

working class, the PC and the petit-bourgeoisie, the PC and women, the PC and liberals.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER - AN AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT OF THE PEOPLE

~~In one sense the adoption of the Charter represented a continuation of earlier resistance.~~ But in another sense, ~~it marked the start of a new phase in the South African struggle.~~ For the first time in the history of South African resistance, the people were called on to formulate and articulate their vision of an alternative society. From then onwards the people would no longer seek to modify the existing order or to be assimilated into a society whose bases they fundamentally rejected. While the process by which the masses had come to this decision had been developing over decades, the Congress of the People represented the crucial historical moment where a completely new order, based on the will of the people, was put on the agenda.

This decision has considerable relevance today. From the moment of the adoption of the Charter, all political solutions 'from above' were ruled out. That is why, even if a 'fourth chamber' were today offered to Africans under the present Constitution, it would still be rejected. From the time of the adoption of the Charter, the people have been unwilling to accept any solutions that fall short of its demands and are not of their own creation.

~~But apart from this process, it is clear that the PC is an authoritative document. It is a document which has priority in SA. It is more important than any other document. This authority derives, fundamentally, from its status as a people's charter.~~

In the first place, it was created in a particular manner. It can be

shown to have come from the people. It didn't emerge from the thinking of any individual leader or group of leaders, any one organisation or groups of organisations. It came from the demands and dreams of ordinary South Africans who wrote out or spoke of their ideas for a free South Africa of the future.

~~Virtually every constitution claims to derive its authority from the people. Virtually every government claims to have a mandate from the people. Because the ANC can be proved to have come from the people of SA, it is more authoritative than any other document.~~

It is a people's document in a second sense. This is because, as I will argue, it caters for the interests of all oppressed people, irrespective of class, and all democrats who struggle for a free, nonracial and democratic South Africa. This is why it remains authoritative thirty years after its creation.

Having said that it is a people's charter, I realise that this is one of the reasons why some people view it with reservation.

~~Some people, the inadequacy of the ANC is precisely because it is a people's document. The concept of the people's document is vacuous, for it is said to lack class content and without which they ask, where is class contradiction and struggle? (By the struggle between classes, whose interests are incompatible or contradictory is meant, under capitalism, a struggle between those who own the means of production such as land, mines and factories, and those who are forced to sell their labour power as a commodity in order to exist.)~~

What is wrong with this view is that in its quest for purity - pure class struggle - it is blind to the existence or downgrades

the significance of contradictions that are not purely between classes. ~~We does not need to look at SA to realise that the very phenomenon of imperialism, which has been called the highest stage of capitalism, represents a contradiction where a whole people, irrespective of class, suffers under the yoke of foreign power. The fact that it is not a contradiction purely between classes does not mean that it is any less a contradiction.~~

Equally, in SA, we do not only have contradictions between classes. The black people of South Africa have been denied their right of self-determination. All blacks, but especially Africans, endure national oppression. All blacks, irrespective of class, are victims of this oppression. It is not only black workers, but all blacks who are disenfranchised and endure disabilities in almost every aspect of their lives.

One of the peculiarities of the South African state is that written into its structure is this systematic national oppression of all blacks. It is one of the factors that facilitates capitalist exploitation in SA. National oppression and capitalist exploitation are inextricably interlinked in South Africa.

The demand for the nationalization of key monopolies and the transfer of land to those who work it were found necessary, not so much because of socialist motivations on the part of those who made and supported the Charter, though many may have been socialists. These demands derive from the historical bases of the South African state, where nearly all the country's land and other assets have been seized from the blacks and are still held by a small minority of the white population. It was felt that there could be no overall improvement in conditions without such changes.

The struggle for the Charter is therefore an anti-capitalist programme, because any programme to end racial oppression in SA has to be anti-capitalist. This is because racism in SA cannot be eradicated without attacking the key power - centres of capitalism, with which it is so closely interlocked.

So when people describe the Charter as a bourgeois document, they are abstracting specific demands from the South African context. ~~that may be a bourgeois demand elsewhere, goes beyond that in the context of a national democratic struggle.~~

To demand that 'The People Shall Govern' is, in this context, a revolutionary call. It is revolutionary because it cannot be accommodated in the existing South African state. The right to vote may have been a civil rights question for blacks in the USA, in the sixties, for they then sought absorption into a common society. In SA, in contrast, the demand to vote in an individed South Africa, is part of a national liberation struggle. It is part of a struggle for sovereignty, for the people have never governed SA.

The Charter is also anti-imperialist. In the first place its attack on the monopolies is in part an attack on the control of the South African economy by international capital. Equally, in the present context, the clause demanding the right to work is an attack on foreign controlled industries, for international investment is primarily concentrated in capital intensive industries, which, especially in the current recession, have thrown many people out of work.

But the Charter is also anti-imperialist in a more fundamental sense. ~~It is only when the people do govern that they can create the~~

~~to control their own country, make it fully independent and sovereignty, and ensure that they break the stranglehold of international imperialism.~~

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If I am correct in describing the Charter as a people's document, as a programme of a people struggling for self-determination, then we are considering a document that seeks to win the support of all those who oppose apartheid, all classes and strata who have an interest in its destruction.

But this leads to certain controversial questions. Who are the people? Some writers suggest that the Charter implies that there is not one people but ^{four} nations or four nations in the process of creation. Alternatively, some critics question whether it is correct to regard the people as including black and white, as the Charter suggests. I discuss these questions and also the allied issue of whether those who consider themselves liberals, can and should be encouraged to support the Charter.

Some people feel that a document that appeals simultaneously to marxist, liberal, Christian and all others opposing apartheid, cannot meet the specific needs of any particular group or class. Although the Charter is not the document of any one class or stratum, I will nevertheless examine the manner in which it deals with the interests of the working-class, petit-bourgeoisie and women. I then discuss the Charter's contribution to the achievement of peace and conclude by examining its place in present-day SA.

THE CHARTER AND THE 'FOUR NATION THEORY'

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THE CHARTER AND THE 'FOUR NATION THEORY'

One of the key clauses of the Charter is headed 'All National

Groups Shall Have Equal Rights'. It is crucial, yet it is also controversial. Some people have argued that this clause envisages the creation of four nations - whites, Africans, 'Coloureds' and Indians, or that it works on the basis that there are already four nations in SA.

Now it is unfortunate that the Charter uses the word 'national' in two different ways. In this clause it appears to be referring to distinct population groups, Africans, 'Coloureds', Indians and whites. But in the sentence 'The National wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people', the word 'national' refers to all South Africans.

I believe that Lionel Forman once advocated a multinational theory. But neither this nor the so-called four nation theory has ever been adopted as a policy within the Congress movement or in our own time by the contemporary democratic movement. This theory survives not in the Charter itself or amongst its supporters but mainly in polemical writings against it and the democratic movement as a whole.

But what this clause of the Charter deals with (read together with the clause headed 'The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened'), is of considerable significance. It calls for equality in the courts, bodies of state and schools and equal language rights and the right of all people to 'develop their own folk culture and customs'.

While most people accept equality in bodies of state, courts and schools, the demand for language rights and the right to develop culture and customs is embarrassing to some. They feel that we are here adopting some of the worst elements of Verwoerdian cultural policy, the artificial or romantic preservation of tribal or pseudo-tribal cultures.

tribal cultures.

Such a view is quite wrong and also chauvinistic. At present there are two 'official' languages in SA, that is, the mother tongues of some fifteen per cent of the population are the official languages for all.

This state of affairs is characteristic of colonial-type conditions. In such situations an imperial power arrives and declares its law to be the law of the land and its language(s) official. One of the conditions for national liberation is equality in this sphere as in all others.

This is not to suggest that all elements of African culture or that of any other section of our population are necessarily progressive and worthy of preservation and encouragement. Just as some aspects of working class culture are reactionary, a democratic policy would not encourage racist, sexist and chauvinistic aspects of any culture. It would encourage those developments that are compatible with the overall democratic, unifying and egalitarian content of the Charter.

In order to protect these rights, according to the Charter, all apartheid laws and practices are to be abolished. The expression of apartheid ideas, anticipating developments in international law, are made a punishable crime.

The clause calling for all national groups to have equal rights must be understood in the first place, by considering what exists in contemporary SA. Insofar as apartheid denies people equal rights, it seeks to maintain this situation not only through coercion, but

prior to Union, and that the Union of South Africa was founded amongst other things on this robbery.

Yet what is wrong is to imply that the stolen land was appropriated by all whites. This is part of a wider tendency in some black consciousness thinking to suggest that all whites are exploiters and all blacks members of the working class. One does not therefore cooperate politically with any white for that would be an alliance with one's slave master.

In regard to land, the truth is that the overall majority of landholdings in SA are controlled by a small group of monopolists. The small white farmers are themselves being squeezed off the land and there is an ever-increasing consolidation amongst the few big landholders.

It is therefore, historically incorrect to suggest that the land grabbed from blacks, was robbed by and is held by all whites. Equally, while it is true that it is primarily the labour-power of blacks that has built SA, whites have also made a contribution. Present day SA has been created by the common labour of all its people. The cities, factories, mines and agriculture have resulted from the energies of all South Africans. Though the wealth that is at present in the hands of a small minority of the whites, would be shared by the people, the Charter holds that all those who love South Africa, who consider it their home, who have contributed to building it and are prepared to continue to develop the country as a democratic, nonracial state, are part of South Africa.

THE CHARTER AND LIBERALS.

There is a tendency amongst some sections of the democratic movement to treat liberals as inevitably hostile to national liberation and the Freedom Charter, and to associate liberalism in SA with the rise of laissez-faire capitalism. There are in fact a number of strands that went to make up and still make up South African liberalism. (These could perhaps be loosely characterised as a) laissez-faire free enterprise liberals, b) liberals who take a strong stand on human rights, while being passionately anti-communist- who would oppose the anti-monopoly clauses of the Charter, and c) social democratic 'liberals')

But I think that a major political tendency among the liberals of the fifties and sixties was a commitment to a non-racial movement against apartheid, for a democratic SA, with universal suffrage.

It is true that many members of the Liberal Party were hostile to the Congress movement and especially the Congress of Democrats. But I think that many of these historic animosities have receded. Some liberals have started to work with their erstwhile antagonists within the contemporary democratic movement. Others feel that the decision of the Liberal Party not to join in the Congress of the People was 'regretted by many liberals'. The Freedom Charter, says one former Liberal Party member, 'was a fine document, expressing basic democratic principles.'

My view is that there is no reason why other democrats should not welcome liberals into the ranks of those who support the FC. In fact they should encourage it, for there is no reason why those liberals, who are committed to universal suffrage and democracy should not support the Charter. It is crucial that those who detest apartheid should harness as wide a range of forces as possible behind a common anti-apartheid programme.

Anyone who supports national liberation, the self-determination of the people of SA, should find no difficulty in supporting the Charter. Anyone who is a South African patriot, who loves his or her country and feels that it belongs to all, should support this document. With regard to the struggle for socialism, there is no reason why liberals in SA should necessarily oppose socialism. There is no reason why the Christian and egalitarian values that have motivated South African liberals should not encompass a development towards socialism, should the implementation of the Charter take that form. (I am dealing here with the dynamic nature of the Charter and its capacity to transform the perceptions of individual liberals. This leaves aside the relationship between the democratic movement and organised liberalism.)

THE FREEDOM CHARTER AND THE WORKING CLASS.

Although the Charter is not a programme of the working-class alone, it nevertheless primarily reflects its interests. Some clauses of the Charter are socialist in orientation and are addressed much more profoundly to working-class interests than would be the case with any bourgeois document.

This worker-orientation is attributable to the development of the labour struggle, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, and the part played by SACTU in collecting workers' demands. Two SACTU members Ben Turok and Billy Nair introduced and spoke to the clause of the Charter which reads 'The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth', a clause which clearly corresponds to workers' interests.

Many other aspects of the Charter are profoundly working-class in orientation. The clause 'There Shall Be Work and Security' deals

with such matters as the 'right and duty of all to work'. It also asserts the right to form trade unions, the abolition of child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour.

The clause entitled 'There Shall Be Houses, Security and Comfort' declares the right to decent housing and that slums should be demolished and unused housing space made available to the people. Rent and prices will be lowered. Instead of the present situation, where 'surplus' food is destroyed, the Charter declares that no one would be allowed to go hungry.

Some people, however, argue (I believe correctly) that the workers' interests lie primarily in the achievement of workers' control and socialism, but these critics say that neither is expressly mentioned. While this is true, the way that the clause on the country's wealth was introduced at the Congress of the People seemed to envisage that industries as a whole would be under the control of the people, that is the people's government. Under this general control, individual production units would be under the control of workers' committees. Nevertheless, how this clause will be interpreted and whether or not the charter itself will ultimately receive a socialist interpretation, will depend on whether working-class leadership is achieved and the extent to which the petit-bourgeoisie, intellectuals, workers on the land, unemployed and other strata start to see their interests best fulfilled in an advance to socialism. This is not something that is achieved by words alone. It will depend on political struggle.

There is an analogy in the development and changing interpretation of the principle of self-determination in the UN. At the time of its

creation in 1945 the United Nations Charter declared that respect for the principle of self-determination was of fundamental importance. Yet it simultaneously recognised colonialism. Indeed some of the leading UN members, France and United Kingdom were, of course, in possession of large empires.

The treatment of self-determination in the UN Charter had been a product of compromise between states, at a time when the West was dominant in the UN, when there were few Socialist states in the United Nations and few independent African and Asian states.

Following successful national liberation struggles, the number of African and Asian states in the UN has continuously increased, thus strengthening the diplomatic power of these states, who often work in alliance with the Socialist states. In consequence, by 1960, a qualitatively different international relationship of forces had developed. Even colonial powers came to recognise that colonialism was doomed (at least formally) and were compelled to recognise the principle of self-determination. Their conception of their own interests changed and consequently a new international consensus, considerably more radical than that of 1945, emerged. This was manifested, dramatically, in the 1960 Declaration, passed without dissent, holding that colonialism was illegal. Equally, in regard to apartheid, the international consensus has been dramatically modified. At the time of its inception, South Africa was a respected member of the UN. But apartheid is now treated as illegal and/or criminal, according to international law.

By analogy, if the democratic organisations struggling for realisation of the Charter, develop a working-class leadership and they convince themselves and other classes that there is a place for all under

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