

The United Democratic Front and repression - January 1985 to April 1986



1. Introduction

The United Democratic Front (UDF) has emerged in the past two and a half years as the major anti-apartheid extra-parliamentary force in South Africa. The growth of the UDF continues to act as a threat to the consolidation of apartheid which the government hoped to do by implementing a range of "reforms".

1985 stands out as the year that the government declared war against our people and our organisations. The government was determined to wipe out the democratic movement. Detentions, treason trials, the state of emergency, mysterious murders and disappearances, vigilantes and the presence of the SADF in the townships aimed to:

- * Destroy the leadership of the UDF and its affiliates creating a space for puppet and illegitimate leaders such as town councillors.
- * Prevent organisations from operating effectively.
- * Separate our leadership from the masses of the people through intimidatory tactics.

This period has posed stringent tests for the legal democratic movement. However we have emerged entrenched more firmly than ever before amongst the masses and the apartheid state has suffered severe defeats.

The lifting of the emergency in February, after it failed to restore "law and order", was an admission of defeat by the South African government.

Nevertheless the government is continuing to use the most brutal methods and as our people's resistance intensifies, we can only expect state violence to increase. In this report we will detail the various repressive methods used by the South African government to attempt to smash the UDF and its affiliates.

2. Detentions

During 1985, 10 998 people were detained, 7 361 under emergency regulations after the state of emergency was declared on July 21, 1985.

In April 1985, Patrick Terror Lekota, the UDF publicity secretary, Popo Molefe, UDF national secretary and Moss Chikane, a prominent UDF activist and former Transvaal UDF secretary were detained under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. They were later charged with treason.

2.1. Emergency detentions

The majority of people detained under the state of emergency were members of UDF affiliates. According to a Detainees Parents Support Committee (DPSC) analysis, 85% of those detained during the first week of the emergency were from UDF affiliates.

Leading members of UDF affiliates such as Amos Masondo, Soweto Civic Association publicity secretary, Paul Maseko, member of UDF Transvaal exec, Paul Mashatile, UDF Transvaal secretary and Esau Chiba, Transvaal Indian Congress publicity secretary spent the entire emergency in detention.

2.2. Swoop on UDF executives

Two weeks after the Emergency was declared, on 24 August 1985, there was a nationwide round up of UDF leadership and 28 UDF office bearers including the chairperson, Curnick Ndlovu, two vice presidents, Christmas Tinto and Henry Fazzie and others such as Billy Nair (UDF Natal), Yunus Mohamed (UDF Natal), Amanda Kwadi (UDF Transvaal) and Usuf Adams (UDF Western Cape).

Billy Nair is suing for damages of R50 000 for alleged wrongful detention and assault while in detention.

By the beginning of September 1985, the DPSC reported that 56% of the members

of the national and regional executives of UDF were "out of action" because of death, detentions and trials. 28 were being held under the Internal Security Act, eight under emergency regulations, seven were awaiting trial and two had been assassinated.

The breakdown of the executives affected in this way was as follows: National Executive Committee - eight out of 16; Transvaal Regional Executive Committee - nine out of 16; Eastern Cape - three out of six; Natal - nine out of 16; Border - four out of 10; Western Cape - 12 out of 14.

Most of these detainees were released after six weeks.

2.3. 1986

The Northern Cape UDF chairperson, Hofman Galeng was detained on 20 January 1986 under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act and is still in detention. So is Jomo Khotso, UDF rural organiser in the Northern Cape. He was detained in September 1985.

On 23 January 1986, Cheryl Carolus, a UDF national official was detained shortly after returning from overseas where she had been part of a delegation visiting the ANC. She was detained for three weeks and then restricted under emergency regulations.

Murphy Morobe, the UDF acting publicity secretary was detained on the same day and released when the emergency was lifted.

Eight people from UDF affiliates in the Northern Transvaal and Potchefstroom were detained for over eight months under Section 28 of the Internal Security Act which provides for "indefinite" preventive detention. They have been recently released after a court ruling challenged this legislation.

Rev Arnold Stofile, UDF Border general secretary and Jeff Mabena, UDF organiser in the region were detained for two months from February to April 1986, under the Internal Security Act. Rev Stofile, who gave evidence for the UDF in the New Zealand court case which ended the All Blacks tour last year was also detained for a couple of hours on his return to South Africa.

2.4. Torture of detainees

There have been numerous allegations of torture of detainees. The most publicised claims were those of 93 Port Elizabeth detainees who filed an urgent application to restrain the police from assaulting them on 25 September 1985.

Some of the allegations included whippings, being forced to eat splinters from a pickhandle broken during an assault and being forced to eat raw potatoes.

Mkhuseli Jack, Eastern Cape UDF exec member and consumer boycott organiser said in an affidavit that he was told to strip naked and a bucket of dirty water containing an irritant was poured over his body.

2.5. Deaths in detention.

Thirteen people died in police custody in 1985, one in security detention. Siphon Mutsi, a Cosas activist from Odendaalsrus in the Orange Free State, died in police custody on May 5, 1985. He was 20 years old.

On 11 April 1986, the recently elected Northern Transvaal UDF president, Peter Nchabaleng, died in detention, allegedly from a heart attack. When he was detained, 12 hours earlier, a family member heard the police saying, "This time, we are going to kill you". His death brought to three the number of deaths in police custody in one week in the Northern and Eastern Transvaal.

3. Assassinations and disappearances.

Since March 1985, growing numbers of our people have disappeared mysteriously or have been killed.

Prior to the declaration of the state of emergency this toll of terror against our people had already begun: From March to July 1985, 27 people went missing, six people disappeared and were later found killed, eight people were assassinated and a number of people were named on hit lists.

Eastern Cape organisations and the now banned Congress of South African

Students (Cosas) have been the hardest hit:

- * Cosas lost 16 members - nine disappeared and seven were assassinated.
- * The Port Elizabeth's Black Civic Association's president, Qaqawuli Godolozzi; general secretary, Siphon Hashe and organising secretary, Champion Galela went missing on their way to the Port Elizabeth airport in May 1985.
- * Four members of the Cradock Residents Association (Cradora) and Cradock Youth Association (Cradoya) disappeared and were later found dead. The four were: Mathew Goniwe, UDF rural organiser in the Eastern Cape and founder member of Cradora and Cradoya; Fort Calata, executive member of both Cradora and Cradoya; Sparrow Mkonto, executive member of Cradora and Sicelo Mhlawuli, a teacher in Oudshoorn. It is widely believed that the authorities were behind the killings.

On August 1, 1985, Victoria Mxenge, UDF Natal treasurer and member of the defence team of the UDF Pietermaritzburg treason trial, was gunned down in front of her Durban home.

Ngoako Ramalepe, an Azanian Student Organisation (Azaso) activist and president of the SRC at Modjadji College, Lebowa died as a result of police action. He was taken into custody by Lebowa police on 17 October 1985, was allegedly assaulted and subsequently dumped in the veld. There he was found by the South African Police and taken to Kwapane hospital where he died the next day.

In the Transkei, Batandwa Nondo was shot down in the middle of a street by Transkeian police at the end of 1985. He had been active in Azaso and at the time of his death he was working for a development agency.

4. Treason Trials

Presently 32 people are facing charges of treason in four different trials. The UDF treason trials are an attempt to criminalise legal resistance and to undermine the credibility of the UDF. They are also an attempt to disorganise UDF and its affiliates by removing their leadership.

4.1. Pietermaritzburg Treason Trial

Sixteen national UDF leaders from Natal and the Transvaal were charged with treason in February 1985 in Pietermaritzburg. They included: Archie Gumede and Albertina Sisulu (UDF president; Essop Jassat (Transvaal Indian Congress chairperson); Curtis Nkondo and Aubrey Mokoena (Release Mandela Committee exec members and past members of the Transvaal UDF exec); Cas Saloojee (past UDF national treasurer) and four leaders of the South African Allied Workers Union.

In December, 12 of the 16 trialists were discharged including all the UDF leaders.

On trial were not just 16 prominent people. The UDF was in the dock - its ideas, mode of operating and very existence were being put under legal scrutiny. The withdrawal of charges against 12 of the accused was a vindication of the legality of UDF.

A number of the accused were originally Section 28 detainees who had sought refuge in the British Consulate in Durban. Observers saw the Pietermaritzburg treason trial as an attempt to justify future Section 28 detentions after the government had borne a great deal of international criticism for these detentions.

However the withdrawal of charges casts even greater doubt on the quality of information that motivates such detentions as well as bannings and confiscation of passports.

4.2. Vaal Treason Trial

The two national secretaries of the UDF, Popo Molefe and Mosiuoa Lekota are presently accused with 20 others, most members of the Vaal Civic Association, for high treason.

The UDF is charged with conspiring with the African National Congress and South African Communist Party of instigating the Vaal rents uprising in September 1984.

Numerous witnesses have given evidence for the state including two alleged "ANC defectors". From their evidence it is clear that the case is being used to discredit recognised opponents of apartheid. For example it was alleged that Dr Beyers Naude gave sixty rand to a trained ANC guerilla. However the incident was alleged to have

occurred on 13 May 1985, three days after Naude had flown to Europe.

5. Other Trials

The DPSC recorded a total of 114 trials under the Internal Security Act and other acts during 1985, involving 2 368 people of whom 2067 were acquitted or had charges dropped against them. An exceptionally high number of people were charged with attending unlawful gatherings and demonstrations.

The large numbers of acquittals points to the fact that a lot of these charges are "trumped up" in an attempt to criminalise UDF activity and remove activists from the political arena. Bail is often very high and accompanied by restrictions making it difficult to continue political work.

Eastern Cape UDF president, Edgar Ngoyi, was charged with the murder of a policeman in June 1985 and initially refused bail.

5.1. Oscar Mphetha

Oscar Mphetha, veteran trade unionist and community leader and one of the first presidents of the UDF was sentenced in 1983 to five years imprisonment after a mammoth trial relating to unrest in Crossroads in 1980.

However he was released on R1 bail pending an appeal. The appeal failed in June 1985 and Mphetha who is 76, a diabetic and confined to a wheel chair, had to begin serving his sentence.

6. Bannings

In July 1983, after considerable international pressure banning orders were lifted over 50 people - almost all the people banned at the time.

Banning orders were used again in November 1985 against Trevor Manuel, UDF Western Cape exec member and in March 1986 against Mkhuseleli Jack, president of the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress and spokesperson for the Consumer Boycott Committee and Henry Fazzie, vice president of the UDF Eastern Cape. However the legislation was challenged and the orders have been declared invalid.

Many emergency detainees, especially in the Western Cape were restricted on their release from participating in political activity. Their restrictions lasted for the duration of the emergency.

Steve Tshwete, Border UDF president was banished to the Ciskei, before fleeing the country in August 1985.

6.1. Bannings of meetings

Since September 1984 bans have been placed on a extraordinary range of gatherings and activities including concerts, fun runs and conferences.

An annual blanket ban is imposed on outdoor meetings and last year all meetings to discuss school boycotts and work stay aways were banned. All meetings of 64 organisations, mostly UDF affiliates were banned for six months in 30 magisterial districts on 31st December 1985. Most these districts are in the Eastern Cape.

Severe restrictions are frequently placed on funerals of political and unrest victims. However they are often ignored.

7. Banning of Cosas

The Congress of South African Students, the largest UDF affiliate was banned in August 1985. In its six years of existence, it became the largest high school students' organisation with 42 branches nationwide including small towns and rural areas.

Cosas has borne more repression than any other organisation and it was only after a systematic campaign of repression failed to destroy this growing and resilient organisation, that the state resorted to banning it.

8. Rural and bantustan repression

As UDF organisation has intensified in the rural areas and bantustans so has repression. Below is a incomplete description of repression in the rural areas.

8.1. Ciskei

38 UDF officials and members of UDF affiliates were detained in the Ciskei in 1985. Saawu, which is particularly strong in townships in and around the Ciskei, has been banned from operating in the Ciskei.

8.2. Bophutatswana

The killing of 11 people in Winterveld by the Bophutatswana police on 26 March 1986 is evidence of escalating repression in this Transvaal bantustan.

According to a member of the Mabopane Winterveld Crisis Committee, 50 people have allegedly died in incidents involving the police since January 15 this year.

More than 500 people had passed through the hands of the police and defence force troops from the South African and homeland governments without being charged, but were all released after allegedly being assaulted.

Alleged forms of torture include the squeezing of private parts with pliers, shocking of testicles, the rape of female detainees and assaults with sjamboks.

UDF activists and supporters have also been dismissed from their jobs or transferred to other areas as a result of their political activities.

8.3. KwaZulu

Inkatha vigilantes have imposed a reign of terror on UDF activists and supporters in and around KwaZulu. The National Education Crisis Conference held over the Easter weekend was badly disrupted by two busloads of alleged Inkatha impis and two people were killed.

In February 1986, Tobias Mgobhozi, chairperson of the Kwandengezi People's Organisation and UDF leader, was killed bringing to six the number of UDF activists allegedly killed by Inkatha vigilantes.

His funeral had to be postponed twice after threats and when it was eventually held mourners were attacked.

The president of the UDF, Archie Gumede, was assaulted by Inkatha impis when addressing a workers meeting in Hambanathi in April 1985.

Countless homes of UDF activists and supporters have been fire bombed and destroyed, forcing many to flee the townships. When some took refuge at a community centre established by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920's, it was also attacked and destroyed by impis in August 1985.

UDF affiliates, Cosas and Azaso were banned in KwaZulu in 1985.

8.4. Lebowa

In addition to the recent death in Lebowa police detention of Peter Nchabeleng, on 16 June 1985, a UDF activist, Shadrack Mafokoane was shot dead by the Lebowa police in Mankweng and in September 1985, UDF activist and president of the Modjudji Training College SRC, Ngaoko Ramalepe died in detention in November 1985. His body was dumped in the veld.

UDF activists throughout the rural townships and villages have been the victims of vindictive detentions, bombings and shootings. Two members of the UDF Northern Transvaal executive had their houses petrol bombed in the same week that Nchabeleng was killed. Joyce Mabudafasi was badly injured and the brother of the second target, Peter Mokaba, was hurt.

9. Vigilantes

Vigilante groups have emerged in many parts of the country particularly since mid-1985, intent on physically punishing those who oppose the apartheid

government and its lackeys, the community councillors and bantustan leaders.

Hundreds of community leaders, activists and young people have been at the receiving end of vigilantes who often operate with the government's approval and tacit encouragement.

It is no co-incidence that they have emerged almost simultaneously in different areas where the political crisis has reached unprecedented proportions and the government has lost control.

The purpose of vigilantes is to alter the balance of power where the re-establishment of political control is beyond the capacity of the SADF and SAP who are limited by publicity and legal restrictions to perpetuate the brutal deeds needed to crush organisation. It is widely believed that vigilantes operate with the approval and support of the security forces.

Examples of areas where vigilante attacks have occurred include Moutse in the Northern Transvaal, Leandra in the Eastern Transvaal and Huhudi in the Northern Cape.

9.1. Moutse

In Moutse, the Mbhokoto vigilante group was set up by Chief Skosana, chief minister of KwaNdebele, after Moutse residents opposed incorporation into KwaNdebele.

At the launch of the Mbhokoto, Chief Skosana publically gave them free reign to deal with "troublemakers" and people "enforcing boycotts".

Members of the recently affiliated Moutse Youth Congress have been common targets of the Mbhokoto.

9.2. Huhudi

In Huhudi, the UDF-affiliated Huhudi Civic Association (Huca) has actively organised against the forced removal of their township. In November 1985, a vigilante group known as "Inkatha" began attacking people opposed to the removal.

A number of young people were brutally assaulted as they were returning from a protest meeting. On 25 November, a member of the Huhudi Youth Organisation, also a UDF affiliate, was shot dead by vigilantes. The homes belonging to Huca official, Mr London and chairperson of the UDF Northern Cape region, Hofman Galeng were burnt down.

9.3. Leandra

The Leandra Action Committee (LAC) has also been organising residents against forced removals. Shortly after the LAC passed a motion of no confidence in the community council for not taking up the issue, a vigilante group began harassing members of the LAC and Leandra Youth Congress.

Leandra's Chief Ampie Mayisa, a prominent UDF leader was brutally murdered by vigilantes in January 1986. In April 1986, his son's eyes were pierced out by vigilantes the day he emerged from hiding.

9.4. Chesterville

In Chesterville, Natal, a vigilante group known as the "A-Team" have attacked many UDF leaders and activists. They are heavily armed with automatic rifles and shot guns. Ian Zamisa, a Saawu organiser was killed by the A-Team late last year.

10. Petrol bombings of homes

Members of UDF affiliates nationwide have had their homes attacked by petrol bombs. Nobody has ever been brought to court for these offences.

Below is an incomplete chronology of petrol bomb attacks:

* The car of the Transvaal secretary of the UDF, Moss Chikane was petrol bombed outside his home in January 1985.

* Three people including an one year old were seriously injured when the homes of two UDF members were petrol bombed in Thabong, a township near Welkom on

February 26, 1985.

* Numerous Port Elizabeth activists were petrol bombed in June 1985 including those of UDF vice president Henry Fazzie, Pebco official Ernest Malgas and Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation president, Ivy Gcina. UDF Eastern Cape president Edgar Ngoyi and his family were left homeless after their home was petrol bombed.

The homes of missing Port Elizabeth activists, Qaqawuli Godolozu and Andile Yawa were also attacked.

* In July 1985 the home of Tom Letsenyoe, executive member of the Tumahule Civic Association was fire bombed. A day later the home of his colleague, Vuyo Dabi was attacked.

* In August 1985, the home of Abel Nkabinde, chairperson of the Leandra Action Committee was petrol bombed.

* In September 1985 the home of Durban sociologist, Dr Fatima Meer was petrol bombed.

* Rev Hans Hlaethwa, chairperson of the Soshanguve Residents Association, north of Pretoria became a victim of fire bombers in October 1985.

* December 1985 saw the homes of political lawyer Pricilla Jana and Dr Momoniat, father of the TIC secretary petrol bombed on the same night.

* Attempts were also made in December to set fire to the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches which also houses the UDF, DPSC and Cawusa offices.

* On December 30, 1985 UDF patron and prominent priest Father Mkhatswa had his church in Sohsanguve attacked with at least two petrol bombs. The home of Peter Manchidi, a UDF activist in the area was extensively damaged by a petrol bomb at the same time.

* Ephraim Mogale, a founder member of COSAS had his home petrol bombed and riddled with bullets in January 1985. He had just been released from Robben Island.

* A hand grenade was thrown at the home of Ekangala Action Committee secretary, Robert Mdala in March 86. Ekangala is a township on the Far East Rand.

* Since January 1986, over 20 activists homes in Atteridgeville, outside of Pretoria have been attacked by petrol bombs and hand grenades. At least one activist, Esther Masuku has been killed. Her son, also a UDF activist and office bearer of the Saulsville Atteridgeville Youth Organisation was injured. In April an attempt was made to obtain a court order to restrain the police from petrol bombing UDF activist home's. Information had been obtained linking the local police to the bomb attacks.