

**Minutes¹ of the Joint Meeting
of the
National Executive Committees
of the
African National Congress and the All-African Convention
April 17-18, 1949**

Minutes, signed by C. M. Kobus [of the AAC], Recording Secretary

A meeting of the above committees was held in the Board-room at the Batho Location, Bloemfontein, on Sunday morning, 17th April, 1949, at 10 a.m.

Present were:-

African National Congress.

1. Messrs. J. B. Marks; 2. A. P. Mda; 3. R. V. Selope-Thema; 4. L. K. Ntlabati; 5. Moses Kotane; 6. J. Malangabi; 7. G. Makabeni; 8. L.S. Phillips; 9. O.R. Tambo; 10. Prof. Z.K. Matthews; 11. Dr. A.B. Xuma.

All-African Convention.

1. Messrs. R. M. Canca; 2. Mda Mda; 3. A. K. Mazwai; 4. S. A. Jayiya; 5. I. B. Tabata; 6. Leo Sihlali; 7. W. M. Tsotsi; 8. Jas. Mdatyulwa; 9. Rev. Z. R. Mahabane; 10. Dr. G. H. GooI; 11. Mrs. Elizabeth Benjamin; 12. Mr. Robert Sello; 13. Mr. C. M. Kobus.

The meeting was under the joint chairmanship of Mr. W. M. Tsotsi, President of the All-African Convention, and Dr. A. B. Xuma, President of the African National Congress.

The meeting was opened with prayer by the **Rev. Mahabane**.

Dr. Xuma in his opening remarks welcomed the delegates and expressed the hope for a successful meeting.

In his remarks **Mr. Tsotsi** said that unity could be approached from two angles. It could be approached from the emotional as well as from the rational angle. The ordinary man's approach was emotional. We were all oppressed, he argued, and therefore we should all unite. But there were real differences which could not be ignored. Unity was a means to an end. It could also be a source of weakness if there was no common aim. We wanted unity in the fight against oppression and therefore we should be prepared to accept as allies all those people who were fighting the common enemy.

There were those who did not accept road of struggle because of the travail through which the road led. We had therefore to define unity. Unity for what? Some were stumbling blocks to unity, and others, through a mistaken analysis, took the road to oppression for the road to unity and freedom. We should waste no time on the form of the organisation we intended to build, but first of all we should discuss the principles upon which unity is to be based.

¹ Scanned from Karis and Carter: From Protest to Challenge,: Documents of African Politics in South Africa, Volume 2 Document 70 (a)

The meeting decided that the principle upon which the proposed unity was to be based be discussed first.

In leading the discussion on Non-collaboration, **Mr. I. B. Tabata** said that we should agree that we reject inferiority and therefore we reject the institutions' created for an "inferior" race and demanded full democratic rights and only those institutions which were recognised in democratic government. By non-collaboration, he said, we meant an unwillingness on our part to work those institutions which were created for our own oppression. A collaborator was one who voluntarily supported and worked political institutions created for the oppression of the Black man. We should support the freely created organisations of the people. That was what we meant by Non-collaboration.

Speaking for the African National Congress, **Mr. J. B. Marks** said that there were fundamental differences between the All-African Convention and the African National Congress. We knew the strength of our armies and we had to unite eight million people. We should have in mind the immediate and ultimate aim of the struggle. For instance a demand for unity on the basis of socialism would be absurd where the position was not ripe. It would be wrong to stigmatise as collaborators those who did not agree with Noncollaboration at this stage.

Mr. R. V. Selope-Thema, M. R. C²., supported Mr. Marks and said that if the Convention delegates advocated a boycott of Government institutions then they should carry out their policy to its logical conclusion. Did the delegates believe that they could tell the people of the Transkei to abolish the Bhunga? (Several Transkei delegates replied "Yes"!) Some of them believed that they could fight these institutions; that was why the government was afraid of the Native Representative Council. If we accepted the policy of Convention then we should have nothing to do with Europeans. If a lawyer who defended an African in a European Court was not collaborating but earning a living, then the M. R. C.s³ were not collaborating. The people did not appreciate the demand for parliamentary representation, what the people wanted was land. We should think of the eight million Africans who still wanted these things. The Bhunga had done many things. It had granted bursaries and planted trees. If he were to go to his own area Pietersburg and tell the people to have nothing to do with the Bhunga, they would think he was mad. We sat in our various homes and cried "Don't collaborate," while in the meantime the people accept these things. Non-collaboration was alright as a long term policy. These things could not be overthrown overnight. We were all agreed. The difference was merely one ,of approach.

With regard to unity **Mr. Thema** said that if by unity we meant the unity of all the oppressed, then we might as well go home. They regarded the unity of the African people of primary importance. Charity began at home. They, the Africans, wanted to unite in their economic and social life, and therefore they had to unite as a race. If we wanted to unite with other people, we could form an alliance with them. We had a purpose to fulfil as a united African race. Our aims might be opposed to those of other people, it did not matter. We should follow the law of self preservation. We should love each other first before we loved other people.

Mr. R. M.. Canca, explaining the meaning of collaboration, said that laws were not enough to rule. Institutions had to be created to create a mental attitude

² Member of the Representative Council i.e. a member of the Native Representative Council, a toothless and dummy body given to the African people in place of the limited franchise in terms of one of the three notorious Hertzog Acts of 1936 - Editor

of acceptance of the laws. These institutions were the N.R.C., the Bunga and Advisory Boards. A collaborator was one who contested a seat in one of the above institutions. He was engaged in a mental swindle. He knew participation in these institutions could not free the African, yet he pretended that it could. The delegates should not confuse issues. A teacher in a segregated school and an African boarding a reserve coach in a train could not be called collaborators because they had no choice in these things.

Mr. G. Makabeni felt that policy was most important. The word "Non-collaboration" was vague. They represented the masses and were concerned with freedom and not with words. The expression was meaningless, it was not honest and it would not rally the people. The duty of a trade-unionist was to represent the interests of the people wherever those interests were. Trade unionists had to state their case before Gov. Commissions when necessary. They had to present the case of the people honestly. We should unite and not weed out leaders even before we had formed an organisation. If we could not look at realities then there was no point in further discussion.

Mr. Moses Kotane said that they could not reply by "Yes" or "No" to the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of Non-collaboration. They were fighting for freedom. Congress did not want to collaborate. The worker in production was operating the machinery of oppression, but he formed another instrument whereby the same instrument could be overthrown through strikes and revolutions. Congress did not want to collaborate, but the people were not ready. We could not carry out "Non-collaboration." The A.A.C. itself had not been able to carry out "Non-collaboration." In some cases non-collaboration might be possible, determined by the preparedness of the people at the particular time. Congress stood for Non-collaboration-when the people were ready. They went into the N.R.C.⁴ to abolish it from within. They could not accept an inflexible term.

Rev. Z. R. Mahabane replied that the analogy of the worker did not apply. Non-acceptance of collaboration because the people were not ready was defeatism. Words were vehicles of ideas which the world eventually followed. Democracy was first a word and then a reality. It was the Apartheid term which had brought Malan into power. We should not drop the term because the people do not follow it. People were already beginning to accept non-collaboration. It was the intention of the Government to establish tribal councils, and we should express ourselves unequivocally against the system. Until the Africans were represented in parliament by their own people they could not abolish their oppression.

Mr. A. P. Mda said that there was much weight in what Convention said on Non-collaboration. There was also much weight in what Congress said. But we shall all be forced in time to accept Non-collaboration. The discussion should boil down to whether Congress was prepared to accept Boycott as long term policy. In 1946 the African National Congress had resolved to boycott the N.R.C. and Advisory Boards. In 1947 there was a slight change in the attitude of Congress. They advocated the election of "Boycott candidates." They felt that the time was not ripe and that the present instruments should be used to further the boycott weapon. We should decide whether we were going to accept boycott or not, and when we were going to apply it. Some thought we should boycott now, others thought we could use these institutions to teach the people boycott. **Mr. Mda** felt that not sufficient work had been done to educate the masses. He proposed the acceptance of the boycott weapon on principle.

Mr. O. Tambo said that it had not been suggested that getting into these institutions to wreck them was collaboration. We should accept the principle and

⁴ Native Representative Council

then decide when to apply it and where. Unity should not break on acceptance or non-acceptance of non-collaboration.

Mr. I. B. Tabata then moved: the following resolution for the All-African Convention:

In view of the political crisis facing the African people today, in view of the urgent necessity to unite the people to fight oppression and for full democratic rights, this joint session of the All-African Convention and the African National Congress executive committees meeting in Bloemfontein this 17th day"of April, 1949, resolves that this unity be based on:

1. A demand for full citizenship rights equal to those of the European.
2. A rejection of inferior status as expressed in the segregated and inferior political institutions created for a so-called child race and for the perpetuation of white domination, viz, the N .R.C., the Bhunga; Location Advisory Boards; and any other institution of a similar nature which may be created to substitute, supplement or strengthen existing institutions.
3. The acceptance of Non-collaboration, i.e. the rejection of the N.R.C.; Bhunga; Local Advisory Boards; The Natives Representation Act, etc.

In moving this resolution **Mr. Tabata** said that the term "Non-collaboration" was open to many interpretations. We, the African people, had decided to use it in this particular sense. We were not concerned with the dictionary meaning of the term in our interpretation of it. He did not understand what the Congress speakers meant by long-term policy. The duty of leadership was the interpretation of the aspirations of the people. We should go out to the people therefore and preach Non-collaboration, and not wait for the people to lead us. We want to eliminate internal strife by agreeing now. We could not accept the statement that the people did not want to go to parliament. If the question were properly put to them they would all say they wanted to go, because that was what they were used to. They were used to making laws in their own Inkundlas, and it is surprising to hear anybody say African men did not want to go to a National Inkundla. That was why we wanted to be agreed on the question. Convention has come to Congress because we realise that unless responsible organisations agree on the boycott it will be difficult for the people to follow. They were suspicious of Government institutions, but it was the intellectuals who went to the people and asked to be elected. The intellectuals must therefore be agreed on non-collaboration. If the position were to be reversed, and Europeans were to elect three Black men to represent them in parliament, they would not accept the position. We must create such an attitude of mind as will make these institutions stink in the nostrils of the people. The people will follow if the leadership gives expression to the aspirations of the people.

This resolution was seconded by **Mr. S. A. Jayiya**.

Mr. R. V. Selope- Thema said that so far as [sic] the meeting had not discussed policy but a programme. He proposed the appointment of a committee.

Mr. L. K. Ntlabati said that we should be agreed on the principle of non-collaboration, but if we found that it would serve our purpose to contest seats in these government institutions we should not be called collaborators.

Mr. Moses Kotane wanted to know whether, if the policy was accepted, it would be carried out immediately.

Dr. G. H. Gool replied that the government would always find quislings to sell the people. We should let them know that all those who went into those institutions would be nailed on to the wall as traitors. He appealed to the delegates to be open with each other.

Mr. R. M. Canca said that we could not support something against which we spoke. There was a school of psychologists who doubted the mentality of the Africans. They don't understand how the African can put up with so much oppression. If we decided to boycott we should boycott.

Mr. Thema said that unity would be destroyed by non-collaboration as a basis. We should merely agree on the principle of unity, i.e. non-co-operation with the authorities and not mention the institutions to be boycotted.

Professor Z. K. Matthews said that para. 1 of the resolution was comprehensive. It dealt with the political, economic and social institutions. Para. 2 and 3 were not consistent with para. 1. They narrowed the question to the political aspect. The joint resolution should incorporate the desire of Congress to broaden the definition. We have to be consistent.

Dr. G. H. Gool explained that we brought in the political aspect because if we succeeded in that field all else would follow. In India Gandhi had advocated the boycotting of government schools. It had failed. The argument was merely a red-herring to confuse the issue more and more.

Mr. C. M. Kobus said that the acceptance of Non-collaboration meant the carrying out of non-collaboration straight away, not at some dim and distant future. We would not speak of fighting segregationist institutions from within, because we could not accept Non-collaboration and still help to work segregationist institutions.

Rev. Z. R. Mahabane moved the acceptance of the original resolution as moved by Mr. Tabata. The resolution was accepted.

Leading the discussion on the structure of the proposed body, **Mr. A. P. Mda** said that the time had come for the establishment of a basis for total struggle against oppression. We should lay such foundation as would make the force gain momentum as struggle continued. The most effective way of appealing to the Africans would be to appeal to them as oppressed people. We should base our appeal on colour. The basis of the organisation should be nationalistic. We could meet oppression by organising on the basis of African Nationalism. This pre-supposed a unitary organisation. The advantages of this would be first of all that we would be able to mobilise the majority of the people in a language they could understand. Secondly, there would be no contradictions within the body caused by groups which may place certain interpretations on certain principles because of differences in political outlook. There was a danger in admitting different groups in the same organisation, particularly was this the case when major decisions had to be made. The Miners' strike confusion was as a result of this weakness. We should appeal to Africans as such, to unite as Africans. An African united front would not be opposed to an alliance with other oppressed groups organised in their national organisations.

Mr. W. M. Tsotsi wanted to know whether if Mr. A. P. Mda was speaking for Congress, as his speech seemed to be contrary to the Congress resolution.

Messrs. A. P. Mda, Dr. Xuma and Moses Kotane stated that Congress had intended the resolution to mean unitary organisations. It meant that other organisations were to be invited to disband themselves and join the unitary organisation.

Dr. G. H. Gool, in reply said that it would be the ideal thing to have a unitary organisation. There had been such in the past, e.g. the I.C.U., but these could not carry the country with them, hence the adoption of the Federal structure in 1935. If in 1935 we had established a unitary organisation we would have been charged with competing with local organisations for membership. There were old organisations long established in their own areas, hence the decision of the Anti-CAD to form a federal organisation, so as to be able to accommodate other organisations. Convention was prepared to guarantee the leadership of the new organisation to Congress by granting a certain number of seats in the executive of the new federal body, to Congress.

Mr. I. B. Tabata: Creating a unitary organisation would mean creating one mass political party dictating to the African population. We would be arrogating to ourselves the right to dictate that no African shall have ideas different from our own. We should fight that, for who would determine this outlook? We wanted the greatest amount of unity among the Africans, and we could achieve this only by inviting other organisations to come in and work with us. No political party could dictate to all the people. We should agree on the minimum demands, then the people would not run away from us because they feared competition. When people wanted to fight they formed federal organisations. That was what had been done in the past e.g. the bus strike. We should have a permanent structure because we were in a state of permanent emergency. A mouthpiece should represent all strata of society. We did not want to see Congress abolished. We wanted to see it strengthened. We should all go out to organise together. Where Congress existed, we should let people join Congress. But these organisations should meet in a federal organisation. This would eliminate mutual competition. If one unitary party were formed, ,', another would crop up. No single party could be a mouthpiece. The mouthpiece of the whites was parliament and we should build a similar organisation.

Mr. L. K. Ntlabati said that by a unitary organisation Congress did not mean a political party. We were dealing with national organisations to fight for freedom. The All-Indian Congress was mainly a unitary organisation, ,until India achieved independence. Only where people had attained national autonomy could they form political parties. When the Dutch fought the English, the Dutch had different shades of opinion, but they were united in their aim of fighting the English. It had been claimed that Convention had been formed to accommodate different shades of opinion. A political body formed to fight for political rights would object to bringing in Teachers Associations in a political body. We should not have a conglomeration of organisations which were not political. He would concede the inclusion of Voters Associations and Vigilance Associations, but teachers should not discuss politics as teachers organisations. They should join political parties.

Mr. O. R. Tambo said that the danger in the suggestion of a federal structure was that it opened up avenues for division. The masses could be united on the fact that they were oppressed because they were black. We should recognise our strength. We should not preach to the masses divisions which did not exist in their minds. The unitary was the strongest form of organisation, he said.

Mr. W. M. Tsotsi said that the discussion was in the air. The Congress had been a unitary organisation since 1912, and yet it had not built up a worthwhile following. The mere fact that an organisation was unitary and black was no guarantee that we would have a following. The people formed their organisations

for local purposes, and Convention had shown that it was possible to politicise these organisations and show them that their disabilities flowed from the general oppression. We should build on what existed and not on a unitary organisation whose future we did not know.

Mr. Leo Sihlali pointed out that even where there is one political party one does find splits on personalities. Even women's organisations split on personalities, e.g. the East London Congress split into two and both groups wanted to affiliate to the Provincial Congress. We wanted to appeal to organisations because we could not appeal to the people in vacuo. It had been said that organisations had specific interests. Could not these organisations be orientated? Ordinary leaders of organisations were not going to accept competition. We could not force the people to disband their organisations, moreover, people would not be prepared to join new organisations, as these would mean more subscriptions.

Mr. G. Makabeni complained that the delegates were not serious. When the president of the A.A.C. said we were not oppressed because we were black, then we wondered whether we were serious. All forces should be centred in one place, namely, a unitary body. He was not sure what the nature of the proposed federation was going to be, but he wanted the Africans to be taught African nationalism and be taught to fight as Africans.

Mr. A. K. Mazwai said that a unitary organisation was not practical. We could not have all Africans owing allegiance to one organisation.

Mr. Moses Kotane said that the Congress was committed to advocate that the organisation be unitary. The point raised, that Congress, a unitary organisation, did not have a large membership was irrelevant, because the small membership was not due to its unitary structure. There could be no stability in a federal organisation because interest in the federal structure remained only while there was a burning question. Why should even ping-pong players be brought into a political organisation? There would be the difficulty of being unable to decide important issues because the constituent organisations had no mandate. In our crisis we wanted a unitary organisation which would be a source of strength. We should have one mouth-piece. The question was not the structures of the two bodies, but which body was to be the mouth-piece. The people should be instructed to one organisation.

Mr. S. A. Jayiya said that it would not be easy to disband local organisations. The people formed their local organisations to fight local questions. This was alright as long as they linked up with other organisations in a federal body to fight the bigger issues.

Mr. R. V. Selope-Thema said that it seemed that the two sections had conflicting mandates and there was no spirit of give and take. Would both the A.A.C. and the A.N.C. retain their respective identities? The League of Nations had gone to pieces and the United Nations was also going to pieces. We could not encourage divisions by allowing separate organisations to exist. According to its new constitution Congress demanded 50% of the funds of an affiliating organisation.

Dr. G. H. Gool said we should try to create such an organisation as would make it possible for Congress and Convention to work together. All the organisations in the All-African Convention would have to be brought into the new organisation. The question of the name was unimportant.

Mr. L. K. Ntlabati said that it would be a sad spectacle if we were to go back to the people without concrete decisions. People were not interested in structure. They wanted to see unity. The country was expecting some form of unity, America was a federation, so had South Africa some federal features. We should come to some compromise, so as to inspire the ordinary man with confidence, we should form a unitary organisation with federal features. There had been no mention of destroying existing organisations. Farmers organisations had a purpose, but they should not be brought into politics. **Mr. Ntlabati** then moved that:

Unity be accepted on the unitary organisation with federal features.

The motion was seconded by **Mr. O. R. Tambo**. When asked what the federal features would be, the movers said that some organisations would be allowed to affiliate, but the new organisation would decide which organisation to affiliate and which not to affiliate.

The Convention delegates wanted to know the basis on which the deciding would be made, and **Mr. R. M. Canca**, seconded by **Mr. I. B. Tabata** moved as an addendum:

Organisations accepting the policy of the new organisation would be allowed to affiliate.

The Congress delegates refused to accept this addendum, whilst the Convention delegates felt that the Congress resolution left as it was would lead to an arbitrary cutting out of certain organisations from the new body, even if they accepted its policy.

As no agreement could be arrived at, **Rev. Mahabane** proposed that the joint-committee should meet before the next conference to continue the discussion.

This proposal was not accepted by Congress.

Mr. I. B. Tabata proposed that we report to the joint conference.

Mr. O. R. Tambo felt that we could not report to the joint conference until an agreement between the two executives had been reached.

The conference was adjourned sine die, at 3:30 a.m. on the 18th day of April 1949.

(Sgd) C. M. Kobus.
Recording Secretary Joint Meeting