

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE ELECTIONS?

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

Presently the balance of forces is delicately poised.

The position of the enemy

* The apartheid state is facing its most serious crisis yet. Within the 18 month period following the Tricameral elections, the state **lost the strategic initiative** to the people's camp. Mass resistance has made it increasingly more difficult to govern SA in the old way. Yet, the ruling bloc can come up with **no coherent political alternative** to the existing system of government.

* While the **local** political 'options' for the enemy in the form of the puppet Council system, Bantustan independence etc are all but **dead**, the **Centralised** apparatuses of the Apartheid state are also tumbling about the government's ears. Witness, the increasing frequency with which the government simply goes above the head of the parliamentary process; the Tricameral option rejected by previously loyal government supporters; the call for talks with and recognition of the ANC from the heart of the National Party.

* As the existing structures of government become less and less effective, the real decision making process is being transferred to the semi-secret National Security structures (JMC System). This cuts across all efforts to cultivate a viable third force.

* The economic crisis continues for the ruling bloc. Business confidence in the long term future of the country is at a very low level, so that, despite the improvement in some factors, such as the gold price and exchange rate, the foundation on which the economy is based remains very weak. Against this background sanctions are set to continue.

* At an international level, the credibility of the Botha regime is at an all time low. Diplomatically, SA is more isolated than at any previous point - to the extent that Pretoria's closest allies have been forced to recognise and talk to the ANC. While imperialist forces clearly have their own divisive strategy to play out here (likely an attempt to use their capacity to pressurise Pretoria as a lever to win concessions from the Democratic Movement), it is against the strength of the ANC that this strategy gets played out.

The position of the people's camp

* The level of political consciousness of the African masses is such that the existing system of rule is seen as illegitimate. This is irreversible.

* The level of organisation varies between regions and from one front to the next. A number of regions continue to show the masses in a state of readiness to engage in struggle, despite the massive repression. Organisation in these regions is well grounded, so that despite the detention of experienced leadership, conditions remain relatively favourable for the emergence of new people to take the lead.

* Repression has had a particularly negative effect on regional and national organisation - on political and other fronts. This has affected the capacity

to launch campaigns capable of uniting people geographically and across fronts.

* Legal mass organisation finds itself under enormous pressure from increasingly sophisticated repressive state strategy.

The Balance of Forces - State/People's Camp.

A balance of power has been reached between the forces of the people and those of the enemy where neither is clearly in a position to seize the strategic initiative. The latter force has run out of political artillery, particularly where national politics is concerned. The former forces, while not relinquishing ground is cornered by sheer repressive force. The potential capacity for tilting this balance in favour of the People exists (given certain factors); whereas this is not the case with the Enemy Camp. However, the latter is capable of making important **tactical** gains, which could represent a weakening of the People's camp in certain regions and on some fronts.

ELECTIONS IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The Elections constitute a **tactical** move on the part of the Enemy with the following objectives:

* To shift the **focus of attention of national politics** away from the fundamental struggle between the Forces of the People and those of Apartheid (antagonistic contradiction) **towards** non-antagonistic differences which exist within the enemy camp.

* This is aimed at allowing the state to **redefine the political agenda** on the state's terms for at least a 3-5 month period.

* Such a redefinition is likely to revolve around the issue of **national security**: how best to manage resistance, rather than the question of **how change through reform can come about.**

* This in turn, it is hoped, will allow sufficient breathing space for the state to impose with all the necessary force, after the elections, new tactical measures (also referred to as the government's reform programme) which are aimed at blunting the struggle.

* By creating the space to tackle the question of National Security, the state hopes to counteract any inroads which the democratic movement began to make at the level of ideological penetration of white mass consciousness. The state hopes to unify white opinion against communism and terrorism inherent in all resistance activities.

* To gain a measure of success in this regard would provide the government with a vote of confidence, not in the future, but for its tyrannical repressive methods of government.

* To run a reasonably orderly and 'presentable' election campaign, free from any noticeable popular resistance: which could be interpreted by international forces that support the Apartheid regime as an indication of the government's ability to work out a reformist solution which would appeal to imperialist

interests.

* This in turn, could be harnessed against the growing forces of international solidarity with the People and the effective diplomatic advances of the ANC.

Differences of Approach within the Ruling Bloc

What are the differences between the various parties within the white ruling bloc? (These differences will increasingly take up the centre stage of the SA political scene as the elections draw closer.)

Firstly, what **unites** the ruling bloc is the concern to impose a solution to the SA crisis **over the heads of the masses** so that power effectively remains in the hands of a minority and **not transferred** into the hands of the majority (People).

What **divides** the ruling bloc is the question of **who exactly** should make up this ruling minority - who should and should not be included - and by what **rules** it should play the game. The 'conflict' over the Indaba is just one such example.

With this in mind, what is at stake for the various components of the ruling bloc is not **whether** mass resistance should be managed and contained by the state, but **how** this is to be done.

Certain parliamentary and allied opposition is on the basis that the government is not properly meeting the threat, their policies are making it worse for us'. These people are looking for a viable third force solution. For an increasing number of such people this 'solution' should include the ANC as a 'factor' in the process.

Our possible Strategic Objectives during the Election Phase

Some prior considerations

In outlining our strategic objectives in taking up the election issue we need to understand **what role does the white electorate play in the maintenance of white minority rule.?**

(At a simplistic level) the ruling white bloc requires a level of white electoral majority **consensus** that the rulers are capable of controlling and shaping the destiny of the country. While this does not mean that the government requires unanimity in support of its policies (in fact 'healthy' political divergence gives the system its 'democratic' face), it does require sufficient confidence by the majority of whites **in the system itself.**

Without this, the ruling bloc faces inevitable fragmentation and splintering, with different forces within its ranks pulling in opposite directions. The more pressure the ruling bloc is placed under to come up with solutions, the greater this tendency. **This weakens the state,** and its ability to govern effectively at all levels.

The weaker and more divided the state, the greater the space of the democratic movement to make progress on the road to the transferral of power to the People.

The question then becomes: how does one 'get to' the white community? We need to 'get to' the white community by relating to and engaging in the terrain of 'white politics'. What is the understanding of politics amongst whites?

Politics for whites is understood in very narrow constitutional terms. It refers only to a 5 yearly election and the operation of the white parties, parliament and government. The uprising which has swept the country *is not legitimate politics; it is violence, unrest, terrorism etc.* All of this implicitly or explicitly falls within the category of *crime*.

In contrast to this with the elections coming up, now is the time for whites to *engage in politics*. Even 'non-political' whites will go to the polls in favour of one or other party. The direction of their votes is only of marginal interest to us. What is key is that *the election period is when white people will be talking political options on a grand scale, in a context of political instability and fluidity.*

As such the elections offer a highly significant opportunity to make an intervention in the thinking of the white community.

In the light of the above, strategic objectives should be:

- * To actively seize the political initiative (such that the People begin to determine the political agenda even under conditions of heavy repression.
- * To undermine the confidence of the white electorate in the existing **system of government**. (Parliamentary politics as it is presently constructed)
- * To undermine the confidence of a strategically important segment of the white electorate in the ability of the government to do anything towards the creation of a viable, peaceful future for SA.
- * To project and **get accepted** the only viable **alternative** - the need to recognise and talk to the real representatives of the People.

Strategic Approach

* The key to an election strategy is **mass action on the broadest possible basis** in order to impact our message: 'we reject your parliament. It is not the place where this country's future will be determined. We are demonstrating this by our actions'. In short, any political message will tend to be hollow unless it reflects the strength of our forces confronting the ruling bloc. (This is particularly important in the current context, where the government is trying to create the impression that the political situation has 'normalised'. An election completely overshadowed by mass action would have 3 main effects:

1. to convince the average white (racist) voter of the need to compromise on the issue of white political domination in his own self interest;
2. to put the final nail in the coffin of the parliamentary system as far as the 'enlightened' voter is concerned, and to promote at least a position of accommodation with the

democratic movement

3. to allow democratic white organisations to advance significantly in terms of numbers and their voice within the white political terrain.

* We need to focus our activities **against the system of oppression/apartheid rule**. This is the enemy. (As such we must be cautious about a boycott approach, as this will turn the white liberal voting stratum into the enemy).

* Our approach should take whites beyond the misleading arena of white (voting) politics to the arena of **active** opposition in concert with the democratic movement. (As such, we must project the message that it is entirely irrelevant whether people vote or not and who they vote for.)

Strategies

(Very tentative)

The elections could possibly offer an opportunity to link up to the National Unity Campaign, by relating our message to the demands and themes of the Campaign and by rekindling opposition to the Tricameral in the Indian and Coloured communities.

A call for action involving (inter alia?) a national stayaway, closure of businesses, school boycotts on or around election day would completely overshadow that event, place it in its proper perspective.

A call that the 'Nats must go' might also allow us to achieve some resonance with the parliamentary opposition, using this as some kind of protection in our campaign.

Repression of any mass action in support of the above would be intense, however, there are three possible factors to our advantage:

1. The breadth and numbers involved would stretch the security forces as never before, especially as they will have to police the election activities themselves.
2. The state will be constrained from explicitly attacking carefully presented election related activities.
3. The pressure will be enhanced if there is any co-operation from big business and the white liberal opposition who would want to use such repression for its own political ends of discrediting the NP.