

Socialists face violence from state and Stalinists

Why did the township revolt decline? For any revolutionary struggle to be sustained, there must be a programme. Otherwise you have just pure anarchy, chaos, mindless violence, in which anyone could be a victim. Anti-social elements that are bred by the system — the tsotsis, the local villains, the rogues, the rapists, the robbers — will take the opportunity to plunder, to completely distort the ideas of the struggle, and turn many people against us. We've seen that happening.

People were murdered. Workers were robbed. During the consumer boycott, for instance, it didn't matter whether you had bought your food at the local shop rather than the white-owned supermarket. Some of these thugs would just come along and say you bought it at the white shop and confiscate it.

If there is no clear programme, and no clear organisation which is creating events and in control of events, then the chances of sustaining a struggle in the townships are small.

The whole concept of ungovernability — making the townships ungovernable — was to a fair extent absurd. If you don't have the organisational mechanisms and resources to control events, the energy and militancy of workers will be dissipated. The energy of the oppressed in the townships will be useless. The killings in the townships will serve no purpose. The only victims will be the people in the townships themselves. The might of the state has not diminished. The military has not been weakened. They have come out of this much stronger. And the propaganda that they have been able to use is to show the complete aimlessness and loss of direction, with one group within a township killing another group. Black-on-black violence was a consequence of the misdirected strategy of ungovernability.

The trade union movement in its embryonic stages has been called on to perform tasks which are at this stage way beyond its ability. More than 80 per cent of the workers are still not in trade unions. And the 20% who are in trade unions are divided among right-wing trade unions, traditional conservative trade unions, and different shades within left-wing trade unionism. There is no homogeneity, there is no single line. The

A South African socialist active in the trade unions talked to Workers' Liberty about the obstacles in the way of building a workers' party to give direction to the struggle for liberation.

trade unions were not able to give a different direction to the township revolt. They were not formed to confront the state. The trade unions' first objective was to deal with issues in the factory for workers. The trade union is not a revolutionary organisation. It is essentially a reformist organisation. It is there to deal with issues of wages and conditions within the framework of capitalism. Its terms of reference are narrow. That is the trade unions' first priority: to get their act together, to build up their organisation.

The trade unions are the training ground and the school for working-class revolutionaries. But they are not directly the working class's instrument for revolution. If they were to confront a state as powerful as South Africa's they would be destroyed.

There has to be a double strategy. You have to give priority to the interests of workers in the factories, but not limit the understanding of workers. Otherwise you will be taking an economic or syndicalist narrow view. In workers' education the links must be made to community struggles, and the workers in the trade union should be within the community struggles.

Workers are in the organisations of the community. They will take up campaigns which will be supported by the trade unions. The trade unions cannot physically lead that struggle, but the experience of organisation, and skills of leadership, of workers within a trade union, should be transferred to within the community so that the lead can be taken by working-class organisations.

We do not yet have a working-class party. We do not have a vanguard political party that has a clear, open commitment to socialism and a workers' charter.

The conditions are not conducive to the creation of a workers' party. For a workers' party to emerge on the scene, the leadership of that party would have to be very courageous. They would be eliminated by the Stalinists as soon as they

showed themselves. They would be regarded as a third force in the political situation, and the ANC strives and attempts to claim for itself that it is the *only* organisation that represents the interests of the oppressed in South Africa. They strive for dominance, they strive for total monopoly and control over whatever happens in the country.

Any new emergent workers' party would be a threat to their power base. The Stalinists would eliminate the leadership of a workers' party. Already that sort of thing is taking place. Socialists are attacked and hounded and threatened and assaulted by the Stalinists.

Any attempt by workers and socialists to form a workers' party now would be suicidal.

The priority now is to build up a non-Stalinist left. There are non-Stalinist left groupings already in the country. We have to strengthen the base of the non-Stalinist left in the trade unions and in the community organisations, until the stage is reached where it is possible to form a workers' party and it is possible for socialists to openly declare their views rather than being in organisations which espouse socialist views but constantly back down because they are a threatened, scared minority.

A campaign is on at the moment to eliminate socialists. The Stalinists want to pave their way to take control, and they are not going to tolerate any opposition to their claims to monopoly control to the leadership of the oppressed and exploited.

The growth of the non-Stalinist left is dependent on the way they cooperate with each other. At the moment it is very difficult for the left in COSATU to move at all, because of the dominance of the Stalinists within COSATU. Anything that is not within the framework of the two-stage theory of revolution is regarded as counter-revolutionary, so some socialists in those unions just say nothing. They are just biding their time and waiting for the conditions to ripen when they can show themselves.

The COSATU left are a minority and paralyzed and incapable of leading a socialist struggle. The onus is now on the left outside COSATU to provide direction and to pave the way for the formation of a powerful socialist base. NACTU remains the only hope for the growth of the non-Stalinists to place socialism firmly on the agenda as a means to transform South African society under the control of the oppressed and exploited working class.