

THE IMMEDIATE TASKS OF THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

This discussion paper was drawn up by a number of organisations that are affiliated to the UDF and are not affected by the present restrictions. It is an attempt to analyse our present position and put forward some proposals for discussion by our members.

As such this is not a mandated position from any organisation, but it is merely an attempt to outline some of the issues that need to be discussed if we are to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Of course we need to remember that our struggle is a national one. Whatever discussions we have in the Western Cape, it is important that we also take into account how our comrades in other centres will respond to the restrictions.

Assesment of state strategy

Militarily on the offensive

While it seems that the state is on the offensive at the moment and we are on the defensive, this is only partly true. Militarily the state is certainly on the offensive. It has been able to hamper our struggle severely over the last few years through the various SOE's and there is no doubt that our organisations are in a worst state now than previously.

It is also clear that the new restrictions are not the end of the road for the democratic road internally. There are simply too many loopholes which enable us to continue working in one way or another. Rather it is part of the state strategy to bleed us to death rather than to smash us outright. This they are trying to do by making almost all our activities illegal without banning us as such.

Nonetheless, the new restrictions are one of the most serious blows that have been aimed at the democratic movement. We need to consider whether this actually marks a new phase in state strategy, and a new phase in repression.

Politically

At a political level the situation is different and it is clear that the state is not on the offensive. It is still unable to provide political solutions to the crisis in SA.

The new restrictions are to some extent an admission that they have not been able to defeat us with the SOE. We can also see the problems the regime faces with some of its own homeland leaders who are not prepared to accept the National

Statutory Council. Some of these like Mabuza, are even making overtures to the democratic movement.

It is quite likely that at some stage the state will attempt to go on the political offensive again. It will have to try to win back some of the legitimacy it has lost through the brutal repression of the last few years. It is difficult for it simply to hang on to power by military force. We can expect renewed reform efforts from the state when it attempts to regain the political initiative.

The October elections are of crucial importance for the state. Especially in the townships, it will make a concerted effort to have leaders elected with some mass support, for example Nxobongwana in Crossroads and Hoza in Khayalitsha. It will thus be of vital importance for the democratic movement to ensure that this does not happen.

At the same time, a move towards winning greater legitimacy may benefit us. As was the case in 1983-84, opposition will have to be allowed some space for if they want legitimacy. It is quite uncertain though, whether this will happen.

Assesment of the strength of the democratic movement

The democratic movement today is seriously weakened from the peak of our strenght in 1984-86.

But we must also remember our strengths

The way forward

The United Front with Cosatu

There has been much discussion around the need for a United Front (UF) with Cosatu. So far little has come of that and we need to discuss this issue seriously. It is obviously a priority at this stage to cement our working relationship with Cosatu at a grassroots level.

The first option seems to be a sectoral UF with representatives from the workers, youth, civic, women and students.

Second option would take a more organisational form with various organisations affiliating to the UF in much the same way as to the UDF. Essentially this would mean a restructured UDF to make provision for the unions.

A question we need to address is whether there needs to be a distinction between the task of the UF with Cosatu and the functions of a more broad anti-apartheid front such as the UDF has been. Can these functions be combined at present?

The need to rally broader forces to our defence

There has clearly been widespread dissatisfaction with the latest restriction from a broad range of forces, as was evident from the response of the churches and from the formation of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy

We need to mobilise these forces in a more active way and draw them closer to the democratic movement. The precise nature of the relationship between these forces and the democratic movement needs to be discussed in depth. Also the way in which this would relate to a United Front (UF) with Cosatu and other forces.

The strategic importance of civic work

Sad state. Not blame our affiliates. We must all take responsibility for this and it is the task of all organisations and activists to see that this situation is remedied.

Civic work is important partly for tactical reasons. Cahac has not been restricted and it is thus able to continue its work openly.

But our civics are also very important for strategic reasons in the light of the October elections. Civics are our alternative to the local authorities of the state. Our civics must be strong, must be seen to be taking up issues of concern to the masses and to have mass support.

All this can only happen if there is a concerted effort to revitalise our civics. A determined effort will have to be made in the coming months to achieve this, and other organisations will have to see in what way they can play a role in this vital task.

How do we work

The problems to be solved

Restrictions and detentions

Clearly there is the need to continue the coordinating role that was previously fulfilled by the UDF. This operates at a number of levels. We need an elected, representative and recognized leadership. We need structures that can come together to strategise and plan campaigns. Clearly it is vital that these functions must continue.

Repression has hit us hard over the last few years and one of the heaviest effects has been the long-term detention of our elected leadership. The new restrictions has aggravated this problem.

We need to discuss whether there are alternative leadership structures that can protect our elected leadership. Can we elect fewer people with nominees from the major affiliates

that are less public and can be consulted? Is a division of public and low profile roles feasible within our structures?

A further problem is how we fill the gaps left by detentions. Obviously co-option is one alternative, but it needs to be done in a way that will ensure legitimacy. Maybe vacancies can be filled by organisational nominations.

We also need to look again at our general structures. It may be desirable to set up a more direct link with the Exec's of our organisations and regions in a context where

proper democratic decision-making is obviously, increasingly difficult.

Public profile

In view of the elections it is vital that the democratic movement must have a fairly high public profile. No one can fight an election campaign from underground. We need to be able to issue press statements and other media, and to rally the masses to our side.

To be able to do the work, our experience has shown us that we will need functioning regional structures. These structures must be able to work as openly as possible.

At grassroots level, our activists must be able to distribute media and do door to door work openly and without fear that they may be detained and charged on some technicality.

Apart from the elections, we need also to campaign for the lifting of the restrictions on UDF and other organisations. The same points apply to such a campaign.

Finance

Finance poses another problem. We must be able to raise funds freely and legally, and to spend it. At the moment the restrictions on the UDF makes this virtually impossible.

Defend UDF Committee

In order to address all the above problems, we need to consider the proposal that we, as the unaffected UDF affiliates, should form a new co-ordinating structure, for example a Defend the UDF Committee that can campaign for the lifting of the restrictions on the UDF and other progressive organisations. A number of issues need to be discussed in this context.

Is there still a need for co-ordination of UDF affiliates? How would this relate to the UF and the need to broaden the front? Our feeling is that in the short term there is definitively such a need.

How should the new structure itself be structured? We suggest that it should have affiliated organisations and that they should in turn set up regions with properly constituted executives in each regions.

An advantage of such a structure is that it will be able to elect its own leadership and will be able to operate fairly openly. Even if it is banned, it does not jeopardise the continued activities of our grassroots organisations. One should also consider how the tasks relating to the election, can be divided among the unaffected affiliates and the new structure.

Should the name of such a structure refer to the UDF to make it clear to the masses who we are. Or would this simply invite immediate state repression.