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Prior to the tricameral parliamentary elections, the United Democratic Front, in an open letter to the then Prime Minister, P.W. Botha, made an earnest plea to abandon the government's plan to implement the new constitution.

The plea was made with a genuine concern for peace. We also warned the government that the implementation of the constitution would lead our country to violence and bloodshed. Today, it is a known fact that the government did not acknowledge our letter, nor did it respond to our plea. Nine months after the elections, our country has been plunged into a political and an economic crisis unparalleled since the 1960 state of emergency.

The UDF was launched in August, 1983 at Rocklands, Mitchells Plain, where 12 000 people from all corners of our country pledged to fight side by side against the new constitution and the Koornhof Bills. The track record of the UDF since then bears testimony to this commitment. We have made massive strides in the struggle against apartheid in the twenty months since the launching of the Front.

The Nationalist government fears the UDF. It has waged a concerted campaign of repression against the Front. But, this has not prevented the growth of the Front, nor has it succeeded in its aim <sup>(of)</sup> nulling opposition to the government's plans of fine-tuning apartheid. For this reason, Mr P.W. Botha and Mr Louis Le Grange in particular, have sought to find scapegoats for the situation in our country. The UDF and certain 'agitators' have become the target of vitriolic attacks by the government.

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Almost the entire leadership has been charged with high treason. 400 people have been killed since January this year and a further 10 000 people have been arrested . Meetings have been banned in the Eastern Cape.

The real cause of the conflict in our country must be laid fully and squarely at the feet of the government which is bent on entrenching white domination. The conflict exists because this government consistently refuses to address the crucial question of the political rights for the majority of the people. The new constitutional dispensation is an attempt by the government to win over large sections of the Black community into its laager. It is clearly an attempt to broaden the base of apartheid rule. But, the government has only been able to co-opt a few individuals who are now widely condemned as puppets of the system. Our people are angry and have expressed their rejection in the strongest terms against those people claiming to represent us without our consent.

The government is being pressurised by our people to dismantle apartheid. And, it is in this climate that it was announced recently that Sect. 16 of the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act is to be scrapped. This however, does not address the fundamental problems of apartheid, nor, does talk of a possible creation of a Black forum in a tricameral parliamentary arrangement. We believe that these initiatives are not there to dismantle apartheid, but to modernise racial domination.

Further, the country is plunging into a deep economic crisis which shows no signs of recovery. Today, more than 3 million South Africans are unemployed; prices are rocketing daily and inflation now stands officially at 16 percent. Real wages are falling

and in this economic climate, the government has raised GST to 12% in order to meet apartheid's growing bill. The cost of illegally occupying Namibia; the implementation of the new constitution; the propping up of the Bantustans and the administration of pass laws, run into billions of rands. The 1988 defence budget now stands at 15.4% of the total budget. And, barely a month after the budget was announced, General Magnus Malan announced that he may be asking for further defence increases if the unrest in the townships continue.

Apartheid policies are contributing to the deepening economic crisis in the country. The government's response has been to cutback on its expenditure on essential social services such as, housing, health <sup>(and)</sup> food subsidies. These cutbacks have hit the vast majority of our people the hardest. It is our view that the Nationalists have abdicated their responsibility for meeting basic human needs and are now, under the guise of privatisation, shifting the burden onto those who can least afford it. It is this very situation which is contributing to the escalating conflict in Black townships and on the factory floor.

The world has heard the testimony of the people of Uitenhage who speak only of the day when fire engines washed blood off the streets. They speak of a system that has used their labour and thrown them onto the streets in a recession. And then, told them to pay for their own oppression in the townships. Almost anywhere we go in the country, we hear the same story. Of councillors who have little power other than to announce rent increases and to grant themselves huge salaries out of the pockets of the residents. We hear of retrenchments, cost of living

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increases, food, rent, transport, of gutter education, beatings, detentions, housing shortages and killings of those who protest. The presence of the police and the SADF in our townships is creating the atmosphere of a country at war with its own people. Our people are angry, they refuse to be party to their own oppression. Protests in the townships have intensified. Over one million students have boycotted classes in protest against the inequalities of apartheid education. Stayaways in the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape have demonstrated our people's opposition to the economic and political effects of apartheid rule.

We in the UDF, wish to reissue our challenge to Mr P.W. Botha and the Nationalist government. We call on them to dismantle apartheid. Attempts to reform unreformable structures is not the solution. Our people have never participated as equals in the government of our country. We are therefore demanding our right to self-determination in the country of our birth. The UDF declaration states this clearly:

- We stand for the creation of a true democracy in which all South Africans will participate in the government of our country
- We stand for a single, non-racial, unfragmented South Africa. A South Africa free of Bantustans and Group Areas
- We say, all forms of oppression and exploitation must end.

This is our vision of a new South Africa and what we in the UDF are striving for. We will therefore welcome any moves which will set us on this course of change. But, in order to embark on such a course, certain realities of the South African situation needs to be considered.

Firstly, the widespread support of the African National Congress and in particular, its leader, Nelson Mandela, is a reality that

the government needs to reckon with. Despite being banned for more than 25 years, the support for the ANC among the masses of our people is unquestionable.

Secondly, for the government to parade certain individuals in the Bantustan governments, in the tricameral parliaments and the Black Local Authorities as moderate and responsible leaders, is not only misleading, but also deceitful. Less than 17% of eligible Coloured and Indian voters cast their ballots last year. Further, in the elections for the Black Local Authorities, the poll was even lower - at times, less than 1%. And recently, more than 150 councillors have resigned and many town councils are no longer functioning. We therefore question the legitimacy and the right of this government to rule over us.

It is patently clear that there can be no peaceful solution to the problems of this country without taking the ANC and the recognised leaders of the people into account. Because we in the UDF accept this reality, it in no way implies that we are a front for the ANC.

The UDF is a broadly based, non-racial front of over 600 organisations with indisputable support throughout the country. These organisations include trade unions, student, youth, women's groups, cultural, religious, political organisations, sporting bodies, traders association and many others. All these organisations are united in their opposition to apartheid. Some of these organisations have adopted the Freedom Charter while others have emerged from very different traditions. It is therefore incorrect to say that the UDF has adopted the Freedom Charter.

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We in the UDF are deeply committed to peace in our country. It is in this spirit that we once again appeal to this government to abandon the destructive course upon which it is embarking.

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**Collection Number: AK2117**

**DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989**

***PUBLISHER:***

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

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

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