

# The Struggle Against Passes

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Report of the National Consultative Committee to the Joint Executives of the ANC, SAIC, SACPO, SACOD, and SACTU

12 December 1956

## 1. Is this a new struggle?

The struggle against passes has gone on, sometimes fiercer, sometimes quieter for many years. The new round of struggle, which is opening as a result of the threat to extend the passes to African women, does not mark the beginning of the struggle but only a new phase. It opens up the possibility of widening and making changes in the whole struggle against passes and of rousing great sections of the people for the struggle.

## 2. Can Victory be won in a single battle?

In such a long drawn out war as the war against the pass laws it would be foolish to expect that victory can be won by a single action of the people. The pass system is the foundation of the whole cheap labour system in South Africa; the ruling class will not easily be forced to give it up. It follows, that victory in the struggle against pass laws must not be looked for in every minor skirmish against the enemy. In a long drawn out battle, there will be many minor victories, minor defeats, many advances, many retreats. But final victory for the people means the end of the cheap labour system of South Africa. It can only be achieved finally by the overthrow of the ruling class, and by the winning of the Freedom Charter as the ruling policy of South Africa.

## 3. Is the present struggle item of any importance?

The present struggle against passes for women can well prove to be the decisive turning point of the whole long drawn out war. There is no aspect of the pass system which will cause such bitter opposition as this; and the present situation therefore enables us to bring thousands of new militant fighters into the struggle, to rouse those who have become accustomed to and tolerant of the pass laws for a new effort and to awaken the conscience and the resistance of those sections of the people, white, coloured, Indian, who do not themselves directly suffer under these laws.

## 4. Is this a struggle of the women alone?

Clearly the women are in the front rank of the battles now opening. They are the victims the government has singled out for its latest attack. But the struggle is not one for women alone. It is one in which women and men must join together, each helping, assisting and encouraging the other as circumstances demand. By themselves, the women can perhaps resist the latest attacks. But their resistance would be stronger and lead more surely to victory if the menfolk fight with them. But even a temporary victorious resistance of the women to the present attack will not end the struggle against the pass laws. Alone, it will only postpone the day of the attack till the

government can muster greater force. It will only be a breathing space before a new attack in a new direction. This must be a joint campaign of men and women, whose aim is to end the pass system and the government which upholds it.

5. Is the slogan `Women shall not carry passes` correct?

It is argued by some, that the present battles will be decided, won or lost on the question of whether the womenfolk take the new passes. Therefore, it is argued, the political line of the campaign must be to encourage women under no circumstances to accept the passes. From this line of policy, it is clear, develops the concept that the pass laws can be fought and beaten only by acts of passive resistance—individual or collective—by acts of steadfast refusal on the part of the women to accept the new passes. No one can deny that such acts would be of tremendous significance, advancing the struggle of the people and giving new morale and enthusiasm to the whole campaign. Nothing should therefore be said or done which would discourage such acts of defiance, passive resistance.

But this is not the only way to fight, nor even the best way. Even widespread acts of passive resistance alone cannot, in the long run, deter the government from its course, if it is determined to use all its force, authority and power to enforce its will. This was one of the lessons taught us by the Western Areas Removal Campaign, which we cannot forget. We must not let our enthusiasm blind us to the prospects of overwhelming government force—mass deportations, sackings from jobs, evictions from homes, etc.—which can be unleashed against passive resisters, to break their resistance. Passive Resistance is good, effective, valuable at the right time, in the right circumstances. But it is not the only way....

6. What other slogans can be advanced?

There are other ways of struggle against the pass laws, each of which has its place. Pass laws can be fought by demonstrations and strikes, by petitions and meetings, by boycott and resistance and disobedience, by active struggle as well as passive. Which of these ways is the best? This can only be conceived in the precise circumstances in which we find ourselves in each area at any one time. Sometimes one and sometimes another, we must learn from the errors of the Bantu Education and Western Areas Campaigns not to be rigid, formal, tied by preconceived ideas about the only possible way to forms of action which do not fit the circumstances. We must be ready to use any and every means of struggle which are appropriate and possible at any time and which advance us to our goal.

The campaign against the new passes for women must not therefore be allowed to stand or fall by the success or failure of passive resistance by the women. The campaign must be conducted—as befits a long drawn out war—with flexibility and skill, now using one weapon, now another, now passive now active. The slogan to be instilled into the minds of the masses is not therefore `the women shall not carry passes`, but rather `We shall struggle every inch of the way, against passes`, `down with passes`.

7. How do we decide what precise action to take?

We must rely on the good sense, responsibility and flexibility of our leaders. They must weigh up at every stage of the campaign what the state of organisation preparedness is. What are the people ready to do? What action will meet with the united support of the people and carry forward the struggle? There must be no reckless `militant sounding` calls to action which are not attuned to the reactions and state of militancy of the people. We must beware of calls to action which do not lead all the people into action but serve only to cut the militant vanguard off from the masses. But we must be active, organising, explaining, agitating the people, preparing them for struggle. And we must be bold when the time for action comes. Mass work, mass agitation, leading to struggle. This is the A.B.C. of Congress policy of the pass laws.