

## The Current State of the Struggle

The African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), along with the independent black labor unions, are currently leading the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The ANC, which has spearheaded the liberation struggle in South Africa ever since its inception in 1912 has been banned or outlawed since 1960 and now operates as an exile organization with headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia. Despite the ANC's outlawed status, due to which it cannot even be legally quoted inside South Africa, the recent upsurge has witnessed a massive increase in its support. Polls show that it is easily the most popular liberation organization in the country. The UDF, a coalition of over 600 organizations, has emerged over the last two years as the major legal force of internal resistance to apartheid inside South Africa. Most of the current protests in South Africa were organized by the UDF. Finally, the growing black labor unions, often working in collaboration with the UDF, have shown through strikes and work stoppages that they now have the power to cripple the *apartheid* economy.

The ANC was formed in 1912 and its program of demands is contained in the Freedom Charter which was adopted in 1955 by the ANC, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress, and the Congress of Democrats. The Charter basically calls for the creation of a non-racial democratic South Africa in which the land and the wealth of the country is controlled by the people. For almost 50 years the ANC followed a strategy of non-violent resistance. However, following the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the ANC adopted armed struggle as one of its principal strategies. Its military wing, the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the Spear of the Nation) remains controlled by the political leadership of the organization, and armed struggle is combined with other forms of mass organization - both illegal and semi-legal. The last five years have seen a rapid increase in ANC activity inside South Africa, both at the military and mass levels, leading the Minister of Law and Order, Louis Le Grange, to lament that "the ANC is everywhere." Since 1977 the ANC has carried out over two hundred military attacks concentrated on key economic and strategic installations, military bases, police stations, and symbols of repression. These include attacks on two SASOL oil-from-coal plants in June 1980, an attack on the Koeberg nuclear power station in December 1982, and in May 1982, an unsuccessful bomb attack on the South African Air Force headquarters in Pretoria.

In June 1985 the ANC held the second "National Consultative Conference" of its membership. The Conference noted that since the white minority regime was determined to defend apartheid by military force, the ANC had no option other than to step up its armed struggle along with mass political action. In the process guerrilla activity would be expanded to targets that had previously been excluded because of likely loss of civilian life. These targets potentially include town councillors, corporations that provide support for the regime along with soldiers, armed police and anyone identified with them. The leadership of the ANC was expanded to include Coloureds, Indians and whites for the first time. The Conference reaffirmed earlier calls to make the country ungovernable and to turn the townships into "liberated zones" with "peoples' committees" replacing the discredited community and town councils. It asked the people to go beyond protest and challenge the system itself. It called for the unconditional release of ANC leaders imprisoned by the apartheid regime. It noted that the ANC needed to improve its political and military network to keep pace with the dramatic rise in above-ground activity since 1984. Finally it also "noted and paid tribute to the contribution that the United Democratic Front has made towards the strengthening of democratic forces and condemned the arrest and prosecution of its leaders and activists."

The UDF was formed in 1983 in response to the apartheid regime's plans to alter the Constitution to give token political power to Indians and Coloureds. During protests to these proposals, Dr. Allan Boesak called for the creation of a broad coalition to fight apartheid arguing that "the politics of refusal needed a united front." The first UDF conference in August 1983 adopted a declaration which stated as its aim the creation of a united democratic South Africa, free of bantustans and group areas, and based on the will of the people. The need for "unity in struggle through which all democrats regardless of race, religion or colour shall take part" was recognized. The conference also alleged that the apartheid regime would co-opt "false leaders" from within the black communities to control the people.

The UDF is comprised of over 600 community, women's, students', religious and sporting groups, and is pledged to educate people and organize protest against apartheid. As a front rather than an organization, the UDF does not make policy for its affiliates. These affiliates take up UDF campaigns in ways suited to their own activities and constituencies. The UDF argues that national political action will succeed only if there is strong local organization. Though the UDF is itself non-racial, it has managed to establish harmonious relations with several black consciousness groups such as the Azanian Peoples' Organization (AZAPO). Some black consciousness organizations such as the Soweto Committee of Ten belong both to the UDF and to the National Forum, a coalition whose membership is restricted to blacks. In 1983 and 1984 the UDF organized protests and campaigns throughout South Africa, especially against the new constitution. In 1983 it sponsored a boycott of elections to town councils for urban Africans. Participation was as low as 10 per cent. In 1984 it organized a boycott of the elections to the Coloured and Indian parliamentary elections. Participation was as low as 18 per cent of the Coloured and Indian population. In 1984 it launched a petition drive against the new constitution that collected about a million signatures. In November 1984 it organized a successful two-day general strike that was supported by a broad coalition of groups.

The November 1984 strike, which numerous black trade unions sponsored along with the UDF, demonstrated the growing power of the labor movement. By the end of 1983 almost 900,000 black workers (i.e. Africans, Coloured, and Indians) were unionized and some unions, especially in the mining industry which is crucial to the *apartheid* economy, continued to expand rapidly. Most of the major unions are now affiliated to two federations, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Council of South African Unions (CUSA). Increased unionization has enabled the number of successful strikes increase rapidly. In 1982 a strike by 70,000 miners won recognition for the National Union of Mineworkers. Again, in September 1984, 80,000 miners struck successfully for better working conditions. The November 1984 general strike paralyzed the Johannesburg/Pretoria area, South Africa's industrial heartland. The proven power of the unions to exert economic pressure on the *apartheid* regime has potentially put them at the forefront of the liberation struggle. Consequently, they have been subject to severe state repression. During the September 1984 strikes sixteen miners were killed and 700 seriously injured. Most of 17,500 miners who participated in an April 1985 strike were forcibly sent back to the *bantustans*.

Over the last two years continued opposition to the new constitution and associated *apartheid* legislation has sparked off increasing violence within South Africa. This growing resistance forced the *apartheid* regime to impose a state of emergency on July 21, 1985. Yet even the special powers given to the police and military under the emergency provisions have done little to quell the violence that has gripped the country. UDF leaders and activists have become special targets of repression and almost its entire leadership is currently in jail. Sixteen prominent UDF leaders are currently on trial in Natal for high treason. They are charged with acts that furthered the aims of the outlawed ANC and South African Communist Party. Twenty-two other leading members of the UDF are scheduled for trial on similar charges in Transvaal in October. The repression has not succeeded in breaking the UDF's strength. The decentralized structure of the UDF encourages less dependence on charismatic leaders, making it difficult for the regime to stamp out its presence and power. The breadth of its coalition makes it virtually impossible to enact legislation that could effectively outlaw all its affiliates. The UDF denies charges that it has direct links with the ANC. While it welcomes support from all anti-apartheid forces, it does not endorse violent methods. However, during the last few months the red, gold and black flag of the ANC has often been prominent in rallies and events organized by the UDF. In a recent funeral a speaker even attempted to recruit youth for the *Umkhonto we Sizwe*. These events underscore the outlawed ANC's growing presence inside South Africa.

**Coalition for Illinois' Divestment from South Africa, September 1985.**