

Pass raids and random arrests were a regular feature of life under apartheid. This resulted in the criminalising of hundreds of thousands of South Africans.

Photo: Ernest Cole, Estate of the Late M.M. Kole



The Separate Amenities Act of 1953 forced black and white people to use separate public facilities such as parks, beaches, buses and public toilets.

Photo: Ernest Cole, Estate of the Late M.M. Kole



Professor Z. K. Matthews of Fort Hare University and prominent ANC leader was the inspiration behind the idea of a Congress of the People or 'people's parliament.' This mass gathering would generate a vision of an alternative society, based on democratic values. Photo: BAH



NEW YEAR, NEW EFFORT

The 'thumbs up' sign was first used as a victory salute in World War II. It was adopted by the Congress Alliance in the resistance campaigns of the 1950s to convey the spirit of inevitable victory.

Cartoon: New Age magazine, February 1955

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 — African and European, 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. LET THE DEMANDS BE GATHERED TOGETHER IN A GREAT **CHARTER OF FREEDOM.**

WE CALL ON ALL GOOD MEN AND TRUE, to speak now of freedom, and to write their own demands into the Charter of Freedom.

WE CALL ALL WHO LOVE LIBERTY to pledge their lives from here on to win the Freedoms set out in the Charter.

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.

Let us organise together for the Congress of the People.

Let us speak together of Freedom.

Let us work together for the Freedom Charter.

LET US GO FORWARD TOGETHER TO FREEDOM!

In March 1954, a National Action Council was established to carry out the Freedom Charter Campaign. It would mobilise thousands of volunteers to gather the demands of ordinary people throughout the country. During the collection of demands, thousands of leaflets like this one were distributed urging people to 'Speak of Freedom.' This process would culminate in a mass assembly where demands would be adopted by delegates representing communities from all over the country. Source: Wits Historical Papers



Canvassing a group of workers in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, for the Freedom Charter Campaign. Volunteer Martin Mafefo Ramokgodi said: *i Volontiya* was a person who actually took initiative. A volunteer had to be simple and sincere. Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE

OPENS AT KLIPTOWN, ON
Saturday, June 25th, 1955



LET EVERYONE WHO WANTS HIS FREEDOM COME TO
KLIPTOWN

On Saturday, 25th June!



Hear the delegates from the whole country
Speaking together of Freedom!

*Come to the
Congress of the People!*

HEAR THE PEOPLE'S FREEDOM CHARTER !

Assemble at ORLANDO COMMUNAL HALL
Assemble at MOROKA DADOO SQUARE
Assemble at JABAVU DADOO SQUARE

Assemble at DUBE OPPOSITE MUNICIPAL OFFICE

Issued by, National Action Council, 37 West St., JHB. Royal 455

The Congress of the People was held over two days in a field in Kliptown, just outside Johannesburg. Up to 7 000 people from all over the country attended.

Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive

Source: Wits Historical Papers



Delegates were welcomed by children neatly dressed in boy scout uniforms. Planks resting on bricks provided the seating for delegates. Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



People arrived carrying posters reflecting their demands. As volunteer, A.S. Chetty put it: They were pouring in, pouring in. Bus loads, lorry loads, motor cars. People on foot. They were coming from everywhere.

Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive




Women delegates
arriving from the Transkei.

Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



There was singing going
on. Eating. Distribution of
pamphlets. Reading.
People talking. Spirits were
high at the Congress of the
People.

Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



What do Women Want?

Women - this is your chance to speak out - your needs, your wishes, your demands!

This public meeting is being held to give women a chance to put forward their demands for the FREEDOM CHARTER. What do women want to make South Africa a better land for their children and families? YOU must give the answer! Let YOUR voice be heard. The Demands will be discussed at the great Congress of the People.

SUNDAY 29th
MAY - 2 P.M.

TRADES HALL
KERK STREET

ALL WOMEN WELCOME!
Prominent Women Speakers

BRING YOUR DEMANDS FOR THE FREEDOM CHARTER!

Organised by the Federation of South African Women,
Box 10876, Jhb.

Poster produced by the Federation of South African Women, calling all women in the Johannesburg area to attend a meeting to express their demands. Source: Wits Historical Papers

Letter from Elizabeth Molete from Sopiatown expressing the demands of her community. Source: Wits Historical Papers

We demand:

- 1 The right to own our own homes, and the land on which we build them.
- 2 The right to leave where we choose.
- 3 Housing loan schemes at low rates of interest.
- 4 Properly made roads and storm water drainage.
- 5 Better shopping facilities, particularly in the non-European townships.
- 6 The right of all people to own and work their own farms.
- 7 That no person be required to carry a pass or reference book.
- 8 Equal rights for all people.
9. The right to vote

Elizabeth Molete
58 Batha Street
Sophia Town.



Women and men from Western Native Township make their presence felt as they demand equal human rights, work and security for all. Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



At the first session, the Isitwalandwe medal, the highest award given by the ANC to people who have made an outstanding contribution to the liberation struggle, was presented to Chief Albert Luthuli, Dr Y. M. Dadoo and Father Trevor Huddleston. Only Trevor Huddleston was there to receive the medal. The other two were banned at the time.

Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



Chief Luthuli's daughter, Albertina, Dr W. Z. Conco, ANC representative and chairperson of the gathering, and Mr Pieter Beylveld, representative of SACOD, on the platform at the Congress of the People discussing the demands of the Freedom Charter. Chief Luthuli himself was banned at the time and therefore unable to be present. Photo: BAHA



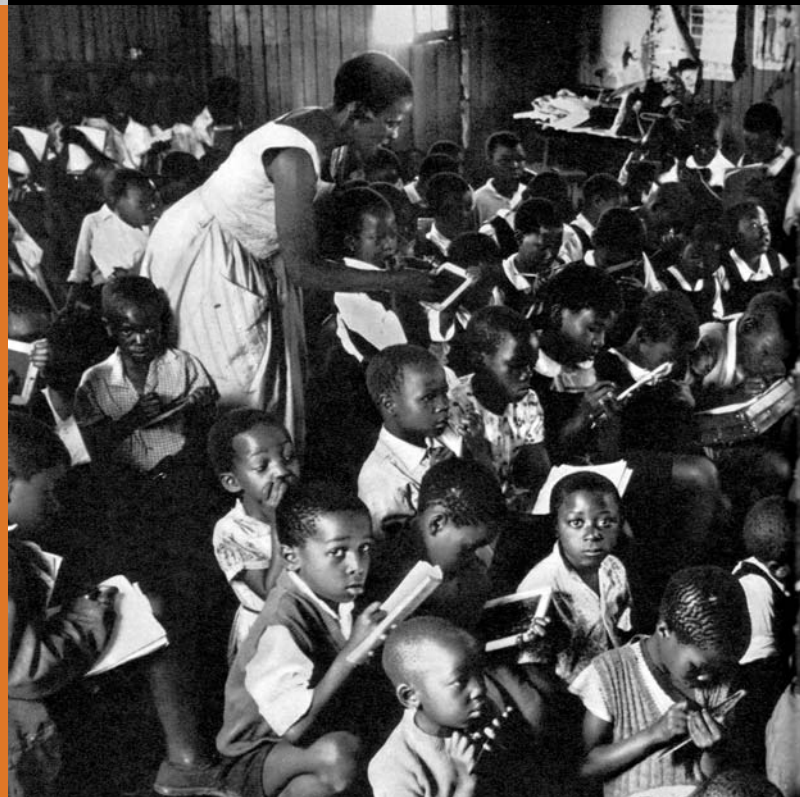
CPC delegate Eileen van de Vindt from the Western Cape remembers: Every delegate there was a speaker. You know, if anyone was called upon to say something he would be able to articulate his grievances, and say something about his plight in South Africa. That was the most inspiring thing of all. Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



At Kliptown, Es'kia Mphahlele read the clause of the Freedom Charter that related to education. The doors of learning and culture shall be opened. Photo: BAHA

Gutter education was challenged by all sectors of the population. The church declared that, he who does not oppose the Bantu Education Act is as guilty in the eyes of God as the man that implements the act.

Photo: Ernest Cole, Estate of the late M.M. Kole





Sign the **FREEDOM CHARTER**



THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN !

ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS !

THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH !

THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT !

ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW !

ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS !

THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY !

THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND OF CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED !

THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT !

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP !

BATHO BA TLA BUSA !

LIKAROLO TSA SECHABA KAOFELA LI TLA BA TE TOKELA TSE LEKANANG !

BATHO BA TLA KOPANELA LERUO LA LEFATSE !

LEFATS'E LE TLA AROHANYOYA HAR'A BE LE LEMANG !

BATHO KAOFELA BA TLA LEKANA IHLONG LA MOLAO !

BATHO KAOFELA BA TLA FUMANA LITOKELO TSE LEKANANG TSE TSOANETSENG BATHO !

MOSEBETSI O TLA ANELA HO BE LE TS'IRELETSO !

MENYAKO EA THUTO LE EA TSA BOTHO, E TLA BULOA !

HO TLA BA MATLO, TS'IRELETSO, LE HO LULA MOTHO A PHOTHOLOHILE !

HO TLA BA KHOTSO LE SELEKANE !

ZONKE IZINHLANGA ZIYOBA NAMALUNGELO ALINGANAYO !

BONKE BAYODLA NGAKHEZO LUNYE !

UMHLABATHI UYOCAZELWA LABO ABAWUSEBENZAYO !

BONKE BAYOLINGANA PHAMBIKWOM-THETHO !

BONKE BAYOBA NAMALUNGELO ALINGANAYO !

KUYAKUBA KHONA UMSEBENZI NOKUNGASHUKUMISWA !

AMINYANGO YEMFUNDO NEMPUCUKO JYOVULWA !

KUYOBA KHONA IZINDLU — NOKUNGATHIKAMEZWA NOKUTHO-KOMALA !

KUYAKUBAKHONA UXOLO NOBUDLELWANE !



The Congress wheel symbolised the multiracialism of the Congress Alliance. A campaign to collect a million signatures aimed to popularise the Freedom Charter after the Congress of the People. For various reasons, and mainly due to state repression, this campaign was not very successful. Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive

Post

MARCH 11, 1956

THE PAPER-BITER



A WOMAN EATS "FREEDOM CHARTER"

Police Swoop On Cape Town Meeting

A PUBLIC MEETING on the Grand Parade, Cape Town, of Coloureds and Africans was broken up in disorder last week when special branch police arrested the vice-president of the South African Congress of Trade Unions, Mr. C. Sibande.

He was taken into custody with a number of other Africans.

The crowd was shocked. Meanwhile, armed police stood about 50 yards away.

The meeting followed the four day N.A.C.T.U. conference in Cape Town.

When Mr. Sibande and two other Africans were put into a police car a large crowd surrounded the vehicle and cried: "May-baya Afrika!"

There was an emotional stir as people shouted: "We are with you, comrades," and "liberation is nearer."

The police attempted to secure "Freedom Charter" documents signed by members of the audience. One young woman, Katie Mrs. M, stuffed the papers into her mouth.

She then bit them to pieces with her teeth.

Mr. (Chief) Ntse of Stone Street, Cape Town, was asked to produce a permit allowing him entry into the Cape, as the police suspected him of being an Indian from the Transvaal.

After a heated argument Mr. Ntse's name was left alone. The police then, seeking information that Mr. Sibande reached Cape Town in five days before the police made the arrest as he was not allowed to remain in an urban area for more than 72 hours.

Mr. Sibande signed an admission of guilt form and paid 15 he was, however, allowed to stay over for the following day.

Mr. Tempest Ntse said that he had shown his pass to the police and was taken into custody, but was released an hour later.

Mr. H. (General) of Johannesburg was exempted after showing his papers and was released (page 3).

**A Maffie's
Boy Friend
Tells All**

£45,000 FRAUD ALLEGED

A 35-YEAR-OLD Indian was held without bail pending an identification parade when he was brought before a District Magistrate's Court on an allegation of fraud said to be worth £45,000. When the Crown asked for a postponement, Yusuf Osman Meer, the accused, applied for bail. Mr. B. E. Terblanche, senior public prosecutor, asked the court that Meer be held in custody pending an identification parade. Bail was refused.

My friend and I were in the Parade in Cape Town, getting people to sign copies of the Charter. Suddenly the police arrived... They wanted to get the signature form with the Freedom Charter from my friend. So she swallowed it, quick.

Eileen Van der Vindt
Photo: Front page of the Golden City Post, 11 March 1956



On 5 December 1956, crowds of supporters gathered outside the Johannesburg Drill Hall during the Treason Trial where 156 Congress leaders were being charged with treason. If found guilty, they could be sentenced to death. Photo: Eli Weinberg, UWC/RIM/Mayibuye Archive



Youth display enthusiasm for the Freedom Charter at a UDF rally in February 1985, at the Jabulani Amphitheatre in Soweto. *Photo: Paul Weinberg, South Photographs*