

OUR FREEDOM CHARTER

By Jack Simons

Equality is the Charter's keynote. It is sounded in the Preamble's call for the building of a democratic state "without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief". An identical note is struck in the clauses on government proclaiming equality of rights for all persons "regardless of race, colour or sex." The principle is extended to national groups.

In the liberated South Africa:

- All people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture;
- All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed; while
- The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime.

In its affirmation of equality the Charter is consistent with the mainstream of world opinion reflected in the Charter of Human Rights, the conventions and resolutions of the United Nations that reject discrimination, the principles of the Organisation of African Unity and policy statements by the Front Line States condemning apartheid. In global perspective the ideology and practice of racism — white supremacy and black oppression — are no less repugnant than slavery.

World opinion has taken a great leap forward since the end of World War Two towards an accepted doctrine of equality of rights and freedoms. Contributory factors include the defeat of the Nazi-Fascist Axis, decolonisation, the strengthening of the socialist sector and the emergence of newly-independent African and Asian states, former victims of colonial rule. There has been a shift in the balance of power, one that favours the struggle against social evils of which racist South Africa is the supreme embodiment.

It is correct for the liberation movement to single out racism, colonialism and apartheid as the main enemy, since they are the main source of oppression. There is more to the

struggle than a bare rejection, however; its complement is a positive determination to unite South Africans of all national groups in a common cause for a single culture. This was the vision of the ANC's founders and it has gained rather than lost credibility in the years that followed. We can now speak with realism of moving towards one South Africa, one people and one nation.

The Roots of Inequality

The closer South Africa advances towards a unified society the greater will be the resistance from divisive forces represented by 'tribalism' and 'racism'. Both have historical roots which can be taken for granted in this essay. Of more significance for the present discussion is the contradiction between the forces making for unity and the obstacles they encounter. Both result from South Africa's special brand of capitalism. Like capitalism everywhere, it breaks down national barriers in the search for a common market, but recreates them in a new form within the national economy by means of race discrimination and tribal segregation.

Racism and tribalism occur in a class society in which differences of language and culture become an adjunct to the primary cleavage between the owners of property and the propertyless workers. The exploiting class, trading in South Africa as a national or racial category, perpetuate their supremacy by dividing the dispossessed into competing groups, fighting one another for land, jobs and power instead of combining their forces for untied action against the oppressor.

The Freedom Charter recognises the linkage between capital and discriminatory inequality, at least to the extent of calling for the return of the country's national wealth to the people, the nationalisation of the "mineral wealth beneath the soil", and public ownership of the banks and monopoly industry. These objectives are compatible also with state monopoly

capitalism, however, and can hardly be considered a socialist programme based on public ownership, a planned economy, workers' management and the payment of wages according to the value of the workers' contribution to the total product.

The founders were radical liberals rather than socialist egalitarians. In spite of the transition to revolutionary armed struggle, Congress has adhered to the original programme of uniting:

"all tribes and clans of various tribes or races and by means of combined effort and united political organisation to defend their freedom, rights and privileges."

Added to a desire for continuity and respect for tradition, there is a Congress realisation that most peasant-workers, who form the bulk of the working class under apartheid, are not yet class conscious enough or ready for the adoption of a socialist solution.

Whatever the reason, Congress is not a workers' party with a socialist programme. The liberation struggle is directed against white domination and national oppression; its objective, in the words of President Oliver Tambo, is "a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa." The equality it seeks is *formal*, guaranteed by law, and providing equal rights to all people. A formal, legal equality of rights is an essential element of a democracy.

Two Revolutions

Another kind of equality is *factual*. It guarantees actual equality of power and opportunity by transferring the means of production to public ownership and distributing rewards under the rule: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. This is socialist equality which the Freedom Charter does not contemplate. At the present stage of the revolution, the liberation movement aims to uproot national oppression and release the economy from control by transnational monopolies. It is not directed against the owners of domestic capital.

The distinction is not acceptable to all groups opposed to the apartheid regime. Some, like the exponents of 'workerist tendencies' and

self-styled 'Marxists', reject all forms of capital, emphasise the class struggle and set their targets at the achievement of socialism.

The ANC's position is that just as there are two kinds of equality, so there are two kinds of revolution, separate yet intertwined. One is the national democratic revolution for equal rights; the other is the socialist revolution for public ownership, workers' control and a classless society. The national revolution for equal rights is the special province of the oppressed nationalities; the socialist revolution takes the form of a class struggle led by the working class of all national groups. The two revolutions co-exist, operating side by side. They interact, blending at many points and fruitifying each other.

This is not the place to debate the separation of function or the nature of the alliance. It is sufficient for present purposes to note that the partnership is an established reality, born out of struggle against the common enemy, nurtured by sacrifices on the battlefield and watered by the blood of martyrs. They are as closely knit as Siamese twins. To separate them would need a surgical operation which might kill or cripple both.

Open Membership

Another departure from the ANC's declared position is represented by the Black Consciousness Movement and an assortment of 'Africanists' who recommend the exclusion of the non-Africans, notably whites, from the ranks and/or leadership of the liberation movement. A related issue is the alleged existence of 'tribalism' in Congress, giving rise to preferential treatment of members belonging to one or other language or regional group. Complaints of tribalism are, however, marginal, serving perhaps to strengthen the hand of persons making a bid for top positions in the leadership, and can therefore be safely ignored in the present discussion.

A convenient starting point is the constitution. The first published in 1919, provided for three kinds of individual members, all required to belong to the "aboriginal races of Africa." This proviso was interpreted to include Coloured on the assumption that the ancestors of

at least one parent were aborigines. Ordinary membership was open to men over the age of 18 years; honorary membership could be conferred on persons who had rendered outstanding service to the people; while auxiliary membership, without voting rights, existed for members of the Bantu Women's National League, who provided shelter and food for the delegates.

A new constitution adopted in 1943 removed the restrictions on women and non-Africans. Clause 3 stipulated that:

"Any person over 17 years of age who is willing to subscribe to the aims of Congress and to abide by its Constitution and Rules may become an individual member upon application to the nearest branch."

The 1958 Constitution retained the open membership clause. Section 3(a) declares that:

"Membership of Congress shall be open to any person above the age of 18 who accepts its principles, policy and programme and is prepared to abide by its Constitution and Rules."

Under the heading "Rights and Duties" the Constitution acknowledges the right of members to take part in elections and to be elected to any committee, commission or delegation of Congress (Clause 6(a)(iii)).

Constitutions are an important but incomplete guide to policy. Practice is another valuable indicator. The available evidence suggests that Congress made no considered attempt during the period of legality to integrate non-Africans. In contrast, Congress in exile includes in its ranks a substantial number of Indians, Coloureds and whites. Their position in the organisation has been informally debated from time to time and is now receiving more attention because of the ongoing preparations for the pending consultative conference. A leading Congressman has circulated a memorandum on tribalism in the ANC and the question of open membership. As regards the latter, he calls on the movement to:

"mobilise all patriots of different races to actively and physically participate in the support of MK."

But there is "at this stage of our revolution, no need for open membership." His argument in brief includes the following assertions:

■ Our struggle is first and foremost against White Domination;

■ Africans can and should liberate themselves under their own leadership;

■ People who want to include non-Africans in the National Executive Committee of Congress may give an impression that Africans are incapable of doing the job on their own.

Sentimentality apart, there is an obvious contradiction between the approved policy of enlisting militants from all national groups and the proposed exclusion of non-Africans from the leadership. An even more serious contradiction exists between this Africanist approach and the claims of Congress to represent all national groups in the struggle for a single South African nation.

A survey of opinion held by ANC members in exile revealed the existence of two minority views, one amounting to an outright rejection of non-African integration at any level of the ANC organisation, the other approving of integration subject to the proviso that the three top positions in Congress be reserved for Africans. Both minorities considered that the rural population in Bantustans was not yet politically mature enough to accept non-Africans in the leadership.

The majority supported the participation of all South Africans in the work of Congress at all levels. Members should be appointed to office strictly on merit. The narrow nationalism of the PAC and BCM remained invalid while the ANC was committed to building an inclusive South African democracy without racial barriers.

One Nation

Tribalism and racialism are much the same. Dominant classes manipulate the differences to suit their interests in ways well known to us. Our history is saturated with the 'divide and rule' strategy used by colonists, settlers and governments to conquer and subdue. Bantustans, the tri-racial parliament, an emerging black bourgeoisie are products of this divisive strategy.

The liberation movement has responded with calls for a united front of South Africans committed to the vision of a liberated society of equals. President Tambo repeated the call in an address delivered on the occasion of January 8, 1985:

"Our cadres are men and women, young and old, black and white, who are involved in daily struggles, making sacrifices in pursuit of the people's cause",

he said. In his message delivered in Luanda, People's Republic of Angola, on January 8 1979, he expressed the

"conviction and hope that 1982 will find the ANC with a membership representative of a cross section of our entire population, a membership which will include a substantial percentage of those South Africans now living under the doubtful privilege of being 'white'."

Nelson Mandela also called for an 'open door' in his interview with the Conservative Party's (UK) Lord Bethal. He was reported as saying:

"Personally, I am a socialist and I believe in a classless society. But I see no reason to belong to any political party at the moment. Businessmen and farmers, white or black, can join our movement to fight against racial discrimination. It would be a blunder to narrow it."

(Sunday Mail London January 27, 1985)

Any discussion of the ANC's composition must of necessity involve an attempt to portray the nature of the liberated South Africa. The debate will continue until Congress makes up its mind on both issues. The Freedom Charter projects the ideal of an integrated society of equals. That vision remains no less valid than when it emerged at Kliptown in June 1955.

SEFAKO MAPOGO MAKGATHO

By Africanus

"We ask for no special favours from the Government. This is the land of our fathers."

S M Makgatho,

ANC Presidential Address, 6th May 1919

The purpose of this article is to give a brief outline of the manner in which S M Makgatho carried out this mission under the changed conditions of his times.

Some Highlights of the Makgatho Era

S M Makgatho was born in 1861 at Gamphahlele, Pietersburg district, Northern Transvaal, and died in Pretoria full of years



Sefako Mapogo Makgatho