

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Every political struggle is a long drawn out war. During its history it will pass through different phases. Its forces will develop or dwindle, shift their position, change allegiance. And in addition, the circumstances in which the struggle is being fought will change. A thousand outside factors not under the control of those who launched the struggle will arise to affect it - a world war or the threat of it; a depression and unemployment; an election; a strike or struggle somewhere else. All these affect the course and future of any political struggle.

No struggle can hope to succeed if it is so rigid from the start that it is unable or unwilling to respond to changing circumstances. The plant that does not bend before the storm snaps and dies; the plant that does not rise again in the sun after the storm gets trampled underfoot. In a long drawn out political struggle it is essential that forms of struggle be based not on "eternal" principles but on the needs of the struggle at each stage of its development, and that the form changes to meet changed situations.

This is the essence of political leadership - determining correctly at each stage of a struggle what organisational steps must be taken, what form the struggle must take to lead to the next stage and on towards the final goal.

To decide correctly it is necessary to consider:

- (a) the human forces ready for the struggle, the forces the struggle will win over once it starts, and the forces the enemy can assemble;
- (b) whether the struggle is going forward, winning new supporters and new victories, or whether it is dying down.

FORMS OF STRUGGLE

Let us consider some of the forms of struggle people have used in other times.

PASSIVE RESISTANCE.

This great tactic has a long and varied history. It is best known as the tactic evolved by the great Indian leader, Gandhi, in his struggles, first in South Africa and later in the liberation of India.

- (a) It means: refusing to carry out a law or regulation, suffering its consequences without hitting back. It can, and often does mean deliberately breaking the law as a symbolic act of protest against it.
- (b) Passive Resistance can be a powerful weapon for awakening peoples' consciousness and arousing their support. It prepares them for future struggle by teaching them that readiness to sacrifice is always the price of victory in a struggle. It can thus be a lever, moving the whole struggle forward to mass actions of other types.

- (c) Often, however, Passive Resistance is a weapon which serves not to whip up the enthusiasm and action of the people but to damp down the desire for mass action and to chain it to rigid, individual acts of sacrifice of leaders. This can serve only to disillusion the masses and destroy the will to struggle.
- (d) The history of Passive Resistance - especially of Gandhi's Passive Resistance movements in India - proves that it is only an effective weapon when it is used to build up the movement and prepare the people for other forms of mass action and mass struggle.

### BOYCOTT

Boycott is really a form of passive resistance - a refusal to co-operate in the operation of a law, custom or regulation.

- (a) Boycott can be a mere withdrawal from activity as a silent protest. This is the character, for example, of the "boycott" of elections as practised by the so-called "Unity" movement in the Cape. The boycott produces no activity - only silence. It thus leaves the field open to the enemies of the people to contest the elections and to be elected, unless the boycott is 100% effective. Such boycott as this can never produce change; it can only act as a demonstration. 100% effective boycotts can only be achieved by intensive organisation, agitation and action.
- (b) Boycott can be active when boycotters do not withdraw from action but enter into vigorous action to make a law unworkable and thus to force its change. This type of boycott would be, for example, a mass refusal to pay taxes, a campaign to get others to refuse to pay until representation in Parliament has been won, or a mass burning of passes throughout the country. This type of boycott is not a passive, armchair act of protest but a mass action requiring preparation and sacrifice.

### AGITATION

- i) At all stages of all struggles designed to lead to mass action, mass agitation is needed to mobilise people, win their support for struggles and widen the basis. Once correct decisions for struggle have been taken, everything depends on agitation.
- ii) Agitation in itself accomplishes nothing unless designed to lead to action: e.g. nationwide agitation by the All African Convention against Hertzog Bills produced greatest agitation in our history, but achieved no purpose other than educating people to the character of the Bills because there was no leadership of the people in action.
- iii) The secret of agitation is to win people for struggle by relating the wider struggle to the local small issues on which they feel strongly and to show how only by success on the issue being campaigned for can local issues be fought and won.

## STRIKE ACTION

- i) Strike action is essentially a weapon of industrial, shop and farm workers against bosses for better wages and conditions, but it can be turned into a weapon of political struggle against the ruling class by:
  - (a) the introduction of political demands which bosses and Government both oppose;
  - (b) widening the action from action in a single factory or industry to action in whole districts or the whole country for political demands, up to and including change of Government, e.g. Finland - universal franchise secured by general strike in 1921. Belgium - deposed a king by general strike in 1950. May Day - Freedom Day - was a political strike, designed to demonstrate the will of the people for "political" demands. Such a strike, carried on, would be not just a demonstration, but would initiate a struggle with the workers on one side and the employers and the government on the other.
- ii) Strike action can be wider than just action of industrial workers; can include stoppage by school students, close-down of shop-keepers, etc., and thus draw in all classes in a nationally-oppressed society.
- iii) Strike action calls for great discipline, unity and a high level of organisation, since often necessary to call strike off in orderly fashion and return to work with only partial success or no success; must take care to keep organisation intact despite this, and prevent split away of less militant from most militant sections, destroying their unity and setting whole movement back.
- iv) Strike action, representing direct clash between working class and ruling class for mastery can, and often does, lead to rebellion, revolution and armed clashes, since ruling class will resort to violence if thinks its rule threatened.

Such a situation, for example, was seen in the African Miners Strike of 1946. The whole apparatus of the state - its police force, the Native Affairs Department, the press and radio - ranged itself on the side of the bosses, trying to make the strike out to be an armed rebellion of the workers. No consideration of laws or justice prevented the Government from using the most brutal measures to smash the strike.

The workers, faced with such an attack, often find their peaceful strike transformed into a minor war, a civil war, in spite of themselves. This was the situation on the Rand in 1922, when European workers, headed by the miners, organised a general strike. Armed force was used against them by the Government. The strikers in turn organised armed detachments to defend themselves and prevent the smashing of the strike. The strike turned into a civil war, in which the Government came out victorious because the white workers refused to unite with the black for the demands of the Non-Europeans for liberation.

### THE PEOPLES' PRESS

- i) At every stage of political struggle, the press supporting the peoples' struggle plays a great role. It explains the aims of the struggle to the whole country. It organises and wins new support for the struggle. It acts as a constant voice carrying the views of its leadership to the rank and file of the struggle.
- ii) The press is a vital part of the agitation which must surround every struggle. It can only fulfil its role to the utmost if it receives the full support of those engaged in the struggle, in the form of news, views and sales of the paper.

### THE ROLE OF LEADERS

- i) No movement can develop without leaders - people who rise to the forefront because of their courage, their ability to lay down clearly a course for their movement to travel and their ability to win active workers for the movement.
- ii) Leadership in a struggle consists of :
  - (a) Giving the correct guide and direction to the movement at every stage of its development.
  - (b) Teaching the rank and file of the movement how to act, as well as listening to rank and file views and learning from them.
  - (c) Learning never to run too far ahead of the views and readiness of the rank and file, and learning also never to lag behind the rank and file.
- iii) While leaders are always necessary, no leader in a struggle is indispensable. Leaders at one stage might prove too timid or too adventurous at another. No movement can afford to keep leaders who no longer serve their purpose. No living movement need fear getting rid of such leaders if it is necessary, since a living movement throws up its own leaders from the rank and file in the course of the struggle.

It is a task of leaders to look for and train new rank and file leaders at all stages as the struggle develops.

### BUILDING A PEOPLES' MOVEMENT

To sum up, then, a peoples' movement can only be built:

- i) by militant struggle, in the course of which local issues close to the people are constantly related to the struggle as a whole;
- ii) by being flexible about forms of struggle, always watching to see whether new conditions and circumstances do not call for new forms of struggle;
- iii) by constant mass agitation and propaganda amongst the people as a whole;

- iv) by courageous, bold leadership leading the people and learning from them;
- v) by working at all times to maintain the widest unity of the people compatible with continued struggle.

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**TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961**

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