

FOR THE RECORD

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ORGANISERS OF THE "CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE".

COMPATRIOTS

On or about 28 August 1988, we read with interest that you were planning a "Congress of the People" and that you had invited a host of organisations including ourselves. We were surprised because we had not received such an invitation.

On 4 September 1988 two delegates representing the CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE Unions (COSATU), Mr Sidney Mofumadi and Mr Frank Meintjies met a delegation from the AZANIAN CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE. The two gentlemen explained that COSATU was not responsible for the media reports and had intended to consult fully with all organisations. They assured us that the only aim of the conference was to show united opposition to the repression unleashed by "the government," in particular the attempt to hold municipal elections after banning 18 people's organisations.

The AZACCO delegation at this meeting expressed disquiet about the following issues:-

- (a) The fact that the organizers belonged to only one political grouping viz the Charterists and jealously excluded all other political groupings from the Organizing Committee,
- (b) The fact that plans were at such an advanced stage and the meeting was scheduled for 24th September 1988 not allowing consultation with membership and between organisations to occur at all. We were presented with a *fait accompli*.
- (c) The invitation extended to a mixed bag of groupings some of whom were not in existence eg. "Free State women"(?), "Rural

AZACCO sent this Open Letter to COSATU on 19 September 1988. The "Congress of the People" was banned by Pretoria.

On 9 December 1989, a one-day conference, jointly convened by AZAPO and the UDF and dubbed the "Conference for a Democratic future", was held at the University of the Witswatersrand. The CDF failed to attract other major tendencies in the liberation movement. It also failed to arrive at any binding decisions whatsoever, despite an attempt to force the Harare Declaration (adopted by the OAU Heads of State on August 21, 1989) down the throats of delegates by employing undemocratic practices throughout the Conference.

areas"(?), Non-racial democratic organisation (?) and in the same breath, excluded hundreds of organisations eg. the AZANIAN STUDENT'S MOVEMENT (AZASM) and the CAPE ACTION LEAGUE (CAL).

- (d) The invitation extended to groupings working within the system eg. the Inyandza Cultural group, the Seposongwe and PPP parties of Bophuthatswana, the DPP of Transkei and the NDM of Wynand Malan. The BCM's rejection of participation in government-created institutions is non-negotiable.
- (e) The invitation extended to liberal groups whose constituencies have never been the oppressed and exploited viz the ECC, the FFF, IDASA and NUSAS. While the work done by some of these groups - in particular the ECC - is to be lauded, the solution has to be hammered out in the first instance by these who are oppressed and exploited.
- (f) The allocation of delegates leaves much to be desired. The non-racial democratic movement, whatever that means, has been given 50 delegates while we were given only 15. The affiliates of the non-racial democratic movement have been granted further delegates such as SANSCO and

NUSAS, sharing 30 delegates, FEDTRAW 4, UWCO 4 and NAYO 13 and a blanket 100 for regional structures in civic politics.

The meeting closed with AZACCO agreeing to consult with its constituents and allies and report back.

After considering the contents of the written invitations and after a thoroughgoing consultation, we feel compelled to place things in perspective. We shall proceed to do so:

(1) *Negotiated Settlements*

We believe that the struggle is for repossession of occupied land.

Calls for 'negotiated settlements' are by their definition, calls by imperialism to broker a "solution" which will result in it retaining a stranglehold in our beloved country. We have already seen in Nigeria, in India, in Kenya - indeed all over the formerly colonized world - that imperialists are only too eager to grant "political power" while retaining economic power in their hands. Neo-colonial solutions are not what the toiling masses in occupied Azania desire - we want total liberation, we want complete control of our individual and collective destinies.

The lessons we have learnt from our neighbour, Zimbabwe, speak elo-

quently of the pitfalls in negotiated settlements. Zimbabwe finds itself still trying to recover from the "settlement" dictated at Lancaster House. We are determined that Azania will not fall into this debilitating trap.

Any definition of "the struggle" which omits the role of the imperialists in this land is a definition which is a lie or a half-truth. And we are all aware that half-truths are worse than lies.

(2) Democracy

It is a gross over – simplification to prattle that the struggle in this land is merely for democracy. Democracy means the dictatorship of the ruling class and is a political system well-suited to capitalist society.

We have all heard that the USA is the model for democracy – a country which props up the Pretoria regime, which oppresses, exploits and dehumanises the majority of its own inhabitants, which is an imperialist power *par excellence*.

We believe that the struggle is for socialism – that only socialism guarantees democracy for the masses of people while retaining dictatorship over oppressors and exploiters of whatever guise.

In this country, we have a class society sensitized by a form of racism so intense that it extends to the slightest nuance in skin-colour.

Any "solution" which seeks democracy in the existing system is a call to reform. And the organisers of the "Congress of the People" revealingly say the following about the coming municipal elections: [ie on October 26, 1988-EC]

"The elections come in the wake of a major crackdown on the democratic movement and the banning of 18 organisations... (T)he elections is (sic) an attempt to sidestep the most pressing issue: the demand for political rights at central government level."

We can only infer that if the 18 organisations were not banned, there would be no need for the "Congress of the People" – because we would be

participating in the elections and in Botha's "4th chamber"! We strongly believe that the masses have shown unequivocally that they reject any participation in the system – and definitely that they reject the "allies" of the conference organisers viz Inyandza, Seposengwe, DPP and PPP.

We say that any definition of the problem in our country which avoids mentioning capitalism clearly intends a form of democracy which will halt on the flip side of socialism.

We may add that the organising of the Conference reveals all forms of undemocratic practices: There was no consultation with organisations invited, the invitation was extended at the last moment and with non-disclosure of vital information, and the list of invitees included some of the most anti-democratic groupings known – including these who actively oil the wheels of the apartheid/capitalist machinery.

(3) Apartheid

We believe that the words of Steve Biko should be our watchword:

"The greatest mistake we have made is to regard all these who oppose apartheid as our allies."

We believe that the struggle against apartheid is only the departure point for our liberatory efforts.

We are not fighting merely to live in the same areas as whites or to share the same toilet seats. We are fighting for the total transformation of this iniquitous and inhuman system.

The misrepresentation of the nature of the struggle in the "Congress of the People" invitation is a matter for intense and lively political discussion.

We believe that the demand for "One person One vote", while necessary, is supply NOT ENOUGH. Majority rule has to go hand in glove with socialism.

We realize that the chequered history of the liberation struggle has given rise to various strands in the broad liberation movement – in particular Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism, Charterism. Hence any attempt to forge unity has to be done in consultation with all organisations on the ground. And it must be actuated by the spirit of non-sectarianism, a spirit whereby we agree to respect each other's differences, a spirit by which we agree to march under different banners but to strike together.

The lessons of 1985-1988 culminating in the tragedy of Pietermaritzburg underline the importance of this delicate process: after all, it is only the ruling class which benefits from our disunity as a liberation movement and as a people.

We believe that Azania is destined to become one under the leadership of the Black working class and that she will indeed become one. And we believe that the setbacks we have experienced are due to the misdirection of Azania's revolutionary elements.

We appreciate and commend COSATU for the bold step it has taken in trying to bring the oppressed and exploited together to determine their destiny. But the points raised above and the unfair allocation of delegates unfortunately leaves us with no choice but to refrain from participating in this Congress. ■

