

The United Democratic Front
stands accused

Delmas Treason Trial 1985 - 1988

The UDF

The United Democratic Front was formed in 1983 out of opposition to the government's proposals for a tricameral parliament and for black local authorities. It united student, youth, political, women's and other organisations who were against these proposals. The UDF ran successful campaigns in 1983 and 1984 calling for a boycott of black local authorities and the tricameral elections. They rejected these schemes and called for "one person one vote." They feared that the black local authorities did not address the real problems and that their implementation would lead to greater conflict. The government took no notice. They banned the UDF's meetings, accused it of being a front for the banned African National Congress, and put the UDF's leaders in jail for legitimate protest.

The Trial and its History

In September 1984 the fears the UDF had expressed materialised: six months after they came into office, the black local authority in the Vaal Triangle increased rents. Residents could not afford the high rents and organised to oppose them. On 3 September 1984 the Vaal Civic Association (VCA), an affiliate of the UDF, organised a protest march to persuade the authorities to drop the increase, which was going to start on that day. The march was blocked by the police, who shot at the marchers without

any warning. Violence broke out in the Vaal and in many other townships. Residents had become frustrated by the increased rentals, bad education, corrupt councillors, no facilities and their exclusion from any real political decision-making. The UDF and its affiliates were blamed for the violence and their members were detained. On 11 June 1985 22 anti-apartheid activists, including UDF leaders, appeared in court. They had already spent many months in detention. They were charged with treason, murder, terrorism and subversion. The State accused them of plotting with the ANC to overthrow the government by violent means. The trialists denied this. The trial became known as the Delmas Treason Trial because it was heard in Delmas for the first 18 months.

The Trialists

The trialists were: Popo Molefe (37), General Secretary of the UDF; Terror Lekota (39), Publicity Secretary of the UDF; Moss Chikane (40) Transvaal Secretary of the UDF; Tom Manthata (48) from the SACC and the Soweto Civic Association (VCA); Patrick Baleka from AZANYU; Dupatl Homoka (35) from Azapo; Rev Geoff Moselane (42); Petrus Mokoena (50) from the Extraditioners Association; David Mphuthi (51); Naphthali Nkopane (43); Ebrahim Ramakgula (58); Banumile Vilakazi (52); Johnny Mokoena (36); Simon Nkodi

(29); Jake Hlangane (40); Sam Matlole (64); and Thabiso Ratsoma (31) are all from the Vaal Civic Association; and Tom Manthata (48) from COSAS.

The Trial

Throughout the trial the accused felt that the judge favoured the State. On 10 March 1987, the judge "fired" one of the two assessors who help him decide the case. He was fired because he had signed the UDF's "Million Signature Campaign" form. The judge refused to dismiss the other assessor, even though the accused complained that he was a member of the Broederbond! How could the trialists get a fair trial when they felt that the judge and the assessor were against them? The Delmas Treason Trial was the longest trial in South African legal history in terms of days in court — over 450 days. The court record consists of 27 194 pages, and the judgement took up 1 521 pages. In November 1988, the Court found that Molefe, Lekota, Chikane and Manthata were guilty of treason. Malindi, Mokoena, Mphuthi, Nkopane, Hlangane, Matlole and Ramakgula were convicted of terrorism. Lekota was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment, Molefe and Chikane to 10 years, Manthata to 6 and Malindi to 5. The others got suspended sentences with severe restrictions. This was the

first time that the courts had given people suspended sentences with restrictions.

The Implications

The Delmas Treason Trial was really a trial of the United Democratic Front, its affiliates, and legitimate extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid. The fact that the trialists were found guilty means that the South African courts have made legitimate protest against apartheid illegal. The Mass Democratic Movement, anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa and overseas were angered and outraged at their convictions. They have vowed to fight for the freedom of the trialists. The defence team is appealing against the convictions and the sentences. They are also applying for a special entry to have the whole trial set aside because of the many irregularities they say occurred during it.

All organisations and individuals must campaign for the unconditional freedom of the Delmas Treason Trialists, for the freedom of all political prisoners and we must all work for the end of Apartheid!



We stand by our leaders

Issued by the Delmas Support Group

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO LEGITIMATE PROTEST

GLOBE