

30TH ANNIVERSARY DEFIANCE

On the 26th June our embattled masses, the ANC and its allies together with the forces of progress the world over, will be celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws. In its 70 years of glorious struggle, the ANC, born into the frontline of the people's struggle, has been tested in a multitude of political battles. The Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws stands out as one of the battles of immense historical significance fought by our people under the vanguard leadership of the ANC and her allies. Starting from the early hours of June 26, 1952, in the words of Nelson Mandela, "The whole country was transformed into a battle zone where the forces of liberation were locked in mortal conflict against reaction and evil. Our flag flew in every battlefield and thousands of our countrymen rallied around." Like all historic battles waged by the masses, the significance of the Defiance Campaign grows with time. Lessons drawn from such battles become even more instructive as we approach our final goal of liberation.

Coming as it does on the great Year of Unity in Action, of the 70th Anniversary of the birth of the ANC, the occasion presents a great challenge to all anti-racist and democratic forces in our country and the world. We review the Defiance Campaign in the light of present tasks and demands of our escalating struggle for the seizure of power in our country.

We focus on the plight of our people – the intensified oppression and cruel exploitation, the increasing terrorism, arbitrary arrests, deaths in detention and assassinations. We focus on the unprovoked wars of aggression waged by the racist regime against the neighbouring African states.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The election victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 marked a turning point in South Africa. The Nationalist Party, dominated by the rising and aggressive class of Afrikaner capitalist, financiers and industrialists, emer-

RSARY OF THE CAMPAIGN

—Che O'Gara

ged from the 2nd World War deeply influenced by Nazi ideas and armed with the fascist technique of organisation and demagoguery. Under the government of the Nationalist Party, the policy of colonialism and apartheid in our country was to be pursued with lunatic thoroughness and a callous disregard of humanity which outraged the whole world. Our people were to be subjected to another round of assaults and attacks on their basic human rights, and all forms of freedom under a barrage of insulting, humiliating and oppressive apartheid laws and enactments. Under discriminatory measures such as Railways and Harbours Amendment Act, Population Registration Act, Group Areas Act, pass laws; the Africans, Indians and Coloureds were herded into segregated 'ghettoes', 'group areas', 'Bantu homelands', 'resettlement camps' and farm prisons, where they could be pinned down, supervised, patrolled and persecuted for non-payment of rents, raided for taxes, passes and liquor. The Immorality Amendment Act and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act brought numerous tragedies. Men and women who lived together for years and reared families, suddenly found themselves breaking the law. Families were broken down resulting in untold misery and frustration.

These badges of slavery administered on our people were accompanied by endless measures to suppress and repress the rising tides of opposition which they invoked to destroy freedom of speech and organisation. South Africa was being transformed step by step into a fascist police state, ruled by lawless terror.

CRUEL LAWS

Under this mountaineous burden of unjust and cruel laws people's resentment was reaching a breaking point. As Mandela explained at the time: "Since 1912 and year after year thereafter, in their homes and local areas, in provincial and national gatherings, on trains and buses, in the factories and on the farms, in cities, villages, shanty towns, schools and

prisons, the African people have discussed the shameful misdeeds of those who rule the country. Year after year, they have raised their voices in condemnation of the grinding poverty of the people, the low wages, the acute shortage of land, the inhuman exploitation and the whole policy of white domination. But instead of more freedom repression began to grow in volume and intensity and it seemed that all their sacrifices would end up in smoke and dust. Today the entire country knows that their labours were not in vain for a new spirit and new ideas have gripped our people. Today the people speak the language of action: there is a mighty awakening among the men and women of our country and the year 1952 stands out as the year of this upsurge of national consciousness."

The beginning of the decade of the 50's was marked by a powerful movement of national awakening. In 1949 the adoption of the Programme of Action ushered in a new militant era characterised by mass struggles. In 1950 the ANC in the Transvaal Province initiated the launching of a one-day strike on May 1. On June 26th the same year, in what has gone down in the history of our people as South Africa Freedom Day, the ANC jointly with the South African Indian Congress called for a nation-wide stay-at-home strike to mourn the victims of May 1st shootings and all those who have given their lives in the noble fight against apartheid rule.



The opening of the campaign. Thousands were in attendance.



Nelson Mandela (right) and Yusuf Dadoo. The first to defy the unjust laws.

MASSIVE CAMPAIGN

In 1951 the ANC national conference in Bloemfontein resolved to embark upon a massive campaign of defiance of apartheid laws. On the following year on June 26, together with the SAIC, the ANC launched the Defiance Campaign. In response to the call to action more than 8 500 disciplined volunteers under the able and dynamic leadership of Nelson Mandela took to battle in mass united action against the apartheid evil laws. Starting off in Port Elizabeth in the early hours of June 26 and with only thirty-three defiers and then in Johannesburg in the afternoon of the same day with one-hundred-and-six defiers, it spread throughout the country like wild fire. Peoples from all walks of life engaged the enemy. There were workers, peasants, doctors, lawyers, teachers and the clergy — Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Europeans. The Defiance Campaign demanded immediate and heavy sacrifices. Workers lost their jobs, chiefs and teachers were expelled from service, doctors, lawyers and businessmen gave up their practices and businesses and elected to go to jail rather than acquiesce to white domination. They were prepared to lose all and remain free in the land of their birth.

The enemy responded in a typical fascist fashion to these just demands of the people. A reactionary offensive in the form of arrests, bannings and detentions was launched against our people and their liberation move-

ment. In 1953 between July and August, forty-seven leading members from both Congresses were arrested, tried and convicted for launching the Defiance Campaign. In November 1952, a proclamation was passed which prohibited meeting of more than ten Africans and made it an offence for any person to call upon an African to duty. A series of other such repressive measures like the so-called Public Safety Act, Criminal Laws Amendment Act, the Suppression of Communism Act were further intensified. Arbitrary bannings were imposed on leaders such as Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Moses Kotane, Dr G.M. Naicker and many others. All these oppressive measures were aimed at intimidating the people to avoid to struggle and to cripple and behead the national liberation movement.

REPRESSION

In spite of all repression, the campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws was an outstanding success and of great significance generally in the unfolding of the overall strategy of the stage of non-violence (1912–1961), i.e. the building of a strong national organisation as a means for mobilising and unifying all our people and particularly, the unfolding of the 1949 Programme of Action. The prestige of our organisation grew and its membership rose tremendously as more and more people were turning to the ANC for leadership.

Though initially launched by the ANC and the SAIC, the campaign lured many Coloureds and, towards the end of 1952, a large number of progressive Whites. In action, unity was born and in unity, action was fostered. Inspired by the Defiance Campaign the Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress were formed at the tail end of 1952 and early 1953 respectively, a process that culminated in the formation of the Congress Alliance in 1953.

**IGAMA
VOLONTIYA**

The *Unity in Action* attained during the Defiance Campaign provided fertile ground for waging the heroic battles that made the period of the fifties go down in our history as the "roaring fifties", i.e. the struggle against Bantu Education, The Congress of the People, Anti-Pass Campaigns and many other battles. The adoption of the theme: Unity in Action by our movement to mark the 30th anniversary of this heroic campaign is no accident. No other way of marking this important event in our lives can be more fitting.

TASKS

All the anti-racists and democratic forces in our country are called upon in their various social formations to rise to the occasion at the 30th anniversary of the Defiance Campaign by making it yet another landmark in the road to a free and democratic South Africa. We are called upon to display an inexhaustable revolutionary initiative in realising the call of Unity in mass Action. We must confront and bring down in a united action the genocidal Bantustan system with its wretched shanty towns where our people are subjected to grinding poverty, diseases and death. The terrorism unleashed on our people by the puppet armies, commanded by Rhodesian Sellous Scouts and agents of BOSS, the arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture and death in the fascist and Bantustan prisons must be halted.

We are being called upon to live to the spirit of sacrifice and commitment to the struggle of the volunteers, to confront the enemy in all fields; in urban areas against high rents, sky-rocketing prices, against the cruel exploitation in the farms and factories, the inhuman conditions at work, cuts on our wages, against harrassment and clamping down of our trade unionists. We have a task to put to an end the bombings, raids, killings and assassinations perpetrated by the racist army in the neighbouring states. Let us rise to the occasion and seize power.

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