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Report of the National Executive Committee
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Verwysings No...
Annual National Conference

March 31st. - April 1st. 1956

The N.E.C. elected at the last Conference in June 1955 set about the work of implementing the resolutions passed at that Conference against the background and inspiration of the Congress of the People. The N.E.C. recognised that as a sponsoring organisation of the C.O.P. and in terms of a resolution passed at this Congress, the C.O.D. was committed to do all in its power towards the implementation of the Freedom Charter.

To this end the joint executives of the four Congresses met in Durban in July and adopted a plan for popularising the Charter. This joint meeting agreed to set up a National Consultative Committee consisting of two representatives from each of the four sponsoring organisations and recommended that Provincial consultative committees be set up in the various regions to be composed in the same manner. These consultative committees were to ensure the continuation of the working together of the Congresses and the carrying out of the plan adopted.

Your N.E.C. elected two representatives to the National Consultative Committee which met in Johannesburg. Our National Chairman is chairman of the National Consultative Committee and our other delegate is the treasurer. The National Consultative Committee was responsible for the publication of 50,000 copies of the Freedom Charter in the four languages, but plans to bring out pamphlets and propaganda material were hampered by lack of finance. At times the National Consultative Committee met regularly and well but latterly this Committee has not had sufficient contact with the other regions. C.O.D. members in Port Elizabeth, assisted in bringing the Port Elizabeth Consultative Committee into existence in October and good contact is being maintained between C.O.D. and the other congresses as a result. The Transvaal Consultative Committee has worked well over the last six months, C.O.D. representatives pulling their weight. Visits to country areas have been paid over the week-ends and public meetings have been held in some centres where the Freedom Charter has been put forward. This committee brings out a monthly bulletin.

PORT ELIZABETH

Over the past year an attempt was made to strengthen C.O.D. nationally. The National Secretary visited Port Elizabeth at the end of September and spent a week there. The Branch was reorganised, new officials elected and membership improved, though still small. The Branch commenced to meet regularly. The main activity of this branch has been in participating in the African Education Movement. A weakness in this centre, partly due to shortage of personnel and partly to a resistance common to most branches to do area work, has been sales of literature and distribution of leaflets. It is strongly recommended by the National Executive that this region try to find ways and means of contacting the European population.

BENONI

Attempts were made to reorganise the Benoni Branch and although a few house meetings were held and contact kept with some people there, the Branch is not functioning. It was hoped that a representative from Benoni would have been

at Conference but for various reasons this was not possible. Money was collected in Benoni for Head Office funds.

PRETORIA

A few visits were paid to contacts here but although money was collected there is still no functioning Branch in Pretoria.

DURBAN

The arrival of additional C.O.D. personnel to Durban in July increased the activity of this branch. The Region which had previously met spasmodically reorganised their work and met fortnightly. Contact with Head Office was good especially over the last few months, as mail was dealt with promptly and efficiently from both sides. A serious attempt at area work was made when the branch canvassed numbers of people with questionnaires. Unfortunately this original method of contacting Europeans was dropped after a good start. The usual handicap of limited, busy personnel hampered this work, but it is our opinion that in Durban as in the other centres, members fight shy of going out to the European population. Literature sales are slow in Durban. Little is done to organise drives and members depend on meetings and functions for selling literature. Leaflet distribution is tackled when material is received from Johannesburg but as far as we know the branch has not issued its own leaflets on any local topic.

The Consultative Committee is working well in Durban and the Congress of Democrats has good contact with the other congresses. C.O.D. members are active in assisting with political classes together with the A.N.C. and the N.I.C.

Durban C.O.D. members are at the moment assisting with the formation of a women's organisation which intends to affiliate to the Federation of S. A. Women and to participate in the campaign against passes.

CAPE WESTERN REGION

A comprehensive report submitted by this region is before Conference, and we are encouraged by the emphasis in this report of the need to do more work amongst Europeans. There has in the past been a tendency in Cape Town to concentrate its forces on working in Non-European areas, and to neglect activity amongst Europeans. We also find their critical analysis of the weakness in "door to door" work is very healthy and promising.

Elsewhere in this report we have commended Cape Town for their leaflet publications and coupled with this we must link our praise for their good work in organising public meetings and the able way in which new people came forward as speakers, to replace banned leading members.

We would like to express our deep regret at the banings of Sonia Bunting, Bennie Turock and Albie Sachs. Their loss as active members has been felt by the movement but we are happy in the knowledge that their example of hard work has been so ably followed.

JOHANNESBURG REGION

This region consists of four active branches and two inactive ones. Since last conference there has not been much change in membership and recruiting has been slow with the exception of the Bellvue Branch, which has considerably increased its membership.

Bellevue's work amongst the Europeans in the area has excelled any done anywhere in South Africa by our branches. Through extensive leaflet distribution, literature selling poster campaigns, discussions on local issues, as well as general ones, they have kept in constant touch with the people.

There is a need here, though, for more serious study courses in the branch itself to assist especially new young people in their political understanding of their work.

The Johannesburg Regional Committee is at present dealing with a very important potential for recruiting members. Through the campaign for the signing of the Charter at tables in the streets of Johannesburg (a campaign initiated by Hillbrow Branch) contact has been established with people sympathetic to our views. Some of these people have been visited in their homes, but much work still has to be done. Interference from police who raid the tables from time to time, has not stopped the work from continuing, nor has it intimidated people from signing the Freedom Charter.

Our main handicap in contacting the signatories is, as always, the limited number of people who are prepared or able to canvass. A resistance to this work must be broken down. There is a resolution before Conference asking other regions to start table campaigns for the signing of the Charter and we hope it will be seriously considered. We would remind the other regions that Hillbrow branch undertook the organisation of its first table with much trepidation and the results surprised even the most optimistic. It is through these tables, as well as through other forms of area work that the small groups of C.O.D. people working in Durban and Port Elizabeth could widen their ranks.

HILLBROW BY-ELECTION

The Hillbrow by-election held in Johannesburg in September afforded this region a very good opportunity of introducing the Charter to the electorate. Some members of the Johannesburg Region disagreed with the N.E.C.'s decision not to support actively Friedman's campaign but the N.E.C. proposed to issue a statement commending Friedman for his stand in resigning from the United Party on the principle of the Coloured vote and asking people to vote for him in preference to the United Party candidate; but the statement would also point out the weakness of Friedman's opposition to the Nationalists. It would also have dealt with the Freedom Charter, which it was intended to distribute.

A general meeting of the Johannesburg region was called to discuss the N.E.C.'s decision. After a thorough discussion the majority of those present voted in favour of the N.E.C.'s policy on this election. A minority still felt it more important that at this particular period all efforts should go towards helping Friedman win election, and our statement would lose him votes. Despite disagreement by some, the Johannesburg members carried out the N.E.C. directive magnificently (those who wished to can-

vass were free to do so). Hundreds of homes were visited and C.O.D. policy explained and the Freedom Charter introduced for the first time. It is apparent that work done in Hillbrow during that election contributed to the success at the Hillbrow tables later.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

A less successful demonstration of support in Hillbrow was a public meeting which was called by the Hillbrow Branch in the Skyline Hotel. The object of the meeting was to popularise the Freedom Charter and C.O.D. policy. Propaganda for the meeting linked up the Senate Act with the need for a new constitution as outlined in the Freedom Charter. Poor attendances at public meetings on subjects which the general public still feel do not concern them directly, is something to be tackled. It is part of the general weakness of our work of rallying the people and we would like to quote here from a letter in New Age :-

"Why have we failed to rouse the truly democratic forces, the bulk of the population against this measure (The S.A. Amendment Act) Is it because, our eyes fixed on the noble vision of a people's constitution whose foundation has been laid by the Freedom Charter, we consider it not worth while to defend what little democracy we have against utter destruction?"

In contrast to this poor meeting, two very successful meetings were held on the Police Raids. These meetings were organised by the Congresses, the Liberal Party and the S.A. Labour Party. For the first time excellent co-operation was obtained with the latter two political parties. Propaganda for the meetings was good, well-known public speakers led by the Bishop of Johannesburg were on the platforms and generally a basis was established for more joint work with other organisations. Congress members both from the platform and floor, did not fail to link up the Freedom Charter with these raids, and signatures were obtained after the meeting at the Trades Hall.

Another attempt was made by C.O.D. to hold a joint meeting with the Labour and Liberal Parties on the S.A. Amendment Act, but this time unsuccessfully. The N.E.C. therefore proceeded on its own and held a very worth-while meeting at the City Hall Steps (a very useful forum when it can be obtained) The public listened with interest to a speaker who put forward the Freedom Charter as the only true alternative constitution. Many signed the Charter at a table at the Steps, and letters came into the office from interested people.

BANTU EDUCATION.

In terms of the resolution passed at Conference C.O.D. members continued to assist the A.E.M. movement. Two N.E.C. members are particularly active in this movement and doing invaluable work there.

C.O.D. members have assisted to form local committees which give assistance to cultural clubs.

Population Registration.

The Government's action in demanding the production of identity numbers for marriages, births and deaths was campaigned against and was exposed by C.O.D. as probably illegal. A pamphlet "Your Number Please" was produced and sold. Bellevue Branch held a public meeting which was poorly attended.

In most centres C.O.D. assisted S.A.C.P.O. in fighting "reclassification". In Port Elizabeth particularly C.O.D. helped to organise S.A.C.P.O. into opposition against this measure.

Durban Region was concerned with employers who were refusing to employ workers who had not their identity numbers. This matter was referred to the local committee of S.A. Congress of Trade Unions to endeavour to fight it in the Trade Union movement.

Anti-Pass Campaign.

The National Executive Committee sent a fraternal delegate to the African National Congress Conference which met in Bloerfontein in December. The delegate delivered a message which dealt with the Freedom Charter, Bantu Education and the Anti-Pass Campaign. This Conference undertook to fight passes for African women as well as the whole pass system and C.O.D. undertook to stand behind them in their campaign. The campaign was to be planned by the National Consultative Committee who eventually called a joint executive meeting of the five congresses (S.A.C.T.U. since having joined the N.C.C.) The joint meeting undertook to support the campaign against passes by assisting in organising and mobilising the people into opposition to passes.

An important milestone in the campaign was the Women's demonstration at Union Buildings. A campaign magnificently organised by the Federation of S.A. Women, culminated in 2000 women lodging their protest against passes, Bantu Education, ethnic groupings and all apartheid legislation. C.O.D. played an active part in this campaign both as individual members participating and collectively through our organisation. The Secretary of the Federation of S.A. Women is a leading N.E.C. member.

Recently a conference was called by the Federation which will long be remembered for its enthusiastic inspiring determination to fight the introduction of passes for women, and other reactionary legislation.

The main task before C.O.D. members in the anti-pass campaign is to join the resistance to passes by refusing themselves to co-operate with the Government in their introduction of identity cards and by educating Europeans into non-co-operation, to win the sympathy of Europeans to the African women's struggle against passes, and to urge the European employers of African women not to assist the Government by registering these employees.

S.A. Congress of Trade Unions.

Acting on Conference decision members of C.O.D. were encouraged to assist trade unions requiring technical and other help. However Conference resolution that a special pamphlet be produced appealing to white workers was not implemented, although someone was asked to write such a pamphlet.

Propaganda.

Since the last Conference the N.E.C. Propaganda Committee was strengthened and has met fairly regularly except for the last month or so, when it has suffered from shortage of personnel again. The Committee has still not produced Counter Attack regularly throughout the year, although it has appeared much more often than last year. The last few editions have been of a much higher level than previously. The Committee request suggestions and active assistance from branches who could indicate what they require in the way of leaflets, pamphlets etc. and general propaganda.

Leaflets.

Numerous leaflets were produced by Cape Western Region and Johannesburg and distributed by most of the regions. Some of the subjects covered

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were "Tembeni", Police Raids; the Senate Act, the closing of the Soviet Consulate (a joint Congress leaflet), the S.A. Amendment Act, etc. Special praise is due to Cape Western Region for hitting back immediately at the police and bringing out a leaflet on the raids even before the N.E.C. who were slow on the job. Cape Western's leaflet was used by Johannesburg and other centres.

Pamphlets.

Two new Pamphlets were produced since last conference, "We Are Many" and "Your Number Please". Five thousand of each were printed and there are still copies on hand. Bellevue Branch sold £20 worth of these pamphlets. They have showed a responsible enthusiastic attitude towards literature selling, and Hillbrow Branch have regular small drives (not enough people participating). The other regions ordered very small quantities of these pamphlets and we feel that Cape Western Region especially could intensify their efforts at literature selling.

Fighting Talk.

Bellevue and Youth Branches and Cape Western Region sell this paper in fair quantities. The other branches take only enough copies for members.

Liberation.

This journal appears to be read by most C.O.D. members although there is not much sale to the ordinary contacts.

New Age.

C.O.D. members in most of our regions sell the paper. Youth branch in Johannesburg organised a function for New Age.

Study Classes.

"The World We Live In" was tackled by some branches and regions but due to pressure of business, fund-raising activities etc. these classes seem to be neglected by most branches. More time must be found for study. Trade Union notes have recently been made available to members.

Finance.

It has been seen from the Financial Statement that the Johannesburg Region once again carried almost the whole burden of financing Head Office. Two branches in Johannesburg, Greenpark and Northern, whose area work leaves much to be desired, rallied magnificently to help Head Office meet its liabilities. A joint function organised by these two branches raised £135 and a joint jumble sale almost £75. A number of smaller jumble sales are also organised regularly by them. Hillbrow Branch has adopted a consistent responsible attitude towards its financial obligations and have organised some successful functions. Their collection of subscriptions has been regular and dependable. Despite its small numbers Durban Branch has made some attempt at collecting monies and hold regular jumble sales. A little money has come in to Head Office from them.

The National Executive Committee appeals to all Regions to regard their responsibility to Head Office very seriously. Time that should be spent on organisational work is devoted by the office to collecting donations, organising functions etc. in order to keep going. Our propaganda continually suffers through lack of finance with which to bring out pamphlets etc. Collecting of finance is a political task and should be regarded as such by all our branches.

If the year under review is not full of extraordinary achievement, it is brimful of possibilities and promise for the future.

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RECORDS RELATING TO THE 'TREASON TRIAL' (REGINA vs F. ADAMS AND OTHERS ON CHARGE OF HIGH TREASON, ETC.), 1956 1961

TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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