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Since Union in 1910 South Africa's Parliaments and legislators have spoken in the name of the small White minority only. The 1955 parliamentary session was no different, but the day after it ended, there assembled in Kliptown, at the outskirts of Johannesburg, the most truly representative gathering of South Africans - the Congress of the People.

The Congress of the People was over a year in the making. Its origins went back to the 1953 Queenstown conference of the African National Congress; to the first meetings of the National Action Council of the four Congresses - The African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the S.A. Coloured People's Organisation and the S.A. Congress of Democrats - from which the historic call for the convening of the Congress of the People was issued. Never before had the ordinary people of South Africa been enabled to take part in deciding their own future. Elections had always in the past been restricted to those on the colour-bar roll. Now for the first time the voice of every citizen in the land would proclaim his needs, his demands.

"LET US SPEAK TOGETHER FOR FREEDOM" said the Call for the Congress of the People, and its stirring words echoed throughout the land.

"We call the farmers of the Reserves and Trust Lands.
Let us speak of the wide land, and the narrow strips on which we toil.
Let us speak of brothers without land, and of children without schooling.
Let us speak of taxes and of cattle and of famine.

" Let us speak of freedom.

"We call the teachers, students and the preachers ...

"We call the housewives and the mothers ...

"We call the workers of farms and forests, the miners of coal, gold and diamonds.

" LET US SPEAK TOGETHER. All of us together. African and European, Indian and Coloured. Voter and voteless. Privileged and rightless. The happy and the homeless. All the people of South Africa... LET US SPEAK TOGETHER OF FREEDOM."

The challenge of our time, said Chief Luthuli, from Groutville in Natal, is "Shall it be freedom for all in our land? Or for Whites only? An indefinite continuation of the status quo? Or a marching together to freedom?"

In the provinces the work for the Congress of the People started - the little meetings, the large conferences, the rapping at doors in the nights after work, the call for volunteers, the approaches to organisations, the distribution of leaflets, the chalking of slogans. The great four-spoked Freedom Wheel of the Congress of the People - the four spokes representing the forces of the four partners in the Congress movement rolling on to progress - appeared on walls and gateposts.

In September 1954 in Johannesburg the Trades Hall was hot and crowded that Saturday afternoon. The delegates rose one after another to tell of their opposition to the growing oppression of the Government. At the headquarters of the Political Branch of the Police another conference was progress, and later that afternoon its results were seen when troop carriers of armed police drew up outside the Trades Hall and the police forced its doors. Charges of treason would be investigated, the police officer announced and then the police herded the delegates together for questioning and searching. "Treason", challenged the police, Treason to talk of Freedom." "Nkosi Sikeleli" answered the crowd, and the slow chant rose and swelled through the hall and out into the streets below.

Two weeks later, also in Johannesburg, the police attempted again to force their way into a conference. This time the people were prepared and an urgent application to ^a the Supreme Court judge resulted in the police being ordered to leave the meeting with the ^{judge} comment "This is not a police state yet!"

In February 1955 the leaflet : "IF YOU COULD MAKE THE LAWS, WHAT COULD YOU DO?" electrified the country. "What do you mean when you speak of freedom," the people were asked. "What changes would you make in the laws, the customs, the way of life to bring happiness to the people of this country?" "How shall we start, thousands of us together, to write the Freedom Charter?"

for the Charter

From the people came the answers, and the demands began to flood in.

From a Cape Town domestic servant : "I want the working people to be up - not cressed down.

From Blouvillein in the Cape : We don't want inspectors to enter our homes.

From Langa : We want equal treatment in hospitals and jails.

From a roadside meeting in Rodepoort : We want a government that will do what the people want.

From the African Dingaka Association : Our association should be recognised as representative of the African Bongoka.

From a conference of mothers : We want confinement allowances for women workers, creches and nursery schools for our children, cheaper foodstuffs, electric lighting and running water in our homes.

From students :

From

From

From

Word of the coming Congress filtered on to the mines, into the Reserves and Trust farms ; spread into the shantytowns and backways; was carried to the

factories and to the schools and colleges.

In Natal the Congress of the People Action Committees sent the callabroad in Zulu and thousands of forms for the collection of freedom demands were distributed. In the Eastern Province the Hxosa version of the Call reached the people. In the Free State Congress volunteers went from group to group writing down their demands in school exercise books.

Still the demands flooded in. They were written in simpel words, in a doxen different languages; some came by post, others were delivered by hand. Many demanded the same compelling things again and again; others reflected the special needs of small local communities who thought of freedom in terms of their own peculiar difficulties and everyday problems.

The Congress of Democrats addressed European voters :

"Are you satisfied with the restrictions on passports? On the record high cost of living? Is everything right in South Africa?"

Songs in honour of the Congress of the People were composed.

By April 1955 a new slogan had spread through the provinces : "A delegate from every town and village, from every suburb throughout the country", and the first democratic elections ever seen in the country were held. Locations and townships were sub-divided; streets and blocks were canvassed; and at night by

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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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