

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN FOR THE COLLECTION
OF SIGNATURES FOR THE FREEDOM CHARTER.

The problem which now campaign for the Freedom Charter is the same as the problem which faced us in the Congress of the People campaign - "How can we integrate the campaign for the Freedom Charter with all our other campaigns and agitations on daily issues?" This problem arises in different ways. But constantly, we of the Congress movement, find that the Freedom Charter is relegated to one side, because we are heavily involved in a campaign or some burning local issue which cannot wait - in a bus boycott, or a factory strike or a school boycott. How can this position be avoided?

Clearly, we cannot for one moment stand aside from the burning daily issues of our people. We cannot miss a single opportunity for entering into and leading the people's struggles of the day because we have planned a Freedom Charter campaign. To do so would be to lose the leadership and support of the people, and to cut ourselves off from the people.

What is the Freedom Charter? As we understand it, the Freedom Charter is the statement of the agreed and accepted aims of the liberation movement. It is the accepted statement of what the liberation movement stands for and fights for. And because the Congress movement is the spearhead of the movement for liberation and was the father of the Freedom Charter, the Charter is also the statement of the aims and the objectives of the four Congresses. Each of the Congresses has in its constitution, a detailed explanation of the meaning of the aims and objects of our constitution. It could well be adopted by us and become part of the aims and objects of our organisation. But to write it into our constitution would be a formality. In actual fact, we have accepted the Charter as part and parcel of our aims and objects already.

How can we win public support for the Charter? Let us put the same question another way. "How do we win support for the aims and objects of our organisation?" For this is the same question. We never at any time sit down and debate such a problem. For we have the answer always in our mind. We know that to realise our aims and objects, we need the support of the majority of the people. We have formed our organisation to win the majority of the people to support our aims and objects. We meet at branch meetings, at committee meetings and at conferences only to decide how to win that support. And yet we never start those meetings off with the question, "How can we win support for our aims and objects?" We ask ourselves instead: "What is happening in our country? What are the matters that are disturbing our people? What are the problems that they want to solve?" And then we go on to ask, "How can we enter into the things that are happening? How can we help to solve the troubles that are disturbing our people?" We know that we can only win mass support for our aims and objects if we are active; agitating, leading, guiding, and advising the people on every issue that troubles them. We know that our aims and objects can give us a solution to those troubles. We know that the people are drawn closer to us by our active entry into the things that are happening. And we know, also, that the people come to understand and accept our aims and objects only by the lessons that are taught by our active entry into their problems and troubles. If one asks at a Congress meeting, "How can we win support for our aims and objects?", the answer will be "Go out and campaign, and agitate on the things that are troubling the people now!" The answer would not be: go out and sell aims and objects like a hawker sells backache powder.

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Why then should we approach the Freedom Charter differently? We should not. If the Freedom Charter is a detailed statement of our aims and objects, we can only win support for it by going out and campaigning amongst the people on the issues that are troubling them. To put it another way. We will not win support for the Freedom Charter by peddling it like backache powders. We will only win support for the Charter by entering into the daily agitation and education and campaigning which are the life-blood of the Congresses. Support for it is won in the course of Congress work on the issues of the day. Put this way, the matter is clear.

Why then is there a need to state it? Because this approach to the Charter has not yet soaked through to all our activity. On the national level, the N.C.C. meets to discuss "How to win support for the Freedom Charter" After that, if there is still time, it will discuss other matters of vital importance to the people - the Bantu Education, the Evaton Bus Boycott and the Population Registration Act. Branches and committees do the same. This week, they decide, we have our hands too full with the school boycott to worry about our aims and objects. We say, in fact, : We must do more about the school boycott! We should have this this same approach always and everywhere to the Freedom Charter.

Why then do we collect signatures for the Freedom Charter? We collect signatures for many reasons. We collect them, because in the act of collecting, we are able to explain our aims and objects more fully than the people can learn for themselves from our actions in a single struggle. We collect them to test our support amongst the people, so that we shall know where we are strong and where we are weak. We collect so that people will remember that this is not only our statement of aims and objectives, but theirs as well, whether they are members of Congress or not. We collect them also as a means to help us find the most advanced, and conscious of the people, and to draw them into our ranks. And for these reasons, it is not enough to just say : 'Everything we do amongst the people helps to show them our aims and objects, and to win their support. It is necessary to go further and say 'once we have shown them our aims and objects, we must get them to understand them fully, and to accept them as their own aims! WE MUST GET THEM TO SIGN!

Can we get a million signatures? Yes we can. But only if we go about it the right way. In all our meetings, we must discuss the problems that are worrying people, and how to enter into them. We must plan for Congress to agitate amongst the people and lead them. We must think about how to educate people, in the course of that agitation, and lead them to support the Freedom Charter. We must plan how to collect signatures, in the course of that struggle and campaign. At all costs, we must avoid treating the collecting of signatures as something that can be planned separately, by itself, as a different item on the agenda from the items dealing with the issues of the day, education, bus fares, passes etc.

Let us take an example. There is a threat to introduce passes for women. The branch meets to discuss what it will do about it. It decides to hold a series of protest meetings, and to lead up to a mass deputation to the local Commission to tell him that the women will not carry passes. In the branch meeting, where speeches for the public meeting are being considered, some speaker should be told to speak about the Freedom Charter; to explaining especially what the Freedom Charter has to say about the passes - "All shall enjoy equal human rights" - to explain that the Freedom Charter is the cement of a single faith in Freedom which will bind all other freedom-loving people with the women in their struggle against passes; to show that the Freedom Charter points the only way to the end of all passes for all time, and

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that is through the replacement of the government by a government "based on the will of all people, without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief". Some of the members who will not be speakers at the meeting should be delegated to set up tables at the meeting, here everyone present can sign. The chairman should be remanded to appeal for people to sign. Perhaps, the branch meeting will decide to duplicate its own signature forms, which quote the sections of the Freedom Charter dealing specifically with pass laws, - small forms with place for say their names, to be given to everyone at the meeting responsible for bringing in the form with nine of his neighbours signatures on it. In this way we find new active workers for our campaign. Perhaps someone will be told to draft a memorandum to be given to the Commissioner. In it he should say that the deputation is not prepared to accept the pass laws, but will fight for the demands of the Freedom Charter. At the public meetins, slogans of the 10 points of the Freedom Charter can be shouted, led from the platform, so that the people begin to learn and look further ahead. Through this Freedom Charter work we will not be interrupting or interfering with the campaign against passes, but helping it, and giving it life, not aiming just at resisting and beating off this particular threat, but setting their sights higher to the day when they will fight for and win a government under which pass laws will become unconstitutional.

Finally, we must consider the functions of the N.C.C., and how it can bring about this close co-ordination between the struggle of the people and the campaign for the propagation of the Charter on one hand and the propagation of the Charter and the building of our organisations on the other hand.

It should be empowered to bring about greater and closer co-ordination in the work of the Congress movement.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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