

13th April, 1988

*ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE WAY FORWARD*

Major developments in the past few months have added a new dimension to the struggle on all fronts. Foremost among these is the "new" profile of deliberate open terror on the part of the regime against democratic forces both within South Africa and abroad. In the sphere of mass struggles, the entrance into active struggle of forces from within the bantustan state machineries and the new surge of militancy among religious groups have opened up new frontiers with tremendous possibilities. Since the beginning of the year, we have held a number of important meetings with various sectors of the MDM, affording us the opportunity to intervene on many a decisive question. In this assessment report, we review these developments and their bearing on our Programme of Action.

*RULING CLASS POLICIES AND TRENDS WITHIN:*

1. The main thrust of state strategy can only be characterised as open terror and sheer arrogance. While the regime pursues the same broad objectives, the intensity of its actions - within the country and internationally - further raises the level of confrontation.

1.1. Having failed to crush the MDM through the SoE, the regime has resorted to what amounts to effective banning. The 17 organisations affected are prohibited from undertaking any of the actions for which they were formed. COSATU can only carry out narrow "trade union activities" - which themselves are to be severely circumscribed under the proposed legislation. It is clear that the regime aims at achieving the following objectives:

\* To immobilise the national leadership of the MDM so as to further dislocate the struggles and to undercut the movement towards co-ordinated anti-apartheid unity in action.

\* To weaken the campaign against the Local Affairs (LA) elections especially in strategic industrial areas: JHB, PE, WCape and Vaal Triangle. Even in areas where the civics had not been effective due to repression, eg., PE and Cradock, the regime has decided to take action to prevent their revival during the boycott campaign. Success of these elections constitutes one of the main current objectives of the regime: on it hinges its whole constitutional formula.

\* Most of the individuals banned are crucial in areas where there has been conflict or where resistance has been tenacious: in Pietermaritzburg the regime hopes to torpedo the "peace talks" and further entrench Inkatha and its murder squads. In the WCape and Boland the regime aims at fanning the KTC conflict and weakening the strong grassroots structures.

\* The timing - a few days before the white by-election - also suggests an attempt to win the support of constituencies otherwise dominated by the ultra-right. In general, the regime is desperate to regain the confidence of ultra-right supporters for the October LA elections.

1.2. Through these actions, combined with attacks on high-profile ANC functionaries, the regime seeks to demoralise the democratic movement, weaken it and promote its own "black leaders" with whom it can strike a "credible deal" In the same vein, we cannot completely rule out the possibility of the regime taking drastic steps eg., the release of NM and other political prisoners into a situation in which the MDM is "immobilised": in the hope that they themselves would be "immobilised": It is difficult - if not impossible - to give coherence to the regime's thinking, but we have to work out our response and general plans taking into account the regime's present and future strategies.

2. The legitimisation of its structures of rule and winning over the masses on the basis of petty improvements and constitutional juggling forms a crucial part of the regime's strategy. PW Botha's speech at the opening of parliament highlights this quite clearly. While it concentrates on what appears to be "pure economics", these issues are in fact crucial to its

political policy: Pretoria's main quandary is that it does not have enough resources to run and maintain the huge state machinery and administration, to wage internal and external war and for the "upgrading" schemes. The projected privatisation of state-owned enterprises, the new system of taxation (VAT) and the wage freeze in the "public sector" are all meant to generate funds for the state. Through these and other measures, such as the recommended wage freeze in the "private sector" too, the regime also aims at appeasing big business. Black businessmen are to be enticed through some promised funds.

Yet, to implement most of these measures and achieve meaningful economic growth, requires "stability" and business confidence - which the regime always strives to attain through repression and "reform", that is, through further government expenditure. Such is the vicious circle.

3. The regime's desperate actions should also be looked at against the backdrop of the crisis of its puppet structures. The rickety and creaking bantustan administrations are a clear demonstration of this. Further, the attempts to set up the National (Statutory) Council have floundered. Combined with the popular contempt for the tri-cameral circus and confusion within this structure, these developments put in bolder relief the utter bankruptcy of the racist ruling clique's policies regarding the black majority - and the African people in particular. Stoffel van der Merwe captures the frustration of the ruling clique succinctly: "The phase of political reform we are now facing is such that it is increasingly important to get co-operation from other groups involved. This has not been forthcoming, particularly in the case of the National Council (NC)" - FM18/3/88.

4. The following trends within the ruling class and "its mass base" also need to be noted:

4.1. The recent by-elections have demonstrated the growing support for the ultra-right. Increasingly, the NP has to depend on English support: a consolidation of new class/national alliances. The intended wage freeze in the "public sector" also emphasises this.

4.2. Big business in general seems bent on cashing in on repression and the regime's proposed union-bashing laws. Attempts by COSATU to cajole them into some form of opposition to the labour amendments has drawn a cool response. While many still talk about long-term solutions, the prospect of apparent stability and economic recovery is uppermost in their minds.

4.3. On the other hand, forces such as IDASA and the NDM continue to cooperate with the FFF initiative for a broad anti-apartheid coalition among whites. Many problems have to be resolved in this regard. But they do realise the need for working together.

#### *MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN MASS STRUGGLES:*

##### 1. The uprising of patriotic soldiers in Bophuthatswana:

1.1. This revolt further underlines the depth of the crisis afflicting the bantustan system. The popular uprising among the people is finding root within echelons of the bantustan administrations. In spite of the weaknesses in their political understanding, most of the forces in Bophuthatswana, Transkei, KwaNdebele, KaNgwane and other areas are moved by deep patriotic sentiments. They have sought or are seeking out the democratic movement.

1.2. In Bophuthatswana, what was the regime's show-piece crumbled - and for a short but decisive 15 hours the regime lost power. The area came close to local popular rule. By their "invasion", the racists confirmed who the real rulers of all bantustans are.

1.3. The patriotic soldiers' revolt brings to sharper focus the following issues: centrality of politico-organisational work among these forces; importance of planning, decisiveness and national "solidarity" when such actions are undertaken; etc. The experience shows quite clearly the need to strengthen our underground[u/g] structures for such work. On the other hand, the MDM cannot stay aloof.

1.4. The situation in the Transkei has its own peculiarities. Yet whatever the chemistry of the forces in power, the general trend is not anti-people. What is lacking is organised mass action which could take the tactical form of support for "the anti-corruption crusade", a united popular movement on the issue of Sabata's proper burial and successor, etc. In the medium-term, these tactical actions would help create space for organisation and action around more socio-political issues.

2. The immediate response of various sectors of the MDM to the clampdown has created a solid foundation for anti-apartheid unity in action.

2.1. At the forefront of the immediate protest actions has been the religious bodies. In their speeches, petitions and demonstrations, the church leaders have demonstrated that they can transcend the boundaries of "martial legality". In these actions, Anglican and Dutch Reformed, Catholic and Moslem leaders found common cause - not just in declarations. The solidarity among religious groups and support from their international colleagues should help further to strengthen the religious leadership as an active participant in mass struggles. It should be noted that the theme of defiance has been tabled by the SACC for debate among its constituents: it should be encouraged, yet ensuring that there is proper national co-ordination, involvement of the wide spectrum of religious bodies, and that there is active mass support.

2.2. The demonstrations by FEDTRAW, NUSAS, Black Sash and others did register popular anger. But their weakness - the weakness of the mass response nationally - is the absence of national (and regional) co-ordination. Consultation within and among democratic structures is now under way, and the extra-ordinary COSATU Congress on May 7/8 is the MDM forum where the final decisions in this regard are to be taken.

3. In spite of the clampdown, mass actions have taken place on various fronts:

3.1. The March 21st. general strike was successful even by conservative estimates. In the major industrial areas - Witwatersrand, Pretoria, ECape - estimates were put at 80% of the workforce. It was also relatively successful in Natal.

3.2. COSATU's programme in opposition to proposed labour legislation has started to unfold. In addition to the consultation within affiliates, inter-union luncheon meetings and demonstrations are being held. In central JHB one such inter-union demonstration recently spilled into the streets. The strike movement so far this year is not as massive as last year eg., in the commercial and catering industries in particular. However a number of important strikes have taken place, including workers in the food and textile industries.

3.3. Other actions are:

*\* Boycotts and demonstrations among secondary and high school students in JHB, Krugersdorp, Pretoria and the Western Cape. The latter included teacher-action.*

*\* The rent boycott continues in a number of areas and it is particularly strong in the Eastern Tvl and Thembisa. In most other areas it is described as 50/50 due to the multi-pronged state strategy to break it.*

4. A number of armed actions have been executed since the beginning of the year. Many actions however go unreported or are distorted. The regime though is forced to admit major ones eg Soweto police station, ECape, Krugersdorp, North and Western Tvl.

#### ***MDM - STATE OF ORGANISATION AND MAIN ISSUES:***

1. When the latest restrictions were imposed, the MDM was just emerging from a period of planning and consultation on programmes to be embarked upon. What came out clearly during this period is the appreciation within the MDM of the need for broad unity in action among all anti-apartheid

forces, and closer co-ordination among the major democratic organisations: the UDF and COSATU.

1.1. In its February Circular, the UDF NEC emphasises the need for such co-ordination. It further states that both organisations had agreed on major campaigns: "The permanent structures [of UDF/COSATU] will help in the planning and co-ordination of these campaigns". Division of labour was also worked out. (We refer to the major campaigns in the relevant section).

1.2. The UDF however had been hard hit by the SoE, with areas such as ECape, NTvl and NWCape most severely affected. In addition, the national structure was not effective; it lacked sufficient contact with the grassroots and had operated in a manner that weakened the confidence of some regions eg the WCape. Related to this has been the problem of factionalism ("the Cabal") which once more threatened to rend the MDM apart.

1.3. COSATU had made many gains in organisational terms: proper constitution, and activation of the political education department; unity of garment/textile workers under its umbrella; some progress in the organisation of farmworkers, etc. However it had to contend with many problems eg the CCAWUSA split, ideological problems at Head Office; the non-functioning of virtually all COSATU Regions (as distinct from the affiliates).

2. Other sectors have also adopted plans in line with the UDF/COSATU national programme. Briefly, developments in these sectors can be characterised as follows:

#### 2.1. Youth and Students:

*\* SAYCO: Adopted its programme at the December CEC. Held a special CEC in March (after the banning) to review programme and, in the main, vowed to continue in spite of the restrictions. To use regions and local structures for publicity. However SAYCO National has been severely weakened by the detention of its President and three NEC members.*

\* *SANSQO*: Adopted programme at December Congress emphasising broad unity in action around sectional and national issues, grassroots organisation, work in the technicians campaign on repression in Turfloop, etc. *SANSQO* is now represented in the UDF NEC. They have also reported that the administrations in "liberal" universities have adopted a repressive posture in reverence to De Klerk - and they are thus heading for a major confrontation.

\* *NASCOC*: Revamped the national co-ordinating committee and set out to launch national structures. Plagued by problems of inexperience. Consultations being held with other sectors.

The three structures and NUSAS held a "Youth Summit" in March to work out mechanisms of co-ordination and review their role within the UDF. They resolved, inter alia, to assert themselves more decisively within the UDF to help strengthen the Front.

## 2.2. Other sectors:

\* *Women*: Broad agreement reached in various regions with other anti-apartheid structures eg Black Sash, church groups, Rape Crisis. However these organisations have adopted a wait-and-see attitude on the issue of affiliation to "Federation". National co-ordinating body has decided that national launch of "Federation" does not have to be preceded by regional launches.

\* *White democratic structures*: Process of concretising decisions of Wits FFF Conference under way. Organisers meeting all interested parties and response from IDASA, NDM and others quite positive. UDF "white affiliates" have formed a National Co-ordination Committee to ensure constant liaison and consultation. At its recent meeting, the NCC decided that they would launch the white coalition immediately after the October LA elections. Other issues being debated are:

+ the theme for mobilisation within the white community: negotiation/Open Society?

+ approach to the LA elections: boycott/participation as white MDM/support "liberal" candidates; and the platform if latter two approaches adopted?



3. In the meetings held between the movement and the MDM, the following major issues were discussed: (NB: All other pertinent questions are integrated into other sections of this report).

3.1. The MDM consultation: represented were the UDF and a number of its major affiliates and COSATU. Covered:

\* state of organisation within various sectors, assessment of current situation including clampdown and the way forward.

\* special attention paid to two major problem areas: the Cabal issue and the conflict in Natal:

+ Cabal: accounts were given of its destructive activities; reasons for its existence; and concrete measures adopted to resolve the problem once and for all: need for democracy and accountability; to strengthen and formalise UDF Commission dealing with the problem; proposed meeting between movement and the two sides; need for on-the-spot u/g guidance.

+ PmH/Natal: accounts given of unfolding of Inkatha/state strategy and response of the MDM; peace talks and implications of the clampdown; the way forward to include: intensified international campaign involving activists from the area; systematic self-defence including movt intervention; a systematic political strategy for mass mobilisation and grassroots organisation; mobilisation of chiefs; MDM to continue pressing for talks. (NB: The structure proposed would have to find ways of dovetailing with subsequent W Mandela initiative).

3.2. Meeting with CONTRALESA (February): Delegation mainly from KwaNdebele. Covered in the discussions were: importance of CONTRALESA and perspectives for its work; approach to each bantustan; agreement on programme of action including need for organisation on a nationwide scale; work within Independent churches; organisation of traditional healers, etc.

3.3. KTC (March): Delegation representing the warring parties. Problem discerned as arising from: urban/rural inter-relations; state intervention; clumsy manner in which some MDM (& Congress) leaders and structures handled the issue. Finally reconciled, and a programme agreed upon for practical implementation, including: need for one civic; forum for consultation;

mobilisation of masses around issues agreed upon; consistent democracy as foundation of all structures; systematic organisation of migrants and the unemployed; etc.

3.4. Teachers (April): Delegations representing ATASA, UTASA and TASA on the one hand, and progressive teachers' unions and NECC on the other. Problems hampering unity were frankly addressed - mainly the suspicions of old, "conservative" tendencies and practices within the mainline teacher-organisations; sectarian tendencies among the progressives; etc. Finally agreed on broad principles and a programme towards one, national anti-apartheid teachers' organisation: to work within and among various organisations for such unity; organise joint projects; establish a negotiating machinery to be convened by COSATU, etc.

*It should be emphasised that, in these meetings, more than ever before, the movement was able to directly guide the future work of a wide spectrum of the MDM and help resolve major problems. In a number of areas, eg KTC, the efforts have started to bear fruit. However, the ultimate success depends on the constant intervention of the u/g within the country: indeed, the fact that the problems reached acute proportions and had to be attended to "from outside" is both a reflection of our authority and a testimony to the weakness of our structures within the country.*

#### **THE WAY FORWARD:**

1. The clampdown on major sectors of the MDM has created new difficulties in the sphere of mass mobilisation. Yet it is an axiom of revolution that mass mobilisation has to continue and intensify. Further, the reality of our situation is that the question we face is not one about the readiness of the masses to act, their militancy; BUT whether or not we are able - at the MDM and u/g levels - to muster the organisational capacity to co-ordinate and lead popular actions. The challenge of the day is NOT whether or not we should implement the programmes agreed upon. The question is how! At the March meeting with the MDM, various issues were raised in this regard. After extensive discussion, and starting from the premise that the

situation is to worsen, this is how the MDM delegation posed these questions:

\* "We agreed that the central issue...is one of the strategic options to be adopted...Two such options emerge: 1) to absorb blows in order to consolidate, i.e., to give ourselves time to rebuild and organise our structures, so as to take the struggle forward; 2) to unite people in action, by defying and challenging the apartheid system. We believe there is no contradiction between the two..."

\* "COSATU's restriction led the organisation to adopting the position that it would defy the state if prevented from discussing the implications, and a response to the ban" (this is in reference to the planned extra-ordinary Congress of COSATU in which the MDM will take active part).

\* "Given the bannings, we are not able to call action in the name of the banned organisations, without inviting a violent state reaction. But the mood of the people is that they want action, and the MDM has a responsibility to co-ordinate the struggles of the people...Thus we need to operate at two levels: 1) subterranean manner in order to consolidate structures; 2) openly in a mood/spirit of defiance, calling on our people to actively resist apartheid laws. Accept consequence."

\* "Problems: 1) what does this mean to building front - broadening alliance of anti-apartheid forces. Will this still be possible with u/g leadership and faceless structures;

2) who will be responsible for making calls for action and consultation. How do we avoid cliquism?"...

\* "UDF should call on people to get into action in the name of the UDF, as it enjoys prestige. However tactic of leadership should be to go u/g in order to continue the work of the front".

\* "One caution sounded was that we should distinguish between u/g strategy of movement and u/g tactic of MDM."

A related and central question is whether the regime is in a position to implement all the measures it has instituted, to police all and sundry - and how in fact we can further weaken its capacity to do so.

3. All these and other questions can only be concretised in the process of extensive consultation and in the actual practice of struggle. But the

organisational response has to be multi-pronged, combining the u/g, semi-legal and legal/open forms. Further, the following factors should be taken into account:

3.1. The forms of action should correspond to the minimum organisational capacities necessary. These actions should themselves be undertaken in such a way that they help to build organisation and should build up to more effective actions. The aim should be to wage an uninterrupted and intensifying mass offensive.

3.2. Co-ordination and leadership are an absolute necessity. At all levels - local, regional and national - there should be "political centres/cores" which strategise and direct mass actions. The UDF and COSATU (and any other relevant organisations in the various regions) should constitute such cores. These structures cannot operate above board.

3.3. A number of major UDF affiliates have not been proscribed: NIC, TIC, women's organisations, white affiliates and so on. COSATU affiliates - as distinct from COSATU per se - are not restricted. In a careful and selective manner these organisations will have to take up the cudgels in the field of publicity and ensuring "legal cover" for some actions (eg Call for March 21st Day of Protest). Except for the trade union movement (to a certain measure), all these structures were operating semi-legally: within the minefield of the S.A. Though their actions on many issues would not automatically constitute an offense, they have been and will always be targetted by the enemy.

3.4. There will always be need for "high-profile" campaigning and leadership. In this regard, religious institutions, cultural and sports bodies and so on - i.e. structures relatively cushioned off from direct state action thus far - will be invaluable. Yet they will have to be co-ordinated, and led by collectives that include the "political centres/cores". Democratic activists should themselves operate within these bodies.

4. The purpose of all the above is to ensure the implementation of the Programme of Action agreed upon. Central in our own Programme is the

campaign to strengthen u/g structures and intensify purposeful armed struggle. Both these elements have an added responsibility under present conditions: including as agents of mass mobilisation. We briefly outline hereunder the major campaigns in the PoA (also agreed upon with the MDM), and the modifications/emphases where applicable:

4.1. There is need for a continuous campaign against the clampdown: in the form of church services demonstrations, vigils, press statements and so on. This should include protest against assassinations, detentions, trials, hangings, suppression of the media and all other forms of repression.

4.2. This campaign and others should further lay the basis for the creation of a broad coalition of anti-apartheid forces. The need for this coalition to isolate and weaken the ruling clique has never been more urgent; the slogan: Botha and his clique are the enemy of the whole nation (and of humanity), has never been more relevant. (NB: Tentative agreement has been reached with the MDM on the timing and organisational questions re: the "All-In" Conferences. This is to be finalised in further consultation).

4.3. The campaign for the boycott of LA elections in the black community is a crucial issue for the democratic forces. Various forms should be used: door-to-door; u/g and semi-legal propaganda; usage of religious, sports, cultural and other forms; formation of "apolitical fronts", etc. And the question should be asked and answered in concrete practice: should the puppets be allowed to campaign - to hold meetings and strut among the people! .

4.4. Labour legislation and Living Wage: It should be noted that COSATU is not prohibited from carrying out both campaigns. Therefore, the organisational forms and actions should not be limited to the semi-legal level. The unfolding lunchtime meetings and demonstrations should be intensified and extended to other sectors of the MDM. The campaign should also lay the basis for united action towards the resolution of the COSATU/NACTU divide. In our meeting with the latter this issue should be strongly addressed.

4.5. Bantustans: In addition to the detailed issues in the PoA:

- \* Ensure "solidarity" with the patriotic forces in Bophuthatswana
- \* Constantly monitor and help steer the election process in KaNgwane
- \* Win over the vacillating chiefs in KwaNdebele on the basis of the preconditions for elections to take place.
- \* Organise for mass action in the Transkei around tactical question of support for the anti-corruption crusade and issue of Sabata's proper burial and succession. To help create space for action around more strategic issues.

4.6. Political Prisoners: As in the PoA. Also intensify campaign re: Harry Gwala; and need to clarify the issue of GM Reception Committee and IDAMASA - ensuring that no one barricades him from the MDM.

4.7. Religious Groups: Need to encourage the new mood of resolute action including the proposed defiance campaign.

4.8. White Democratic organisations:

- \* LA elections: should call for a vote against apartheid - support candidates on basis of anti-apartheid platform: anti-JMC's, against group areas, against separate amenities, for non-racial democratic City Councils, etc. The campaign should help cement National Initiative towards the white coalition.
- \* The central theme for the coalition/mobilisation within the white community should be agreed upon in broad consultation: not negotiations but eg For an Open/Just society. Issue of negotiations to arise concretely and in context during process of mobilisation.
- \* Speed up arrangement for meeting with FFF.

#### CONCLUSION:

The developments outlined above pose new questions and challenges for all sectors of the democratic movement. It is therefore necessary to issue A

CALL briefly assessing the situation and outlining broad guidelines on the way forward.