

C19

NATIONAL CONVENTION

INTRODUCTION

Rev 'C 19''

Let us begin by placing the issue for a national convention in a historical context. In 1908 - 1909 a National Convention was held to draw up a constitution for South Africa. This National Convention came up with a constitution for the Union of South Africa. But this National Convention was a racist gathering - the oppressed and exploited were excluded and took no part in it. As a result 1912 saw the formation of the African National Congress whose aim was to fight for a democratic South Africa.

Almost 50 years later the white Labour Party introduced a motion in the Home of Assembly, calling for a National Convention "of all sections of the community to consider the establishment and maintenance of a democratic society." Liberal Party members supported the motion. The United Party's response was that the idea of a National Convention was impracticable; Verwoerds response was that it was "positively dangerous".

The next time the National Convention comes up as an issue is in 1961 with the move to draw up a new constitution declaring South Africa a Republic.

At the All in African Conference held in Pietermaritzburg on 25/26 March to strategise opposition to the Republic, a resolution was adopted to call for a National Convention. A National Action Council was formed with Mandela as chief organiser. His mandate was to campaign for a National Convention and if this was ignored to make plans for a strike and campaign of non-cooperation.

The National Convention was to be summoned before May 31, 1961. - It was to be attended by elected representatives of all adult men and women on an equal basis irrespective of race, colour or creed, and was to have full powers to determine a new constitution for South Africa.

As part of the campaign to summon a National Convention Mandela wrote to the United Party. He stated that if the U.P. was for a democratic and peaceful solution to the conflict in South Africa, then it was their duty to back the call for a National Convention. He stressed that although the call for a National Convention raises certain questions such as (1) What shall be the basis of representation at the Convention and (2) How shall the representatives be elected, those were not the most important at that point. What was important was whether the U.P. was for or against a National Convention.

The situation today

Now in 1984 we are once again faced with a new constitution which is going to affect us the oppressed and exploited in a thousand adverse ways, which is going to strengthen Apartheid. We were not consulted and took no part in drawing up this constitution. For this reason the whole concept of a National Convention has once again become important to consider, discuss and work through.

Now in the past various organisations and individuals (including Buthelezi, PFP and TUCSA) have called for a National Convention, but with very wierd and watered-down pre-conditions. What we need to do is look at how the democratic movement in the 1950's and 1960's conceived of the National Convention.

The first point that the democratic movement makes is that calls for National Conventions by opportunists and liberals are simply for the purpose of devising new ways and means of continuing racial oppression and class exploitation. The democratic movement can have no truck with such calls.

Rather when the democratic movement has made calls for a National Convention representative of all the people it has done so because in South Africa a white minority illegally monopolises state power to perpetuate and defend apartheid.

The function of a National Convention would be to discuss and draw up a truly democratic constitution in which political and economic power would be vested in the hands of all the people.

More concretely two things characterize a National Convention:

- (1) The National Convention would have to be given sovereign and unlimited authority to change South African society in all its aspects.
- (2) The National Convention would be attended by the elected representatives of the people.

Beyond this to ensure that the National Convention is genuinely sovereign and democratic there are 5 pre-conditions that have to be met:-

- (1) The present racist constitution has to be suspended.
- (2) All the people's organisations have to be unbanned; all political exiles have to be allowed to return immediately and unconditionally; all political prisoners banned, banished and restricted patriots have to be released. In addition all the people's leaders must fully participate in the preparation for and actual work of the National Convention.
- (3) There has to be an immediate, complete and unconditional compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- (4) There must be an immediate repeal of the Land Act, the Urban Areas Act and in addition all repressive legislation (the Internal Security Act, security legislation and proclamations in the Bantustans) must also be repealed.
- (5) The police and army must be disarmed and they must also be disbanded.

This then presents us with a picture of what characterizes a National Convention and what the pre-conditions are before a democratic National Convention can be convened.

Before concluding I think that one final point is important: that is that the democratic movement stresses that only when our liberation struggle seriously threatens the Apartheid regime will it be prepared to set into motion the convocation of a National Convention. This means that the liberation struggle has to be strongly intensified before a National Convention can become a reality.

QUESTIONS

- (1) Can the call for a National Convention advance our work here and now?
- (2) If yes how can we popularise this demand, making it meaningful to ordinary people?
- (3) How do we defend the National Convention demand from attacks by anti-UDF tendencies?

NB. A longer paper looking in more detail at National Convention and also at the whole question of Constituents Assembly is available on request. The paper is ⁺ fifteen pages long.

Collection Number: AK2117

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location: **Johannesburg**

©2012

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of the collection records and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of a private collection deposited with Historical Papers at The University of the Witwatersrand.