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United Democratic Front: Leadership and ideology

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Title: The United Democratic Front: Leadership and Ideology.

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Introduction:

The UDF is essentially a federation linking a large and heterodox collection of organisations varying in function, size, and popular impact. It is strongest in the Eastern Cape, traditionally the stronghold of the ANC, with which many local UDF leaders are historically associated. Class and communal cleavages as well as the presence of rivals with a popular following, make the UDF comparatively weaker in Cape Town and Durban. In the industrial heartland of the Transvaal, the UDF is undoubtedly paramount, but the sheer size of the urban centres, their social complexity, and the uncertainties of the UDF's relationship with a well-established trade union movement, make its own capacity for marshalling disciplined support questionable. In the Transvaal, to a greater extent than in its other four main regions, the UDF has come to depend upon a tacit alliance with an increasingly politicised yet politically independent trade union movement. Any analysis of the UDF, though, should not be limited to the bureaucratic boundaries of its often patchy organisation, for the UDF functions more in the fashion of a social movement than a deliberately contrived political machine. With this consideration in mind, two questions need examining. Which social constituencies does the UDF represent? Is it possible to perceive in the UDF's ideological discourse the interests or concerns of particular social classes?

LEADERSHIP

Of course, in one essential sense, the UDF is a working class movement. In a social context in which a black bourgeoisie scarcely exists, in which members of petty bourgeois or middle class groups at best constitute a thin layer, and in which the rural population is largely proletarianised or at least dependent on wage labour, any popular organisation has to have a working-class base. This is as true for a conservative movement such as inkatha, as for a radical one like the UDF. To understand the social character of a political body it is more helpful to look at leadership, or rather different layers of leadership, and the relationship leaders have with particular constituencies.

Taking the national executive, together with the five most developed regions, the most recently elected UDF leadership comprises sixty-six people[1]. The majority of these are men - only eight are women. They are mainly young; of fifty whose ages can be specified, seventeen are in their thirties, eleven in their early forties, and six in their twenties. Four are in their fifties and ten are over sixty. Fifteen are ANC veterans; most of these are in the over-sixties group but it includes younger men who were involved in clandestine ANC activities in the 1960s and 1970s. Of the ANC group, five were also members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, seven were involved in SACTU (in some cases the same people), and seven have served long prison sentences for political offences in Robben Island or Pretoria Fort. Another four UDF leaders received prison terms after the 1976 Soweto uprising. Apart from the Congress group (augmented by another four people associated with the NIC and TIC revivals), UDF executives include former adherents of the Liberal Party (2), the Coloured Labour Party (2), the Black Consciousness Movement (6), and the Unity Movement (1). Socially, UDF leadership is heavily middle class - eleven from highly paid professional backgrounds - legal, medical or academic, and three priests, eight teachers, a nurse, a legal clerk, a social worker, a researcher, and two technicians. Amongst the other leaders who occupations can be identified, 17 are workers, three of them skilled artisans and the rest labourers or industrial workers. At least four of the workers are full-time trade union officials. The working class group also includes the SACTU veterans, some of whom are no longer working. Finally, there are six executive members who are professional activists, mainly youth or student congress organisers. Notably absent from the UDF leadership are people from middle-level management, modern commercial occupations, township business, and petty trading. There are traders, though, in one of the

regional executives, not covered in this survey, the Northern Transvaal. UDF leadership, finally, is predominantly African, though the five executives also include six Indians, eight coloureds, and five whites[2].

Regionally, the two largest executives, Natal and Transvaal, are socially the most heterodox. The Western Cape's fourteen members are almost evenly balanced between workers and professionals, with three of the seven professionals from working-class backgrounds. The Eastern Cape's executive comprises two old SACTU/Umkhonto stalwarts, two teachers, a factory worker, and a technician with some experience as a trade union organiser. Too little data is available on the Border executive to make useful generalisations.

The Transvaal executive provides the most representative social profile of the movement as a whole: it is the most youthful and has an unusually high proportion of people (ten) with some experience in both the 1970s and 1980s of working in youth organisations. There is the most detailed data for Natal's executive[3] ; it is arranged in the table below:

(TABLE 2)

What is demonstrable from this biographical profile is true also for other executives. Though the Natal leadership falls largely into the professional/middle class categories, sociological classifications are not by themselves very helpful. For these are people who have often become prominent in the organisation of popular movements around the

TABLE 2

Natal UDF Regional Executive: biographical details:

GUMEDE A	Age: 72; Profession: lawyer; residence: Clermont, Durban; Organisational affiliation: ANC, Liberal Party, Joint Commuters' Committee, Release Mandela Committee.
XUNDU M	Age: 52; Profession: priest; residence: Lamontville, Durban; Organisational affiliation: ANC, vice-chairman - JORAC.
NAIR B	Age: c. 60; Profession: trade unionist; residence: Durban; Organisational affiliation: NIC, Natal secretary - SACTU, Umkhonto we Sizwe (1963-½983), Robben Island).
MOHAMED Y	Age: c. 30; Profession: attorney; residence: Durban; Organisational affiliation: NIC.
TSENOLI S	Age: 31; Profession: teacher/translator; residence: Lamontville, Durban; Organisational affiliation: JORAC, Lamontville Youth Organisation.
MXENGE V	Age: 43; Profession: midwife/lawyer; residence: Umlazi, Durban; Organisational affiliation: treasurer - RMC, Umlazi Water Committee, Natal Organisation of Women.
COOVADIA J	Age: 46; Profession: doctor/academic; residence: Durban; Organisational affiliation: NIC.
AFRICA S	Age: 30; Profession: researcher; residence: Sydenham, Durban; Organisational affiliation: Durban Housing Action Committee.
MPANGA R	Age: c. 50; Profession: labourer; residence: Umlazi, Durban; Organisational affiliation: ANC (Robben Island), RMC, Umlazi Residents' Association.
NDABA	Age: 35; Profession: teacher; residence: Clarewater, Durban; Organisational affiliation: coordinator - NECC.
KOZA R	Age: c. 25; Profession: technician; Organisational affiliation: AZASO, NAYO, NECC.
BONHOMME V	Age: 42; Profession: upholsterer; residence: Durban; Organisational affiliation: Labour Party (1969-1979), Furniture and Allied Workers' Union, DHAC.
NOSIZWE M	Age: 35; Profession: medical technician; Organisational affiliation: Natal Organisation of Women.
KEARNEY P	Age: c. 45; Profession: teacher/Director - Diakonia (Ecumenical organisation); residence: Durban; Organisational Diakonia.
NXUMALO T	Profession: teacher/trade unionist; Organisational affiliation: National Federation of Workers.
NDLOVU C	Age: c. 60; Profession: activist; residence: Durban; Organisational affiliation: GWU (Garment Workers' Union), ANC, SACTU, Kwa Mashu Residents' Association (1960), South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Robben Island, 1964-1984).

preoccupations of the poor: rents, housing conditions, transport, and the cost of services. They belong to an intellectual middle-class rather than an entrepreneurial one. Mobilised youth is well represented on the executive, both generationally, and with youth organisation office bearers. Organised labour is under-represented considering its strength in Natal; its limited presence in the two 1950s trade unionists and the President of the National Federation of Workers indicate the distance between the Natal UDF and contemporary mainstream black trade unionism.

For the UDF, though it is very largely a movement of the poor, is not one which normally mobilises its following through direct appeals to class identity. Its preferred social constituencies are usually socially amarphous: 'youth', 'community', or 'progressive' whites. This is partly a reflection of the historical experiences of the last decade: educational breakdown, school-leaver unemployment, demographic explosion, the fiscal disarray of local government, the rising cost of living, and the state's efforts to create for itself a widened popular legitimacy. The conflicts produced by such developments do not lend themselves to precise social configurations. Then there is the ideological legacy of the Congress tradition which stresses social unity rather than class confrontation. Finally, there is the disproportionate share in leadership of a radicalised intelligentsia whose members, even if they are philosophically influenced by Marxism, speak a language very removed from the experience and culture of working class people. As a correspondent in Grassroots observed after the UDF launch:

> Most of these workers are not educated. That is why there are no workers in the UDF. To open your mind, if you can look at the meeting that was held at Mitchell's Plain. The workers were there. But the workers didn't understand what that meeting was for. Because the language that was used, is the language that is not known by the workers [4].

When UDF leaders do speak a popular language, it is usually (though not always, as we shall see) a populist one. This is not surprising, for their most deeply felt area of common experience with their working class constituency is not the struggle between capital and labour, but rather the conflict between people and state.

IDEOLOGY

What the UDF stands for ideologically is complicated. First, it is a social coalition embracing different groups which have different social, political and economic agendas. Such differences, though, are not always easily apparent from formal statements and authorised comments. Secondly, the UDF's character is to a degree shaped by the conscious views and perceptions of its ideologues, but it is also influenced, perhaps more profoundly, by the behaviour and culture of its popular following. The organisation's ideological impetus may derive as much from the unselfconscious perceptions and actions of ordinary people as the intellectual constructs of sophisticated leaders.

The UDF was conceived of as a transitional front, not a political party, nor a rival to already established liberation organisations. Consequently, initial programmatic statements were usually limited to a few key principles intended to unite the broadest of social spectrums: 'from workers to students, from priests to businessmen, Nyanga to Chatsworth, to Soweto to Elsies River' [5]. The UDF stood for nonracial 'unity of all people', for a 'government based on the will of the people', for 'a willingness to work together' despite 'different approaches to the problems that confront us' [6]. Notwithstanding the 'Charterist' allegience of some

of the major organisations which affiliated to the Front, at its inception leaders insisted that 'it was incorrect to link the UDF directly to the Charter'[7], that the UDF was 'not Charterist'[8]. In fact, though, from the beginning, adherence to the Charter was viewed by most UDF leaders as signifying an advanced stage of ideological progress. Albertina Sisulu, opening the SOYCO launch in July 1983, held that the guidance supplied by the Freedom Charter 'would prevent reactionary agents from hi-jacking the struggle'[9]. Samson Ndou informed a commemorative meeting on 23 June 1983 'We want to place on record that we subscribe to the Freedom Charter. Therefore we are members of the UDF'[10]. Two years later, Western Cape Secretary Trevor Manuel argued that different opinions and perspectives ... (are) emerging ... (it) is necessary to do battle at the ideological level to define a clearer ideological stance'[11]. Accordingly, UDF's Update suggested:

> Although the UDF has not adopted the Freedom Charter, "We believe that the Freedom Charter is the most democratic document expressing the wishes and aspirations of our people" [12].

In June 1985, UDF affiliates distributed half a million copies of the Charter on house to house visits and rallies to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Congress of the People[13]. By April 1986, Stone Sizane of the East Cape UDF executive was telling a local newspaper that the UDF 'subscribed to the Freedom Charter'[14].

In reality acceptance of the Freedom Charter was understood as the logical accompaniment to the perception of the 'National Democratic nature of our struggle'[15]. Such a struggle was one fo the 'broadest possible alliance'[16]. It was a struggle of 'the people's camp', 'the overwhelming majority of South Africans - the black working class, the rural masses, the black petty bourgeoisie (traders), and black middle strata (clerks,

teachers, nurses, intellectuals)' as well as 'several thousand whites who stand shoulder to shoulder in struggle with the majority'[17]. The National Democratic Struggle had three objectives: 'the struggle to remove all racial oppression; the struggle to remove the grip of the monopoly companies over our country; and the struggle to build democratic majority rule in a unified South Africa'. In this struggle 'the UDF has identified the working class as the leading class'[18]. Why not, then, a struggle for socialism? Largely because 'we must not forget there are different interests among the oppressed. While they are united around the immediate task of destroying national oppression, their long-term interests are not identical'[19]. Does the UDF, then, leave the question entirely open as to which long-term interest in the end should predominate? That depends on how attentively one reads the UDF's theoretical publications. In Isizwe, an article on unemployment suggests that 'the struggle against unemployment is also struggle against capitalism and national oppression'[20]. Despite such contentions, though, the anonymous writers in Isizwe are very critical of those who view national democracy as a tactical concept rather than one of long-term principle:

> We are thinking here of those who pay lip service to our broad struggle of national democratic struggle. That is, those who say: 'Yes, the popular struggle, NDS is important'. But they do not really believe these words in their hearts. For these watered down workerists the national democratic struggle is simply a tactic of the moment. For them the broad front of the UDF is an unfortunate and temporary structure. Our talk about national democratic struggle is 'merely a concession to the traditions and culture of the masses in South Africa'[21].

For mainstream UDF thinkers, 'weeding out' the petty bourgeoisie would be a strategic mistake for it would risk increasing the prospects of the State security 'more collaborators and more legitimacy'[22]. In other words, despite the antipathy to workerists, the virtues of social alliances for democrats may have little to do with long-term ideological principles.

Here some UDF leaders are quite unambiguous. Billy Nair, when asked whether he thought 'that capitalism would not survive the implementation of the Charter' replied:

> Of course! The implementation of the Charter is the first step towards the establishment of socialism. The demands of the Charter cannot be met within the present social, political and economic order. The Charter serves as the basis from which workers can build a free, equal and just society. The Charter is so far the only guarantee towards the realisation of that peaceful society, it is not an end in itself[23].

Not all UDF ideologues would go as far as this; the preferred formulation is usually less specific:

> At this point when these decisions are being made, the balance of forces in the country would determine the shape of things to come. It would determine how quickly the demands in the Charter could be implemented.[24] The level of mass consciousness would determine that too ...[25].

Nair himself in a different later interview conceded that 'we are going to have to carry over some of what exists in our present society into the new one' and that it would be necessary 'to cater for small traders and small farmers, and to even protect them as long as they do not threaten to become big capitalists'. Opposition to big capital could provide an essential unity of interests for all oppressed classes - 'the working class, in particular, the small peasant, the small business people, even the small manufacturer' - for all were enmeshed in 'the vice-grip of the massive monopolies which have developed and which are encouraged to develop by the Nationalist government'[26].

Opposition to monopoly capital, then, can be the principled basis for unity between the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, and 'the middle strata'. Even assuming that the nuances of UDF theoretical expositions are widely understood within UDF leadership, which is unlikely, there is

clearly, within the framework provided by the notion of national democratic struggle, room for the expression of different positions. At leadership levels these can be placed in three groups. For the sake of convenience, these can be labelled nationalist, national democratic and socialist. These categories are, of course, idealised; elements of all three positions may influence to a greater or lesser degree the outlooks of individual leaders.

The nationalist position was more conspicuous in the early days of the UDF. Its strands usually include an emphasis on a heroic tradition of nationalist resistance, the celebration of an inconography of martyrs and, as a subsidiary element, a populist conception of economic nationalism. Nationalist ideology is usually to the fore when leaders wish to express the UDF's intention to 'bring together all classes'. But it is also given prominence by particular sections of leadership. The Release Mandela Campaign, for example, often provides a platform for nationalist sentiment. Its Transvaal Chairman and former UDF NEC member, Aubrey Mokoena, is one of the foremost exponents of a nationalist position with his promotion of a cult of charismatic leadership around Nelson Mandela. For Mokoena, Mandela 'is the pivotal factor in struggle for liberation. He has the stature and charisma which derives from his contribution to the struggle' [26]. Mokoena's language is not atypical. Newa Ramgobin told his audience at a Soweto RMC meeting in July 1984 that:

> I want to make bold and say in clear language that the human race must remain grateful, that the human race must go down on its knees and say thankyou for the gifts it has been endowed with the lives of the Nelson Mandelas of this country [27].

Associated with the tendency to accord reverance to brave leaders is the depiction of the Freedom Charter as a sacred symbol of patriotism. 'Betray

the Freedom Charter and you betray the people', argued Zinzi Mandela at a 1983 TIC meeting, 'We consider it treason to turn against the people's demands as set out in the Freedom Charter' [28]. This is not a view which encourages discussion or debates as to how the Charter should be interpreted or even which allows for the possibility of different interpretations of the Charter being possible. For here the Charter is understood as emanating from an organically unified general will. On economic issues, the language of UDF nationalism is often strongly anti-capitalist, but it is communalist, not socialist, in its prescriptions. Allen Boesak in his evidence to the Carnegie Commission on poverty described poverty as primarily a 'moral challenge' and delivered a scathing critique of 'white greed' and 'free market' economics. Nevertheless, despite his condemnation of 'the inequitable system which capitalism is' his 'call for clear political action' was firmly within a well entrenched South African populist tradition:

> To 'get up and walk' means for us no less than what it meant for the Afrikaner to whome DF Malan spoke, and that is to work for the day political, social and economic change shall become a reality, so that all South Africa's people, including the poor, shall be able to live as God had intended for them to live.29

Advocates of individual entrepreneurship are unusual, though, in the UDF. They are not wholly absent but they are not strongly represented in leadership. Nthato Motlana, Chairman of the Soweto Civic Association, and a frequent spokesman on UDF platforms, is one of the very few popular political figures who can be associated with a capitalist ideal. He is currently, for example, one of four Soweto notables who have formed a company, Black Equity Participation, with the aim of taking over the assets of departing American corporations[30]. Businessmen, though, are quite rare even within the leaderships of local affiliates. It is the case that some

township traders were involved in the consumer boycott committees - in Pretoria, for example [31] - and it is true that the boycott organisers appeared to envisage a progressive political role for business urging it to become 'more aware of its political responsibilities [32]. But businessmen seem to have shied away from substantial involvement in civic structures. In Tumahole, for example, in the Orange Free State, though the ad hoc committee set up in July 1984 to lay the groundwork for a civic included three shopkeepers and two priests, these people found they were too busy to join the leadership of the Tumahole Civic when it was launched in October. They had apparently been frightened off, partly by the radical language of the core group of student activists and trade unionists around which the Civic started, and also by the risk of losing their trading licences [33].

A capitalist perspective is unlikely to emerge in UDF nationalism from the influence of the very small group of black entrepreneurs who have so courageously participated in UDF-led structures. What is possible is that the UDF leadership may tone down some of its economic rhetoric to win more favour within the white community. If the UDF succeeds in any future efforts directed towards winning a substantial white constituency, it is likely that there may emerge a rather stronger liberal democratic theme than exists in UDF discourse at the moment. Significantly, Billy Nair, in a pamphlet issued during the 'Call to Whites' campaign, referred to Lincoln's Gettysburg address as the essence of the UDF's conception of democracy [34].

The national democratic position is dominant within UDF leadership. As we have seen its advocates understand the ultimate foe to be monopoly capitalism but believe that opposition to capitalist imperialism in South

Africa can, because of existence of national oppression, be most effectively mobilised through a 'strategy of broad popular alliance'. The working class is the leading class in such a strategy, but the social objectives of the 'people's camp' would be both more and less than the class interests of an industrial proletariat. The Freedom Charter accommodates the aspirations of a broad range of groups; small businessmen, professionals, peasants, and of course, workers. In fact, though 'national democracy' is rarely spelt out at public meetings as carefully as it is in polemical and academic journals. 'Capitalism, not whites, was what Black people had to regard as the enemy' proclaimed Curtis Nkondo, a member of the first UDF NEC at the inauguration of Peyco [35]. Significantly he spoke in the Eastern Cape, where anti-capitalist sentiment appears to have a genuine popular resonance. Here is Wonga Nkala, president of the Uitenhage Youth Congress addressing 30 000 people the day after the Langa massacre:

> 'The Western imperialists do not see or hear the cries of the black majority. Their eyes are covered by gold-dust, and their ears by diamonds. They are only concerned about the wealth they are raping out of our country. So their response to the massacre, led by Reagan, was hypocrisy of the worst kind. They too are responsible for killing unarmed and defenceless people, by supporting reactionary governments here and in other parts of the world. Local capitalists called for all parties to meet. They want to be heard protesting becauce they fear the massacre will fuel the disinvestment lobby. But not out of concern for us' [36].

Nkala's speech was not unusual. According to State of the Nation in October 1985, common themes at funerals have included 'the nature of imperialist interests and their role in attempting to misdirect the struggle; and the interests of the ruling class'. Elsewhere, though, there has been evidently less unanimity on the nature and identity of Imperialism. Allen Boesak in early 1985 invited Senator Kennedy to South Africa. Kennedy spoke to enthusiastic meetings but not all UDF supporters were happy. Through his visit, contended 'Doubtful' of Athlone, 'the broad

aim of bringing working issues, especially economic demands of the UDF took a step backwards' thus preventing 'the development of the UDF into a stronger, militant and tighter body' [37].

For its interpreters, 'national democracy' is not liberal democracy. In the view of a contributer to New Era, a Cape Town UDF affiliated publication:

> Democracy means, in the first instance, the ability of the broad working masses to participate in and to control all dimensions of their lives. This, for us, is the essence of democracy, not some liberal, pluralistic debating society notion of a 'thousand schools contending' [38].

For national democrats, democracy is created through the organisational structures which emerge in the course of struggle; it is these rather than precisely elaborated social programmes which ensure that the ultimate society will be one in which the needs of popular classes will be met. A constant refrain in UDF speeches and statements is the notion that leaders are at most bearers of a popular mandate, that as delegates they are directly accountable, that democracy should be the politics of popular participation. Hence, for example, the antipathy amongst many UDF affiliates to the concept of a leaders' constitutional convention or a Lancaster House type of transfer of political power [39]. Now, of course, in reality the UDF does not constantly function according to such prescriptions. Strategic decisions have not in every instance emanated from or been sanctioned by mass meetings or street committees. But much has depended upon grass roots initiatives. The stronger civic and youth affiliates have often been organised and led by trade unionists who have taken as their inspiration democratic trade union organisations. For example, the Tumahole Youth Congress (TOYCO) took as its model the structure of the Chemical Workers' Union at nearby Secunda [40]. Such

literal imitation is exceptional, but more widely the adoption by civics during 1982-83 of fee-paying membership and elected branch officials grew out of recent trade union experience in many centres. In particular, the notion of a mandated leadership with very limited decision-making authority is ascribable to the influence of trade unionism.

National democracy, then, allows for the construction of a radically egalitarian social order. Such an order should be based on 'the will of the people'. 'Our structures must become organs of peoples' power'. 'Ordinary people (must) increasingly take part in all the decisions ... Few people making all the decisions must end'[41]. This romantic conception of the popular will pervading social and political organisation is often linked with a spontaneous and voluntaristic understanding of political struggle. During the Soweto consumer boycott, trade unionists on the Committee objected to the youth stoning wholesalers' trucks which were replenishing township shops. UDF leaders were reluctant to discipline the youth: 'It is not our duty to tell them not to stone or burn the trucks. We can only tell them why'[42]. The people determine their own forms of political assertion; leaders may inspire or advise but not prescribe. Despite the disclaimers of its advocates, national democracy is in essence populist, and it accommodates at best awkwardly the more disciplined and vanguardist notions of class mobilisation.

Nevertheless, as should be clear by this point, socialists have found room beneath the UDF's umbrella. Certain trade unionists urge that workers have no alternative but to participate in the UDF if their class objectives are to be realised. 'By actively participating in these (broader) struggles, we can influence their direction and goals. Worker leaders,

emerging from the training ground of unions, can take their places amongst the leadership of the political struggle [43]. In a leaflet circulated in 1984 by the Transvaal Anti President's Council, socialism is perceived as intrinsic to the process of national liberation:

> We believe that the struggle in S.A. has two aspects (NOT phases or stages). We believe that it is not enough just to have 'one person - one vote'. For the majority of South Africans (namely the working people) 'liberation' will be meaningless and empty unless the economy is restructured because that is the only way to guarantee significant and lasting improvements in the quality of life of our working people. Hence the CLASS STRUGGLE is a vital component of our fight for change. Here the working class and its allies confront the owning class and its allies. Because of the increasing development and industrialisation of the S.A. economy and the increasing organisation of the working class into independent trade unions, we perceive AN INTENSIFICATION OF CLASS STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA [44].

Nor do all UDF socialists share the sanguine expectation that because 'it is impossible to separate off Apartheid from the capitalism system ... truly committed opposition to Apartheid ... will lay the foundations for a fundamental change' [45]. Hence the concern expressed by Port Elizabeth UDF executive member, Derek Swartz, about the:

> ... criticisms of the 'popular' nature of our strategies and campaigns which did not emphasise the class nature of our struggle ... students and youth tend to dominate organisations ... Although many of them come from the working class, they have a natural populist tendency. Workers have the experience which youth do not have [46].

In fairness to students, their organisations have often been the first to recognise that workers 'produce the wealth of our country and are the crucial class in bringing about change' [47]. Yet it is the case that youthful activists have often been insensitive to the material considerations which sometimes inhibit workers from supporting militant political actions. In the context of white left student politics in which the UDF finds its principal white constituency there has developed a 'left opposition' with the UDF. This finds expression in an arcane critical

discussion of the internal colonialism thesis. Internal Colonialism is an analytical approach to South African politics which originated with the South African Communist Party. It is today influential within UDF intellectual circles in supplying the underpinning rationalisation for the concept of national democracy[48]. The critics of Internal Colonialism stress the potential for the 'development of a so-opted middle class and for the emergence of reactinary nationalism' within the movement for democracy. Fighting racial oppression challenges 'capitalism in its present form' not in substance; 'it does not guarantee its fundamental transformation[49]. The debate seems to be most vigorous at the predominantly white universities. It may, though, have had a wider impact, for in November 1986, Isizwe contained a strong attack on the 'watered down workerists ... within our own ranks' with their 'defeatist, passive attitude towards the oppressed, black petty bourgeoisie and middle strata in our country'[50].

Probably, the finer points of the argument within leadership echelons between national democrats and socialists have not evoked much popular interest. For amongst rank and file activists, working class identity and a socialist understanding of exploitation are two themes which are constantly recurrent in their public rhetoric and private perceptions. Here is an extract from a leaflet distributed in Alexandra during the rent boycott:

> We won't pay to live in these Gettos (sic). We are treated like donkeys, kept in these yards at night, but working for Baas in the day. This Alexandra is like a donkey yard. They let us out to work in Baas se Plek .... We produce the goods, but we get low wages. And when we want to buy, things are very expensive. Because the bosses have added big profit. We even are the ones who build houses, but they are expensive. Our little money is taken away by rent and inflation, which are the other names for profit. Who gets the profit? Goldstein, Schacat, the Landlord Steve Burger[51].

Similarly in Soweto an anti-eviction leaflet addressed its readers as 'workers and residents' and called for, in the event of evictions 'an industrial standstill' [52]. One of the most striking indications of the existence of a rank and file socialist consciousness is the testimony of twenty-year old Comrade Bongani, a member of the Tumahole Youth Congress:

Question: What do you understand by capitalism?

It is a system of private ownership by certain individuals who own the means of production. My parents, from Monday to Friday can make a production of R1 000, but he or she is going to get, say, R50. So our parents are being exploited so that individuals can get rich. That's why I prefer socialism, because the working class will control production[53].

There is evidence, then, to suggest that, regardless of the delicate qualifications to be found in the more cerebral definitions of National Democracy, a substantial proportion of the UDF's committed following are motivated through their class identity and inspired by a socialist vision. Whatever the ideological predilections of the largely middle-class leaders of the movement (and many, in any case, are committed to social transformation), such a constituency would be very difficult to demobilise in the event of a retrest from radicalism after liberation. Popular initiatives have played too important a role in the UDF's own development for its ordinary participants to be reduced to the role of a passive chorus. In the long term this may be the most important legacy of the embreyonic institutions of popular participatory government which were created in the course of 1985-1986. No understanding of the UDF's ideological character can therefore be complete without a consideration of the efforts to build and consolidate 'People's Power'.

PEOPLE'S POWER AND PEOPLE's COURTS

UDF leaders use the phrase 'people's power' to refer to the process in which, after the collapse or abdication of local state authorities, civics and youth organisations assumed administrative, judicial, welfare, and cultural functions within their respective communities. People's power was often represented in modest and pragmatic projects. Fore example, residents' groups would, in the event of a breakdown in municipal services, organise street cleaning. Children would create 'people's parks' on waste ground, naming them after liberation heroes, and decorating them with gaily-painted scrap-metal sculptures. The NECC's subcommittees began devising syllabuses for democratic and non-elitist history and English courses. But of all the manifestations of people's power, the efforts of local organisations to administer popularly acceptable forms of civil and criminal justice were the most challenging to the state's moral authority. More than any other feature of the insurrectionary movement which the UDF's structures straddle, people's justice testifies to the UDF's social and ideological complexity as well as the extent to which it has been shaped from below by popular culture.

Political activists claim that people began to bring complaints or disputes to community organisations almost from their inception. This reflected a widespread lack of confidence in the police which was accentuated with the outbreak of conflict in 1984. Police were reputed to be inaccessible and unhelpful. The official Commissioner's Courts were believed to be corrupt and arbitrary [54]. The construction of an alternative source of justice and civil order seems to have taken a similar course in most centres. In Pretoria's Atteridgeville, with the effective

extension of community organisation at the beginning of the consumer boycott in August 1985, ASRO leaders were asked to referee disputes between neighbours or to resolve family arguments. In response the residents' organisation opened an advice office. ASRO developed a decentralised structure with eleven area committees. These committees began in late 1985 to function as 'people's courts' (though ASRO leaders disliked using this phrase). The Advice Office became the ultimate authority to which people could appeal. Only a minority of Atteridgeville streets had their own committees by the second emergency, but where these did exist they handled family disagreements [55]. Before this system was elaborated, youth groups held 'kangaroo courts'; apparently these characteristically were harsh and unfair [56]. Brutal kangaroo courts run by the Amabuthu emerged in Port Elizabeth between July and September 1985 when PEECO and PEYCO leaders were in detention [57]. To curtail their spread, street and area committees started to operate as courts. PEBCO's executive took on the function of final arbiter. PEBCO officials claimed that their courts, in contrast to the Amabuthu tribunals, never inflicted physical punishment. Both in Port Elizabeth and in Uitenhage the activists recognised limits to their judicial competance; murder cases, for example, were referred to the police [58]. In Alexandra a more formalised structure developed. Though the yard, block and street committees were empowered to settle quarrels, for intractable issues and for theft and assault cases, five members of the Action Committee were nominated in February 1986 to sit in judgement. The court was held at regular intervals in a room specially reserved for the purpose. During its operation public complaints at the nearby police station declined by 60 per cent [59]. Comparable systems of people's justice emerged in many of the other centres where strongly structured local organisations existed. In the Transvaal this included Krugersdorp's Kagiso

and Munsieville, Duduza outside Nigel, Mamelodi (Pretoria), Letsilele (Tzaneen), and Soweto. In the Eastern Cape, people's courts functioned in most towns through late 1985 and early 1986.

'The People's Court is not simply a bourgeois court taking place in a back room in a ghetto' insisted a pamphlet circulated in Atteridgeville:

> Unlike the present legal system, it should not be biased in favour of the powerful and must not simply be a means whereby the interests of the powerful are ensured at the expense of the oppressed and the exploited [60].

The solution to each crime 'must conclude with a political thing' [61]. Advocates of people's justice emphasise its conciliatory nature: the ultimate aim is the social reintergration of the offender. Thieves are enjoined to return property or compensate owners. In one well-publicised Alexandra case, the thief, a habitual offender, was placed under the supervision of a committee comprising AAC members, the man from whom he stole, and his nephews. This would ensure that he stopped drinking and squandering his savings [62]. In Uitenhage, courts 'are not trying to imitate the white courts or trying to beat people. They are trying to create peace among the people' [63]. With those miscreants who resist the injunction 'to become one of us' the ultimate sanction, Atteridgeville organisers claimed, was ostracism [64]. Youthful comrades in Port Elizabeth who persisted in beating people up 'would be suspended' and not allowed to wear PEYCO T-Shirts [65].

Apart from trying criminals, in several centres courts imposed curfews to lower the incidence of street brawling and alcohol-related violence. Officials ordered shebeens to close early. Comrades searched sheebeen customers for weapons. Amabuthu or Comrades authorised as 'marshalls' by

the civics would police the curfews. In Atteridgeville people complained that marshalls stole during the searches. Area committees took on the duty of weapon searches. Civic activists claim that such measures were effective in reducing the number of violent crimes. The organisations were sufficiently effective in their judicial role that the police themselves referred cases to them[66].

This is the picture of people's justice provided by leading township activists quoted in UDF literature and other sympathetic accounts[67]. It may be rather idealised. For example, in Mamelodi, the Youth Organisation established disciplinary committees in each street. In the event of a crime these could convene a court from any street residents who wished to participate. At least one disciplinary committee sanctioned physical punishment. Its constitution .... 25 lashes with a sjambok for 'robbery in the name of the struggle', 15 for rape, and 5 for disrespect to teachers. In Mamelodi, as elsewhere, court officials denied they executed the guilty[68]. Courts which sanctioned such methods as the 'necklace', they said, were Kangaroo courts[69]. They were not connected with their organisations. In Soweto, Port Elizabeth, a shanty town created after the upgrading of Kwa-Ford and the expulsion of its poorer tenants, a people's court was administered by the Committee of Ten. The Committee claimed allegience to PEBCO but this was disputed both by PEBCO and young militants in Soweto. The courts in Soweto were notorious for necklacing. On 9 February 'hundreds of UDF supporters, mostly youths, gathered in the streets of Soweto to seek out the dissidents', that is the Committee of Ten. Next day, five charred bodies were discovered[70]. In Kleiskool, outside Port Elizabeth, a fifteen year old rapist was stoned and then stabbed to death after being 'pointed out to Comrades' by the family of a

12 year old rape and murder victim [71]. Civic leaders opposed necklacing but not everybody shared their conciliatory vision of justice. In Port Elizabeth there was a 'tendency, if people were dissatisfied with the decision (of the area committees), to go to the Amabutho to charge them to sort it out' [72]. A recent court case found the Amabutho guarding PEBCO's president, Edgar Ngoyi guilty of burning to death one of Ngoyi's visitors, a young AZAPO member who had come to the PEBCO chief to beg forgiveness for his role in a petrol bomb attack [73]. Pascal Damoyi, a resident of Alexandra and a member of the workerist Residents' Association, contributes a disillusioned account of people's justice in Alexandra. Action Committee and Civic Association comrades arrived to sort out a quarrel in his yard. A family had built a wall which had encroached upon the space of other households. Both sets of comrades were 'aggressive, and in a bloody mood'. They took the sides of their respective complainants, willing to appear accountable only to their 'clients' rather than all the yard's inhabitants. They threatened to sjambok those who objected to their ruling (which upheld the rights of the wall-builders). This may have been an atypical incident - it occurred in an area in which no organised committees existed [74].

In Mamelodi, MAYO people saw they system as exemplifying entrenched popular custom: 'You have to understand this from a traditional point of view. People in the community must judge others. You cannot look at it from a white point of view'. Consequently in the case of offenders being burnt, such 'acts are not criminal, they are punishments and judgements by the people' [75]. In Alexandra tradition was also summoned to defend the courts by a resident interviewed in The Star:

> A popular belief, deeply rooted in society is that some problems in our townships are beyond the white man's law. Only the people's courts, guided by senior citizens, are competant to sit in trials. We do not understand why some white man's laws should be applied in what are purely domestic affairs [76].

It is possible that at least in some centres the justice dispensed through UDF affiliates represented not so much an innovation as an adaption or reformulation of existing communal mechanisms of social control. In Mamelodi, for example, several systems of 'subterranean' justice operated in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In one ward a crime prevention unit of householders called the 'volunteers' met regularly to administer floggings to 'recalcitrant youths over whom parents of the ward had lost control'. The volunteers policed the ward with teams of whistle blowing vigilantes until an end was put to their punitive actions by the Community Council. The volunteers also helped resolve family and neighbourly squabbles. Notwithstanding the floggings, 'the central aim of the Ward Four court proceedings' was 'to prevent the breaking of relationships and to make it possible for partners to live together amicably'. The volunteers were rivalled and eventually eclipsed by a political organisation, the Vukani Vulimehlo People's Party. The VVPP later contested and won the Community Council elections but before this, it built up a predominantly youthful following governed by a militarily styled hierarchy. It ran a secretive and extremely brutal 'Lekgotla' to enforce its territorial claims, to maintain organisational discipline, and uphold law and order. The VVPP also offered protection to shebeen owners. The VVPP enjoyed some political popularity; its opposition to shack removals and high rents explained its victory after a relatively high 28 per cent participation in the 1983 Council election. Nevertheless, essentially the VVPP functioned through a patronage system, geared to the supremacy of its 'president for life', Bennet Ndlazi [77].

Clearly the people's justice activated by MAYO had little in common with the coercive cabal of Ndlazi's Makgotla. The VVPP courts conflicted with other folk conceptions of justice which emphasise judgement by one's peers, informal open procedures, and popular accessibility. The volunteer's courts also differed from MAYO's disciplinary committees because they were run exclusively by householders (rent-payers) and were largely directed at youth. But the three all sprang from a common perception of the inadequacy of official law. And, as with the earlier institutions, MAYO activists would claim for their disciplinary committees the sanction of communal tradition.

Mamelodi may have been a special case but it is unlikely; various forms of Makgotla have existed in other centres [78]. It is probable, therefore, that people's justice expressed an ideological synthesis; externally derived concepts such as, for example, a socialist critique of bourgeois courts, overlaying but not obliterating more widely held folk notions of justice and discipline. These could have been especially influential when community organisations successfully incorporated older people into their structures. In Graaf Reinnet, for example, the Lutheran church supplied a ready-made grassroots network: 'most of the street representatives are elders and evangelists' [79]. Not that the invocation of tradition was the monopoly of older people. In Sekhukhuniland, Lebowa, this was tragically evident in March 1985 when thirty-two people were burnt to death after accusations of witchcraft. Witchburnings are not a frequent feature of social life in this region but they have been historically evident during periods of socio-economic tension or political strife. Witches are blamed for lightning strikes which happen especially often at times of drought. The 1985 witchburnings introduced two departures from

custom. They were carried out by youths without the normal affirmation of guilt by nyangas, and the executions were through the necklace method[80]. In towns the victims of necklacing are often suspected informers or collaborators 'with the system' (a category which from a partisan perspective can range across a broad spectrum - community councillors to members of AZAPO). In August 1986, a Soweto journalist recorded in her diary witnessing the distraught mother of a necklaced child 'in a state of shock ... mumbling that her child is not a witch, but is sick'[81].

The political activists' conception of justice is an essentially humane one. There is no firm evidence to suggest that UDF affiliates have sanctioned or condoned necklacing or similarly brutal forms of killing. But outside the ranks of disciplined cadres there exists a much wider movement which the UDF can claim as a constituency. Even among the activists there is not the same emphasis on the rehabilitative purpose of justice which one finds in the perceptions of leaders. In Mamelodi, MAYO members talk about the necessity to 'get the lumps out of the community ... the unwanted elements'[82]. As mentioned, justice-seekers in Port Elizabeth if they were dissatisfied with the decisions of the people's courts, turned to the amabutho for more severe retribution against suspected criminals. The people's courts instituted by UDF affiliates were different from earlier forms of unofficial justice because they were motivated by a deliberate effort to replace the organs of the State and in so doing transform social relationships. But people's justice did not evolve in a cultural vaccuum; it was shaped as much by popular beliefs and folk morality as the programmatic concerns of activists. As such it could be ideologically ambivalent, drawning alternately on visions of a classless future and utopian nostalgia for a harmonius past.

NOTES

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3. Source: interview with Paddy Kearney, January 1987.

4. Grassroots, Vol. 4, No. 8, October 1983, p. 6.

5. Quotation by Virgil Bonhomme of DHAC on flyleaf of United Democratic Front, National Launch, booklet distributed at Rocklands, August 1983.

6. Ibid, p. 8.

7. Trevor Manuel quoted in The Star, 2 August 1983.

8. Albertina Sisulu in SASPU National, vol. 4, No. 3, September 1983, p. 3.

9. Rand Daily Mail, 1 August 1983.

10. City Press, 26 June 1983.

11. Karen Jochelson and Susan Brown, 'UDF and ZAZPO', Work in Progress, No. 35, February 1985.

12. UDF Update, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1985, p. 3.

13. Ibid.

14. Evening Post, 7 April 1986, p. 11.

15. Zac Yacoob in SASPU National, Vol. 4, No. 3, September 1983, p. 5.

16. 'Errors of Populism', Isizwe, Vol, 1, No. 2, March 1986, p. 16.

17. Ibid, p. 17.

18. Ibid.

19. 'National Democratic Struggle', Isizwe, Vol. 1, No. 2, March 1986, p. 32.

20. Isizwe, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1985, p. 39.

21. 'Errors of Workerism', Isizwe, Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1986, p. 26.

22. Jeremy Cronin, 'Some Comments on the Labour Monitoring Group Paper', unpublished ms.

23. SASPU National, May 1984, p. 17.

24. State of the Nation, October 1985, p. 13.

25. Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, 30 Years of the Freedom Charter, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1986, pp. 179-180.

26. 'Heed Free Mandela Movement, Government Urged', press cutting used as Exhibit D 30 in State vs. Mewa Ramgobin.

27. Speech at Release Mandela Committee meeting, Soweto, 8 July 1984, Schedule A, Indictment, p. 19, State vs Mewa Ramgobin.

28. SASPU Focus, Vol. 2, No. 2, June 1983, p. 26.

29. Social Review (Cape Town), issue 24/25, april 1984, p. 38.

30. Weekly Mail, 16 January 1987, pp. 1-2.

31. The Star, 18 December 1985. Three detained organisers owned one pharmacy and two supermarkets.

32. Jeremy Seekings and Matthew Chaskalson, 'Politics in Tumahole, 1984-85', Association of Sociologists of South Africa conference, Durban, 30 June 1986, paper No. 59, p. 15.

33. Work in Progress, 39, October 1985, p. 9.

34. United Democratic Front, 'Call to Whites, Join Us!', pamphlet issued in early 1986.

35. Rand Daily Mail, 21 June 1983.

36. State of the Nation, May 1985, p. 12.

37. Grassroots, Vol. 6, No. 1, February 1985, p. 4.

38. 'Sowing confusion', New Era, (Cape Town), Vol, 1, No. 1, March 1986, p. 38.

39. Weekly Mail, 30 August 1985, p. 13; 30 May 1986, p. 10.

40. Seekings and Chaskalson, op cit, p. 22. See also the structure and workings of the Alexandra Action Committee as reported in the Financial Mail, 16 May 1986.

41. 'UDF Message', Grassroots, February 1986, Vol. 7, No. 1.

42. Work in Progress, 39 October 1985, p. 23.

43. 'MGWUSA on the UDF', South African Labour Bulletin, p. 72.

44. 'Why we cannot participate in the election referendum; the viewpoint of the Transvaal Anti-President's Council Committee', Exhibit D 36, State vs Mewa Ramgobin.

45. 'MGWUSA on the UDF', pp. 74-75.

46. Work in Progress, 39, p. 10.

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62. Ngcobo, op cit.

63. Isizwe, Vol. 1, No. 2, March 1986, p. 36.

64. Suttner, op cit, p. 20.

65. Ibid, p. 17.

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