

## Keep up the good work

SEVERAL messages of support were received by Grassroots for its Third Annual General Meeting.

### CAHAC

THE Cape Areas Housing Action Committee: We salute Grassroots for its contribution to the peoples' struggles since 1980. Largely because of these struggles, the government can no longer continue to rule in the old way. It has been forced to buy time through the President's Council proposals and the Koornhof Bills.

These will no doubt be strongly resisted. The government will not allow this resistance to continue unchallenged. Already we have seen how they use the media to confuse the people. Thus, the role of Grassroots will become even more important.

### CTMWA

THE Cape Town Municipal Workers Association: Grassroots has filled an important vacuum. The newspaper is most informative and plays a vital role in educating the oppressed. Continue the good work.

### MPCC

THE Mitchells Plain Coordinating Committee: We salute you, pledge our continued support and hope you will grow stronger as the only genuine people's paper. Forward the people's paper.

### MWASA

MEDIA Workers Association (Western Cape): We sincerely hope that efforts to distribute the paper more widely will bear fruit. To this end, we pledge our full support.

### SASPU

THE South African Students Press Union: Grassroots dedication as a paper which is truly the voice of the people has been an inspiration to all in the alternative press. We express our continued support in the way ahead.

### MPYW

THE Mitchells Plain Youth Movement: We reaffirm our commitment to the goals of Grassroots as a uniting force in our struggle, on the basis of our belief in the united action of the oppressed people, including the youth. We pledge again to seek maximum involvement of our members in Grassroots.



Advocate  
Dullah Omar

## Teaching people to stand together and fight

THE first great service Grassroots rendered was to make people believe in themselves, a Cape Town advocate Mr Dullah Omar has said.

Speaking at the official opening of the AGM, he said the community paper was born at a time when people in hundreds of locations still had to take the first step forward.

Grassroots helped to fight the demoralisation and apathy and build people's confidence in themselves.

"It assisted people in understanding that they are not spectators in their own destiny but participants. We help to shape the future.

"People were encouraged to examine their own day to day problems, grapple with them and unite with others with similar problems.

"We have learnt that if we

stand together and fight together, we can succeed.

"Grassroots highlighted efforts of communities to help themselves, helped people to share experiences with others.

We also learnt it was only the people who could bring about change in South Africa.

Not a single paper controlled by big business, including the Cape Herald and Sowetan, represented the views of the oppressed, he said.

At one time we did have newspapers which either belonged to or served the oppressed. In the 1940s and 50s, the Guardian was read by thousands of blacks.

"When it was banned, it came out under the name Advance and then Clarion and then New Age. All of them suffered the same fate.

"There was also the Torch

circulating mainly in the Cape. Though not banned, it was forced to close down due to the persecution and banning of its personnel.

"The end of these papers signified that South Africa had entered a period of darkness and repression. The ANC and PAC were banned and countless people persecuted.

"The State, assisted by other sections of the ruling class, launched a gigantic campaign to change the thinking of the oppressed.

"By attacking the minds of the young and destroying people's leaders, the strategy of the State was not only to produce a slave mentality but destroying a people's history."

He said we were taught that we had no history, or if we did, it was dirty and treacherous.

"After 13 years, in 1973 the workers struck a blow for free

dom. Wave after wave of strikes brought new hope.

And our students at schools and bush colleges, in 1976 and thereafter, "became soldiers of the freedom struggle".

"The decade of 1973 to 1983 is undoubtedly the decade of the worker-student alliance.

"It does not mean that everybody overnight changed from slaves into freedom fighters.

The State's onslaught had taken its toll, Mr Omar said. In locations and communities all over the country, people still complained about what was being done TO them and wondered what was going to be done FOR them.

"The role Grassroots began to play three years ago was to a large extent determined for it by the very situation in which we lived."

GRASSROOTS seems to be a child of the oppressed. So when a child is enjoying her birthday, the people who gave it birth celebrate. We do not only want to wish it

many more happy birthdays but we also ask ourselves and our child "which way are we going and how do we see your place in the struggle ahead". At the same time, the

people's offspring, Grassroots, can also ask whether they, the people, appreciate their offspring, and have we made proper use of the child in our work. — Mr Omar.

## Forward with the people's paper!

MORE THAN 500 singing, cheering and chanting people. The glare of the video camera lights. The backdrop of a beautifully hand-painted banner symbolising the growth of Grassroots since 1980.

Banners of several civic, union, student, youth, women's organisations draped around the hall, signalling their solidarity with the paper. Messages of support, hailing the paper's good work. The hive of activity in the hall's foyer as people clamour for Grassroots T-shirts, buttons and stickers.

This was the scene at the opening of Grassroots' Third Annual General Meeting in St. Marks Hall, Church St., Athlone, on Friday March 18.

It wasn't so much "a show of strength" as someone remarked, or to indicate "we've made it after three years". But, as one organisation said in its message: "Forward the people's paper".

It was a time for members, supporters and subscribers of Grassroots to hear reports on the paper's progress, listen to speakers outline the important role of the paper and discuss the future.

And, in the end, to get people to rededicate themselves to taking the paper "forward".

Speaker after speaker applauded the role Grassroots had played since 1980 and condemned the President's Council proposals and the Koornhof Bills. These included the Grassroots' outgoing chairperson, Essa Moosa, the outgoing secretary, Rashid Seria, Cape Town advocate Dullah Omar, and Pastor Frank Chickane of Johannesburg.

On Saturday, March 19 at the St. Francis Cultural Centre, Langa, it was down to the serious debate of the paper's future with delegates and observers from about 80 organisations attending.

## Educative, critical but still a mouthpiece

MORE educative, independent, critical but still a mouthpiece of democratic organisations.

This was the decision of the AGM on the future role of Grassroots.

It followed group discussions and a paper by organiser Lila Patel on The Way Forward. The paper included discussions with activists, youth groups, trade-unions and members of civic, student and women's organisations. The discussions were part of the assessments which took place before the AGM.

Ms Patel said many people felt Grassroots should be more political rather than a narrow issue-orientated paper.

There were different views on what was meant by political. Some understood it to mean that the



During the two day programme delegates broke up into groups to discuss questions facing grassroots. Here is one of the eight groups at work.



Delegates at the AGM's report back session.

paper should be a political mouthpiece.

Others felt Grassroots was political. Reporting on organisation at civic, youth, women's student and worker levels was political but at a different level.

Still others agreed that the paper was political but felt organisation had reached a higher level and faced new challenges like the President's Council and the Koornhof Bills.

They felt the paper should continue to be a mouthpiece for mass organisations but the emphasis should change.

It should be more educative and link struggles for rents, wages and so forth to apartheid and capitalism. It should also criticise the way we work, its successes, failures and weaknesses.

It should have some independence in giving political direction but this independence should not mean the paper was separate from mass organisations. It should explain why conditions existed and not only report on it, Ms Patel said.

The AGM resolved that Grassroots should remain a mouthpiece of mass organisations but become more educative.

It should remain a broad forum in which views and opinions could be debated and criticised. The debate should not be aimed at intellectuals but at educating and politicising all its readers. Criticism should be constructive and not divisive. The effects of the criticisms should at all times be considered by Grassroots.

THE new executive of Grassroots for 1983 includes Rashid Seria, chairperson; Lynn Matthews, secretary-treasurer; Machella Naidoo, assistant secretary; Essa Moosa and Enver Daniels, trustees; Kay Arnold, newsgathering convenor; Steve Carolus, distribution convenor; Marion Jacobs and Willie Hofmeyr, advice convenors; Shanaaz Meer, fundraising convenor; and Anton Fisher, workshop convenor.