



9 THE FREEDOM FRONT

WE CALL THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA, BLACK AND WHITE — LET US SPEAK TOGETHER OF FREEDOM!

WE CALL THE FARMERS OF THE RESERVES AND TRUST LANDS. LET US SPEAK OF THE WIDE LAND, AND THE NARROW STRIPS ON WHICH WE TOIL. LET US SPEAK OF BROTHERS WITHOUT LAND, AND OF CHILDREN WITHOUT SCHOOLING. LET US SPEAK OF TAXES AND OF CATTLE, AND OF FAMINE. LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM.

WE CALL THE MINERS OF COAL, GOLD AND DIAMONDS. LET US SPEAK OF THE DARK SHAFTS, AND THE COLD COMPOUNDS FAR FROM OUR FAMILIES. LET US SPEAK OF HEAVY LABOUR AND LONG HOURS, AND OF MEN SENT HOME TO DIE. LET US SPEAK OF RICH MASTERS AND POOR WAGES. LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM.

WE CALL THE WORKERS OF FARMS AND FORESTS. LET US SPEAK OF THE RICH FOODS WE GROW, AND THE LAWS THAT KEEP US POOR. LET US SPEAK OF HARSH TREATMENT, AND OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN FORCED TO WORK. LET US SPEAK OF PRIVATE PRISONS AND BEATINGS AND OF PASSES. LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM.

WE CALL THE WORKERS OF FACTORIES AND SHOPS. LET US SPEAK OF THE GOOD THINGS WE MAKE, AND THE BAD CONDITIONS OF OUR WORK. LET US SPEAK OF THE MANY PASSES AND THE FEW JOBS. LET US SPEAK OF FOREMEN AND OF TRANSPORT AND OF TRADE UNIONS; OF HOLIDAYS AND OF HOUSES. LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM.

WE CALL THE TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND THE PREACHERS. LET US SPEAK OF THE LIGHT THAT COMES WITH LEARNING, AND THE WAYS WE ARE KEPT IN DARKNESS. LET US SPEAK OF GREAT SERVICES WE CAN RENDER, AND OF THE NARROW WAYS THAT ARE OPEN TO US. LET US SPEAK OF LAWS, AND GOVERNMENT, AND RIGHTS. LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM.

WE CALL THE HOUSEWIVES AND THE MOTHERS. LET US SPEAK OF THE FINE CHILDREN THAT WE BEAR, AND OF THEIR STUNTED LIVES. LET US SPEAK OF THE MANY ILLNESSES AND DEATHS, AND OF THE FEW CLINICS AND SCHOOLS. LET US SPEAK OF HIGH PRICES AND OF SHANTY TOWNS. LET US SPEAK OF FREEDOM.

The practical experience that taught Congress Alliance members most about building non-racial unity was the organizing of the Congress of the People in June 1955, by a newly-created National Action Council (NAC) consisting of eight members from each of the four sponsoring bodies.

We call the people of South Africa, black and white — Let us speak together of freedom!

We call the farmers of the reserves and trust lands. Let us speak of the wide land, and the narrow strips on which we toil. Let us speak of brothers without land, and of children without schooling. Let us speak of taxes and of cattle, and of famine. Let us speak of freedom.

We call the miners of coal, gold and diamonds. Let us speak of the dark shafts, and the cold compounds far from our families. Let us speak of heavy labour and long hours, and of men sent home to die. Let us speak of rich masters and poor wages. Let us speak of freedom.

We call the workers of farms and forests. Let us speak of the rich foods we grow, and the laws that keep us poor. Let us speak of harsh treatment, and of children and women forced to work. Let us speak of private prisons and beatings and of passes. Let us speak of freedom.

We call the workers of factories and shops. Let us speak of the good things we make, and the bad conditions of our work. Let us speak of the many passes and the few jobs. Let us speak of foremen and of transport and of trade unions; of holidays and of houses. Let us speak of freedom.

We call the teachers, students and the preachers. Let us speak of the light that comes with learning, and the ways we are kept in darkness. Let us speak of great services we can render, and of the narrow ways that are open to us. Let us speak of laws, and government, and rights. Let us speak of freedom.

We call the housewives and the mothers. Let us speak of the fine children that we bear, and of their stunted lives. Let us speak of the many illnesses and deaths, and of the few clinics and schools. Let us speak of high prices and of shanty towns. Let us speak of freedom.

Let us speak together. All of us together — Africans and Europeans, Indian and Coloured. Voter and voteless. Privileged and rightless. The happy and the homeless. All the people of South Africa; of the towns and of the countryside. Let us speak together of freedom. And of the happiness that can come to men and women if they live in a land that is free. Let us speak together of freedom. And of how to get it for ourselves, and for our children. Let the voice of all the people be heard. And let the demands of all the people for the things that will make us free be recorded

We call all the people of South Africa to prepare for the Congress of the People — where representatives of the people, everywhere in the land, will meet together in a great assembly, to discuss and adopt the Charter of Freedom.

This Call to the Congress of the People is addressed to all South Africans, European and Non-European. It is made by four bodies, speaking for the four sections of the people of South Africa: by the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats, and the South African Coloured People's Organization



DELEGATES TO THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE IN KLIPTOWN.
 (PHOTOGRAPHER AND SOURCE: ELI WEINBERG, UWC - ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM MAYIBUYE ARCHIVES)

When South Africa's first non-racial trade union coordinating body was formed, the South African Congress of Trade Unions became part of the Congress Alliance. SACTU's members joined with the thousands of other Congress Volunteers in canvassing demands for the Freedom Charter. The active involvement of SACTU in this and many other Congress campaigns derived from its belief that organizing workers is inextricably linked to engagement in the wider political struggle, and that both workplace and community issues are the concern of a committed trade union.

We firmly declare that the interests of all workers are alike, whether they be European, African, Coloured, Indian, English, Afrikaans or Jewish. We resolve that this coordinating body of trade unions shall strive to unite all workers in its ranks, without discrimination and without prejudice. We resolve that this body shall determinedly seek to further and protect the interests of all workers, and that its guiding motto shall be the universal slogan of working class solidarity: 'An injury to one is an injury to all!'

Declaration of Principles adopted at the foundation conference of SACTU, 5 March 1955

The NAC drafted the Freedom Charter from the demands for a non-racial South Africa collected from all over the country. It was adopted at the Congress of the People, held in Kliptown, outside Johannesburg, on 26 June 1955. The delegates included 2,222 Africans, 320 Indians, 230 coloureds and 112 whites: non-racialism in overt, self-conscious and affirmative form, projecting a vision of the future South Africa after the defeat of apartheid. Delegates and volunteers then reported back to their constituencies and began popularizing the Freedom Charter.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER

as adopted at the Congress of the People on 26 June 1955 where the Transvaal Indian Congress and the Natal Indian Congress were present

PREAMBLE

We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: —

That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people;

That our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

That our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

That only a democratic state, based on the will of the people can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore, we the people of South Africa, black and white, together — equals, countrymen and brothers — adopt this FREEDOM CHARTER. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing nothing of our strength and courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws.
All the people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country.
The rights of the people shall be the same regardless of race, colour or sex.
All bodies of inquiry, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS!

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races.
All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride.
All people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs.
The branding and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime.
All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH!

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africa, shall be restored to the people.
The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industries shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole.
All other industries and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people.
All people shall have equal rights to work where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT!

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it by banning land and land changes.
The state shall help the peasants with implements, seeds, tractors and loans to save the soil and assist the tiller.
Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land.
All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose.
People shall not be robbed of their cattle and forced labour and farm persons shall be abolished.

ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW

No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without law.
No one shall be condemned by the order of any Government official.
The courts shall be representative of all the people.
Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education and repentance.
The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people.
All laws which discriminate on the grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

ALL SHALL ENJOY HUMAN RIGHTS!

The law shall give effect to all the right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children.
The privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by law.
All shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to town, from province to province, and from South Africa abroad.
Pass laws, permits and all other laws restricting these freedoms shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY!

All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers.
The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to share full unemployment benefits.
Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work.
There shall be a forty hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave and six weeks leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers.
Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and city servants shall have the same rights as all others who work.
Child labour, compound labour, the hut system and contract labour shall be abolished.

THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage natural talent for the enhancement of our cultural life.
All the cultural treasures of our land shall be open to all by free exchange of books, ideas and talents with other lands.
The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace.
Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all of Africa.
Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships based on the basis of merit.
Adult literacy shall be ended by a state state education plan.
Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens.
The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT!

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security.
Unlet housing space to be made available to the people.
Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no one shall go hungry.
A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state.
Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children.
Slums shall be demolished and new suburbs built where all shall have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres.
The aged, the orphan, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state.
Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all.
Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!

South Africa shall be a fully independent state which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations.
South Africa shall strive to ensure world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation — not war.
Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all.
The people of the protectorates — Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland — shall be free to decide for themselves their own future.
The rights of all the peoples of Africa to independence and self government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of a close cooperation.

Let all who love their people and their country now say, as we say here
THESE FREEDOMS WE WILL FIGHT FOR, SIDE BY SIDE, THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES UNTIL WE HAVE WON OUR LIBERTY.

POSTER ON THE FREEDOM CHARTER, ISSUED BY THE TRANSVAAL INDIAN CONGRESS.
(SOURCE: SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY ARCHIVE)

Let us face it! The Nationalists have driven the African people to the point where many who were formerly not involved in political movements - who are today still outside the African National Congress - are up in arms against apartheid and for their rights. This is inevitable and this must be welcomed. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL VANGUARD FIGHTERS FOR FREEDOM ARE LED IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS BY THE MILITANT PROGRAMME AND ACTIONS OF THE A.N.C. BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE A.N.C. SHOULD EXPECT OR TRY TO CLAIM A MONOPOLY OF ALL ANTI-APARTHEID FIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE. Many actions may originate outside the ranks of the A.N.C. some locally, some initiated by other leaders and groups. But if they are for the right policies the A.N.C. must welcome such actions and campaigns and fight with them in the over-all freedom fight. It is the principle that counts, the battle that is being waged and every struggle must be judged on that basis and not on the basis of personalities and inter-organisation jealousies.

The rest of the 1950s saw countless campaigns: among the best remembered are demonstrations against the demolition of racially mixed freehold areas like Johannesburg's Sophiatown, boycotts of buses to protest fare increases, and of potatoes to highlight the conditions of farm labourers. The demands of the Freedom Charter for a non-racial South Africa provided a focus for unity in all these struggles, and the front was widened to include organizations not affiliated to the Congress Alliance.

Let us face it! The Nationalists have driven the African people to the point where many who were formerly not involved in political movements — who are today still outside the African National Congress — are up in arms against apartheid and for their rights. This is inevitable and must be welcomed. We believe that all vanguard fighters for freedom are led in the final analysis by the militant programme and actions of the ANC, but this does not mean that the ANC should expect or try to claim a monopoly of all anti-apartheid fights of the people. Many actions may originate outside the ANC, some locally, some initiated by other leaders and groups. But if they are for the right policies, the ANC must welcome such actions and campaigns, and fight with them in the overall freedom fight.

The Women's Federation represents a great working unity between the different women's organizations representing the different sections of South African women. To suggest that it is unnecessary or that the ANC Women's League 'could have done the job' is in the same breath to attack the very basis of the Congress movement itself. Why then do we not say to the Indian and Coloured Congresses and to COD, 'Why a National Action Committee? Why not come in with us?'

On the women's fighting front, the Women's Federation is the counterpart of the alliance built by the Congress movement. It is composed of the bodies that campaign together, that stand for the same programme, yet it is something mightier than all its independent parts, built by their cooperation on the basis of unity in action. Coloured, Indian and democratic European women, though not affected by passes today, have opposed these evils inflicted on African women because they know this is apartheid at work and no women's rights in future are safe under apartheid.

So the Women's Federation is part of the freedom front. It augments and strengthens it. It is a full-blooded member of the freedom movement and must not be regarded — or treated — as a step-child. Part of the Congress front, the Federation must nevertheless have freedom of action within it.

SECHABA: Bulletin of the Transvaal ANC, September 1956

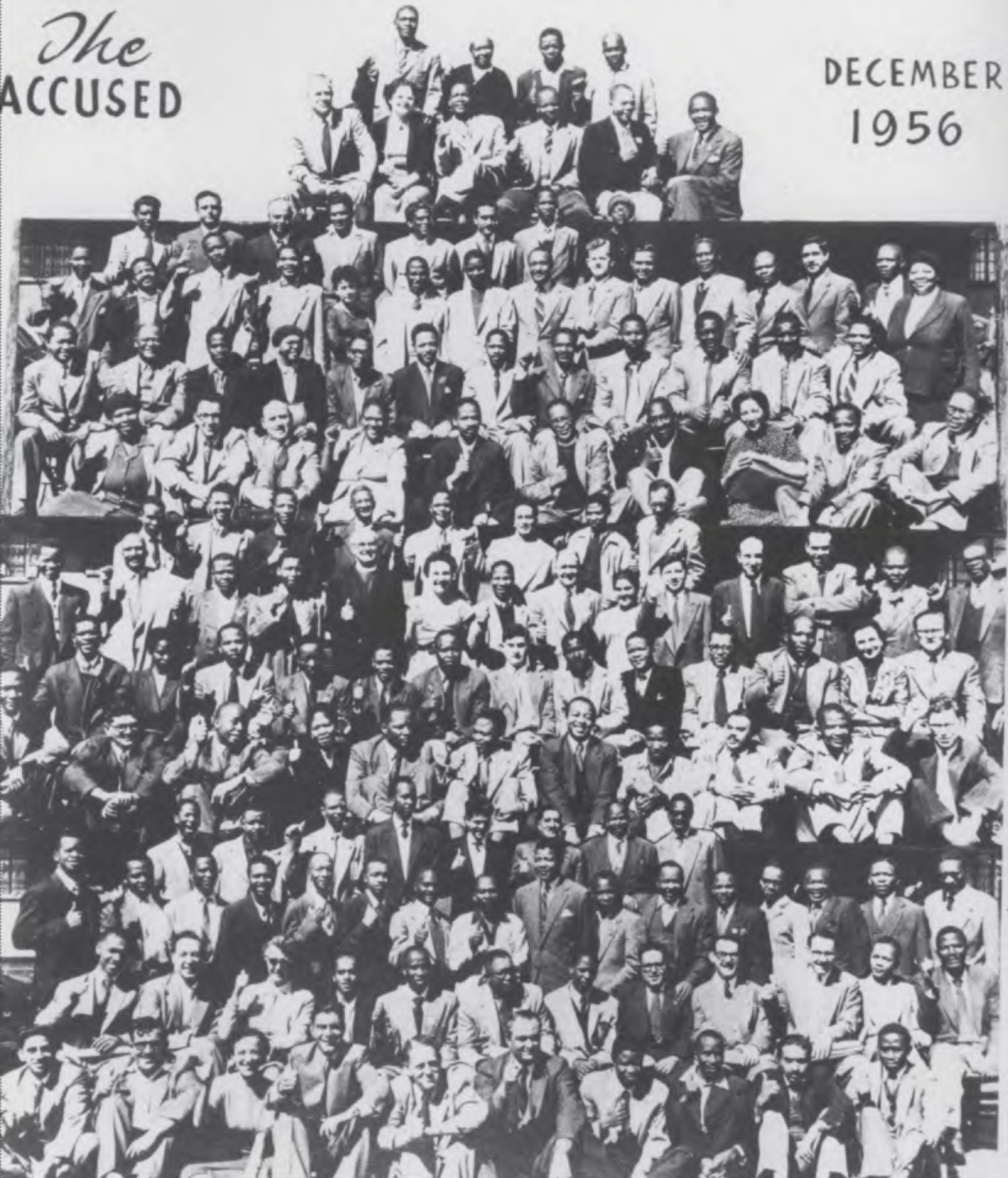
The South African government had been closely monitoring the ground swell of support for the Freedom Charter. Police barred bus loads of delegates from attending the Congress of the People, and Special Branch agents backed up by hundreds of armed police on horseback searched the crowd at Kliptown. The state collected Congress documents in raids over the next year, and then in December 1956, some 156 people — two-thirds African and the rest Indian, coloured and white — were arrested and charged with High Treason. In a trial that lasted four years, the state tried to prove that the Freedom Charter was a communist document, part of a conspiracy aimed at instigating a violent overthrow of the state. The attempt failed: the trial ended with the acquittal of all defendants.

While the Congress movement suffered from this deactivation of its leadership, it also benefited from the lengthy and intensive contact between activists from all over the country afforded by the marathon trial. The wide spectrum of political views among the treason trialists has been summed up as 'ranging in outlook from Moses Kotane to Chief Lutuli'.⁵ In fact, since the defendants were seated in alphabetical order, the Communist Party leader and the Christian nationalist forged an intimate relationship, personally and politically, during the months they spent sitting next to each other in court. Similarly, blacks who had never experienced first hand the non-racialism they had endorsed through the Freedom Charter interacted as equals with whites. Thus the developing unity, despite diversity, of the Congress movement owed a big debt to the Treason Trial.

TREASON TRIAL

The
ACCUSED

DECEMBER
1956



ANC PHOTOGRAPHER ELI WEINBERG HAD ORIGINALLY PLANNED TO STAGE THIS GROUP PICTURE OF ALL THE TREASON TRIAL DEFENDANTS IN JOHANNESBURG'S JOUBERT PARK, BUT PERMISSION WAS WITHDRAWN WHEN A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL LEARNED THAT BLACKS AND WHITES WERE TO BE SEATED TOGETHER. THE DEFENDANTS WERE THEN PHOTOGRAPHED IN SMALLER GROUPS AND WEINBERG PREPARED A MONTAGE. (SOURCE: SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY ARCHIVE)

These freedoms we will fight for
side by side, throughout our lives
until we have won our liberty.



GRAFFITI SUPPORTING A CLAUSE FROM THE FREEDOM CHARTER, DOWNTOWN JOHANNESBURG, 1956.
(PHOTOGRAPHER: ELI WEINBERG. SOURCE: UWC – ROB BEN ISLAND MUSEUM MAYIBUYE ARCHIVES)

NOTES:

¹It was the call for the Congress of the People that prompted the South African Coloured People's Organization (SACPO) to formally change its name to the Coloured People's Congress (CPC).

²Practice whereby coloured farmworkers were rewarded with periodic shots of wine or brandy throughout the working day, ostensibly to ensure productivity.

³The Federation of South African Women (FedSAW), formed in April 1954, is best remembered for organizing an anti-pass demonstration on 9 August 1956, when 20,000 women from all over South Africa marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to present a petition to Prime Minister J. G. Strijdom.