

'Charter most akin to community's needs'

By MOEGSIEN WILLIAMS

FRANKLIN SONN started last week with a campaign that will radically alter the political profile of his organisation, the Union of Teachers' Associations of South Africa — persuading 25 000 teachers to adopt the basic policy document of the ANC, the Freedom Charter.

The composition of the CTPA and Utasa, mainly "coloured" teachers employed by the House of Representatives' education department, makes it a daunting task.

While drawing a large membership in urban centres such as the Peninsula and Port Elizabeth, it also has a large membership in rural areas.

In a wide-ranging interview at his office on the campus of the Peninsula Technikon, Sonn said: "It's obviously not a decision that can be taken at a single meeting on a Sunday afternoon."

He outlined a blistering programme that will keep him and his executive members on the campaign trail to all parts of the country "virtually every weekend from now until next June".

"My proposal to the organisation is based purely on calculated strategic action in terms of its future development."

Structures

"For this, my organisation needs a mission statement which leads to shared values and on which a programme of action can be based."

Sonn said the adoption of the Freedom Charter as a mission statement could only be successfully done by painstakingly "working through" the organisation's democratic structures.

"A decision to adopt the Charter can simply be announced and people will agree or it can be dictated to them to accept. But it will not be worth the paper it's written on."

"By the end of our campaign not one of our members will be able to say he or she had not had an opportunity to have a say on the adoption of the Charter," Sonn said.

This will be done through Utasa's regional and local structures and representatives at the organisation's annual conference would be delegated to take a decision.

Sonn said he expected "some tension" in his organisation during the debate on the Charter, but he was confident that there would be a unified approach when a decision was taken.

"Our strategic plan is to mobilise our members on the basis of the Charter, which is not to simply get

"AT the end of the day I'm confident that I'll be able to get the 25 000 members of my organisation to support the adoption of the Freedom Charter."

This confident statement made by Franklin Sonn in an interview this week is not misplaced.

Attending the annual gatherings of the Cape Teacher's Professional Association (CTPA), one of the largest and best-organised teachers' bodies in the country, or of its federal body, the Union of Teachers' Associations of South Africa (Utasa), the depth of his support and popularity among rank-and-file members is immediately apparent.

Sonn has pull and sway, together with charisma, a persuasive intellect and a "gift of the gab", that has led to his unchallenged leadership of teachers' organisations for more than 11 years.

Born in the Vosburg district near Victoria West, Sonn matriculated at Harold Cressy High School in Cape Town in 1957 and attended the University of the Western Cape where he completed a BA honours and a teacher's diploma.

He taught for 12 years at secondary school level and served five years as principal of Spes Bona High School in Athlone.

He has been rector of the Peninsula Technikon in Bellville South for 10 years.

them together from time to time at meetings. Mobilisation can only be done effectively through effective planning and demonstrated hard work."

Sonn said the Freedom Charter succinctly expressed the aspirations and desires of the majority of the people in South Africa.

Beliefs

"The Charter is most akin to the existing beliefs of our community and is a document that best encapsulates a shared value system that is necessary if we want to liberate our country."

"It is in essence a bill of rights which satisfies almost all basic requirements. We will, of course, look at other documents such as the ten-point plan of the Unity Movement and the Manifesto of the

Black Consciousness Movement during our campaign."

Sonn said there were a number of organisations and people who had differences with articles in the Charter, such as its reference to national groups and the question of socialism.

"In any democratic system there will always be arguments over interpretations of concepts and issues. These arguments, however, must never stand in the way of the need to act together."

It was difficult to predict the political repercussions should the teachers' organisation decide to adopt the Charter, he said.

"We must act in terms of our convictions. We don't really have fears because what we are about to do we believe to be in the best interest of our members and community."

Sonn said he did not agree with all the methods employed by the ANC.

"We know, however, that the ANC has been driven to violence because for more than 40 years its peaceful efforts have been rebuffed by the violent reaction of the State."

"Terrorists"

"I don't believe there'll be a reduction in violence through counter State violence, or by merely preaching against violence."

There was an onus on South Africans to demonstrate they could find unity of purpose and create a democratic and nonracial society in a "non-violent way".

Sonn said he envisaged his teachers' organisations "growing closer" to other progressive organisations.

"In principle, we are of one mind. Naturally, if we declare our shared values on the basis of the Charter, our affinity will be much closer."

"It is not in the interest of anybody to seek division. Our purpose is to seek unity and find points of agreement."

He said there are many people and groups "who are going around and saying things about us."

"These people say they believe in the liberation struggle, but some of them are more intent on destroying unity in the ranks of the oppressed and are as dangerous as the reactionary forces."

"Often these forces claim to be democratic, but when their strategic plan is examined, you'll find little evidence of respect for the rights of the individual which is after all the cornerstone of democracy."



WHAT NEXT!

1987 will definitely be remembered as the 'year of the splits'. No, I'm not talking about what ballet dancers do, I'm talking about wheeling and dealing and party leaving!

First some new old Nats split from the old new Nats, then the Democratic Party split and swam away from the Labour Party, then Ri-aan nearly had to split from the SABC-TV, some PFP chaps split but didn't go to Perth, Joan Collins split from her husband and denied reports that she was going to team up with Rambo the Rock, who split from his wife. Now the independents have split hairs among themselves and have divided into a couple of groups all claiming to be the splitting image of each other.

Standby folks for the Democratic Reformed Independent Party, the Progressive Democratic Party of Independent Independents, the Independent Federation of Party Movements, the Movement for New Independent Democracy and the Independent Movement of Dakar Democratic Federations all of whom will probably form an alliance for the next election under the banner of the Federal Movements of New Democratic Independent Progressives and Reformed Dakar Parties. Then after they lose that election, they'll blame each other, go their separate ways and study the latest jargon before giving themselves new names or they'll simply split for Perth

where they can be nice to the Aborigines.

Well we've learned anything this year, then it is that it is very important to know who your friends are. Except that this is a lesson that history taught us long ago — take old Julius Caesar for instance. A great guy who ran (over) the whole world and what do his closest buddies do? They not only stab him in the back, but in his stomach and his chest as well — till he looked like a sieve! And Brutus was nogal an honourable man!

Now you tell me, what's the difference — except a few drops of blood maybe — between that and the axing of Helder Berk Denis from the leadership of the No



Democracy (yet) Movement, hey? Stabbed in the back! And Why? Just because they think that Denis may be

a menace to their credibility among blacks! Geez! Since when has that been an issue? Look at the CP — no

credibility among blacks and today it's the offered opposition somewhere. And the Nats? Zilch credibility with blacks and its been in power since 1984!

Excuse

Credibility among blacks! Really! What a weak excuse. If I was Denis, I'd go straight to Chris, kiss and make up and then accept an ambassadorship to Lebowa or make myself available to fight Wynand on his own turf in the next election. But apparently Denis — like Brutus (though not to be confused with Denis Brutus) — is an honourable man so he'll go it alone like a true independent!

I read somewhere that all the oppositionous in the House of Self Representatives

were going to form an umbrella party in case of a political rainy day. Guess what is going to be called, nogal! The United Democratic Party — UDP! Well, I scheme that either that is a nice try to get Archie and friends to go tricameral, or it's a lekker ploy to get people to vote for them thinking that they're voting for the United Democratic Front! Now we just have to wait for leadership "Who's the Boss" struggles, then we'll have more splinters! Eina!

And in the Banana Republic of Transkei old Kaiser said that George Forgie should have his bottom spanked for his corruption. So I suppose this brotherly split in this banana republic amounts to a rather expensive banana split!