

# udf and the international struggle

The international goals of the United Democratic Front are in no way different from its internal goals. We seek to end apartheid, to free our people from the scourge that makes their lives miserable. To effect this, we engage inside the country, in mass political action to demonstrate our rejection of apartheid and especially its most recent manifestation in the New Constitution and the Koornhof Bills, and the State of Emergency.

The UDF is only two years old, but already behind us we have a lot of experience in the struggle. It is important for us to learn what we can from our own short history. Here we will look at how the UDF was able to make important international gains in the so-called "Consulate Affair".

In both internal and external struggles our strategy has been to isolate the racist regime from any support, to mobilise the greatest possible support behind the democratic movement and to encourage any action that will reduce the capacity of the regime to continue its oppressive system.

For our internal strategy to succeed we need to take into account the concrete conditions existing locally. Equally, the way that we wage the struggle

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on an international level must take account of the special character of international relations, its specific dynamics. The way that one conducts the international struggle is not the same as mounting an internal campaign.

When you are fighting in the mountains and jungles you cannot apply the same strategies and tactics that you do when you are fighting in the desert. Your goal will be the same, but your strategy and tactics cannot be identical. We need to know the terrain, and we need to develop appropriate tactics and strategies.

## need for international support

We need to form a correct assessment of the complex international relationship of forces. Neither the forces against apartheid, the Socialist States, African and non-aligned states, some of the more democratic Western and Latin American states, nor the more collaborationist Western and Latin American states, are monoliths. We need to understand the strengths, divisions and weaknesses within and between these states and groupings of states. If we are able to make an effective intervention we cannot settle for easy simplistic analyses that ignore the complexity and precise character of international relations.

We need, in our international activities, to form a variety of types of relationships with international organisations, states, political organisations and church groups, etc. In each case we have to assess the character of each organisation or state. One cannot make identical requests, nor expect identical relationships with every type of state. International

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relations are governed by diplomatic conventions and the observance of protocol, and these should be respected.

Similarly, we need to evaluate the limits to our expectations in any particular relationship. Certain states and organisations will genuinely assist us because they support our struggle and understand that it is a national liberation struggle. Other states and organisations may hope to drive a wedge between the various components of the forces struggling for liberation. Such states might try to mute the most advanced sections of the democratic movement, seek to transform our struggle into a civil rights movement, and attempt to project a 'third force' outside or within our struggle.

The fact that certain states and organisations may not totally share our goals or may not share most of our goals, the fact that certain of their motives in entering the relationship may not coincide with ours, does not bar us from forming a relationship on terms favourable to us. Certainly it does not mean that such a relationship is without advantages for us.

We can learn from the international strategy of the Vietnamese in their epic struggle against imperialist occupation. At one stage the Vietnamese liberation movement sought United States support against the French colonists. Then, in the second phase of struggle after defeat of the French, the Vietnamese played off the French against the American imperialists.

Nevertheless, whatever relations we enter into, whatever diplomatic initiatives we undertake, must be measured against our overall goals. We must therefore ask, when evaluating any particular action or possibility: does it or will it advance the struggle to end apartheid, either by widening or strengthening the anti-apartheid forces, and/or by weakening the regime and/

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or by exposing its criminal acts to the world and/or by loosening the ties between the regime and its sympathisers?

Alternatively, any activity that might diminish the power and prestige of the democratic forces against apartheid, any activity that might set the struggle back, must obviously be rejected.

Just as the UDF is formed internally on the basis of a united opposition to apartheid shared by a variety of groupings, externally it seeks support from all opponents of apartheid. Generally our relations are close to those who are sympathetic to the UDF and with whom we share a generally similar understanding on a number of issues. But we have to establish correct and principled relationships with other states and organisations. It may be very difficult to establish meaningful relationships with states which condemn apartheid on the one hand, but whose internal policies we may find repugnant, or whose attitudes on certain issues may be different to ours. It may, nevertheless, be in the interests of the UDF to establish and maintain certain of these relationships - provided that they serve to advance our struggle.

If we are to conduct a sophisticated domestic and foreign policy, we have to be adept not only at direct attacks and responses, but also at spotting and exploiting differences in the enemy camp. Even with out-and-out reactionary governments our job is to make it difficult for them to collaborate with apartheid. And within reactionary states, our quarrel is not with every party or organisation in such a state. Nor do we have any quarrel with the ordinary people who generally support our struggle.

These are, then, some of the considerations that should guide our international policy. How this has been pursued in relation to the elections and their after-

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math, especially the consulate affair will now be considered. Finally, attention will be given to future priorities.

## elections and their aftermath

During the recent elections for the new 'tricameral' parliament, the UDF sent letters to various national and international organisations and states, explaining its objection to the new constitution, emerging from a regime that has no right to govern the people of South Africa. It called for expressions of solidarity. Amongst the most significant were that of the late Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who called for a boycott on the eve of the polls, and the unprecedented statement of the United Nations Security Council, declaring the new Constitution to be null and void.

Since the elections, the popular resistance has thrown the regime into a panic. Not only have leading democrats been arrested, but state terror has been unleashed against ordinary people on an unprecedented scale.

What would be the correct response of the UDF in this situation? The scale of repression appeared to signal a return to 'darker times' with a possible banning of UDF, wholesale banning of affiliates and leaders. The job of the UDF, it is suggested, was on the one hand to take defensive action, whatever action that could give our organisations protection. At the same time it had to intensify its offensive against the apartheid regime and its allies. In a changing situation

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it had to adopt flexible tactics in order to obtain maximum advantage. Its job was to ensure that whatever the regime sought to do to the democratic movement, would cost it a great deal, whether in internal resistance or increased international embarrassment and isolation. For everything that is done to us, we must try to exact a price, sufficiently dear to make the racists think again before they attack us.

## occupation of the consulate

After being freed by the Natal Supreme Court on the basis that their detention orders were defective, 5 UDF and Natal Indian Congress activists went underground. After the orders were modified, police launched a massive search for them. Had they simply given themselves up, these men would undoubtedly have been 'victims of apartheid'.

Instead of being objects of our pity and/or protest alone, the five UDF and NIC leaders, joined by Paul David, who was also being sought, presented themselves at the British Consulate and applied for temporary asylum.

Kader Hassim of APDUSA (before giving himself up to the police) suggested that he did not want to go the consulate because he did not want to give Britain the opportunity of appearing to be the champion of South Africa's oppressed people. "Britain is not an ally or friend of the oppressed and exploited people here or anywhere else". "Britain, together with the other Western powers, are the technical advisers of the Botha regime". (City Press 23.09.84)

Now I am sure that the Consulate Six had no illu-

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sions about Thatcher's government. Let us examine what they achieved, by creatively exploiting international contradictions:

\* Instead of giving themselves up and going meekly to prison, they took the initiative and created an entirely new theatre of struggle.

\* This threw into the international limelight the repression of democratic leaders, whose "offence" was to have campaigned against the racist constitution of an illegitimate regime. The popular victory against the constitution, which was well known within the country, became internationally publicised.

They were thus able to externalise and take forward the offensive around the constitutional 'reforms' by providing an international issue through which the allies of the South African people could focus attention on the various atrocities being perpetrated by the apartheid regime.

\* This wiped out what 'gains' had been made in PW Botha's European tour in 'respectabilising' the regime - and upstaged his inauguration as State President.

\* Simultaneously, these events drove a wedge between the South African and Thatcher regimes. The UK government was unable to kick the UDF leaders out. South Africa was unable to march into the consulate and retaliated by refusing to send its alleged arms smugglers back to Britain. The result was increased tension between 'friends'. One

symptom of this tension was the United Kingdom's voting in favour of a militant anti-apartheid resolution in the UN Security Council. Normally, they would abstain or veto such resolutions.

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\* These actions drove a further wedge within the Western Five. While the UK and US were demonstrated to be collaborators, France sought to distance itself, with an unprecedented appearance before the special committee against apartheid.

\*Anti-apartheid demonstrations in the United States on South African Consulate premises have clearly been influenced by the Durban Consulate occupation. These activities have increased the pressure on the policy of "constructive engagement" and forced Reagan to condemn detentions and apartheid in general.

\* The Consulate Six made use of international media coverage to speak about events well beyond their own personal situation.

Their occupation of the consulate provided a means for throwing the spotlight on racist repression in general, whether through detentions, shooting in the townships or other violence. It is unprecedented that we should read a statement by Archie Gumede, Billy Nair and Paul David on the front pages of not only overseas newspapers but as the lead story of our own newspapers. In the Star 18.10.84 we read of their call on the government that "in the interests of peaceful change to stop all police violence in the Vaal Triangle, meet the demands of the people in this area, return the four men to London to face charges of arms smuggling, stop all acts of denigration and threats against the United-Democratic Front and undertake to scrap detention without trial."

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The entire consulate affair, taken together with heavy handed responses by Pik Botha, Le Grange and others, served to reinforce the isolation and pariah status of the South African police state.

## questions for discussion

1. What is meant by saying that the international goals of the UDF are the same as the internal goals, but the way in which we conduct these different parts of our struggle may be different? Do you agree with this?
2. Discuss the tactics and strategy of the Consulate 6, and compare these with the statement made by Kadir Hassim of APDUSA (see page 45 above)
3. "The struggle will be won inside South Africa, not outside ... therefore UDF should forget about the international struggle". - Discuss this statement.

