

This combined opposition of diverse political trends presents a serious challenge to the Nkrumah Government. If it succeeds there is no guarantee that it would represent a step forward—and it could mean a serious backward step. All the more reason for Nkrumah to recognise that the advance of the Gold Coast towards complete self-government depends on the extent to which the working-class and progressive elements become the vanguard of liberation. It will depend not on vain professions of being 'Marxian Socialists' but the application of Marxism to the actual struggle to make the Gold Coast free and independent.

The Convention People's Party was born in the struggle against British imperialism. When its leadership stimulated the masses in this great fight, the British Government was forced to make big concessions. When the struggle is renewed, and on a higher plane, then the Gold Coast will come into its own.

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# THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE OF THE A.N.C.

By "OBSERVER"

**T**HE special conference of the African National Congress came to an end in Johannesburg on Sunday April 1st. The 43rd Annual National Conference held at Bloemfontein last December had decided, owing to lack of time, to convene this special conference to consider the adoption of the Freedom Charter, further plans in the anti-Pass campaign and the draft constitution. The last item was referred back to the branches and will be dealt with next December.

Over 250 delegates, from all four Provinces, came to Orlando for the Conference. The number would have been even greater had the Cape Province been represented according to its full strength. That it was not so represented was due to what amounted to sabotage and should be investigated. Many delegations could ill-afford the long journey so soon after the national Conference. Yet they made the necessary sacrifice and came to Johannesburg, realising the importance of the issues to be discussed.

The significance of the Conference lies above all in the fact that it was faced with a task as deeply significant as any in the forty-three years of the existence of the A.N.C. This was the adoption of the Freedom Charter, a document of major importance, a declaration of fundamental principles, the expression of the aspirations of the people of South Africa.

The ratification of the Freedom Charter by an overwhelming majority marks a turning point in the history of the A.N.C., and a radical change to a broader outlook on national affairs. For here, in this Charter, are embodied the social changes and fundamental free-

doms which can make South Africa a happier country for all than it is today. As Mr. Mokgothi put it, "This is not a document imposed from the top." It is rather a document discussed and formulated by the people themselves, both of the towns and of the countryside; people who are landless and suffer from famine; people who grow rich foods but are kept poor by the laws of the country; people who work with their brains and their hands. It is a declaration of the desires and the beliefs of the people of South Africa, black, brown and white. It is a rallying point for all those who would like to see a better South Africa, a South Africa freed from racial discrimination and Herrenvolk ideologies.

The critics of the Freedom Charter came from the ranks of the "Africanists." They alleged that the Charter "is a document produced in Moscow." That "South Africa belongs to the Africans alone." And that the Charter has no right to declare that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it." They maintained that the Freedom Charter was a negation of Congress policy.

Quite obviously, as the Congress overwhelmingly decided, the Charter is not a negation of Congress policy. It is a development of past policies and programmes of the A.N.C. It does not only claim for Africans the right to participate in the governing councils of the country, thereby using the present institutions as a standard for their aspirations, but boldly outlines fundamental changes in the political and economic set-up which alone will enable the Africans' claims to be satisfied. It does not only criticise existing institutions and policies, but sets forth explicitly the basis for new institutions and policies on all important questions of national affairs, and the relationship of our country to the world outside. **In short, and what is most important, the Charter describes precisely what Freedom means.** From now on the word "freedom" ceases to be an expression to which various interpretations may be attached. The Freedom Charter will become a Congress testament, in which the freedom at which we aim is expressed in no uncertain terms. It stands out as a powerful instrument for cementing the bonds of unity of the various sections of the people of our country.

The Congress, by an overwhelming majority, rejected the false arguments and slanders of the "Africanists," who merely turn the vicious race theories of the master-group in this country inside out, and seek to replace the ideology of White chauvinism with an equally harmful and wrong ideology of Black chauvinism. Congress has turned its back on racialism, and its advocates within the movement.

The debate on the passes which followed a well-prepared report from the Executive, was a practical one which clearly indicated unanimous rejection of the passes and the contempt in which they are held by every one of the delegates. The point which, however, became the subject for differences of opinion was the methods and tactics to be employed by Congress to fight against this system. The ideas expressed by various speakers can be summed up as follows: On the one side we had the emotional type of speaker who stirred the delegates for "action" without analysing the nature of the problem to be solved and the type

of action to be employed. On the other hand a more realistic type of delegate came forward who readily saw the wisdom of taking into account the state of organisation and the readiness of the people to take a particular type of action, under conditions obtaining in any particular area. These considerations were carefully examined by Conference, and the realisation of flexibility in such a situation soon became a keynote in the approach to the issue. The resolution adopted by Conference reflects this approach. It was resolved "to employ different methods and tactics and all forms of mass education and organisation of the people to fight the passes in different areas under different conditions.

The characteristic features of this conference were, in the first place that a large number of enthusiastic women delegates attended and participated in the discussions. Secondly, in spite of the provocative attempts by some disruptive elements to stampede the progress of Conference, a serious effort was made by delegates to avoid the mistakes of the last conference, such as emotionalism, provincialism and unnecessary concentration on side issues. The delegates gave their undivided attention, accompanied by a high standard of discussion, to the important issues of the Conference. Despite the highly offensive tactics and provocative arguments of the "Africanists," they were given a fair hearing. They failed because their arguments were flimsy and unconvincing. Full freedom of speech was allowed.

This does not mean to say that no mistakes were committed at Conference, or that delegates were clear on every issue under discussion. Both in the conduct of the meeting and in the discussion there was room for improvement. Most important of these weaknesses was the failure of many delegates to give serious attention to the executive report. They should have gone into the causes of the failure of the branches, as reflected in the executive's statement, to submit their reports. The failure to discuss the anti-pass campaign on the basis of the document presented by the executive to the delegates was a serious failing. Much time was spent in discussing the evils of the pass laws, rather than the method of struggle against them, which would have given the delegates a better understanding of the implications of the resolution on the passes. Both the resolution and the executive report should be circulated together for thorough discussion.

Despite these imperfections, the special Conference of the African National Congress was a great achievement, marking a new high level in the development of the organisation. This Easter, 1956, Conference will go down in history as a historic milestone: the Conference that adopted the Freedom Charter.

The immediate task confronting the Congress branches is to work for greater unity and broad alliance in the campaign for the endorsement of the Freedom Charter by the masses, linking it with the great struggle against the passes, in terms of the Conference resolution:

**"We call upon the Africans in towns, villages, farms and Reserves, to organise every man and woman into the campaign against the pass laws, and to embark upon any effective political action commensurate with the state of organisation, and not to relax until the pass system has been abolished."**

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