

## WHY WE ORGANISE

Our struggle today is at new heights and is more deeply rooted. Many more people are fighting for their rights, are more united and more aware. We see this in the sustained mass action countrywide - in factory and school, township and village - in the consumer boycotts, stayaways and rent boycotts, in the street committees and people's courts. Increasingly the people refuse to be ruled in the old way, and demand democratic self-government over their daily lives.

This fundamental challenge to apartheid rule did not just suddenly happen. Painsstaking ORGANISATION, over many years, unlocked for an oppressed people the doors of passivity and powerlessness, of ignorance, division and fear. And it is organisation which remains the key to defending and taking further the challenge to apartheid rule - finally and decisively tipping the balance of power in favour of the people.

### What we mean by organisation

For us in the democratic movement the concept "organisation" has a particular meaning. When we talk of "organising" or "organisation" we refer to a process which involves a number of things:

1. building the unity of our people
2. raising the level of understanding and awareness of our people
3. bringing about their active involvement in struggle and in the issues of daily concern to them
4. giving this unity and involvement, structure and form, content, consistency and direction.

All of the above, taking place in a dynamic way, is the process of organisation. Organisation for us means fulfilling vital requirements in our struggle for national liberation.

### Why we organise

Denied full political rights and access to the wealth of the country, the daily lot of our people is one of poverty and hardship. Denied a democratic say and control over their lives, the oppressed have no power to change this situation. The councils, management committees

and other puppet bodies the Government sets up for us are undemocratic and unable to do anything about our problems. But by uniting and acting on our problems, our people gain the strength and power to challenge their oppression and to overcome it. Organisation is our tool to build this strength and power.

Central to our understanding of the need for organisation is our belief that it is only through our own efforts that we will be able to do something about our problems. We know our problems best and are best able to represent ourselves. We cannot rely on the Government and its dummy bodies. Their interests are opposed to the interests of the oppressed. Our experience has taught us that only when we ourselves act on our problems are the pressures for change generated. We have to take charge of our own lives in order to change it.

The efforts we talk of are the efforts of the mass of people. Not just of a few individuals or a few enlightened leaders. Change in the true interests of the majority will come about only through the united action of the majority. So we organise to bring about the active participation of the maximum number of people in the issues of daily concern to them - issues of high rents and low wages, poor housing, forced removals and gutter education.

Increasingly the basis upon which our people are struggling is becoming more political as the government uses brute force to crush our struggles, and as ~~we become~~ our people become more and more aware that apartheid rule is the root cause of their misery.

In acting on our problems, we act in unity. Without unity we cannot effectively challenge our oppression and strike telling blows against it. We share common problems, and by taking them up together we exercise greater strength and power.

The enemy will always try to undermine and weaken our struggles through dividing us - offering concessions to some and not to others; trying to discredit and isolate democratic organisations and leadership from the people.

Where the Government seeks to divide us - parent from youth,

homeowner from tenant, Zulu from Xhosa, urban from rural Indian from African - we organise to cement a lasting unity.

Building the unity of our people, maintaining it and defending it, ranks in priority for us.

To survive, apartheid depends not only on our disunity and lack of action, but also on our ignorance. Ignorance of the reasons for our hardship. Ignorance of our right to a better life. Ignorance of our ability to fight for that right and to achieve it.

We organise to raise the level of understanding and awareness of our people. Through mass struggle we learn that there are reasons for our life of misery and oppression. We learn that our problems can be overcome. We learn the power (of) and need for united action. We learn of and develop confidence in our ability to make decisions for ourselves, to take charge of our own lives, and to influence the course and outcome of events.

To give proper expression to our unity and action, to co-ordinate and direct it, to consolidate and build on it, we form organisations, structures and committees.

Our organisations ~~us~~ allow us to communicate with one another, to discuss matters and jointly arrive at decisions. Through our organisations we are able to plan action, implement and co-ordinate it. It represents our collective voice and ensures we act in unity.

The experience of our people in their own democratic organisations, is the experience of democratic participation. Our people are ~~are~~ exposed to open discussion and a free expression of views; to working together and sharing joint responsibility; to discipline and accountability.

Through all of this - this dynamic process of organisations - we are protecting ourselves from attacks on our living standards, fighting to improve the quality of our lives, and bringing about ~~permanent~~ change in our interests. As we organise, not only are we challenging and breaking down the old and negative, but also ~~building~~ creating and building the new and positive.

## Forms of organisation

The democratic organisations we establish take many and varied forms. The kind of organisations we form and the way they are structured, is determined by a number of factors. These include who is being organised, what their interests are, what issues we're organising around, what our ~~as~~ goals are.

It could be hostel dwellers, students, commuters, teachers, or the unemployed that is being organised. And the organisation we establish could be an SRC, trade union, rent action committee, parents crisis committee, women's group, detainees committee or a political organisation.

Sometimes we form bodies for specific sections of the people like unemployed workers associations or youth congresses. Some of these bodies come together under Civic Associations to represent the total interests of all residents in the community, or all of them can come together under a broad political movement like the UDF to fight for national liberation.

Organisation we can see, occurs at different levels and assumes different forms. A careful reading of all relevant factors and conditions, and the lessons and experience we gain while organising, will guide us on the nature, form and structure of organisation. But almost as a rule, it is crucial to achieve the involvement of the people who directly experience a particular problem or set of problems.

It is not good, for example, for the youth to take up and lead a struggle against high rents while the workers, parents and tenants do not. Similarly it is not good for the taxi owners and drivers to take decisions on a bus boycott and not the commuters.

## Approach to organisation

We commonly refer to our approach to organisation as the mass approach. This is based on our understanding that mass struggle is the key to change. Our mass approach means that we must always be at the level of the people. To confuse the awareness and commitment of the masses with that of activists, would leave us as a small peripheral

clique isolated from the people. What are the feelings of the majority of people? How deeply do they feel about any particular issue or problem? How far are they prepared to go with action? What is their level of understanding on this issue? - these are important questions to ask for anyone who is serious about organising.

In line with this, our approach on any issue is one which seeks to win over as many people as possible. We are careful not to alienate people through ill-discipline, poor conduct or rash action. Important to this approach is consultation and hard work to ensure that any decision or action enjoys the broadest possible support. Not only is this an important part of our democratic practice, but it is necessary for the success of that action.

To begin from where the people are at, is the key to effective organisation. Organisation is the key to mass struggle. Mass struggle is the key to change.

### Methods of organisation

We employ all <sup>and</sup> any method which allows for contact, communication and consultation with the masses. Methods which allow us to know the real thoughts and feelings of the people, which promote the message of the organisation, and which will ensure the united response of the people.

Methods we use include posters, pamphlets, mass meetings, house visits and street meetings.

### New conditions, new methods, Same task, same approach.

Under present repressive conditions, where we are denied the right to freely organise and <sup>are</sup> faced with bannings, detentions, vigilante action, soldiers and police, ~~etc~~ some of these methods are difficult to employ, if not impossible. Under the new conditions we have to devise new, creative methods. But our task of mass mobilisation and organisation remains. Our approach to this task remains the same. Under new conditions the question is how?

While addressing this question, we must continue to fight for our right to organise - freely and openly.