

Preparation for the Final Onslaught

DAWN Interview with Comrade Joe Slovo

Dawn: What is the significance of the current mass political actions inside the country?

Joe Slovo: Towards the end of last year, the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party (SACP) spoke about the decade of the 80s being the decade of the struggle for people's power and all the events since the beginning of this great year of struggle have borne out the correctness of the projection which is contained in that statement and I think it is correct to say that today looking at the events of the last six months in particular, that there are present the ingredients of what one might call a pre-revolutionary situation. Despite vicious enemy retaliation, the urban population, in particular, is absolutely uncompromising in its readiness to engage itself against the racist state. It is clear that the people are showing the absolute rejection of the so-called reform programme which the enemy is using in an attempt to stem the revolutionary tide. The people are also showing a complete rejection of the fraudulent bantustan programme which is an attempt to divide South Africa, to divide its people and to get the South African masses to accept a complete confirmation of the original foreign conquest of their country. The people are also showing a growing acceptance of the leadership of the African National Congress at all levels of their struggle.

The situation is also characterised by a continuous extension of the struggle to new areas. Areas which previously seemed dormant like the Orange Free State have also come into the picture of struggle and in general one can say, as I indicated at the outset that looking at the position as a whole it is clear that the ingredients of a pre-revolutionary situation are present in our country.

The reason I say this, apart from the activity of the

people, is that the possibility of change in our country depends not only on the strength and weakness of the enemy; it depends not only on the strength and weakness of our own organised movement but it also depends on the confidence which the masses have on the possibility of victory.

There can be no doubt that inspired by their own struggles, inspired by the victories on the borders earlier on in Angola and Mozambique and now once again in Zimbabwe, the masses of our people are beginning to sense the possibility of a successful struggle for the final destruction of the racist regime and for the winning of people's power. And therefore, it is quite clear that if one examines the current political mass actions inside our country they must be regarded as more than just isolated activities. They must be regarded as an urge which is expressing itself at all levels of the society in South Africa for the preparation for the final assault against racist supremacy in our land.

Dawn: Do you think there is any qualitative change in the political content of the present student boycotts compared to the 1976 Upsurges?

Cde Joe Slovo: Well, in the first place the one significant thing which should be said about the present student boycott is that for the first time it has involved on a massive scale another very important section of the oppressed black people and that is the Coloured people, and in the more general sense the significance of these activities compared to 1976 is that in 1976, if we remember the way the Soweto Upsurges began with the activities in the school it was clear that initially the issue was posed by the students in a narrow way on the question of the imposition of the Afrikaans language and as we know it developed into a much more profound form of struggle.

DIFFERENCE

The difference in the political atmosphere today is demonstrated by the fact that now from the very beginning the demands which are put on the agenda by the student boycott movement are not restricted to a small area on this or that issue but initially it is an assault on the whole system of unequal education and it already right from the start contains demands connected with the position of the black people as a whole in the oppressive system and in that sense one could say that the current student boycott has got a more profound political content and it has that profound political content because of the experiences which the students gained in the 1976 upsurges and the upsurges which occurred beyond 1976.

Dawn: What are the main features of the massive strike action that is sweeping South Africa?

Cde Joe Slovo: Well, in the first place, obviously they are a symptom of the worsening conditions of the working class in the economic field. We know that the massive increases in pay which the workers won in the struggles in the early 70s have now been almost rendered meaningless in the light of the enormous inflation which has developed inside the country and the workers are showing that they are once again prepared to engage in using their collective strength in order to win better pay, better economic conditions and in order to make it possible for them to survive economically from day to day. But this is only the very immediate content of their actions.

CONTENT

I think it is true to say that the strike actions which are taking place also contain at all levels the ingredients of the struggle by the workers in South Africa to build a genuine trade union movement. A struggle which rejects the proposals which have now been implemented by the regime which came from the Wiehahn Commission, proposals which are intended to prevent the emergence of a genuine independent trade union movement in South Africa, representing the most exploited section of our working class, the black workers. And it is significant that in all these strikes whether it be the strike which was connected with Port Elizabeth Black Community Organisation (PEBCO), whether it be the recent strike of the municipal workers in Johannesburg, whether it be the red meat strike in the Cape, the demands which are emerging continuously in the strike actions contain not only an assertion of the claim to better conditions, but also on the right of the workers' organisation. And, one can say that included in many of the actions are already demands which show that the workers are beginning to recognise the important role which they must play as a collective class in the general struggle for the creation of a new society in South Africa.

I think further significance of the massive strike movement which is developing is that as far as the mass of the people are concerned they regard the strike actions as reflecting not only the isolated demands of workers in individual factories, but as part of the overall struggle against the racist regime and this is evidenced by the fact that in many of these strike actions like Wattis and Monis, like the red meat strike, people from other levels of society are showing

their solidarity with the striking workers. I think the further and a very important aspect of the growing strike activity in South Africa is that it is laying the foundation for a much bigger and more massive assault on the racist state.

We must remember that the 1976 Soweto Upsurges was preceded by the series of strike actions which began in Natal in 1973 and spread throughout the country. It is the action of the workers during that period which created the atmosphere, the confidence and the inspiration which eventually led to the student upsurges, which in turn also led to strike activity by the workers not only in the economic field but also in the political field. We all remember the important contribution which the working class made in their solidarity action in the three or four major general national strikes in support of the student activity and as a demonstration against the racist terror on the people.

DECLARATION .

Dawn: SACTU has declared 1980 the Year of the Mobilisation of the Worker. What reasons have prompted SACTU to take such a decision and why in this year particularly?

Ede Joe Slovo: I think it's already clear from what I have said that the organised activity of the working class is one of the most fundamental pillars of the struggle of the people as a whole for the destruction of the racist exploitative system, and it is absolutely understandable that in this era which, one must say, begins with the year 1980, of the preparation of a final assault on racist power that it is the working class that above all should be mobilised to play its part.

The African National Congress and its allies have always believed that the fundamental force in South Africa for the assault on the racist state is the class which is the most oppressed, which is the most exploited and that is the black working class. And, therefore, the Year of the Mobilisation of Workers is an expression not only of the desire of the movement as a whole and of SACTU in particular to organise the working class in the trade unions, to organise them at all levels, but also in order to mobilise them as a force in the general struggle for national liberation.

Dawn: On the question of the relationship between the political and military, the Strategy and Tactics of our movement states among other things: "The masses of the peasants, workers and youth, beleaguered for a long time by the enemy's military occupation, have to be activated in a multitude of

says not only to ensure a growing stream of recruits for the fighting units but to harass the enemy politically so that his forces are dispersed and therefore weakened". Do the current developments confirm the correctness of our position?

De Joe Slovo: Well, our position on the relationship between the political and military struggle has always been clear. Our movement has always regarded the military struggle as a continuation of the political struggle by means which include military confrontation and it is for that reason that since the early 60s we have embarked on the policy of combining political action with military strikes against the enemy. But despite the fact that we have done this we continue to accept and will continue to accept that the essence of our struggle remains political.

POWER

The struggle for power in South Africa is not just a struggle of an elite military force. The struggle of the whole people and there can be no doubt about it that at the moment the activities inside the country by the masses of people and to which we have already referred continue to be the most important threat to the racist regime. The political struggle at the moment is still taking what one might call a guerrilla form. It is happening now here, now there. Strikes take place in Cape Town, then they take place in Uitenhage, then in Durban, then in Johannesburg. School boycotts start in Kwa-Mashu. It gets taken up in Bloemfontein, it has its echo in Soweto and so on and so forth. We believe that the moment is approaching when what I have called the guerrilla content of the present political struggle will take on a much more permanent and a much more national form, that it will come to a point where these actions will be combined on a national scale where the workers throughout the country will act at one time and the question remains, what then is the role of military activity during this kind of phase?

Well, there can be no doubt about it that the activities in which Umkhonto we Sizwe has engaged in the last year or two have played a most significant role in preparing the conditions in which the people are responding in the way which we have witnessed. There is no doubt that these activities will be intensified and with the intensification of these activities, there is also no doubt that the political activities and the political resistance of the people will be heightened and therefore there can be no doubt that this combination of political and military activities not only by the

movement, but by the people as a whole, who will slowly but surely be involved in the military struggle as well, will culminate in a successful seizure of people's power in our country. And it is also clear as you asked that the current events in South Africa confirms the correctness of the position of our movement which is to continuously work for the combination of mass activities, mass actions, mass organisation, mass resistance together with blows at the enemy which will both damage the enemy and inspire the people to storm the heights of its citadels both politically and militarily.
