

At this moment --- the opening of the Congress of the People --- which has been awaited by millions of people throughout our unhappy land, I sit 400 miles away. I am only one of your leaders whose mouth has been sealed and movement has been curtailed, but I speak for all of us when I say that though absent from this Assembly, we are with you today.

It was in this very Kliptown, that 15 months ago I was privileged and honoured to be the first person publicly to read the stirring call for the Congress of the People, which since that day, has fired the imagination of every oppressed person and of every democrat. We called on the workers in the towns, on the farmers on the land on the miners, housewives, teachers and students to assemble together to speak of their dark lives and to proclaim in one mighty voice for freedom. We called on you all, at this Assembly, to write a Charter which will become the clarion call of every person who truly loves this land and the people who live in it.

From the very moment that the idea of the Congress of the People became known to the people, the state power started a campaign to undermine it. Wild statements and accusations were made by Nationalist Party spokesmen and by the high officers of the law. Almost every people's leader who was prominent in the campaign was banned and his activities restricted. Our organisers were interfered with wherever they went. Meetings were raided and people arrested. It is not enough that the laws of the land give the police almost unlimited power to repress ideas and movements which are unpopular with the rulers, they went further and resorted to actions which the courts held were against the laws of the land.

These are the actions of people who are frightened, of a government which knows that the policeman's boot, his gun and his baton, will not stop the movement of the people for liberty. Leaders may

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be banned and obstacles placed in our way but they will have forgotten the lessons of history if they believe that in this way they can ever stop the achievement of the just aims of the people.

Only yesterday the Parliament of S. A. concluded its 1955 session - one of the grimmest and most crippling in our history, for each chapter of Nationalist misrule brings us nearer to the darkness of full fascism.

For the last 45 years since Union our history has been one of rule of the great majority ^{by a tiny entrenched minority;} / of the continual, never-ending whittling away our limited rights; of rule by decree and proclamation, and not by consultation and democratic participation of the majority.

Our Parliament claims to be the voice of South Africa, the expression of the people's will.

We tell the world that Parliament speaks not for the people, for ourselves and for all true democrats; not for the people who work the land and in the mines and in the factories, who built South Africa from its earliest days -- but for a group of terrified rulers, for the Nationalist Party caucus.

Yesterday, the closing of Parliament, was the end of one epoch, and today is the beginning of a new one.

Here at this Assembly, through our Charter and from the delegates of the people, will be heard the true voice of South Africa.

They say the people are too ignorant, to rule themselves. They say we are not ripe for freedom.

If we are fit to create the wealth of the land we are fit to say how it should be used. If we must pay taxes we must also vote. If we can build the great cities we should not have to live in shacks.

The demands of the ordinary people to have poured in for the Freedom Charter - on the backs of envelopes, on sheets torn from school exercise books, - will have

more/....

more force in history than the neatly printed laws gazetted by our government.

These simple words, written in the people's languages, and from their hearts and deepest, most pressing needs, are in total the shape of the South Africa of the future.

Why is the Congress of the People an assembly of a different kind, and the Freedom Charter which it will adopt the document which will make new history in South Africa?

It is because for the first time in the history of our ~~race~~^{race and} land people of every colour, Africans, Europeans, Indians, Coloureds and Malays, have through their democratic organisations acted together to convene this giant assembly.

It is because for the first time in this land where the majority of the people have no say in their future ~~that~~ the voice of the true representatives of the people will be heard.

It is because for the first time men and women elected by the people have assembled together on a basis of full equality.

It is because, above all, the Charter of Freedom which will emerge will not be a document drawn up by a few leaders, but one which was born in the minds of the ordinary people of all races who are treated with contempt today but who will be the rulers tomorrow.

In the long history of heroic struggle by the people of South Africa there have been many political calls and many assemblies. But there comes ^a time in the history of struggle of every people when new heights are scaled — when the struggle leaps forward with a new urgency among the people.

We/.....

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We are now living through such a period. The Congress in which you are taking part is not just another meeting. The document which you will draw up is not just another resolution.

~~However great in itself, the Congress of the People and~~ However successful the campaign for the Congress of the People, the adoption of the Freedom Charter cannot of itself mark the goal of our struggle. It can however be a turning point in the history of South Africa and I am confident that when that history is re-written those of you who are here to-day will earn a special place as the authors of a new and democratic South Africa.

LONG LIVE OUR NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS!

FORWARD TO FREEDOM!

MAYIBUYI-AFRIKA!

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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