

the defiance campaign

At a public meeting on 24 August 1989 Black Sash National President Mary Burton provided some answers to questions about the Campaign. The following extracts are still relevant to future action.

There are many questions concerning the Defiance Campaign which are being asked by those outside the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). Sometimes they are asked sympathetically, sometimes with hostile intent. It is important not to evade those questions but to look at them honestly and try to answer them.

1. Who is the MDM? Who has planned the Defiance Campaign? How democratically has it been planned?

Representatives of the MDM have stated clearly that it is a broad alliance with COSATU and the UDF and its affiliates as a core. The editor of *Business Day*, Mr Ken Owen, has added the ANC to the list, based on information about a meeting said to have taken place in Lusaka in June. It is only to be expected that organisations within the country should consult with exiled leaders, and only the fact that the ANC and other organisations are banned which makes it advisable not to specify whether they are involved. As the Campaign has progressed, organisations like our own which are not structurally part of any movement have indicated their support for the Campaign and have participated in its actions.

The regulations promulgated in terms of the State of Emergency have so curtailed the ability of organisations to meet in safety that it is difficult to assess what degree of consultation with grassroots structures has been possible. The fact that participation has been widespread, and that UDF affiliates which are geographically widespread have clearly been involved, seems to me to prove that the claims that the Movement is both mass-based and democratic are as correct as possible in the prevailing climate of repres-

sion. Furthermore, I have neither seen nor heard any evidence of coercion, and the fact that in some parts of the country restrictees are seen as too important to the Movement to be allowed to put themselves at risk shows that there is room for differences of opinion and strategy.

2. What are the objectives of the Defiance Campaign?

These appear to be multiple. The first thrust seems to have come from the severe restrictions imposed on many of the detainees released in the wake of the hunger strike at the beginning of the year. Discussions about how to oppose these restrictions led to a wider focus on restrictive laws in general. Secondly, there are the daily conditions of the lives of millions of people which cause anger and frustration. Leaflets have been prepared which detail the facts and register the bitterness which many feel about the ever-deepening problems with regard to health, education, shelter, unemployment, crime, repression and fear.

There are other objectives too, which are equally intrinsic to the importance of the Campaign. There is widespread concern that the crisis situation in South Africa, largely created by internal resistance, external pressure and looming economic collapse, will bring about negotiations and settlements which ignore the views of the majority of the population (who have borne the brunt of apartheid rule, and the costs of the resistance) and of the organisations which have been banned and exiled, particularly the ANC. The Campaign is designed to bring these actors on to centre stage for participation in such negotiations.

It is necessary to stress once again the importance of lifting the ban on the ANC, PAC and other political organisations. It has become

ridiculous, and costly, for organisations in South Africa to send representatives abroad to discuss the future with the ANC. And on return, are these people hypocritically to abide by the laws that prevent them from quoting the people they have met? Let us see the State President exercise true leadership by allowing us (and his own supporters) to meet the representatives of these organisations here, to argue with and question them and to engage in open and civilised debate.

3. Will the Defiance Campaign, however peaceful and disciplined, lead to violent confrontation?

Many of us have witnessed at first hand the discipline and control of those taking part and of the marshalls and leaders in many of the actions. We have also witnessed occasions on which the actions of the police led to violence. Can one say that because this is predictable, given the past history of police action, one should therefore take no action? I believe it is wrong to acquiesce in what one knows to be wrong simply because the wrongdoer has more power and is not afraid to use it.

We do have to say that we do not support the aggressive actions that have sometimes occurred - the throwing of stones by angry people does not lend weight to the Defiance Campaign. The Black Sash cannot accept actions such as the killing of the Nyanga policeman, nor the bombing of banks or other premises. We need to stress that there is nothing except innuendo or suspicion to link these events to the Defiance Campaign.

We see our task as being not to hide away from the violent reality of our society but to do all we can to reassert the claim to the right of peaceful protest and assembly.

4. Can this Defiance Campaign be misused and manipulated, can those who wish for violence use it as a cover, and where does this lead us?

We need to acknowledge that we have these anxieties and doubts. There is a danger that they will paralyse us, and that we will retreat into the world where we feel more comfortable - the world of ideas and debate, rather than risk involvement. If we allow ourselves to be paralysed, we leave the terrain open to the very confrontation which we dread - between those who will take oppression no longer and those who will brook no resistance. There are strategies and techniques which can be learned by those who engage in non-violent action which minimise the risks.

The most important question of all is: What is *our* responsibility? Do we need to throw our weight behind the organisations that represent the majority of the people to achieve their aims - because they *are* the majority? Will we be accused of being 'useful idiots' - the unwitting tools of the ANC, or of the working class, or of the communists?

I believe the question for us is: Do we want to uphold and protect human rights? And if so, how?

We have a special responsibility to tell the truth without fear or favour. We must throw back the thick and musty curtains of apartheid and emergency rule, and let the healthy air and daylight in.

I will no longer be silenced by the emergency regulations, and I call on the editors of all the newspapers of this country to unshackle themselves, to report events with only the proper restraint of wise and responsible journalism, and no longer to deny their readers the full picture of what is being done.

The Defiance Campaign, in the words of Professor Jakes Gerwel, Principal of the University of the Western Cape, is 'an opportunity to rise in a disciplined and non-violent manner and indicate to a minority government that it does not rule with the consent of the people'.

Let us grasp this opportunity. □

DEFIANCE IN ACTION

'I am Sgt Davies. You are under arrest. Come with me.' This, or versions of it, was heard by twelve Black Sash members in Johannesburg on Wednesday, 2 October 1989, as they stood in lawful picket in support of the defiance of hospital apartheid. We were gathered up and escorted to the police station.

The hospital defiance campaign continued without a hitch. Police stood by and allowed a peaceful, non-racial crowd to receive treatment at the hospital. Meanwhile, we sat in a room in the Parkview police station and waited for hours whilst the police decided how to process us. Our small victory that morning came when, after an initial refusal ('Do you think this is a picnic?'), we were allowed to retrieve Sarah's flask from her car, and each savour a half-cup of warm coffee. Later, 'mug-shots' were taken (no fingerprints), and we were each led off and asked to sign that we understood the nature of the charges that we were facing, and that we preferred not to make a statement. Finally, we were released into the arms of our anxious chairperson!

Our analysis was that the police had had firm instructions not to disturb the protest planned at the Johannesburg Hospital. However, they had not been specifically ordered to leave the Black Sash alone. So, out of frustration, they arrested

us on a charge that everybody knows could not be made to stick (that of attending an unlawful gathering as defined by the Internal Security Act). We have heard nothing from them, and do not anticipate that we will ever be arraigned.

STOP PRESS: On 31 October the police advised that the Attorney General had declined to prosecute and the 'exhibits' (sashes and posters) could be returned. □

Sheila Weinberg, Transvaal Region

defiance is the right to peaceful protest

On Thursday, 24 August, 22 members of Cape Western Region (pictured below) were arrested for holding a mass stand in Greenmarket Square, following a public meeting addressed by National President Mary Burton and other speakers.

Police who arrived on the scene in yellow vans ordered the standers to disperse after a few minutes only. When the time limit was up, the posters and banner were confiscated and the standers rounded up. After photographs and fingerprints were complete, the 22 were released on their own recognisances and the docket forwarded to the Attorney General. □

Cape Western Region

