

# ORGANISATION: THE ONLY WEAPON

By J.M.

**I**N their struggle to free themselves and build a new life the oppressed peoples have only one weapon—ORGANISATION! It is for this reason that the current interest being shown towards organisational problems within the African National Congress is of such significance. Nor is it surprising that the debates on organisation should be taking place at this time when the ruling class is doing all in its power to destroy the People's Organisations. The period of "hardening and sharpening"—of discarding outworn practices and methods and developing others is precisely now when we are under the most fierce attack.

## THE VALUE OF DISCUSSION

But if the self-criticism over organisational weaknesses in the A.N.C. is to be of lasting effect and value, two conditions must be fulfilled:

- (i) The scope of the discussions must be extended beyond the present emphasis on constitutional changes.
- (ii) The leadership must ensure that the rank and file participate fully in the discussions.

It is not the first time in the history of political organisations that an examination of one aspect of a movement's work should be the beginning of a thorough discussion and critical examination of all branches of its activity.

Thus the problems of the A.N.C. have up to now centred, by and large, on suggested changes in its constitutional structure and practice. It is true that the Reports of the National Executive to the National Conferences in 1954 and 1955 both contained searching analyses of our main organisational problems. But even these did not, and perhaps could not, go far enough. As the debate continues it becomes clear that changes of constitutional structure alone will not plumb the depths of the problems we are faced with. Not that the present constitution and the practices connected with it are not in need of fundamental change. Indeed it is necessary to state emphatically that **within the present framework** very little advance in political consciousness and understanding of the rank and file and of the leadership is possible.

We feel it necessary to criticise the attitude that ALL that is required is to raise the political understanding of the membership and the present constitutional structure will work well. This attitude unjustifiably creates a hiatus between political understanding and constitutional structure and practice, whereas in truth the two are merely the two sides of the same coin. As the level of political consciousness grows certain constitutional forms are seen to be a hindrance and brake

on further development. So that the present demand for changes in the A.N.C. constitution and structure are a reflection of the development of political understanding in the movement which finds the present structure unsatisfactory. Furthermore it is the duty of those with clearer understanding and deeper perspective to lead the whole movement forward and not to trail behind the stream of history, as it were.

## **WEAKNESSES**

Specifically stated, the basic weakness of the present constitutional structure of the African National Congress lies in the fact that after it is elected at National Conference by delegates drawn from local branches throughout the country, the National Executive is practically isolated from them except for the short periods during which branches assemble at National Conference. Once Conference is over the policy and programme decided upon is virtually delegated to organs not elected by our supreme body (the national conference), namely, the provincial executives which are the agents of their provincial conferences. In other words in between conferences **THERE IS NO CONTACT BETWEEN THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE AND THE BRANCHES EXCEPT THROUGH its tenuous links with the provincial executives.**

The disastrous effects of this on all organs of the movement—national, provincial and local are only too well known to anyone who has participated actively in any recent campaigns undertaken by the A.N.C. Imagine a situation in which our supreme directing body receives no reports at all from local branches nor sends material directly to them! That may have been suitable in days when events occurred at a much slower rate and Congress was a Resolutions Movement, but today something more effective is required.

## **PREMIER PARTNER**

But our problems cover a much wider range than that. The growing political power and influence of the African National Congress as premier partner in the democratic alliance known as the Congress Movement; the growing range and diversity of activities that the liberation movement as a whole has to engage in, require an examination of our entire outlook to **POLITICAL WORK.**

If the African National Congress is to achieve the degree of organisational efficiency expected of it in the current emergency the level of understanding of both the leaders and rank and file will have to be raised considerably. Such political understanding will have to be based on a more profound study of our society and its development not only in South Africa but in the world as a whole. We will have to make proper and frequent use of self-criticism as a dynamic means of correcting mistakes and improving the quality of our work. We will, above all, have to engage in and lead every active struggle of the masses against tyranny whether local or national. Last but not least we have to realise that the days when political leadership could be left to part-time workers are over.

The correct relationship between political theory and practice is always a difficult one to maintain. And no doubt one can find good reasons for the present paucity of organised political education within the A.N.C. particularly at branch level. Nevertheless this defect cannot be tolerated any longer. In this connection an idea being started in the Eastern Cape is of interest. The attempt is being made to conduct political classes by way of elaborating in detail the different sections of the FREEDOM CHARTER. In doing so lecturers are, of course, compelled to cover the entire field of economic, political and social life in our country and the world. On a national scale the method of conducting classes on the basis of the Charter, besides being interesting to the members (who know all about the Charter), would have profound effects and incidentally is one sure way of making the Charter part of the very soul of our people—a necessary condition of victory.

For the rest our great need is for a cadre organisation in the true sense. We must produce sufficient trained political workers for all fields of activity and for all parts of the country. In the final analysis our victory will depend on the amount of effort we direct towards that end.

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