

AL20

Row "AL20"

THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN
DISCUSSION PAPER 2/2/84

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION:

The Signature Campaign is a make or break campaign for the UDF. It can ground the UDF amongst the people; or it can dissipate our energy. It can give us a solid basis to resist Apartheid, and move forwards to build a united, democratic South Africa free from oppression and economic exploitation. Or it can allow the Nationalist Party the space to succeed with their New Deal. If we fail to resist this New Deal, we must know that Apartheid is here to stay.

This year is a crucial year for the democratic movement. The campaigns we organise this year are watershed campaigns. The Signature Campaign is as important for UDF, as the Defiance Campaign and the Anti-Pass Campaigns were for the Congress organisations in the 50s. We have the political task of uniting the people of South Africa, outside of the tri-cameral, Bantustan and dummy structures; of keeping people out of the clutches of Hendrikse, Poovalingham, Botha, Sebe and their allies.

The state is using every ounce of its energy to divide us and coopt some of us onto their side. UDF needs to use every ounce of our energy to build national unity. Since the 1950's the people of South Africa have not had a national voice. The repression of the Sharpeville era left our democratic mass movement shattered. Where people organised it was without a coherent direction. UDF must develop its potential to speak for all the people of South Africa and to lead and guide our people nationally.

This, comrades, is our historical task. And it is an enormously important task. The future of South Africa depends on our ability to organise the mass of people of South Africa to reject the New Deal in all its aspects. If we fail, we must know that we have abandoned the people of South Africa to a far more sophisticated and more intoxicating brand of Apartheid; and a more difficult form of Apartheid to fight against.

The Signature Campaign, alongside our organisational work around peoples problems in our areas, is the best method for us to build and strengthen the democratic movement. We are fortunate here, we are not the first people to organise a Campaign for one million signatures in South Africa. We can learn from the previous experience, avoid the problems that people faced then and gain from an assessment of it.

After the Congress of the People in 1955, the Congress movement embarked on a campaign to get one million people to endorse the Freedom Charter, and accept it as their own policy. The Consultative Committee (CC) stated clearly: Our aim is not to get one million signatures but to get one million people to know and accept the Freedom Charter. The campaign was seen as a way to educate Congress activists, and to recruit new members as a way to build each of the organisations in the Congress movement.

The Million Signature Campaign we're organising now is different from the Campaign in 1955. The situation we're facing is different. In 1955, the Congress Alliance had put the question of democracy and the will of the people on the map by organising the Congress of the People. These same questions have been raised now, but by the State. We are going to the people of South Africa to ask them to reject an offer of pseudo-democracy from the State. This makes it easier for us in some ways. The State acts as a pressure on us. It keeps us on our toes and constantly reminds us of what will happen if we fail. But we need to set our own goals as well. Our signature campaign is against a specific state strategy - the new Constitution and the new Koornhof Bills. The 1955 campaign was primarily for the Freedom Charter, and implicit in this was the rejection of the Apartheid system.

There was no elaborate blueprint at the outset. The NCC and the regional CC's monitored developments, planned strategies, provided resources. Initially the NCC produced the forms and advised branches to set up tables in the streets, go door-to-door and appeal for signatures at mass meetings. But the NCC constantly reassessed the campaign. Their second report drew the conclusion that the SC should be wound up. Subsequently they issued a new plan for organisation of the signature campaign, which answered the problems they had experienced. The NCC consisted of people elected by the organisations. But once the committee was set up, it could plan, assess and strategise on its own, and it reported back to the organisations on a regular basis.

At these meetings the organisations could determine the general direction in which they saw the campaign should be moving.

So Congress activists hit the streets with forms and pens and brought back reports of how people responded to the Freedom Charter. An anecdote about Kensington is useful here, and will make us feel not so bad about the problems we are going to encounter!! 28 volunteers went door-to-door in Kensington, with copies of the Freedom Charter, and pamphlets about the shortage of postboxes or phone booths. This was an area in which there were many squatters, where people were being evicted and moved from the area; in which housing was a burning issue. But they forgot this issue and focused on telephone booths!!! The aim was to hold a mass meeting in the area, and to collect signatures there; but, the pamphlet had neither date nor venue for the meeting. So the activists went back to Kensington the following weekend to advertise the meeting and to collect signatures door-to-door.

In their assessment, the NCC said that the Campaign must be organised as part of each organisation's activities, not dealt with as a separate item on the agenda. In their work, the organisations presented the Freedom Charter as their policy, and the Congress Alliance was presented as the only organisation capable of uniting all these organisations and uniting the people against Apartheid.

So the organisations continued to fight for issues affecting the people, and in these campaigns, they built the organisations, explained the Freedom Charter and asked people to sign to show their support. For example, the women were fighting against the pass laws, so they had a special form which had the Freedom Charter demands and a slogan against passes. As the NCC report said: Our aim is not "to go out and sell our aims and objects like a hawker sells backache powders". (No offence meant to Mr Marks' profession!) Our aim is to resist the changes the government hopes to force on us, and the signature campaign is a tool to do this. It is not an end in itself. The campaign gives us the car to reach our goals - to educate ourselves and the people of South Africa about the oppression and exploitation.

- to show the country and the World that the people reject Botha's schemes, and support a non-racial democratic South Africa
- to build our mass based organisations so they are truly the voices of the people, and to build unity between them
- to lay the basis for asking the people to resist in the future, be it conscription, removals to Khayelitsha ...
- to build non-racial national unity, which is an enormous and lengthy process which we are only beginning now.

THE SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN

AIM:

The aim of the campaign is to collect at least one million signatures countrywide. The Western Cape region has been set the sub-total of 300 000 signatures. The length of the campaign will be between four to six months.

The content of the signature form can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Rejection of the Constitution Act
- 2) Rejection of the Koornhof Bills
- 3) Support for the United Democratic Front
- 4) Commitment to the creation of a unified, non-racial and democratic South Africa.

It is important that this is not a petition but rather a signature campaign. The signed forms will not be presented to the government OR any other Apartheid authority.

What then is the purpose of conducting a signature campaign?

B. OBJECTIVES

There are a number of possible objectives regarding the Signature Campaign. It is important to realise that the Signature Campaign is a means towards achieving these objectives, and does not become an end in itself.

1. Education and Awareness

The campaign to make people more aware of the new constitution and Koornhof Bills began with the UDF launch in 1983. The Signature Campaign would ensure that this education process is deepened through the direct contact between UDF activists and those signing.

2. Ideological

The collection of a million signatures would prove that there is widespread opposition to the 'new deal' in particular, and apartheid in general. More important, it would prove that support for the UDF is both numerous and active.

Ideological gains could also be made at the local level. For example, UDF affiliates in the township region could collect more signatures than the number of votes in the Community Council elections, and thereby call on the Community Councillors to resign.

3. Organisational

The need to consolidate the organisational base of the UDF is vital. The campaign can help to achieve this by:

- a) making UDF activists/organisations know and understand local areas and local demands,
- b) including these local demands on the signature forms in order to build grassroots organisation,
- c) making contact with a wide range of non-UDF organisations and individuals,
- d) popularising existing UDF organisations amongst the community.

4. Links to other Campaigns

The work of the signature campaign will also assist the UDF to mobilise and organise in terms of future campaigns. In the Western Cape, these could include opposing the threatened move to Khayelitsha and organising a massive stayaway for the forthcoming coloured and Indian elections.

5. National Unity

The signature campaign has the potential to mobilise all sectors of the people and all regions in terms of a common set of demands. Through the practical experience gained during the campaign, we can move a step closer to national unity of the democratic movement.

C. APPROACHES TO COLLECTING SIGNATURES

The approach used by different organisations and areas during the campaign will obviously differ according to different conditions. A number of broad guidelines are offered here to assist organisations and areas to formulate a particular strategy for themselves:

1. Training of activists

Training can take place on a number of different levels, depending on whether those being trained are current UDF activists, new activists or volunteers who assist from time to time. The training could cover, in varying degrees, the following aspects:

- a) Analysis of the Constitution Act
- b) Analysis of the Koornhof Bills
- c) The nature, aims and history of the UDF and its organisations
- d) The objectives of the million Signature Campaign
- e) Personal conduct when collecting signatures
- f) Conditions in the areas to be visited

2. Planning

Planning the correct approach for collecting signatures in different areas (eg. organised, unorganised, middle class, working class) as well as from different sections (eg. workers, students, women, religious groupings) is one of the most important parts of the Campaign. Thorough planning may take extra time, but the long-term organisational

advantages make planning essential.

Planning the campaign in each area can involve a number of approaches. Foremost amongst these are:

- a) the use of pilot studies
- b) area workshops
- c) area research.

The term pilot study refers to the method of collecting signatures in a small part of the area and using the information obtained from this to discuss an overall approach to the area. Possible questions that can then be asked at a workshop include:

- a) What UDF organisations exist in the area. How can the campaign strengthen them?
- b) What other organisations (cultural, sporting religious etc) exist in the area? How can the Signature Campaign be used to draw these organisations closer to the UDF?
- c) What are the local demands/issues in the area? How can these be incorporated into the campaign in order to build local organisation?
- d) How can the signature campaign be used to mobilise people in the area in terms of future UDF campaigns, eg. anti-Khayelitsha campaign, coloured election stayaway campaign, anti-conscription campaign.
- e) How can the campaign be used to build the area committee? How can new people/volunteers be drawn onto the committee?
- f) What links can be made with other areas in taking up the campaign jointly? How can this strengthen the regional structures?
- g) What training programmes need to be run in the area for local activists?
- h) What methods will be used to collect signatures? How do we inform the community that UDF activists will be coming door-to-door? What are the other key points in the community where signatures can be collected? (shops, factories, stations, bus queues, bridges, schools, churches, mosques, sporting events, public meeting places, mass meetings)
- i) How do we collect signatures from unorganised/unknown areas? How often should we get activists together from all areas to blitz one particular area?

There will be many more questions that will have to be answered. While conditions, and thus strategies, will differ from area to area it is important to realise at all times that the primary task of the campaign is to strengthen organisation. This will only be done on the basis of a thorough knowledge of local conditions in each area. This is the most immediate task facing us at the moment.

3. Publicity

Another urgent task facing us as we start the million signature campaign is to make sure that there is massive and widespread awareness of the campaign. The job of collecting 300 000 signatures will be made much easier if general excitement and interest can be spread amongst the communities about the campaign. The collecting of signatures must be accompanied by the distribution of newsletters, pamphlets, posters and stickers as well as ongoing coverage in the commercial press.

Use can be made of certain key dates around which certain sectors can be mobilised to support the campaign. Examples of this include:

- March 21 - Sharpeville Day
- Easter - Churches
- May Day - workers
- May 31st - Anti Republic Day
- June 16 - students

In addition to focussing on key dates, we must also bear in mind when regional and national gatherings are going to take place eg. student, youth, women, civics, workers. All these opportunities should be used to promote and popularise the campaign.

While planning ahead is essential, it is important to remember that we cannot simply sit down here and map out the campaign in a mechanical fashion. We must be prepared to respond to many issues as they occur, to shape the campaign around the lived reality of peoples' day to day existence.

D. COORDINATION OF THE CAMPAIGN

INTRODUCTION

Because of the importance of the campaign, we must set up structures to coordinate the campaign to ensure that:

1. Proper planning and regular strategising takes place
2. Work will be done quickly and efficiently
3. Key people in our organisations do not become over-extended.

AREAS

Each area must have at least one co-ordinator.

REGIONS

- A. Each region must appoint a co-ordinator whose functions will be:
1. To see to the distribution and collection of signature forms
 2. To work closely with area co-ordinators to ensure that all areas are being covered and to encourage strong areas to assist weaker ones
- B. In addition, an education and training sub-committee of 3 persons must be established in each region.

OVERALL CO-ORDINATION

Overall co-ordination is going to be a demanding and crucial task. The people serving on this committee will have to eat, sleep and drink signatures for the duration of the entire campaign. This is the committee which will have to inject life into the campaign all the time. Their tasks will be:

1. To ensure that forms are printed and distributed to all regions
2. To ensure that forms are returned, forwarded to the national office
3. To assist regions to develop their local strategies
4. To co-ordinate all regional activities to prevent duplication and to ensure that no area is left untouched
5. To develop structures in the rural areas to ensure that the campaign can be carried there
6. To take full responsibility for the planning involved in blitzes
7. To meet regularly with organisations to ensure that their activities do not clash with one another or the UDF
8. Together with the Publicity Secretary, to develop a media strategy.

In order to fulfil these tasks, this committee will have to meet at least once a day. Members of this committee will therefore not have any time to spend on any other organisational activities.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

1. The Executive proposes that members of the co-ordinating committee be elected by GC.
 2. Before any person is accepted on the committee, his/her nomination has to be approved by the organisation to which he/she belongs.
 3. This committee should collectively be directly responsible to GC. The broad mandate for this committee will be determined from time to time by the GC.
 4. The committee would consist of 10 people, occupying the following portfolios:
 - (i) Co-ordinator who should be an executive member
 - (ii) Blitzes
 - (iii) Regional Consultant
 - (iv) Organisational Consultant
 - (v) Rural areas
 - (vi) Unions
 - (vii) Churches
 - (viii) Muslim sector
- In addition,
- (ix) A representative from the Media Committee
 - (x) The Publicity Secretary.

We propose that the criteria for election to the committee should be:

1. Skills and or contact in certain areas
2. A commitment to work solely on the signature campaign.

Collection Number: AK2117

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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