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## **Building the Anti-Apartheid Coalition**

### **1. Introduction**

The question of building a coalition of forces against apartheid is placed high on the agenda of the National Democratic Struggle (NDS) by the political conditions that prevail in South Africa today.

These conditions are:

a) The emergence, the growth and development of a powerful **Mass Democratic Movement (MDM)**, which is based on and unites community organisations, political organisations and trade unions, and puts forward the vision of a future South Africa based on the **Freedom Charter**. The MDM displays growing unity in both ideology and political programmes, as trade unions (COSATU), political formations (UDF) and health workers (SAHWCO) adopt the **Freedom Charter** and define their political aims in terms of it.

b) The apartheid regime has increasingly turned itself into an enemy of all the people and has opened itself up to a growing mass challenge through its racist oppressive policies and practices. For example, attempts to make the bantustan scheme work, through forced removals and incorporation in areas like Braklaagte, Peelson and Moutse, have generated mass militant opposition where the people are calling for an end to forced incorporation, forced removals and the bantustan system itself. The **Labour Relations Amendment Act (LRAA)**, which is aimed at maintaining the cheap-labour system and suppressing democratic trade union rights, has met with determined opposition from the organised workers. Many sportspeople who were traditional government supporters can no longer live with being rejected by other countries and excluded from international sports events because of apartheid.

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They now demand that the system must be ended. Businesspeople are disillusioned with the regime because of its failure to create political stability, its growing isolation, and the shrinking economy. In turn the white social base of the regime, especially the white workers, are turned away by the falling standard of living from the NP government, and they do not trust that it can insure their privileges of protected jobs and higher wages. And, the over-extended rule of the security establishment - the army and police chiefs who have taken over the role of parliament - has turned many liberals and other whites who believe in 'civilian' parliamentary rule against the NP government. The government's continued and unsupported talk of reform has been shown to be transparent - the NP has failed to convince the majority of people that it can bring about change, peace and stability.

c) **Growing and wide-ranging opposition to the government.** Sportspeople, religious groupings, sections of business, liberal whites, political organisations and unions have increasingly expressed varying degrees of opposition to the government and the apartheid system. The opposition is sometimes offered jointly where there is limited cooperation between the MDM and other groupings outside it, at other times by small pockets of these groups apart from one another. But most important is the fact that the mass bases of diverse political groupings have come together in action on the ground against the common enemy, the apartheid regime, its bantustans and other puppets. For example, in Bophuthatswana this diverse grouping has included trade union members and other sections of the communities threatened with incorporation into Bophuthatswana, including (sections of) the support base of the official opposition to the Mangope regime.

The task of the MDM and the democratic movement as a whole is to deepen the isolation of the regime, maximise unity against it and weaken its ability to resist the struggle for a democratic, and non-racial South Africa. This means that we must find common ground for joint action with forces which are broadly anti-apartheid or potentially anti-apartheid. A key organisational task of the democratic movement in the current phase of the

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National Democratic Struggle (NDS) is the creation of a coalition of forces that can bring down the apartheid regime. The main content of the NDS is the liberation of the oppressed majority, particularly the Africans, and the transforming of South Africa into a non-racial, united democracy; this can happen by placing political and economic power in the hands of the broad working masses.

This cannot be achieved all at once nor can it be achieved by the working people acting in isolation from actual and potential allies, from other democratic sections of the oppressed and white communities. The unity in action of all these forces behind a democratic programme is a necessary condition for both the isolation and final destruction of apartheid.

There is therefore a need for a platform on which this vast array of forces may unite and strive towards common aims. This platform must be built with a full grasp of the specific conditions, the grievances and aspirations of all involved. It must be understood what they are prepared to struggle for and how they are prepared to do it. It must also be made sure that those that are politically lacking in some way may be reinforced: their political understanding and commitment can be enhanced, so as to weld them into an unyielding fighting force against apartheid.

### **1.1 What is the Anti-Apartheid Coalition (AAC)?**

It is the united front of the broad National Liberation Movement, which is made up of those forces who share the long-term programme of the NDS as set out in the Freedom Charter, who are therefore in a long-term programmatic alliance, and those with whom short-term alliances are possible. It must be capable of bringing down the apartheid regime.

## **1.2 What is the basis of the AAC?**

**A. Concretely the AAC must be based on forces for change - all the oppositional forces that are organised at the following levels:**

**a. The broad national liberation movement based on and spearheaded by the revolutionary alliance and which embraces the mass democratic organisations, particularly the UDF, COSATU, COSAW, SAHWCO, SAYCO, NADEL, and Women's Organisations (FEDTRAW, UWCO, NOW, etc).**

**b. Organizations of the people outside the broad National Liberation Movement (NLM), including those that enjoy relatively limited but important support of the broad mass of the oppressed, like NACTU, AZAPO and various mass groupings in the bantustans who have opposed apartheid in various ways and who agree about the need to overthrow the apartheid regime and build a democratic government in its place.**

**c. Those forces who are breaking or have broken away from the apartheid regime and with whom it is necessary to forge an alliance, for example, Five Freedoms Forum (FFF), Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA) and sections of the parliamentary opposition organised in the Democratic Party (DP).**

**d. The black working class must be the leading mass force because it is the largest, the best organised, the most politically conscious force and the most committed to fundamental social transformation beyond the destruction of apartheid.**

**B. The coalition must be rooted in and reflect the experiences and struggles of the broad masses. Its perspective must be one that reflects their demands and unifies diverse forces against apartheid.**

**Each force has its own view of the political and economic situation. This view is shaped by its conditions of life, and also by its grievances and**

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aspirations. More importantly, there are those grievances and aspirations which are common to most. These are often minimum common-points which make it possible to have cooperation between diverse groupings. The perspective that is used to unite these forces must fully recognise and understand the specific grievances and immediate interests. In understanding these, we must correctly gauge the potential they create for united action for a common goal. The following popular demands are the components of such a unifying perspective:

1. One person-one vote in a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa.
2. The lifting of the State of Emergency.
3. A living wage for all.
4. Freedom of association and expression.
5. Press freedom.
6. The unconditional release of all political prisoners and return of exiles.
7. The scrapping of repressive laws.
8. The ending of political trials and hangings.
9. The withdrawal of troops from the townships.
10. The unbanning of the ANC and other banned organisations.

**C. The specific agenda of the MDM must be:**

- a) The broadening and consolidation of the MDM: drawing more forces into our ranks and influencing and leading those outside the MDM.
  - b) Uniting all the forces for change led by the MDM in campaigns around specific issues.
  - c) Keeping the strategic initiative firmly in the hands of the MDM and taking advantage of the regime's political and economic crisis.
  - d) Dividing the ruling bloc by fragmenting the National Party's social base, drawing forces away from its organs and influence, thus weakening and isolating the most dangerous and reactionary core.
  - e) Isolating the regime from international support and mounting international pressure on it.
  - f) Ultimately outlining and shaping a political path that ensures maximum unity on the side of the democratic movement so that the democratic movement can determine both the terrain and terms of struggle.
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g) Ensuring that UDF and COSATU lead the mass contingent of the coalition.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The anti-apartheid coalition is a platform for maximum unity against apartheid and an important step towards the realisation of the goals of the transfer of power to the people of South Africa. It is not a substitute for the fighting alliance of UDF and COSATU, nor can it take the place of the working class, its political organs and the strategic goal of socialism. But it is connected to all these, in that the democratic movement as whole led by the working class must take with it all social forces that are not antagonistic to it into the new South Africa. This calls for a process that involves finding minimum conditions for joint action against a common enemy. The task of building the AAC demands patience, perseverance, creativity, firm principles and flexibility of tactics.

#### **QUESTIONS**

a. What conditions have made it possible to form an anti-apartheid coalition now?

b. What groupings/organisations comprise such a coalition?

c. How does the agenda of the MDM differ from the agendas of other organisations in the coalition? And how does the MDM's agenda connect with or link up with the agendas of other organisations/groupings?

d. Why is the anti-apartheid coalition "an important step towards the goal of transfer of power to the people"?