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REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ACTION COUNCIL OF
THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE TO THE JOINT
EXECUTIVES OF THE A.N.C., S.A.I.C., S.A.C.P.O.,
and the S.A. C.O.D.

The Congress of the People held at Kliptown on the 25th-26th June 1955 was the most representative and largest gathering ever to assemble in South Africa. Its impact on the political scene was twofold. It, for the first time laid down the basis for uniting all democratic elements around a common programme and gave rise to a new spirit and enthusiasm amongst large sections of our people. Coming at a time when the struggle against the nationalist government had suffered a number of set-backs, the C.O.P. has had the effect of consolidating the organisational forces of the liberatory movement and of giving it the perspective of further advance in the struggle. There can be no doubt that every delegate who attended C.O.P. left it with renewed vigour and a heightened confidence in the peoples' ability to defend themselves and to hit back despite the tremendous obstacles placed in their way by the authorities.

The original major task which your National Action Council was set by your executives was fulfilled. It must, however, be placed on record that the scope of the preparatory work which was envisaged by the original plan had, of necessity, to be narrowed. During the course of the campaign various weaknesses manifested themselves to which brief reference must be made. A sober assessment of these weaknesses will not detract from the historic impact which the campaign and the C.O.P. has had but will serve to guide us in our work in the future and to make more effective any follow-up campaign which will be embarked upon.

The Preparatory Campaign.

The original plan divided the campaign into three major stages.

1st. Stage.

The idea of C.O.P. was to be popularised and there was to be a mass distribution of the Call throughout the country. Provincial and Regional committees were to be set up in all the major centres to take charge of the campaign on the local level.

2nd. Stage.

Local committees of the Congress of the People were to be set up in every corner of our land and demands for incorporation into the Charter were to be formulated.

3rd. Stage.

During this phase delegates were to be elected to C.O.P. and the assembly itself was to be held.

During all three phases the organisational drive was to come from a band of 50,000 volunteers the call for which was made by Chief Luthuli at the outset.

Although large numbers of volunteers were recruited in the different Provinces we failed to set up effective organisational machinery to make proper use of them. Faced with the need to base our campaign almost entirely on the voluntary efforts of these volunteers our failure in this field contributed, in a large measure, to many of our shortcomings.

In its initial stages the campaign evoked an

excellent response both from the mass of the people and from the organisational units of the four sponsoring organisations. Over 100,000 copies of the Call in all the major languages were distributed. Successful conferences to set up Provincial and Regional committees were held in most of the major centres. The appeal which the idea of C.O.P. had, can be measured by the fact that in the Transvaal 1300 delegates came to the provincial conference despite the fact that it was called on a fortnight's notice.

After this initial period there was a lapse of time during which, with few exceptions, very little work was being done to carry the campaign further. Apart from the failure of the volunteers, another factor which contributed to this lapse was that during this period the core of the leadership of the campaign was immobilised as a result of Government bars. It is a tribute to those who remained that despite these blows they managed to carry through the major task so successfully.

Throughout the campaign your N.A.C. was handicapped by a shortage of funds. This had the effect of making it impossible to publish the required amount of propaganda material. The shortage was occasioned by the fact that the N.A.C. was an ad hoc body which could not directly mobilise a rank and file for the purpose of raising funds. In future campaigns of a similar nature it would be advisable to make the sponsoring organisations responsible for the financing of the campaign at the national level. On the other hand, at the local level, the efforts of most of the outlying provinces shows strongly that it is both politically important and possible to raise the required funds from the ordinary people. The huge amounts which were raised in order to send delegates many hundreds of miles is proof of the fact that the people are prepared to make sacrifices in order to finance the struggle. This is a matter which requires emphasis because in the long run the liberatory struggle must be financed by the ordinary people whose support is more reliable and more constant.

During the course of the campaign the people of South Africa were confronted with a number of specific issues such as Western Areas removal and Bantu Education, which required immediate action on the part of the Democratic movement. As a result, a lengthy period elapsed during which the main forces of the sponsoring organisations were directed towards campaigning on these specific issues rather than on the C.O.P. There can be little doubt that if the maximum response is to be evoked from a campaign such as C.O.P. the people must be shown that there is a direct connection between the more long term aims of the Freedom Charter and their local and national struggles against immediate threats. Your N.A.C. and the four sponsoring organisations at no stage managed successfully to link C.O.P. with the day-to-day struggles of the people. Had we worked properly in this regard the campaign, e.g. against the removal scheme, instead of bringing the C.O.P. to a virtual standstill in the Transvaal, would have raised it to greater heights.

When the original plan was adopted it was envisaged that committees on the local level would be established throughout the land and that whatever might come of C.O.P. itself, the establishment of these committees would inevitably result in the organisational strengthening of the sponsoring organisations. Only a negligible number of local committees were set up. Our failure to do this resulted in C.O.P. not being as representative as it might otherwise have been. It must however be recorded that in a number of areas the existing units of the sponsoring organisations were strengthened and activated as a result of the C.O.P. campaign.

The Congress of the People.

An analysis of the figures of the credentials committee will provide us with an important guide to our weaknesses not only in relation to the C.O.P. campaign but also in relation to our work in general.

There were 2,804 delegates representing all the most important centres. There were approximately 300 delegates from Natal, 250 from the Eastern and Western Cape and 50 from the O.F.S. The balance came from the Transvaal, mainly from Johannesburg. Your N.A.C. without wishing in any way to detract from the excellent work done in the other centres, wishes to make special mention of the Natal Midlands region which right from the early phases of the campaign until the C.O.P. itself admitted itself admirably. We make this special mention because prior to the C.O.P. campaign there were no substantial units of the liberatory movement in existence in this region and the C.O.P. campaign stimulated the setting up and the operation of an efficient organisational machine which will no doubt strengthen the future work of the liberatory movement. The excellent work of the Cape and the rest of Natal in sending so many delegates over such long distances also requires the highest praise.

Relatively speaking, the campaign in the Transvaal did not reach the same heights as in the other centres. It is true that the tremendous task of making all the technical arrangements for the assembly drained a great deal of the Transvaal resources and was a job which in the circumstances, was well done. At the same time all will agree that because of the close proximity of the venue the Transvaal should have had a far larger delegation. The fact that it only managed to send approximately 2000 delegates is a matter which should receive the attention of the sponsoring organisations in the Transvaal.

It must also be noted that the overwhelming majority of the delegates came from the main urban centres i.e. from areas where the Congress branches have been operating for many years. While it is natural to expect strong delegations from those areas in which the liberatory movement is better organised it is a matter of some concern that the movement in an organised form has not taken strong enough roots in the smaller towns and in the vast and thickly populated countryside. The Northern Cape, the Transkei and Ciskei, the Transvaal and O.F.S. countryside were hardly represented. The figure of 9 representatives from the reserves throughout South Africa suggests very strongly that the campaign did not effectively reach the countryside. Your N.A.C. is of the opinion that this weakness arose not because the concept of C.O.P. did not appeal to the people in the countryside but because very little, if any, work was done to carry the message of C.O.P. outside the main centres. Bearing in mind that the liberatory movement in South Africa cannot hope to make an impression on the political scene without the successful mobilisation of the millions of people in the countryside, this is a weakness which must be seriously tackled.

The overwhelming majority of the delegates came from the residential areas such as locations etc. Only a minute proportion came from factories or mines. This fact illustrates the low level of trade union organisation amongst the workers. It also indicates that the Congress movement as an organised weapon has not yet made its impression at the point of production. In such circumstances, industrial action as part of liberatory struggle becomes extremely difficult if not impossible.

WHAT NOW ?

As indicated at the outset, and despite some of the above weaknesses, there can be no doubt that the C.O.P. was an

outstanding success. Not only did it create a new spirit but it produced the Freedom Charter, a document which has laid the basis for important advances in the future. However difficult it might have been to relate the day to day struggles of the people with C.O.P. campaign, the Freedom Charter stands in a different position. The essence of the Charter is not only the long term but also the more immediate day to day demands of every section of our community. Every person in South Africa whether he be a peasant, or a worker, a teacher or a miner, a farm labourer or a domestic servant, will find reflected in the Charter his most cherished desires. Thus the campaign to popularise the Freedom Charter will find fertile ground.

At the Congress of the People the following Resolution was adopted :

"We who have come from every corner of our land, chosen by our people to meet together in this great assembly, believe that the Freedom Charter we have adopted contains in it the true and most just desires of the overwhelming majority of the South African People.

We proclaim that in this land, where the mass of the people own nothing and know only poverty and misery, this Charter will become the most treasured possession of all who are oppressed and of all who love liberty.

Wherever there are people living or working together, they must be told of this great Charter, so that they may see and understand the sweeping changes that will come from their everyday struggles against indignity, inequality and injustice.

We declare that all ^{the} sons and daughters of South Africa will work, from this day on, to win the changes which are set out in the Freedom Charter. Those who are in the forefront of this struggle will forever hold an honoured place in our history. Those who work against it will be isolated and scorned.

We pledge that when we return from here to our homes, we will at once make known to all our neighbours and workmates what we have done here, and we will win support for the Freedom Charter.

We pay tribute to the A.N.C., S.A.I.C., S.A.C.O.D. and S.A.I.C.P.O. for the service they have rendered to South Africa in starting and organising the campaign for the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter. We mandate these bodies to continue to work together and campaign for the achievement of the demands of the Charter and to get the Freedom Charter endorsed and accepted by all democratic organisations and people. "

It becomes the urgent task of the liberatory movement, without delay, to set in motion a campaign for the popularization of the Freedom Charter. This must be done while the C.O.P. is still fresh in the minds of the people. A long delay will have the effect of lessening a great deal of the tremendous enthusiasm which exists today. That the people are eager to take the next step is well illustrated by the volume of correspondence which your N.A.C. has had since the C.O.P., asking what further steps should be taken.

The most urgent task (and this is a task about which your N.A.C. has already advised delegates) is to hold report back meetings throughout the land in order to convey to the people who elected delegates the result of the deliberations at the C.O.P. In view of the fact that the police confiscated all the documents at the Congress your N.A.C. has circularized a

copy of the Charter and the resolution to all delegates with a request that until a further decision is made, a report back campaign should be undertaken.

Your N.A.C. is of the opinion that any campaign which is undertaken ought to reach not only the people in the main urban centres but also the mass of the people in the countryside who were not effectively drawn into the C.O.P.

As a first step towards making known and obtaining acceptance of the Freedom Charter we suggest that a target ought to be set, to be achieved by a fixed period, of individual endorsement of the Freedom Charter. If organised effectively such a signature campaign will serve many purposes

- a) It will be a campaign of a national character and place before the whole democratic movement the task of achieving some common immediate objective.
- b) It will stimulate the organisational units of the sponsoring organisations to go out amongst the people and establish contact with them on an unprecedented scale. This is particularly important in regard to the vast areas which have, in the past, not been effectively drawn into the liberatory struggle.
- c) It is not so much the signature of the individual which is so important. If the required number of signatures are obtained it will mean that the political level and consciousness of hundreds of thousands of people will have been raised. This follows from the fact that the obtaining of signatures is not just a routine or technical matter but presupposes a thorough explanation of the Freedom Charter and all its implications.

We suggest that the target ought to be one million signatures by June 26th 1956. The allocation of quotas to the various provinces ought to be on the following basis :-

Transvaal	450,000	Cape	350,000
Natal	150,000	O.F.S.	50,000

In such a campaign a spirit of healthy competitive mood between the various provinces ought to be stimulated.

In addition to the above and as part of such a campaign attempts should be made to obtain endorsement for the Freedom Charter by every organisation throughout the land.

It is essential to publish, as soon as possible a booklet on C.O.P. Such a booklet should contain an inspired report of C.O.P. together with pictures and the Freedom Charter. If well done a booklet of its nature should have a ready market not only in South Africa but also overseas.

We suggest further that the Freedom Charter ought to be made the basis of an educational campaign both within the sponsoring organisations and amongst the people. To this end it might be considered advisable to work for the publication of a separate pamphlet on each section of the Charter. Each pamphlet apart from quoting the relevant section of the Charter should contain an analysis of that section supported with detailed documentation of the topic dealt with. For example the pamphlet on the section of the Charter dealing with land would contain in it the history of the manner in which Africans have been robbed of the land, a summary of land legislation affecting Non-Europeans and an analysis of some of the demands which gave rise to the incorporation of such a section in the Charter. If these pamphlets are published it will serve not only to popularize the Freedom Charter but will cater for the keenly

felt drive in the democratic movement for educational material.

MACHINERY.

Your N.A.C. continued to meet after the C.O.P. in order to finalize certain outstanding matters such as finance and the drafting of this report. Having been brought into existence in order to convene the C.O.P. and with no further powers, it will now cease to function.

Committee

In order to take charge of the follow up campaign it is necessary that there should be a standing committee of the joint executives. Such a joint committee would not only serve to co-ordinate the Freedom Charter campaign but will in addition be an effective machine for the co-ordination of any other joint activities which may be decided upon from time to time. It, of course, follows that in matters of basic policy such a joint committee would be subject to the control and guidance of the respective organisations. As in the C.O.P. campaign such a joint committee would require an executive situated in one centre which would function between full joint executives meetings. The same pattern of joint committees ought to be repeated on the Provincial or regional level. As regards the latter, it is suggested that the existing provincial or Regional C.O.P. committees ought to be transformed into joint committees of the four congresses. It should be emphasised that the setting up of such machinery will in no way infringe upon or affect the autonomy and complete independence of the respective organisations. The joint committees should be regarded as bodies which discuss common problems and which from time to time co-ordinate these campaigns which have been decided upon by the four Congresses together.

Long Love The Freedom Charter !

Mayibuya, Afrika !

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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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