

TOWARDS A UNITED FRONT OF ANTI-APARTHEID FORCES FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION

00. The central purpose of this memorandum is to open debate on problems of a broad united front of anti-apartheid forces. Observations and recommendations herein included are advanced in the same spirit. A list of questions is being suggested to facilitate discussions:

- (a) Is the broad front of anti-apartheid forces appropriate to our situation?
- (b) What should be the strategic approach of the NLM?
- (c) What should be the relationship of a minimum programme to long-term goals?
- (d) Is there a place for the PAC and Inkatha in a broad alliance?
- (e) Would the "white left" have a role in a broad anti-apartheid coalition?
- (f) Does the MDM constitute a broad front of anti-apartheid forces?
- (g) Is the BCM relevant to the general anti-apartheid struggle?

PART I. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE:

01. The relevance of this topic is dictated by the current political dynamic which is increasingly informed by the need for the broadest possible coalition of genuine anti-apartheid forces which constitute segments of the established transformative process. The history of the liberation movement is replete with examples of a general commitment to the employment of this valuable tactic:

(i) The united front effort is inherent to the history of the ANC and has been one of the cornerstones of its perspective since its formative years. This had made it possible for the ANC to transcend ethnic, tribal, racial and ideological differences and earn a deserved place as a truly national movement in both form and content.

(ii) From its inception the APO advocated nation-wide alliance with existing organisations of the oppressed.

(iii) The Indian Congress, as representative of the aspirations of a harshly discriminated and exploited group emerged from subjectively secular origins and mellowed into an important factor in the general national sentiment and political temperament of the oppressed majority.

(iv) The ISL, as well as the ICU during their hey-days took on board the principle of united front action and sought to imprint this as a hallmark of non-racial cooperation in the working class movement of the time.

(v) Perhaps what has emerged as the classic South African example of the concretisation of the United Front tactic in South African history is the relationship between the ANC and the SACP. Whereas the cooperation began unsteadily it was consolidated in the melting-pot of struggle over many arduous years of mutual influence and respect.

(vi) If other organisations of the oppressed took longer to espouse the tactic of the United Front it was perhaps the harsh implications of the Hertzog Bills which were about to be passed into law in the early 30's which imposed the need and brought the lesson home. As a result a united front determined to confront the obnoxious Bills was formed in 1935. This was the historic All-Africa Convention.

(vii) Of much more historic significance and of lasting impact was the formation of the Congress Alliance at the initiative and emphasis of the ANC and its allies. The birth of the Congress Movement was an historic inevitability in view of the background and tradition of its different components. In spirit and character the Congress Alliance was such that it cleared the way to the establishment of today's mass democratic movement.

02. It is imperative that a critical appreciation of the strength and weakness of the Congress Alliance be made, with a view to eking out crucial lessons. In the context of this dissertation this will be done in broad strokes. It should suffice to repeat here that the Congress Movement was an historically evolved political product. Its strength lay in a commonality of perspective shared by its individual components, a strong political leadership which also accepted the responsibility of the ANC to be in the vanguard, as well as the ability of the alliance to reach out for support and following on a nation-wide scale in such a way as to cut across race, class or creed. It contrasted sharply with the political programme of the apartheid state at a time when the newly-imposed regime did everything in its power to sustain its authority by seeking to divide its victims. Yet the alliance could not have been a perfect organism: (i) The COD remained a loyal component, very popular with the oppressed but with minimal influence in the body politik of whites as a group. Some of its activists were actually harassed and isolated as "servants of foreign powers" and outright "reds." It was still a long way from the day when many whites would accept the inevitability of democratic change. Because of the absence of a sizeable support base within the white group, the COD was fated to fold up as it did.

(ii) Despite a common commitment to the FC it was near impossible for the alliance to share uniform perspectives in view of the component organisations' individual characteristics especially in the changed situation when the Union became a republic and immediately proscribed the ANC, the PAC and imprisoned scores of seasoned leaders whilst forcing others into exile.

(iii) Whereas the alliance was very popular amongst the people and could call them to action, it had not reached a level at which it could be said to have been a truly mass movement.

(vi) The alliance was almost decapitated with the arrest of the cream of the leadership at Rivonia and elsewhere. This opened room for Black Consciousness and narrow-nationalist tendencies to gain ground. In a situation where the masses yearned for everyday leadership and guidance, state repression and tough legislation undermined cohesion and morale. For this reason, some analysts have referred to this period and the post-Rivonia "lull." It is argued here that the phrase is misleading and the purpose for which it is being used will carry through much better, unambiguously, in the context of the strengthening then, of the state machinery in the face of internal political pressure and the mushrooming international anti-apartheid lobby. However, the arm of the regime was able at the time to keep resistance to apartheid relatively under check.

03. The emergence of the MDM must be seen in the context of the revolutionary forces which had been forced underground from where they managed to survive and work assiduously however under extreme conditions. At another level the successful development of the armed struggle (after Wankie and specifically in the post-Soweto 196 era) released the much needed political energy overwhelming even the repressive structures of the regime. Having liberated the majority of the oppressed from the fear of the enemy, in this way, the mass character of the struggle took form exactly in the spirit of the Congress Alliance on whose tradition it based itself.

The perspective of the M-Plan was being discussed and implemented with renewed vigour. In the circumstances, the ANC, which in itself embodies the general aspirations of the people as a whole successfully called for the creation of a United Front of the oppressed people. In the wake of this, the UDF was launched after careful preparation. It is further being argued here that the birth of the UDF posed urgent challenges to the ANC and exposed the imperative of transforming the ANC's organisational

character in keeping with the mood that was abroad inside the country. It is against this background, which underpinned the new heights conquered in struggle, that the 2nd National Consultative Conference of the ANC considered and approved the recommendation of opening up all structural levels of the ANC up to the NEC to include all South African revolutionaries irrespective of colour.

04. The political dynamics which influenced the birth of the UDF combined in the context of the heightened militancy of the 80's and spawned the COSATU, further consolidating unity and in recognition of the central role of the workers in the struggle for national liberation.

05. What has not happened up to this stage is the elimination of splinter groups which persist under different cloaks but bearing a tendency to want to "go it alone" as blacks. In this category belongs the different Azanian organisations (as opposed to tribal-based organisations). It is however important to stress that these organisations which have not come into the mainstream should not be regarded as immutable and deliberately intransigent. In this regard the lesson of AZASO and to some extent the problems which led to the AZAPO split are most instructive. Even though it is correct to see them as adherents of the Black Consciousness and/or Africanist philosophy they are not identical with the PAC despite the PAC claims to the contrary. The category has to be seen for what it is! A heterogeneous political group driven by sentiments of black self-assertion and a general revanchist motive. Their major weakness is the failure to march in step with history and accept socio-political reality without bias. Yet they fight the regime, using their own methods which are perhaps divisive. We should learn well how to rope them in so as to conserve the most energy in the contest with the forces of apartheid.

06. The bantustans present a unique problem. They are a definite product of apartheid and are designed in form and content to ensure its perpetuation. But it is incontestible that the majority of the African population is located in these areas into which they have been forcibly herded by Pretoria. In a very real sense, therefore, the bigger percentage of what must constitute the motive force for revolution is in the bantustans. Any strategy which can lead to the conquest of a new democratic order in South Africa must prove capable of harnessing this overwhelming political

potential. It is true that the people there have not accepted the imposition of the "homeland policy" of the regime - they are engaged in active struggle but we have to reach out even more seriously and provide leadership on the spot. We have to take them along with us by creating appropriate structures that will make it possible to circumvent the problem of collaborators currently in authority or even to neutralise others as we win over those who believe in the well-being of the people. The liberation movement has to address the question of the bantustan leaders who show a willingness to make a break with the past. Sould they not form an association of anti-apartheid leaders and rescind their allegiance to Pretoria in a way that would earn them the respect of their compatriots? We are here not talking about the SA Black Alliance-type of a fiasco, Inkatha or the Kwa-Natal talking shop, but an organism that could genuinely oppose the status quo and identify with the democratic transformative process as far as the circumstances can allow. At any rate, the point is that, if there is one Enos Mabuza, then it is possible to identify more of his type and develop them whilst exercising extreme caution. Such a goal should not be made irrelevant by the existence of a strong MDM or CONTRALESA.

07. In the recent period it has become more evident that the white extra-parliamentary movement has an important educational role to play. The history of IDASA and its role is a case in point. In a very short space of history it has welded the extra-parliamentary forces which have always been in disarray and with no definite perspective into a force that cannot be ignored by anyone who is interested in change in South Africa be they reformers or transformers. Some analysts are currently arguing for its recognition as a veritable chapter of the MDM. It is a view that might invoke our sympathy considering the dynamic involvement of the UDF affiliates in the FFF for example. Organisations such as the Black Sash have always been consistent supporters of the struggle for change and the general cause of the oppressed. The common shortcoming of the extra-parliamentary organisations has been the fact that its composite wings are mainly peopled by non-Afrikaners.

It is imperative that the anomaly of distancing the Afrikaner, which is not in any way of our making, be redressed. What we need is to exploit the positive complexion in the extra-parliamentary movement and reach out to the Afrikaner in both town and country - especially the plattelander

who has constituted the reliable socio-political base of successive white regimes for ever so long. It will be a tough struggle but one that has to be waged in a hurry.

PART II. A CASE FOR A BROAD UNITED FRONT:

08. It has been amply demonstrated that the idea of a united front has pre-occupied the ANC and its allies throughout the entire history of the liberation movement of South Africa. Today such decisive slogans which constitute the clarion-call of our annual action plan supply adequate proof: Unity in Action; United Action for People's Power; Mass Action for Power. What is basic to any united front strategy has to be a commitment to struggle - to engage the adversary on many fronts. The fact that we have always cherished this approach is emblazoned in our history and amplified in our current perspective. It would however be great folly to lose sight of the fact that there are variants to the united front strategy. The fundamental ones can be roughly categorised as follows:

(i) Reconciliatory - where one or more parties enter into an alliance with the express purpose of repairing old differences.

(ii) Convenience - parties strike a coalition to obviate embarrassing political realities or to camouflage bickering,

(iii) Concern - temporary alliance calculated to make a strong statement against the status quo in order to amplify demands for reform.

(iv) Principled - one or more parties allied together with a principled objective and determined to triumph even at the highest sacrifices and yet with no desire to merge due to political or tactical reasons.

(v) A combination of two or more of the above variants.

09. In the peculiar South African situation, the strategic approach of the National Liberation Movement has to be informed by the actual terrain and the strategic objective of the struggle. It is equally true that the tapestry of forces which make up the political face of the general opposition is ideologically variegated. Yet it is this milieu that the dynamics of real change are being formulated. It is therefore imperative that in the context of the mood and level of struggle, taking into mind the entirety of the forces at play, and, juxtaposing the transformative process with the reactive process at the hub of which is the regime itself,

we spell our strategies with urgent but careful deliberation. The case for a broad coalition of genuine anti-apartheid forces cannot be over-emphasised. The point, however, is to learn well how to handle it in this, the fifth anniversary year of the UDF.

The question that needs to be addressed is which one of the variants is appropriate to the current situation in South Africa. Its resolution depends largely on which forces can be regarded as genuinely anti-apartheid in the most unambiguous terms. It is a matter for urgent debate.

It is being argued that our variant should be one which recognises the vanguard role of the ANC and the centrality of the Freedom Charter in the transformative process. Furthermore it should be one that is committed to the principles and general recommendations for a new constitutional order non-contradictory to the ANC Guidelines on the issue. The purpose of such a front should be to unite the broad masses of the oppressed from all classes and social strata, together with the white compatriots who are striving for change, around a programme of action towards the transfer of power to the democratic majority. Such a front must do everything possible to reverse the historical polarisation and promote a sense of one South African identity, towards a united, democratic and non-racial future. However, its principal plank must necessarily be an acceptance of the African majority as the motive force in the struggle.

Speaking on the role of the MDM recently, Murphy Morobe underlined that: "Our primary task is to build a broad coalition of anti-apartheid forces on the basis of minimum demands and unity in action. This coalition must maximise unity against the regime, isolate it and provide a platform where the strategic core of the MDM, together with other forces for change, may determine both the terrain and terms of struggle." WM 4/8/89. Since by the strategic core it is obviously meant both the UDF and COSATU, it is these other forces that he refers to which we have to identify and harness positively. This constitutes a struggle in itself. Yet it is one that has to be waged with the utmost seriousness by the ANC.

10. A realistic approach must of necessity bring up the issue of the PAC, its position and role. In the same vein it is appropriate to examine the various factions of the Black Consciousness Movement. It is however outside

the scope of the present memorandum to deliberate on the history of the subject. It should suffice to repeat here that the PAC at least is a recognised entity at the level of the Frontline states, OAU and UN. The fact that it has sought to compete with the ANC since its inception has not stopped us from entering into some arrangements with them in the past. Recall the All-in Africa Conference of Pietermaritzburg in 1961 and the short-lived "alliance" in the early sixties in London (significantly this anti-Pretoria effort reputedly included SWANU). Because of PAC narrow-mindedness and fervent Africanist philosophy, it has had a very questionable constituency at home. Yet the PAC is a fact, it has a history and a following at home, and in exile. The task before us is to determine where to place it in the consideration of a broad anti-apartheid front. It is a difficult question which depends decisively on the nature and attitude of the PAC itself as well as its programme. It would however be fatal to ignore it completely. We need to analyse the issue and establish if there are any genuine individuals or factions within the PAC who could be taken along as we work towards our strategic goal. A similar measuring stick has to be used in approaching the issue of the BCM.

It is true that to take the PAC blindly on board would exacerbate the natural problems of suspicion and political dishonesty in any front. Yet in truth and in effect such problems will emerge even without the inclusion of the PAC. The point, however, is to prepare for them in advance so as to be able to contain them.

11. The troublesome issue of Inkatha is relevant to the theme of this matter in a number of ways. It is fact that the majority of its supporters interpret it differently and do not share a common political perspective. Their everyday outlook vacillates according to manipulations by Ulundi and the contradictory harangues of Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi. Gatsha cannot forego his strong hold on Inkatha because that would spell his immediate political doom.

We obviously need our people who are being led astray by Gatsha to come along with us. The greatest handicap is the lack of effective methods that could make Gatsha irrelevant. The Natal Peace Initiative could be extremely useful in this regard. To Gatsha the possibilities of peace there are very ominous - he visualises a general drift towards the UDF

once peace prevails. And such a development is not very far fetched. We have to examine possibilities of strengthening CONTRALESA in the area and never let up in making overtures to King Zwelithini. This approach has its inherent risks, but it can be done calculatedly. Another variant to the approach would be to launch such an offensive in the bantustans as to win more support, have more Mabuza-type leaders and isolate the irredeemables along with Gatsha. The leadership of Inkatha must be invaded, contradictions identified and emphasised to the point of utter disruption. In the process we will meet individuals (like Gibson Thula, ex-Inkatha Soweto leader) who might see our point and help us in the process. Otherwise to bring Inkatha into any alliance would be cataclysmic for as long as it retains its present character.

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