

## TRANSFORMATION OF THE UDF

This is a very brief contribution to the ongoing discussion on the transformation of the UDF. It focuses on a limited number of issues which represents what could become the broad orientation of the UDF.

### THE UDF IN THE PAST

In the past the fronts role was to:

1. Act as the internal political centre, as the key political opposition to the government and campaign around the national political grievances and demands of the people.
2. Create and build mass organisations across all the sectors, who were involved in taking up day to day problems and supporting the national political campaigns. It is important to characterise the mass work on 'economic' issues like rent, transport etc as struggles for Development' which took the form they did because of objective conditions and the phase of the struggle which focussed on protest and the building of democratic organisation.
3. Coordinate the work of the organisations, make possible the exchange of information and ideas and lend cohesion to the democratic movement.

### CHANGED CONDITIONS

This is obviously a complex analysis which will need to be looked at carefully. Some of the key factors include:

1. Unbanning of the ANC and SACP, return of exiles and release of prisoners, which has had both positive and negative consequences. (need to discuss).
2. Recognition by all that South Africa has begun a transition from Apartheid, to something that is not conclusive or well defined, but includes some variation of a multi-party democracy, mixed economy and non aligned position in the world.
3. Increased focus on national political solution, negotiations, constitutional matters, the creation of a 'new' South Africa.
4. Growing challenge to develop a policy framework, and detailed policy for a democratic future, contributing to strong debates on these policy questions, growing expectations from the have nots and growing feeling of 'fear' or insecurity about losing privileges from the haves.
5. Related to the above point, a growing discussion about changing the institutional framework and structures of the state and civil society.
6. Some degree of demobilisation within democratic movement, weaknesses relating to political strategy, organisational strategy, level of coordination and cohesion within democratic movement. Each of these points need to be analysed in detail because they contribute significantly to our loss

of initiative and constrains our ability to maximise gains in this period.

7. The altered balance of forces in the world, which is characterised by the absence of a strong socialist bloc, and the dominance of capital who are feeling particularly confident has serious implications for South Africa. (needs further discussion).

#### RESPONSE OF THE UDF

The replacement of the UDF by the ANC as the political centre implies a lesser role for the UDF at this level. The struggle for the reconstruction of South Africa will take place at various levels, the political being only one. The task of the UDF is to participate to ensure that THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE COUNTRY TAKES ON TERMS DECIDED BY THE PEOPLE AND IN THEIR BEST INTERESTS. Reconstruction is about developing appropriate policies for socio-economic transformation, implementing them in a way which fundamentally changes the social power relations in all areas (economic, political, education, etc), result in concrete improvements in the material conditions of life which flows from a restructuring of the overall political economy which is both sustainable and democratic. A meaningful reconstruction will involve a crucial, independent role for the organisations of civil society. This is going to be important if we are to learn the lessons of other developing countries like Mozambique and also from Eastern Europe. (needs more discussion). It is in this area that the UDF has a central role. Continuing to build mass organisations, improve their capacity to participate in the process of reconstruction which involves transforming them in line with the changed conditions, ensuring higher degree of coordination and cohesion than in the past to be able to adequately handle the attempt by the state to decentralise negotiations and emphasise differences and co-option strategies.

#### A CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF A SIX MONTH PROGRAMME OF WORK

1. Put in a concerted effort to establish a national civic and a national rural work forum. This must be given the status of a national campaign, with a clear political, organisational, media etc strategy linked to it. This will a concentration of resources, both personnel and financial into this area of work.
2. Simultaneous creation of national and regional development forums, across sectors that will be made up of mass organisations, service organisations and development organisations. Their main task will to make assessments of their geographic area, build both regional and localised development plans around which mobilisation can take place and which provide a focus for organisations to embark on their own development work, act as a debating forum and act as link points in developing a national consensus around some

kind of development plan for the country. They will produce regular discussion papers, news briefs and hold regular seminars and workshops to heighten coordination, cohesion and maximise the sharing of information and experiences.

3. Look at a more systematic training of 'development workers', who will come from the ranks of mass organisations and undertrained service organisation workers. This needs to be sophisticated programme which involves, on the job training, one month and three month courses, with a smaller element of academically oriented longer term courses. It would not be unrealistic to set up a centralised professional group that will develop a core programme that will then guide work nationally, alongside which could be established a 'development training centre' where the main development cadre is trained. There is a fair amount of international experience that we could draw on in this regard.

4. A slim but efficient structure that will follow a well defined process will be needed to be put in place to realise such a programme, starting with national consultations, brainstorming workshops, and the production of a widely available document that lays out the process in great detail to be followed by all.

This programme could well become the core around which the UDF is built. It also make academic the discussion about fronts and broader fronts since the process will determine who is willing to be involved, which should be open to all who subscribe to a common approach to reconstruction and development that needs to be spelt out. The approach and the concrete suggestion might appear to be exaggerated, this is done for the purpose of encouraging debate.