

Interview with Murphy Morobe, United Democratic Front acting National Publicity Secretary
By GAVIN EVANS

Since the State of Emergency was declared on June 12 thousands of UDF activists are believed to have been detained or to have gone "underground" to avoid detention. One of those "in hiding" is Murphy Morobe, UDF acting National Publicity Secretary.

Morobe, 30, has been a political activist since the early seventies when he became involved in the South African Students Movement (SASM). In 1976 he was one of the key Soweto Students Representative Council leaders and was hunted by the police for many months before being detained. He spent nearly seven years in detention, police custody and as a political prisoner on Robben Island. After his release he worked as an organiser for the General and Allied Workers Union before being elected UDF Transvaal Rural Organiser. When Mosiuoa "Terror" Lekota was detained and charged with Treason, Morobe took over his position as UDF National Publicity officer. During the last State of Emergency Morobe was detained for over two months.

- He spoke to New Nation from hiding - somewhere in the East Rand. Here he comments on some of the key issues facing the front.

* On the reasons for the declaration of the State of Emergency on June 12:

We need to start off by restating what we were saying when the last emergency was lifted - that is that the lifting of the State of Emergency was a victory for the democratic movement. When it was lifted in March the state had clearly failed to achieve its aims. In fact the democratic movement was stronger at the end of the emergency than before it had been declared.

So as soon as it was lifted there was a flurry of activity - a whole range of new affiliates joined the UDF and a number of important campaigns were launched.

In the eastern Cape, the Northern Transvaal and parts of the eastern Transvaal the consumer boycott was resumed with great success. The rent boycott launched by many of our civic associations was hitting directly at the structures of apartheid - people were boycotting rents not only because they were unhappy with conditions in the townships, but also because they were opposed to the system of apartheid as a whole and they did not want to pay rents which were used to run structures of apartheid. When the rent boycott was launched in Soweto with an almost 100 percent success the government became frightened.

Also very important was the May Day stayaway which was supported by every organisation of the people. We had African, coloured and Indian workers from all over the country - urban and rural areas - participating, and a large number of black traders also showed support. It isolated the apartheid regime more than ever before and showed them that our struggle had reached new levels of maturity. So they were very scared about what could be achieved on June 16.

limiting its activities to factory floor issues - to wages and working conditions - so that it wouldn't be a threat to the structure of society. But in recent times, particularly since the formation of COSATU, unions have found it impossible to wage their battles on the shop floor without confronting the apartheid state directly. So increasingly the workers have seen the link between their exploitation in the factories, shops, mines and farms, their oppression in the townships and their lack of political rights.

There has been a growing unity between workers, students, residents, women, youth and other sectors - and a growing number of whites as well. COSATU has been playing a central role in building this unity and its members have taken a lead in civics, youth organisations and parents committees. So the state realised that if it was going to crush the democratic movement it was going to have to go for the trade unions as well, because the unions today are an integral part of the liberation struggle.

* On the effect of the emergency on the ability of organisations to operate legally:

The current wave of repression will close the legal space to a certain extent. It certainly makes it increasingly difficult for organisations to work openly - because the state will simply not allow it.

But at the same time we in the UDF intend to assert our existence as a legal organisation and to exploit every legal opening that presents itself.

We have already seen that through structures like street committees and people's defence committees we can protect ourselves to some extent against repression, and at the same time deepen the level of democracy within our structures.

But what many people in our communities are saying is that with the troops in the township, the detentions, the vigilantes, the banning of meetings, it is becoming virtually impossible to work legally. So they are looking more and more to the ANC and the armed struggle because they feel nothing else is feasible.

* On "black-on-black" violence.

In South Africa we have a situation where the government has created proxy forces to destabilise other southern African states and destabilise the black townships. We believe these forces are little more than extensions of the SADF and SAP, but are often more vicious because the government is not directly responsible for them. They come up in different guises - the Umbokhoto, the A-team, ~~Ishaka~~ ^{the White Paper}, the MNR, Unita - but their source of support is the same.

So this violence shouldn't be characterised as "black-on-black" violence because it is little more than an extension of the violence of apartheid. The full arsenal of the government's repressive machinery has not succeeded in crushing us - so now we see death squads appearing all over the place.

A similar situation exists with Inkatha which the state is clearly trying to promote through the emergency. One thing they are attempting to do is to allow groups with pro-government positions like Inkatha to consolidate their positions while other groups are not allowed to operate openly. So it comes as no surprise when we see Gatsha spending his time attacking the democratic movement instead of directing Inkatha towards confronting the apartheid state in a way that goes beyond platitudes.

* On the prospects for majority rule in the near future:

It is very clear that the state is losing its grip on the situation in our country and that the people are asserting their power with more and more confidence. The government seems to have no clear strategy, no real way of staying in power. Their "reform" programme has failed and now they are resorting to using brute force.

This is why the level of violence is escalating. It is a clear sign that the government is not yet prepared to give in to the aspirations of the majority of our people, but they have no clear strategy for getting out of the mess they are in. So we have no doubt the state will continue to escalate the violence.

But as more and more blood is spilt people are becoming more and more determined. Bullets and batons and detentions are not going to stop them. So if you listen to what most people are saying in our communities you will understand why so many people believe we are on the road to liberation and that the day of freedom is not far away. We have already seen the emergence of structures of people's power throughout the country and we can expect a lot more of this in the near future. So I am very optimistic.

* On the question of negotiations:

In a sense this is an academic question at the moment. The most striking revelation of this came from the Eminent Persons Group visit. They stated very clearly their mission was to come here and encourage negotiations between the government and the people's representatives. But in their report they said there was little prospect of a peaceful solution in South Africa and they blame this on the government.

For us who encounter apartheid repression and exploitation every day it is clear that the government is not at the point where they are considering ending minority rule. Even clergy are being detained and those who preach non-violence are being shot at.

*On the national Statutory Council:

The National Statutory Council, like the new provincial structures, cannot succeed because they do not have the support of anybody. If they did have a measure of support it would not have been necessary for the state to force these things down our throats at gunpoint. All the so-called reforms have been carried along by the Casspirs. So we don't even want to spend time discussing things like this.

* On the tri-cameral parliament:

The point is that the state has made an absolute mess of the parliament. They have done exactly what we warned they would.

The coloured and Indian MPs said they were only going into parliament in order to use it to oppose apartheid - in order to use it to improve the lot of the oppressed people of our country.. We said they would be unable to do this and we have been proved right.

Now with the passing of Le Grange's new repressive laws the issue has been decided. We demand they follow the course taken by Dr Slabbert and Dr Boraine and resign their seats.