

## DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE U.D.F.

### Introduction

The legislation of the ANC and other organisations on February 2nd, 1990 brought to the fore intense debates and discussions on the future of the UDF. Two main arguments preponderate:

a. The first argument is that, the UDF should dissolve now that the ANC has been unbanned. It suggests that:-

- i. The UDF was a mere stand in for the ANC and must now accord the latter its rightful place as the leader of our struggle
- ii. Some affiliates - SAYCO and Women's organisations of the UDF have dissolved and have joined auxiliary organisations of the ANC such as Women's league and Youth league others such as the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee, Durban Democratic Association and Cape Democrats to mention but a few, have dissolved to form branches of the ANC.
- iii. The UDF has completed its growth circle. It cannot draw in new formations. There is no hope of winning over the PAC and AZAPO.
- iv. The move towards the formation of a National Civic Body with with a capacity to co-ordinate civic action render the UDF irrelevant.
- v. The ANC is the main vehicle through which the majority would attain power. Therefore our resources and best cadres must be deployed and harnessed in the building of the ANC. The existence of the UDF makes this task impossible.

b. The second argument is that the UDF should transform its character. This argument recognizes:-

- i. The importance of the co-ordinating role of the UDF and the continued need for the strategy of the front politics.
- ii. The need to draw into the struggle forces traditionally not part of the democratic movement. It points at potential and capacity to CONCRETISE the unifying perspective as evidenced by the conference for Democratic future (albeit not structural).
- iii. That by adopting the Freedom Charter the UDF narrowed its scope and was no longer in a position to win the allegiance of forces which did not subscribe to the Freedom Charter.
- iv. The UDF should transform into a real mass front whose leadership would be drawn from and be accountable to affiliates. Such a front should seek to scale down on its high political profile and adopt a set of principles that would facilitate its broadening.

- v. The need for a national patriotic front initiated and led by the ANC.  
Such a front should not only include the tripartite alliance, but also groupings such as the PAC, AZAPO, INYANDZA movement and others.

These arguments recurred many times at local level in the NEC and NWC meetings as well as at April UDF workshop in Cape Town. Do these arguments adequately address themselves to the concrete situation facing the democratic movement and the attendant challenges. This paper attempts to synthesize the views of the national working committee meeting held in September 1990 and attended by the National Executive Committee, and representatives of all UDF regions, some Southern Transvaal sectors and some member of the national executive committee of the African National Congress. Furthermore the paper is intended to stimulate a debate on the transformation of the UDF taking into account the urgent tasks of the liberation movement in the current phase.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE UDF

Any serious discussion on the future of the UDF requires a cursory look at the history of this August front. What were the circumstances which gave rise to the UDF? What is the historical context in which the UDF was borne? What role did it play and what are its achievements. More importantly the debate should be located within our overall strategy in the current phase. It means we must recall our strategy.

By the late seventies - beginning of the eighties, a flurry of mass organisation, i.e. civics, housing action committees, commuters committees, youth congresses had begun to emerge. However, these ORGANISATION fought isolated struggles. Soon progressives began discussions on how to wage united struggles, given the commonality of the issues around which struggles were waged.

The governments introduction of repressive laws, the Koornhof laws and three chamber constitution did not only make unity imperative but also demanded a political response. Thus the UDF was born as a united response with a wide ranging program of organisation with A STRONG mass content but with A LIMITED objective of preventing the regime from winning support for its "new look apartheid". It organised a boycott of the election. The boycott was preceded by intensive campaigns to educate the masses of our people on the inadequacies and dangers of the government reforms.

Although it was conceived as a front with limited objectives, its campaigns and activities fell within our broad strategy of the National Democratic Revolution spearheaded by the African National Congress. It sensitised the masses to the political issues of the time, and thus building support for the policies of the African National Congress.

## ROLE OF THE UDF BEFORE FEBRUARY 2nd, 1990

Since its inception, the UDF played a critical role in the struggle for freedom. It provided leadership, inspiration, guidance and co-ordination to a wide range of organisations which had previously fought isolated struggles. It unified the struggles of our people and gave them a national character and a political content. Organisations began to relate their local struggles to national politics and focused on the question of state power. It focused the minds of the people on our strategic objective of transfer of power.

The masses of our people, their energies and organisations were harnessed in the unfolding national democratic struggle and galvanised into a united offensive against apartheid and exploitation. This enabled the democratic movement to win the battle of ideas and to render the government reforms unworkable.

Concurrent to the collapse of the systems, were the sprouting of democratic civics, youth, women, professionals, student organisations - organs of people power, winning the allegiance of our people. The leaders of our people in the ANC became even more popular and the ANC grew in stature and prestige. The mass pillar of our struggle was consolidated and mass insurrection became a possibility although it was not conceived by the UDF.

The absence of a visible legal ANC gave rise to calls by some affiliates as early as 1984, that the UDF should transform itself into a cohesive political movement. Names such as United Democratic Movement (UDM) were suggested.

Two factors accounted for these debates:-

- (a) The huge support that the UDF had gained and the fear that if the UDF had dissolved that support would be lost to the struggle.
- (b) Many affiliates had adopted the Freedom Charter - it was felt that the UDF, too should adopt it and discard those affiliates who did not want to adopt it.

## PLAYING THE ROLE OF A POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Increasingly the UDF played the dual role of a front and political organisation. While the political role of the UDF facilitated ideological cohesion which was achieved by 1988. Its fighting alliance with COSATU gave impetus to the forward movement. Simultaneously the scope of the UDF to broaden itself was narrowed. Several organisations became reluctant to affiliate to the UDF.

Furthermore the role of affiliates in taking initiative and influencing the UDF policy diminished. Democratic processes within the UDF became distorted. That dialectical process of policy developing from bottom to top and vice versa changed to a situation where policy was essentially formulated by a few people in top leadership positions. Affiliates were mere repositories of and implementors of such a policy. The four years State Of Emergency aggravated the situation.

The State of Emergency meant that the general councils, forums where affiliates met to exchange views, evaluate work, strategise and formulate policy could no longer meet regularly. The social base and strength that the front drew from its affiliates were undermined. The culture of democracy which had become the hallmark of the UDF from the time of its inception was lost.

The need for operation under conditions of secrecy resulted in a small group of the top leadership making policy for the UDF. Tensions and contradictions characterised the UDF. The dynamism and vibrancy characteristic of the UDF up until the mid eighties disappeared. Many affiliates lost interest.

#### CONFERENCE OF A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE - A UNIFYING PERSPECTIVE

Although the state of emergency and the resultant style of work affected participation and stunted local initiative, the UDF did not lose the will to organise coordinate and unite anti apartheid forces. The successful conference for a Democratic Future underlined not only the correctness of the unifying perspective and strategy of front politics but, highlighted the potential of the UDF to unite a broad range of anti-apartheid forces in a common struggle. Its political leadership and guidance were unquestionable.

However, the legalisation of the ANC on February 2nd, changed the political situation fundamentally. It meant the ANC had to resume its visible role of political leadership of our National Democratic Revolution. Having recognised the vanguard role of the African National Congress at its inception, and to this extent having stated this in its working principle the UDF could not conceivably compete with the ANC for leadership.

#### WHAT THEN IS THE ROLE OF THE UDF IN THE CURRENT PHASE OF OUR STRUGGLE?

This question cannot be answered mechanically or emotionally. Indeed, we should not be sentimental or romantic in our response to this question. Nor can we afford to be subjective.

Our answer must be informed by the objective needs, in the current phase of our struggle and the concrete challenges facing the democratic movement. But to understand the objective situation and our concomitant task, we need to call to mind our strategic objective and our overall strategy to achieve that strategic goal. Similarly we need to understand the nature and scope of the forces ranged against apartheid and which must be harnessed in the struggle to make our strategic objective a reality.

### OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Our strategic objective is the transfer of power from the racist minority to the majority. To this end the ANC and the Democratic movement have always combined various forms of the struggle, mass action, the international isolation of the regime, armed struggle and the underground organisation. These forms of our struggle were characterised as the pillars of struggle. The United Democratic Front played a crucial role in strengthening the mass pillar creating conditions for the international isolation of the regime. It galvanised in action the masses and diverse range of forces and brought international focus upon the excesses of the regime. During this period several companies disinvested, governments broke diplomatic ties (albeit to a limited extent) with Pretoria.

The sanctions intensified to unprecedented levels culminating in the comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of the US Congress. The adoption of the Declaration on Apartheid and its destructive consequences, by the UN General Assembly, the Common Wealth Declaration on S.Africa and the Harare Declaration of the OAU combined with all-round pressure to compel the regime to agree to negotiate with the ANC. Subsequently the Groote Schuur and Pretoria Minutes were signed. Some political prisoners were released, the State of Emergency was lifted and the regime has undertaken to review repressive legislation during the next session of parliament.

The ANC responded to these developments by suspending the armed struggle in order to assist the peace process. The armed struggle was merely suspended not abandoned. Therefore the armed struggle and the rest of the pillars of our struggle remain in place. And negotiations is just another terrain of struggle which must continue to be reinforced by mass action and the international isolation of the regime in order to bring about the transfer of power to the people.

Our strategy to achieve the goal of transfer of power remain even in the current phase, the National Democratic Struggle (NDS) or National Democratic Revolution. The NDS is spearheaded by the African National Congress.



In this strategy must be harnessed mass formations, civics, students, professional, trade unions and educational organisations. Not only members of the ANC take part in this struggle, but many individuals and organisations holding divergent views but who nonetheless want to end apartheid must take part in the NDS.

The UDF had already brought many organisations under the ambit of the NDS. Many of these have since come to accept the ANC policies. But there are several others who have not yet joined the ANC and who may not join it in the foreseeable future. Through the tactic of front politics we managed to engage millions in the struggle led by the ANC without requiring them to leave their organisations and join the ANC. Two gains were made in this regard. In the course of the struggle many people began to share with the ANC the perspective of a non-racial democratic South Africa. Simultaneously the social base of our struggle was broadened by the participation of many organisations and individuals who did not necessarily support the ANC. Many more such as NAFSOC, NAMDA, NADEL and others were drawn close to the movement. However the high political profile of the UDF and its commitment to the Freedom Charter has often made these organisations reluctant to affiliate to it.

The above appraisal of the current situation and the acceptance of the importance of the strategy of the National Democratic struggle seem to suggest that a broad front of organisations opposed to apartheid is necessary.

In this connection the National Working Committee meeting of the UDF at which ANC National Executive was present, expressed the view that the tactic of united front politics was still relevant to our struggle and that we should not abandon it at this stage. It advocated a front broader than the UDF and in which affiliates would participate dynamically in the formulation of policy, strategy, and the implementation of same. Mass action should be the driving force of such a front. In order to allow for the consolidation of the mass component of such front, the Freedom Charter should not be the basis for unity.

We cannot agree more. We need to retain the people and organisations whom we brought into the struggle. At the same time we must develop creative ways of drawing more and more organisations into the National Democratic struggle. If we don't do so then we shall be narrowing down the social base of our movement and weakening our strategy of NDS. Many people who had previously been part of our struggle will be lost to the democratic movement.

## TO CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF THE UDF.

In April we acknowledged that the changed political context required the scalingdown of the political profile of the UDF to avoid competition with the ANC. The change in character of the UDF is also necessary to facilitate the absorption of other groupings such as NAFCCO, SABSWA, NADEL, INYANDZA, Religious groups et al. Perhaps if we discarded the Freedom Charter we would facilitate the broadening of the Front and thereby the social base of our struggle.

The reluctance of some organisations to join the UDF which has high political profile suggest that any United Front in which the ANC and the Party participate is unlikely to attract these groups. Yet we need them in the struggle. Therefore the front envisaged here would be different from a National Patriotic Front led by the ANC and accommodative of the PAC, AZAPO, INYANDZA MOVEMENTS and other political groups in and outside the bantustans. This sort of a front would be operating at a much higher level than a changed UDF.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES AND THE ROLE OF UDF IN DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION

Previously the UDF emphasised opposition, protest and defiance. It pin pointed the inadequacies of the system, its social inequalities and demanded that the regime and its structure should redress them. The UDF was generally not pro active, save in respect of creating new organisations such as civic associations - the task it continues to perform.

Whereas the struggles of the UDF and its affiliates related directly to the work of development, there were no compelling reasons for the UDF to actively promote development. It sought to focus on the weaknesses of the authorities. The change in the balance of forces and the prospect of an ANC government has brought to the fore, the issue of development and reconstruction. The ANC would now be required to address this question concretely. Like the National Party Government, the ANC government will have to contend with huge demands for the upgrading of the quality of the lives of millions to whom apartheid has bequeathed, homelessness, illiteracy and poor quality of education and facilities, unemployment, rising living costs and appalling health conditions in the townships and rural areas. These problems, the ANC will inherit from the Nationalist's government.

The future or transformation of the UDF should be discussed taking into account this concrete situation. Does the UDF have a role in addressing the question of development?

Perhaps we should examine whether the UDF should not be transformed such that whilst it continues to facilitate the formation of and coordinate activities of the civic associations, church youth, COSAS, NUSAS, SANSCO, SAHWCO, NAMDA, NADEL, SABSWA, NEC, NAFCOC and others, (it is assumed that a changed UDF would absorb the above organisations - previously unaffiliated) it focuses more on development, raise debates on strategies for development and facilitate creation of regional development forums.

There are several service organisations in the country which whilst having contact with local civics operate in isolation from one another. Neither do mass organisations have sufficient influence on the work of service organisations. Consequently there is duplication and absence of a coherent strategy on development. The UDF could facilitate coordinations of the activities of these organisations, build strong sectoral organisations some of which could transform into NGO's - addressing the issues of development in their sphere of activities. For example efforts could be made to facilitate cooperation in health education and facilities between NAMDA and SAHWCO. The NECC, and student bodies could jointly carry out development work in the education field e.g. career guidance, libraries, people's education programmes. The civics could focus more on housing and local government and planning as well as the provision of services to the communities. Civics could also prepare people for local government and financial management.

The participation of the UDF in development will not be one of managing the process. It should not seek to take charge of the technical work of development. It should not rather provide political guidance in respect of development and facilitate the involvement of communities through their structures in determining priorities for development and formulation of strategy in that regard.

In this way, we can combine dynamically mass action and the building of organs of people's power with the process of development and reconstruction. Already indications are that the ANC is going to face difficulties in raising money for development. Foreign governments refuse to fund political parties. A case in point is the recent refusal by the Japanese government to fund the ANC on the basis that funding the ANC was contrary to their government policy.



However, all the governments which refuse to fund the ANC programmes are amenable to funding projects which are not associated with the ANC or political parties. A transformed UDF can use its influence on these governments to fund or increase their funding for development in which we participate through progressive sectoral formations and service groups. The added advantage of such an initiative could be the prevention of some hostile groupings from occupying this space.

In conclusion, we reiterate that this is a mere discussion paper which attempts to approach the subject of the future of the UDF from an angle that must give direction to the debate at all level. It attempts to locate the debate in the current situation and highlight the concrete needs and challenges facing the ANC and the democratic forces in general.

The paper is not sufficiently coherent nor is it comprehensive as it was written in a limited time. A more comprehensive paper is necessary for further debates. We submit however, that for the purposes of this NEC it does lay some basis for a fruitful discussion - a discussion that will put some meat on the bones.

AMANDLA - NGAWETHU !

ALL POWER - TO THE PEOPLE!

(Popo Molefe)

P R E S E N T E D   F O R   D I S C U S S I O N

B Y   T H E   N. E. C.   -   17<sup>th</sup>~~18~~<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 1990