

Interview with Murphy Norrie - July 1986 (Gaston Williams)

Q 1

How has the state of emergency effected UDF? In have you managed to continue operating and have you managed to keep your structures together?

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The UDF is the main organisation singled out by de Klerk as being responsible for the uprising taking place around the country. They have also accused the UDF of being part of ~~the~~ a conspiracy with the ANC. So it is no surprise to us that they have acted viciously.

Almost all known activists of the UDF have been effected in one way or another - almost all the key activists have been visited by the security police & it is clear that they wanted to detain these people. Our offices were raided & on numerous occasions the offices of our affiliates have been raided, with all kinds of things being confiscated from these offices - to the point where it has become impossible for some of these offices to operate because staff have been detained.

However, the last emergency was also used mainly as the UDF & its affiliates, so that the affiliates & the UDF activists have been able in some kind of way adapt themselves. In fact we have not returned to a complete state of normality since the last State of Emergency. Some of us have been semi-underground ever since the last emergency was lifted.

So that when the emergency was declared it would be true to say that we were much more prepared than we were last time. It certainly didn't come as a shock. It was clear that the emergency was coming we were not certain on the particular form it would take but it was

claim that some kind of martial law, some kind of removal of all rights, some kind of attempt to destroy our organisations completely, some kind of way of removing of all the legal space existing — that that kind of thing was going to come. So that because it was not a shock most people were prepared.

When the security police swooped in the morning of the emergency that very few people were found. In fact most of the homes they raided that night, the activists were out. Some organisations were unaffected & did not suffer any casualties because all of the leadership people were not sleeping that night at their homes.

So in a sense it was the very 1st blow to the system. As far as the offices of the VDF & its affiliates go, since the last emergency we have been waiting expectantly for the security police to come, to close our offices, detain the activists & bring our operations to a standstill. So there again appropriate measures were taken, and when we resumed work after the 1st few weeks of the last emergency we had accepted that we were not going to be able to make the office the central focus of it. VDF,

we were able to recover much more quickly than we did last time at the level of the office. Already the office opened again with a skeleton staff performing the bare minimum of tasks — so that the office remained closed only for a few days, and many of the functions of the office were being conducted from outside of the office.

On the other hand we don't want to say we are <sup>not</sup> in a democracy at any level. Of course the VDF and its affiliates are part of the legal democratic movement. The VDF has been designed to operate in an open & legal way and its operations were very very public. ~~but that~~ So it obviously

is not designed to operate in underground conditions. So there is a demand to some extent, but I think the 15 point is that there has been preparation & that preparation has paid off.

Already most of our affiliates are meeting in one way or another

Q: 2 What do you think is the state's aim with the State of Emergency? What put them in the position where they felt the necessity to call on emergency?

A: We need to start off by ~~repeating~~ restating what we were saying when the last emergency was lifted. That is that the lifting of the State of Emergency was a victory for the democratic movement. When it was lifted in March 1968, the state had clearly failed to achieve its aims under the State of Emergency, and in fact we were stronger at the end of the SOE than prior to when the emergency had been declared.

So I think that is the 1st point to be made. As soon as the SOE was lifted all the evidence that the VDF & its affiliates were very alive came to the fore. There was a flurry of activities all over the state - a whole range of new affiliates had come forward to join the VDF & a number of NB campaigns had been embarked upon by affiliates.

The one thing was that the consular boycott had been resumed in the E Cape & in the N. T. & parts of the E & had been very successful.

The second thing is that many of the civic associations had embarked upon the rent boycott which was hitting very directly at the structures of apartheid. What people say is that they were boycotting rent not only because rent

were high but also because they were unhappy with conditions in the townships - with standards of living - also that they were against the system of apartheid as a whole - that they did not want to pay rents which were used to run structures by apartheid. The rent boycotts had begun to spread from area to area very fast - the most significant of course was the landing of the rent boycott in Soweto as from the beginning of June & an almost 100% success had been achieved.

The other point was the success of the May Day Campaign. Over the past 2 or 3 years a no. of campaigns had been waged. One of these campaigns used as national on the May Day Campaign was & therein lies its significance - we had every organisation of the people supporting that campaign - we had people from all parts of the country - including those parts of the country which had not participated in townships - particularly people in both rural & urban areas - we found not only African women but also coloured & Indian women participating in the struggles for the first time - we found leaders in the black community everywhere - it was national in many different ways

It indicated that the struggle had entered a new stage - one in which it would be truly possible to wage truly national campaigns. We pulled together a cross-section of the people & it isolated the apartheid regime. So that to the other point - what it indicated for the state was that if it was the content of mobilisation for May Day what then would be the content of mobilisation for June 16 & around that period?

The other thing which forced them to declare the B.C.F. was the desintegration within the white power bloc. The conflict between the ultra-right wing - the A.I.B. & its supporters and

The government was becoming an issue and there was a real fear in the govt that it was beginning to lose the support of the Afrikaners & the white community as such. — Losing support on the one hand to the UDF itself through 900AC, through the "Call to Whites" Campaign, to organisations like the End Conscription Campaign. But on the other hand also to the right wing — the AFB etc. ~~with~~

Whereas a few years ago they seemed to not to care too much about their support in the white community because they were hoping at that stage to broaden their base by including coloureds & Indians in the tri-racial partnership. But having failed to win over the coloureds & Indians, having failed to win over people in the townships, having failed to win over the rest of the black urban population through the Black Local Authorities, they now had to resort back to winning over the white community. And the one rallying issue of for the white right wing is that the govt has been unable to deal with the revolution & so that strong measures would ~~be~~ <sup>counter the</sup> very clearly — and I think over the last few weeks you can see very clearly that ~~the~~ the Conservative party has been taking a stand & that they have criticised the steps the govt has taken.

One of the most ~~big~~ reasons of course in the economy. What has been coming very clear to the business sector in SA is the overseas investors ~~is~~ that the political situation in SA is completely unstable; that the Botswana regime is unable to guide this country into some kind of peaceful future & that indeed the present regime has no political future at all & that all of this meant that there was uncertainty about investments in the future.

What the state is hoping to achieve through the SOE is to crush the democratic movement & thereby give

the appearance that there is political stability in the country - hoping that that would bring back the investors & restore their confidence. The logic they are using of course is that foreign investors are not really interested in human rights issues - not really interested in how stability is brought about & what means are used as long as there is stability.

Q:3 What effect will the state of Emergency have on legal struggle? Does it mean that most organisations will have ~~to~~ ~~struggle~~ to work underground? Are the UDF-linked structures capable of coping with this kind of change?

A: One view held very strongly in the UDF is that we must fight for our legal existence & we intend wherever possible to work in a legal & open way & to take full ~~open~~ advantage when these possibilities arise.

Of course in the present situation it is very difficult for organisations to continue their work completely openly. What we have had to do in many areas work is continuing at a mass level - street committee meetings, etc.

We are not paralysed, despite the fact that things have become incredibly difficult.

We see our work as consolidating & organising the masses. This is the main thrust of our work. We are not going to run away from Red Park. Whatever it means we will continue to fulfil that responsibility.

What many people are saying - many of our activists & members of our affiliates - is that with the troops everywhere, with them not being able to hold meetings, with everything legal being impossible & if with everything being illegal people are

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are saying they have no option, but to look towards the A/P/C  
a becoming part of the armed struggle. They are saying that  
nothing else is possible. The state is making you as though  
you are throwing handgrenades at them. And this is driving  
ordinary people towards the armed struggle. They are saying  
they have no other option. It is becoming more & more  
difficult for people us to try to ~~people~~ argue against this -  
it is difficult for us to say to people who come to us ~~that~~ say  
they want to take up arms when the state, and through them  
the vigilantes, the whiteboes, Inxatha, Amagwe are attacking us -  
they are being armed & quite often in collaboration with the  
police - what do you tell these people?

Q: 4 What about the question of "black-on-black violence"?

A: Any undemocratic system will use all kinds of methods &  
stop at nothing to wipe out its opponents.

We have seen this with SA in many different cases. We  
have seen in Mozambique with the formation of the MNR  
which beyond any doubt is a creation of the Pretoria govt.  
and the MNR is backed by the Pretoria govt, it is trained  
by the Pretoria govt. Even after they signed the peace  
agreement - not only support - they continued to prop  
up the MNR.

Likewise UMTA has been kept alive by SA to the point  
where many people see it as nothing but an extension of the SA -  
and these things are no secret.

There are just two examples. It could easily be portrayed  
as black on black violence. We know what it is. It is part of  
the apartheid regime's strategy of destabilising countries. But  
not only that. It is also backed by imperialist forces. The  
Reagan administration supports UMTA - that is no secret -

otherwise we have a situation here where the government created from within the oppressed people a force which is opposing the democratic movement - a force which has become an extension of the SADF & SAP & Security Police. But because they are not formally part of the SADF or SAP they can even be much more vicious, because the govt is not directly responsible for them. But we do believe they are set-up & backed by & financed by the state. They come up in various different guises - the vigilantes, the umbelthos & various other bands.

We had a number of examples recently. The UDF had a press conference. There were two vigilantes from the East Rand who admitted they were being paid by the security police to patrol banks & homes of members of the UDF, homes of members of the East Rand Peoples Organisation - one of the affiliates of the UDF - and that people know very clearly that is what it is all about. So there is no black-on-black violence, but the violence is the violence of the apartheid regime. It is just another form, another method.

It is important to note that because they have been unable to use the vast repressive machinery which they have available - the repressive laws, the <sup>SADF, SAP</sup> police & riot squads, the whole system of informers, all of these things - because all of that has been ineffective they have been forced to resort to having this method of what are basically death squads - which they now call vigilantes - who go out hand in hand with the police on missions. They are seldom on their own, but most times they are accompanied by the police.

Q:5 Could the level of violence degenerate into a border situation where no one wins?



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A: Because of the lack of information about what is happening we can understand why people who are outside of the struggle itself would get that kind of impression.

When one talks about the level of violence escalating it means the state has no intention of giving in to the aspirations and demands of the people. They have made this very clear. They will stop at using nothing to suppress the uprisings - to suppress these democratic organizations of the people.

And we have seen during the SOE & over the last SOE that the worst kind of terror is possible. So on the part of the state we have no doubt that they will continue to escalate the violence - that they will continue to escalate the murders of people.

As time goes on & as more & more blood is spilled our people are ~~going to be~~ becoming more & more determined & bullets & detonations & bombs etc not going to stop them.

Unless we abandon that struggle we see no way they will escalate the violence. He has gone down in record as saying that they have not yet used most of the power that they have at their disposal.

They are warning. They have already said very clearly that they intend escalating the violence.

So on a scale it's true to say the violence will escalate. But if we speak to people - to ordinary black people - the picture is not one of doom despite the presence of troops, despite the shooting of kids on the street etc - the picture is not a pessimistic one. Every body believes we are much closer to our freedom now and that in fact we are on an irreversible path to liberation.

More views that people have are not groundless. What is happening in the community is that the phenomenon of people's power which has emerged from the beginning of this year is one that answers there is going to be stability within the black community.

That despite all of the fighting which is going on what is happening is that the structures of apartheid have been destroyed and people through their own creativity & their own initiative have established their own alternative structures - to run the townships. The black local authorities have been destroyed & people have set up their own civic associations & street committees etc. And that indicates that people are beginning to take more & more control over their own lives.

Although the state is more & more going to arm all kind of people, from the point of view of the people the struggle is between the people - the state & its allies & the emergency has been a response to strategies which have emerged from the people.

If one looks at Inkatha, for example, we don't see any difference between them & the state - we don't see any difference between Gatsha Buthelezi & the state, so that at the state uses these differences - they will project Gatsha very much to try to give the impression that there is a lot of division amongst blacks. But it would be correct in saying that all of that is part of the power base of the state - or rather an alliance with the state.

Q: Is there any prospect for liberation - for one person one vote - within the next decade?

A: The generally held view is that liberation will come in the next decade. ~~that~~ It is difficult to predict how things are going to go, but what is certain is that we are on our way to freedom & the state is losing more & more its grip on what is happening - it is losing control of many parts of the country & the emergency is a response to this.

Also, the present steps they have taken indicates they do not have a strategy. There is no clear strategy on their part.

They were forced to declare a SOE. They didn't do it because it was part of a well-orchestrated plan. They don't have any way of ensuring that they remain in power. So all signs point to liberation coming within the next few years.

Q.7 How does the UDF view the question of negotiations? What prospect do you think there is for a negotiated settlement in SA?

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A There are very few people left in this country who believe that the regime is prepared to have discussions & negotiations with the true leaders of our people - not those that they themselves have installed.

The most striking revelation of this has been in the report of the eminent persons group where they have stated very clearly that their mission was to come here and encourage negotiations between the state on the one hand and the people's representatives on the other. We were very sceptical. In fact at first we didn't even want to meet with the EPG. But we did meet with them.

In the report of the EPG they said there is no prospect of a peaceful solution in SA, there is no prospect of talks and they state very clearly that in their view the government is not prepared to talk to the ANC.

That is at one level. From what one encounters the regime in many aspects of apartheid repression & exploitation in the factories & townships & townships etc it is very clear to people that there is, all the indications are that this government is not prepared to talk. Her clergyman have been detained & her leaders who have been preaching non-violence have been shot at by the troops.

Q:8 What is the UDF's view of the proposed Sir Geoffrey Howe visit?

The UDF has decided on this matter. See my statement in press & by other news from other sources on 24.12.84. We will meet

A: The UDF has not yet decided as to whether we will meet with him or not, but we are extremely suspicious of his intended visit to SA. The Eminent Persons Group was here & they spent some time here, they met a whole range of people & then they studied the issue & they have arrived at certain conclusions. Because those conclusions are unacceptable in particular to the Mothers require they are looking for ways out of it. One reading of the situation is that they are looking for ways of means of being able to bypass the report of the EPG & to be able to continue their support for the ~~of~~ apartheid regime that basically his mission: "how can we justify our continued support for this regime?"

Q:9 What does the SOE represent in terms of the process of struggle in South Africa?

A. The point is this: what the state has been saying is that there is this small group of radicals & agitators & intimidators who have been transported into our communities by the Communist Party & the fronts & the AWC etc & who are stirring up trouble. The question we need to ask ourselves is why then have they taken away the most basic of rights from everybody in South Africa - from everybody, from all - not even the clergy & the priests, not even the Archbishop can say what they want to. If what they are saying in terms of what the Bible preaches is not in keeping with the emergency regulations then it can't be said.

Where is this theory that there are a small group of radicals,

that there are a bunch of communists aiming to destroy civilization in this part of the world. They have exposed themselves very clearly. The fact - what this regime is doing is that they have declared war on the people of this country. - of all of the people - because ordinary people, be they black or white, be they radical or be they liberal - are people who are by their nature opposed to fascism & tyranny - because of that they have now unleashed this war on all of the people.

The liberal press has been silenced. Why is it that the newspapers have been silenced? Why is it that even the African media which without any shadow of doubt has been totally suppressed by the racist regime, of apartheid, of exploitation, of P.W. Botha, of De Klerk's laws - why is it that even they cannot publish anything they want - that even they cannot so as their reporters cannot ~~write~~ write about what they witness with their own eyes?

There are questions that every South African needs to look at every South African needs to search himself for answers. And in fact it should be clear to all that the government is going to destroy things and plunge us into a dark abyss.

The responsibility is then for all South Africans to stand up and demand what are recognized as rights in all parts of the world - of free association, of freedom of the press etc.

Even as we are not interested in politics to be duty-bound to stand up against the government.

Q: Response of the business community?

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 exert pressure on the government? and we know that they are in a position to exert pressure in the state

Are they going to use whatever muscle they have or are they going to allow things to continue.

It is our view that this kind of tyranny is in the long term interests of nobody. Nobody can benefit from it.

We are looking at everybody. The white community needs to stand up now & say is this what they have been working for? Are these the laws they have been working for - that are doing, muzzling them

Q.11 Response to National Statutory Council?

A: The National Statutory Council, like the new provincial structures which they have set up cannot succeed because they are not supported by anybody. If they did have a measure of support it would not have been necessary for the state to force these things down our throats at gunpoint. Just as what is happening. All the so-called reforms that have been pushed have all been done at gunpoint. If they were real reforms which were going to alleviate the suffering of our people it would not have been necessary to do it at gunpoint. So we don't want to spend much time on things like that

Q.12 Success of re-constituted parliament?

A: The point is that the state has made an absolute mess of the parliament. They have done what we have been warning. We covered a Gordon P. H. Smith they were going into parliament in order to use it to oppose apartheid - murder to use it for the lot of the oppressed people in this country. With the LeGrange laws that the challenge has been decided. We demand they follow the course taken by Stubbins & Brown & design their acts.

Q<sup>13</sup>: Is the government using the State of Emergency to give Gubatha or Gax?

A: Gubatha is riding on the back of the Campus. What is there for Gaxha to boast about when he has a meeting in the presence of the STAF, when the emergency is declared & nobody else can hold meetings & when movement is restricted. There's absolutely nothing to boast about. 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 SOE - and the way Gubatha's been allowed to operate shows it very clearly - is for pro-government groupings to be able to consolidate & grow. And it is clear that this is what is happening with Gubatha.

Q<sup>14</sup>: Effect of SOE on Trade Unions. Reason for crackdown?

A: In the past the state hoped they would be able to coopt the trade union movement. They hoped - what they were hoping to do was to limit the activities of trade unions to the factory itself - wages & working conditions - so that it wouldn't be a threat to the existence of the present structure of society.

However, in recent times, particularly with the formation of COSATU, workers & trade unions have found it impossible to wage their battle on the factory floor without waging their battle against the state. Increasingly the workers have seen the link between their exploitation at the factory - the low wages & poor working conditions - and the oppression in the townships & their lack of political rights. And in fact what's been happening is that there's been growing unity of students, workers, residents, youth, women, clergy - people on increasing numbers.

of whites as well - and Cuban & the organized workers have  
been playing an increasingly big role within this growing  
unity. Workers have begun to play an increasingly big  
role within civic associations, youth structures, Parents  
Education Crisis Committees within the townships. So that  
the aim of the state has been to crush the democratic  
movement and if they are to do that then indeed they also have  
to crush the trade unions, because the trade unions today are  
an integral part of the democratic movement & the liberation  
struggle.