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N.C.C. STATEMENT - FOR CONSIDERATION OF :

African National Congress, S.A. Coloured Peoples' Organisation, S.A. Indian Congress, Congress of Democrats and S.A. Congress of Trade Unions.

1. THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1958:

The results of the General Election of 1958 have been received with indignation and bitterness by all upholders of South African democracy. The viciously undemocratic and Anti-non-European Nationalist Party has been returned to power for a third time, with more seats and more votes than ever before. They have 103 seats in the new House of Assembly and the United Party, which supports a form of White racial domination somewhat less crude and blatant than that of the Nationalists has 53 seats. The Labour Party and the Liberal Party, which have in the past few years been moving increasingly nearer to the Congress ideal of a multi-racial democracy, were eliminated entirely from Parliament (with the exception of African representatives). In the Senate there remain 77 Nationalists and 8 U.P. Senators.

The new Parliament will be the most reactionary, undemocratic and oppressive in the history of South Africa. It faces the majority of our people with even more drastic threats to their standards of life, their fundamental human rights, their liberty and dignity. It faces our democratic movement with a hard struggle to maintain its legality and existence.

In the fact of these threats and dangers, it is essential for the advanced national liberation, democratic and trade union movements which have joined forces in what has come to be generally known as the "Congress Alliance" to strengthen their ranks, to eliminate all causes of friction and misunderstanding and to renew their determination to advance steadily, in harmony and in deepened understanding, to victory for the great cause which inspires us all: the Freedom of our Country.

It is with a view to achieving these purposes that we are initiating what we are confident will be a fruitful, open-hearted and constructive discussion on the events leading up to and culminating in National Protest Week beginning on April 14th; its facts, its mistakes and achievements and its lessons.

2. NATIONAL PROTEST WEEK:

(a) The £1-a-Day Campaign:

During the bus boycotts of 1957 it was acknowledged by almost everybody except the Government that the underlying cause of this great movement was the intolerably low wages paid to workers, especially to so-called "unskilled" African workers.

The S.A. Congress of Trade Unions, taking cognisance of this situation, called a mass conference of workers on the Witwatersrand which was very widely attended. The Conference decided unanimously - the demand coming from the rank and file delegates - to call upon SACTU to press for wage increases and a minimum daily wage of £1 a day.

At a special enlarged meeting of the N.C.C., SACTU put forward a plan for a campaign to be conducted by the entire movement for these demands, and as an immediate step in that direction - the recruitment

...../of 20,000

of 20,000 new members to trade unions. The plan was unanimously adopted. The N.C.C. set up a special £1-a-day sub-committee to conduct this campaign, and requested all constituent organisations to appoint representatives to it. Unfortunately we must frankly concede that most of the organisations failed to give this campaign sufficient weight and attention. They did not - with the exception of SACTU - appoint their senior executive personnel to the £1-a-day Committee. There was a tendency to regard SACTU as the body conducting the campaign - with the other partners playing a passive role of "giving it their blessing".

This tendency weakened the campaign right up to the National Workers' Conference of March 16th. Nevertheless, the demand for £1 a day made a deep impression. The Memorandum on the subject drawn up by the Management Committee of SACTU was widely circulated and the slogan won mass support - as was convincingly demonstrated on the Witwatersrand on June 26th, 1957, when a highly effective stay-away was carried out by the great majority of the African workers with "£1 a day" as one of the main demands.

A mass conference called by the joint Congresses in the Transvaal was held in September. At this conference, delegates from the floor proposed a further general strike and suggested that it should be timed to co-incide with the General Election. Following this conference it was decided to broaden out the campaign for higher wages and to make it into the general political campaign of the movement to defeat the Nationalist Government. A part of this general campaign was the idea of a National Workers' Conference. (See Luthuli's Statement, 7/11/57).

(b) The National Workers' Conference:

The N.C.C. then decided to sponsor a National Workers' Conference to be held in Johannesburg on February 16th (following a resolution to this effect at the SACTU National Conference, the date was put back to March 16th, and a series of regional conferences proposed for February 16th). N.C.C. appointed a special committee to prepare for the Conference and to act as a secretariat for the £1-a-day Committee.

The National Workers' Conference was highly successful and representative. In a mood of great militancy and unity it adopted a resolution calling for the week beginning Monday April 14th to be observed as a National Protest Week to be marked by demonstrations, protests, pass-burning and stay-aways.

There was a certain amount of turmoil and confusion at the Conference at the time resolutions were being debated and put to the House. Some proposed the date of the demonstrations should be April 1st; others that it should be of "unlimited" duration. Some passes were actually produced and set aflame! As a result it was not entirely clear what had in fact been decided by the Conference. Most delegates, however, were under the impression that a call had been made for a stay-away on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

The N.C.C. attempted to bring greater clarity to the situation in a circular issued immediately after the Conference recommending that the stay-away be observed for the three days wherever possible, that the idea of pass-burning should not be encouraged as it confused the issue and asking local leaders to confer and decide on the appropriate form for the National Protest Week in each area.

It should be mentioned that, immediately prior to the National Workers' Conference a request was received from Natal for a meeting of Executives, in view of their feelings that Natal was not in a state of preparedness for any contemplated industrial action. This

...../ request.

request was agreed to, but somehow or other there was a breakdown in communication and the message was not received. But the N.C.C. was influenced by Natal's views in deciding to recommend local option in deciding what to do.

(c) After the Conference:

Following the National Workers' Conference, the N.C.C. issued posters and leaflets popularising the slogans - "For a £1-a-day Law", "End Pass Laws" and "End Nationalist Laws", and popularising the general idea of National Protest Week. The Constituent Organisations in many areas got down to hard door-to-door work implementing the N.C.C. decisions. But it must be admitted that not enough was done to direct, co-ordinate and plan the campaign for the National Protest Week.

*over optimistic reports*

This weakness was especially damaging in view of the tremendous counter-propaganda conducted by the Government, the Police, the United Party, the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, the Daily Press, both English and Afrikaans, newspapers like "The World" and "Golden City Post" and elements from among the African people themselves, such as certain Chiefs, people like Dr. Nkomo, who had long been expelled from the A.N.C. and others who are still inside the A.N.C. but who belong to the separate "Africanist" faction.

The movement did not do enough to reply to all this propoganda. Nevertheless a great deal of work was done, especially by rank and file African Congressmen and trade unionists. The campaign, whatever its weaknesses, was known to and discussed throughout the length and breadth of the country. The Government mobilised the police and defence forces, cancelled all police leave, prepared to bring large numbers of convict labourers in as scabs.

(d) Special Sub-Committee:

*Discussed with SACTU*

Meeting on the eve of National Protest Week, the N.C.C. had to consider what the situation would be if the Government used the stay-away as an excuse for massive repression and arrests. The situation had to be envisaged in which it would become impossible for leadership to be provided and decisions to be taken in the normal way. The N.C.C. therefore appointed a special sub-committee to deal with this emergency, to gather information, take necessary decisions and convey them to the people.

It was felt that it was not possible for a fully representative group to be appointed for this purpose; and its personnel consisted only of leading members of the A.N.C. On the whole this decision was justified, but in retrospect it will be seen that a serious mistake was made by omitting representatives of SACTU, which had carried so much of the burden of preparation and played so important a part. We greatly regret this error and in extenuation can only say that it was not deliberate but an oversight, due to the great haste in which the committee was appointed.

*Agreed error re haste. (SACTU clarified)*

(e) Monday, March 14th.

The N.C.C. had never anticipated that a nation-wide stay-away would take place on Monday, March 14th, realising that only certain areas were in a state of organisation and preparedness necessary for such wide-scale action.

*but did not expect such a strike.*

A number of areas and industries did in fact respond to the call to observe the stay-away. In the Western Areas of Johannesburg, a very high proportion of people observed the stay-away. In certain industries, especially where SACTU affiliated organisations have been organised, successful strikes were carried out. In Johannesburg and

*NO SACTU blunders. see only affiliated unions. wherever possible. SACTU water concept is limited. must be as related to the main union to the nation*

*treason strike action; filelets; numbers in bars of filelets; SACTU numbers in bars of filelets; was contemplated (SACTU) was contemplated; v. Davies; v. Davies*

*NB* SACTU ~~was~~ ~~only~~ ~~aff~~ ~~unions~~ ~~with~~ ~~it~~ - ~~not~~ ~~was~~ ~~was~~ ~~of~~ ~~workers~~ - ~~failure~~ ~~of~~ ~~1946~~?

parts of Durban the Indian community observed a day of Hartal. On the Durban docks and elsewhere in Durban many workers stayed at home. In Port Elizabeth, in the face of a police reign of terror, very many honoured the call to stay at home. In many smaller towns, especially in the Transvaal and Natal, African workers and even farm labourers took the truly heroic step of staying at home.

The whole Congress movement is deeply moved and inspired by the response of these fine people, who have in many cases lost their jobs and even their homes as a result of their loyalty and discipline to the movement.

Nevertheless, by midday on the Monday it had become clear that - for reasons which we shall attempt to analyse below, the stay-away had fallen well below expectations in many areas where it had been hoped to be at its best. In the vast South-Western Region of Johannesburg and in Alexandra Township the great majority of workers had gone to work. Along the Reef, for the most part, the stay-away had not "come off".

The emergency sub-Committee appointed by the N.C.C. had made detailed arrangements to receive information on the progress of the stay-away protests. Throughout the day reports came through - not only from Congress members and observers but also from independent and impartial sources surveying the various townships and industrial areas, checking the train and bus termini, on the Witwatersrand and also from Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Durban.

These reports made it clear, that, taking Johannesburg as a whole, the movement had failed to gain the support of a big majority of the workers for the stay-away. Industry and Commerce was for the most part functioning normally. The unequal response from different areas meant that in most work places only a part of the workers - mostly from the Western region - were away: a factor which made it easy for employers to carry on production and to victimise those who were absent.

(f) The "Back to Work" Statement:

*Complaints from SACTU, some information of emergency committee became necessary.*

In the light of these hard realities, the emergency sub-committee appointed by the N.C.C. decided late on Monday afternoon to issue a statement on behalf of the A.N.C. and the movement generally, calling off the strike and advising workers to return to work.

After a full discussion, the N.C.C. decided to approve and endorse this action by its sub-committee. (It must however be pointed out that the representative of SACTU expressed his organisation's disagreement.)

The N.C.C. felt that the sub-committee had saved, what could easily have become a very ugly situation.

To continue the stay-away when it was clear it did not enjoy the support of the majority of the workers, would merely have resulted in the isolation and unnecessary sacrifice of the most loyal and disciplined vanguard of the movement. In many areas, in disappointment and frustration at the lack of response, many elements were proposing methods which could have only led to friction and bloodshed among the people themselves, which would have given the police and the Government the chance they were seeking to intervene with merciless mass repression against the people and against the movement.

We are aware that many Congress workers and trade unionists felt angry and "let down" by the "back to work" statement. But in retrospect we are convinced that it was the only course that could have been followed without disastrous results.

...../if a majority.

*Correction of decision. Political Decision discussed with SAC - clarification re change of slogan (emphasis?) - Nats must go forward on its own NMG's impact on sit*

If a majority in the affected areas had stayed at home, while only a minority had gone to work, they would have been a good case for going on, in the hope that the stay-at-home would grow the following day, but most workers had not responded, and to have carried on would have merely isolated the most loyal workers, given employers and the Government a chance to victimise them, led to division and bloodshed, encouraged intimidation and perhaps led to a major setback for our cause.

*in impact on situation. (Catholics etc!) belief*

We therefore congratulate the N.C.C. sub-committee for its courage and wisdom in knowing how and when to call an ordered and disciplined retreat under such difficult conditions.

*NMG not more production*

(g) Why the Failure?

The stay away, as we have said, was not the unmitigated failure it has been painted by opponents and critics of the Congress Movement. All the same, it fell well below expectations and has been a temporary setback. It is necessary for us to discuss the reasons for this setback, not in a spirit of recrimination and bitterness, but in order to draw the correct conclusion for the new struggles and campaigns before us.

*above slogan*

We have mentioned above the powerful campaign of intimidation and propaganda launched by the Government, the police, the employers and the United Party - together with all sorts of agents and confused elements among the non-European people, certain trade unionists, white and non-white etc. In the face of all this intimidation and propaganda, our Movement did not put a sufficiently effective and united resistance and counter-propaganda. We did not make it sufficiently clear and positive that we were not demonstrating in order to "help" the U.P., or the Nationalist Party, but to highlight the independent demands and aspirations of the masses at the very time when a travesty of democratic procedure was being carried out from which they were excluded.

We underestimated the powerful influence of the pro-United Party press in the urban areas and the extent to which the African masses, filled with justifiable hatred of the Nationalist Party Government, had pinned their hopes on a victory of the U.P. and were influenced by the English-language press which kept repeating, quoting so-called "African leaders" that the strike would drive the voters into the arms of the Nats.

Other factors weakened our campaign. There had been the confusion referred to earlier, in which the whole campaign had been regarded to a large extent as "mainly a SACTU concern". There had been hesitation in some areas as to the wisdom of mass action at this time. There had been internal A.N.C. "crises" and disputes in the Cape and especially in the Transvaal which had taken up much time and energy just when everything should have been put into preparation for the National Workers' Conference and the implementation of its decisions.

Above, all, the events of April 14th underlined serious organisational shortcomings in our movement. The A.N.C. has not seriously implemented the famous "M plan" decided upon in 1952. And the idea of winning 20,000 new members for SACTU unions, which formed an integral part of the organisation of the fl-a-day campaign plans, was never seriously implemented and was later almost forgotten. It was not just a plan for SACTU but for the whole movement, and if we had carried out this plan April 14 would have had a very different result. Neither the police nor the employers could have intimidated organised workers, as they did unorganised workers.

(h) Was the Decision correct?

The question will be asked: in the light of these handicaps, ...../many of which

many of which were known before April 14th, and before the National Workers Conference, was the actual Protest Week and Stay-away decision correct or justified?

In our opinion it was fully justified and has in fact been fully vindicated by events. Even though the stay-away did not come off as expected the fact is that it dominated public discussion in the newspapers and in the speeches of the politicians seeking election in a way that had never happened before during a South African General Election.

More than they were attacking one another, the main parties in the election were devoting their attention to the real opposition - our Congress Alliance. As Chief Luthuli has correctly pointed out,

"I do not recall any election in which a political organisation was discussed as much as the African National Congress in this one. A minimum wage of £1 a day was recognised by all.... A great political revival centring on our demands went through the country and the results of this will be felt and seen more and more in the future." (Interview in New Age, April 25th, 1958.)

National Protest week, however disappointing in certain respects, has on the whole led to an advance in the status and understanding of the Congress movement.

(h) What next?

We need have no doubt that the opponents of freedom and the enemies and critics of the Congress Alliance will seize the present time to redouble their attacks. We can expect nothing from the Nationalist Government but further onslaughts on the peoples' rights, more apartheid and robbery, more persecutions of the type exemplified by the Treason Trial. Already hostile papers and persons are exulting over the relative failure and calling off of the stay-away, the relatively disappointing results of the SACPO-supported candidates, especially in the Eastern seat, and proclaiming that "Congress is finished." Their rejoicing is premature, and they are very much mistaken, for our great movement is going to emerge from this period more powerful, united and determined than ever before.

But it is urgent that we regain the initiative and press ahead with our work of organising and leading the people. In particular we recommend that we tackle with new drive, efficiency and enthusiasm the outstanding problems which were tackled - but by no means disposed of - in the campaign of National Protest Week, especially:

- (a) The urgent need for increased wages and £1-a-day minimum wage, coupled with a drive to help build trade unions;
- (b) The fight against pass laws, for women and men;
- (c) The fight against apartheid; especially Group Areas, Bantu Authorities and Ethnic Grouping, Job Reservation. (Attention is sharply drawn here to the growing signs of economic crisis and unemployment, and the special threat this poses to non-White workers in view of job reservation).
- (d) The fight for civil liberties, especially -  
-defence of the Treason accused and all others charged with political offences;  
-lifting of bans on meetings, especially the proclamation of April 12th.

.... / the fight against

-the fight against the Suppression of Communism Act, Criminal Laws Amendment Act and bans and threats of further bans against the A.N.C. or any other members of the Alliance.

(e) The Boycott of Nationalist Products.

(f) The popularisation of the Freedom Charter.

Side by side with mass campaigns on these lines, we strongly urge that each Constituent Body should make a most intensive drive to strengthen and unite its own membership.

(j) June 26th.

*ANC Zinnat Th Raw SAIC -  
SAIC 2000 member left the team -  
COJ*

The N.C.C. recommends that each organisation should devote immediate attention to discussing the form which the commemoration of June 26th should take this year.

In these discussions, from which it is hoped concrete proposals will emerge to be placed before all organisations, consideration should be given, on the one hand to the ban on gatherings which may, it is feared, still be in operation by June 26th, and to the unwisdom of setting over-ambitious tasks at the present phase; on the other hand to the urgent necessity for the movement to seize the initiative and demonstrate its vitality, and to the generally favourable situation which exists, despite the setbacks and disappointments of March.

(1) No Cause for Pessimism.

The General Elections has not solved a single one of the problems that face our country: the poverty and oppression of the masses, the fear and insecurity that broods over the land, the shocking injustice of the "South African way of life" that scandalises all the world.

The fight goes on to rid our country of the Nationalists and all they stand for, and to rebuild our country on sound foundations that will respect and care for all our people.

We enter that fight, in this new phase, under conditions which - whatever its immediate dangers and hardships to the courageous men and women who follow our banner of liberty - afford no grounds for despair and pessimism as to the future.

The election has brought home to innumerable South Africans - Whites as well as non-Whites - that within the framework of our present electoral and political system, which is a grotesque travesty of democratic institutions, it is impossible to get rid of the Nationalists, or to hope for a more progressive and enlightened future for our country.

Already, at last year's Multi-Racial Conference we saw the beginnings of a powerful tendency of people outside the Congress movement to join forces with us in the broad general struggle to win for our country a multi-racial democracy. This tendency can only be strengthened and accelerated by the outcome of the 1958 General Election. We of the Congress Alliance shall do all in our power to welcome and encourage new friends and partners to join us in saving our country from the perils and disasters of Nationalist excesses.

At the same time, our most urgent task remains that of consolidating and expanding our own organisations and building on even firmer foundations that brotherly co-operation among the Congresses which is our greatest achievement and our guarantee of victory. We shall vigorously resist any attempts from without or from within to divide us or to sow seeds of doubt and suspicion between us,

..../we must redouble

We must redouble our efforts to build up and strengthen the Congress and trade union movements, and to broaden and consolidate the peoples' united front against apartheid which began to take shape at the Multi-Racial Conference.

The tides of history are running fast in favour of liberty and democracy for all humanity. We, the people of South Africa, may it is true have to face still more trials and tribulations and persecutions at the hands of those savages who perpetuate barbarous abominations in the name of "White Christian civilisation". We are sustained by the certainty that their days are numbered. Sustained, temporarily in power by force and fraud, their "ideology" is nothing but an appeal to naked greed, tribal exclusiveness and group selfishness. They cannot survive as a ruling caste in the modern world.

Our cause is just and it shall prevail.

Johannesburg.  
May 1st, 1958.

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Mrs Joseph



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**FEDERATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN 1954-1963**

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