

UDF Under Secy  
Interview with Murphy Morobe, UDF acting National Publicity Secretary  
By GAVIN EVANS

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Since the State of Emergency was declared three weeks ago thousands of UDF activists are believed to have been detained or to have gone "underground". In (the first interview with a UDF leader since the emergency was declared) Murphy Morobe, UDF acting National Publicity Secretary, spells out the effect the latest crackdown has had on the Front's activities.

Morobe, 30, is working from the underground - somewhere in the East Rand. He has been a political activist since the early seventies when he became involved with the South African Students Movement, and later became one of the Soweto ~~Parents~~ Students Representative Council leaders. After being detained in 1977 he spent nearly seven years in police custody and on Robben Island. <sup>After</sup> his release he worked as an organiser for the General and Allied Workers Union and later became the UDF's Transvaal Rural Organiser. When "Terror" Lekota was arrested and charged with treason, Morobe took over as National Publicity Secretary. Over the last 10 years he has spent three periods in detention.

Q: The UDF has been one of the groupings most affected by the State of Emergency? Have you managed to continue operating and to keep your structures functioning?

A: The UDF is the main organisation singled out by Le Grange as being responsible for the uprising taking place around the country. He has also accused the UDF of being part of a conspiracy with the ANC. So it is no surprise that they have responded harshly.

Almost all known activists of the UDF have been affected in some way. But because the last emergency was also aimed mainly at the UDF and its affiliates we have been able to adapt to some extent. One reason is that we did not return to a complete state of normality after the last emergency. Many of us remained semi-underground even after it was lifted.

As a result we were much more prepared than we had been before the first emergency. It certainly didn't come as a shock. So when the security police swooped on the morning of June 12 there were very few people around to be found. Most of the homes of our activists were raided that night, but some of our affiliates did not suffer any casualties because all of their people had not slept at home.

Of course our offices were raided, but there again we took precautions. After the last emergency we realised the office couldn't be the focal point of our organisation, so much of the office work was being done from outside of the office.

But on the other hand we don't want to say we are not in disarray at any level. The UDF has been designed to operate in an open and legal way and its operations have always been very public. The UDF and its affiliates are not underground organisations. But I think it's important to stress that there has been preparation and this paid off.

Q: Why do you think the government decided to call a State of Emergency?

A: When the last emergency was lifted in March the state had clearly failed to achieve what it set out to do. By the end of the emergency the democratic movement was stronger than it had been before it was declared. So as soon as it was lifted the UDF and its affiliates were very alive and came to the fore. There was a flurry of activity - a whole range of new affiliates joined the UDF and a number of important campaigns were conducted.

The consumer and rent boycotts were stepped up - focussing not only on the standard of living but on the system of apartheid as a whole. They were beginning to spread throughout the country and in some areas were 100 percent successful.

Then there was May Day which was a national stayaway involving people from all over the country - Africans, coloureds and Indians, people from urban and rural areas, workers and traders. It indicated the struggle had reached a new stage and isolated the apartheid government more than ever before. So they were clearly worried about what could be achieved on June 16.

~~Then~~ Also important <sup>has been</sup> was the increasing disintegration within the white power bloc. On the one hand the government was losing support to the UDF itself - through groups like JODAC, through <sup>and</sup> its "Call To Whites" campaign, through organisations like <sup>the</sup> End Conscription Campaign.

And on the other hand they were losing support to the right wing. Whereas <sup>and</sup> a few years ago they seemed not to care too much about their support in the white community (because they were hoping to broaden their base by including coloureds and Indians in the tri-cameral parliament) but having failed to win over the coloureds and Indians, having failed to win over a section of the black population through the Bantustan authorities or the Black Local authorities, they had to resort back to winning over the white community. And the one rallying issue is repression, so they resorted to strong-arm measures. <sup>you</sup> you can see very clearly that over the last few weeks the Conservative Party and <sup>the</sup> the AWB have been very quiet and have welcomed the steps taken by the government.

Finally there is the question of the economy. What has been becoming very clear to the business sector in South Africa and to overseas investors is that the political situation in South Africa is very unstable and that the Botha government has no future at all - and this <sup>means</sup> that there has been uncertainty about the wisdom of investing in South Africa.

So the state needed to crush the democratic movement to give the appearance of political stability - hoping this would bring back investors and restore confidence.. The logic they are using of course is that investors are not interested in human rights as long as there is a stable climate for their profits.

Q: The UDF is not the only organisation which has been affected by the emergency. The trade union movement, for example, has suffered more than previously. Why do you think this has been the case?

A: In the past the state hoped they would be able to coopt the union movement by limiting its activities to the factory floor itself - to wages and working conditions - and that this wouldn't be a threat to the existence of the present structure of society. However, in recent times, particularly since the formation of COSATU, trade unions have found it impossible to wage their battles on the factory floor without confronting the state.

So increasingly the workers have seen the link between their exploitation at the factory and the oppression in the townships and their lack of political rights. There has been a growing unity between workers, students, residents, women, youth and other sectors - and a growing number of whites as well. COSATU has been playing a central role in building this unity and its members have taken the lead in civics, youth organisations, Parents committees and so on. So the state has realised that if it is going to crush the democratic movement it is going to have to go for the trade unions as well, because the unions today are an integral part of the democratic movement and the liberation struggle.

Q: How does the UDF view the effect of the emergency on civil rights in South Africa?

A: The point is this: what the government has been saying is that there is a small group of radicals and agitators and intimidators who have been transported into our communities by the Communist Party and the Kremlin and who are stirring up trouble. Now we need to ask ourselves why then have they taken away the most basic of rights from everybody in South Africa? Not even the clergy can say what they want. If what they are saying in terms of what the Bible preaches is not in keeping with the emergency regulation then it can't be said.

They have exposed themselves very clearly. What the government is doing is that they have declared war on the people because ordinary people - be they black or white, be they liberal or radical - are people who by nature are opposed to fascism and tyranny.

The press has been silenced - even the Afrikaans press who have been supportive of PW Botha why is it they cannot publish what they want, why can't their reporters write about what they witness with their own eyes?

These are questions every South African needs to look at and to search for answers. The responsibility is then for all of us to stand up and demand that there be recognised as rights in all parts of the world - of free association, free speech and a free press. You no longer need be interested in politics to be duty-bound to stand up against the government.

Q: How would you assess the response of the business community to recent political developments?

A: The people are looking with a watchful eye at the business community. Are they going to be party to what is happening or are they going to assert pressure on the government as we know they are in a position to do?

It is our view that the kind of tyranny taking place at the moment is in the long term in the interests of nobody. So we are looking everybody to stand up and be counted. The white community needs to stand up and say these laws which muzzle everybody are not what they want.

Q: What effect will the current crackdown have on the UDF's ability to operate legally?

A: One view held very strongly in the UDF is that we must fight for our legal existence. We intend to take full advantage of every legal possibility which arises. But of course the present situation makes it very difficult for organisation to work completely openly.

We see the main thrust of our work as organising and mobilising the masses. We are not going to run away from that task. Whatever it means we will continue to fulfill that responsibility. Already much of the work is taking place through street committees and other grassroots structures which are harder to break.

But what many people in our communities are saying is that with the troops and the detention and the vigilantes and the ban on meetings it is becoming impossible to work legally, and so they are looking towards the ANC and the ARMED STRUGGLE. Because they feel nothing else is possible. It is becoming more and more difficult to argue against this.

Q: The subject of "black-on-black" violence has featured prominently in the press recently. Where does the UDF stand on this question?

A: Any undemocratic system will use any method available to wipe out its opponents. In South Africa we've seen this through the government's backing of the MNR against the Mozambican government and UNITA against the Angolan government - as part of an attempt to destabilise these countries.

Likewise we have a similar situation within the country where the state has created forces which are little more than extensions of the SADF and SAP. And often they are more vicious because the government is not formally responsible for them. They come up in different guises but with the same basic source.

So we reject the notion of "black-on-black" violence because we believe ~~it~~ the violence is an extension of the apartheid system. It's just another form, another method. The full arsenal of the government's repressive machinery have not succeeded in crushing us - so we now see death squads appearing all over the place.

Q: Could the level of violence degenerate into a Beirut situation where the war drags on for years and no-one wins?

A: Because of the lack of information about what is happening one can understand why people who are outside of the struggle can get this kind of feeling.

When one looks at the level of violence escalating it is a sign that the government is resisting giving in to the demands of the people. They have made this very clear - they will stop at nothing to stop the uprising, to stop the democratic organisations of the people. So on the part of the state we have no doubt they will continue to escalate the violence.

But as more and more blood is spilt ~~on~~ people are becoming more and more determined and bullets and detentions and trials are not going to stop them. Unless we abandon the struggle we believe the state will continue to escalate the violence. PW Botha has already said they have not yet used the full power at their disposal.

But if you talk to ordinary people in the black community the picture you get is not one of doom. Everybody believes we are much closer to our freedom now and that in fact we are on an irreversable path to liberation.

And these views are not groundless. What is happening in the townships is that the phenomenon of people's power which has emerged since the beginning of the year is one that assures there is going to be stability within the black communities despite all the fighting that is going on. What is happening is that the structures of apartheid have been destroyed, and people through their own creativity and initiative have established their own alternative structures to run the townships.

Q: So do you believe that majority rule is not far off?

A: The generally held view is that liberation will come in the next decade. It is difficult to predict how things are going to go, but what is certain is that we are on our way to freedom and the state is losing its grip - they do not have a clear strategy and they have no way of ensuring they remain in power. So all the signs point to liberation coming within the next few years.

Q: What prospect is there for a negotiated settlement in South Africa in the near future?

A: There are very few people left in the country who believe the government is prepared to hold discussions or negotiations with the true leaders of the people - not those that they themselves have installed.

The most striking revelation of this has ~~been~~ emerged from the Eminent Persons Group visit. They stated very clearly their mission was to come here and encourage negotiations between the state and the people's representatives. But in their report they said there was little prospect of a peaceful solution in South Africa and they blame this on the government.

For us who encounter apartheid repression and exploitation in the factories and townships and bantustans it is very clear that the government is a long way from ceding power to the people. Even clergy are being detained and people preaching non-violence have been shot at.

Q: When Sir Geoffrey Howe visits South Africa will the UDF be prepared to meet him?

A: We have not yet made a decision on this question, but we are extremely suspicious of his intended visit. The EPG was here for some time, they met with a wide range of people, they studied the issue and they arrived at certain conclusions. But because these conclusions were not to the liking of the Thatcher government they are looking at new ways out of it. Our reading of the situation is that they are looking for ways to bypass the report of the EPG and to be able to continue their support for the South African government.

Q: Q: Over the last few weeks Inkatha has received a lot of prominence in the media while the UDF has been silent. Is this likely to be a lasting product of the emergency?

A: Inkatha is riding on the back of the Casspirs. What is there for Gatsha to boast about when he has a meeting in the presence of the SADF - when the emergency is declared and nobody else can hold meetings and when movement is restricted. There is absolutely nothing to be proud of there.

It is very clear that under normal conditions the opposition would be far too great for him to be able to have a meeting like he had in Soweto. One of the aims of the emergency is for pro-government groups to be able to consolidate - and this certainly applies to Inkatha.

Despite what he says we don't see any differences between Gatsha and the government. They will project him to try to give the impression there are major differences among blacks.

Q: How does the UDF view the proposed National Statutory Council - and developments in the tri-cameral parliament generally?

A: The National Statutory Council, like the Regional Services Councils, cannot succeed because it has no support. If these bodies had support the government would not have to force them down our throats at gunpoint.

As far as the tri-cameral parliament is concerned the government has made a total mess. They have done precisely what we warned they would do.

The coloured and Indian MPs said they were going into parliament to use it to oppose apartheid. But with the passing of Le Grange's laws despite their protestations they have clearly failed in their goal. The issue has been decided for them. Now we demand they follow the course set by Dr Slabbert and Dr Boraine and resign their seats.

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