

Interview: Hassim on APDUSA

APDUSA (African Peoples' Democratic Union of Southern Africa), the most prominent affiliate of the Unity Movement, has been revived. Free-lance journalist and researcher Yunus Carrim recently interviewed KADER HASSIM for WIP, to get some sense of the meaning of APDUSA's revival. Hassim (49) was the first accused in the 1971-2 APDUSA trial in which 14 people faced Terrorism Act charges. Sentenced to eight years on Robben Island, he was subsequently struck off the lawyers' role, and presently works as a legal clerk in Pietermaritzburg. Kader Hassim is chairman of APDUSA's Pietermaritzburg branch.



WIP: When was APDUSA formed?

Hassim: The first official conference was held in Cape Town in 1962, though the initial idea of forming a political wing of the Unity Movement was sounded out at a meeting in 1960.

WIP: Why was APDUSA formed, and what was its relationship with the Unity Movement?

Hassim: The Unity Movement was a federal structure of different organisations - civic, cultural, teacher, sports, youth and other. But there was no specific political organisation which an individual could join directly. If he wanted to join the Unity Movement he had to do so through its affiliate organisations which were not political in the direct sense. So we formed APDUSA as a specifically political affiliate of the Unity Movement, with the object of recruiting people directly on a political basis.

WIP: What is the programme of APDUSA?

Hassim: The programme of APDUSA is the Ten Point Programme of the Unity Movement formulated in 1943. It

basically calls for universal franchise; free education; inviolability of person; freedom of expression; freedom of movement and occupation; racial equality; and the revision of the land question, the civil and criminal code, taxation, and labour legislation.

Now of course things have changed since 1943 and aspects of the programme obviously need to be reviewed. We mean to do this soon. But basically APDUSA subscribed to the Ten Point Programme - except that it stressed in its constitution that 'the democratic aspirations of the workers and peasants shall be paramount in both the short-term and long-term orientation of APDUSA'. And by African we mean all those who live in Africa and who advance its cause.

WIP: How do you understand the differences between the Unity Movement and the Congress movement?

Hassim: The Unity Movement believed that an organisation must have a set of non-negotiable goals that give it direction. But the Congress movement was always hesitant to commit itself to a clear set of goals. It had different programmes and charters and working documents every now and then, but nothing principled. For us, however, a

programme was both a means and an end - and we judged others by the yardstick of our programme. The Ten Point Programme was a programme for nothing less than human rights. What France achieved in 1789. There's nothing unreasonable about it. So we insisted on the programme as a minimum basis on which to work with other organisations.

But the Congress had no such principle. They were prepared to work with any organisation for a specific objective. During the 1958 general election, for example, they wanted to form an alliance with all anti-National Party forces, including the United Party, so as to defeat the Nats. It's happening again today. The Congress tradition has been characterised by these Popular Fronts which bring together antagonistic classes and groupings. Now when you do that sort of thing your basis for coming together must be extremely wide to accommodate everybody, and so you have to compromise on your programme. We in the Unity Movement were not prepared to do this.

The Congress, you must understand, was under the tutelage of the liberals - and it was they who were largely responsible for the failure of the two movements to arrive at an understanding. But a further matter that divided us was non-racialism: whereas the ANC was confined to Africans and the various Congresses were constituted along racial lines, the Unity Movement accepted people of all colours.

Of course a fundamental difference between the Unity Movement and Congress was over the question of non-collaboration. The Unity Movement refused to take part in dummy institutions and government structures, but the Congress leadership participated in these government bodies, such as the Native Representative Councils.

WIP: Some clarity on a point. Are you drawing an analogy between the attempt at an anti-National Party alliance by Congress in 1958 and the United Democratic Front of the moment?

Hassim: Up to a point. The concept is the same - except that the UDF hasn't invited the Progressive Federal Party to join. I don't suppose they'll want the homeland parties to join. But they are in fact trying to create a spurious unity of antagonistic classes and

groupings. In fact, they even had to jettison the Freedom Charter in establishing a basis for their broad unity so as to accommodate organisations like the Black Sash, NAFCOC and the Islamic Council.

WIP: How do you see the Freedom Charter?

Hassim: The Unity Movement did not in the first place have any confidence in the Congress leadership that initiated the idea of the Charter. But also we had our own programme formulated a good 12 years before the Freedom Charter, which the Congress was invited to commit itself to, but refused to do. As for the Charter itself, it envisions a democracy - which we welcome. There are socialist elements in it - but I don't know how serious Congress is about that. But the main objection we have to the Charter is the four-nation thesis and the protection for minorities that it endorses. This is in total opposition to the concept of a single South African nation that the Unity Movement espouses.

WIP: You say Congress should have supported the Ten Point Programme. But surely any unity between Congress and the Unity Movement could only have been on the terms of Congress, as it had an echo amongst the masses while the Unity Movement did not. In fact, the Unity Movement is often seen as having been little more than a small coterie of intellectuals whose fondness for abstract discussion was matched only by their distaste for any concrete practical activity. What is your response to this?

Hassim: It's a smear tactic to refer to the Unity Movement as a small coterie of intellectuals. It's a falsification of history. In fact, during the 1940s the Unity Movement was a mass organisation. The long list of organisations represented at the 1945 conference, for that matter, belies the claim that the Unity Movement was little more than a small band of intellectuals. The Anti-Segregation Council, for example, which later took over the NIC, was originally in the Unity Movement. In the 1940s the Unity Movement was the largest political organisation in the country. If you

look at the minutes of the 1946 Annual Conference, you will see that, at a conservative estimate, the membership of the Unity Movement through its affiliates was put at 60 000. It was only in the 1950s that the Unity Movement was eclipsed in terms of numbers by the Congress.

WIP: The Unity Movement claims to have had mass support amongst the peasants in the Transkei. What substance is there to this?

Hassim: The strategy of the Unity Movement was to link the struggle for national liberation with the solution of the agrarian problem. This was so because at that time the vast majority of the population were landless peasants - people who had aspirations to a life of peasantry. The other political organisations put all their eggs in the working class basket and ignored the peasants. Point 7 of the Unity Movement programme called for a new division of the land; and with the fight against the rehabilitation schemes from 1947 onwards, and the opposition to the Bantu Authorities Act in the countryside, the Unity Movement became deeply involved in the struggles of the peasants. One of the Unity Movement's strongest affiliates was the Cape African Teachers' Association, and it was the teachers who were often our link with the countryside.

WIP: You said earlier that a fundamental difference between the Unity Movement and Congress was over non-collaboration. But the Unity Movement is often criticised for fetishising the boycott, for making a principle of what is really a tactic that should be used only after taking account of all the contradictions in a situation. What is your response to the charge that the Unity Movement subscribes to abstract boycottism?

Hassim: Non-collaboration is not a principle. It's a policy, a long-term strategy. Essentially it is based on the view that an oppressed people cannot be ruled for long unless they are prepared to participate in institutions designed for their own oppression. There is no direct link

between the ruling class and the oppressed people, so ruling class ideas permeate through liberals to the black intelligentsia, who in turn pass them on to the oppressed. So the intelligentsia is used as the tool of the ruling class to carry out its plans. Non-collaboration is therefore designed to snap this link between the ruling class and the oppressed; it is meant to show that there is a wide chasm that separates these two groups which in fact have diametrically opposed views. Non-collaboration seeks to clearly define the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, to clearly draw the battle lines.

Non-collaboration is not simply boycott of government institutions. It's a whole philosophy where you turn your back to the ruling class and you face the oppressed. You see no salvation in the ruling class but in the oppressed. But this doesn't mean that you boycott for boycotts' sake. No, the boycott is selectively used. It is used only when it concretely advances the struggle. There is nothing abstract about it. For example, when Bantu Education was introduced in the 1950s, we felt that the people should not participate in it, not by boycotting schools which would be self-destructive, but by the pupils, teachers and parents coming to fully appreciate what the aims of Bantu Education are and to refuse to simply submit to these aims. We have also refused to support certain economic boycotts - like some of the consumer boycotts in the 1950s - while on the other hand we supported the boycott of meat during the strike in 1980. So we have been very selective in the use of the boycott.

WIP: Turning to the present: APDUSA recently distributed leaflets in Pietermaritzburg and Durban calling on people to boycott any referendum among Indians over the new constitution. This was in opposition to the Natal Indian Congress which called for a referendum so that Indians could register their rejection of the constitution. Why did APDUSA call for a boycott of a referendum? And wasn't this being divisive?

Hassim: In fact it is those who called for a referendum who stepped out of

line, and it was they who were being divisive, not us. They know full well that the masses have unequivocally rejected participation in dummy institutions and government structures. So our call for a boycott was entirely consistent. To have taken part in a referendum, which is a process of the new constitution, would in fact have been to take part in the new constitution. Moreover, it would have been an ethnic referendum - it was in fact a decision by the NIC to take part voluntarily in a racial process, and we wanted to have nothing to do with that.

And of course we were not the only ones. AZAPO would never have supported the referendum, nor would have SACOS and perhaps the unions. So you would have had the situation where some of the people who opposed the constitution would have said 'no' in the referendum, while others would have boycotted the referendum. And it might well have been the case that the majority of those who did go to the polls would have said 'yes' to the constitution. I can remember, for example, in 1958 the Congress put up Piet Beyleveld as a candidate for the election of a Coloured Representative to parliament. His opponent was one Abe Bloomberg, a United Party type. The Unity Movement called for a boycott of the elections, and there was a massive stay away from the polls with the result that Bloomberg got in. Now of course that was an election, which is not the same as a referendum - but there's a lesson in it anyway.

WIP: Now that there's not going to be a referendum for Indians and coloureds, and all sections of the democratic movement are committed to a boycott of elections to the tri-cameral parliament, would you be prepared to work with other organisations calling for a boycott?

Hassim: We would be happy to work with other organisations like AZAPO, SACOS and some of the unions because they have a set of principles by which they act. Not so Congress. In 1981, for example, a broad Anti-SAIC front was established, made up mainly of the NIC but also including other forces opposed to the SAIC. The campaign was a huge success. But it was NIC alone which claimed the credit for it all. Not that

Congress didn't do the lion's share of the work, but the other forces should have been acknowledged too. So we are very wary of any alliance with the NIC. What we are interested in is disciplined, principled alliances - and this we won't be able to establish with the NIC or other organisations in the UDF.

WIP: So what is your relationship with AZAPO? And do you see a role for APDUSA in the National Forum which seems to aim at some sort of coalition of all progressive forces outside the UDF?

Hassim: We have a warm and happy relationship with AZAPO. We work together whenever we can, and we regard them as a very significant section of the liberatory movement. But the National Forum is simply a forum. One doesn't know if it's ever going to crystallise into an organisation. We are not prepared to join the Forum because of the liberals associated with it. We do not want to rub shoulders with liberals, whatever their colour. But we welcome dialogue with the progressive sections of the Forum.

WIP: But do you have any serious theoretical differences with the Draft Manifesto of the National Forum?

Hassim: Given the brevity of the Manifesto, there's not much I can say. Nothing is spelt out in it. It's much too general and vague, and it's difficult to assess what it really means. But crucially missing from the Manifesto is an appreciation of the dominating role of liberalism in its various forms, the paramount importance of political power through the full franchise, and the demand for civil liberties. But until I'm able to lay my hands on documents which spell out in detail the various facets of the Manifesto, I don't think it's fair for me to say anything further.

WIP: Returning to the elections for the tri-cameral parliament, how do you hope to carry the campaign forward?

Hassim: We have begun going house to house to discuss the new constitution with the people, but at the moment this

is still on a small scale. We have distributed leaflets, and we intend to produce more pamphlets, stickers and placards. We will also hold public meetings if necessary. We would also consider entering into alliances with other organisations which oppose the constitution, provided it does not compromise us in any way.

WIP: So what is the present strength of APDUSA?

Hassim: We are just reviving. We had to contend not only with the set-backs that all the organisations suffered in the early 1960s, but also with the severe blow we received in 1971 when over 200 of our activists were detained and the rudiments of our structure destroyed. At the moment we have branches in Cape Town, Kimberley, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and we are trying to revive the old branches and create new ones elsewhere. We are small in numbers, but we have a very determined membership, and we have a perspective. With our programme being right and our strategy being correct, we are sure to grow in strength.

WIP: Finally, how do you see the present phase the country is in, and what do you think of the prospects for fundamental change in South Africa?

Hassim: I feel that today more than ever before the oppressed people of this country are in danger of their aspirations being betrayed. South Africa has become more than ever before a battle ground for the super-powers. And the West is determined not to lose its hold in South Africa. Imperialism wants to preserve its interests here at

all costs and is more and more pretending to be a friend of the people. The oppressed must be on their guard against the designs of imperialism and especially its agent, liberalism. In particular, attempts to divide further the people - coloureds and Indians from Africans, urban workers from migrants - must be vigorously resisted. The basis for this already exists in the resurgence of mass resistance since 1976. This must be intensified. And the independent trade union movement must play its role too. Perhaps the most striking feature of the struggle in recent years has been the growth of the trade union movement. But the unions must become more involved in the wider political struggle - otherwise they can become reformist, and this would represent an enormous defeat for the working class.

A few words on the Nkomati Accord. I think Mozambique had no choice. It was a question of survival and the preservation of the gains of the Mozambican revolution. I just cannot understand how some organisations can criticise Mozambique for having betrayed us. It's nonsense really. These people who attack Mozambique - do they know a day of hunger or the devastation of war or the responsibility of governing a country where famine stalks the land? Really, if there's any criticism to be levelled at all it is at the FRELIMO leadership simply for underestimating the power of the South African state and overestimating the capacity of the Soviet Union to come to their aid. But the Accord does not represent a defeat for our struggle. It is simply a reflection of the contradictions we find ourselves in in the Southern African sub-continent at the moment. But I have every confidence that these contradictions will be ultimately resolved in favour of the people ■