

Defend, consolidate and advance the Front

Topic 1:

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE AND THE FRONT APPROACH

What has been the experience of the Front approach in national liberation struggles in other countries?

"For the working class to play their full role, their leadership must be fundamentally political leadership....Insofar as the legal democratic movement is concerned, this can only mean working class leadership of the UDF itself".

Some people say that we should be building a pure working class front. Others feel that it is correct to build a united front of all oppressed classes led by the working class. What do you think? How do we build working class leadership of the UDF?

Topic 2:

BROADENING THE FRONT

At the same time as bringing together the mainstream democratic forces the UDF has come to extend its "political and moral influence" and work with a far broader range of popular forces. This has brought these broader forces closer to the democratic movement, without them necessarily affiliating to the Front. Examples of this would be some religious groups, sports bodies, cultural clubs, traders and so on.

DISCUSSION : What have the democratic organisations in your area done to extend their influence to these broad range of organisations, that is to broaden the Front. Identify which are the groups which fall outside the mainstream democratic movement. Discuss how the Front in your area should practically work with these groups; what have the problems been in the past?

Also discuss what is meant by the paper when it says that these groups must be won over politically, rather than in an opportunistic way (page).

The paper also says our political approach should "deprive the enemy of every support base, and of every political ally". Have you done this in your area? Also talk about how this approach can help to deal with the vigilante/kitskonstabel problem.

Topic 3

THE UDF AS UNITED FRONT AND POLITICAL CENTRE

"The development of rudimentary structures of peoples power has had profound effects on the nature of the UDF. At the township level, the street, the block and zonal structures cut across the old sectoral lines of our affiliates. (This has led to a responsibility which is global political (an overall political role) and not only specific to a particular sector be it youth, civic, labour, women or student".

The general raising of the level of our struggle since 1985 has at the same time laid the basis for the Front to propel the mass democratic movement into a qualitatively new phase. The penetration of all sectors of the democratic movement (civic, trade union, women, student, youth) into virtually every corner of the country under the banner of UDF and COSATU created the conditions for a much more powerful united front of organisations than had hitherto been the case. The bringing together of all community-based organisations under the banner of the Front allowed the UDF to play a far more dynamic and active co-ordinating role, compared to the very loose co-ordinating role it had played before. As indicated above the development of rudimentary organs of peoples power even began to break down the strict barriers between different sectors operating in any one particular area.

At the same time, all sectors of the mass democratic movement began to look to the UDF to provide political direction and leadership at national, regional and local level. The massive repression placed new demands on the democratic movement. The UDF began to be called on to play the role of providing a political centre for the mass democratic movement.

Shifts and developments in the character of the mass democratic struggle, and in the character of the Front, have given rise to two closely related developments:

1. The united front of organisations to enable effective co-ordination.
2. The emergence of a political centre based in the united front to enable accountable and dynamic political leadership.

Discussion A: Building the United Front at the local level

"The United Front needs to be built at a local level. Zonal and area committee structures of the UDF must be transformed into united front structures in which all sectors are represented, especially workers, youth, women, students and civics".

Is there a UDF committee in your area acting as a united front of organisations? If not, what are the problems? How can the united front be built in our area?

If your UDF structure is performing this function, discuss how to make sure that it operates in the following way, truly mass-based, that is properly accountable to all representatives of all the organisations and

zones in your area

- helping to build and strengthen organisation at local level
- co-ordinating and initiating activity and campaigns in your area
- maintaining proper contact with regional and sub-regional structures of the UDF
- building a relationship with the local branches of COSATU?

Relationship with the trade unions at the local level:

"It is incorrect to turn the trade union locals into pure political organs. At the local level, the forums for political co-ordination are the zonal, area, and township co-ordinating committees".

What is the relationship in your area of the UDF local to the COSATU local? Has COSATU been given the opportunity to be represented on your local UDF committee?

Discussion B: Building the Political Centre

"At the local level the political centre is the heart and engine of the united front of organisations...By 'political centres' we are referring to organisational collectives that are capable of providing political leadership, that are able to strategise, to lead...They do not simply react to one crisis after another. They are able to plan ahead carrying the struggle to the enemy on the peoples terms".

Some of the functions of the political centre are:

1. To regularly review the state of organisation and the forces at work in a particular area;
2. To assess the strategies of the enemy and the impact they are having on the people;
3. To strategise and give political direction in an ongoing way rather than waiting for a crisis to arise;
4. To assess the weak links of the democratic movement in the local area and to devise ways of correcting the problem; whether it is specific to a sector, eg. the absence of a civic or womens organisation, or whether the weakness applies to all the organisations, eg. a low level of political education and training or an absence of propaganda.
5. To look beyond its immediate area of operation, eg. nearby townships and assist in extending the work of the Front.

Is the Front in your area fulfilling the functions listed above? If not, discuss how these functions can be fulfilled.

How can we ensure the tasks of overall political leadership be performed without undermining the processes of democracy?

Topic 4:

THE UNITED FRONT AND THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

The approach that we have adopted helps us to adapt to emergency conditions in two ways:

*The building of a "political centre" enables us to create decentralised political leadership at local levels. This leadership collective can strategise and plan how best to "defend, consolidate and advance" organisation at a local level. Local areas don't only rely on direction from the UDF NEC and REC.

* The broadening and deepening of the Front into all facets of our peoples lives transforms the UDF into a true Peoples Front. In this way it is more difficult for the regime to isolate us from the people and to render us defenceless. This is what is meant by the paper when it says "the political key to defence lies in broadening to the maximum the peoples camp, while isolating to the maximum the apartheid regime".

DISCUSSION: What have been the political problems you have experienced in your area during the State of Emergency?

How can the creation of a local political centre, based in the Front, help you to overcome these problems?

How can the broadening and deepening of the Front help you to overcome problems caused by the Emergency?

Topic 5:

THE WAY FORWARD

We have recognised that not all the mass based organisations in the democratic movement are affiliated to the Front, particularly many of the trade unions in COSATU. At the same time we have said it is absolutely necessary that we have a much closer and more structured relationship to these organisations. This has given rise to the mistaken approach amongst a small minority in the democratic movement: - that in order for us to develop this relationship it is necessary for these organisations to formally affiliate to the Front, OR that the UDF must be dismantled and a totally new front must be created.

DISCUSSION : Why are these two approaches mistaken?

How do we build the Front in a way that creates the maximum unity in action between all the mass-based democratic formations, particularly and COSATU?

What can be done under emergency conditions to strengthen the Front?