

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE
HELD IN NATAL ON SUNDAY 21ST MARCH, 1954.

PRESENT: The National Executive Committees of the African National Congress, The South African Indian Congress, The South African Congress of Democrats. The South African Coloured People's Organisation was represented by a member of the Johannesburg Branch.

APOLOGIES: A telegram was received from the President of S.A.C.P.O. apologising for the inability of his executive to be present and wishing the meeting success.

OPENING: Chief Luthuli in his capacity of chairman of the meeting opened the proceedings by welcoming those present, and stating that this was an

ADDRESS: historical gathering. Co-operation between the A.N.C. and S.A.I.C. which had been established during the defiance campaign had grown and developed. It had now become desirable to enlarge the circle of co-operation and with the addition of the South African Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation a force of co-operative effort had been started which would finally defeat reaction in South Africa. It was obvious that S.A. white voters could not defeat the Nationalists on their own, but the growth of co-operation between all the democratic people would defeat them and would prevent any autocratic Government in the future. A multi-racial state would be established finally representing a democratic state of all the people of this land.

MESSAGES: The Chairmen of the A.N.C., the S.A.I.C. and the S.A.C.O.D. and the representative from S.A.C.P.O. all addressed the meeting pledging the support of their organisations and wishing the meeting success in its deliberations.

DRAFT A draft memorandum was tabled for members and Professor Matthews led
MEMORANDUM: the discussion on the resolution for a Congress of the People of South Africa. This resolution had originally been agreed to at an A.N.C. Conference in Cradock in 1953 and was then passed by the A.N.C. National Conference in Queenstown, Since then some of the other organisations had endorsed it at their conferences.

The A.N.C. had come to the conclusion that it is time to give tangible expression to the fact that there is a body of people who believe that we should build a united South Africa - many white people do not believe that there must be perpetual domination of Non-Europeans but so far these groups who believe in unity have not done anything practical and therefore the African people must now extend the hand of co-operation to other sections of the population. The fact that A.N.C. has taken the initiative will ensure that the Non-Europeans will not be overlooked. All other people who are genuinely interested and sincere must be made to feel welcome to join with us, must in fact be encouraged to do so. It is no longer possible to be isolationist.

It is the task of this meeting to draw up a Freedom Charter - a declaration of rights for the people of South Africa, a document which will inspire the people with fresh hope, give them the incentive to work for the future of their country, embody the feelings and aspirations of the people and be a guide for activity and positive objectives.

RESOLUTION: It was agreed that the four organisations present agree with the principle of a Congress of the People.

RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE: The resolutions committee which was elected put forward the following resolutions which were unanimously adopted by the meeting:-

1. That a joint planning committee be established, consisting of not more than five members of each of the sponsoring organisations, appointed by each of the organisations here represented.
2. That the African National Conference act as convenors of the Planning Committee.
3. That the headquarters of the Planning Committee be Johannesburg.
4. That the Planning Committee draw up:-
 - a) A draft plan of Campaign based on the points raised in discussion at this meeting.
 - b) An outline of the Freedom Charter.Both these documents to be submitted to the sponsoring bodies within four weeks from today, and to be ratified at a future joint executive of the sponsoring bodies.
5. That the Planning Committee consider:-
 - a) What other organisations might be invited to participate in the campaign and the basis on which they should participate.
 - b) The fixing of a date and venue for the National Congress, not later than the end of June, 1955.
 - c) The establishment of similar joint committees on a provincial and local level to conduct the campaign.
6. That this meeting adopt the name "CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE."

PRESS STATEMENT: It was also agreed to issue the following press statement from the meeting:-

"A joint meeting of representatives of the A.N.C., S.A.I.C., S.A.C.P.O. and S.A.C.O.D., was held this weekend.

United by the aim of achieving full citizenship rights for all South Africans, and by a common desire to make the democratic aspirations of our people heard powerfully through out South Africa and the world, the meeting resolved to convene a 'Congress of the People' at a date to be announced.

The Congress of the People will consist of democratically elected representatives of people of all races from all parts of the country and will be the most widely representative gathering of South Africans ever known in the Union's History.

The Congress will frame and adopt a Freedom Charter expressing the will of the people of all races, based on the decisions of meetings and assemblies at which delegates are to be elected.

A Joint Planning Committee of the four bodies has been established to carry out the campaign and bring the 'Congress of the People' to fruition."

VOTE OF THANKS: Mr. O. Tambo proposed a vote of thanks to our hosts for the smooth running of the meeting and the excellent catering arrangements.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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