

SACP CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS AN ELECTION MANIFESTO

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1. Contextualising the forthcoming elections

It is important to contextualise elections for a Constituent Assembly in order to emphasise the point that our approach to the elections is just as, if not more important than the contents of an election manifesto per se.

1.1 Elections for a CA should be regarded as part and parcel of the national democratic revolution. Such elections are not a departure from our overall programme, but an important stage towards the full realisation of our objectives. These elections do not mark the installation of national democracy, but are a crucial step in the transition towards national democracy. The elections mark the formal beginnings of the transition period.

1.2 The main content of our revolution is the liberation of African people in particular and black people in general. The focus, character and content of our election campaign should reflect this reality. It is important to continually and uncompromisingly re-assert this in order to counter some reformist tendencies beginning to emerge within sections of the national liberation movement. Nowadays there is pressure for us to abandon some of the main tenets of the national liberation struggle "in order not to scare voters away". Our Party is a particular target here. The national liberation movement is being asked to break the alliance as an attempt to win some undefined 'middle ground'. We are being called upon to satisfy and attract 10 000 voters in order to lose millions of voters? We need to ask ourselves the questions: Who is scared of the SACP? Who is scared of nationalisation? It is not the overwhelming majority of our people, but a minority who in any event is not going to vote for us.

1.3 It is absolutely important that we as the SACP, and the Tripartite Alliance as a whole, enter this election on a principled rather than an opportunistic basis. Entering these elections on a principled basis means that we unabashedly champion the cause of the most oppressed and exploited sectors of South African society, who constitute the overwhelming majority of our people. This should not be a problem if we believe that our programme truly represents their aspirations. It is also the struggles of this immense majority, cynically referred to by the liberals as a "silent majority", that have taken our struggle to where it is. This principled stance is informed by the fact that there is a fundamental contradiction between the interests of white minority rule and those of the oppressed majority. If we try to be everything to everybody, we are, in essence, sacrificing our noble objectives and abandoning the majority of our people. This would constitute an opportunistic entry into elections. Such opportunism is characterised by a 'wishy-washy' 'catch-all' election manifesto that means nothing to everybody.

1.4 We must reject the notion that the deepening of mass struggles is in contradiction to preparing for an election. There is a growing industry of advice, unfortunately from

even our own ranks, telling us to move away from the politics of mass struggle to the politics of contesting elections. The best way for preparing for an election is to intensify our struggle on the ground in order to prepare conditions for an effective transition. In preparing for elections our mass struggles should be focused on dislocating apartheid structures on the ground, in order to build transitional structures from below. Our experiences with the National Peace Accord here should be instructive. Creation of transitional structures at the top is not going to automatically filter out to the ground where it matters most. Struggles are therefore needed to ensure that it is the people themselves, in their various localities, who constitute interim/transitional government. Such struggles would also strengthen our hand in any transitional government. Such a focused struggle would immediately relate local struggles to the process of negotiating an interim/transitional government. Our approach to elections should be that elections constitutes part of our strategy of mass mobilisation and represents what will perhaps be the largest of our mass action campaigns.

1.5 The development of a mass action programme to prepare the ground for a free and fair election is the most important task for the year ahead. It is proposed that our mass action should target those institutions of apartheid that threatens most the holding of a free and fair election. The lack of free political activity in some of the bantustans should be a priority. Mass action should be embarked upon in bantustans like KwaZulu, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei. This campaign should be taken up as a national campaign as a matter of urgency. Such campaigns should be replicated at regional level, with particular attention being given to structures such as the NPA and the TPA. For an example in Natal the NPA is in alliance with Inkatha through the Joint Executive Authority, and through this structure they are engaged in restructuring regional government in such a manner that the federalist bloc is strengthened. Therefore, in the case of Natal the JEA is one of the structures to be targeted as part of the creation of the climate for free political activity.

1.6 At local level, widespread campaigns should be launched to try and dislocate as well as discredit apartheid local authority structures. These structures continue to pose in many parts of the country a serious obstacle to the holding of a free and fair election. In particular these structures are engaged in widespread unilateral restructuring aimed at strengthening the interests of the white minority regime at local level. There are already hundreds of local struggles and initiatives throughout the country, and they need to be co-ordinated and be given a national character. Our strategic objective during this year should be the shifting of power away from apartheid structures to joint interim structures.

1.7 There are numerous advantages in embarking on such struggles. Some of the most important include the following:

- i. Tackling the root causes of the violence and repression in some of the bantustans, which rest on the apartheid structures themselves. It is not adequate to simply wage an ideological attack on apartheid structures. What is important is that the focus should be on the structures themselves, and an ideological attack should act to support concrete struggles

- b. Such struggles would also create the basis for a mass-driven transition process
- c. The creation of a basis for building an interim government from below rather than relying only on national agreements, whose effect might not filter down to the ground. It is also the aim of the regime to enter into national agreements that do not affect its power base on the ground. Any transition structures will not take root at local level unless the necessary conditions are created
- d. The mobilisation of people for an election campaign around a concrete programme of action. Such a programme would directly relate to national negotiations for transitional arrangements
- e. Such an approach would allow models of local and regional government to evolve from below rather than being imposed from above
- f. Our hand in an interim government will be strengthened
- g. Our branches will be given a concrete programme around which to organise their activities.

No matter how attractive our election manifesto and election speeches would be the crux of the matter is that people will vote for us only in, so far as we continue to tackle issues that affect them on a day-to-day basis. People will vote for us on the basis of our track record. Our track record is not only what we have done in the past, but what we continue to do.

1.8 Although we will be entering these elections as part of the Tripartite Alliance and an ANC led front, we need to guard the independence of our Party and other organs of the working class. History tells us that it is in such moments of 'Uhuru' and democratic elections led by national liberation movements that the independence of the working class is sacrificed to the detriment of our longer-term objectives of a transition to socialism. We need to see these elections as simultaneously requiring the strengthening of our position as a political vanguard and leader of the working class. Consequently our contribution to the election campaign should reflect this. Such strengthening of the role of the working class will also ensure that it is strategically placed to play a central role in both the transition process and in the establishment of a national democracy.

1.9 Perhaps what is most important for us is to ensure that the election campaign is mass-driven. It is our branches on the ground that are going to be the mainstay of the whole campaign. It is for this reason that the nature of our election campaign must be sharply different from bourgeois-style election campaigns. In fact the major benefit we should derive from an election campaign is not only winning an election - which we must - but also to build our organisation and mobilise our people. Though making the point after the Sandinista had lost an election in Nicaragua, Alejandro De Bendaña, a senior leader of the Sandinista, makes an important observation in this regard:

Certainly, government is a very significant power, but it is not an indispensable one, and it is definitely not the only one in the transformation of society. An even

more powerful engine is the capacity of people, by way of consciousness and organisation, to transform their own communities and to demand in an organised fashion, their due individual and collective rights. (in New African 27/6/91).

1.10 We must also be critical of the notion that preparing for elections is not important, but what matters is the struggle. Such an approach represents the extreme opposite of the approach criticised above. This notion fails to realise that 'the struggle' is not an abstract phenomenon, but is always related to, and rooted in, the major issues facing us at different stages of our revolution. If this phase of our revolution involves an election, our struggles on the ground should concretely take into account this reality. It is after all our very struggles that have taken us to the stage of an election.

1.11 Our overall strategic objective should be the drawing of a democratic constitution that should set in place processes that will enhance the possibilities, and not undermine prospects, for the achievement of our long-term objectives.

2. Towards an election manifesto

2.1 A democratic constitution, whilst as inclusive as possible, should prioritise and reflect the interests of the overwhelming majority of our population particularly the working class and the urban and rural poor.

2.2 This constitution should emphasise the importance of a democratic constitutional order that is not simply based on representative democracy, but also on participatory democracy. It should include and be based on enshrining such processes as accountability and the right to recall.

2.3 Enshrined in the constitution should be a commitment to and creation of structures to undertake widespread deracialisation of South African society, and the eradication of gender-based discrimination.

2.4 Paramount in an election manifesto for the SACP is a clear commitment to the minimum conditions for the realisation of the goals of national democracy. Foremost amongst these is a commitment to economic reconstruction and the eradication of the economic basis of colonialism of a special type. This economic reconstruction should aim at addressing some of the key economic and social needs of the working class and the rural poor. These would include employment creation and the provision of housing, education, health services and the provision of land to the landless mass on the countryside. A pre-condition to the achievement of these basic needs would be a commitment to public ownership of identified key sectors of the economy, and stopping any further privatisation of state-owned property.

2.5 A clear commitment is needed to the effect that the major issues relating to the nature of a democratic state will be decided upon by the Constituent Assembly. In particular these are issues relating to boundaries and functions of regions; the constitutional framework for an economic system; bill of rights; and a system of government.

2.4 An election manifesto should commit itself to the swiftest possible transition to majority rule. This would entail shortening the transition period to the minimum possible time required to prepare for the dislocation of apartheid state apparatuses and major economic institutions of colonialism of a special type. Guiding our approach in this regard should be the fact that there is a fundamental contradiction between apartheid and national liberation. The two cannot co-exist.

3. Outstanding strategic issues

Our approach to elections and the final contents of an election manifesto is dependent on our Party resolving and taking final decisions on some key strategic issues. Some of these issues have been discussed and debated in the organs of the Party, but no decisions have been taken. If we are to effectively map out a strategy for elections and the entire transition period we can no longer postpone these issues.

3.1 It is urgent that our coming Central Committee meeting fully discusses and take a firm decision on the 'Strategic Perspectives' document adopted by the NEC of the ANC. This document has fundamental implications for the nature of the transition process. It also has very serious implications for our approach to elections and an election manifesto. For instance adopting that document might mean that we have to go to an election with a message to our people that we are postponing the transition to full majority rule even after a victory in a (second) democratic election or by extending the transition period. Of even more importance however in discussing this document is that our entire strategic orientation has to shift in very fundamental ways. We cannot enter an election without a clear position on these matters.

3.2 We need as a Party to clearly state to our people that an election for a Constituent Assembly does not herald the installation of a democratic government. This should be made clear in order not to create unrealistic expectations about what an interim government will be able to deliver. However the point being made here does not by any means relate to the possible failure of an interim government to deliver as a result of an extended period of power-sharing and sunset clauses. As Marxist-Leninists we must be acutely aware that the problem with the stage of an interim government is that the ruling class will still be wielding enormous economic and political power which will be used to try and block any attempts by the democratic forces to address some of the basic needs of our people. This issue requires careful attention. The complexity of the issue before us is that we must not be seen to be sending conflicting messages to our constituency about the need to vote for a constituent assembly and at the same time say their needs won't be met. This therefore requires that we analyse and discuss what an interim government can and cannot do.

3.3 The third issue we have to deal with is that of a communist bogey that will be thrown up by all the enemies of the national liberation movement to try and discredit the ANC. Here it is not so much the problem of our constituency, but the dangers of the failure of the national liberation movement as a whole to defend the alliance. Failure to deal with this issue adequately could place our revolutionary alliance in jeopardy at a time when unity in purpose is most needed. The most serious danger could be the emergence and strengthening of anti-communist opportunism within sections of the

national liberation movement itself.

3.4 Although the issue of mass action is dealt with above, it is important that this matter be thoroughly debated. We should not hide the truth here. In our Party there are clearly different conceptions of the relationship between mass action and negotiations. These differences have also surfaced much more sharply in the debates around the 'Strategic Perspectives' document. Similar differences could easily emerge on the question of the relationship between an election campaign and mass struggle. The Central Committee should emerge with a clear strategic direction on this matter.

3.5 Our approach to the issue of 'ethnic minorities' requires serious debate within the ranks of our Party. We have always played a leading role in guiding the national liberation on this question. This issue needs to be revisited in a rigorous manner. For instance one of our most important task in building national democracy has been the question of building a South African nation. The way we approach the issue of ethnic minorities during an election campaign and in a manifesto should not be informed by short-term pragmatic approaches, but should be based on our long-term goals in building a new South African nation. The way the issue of 'Indians' and 'Coloureds' is being dealt with in relation to the Africans in particular is very haphazard, and more often than not characterised by expediency in the context of a forthcoming election.

3.6 Related to the above question, a pressing issue to discuss is that of an ANC-led Front to contest an election. There are a number of matters that are unclear here. The comments made by the President of the ANC in an interview with Sir David Frost on the question of the ANC alliance with the Party, necessitates an urgent discussion of this matter. For example, are we forming an ANC-led Front or is the ANC including members of other parties in its election list? These two approaches are very different. Related to this issue is the place of the Tripartite Alliance vis-a-vis the rest of the Front. There is also a lot of disgruntlement on the ground about the inclusion of some of the bantustan/tricameral parties in an ANC-led Front (eg Labour Party in the Western and Eastern Cape and Ramodike in the Northern Transvaal). For us what is important is a clear understanding of the class composition of such a Front and what the different class components might be wanting to achieve by joining it. It is very clear that some sections of this Front might represent sections of the petty bourgeoisie that have moved over decisively to the side of the national liberation movement. Other sections are entering this Front on an opportunistic basis, either to save themselves politically or in an interventionist fashion to try and turn the national liberation movement into being a political instrument of an aspirant national (even comprador) bourgeoisie. Fronts are a ways class alliances. Being absolutely clear on these questions - which should involve an analysis of the changing class forces and alliances in the post Feb 1990 period - is what is required of us as a Marxist-Leninist Party in this period.

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