

CONGRESS ALLIANCE,

A DISCUSSION PAPER

The first beginnings for joint actions and struggles was started with the declaration of the Dadoo, Xuraa and Naicker Pact in 1949* And with this commenced the first major and historic joint struggle for freedom and democracy in 1950, when the ANC, SAIC, SACPO and the SACP called a general strike on June 26 which was a united action by the oppressed people, and this joint struggle laid a firm basis for future joint actions. This was followed by the historic Defiance Campaign of 1952, the great assembly of the COP, which comprised of the ANC, SAIC, SACPC, SACTU (but not the CPSA, because it was banned by the Nationalist Government in 1950), and then there was the Protest Day strike of 1953 - the General Strike and Pass burning campaign after Sharpeville in 1961.

With the adoption of the Freedom Charter which became the common programme of the various Congresses led to closer co-operation and working of these Organisations and subsequently this brought about is now commonly known as the "Congress Alliance". Before the alliance was formally set up the various Congress worked through what was known as the National Consultative Committee.

After over a decade of joint action to-day the question is being posed whether the "Congress Alliance" as constituted should still continue to work both at home and abroad, or whether there should be one organisation to lead the revolutionary struggle in South Africa. These are important questions and before we proceed to answer these it is necessary to recall

certain debates and discussions during 1958 and the years that followed on the role of the Congress Alliance. There was a school of thought which stated that the Congresses should merge because it was divided into racial or national lines. And also since it had a common programme in the Freedom Charter there should be one organisation. During the discussion that ensued it became clearly evident that this was an erroneous line and the various Congresses rejected it on the following grounds;

1. The various Congresses came into being at

different stages of the development of the political struggle in South Africa.

2. That the various Congresses are not a political party but national organisations which embraces all sections of the people irrespective of ideological views and differences are brought together on a common programme.

3. That the time was not ripe for the merging of the various organisations due to the consciousness among the people.

4. That whilst the various national groups have a common oppressor, it also has certain peculiarities which precludes the coming into being of one organisation. The peculiarities are some of the oppressive laws which donot affect all sections of the people.

For the above and other reasons the theory of one organisation was rected.

During this period another erroneous view was being put forward and that

is the ANC is not projecting its image and this was termed as the "African

Image" clearly to the people and the world at large. And added to this was the view that the various Congresses were not functioning properly and

their organisations are not being strengthened, because of the Congress Alliance. It was also stated that the organisational weaknesses of the Congresses were due to the composition of the Congress Alliance. And therefore the various organisations should work independently and the Congress Alliance as constituted should cease and instead revert to the former position of holding joint consultations on a National and Provincial

level.

Now let us examine the various issues which gave rise to the formation of

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the Congress Alliance and whether it has a role to play at home and abroad and whether it should still exist at all.

Having rejected the one organisation theory, the Congress Alliance continued to function, but not very satisfactorily though, in view of the new theory to project the African image. However, the Alliance continued with its work and called upon the various Congresses to build their respective organisations and carry out the policy and programme of the Freedom Charter and thereby strengthening the Alliance. It was felt that the inactivity and organisational weaknesses of the various Congresses are matters which should engage the urgent attention of the respective organisations and the Alliance should not be held responsible for such failures.

In 1960 when the ANC which was and is the main force in the Alliance was banned the Congress Movement was immediately faced with new problems and this was further aggravated with the banning of the COD. In spite of this the Alliance "still continued to function with the ANC and COD fully participating in the affairs of the Alliance.

Are the reasons advanced in rejecting the one organisation theory still valid. We think it is and therefore very careful and mature consideration must be given if any changes, if at all has to be made in the structure of the Alliance. One must take into account the situation at home and abroad and whether the Alliance as constituted should continue to exist and carry out its activities.

After the banning of the ANC and COD, the Alliance effectively carried out both legal and illegal activities and this will continue until victory is achieved.

At present SACTU, SAIC and SACPC are the only legal organisations of the Alliance and for all intents and purposes these are illegal because of the harsh limitations imposed by the Vorster Government. Can these organisations in the circumstances play an effective role? Yes. They can. They must and can continue to work both legally and illegally. These organisations must carry out whatever little legal work that could be done to assist in the mobilisation of the oppressed people for the revolutionary

struggle. These organisations can and must assist the underground movement and the armed struggle.

Reverting to the question of one organisation it must be pointed out that in view of recent legislation organisations of mixed membership cannot be formed (Liberal Party had to disband) and in view of this the various Congresses will have to exist independently and strengthen the Alliance and the underground movement.

On the question of projecting the "African Image" it was argued that the premier national organisation in South Africa the ANC was not playing its

independent role effectively because it was submerged in the Alliance. Is

this statement correct? Most certainly not. Because the Alliance was a broad front of the various Congresses committed to a common programme to be

carried out by the respective organisations. This has, is and will continue to be the correct approach in the South African context.

The question that should be posed is not the projection of the "African Image", but the projection of the joint struggles of the oppressed of all nationalities under the leadership of the Congress Alliance, whose main force is the ANC. Our struggle in South Africa is unique, because it is,

not only the African people who are fighting for democratic rights and

national independence, but equally the Indian and Coloured peoples. So it

is of vital importance that we should project this image forcefully and without any reservation at home and abroad and we must not succumb to

pressures or the whims and fancies of some people at home and abroad that

the ANC or the African people should and must "go it alone". It must also

be pointed out that in our struggle for national liberation we also have the unqualified support of the Congress of Democrats, a purely white organisation and other progressive whites.

At this juncture of our struggle what changes are visualised in the

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structure of the Alliance or should there be any changes at all. Even if we wanted to disband the Alliance as constituted at home, we cannot take such a drastic step because we have no mandate to do so, and even if we do so, we cannot impose such a decision to be binding on the Alliance at home». What we should and must do is not the disbandment of the Alliance but its consolidation.

At this stage it would be appropriate to raise the question of the SACP in the Liberation struggle. The SACP together with the Congress Alliance and other progressive forces have led the struggle for national liberation.

And in view of the fact that it had participated in joint campaigns at home, we should open our doors, so that the SACP should also take its rightful place in the Alliance, so that our ranks would be further consolidated. And we should also consider bringing in any other organisation which is prepared to accept our programme and policy and thereby further broadening and consolidating the revolutionary Front for the emancipation of our people.

In our struggle for liberation we must unite all sections of the oppressed and progressive forces into a broad united Anti-imperialist front, because

our struggle in South Africa is going to be a long, protracted and difficult one. The fight against the Vorster regime is indeed a fight against imperialism, so therefore our struggle must be directed against Imperialism and the reactionary ruling class and all the reactionary forces.

In raising the question of a broad united front, we must also raise the question of our programme embodied in the Freedom Charter. Is this programme dynamic? Does it fulfil the requirements of the armed peoples' struggle which we have embarked on? Does it meet with the requirements of a broad united peoples' front?

Our programme most certainly has certain limitations, in view of the fact that it was drawn up at a time when the question of the armed struggle did not arise and hence was not discussed. It has its limitations in that the armed struggle is not merely going to be just for the removal of the pass laws, colour bars and the destruction of the apartheid system (the imperialists also support us on this) but our revolution must be a profound one which must overthrow imperialism, the reactionary ruling classes, the Nationalist Government and all other reactionaries who support

the present South African regime.

Our programme does not say anything about our fight against Imperialism, and this is a serious omission, because the main enemy of the oppressed peoples throughout the world is American Imperialism in particular and Imperialism in general, and hence we are part and parcel of the world wide anti-imperialist movement for national liberation. Our struggle and the fight against oppression is indeed against imperialism, because it is imperialism which is the mainstay of the reactionary Nationalist Government and the ruling class in South Africa.

Another limitation is what type of government will be set up in South Africa. Will it be a national democratic government of all nationalities, of the various political parties or a worker-peasant soldier government.

Another limitation is on the land question and foreign monopolies etc. etc. These and others are some of the questions that have to be thoroughly debated and correct decisions arrived at in the light of the present situation and our struggle and make the necessary changes, so that we could pronounce to our people and the world with no uncertainty and rouse and mobilise our people around such a revolutionary, dynamic programme.

And now we must consider the question of organisation and leadership in relation to such a programme. You will readily agree that the implementation of a revolutionary programme needs a revolutionary organisation and leadership.

You will also agree

You will also agree that to build a strong and powerful movement such as ours we must comply with certain basic fundamental and essential requirements of being in a revolutionary organisation.

These are;

1. We must belong to a unit of our organisation.
2. Make regular financial contribution to the organisation.
3. Carry out the policy, programme and decisions of the organisation.
4. Democratic centralism, and collective leadership must be adhered to at all times.

If any revolutionary organisation wants to fulfil its tasks and complete the revolution, then it must strictly adhere to these fundamental and basic prerequisites to membership.

If any one of these requirements are absent then the organisation will suffer and will not function satisfactorily.

And finally, the leadership must be dedicated, dynamic, energetic and inspiring not only to its membership, but to the masses of the people it is leading.

It is only such a leadership that could rally the masses of our people to a successful revolution.

The failures, bad style in work, lack of guidance and clarity stems from a poor or bad leadership. And when one speaks of leadership one does not only refer to National leadership but leadership at all levels.

This short discussion paper has raised a number of questions concerning the Congress Alliance, its role and leadership and we hope that the debate that would follow will clarify the issues raised and make concrete proposals to the forthcoming National Conference.