

# The front debate

The articles in this column aim at taking further the debate about united fronts, introduced in the last issue of **MAYIBUYE**. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of the organisations to which the writers belong. The aim is to generate as much debate as possible. Further contributions are welcome.



**A** brief look at the history of the UDF will reveal that the Front was formed during a period of what the regime thought was the consolidation of apartheid policy.

Ten bantustans had been established, and four of these had accepted a status of 'independence'. When the regime pushed through the House of Assembly the Koornhof and Tri-cameral Parliament Bills, it was bringing the legal-constitutional separateness to the urban areas.

It is small wonder, therefore, that civic associations became the backbone of the UDF after it was formed. The Front was formed to confront the regime on two specific issues that sought to entrench white control on the one hand, and further isolate and exclude the African majority from all effective institutions of power on the other.

## POLITICAL ORGANISATION

At the time of its formation, it had been expressed that the UDF was not a political organi-

## The future of the UDF

by Gugile Nkwinti, Eastern Cape  
ANC and UDF regional secretary

sation that sought to replace the African National Congress. On the contrary, it had to work towards the unbanning of the ANC so that the latter could take its rightful place in engaging the regime in mechanisms aimed at transferring power to the majority.

But this immediately implied that the UDF was perceived as having a Congress or Charterist inclination. This narrowed the base of the Front.

Now the ANC has been unbanned; and the UDF has not been disbanded. Fears have been expressed, perhaps correctly, about the UDF being used by some activists as a base from which they could undermine the ANC. I will not pursue this point any further as I believe that my text as a whole will impact on it.

It is not, in my opinion, neces-

sary to emphasise the successes of the UDF in confronting the regime and rendering the townships ungovernable, in discussing the future of the UDF. One needs to look at the Front itself, and examine its strengths and weaknesses as a vehicle to a democratic society.

## DYNAMISM AND VIBRANCY

It is true that, at some point in time, the Front lost dynamism and democratic vibrancy across its hierarchy. The question that has to be asked is: to what extent can this be attributed to subjective weaknesses within the leadership structures of the organisation itself or to the extremely difficult conditions within which the Front operated? Or both?

**T**he previous MAYIBUYE article hits the nail on the head when it points out that we cannot sacrifice the collective gains of our struggle to partisan (or even sectarian) interests.

This requires us to execute several tasks – the most urgent being to build peace among our people and the capacity to defend that peace. Well-rooted political and community organisations must jointly provide a framework within which this can be achieved.

For clear, goal-directed action to happen there is also a need to thrash out a clear programme of action for the common front. In this way we are able to ensure that our common action and assault on apartheid brings us closer to the basic aims of the struggle.

### COHESION AND UNITY

The cohesion and unity of anti-apartheid forces depends crucially on the liberation movement being able to pull together. It is on this score that we can hardly afford to let the masses be disillusioned by watching a quibbling contest/mud slinging between our leaders.

Furthermore, we are already involved in a process where the basis for negotiations is being laid. The task again falls on the liberation movement to ensure that the very foundations of this

# The broad patriotic front

**by Sam Mkhabela, political education officer of the ANC Witbank branch and UDF leader**

process is mass participation on the question of transfer of power to the people.

It is for this reason that the Constituent Assembly and the Interim Government have been pin-pointed as the best instruments to ensure that negotiations take place on a basis that fundamentally addresses the interests of the masses.

The legitimacy of any step taken to resolve the question of apartheid colonialism depends on the process by which this is done.

There are two sides to this: how effectively we involve the masses and the credibility of the participants in this process.

The success with which we can carry out the attempt to build a genuinely patriotic front will greatly influence not only the prospects for the transition to democracy, but also the chances of a stable post-

liberation future.

Following on the discussion above, we may suggest that a possible programme of the patriotic front could include the following:

- The setting up of independent monitoring structures, and an impartial institution to deal with cases of political violence and intimidation against the people.

### CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

- A campaign for the constituent assembly and interim government. Here the participants in the broad front would have to set up the appropriate campaign structures as well as identify specific ways in which pressure can be applied on the regime through national and sub-national mass action.

- Clear links have to be estab-

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In discussions around the future of the Front, the idea of transforming its character has received dominance. The UDF, it is argued, is supposed to remove itself from the political centre-stage, for that belongs to the ANC. Some as-yet vague ideas have been thrown about, about such a front playing a co-ordinating role for civic, student and other non-party political organisations. This would definitely have to include the trade union movement.

The idea of a social movement

existing on levels of civil society immediately springs to mind. This is what should be emphasised when considering the future of the UDF. It need not bear the same name; nor should it suffer from the narrow political confines in which the UDF found itself hemmed.

During its existence, the UDF had brought into reality the notion of non-racialism within a hostile milieu of extreme state racism.

It built within the mass democratic movement a culture of democratic practice, characterised by demands for mandates

and accountability from those who hold elected positions in organisations.

The political situation has generated serious debates on questions of fundamental import. These include the possibilities of establishing democratic formations such as a broad patriotic front. These formations will be geared not only at transforming apartheid society. They will also have to act as checks and balances for the dynamism and vibrancy of democracy beyond the apartheid state.

This should be the direction into which the Front is trans-



**Leaders from a range of anti-apartheid organisations which participated in the Conference for a Democratic Future a few years ago.**

lished between the struggle around negotiations at a national level and the ongoing campaigns of the masses such as the land re-occupation struggles based on the popular spirit of defiance.

- The campaign for 'Peace and Freedom Now' needs to be taken further to encompass other political formations, to be a campaign of the broad front, as well as being linked to the demands for the normalization of political life in South Africa.

- A unifying declaration – setting out the perspective of unity in action and a code of conduct

that includes the discouraging of political opportunism, e.g. where groups participate in joint efforts only when it suits them and pulling out for sectarian reasons.

- A clear process of dislodging, rehabilitating and winning over those previously serving apartheid has to be directed by guidelines built into the programme of the broad front.

- Consideration needs to be given to forms of participation of the international community in the process of transition, including pressure to normalise the situation and curb anti-people

violence.

**AVAILABLE FORCES**

Attention needs to be given to ways of extending the broad front, not confining it to the founder-participants. At the same time, it is necessary to recognise that it is basically a front of struggle: to proceed with the forces available and include others as it goes on, and not be bogged down by 'endless' debate around 'fine-tuning' or self-conferred powers of veto by those standing outside the effort being made. ♦

formed.

The existence of such a front of organs of civil society can only reinforce the task of national liberation that we urgently face today. This will be so only if the front sees its primary task as advancing the interests of the sectors of society it represents, including, above all, the destruction of the system of apartheid.

**BROAD PATRIOTIC FRONT**

Recently, I cast a cursory look at an article by Patrick Cull in

the Eastern Province Herald (5/1/91), entitled: "SA alliances born of fear". He refers to the utterances of the Labour Party leadership which may imply possibilities of forging an alliance with the National Party.

It may well be that proposed alliances in one or more of the numerous camps, particularly those which form part of the status quo, are based on fear. In others, however, they are based on strategic and tactical necessity, principle and/or other imperatives.

It is basically around strategic and tactical considerations that

a patriotic front can be formed. The urgent and strategic challenge to destroy apartheid, and the possibility of achieving this by peaceful means, have created the basis for unity among a wide spectrum of forces. This has led to the realisation that it is necessary to rationalise resources – including human and material ones.

While differences among these forces will remain, for example, on details about the future constitution, their current and immediate objectives can bring them together – if only temporarily. ♦