

WESTERN CAPE REGION - REGIONAL CONFERENCE
- 29/30 SEPTEMBER 1990

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF THE WESTERN CAPE

My recollection of the ANC before I left the Cape, 27 years ago was of an ANC office which I shared as a trade unionist at 5 Albertus Street, Cape Town, an office no bigger than 24 square metres.

During the earlier days of the Congress Movement, when we still saw the need to have an Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress, Congress of Democrats and the ANC, we developed a co-operation between different racial groups which eventually led to the complete racial integration of our membership and leadership, in 1985.

There are some special Cape features at which we need to look.

In the Western Cape, the government imposed on us the policy of a "Coloured Preferential Area". Needless to say, this had terrible consequences on the thinking and practices, in the relationships between different racial groups, especially between African and Coloured. Its negative legacy has yet to be completely eliminated, our integrated membership approach is an important part in this process. Perhaps some people say that it took the ANC a long time to reach this stage. Maybe they are right but we regard it as being of crucial importance that in the process of deciding on any important change, it is absolutely necessary that our organisation ought to be able to carry the population with it. This is the style of the ANC.

Before my departure in '63, the Non-European Unity Movement, now called the Unity Movement of South Africa had some presence in the area. The Labour Party was taking its first strides and a comrade like Hennie Ferris saw fit to participate. Neither of these movements are of any real significance today. The PAC, after the Philip Kgosane march, had a presence to be reckoned with. But that was in the past.

During the earlier period, our teaching community which was very vocal and highly organised, either played an abstentionist or a reformist role. The position is very different today. Because of the advance and the strength of our movement, this strata of our society has won greater confidence. Today, it is not uncommon for teachers to be going on strike or participating in a demonstration. Teachers are today playing a much more positive role within our movement, as equals.

Perhaps the most significant population development in Cape Town has been the tremendous growth of the African townships - Crossroads, Khayelitsha and so on. Despite the harsh opposition of the authorities, African people have come in search of jobs, homes and a future, only to find that it is not to be found. It is our primary responsibility to draw them into our organisation and in the process to counteract any of the racialism which the enemy would like to foster. WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH OF RACIAL CLASHES.

Perhaps this is our most important challenge in the Western Cape, TO BUILD UNITY BETWEEN OUR PEOPLE ACROSS COLOUR LINES.

On the white front, I've recently addressed ANC branch meetings with a white membership equal to the whole of the Western Cape membership of the one-time Congress of Democrats. This is clearly important but surely only the beginning. We will need to make it clear that the white population is not only the preserve of the existing political parties - the Nats, the DP, the CP, etc. We shall have to challenge these parties and win the allegiance of people in the white community. In so doing, we need to recognise the interdependence of all racial groups in our country.

During the period of severe repression, our Mass Democratic Movement, our civics, our churches, our youth, our women and our workers stood firm at the barricades. Our Umkhonto we Siswe played a heroic role under the most difficult circumstances imaginable and we built an international solidarity movement of which we can be proud. We lost many lives both inside and outside of South Africa through these bitter struggles and in the process, we have WON new space. LET US REMEMBER THAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN NOTHING .

We refused to give the other side credibility and we called upon our people to make this country ungovernable. Our people responded.

We now enter a very NEW PERIOD in which our primary challenge will be that of BUILDING OUR ORGANISATION. We are moving from the politics of protest to the politics of challenge for power.

The process of building and preparing for elections requires administrative experience of a type virtually unknown to most of our members. We have to learn these skills NOW. There is in fact NO TIME. For example, in each area, we will need to record the political positions of each household, so that faced with the election we will be able to move our machinery into top gear. We need to win FAMILIES to our side.

We have been brought up in a culture of 'kragdadigheid'. We have had to defend ourselves by all possible means. We have now won the right to speak openly, wear an ANC logo and canvass openly for our point of view. We should now learn the art of convincing people by the strength of our argument. Whilst intolerance of oppression is necessary, intolerance of people with a different point of view is quite unnecessary. Experience tells us that intolerance never wins friends or respect - or support.

In the process of building our organisation, we need to build on our past successes. We need to channel the skill, the energy, the courage which went into challenging the regime on the streets into challenging them in the political arena. We need build a relationship with our neighbours and our constituency. Whereas yesterday we found it necessary to hide our identity from the person who lived next door, today it is exactly the opposite, we should see in them future ANC members.

The Nationalist Party is now considering the opening of its ranks to Blacks. In this region, they will no doubt be looking for converts among the Labour Party and the Management Committees, the uncommitted and the vulnerable. We need to take positive action to counter these moves. By their militancy the people have shown that the old order of "baas en kneg" is past. We must ensure that the Nationalist ideology and deception is totally unwelcome within our communities by ensuring strong ANC leadership and organisation in these areas.

Some people may be thinking that we are well on the road to change and that we can therefore now leave everything to Mandela and his team at the table. Clearly this is a false sense of security and we need to provide maximum MEMBER participation. Each member needs to understand and to clarify this with potential members. We need to build our branches and so lend strength to our team at the table. The responsibility rests on each and every member and not only on those at the table. Their success will be determined by the degree of organisation on the ground.

A number of our comrades have paid serious attention to the preparation of papers for commissions which will be sitting at this conference. A number of very valuable proposals have been made and I urge you to study and consider these very carefully.

We are soon welcome the large majority of comrades back home from exile and from prison. These comrades have been forced to live under very difficult circumstances and we must go out of our way to assist them in the process of re-integrating into our society. Many of these comrades have a

great deal of organisational experience and they should be drawn into the building process.

GROWTH OF OUR MOVEMENT IS SO URGENT, it is not going to develop at the necessary pace if we are going to depend primarily on paid clerks and administrators, plus part-time or occasional volunteers. We seriously need to consider the proposal that elected leaders should function on a full-time basis .

As we embark on this campaign of building our organisation, the racists recognise the dangers to their very existence. Hence, they see the need try to undermine our credibility and engage in violence with a view to trying to destabilise the whole peace process. Their dirty tricks department still engages in the worst possible acts of lies, deception and violence.

Unfortunately, by way of trying to undermine the ANC, it disgusts one to observe that certain newspapers such as the Cape Times are prepared to engage in the most serious misrepresentation of fact about our organisation. This must be denounced with all the authority at our command and we call upon the commercial press to cease its dependence on sensationalism. Newspapers, if they so wish, can play a positive role in society.

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One of the more immediate issues facing our people is that of "One City, One Council". This is a most positive development which has been won after many years of struggle but the solution must be worked out with care. Some councils are trying to entice the Civic into quick solutions. We should advise our people not to commit themselves too hastily but rather to engage in discussion with the whole movement so that we have a nationally agreed policy.

Civics is a specialised field and we need to train and develop people for this purpose without delay.

The Civics played an important role in the development of struggle when we were illegal. The legalisation of the ANC has resulted in many of our members ceasing to play an active role in these organisations. This should not be so.

Whilst the Civics is not the property of the ANC, it is the responsibility of our membership to participate to the full in its development. We should understand that it is the home of people of all shades of opinion.

The right of working people to re-occupy District Six has been won. This is an example of the type of pressure that

civic organisations can bring to bear with the resulting success.

We need to pay special tribute to our spiritual leaders who played such a valiant role during the difficult days of our struggle. We recognise that the Church, the Mosque, the Synagogue plays an extremely important part in the lives of our people. To us the defence of this right is crucial. Contrary to the fears which are often expressed, this in no way contradicts or runs counter to our relationship with the South African Communist Party.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions, COSATU, represents the other wing of our alliance. One remembers the call of that great man, Chief Albert Luthuli who called on every ANC member to be a member of a trade union. As members of the ANC, we should expect all our people to play a much more meaningful role in the development of the progressive trade union movement in the Western Cape. Our people are in the main working people and a close working relationship with COSATU will lead to a significant development in the rise of political consciousness and organisational development.

In the course of struggle, we have come across a number of people who have expressed admiration, support or patronage for the ANC. Valuable as this is, what we really need are participants, MEMBERS who will be subject to the guidance and direction of our movement. We are in the process of building the most impressive political organisation that has ever been seen in the history of the Western Cape. We have a record of struggle of which we can be extremely proud. We call upon all socially conscious people to participate together with us in the process of change.

AMANDLA !
POWER !

Comrade Reg September
29 September 1990