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Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee

Draft Programme of Action

February 1983

OUR CONTEXT

In 1983, at the time of the white referendum and soon after the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF), Jodac was formed. At that time we defined ourselves as an organisation embracing the principle of non-racialism, through which democrats in the Johannesburg area could oppose the government's reform initiatives and participate in the UDF - the first non-racial extra-parliamentary movement to emerge in recent years.

At that time, the government was confident of its capacity to carry out its reform strategy and to unite white, coloureds and Indians behind the tri-cameral parliament.

The situation now is vastly different. After a year of vigorous opposition to high rents, unequal education, low wages, high costs, and the lack of genuine representation, the government's reform initiatives have been severely damaged.

The schools boycotts, the township uprisings, the anti-election campaigns, the stay-away and worker strikes have seriously undermined the confidence of the government and its allies.

Internationally, the government initially received some sympathy for its proposals. But now it is becoming more and more isolated due to the mounting international campaign against apartheid.

Despite their weakening position, the government is still powerful. The military have come to play a central role in the government. It is being used to extend South Africa's influence in Southern Africa. In the face of escalating resistance it is now being used extensively to quell internal opposition. However this militarised government is likely to continue implementing the reform process.

In the white sector, where our main constituency is found there is also a situation of flux and change. With uncertainty about the future of white rule, splits have deepened between different groupings in white politics and new alliances are also being formed.

Firstly, conservatives from a range of political affiliations are coming together to form a solid bloc while NRP and right wing members of the PFP move closer to the government.

Secondly, differences are emerging between the government and big business. A year ago big business welcomed the reform initiatives but today big business in particular have shown increasing frustration with and criticism of government policies.

They argue that reforms such as the tricameral parliament and black local authorities have created greater problems and want the government to implement reforms at a faster rate.

The government's inability to formulate policies to pull South Africa out of the deepening recession as well as the government's heavy handed action against unionists has widened divisions between the two.

Lastly, a small but noticeable sector is becoming disillusioned with parliamentary politics. Many people have begun to question their traditional political affiliations as well as parliament itself. In part, this reflects itself in a sense of uncertainty and lack of confidence both within the PFP and to its left.

Over the past year the UDF and especially organisations under its banner have increased and strengthened and have come to present a fundamental threat to the system. The task ahead for UDF and its affiliates is to consolidate the gains of last year by:

- increasing the challenge to the system and sowing greater divisions within the ruling classes.
- gaining increased support.
- building and strengthening their organisations
- developing a united direction on major issues
- increasing commitment to and participation in the struggle.

JODAC'S ROLE AND TASKS

Jodac remains committed to the principle of non-racialism and operating in the Johannesburg area. Moreover the nature of the struggle over the past year and its effect on the white sector increases the importance of such an organisation and gives us a crucial role to play. As such our role for the coming year is to:

- provide political leadership and raise political questions within the white sector
- develop a clear and well known public political image
- present itself as the means through which whites can get involved in viable extra-parliamentary opposition
- attempt to draw all white democrats into its ranks
- continue to expose and respond to government initiatives
- act to deepen divisions amongst the ruling classes
- popularise UDF in Johannesburg
- actively support and strengthen the campaigns of the UDF.

After a year, Jodac has gained valuable experience in struggle, built up its structure and leadership and has developed a vitality and enthusiasm which now needs to be constructively channeled.

However considering the tasks ahead, we are still small, our structures are not in full communication with each other and some of our activities do not reach all the membership. In addition we

have not yet fully explored the effect that recent struggles have had on the white sector.

Jodac should therefore:

- improve communication within the organisation
- develop a common analysis and united political direction
- strengthen our relations with other white democratic groups
- increase the involvement of all our members in the UDF
- enhance our knowledge of actual conditions in the white sector
- embark upon a well organised recruiting campaign.

MEMBERSHIP, CONSTITUENCY AND THE PUBLIC.

In working in the white sector in Johannesburg, we need to make a distinction between the broad public, our direct constituency and our membership:

- The broad public are all those people Jodac can reach through the commercial media, campaigns, mass meetings, pamphleteering, poster blitzes etc.
- Jodac's direct constituency would be those in the Johannesburg area who either are or could become sympathetic to the aims of the UDF.
- Jodac's direct membership comprises all paid up members.

We must bear in mind these distinctions and differing conditions when we decide on our priorities for action.

Jodac achieves its objectives by focussing on and taking up specific issues. The way these issues are taken up will vary depending on whom we target as the grouping most important to reach.

Some of the issues to be taken up are:

1. Freedom Charter Campaign

1985 is the 30th Anniversary of the Freedom Charter. The Charter as a historic statement of the minimum demands of South Africa's people is as relevant today as it was in 1955. It links present struggles with those of the past. Its demands around such issues as political rights, economic, social, educational and others are demands that must be met if democracy in South Africa is to be achieved. It helps provide a vision of a future democratic South Africa.

The campaign to popularise the demands of the Freedom Charter is going to be taken up by a number of democratic organisations and will help to bring about greater unity between different areas and constituencies.

Jodac's participation in the campaign should aim to:

- Firstly educate its members about the demands of the charter, its tradition and significance today.
- Work with other groups in the Johannesburg area on this issue to broaden an understanding and acceptance of the Freedom Charter.
- Together with these groups run a mass campaign in the Johannesburg area
- Participate in and support the broader Freedom Charter campaign.

As much as possible the Freedom Charter campaign should be linked to all other campaigns and issues taken up by Jodac. It should be a major priority in Jodac and all of our structures and membership should be integrated into the campaign.

2. Militarisation, Conscription and the SADF.

The growing repugnance in our constituency for the SADF's role in the townships, the continued occupation of Namibia and its role in Southern Africa, the increasing militarisation of all levels of our society and the prospect of four years in uniform has made the SADF and conscription burning issues.

These are crucial issues which affect our constituency and the white sector directly. Opposition to the SADF and conscription has been growing over the years. In 1983 the End Conscription Campaign was launched with committees around the country to channel this opposition.

Because these issues are imperatives for Jodac, we are affiliated to the ECC and they need to be of ongoing priority.

We need to:

- educate our members about militarisation.
- develop an awareness about the options for people facing conscription.
- use the issue to increase our membership.
- put our full organisational weight behind the ECC campaign.
- work out how Jodac specifically can further the campaign.
- take the issue up in the white sector to help diminish support for the government's repressive institutions.

3. The Tricameral Parliament.

The success of the election boycotts have discredited the tricameral parliament. For some whites this has caused uncertainty about the future while others still feel that more far reaching reforms could be implemented through it. This is especially the case now that government has launched a process for considering constitutional issues for Africans.

Jodac was set up to oppose the new constitution and the Koornhof Bills and they should continue to be a priority in our programme.

While specific issues have not yet been identified Jodac needs to be alert to respond to and expose ongoing developments.

We should therefore:

- play a role in analysing the new parliament to create a critical understanding of it, especially in our constituency
- stress that the central issue is that it is a parliament which is not elected or decided on by all South Africans in a unitary state
- stress the role of UDF as the extra-parliamentary opposition to the new parliament

4. The Koornhof Bills.

The term "Koornhof Bills" has become a blanket term for most aspects of government policy and legislation regarding African people. This includes the bantustan policy; the imposition of unrepresentative structures like the community councils; forced removals and influx control.

These are the essence of apartheid because they are the fundamental structures serving to keep Africans exploited and oppressed. Around many of these issues there has been fierce struggle and resistance.

The white sector is for the most part distanced from these struggles. A lack of information and often inadequate coverage in the commercial press exacerbates this.

- These issues should be taken up by us in a similar way to issues around the tricameral parliament. In addition we should:
- bridge the gap between African townships and the white sector by disseminating information.
 - providing support for township struggles.
 - facilitating discussions around particular struggles.

5. Repression.

As well as being extremely severe in the black sectors, this issue is one that affects our constituency directly. It is a source of outrage in our constituency and is an issue which readily gives the lie to the reform initiatives. Detentions, hidden repression, "dirty tricks", "right wing" attacks, and the nature of the judicial system all fit into this category.

We should channel outrage in our constituency into understanding and mount constant campaigns against the repression of the progressive movement as it arises.

Furthermore we need to:

- constantly educate our membership and constituency on security legislation and detentions
- act in solidarity with all victims of repression by attending political trials, joining support groups etc

- work closely with DPSC and DESCOM, and send representatives to their meetings.

6. Women's issues.

Recently, women's organisation within the progressive movement came together to form Federation of Transvaal Women (Fedtraw). This provides the opportunity for white women to join up with progressive organization. Feminism has a wide appeal and support within our constituency, but as yet most women are not organised into political women's organisation.

We should, therefore, educate our members on women's issues and help organise women to support and participate in the struggles of Fedtraw.

7. Labour issues.

The stayaway by hundreds of thousands in November last year highlighted the power of organised workers and the threat it provides to apartheid rule. This was especially significant at a time of recession and mass retrenchment.

1985, is also the 30th anniversary of the formation of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu). This raises for us the issue of the history of worker organisation and struggle in South Africa.

Jodac needs to:

- highlight the significance of the role of the working class amongst our members through education and debate.
- support worker struggles where appropriate and called upon to do so.

8. International Year of the Youth

The United Nations has declared 1985 as the International Year of the Youth. Nearly all sectors of South African society, including the government are taking up this issue.

We cannot get highly involved in this campaign because we are not an exclusively youth organisation but we can:

- support the campaigns of the progressive youth organisations especially in the Johannesburg area.

9. Further Issues

By highlighting the above issues we are not limiting ourselves to them. Undoubtedly future issues will present themselves which we could respond to as the struggle unfolds over the year.

Firstly, ecological issues are becoming of greater concern such as Koeberg, nuclear waste, Bophal, industrial waste, food poisoning.

Secondly, with the growing recession, focussing on economic issues such as the rising cost of living, unemployment and the ever growing role of monopolies will become increasingly important.

We need to develop a deeper understanding of these issues within a membership. How they will be taken up and linked to our broader programme can be worked out as the year progresses.

A feature of last year's programme was the commemoration of key historical events such as Sharpeville, May Day and December 16th. These events can be used to educate us about the history and nature of our struggle. They should also be integrated into our overall programme.

IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION

We need to prioritise our activity according to the needs of the different groups we are addressing and we need to weave together all the different strands of the programme into an integrated coherent whole.

All the conventional methods of political action can be used to take up these issues eg. public meetings, press stories and statements, posters, pamphlets, demonstrations, seminars, workshops etc. We also need to find interesting and creative alternatives to complement and add to these orthodox forms.

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