

JACK SIMONS on "HOW TO ORGANISE UNDERGROUND WORK: COORDINATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY"

Transformation

I had the good fortune to read Comrade Kay's excellent paper on Cadre Policy before preparing my own contribution. He covers a wide field of issues related to the revolutionary upsurge now under way, the variety of forces opposed to apartheid and white domination, the organisation of revolutionary cadres, the training they need to cope with the enormous tasks of seizing power and building a new society after the overthrow of the racist regime.

Of particular relevance to my theme is his discussion of the kind of training needed to equip cadres for leadership. He insists on the importance of regular, systematic political education and defines the qualities that training and organisation should produce. These include absolute commitment to the revolution, an ability to mix easily with members of local communities at home, close contact with working people and trade unionists, strict discipline and a will to succeed in tasks assigned to one.

All of us no doubt agree with Comrade Kay's selection of traits that distinguish a mature and hardened revolutionary. What remains, however, is the manner in which these qualities can be implanted or grafted on members of our organisation. I think it necessary to say something about the process involved in creating a revolutionary cadre out of what one might call the raw material presented by recruits to the organisation, whether it is the African National Congress, SACTU or the Communist Party.

Marx wrote in his Theses on Feuerbach that men are "products of circumstances and upbringing". The circumstances change through human intervention; "the educator must himself be educated". The bringing to together of the two parts of the process of change, the changing of circumstances and of human activity, "can only be conceived and rationally understood as revolutionising practice". Let me expand on this thought and apply it to our circumstances.

Becoming a revolutionary involves a process of transformation from one kind of

being to another with a different consciousness and outlook on life. In sociological terms the revolutionary is a "deviant", a person who abandons the habits and lifestyles of orthodox, traditional society to join the ranks of radicals. He devotes his life to the overthrow of the existing order, which in our case is the detested and evil complex of baasskap, discrimination, national oppression, inequality and social injustice that is known the world over as apartheid.

All of us have grown up under its shadow. We bear the marks of the system's obsession with race, colour, tribe and ethnicity. This is a cultural heritage, neither innate nor genetic. It can be overcome and expelled from one's consciousness by a conscious, deliberate effort. It requires one to absorb new concepts, words, patterns of thought and behaviour which take the place of the ideas implanted in infancy and childhood. Few of us find a way to the new, radical outlook of a revolutionary without assistance from an "educator" who in Marx's words has himself been educated. Most of us can recall a particular person or group who started us on the revolutionary road, perhaps through actual participation in struggle or by opening our minds to the goals of national liberation, the backwardness of tribal and racial thought, the causes of human suffering and the social injustices perpetrated by the racist regime.

Liberation

Liberation from oppression is rarely a single, once for all time transition from the old way of life to a radical social order. The change usually takes place gradually, often in an uncoordinated manner, in fits and starts, with outbursts of violence and resistance, such as we are experiencing at the present time in our country. People usually retain attitudes acquired in the old society while moving to a revolutionary perspective and social system. We reject the manifestly oppressive injustices of the detested regime but cling to traditions that include oppressive practices inherited from the past.

To clarify my line of reasoning I draw attention to the liberation of women from male domination, something we call male chauvinism. Our cadres of both sexes often exhibit patterns of thought and conduct derived from traditional culture. This can be seen in the supportive roles that women occupy in the revolutionary structure which

is led, one might say dominated, by the male cadres.

It is useful to examine the phenomenon of male chauvinism in other societies for purposes of comparison. I have chosen Saudi Arabia, the leading oil producer in the Middle ^{East} ~~East~~, as an outstanding example of rapid social change from poverty and backwardness to great wealth accompanied by strong adherence to traditional practices. In Saudi Arabia, as in Iran, the veil or chador persists as a symbol of female subordination. Fatima Meer, a leading South Africa sociologist who visited Iran in 1984, observed that "The veil and the women in veils have always been used as pawns in the struggle for male-manipulated power". The chador became a symbol of Iranian nationalism while the Moslem clergy denounced women who wore skirts and appeared unveiled in public as instruments of decadent western culture. Professor Meer quotes Iranian feminists who declare that "It was necessary then to cover these women, to destroy them as sex objects and create Muslim and anti-imperialist human beings out of them" (Fatima Meer, Towards Understanding Iran Today, Inst. for Black Research, Durban, 1985)

Saudi middle-class women wear fashionable western dress when travelling in Europe. On their return and as the plane enters Saudi airspace they are handed long, black cloaks which they wrap over their clothes, covering their bodies from head to foot. The chador is prescribed dress for women in public places where women are segregated by law in shops, banks, schools and universities, and prohibited from driving motor vehicles. In government offices women are provided with segregated working places from where files and papers are carried to the male section by expatriates or members of married couples through whom the exchange of papers is conducted. Only 5% of the country's workforce consists of women, but they have recently gained access to separate universities for their sex where they can qualify for higher degrees and the professions. Saudi women do not campaign against sex segregation and inequality because their disabilities are deeply ingrained and fighting for their removal might endanger gains already made.

Progressive women in other Moslem countries have been more courageous and achieved a fair measure of success in their struggle for feminine liberation in Tunisia, South Yemen and Iran. The most far reaching proposals for reform come from Marxists, such as members of the Tudeh Party in Iran. They ~~claim~~ claim that the exploitation of women is rooted

in the wider field of capitalist exploitation from which working people of both sexes could escape only by embracing a socialist mode of subsistence. The Tudeh Party which led the struggle was destroyed by the Ayatollah regime under a ban imposed in ~~19~~ 1983 when 1500 party members were arrested and 83 sentenced to death.

Liberation Theology

Iran is experiencing a theocratic revolution led by the Muslem clergy who use state power to conduct the war against Iraq and maintain their grip on the working people by denouncing imperialism and condemning the spread of radical liberalism and Marxism. The South African revolution in contrast is secular, neither directed by nor against religious authority. I propose to discuss the position of churches in the struggle and the attitude of our movement and its cadres to religion.

At a guess, most of our cadres have been brought up in a religious atmosphere stemming from their families. One or both parents belong to a church, attend its services, bring the children to baptism and confirmation, turn to the church for weddings and burials. Incidentally, well over 60 % of Africans at home profess to belong to a Christian sect, a far higher proportion than in most other African countries. Our movement does not however cater for believers in our ranks or provide opportunities for discussion of their beliefs. The whole subject is taboo in spite of the strong religious bias that can be noticed at burials and ceremonial occasions.

Because of this neglect we are ill-equipped to take advantage of a liberation theology now spreading among Christians and Moslems in South Africa. Our cadres ought to work with and influence the churchmen who oppose apartheid but we are not trained in the dialectics of theology and its opposing ideology of atheism. Many of uave heard of the supposedly marxist epigram that "religion is the opium of the people" but assert it out of the context in which Marx examined the reasons for people's reliance on religious beliefs in suffering and distress. There is a close interaction between Communism and Christianity as is pointed out in a recent scholarly work by Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio of Cape Town University entitled Between Christ and Caesar, 1986. I shall draw heavily on his treatise in the remainder of this section.

He traces modern Catholic teachings on social questions to a papal encyclical issued

in 1891, the year when the Italian Socialist Party came into existence, and links it to the appearance of the Communist Manifesto in 1848 and the formation of the First International of Working Mens' Associations in 1864. The working class of Western Europe had become a force for themselves. The Catholic hierarchy recognised the challenge that this development presented and turned its attention to the disabilities and demands of the working people. The Pope's encyclical issued under the title Rerum Novarum repeated the church's traditional adherence to the nobility and landed gentry but devoted so much attention to the poverty and related problems of the workers that it came to be known as their charter.

We realise that the church is part of the established order, indeed one of its main pillars. A revolt by religious leaders against the state authority has serious consequences which they are prepared to face only under great pressure of conscience and mass discontent. When Martin Luther opened the way to the Protestant opposition to the papacy by condemning its corruption, immorality and debasement of its doctrines he opened the floodgates to widespread discontent among Germans with the conduct of priests and their superiors

The controversy between State and Church in South Africa has a different kind of origin. It arises from the ruthless repression of the majority by the racist regime and the rising tide of resistance to the white autocracy, the conflict between the concept of a Christian community joined by a common belief in Jesus Christ and the divisive nature of the apartheid system. Black and white Christians belong to the same or sister churches but are segregated by racial barriers in the general society the divisive nature of which inevitably penetrates through church walls.

One of the issues that brought the conflict to a head resulted from the conscription of whites for military service in the SADF at home and beyond national boundaries in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and other neighbouring states. Villa-Vicencio describes the dilemma of of English-speaking churches with a black majority membership. How could they reconcile the recruitment of white church members for an unjust war with their denunciation of all forms of violence in the settlement of disputes ? The South African Catholic Bishops Conference made a stand in 1985 by calling for an end to conscription

while English-speaking continue to argue about conscription and the appointment of chaplains to the armed forces.

Dutch Reformed churches adopt divergent policies. The white synods continue to endorse the apartheid doctrine which the NGK formulated in the 1930s and find biblical justification for race segregation in the church and the general society. This aggressive defiance of world opinion provoked a declaration by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that apartheid was a "heresy" and violated accepted Christian doctrine. The Dutch Reformed Churches thereupon withdrew from the world body and issued a statement providing theological support for apartheid, a viewpoint that led to a split in the NGK. What is known as the "Kairos" document appeared in 1985. Its opening line ~~is~~ reads "The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations" The document goes on to say that the Christian church is divided. There is a White Church and a Black Church - sometimes within the same denomination. There are Christians on both sides and some in the middle who try to sit on the fence.

Intricate theological issues are involved in the conflict between the State and Church, between the regime's misuse of the State's authority and the duty of church members to resist. The area is one in which our movement can and ought to take part in support of theologians who oppose apartheid in word and deed. To carry out this important work we need cadres who are familiar with the historical background of the dispute, its origin and the contrasting viewpoints. That study has to be acquired through concentrated study and discussion

The Department of Political Education

To make such studies in cooperation with our cadres is the proper function of the Department of Political Education. It prepares programmes of study, draws up syllabuses, attempts to recruit instructors, invites departments and sections to send members to classes and offers to provide refresher courses for cadres selected to attend party schools organised by our allies. One of the department's major efforts is to conduct classes for cadres awaiting deployment and secluded from the general members - the so-called "underground houses or units" of the movement in Lusaka. This activity,

which has continued without a break for something like nine months, has given the department and its corps of part-time, volunteer instructors, much insight into the way our organisation functions, the difficulties of organising underground political work, and the capacity or willingness of our cadres to benefit from instruction.

We find that two or three members of every unit show a serious interest in our classes. They take part in discussions, have a sound knowledge of the issues discussed, are well informed about the course of the struggle and exhibit a relatively high standard of political awareness. The majority, numbering about 10 or 12 in a "house" have little to say either because of a language problem, or ignorance of the topics discussed, or lack of interest. Instructors do their best to break down the invisible barriers between themselves and the cadres but the response is often disappointing.

There is a tendency in some houses to take advantage of the instructors' visits to give vent to complaints and put forward requests for radios, television sets, foodstuffs, clothing, bedding and other articles said to be in short supply. All complaints and requests are carefully noted and passed on to the relevant authorities. The instructors take pains to explain that they have no power or authority and that requests should be addressed through the official channels.

Such problems are bound to arise in any situation in which men are waiting to be deployed sometimes for months on end. They surely occur also among cadres working under far more difficult conditions in the underground at home. The Department's impression is that we have a long way to go before we arrive at satisfactory procedures, establish efficient lines of communication and coordinate the various services required: education, welfare, health and security

To develop and maintain an interest in the classes, the Department selects themes that are topical, have a theoretical significance and may be related to the interests of cadres who often indicate that their primary concern is to return home and put into practice their technical skills. To illustrate the range of topics discussed in the classes I have listed those presented in February and June of this year. These are

1. The code of conduct of a revolutionary cadre
2. Nationalisation, socialisation and the Freedom Charter

3. The religious community as part of MK and the NDR
4. The composition and role of ARMSCOR in the enemy's military aggression
5. Youth and Students Organisation at home
6. Street Committees: their functions and prospects
7. United States Policy in Southern Africa
8. The role of the Church in the NDR

Additional classes are held on specified topics at the request of units. Recently the Department's instructors addressed one of the "houses" on the 66th Anniversary of the SACP in response to a special invitation.

We are aware of our programme's shortcomings. The concentration on current affairs and isolated themes falls far short of an integrated study course providing in-depth knowledge of the social sciences, philosophy, and the theory of revolution. Course of this kind can be made available but are hardly suited to the needs of underground cadres supposedly in transit - though stay put in the houses for many months on end. More systematic courses are arranged for cadres selected for one or two years of study in party schools abroad. Complaints have been made by the authorities in the countries affected of the low level of education and discipline among our students. The organisation of pre-school classes in Lusaka is intended to improve the standards of political education of cadres before attending party school and hopefully raising their morale and self-discipline to acceptable levels. A copy of the Draft Programme prepared for this year's batch of cadres due to go abroad is attached

Conclusions

Political education has a low rating in the movement's list of priorities. It received much attention at the Second Consultative Conference in Kabwe in June 1985, but enthusiasm soon evaporated. Senior members of the department's staff were transferred without replacement or seconded to other duties regardless of the department's interests. The mounting obstacles to effective operations became so serious that in recent weeks a proposal was put to the NEC that the department should be dissolved or at least put into cold storage for six months or so. Only stubborn