

CONGRESS OF DEMOCRATS.
Annual General Meeting - Sept., 1956.
POLITICAL REPORT.

The events since the Congress of the People show two main features. Firstly, the continuing strength and influence of the vanguard organisations of the Congress movement, of the National Liberation movement - the alliance of the African National Congress, the S.A. Indian Congress, the S.A. Coloured Peoples Organisation, the S.A. Congress of Democrats, and the S.A. Congress of Trade Unions. Secondly, the fact that our 'power-mad' rulers are having to resort to greater and greater repression and oppression to maintain themselves in power. Further that they cannot face adverse criticism without raising the cry of "un South African," "Jingo Press," or Communist agitation." Surely these are signs of weakness and theoretical bankruptcy? On the other hand we must not go to the other extreme and think that the struggle is going to be easy. A great deal of solid political groundwork has yet to be done.

That the Congress of the People was an outstanding success and that the Freedom Charter is an inspiring document, is undeniable, but the Congress movement has wasted a lot of the fire which was engendered by the Congress of the People, and the campaign which preceded it. Insufficient opportunities of taking the Freedom Charter to the people on concrete issues were made use of. Popularising the Freedom Charter must be one of our main tasks for the future.

While the popularity and support for the Congresses and their positive policy stated in the Freedom Charter continues in the face of police intimidation, the last Parliamentary session showed plainly how weak and degenerate is the official opposition. Having sacrificed their principles for expediency they have no answer to the attacks made on them by the Government. The outcome has been the emergence of no less than seven white groups professedly against the Government. Whether this opposition springs from a disagreement on principle or not is a moot point in the majority of cases. There are exceptions of course.

The splitting of the official opposition shows clearly that the struggle must in essence be extra-Parliamentary. We must not however ignore the opportunities offered us by the Parliamentary platform for exposing our present rulers and publicising our aims and policies.

The correctness of the policies of the Congresses in leading a struggle for National Liberation is shown by the forms of the campaigns of the more militant non-Congress organisations. Their outlook is rapidly coming closer to that of the Congresses. It is their policies which have changed, not ours. More than ever before the way to broad alliances on the basis of present agreements is being steadily opened.

The possibility of such alliances is shown by recent events in other parts of the country. Electoral pacts and joint action committees of the Liberal and Labour Parties, the Black Sash and the Congress of Democrats on issues such as "Locations in the sky", Group Areas and Removals, in Johannesburg; Group Areas opposition in Durban, and Banut Education and the African Education Movement in Port Elizabeth, all show that united opposition to the Government is possible on the basis of mutual respect between organisations.

THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT IS THE MAIN ENEMY, not the political parties and elements in opposition to it.

The Congress movement should constantly gain strength from its experiences in its daily struggle against the enemy. In the Western Cape progress has not been made. This general weakness has a limiting effect on the impression the Congress of Democrats

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DRAFT ORGANISATIONAL REPORT.

The attempt to build a stronger Congress of Democrats in Cape Town during the past year must be viewed from two sides. Outside of our own organisation the chief factor holding back growth has been the general weakness of the Congress movement in the Western Cape. It is difficult to imagine a really strong C.O.D. being built where the other Congresses are weak and fail to respond to Government attacks. As part of the Congress alliance we must accept our share of the blame for this general weakness. It should be seen as one of our main tasks for the coming year to work with the other Congresses to improve the level of political activity in Cape Town. Within our own branch we have not used sufficiently the political and other opportunities which have come our way to improve our own organisation and to make it more attractive to Europeans who are now beginning more and more to look for an answer to the continual and destructive attacks of the Nationalist Government in all fields in South Africa.

Nevertheless, we can note with pride that despite the two general shortcomings just mentioned, this branch of C.O.D. has revived itself from the virtual inactivity of the first half of 1955. At that time, Government bannings of our leaders and most active members, together with Congress weaknesses, had combined to put three branches of C.O.D. out of action. By June 1955 all that was left was Claremont branch with six activists. Our main interest since then has been the slow rebuilding of Cape Town Branch and the building of a functioning committee both of which were greatly helped by the successful National Conference held in Johannesburg over Easter. There we realised that it was possible to organise Europeans around the Congress movement and the Freedom Charter. That realisation has provided the spirit which is necessary to maintain our organisation.

In the first six months of the past year C.O.D. failed to take part in a single public campaign. Since then it has played a leading part in both the bus boycott and the Anti-pass campaign. In the six months prior to Conference, we issued 15,000 leaflets on three issues, to the European public; since then, 27,000 on five issues. This does not include those issued in conjunction with our Freedom Charter tables and literature drives, nor the thousands issued on behalf of SACPO during the bus boycott campaign. Financially we raised more during the anti-pass campaign in one fortnight, than in the six months prior to Conference. The unanimous change-over to weekly branch meetings also reflected the desire to go more deeply into our activities and to plan them better. Finally, since Conference, new members have been drawn in to stay. This, our major aim, can only serve to hearten us all to redouble our work to win over more Europeans to Congress policies.

Our errors have been many. It will pay us well to consider them closely. If there is a cardinal error, it has been our attitude of aloofness, not only to other non-Congress organisations and people, but even to some of our own members. Too often we think in terms of cold political problems, forgetting that the members who do our work are first and foremost human beings who do not only come to us for political work, but also for comradeship and warmth. Our meetings tend to be cold, insufficiently organised and for the newcomer, often antagonising in that we make little conscious effort to plan for new members. We fail to realise that they are not necessarily 100% supporters of the Congress movement, that many are apprehensive about joining an "extremist" political group. We must work to break down this initial barrier, bring to them more knowledge of the liberation movement, break down their old ideas with the new and inspiring ideals of the Freedom Charter. For all of us there is the need to appreciate more fully in direct human terms just what the fulfilment of the Charter would mean to all South Africans. Ours might be a dour struggle. We must make it more human and thereby, more realistic. In the same way, our efforts at co-operation with other organisations are ill-conceived and often crude. We must realise that there have been errors on both sides, Congress and non-Congress. The spirit of co-operation will be difficult to build - it must be achieved if we are to go forward against the Nationalists.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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