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PROFESSOR Z.K. MATTHEWS

(Activities in the A.N.C. covering the period 1953-1956)

1. I returned from the United States in May 16, 1953, and at once took over the Presidency of the African National Congress (Cape) from Dr. J.L.Z. Njongwe, then of Port Elizabeth who had acted as President of the A.N.C. (Cape) during my absence overseas.
2. I had gone to the United States to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, New York, as Henry Luce Visiting Professor for the academic year 1952-1953. I was absent from South Africa from June 12, 1952 to May 16, 1953.
3. On my resumption of duties as President of the A.N.C. (Cape) my first duty was to prepare for the Annual Conference of the A.N.C. (Cape), the venue of which was fixed as Cradock, with the dates 15th and 16th, 1953.
4. I delivered the Presidential address to that Conference on August 15th, 1953.
5. In the course of this address I referred to the fact that various organisations in the country had under consideration the idea of a national convention at which the constitution of the country embodied in the South Africa Act, as amended, might be reviewed and suggestions made for its amendment to bring it into line with changed conditions in South Africa. I pointed out that the Nationalist Party at present in control of the reins of government was engaged in revising the constitution and refashioning the South African state in the light of their beliefs as witness the attack on the Entrenched Clauses regarded by them "as the dead hand of the past". On the other hand the amendments proposed by the Nationalists did not commend themselves to all political parties or to all sections of the population. Hence other bodies proposed the holding of National Conventions with a broader basis than that contemplated by the Nationalists.

The Labour Party proposed the holding of a national conference; the Institute of Race Relations canvassed the idea

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of such a conference. The Dutch Reformed Churches proposed the holding of a conference which might discuss the application of Christian principles in a multi-racial society.

6. All the proposals emanated from European organisations. I asked in my address whether the time had not come for the African National Congress, the premier political organisation of the African People, to consider the convening of a national conference at which all sections of the population might be represented to consider the kind of South Africa which they should like to see in the future, in which the legitimate rights of all sections of the population might be adequately safeguarded.
7. Arising out of this suggestion the A.N.C. (Cape) Conference at Cradock passed the following resolution:

"That the Conference notes with interest the remarks of the President on the need for the establishment at the instance of the African National Congress and under its leadership of a Congress of the People in South Africa to draw up, inter alia, a Freedom Charter or Constitution embodying a vision of the future South Africa as we in Congress see it. Conference instructs the incoming executive to make specific recommendations in this regard to the African National Congress Headquarters. Such a Congress of the People would serve to unite all democratic forces in South Africa among all races into a front against the dangers of fascism, and would enable the A.N.C. to demonstrate in a practical manner its policy for the solution of the problems of the country."

8. In the normal course this resolution of the A.N.C.(Cape) Conference was brought to the attention of the National Headquarters and was included for consideration in the agenda of the National Conference of the A.N.C. which was held at Queenstown in December 1953 and which I attended.
9. The Queenstown Conference adopted the following resolution:-

"Conference instructs the National Executive Committee to make immediate preparations for the organisation of a Congress of the People of South Africa, whose task shall be to work out a 'Freedom Charter' for all peoples and groups in the country. To this end Congress urges the African National Congress national executive to call a meeting of the national executives of the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Organisation, the South African Congress of Democrats and any other democratic organisation for the purpose of placing before

"them the plan of Congress and obtaining their co-operation in creating a truly representative Convention of the People of South Africa".

10. The first post-conference meeting of the National Executive of the A.N.C. was held in March 1954. At the meeting it was decided that steps should be taken to give effect to the resolution regarding the Congress of the People by inviting the National Executives of the bodies referred to in the resolution to a preliminary meeting to be held in Durban in May 1954.
11. I took the opportunity at that meeting to draw the attention of the National Executive to the fact that there was a possibility that I might be called upon by the Governing Council of the University College of Fort Hare to act as Principal for a limited period, and that if this happened I would necessarily have to withdraw from active participation in Congress activities. I would call upon Dr. Njongwe to take over my duties as President of the A.N.C. (Cape) as he had done during my absence in America. The National Executive readily agreed to the arrangement.
12. I was in fact invited by the Governing Council of the University College of Fort Hare to act as Principal of the College during the absence on six months/leave of Professor Dent. The period was from May 1, 1954 to October 31, 1954. Dr. Njongwe took over my duties as Cape President including my ex officio position on the National Executive.
13. In the meantime the President-General, Chief A.J. Luthuli, asked me to prepare a memorandum on the Congress of the People to be placed before the meeting of the National Executives of the organisations which were invited by the A.N.C. to consider the idea of the Congress of the People. This I consented to do.
14. In drawing up the memorandum I had before me suggestions which were submitted by various individuals indicating their views on the significance of the idea and how it might be implemented.

14. The memorandum which was eventually placed before the National Executive is contained in the attached memorandum, and not that from which the Prosecutor quoted in his opening address, which was one of those submitted for my consideration and from which I believe I took only one or two paragraphs.
15. I was present at the first meeting of the Joint Executives of the four organisations: The African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured People's Organisation.
16. The memorandum referred to above was placed before the meeting. After lengthy discussion the idea of the Congress of the People was agreed to in principle, but the method of implementing it contained in paragraph 12 of the memorandum was rejected. Instead it was agreed to set up a National Action Council consisting of a number of representatives of the different organisations to work out the details of how to give effect to this resolution including the possible extension of an invitation to other bodies to become sponsoring organisations. The National Action Council was to consist of five representatives from each sponsoring organisation and was to be empowered to make recommendations to the joint executives of the sponsoring organisations which alone would be empowered to take executive action on the recommendations of the National Action Council. It was suggested that the National Action Council should consist preferably of members of the executives of the sponsoring organisations resident in the Transvaal so as to make it easier for them to meet, as frequent meetings would be necessary especially in the early stages of the campaign.
17. I was not a member of the National Action Council and I never had the opportunity to attend any of its meetings. As indicated above, I withdrew temporarily from the A.N.C. activities owing to my preoccupation with my duties as Acting Principal of Fort Hare.

18. I did, however, attend the Annual Conference of the A.N.C. (Cape) which was held at Uitenhage on June 26, 27, 1954. The Conference was presided over by Dr. J.Z.L. Njongwe, the Acting President who delivered the Presidential address. I was, however, re-elected President and I accepted on condition Dr. Njongwe continued to act until November 1st, 1954, when I would resume my duties as President. This I did in due course. - my address there was 2.11.18
19. I attended the Annual Conference of the A.N.C. which was held in Durban in December 1954. In the absence of Chief A.J. Luthuli who had by then been confined to the district of Lower Tugela by order of the Minister of Justice, I acted as Deputy-President at the conference. Rev. J.A. Calata acted as Speaker of the Conference.
20. At this Conference the main subjects which engaged the attention of the delegates included the Congress of the People, the question of Bantu Education and the Western Areas Removal Scheme. The latter two topics had so agitated the minds of the African people that it seemed as if the idea of the Congress of the People was going to suffer temporary eclipse.
21. The first post-conference meeting of the National Executive was held in Natal in March 1955. At this meeting the National Executive reviewed the position with regard to the resolution on Bantu Education adopted at the Durban conference. The terms of that resolution were as follows:

"Conference insists that the correct policy to be observed towards Bantu Education is one of fighting an uncompromising consistent battle against the implementation of the Bantu Education Act and therefore resolves upon total rejection of Verwoerd's evil Act as the moral and spiritual enslavement of our children. To defeat this act it calls upon African parents to make representations to withdraw their children from primary schools indefinitely as from April 1, 1955, until further directives from the National Executive Committee. Furthermore, Conference calls upon the National Executive Committee to keep a vigilant eye on the situation and to issue directives from time to time that will give a disciplined lead to our opposition as well as to approach individual sympathetic societies for their support."

- 22. The reports from the various provinces placed before the Executive indicated that insufficient preparations had been made by the branches to implement the schools boycott resolution by April 1, 1955. It was accordingly resolved to postpone implementation of this resolution pending a special conference on Bantu Education to be held at Port Elizabeth on April 10, 1955. At this conference it was decided to stand by the boycott resolution but to make its implementation in any particular area dependent upon the response of the people in the area concerned and the preparations made by the branch to provide alternative cultural activities for the children withdrawn from school.
- 23. In the event only a few areas in the Transvaal and in the Eastern Cape embarked upon the schools boycott.
- 24. At the Durban conference in 1954 the following resolution was adopted in connection with the Congress of the People:

I attended the Special National Conference

"This Conference declares its unqualified support for the great Congress of the People sponsored by the National organisations of this country. In this connection conference enjoins all national organisations, church movements and associations to support, join in and participate in the great (Congress of the People) campaign for the calling of the mighty Congress of the People having as its aim the drawing up of a Freedom Charter embodying the aspirations of the people of South Africa for a future free, united, multi-national democratic community in which oppression and exploitation will be a thing of the past. The organisation of the Congress of the People is a common task in which all democrats can participate. Therefore Congress supports the call for 50,000 Freedom Volunteers issued by the People's President Chief A.J. Luthili, to gather the demands of the people and to ensure that the Congress will be the most representative assembly in the history of our country" (Resolution 1).

- 24. In the meantime the National Executive had decided that the Campaign for the Congress of the People should be brought to a close and fixed June 25, 26, 1955 as the dates for the Congress of the People, with Kliptown, Johannesburg, as the venue.
- 25. For us in the Cape it meant that the Congress of the People would clash with our Provincial Conference which was due to

open on June 25, 1955. The Cape Executive therefore decided to hold the Provincial Conference a week earlier i.e. June 18 & 19, 1955. —

26. I delivered the Presidential address at this conference but indicated that I would not be available for re-election as ^{President} President. Rev. W.S. Gawe was elected President but I remained a member of the Cape Executive with the duty of assisting Dr. R.T. Bokwe in his capacity as Provincial Treasurer.
27. Owing to pre-occupation with College duties, especially in view of the disturbances which had taken place at Fort Hare in May 1955, I was unable to attend the Congress of the People on June 25, 26, 1955 so that I have no first hand knowledge of what transpired there.
28. I did, however, attend the meeting of the A.N.C. National Executive held in July 1955 in Natal at which the Freedom Charter adopted at Kliptown was placed before the National Executive for its endorsement.
29. After detailed consideration of the terms of the Charter dealt with matters of policy, it could only be endorsed, if at all, by the National Conference, the supreme body of the African National Congress. It was therefore decided to place the Freedom Charter before the Annual Conference to be held in Bloemfontein in December, 1955.
30. On the day following the meeting of the A.N.C. Executive, a meeting of the Joint Executives was held at which it was similarly agreed that the Freedom Charter would have to be placed before the National Conferences of the different organisations for ratification, although the meeting of the Joint Executives agreed to recommend the adoption of the Freedom Charter by their respective organisations.
31. On September 27, 1955, in a nation-wide raid by members of the Special Branch of the South African Police purporting to be in search of evidence of treason committed by various persons, my home at Gaga Street, Alice, C.P. and my office

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31. In December 1955 I was invited by the Governing Council of Fort Hare to take over the Acting Principalship of Fort Hare for six months in view of the approaching retirement of Principal Dent. I accordingly informed the President-General that I would not be available for A.N.C. work during that period. I did, however, undertake if possible, to attend the Bloemfontein Conference to represent the President-General. I attended the Conference for one day.

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32. The main subject which occupied the attention of the Conference while I was present was the election of office-bearers for the period 1956 to 1958. Chief A.J. Luthuli was re-elected President and I was elected a member of the National Executive, along with a number of other persons.

33. After the elections so many of the delegates were compelled to leave that it was decided to refer the matter of the adoption of the Freedom Charter to a special conference to be held later.

34. This conference was held in Johannesburg on March 31, 1956.

35. By that time I had withdrawn from active participation in Congress and so I was not able to attend the conference. It was at this conference that the Freedom Charter was finally adopted by the A.N.C.

36. During the year 1956 I attended no formal meeting of the National Executive of the A.N.C. *I did attend at least one like executive meeting at Bloemfontein, 1956.*

37. On December 5, 1956, I was visited by four members of the Security branch of the South African Police under the leadership of Detective-Sergeant Nel at my house in Gaga Street, Alice, C.P.

Sergeant Nel produced a warrant for my arrest which he allowed me to read. He then informed me that he was going to search my home before he took me into custody. I asked him for his search warrant. He informed me that in view of the warrant of arrest he did not require a search warrant. Although I was

not convinced by his statement I allowed him to search. A number of documents were seized. When he had concluded the search at the house he asked me to accompany him to the Principal's office at Fort Hare for which he was in possession of a search warrant. He showed me the search warrant and I satisfied myself that it authorised a search of the Principal's office which I had, of course, occupied throughout the whole of 1956. There also some documents were seized.

38. Thereafter I was taken to the Charge Office. At 9 a.m. I appeared before the Magistrate in Alice for remand to Johannesburg.

39. The same day I was taken by car to King William's Town where I reported at the Charge Office. Later I was joined by other accused persons from Middledrift, Cradock, Queenstown, Bolotwa, Stutterheim. From there we were taken by car to Port Elizabeth where we were locked up in a cell for the night. At 6.30 a.m. the next day we boarded an uncomfortable military plane bound for Johannesburg. We entered the Fort on Thursday, December 6, 1956.