

ANNEXURE "B 5"THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE

As a result of the historical call made by the African National Congress at its Conference in Queenstown, the National Executives of the African National Congress, South African Indian Congress, Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation have decided to call on the people of South Africa to come together in a great assembly - THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE.

The South African peoples' movement can be proud of its long record of unbroken struggle for rights and liberty, but never before have the mass of South African citizens been summoned together to proclaim their desire and aspirations in a single declaration - A CHARTER OF FREEDOM.

The drawing up and adopting of such a charter of freedom is the purpose of which the Congress of the People has been called. Never in South African history have the ordinary people of this country been enabled to take part in deciding their own fate and future. Elections have been restricted to a small minority of the population; franchise rights, particularly in recent times have been threatened and curtailed. There is a need to hear the voice of the ordinary citizen of this land, proclaiming to the world his demand for freedom.

WHAT IS THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE?

The Congress of the People will not be just another meeting or another conference. It will be a mass assembly of delegates elected by the people of all races in every town, village, farm factory, mine and kraal. It will be the biggest single gathering of spokesmen ever known in this country. The representatives of the people who come to the Congress will consider the detailed demands of the people, which have been sent in for incorporation in the Freedom Charter, and will embody them into a declaration. This Freedom Charter will be the South African peoples' declaration of human rights, which every civilised South African will work to uphold and carry into practice.

By decision of the joint National Executive Committee of the sponsoring bodies, the Congress of the People must be held as soon as possible, and in any case, not later than June, 1955. In view of the tremendous number of delegates who will be gathering at the Congress of the People, a centrally situated place for holding the Congress is being considered. The exact date and venue of the Congress will be announced in good time. The Congress of the People will be made the occasion for a great cultural festival of the national and folk arts of all sections of our population.

HOW WILL THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE BE ORGANISED?

The first task will be to make the whole country conscious of the Congress of the People, and to imbue them with a feeling of the tremendous importance of such a gathering. This can only be done through the greatest possible campaign of printed propaganda material side by side with a string of hundreds of meetings, house to house canvasses and group discussions. The central aim of all these activities will be to get citizens of the country to speak for themselves, and to state what changes must be made in their way of life, if they are to enjoy freedom.

Every demand made by the people at these gatherings, however small the matter, must be recorded and collected for consideration by the Congress of the people for inclusion in the Freedom Charter. In this way, it will become the Charter of the people, the content of which has its source in their own homes, factories, mines and reserves. It has been decided that all these demands must be formulated by October 30th, 1954.

CAN WE SUCCEED ON SUCH A SCALE?

The main burden of such a campaign of national awakening as this will fall on those politically conscious and active people who make up the membership of the national liberation organisations. If the campaign is to succeed, the message of the Congress of the People and the news of the Freedom Charter must be carried to every corner of the country. It is unthinkable that the funds can be found by the organising committee to hire the large teams of full-time organisers needed for this work.

But if there is sufficient understanding of the radical changes that such a campaign can make in the South African situation, then the same spirit of self-sacrifice and discipline, which was the hall-mark of the Defiance Campaign, will be created. With such a spirit, people will once again come forward, volunteering to give up their holidays, weekends and spare time without pay in order to carry the campaign into those parts of the country where there are no existing organised political groups. We must expect from the advanced people in all the Congresses, those sacrifices made by 8500 volunteers during the Defiance Campaign who sacrificed their liberty and their jobs in the cause of freedom.

We will create a corps of Freedom Volunteers, who will be the core of the campaign, and make themselves available to the organisers of the campaign for whatever work in whatever place they are required.

HOW TO SET ABOUT IT

To carry through the campaign, the four Congresses have set up "THE NATIONAL ACTION COUNCIL FOR THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE" composed of equal numbers of representatives of each body, which will act throughout the campaign, subject to the guidance and supervision of the sponsoring bodies.

A CALL TO THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE has been adopted. Every Union-wide organisation without exception, is being asked to support and endorse this call. Those organisations who do so will be asked to appoint representatives to the National Action Council.

The aim is to establish CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE COMMITTEES on a provincial basis, and on a town, suburb, factory or street basis. At all these levels, attempts will be made to draw in the participation of every local organisation and group.

The immediate task is the establishment of Provincial Committees by the 30th June. These committees will be composed of equal numbers of representatives of each of the original sponsors. Their first duty will be to convene a Provincial Conference, to which every organisation possible will be invited, and which will elect additional members to the Provincial Committee.

Wherever possible, this procedure must be repeated on a town or district basis. Only through setting up such active committees on the widest possible scale, drawing in thousands of active workers to assist them, can the campaign succeed on its greatest scale. Through these committees, the demand of the people everywhere will be gathered, the people be canvassed and local delegations to the Congress of the People be organised.

Above all it must be remembered that the creation of a network of local committees in every corner of South Africa will in itself be a major political achievement, which will be of tremendous value in every struggle of the future to achieve the demands set out in the Freedom Charter.

HOW TO MOBILISE FOR THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE.

The message of the coming Congress of the People cannot inspire people unless everywhere it is linked in peoples minds with their own burning problems, and with the vital issues of the day. When speaking to farm squatters the Congress of the People must be linked in their minds with their own struggle against ejection from their homes; to town workers, with the fight for trade union rights and better wages; to the people on the trust farms, with the culling of cattle. Every vital issue, whether it be the eviction of people from the Western Areas, the introduction of apartheid at the Universities, the expropriation of property under the Group Areas Act, or the removal of voting rights under the Separate Representation of Voters' Act must be linked with all the propaganda for the Congress of the People.

WHO WILL VOTE?

Because of the long history of indirect and sham representation from which the Non-European people have suffered, it has been decided that the basis of election to the Congress of the People should be direct. That means that representatives elected by the people in any area or unit will go direct to the Congress of the People.

Every person over the age of eighteen, without distinction of race, colour or sex, will be entitled to vote for his representative.

Since the aim of the Congress of the People is to hear the desires of every group in South Africa, it is obvious that each voting unit will not be composed of the same number of people. If a European farm, employing fifteen African labourers decides to send a delegate, that is all to the good. On the other hand, large urban townships cannot be expected to send one representative for every fifteen inhabitants.

At this stage of the campaign, it is not possible to define precisely what will make up an electoral unit. It is only after the preparatory work has been successfully carried out that a more definite demarcation can be made, based on the number of local committees. In the last resort, local committees will have to decide what units in their locality will have to be represented, based on a target set by the National Action Council.

HOW WILL PEOPLE VOTE?

Election Day should be made the occasion for great political demonstrations and rallies in every part of the land.

Wherever possible, election of delegates should be held by public vote at a meeting of the electors. There may be cases however, such as on a mine or farm, where the holding of a meeting may not be possible. In such cases a canvass of the electorates by the local committees may prove to be the only practical method. It must be stressed that delegates to the Congress of the People are not delegates from local committees, but from the people in the areas where the local committee organises the work.

HOW WILL THEY GET THERE?

Thousands of delegates converging on the central venue for the Congress of the People must take place in an atmosphere of great political demonstrations. Where a large number of delegates are travelling together, Freedom Processions to greet them in every town they pass through, must be organised. Where possible, Freedom trains should be arranged to carry delegates, but where funds are not available for this, delegates should band together on a Freedom March, even though it may take some days for them to reach the Congress.

It is obvious that the National Action Council will not be able to meet the bill for the expense of delegates. We are confident that if we have created sufficient enthusiasm for the Freedom Charter and the Congress, the electors themselves will be prepared to make the sacrifices necessary to see that their chosen representatives reach the Congress.

WHO WILL PAY THE BILL?

In spite of this, the National Action Council will require tremendous sums of money to see that a copy of the "Call" to the Congress of the People gets into every home in the land, and to see that delegates are provided for at the Congress. It is therefore most important that every unit taking part in organising the Congress of the People should seize every opportunity to collect funds from the people for the campaign.

Not only must every supporter be asked to pledge regular sums of money to the campaign, but in the countryside particularly, people must be asked to make pledges of cattle and other foodstuffs to feed the delegates at the Congress.

The campaign for the Congress of the People is not a campaign for members of the Congresses alone. All those who wish to hear the voice of the people must be encouraged to join in. There can be no neutrals.

Those people and those organisations who refuse to take part, will stand exposed as fearing the democratically expressed opinions of the majority of South African citizens, and will lose the support and allegations of all decent freedom-loving citizens.

In such a campaign as this, thousands of new active workers will rally to the support of those who have initiated and carried through the main burden of the campaign. New strength and new enthusiasm will grow in our ranks making it possible for us to lead our people forward to the winning of the Freedoms set out in the Charter which our people will write and adopt.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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