

UDF - Last Beleaguered Hope

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AZHAR CACHALIA - UDF National Treasurer [interviewed in hiding]

As I have pointed out earlier, the UDF is a legal non-violent front consisting of many, many affiliates. At the moment it is virtually impossible to campaign outside of parliament and to use non-violent legal strategies. In fact the recent regulations that were passed during the middle of December effectively rendered all forms of extra-parliamentary opposition illegal. The UDF is increasingly being pushed therefore on the wrong side of the law - not by choice but of necessity. We will do everything in our power to keep the UDF alive because we honestly believe that the UDF must be the last possible hope for a relatively peaceful transformation to democracy in this country."

Narrator:

Saturday - August 20th 1983.

At the Rockland Civic Centre in Mitchells Plane near Cape Town, an estimated 10 000 people celebrate the National Launch of the United Democratic Front.

Over 1 000 delegates - representing some 575 organisations - attend this historic launch of the broadest alliance of anti-government groups since the Congress Alliance of the 1950's.

Committed to a single, non-racial and unfragmented South Africa, the UDF's immediate aim is to oppose the implementation of constitutional reforms designed to grant so-called coloureds and Indians limited parliamentary representation whilst ensuring total Black exclusion from the political decision making process.

MR ARCHIE GUMEDE:

We believe that South Africa is one nation and we are willing to demonstrate that belief in our nationhood.

DR ALLAN BOESAK:

The Apartheid line is not at all abolished, it is simply shifted so as to include those so-called Coloureds and Indians who are willing to co-operate with the government.

MR AUBREY MOKWENA:

And we are here under the banner of UDF to galvanise our forces to move forward like an enormous phalanx like an enormous force to say "No" to the Koornhof Bills to say "No" to the constitutional laws and to say "No" to the pseudo-dispensation.

AZHAR CACHALIA:

UDF at its inception set itself the task of rendering the tri-cameral parliament and the Black local authorities ineffective.

Narrator:

November 1983 - "referendum day"; ceremoniously casting his vote, Prime Minister Botha receives an overwhelming endorsement for his new constitution from the all-white electorate.

With customary disregard for Black opinion and arrogant intolerance to opposition, the Nationalist party government confirm their intention to impose their new constitution.

TV Interview - Prime Minister P.W. Botha:

It also means that we will take further steps as to evolutionary reform about those peoples [the Blacks] who form a different.....ah, who needs a different constitutional development in South Africa.

TV Interview - Minister of Constitutional Development:

Well let me say this, irrespective of the percentage poll, this constitution is going to be implemented.

TV Interview - Prime Minister P.W. Botha:

And I believe that most coloured people will be as responsible as the white people and will come forward and accept what is offered to them ...to improve their position in their land of birth..and the same will happen with the Indians.

So I'm not now considering negative results.

I'm in a positive spirit at present as you can see.

Narrator:

August 19th 1984.

In a massive show of rejection for the new constitution - the UDF celebrates it's first anniversary before a crowd of over three thousand supporters.

Calling on Coloureds and Indians to boycott the forthcoming elections, in one year the UDF has grown to a membership of over two million - with 648 affiliates.

FATHER MKHATSHWA - August 1984

When the UDF declared war against the "new constitution", it was declaring war against Apartheid.

Narrator:

Designed to entrench white supremacy, through the illusion of so-called "reforms", - for South Africa's voteless Black majority - the new constitution guarantees the political exclusion envisioned by Dr Verwoerd's Apartheid Bantustan policy.

Elections for the Coloured and Indian chambers of the new tri-cameral parliament take place on August 22nd and 28th respectively.

The success of the anti-election movement - in their call on Coloureds and Indians to boycott these elections - is measured by dismal percentage polls of 18 and 16 percent respectively.

In twelve months, the grass roots momentum of the UDF, and the numerous campaigns of its affiliates, has succeeded in discrediting the new tri-cameral parliament.

REV FRANK CHIKANE:

We the representatives of the black majority in the form, of Civic Associations and Residents organisations throughout the rural / urban areas of the Transvaal, in the so called "African townships"....

Narrator:

By August 1984, alternative peoples structures, in the form of Civic Associations, firmly established in townships across South Africa have effectively undermined the credibility of government appointed Black local authorities.

AZHAR CACHALIA:

"Over the three years since the UDF's inception there has been resistance to Apartheid on a scale not seen before. I think even in the 1950's when many many people fought against Apartheid, I think the difference in quality this time is that its much more wide spread and it appears that there are many many more people involved.

Narrator:

Historically insensitive to Black opinion, the South African government - in the face of massive grass-roots opposition - defiantly institute their new constitution. The inherent exclusion of any future possibility of Black participation in the political decision making process, contained in this neo-Apartheid reform process - is a final declaration of war against the Black majority of South Africa.

AZHAR CACHALIA:

Some of us may decide join the struggle by choice because we dislike Apartheid, we dislike what this govt stands for and therefore we are involved in the anti-Apartheid struggle. But many of our people join the struggle out of necessity. They are paid starvation wages, they don't have homes, they have severe problems with transport...in fact it is impossible to live in this country if one is a Black person.

Narrator:

Sharpsville - September 3rd, 1984.

A long time coming - simmering anger at the protracted day to day hardships imposed by Apartheid structures erupts in violent protest as the Black township communities of the Vaal Triangle oppose the imposition of rent increases.

The South African government reacts in the only way that it knows how - with the iron fist.

Violence escalates as police and army units move in to seal off the townships and the struggle against Apartheid enters a new and bloody phase.

AZHAR CACHALIA:

We said at the time of the campaign that the new parliament was in fact going to plunge this country into a crisis.

That view of the UDF has now been vindicated.

The tricameral parliament lies in ruins today - it has no legitimacy internally or externally;
the black local authorities - in so-far as they exist - are tottering;
throughout the country black local authorities have collapsed.

What has also been very significant in the UDF's campaigns is that, I think for the first time, politics in the very real sense - the politics of resistance has been taken to the remotest parts of the country.

Narrator:

By June 1985 - the South African government, fast losing control - introduces the shock military element of a State of

Emergency to stem the sweeping advances made by the democratic movement through co-ordinated action of its extensive network of Youth Congresses, Civic Associations and labour movements.

Determined to force a military solution on a political crisis - with the declaration of the third State of Emergency on June 12th this year - the South African government has detained over 35 000 people.

Since September 3rd, 1984, over 2 000 people, almost all Black, have lost their lives in this phase of the struggle.

MURPHY MOROBE - Acting Publicity Secretary UDF

I think that with the emergency presently, there is a clear indication that the government is trying to shift the focusto shift the terrain ratherand pull it away from the political and take it towards the military.

If one looks at the presence of the SADF in the townships, at the arming of police all around, the building up of what they call "special constables" - or what we call "instant constables" who have only three months to be trained - putting all those men under arms;
and we actually see the establishment of vigilantes all round - that is a deliberate campaign to shift the terrain and militarise the whole conflict within the country.

Because at the political level they have lost the initiative, they have no political answers to the crisis in this country, so they think that if they shift the terrain towards the military then they have a much more better chance

because they have this belief that their repressive capacity is so strong that it can conquer anything - but we know very well from the experiences of the Americans in Vietnam, that no matter how strong the force, how strong the government, if there is no mass support those guns amount to nothing; because they can't conquer a people.

They may cause harm, they may kill people and so on but in the end they can't in fact bring about political solutions - so clearly that is where we think that we fit in as the UDF, as the govt tries to shift the terrain we are to resist being drawn toward that kind of terrain & we have to maintain the struggle where the govt is at it's weakest - at the political level.

HELEN JOSEPH - 1983

"It may be that some of us here today will be banned, but our cry will always be - you can ban us - but you cannot break us"

AZHAR CACHALIA:

Since the beginning of the second state of emergency more than 25 000 people have been detained under emergency regulations;

that excludes of course detentions in terms of specific sections of the security legislation such as Section 29 and so on.

Of those 25 000, our estimate is that between 70 to 80% of those affected are either executive members of the United Democratic Front at a national level or at a regional level or members of affiliates or supporters of the United Democratic Front and its affiliates.

FRANK CHIKANE - 1984:

And I want to warn them, that if they touch the UDF as they are preparing themselves to do - if they touch the UDF then all the oppressed majority will conclude beyond doubt that there is no more [the possibility of] a peaceful effort of changing South Africa.

AZHAR CACHALIA:

What I think is very important to emphasise is that the UDF has, since it's inception, worked as a non-violent legal open organisation to the extent that we have now been forced - literally - underground with all legal space effectively being closed.

If the UDF is destroyed it means that non-violent, legal opposition will have been destroyed - the struggle as such for a non-racial democratic South Africa will not end - we just hope that non-violent peaceful means are not rendered impossible forever.