



The Alliance assesses the past two months

How does the ANC/COSATU/SACP alliance view the present period? This discussion paper analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the mass action campaign, evaluates the political situation, and suggests a way forward. First presented to the 23 August tripartite summit, the document has been referred back to alliance structures for discussion.

1 A major advance

The past two months have seen a significant advance for the ANC-led tripartite alliance and the broad national liberation movement. The initiative and much of the moral high ground has been decisively taken away from de Klerk.

The essential reason for these major advances has been two months of unprecedented mass action. In addition to the largest stayaway in our history, over 5 million people participated in numerous actions - marches, rallies, occupations. Particularly significant was the widespread character of these actions, with many marches of several thousands occurring in the smallest platteland towns.

But to measure success we need also to consider the first three phases of our mass action in terms of the main objectives of this period. Unfortunately (see 4.3 below) we were not always clear or completely united in our interpretation of these objectives.

We suggest that the following two main objectives best capture the main immediate objectives of the first three phases, and they also best illustrate the success of this period:

- * To *reactivate and consolidate our own forces* in mass action; and

- * in so doing to *alter the balance of forces* to

ensure the speedy achievement of our main demands - a CA, an IG, and serious measures to end the political violence.

1.1 Reactivating and consolidating our own forces

It is no secret that our broad mass constituency was confused and often felt disempowered by what it perceived to be an undue focus on CODESA negotiations.

- * The last two months of mass action have seen an active re-engagement of our formations and our leadership structures with the base.

- * The mass actions have released enormous mass energy and creativity. Numerous mass actions pushed back the boundaries of what is permissible, and of what is possible whether it is permitted or not. There has been a very important change in the mass mood and morale.

1.2 Altering the balance of forces

1.2.1 Weakening the regime

The regime has been weakened in a number of significant ways.

- * We were able, both locally and especially internationally, to ensure that blame for the deadlock at CODESA II was laid where it belonged - on the regime's stubbornness and fundamentally

undemocratic agenda.

* Because of this we were able to open up *significant cracks in the regime's social base*. Especially notable here were the COSATU/SACCOLA negotiations which drove a temporary wedge between de Klerk and leading sectors of big business. On the eve of the two-day stayaway Cde Mandela, and numerous sectoral and shopfloor negotiations, successfully struck deals with companies drastically limiting the number of dismissals.

* Above all, in this period we have dealt a severe blow to what the regime considered to be its major selling point: *FW de Klerk's personal image*.

1.2.2 Internationalising the struggle

We have also been able to reverse some of the losses on the international front we have been suffering. Instead of watching and wailing as sanctions eroded, we have in particular managed, mainly through the UN Security Council, to open up the transition process to much greater international scrutiny. This has all along been a major objective. And it has been fiercely resisted by the regime.

Already, during the first week of August, the presence of a handful of international monitors helped contribute significantly to the political success of a number of major marches.

This is not to say that internationalising the process does not also have potential problems for us, about which we need to be extremely vigilant.

1.2.3 Exposing the bankruptcy of rivals

In consolidating our own forces in action we have also exposed the opportunism and ineffectiveness of a number of political formations (PAC, AZAPO, etc) whose main mission has been to compete with the ANC alliance rather than taking on the regime. This throws open the whole question of the terms on which we rebuild the Patriotic Front.

2 Ruling bloc strategies

The two months of mass action helped clarify regime and broader ruling bloc strategies, particularly strategies to disarm mass action.

2.1 The regime's strategy for handling mass action

The regime tried to deploy two main weapons against the mass action:

* *Low Intensity War (LIW)* – using proxy, special and ordinary security forces to spread carnage, thus demobilising and disorganising our own forces; and

* *Disinformation* to blame this bloodletting on the mass action itself.

Boipatong, one day after the launch of our campaign, laid bare this very strategy. It

boomeranged badly against the regime because:

* LIW is a much more high risk strategy in the industrial heartland of South Africa (than it is in remote rural parts of Mozambique, Angola or KwaZulu). LIW unleashed on Boipatong is much more visible to the local and international media, to human rights bodies, and it destabilises the economy. The massacre appalled the world.

* "But what really appalled people overseas," in the words of John Carlin, SA correspondent of the London newspaper *The Independent* "was the response of the government to Boipatong. The ... Minister of Law and Order put what was seen as a cynical political spin on the massacre by blaming it all on the ANC campaign. 'What do you expect? They had it coming,' was a message that ... came to be expressed not only by Mr Kriel, but by Roelf Meyer and Mr de Klerk himself in the following days."

In other words, rather than improving their situation, the *combination* of LIW and Disinformation around Boipatong doubly damaged their case.

Although the regime persists with this strategy it is now much more vulnerable:

* There is much wider appreciation that LIW is being used;

* international monitoring is being introduced;

* under the pressures of the period, every week brings fresh exposures of death squads, police incompetence, and governmental corruption.

The regime is now reassessing the cost to itself of the strategy unleashed in August 1990 of facilitating IFP's projection as a "national political party", ie of carrying the violence from Natal into the PWV. There are signs that the regime, to lower the political costs for itself, might be encouraging Buthelezi to return to a regional base.

2.2 "Liberal" forces and big capital

A notable feature of the past two months has been a concerted ideological offensive against mass action by a bloc of liberal forces strongly positioned within much of the English-language press. The main features of this offensive have been:

* to predict failure of the mass action. Sometimes failure is predicted by attributing to the mass action an immediate insurrectionary objective;

* to claim massive ANC intimidation and violence;

* to portray the mass action as the result of "union bosses", "communists" and even "anarchists" momentarily taking over the reins of the alliance. Both de Klerk and Cde Mandela are portrayed as having lost control. Cde Mandela's

personal prestige is said to be dented by the mass action!;

* to portray the mass action as simply a temporary "flexing of ANC muscles" (like the white referendum) before an "inevitable return to negotiations".

The essence of this offensive is to de-link mass struggle and negotiations, and therefore to deprive us of our major weapon in the negotiations process.

3 Mass action and negotiations

One common misperception about the last two months is that it has been all mass action and no negotiations. *In fact, there have probably been more negotiations in this period than at any other time in our history:*

* In literally hundreds of local marches, occupations and other mass actions, communities entered into negotiations with the local police, local authorities, etc. Mass power and negotiations at local/regional level were combined and they were brought to bear on state institutions of all kinds;

* major negotiations in the context of the UN Security Council;

* the COSATU/SACCOLA negotiations;

* negotiations both at shopfloor and by Cde Mandela with business, to minimise dismissals;

* the reactivation of the process towards a national economic negotiation forum.

Particularly in the case of the numerous, mass action-related, local level negotiations the past two months have seen a process in which the people have begun to occupy the terrain that had otherwise only been formally opened by national negotiations (by bilateral minutes, the National Peace Accord and by CODESA itself).

The essential point is that throughout this period negotiations did not disappear as a feature of our strategy.

* In the first place, as we have just shown, there are more ways than bilaterals or CODESA for engaging the enemy on the terrain of negotiations.

* Above all, throughout this period the core national demands of our mass action *have precisely been related to a negotiated constitutional settlement* (a CA, an IG and serious endeavours to end the violence).

4 Shortcomings and weaknesses

4.1 Occupations

At the beginning of the PoA we spoke of "city occupations", "occupations of state buildings" and "factory occupations" but we were vague about what exactly we meant by occupation and what our

objectives were. Did occupations occur on any scale? What lessons can be learned?

4.2 Organisational co-ordination

The period, despite its enormous successes, underlined a number of organisational weaknesses:

* the departmentalising tendency of the ANC - ie the tendency within the ANC for campaigns to be a Campaigns Department affair only, to the detriment of an integrated approach that combines organisation, campaigns, forthcoming elections, negotiations, etc;

* the ineffectivity of some of our structures for campaign work, eg how effective were many ANC branches as organs of struggle? In the PWV, tripartite Action Councils were formed to overcome this kind of weakness of existing constitutional structures;

* weaknesses in tripartite consultation - eg around the COSATU/SACCOLA initiative;

* misunderstandings and strains between the tripartite alliance on one hand and key allies - civics, the progressive churches, the educational sector;

* regional unevennesses - this meant that some key areas were largely untouched by the actions (eg Bop). Regional unevennesses have also contributed to poor monitoring by our own formations and therefore little or no publicity around numerous actions in areas away from the main centres.

4.3 Lack of strategic clarity

Generally, the mass action itself has helped to clarify and unify our strategic perspectives. But

* we have sometimes played into the hands of the regime and other ruling bloc forces in their attempt to portray our PoA as "insurrectionary".

* On the other hand, to say that our actions were not insurrectionary in character does not mean that they were merely "symbolic" ("a flexing of muscles") as we have at other times implied. Our mass action achieved numerous real (if still partial victories), it has helped us consolidate our forces and materially change the balance of forces.

* We also need to ask whether the extremely ill-considered bilateral with the regime on 9 August reflected strategic unclarity. The meeting nearly threw away all the ground we had won in the previous two months. Although it was immediately criticised and corrected, we need to ask what strategic assumptions, if any, led to the blunder.

4.4 Propaganda

Generally we were weak on this front. This was partly, but not entirely, due to the negotiations with SACCOLA which made it difficult to go ahead with distributing material on the stayaway until the very

last days. Opportunities to address a number of constituencies, among them the security forces, were also missed.

4.5 Mobilising around events rather than issues

Partly related to 4.3 and 4.4 above, there was sometimes a tendency for us to mobilise more around events and dates (a big march) rather than around issues. Were we always able to establish a clear connection in the perception of our mass constituency between mass action and specific demands and issues?

4.6 Phase four

Although there has been some discussion, phase four of the PoA remains vague. This has contributed to an impression that we were merely "flexing our muscles" in the previous two months. This problem has been compounded by our slowness immediately after the first week of August to return to our constituency to explain and collectively assess the results of this period.

The way forward

1 Ongoing mass action

1.1 Introduction

The first three phases of our programme of mass action were successful because we were, generally, able to map out a clear process with stages and specific targets. Phase four has been much less clearly mapped out. It is absolutely imperative that we do this immediately. In doing this we need to bear in mind some basic considerations:

1.1.1 Pacing our PoA

A successful continuation of our PoA will need to address two partly contradictory demands:

- * On the one hand our constituency has been massively reinvigorated by the week of unprecedented mass action. Already there are signs of impatience at the present vacuum.

- * On the other hand, key activists and grassroots structures are in many cases temporarily exhausted.

We need, therefore, to pace our ongoing PoA, but pacing does not mean delaying. We need to map out a campaign perspective for the next months, so that, even if the same intensity is not immediately maintained, we are already building up for the next major wave of actions.

1.1.2 Taking the mass action to even greater heights

We have mobilised millions of our people for Peace and Democracy, we must now move several steps

forward. This means not merely more of the same, but

- * beginning to challenge power institutions at local and regional level; and

- * introducing new forms of action, eg the PAYE campaign.

1.1.3 Building the pro-democracy movement

While we have developed relations with other democratic forces during the previous three phases, we are still not embarking on joint actions in any significant way. We now need to move on this [see also 1.3 below].

1.1.4 Preparing for elections

Our mass action campaigning must identify issues that win us broad support, so that we extend our influence and leadership.

Built into our mass campaigning must be constituency building. That is, we must be building up our organisational capacity to fight elections.

1.1.5 A focus on socio-economic issues

The previous phases of our mass action tended to neglect issues like VAT, a living wage, housing, land, the drought, food prices, retrenchments, pensions, etc. We need to begin to focus on these issues in ways in which we can win concrete victories.

1.1.6 Combining mass struggle and negotiations

Amongst other things, this means:

- * If, and when, the main negotiations begin again, we must not falter in our mass campaigning. Our key leadership must be seen actively to be committed to ongoing mass actions.

- * We must claim our negotiation victories in action. For instance, when the UN monitors arrive, and when they are despatched to various parts of the country, we should have mass rallies to welcome them. Their arrival is *our* victory, not a favour from Pik Botha.

- * We must remember that mass rallies, marches etc are major forums in which our leadership can report back and explain what is happening on the negotiations front. In the absence of ongoing mass activity, our constituency has to rely on the SABC, and this quickly produces disempowerment, confusion and mistrust.

1.2 Phase Four Campaigns

The following are some of the campaigns that have already been suggested. We need to concretise and elaborate upon them:

- * *Ongoing campaign for a CA and IG*

- * *Against dismissals* – in particular, the struggle for the re-instatement of the dismissed health workers. COSATU is transforming this into a COSATU, and not just NEHAWU struggle. The whole alliance needs to take it up. The campaign

needs also to be broadened into a wider struggle against the regime's general dismantling of public health services.

* *Democratisation of SABC* – the SABC is a highly strategic and fairly vulnerable target for campaigning.

* *Campaign for free political activity* – here the main targets would be the repressive bantustan structures in Ciskei, Bop and KwaZulu. In particular we need to decide whether to go for them all equally at once, or whether we first mount a major national campaign against Ciskei in particular. We also need to consider actions against major financial supporters of Bop, for instance - eg Anglo, Standard Bank.

* *PAYE boycott* – a campaign to have PAYE sums deducted by management paid into a neutral "Peace and Democracy Fund" rather than to the regime.

* *Campaign against corruption and murder*

* *Food prices and drought relief*

* *Release of political prisoners*

As with the first three phases of the PoA we need to combine the focusing of key national demands with the maximum of local initiative and rolling mass actions around local grievances and demands.

1.3 A Convention for Peace and Democracy

* In order to sustain and consolidate many of the gains of the past two months we need to work for the convening of a major Convention for Peace and Democracy. The target date could be mid-October. The Convention should have a largely "civil society" character. The initiative for its convening should be in the hands of COSATU and other forces like the churches and business. Its objective would be to reinforce our major demands for a speedy transition to democracy.

* A related suggestion, which may or may not be combined with such a convention, is a meeting in South Africa of international anti-apartheid formations.

2 Negotiations

2.1 Some general principles

Learning from some of our past difficulties and mistakes, we need to ensure:

- * that the negotiations do not lock us up in processes that isolate us from our constituency;
- * that the negotiations are as open and as understandable as possible to the people; (This means they need to be focused on decisive issues, on three or four clear demands.)
- * that, without being childish or churlish, we are

careful about how we conduct ourselves in the negotiations and how we report back upon them - we sometimes convey a public impression of enormous friendliness with our opponents.

2.2 What must the regime do before we return to negotiations?

It is clear that the ball is in the regime's court. It is also clear that the essence of our demands is twofold:

- * there must be a clear public commitment to a democratically elected, sovereign Constituent Assembly and IG;
- * there must be concrete, practical steps taken to end the political violence.

However, we still need to be absolutely clear, and consistent across the alliance, on what exactly will constitute an adequate meeting of our demands [see separate discussion paper].

2.3 In what forum should constitutional negotiations be taken up?

Assuming that our demands are met, how do we pick up on the negotiations? *It is essential that we should restructure the negotiations process to bring it into line with the realities of the present balance of power.*

In practice this could mean:

* In the first place, resumed negotiations would assume a BILATERAL CHARACTER, that is, they would be between an ANC delegation and the regime. It is recommended that the ANC delegation should include members of the alliance.

* Once a settlement is agreed upon within the Bilateral Forum, this settlement would then be taken into a Multi-Lateral Forum. But this latter forum should not be allowed to undermine the basic bilateral agreement.

Hard and fast decisions on the exact character and composition of this MULTI-LATERAL FORUM should perhaps be left to closer to the time of its formation. There are, however, a number of factors to be borne in mind:

- * The many obvious shortcomings of CODESA vs the dangers of spending months re-negotiating a multi-lateral negotiating forum whose functions we are now, in any case, aiming to curtail severely;
- * the fact that Vance/UN Security Council see CODESA as the key forum for constitutional negotiations;
- * the probability of more forces (PAC, AZAPO, 'New Right', etc) joining the process. ☆