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REPORT TO THE NATAL REGION GENERAL COUNCIL OF
UDF ON THE PORT ELIZABETH CONFERENCE HELD ON
17/18 DECEMBER 1983.

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1. DELEGATES

A total of 90 delegates in addition to members of the regional executive represented the Natal region at the conference. There were no observers from Natal.

2. TRANSPORT

About 54 of the delegates travelled by bus and some of the others by cars. The entire cost was covered by the contributions of the delegates. The bus left on Thursday 15th December at 11pm and returned on Monday 19th December at 9am.

3. ACCOMMODATION

Most of the Natal delegates were accommodated in a church hall. Meals were provided at the conference hall.

4. CONFERENCE - SATURDAY, 17 December

4.1 Session ONE

* Opening Address by the President, A.Gumede

He pointed to the key issues which were to be discussed at the conference. He said that although there would be many different views on the issues there should not be any division in the UDF ranks. He called for open, rational and dispassionate discussions which would enhance the unity of UDF.

* Report of the National Secretary - P.Molefe

Copies of this report are available. This report examines the crisis in the ranks of the oppressor and the problems in the forces of resistance. The tremendous progress made by the UDF in extending organisation to new regions such as Border and the OFS and more important, to the rural areas. He indicates some of the challenges that faces the UDF in the near future.

* Commissions

5 Commissions of about 100 persons were formed. 4 Questions were discussed in the commissions:
i) the relationship between "first level" organisations and the UDF
ii) broadening of the UDF
iii) transforming the mobilising capacity of the UDF into a more disciplined and permanent form.
iv) how should the successful campaign against the recent Black Local Authority elections be followed up?

LUNCH

4.2 Session TWO

* Paper on the Referendum by E.Molobi

Copies of this paper are available. This paper looks at the objectives of the UDF, defines principles strategies and tactics and looks at some of the operational principles of the UDF.

* Plenary Discussion on the Paper

* Comments on the Position of each Region

Natal - our position was given by C.Mdlovu in an excellent address
Northern Cape - their position was a "vote no" position
Border - boycott - although they had not discussed the issue before coming to P.E.
Western Cape - had 3 views : boycott, vote no and a national convention.
Eastern Cape - had 2 views : boycott and vote no
Transvaal - had 2 views : boycott and vote no

OFS - at this stage their position was a "vote no" position

* Clarification and Motivation on above positions

Each region then clarified its position. Where there were "split" votes, separate speakers motivated each position.

At this stage it was clear to the house that there were strong differences in approach to the question.

* Commissions

The commissions were to have discussed the key questions in E.Molobe's paper related to the referendum. However, the discussion took the form of a debate between the proponents of the "boycott" and "vote no" positions.

The Natal delegates argued their case with great vigour and clarity. They were able to clarify their position and persuade large numbers of the correctness of their positions.

* Report Backs

The reports indicated that both positions were being argued strongly, but that there was a swing towards the "vote no" position.

* Straw Vote

The Natal delegation requested a straw vote to indicate the strength of the two positions. Although the declared result was 55-45 in favour of the "vote no" position a more accurate figure would have been 60-40.

5. CONFERENCE - SUNDAY, 18 December

* Commission

A commission consisting of 7 persons from each major region and smaller numbers from the others was appointed to formulate a compromise.

This commission worked from 11pm on Saturday to 5am on Sunday. It recommended that in view of the different conditions in the Indian and Coloured communities, the urgent need to advance the campaigns against the constitution and collaborators further, and the need to maintain unity in the ranks of the UDF there was an urgent need for tactical flexibility to be accorded to affiliates. It recommended that the question of flexibility and the two tactics be referred back to each region for further discussion. The regions are expected to discuss this as a matter of urgency and communicate their decisions to the secretariat.

* Conscription

A very short paper was presented because time was running out.

* Million Signatures Campaign

A report was presented. All regions agreed to participate in the campaign.

* Resolutions

This part of the agenda remained incomplete.

* Closure

The closing address was given by President, O.Mphetha.

6. DEPARTURE

The Natal delegation left for Durban at the end of the conference.

7. COMMENTS

Every delegate is to be commended for the mature and disciplined way in which the debate was conducted by them. The Natal delegation received national recognition for this quality.

INTRODUCTION :

Today, almost a year after the germ of the United Democratic Front was conceived, and just a few days before the beginning of a new year, we are gathered here in all our hundreds as delegates from various centres of South Africa, to synthesise and decide on very crucial questions in our history. This now demands of us a very careful evaluation of our work, tactics and strategies. This conference promises therefore, to be a truly momentous event in the life of our Front. Decisions and resolutions adopted by this conference are going to be decisive in terms of the future direction of the UDF and, indeed, the way forward of the national democratic struggle in South Africa.

However, to be able to arrive at a correct political decision, we need to take a synoptic look at a number of factors influencing our tactics, strategies and programmes. This report will, therefore, attempt to cover the following :

- a) The State Crises and its strategy.
- b) The Democratic movement
- c) Our gains and problems
- d) Our future strategy

2. STATE CRISES

South Africa is today in a state of crisis. This crisis has manifested itself in all fronts - in education, on the labour front, within political structures and within economic circles where inflation and recession have assumed alarming proportions. These are but a few of the areas of crisis. Also worth mentioning here, is the housing backlog, which is today a permanent contradiction and a political issue in our country.

The state crisis, we must point out, continues to deepen as the forces of resistance develop and become stronger. Our organizations have, over the last few years, organized high forms of resistance - around education, around housing, rentals, high transport fares, against puppet state bodies and for better pay and working conditions on factory floors. All forms of resistance in the different sites of struggle challenged and frustrated relations of domination and oppression.

2.1. State response to the crisis :

The government realised that it could no longer rule by the same methods. It had to adapt to new conditions and situations. It responded by starting on a process of restructuring its rule. A process essentially calculated to maintain the relations of domination, exploitation and oppression. As far as the government was concerned, the most effective and viable strategy was to weaken the forces of resistance by resorting to sophisticated methods of divide and rule. In short, what they hoped to do, was to co-opt a tiny middle class sector and in this way to isolate the working class.

To realise its objective the government appointed a number of commissions on various aspects to determine the most effective methods of control, e.g. Michahn and Riekert on Labour relations, Rabie on security, de Lange on education. Similarly, the PO proposals and the housing policy are some of the state's attempts to survive, and preserve Apartheid and the current economic relations.

Apart from all these, we have seen in recent years, a close alliance developing between big business and the military. The State Security Council, a body making the most important and strategic decisions for the country, is today effectively controlled by the military and big business. We see here a systematic shift of power from the hands of parliament to those of unelected bureaucratic structures. Having succeeded in drawing big business into its ranks, the state has clearly broadened its base and increasingly its resilience. Over the past few years, as well, the state has increasingly attempted to crush democratic forces outside South Africa, through its policy of destabilization. More and more, it has hit out at those countries on its borders which have dared not only to sympathize with the struggle against Apartheid, but who also, within their own countries, have tried to build a new society.

We see, then, that although in a state of crisis, the government is certainly not in a state of collapse. To believe otherwise, would be an illusion..

However, as the state is restructuring itself, our organizations too have responded to the challenge and are also restructuring. We think that the growth of our organizations and resistance to oppression is particularly important to us because if the state's restructuring is unopposed, it could weaken our struggle.. and our organizations. It is, therefore, very important that we effectively defend our hard won unity, the unity that took years and great sacrifices to build.

THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

Our response to the state strategy has been to oppose the division of our people. We see the unity of our people as paramount; it had to be fought for, it has to be defended. Our response, therefore, was the formation of the United Democratic Front.

At the same time, though, the UDF was not simply a response to a call for unity. It was a culmination of building organizations which fought struggles affecting all our people in various parts of the country. Although these struggles were unco-ordinated, they all challenged the relations of domination. In this way, the UDF grew out of the development of organizations and the need to co-ordinate isolated struggles into broader forms of national campaigns and resistance.

3. WHAT WERE OUR OBJECTIVES WHEN WE FORMED THE UDF?

- (i) to take the ideological initiative out of the hands of the state
- (ii) to unite our people across class, colour, ethnic and organizational lines to oppose the Apartheid reform offensive of Botha.
- (iii) to co-ordinate the activities of all organizations opposed to Apartheid.

- (iv) to advance the mobilization and to deepen the organization of our people
- (v) to prevent the state from implementing its so-called reforms, or at least, to make it difficult for them to do so.
- (vi) to deepen the understanding of our people on issues affecting their lives, such as the P.C. Proposals and Koornhof Bills, the Community Councils and Black Local Authorities, the Coloured Management Committees and the new housing policy, etc.
- (vii) to establish a broad front to serve as the voice of our people.
- (viii) to link politics with the day to day experience of our people.
- (ix) to draw into the front groupings operating outside the government structures.

4. THE TRACE RECORD OF THE UDF.

Although we started the front with only 3 regions, namely, Natal, Transvaal and Western Cape, we have, during the last three months, extended to other regions. Two regions of the UDF have been formed in the Eastern Cape and the Border. An interim committee has been formed in the Northern Cape which is a largely rural area. Inroads have been made in the Orange Free State where Area Consultative Committees have been formed. We are confident that by the end of the first quarter of the new year we shall have extended to all regions of South Africa.

The last three months has also seen a mushrooming of new civic and youth organizations. These organizations were not only inspired by the UDF, but were initiated by the UDF itself.

We have also been able to increase our capacity to reach the people and to win some amount of legitimacy for the ideals of the Front as well as to provide an alternative for a democratic South Africa. We can see this from the thousands who have responded to our newsletters, mass meetings, etc. For example, 15 000 people attended the UDF National Launch, over 30 000 attended our Peoples' Weekend Rallies, and more importantly, thousands are reached daily in our areas by our affiliates.

In addition, we have scored major successes in a number of campaigns over recent months:

- Following a UDF call in the Western Cape, there were very low polls in the Coloured Management Committee Elections.
- Similarly, people responded throughout the country to the UDF call to boycott Community Council and Black Local Authorities elections.
- The UDF focus on the Ciskei evoked national and international attention.
- Thousands of people attended the NIC meeting to challenge the Botha/Rajbansi meeting.

We have made these gains in a climate in which the UDF is engaged in a battle to win support for its initiatives. We can say without fear that we have, for the moment, gained the upper hand in this battle. And, at no stage can we afford to take a step back.

To ensure that this does not happen, we need to look not only at our gains, but also at our problems..

Before the launch of the UDF, organizations had been engaged in their day to day activities and struggles.. The emergence of the UDF presented new problems. The fast rate of growth created excitement and interest which drew more and more of the leadership of the affiliates into UDF campaigns. The result was that the activities of the affiliates were subsumed by the UDF activities and organizations were drained of their leadership. In essence, this meant that consolidation became very difficult for many first level organizations. This poses a threat to the long-term activities of these organizations and the entire Democratic movement. The challenge facing this conference is to evolve a programme of action which will allow scope for growth and development of these organizations; a programme of action that will link our day to day work in our organizations with the work of the UDF in a way that will build both..

We have also not been able to facilitate effectively the process of consultation and democracy. We need to ensure that all decisions are taken or understood by the membership of organizations, taking into account the masses we still have to organize. This problem must be addressed in order to prevent mistaking the consciousness of the leadership for mass consciousness. This is important because we know that over the years, people have developed a scepticism and a fear of politics. We cannot pretend that the excitement the UDF has created has put an end to these feelings. We must take the prevailing consciousness as a baseline and take people through a process that will overcome their scepticism and fear. Again, this means that we must take the day to day concerns with which people are familiar, and link them to our political work..

These organizational problems must be addressed seriously. When we ask ourselves - "Where are all the people we have reached? Have they come into our organizations?" we find ourselves unable to answer precisely because we have not been able to channel effectively the people we have won over into our organizations.

The other difficulty which we face is that the different aspects of the 'New Deal' affect different sections of our society differently. In fact, the constitution and Koornhof Bills are designed to fulfil the specific function of sowing division. How do we approach these matters? Do we act as though we are affected similarly? Do we act as though divisions on the basis of race are non-existent? On the other hand, do we through our practice encourage and entrench these divisions?

What are the factors which guide us? Is there a difference between campaigns initiated by us and those which are responses to state initiatives? To illustrate, when we responded to the Black Local Authorities Elections, our campaigns were directed primarily, or even exclusively at affected communities. However, when we initiate the signature campaign, we cannot afford the risk of entrenching divisions. The underlying objective of such a campaign must be the building of unity. These questions will assume increasing importance in the future. In answering them, it is important that we understand the conditions at a given point and that we take decisions that will fulfil the aims and objectives of the UDF.

THE FUTURE:

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this conference is primarily to plot a course for the months ahead. We do this with an understanding of our successes and failures as detailed earlier. We should also take account of where the government is and what can be expected from those quarters.

We operate in a period in which PW Botha believes that he has a strong mandate from the white electorate following the 56% YES vote in the white referendum. PW Botha believes that this mandate allows him to proceed with his attempts at restructuring. This confidence results in a strategy which rules our naked repression as an immediate option. We see therefore that even though the UDF has made major gains, gains which threaten the implementation of the 'new deal', Botha has not yet resorted to mass detentions and individual bannings, or the banning of the UDF itself. Instead, we have seen a shift to harassment which involves threatening telephone calls to leadership and an increasing number of arrests involving little more than technical offences - eg motorcades, distributing leaflets, demonstrations etc. This is coupled with various attempts to isolate the UDF by attempting to project it as a front for the banned ANC. In relation to the previous years of harsh repression, these moves indicate a strategy of gentle persuasion, to create the conditions whereby the democratic movement can be isolated and cast off.

Yet, all is not rosy for the state. At an international level, Pik Botha has been largely unsuccessful in attempts to win support of European governments, support so necessary for the state to regain entry into the international fold.

Also, the state has grossly over-estimated the strength of the junior partners. Neither Hendrickse nor Rajbansi have sufficient confidence to face a referendum. Together with Botha they are trying to manoeuvre their way out of this situation by using flimsy arguments about the cost of a referendum. They wish to hide behind 'scientific surveys' the results of which they hope will be less embarrassing than the results of a referendum.

The sum total of this is a realisation by the state that it is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of our community; a battle which will determine whether or not it can rule by consent, or whether the big stick must be hauled out and it must rule by coercion. It is for this reason that the state is now desperately trying to prop up its allies, Rajbansi and Hendrickse. It has set up, in the case of the Labour Party, a specialist unit for conducting the campaign within the so-called Coloured community. Already, RLM has been collected. With such backing, the Labour Party hopes to lay the basis for an acceptance of the constitution by so-called Coloureds.

Within this framework, we need to understand the scope of our work in the year ahead. We need to identify certain characteristics of our campaigns in order to make our task more efficient and effective.

Our campaign against the Constitutional and Koornhof Bills must be intensified. We must direct our energies towards a fuller understanding at a mass level of the need for unity and an absolute rejection of this so-called new deal.

The base of the UDF is largely urban. Yet, repression is at its worst

in the rural areas. It is these people who are increasingly faced with barbaric forced removals to bantustans and an increased police and military presence. To be effective and truly national, the UDF must try to include these farflung communities and thereby extend our base. Already we have made some gains. The period ahead calls for an intensification of this.

Our future work is going to be crucially affected by the manner and extent to which we address the Koornhof strategy. The continued denial of Section 10 rights to Africans, the removals and relocations and the incorporation of areas into the bantustans are all part of a strategy designed to force Africans into bantustans. Our people in Magopa, Driefontein, Crossroads, KTC, Lamontville and Rambanathi are under the threat of either being removed or of having their areas areas incorporated into these backyards of Apartheid. In addition, those who cannot acquire Section 10 rights, are forced to the bantustans to starve there.

On the other side of the resettlement/relocation coin is Koornhof's attempt to co-opt a select few through the Black Local Authorities. Yet already we have made substantial gains here: we have successfully mobilized for a boycott; we have created informal organizational structures; we have created organizations opposed to those government created institutions, and we have discredited the Black Local Authorities.

But, we must recognize too, that the Black Local Authorities are a reality. They are being implemented and they will affect the daily lives of our people. What is the next phase of our campaign? Are we going to relax now that we have organized an effective boycott? Or are we going to find new ways to frustrate the Koornhof Bills, and in doing so, develop a coherent strategy against these bills.

Even though we understand the UDF to be a broad front, we must recognize that it is not nearly broad enough. There are many organizations which remain outside our front, organizations which have not been part of the mainstream of the democratic movement over the last few years. We cannot accept this situation as it is these organizations who will become the targets of co-optation. Our task is to bring them into our fold.

At the same time, this expansion must not happen at the expense of our organizations. The previously mentioned tasks relating to democracy and the building of organizations must be made concrete.

This is the scenario of the next few months. We see the UDF fulfilling these tasks by applying itself to the issues which will dominate discussion at this conference: namely, our response to the referendum/elections, the signature campaign and our campaign against conscription. Unfortunately we will not have time to deal with the question of removals and resettlement, but they must be built into our campaign.

For these reasons, the decisions which we take will be crucial to the future of our work. These decisions, must above all, build both the unity of our people and of our front.

103

103

We meet at a time when the history of this country passes through one of its most important moments. In South Africa today, the capitalist system together with its organ of power, the racist state, are experiencing a crisis the severity of which mounts by the day. At times like these, it is imperative that all of us who are rallied as an antithetical force against the present regime should analyse thoroughly the objective conditions which shape our lives in this country. We should then reassess our strength and strategies in order to chart scientifically the course of our future struggles.

The democratic movement picks up the reigns of a struggle endowed with rich historical experiences. A synoptic look at our history will reveal that our people through various campaigns have always engaged the enemy on many occasions. When the rulers set up the Union of South Africa in 1910, the people set up their own organisation in the form of the ANC, two years later, in 1912. This organisation was set up to oppose the government and to concretise their national aspiration. 1919 saw the Free State women campaigning against the passes. The 1935-36 Hertzog bills which actually removed the Franchise from the African and Coloured sections did not go without challenge. In 1946, opposition against the Indian Caste Acts in Natal was also staged by the massive participation of the people. 1952 brought the initial stages of the boycott campaigns, and later on, when the regime sought to strengthen their position by bolstering Bantu Education, the students registered their categorical rejection in the 1976-1980 boycotts.

Presently, the state is coming with the 'new constitution- and the Koornhof bills' and this whole gimmick of reform, which the democratic movement must attend to.

The democratic movement must in the first instance adopt a particular frame of outlook if it is to face the challenges of its day successfully. That conceptual framework must be a scientific one in which case no amount of tradition and emotion will cloud its analytical processes. The democratic movement is called upon to be flexible in its approach and in this regard recognise the fact that the objective conditions in which it operates are not permanent or static at any given time, but are dynamic. There is the ever present flow and ebb represented by the regimes political twist and turn which the democratic movement must fully analyse and take advantage of.

Great challenges presenting a new set of conditions are presently facing the democratic movement in South Africa. It is imperative that in responding to these conditions, the democratic movement should be able to maintain a proper balance between its principles as against the strategies and tactics applied in order to achieve its objectives. Firstly, principles are essentially fixed and fundamental beliefs around which a general outlook is formed. The form general guides to action but are not the actual action itself. Strategies on the other hand are processes involving the proper timing and planning in order to create conditions that are suitable for the implementation of one's programme at one's own pace, taking into account the material conditions in order to change them. Whereas tactics are mere skillful procedures calculated to gain some end. Principles are therefore long term and are more philosophical and ideological; whereas strategies are more of medium term nature while tactics are actually flexible and short term as they are the tools utilised to achieve our objectives. In order to illustrate this point, let us take an example from a practical situation. As a principle, the democratic movement believes in a non-racial South Africa. The strategy it has adopted is that of opposing the government's constitutional plans. What the conference must now discuss are the various tactics

applicable to implement that strategy in order to achieve our overall principle of non-racialism and democracy. Many other examples could be quoted. It is important for our work that we understand this basic difference between principles on the one hand, and strategies and tactics on the other. It is only when we master this that we will be able to be flexible in pursuing our objectives without abandoning our principles.

Coming back to the present position of the FRONT. The UDF is a young FRONT. The question of the unity and strength should be of underlying importance to everybody not only in this meeting, but to every democrat and freedom-loving person in South Africa. So that whatever strategy and tactic we apply, these should be weighed not only against our principles, but also against causing schisms, factionalism and cracks that would weaken its effectiveness and strength, while bolstering at attacks from both the left and the right.

In the present discussions continuing concerning the tactics to be adopted on the referendum which was supposed to have been called by the state and its quislings, and was to test the 'Indian' and 'Coloured' people's reaction towards the constitution, it has become clear that the state and its stooges have developed cold feet on this issue. Now PW Botha and his lackeys talk of going ahead with the elections, thus circumventing perhaps an embarrassing situation with regard to the referendum. Now that we shall be discussing the referendum issue, let us look at the crucial questions related to this issue, some of which are the following:

1. The Unity of the FRONT
2. Which tactic would best serve to enhance the Democratic movement
3. Which tactic would best disorganise the state
4. The best way of preventing/obstructing the implementation of the states constitutional proposals

THE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Looking at the short track of the UDF ever since the historic launching in Cape Town. It is necessary that we develop some broad operational principles, specially because a set of new conditions are created every day. In this regard, we need:

- a. To strengthen the structure and bond of the Front. Firstly at constituent member basis. Members should not only meet at council meetings, local campaigns on various issues should involve the majority of the constituent members with the working people spearheading the political campaigns.
- b. To intensify our campaigns and in the process we must develop our organisations while we spread and implant the UDF in all areas where no form of activity is taking place.
- c. To isolate the racist government from the people by embarking on an intensified awareness programme aimed at not only uncovering the empty promises of the state, but also at popularising our demands and the Democratic front, while we neutralise the position of reactionaries.
- d. We need to exercise utmost discipline especially now at this moment of unprecedented violent provocations from certain government

protected quarters. We must never allow our detractors and enemies to have reason to disrupt our work and programmes. We have a noble task of mobilising and organising our people into a formidable front that will be able to render the useless plans of the government's reform unworkable.

e. Lastly, we must be initiators and not only reactive. We must constantly study the unfolding political and economic situation so as to keep abreast with all the low powered tricks of the oppressive regime.

In conclusion, let us recall the words of Cabral, when he was addressing the United Nations Special Committee on Territories under Portuguese Administration, when he declared:

"We reject the idea of begging for freedom because it is incompatible with the dignity and sacred right of our people to be free and independent."

Let us therefore reaffirm our steadfast determination irrespective of the sacrifices involved to work tirelessly for a free and non-racial democratic South Africa.

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