

face to face

POPO MOLEFE — Bldg. Fm. 25.11.83

Resisting the constitution



Popo Molefe is the general secretary of the United Democratic Front (UDF). He spoke to the *FM* about the aims of the front, which was launched in Cape Town on August 20.

FM: What is the UDF?

Molefe: The UDF is a nonracial front led to resisting the new constitution and the legislation known as the "Koornhof Bills" — the Black Local Authorities Act, the Black Community Development Bill and the Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Bill. It's made up of numerous affiliate organisations which retain their autonomous identities although all subscribe to the UDF's overall aims.

How much support does the UDF have?

We have enjoyed tremendous support from people and organisations both inside SA and abroad. At our launch we started off with 400 affiliate organisations from three regions — Transvaal, Natal, and the western Cape. Since then a further 178 organisations have affiliated, bringing the total up to 578. A new region has been formed in Border and the groundwork has been laid for further regions in the OFS, Port Elizabeth and the northern Cape. We estimate that 2m people are affiliated to the UDF.

Where is the support strongest?

Our main support is in the urban areas where organisation is obviously much easier as people are more politicised. But we are slowly beginning to work in the rural areas. Conditions there are very different and clearly present us with a challenge to evolve special programmes.

It has been alleged that the UDF is an attempt to recreate the African National Congress (ANC).

It's true that both the UDF and the ANC are groups opposed to apartheid in SA. But we must say categorically that we have no relationship with the ANC and don't envisage one because we are operating legally, and it is banned. The methods we are using to oppose the State also differ fundamentally. The ANC uses violence: we are dedicated to non-violence.

As a professed non-racial organisation, what is the UDF's attitude towards the black consciousness

National Forum Committee (NFC)?

The NFC is not a formally structured organisation. It only comes together occasionally in a seminar-type forum to review the political situation. That is why some UDF affiliates like the SA Allied Workers' Union and the Azanian Students Organisation are also in the NFC. The UDF has a practical programme of action that is being implemented by our affiliates on a day-to-day basis. We do not see ourselves as competing with the NFC.

How important is it to the UDF to have trade union participation in its activities and which unions have affiliated?

Union participation in the UDF is of crucial importance. The problems which confront workers are not confined to the factory floor. They also need to be organised beyond that — for example, as commuters and ratepayers. However, these problems are not specific only to workers. They affect all black communities. The UDF provides a forum for co-ordinating action on these issues.

The following includes unions and union groupings directly affiliated to the UDF: SA Allied Workers' Union; unions under the umbrella of the Council of Unions of SA; General and Allied Workers' Union; Motor Assembly and Components Workers' Union of SA; Municipal and General Workers' Union; Orange Vaal General Workers' Union; SA Scooter Drivers' Association; the General Workers Union of SA; SA Mineworkers' Union; and the National General Workers' Union.

Unity talks.

Some unions and union groupings have decided not to affiliate because they feel this would prejudice the current union unity talks — but they have pledged support for all the UDF's programmes. They include the General Workers Union, the Federation of SA Trade Unions, the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Union and the SA Railway and Harbour Workers' Union.

Some say the UDF is simply involved in protest politics — making a lot of noise but not really doing anything concrete to challenge the *status quo*.

In the situation in which we are operating there is no way we can divorce ourselves from protest politics. We hold meetings with affiliates, public meetings and undertake actions like writing letters to PM PW Botha. We think speeches are one of the most effective ways of drawing the attention of people

to certain evils. This challenges the State in that we are providing an alternative analysis of what is happening in this country. But we are not just simply protesting. We are engaged in programmes to initiate new organisations where none existed before. We are also providing training to consolidate existing organisations and to deepen their activists' understanding of issues.

What implications does the white community's "Yes" vote have for the UDF?

Government decided on the new constitution and the referendum without consulting the majority of the people. We therefore reject both. The constitution is a legalised form of violence against the oppressed majority and has set the scene for a tragic conflict which will befall SA in the future.

Only 8% of the population in SA voted on November 2. To implement the constitution PW Botha is dependent on the support of the coloureds and Indians. The SA Indian Council and the coloured political parties are puppet bodies which do not have the support of the people. Thousands of people have responded to the call of the UDF, demonstrating the popularity of the voice of opposition to the new constitution.

But we do not want to pretend that the "Yes" vote is not a setback. However few people may support the constitution, the truth is that it will divide the oppressed majority because a few unsuspecting Indians and coloureds may be fooled into supporting it.

Will the UDF call for a boycott of referendums or elections in the Indian and coloured communities?

We feel we cannot respond to this issue impulsively. We can only address this problem adequately once we have consulted with UDF affiliates — especially those from the Indian and coloured communities. Our decision will be made at our national conference from December 16-18 in Port Elizabeth. Do you think the UDF can actually succeed in opposing the passing of the two remaining Koornhof Bills — the Black Community Development Bill and the Orderly Movement Bill?

In opposing the bills we are motivated by the assumption that we are dealing with a rational government that is capable of assessing the feeling of the people and responding correctly. If government was able to reverse the Pension Preservation Bill in 1981 because of strikes and community protests it should equally heed the voice of the UDF today.

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