde, but the control of the Progressive Federal Party, Inkatha and big business.

v. The opening up of channels of communication with the ANC.

vi. The calling for the resignation of P.W. Botha and Le Grange and their replacement with 'reformists' with more acceptability to business and the international world and calling off the state of emergency.

vii. The attempted rebuttal of the strategy of disinvestment and sanctions.

viii. The restructuring of the economy through deregulation, selling off the profitable parastatals, cutting government spending, etc.