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UDF TRANSVAAL SECRETARIAL REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 1985

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Rev 4/25

1. INTRODUCTION

The task of compiling a secretarial report which covers the first twenty-two months of the Transvaal Region of the United Democratic Front is a mammoth one. The UDF's rapid growth and its extraordinary dynamism is difficult to capture in a report of this nature. An added difficulty is the absence of all our records which have been confiscated by the security police.

Of the volumes that can be written about the UDF (TVL), we present a modest attempt at reporting on the activities of the Front in this region to date. Many events of the Front are not mentioned here, for such events of the Front are too numerous to mention in a short report.

This report is in four sections. First we will deal with the situation prior to the formation of the Front, then our response, this will be followed by an evaluation of the present situation, and we shall end with pointers to the way forward.

2. SITUATION PRIOR TO THE FORMATION OF UDF

During the period between 1977 and 1983, there was a countrywide wave amongst progressive people towards grassroots organisational work. Although a large number of organisations emerged, these were isolated and sparsely distributed. Political campaigns were either localised or of an ad hoc nature, for example, Anti-Republic Day Campaign and the Anti-Saic Campaign.

The political and economic crisis facing the Apartheid State was ever deepening. By 1982 the state had to undertake definite steps towards resolving the crisis. Amongst these steps was the adoption of the so-called Reform Strategy which in the main involved the Koornhof Bills and the Constitution Act. With this devious scheme the regime aimed at: dividing the cherished unity of the oppressed; co-opting sections of the coloured, Indian and African communities, and thereby broadening its reactionary base; isolating the working class by luring the oppressed middle classes and finally, creating the impression of reform abroad.

P W Botha and the new "enlightened" Nationalist Party emerged as the great Afrikaners who would resolve the crisis. The white public and the Western Nations were convinced of this - The bold, confident Botha was on the march. His political moves served to confuse the ranks of the PFP, and he confidently allowed the ultra-right verkramptes to be alienated. He became the darling of big business. This campaign climaxed with the Eshowe Conference (held on 4 January 1983) - for a moment it seemed as if this grand trick would work.

I cannot remember the date of Eshowe conference

On the international scene, the regimes Western allies were on the offensive against solidarity groups, claiming that there were signs of change in South Africa. At the same time the US was stepping up "constructive engagement" with this illegitimate state. The South African question was slipping from the agenda of International Human Rights Organisations.

3. OUR RESPONSE - THE IDEA OF A FRONT

It became clear that only a United Front of all the people of our land would be able to effectively counter this onslaught. This United Front Against Apartheid would: unite our people across racial lines; unite democrats across class boundaries; co-ordinate resistance to the reform strategy at a local, regional and national level; link the struggles of the urban centres to those of country-towns and rural areas; counter the state propaganda both at home and abroad; unite groups and organisations with different ideological leanings and ignite the fires of resistance in every corner of the country.

The conference of the Transvaal Anti-SAIC Committee provided the opportune moment to issue the call for united action. In the Transvaal an interim committee was formed to begin the ground work and in May 1983 the Transvaal UDF was launched with a General Council and a consultative committee for the purposes of co-ordination. The region was not fully constituted and structures were not finalised, for every attempt was being made to draw in as wide a range of progressive organisations as possible, into the Front. A concerted attempt was even made to persuade Azapo to affiliate. In most quarters the idea of the UDF was received with excitement and enthusiasm. In July 1983 the first Transvaal Regional Executive Committee was elected. Comrade Albertina Sisulu, who was in detention at the time, was elected as President.

On 20 August 1983, six hundred people from the Transvaal attended the National launch of the UDF, either as delegates or as observers. The historic launch had an electrifying effect on organisations and individuals throughout the country, and the Transvaal was no exception.

On returning from Cape Town, the region plunged into the first major campaign of the UDF - the Anti-Black Local Authorities Campaign. The Programme of Action of this campaign included; the formation and strengthening of local organisations like the SCA, VCA, etc. It also included door-to-door work, workshops, propaganda and mass-meetings. By December 1983, through our campaign, we displayed that the new Black Local Authorities were as unpopular as the hated Community Councils. The campaign also laid a firm basis for the eventual dismantling of the Black Local Authorities in most townships. Through this campaign the UDF was introduced at a mass level in almost all the townships. We failed, however, to link the campaign to issues in the coloured and Indian areas.

By this stage, a number of important new organisations were formed, and affiliated to the Front. Amongst them are the VCA, SOYCO, AYCO, TIC and the Anti-PC Committee.

In November 1983, the white referendum was conducted. On the eve of the referendum the first major provincial rally was held as part of the National Campaign against the fraudulent constitution.

First National
was elected
on 5 Aug 1984

K2
K4

Formation
of org. was not
part of
UDF programme
as highlighted
by K2, K4

I don't know what this
meant but I assume it is
a matter of political expression

In this period, the 'Solidarity with the People of Ciskei Campaign' was undertaken jointly with affiliated and non-affiliated trade unions like CCAWUSA and MAWU. The solidarity campaign was in response to the events surrounding the uprisings and brutal repression in Mdantsane.

We ended 1983 at the National General Council held in P.E. The Conference dealt almost solely with the infamous debate surrounding the coloured and Indian referendum. The Transvaal delegation went ill prepared to the Conference and the resulting difference on the issue led to bitter conflicts and divisions which haunted the Transvaal UDF for many months thereafter.

January
In February 1984 the Million Signature Campaign was launched at a rally in Soshanguve. Amongst the aims of the campaign was to: consolidate the mobilisation during the Anti-BLA Campaign; to intensify grassroots work by entering into one-to-one discussions with people in the streets and in their homes; to display to the regime, the world and our people that the UDF has a large number of supporters. The campaign stretched on for much longer than initially planned. In the Transvaal, about 60 000 signatures were collected, rather than the targeted 250 000. The campaign was hampered by state harassment and counter propaganda. However, the campaign assisted greatly towards advancing the aims of the Front. Firstly, it provided a means for active involvement of a large number of people who had not previously participated in the activities of the Front. Secondly, it acted as a unifying campaign in the sense that it was conducted in all constituencies and amongst all the affiliates throughout the country. Thirdly the campaign introduced the UDF and its policies to hundreds of thousands of people at a personal level - perhaps herein lay the greatest value of the campaign. And, lastly, the propaganda generated by the campaign served to counter state propaganda. Thus, what on the surface appeared to be a harmless collection of signatures was in fact a campaign which engaged the state on terms and at a pace dictated by us. This campaign was not a reaction to a state initiative but rather forced the state to react to us on our terrain.

The P.E. Conference decided that a campaign against conscription should be launched. However, this issue was not addressed as a campaign, apart from it being linked to the Anti-Constitution Campaign by the TIC and Anti-PC Committee. This was because most organisations outside of the white community did not regard this as an immediate issue.

No report can be complete without mentioning the only major fund-raising activity we engaged in - the highly successful People's Festival was held in March last year.

By mid year the Anti-Constitution Campaign had taken root, particularly in the Indian and coloured communities. Intensive door-to-door work was being conducted in these areas. This campaign was also being conducted by the youth organisations, women's organisations, trade unions and organisations in the African townships. The momentous victory that followed, once and for all shattered the false image created by P W Botha.

That is correct
Lunch hour
Meeting on 3, 11.84

MSC
Launch
was on
January

Agree
on Conscription

The first large scale detentions of leading UDF activists was on the eve of the August elections. Despite the repression suffered by UDF, affiliates intensified the struggle against the racist regime. The Vaal Civic Association embarked upon a rents boycott which is historically unprecedented. Neither the occupation of the townships by the SADF, nor the detention of every politically active person, nor the many deaths in the streets could quell the militancy of the people.

On the education front, COSAS had continued to draw in more and more schools into the battle for SRC's and relevant education.

All of these events culminated in the highly successful two day stay-away in November. The stayaway united trade unions and UDF affiliates in action.

Because of the repression against UDF, the slogan "Long Live UDF, Ban Apartheid" was adopted by the NEC. It was decided that a pro-UDF Campaign around this slogan be conducted.

The year was closed with the Black Christmas Campaign, a campaign which was used to take stock of the events of the past months and to generate solidarity with those who suffered because of the uprisings.

We debated Edward Kennedy's visit early this year, and thereafter began work for the Peace Prize Celebration. The celebration was very significant in that it brought the UDF new allies. Its significance also lies in the fact that it was the biggest UDF function ever held in Soweto.

On 19 February 1985, scores of homes and offices were raided by the security police and a further eight people were detained for high treason. The state is continuing in its attempts to disorganise the UDF and at the same time marginalise it by alienating the Front and its leadership from the masses. Fortunately we were much better prepared this time than we were in August last year - our operations have continued smoothly.

4. THE PRESENT SITUATION

At the organisational level the Front has grown to become very strong. Today there are organisations in many, many more areas than had existed prior to the formation of the UDF. There is also a new sense of militancy amongst the people. They are displaying a preparedness to fight the Apartheid system regardless of the cost. However, many organisations in the Front do not have strong and sophisticated organisational networks and yet many others do not have a developed layer of activists.

By effectively mobilising against the Black Local Authorities and the Tri-Cameral parliament, we have broken the back of the state's so-called reform strategy. At the same time, with the intensification of the struggle and the deepening economic recession, the state has little hope of resolving the crisis it faces. The state is no longer forging ahead confidently, nor is its strategy as clearly worked-out as it once was.

Militancy
Vigorous
determination

This campaign
failed

Contradicting
two 1st para

MP

On the international front, the balance of forces has definitely swung into our favour. The South African question is once again high up on the agenda. As a Front, we are also in dynamic interaction with support groups and other organisations throughout the world.

5. THE WAY FORWARD

A programme of action for the UDF has begun to take shape in the following issues and campaigns: the Anti-repression and Release our Leaders Campaign, the cost of living issue, the Anti-Conscription Campaign, the Anti-Forced Removals Campaign, the development of organisation in rural areas and the Campaign to bring the Black Local Authorities, the Tri-cameral Parliament and the Bantustan Governments to a halt.

We go forward confidently with the knowledge that not many more of our AGM's will be held under Apartheid rule.



This stated just after our arrival

The reading of the financial report 83 to Dec 84

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