

Consumer ban lifted as leaders take note of community demands

"IF YOU are leading the people, you must always look behind to see if they are still following," says Wonga Nkala, president of the Uitenhage Youth Congress (Uyco).

He was commenting on the lifting of the consumer boycott in Uitenhage last month after detainees were released and the emergency lifted. The boycott had led to shops closing down and some white shopkeepers dropping racist attitudes.

At the time a national consumer boycott was on the cards. It was felt a continuous consumer boycott would be too taxing on people.

Since the Uitenhage killings in March last year, Nkala was twice charged and acquitted, refused bail, and detained from court on acquittal. In an interview with Saspu National, he spoke about some of the lessons and gains of the past year.

A major victory won by the people was the demise of the town council.

After this, organisations were left with the question what now?

This is when the idea of street and area committees came up, says Nkala. Many people were drawn into activity through these. Every person can participate and decisions

can be taken democratically.

Street and area committees grew to be the foundations of progressive organisations and the foundations of people's power in Uitenhage.

"These were a great leap forward. If a decision or action is to be effective, it has to be taken and done by the people themselves. Even government accusations of instigators are hollow now because decisions are taken and carried out by the community as a whole at all levels".

It helped especially during the State of Emergency. Organisations couldn't communicate with the people through mass meetings and media. The democratic structures were able to resist the clampdown and communication wasn't totally broken".

But the structures are not yet perfect. Coordination and the political aspect are still lacking, says Nkala.

"Some area committees thought they were just courts, since people were reporting all cases to them. They had to be educated about the broader political duties of the street and area committees. This is an ongoing process and attention is being paid to educating people and developing progressive leadership".

Uyco is concentrating on education programmes and discussing political issues, including past campaigns and lessons. But repression still makes meetings difficult.

In dealing with discipline, area committees have to decide which cases they are able to deal with.

The aim is to get the person who

commits a crime is made to understand why it is wrong. Sentences avoid physical punishment.

Emphasis is on changing the way people think. This is what made them commit the crime in the first place. Only if a person understands why a crime was wrong will they accept the punishment.

Some sentences have been to assist elderly people or organisations, eg. cleaning yards and washing windows, or distributing pamphlets.

Street committees have helped heal past tensions with Naawu. "In the past, they were saying that the struggle ends on the factory floor. Now the workers, the members and leaders of Naawu, are being organised into the street committees.

On March 21 60 000 people gathered in Uitenhage to commemorate the anniversary of last year's Langa massacre.

PEOPLE didn't come to the Langa memorial meeting to shed tears. They came to rededicate themselves to the struggle.

The struggle has reached new heights and there is no turning back. More than ever before people are determined to fight. People are prepared to die and nothing can stop them.

This was the message as about 60 000 people gathered at KwaNobuhle stadium, Uitenhage, to commemorate the victims of the Langa massacre on March 21 last year.

In Uitenhage and PE, workers and residents, staged a massive stayaway, called jointly by the UDF and Cosatu to commemorate the day.

Speaker after speaker at the rally said democratic forces would intensify their struggle for the demands in the Freedom Charter.

"The oppressed and exploited people are fighting against the system. Through mass action and mass resistance the people are sowing the seeds of popular organisation", said an Azaso speaker.

"We need to unite as students, workers and residents, we need to consolidate our gains".

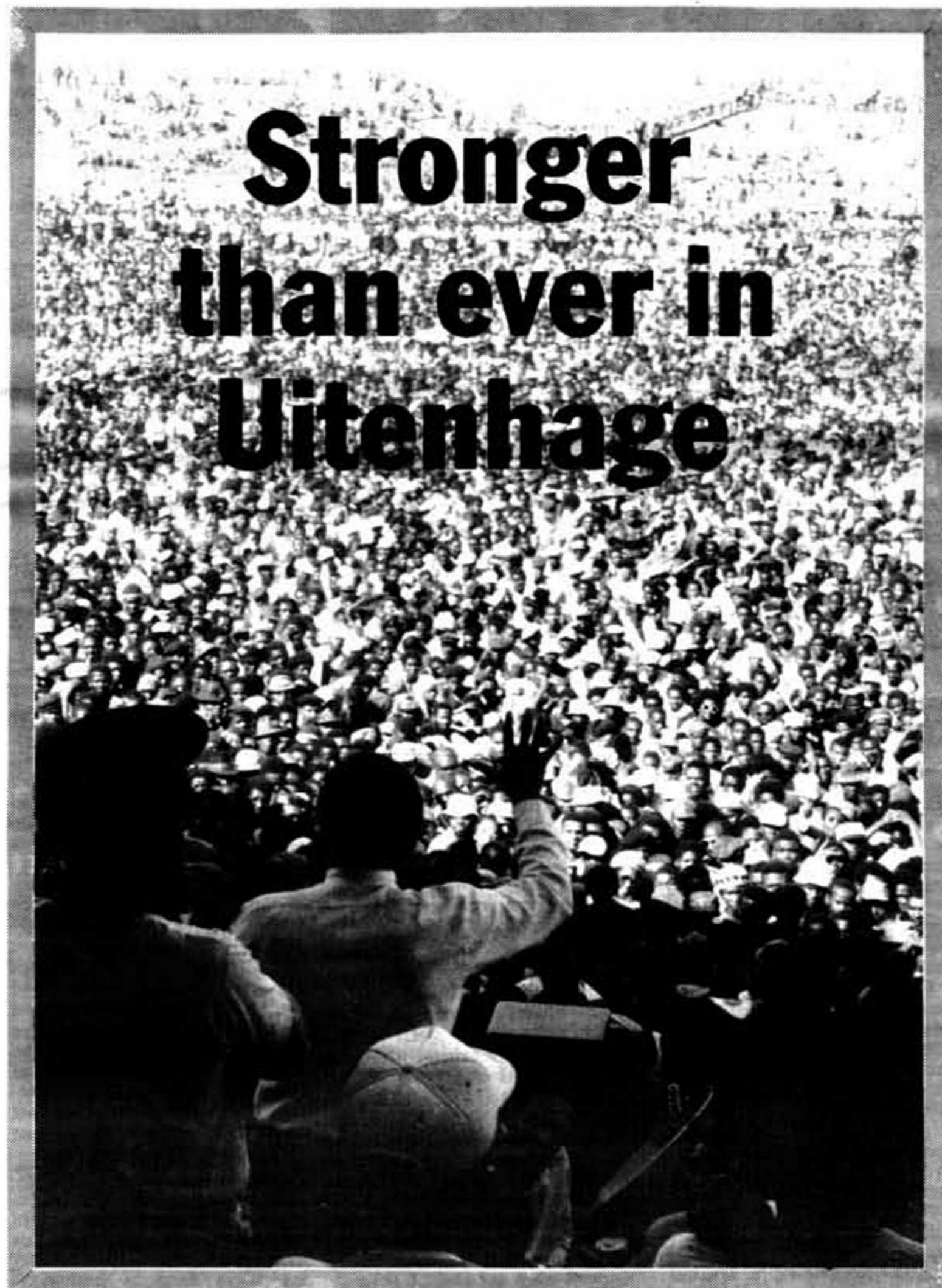
"The progressive movement will continue to strive for the unbanning of the ANC and the release of political prisoners", he said.

Uitenhage Youth Congress (Uyco) president Wonga Nkala said those killed in the Langa massacre last year had made the supreme sacrifice. On that day the government revealed its true colours.

"We are here so the fallen heroes can speak", he said, "so our mothers shot in Sharpeville, our sisters in Soweto, our brothers who died on the ninth floor of John Vorster square, can speak through us".

People's opposition in Uitenhage led to the demise of the community council. They had made apartheid unworkable, he said. "The struggles we are waging are not only for a non-racial and democratic SA, but for a SA where the interests of the working class are paramount", he said. "For this we are prepared to die".

The Release Mandela Committee's Aubrey Mokoena read a harrowing and rousing message from Winnie Mandela.



60 000 gathered at Uitenhage to remember those killed on March 21 last year.

The people of South Africa want peace, they want to govern SA together, said Rev Mcebisi Xundu. But the SA regime continued its aggression against the people.

UDF patron Allan Boesak said 1985 was a turning point in the history of the struggle. There is no turning back.

"We can't undo what has happened or bring people back to life", he said, "but we can make a promise to ourselves and to our children

that those who died didn't die in vain".

The Botha government would cling to power as long as they could. But the people were determined to be free and no-one could stop them.

Billy Nair from the UDF and Natal Indian Congress said as long as the apartheid system continued more lives would be lost. Stressing the importance of organisation and discipline, he said every facet of

life, every street must be organised.

"If people don't join organisations we won't succeed in destroying apartheid".

UDF national president, Curnick Ndlovu, praised the late Moses Mabhida, ANC, SACTU and SACP leader.

After the commemoration people moved to the graveyard to unveil a tombstone for last year's Langa victims.

And the call for action and the stayaway to commemorate the shootings at Langa came from the factories and the area committees.

Asked about negotiations around the Langa removals and the consumer boycott Nkala said people didn't see the struggle as being conducted only through negotiations. "But where negotiations can further our cause, we will use them".

People didn't put all their confidence in meeting the town council. But they would know they had tried all possible means of resolving the issue peacefully.

One Development Board official called organisations to a meeting and set up an ad-hoc committee of five to 'represent residents' interests'. UDF affiliates didn't attend, but some people did.

Two days later the ad-hoc committee was exposed as a stepping stone to form the Regional Services Council. People have rejected this as perpetuating the community and town council system.

A lesson was learnt from this. People can't just go and do these things on their own. Any structure must come from and be accountable to the people.

Planning their own future in Langa

LANGA RESIDENTS have demanded that the government pay for Langa to be upgraded instead of removing people.

"Our sweat and the sweat of our fathers has made businessmen live in luxury. All we are asking is what is rightfully ours."

Langa has 50 000 residents and lies next to a white suburb in Uitenhage. After the March 21 massacre last year, 350 white residents petitioned the government to remove of Langa residents to Kwa Nobuhle. Soon 426 families living closest to the white suburb were served with eviction notices.

Local residents responded: "We will not move, with a court order or without."

The court case was held in the supreme court in Port Elizabeth on the March 25. Before it started a representative of the community was offered a deal. If the 426 families moved to Kwa Nobuhle they could stay there without paying rent or service charges and the government would upgrade the rest of Langa as the case would then be dropped.

The representative said he had no mandate to accept. The court case went ahead and judgment was reserved.

Langa residents commissioned a group of progressive planners, architects and engineers, Planact, to draw up proposals for upgrading Langa.

Community facilities are bad. There is one small clinic, a few uneven playing fields and only one tap for every 1158 people. There is no school. The roads and storm water drainage are poor.

Planact proposed a two year emergency upgrading process which could bring services up to a minimum standard. This would cost about R3,5 million.

Next would come flush toilets, running water, electricity and tarred roads at the cost of about R22 million. New community facilities such as schools, libraries and halls will also have to be built.

The following principles would be used:

- Langa's democratic structures must have full control over the process, making major decisions and controlling spending;
- Upgrading must be affordable to people;
- Sufficient land must be available;
- The community must get the economic benefits. For example residents should be employed to do the work.
- Land rights must be secure.