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Rev "AH S" —

Disc ; FC file: tool story: FC as an organising tool

For the last few years the major task for democratic South Africans has been the building of popular mass based organisations in all sectors. How can the Freedom Charter help us in this task?

Steve Tshete (say who he is) has said:

"The Freedom Charter belongs to the people of South Africa. Everyone of those ten points in the Charter can be used to rally our people anywhere in South Africa."

But to use the Freedom Charter to rally our people and to build our organisations is not something that happens automatically.

We cannot just hand out copies of the Charter and expect mobilisation and organisation to occur.

What kind of document is the Freedom Charter?

The Freedom Charter (FC) is the recorded voice of the struggling people of South Africa. To use it in the task of organising we need to understand exactly what kind of document it is. You can't use a spoon to cut meat. We also need to know what sort of document it is not.

The FC is not in itself a Programme of Action. A programme of action is a plan of action. It sets down tasks for particular groups of people. A programme of action also often makes deadlines, the times by which these tasks must be completed. It sets out methods of work. Programmes of action are essential organising tools. We need to spell out the different steps and stages involved in our various tasks. We also need programmes of action to assess how our work is going. Are we falling behind? Are we on time? The preparations for and the organising of the Congress of the People, for instance, involved many Programmes of Action. But the document that emerged from the 1955-Congress of the People - the Freedom Charter, is not a programme of action.

That is not a weakness of the Freedom Charter. You don't blame a spoon for not being a knife. All this may seem obvious, but too often activists allow their enthusiasm for the FC to blind them about the need for other kinds of programmes too. Although the FC is not a programme of action, the general demands that it lays down should certainly inspire all programmes of action in our struggle.

The FC is also not in itself a party or organisational programme. The FC was not drawn up by any specific organisation. It was not even drawn up by the Congress Alliance, although this alliance made the Congress of the People and the FC possible. The FC was made by the tens of thousands of South Africans, from all parts of

our country. It emerged from the people's struggles and aspirations.

A party or organisational political programme is a more developed statement of position. It will spell out not just the aims of the organisation. It will also indicate the broad strategy and tactics of the organisation in seeking to win these aims. Although the FC is not this sort of document, it should guide all such programmes of progressive organisations.

The FC is the recorded voice of the masses of our people, It is one of the most valuable tools we have in our struggle. We have tried to argue, however, that it also important to understand what the FC is not. Some supporters of the FC fail to see that we also need programmes of action and clear organisational programmes. The FC does not replace these different kinds of programmes.

But let us now look at the positive role the FC can and is playing in organisational work.

The FC - is a rallying call for different sectors of struggle

In the first place the FC provides read-made guidelines for sectors of our struggle. When Azaso meets for its Annual Congress in Soweto, let us say, it meets under a big banner: "Let the Doors of Learning and Culture Be Open"

That same slogan dominates the Nusas July Festival in Durban and the Annual General Meeting of Cosas. Three different organisations working in the general sector of education are able to turn to that particular clause of the FC. In addressing the issues around which they must build organisations, they are able to look closer at the specific demands under the general heading of Learning and Culture etc.

We can see from this that the FC is able to provide general guidelines to specific organisations. We can also see that it provides the basis for a general working UNITY between different organisations - Cosas, Nusas and Azaso - all working in the general sector of education.

The same unifying organisational function can be seen in the recent experience in the Western Cape. In this region, the Cape Housing Action Committee (Cahac) has adopted the FC, and it is using the Charter demand: "Housing, Security and Comfort" as its main slogan. Cahac organises in the Coloured group areas. At the same time the Western Cape Civic Association (WCCA), which organises in the African townships, is guided by the FC. The WCCA and the Anti-forced Removal Committee of the UDF (W.Cape) are at present struggling against the government's plan to force all Africans in the W. Cape to move to Khayelitsha. This committee has adopted as its slogan the same charter demand for "Housing, Security and Comfort".

Here we can see how the FC lays the basis for organisational co-operation between different areas. It is inspiring the struggle of Cahac against poor housing conditions in the Coloured areas, and the struggle of the WCCA and the UDF Anti-forced Removals Committee against the Khayelitsha removals.

#### Unity across sectors

We have so far considered ways in which the FC can promote organisational co-operation between different organisations working in the same general sector (education and housing are the two examples used).

But the FC also has the potential to promote unity across sectors. Here is a letter from a student which he wrote last year to the people administering his bursary:

see Feetham lecture

The struggle for better education and the struggle for housing, and security are not unconnected. It would be a mistake for comrades in Cosas, for instance, to only concern themselves with the demand for the "Doors of learning and culture to be opened". Everyone of those ten clauses in the FC are linked together. When we seek to develop and build our organisation it is correct to conceptualise on the most specific demand related to the particular sector of work. But we should never lose sight of the links with other sectors of the struggle.

By linking together a SERIES of demands the FC provides an enormously useful guideline for organisational unity across sectors.

#### The FC and our style of work

The first and most important demand of the FC is that "The People Shall Govern." It is this demand that comes first, and is the demand that summarises all the others.

But if this is our number one demand, it must surely tell us about HOW in the present we should be organising. If one day the people are to govern, ordinary working class people must be developing skills, knowledge, confidence. Leadership in our organisations must be drawn from the working masses. To ensure this our style of work must be democratic. All members of our organisation must know that the organisations are THEIRS, that they are jointly responsible for the organisations.

Democracy is not just the right to vote for parliament once every four years. Full democracy means that the majority of the people have an ongoing say in all aspects of their lives - in the communities where they live, in the places where they work, in the factories, mines or on the land, in the schools where they learn. In all these places working class people, the great majority in our country, need to have a dominant, ongoing and

meaningful say.

#### Charter discipline

In considering the question of democracy it is important to tackle a prevailing error. Sometimes activists speak of themselves as being under "Charter Discipline". If this means their actions are guided in general by the FC, then that is a good thing. But they should use different words, because this is not a case of being under "discipline". The FC is, of course, not an organisation! It is only by being directly answerable to the members and rules and reputations of the people's organisations that one can speak of being under "discipline". In some cases people use the term "being under Charter discipline" to avoid the discipline of our mass democratic organisations - whether they are in the youth, civic, women or labour sectors. Such an attitude is wrong. This error must be exposed.

The FC is a guiding light in our struggle. But it does not replace organisational discipline. To use the name of the Charter to avoid democratic discipline is, of course, to go against everything the FC stands for.

#### The People Shall Govern

Finally, it must be said that the demand that the "People Shall Govern" cannot be fully realised just by building up strong democratic organisations within the existing apartheid state. The FC calls for ... (etc quote the demand and explain in simpler words relating to the various instruments of State power - army police, courts, admin).

ends

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