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Mr. Mohammed Valli - Executive member of the UDF

The "reform" proposals

In 1982, because of the mounting pressures on white minority rule, the South African government proposed certain new laws.

These were, on the one hand constitutional changes, and on the other hand the Koornhof bills.

In terms of the new constitution (now the Constitution of South Africa Act of 1983) three houses of parliament would be established in a tri-cameral system. These would be the white, coloured and Indian houses of parliament. The new constitution makes no mention of the African people, who constitute 75% of the population. For every four white representatives in parliament, there would be 2 coloureds and one Indian.

Furthermore a President's Council consisting of 20 whites, 10 coloureds and 5 Indians - elected by the respective houses of parliament - would be established. In addition to these 35 the President appoints a further 25 members to this council. The Presidents Council would have the final say in the event of the three houses of parliament not arriving at consensus on a matter.

The President would have wide powers, for example, control of the military and the administration of African people.

The Koornhof Laws (named after Piet Koornhof, the notorious minister of Co-operation and Development) were:

1. The Black Local Authorities Bill (now the Black Local Authorities Act of 1983);
2. The Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill (now replaced by Aliens and Immigrations Bill) and
3. The Black Development Bill (now the Black Development Act.)

The Black Local Authorities Act provides for the establishment of autonomous local authorities for African townships in urban areas. The autonomy at the local level is meaningless without political power. There being no economic infrastructure in the African townships makes these financially unviable. It can only lead to increases in rents and taxes and thus further eroding the already poor living conditions of our people.

The Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill was aimed at further restricting the mobility of people living in the rural areas and in the Bantustans. It proposed that any person providing accommodation to an "illegal" (ie. one who does not have a permit to be in a town or city) would be fined an amount of R200. Any person who provides employment for an "illegal" would be fined an amount of R5000.

The United Democratic Front:

It was in response to the constitutional proposals and the Koornhof laws that Dr. Allan Boesak (President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) said at a conference held in Johannesburg in January 1983 that "there is no reason why churches and community workers and students organisations cannot form a united opposition to these new evils of apartheid."

This momentous call sparked off a process of vigorous discussions at national, regional and local levels on the feasibility and need for a united opposition. This process culminated in an historic conference held in Cape Town at which 400 organisations represented by 1500 delegates launched the United Democratic Front. (UDF)

The UDF rejects the new laws on the following grounds:

1. The essence of apartheid ie. the Group Areas Act, the Pass Laws, Bantu Education, and the legalised denial of human rights remain unchanged.
2. Millions of African people continue to be deprived of their citizenship in the forced implementation of the Bantustan policy, thus making our people foreigners in the land of their birth.
3. The new constitution, on the one hand ensures that the white minority retains all political power, and on the other hand entrenches racialism.
4. These "reforms" are aimed at dividing the unity of the oppressed - coloured and Indian from African and urban from rural.
5. These laws are also aimed at improving the image of apartheid abroad.

A Historic Unity

Today, the UDF has 590 member organisations. Amongst these are trade unions, civic Associations, womens organisations, Youth organisations, student unions, political organisations and religious bodies. The three Presidents of the UDF are Albertina Sisulu, Archie Gumede and Oscar Mpetha, all veterans in the struggle for national liberation. Our patrons include: Dr. Beyers Naude, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Dennis Hurley, Fr. Smangaliso Mkatshwa, Dr. Alan Boesak, Francis Baard Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Dennis Goldberg and Ahmed Kathrada.

The UDF is both non-racial and non-sectarian. Its principal aim is to unite our people in action against apartheid and in particular against the hated "reforms". It is the biggest and most significant non-racial political movement operating legally within the country since the Congress Alliance of the 1950's. The membership of the UDF has been estimated to be two million people.

During November 1983 the first elections for the new Black Local Authorities were held. The UDF campaign for a nationwide boycott of these elections. The result was an average national poll of 10%. In Soweto a township of 2 million inhabitants, the poll was only 6%. This marked UDF's first major victory against the so-called reform strategy of the white-minority government.

Presently the UDF is involved in a number of campaigns:

1. The first elections for the coloured and Indian houses of parliament are to be held on 22nd and 29th August 1984 respectively. We are once again campaigning for a boycott of both the dummy parliaments and the elections.
2. The "Million Signature Campaign" which was launched earlier this year aims at amassing signatures of one million South Africans who reject the new laws and apartheid.
3. Over the last two decades 3.5 million of our people have been forcibly removed from land which they have occupied for generations and relocated into the barren bantustans. A further two million people have been earmarked for forced removals. The UDF has begun to intensify the opposition to forced removals and dispossession of our land by co-ordinating the resistance of individual villagers throughout the countryside.

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