

THE A.N.C. CONFERENCE

By J.B.M.

EARLY in December 1955, Bloemfontein will be the venue for the 43rd Annual Conference of the African National Congress, where all different shades of political opinion will find expression. Many a time in the past has the African National Congress chosen Bloemfontein as the centre for the making and taking of far-reaching decisions. But never before has Conference assembled here at so critical a time; a time when the future destiny of the Non-European people in general and of the African people in particular is at stake; today, when the Nationalist Government in their mad determination to perpetuate White domination, have unleashed a reign of terror hitherto unknown in the annals of the oppression and exploitation of the mass of the South African people. Hence the political and organisational importance of the forthcoming conference can in no circumstances be overestimated.

Thus, Conference must take proper stock of the political situation and take decisions commensurate both with the gravity of the situation and the organisational strength and ideological influence of the African National Congress. Conference must focus attention of the delegates, as well as that of the whole of the country, on the great political tasks facing the oppressed and progressive peoples within the sub-continent. Conference must therefore lead, rally and mobilise the teeming millions of Africans of all classes and categories to take up a systematic struggle against the evils of the Nationalist Government which are embodied in their ignominious policy of apartheid in all its ramifications.

Conference must make delegates understand, that the defeat of the fraudulent policy of apartheid upon which the Nationalists climbed to the helm of our society will mean the end of the Nationalist regime in Southern Africa and the beginning of a new era. It is an historical fact that nice words and resolutions will not make the tyrant change his mind; it becomes imperative that a sharp departure be made from the old tradition of Conference indulging in revolutionary phrases and petty squabbles and failing to make delegates realise their responsibility to the nation, which is that of taking a lead in the implementation of Conference decisions in their respective areas.

FOLLOWING THE CHARTER

At this stage the Freedom Charter, which was adopted at the Congress of the People at Kliptown, Johannesburg, on June 25 and 26, comes in most conveniently as a basis for the discussion of future action. The Charter is the sum total of the demands and aspirations of the downtrodden and freedom-loving peoples; and was approved at one of the greatest and easily the most enthusiastic Congress that was ever held under the leadership and on the initiative of the African National Congress, supported by its allies in the struggle—the South African Indian

Congress, the Coloured People's Organisation and the Congress of Democrats.

This assembly took place in the face of police terror and intimidation unheard of in the history of South Africa; but the people refused to be cowed and instead demonstrated their readiness to struggle for their fundamental freedom.

This being the position, the Charter should provoke a very lively discussion of a vital document. For the Charter counterpoises the deceptive policy of apartheid with democratic principles aimed at transforming South Africa into a free country, in which the pigmentation of the skin will not be the criterion for the inferiority or superiority of the individual; but where all will be free, and accorded equal opportunities for development. Thus, in this era of imperialism when capitalism is resorting to fascism to prolong its parasitic existence, and when the Colonial people all over the world are making great sacrifices for their liberation and independence, Conference must adopt the Freedom Charter as a basis for a programme of action and treat it as the political bible of the nation.

The adoption of the Charter by Conference will give great impetus to the million-signature campaign, which in itself should help to consolidate the A.N.C. and greatly increase its numerical strength. The adoption of the Charter will afford the National Consultative Committee an ideal opportunity of drawing in all the national sections as represented by the African National Congress, The South African Indian Congress, The Coloured People's Organisation and The Congress of Democrats on a common programme of action against the tyrannical government of Strijdom, Swart and Company.

GIVING A CLEAR LEAD

Conference must of necessity direct the attention of the country and delegates to the burning and immediate problems that face the African people.

The delegates to Conference must be presented with a clear and objective analysis of the struggle against Bantu Education. The successes and failures of the campaign must be very carefully discussed, with a view to assessing the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the boycott weapon as revealed by the partial withdrawal of children on the Reef and in the Eastern Cape. The confusion and lack of clarity contained in the directive calling upon parents to withdraw their children from Bantu Education schools must be cleared by conference. Conference must make the delegates understand that the mere passing of a resolution calling for the boycott of schools and the fixing of a date does not automatically bring about the contemplated action. It is only the vigorous prosecution of the campaign among the parents, explaining the dangers inherent in Bantu Education that can give the desired results. It is the active and voluntary participation of the parents in the fight against Bantu Education that will eventually paralyse the Verwoerd machinations. There must and can be no compromise on Bantu Education and the waverers and collaborators must consistently be

exposed. It is in this light that delegates to Conference must approach the problem posed by the Bantu Education Act.

Next come the vexatious Pass Laws which have turned South Africa into an open prison for African men. Their contemplated extension to African women means the further intensification of the age-old oppression of the African masses.

According to African tradition, men are the warriors and defenders of the women, children, homes and cattle against all marauders. One would therefore expect this onslaught upon the liberty of the women to arouse great indignation among the whole of the African people. In the past the militancy of the African women together with the solid support of their men-folk compelled the White oppressors to change their minds and refrain from drawing the women into the whirlpool of misery, humiliation and exploitation brought about by the obnoxious Pass Laws. Yet the only real defence for the women is the total abolition of all Pass Laws.

Needless to say there are already numerous suggestions from all over the country as to how this attack can be met. They include mass protests, boycotts, general strikes and defiance. Whatever happens, however, the country will expect a very clear and bold lead from the Annual Conference.

There can be no doubt that a militant lead given on the Pass issue will be followed by the overwhelming majority of the African people. The recent demonstration to Pretoria of women under the auspices of the Federation of South African Women is indicative of the mood the women are in and their readiness to follow a militant lead.

ELECTIONS

During recent years, the A.N.C. has orientated itself and moved away from its old traditional policy of secretarianism and narrow nationalism towards a more progressive nationalism which appeals to the broad masses of the people. This orientation has enhanced the prestige of the organisation at home and across the seas, and has also increased its fighting potential.

The present enormous political and ideological influence the A.N.C. commands calls for immediate consolidation. As such can only be accomplished by a progressive, conscientious and experienced leadership, the country is looking forward with great expectations to the forthcoming annual elections.