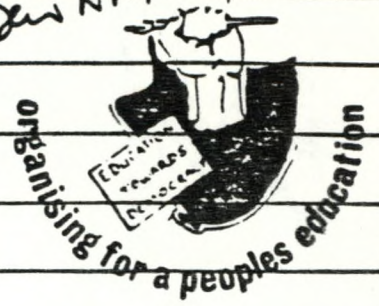


AM37

AZASO

National Newsletter

Ben "AM 37"



March 1984

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STATE OF STRUGGLE

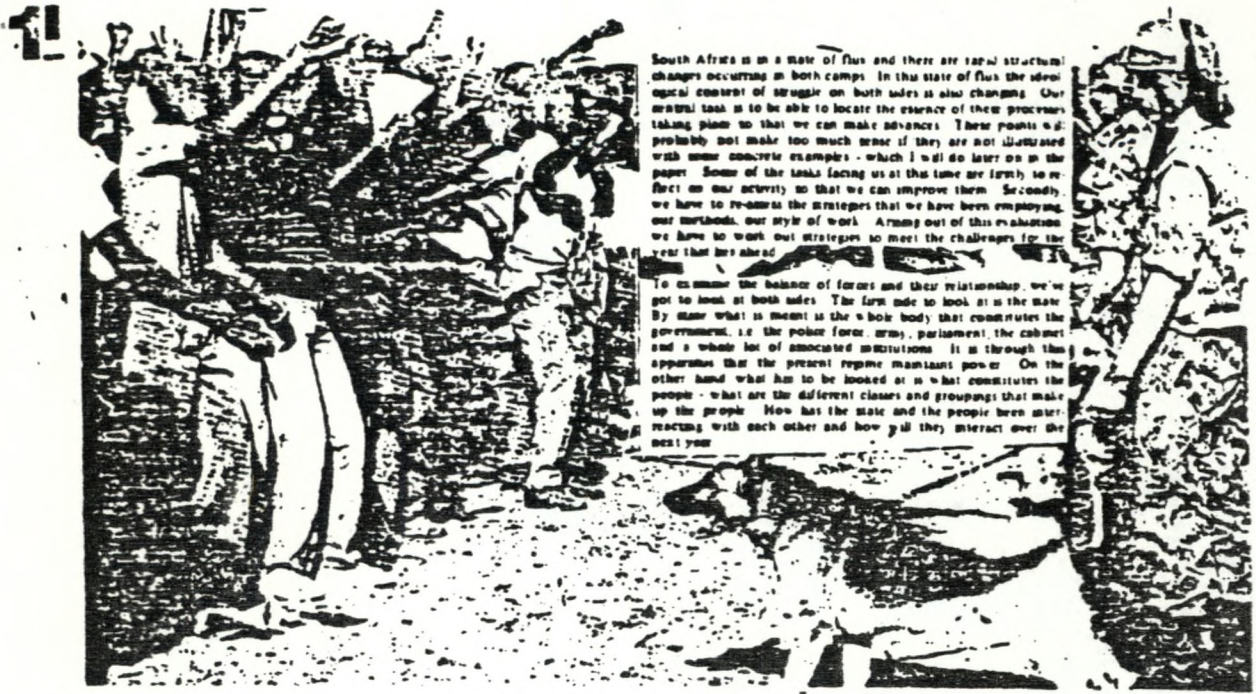
An analytical overview of the past year, looking at the balance of forces i.e. who makes up the enemy camp what are their strengths and weaknesses. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the forces on the side of the people. Flowing out of this, we can look at the role of the UDF and AZASO and the relationship between them - how their campaigns are going to interrelate and how one is going to support the other.



(Y. MAHOMED)

AZASO -GC '83

DISCUSSION SERIES NO 1



South Africa is in a state of flux and there are radical structural changes occurring in both camps. In the state of flux the ideological content of struggle on both sides is also changing. Our central task is to be able to locate the essence of these processes, taking pains to that we can make advances. These points will probably not make too much sense if they are not illustrated with more concrete examples - which I will do later on in the paper. Some of the tasks facing us at the time are fairly so we first do our activity so that we can improve them. Secondly, we have to re-assess the strategies that we have been employing, our methods, our style of work. Arising out of this evaluation we have to work out strategies to meet the challenges for the year that lies ahead.

To examine the balance of forces and their relationship, we've got to look at both sides. The first side to look at is the state. By state what is meant is the whole body that constitutes the government, i.e. the police force, army, parliament, the cabinet and a whole lot of associated institutions. It is through this apparatus that the present regime maintains power. On the other hand what has to be looked at is what constitutes the people - what are the different classes and groupings that make up the people. How has the state and the people been interacting with each other and how will they interact over the next year.

When we look at the state, we say that the state is in a CRISIS and this crisis is an ORGANIC CRISIS. Firstly we have to look at what constitutes the crisis. The crisis can be characterised in-to three aspects:

- i) Economic
- ii) Political
- iii) Ideological.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The economic crisis is characterised by the following features. Firstly, unemployment is intensifying due to the recessionary phase of the economy and even if we move out of the recession, there will still be people permanently unemployed. Secondly, there is the ever persistent problem of balance of payments and this problem is going to remain. The reason for the problem is that even though South Africa is a developed industrial state, its main industries are manufacturing and mining. None of these produce capital goods, i.e. they don't produce machines that are used in order to produce consumer goods. All it does is that it produces consumer items - items that are used by the end user. It is able to straddle the balance of payments problem because of the gold price. It is able to produce a very precious raw material and when the price surges it is able to temporarily overcome the balance of payments, but it is a permanent structural problem that will remain. Thirdly, is the aspect of the decline in foreign investment. Fourthly, is a negative growth and in fact a stagnation of the economy. This also contributes to unemployment. The final point is failure of the decentralisation policy. This policy is an economic policy in terms of which the state wants to make its political strategy viable, i.e. the whole Bantustan policy. An example of this strategy can be seen in Mdantsane in East London, which is a decentralised point. More than R500 million would be set aside to offer various perks to attract capital to these areas. This has not succeeded.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS

The political crisis is characterised by the following factors. Firstly, the increasing role of the military. Together with this there has been the movement of power away from parliament to executive committees with an increasing role of the military in these structures, eg. State Security Council, Economic Advisory Board, Cabinet Committees. These have become more the organs of power than parliament. These committees operate in secrecy and are much more bureaucratized and controlled from the top. A further point is the failure of the bantustans. The failure to win legitimacy from any other state institutions, i.e. the SAIC, CRC, the Management Committees and Community Councils. All these structures have failed. Whatever attempts

to control or win people over by consensus have failed. What has intensified the crisis are the increasing struggles of the workers, community, student, women and on the political level. One of the vehicles through which these various struggles have fused is the UDF. This is also an area through which there has been a contribution to the political crisis.

THE IDEOLOGICAL CRISIS

What the state is experiencing at this stage is a crisis of legitimacy. It knows that it does not enjoy the support of the majority of the people, it makes numerous attempts to show that it does - that it does have a national policy. The whole Bantustan policy, the Constitution Act, the attempt to incorporate Indians and Coloureds, giving greater rights through the Black Local Authorities Act to urban Africans are all attempts to legitimate its power. Again you see this in Pik Botha's trip overseas after the referendum, where he has been trying to project an image of reform. These are some of the characteristics of the crisis.

When we say that this crisis is organic, we mean that the crisis has been around for a long time. Secondly, the crisis has got incurable structural conditions. Whatever attempts are being made are not going to solve the problems. The crisis is only going to be solved by a fundamental restructuring of society. Despite this, there is movement within the political forces in the capitalist state in that they are trying to bring about changes from the top. In order to save the situation, because the state knows that it has to do so to maintain power - these are the kind of efforts that are being made.

Let us look at what the efforts are to restructure. On the level of trying to control the flow of labour due to the increasing resistance of workers, we see the Riekert and Wichahn reports. This was to in some way control workers, but also to allow them to operate under certain controlled conditions. Secondly, the Riekert report was to control the flow of influx labour from the Bantustans. If we look at these two reports we can see that they are inevitably bound to fail. They will fail because of the economic need that drives people, whether they are in Bantustans or not, drives them to the urban areas for employment. If people are staying in the Bantustans they are going to move to urban areas even if they have to go to jail, because the choice is between starvation or being in jail in an urban area. So no matter what systems of control are going to be used, people are still going to gravitate toward the urban areas. Another point is that the way the Bantustans are structured, i.e. pieces of land all over the show so that the ability of the state to control and police them in terms of borders becomes virtually impossible.

Another attempt at restructuring is the Constitution Act, where power is shifted away from parliament to more executive control while at the same time a very concerted effort is made to break black unity by coopting certain sectors of the Coloured and Indian communities although there is an attempt to incorporate the community as a whole. The design is that they know that they cannot coopt the community as a whole and what they need is to coopt certain leading actors within these communities. Therefore the actions of the state are actually to reach out to more businessmen. The Labour Party for example are not having mass meetings. They are carefully choosing certain targets like teachers, small businessmen, civil servants etc.

The Koornhof Bills on the other hand is part of the same package. It is again firstly seeking to divide the urban from the rural people because it is going to give more rights in terms of the Black Local Authorities Act and the Genocide Bill. Secondly, it is part of the strategy to create a black urban dweller who is going to be given security. This further strengthens the housing policy - "give a person some property and he will be satisfied in that context".

Even in education, (this is something that AZASO can look at more closely), is the De Lange Commission and the White Paper that arose from it. All this is to be geared to the 'restructuring' process and when this is examined it should be done so in the light of the above considerations.

What we have to do is to look at whether this restructuring actually alters the terrain of struggle. The question we should ask is not whether this is reform, are these changes genuine or cosmetic. The right attitude to adopt is that these changes are taking place. We KNOW what the state's objectives are. It is making these changes in order to maintain itself in power. The real question is how we can use them to our advantage, because we also want power. Therefore this is a constant dialectic of struggle between the two contending forces, i.e. those that don't have power and those that do.

These have obviously broadened out the space for legal struggle. When we say this, we must also bear in mind that the state rules by consensus or by coercion. It has still got the strong military, police force and all its repressive apparatus waiting. If attempts at consensus fail, we are going to be crushed. This is something we must never lose sight of. So while we've got the space, we must make maximum use of it and not be unmindful that the moment we overstep a certain mark, they are going to crush us. Therefore strategies must be worked out carefully so as to maintain a balance of forces and still make gains.

To come back to the points that were made in the introduction, because the state is making all these attempts to restructure, it means that strategies we employ must also change. What is then required in this state of flux is the creative ingenuity that we have to use in looking at new ways of doing things, at the same time bearing in mind the coercive and repressive apparatus. Secondly, we know that when we move forward, we must also have a defensive position so that we can retreat. When we do move forward, we must be cautious about it, but on the other hand, we must not trail behind. What is important is that we've got to have popular support when we move forward. In different circumstances we must look at old tactics that we've employed and see if we can give them a different content. Let me give one illustration, recently there was a discussion amongst activists who were organising around the water issue in a particular area. Due to water restrictions, there had been various surcharges and some areas had already had mass meetings which were fairly successful (about 500 - 600 people attended). People were arguing that mass meetings should be held. Some people were of the opinion that there were already mass meetings in their areas and this had achieved nothing. You get people together without achieving concrete results. Someone came up with the idea that what we had to engage in was some kind of action. Some kind of protest that is going to yield results. A mass meeting was not going to make an impact.



Therefore an alternate form of action needed to be engaged in. In this new form of action perhaps fewer people can be involved eg. 50 people going to the City Hall and occupying an office or something like that. If this is done, at some level you are going to get a concession. Either a stay of the increases or something, and then you have your mass meeting. In that sense your mass meeting can serve a different function because it makes an advance on your previous position. Previously mass meetings were held to rally support to demonstrate that the people are behind you in the demands that are being made. In a sense we have to look at the old methods and see in what kind of ways we can restructure the ways and methods that were being used in the past.

Now I want to move to the area of looking at the people themselves. When I talk about the people, I refer to a number of classes. It is primarily the working class but also all the oppressed people who are denied the right to vote which will include the student sector, professional people etc. All these people constitute the people. Firstly, if we look at the past year, there has obviously been an increase in the level of organisation and mobilisation. If we sat back a year ago and looked at the UDF launch, for example, the fact that we could mobilise 15 000 people to come to a rally would have been beyond our expectations at that point in time. At Edendale, during the People's Weekend we could get 7 000 people and I think the capacity to mobilise people has been repeated in different parts of the country. In Port Elizabeth, which was totally unorganised, we could get 300 people. So, the capacity to mobilise has made certain advances, but then questions we must ask ourselves, is what must we do with these people? Are they organised into any kind of disciplined unit - can you make calls upon them to engage in forms of action - do we have that capacity? Do we know who they are and how they are organised - what level of skills do they possess? So these are all the kinds of questions that are thrown up. This increasing capacity to mobilise shows an increasing strength of our organisation. Also, the past year has seen the growth of UDF, but this will be dealt with later as a special category.

This year has also seen the hegemony of those persons who accept the national democratic struggle as part of a principled strategy. That the character of the struggle has got to be national and democratic. Within student ranks the whole concept of national and class struggle - which is primary and which is secondary, always takes up a lot of time. Basically we have to

remember that there is a dialectical relationship and not necessarily a succession i.e. that one follows the other. Workers are part of the oppressed community and their national demands cannot be met without certain fundamental social changes and that these struggles are the struggle for national liberation and these are the only struggles, if one looks back historically, that have ever succeeded. If one looks at our experience throughout the world, there has never been a struggle between the workers and the capitalists, where the workers alone, the workers and the capitalists, where the workers alone, without alliances with others, have succeeded. But also in any state that national oppression exists, there is a movement for democratic rights. National democratic rights mean the right to vote, the right to freedom of movement, etc. This cannot simply be located at the relations of production - these are felt rights, even by workers themselves outside the production process. The whole denial is mediated by the relationship between the oppressor and oppressed - they are not related at the point of production. People who don't see this miss out on a very important fact.

I would like to read out a passage that encapsulates the point better than I can.

"The enemy is defined not by its function of exploitation but by wielding a certain power and this power too does not derive from a place in the relation of production, but is the outcome of a form of organisation characteristic of the present society.

The society is indeed capitalistic, but this is not the only characteristic. It is sexist and patriarchal as well as racist".

This illustrates my point that we cannot ignore that these are all other characteristics and you've got to struggle against them too. At this point, I would like to leave the issue of the national democratic struggle.

Now to move on to just looking at the past year and the development of the UDF. All of us have at some level or other participated in the UDF. AZASO, being the first affiliate of UDF, would have taken a leading role at some point. But firstly if we look at the UDF - it has been through some phases that by January it had been formed in embryo. Over the next 2 to 3 months, people went out and consulted because it was only a few people at the Transvaal Anti-SAIC conference who took the



decision. In this sense the UDF has been characterized with some kind of compliance with the democratic process leading on to regional formations prior to the national launching. Thereafter, the next phase was the national launching and at that point again, we had a debate as to whether 3 regions were strong enough to take that decision to have a national launching for the whole country. Again we felt that it was important to make an impact. One of the motivating factors then was that a group that did not have any kind of mass support, i.e. the National Forum Committee came into existence particularly to, in a sense, thrust aside the eloquent momentum that was being developed by the UDF. This had to be counteracted on an ideological level and we had to take the decision to seize the moment at that point in time. So we had the national launching. Subsequently if one looks at the state reaction to UDF we find that it ignored the UDF or what it tried to do was to move just prior to the launching by coming out with fake pamphlets which said the launching by coming out with fake pamphlets which said the rally was called off. There were also pamphlets issued in the name of the BC movement and so on, trying to disrupt the event. These actions backfired on the state because our ideological machinery was well geared - we got more publicity in the press, and were able to come up counter posters and pamphlets almost overnight. Before the rally there was the whole question of the UDF and the National Forum being counterposed to each other and this left everybody wondering what the strength of the UDF was.

At Rocklands, at the conference, in terms of national representation, and at the rally in terms of mass support of the people in the area, showed the state that the UDF had become the most significant political force since the Congress Alliance. This then is the reality which the state had to contend with. Its response then to the UDF was to ban most of its meetings and also meetings of its affiliates. This indicated the desperation of the state and we took a decision subsequently that the next time they banned a meeting, provided that the legal considerations warrant it, that the ban would be challenged. The UDF also decided to take on the state at many levels. What was then done was a letter was written to the Prime Minister. Let us look at the post national launching period. The UDF needed to demonstrate the support it had on a national and regional level. To allow the masses of the people of the different regions to actually participate in that process of being part of a rally, coming together to take a stand to demonstrate that the majority of the people within this country had an alternative focus to the white referendum which took place on the 2 November. Then the UDF moved into its current phase, which has been intensifying our opposition because it is clear that once the state had finished off with the white sector, major energies were going to be thrust at the Indian and Coloured communities. Firstly, the state was launching into the whole exercise to divide the unity of the black people and coopt certain sectors of the Indian and Coloured communities. Secondly, it was going to launch within the African sector in terms of implementing the whole Koorahof Bills strategy, particularly the elections that took place in many parts of the country through the Black Local Authorities Act and the Community Councils where they existed. This is basically the point that we are at at present. I'll come back to future strategies and what phases we are going to move into. I think it is opportune now to take some of the lessons we have learned and to evaluate them. Firstly, we have achieved a level of mobilisation that is beyond which we would have made in terms of our assessments if we had made it a year ago. Secondly, we haven't answered the question of what we are going to do with that capacity to mobilise and how do we transform this into more solid organisation. We know that that is the challenge that lies ahead and that's what we have got to go ahead and do.

Whilst we are developing an offensive strategy, and using the space that has been provided by the 'restructuring' process, we have got to continue developing new strategies. One of the things that we need to begin doing is to engage the state. This can take on various forms. Firstly it took on the form of the

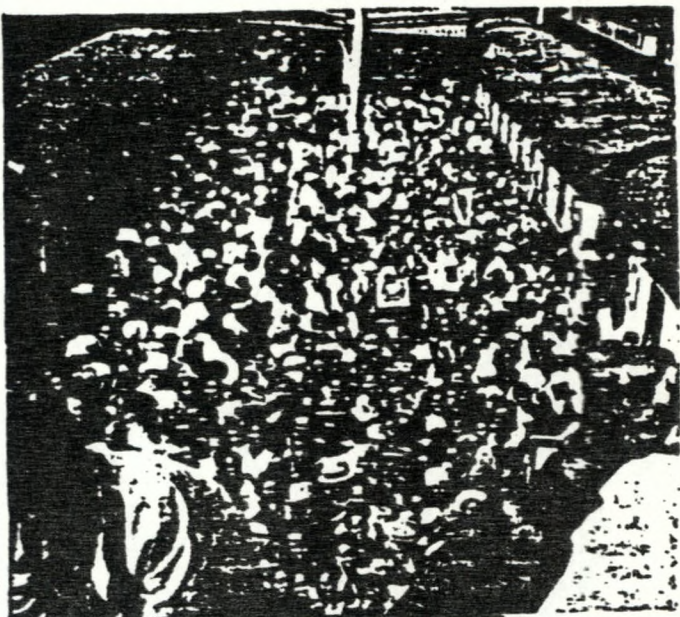
letter that was written to the Prime Minister and if one takes the response to that in the various areas one finds that there are various views on this particular tactic.

Let us look at the motivations for actually taking on the state. Firstly, the point has to be made that we are moving away from the phase that characterised the 70s, the phase of protest politics, the phase of militant rhetoric ... One can shout militant slogans until one is blue in the face, but this is not going to get power. What we have to do is to move into a different phase. We are serious about gaining political power in this country, we want to eliminate oppression and exploitation and we know that we the only people who can do this. When we deal with the state we believe in the concepts of mass mobilisation, mass organisation - that we are answerable to the masses of our people. We have gone beyond the stage of militant rhetoric and therefore we've got to show people that we can actually take on the state. WE are beginning to organise ourselves in some way, we are a force, we can say that there are two to two and a half million people behind us - that there are 500 organisations affiliated to the UDF. In some way it's a measure of strength that hasn't been seen since the Congress Alliance. But we have to look at that relative strength so that when we write a letter to the Prime Minister, it must reflect the reality that we are looking at. We cannot make unrealistic demands - when we say that we are going to do something - we must be able to carry it out: this is what we mean by serious politics.

People have in fact said that writing a letter to the Prime Minister is moving backwards. Are we actually moving backwards? We are moving backwards in the sense that this was a tactic that was employed by the Congress Alliance in the 50s. They used to write to the state at that time and we say that when we evaluate that tactic

was employed by the Congress Alliance in the 50s. They used to write to the state at that time and say that this is the conditions that exist and you don't do A,B,C, - we are going to engage in X,Y,Z, acts and that's what they actually did. The point that has to be made is that when we evaluate that tactic, we must do it in such a way that it takes us forward, we must not make threats that are empty because then people don't take you seriously. Now we are not a small group of militants that are isolated from the mass of the people, we are now representative of a constituency. In a sense those people expect leadership from us. When we call upon our people to do something and they respond, that is when we say that we are organised and that is the level of politics that we are engaged in today.

Engaging the state doesn't just mean writing letters to the Prime Minister. It can take on many other forms. Another form is what happened in Natal recently. The Natal Indian Congress was faced with a situation where some people were saying that the NIC was only capable of rallying a lot of African people from the townships who fill um the halls at meetings. The criticism was that the NIC didn't enjoy support from the Indian masses. The NIC therefore had to do something especially in the light of the fact that P.W. Botha was moving in on an initiative to win over the Indian people. Somehow the NIC had to engage in some sort of action that would dislodge the focus on him and what he wanted to do to what NIC wanted to do. The NIC after a great deal of discussion decided that what they needed to do was to protest with a placard demonstration just outside the City Hall. NIC also realised that this act might be illegal, but went on as an act of defiance. The result was that the NIC had actually succeeded in dislodging the Prime Minister as the newspapers carried headlines about the event. Further than this the NIC had managed to rally people around simply because this act was legitimate in the eyes of the people. The important point here is that the act of defiance didn't alienate NIC from the masses of the people, it actually carried the masses along. The lesson to be learnt here is that what we must do is we must make a careful assessment of what we are going to do - as well as the consciousness of our people at the time



and whether we can carry them along with us. We become vulnerable to the state the moment we speed too far ahead and we isolate ourselves from the people. We must know that our strength is our people - the main resource that we organise and can mobilise is the strength in our numbers of our oppressed people. The other aspect of that strategy was clearly that it was not just the radical people within the NIC Exec. that went on that protest, but it was the whole exec. and beyond that it took a number of people that were invited. Whilst these people were still in the police cells, the NIC was still winning a victory in that those people who were involved were in the process and at the same time mass support was growing. This example illustrates the fine balance that exists between a kind of conservatism (in that the masses go in front of you) and on the other hand, adventurism (going ahead irrespective of the level of the consciousness of the people and leaving them behind). We must move in tune with the masses so that when you take on those actions you have popular legitimacy. The final point that has to be made is what is known as flexibility of tactic - we will have to make very sharp twists and turns and that these changes are necessary because they advance the struggle. Writing a letter to the Prime Minister at a particular point in time might be the correct thing. It doesn't mean that we are moving backwards or forwards - we might be moving sideways. It's like climbing a mountain, ie. you can't always go upwards sometimes it is necessary to get a better position so you actually have to move sideways so that you can climb again. We have to be creative at all times and move differently and use different tactics.

Just looking at the people's camp again, the other aspect that I want to go into is the whole area of those people who don't share the national democratic struggle as a strategy but are still part of the people's camp. The first grouping is the workerist grouping. These are the people that believe that workers must go in on their own and their belief is that an alliance of classes, which is what the UDF is, and what the national character of the struggle requires, then what is going to happen is that the petty bourgeoisie, the student sectors are going to use the working class in order to divert the struggle and therefore that form of struggle is not valid. The response to that kind of argument is that there is some truth in what they say - there is that kind of danger and the working class has to all times be vigilant. Let us see that the whole concept of working class is different from worker. A person who supports the working class ideology means that he doesn't share the values of the capitalist system of exploitation and believes that society has to be restructured so that you remove the conditions of exploitation and his class background may be different. As long as he is truly committed to those beliefs, and has committed himself to make

that sacrifice and works in a disciplined way with workers and with the broad masses of people - that person is actually promoting the struggles of the working class irrespective of the fact that he works in a factory or not. The point that has to be made is that the intelligentsia has certain inherent weaknesses and because of this we have to continually struggle against these tendencies within ourselves. The workerist also argues that people can only be organised at the point of production where the main relations are the relations of exploitation, but it must be noted that the capitalist doesn't maintain power only through the relations of production, but also through the capitalist state. If you are going to transform society, there is some way that you have to politically challenge the capitalist state and that can only be done through political formations. The success of the national democratic struggle is going to be determined by the working class hegemony within the alliance of classes and how strong it is.

The second grouping are those who align themselves to the black consciousness outlook. The point must be made here that this grouping exerts very little influence on the broader national democratic struggle simply because they remain a small group of intelligentsia who do not engage in mass mobilisation as a form of struggle. However of all the mass organisations, AZASO is, by its nature, being a student organisation, particularly susceptible to the advances of the black consciousness philosophy. What remains is for AZASO to be vigilant and to continue to expound the principles of the national democratic struggle, to its member and to the community at large.

The third grouping is Inkatha. Inkatha is historically a cultural movement. But one cannot deny the fact that Inkatha has to some degree mass support. Therefore it becomes important in how we deal with Inkatha. Some of the problems with Inkatha are that it preaches tribalism. Inkatha does not attract intellectuals therefore it is no real threat to AZASO. However, UDF needs to reach out to the people in the rural areas.

The next area I want to look at briefly is the role of AZASO and the relationship between AZASO and the UDF.

Students generally form part of the intelligentsia. One of the roles of students is to expound the revolutionary theory. What we need in the struggle is people who can defend our position in terms of theory and students can play an important role in this aspect. This area is one of our weaknesses in that we do not have people who can respond immediately to any criticisms that may arise. AZASO should assert itself as being the national student representative of the students of South Africa. It should have total hegemony in the student sphere nationally and should be the voice of South African students internationally. This is one aspect in which AZASO is lacking and should make every effort to forge links with international student movements.

Relationship between AZASO and UDF

AZASO as one of the first affiliates of the UDF must begin to play an important role in its campaigns, one of them being the anti-conscription campaign, because it directly affects students. Other campaigns that AZASO can involve itself in are:

- 1) Forced removals
- 2) Million signature campaign
- 3) Anti-Community Council campaign
- 4) Expansion into rural areas
- 5) Other new avenues.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to pose four questions which generally the progressive movement needs to answer:

- 1) To what extent do we understand the nature of our struggle?
- 2) How many activists have the necessary skills and how do we facilitate these skills?
- 3) How organised are our structures and how organised are the masses of the people?
- 4) What are the priorities facing us?

The challenge facing the progressive movement in the coming year is very demanding and we need to conduct ourselves in a disciplined manner and with utmost commitment in order to meet these challenges.

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