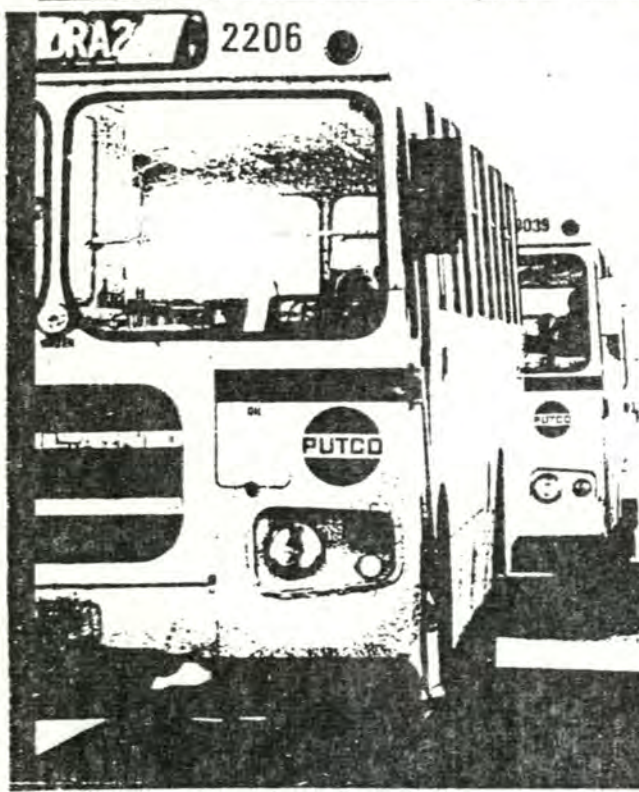# WORK IN PROGRESS

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DEBATING LIBERALISM IN THE 1980s

INTERVIEWS:

- HASSIM ON APDUSA
- MUFAMADI ON GAWU

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Contents

Cover by Kevin Humphrey

Editorial

The Accord of Nkomati was signed by the Mozambican and South African governments on 16 March. Prominent among the mutual obligations imposed by the Nkomati Accord are the following:

* Forbidding and preventing the organisation of irregular forces, armed bands or mercenaries in the two countries;
* Eliminating from the territories bases, training centres, places of shelter, accommodation and transit for anyone contemplating terrorism.
* Taking appropriate steps to prevent the recruitment of people for terrorism.
* Preventing the transit of would-be terrorists from either country to the other, or to any third state which has a common border with either South Africa or Mozambique.

Some have interpreted the signing of the Accord as an indication of crisis in Mozambique. President Machel points out that the war waged against Mozambique - principally involving the South African-backed MNR - has had devastating effects. 'Our people had their property looted, their houses destroyed, their granaries raided, their crops pillaged and flattened, their cattle stolen and killed, their tools burnt and destroyed. The communal villages and co-operatives, the schools and clinics, the wells and dams built by the people with so much effort and sacrifice, became targets for the enemy's criminal fury...840 schools have been destroyed, affecting more than 150 000 schoolchildren. Twelve health centres, 24 maternity clinics, 174 health posts and two centres for the physically handicapped have been sacked and destroyed. Nine hundred shops have been destroyed thus hampering sales and supplies for about four and a half million citizens'.

While AZAPO saw the Nkomati Accord as a betrayal of the liberation struggle, and a 'marriage of convenience', Machel argued that it had its progressive side. The Accord 'crowned our socialist policy of peace with success', and was a defence of 'the first state of workers and peasants in the (southern African) region'.

Within South Africa, the UDF viewed the Nkomati Accord as an indication of the crisis facing South Africa's ruling group, while the National Forum saw it as 'a temporary setback for the liberation struggle'. According to the National Forum, the struggle would now shift into the internal arena. Exile liberation groups would be forced to change their tactics, and black people relying on the exile movements for their liberation would now have to identify with 'the national liberation movement'.

The ANC acknowledged that the Accord was a setback, saying that it would help perpetuate white minority rule in South Africa. But, argued an ANC spokesperson, 'the people of southern Africa know from their own experience that there can be no peaceful co-existence between freedom and independence on the one hand, and colonialism and racism on the other. We are confident that the masses, their parties and governments...will remain loyal to the cause and firm in their resolve to stand with our people until victory is won'.

It is difficult to know exactly what Nkomati is: a 'betrayal of the liberation struggle' or a 'defence of socialism'; the result of crises in South Africa, or Mozambican weakness. But the signing of the Nkomati Accord indicates a profound change in South African politics; it places internal political organisation at the forefront of any attempt to transform South Africa's racially-based capitalist society

Debating Liberalism in the 1980s

a critique

What is liberalism? And what is its place in current resistance politics? CEDRIC DE BEER responds to Daryl Glaser's analysis of these issues, which appeared in WIP 30.

Daryl Glaser's article in **Work In Progress** 30 ('Liberalism in the 1980s'), takes the reader on a guided tour of recent political developments in South Africa. Most guided tours have two flaws: they try to show you too much; and while they look at interesting sights, they do not give you the chance to investigate the deeper realities. So it is with Glaser's article.

In a few pages, the 'Liberalism' article looks at three important topics:
* the differing strategies of those groups which, while attempting to reform South Africa, want to retain the structures of exploitation and domination intact;
* the nature of liberalism in South Africa today;
* the different class interests of those who have at least one goal in common - the transformation of South Africa into a single non-racial political system which allows the majority of citizens access to political power.

The third of these topics is the most interesting and important for WIP readers. It touches on the nature of class alliances; the political struggle of the working class; and the relationship between oppression and exploitation. It is also the shortest section, covering just one page of a six-and-a-half page article.

This division of Glaser's article is my own, rather than the author's. He presents his argument as if he was only looking at the middle theme: an analysis of liberalism in the 1980s. The analysis of so many different political positions under the catch-all term 'liberalism' is the major deficiency of Glaser's article. His failure to define liberalism results in confusion, and what follows is an attempt to clarify some of the issues he raises.

The rise of liberalism as a political doctrine closely corresponds to the emergence of the capitalist class in Western Europe, and particularly to the rise of industrial capitalism.

To create political conditions conducive to capitalism, the rising bourgeoisie needed to break existing feudal power. This was held by the aristocracies and monarchies which governed the societies where capitalism was struggling to take root. Their rule, regional in nature, was based on peasant or feudal economic relations. It was passed from generation to generation, and so excluded the capitalist class from the power needed to transform society.

The political battles that were fought to dislodge the aristocracy from power gave rise to a set of political principles according to which each state should have a single constitutional form of government. The individual was placed at the centre of the political universe, with political rights and duties. Individual liberty was guaranteed under the law. Economically, individual 'freedom' was assigned a more limited, but nonetheless critical meaning. Pre-capitalist economic forms tied most producers to the land. But industrial capitalism needed an urban work-force. This had to be created by 'freeing' direct producers

from the land (their only means of
subsistence), and allowing them the
'freedom' to work as wage labourers in
the new factories.

Liberalism has certain clearly defined
ideological components. Formally, all
people are born equal, and are free to
exercise this equality within a
political system. This guarantees
individual rights to the extent that
they do not infringe on the rights of
others. These 'civil rights' include
freedom from discrimination, freedom of
speech, freedom to choose where to live
and work and, importantly, the right to
elect a government which represents
'the wishes of the majority'.

Classical liberalism was committed to
the logic of the market place, the
rationality of competition, and the
belief that individuals are rewarded
according to their merits. But this
faith in the capitalist economy and a
minimum of state interference has not
gone unchallenged, and no longer holds
the dominant position in the spectrum
of liberal beliefs. A new school of
thought argued that political rights
and capitalism were not enough; that,
in addition, it is necessary for the
state to provide for the well-being of
all citizens. This involves eradicating
the worst poverty and providing
essential services and care for those
who are unable to look after themselves.
This position is reflected in the
modern welfare state - 'capitalism with
a human face'.

Before returning to Glaser's article,
two points need to be made about the
relationship between liberalism and
capitalism:
* Liberalism was forged out of the
political struggles waged by the
emergent capitalist class. It is also a
reasonable description of the political
system existing in the advanced
capitalist countries. But this does not
mean that liberalism and capitalism are
linked in all cases. Indeed, many
capitalist states in Latin America,
Africa and Asia employ totalitarian and
anti-democratic political systems to
guarantee the continued existence of
capitalist relations.
* It is quite possible to hold liberal
political beliefs without having a
specific commitment to capitalist
economic relations. Concepts like
'freedom', 'equality', 'individual
rights' and 'universal franchise'

have acquired sufficient autonomy to
have no necesssary relationship to an
economic system based on wage labour
and private ownership of the means of
production. Indeed, it is one of the
tasks of radical activists to win to
their cause liberals whose prime
commitment is to political democracy,
and to show them that their commitment
is inadequate if it does not also
incorporate democracy in the economic
sphere of relations of production.

LIBERALISM
AND REFORMISM

Glaser's article provides us with no
definition of liberalism. It seems to
include almost everyone who expresses a
commitment to any kind of change in
South Africa - except the forces of the
ultra-right. Under the title of
'liberal' are included such diverse
positions as supporters of National
Party reforms, and those whose
liberalism 'consists in their vague and
tendentially social-democratic
definition of socialism, and in their
failure to articulate a clearly defined
anti-capitalist position'.

The inadequacy of this definition is
revealed in Glaser's analysis of the
white vote in the recent referendum. We
are told that PW Botha's ability to
rally a substantial 'yes' vote for what
he portrayed as a mandate for change
reflected the 'profound divisions
currently rending white politics in
general and South African liberalism in
particular'. But this is inaccurate. PW
Botha's constitution united South
African liberals as they have seldom
been united before. No one espousing
any of the basic liberal doctrines
could have considered voting for a
constitution which:
* excludes the majority of South
Africans from the political process;
* is based on ethnic identity rather
than the value of the individual;
* is based on laws which restrict
where people may live and what jobs
they can seek;
* requires undemocratic laws and
authoritarian practices to ensure the
survival of the state in its present
form.

The constitution has attracted the
support of many who wish to see limited

changes introduced into South Africa.
Many of these are business people whose
commitment to minor reform is premised
on their desire to see the capitalist
order strengthened and protected against
the rising tide of popular resistance.
But to deduce from this that they are
also liberals is a step which defies
all logic.

Debate and the vote in the white
referendum show that many PFP members
and others who oppose the National
Party voted 'yes for reform'. What the
referendum did was to divide out
liberals from reformists. This process
has nudged the more militant of these
liberals, and those with a less
conscious commitment to capitalism,
towards the popular democratic groupings
most substantially represented by the
UDF. This is something that should be
welcomed and encouraged. The fear that
it might somehow threaten working class
interests is something that will be
dealt with later on in this article.

If we ignore this woolly use of the
term 'liberalism', the bulk of Glaser's
article is unexceptionable. It provides
a brief survey of the positions occupied
by a number of different groups who are
interested in reform. What calls for a
reply, or rather for expansion, is the
last section of the article.

In summary, Glaser's argument is
this: 'radical liberals' found in large
numbers in the UDF represent the
interests of the petty bourgeoisie and
are committed to a unitary democratic
South Africa. They are 'more than
willing to mobilise and consolidate a
proletarian base in pursuit of their
goals'; indeed, 'the popular democratic
politics they espouse enjoys
considerable working class support'.
What is uncertain is whether the
'proletarian social base' will force
popular democratic politics into a
'socialist project' or whether liberals
will guide it in a reformist
direction.

This is fair enough as far as it
goes, but we are back on the guided
tour, seeing the sights but not asking
any of the interesting questions.
Firstly, what is the basis for the
class alliance (potential or actual)
between the petty bourgeoisie and the
working class? Secondly, what will
determine which of the two classes will
dominate such an alliance?

THE BASIS FOR CLASS ALLIANCE

The answer to the first question can be
found if we ask ourselves (using
Glaser's terminology) why there is
substantial working class support for
popular democratic politics with its
vision of a unitary democratic South
Africa.

Those espousing popular democratic
demands have no specific commitment to
capitalism. Indeed, Glaser tells us
elsewhere in his article that 'they are
prepared to push reform to the outermost
social-democratic limits compatible
with capitalism or even beyond'.

The political programme of these
democrats is reflected in the
Declaration of the UDF. It aims at 'the
creation of a single, non-racial,
unfragmented South Africa; a South
Africa free from bantustans and Group
Areas'. The target is quite clear - the
destruction of apartheid in all its
forms and the end of 'all forms of
oppression and exploitation'.

The question before us can now be
rephrased: why should this programme,
'tendentially social democratic in
nature', enjoy considerable working
class support?

On one level, the answer to this
question is simple. It is the working
class, and particularly the African
working class, which suffers most at
the hands of the apartheid state. Lack
of access to political power; the
effects of bantustan fragmentation,
especially the loss of citizenship; the
rigid control over where people live
and work through contract labour and
group areas; the indignities and
brutalities of influx control and
population removals; these are essential
components of apartheid, and have a
profound effect on the quality of life
of the working class.

This assault on the well-being, and
sometimes even the survival of
individuals within the proletariat, is
sufficient reason for the working class
to be committed to destroying apartheid
and to supporting any democratic
movement which has this destruction as
its major goal. However, it is the task
of political analysis to take us deeper
than the level of what people
experience, and how they feel about

it. This brings us to the point of examining why those who are committed to what Glaser calls 'a socialist project' should be interested in 'popular democratic' anti-apartheid struggles.

This question involves the relationship between capitalism and apartheid. They are not the same, and exist at levels which, for the sake of analysis, can be separated. Capitalism is an economic system - a way of ordering the production and distribution of commodities and the relationship between different classes involved in this process. Apartheid, on the other hand, is a way of ordering the political and social relationships between population groups. While capitalism and apartheid are not identical, they are very closely linked. Racial discrimination, segregation and apartheid played a vital role in establishing capitalism in South Africa. They continue as factors maintaining the conditions necessary for the survival of the capitalist system. By the same token, the needs of capitalism have played a crucial role in determining how racial politics has been structured in South Africa, and the development of monopoly capitalism in South Africa is a major factor in the restructuring of apartheid currently taking place.

In the decades after the discovery of diamonds and gold, various Land Acts (which laid the basis for the present bantustans) drove large numbers of Africans off the land, so contributing to the work-force that the mines needed so badly. The existence of rural 'homelands' provided both the opportunity and the justification for the low wages paid to these early workers. The profitability and survival of the mining industry depended on the low wage structure that resulted.

In the history of South African capitalism the three pillars of apartheid - bantustans, influx control and migrant labour - have given critical support to capitalist development. They have ensured the smooth flow of cheap labour to industries of dubious profitability; they have made it possible to keep to a minimum the cost of housing the work-force by allowing only the worker and not his family into the towns; they have allowed the reserve areas to be turned into rural ghettoes into which the vast army of unemployed can be dumped, there to be controlled by the surrogates of the central state. Residential segregation, another essential feature of apartheid, has made it easier to crush militant opposition to the social order amongst permanent urban residents.

Finally, racial classification has facilitated the process whereby inferior and cheaper health, educational and social service facilities are made available to different groups. Services are provided up to the point that is required to maintain a literate and able bodied work-force, rather than an educated and healthy community.

It is possible to conceive abstractly of some far distant time in which South Africa might have a form of non-racial capitalism. Such theoretical bubble blowing is of little concern to the present argument. What is of concern is that capitalist relations have been built on racial domination, and that the structures of exploitation continue to be inextricably bound up with the political system that is apartheid.

It is this which creates the objective basis for an alliance between the working class and other oppressed class fractions engaged in a struggle for political democracy. It is, for the same reason, essential that any 'socialist project' must incorporate a strategy to end the political system which ensures the continuation of capitalist relations.

The organic link between oppression and exploitation in South Africa provides a major reason for socialists to oppose apartheid. But it is not the only one. Apartheid does not exist only in people's heads. It has concrete effects, and structures the institutions of society in its own image. In particular, it is dangerous to believe that segregation and the bantustan policy have not created and consolidated real ethnic divisions, and real conflicts of interests between rural and urban communities; and between those who are included in, and those excluded from, the new constitution.

These conflicts may be secondary to the fundamental capital-labour contradiction. They will, nonetheless, prove to be a substantial obstacle to any attempt at building socialism

which involves rational planning in a single, co-ordinated political entity. As such, it would be naive for socialists to believe that these conflicts can be dealt with after the more fundamental contradiction has been overcome: this is a kind of 'two stage theory' in reverse, where questions of national divisions and conflicts are postponed until the economic structure has been transformed.

THE BALANCE OF FORCES

The final question raised in Glaser's article is that of the relative balance of forces within a democratic class alliance. Before turning to this, it would be as well to clarify the meaning that is being assigned to 'working class'. Glaser no-where comes to grips with this problem. He avoids it by talking about the 'organised working class' by which he means workers at the point of production and the unions into which they are organised.

Any 'socialist project' must aim at eradicating the deformations and distortions created by capitalism. As such, it must have a broader conception of the working class. It must, for example, include the women who provide free services to capitalism by maintaining male workers and ensuring the reproduction of the working class. And it must include those three million or more people rendered jobless by being excluded from the production process. These sections of this more-broadly defined working class are precisely those who suffer most from apartheid. Many of them are confined to the death-like conditions in the bantustans. In the case of women, they are trebly oppressed: as women, as blacks and as part of the working class. For them in particular, the struggle against apartheid has an immediacy which cannot be defined away as being of secondary importance.

We are now in a position to come to terms with Glaser's fear that in a democratic class alliance, the interests of the working class will be subordinated to the petty bourgeoisie. We know:
* that a national political struggle for democracy and against apartheid

is in the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie who are certainly an oppressed group.
* that any socialist project must have, as an essential goal, the termination of apartheid.
This leads directly to two further propositions:
* that it shows a naive misunderstanding of politics to believe that the petty bourgeoisie will not wage a political struggle against apartheid, and try to mobilise all other oppressed classes, including the working class, into this struggle.
* this being the case, the only way to ensure the dominance of working class interests in political struggle is if the proletariat does what it must in any case do if it is to end economic exploitation: enter wholeheartedly into the national struggle against the political system which guards and protects that exploitation.

It is of no use to bewail the fact that 'petty-bourgeois elements' dominate, or might dominate, the democratic movement. If they do so, it can only be by default - because the political leadership of the working class is not meeting its responsibilities.

There is a final ambiguity in Glaser's article that needs to be clarified. It involves the relationship between trade unions and the popular democratic movement. He implies, rather than states, that because unions are organised at the point of production, they are more likely to represent the political interests of the working class. In this context he states that the 'radical liberals' in the UDF fail 'to articulate a clearly anti-capitalist position'.

On referendum day last year, FOSATU encouraged union members to display slogans calling for 'one-man, one-vote'. This is a most typical liberal slogan, containing not the slightest social-democratic tinge. But one cannot conclude that FOSATU is liberal in character, nor that it is soft on capitalism. It merely demonstrates that organisations should not be categorised by their political pronouncements, but by their overall programme.

It should also be borne in mind that unions, by their nature, do not organise the unemployed or the spouses of workers. There will even be times

when the short term interests of the unemployed may be at variance with those who have jobs. In short, working class politics must incorporate both organisation at the point of production, and a programme aimed at establishing a democratic political order.

These two elements are both separate and closely linked. The most difficult question facing progressives is how they can be united in a single programme. It is a difficulty rooted in the complexity of South African society and in divisions imposed by political and economic structures.

To simplify and sloganise these difficulties is unhelpful. They are not a matter of union officials' distrust of petty-bourgeois liberals, nor of political activists' dislike for 'workerists'. The problem is how mature progressives can wield together an effective force to end both economic exploitation and political oppression.

a response

Continuing the debate on liberalism, DARYL GLASER considers some of the criticisms of his WIP 30 article raised by Cedric de Beer.

THE DEFINITION OF LIBERALISM

The question central to both Cedric de Beer's article and my own (WIP 30) is: what is the definition of liberalism? Whereas my article (wrongly) utilised an unstated definition, de Beer set out (correctly) to make his definition of liberalism explicit. It is in the interests of the debate as a whole that the meaning of 'liberalism' be clarified.

In this regard it is interesting to note that de Beer's main concern is to establish the alleged distinction between 'liberalism' and 'reformism'. He argues that the white referendum 'neatly' separated 'liberals' from 'reformists'. This, he says, is because 'no one espousing any of the basic liberal doctrines could have considered voting for a constitution' of the type proposed by the Botha government. I shall take issue with this shortly. On the other hand, de Beer is quite happy to accept the basic proposition about 'radical liberalism' advanced in the WIP 30 article: in de Beer's words, the referendum debate 'has nudged the more militant of these liberals, and those with a less conscious commitment to capitalism in the direction of popular democratic groupings most substantially represented by the UDF'. His only point of difference with my article is that he stresses the positive implications

of this process whereas I emphasise its ambiguous (not its negative) implications.

Liberalism is notoriously difficult to define because the term is used variously to describe several different kinds of state forms and political philosophies. The first of these philosophies, associated with the ascendent bourgeoisie in early capitalist Europe, is classic liberalism. This asserted individual rights in opposition to feudalism's exactions; the market and meritocracy in opposition to feudal monopolies and hereditary privilege; and national and market unification in opposition to the feudal parcellisation of society along dynastic and religious lines. It sought a codified legal system to regulate competition in the economic market, and the separation of powers, a plurality of parties and the franchise to regulate political competition. Classic liberalism is associated with the classical liberal state of the type forged after the French and American Revolutions.

The second state form, the creation of which required a further elaboration of classic liberal philosophy, is the bourgeois-democratic state. This is the state whose inter-party competition is regulated by a universal rather than restricted franchise. Far from being a part-and-parcel of the classic liberal state - which sought to restrict the vote first to the properties and then to males - the 'universal franchise' state was established in Western Europe, North America and Australia only in the twentieth century and only after a long series of popular struggles, wars and

other ruptures.

Thirdly, there is **welfare liberalism**. At first sight, this appeared a paradox: how could liberalism, with its emphasis on free competition and its opposition to state interference, include a welfare dimension? The paradox is resolved if we understand that, just as universal franchise amplified the principles of universalism and liberty contained in classic liberalism, the **welfare state** proved compatible with the liberal idea that competition and individual acquisitiveness need to be regulated in the interests of wider harmony. It should be added that the welfare state concept originated with the un-liberal Bismarck regime in nineteenth century Germany; it was only later welded to the liberal state both via explicitly 'liberal'parties (eg the British Liberals, the US Democrats), and via the parties linked to the working class (Britain's Labour Party, West Germany's SDP). Though at times portrayed as superseding capitalism - especially by social democrats - it has been shown that the post-war welfare statism of the advanced centres is compatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations. Its essential effects have been to extend the scope of state intervention to include the maintenance of the working class and the management of capitalism's economic and social crises.

The definition of liberalism is further complicated by the existence of hybrids. In Latin America, liberalism often refers to the philosophy of landed oligarchies opposed to state interventions designed to serve independent industrial development.

The matter is compounded also by the fact that liberalism can be classified along a qualitatively different plane, according to its degree of willingness to reconcile with the existing order, versus its determination to transform it. In the French Revolution, for example, constitutional monarchists faced the opposition of more militant Republicans. The liberalism which began to sprout in Germany after 1848 was conservative enough to be neutralised by Bismarck through the co-optation of its adherents with growth-promoting economic measures. By contrast in Nicaragua the liberal-democratic bourgeoisie tried to take the lead in the struggle to overthrow the Somoza dynasty in the late 1970s. A

great deal depends on the strength or the extent of grievances present in the urban-based bourgeoisie, which in turn usually provides the main support for liberal political and economic reform. This need not, however, be the decisive factor, as the more radical liberals may sever their ties with the bourgeoisie altogether, and cement alliances with the masses.

Finally, it should be mentioned that 'militant' or 'radical' liberals may be coherently and philosophically liberal (and inter alia 'anti-communist'), or may have an **ambiguous** attitude to socialism (this is true especially of social democrats). This ambiguity is notably present in the 'progressive nationalism' of many third world movements (including ZANU in Zimbabwe). One may wish to question the analytical wisdom of treating European social democracy - committed as it frequently is to 'socialism' and linked to the unions - as 'liberal' The label, however, has much greater resonance in third world contexts where social-democratic currents have traditionally not been linked to working class movements, and have concentrated on 'universal' demands for 'democracy' and

so on. European social democracy is, by contrast, often quite 'workerist'.

LIBERALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is not easy to apply these categories of liberalism to the South African context. The original categories used in **WIP 30** - Establishment, Independent-Establishment, Bourgeois-Democratic and Radical Liberalism - do not fit easily into any of the 'pigeon-holes' just discussed, but incorporate elements of each. To be schematic:

South Africa:

Establishment Liberalism	=	(i) conservative reformist
		(ii) classic liberal
Independent Establishment Liberalism	=	(i) somewhat less conservative
		(ii) classic liberal
Bourgeois Democratic Liberalism	=	(i) strongly change-oriented
		(ii) bourgeois-democratic at the level of politics, undefined, though always anti-socialist at the level of economics.
Radical Liberalism	=	(i) militant
		(ii) tendentially social-democratic, welfarist.

In terms of class alliances, Establishment and Independent-Establishment Liberalism are supported by the bulk of South Africa's capitalist class. Bourgeois-Democratic Liberalism receives the support of the more enlightened bourgeois and professional strata. It also has links with quasi-mass organisations (like Inkatha). Radical Liberalism is treated with fear by a bourgeoisie which is concerned to avoid the disruptive and radicalising effects of mass action. Radical liberals have allied themselves instead with the popular classes. They should be clearly distinguished from other elements aligned to the masses, notably left-wing (socialist) activists, who are found in

the same organisations.

Organisationally, Establishment and Independent Establishment Liberalism find expression in the conservative Sunday newspapers, the employers' federations, the right of the PFP, etc. Bourgeois-Democratic Liberalism is dominant in the PFP, and is strongly represented in church hierarchies, the Black Sash and the South African Institute of Race Relations. Radical Liberalism is one of a number of philosophical world views present in the UDF and the National Forum. The National Party is not liberal (the reference to 'NP liberalism' in WIP 30 is a misprint). Though its current economic and racial policies have a sympathetic audience in Establishment Liberals, the NP includes, alongside a liberal current, a proto-fascist component (authoritarianism, anti-parliamentarianism, 'remnants' of white populist racial chauvinism). At the other 'extreme', the UDF, too, is not liberal, since it includes left activists and, in important instances, assertive grass roots structures. Liberalism is, however, a definite current within the UDF (as de Beer would agree).

ON POPULAR FRONTS

De Beer's emphasis on the positive implications of Popular Frontism rests on his tendency to stress the common opposition of blacks of all classes to apartheid, and on the close and organic link between racism and capitalism (the notion of a non-racial capitalism being relegated to the realm not so much of logical impossibility as of, in de Beer's words, 'theoretical bubble blowing'). Presumably de Beer also has in mind the more thoroughly transformative achievements of mass-based radical nationalism (eg Mozambique and Viet Nam). His position is probably also informed by reflections on the disasters associated with the 'workerism' of the Third International in the late 1920s and early 1930s - disasters which culminated in fascism and the obliteration of working class organisations in much of Europe.

These arguments and factors all deserve serious attention. They should not, however, blind us to the fact that a strong case can also be made for

emphasising the ambiguous implications of Popular Front formations. Such a case could rest on the less encouraging experiences of 'progressive nationalism' (from Mexico in 1910-20 to Zimbabwe in the 1980s), and on the repeated upstaging of the combative sections of the working class during the anti-fascist popular frontism of the 1930s and 1940s. Apart from this, a very strong case - which we do not have the room to elaborate here - could be made for rejecting the functionalist claim that a non-racial political order is incompatible with the reproduction of capitalist relations in South Africa.

Whatever their merits or demerits, these arguments - and the problems they pose for Popular Frontism - cannot be dismissed as lightly as de Beer occasionally implies. His article seems to suggest that the marriage of Popular Frontism and socialist objectives can be consumated just as soon as the political leadership of the working class recognises, and carries out, its historical 'responsibility' to rise above trade unionism and 'enter wholeheartedly into the national struggle against the political system'. It was precisely the 'political leadership of the working class' which, under the rubric of various kinds of Popular Frontism - anti-fascist until 1945, and thereafter anti-monopoly - helped rescue Western and Southern European capitalism from the most active social and political crises.

This does not mean that the organisations of the working class should confine themselves to simple trade unionism, nor that they should avoid alliances with the representatives of non-proletarian classes and strata. It is rather to reassert what should be an obvious point: that the mere presence of socialists and combative workers within the terrain of popular opposition politics is not enough to guarantee a sustained challenge to the authority of capital. Surely, at a minimum, it is necessary to note both the possibilities and the dangers associated with Popular Frontism - and to concede that the mere entry of the working class and its leaders into fronts is not sufficient to obviate the risks entailed? In this light, de Beer's singular emphasis on the 'positive' value of fronts as weapons of socialist transformation appears one-sided.

REFORMISM VS LIBERALISM?

De Beer's conceptualisation of frontism in South Africa is not unconnected to his definition of liberalism. On the contrary, it depends upon an understanding of the latter which allows him to demonstrate liberalism's ready compatibility with socialist objectives. This involves a two-fold argument, the combined effect of which is to shift the locus of the definition of liberalism to the left and to thereby blur the boundary separating it from socialism.

In the first place, de Beer distinguishes between reformism and liberalism. The former label he pins to the Botha regime and those sympathetic to its initiatives; the latter designates only those who oppose the new constitution on the grounds of its incompatibility with basic liberal concepts (freedom, political equality, nationhood, etc). Thus, in de Beer's analysis liberalism begins where support for the constitution ends. It is difficult to see how such a rigid criterion can be applied without depriving liberalism of any meaning in the South African context whatsoever. For it would exclude from the liberal camp not only the **Sunday Times** and Anglo American, but all those abiding by the PFP constitution - a document which does little to hide its concern to preserve (via the minority veto, federalism, and so on) white political and economic privileges.

The fact of the matter is that the liberal commitment to universal nationhood arose primarily in the context of struggles to weld linguistically and, to some extent, culturally homogeneous European populations into single nations. When liberal social anthropologists and sociologists discovered the third world, however, their conception of nationhood was in many instances modified to accommodate 'ethnic' and cultural differences - 'pluralist' theories being one expression of this tendency. Moreover, we have already noted that liberalism was originally committed neither to universal franchise nor to mass-based democratic politics; these were the product of later elaborations of liberalism. It therefore seems quite unjust to exclude what I

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have called Establishment Liberalism from the liberal camp simply because it does not conform to a 'pure' model of liberalism as defined by de Beer.

Botha's reformism is itself not liberal; its authoritarianism, its continuing obsession with ethnicity, and its bureaucratic interference in the labour market, are together sufficient to disprove its liberal credentials. However, given the context of a conservative-reformist bourgeois class - and an Establishment Liberalism ready to take whatever it can get from the 'recalcitrant Nats' - an unhappy marriage between the regime and the right wing of liberalism becomes conceivable.

ON 'LIBERAL' RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

If de Beer's one concern is to define a whole section of the 'reformist' opposition out of the liberal camp, his other is to offer a definition of liberal values which allows a marriage of liberalism and socialism to appear relatively uncomplicated. Concepts like 'freedom', 'equality', 'individual rights' and 'universal franchise', we are told, 'have acquired sufficient autonomy' to have no necessary relationship to capitalism; they can, in consequence, be given a real socialist content. Were this not so, FOSATU's advocacy of universal franchise during the referendum would indicate that it is liberal and thus 'soft on capitalism'. Instead of judging movements on the basis of their pronouncements we should, de Beer concludes, examine their overall programme.

Everything here depends on how one formulates this argument. A socialist is perfectly justified in demanding a political order which respects universal franchise, party competition, civil liberties and so on. Indeed, the uneven record of 'actual socialism' in the twentieth century has led many in the European left to conclude that no democratic socialism is possible without such basic freedoms. De Beer's error is to portray these as 'liberal freedoms' when in fact liberalism has never enjoyed an exclusive claim on them. In the late nineteenth century it was the working class movement which demanded full civil freedoms and universal

franchise, and the bourgeoisie which resisted. The liberal - and therefore capitalist - appropriation and monopolisation of these concepts since roughly the Second World War is perhaps one of the most dramatic developments of the second half of this century. If these concepts are to be recaptured by the left, it can only be on the basis of their disarticulation from liberal discourse. Liberalism is indissolubly linked to capitalism; **libertarianism is not**. Absorbing liberals into socialist-oriented political alliances ultimately requires not that their liberal but that their libertarian principles be given coherent socialist content. It requires that they should eventually **cease** to be liberals. It is because he ignores the necessity for this qualitative break that de Beer is able to present liberalism as a political partner which socialists can court without danger ∎

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 country-side, 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 ∎

Interview:

Mufamadi on GAWU

Trade union unity and relations with the UDF are two of the most difficult issues which trade unions have had to face recently. WIP interviewed SYDNEY MUFAMADI, general secretary of the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) on these questions.

WIP: How does GAWU see the relationship between working class and popular or national struggle in South Africa?

Mufamadi: There is no question that the essential problem which people in South Africa have got to address is the question of economic exploitation, which is capitalism. But there is a specific form which capitalism in this country has taken. This involves national oppression, where the African working class experiences national oppression, which is meant to maximise profits. Because of that, we see a link between the issues which workers are organising themselves around - on the factory floor and in political oppression. Workers have to address both these questions in an organised form.

WIP: Some unions argue that at this moment in South Africa's history, it is important for the working class to organise distinctly and separately from other class influences. At a particular stage, according to this view, the political and organisational confidence of the working class becomes such that it is able to move into alliance with other classes. This ensures that real and meaningful working class leadership emerges. How do you respond to this approach?

Mufamadi: We see things differently. Some want to perceive the working class as only found on the factory floor.

Our view is that even those people who are not behind machines on the factory floor can be said to be waging a working class struggle if the issues which they take up in their various sites of struggle, and the way in which they take those issues up, serve to undermine the class relations upon which the present society is built.

If we go, for instance, to the community where we find our people living in squalid conditions, these questions can be addressed in class terms. The workers cannot say that they have nothing to say about that kind of situation. Because that is the situation they are faced with. People can wage a working class political struggle around those issues which affect them, and trade unions can play a role in instilling working class consciousness.

There are people in rural areas, and we as trade unionists have limitations which we have to contend with. Our sphere of operation is the factory floor, but we need to address ourselves to those who are, for instance, in the rural areas. We don't have the necessary infrastructure as trade unions. Even if we come up with one union federation, we still will not have the infrastructure to reach people in those areas. We think, and this has been proven in practice, that the UDF does offer that kind of infrastructure. And we think that working class consciousness can be instilled into the masses of our people through this available infrastructure.

WIP: GAWU has joined the UDF. What do you see as the best form for an alliance between working class organisations and popular or community organisations in the two struggles you've outlined?

Mufamadi: All the organisations that have affiliated to the UDF have done so because they are in full agreement

with the UDF declaration. We want to
see those organisations as equal partners
in this united front. Ideologically
speaking, we are saying that we are
involved in a national democratic
struggle wherein we put special emphasis
on the leadership role which has to be
played by the working class. If you
look at the UDF declaration, there is
nothing there which negates the
interests of the working class. We feel
that we as a trade union have got room
in the UDF as much as any other
progressive form of organisation, be it
operating in the community, at a student
level or in the women's front.

WIP: What would satisfy you that
working class leadership was a fact in
the struggle you spoke about, and what
form should this leadership take?

Mufamadi: It is not important whether
the majority of people on the UDF
executive are from a trade union or
not. That would be a wrong understanding
of what working class politics or
struggle entails. If the programme of
action, which is guiding the UDF,
ensures that the interests of the
working class are safeguarded; and if
whenever there are UDF meetings where
important policy decisions are taken
there is participation of
representatives of the workers'
organisations, that ensures that workers
are represented in that sort of a
front.

But we are not envisaging in an
alliance of this nature that one section
of the alliance will dictate to other
sections what is to be done in the
front. We believe that this involves
some kind of common perspective of
issues which has got to develop in the
process of common struggles. These
common struggles can only be waged if
people are willing to fight together in
an alliance like UDF. Working class
leadership has got to emerge in that
kind of process.

WIP: Let's move on to the question of
GAWU's relationship to the trade union
unity talks. At the March unity meeting
in Johannesburg, certain unions
including GAWU left the talks. What
happened?

Mufamadi: There are two aspects which
are central to this question: industrial
unions, and progress. GAWU has long
been committed to the formation of
industrial unions. We see this as the
form of organisation which guarantees
efficiency compared to the way in which
we are structured at the moment. We
committed ourselves to this even before
the idea of union unity talks. When the
idea of the unity talks came about, we
welcomed that move. Unions saw the need
to unite against the onslaught from the
state and against the problems that we
face on a day-to-day basis on the
factory floor. Our participation in a
series of meetings confirms our
commitment to the question of unity.

At an inter-union level, we came to
realise that if we are to form one
progressive trade union federation, all
the unions participating will have to
restructure themselves. Some are
currently operating as general unions,
while others are already organising
themselves along federal lines.

We came to that realisation, and a
commitment was made to restructure
ourselves along distinct industrial
lines. But no deadlines for this were
set. We thought this was proper, because
there is no way in which we could
assert deadlines in establishing
industrial unions. Setting deadlines
would presuppose that we are operating
in a normal, interruption-free
situation. But we experience a lot of
interruptions, one of them being state
intervention in the running of our
trade unions. Given these kinds of
interruptions, and other problems which
relate to material and human resources,
we realised that restructuring the
general unions along industrial lines
would be a long process.

It is unfortunate that some of our
fellow participants in the unity talks
were already operating as industrial
unions. Some of them were in a relatively
advanced stage, and were a step ahead
of other unions. But what we thought
they should have done was to accommodate
us in the process of forming industrial
unions. If some unions are lagging
behind others because of the way they
were established, we saw it as our
collective responsibility to work
together in the transition from the
present state of affairs to the end
envisaged.

WIP: You have previously suggested that trade union unity is being imposed from above, not built from below. Presumably this relates to GAWU's commitment to the regional solidarity committees as a process in building unity. Had these regional solidarity committees been meeting regularly prior to the March feasibility meeting in Johannesburg?

Mufamadi: Yes, in some areas, and no with regard to other areas. The idea of the regional solidarity committees was initially mooted at our first unity conference at Langa in mid-1981. This committee did not meet much immediately after that, because of the state clampdown which came immediately after that conference. But one of the efforts of the regional solidarity committees were the one-hour stoppages called to observe the death of comrade Neil Aggett. We thought that if people could meet in that spirit, a lot of issues could be dealt with by the workers themselves. We were thinking about a situation where, for instance, shop stewards from various unions would come together and discuss common issues which affect them factory floor, and try to formulate common strategies at regional level to deal with them.

But I must say that, even though we have been meeting in the Transvaal, some of the unions never turned up. And even those unions that did meet did not meet as often as they could have done.

WIP: Did GAWU, Municipal and General Workers Union, and SAAWU walk out of the March unity meeting, or were they expelled?

Mufamadi: We did not walk out of the unity talks. Some unions felt that we were delaying the formation of a federation because we were taking too long to restructure ourselves. This was in spite of the practical problems that we tried to highlight at the unity talks. They decided that they were in a position to go ahead with our exclusion, and felt that we should be given observer status. This was totally unacceptable at that point in time: when we went to those talks we had a clear mandate to be full participants. We found ourselves in a dilemma. We could not change our status without a mandate to do so from our membership.

When we brought that to the other unions' attention, they felt that all we needed to do was to go back to our membership and give them feedback on what transpired at the talks, tell them that we had been offered a new status, and seek a fresh mandate.

WIP: Does GAWU intend to seek a different mandate from its members on the question of union unity?

Mufamadi: Not necessarily. What we have already started doing is to report to members what happened at the unity talks. The mandate they gave us is still the same at present. Our membership will have to look at the new status we have been offered, and see what kind of mandate they can give us in the light of that.

WIP: In terms of GAWU's commitment to retructure along industrial lines, what areas will you be concentrating on in the future?

Mufamadi: Historically we are a general union. GAWU emerged as a breakaway from BAWU, which was itself a general union. A lot of BAWU members decided to break away with the group establishing GAWU. That's how we became a general union.

We decided, even before the unity talks started, to assess what areas we are relatively strong in. When we feel we have the necessary human and material resources we will establish an industrial union in those particular industries. That is our objective. But the circumstances we are operating in change from time to time. For example in 1982 we realised that the Municipal and General Workers Union was organising in the railway sector, and we were also organising there. We felt that we should combine our respective membership and come up with one union for railway workers. This has since been established.

WIP: Are there other areas where GAWU is close to the establishment of industrial unions?

Mufamadi: If one looks at the extent of our organised presence in the metal industry, we think we can come up with an industrial union. But we decided to

shelve that idea because although we've got a strong presence, there is already an established union - MAWU - in that industry. MAWU is one of the unions participating with us in the unity talks. When the idea of bilateral discussions between unions organising in the same industry was raised, we felt that we could come together with MAWU and look at the possibility of a merger. This would facilitate the formation of a unified trade union federation.

WIP: So you are saying that in relations with MAWU, you have been a positive participant in the question of demarcation?

Mufamadi: Yes. We did commit ourselves to the question of industrial demarcation, and we saw it as an obligation on our part to sit down with any union organising in an area where we were also organised. Even the consideration of a merger was positive.

WIP: Have you signed your members in the metal industry over to MAWU?

Mufamadi: No, but that is one possibility we were toying with. Unfortunately, we were then asked to take a new status in the unity talks, and that status does not enable us to discuss that question with MAWU at the moment. But when unions were asked whether they could commit themselves to meeting with other unions where they overlap in areas of organisation, we indicated that we would be prepared to sit with MAWU in as far as our membership in the metal industry is concerned, and also with the Food and Canning Workers Union.

WIP: What are GAWU's long-term plans on trade union unity, given that you've now been offered observer status only, and that you're not able to accept that?

Mufamadi: We still see ourselves as very much part of the unity talks. That is why we see the coming mandate which our members will give us as very crucial, and something which cannot be hastily decided on. We need a lot of

discussion within GAWU itself.

We have no ill feelings towards those still participating in the unity talks. When we get a mandate, we will see how those participating in the unity talks can accommodate whatever mandate we have been given. We don't think that the doors for co-operation with those unions, either individually or collectively, have been closed. We are still trying to co-operate with them as ever before. All possibilities are still there for us to work towards unity with them.

WIP: One final question on GAWU's strength: how many signed up and paid up members does GAWU have?

Mufamadi: One cannot be categorical about this. It's a fluctuating position. Last year, for example, we experienced recession, and this affected organisation. Our current estimate is that our signed up membership is 30 000; and paid up membership in the region of 18 000

Bus Boycotts, Monopolies and the State

Transport is an area of crucial concern for the African working class. The Alexandra bus boycott earlier this year showed the nature of conflict between working class commuters and the transport monopolies. Events around the boycott also demonstrated the links between state and capital in an evolving transport policy. JOHN PERLMAN examines the Alexandra bus boycott, and analyses changing transport policy in South Africa.

On 16 January this year, the vast majority of Alexandra township's 36 000 bus commuters refused to board PUTCO buses. This three-week long boycott provides a good example of how police, traffic officers, security policemen and the bus company combine together and use a wide range of methods to break a boycott and force commuters back to the buses. The boycott also highlights important features of the African bus transport system - monopoly control over bus transport; increased fares in spite of the rising cost of living for commuters and rising profits for bus companies; protection of bus company interests and stifling of commuter opposition.

Bus transport serves the interests of the state, bus companies and employers in particular ways. This 'alliance' of interests is not a straightforward one as their interests do not coincide in every respect. Steps which each party take produce both the desired results and give rise to other forces which contradict their aims. African commuters have struggled against this situation. Consequently the government set up the Welgemoed Commission to look into some of the strains and tensions in the bus transport system. The Commission will affect bus transport for African

commuters - who provides the transport, who pays for it and what spaces are left for people to press demands for affordable efficient transport.

The boycott was sparked off by a 12,5% increase in fares on the Witwatersrand. In August last year, PUTCO announced that a reduction in the price of diesel fuel of 3,1 c per litre would save the company R2,6-m a year. This saving would be passed onto the commuters. Shortly thereafter, PUTCO's application for a 12,5% increase in fares was approved. PUTCO public relations officer Pat Rogers said the company would honour its earlier promise. It would however have to go through the same procedures to decrease the fares as it had to increase them.

Although the fare increases were approved in August 1983, they were only introduced in January 1984. Members of the Alexandra Commuters' Committee (ACC), set up to co-ordinate the boycott, criticised the timing of the fare increases. They said January was an especially difficult time because most people had been 'cleaned out' by the holiday season. Children had just returned to school and parents were faced with expenses for fees, books and clothing. The ACC contacted a PUTCO representative before the boycott started and asked for a postponement of the increase. In a statement to the press, Pat Rogers said PUTCO had no way of being sure when the new fares would be introduced. The timing of fare increases is referred to an interdepartmental committee. The police, security police, Department of Co-operation and Development (CAD) and town councils are consulted as to whether boycotts or other protests would be likely. A senior PUTCO official said the timing of fare increases was a 'politically sensitive issue': 'For instance, June 16 ... would be a very bad day to increase bus fares.' An ACC spokesperson felt the timing of the increases had worked against them. The

holiday break made it difficult to hold
meetings and organise commuters in
opposition to the increase.

ALEXANDRA COMMUTERS' COMMITTEE AND THE BOYCOTT

The ACC began as an ad-hoc committee,
consisting largely of people from
existing organisations in Alexandra such
as the Congress of South African Students
(COSAS); Alexandra Youth Congress (AYCO)
and the newly formed Alexandra Civic
Association. This committee decided
something should be done about the fare
increases and called a meeting for
Thursday, 12 January. Pamphlets were
issued calling people to a second meeting
on the Saturday, where the ACC was formed
and a decision taken to boycott buses
from the beginning of the week. The
following day a van with a loudhailer
travelled through the township calling
for support for the boycott. Messages
were also sent to ministers to read out
in church.

The first day of the boycott was
undoubtedly a success. Buses leaving
Alexandra in the morning were empty.
Some people walked to work while others
battled for places in taxis or private
cars. Large numbers of people were
reported to be stranded without transport.
A PUTCO statement said Alexandra passenger
loads were 'only a fraction of the normal
carry'. This they claimed indicated
'successful intimidation rather than a
successful boycott'. A commuter had a
different view: 'The bus fare increases
have been so large that we cannot afford
them. PUTCO must think when it implements
increases: we are not people who earn
fantastic wages. How are we going to
afford rent and food when such a large
amount of our wages goes on travelling
expenses?' (Star, 16.01.84). Hundreds of
commuters used the buses to return home
but disembarked at the Wynberg terminus
on the edge of the township. A strong
contingent of police, some in camouflage
uniforms, was present. Some buses which
entered the township in the evening were
stoned and nine were damaged.

On the second day of the boycott PUTCO
claimed 30% of the commuters were back on
the buses. A press report said the number
of passengers was 'a little higher' than
the day before. Buses were withdrawn from
the main terminus inside the township in
the early morning. During the afternoon
police escorted buses into Alexandra.

On day three, the Star said the boycott
was easing off but members of the ACC felt
it was still 60% effective. Buses again
operated from the main terminus in 15th
Avenue, while uniform and plain-clothes
police stood by. On return journeys, few
passengers journeyed all the way into the
township. Commenting on the police
escorting and dispatching buses, an ACC
spokesperson said it 'was an act of
provocation' because police were
'interfering in a situation which does
not concern them. We would like to come
to terms with PUTCO and not with the SAP'.
PUTCO acknowledged there had been a marked
passenger fall-off during the first two
days. A PUTCO official said buses were
withdrawn from Alexandra after 7 pm as
several had been stoned.

On the fourth day of the boycott reports
said peak hour buses were leaving the
township near-empty and collecting only
partial loads on the outskirts. Police kept
a watch on the main 15th Avenue terminus,
where bus shelters stood empty and
commuters stood a short distance away
waiting for taxis. Some residents boarded
buses at Wynberg.

At the end of the first week PUTCO said
revenue figures indicated passenger
carrying was 'nearly back to normal –
about 10% down on the usual figure.' A
newspaper report however said few peak
hour buses left the township fully
loaded. Nonetheless the ACC called for a
meeting on the weekend in view of the
police presence and a 'weakening of the
boycott because of police interference and
harassment'. They did however insist that
the boycott was still on and had the
support of commuters. Pat Rogers said:
'A boycott means a spontaneous resistance
and what we have had here was intimidation
to our passengers. This intimidation now
appears to be over and our buses are
running normally ...'.

If Rogers thought it was all over
someone else didn't because early in the
morning on 23 January, the seventh day
of the boycott, five members of the ACC
were taken from their homes by plain-
clothes policemen. They were ACC
chairperson Mike Beea, vice-chair Mack
Lekota, AYCO publicity secretary Naomi
River, ACC organiser Obed Bapela and
Patrick Banda. Police also raided the
home of Rev AP Moleleki, a Methodist
minister in whose church the weekend
meeting had been held. They
confiscated a typewriter and a duplicating
machine, saying they had been used to print
the bus boycott pamphlets.