

BLACK RENAISSANCE CONVENTION

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE
ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Chairman:

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**Report on the Black Renaissance Convention held at Hammanskraal,
December 13-16, 1974**

FRIDAY: 13TH DECEMBER

The Registration office opened at 2.00 p.m. Many delegates started pouring into the Conference Centre, the majority in the early part of the evening.

In spite of the ruling by the Steering Committee that no White reporters would be allowed at the Convention, two White newsmen presented themselves early in the afternoon. They were dealt with without further ado. Fortunately, they cooperated very willingly. At 8.30 p.m. the house was called to order. Ds. Allen Boesak, presently a candidate for the Doctorate of Divinity in Holland, requested Bishop James of the A.M.E. Church to open the proceedings with a prayer. He welcomed the delegates to Hammanskraal. Only informal business was conducted that night. The rest of the night was taken up with a general "Let-us-know-each-other".

SATURDAY: 14TH DECEMBER

Speaking on behalf of the Steering Committee, Ds. Allen Boesak welcomed everybody. A few announcements were made:

- 1) Rev. John Thorne, President of the South African Council of Churches, was appointed to chair the day's meeting, followed by Rev. Stan Mogoba on the 15th December.
- 2) No electronic equipment would be allowed into the conference hall during the proceedings. Only one tape-recorder could be used by the Committee to record the speeches of the guest-speakers.
- 3) Photographs were not to be taken during the sessions, except outside and with the permission of the subject.
- 4) There were slight alterations in the Agenda e.g. Mrs. Meer would replace Mr Collins Ramusi as first speaker.

Rev. J. Thorne took the chair. He thanked the Ad Hoc Steering Committee for bringing so many Black people under the same roof. "If you fail to plan you have planned to fail", he quipped.

He allowed a five-minutes-break for the delegates to know one another and to share some of their anxieties, fears and expectations about the Convention.

Fraternal greetings of solidarity were given by Rev. M. Ngakane (Mission and Evangelism - S.A. Council of Churches), Rev. E. Tema (N.G. Kerk in Afrika - Ministers' Fraternal), Mrs. J. Phakathi (Christian Institute of Southern Africa), Rev. Andy Makhene (IDAMASA - in the place of Rev. Sol Lediga). Ds. E. Tema, of the N.G. Kerk in Afrika, uttered some significant words: "We wish the Conference well and welcome the opportunity where Blacks come together. We find ourselves living in a fragmented Church structure. The Black section of the N.G. Kerk is aware of the oppression and is no longer prepared to put up with it."

Ds. Allen Boesak informed the Conference of a similar Convention which was taking place in Namibia 13th-16th December. The Black Renaissance plucked its absolute solidarity with the Namibian people, and asked this to be recorded.

At 9.40 a.m., the chair allowed the delegates to shout their fears and expectations as these arose in their minds:

Expectations: Solidarity, Liberation, Commitment, Self-determination, Power, Fearlessness, Direction, Togetherness, Confrontation, Concrete Action, Honesty, Facing Reality.

Fears: Problems too many to cope with, misinterpretation and distortion of the facts, Isolationism, Glorified workshop, What after Convention?, Fear of ourselves and our shadows, Lack of single mindedness, Homelander will be attacked, not sincere in talking about liberation, How can Christians accommodate Muslims in their theology?

Rev. Moeti Maurice Ngakano's Presidential Address:

In it he emphasised concepts like solidarity, the opportuneness of the Convention, its historic nature and the need for united practical action. (cf. whole speech).

10.15 a.m. TEA BREAK - Meeting resumed at 10.40 a.m.

Before Mrs. Fatima Meer could present her address, a tirade of questions and "points of orders" were directed at the Chairman. Some of the questions concerned the composition and nature of the Steering Committee; others questioned the aims and objects of the Convention and felt that they should and had to be radicalised. The Steering Committee replied to all the queries. Other interjections were purely childish and showed a serious lack of understanding of democratic procedural rules at such conferences. The Chairman gently allowed the debates to drag on. The Steering Committee made it clear that its programme was flexible, because it did not wish to stifle proposals and wider discussions. One motion after another littered the chair's table.

As the session progressed, it became evident that some delegates (later identified as BPC) were terrified of a new rival political organisation. Their fears were allayed when they were reassured that this was never the original intention of the organisers. The Steering Committee readily endorsed the suggestions that the Convention should be seen as a reinforcement of other black organisations who had also struggled for the liberation of the Black people.

Another element came to the fore - i.e. the presence of some persons who are actively involved in the political institutions of Apartheid. It was becoming clear that "separate development and its institutions" would come under heavy fire from the Conference.

Before the lunch-break, the house agreed that two committees be formed in order to expedite matters:

1. Resolutions Committee
2. Committee to deal with "Aims and Objects"

1.35 p.m. - Third session

Telegrams, letters of congratulations and good wishes for the Black Renaissance Convention were read. They came from South Africa, United States of America and Western Europe. One or two of the telegrams were queried, especially the one from the United States. One delegate expressed his fears of the C.I.A. and U.S. imperialism and that the Convention should watch against this menace.

The members of the Committee to revise the "Aims and Objects" were:

Oscar Motsape - E. Tema - Mike Ranthe

Resolutions Committee

J. Phakathi - L. Rassool - D. Curry - Mrs. Qunta - D. Ntuli

Mrs. Fatima Meer's Speech: "Role of women in society....."

She requested the Conference to rise in order to pay respect to:

- Rev. Mayatula - who symbolises the detainees-without-trial.
- Nelson Mandela - who symbolises those on Robben Island.
- Oliver Tambo - who symbolises those in Exile.
- Abraham Tiro - who symbolises those who died in the struggle.

After her brilliant speech and presentation, Mrs. Meer was subjected to a barrage of interesting questions.

When the Chairman called upon Mr. S. Motsuonyane - President of NAFCOC - to address the Conference on "Black Consciousness and the economic position of the Black man in South Africa", some "points of order" calls were made. It was at this stage that Rev. Ngakane threatened to "take very strong measures" against those who failed to conduct themselves in an orderly fashion. Mr. Mr. Motsuonyane then proceeded to deliver his address. He answered all the questions that were put to him, following his talk. At 4.10 p.m. the Conference adjourned for tea.

When business resumed at 4.55 p.m., Rev. Ngakane assured the Conference that the Committee responsible was still condensing the 21 suggested "Aims and Objects" into a digest form. In the meantime the Conference was to continue with the papers.

Speaking on behalf of the group that had come to be known as the SASO/BPC axis, a delegate publicly apologised for the irresponsible behaviour of his allies without withdrawing their sentiments, especially on the need for unity and solidarity. Rev. Ngakane accepted the apology. He assured everyone that all the delegates were free to express themselves and make whatever contribution they deemed fit. Only the unruly elements would not be tolerated.

Dr. Manas Buthelesi spoke on: "The relevance of Black Theology in the liberation of a people - the christian challenge of Black Theology". Questions and a brief discussion ensued as usual. Dr. Allen Bocosak announced that the papers of the guest-speakers would be made available in due course.

The Conference adjourned for supper and returned to the night session at 7.45 p.m.

In order to push forward with the agenda, the house voted in favour of working till late into the night. It was announced that the "Dashikis" - a Black musical group - would render a performance soon after the evening session.

The Convenor of the Resolutions Committee reported their findings. Mrs. Phakathi pointed out that her committee had seen it fit to draw a clear distinction between what they saw to be AIMS from other proposals which sounded more like Resolutions. The discussion centred around the aims, postponing the Resolutions to a later stage, in order to allow amendments. Clarificatory questions about the "modus elegendi" were directed at the Steering Committee and were satisfactorily answered. The presence of the "Homelanders" was challenged. It was repeatedly stated that the leaders of the Black people were the Sobukwe, Sisulu and Mandelas, and certainly not the "Homeland Leaders" who are a Government imposition on the people. (N.B. all the original as well as subsequent "Aims and Objects" as well as Resolutions of the Convention can be found under appendix).

Finally, the aims of the Convention were reduced to five points:

1. Black solidarity for total Black liberation.
2. To articulate the Black people's aspirations.
3. Acknowledge the existing Black organisations and give moral and other support for liberation of Black people.
4. To outline a programme of action for Black liberation.
5. To appoint a Steering Committee for organising and co-ordinating future meetings of Black organisations.

The Resolutions were cut down to six (cf. appendix). Following some lively debates on the implications of the aims, the night session ended.

SUNDAY: 15TH DECEMBER

At 9.00 a.m. the first session of the day began under the chairmanship of Rev. Stan Mogoba. The Chairman warned the house that we were behind schedule. One speaker, subsequently supported by a tiny minority reminded the chairman that the house had been promised that the items on Resolutions would take precedence over other business. The majority felt that it was nonsense to try and discuss motions or resolutions in a cumbersome crowd of three hundred people. Instead it was suggested that the house had better divide itself into eight workshops for a thorough discussion on each of the suggested resolutions. Mrs. Fatima Meer resolved the matter by tabling a motion which was unanimously accepted. It read: "We accept the objectives and resolutions submitted by the Resolutions Committee of this house. We now instruct the workshops to discuss these resolutions and objectives with a view to formulating a declaration of the Black Renaissance Convention."

The names of the eight groups were accordingly read. After calling out the names, the Secretary asked all those whose names had been omitted to come to the chair, so that they could be allocated to the eight groups. Because most of the SASO/BPC people had registered too late and because some of them had not been registered then, naturally, a number of their names did not appear on the official list which had been drawn up early in the Conference. Led by one or two dubious characters, the SASO/BPC axis decided to form themselves into the ninth group. The Steering Committee had no objections to this move and apologised to them. It is surprising then when these students accused the house of discriminating against them, dubbing them "foreign elements". Some precious time was wasted on arguments which went in circles and split hairs on stupid trifles.

Though not following a logical pattern of argumentation, some valuable statements were uttered. e.g.:

- a) The regaining of our country and its wealth.

- b) The type of social order after liberation.
- c) The dangers of elitism.
- d) Foreign investments in South Africa generally and homelands in particular.
- e) The keen interest of the imperialist foreigners in our liberation struggle.

At 4.25 p.m. Fr. A.M. Zwane spoke on: "Social Communications media in developing countries". Questions followed his dynamic paper. The house concluded that there was at least only one way of controlling the newsmedia - viz: the founding of a Black-owned newspaper or magazine. Otherwise, Black people in South Africa will never communicate the way they would like to.

Father Zwane's paper was followed by a joint presentation of their speech by Miss Fossia Fisher and Mr. Harold Nxasana. They spoke on: "The Labour situation in South Africa and Black awareness". Inevitably, this paper sparked off much discussion, revolving around the rôle of the proletariat in the struggle, Trade Unionism etc. After the Chairman had thanked all three speakers, the Conference adjourned for supper. The women were requested to carry their supper to the conference hall where they would have a private session.

At 7.15 p.m.: A speaker insisted that the Conference had to deal with the matter of the declaration as a matter of priority. Finally, it was agreed that Professor G. Nkondo's paper on "The Educational world of Blacks in South Africa" should precede a discussion on the proposed Declaration. Having answered a barrage of challenging questions, Professor G. Nkondo was given a spontaneous standing ovation by the Conference.

Then the most dramatic and crucial moment of the Convention started. After the Resolutions Committee had reported its findings, especially the section concerning the Declaration and Resolutions, a heated and lively debate ensued. Before a vote on the whole corpus of the Declaration was taken the Conference discussed every clause of the document plus the Resolutions, individually.

Once again, the matter on separate development caused tempers to flare up. In due course, the house made it clear that the Black people in South Africa rejected what was constantly referred to as "that iniquitous fascist system". At some stage one delegate condemned homelands as "fascist excretions...." As the Resolutions condemned "separate development and all its institutions....", certain delegates sounded a note of warning about a possible ambiguity. What sort of institutions are we referring to? One speaker pointed out that the so-called Bantu, Coloured and Indian "universities" were also institutions of separate development. In fact, our whole life as Blacks was based on separate development. The delegates then made it clear, they meant primarily the "political institutions" and such like bodies. At one moment, a delegate threatened to "scrap" the students from the Convention, because by studying at those "universities" they were collaborators of the system too! (Loud laughter).

Mrs. Patina Moor sounded a word of warning about the dangers of black racism. South Africa had to be shared among all its people, irrespective of race, religion or colour. She was reacting to remarks which could easily have been interpreted as racist attitudes. Mandela, Sobukwe, Biko, Tiro and Pityana can never be accused of racism.

Another clause which caused a flurry-up was the one dealing with detainees and exiles. Someone denounced SASO for condoning the Homeland leaders in public, whilst making secret approaches to them for help. It was disclosed, for instance, that SASO had appealed to two Homeland leaders - viz: Gatsha Buthelesi and Sonny Leon, for the release of the detainees. This proved to be a damning revelation. The Homeland leaders who were widely denied the allegation.

Mrs. Moor, who was involved in the bitter exchange of words with the insulting SASO "leader", blamed the Chairman for failing to protect her against such shameful unaccountability and for stopping her (Mrs. Moor) from explaining the matter further. That was when she was falsely reported to have resigned from the Convention in protest. All this happened after the Declaration and Resolutions had been unanimously passed. By adopting the Declaration and Resolutions with such acclamation, the Convention felt that its most important work had been accomplished. However, such a statement should not detract from the marvellous work which followed the Declaration.

A sub-clause demanding the exclusion of the "protagonists of Apartheid" from Black Conferences was debated. Quite a number of the delegates felt that even if we totally disagree with the "Homelanders", we should still talk to them. Delegates cautioned against "expelling" the homeland officials, because such an action might antagonise them even further. From time to time the Honourable Collins Ramusi interjected and was given audience, although subsequently booed. He publicly condemned separate development and gave reasons why he operated within the frame-work of that system. It became evident that Collins Ramusi was an extraordinarily courageous leader. He was not too astonished by the hostile attitude of the audience, as the Steering Committee had forewarned him about the mood of the Convention. Collins Ramusi had assured the Organising Committee that the risk was worth taking. By a wide margin the house voted in favour of excluding homeland leaders and all "protagonists of Apartheid" from all meetings of Black people. Some people thought that a re-count of the votes was necessary. After the Chairman had clearly explained what the Conference was voting on, the same number of positive votes was registered. Contrary to newspaper reports, Mr. Collins Ramusi and other "homeland leaders" remained seated until the Chairman adjourned the meeting for the night. The Homeland officials were not physically evicted.

Mrs. Jane Phakathi of the Christian Institute of Southern Africa, was elected Chairlady for the following day. That Sunday evening, 15th December, 1974, was indeed one of the most dramatic and most significant highlights of the whole Convention. The so-called "expulsion" of the Homeland leaders was of little importance, many delegates maintained. Its significance lies in the fact that symbolically separate development and its authors were unconditionally and utterly rejected by a representative group of the Black Community.

At the end of that session, some delegates spontaneously burst into songs of jubilation. Black Power fists flew into the air. As it had already been indicated, SASO/BPC axis formed not more than twenty persons altogether, the results of the voting clearly proved that the whole house had taken all the decisions of the Convention.

MONDAY: 16TH DECEMBER - LAST DAY OF THE CONVENTION

Mrs. Jane Phakathi chaired. She confused the house by reintroducing previous motions which had already been dealt with and disposed of e.g.:

- a) the constitution of the Steering Committee
- b) reference to some complaints from the "rebel" Group 9.

Although she tried her utmost to justify her questions and actions, the majority of the people strongly believed she was secretly working with a definite clique. Bitter complaints about her chairing were later submitted to the Organising Committee.

Mrs. Fatima Moor threatened to resign because of some of the developments of the previous afternoon. But she never carried out her threat.

The last of the guest-speakers proceeded to read his paper on "Towards the manifestation of Black Consciousness". Mr Mafika Gwala from Durban, was his name. His paper, judging from the enthusiastic response of the Convention, turned out to be a fitting closing speech. He was very good in his answers. The underlying challenge of his talk was a call to action without further delay. After he had been thanked by the Chairlady the Conference debated the question of whether or not to establish a permanent Committee. The house decide to entrust the Ad Hoc Steering Committee with the task of completing whatever work was connected with the first Black Renaissance Convention, including the printing and publication of the book originally envisaged by the Committee. It was felt that to found another permanent structure might provide the "enemy" with another opportunity of cracking down on those concerned. The house was in favour of organising committees on an Ad Hoc basis and to intensify organisational work in the Black associations and movements. The present Steering Committee was asked to handle press reports, although any of the delegates could answer certain questions that arose out of the newspapers.

VOLE OF THANKS

This was given by Mr. P. Gumede, Vice-President of NAFCOC. He thanked all the delegates. But above all, he was very grateful to the Steering Committee who had had the vision to bring together a cross-section of the Black people of South Africa and provided them with a public platform to air their honest views. He said that he was certainly sure that he was expressing the sentiments of the house. He particularly stressed the amount of work which was involved in organising the Convention and the absolute dedication of the organisers to their work. He praised the cooperation of the younger delegates, although he was aware that the Whiteman's newsmedia would distort the heated but constructive debates. Mr. Gumede thought that although Black organisations are very necessary to serve the Black Community, they could nonetheless be a source of bitter divisions. Hence the need for some loose machinery which could bring the Black organisations and other Blacks together from time to time and for joint planning and action.

Finally, Mr. Gumede warned that the massmedia would seize upon the "expulsion" of the Homelands to divide us and attempt to annul our deliberations. **WE SHOULD TAKE A FIRM STAND AGAINST THAT!** he cautioned.

The Chairlady asked the Conference to rise for the National Anthem "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" (God Bless Afrika our beloved country;...) Black Power fists jabbed the air and beautiful Black brothers and sisters hugged one another with feelings of joy, gratitude and SOLIDARITY.

SO ENDED THE FIRST BLACK RENAISSANCE CONVENTION - The time was 3.25 p.m.
16th December, 1974.

White South Africa was celebrating the "Day of the Covenant".

Types of groups and persons who participated in the BLACK RENAISSANCE CONVENTION

CATEGORIES:

1. Black Theologians
2. TECON - Artists/Dramatists
3. Teachers.
4. Entrepreneurs.
5. Black Labour Organizations
6. Industrial workers
7. Academics
8. Housewives
9. Medical Practitioners
10. Nurses and Para-medics
11. University Students' Organizations
12. Youth
13. Journalists and Radio men
14. Political activists and Politicians of standing
15. University lecturers
16. Musicians
17. Social workers
18. Sociologists
19. Urban and Country representatives
20. Lawyers