

● SOUTH AFRICAN CROSSROADS

Over the past year, persistent and widespread mass action in South Africa has been met by state violence which, in turn, has provoked stubborn popular resistance to the repressive actions of the regime's security forces. The regime's capacity to maintain 'peace and order' has been put into question and the economy thrown deeper into crisis.

In this situation intense pressure has been exerted, by an array of individuals and organisations both inside and outside the country and by foreign governments, both on the Botha government and also on the ANC, to open negotiations directed towards the peaceful settlement of the current political and economic crisis.

Two things are significant about these initiatives. Firstly, they signify a recognition by disparate forces, including some who support the regime, that the state has been unable either to control mass opposition to apartheid by repressive measures or to pacify people by offering an acceptable package of reforms. This failure of the regime to chart a way out of the present crisis has impelled a number of business and other organisations to search for alternative solutions by directly approaching the ANC.

And herein lies the second point of significance – these initiatives are based on the fact that no peaceful solution is imaginable unless the negotiations involve the ANC as the principal representative of the liberation movement. What this signifies is the collapse of the strategy of 'constructive engagement' which assumes that the reform or dismantling of apartheid can be brought about directly by negotiations between the Botha regime and the governments of the USA or other countries but from which the ANC is absent.

It has become clear that a negotiated settlement capable of winning popular acceptance would have to be reached through discussions between the Botha regime and the ANC. But is there any basis for such a settlement? Since Botha became president of South Africa, the regime has pursued a two pronged strategy. On the one hand it has offered a series of 'reforms' – tri-cameral parliament, recognition of black trade unions for instance which, coupled with the Bantustan policies, are aimed at dividing black political opposition.

On the other hand, the regime has extended and 'improved' the state's repressive capacity. A reorganisation of the state structures has concentrated power in an

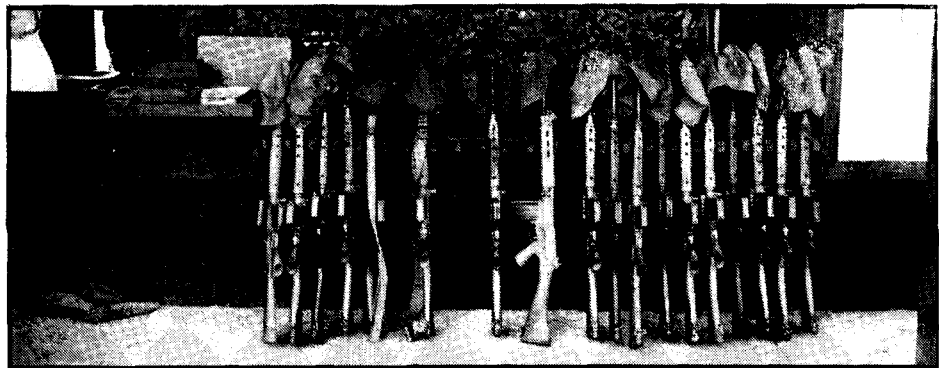
increasingly centralised and militarised executive arm of the state. The capacity of the security forces has been enlarged by the increasingly frequent use of the army to crush, together with the police, mass political actions.

Nevertheless, the regime seems to be quite incapable of overcoming mass resistance. The present conjuncture is characterised by the continuity of mass struggles. Despite all the state violence, in different regions and over different issues, the masses re-appear in the streets day after day undaunted by police action.

While it is this fact, above all, which has brought the question of negotiations on to

there must be the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners. Secondly, the state of emergency must be terminated and all those detained under the emergency regulations released. Thirdly, the army must be removed from internal politics and the repression of politics by the police and security forces ended. Fourthly, there must be the conditions of political freedom. This does not mean, merely, the lifting of the ban on the ANC and other organisations, but a repeal of all laws which have the effect of suppressing oppositional political action.

Yet, the question which remains is whether negotiation is a possible solution to



the agenda for sections of business and various political groupings, it is nonetheless clear that the conditions are not yet present in which the ANC can contemplate entering into negotiations. It is not possible to negotiate when political activity is strictly constrained, where representative organisations are banned, where leaders are always vulnerable to arrest and where force is the main means of state politics.

The situation is quite different to that which prevailed in Zimbabwe. Then, the predominant instrument of the liberation struggle was the guerrilla army and that army continued to operate during the negotiations. Its strength was the major factor which forced the government to the conference table and kept them there until a settlement was reached.

Yet the armed struggle in South Africa has not reached a stage in which the units of Umkhonto We Siswe (MK) are able to sustain the main political front. The major political force which would give the ANC its negotiating strength, is popular struggle under the leadership of the UDF and the ANC, with the support of the black trade unions.

The ANC has laid out four conditions which must be satisfied before it is prepared even to contemplate negotiations. Firstly,

the present crisis? While the state still holds the balance of power, the important change which has emerged as the outcome of the struggles of the past 10 years is that the state appears unable to overcome popular resistance. Indeed, numerous elements of a situation of dual power have begun to appear.

At the same time, the national liberation movement is not yet in a position to overpower the state. There has not yet been a decisive shift in the balance of power such that either side can impose a settlement. In these circumstances, everything hinges on the negotiability of the positions held by the Botha regime and the ANC.

Undoubtedly, many of the demands set out in the ANC's Freedom Charter could not be achieved immediately and would have to be worked towards during a period of transition after the installation of a democratic regime, for example, the provision of housing and educational facilities. But this does not apply to political rights. The Charter declares: 'Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which makes laws.' What this means is that a fundamental demand of the ANC is for a unitary state with a common electoral roll. On his visit to Britain, Oliver Tambo stressed

that the ANC was not prepared to agree to a system as in Zimbabwe, in which a white constituency will be accorded a veto over policies accepted by the majority.

On the other side, although Botha plays with the words of 'universal suffrage' his party utterly rejects the idea of a single, universal roll. Universal suffrage means, for the National party, the right of Africans to vote in their 'own' political institutions in the Bantustans and in the local black councils in African areas inside 'white South Africa'. Only some form of federal state which would guarantee the continuation of white supremacy would be acceptable. And this is all the more so given the pressures on Botha from the right wing parliamentary parties. For the regime, then, the political system is also non-negotiable.

Of course, under changed circumstances the regime may be forced to surrender its position, particularly if its basis of support among the white populations continues to erode. But what will determine that is the capacity of the liberation movement to expand and strengthen its opposition to the regime.

The more the regime is seen to be incapable of controlling the crisis the greater will be the tendency for different social forces to search for alternative solutions. This is not without its dangers because the regime may be driven even more rapidly to attempt to shift towards a military dictatorship in an attempt to stave off the collapse of apartheid.

The defeat of such a move rests on the political and military strength of the liberation movement. This requires firstly a consolidation of political alliances around the ANC and, in particular, the drawing of the black trade union movement more directly into the liberation struggle. Secondly, it requires the implementation of the decision of the ANC consultative conference to extend the military struggle from armed propaganda to people's war.

Harold Wolpe