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Argus 17/8/1983

Uniting against the Beta Plan (editorial)

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Uniting against the Botha plan

August
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1975

NEXT SATURDAY will see the formal launching on a national basis of the United Democratic Front, a wide alliance of groups, political and otherwise, intent on opposing Government policy, in particular Mr P W Botha's new constitution. It remains to be seen how cohesive the alliance will be. But there can be no doubting its potential impact on the South African political scene.

The Front includes practically every anti-Government political and social body of note in the black and coloured communities. It has white backing in the form of the Black Sash and Nusas, among others. It has powerful religious (both Christian and Muslim), labour and student support. It bids to fill a political vacuum that has existed since the early sixties.

The Front is starting up as the Government's constitutional changes are about to receive their final endorsement under the existing political system. The Front's most telling challenge is to the Government's claims of decisive support for its reform initiative from the coloured and Indian people. The Labour Party's willingness to work with the new constitution, initially at least, is quite decisive for the Government's plans if these are to have any credibility at all as a means of sharing political power. The UDF is likely to bring the party and its adherents under tremendous pressure in the event of a referendum, general election or other test of popular support for the proposals.

Against a multitude of voices protesting that the new constitution will entrench apartheid, polarise the races, alienate the black majority, the Labour Party's only chance of sustaining its position will depend on what visible gains for the coloured people it can show for its strategy. The signs are not auspicious.

The UDF offers to bring no new policies or philosophies to the scene. It will bring together voices that have sounded disparately for many years without being heard — voices that need to be heard for the sake of peace and good government.

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