

# grassroots

Vol. 10 No. 1 January 1989 FREE!

This newspaper has been covered in terms of emergency regulations  
**SPECIAL EDITION**

## Fighting for the truth!

**STOFFEL BOTHA** says Grassroots is subversive. He says that we portray the African National Congress and its leaders in a favourable light.

Grassroots has never lied about the ANC - we have always tried to tell our readers the true facts about this organisation.

If the facts about the ANC portray the organisation in a favourable light, this is not Grassroots' doing.

The ANC is banned by the Government. Yet, everyone talks about the ANC - what they stand for, who their leaders are, and about the movement's activities.

Cabinet Ministers talk about the ANC all the time on television, radio and in the daily papers.

All this talk about the ANC has made our readers curious about the movement. Indeed, the ANC is held in high regard in our communities.

Its leaders, Mandela and Tambo, are universally respected by Governments and citizens alike.

Albert Nothnagel, National Party MP, recognises the ANC as a "very important factor" which the Government must address. The maverick AWB leader Terreblanche says there are only two political factors in the South African political equation - "Die AWB en die ANC".

Representative delegations of clergy, businessmen, academics, sports administrators (including the SARB's Danie Craven and SARU's Ebrahim Patel, the National Soccer League and the South African Soccer Federation) have had talks with the ANC. Even Cabinet Minister Allan Hendrikse has tried unsuccessfully to meet the move-



Protesting students make it clear that they support the ANC: Stoffel and his government would prefer you not to see this.

ment. Despite this widespread interest in the organisation, the Government seeks to deny our readers the right to information about the ANC.

The ANC is an organisation which occupies great importance in the minds of the peace-loving people in South Africa.

For forty eight years it operated as a legal organisation campaigning peacefully for an end to white minority rule.

Its support in the 1950's ran into hundreds of thousands and reached all corners of South Africa.

When the organisation was banned by the Government in 1960, support for it did not decline.

Indeed, even though the organisation took up tactics of armed struggle because no other road was left open to it, we believe its support in the black community actually grew.

Today, the ANC is undeniably the major political force in the black community. Nelson Mandela is found to be the most popular leader in almost every survey of black political opinion. Furthermore, Mandela was honoured in almost every capital in the world on his 70th birthday.

It is our view that peace in South Africa depends on the Government being prepared to negotiate with the ANC. This is not projecting the ANC in a favourable light - it is stating a reality.

By calling for the unbanning of the ANC we are not promoting violence in South Africa - we are promoting peace.

Violence is promoted by the restriction of legal political channels of expression such as the restriction of organisations and the banning of newspapers. Such actions lead some of our people to abandon hope in the use of peaceful means to claim what is rightfully theirs, and take up arms.

We believe that the ANC is a very important factor in South Africa's future.

The ANC wants to negotiate and advocate peace. In contrast, the South African Government does not want to negotiate with the ANC.

The Government is regarded by the majority of people to be the cause of hardship, deprivation, disorder, injustice, sickness and death through its policy of apartheid, forced removals, bannings, restrictions and detentions.

Grassroots has always advocated a peaceful resolution to the conflict in South Africa. At the same time, we have always insisted that a peaceful resolution depends on democratic rights being granted to all South Africans.

We believe all South Africans form one single nation and that a democratic system is essential to peace in our country.

## Grassroots goes international...

The Campaign to save Grassroots and other threatened publications has been taken to the international political arena by two Grassroots executive members.

As a result of their efforts, the warnings against Grassroots, New Era and Work in Progress were discussed at a meeting in London this week between the Eminent Church Persons Group

and Britain's foreign minister Sir Geoffrey Howe.

Rehana Roussouw and Mansoor Jaffer, arrived in London on the week-end to begin a European tour for Grassroots and the Save the Press Campaign.

They held brief talks with the leader of the church delegation, former Zimbabwean President, Rev. Canaan Banana.

Earlier the two met

with Phillip Spender, the Director of Index on Censorship, an international censorship monitoring organisation.

The organisation has mobilised its members in Scandinavia, Holland and the United States, following the meeting.

Mr Spender said: "We will circulate information about what is going on. We are also organising letters of protest to be sent to newspapers in

South Africa so that the concern of people here can be demonstrated."

He went on to say: "This is bound to be an ongoing campaign. If the government insists on carrying out attacks on the independent press, we will be tested to find more ways of countering the attacks.

"We urge the South African government to restrain itself from carrying out these attacks and to stop using its

physical force and firepower.

"The more newspapers in South Africa can feed the outside world with up-to-date and accurate information about the attack on the press, and the crisis in South Africa, the more their friends and supporters outside will be able to help them," he said.

"We must make sure therefore, that what the government does, it

cannot do in silence." Rossouw and Jaffer are also due to meet UK Foreign minister Lynda Chalker later in the week.

They will also be holding talks with the British Government's All-party Committee on South Africa.

Urgent telexes have been sent to church groups, trade unions, community organisations across the world warning them of the la-

test attack on Grassroots and New Era.

These included appeals for letters of protest to be sent to Botha.

We appeal to our readers to fill in the postcard on the back page of this newspaper and send it to Stoffel, to show him our disgust at his actions.

**DEFEND GRASSROOTS: DEFEND YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW**

## grassroots comment

### Stoffel will not silence us!

The Apartheid government is in a deeper crisis than ever before.

Politically they have lost control. Last year's disastrous municipal election proved once and for all their inability to pull the wool over our eyes.

The white ruling class is in disarray. Their economy is in shambles. Starvation, unemployment and hardship stalk the land.

Day-by-day international pressure grows. Sanctions, and sports and cultural boycotts, are hitting hard.

Our people who are forced to face high rents, low wages, high taxes and absurd upgrading schemes are getting very angry.

The white minority rulers are desperate.

Their attack on the democratic movement has never been more vicious.

No opposition is left untouched. They criminalise our churches, bishops and priests. Our schools and townships are their battlefields. Our workers are terrorised and prevented from trade union activity.

They are trying to smash our organisations and ban our leaders. They come into our communities to kill and instigate violence among us.

Our newspapers, too, are being silenced. There are over 100 laws which dictate what publications may and may not say.

In 1985, when the first state of emergency was imposed, the Press was severely restricted.

When the state of emergency was renewed in 1986, even more Press curbs were added.

In 1987 new emergency laws were introduced which allow the state to issue warnings to publications which it does not like. If the warnings are ignored, publications can be closed down.

It was under these circumstances that Grassroots, New Era and several other publications received initial warnings from the Minister of Home Affairs, Stoffel Botha. Grassroots, New Era and Work in Progress received their final warnings this month, which means Botha can now close them down for up to six months.

But we know the regime is not strong.

Their reform/repression strategy has succeeded only in increasing our determination to fight for a non-racial, democratic and just society.

They have not stopped our protests, nor forced us into submission.

The South African freedom struggle has never been easy. But our source of strength is drawn from the spirit of militant defiance which characterises everything we do.

It is that strength and spirit which has carried us through the many battles we have fought. But our march towards victory is not complete. The war rages on.

This year we are again going to be called upon to display our courage and commitment.

We are not going to take these threats of closure lying down.

An attack against the people's papers is an attack on the whole democratic movement.

The truth is necessary for any process towards democracy and justice.

Let us rally together  
in defence of  
the people's papers.  
Don't let Stoffel stop us.

# The people make history...

# The p fights



One of the thousands of mourners at the Cradock funeral of Mathew Goniwe and his comrades in 1985. Grassroots has always reported on the conditions and events in the rural areas.

UNLIKE most newspapers in South Africa, Grassroots is not owned by big business whose only interest is in making profits.

In South Africa until 1980, it was only the rich and the powerful who had access to the press.

The poor and the voteless were always ignored.

In 1980, this was changed when Grassroots was set up. The paper began to reflect the views of the silenced community.

In 1980, an upsurge swept schools in the Cape Peninsula. Parents and students came together to address student grievances.

When calm returned to the schools, the parent-student committees turned to community issues and students took up their parents' grievances of poor wages and high rents.

Youth and civic organisations began to form, but the grievances they highlighted were ignored by the large newspapers.

Grassroots went to organisations and the communities and asked how they could help.

These organisations joined Grassroots which became their paper. They decided what stories would be written. Grassroots was the only voice they had. In the first few editions, the paper was filled with stories of hardship and suffering in the black communities and the attempts of organisations to improve their conditions.

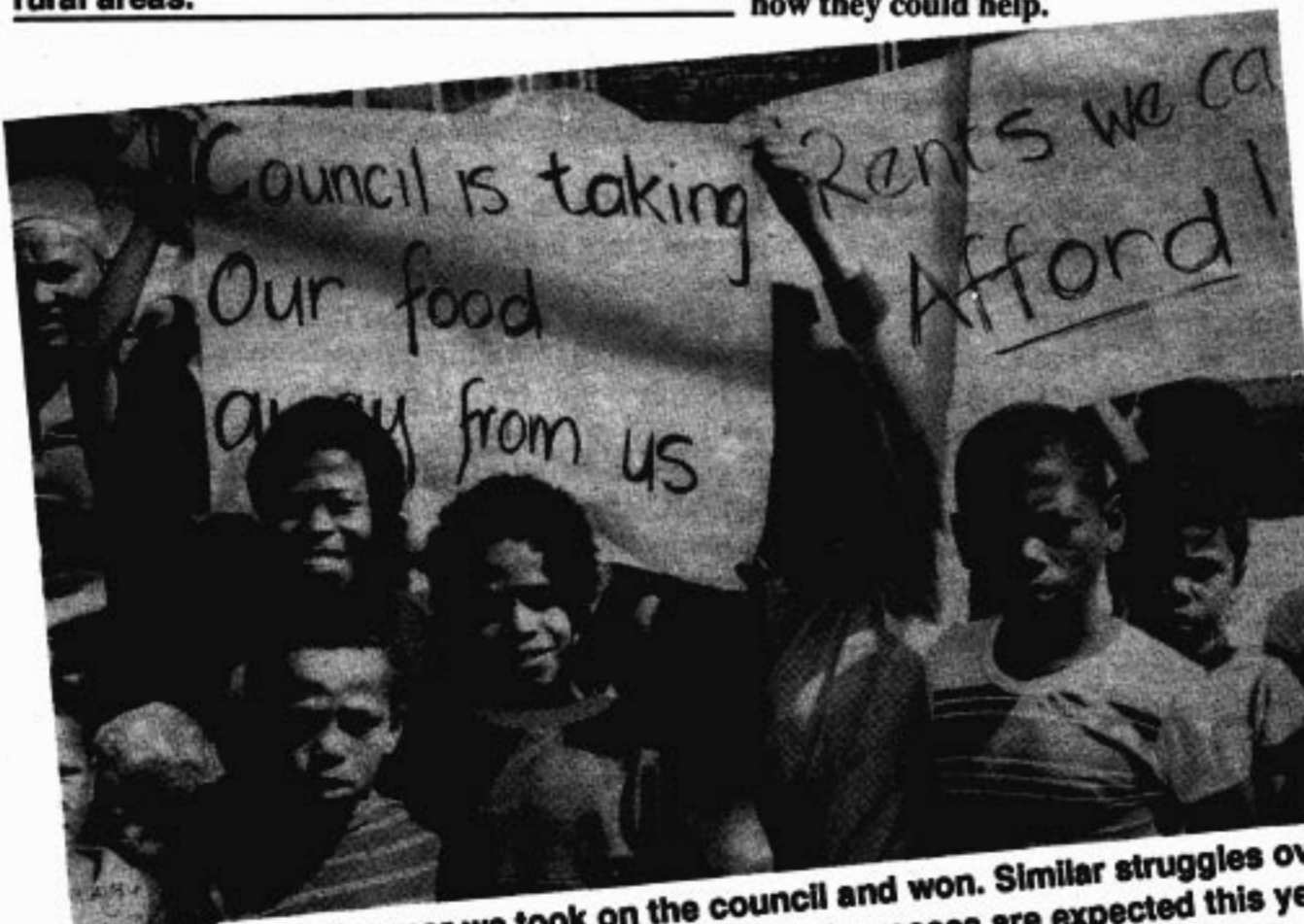
The paper assisted by publishing stories on how to start an organisation, how to chair meetings, and gave examples of people who had successfully done so.

The stories were written by the people themselves, giving people an opportunity to learn writing skills.

Grassroots assisted organisations with campaigns in their areas. In Mitchell's Plain, the Electricity Petition Group campaigned around the problem of poor estimation of the electricity bills.

When Grassroots published stories about the EPC, it gave them a chance to reach thousands of homes in the area.

Members of organisations went



1982 was the year we took on the council and won. Similar struggles over rent increases are expected this year



Bravery and barricades

## OUR READERS SPEAK OUR READERS SPEAK OUR READERS

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**Amy Thornton - Restricted Chairperson of Cape Democrats:**

"In the nine years since Grassroots started, it has become the voice of the voiceless. Final warnings and attempts to get it off the streets will in no way remove what Grassroots stands for or what will be said in the future."

**Moegsien Williams - Editor of South**

"The government is intent on smashing publications that promote and articulate an alternative society. I think that all people who care about press freedom should object strongly and go as far as trying to stop this government from closing publications such as Grassroots and New Era."

**Randall van der Heever - CTPA executive**

"Grassroots has made a huge contribution to critical and creative thinking in education, upheld the spirit of People's education and effectively conscientised students, parents and teachers for democratic citizenship."

**Jan Van Eck - Independent MP**

"Threatening to close down Grassroots and New Era will not destroy the aspirations of the oppressed masses which Grassroots has so consistently and courageously represented."

# and grassroots is there! paper that s for you

door-to-door with copies of Grassroots and a petition. The paper explained the problem and how it could be tackled.

In the first few years of the paper's life, the pages were filled with stories of victories as organisations throughout the Cape Flats took on the Council and won.

Even a simple washingline campaign by Lavender Hill housewives was given space in Grassroots and a few editions later, there were pictures in Grassroots showing the new lines the women had won.

Grassroots' close links with organisations is reflected in the paper through the years of its existence.

The paper fought side by side with the communities battling to improve their conditions.

And throughout the years of struggle, Grassroots was the only paper highlighting these events. While other newspapers reported on the latest fashions and events in the parliament, it was the only voice reflecting the views of extra-parliamentary organisations.

The historic launch of the United

Democratic Front at Rocklands Civic in August 20, 1983, changed the history of extra-parliamentary politics and the work of Grassroots.

The paper was used to popularise the Front and thousands of copies were distributed door-to-door in Cape Town to draw the crowds to the launch.

After the launch, Grassroots began publishing stories which not only spoke about struggles and victories in the Western Cape but included stories of similar struggles in every corner of our country, from Soweto to Duncan Village, Botshabelo to Ashton and from Umlazi to Port Nolloth.

People were encouraged to join organisations and learned about struggles in other countries.

Because of the link between the newspaper and community organisations, Grassroots came under attack when organisations did.

In 1985, at the height of the uprisings, Grassroots was prevented from covering the police brutality in the streets of the townships when almost the entire staff were de-

tained.

Since then the role of the newspaper has become more and more important.

The media restrictions imposed by the state of emergency stopped all coverage of 'subversive' news in the commercial press.

The government has tried to prevent all newspapers from publishing stories which showed the extent of resistance to their policies.

It was only newspapers like Grassroots - the so-called alternative press - who continued to publish stories of resistance and government retaliation.

Grassroots readers were kept informed of the news the government was trying to stifle.

And for as long as possible, Grassroots will continue to find ways to publish the truth about the struggles and the victories which form part of the daily lives of the majority of South Africans.



became a familiar sight in 1985

In 1987, during the historic railway workers strike, we had the news

## REPRESSION WON'T STOP US!

SINCE Grassroots first appeared on the streets of Cape Town, the newspaper has been a target of state repression. These attacks have only strengthened our resolve to fight back.

**In 1980:**

- Only months after the paper was set up, our first organiser, Johnny Issel, was banned and could no longer participate in the activities of the organisation.

**In 1984:**

- The Grassroots offices in Corporation street were burned down in a mysterious fire. The police investigation, started four years ago, has yet to show results.

**In 1985:**

- During the height of the uprising almost the entire staff was detained. Just two months later Grassroots was back on the streets.

**In 1986**

- When the new media regulations took effect in August, Stoffel Botha began his campaign to remove Grassroots, New Era and other progressive publications from the streets.

**In 1988**

- Grassroots was first warned in March 1988 that Stoffel was considering issuing a gazzetted warning against the paper for publishing 'subversive propaganda'.
- He struck again in May when New Era Magazine, also a Grassroots publication, was warned for 'fomenting a revolutionary climate' and 'promoting the public image of the ANC'.
- Grassroots, together with other publications, launched the Save the Press Campaign which has successfully gathered an enormous amount local and international support and made it increasingly difficult for Stoffel to act against the Press.
- Grassroots continued to publish, enlarging our print order and even started a new publication, the Shield, which appeared twice last year.
- On 19 August an assassination attempt was made on the life of Grassroots journalist, Veliswa Mhlawuli, in which she lost an eye. Not even two months later, while she was still undergoing hospital and psychiatric treatment, she was detained. She is presently being held in solitary confinement under section 29 of the Internal Security Act. Veliswa is the mother of two sons aged 9 and 15 and was also supporting her aged mother.
- Grassroots has demanded that Veliswa be charged or



Veliswa's mother, (right) and her two sons Brian (15) and Phillip (9), outside their Gugulethu home.

released. An international campaign to put pressure on the government to release her has been launched by international journalist organisations worldwide.

- New Era and Grassroots received their second warnings in June 1988.

**In 1989**

- The final warnings came last week. Grassroots, New Era and Work in Progress, a Johannesburg-based magazine, were given two weeks to make representations to Stoffel before he decides whether to close us down.
- The day before the final warning was gazetted, police officials came to the Grassroots offices and told the staff that they were investigating charges against us for contravening the Police act, the Prisons Act and the emergency regulations.

Grassroots has taken all the punishment that the regime has dealt us in the past and not only have we survived, we have grown and developed. More than that, we have become more and more determined to wage the struggle for information.

### OUR READERS SPEAK OUR READERS SPEAK OUR READERS

**Dullah Omar**  
- Western Cape  
UDF Chairperson

"I think Grassroots is the one paper that has been sensitive to the brave efforts of local communities to build organisations through which people can deal with their problems. We protest vehemently against any attempts to close down Grassroots."

**Essa Moosa**  
- Lawyer

"We need to condemn the warning issued to Grassroots in the strongest possible terms. It is clearly an attempt to stop news from being conveyed and to stop people from making informed decisions."

**Saamstaan**

"Stoffel Botha and the government are panicking. On top of having a State of Emergency and lots of media restrictions they still need to threaten Grassroots. Banning or restricting papers like Grassroots will only make us more determined to defeat them."

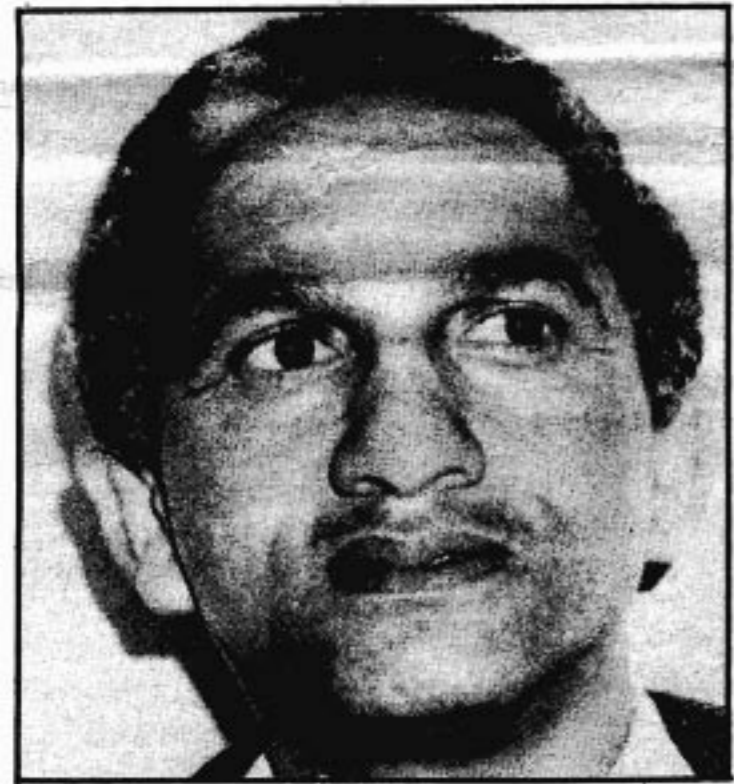
**Call of Islam**

"We declare our solidarity with Grassroots and all threatend publications. To Stoffel we say... your attempts at strangling the voices of democracy is an admission of defeat. Now you're trying to silence the voice of truth. In the hearts and minds of the people, Grassroots will live on."

# Life without Grassroots: the kind of news Stoffel approves of.



## "Grassroots tells the people's stories"



Mr Wilfred Rhodes, a grassroots reader for 9 years and CAHAC organiser

WE spoke to Wilfred Rhodes, Grassroots, reader since 1980 and organiser of the Cape Areas Housing Action Committee about the warnings we have received...

**Grassroots: How has Grassroots been received in your area?**

Mr Rhodes: Generally people were very eager for the paper. Grassroots has become the people's paper because of its persistency in covering the truth. That is what made the paper accepted in the community - it always told their story.

There were cases of people saying, "I don't want Grassroots, I'm not interested in politics."

Then we would sit down and explain to them that stories about birth control or how UIF works were important to them.

That would lead to discussion around other stories in the Grassroots.

Most times when we left their homes, those people would have changed their attitude.

Ja, so Grassroots became our contact point with the community.

It meant we in the civic could speak to people, find out their opinions and discuss their problems and hopes.

And they were constantly informed of what was happening.

**Grassroots: How do you think people will respond if the newspaper should get closed down.**

Mr Rhodes: Well, in the past people have been angry if they heard that this or that issue of the paper has been banned. Because it meant that the people were being deprived of

valuable information. Also, the commercial press won't cover the issues affecting us. So, if a Grassroots could not come out, it was really felt.

For instance, about three weeks ago 200 people were evicted from the Uitkyk squatter camp in Kuilsriver. Most of their clothing and possessions were either damaged or lost in the process. A small story was written in the Cape Times. No other coverage was given. Now that is the sort of story that Grassroots would write about in

much detail.

**Grassroots: What will you as one of our readers do about the closure**

Mr Rhodes: I would say that the responsibility of ensuring that grassroots stays alive, is ours. We have to ensure that Grassroots and other newspapers under similar attack are not silenced.

For when they silence these papers, they will be silencing the people's voice. It is only when we continue hearing the truth and fighting for the truth that we will be free.

**DEFEND OUR MEDIA MASS RALLY**

**DULLAH OMAR  
FRANK MEINTJIES  
UWCO SPEAKER  
JAN VAN ECK  
RASHID OMAR**

**ROCKLANDS CIVIC  
MITCHELLS PLAIN  
WED 25 JAN  
7.30PM**

**We need all the help we can get!** Show your disgust and anger at the threatened closure of YOUR newspaper by writing to the minister himself, or fill in the postcard below. Cut it out, stick it on a piece of cardboard and send it to: Minister Stoffel Botha, Hendrik Verwoed building, Private Bag X9102, Cape Town, 8000.

**Minister Stoffel Botha  
Hendrik Verwoed building  
Private Bag X9102  
Cape Town  
8000**

STAMP

Dear sir

I feel that you are making a grave mistake in threatening to shut down GRASSROOTS. I do not support you in this decision and request that you seriously reconsider. Now is not the time for bannings and restrictions. We need debate, and to hear all sides to each story.

Yours faithfully

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