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DETENTION ACTION COMMITTEE (ADAC) REPORT

A: Formation and Development of ADAC;

After the detention of Mark Kaplan and Johnny Issel in Cape Town in late 1981 and the earlier spate of detentions in Joburg, a group of people came together in Cape Town around the issue of detention. This group initially saw its role as a care group for those in detention and as a means of bringing together and supporting the relatives of those detained.

During early 1982 it became clear that there were certain problems with this structure: firstly, non-parents were greatly outnumbering parents and threatened to swamp the committee; secondly, non-parents were tending to move faster politically than parents were prepared to go; thirdly, it appeared that the tasks of the two groups differed - with non-parents needing to concentrate to a greater extent on exploring the detention issue practically and theoretically.

For this reason two groups were formed: the DPSC (parents) and ADAC (non-parents). A working relationship was set up between the two with DPSC drawing on ADAC resources where required.

ADAC at present consists of four subcommittees: education, health, newsletter and research. While each subcommittee concentrates on a particular aspect of the detention issue, an attempt is made to draw in people from different subcomms around different projects. Monthly business meetings are held and day-to-day matters are handled by a four-person steering committee.

At the moment there are about 20 active members of ADAC consisting mostly of off-campus white activists. In this respect ADAC has provided a useful 'political home' for people who could not otherwise belong to either student or community organisations.

While being open to all who share its aims, ADAC has continued to rely on this just-mentioned category of people for membership as it was felt that it was important not to draw activists away from their organisations to work on detention as a primary area of involvement.

Also, while ADAC is directly community-orientated in its approach and activities, it does not have a structured relationship with other organisations.

ADAC has established its direction and legitimacy by moving slowly and learning from mistakes. Having begun as an ad-hoc detention action committee, National Detainees Week in March 1982 showed that general support for an organised detention group would be forthcoming. The youth in particular showed their support and it was decided that youth should form a major focus of ADAC's activities.

By the end of 1982 it was felt that ADAC's existence had been accepted and the 'ad-hoc' was subsequently dropped: ADAC thus became the Detention Action Committee - a developing support and resource group which could also play an important ideological and educative function.

B: ADAC's Ideological Role :

In looking at ADAC's history we mentioned how ADAC was formed partly to fulfil an ideological role different to that of the DPSC. During 1983, a year in which broader national questions such as the PC and the Koornhof Bills are very much on the agenda, we have realised the need to place detention in the context of other forms of repression and to try to locate repression and its role in broader state strategy.



One way of doing this has been to hold education meetings, both open and internal, in which papers were given, for example, on: legal aspects of detention and security trials, the role of repression in state strategy, the MASA Report and health care of detainees, the role of the military in SA and Namibia, and others.

The talk on trials and the booklet 'You, Detention and the Law' (mentioned later) reflect our belief that detention cannot be seen in isolation, or as "detention without trial", but should rather be seen as a point in the repressive cycle which often proceeds onwards to trial and imprisonment; and, secondly, our belief that the courts and legal process are being used increasingly to narrow the boundaries of permissible political activity, partially replacing cruder measures such as banning and long-term detention.

This understanding, that security trials are not legitimate as they are held under laws that are undemocratic and repressive, means that we reject the slogan "charge or release". This is also inseparable from our belief that detainees are honourable people struggling for goals with which we identify ourselves, a belief expressed in our slogan to mark National Detainees Day: "Take Forward Their Fight".

Consistent with this view, ADAC, through its newsletter, ADAC News, has called for support for the accused in the Mpetha trial, while a resolution was passed at an ADAC open meeting urging the state to grant clemency to the six ANC members sentenced to death and to release all political prisoners and detainees.

The ideological gains that can be made around the detention issue are much broader than this, however, precisely because detention is a concept repugnant to a very wide spectrum of opinion, right down to the most conservative of liberals. It is therefore a human rights issue which can divide middle-of-the-road groupings from the state.

It is ADAC's task in working around the issue to emphasise this potential division, while pointing out increasingly why detention is necessary and integral to government policy, thus developing the issue further and taking a wider range of people with us to some of the understandings mentioned above.

#### Publicity and Pressure as Ideological Weapons:

The nature of detention as a public issue raises the question of publicity and pressure as ideological weapons. ADAC decided in 1982 that it would not issue press statements and seek a high profile in the media as the DPSC has done. In keeping with a more low-key approach, ADAC media has been distributed to organisations and has sought to analyse detention politically in a way that is relevant to activists and their organisations, a way that is not attempted in the commercial media.

Likewise, while ADAC have as yet not provided speakers for public platforms (as the DPSC have done), ADAC has given messages of support on various occasions (eg. Neil Aggett Memorial, Cayco launching, Grass-roots AGM). Additionally ADAC read a message of solidarity at the Azaso-organised vigil for the 3 executed ANC guerillas.

On the press issue, however, there has been a rethink and informal ties have been established with various journalists with a view to ADAC using the commercial media more effectively (and, at least, for the purpose of facilitating a 2-way information flow with the press).



The Health subcomm. of ADAC has helped to show the way in one of the critical areas where publicity is most necessary : exerting pressure on the professions. This is so because detention is an issue that involves both the medical and legal professions intimately. In raising questions such as : the duties of a doctor towards his/her patient in terms of the Tokyo Declaration and the admissibility and reliability of evidence based on statements made by witnesses or accused people while in detention.

Together with their DPSC counterparts in Durban and Joburg , the ADAC health subcomm. helped to draw up the Memorandum that was submitted to the MASA Commission. The health group has subsequently been effective in placing pressure on MASA for its handling of the detention issue (eg. writing a letter, which was published in the SA Medical Journal, criticising the MASA Report, and distributing an open letter to delegates at the recent MASA Congress pointing out that MASA could go further in pressurising the state to accept those demands in the Report which were rejected.). In addition a seminar on the Report and the health care of detainees was given at the UCT Medical School Campus.

In the area of law, the information booklet 'You, Detention and the Law' has been produced , while the legal people in ADAC (who don't form a separate group as do Health) are in the process of discussing the best approach to collectively dealing with the legal profession (as distinct from ongoing individual research).

This is a difficult question because the lawyers most concerned with detention - judges, magistrates and prosecutors - are , for different reasons , not accountable in the same way as private practitioners who would be more susceptible to pressure , and who can , of course , be called upon to take a stand from their own position.

#### C:ADAC's Resource Role :

One of the primary reasons for the continued existence of ADAC has been the ongoing need to raise awareness of the detention system , security laws and political trials. ADAC has gradually established itself as a recognised resource group on detention. But there is still much scope for us to expand our educational resources and for individual ADAC members to develop media and other resource skills.

A particular weakness of ADAC, which needs urgent attention, has been our inability to produce "quick news" and to have information at our fingertips about latest developments nationally.

#### Resources provided :

- i) Participation in youth group programmes : short plays , simulation games , and introductory talks on detention - an attempt has been made to draw youth into the planning and carrying-out of the educational input;
- ii) ADAC News : provision of general news and more analytical articles - a mouthpiece for ADAC and a way of spreading information on detention.;
- iii) Education Talks : see above under Ideological Role ;
- iv) Aggett Memorial Meeting on 5 February : Pamphlet "we wont forget Neil Aggett- he is but one of many" produced and distributed at PCWU-organised commemoration meeting;
- v) National Detainees Day on March 12 : the "Take Forward Their Fight" slogan was popularised through the wide distribution of stickers , pamphlets and posters (the posters having been produced together with an independent poster workshop group);
- vi) 'You , Detention and the Law' Booklet : arising out of one of ADAC's open education talks , a booklet giving a brief summary of the key sections of the 1982 Internal Security Act and attempting to look at



practical issues faced by people in detention and on trial in an accessible question-and-answer format - distributed nationally;

Detention Resource Centre : ADAC resources and various other materials on detention and related issues are housed in the Criminology Institute at UCT. ADAC also has links with university-based psychological and legal research on detention.

Projects being worked on : I) a slideshow which, in looking historically at repression and resistance in SA, will attempt to explain the coexistence of repression and reform in the current political climate, as well as focussing on the growth and development of organisations around detention; II) a booklet on the development & role of the various security services in SA.

D: ADAC's Support Role :

I) The DPSC : while ADAC continues to exist alongside the DPSC(WC) as a separate organisation fighting detention, it provides assistance to the DPSC whenever needed. A few people who work on the DPSC are also members of ADAC and this ensures a flow of information and some continuity between the two committees (even though there is no structured link).

C) Ways of assisting : a) providing support for the demands of the DPSC; b) raising awareness of detentions and trials; c) practical support, eg. transport for prison visits; d) providing personal support.

II) Care-groups : another important level of support is that of assisting detainee care-groups. ADAC participated in the care-group set up for Cape Town detainee, Saleem Badat. This type of backup would obviously be important during a time of widespread detention. ADAC proposes to draw up a checklist setting out all the small things that a care-group usually needs to attend to.

III) Another level of support has been the giving of informal advice to people harassed in various ways by the security police.

E: United Democratic Front :

ADAC signed the declaration of support on the launching of the UDF : but the position of resource groups within UDF(WC) is not entirely clear.

C) What is clear is that, while ADAC is recognised as a legitimate grouping fighting around detention, we are not a mass-based organisation having a branch structure in the Western Cape region. If it transpires, as seems likely that resource groups are not to be formally incorporated into UDF as affiliates, ADAC would still give its full support to the UDF campaign by providing resources and popularising the campaign through its newsletter.

Members of ADAC are also encouraged to participate as individuals in area committees and through other organisations (eg. UWO).

F: The Road Ahead :

The next year or so will be one of immense political campaigns and will present us with many challenges. We believe that the times ahead will reinforce the need for education and organisation around the detention issue - both inside the existing detention committees throughout the country and within other organisations. Our resource and support role becomes even more important in the era of PC and we must prepare ourselves to counter the possibility of largescale detentions when initiatives like the UDF gather further momentum. Above all, we must not allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security in a period in which there seem to be (apart from the Eastern Cape) fewer detentions and certainly fewer bannings than for some time. Rather, our support for those comrades in detention, on trial and in prison must intensify!

WE MUST TAKE FORWARD THEIR FIGHT!!



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