

In the name of "unity", we cannot conceal differences that
must be brought into the open, says

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Uncompromising Struggle for the Freedom Charter

ON JUNE 26th, 1955, the Congress of the People of South Africa through their representatives gather at Kliptown, Johannesburg, adopted the Freedom Charter.

That great gathering ushered in a new era in the chequered history of the liberatory struggle in this country.

The power that lay in the simple unpretentious words of the Freedom Charter has been amply demonstrated, if only in the reactions it has aroused from the reactionaries on the one hand and the people on the other. To the people it is a clear and noble expression of their aspirations which must be attained in our lifetime. To the Nationalist Government the Charter represented the most comprehensive and consistent programme that has so far been put forward in opposition to their own. Recognising this the Nationalist Party lashed out at the Charter and the organisations that gave rise to it. By making the Freedom Charter the centre of their attacks on the Congress Movement they endorsed its dynamic character and ironically enough made it probably the most famous document in South African history.

The very fact that the Charter represents the most progressive programme ever put forward by the national organisations of the oppressed in this country should have suggested that it would be opposed tooth and nail by all reactionaries. It should have been anticipated that this opposition would come not only from openly reactionary circles but also from other groups some of which claim to be "democratic."

The acceptance by the multi-national Congress of the People of the Charter sounded the death knell to all manner of political will-o-the-wisps that still find currency in our country. Hence an ideological and physical struggle, concealed and open, taking many different forms and from all

manner of groups and interests was to be expected. The physical attack came in the form of a Treason Trial. The war of ideas took this and other forms.

The question that arises is whether or not the Congress Movement has effectively dealt with this ideological war against the Charter. Have we sufficiently realised the need to wage an uncompromising struggle for the complete victory of the Charter in the ideological field? Have we succeeded to show by a close analysis of all the terms of the Charter that it is the only adequate answer for the problems that face South Africa today and is therefore the correct strategic objective of all progressive forces?

Have we placed all the necessary ideological weapons at the disposal of our people to enable them to repeal and defeat the attacks on the Charter in the field of ideas?

There is a tendency in the Liberatory Movement (using that expression in its broadest sense) to play down or even shy away from ideological differences. People feel the paramount need for a broad united front against the very real and overwhelming reactionary advance in our country. Keenly responsible, anxious always to maintain progressive forces intact as far as possible we are leaning over backwards to avoid any suggestions of sectarianism.

But the question is how is this being done? Are our methods correct? Are we not in our desire for unity on practical issues against Apartheid falling somewhat into the "marsh" ideologically?

A false way to unity is to place in the forefront the "reconciliation" of groups or persons. Differences are hushed up, their causes, their significance, their objective conditions are not elucidated. If there is no agreement on a common policy then it is given an interpretation that makes it acceptable to all. This leads to narrow-circle diplomacy and the adjustment of conflicts at all costs. In the long run it leads to confusion and disillusionment.

We are not suggesting that this is the position in so far as the Congresses are concerned although even there the full development of self-criticism in ideological matters has not been attained. We are primarily concerned with the relationship between the Congress Movement and potential allies in a broad anti-fascist united front.

The only true road to unity lies in thrashing out differences in the most open, clear and, if need be, ruthless way, so that at last the truth should be apparent to all. The situation in South Africa renders it particularly necessary for this principle to be observed. The fact that there are laws which place heavy restrictions on the manner and scope of such ideological discussions is no excuse but is a strong reason for even greater discussion.

The fact that the united anti-fascist front we seek to build is a broad movement merely affects the basis of unity and the degrees of unity upon essentials. Within the Congress Movement, for instance, a higher form of

unity upon essentials is required than in a broad united front which includes Liberals, Labourites, etc. And for Socialists an incomparably higher and more difficult form of unity is called for.

But the point is that whatever movement we are dealing with, points of difference must be understood and the basis of unity clearly stated.

There is relatively little difficulty in so far as the Congress Movement is concerned. All sectors of the Congress accept the Freedom Charter as their basic policy and programme. The Freedom Charter is a statement of objectives sufficiently comprehensive and long-term to lay a powerful foundation of unity for years to come. There may be those within the Congress movement who quite rightly see the need for even more fundamental changes in South Africa than are envisaged in the Charter. Such persons, however, know that such changes lie so far ahead that they cannot be made the subject of a struggle today. All progressives are obliged to fight unreservedly for the achievement of the aims contained in the Freedom Charter. That is the essential pre-condition for any further advance.

The Charter probably represents the maximum that can be accepted by ALL democratic elements in the present historical stage in S.A. On the other hand it is the minimum that can be expected of any person who wishes to be considered part of the Congress Movement. No person or group can possibly be considered to be part of Congress unless they accept all the fundamental aspects of the Freedom Charter without qualification. And the main efforts of the Congress Movement should be to secure the acceptance of the Charter by all groups in the country. This will be done not only by means of discussion but by convincing the people through active mass struggle that the Charter is the only way out.

Whilst the Charter represents the basis of unity in Congress it can hardly be expected to form the essential basis of an anti-fascist front directed against the Nationalist Party and its Apartheid ideology.

Many groups who are not part of the Congress Movement and who do not accept the Charter must be brought within the framework of a broad united front against the Nationalist Party . . . a Popular Front.

The aims of such a popular front will only coincide with those of the Congress Movement over a limited field and for limited objectives.

It is essential to define both for the benefit of Congressmen and for potential allies in a united front precisely how far the limits of the United Front extend.

The Congress Movement clearly does not expect that all groups with whom it is prepared to join in a broad front agree on all aspects of its policy. It insists that these groups or organisations will be prepared genuinely to participate in the practical struggle to defend the people from the attacks of the Nationalist Government and to secure the defeat of the Apartheid policy which has become the supreme menace facing all people in the Union today.

For its part the Congress naturally claims power of independent action ; the right to express its differences from others clearly ; to protect its programme and extend its influence at all times.

Our differences with temporary, partial and even vacillating allies must be stated clearly so that the people can be made aware of the basis of united front tactics being pursued at the present time.

It is particularly important to elucidate this problem as some of the groups or parties with whom the Congress Movement is urging co-operation are themselves engaged in furious campaigns against the Congress and its programme—the Freedom Charter. Some of these groups imagine that advantage can be gained out of the sincere manner in which Congress is carrying out a united front policy to undermine the Congress and its leadership.

With greater maturity and responsibility and because it is more sensitive of the dangers represented by the Nationalist Government the Congress Movement has not always retaliated against attack as it could.

It does become necessary to warn against the kind of campaign that has been carried on for some time now against the Congress Movement. The intensity of these attacks have increased during the period of the Treason Trial. As always when punitive measures are taken by the authorities against the progressive movement the opportunity is seized by all sorts of dissident groups to make “ideological” attacks on the Movement.

It is interesting to note the groups participating in this campaign on Congress. It is an unholy and motley audience which includes the Nationalist Party, the United Party, sections of the Liberal Party, the Africanists, various newspapers including the “Golden City Post,” “World,” “Contact,” “experts” on African affairs in the United States, etc.

It is impossible to deal with all the forms of this offensive which is being carried on by means of slander, gossip lies, through newspaper articles, interviews and comments. We should like to deal with some of the criticisms levelled at Congress.

One criticism against the Freedom Charter and shared by such apparently diverse groups as the Nationalist Party, Liberal Party and Africanists is that the Freedom Charter is a “communist” document.

One would search in vain for some feature that stamps the Charter as a “communist” document. None of the groups who level this criticism have ever tried to make their conclusions rest on an examination of the terms of the Charter itself. They never bother to state what exactly makes the Charter “communist.” One can only conclude that the word “communist” as used by these reactionaries is a kind of political swearword.

The Africanists have criticised the Freedom Charter for asserting that "South Africa belong to all who live in it, Black and White." They argue that the country belongs to the *Africans only*. This attitude must be noted by those misguided persons who are now engaged in a campaign of white-washing the Africanists.

The Charter is of course referring to the position as it should and will obtain in a democratic South Africa. This must be so because strictly speaking South Africa, today, belongs to a very tiny minority of mining magnates, industrialists and landlords together with overseas imperialist interests. It does *not* belong to the majority of people, white or black. These tiny few are prepared to prove and defend their present ownership with all the forces at the command of their state machine. The task of democracy will be to restore ownership to the vast majority in S.A. who have worked and slaved to develop it.

It has been alleged that certain sections of the Congress Movement are dominated by others. The Congress of Democrats has been most frequently mentioned as a dominating force. Before 1953 when the Congress of Democrats was not in existence it was alleged by these people that the A.N.C. is dominated by the South African Indian Congress. When the Congress of Democrats was formed at the instance of the A.N.C. the attack switched to the C.O.D. Incidentally it is never said that the Congress of Democrats dominates the Indian Congress. It is only the African National Congress that is so "dominated." The reason is that the criticism is basically racialist in its origins.

These people think that by accusing the Africans of being dominated by Whites they will the more readily succeed in their aim of discrediting the A.N.C. as a force among the African people who are suffering national oppression by a White minority. This allegation is not made in relation to the C.O.D. on the grounds that it is "communist." Even the most die-hard reactionaries know that communism cannot be attached to any race or skin-colour.

Another favourite ideological criticism is that the Congress Movement is multi-racial and not non-racial. Previously the claim was that the Liberal Party was the only multi-racial organisation in the country and that the Congresses were "racial." This was not too effective inasmuch as the Congresses had fought struggles as a multi-racial group virtually single-handed for the last decade whilst others stood discreetly away from the firing-line. The racialist Nationalist Government had by its actions shown that it too recognised this fact. When it banned a Congressman from participating in various organisations it included them all and treated them as one. It was and is gross impertinence for those who had done nothing to fight racialism to turn round now and pose as champions of anti-racialism as compared with the Congresses.

Today the criticism has become more sophisticated but no less ridiculous. The Congress is allegedly multi-racial and other groups claim to be non-racial. This is being screamed at the country . . . by whom? The "Golden City Post" and the interests behind it, the Pan-Africanist Congress, Mr. Jordan Ngubane, the Liberals! The Golden City Post and its backers go further and suggest virtually the dissolution of the Congresses and their replacement by a veritable hodge-podge that includes Liberals, Labourites, Black Sash, "left wing" U.P., Pan-Africanists, and dissenting Nationalist professors.

This is a policy of disruption of the freedom struggle and the creation of a debating society. In ancient times philosophers learnedly debated the problem of the number of angels that could dance at the point of a needle. The organisation advocated by the Golden City Post would probably debate the difference between "non-racial" and "multi-racial" before it finally split into a thousand fragments.

There are forces in S.A. genuinely working for a democratic society in which racialism would be impossible. These are forces which recognise that racialism stems from a definite source that lies at the root of South African state structure. These forces realise that state-power is the key to the solution to the problem of racialism. The core of those forces is to be found in the Congresses and it is from them that genuine and honest ideas for the formation of a single all-South African organisation will come. And when the Congresses at the right time call for such an organisation many of those who are shouting today in favour of such an organisation will oppose its formation tooth and nail. They are not in favour of a non-racial organisation. They are in favour of an anti-progressive policy under cover of a progressive idea.

These are merely some of the ideological attacks which must be met openly and boldly by Congress. We must make our leading freedom volunteers aware of this war against Congress and take the necessary measures. Our strength must be concentrated on securing closer ties with the masses through struggle. The reactionaries must be isolated. To those persons who are young in the movement, and whose mistakes are the result of lack of understanding and experience, we should extend the hand of friendship and teach them in order that they might turn out true leaders of tomorrow.

Only in this way can our movement be ready for the stern battles that lie ahead.