NATIONAL EDUCATION CRISIS COMMITTEE

SECOND NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS, SATURDAY 29 MARCH 1986

PEOPLE'S EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE'S POWER
Friends, Comrades,

I welcome you to this historic gathering, a meeting of people from all over the country, from every province, from big and small towns, rural and urban areas. We gather here as a meeting of people drawn from all walks of life, from all sections of the people: students, teachers, parents, workers, community and political leaders. We bring together all sections of the oppressed community and all who detest apartheid. We have tried to ensure representation of all political tendencies and all sections of our population, black and white.

This is a truly historic conference in the tradition of earlier national meetings such as the Congress of the People of 1955 and the 1961 All-in Africa conference.

It is an important lesson to the apartheid forces: The people stand united. Ten years after the 1976 rising we remain united in our demand for the ending of apartheid education and the establishment of a democratic, people's education. We also remain convinced that this can only be achieved with the eradication of the apartheid system and the establishment of a democratic people's South Africa.

Ever since 1976 the people have recognised that apartheid education cannot be separated from apartheid in general. This conference once again asserts that the entire oppressed and democratic community is concerned with education, that we all see the necessity of ending gutter education and we all see that this is a political question affecting each and every one of us.
Let us now turn to the critical question which concerns us all, all oppressed and democratic South Africans. The December Conference gave the government until today to meet the demands of parents, students and teachers. Has the government met the demands? We want to answer this loudly and clearly so that there can be no mistaking what we are saying: The answer is NO. They have not met our demands.

We are saying this for two reasons: firstly most of the demands which we made in December have not been met. Secondly any steps the government has taken have been sideways steps. They lifted the emergency because they were forced to do so, because they were afraid of the united mass action of the people which they know is coming after March 31. At the same time they said they were going to impose a permanent emergency by giving the SAP and SADF powers throughout the country, whereas previously they have only had these in parts of the country.

In the meantime, the emergency in fact continues to exist throughout the country. There is little difference now from when the official state of emergency was in force. It was after the emergency was lifted that our children were shot in Kabokweni in the Eastern Transvaal and that other atrocities were perpetrated. The demands of the December Conference have not been met.
As we meet:

* Cosas remains banned
* Students are still in detention
* Teachers continue to be dismissed and forcibly transferred
* Attempts are still being made to stop democratic SRCs from functioning.
* School buildings are unrepaiRed
* Troops are still in the townships.

Boycotts have taken place throughout the country because of the intransigence of the authorities, their refusal to meet our just demands.
We stand today at a crossroads in our struggle for national liberation. We hold the future in our hands. The decisions we take at this conference will be truly historic, in the sense that they will help determine whether we go forward to progress and peace, or whether the racists push us backwards and reverse some of the gains that we have made, towards barbarism and chaos.

I want to make it clear that these aren't empty slogans. When we say that we have reached a decisive historical moment, this is based on a careful assessment of our current reality. In any struggle it is extremely important to recognise the critical moment, the time when decisive action can propel that struggle into a new phase. It is also important to understand that this moment doesn't last forever, that if we fail to take action that moment will be lost.

This moment has a number of important features:

- the state has lost the initiative to the people. It is no longer in control of events.
- the masses themselves recognise that the moment is decisive, and are calling for action.
- the people are united around a set of fundamental demands, and are prepared to take action on these demands.

Having said this, I want to strike a note of caution. It is important that we don't misrecognise the moment, or understand it...
to be something which it is not. We are not poised for the immediate transfer of power to the people. The belief that this is so could lead to serious errors and defeats. We are however poised to enter a phase which can lead to transfer of power. What we are seeking to do is to decisively shift the balance of forces in our favour. To do this we have to adopt the appropriate strategies and tactics, we have to understand our strengths and weaknesses, as well as that of the enemy, that is, the forces of apartheid, reaction.

Having said this, let us describe some of the main features of the current situation. The government introduced the state of emergency because it was losing political control. It hoped that the emergency would achieve two objectives: firstly, to stop the advances of the democratic movement, and to destroy the people's organisations which were taking control in various parts of the country. Secondly it aimed to reinstitute the puppet bodies in the townships which had been destroyed since the Vaal uprising ten months previously. Through this two-pronged attack it hoped to regain control, regain the initiative, and impose its apartheid reforms on the people.

In fact, the state failed hopelessly in these objectives. Its brutal actions, and atrocities committed by the SADF and SAP, only angered the people more and mobilised them in evergrowing numbers. Puppet structures, instead of being restored, came under more widespread attack. In a number of areas people's
Organisations strengthened their structures and became more rooted in the masses. Struggle began to be waged in all corners of the country and new organisations sprang up daily. Where youth had previously waged the struggle alone, whole communities now involved themselves in united action against the regime.

Despite the heavy blows against our leaders and organisations, there was a real strengthening of the democratic forces, the people's camp; and a weakening of the forces of apartheid, the enemy camp. Let us first look at the situation in the enemy camp. When the regime declared the emergency, all sections of the white ruling bloc supported it, in the belief that the resistance of the people would be crushed, paving the way for a Buthelezi-Kuzorewa option. Barely one month later this appearance of unity had crumbled. Mass resistance had spread and taken new forms. The regime stood more isolated than ever before at the international level; and the economic crisis reached new proportions with the loss of investor confidence in the stability of the South African regime.

This situation brought home to its allies that the regime was no longer able to rule in the old way. The people heightened contradictions within the ruling bloc by strategies such as the consumer boycott. The regime became increasingly divided and unable to act as greater pressure built up, locally and internationally, to meet the people's demands. The divisions reached right into the cabinet itself, as sections of the government differed with each other on the correct way to deal
with the situation. The SPCC initiative created public divisions between the SADF and SAP on the one hand, and the DET on the other; something which previously would have been unthinkable.

The initiative passed into the hands of the people. The ANC, in particular, became seen as the primary actor on the South African stage. Not only the people, but sections of the white ruling bloc, began to look to the ANC to provide an indication of future direction.

Doubts amongst whites in the ability of parliament to provide a solution to the country's problems reached a peak with the resignation of Van Zyl Slabbert. Politically, therefore, the regime had become totally isolated, both locally and internationally. Morally, it had been exposed as totally bankrupt and without any legitimate right to rule. Economically, it faced its worst crisis ever.

It was in this context that they lifted the state of emergency. They did not do this from a position of strength. The people forced them to lift the emergency. They are trying to gain a breathing space before launching a new offensive against the people.

A number of pressures forced the regime to lift the emergency. But it was the deadline which was set at the December conference which was the decisive factor. They knew that the eyes of the
whole country would be on the decisions of this conference, and they hoped that the lifting of the emergency would defuse a programme of united action. We know that they intend re-imposing the emergency in another form. But we must not let this happen. We must frustrate this scheme.

Advances of the People

When the emergency was declared, a situation of ungovernability existed mainly in two areas, the Eastern Cape and the East Rand. By the beginning of this year the situation was very different. Ungovernability had not only extended to far more areas. The people had actually begun to govern themselves in a number of townships.

The period of the emergency saw very important advances made by the people. Confronted by the terror of the SADF and SAP, the people, under the leadership of their organisations, closed ranks. Structures were built which would survive the period of the emergency and beyond it. In a number of townships, the area was split up into zones, blocks and areas, each of which would have its own committee, and some townships developed street committees.

As a result, in many cases our organisations matured and grew under the guns of the SADF. Action taken against the leadership didn't result in the collapse of our organisations. Not only did our organisations grow in strength, they often took over the
running of the townships. So we saw the emergence of zones of People's Power in a number of townships. This development is so important that I shall deal with it separately later.

Another feature of the emergency was the highly political character of the struggle we waged, and the tendency for the struggles to develop in a national direction. The masses linked up local issues with the question of political power. A set of national demands emerged which transcended specific issues or regional differences. The transformation of SPCC from a locally led education initiative into a national body combining educational and political issues is an important instance of this development.

Our struggle took on an increasingly national character in another sense too. From being youth-led, the struggle began to involve all sections of the population. Greater involvement of parents gave rise in turn to initiatives such as that of the SPCC. This development wasn't confined to education however. Parents and workers began to take a more active involvement in all issues concerning the community. There was a general recognition in the democratic movement that it was a major challenge to consolidate and accelerate this process. There was also a recognition that serious obstacles existed which had to be tackled. Our youth organisations began to play an important role in trying to channel the militancy of unorganised youth into disciplined action, responsive and accountable to the whole community.
Complementing this was the development of a close relationship between the trade unions and the rest of the democratic movement. The formation of Cosatu was of particular importance in this regard, since it took a strong stand supporting trade union involvement in community and political issues.

In terms of developing the struggle nationally, we made our most significant advance in the last months of the emergency. For the first time in decades, our people took up the struggle in the rural areas. People in a number of bantustan areas challenged the so-called tribal authorities, and in some instances even replaced these bantustan sellouts with people's village councils. Areas which the enemy could previously rely on as zones of subservience and passivity were now being turned into zones of struggle. In the midst of the emergency our people waged campaigns against these puppets in seven of the nine bantustans. Of course, the majority of our people in the rural areas have yet to challenge their oppressors. But the significance of these developments should not be underestimated. Everyday this process is being furthered as more and more people in the rural areas take up the cudgels of freedom.

In summary, then, a new situation developed in the course of the emergency, with a number of special features. On the side of the regime, they found themselves totally isolated, divided and unable to act effectively. On the people's side, organisation
often matured, sprung up in new areas, and resistance took on an increasingly national character. We have isolated these as the most significant features of this period, as the features which characterise the special situation, or decisive moment in which we find ourselves.

This doesn't mean that the regime has no strengths and we have no weaknesses. If we overplay the regime's weaknesses and ignore their strengths we shall be fooling ourselves. More importantly, if we only concentrate on our strengths and ignore our weaknesses we shall commit serious errors. I have pointed to positive tendencies which have to be encouraged. But we must also be aware of the counter tendencies which threaten to reverse our struggle if we don't address them seriously. We need to consolidate, defend and advance the gains we have made in this period. In this way we can deepen the breakthroughs we have achieved in the various parts, thereby ensuring that temporary gains are transformed into fundamental and long-lasting features of our struggle.
DEFEND, CONSOLIDATE AND ADVANCE

We have said that we must have no illusions about the type of regime we are dealing with. The increase in atrocities since the lifting of the state of emergency shows that we can expect no let-up. The regime may be losing control, but as it gets more desperate, so its actions get more criminal. The advances which the people have made mean that the old methods of state repression are no longer effective. Detaining our leaders no longer frightens off our people or breaks our organisations.

This is why the system is adopting new methods to try and destroy us. These methods are taking three main forms. What they all have in common is that they are illegal or semi-legal, and that they use secret terror or more open fascist methods. They all involve physical attacks or killing of our leaders and ordinary residents.

Firstly our people are being attacked by apartheid vigilante squads in areas where apartheid authority has been challenged or destroyed. From Moutse to Welkom to Lamontville these agents are operating to try and prop up the rejected community councils and tribal authorities.

Secondly apartheid death squads are operating to assassinate important leaders of the people. Since the killing of Matthew Goniwe a number of our leaders have fallen to these agents. Our people have foiled a number of other attempts on the lives of our leaders. Assassinations have happened in areas such as Leandra.
where our people are threatening to establish democratic control of their communities; or where the process of people's power has advanced such as in the Eastern Cape and Pretoria. It is not possible to say exactly who is responsible for such murderous acts, since these cowards strike under the cover of darkness. But we just have to ask ourselves, who has the capacity to mount these actions, and who stands to benefit from them?

Thirdly, the SADF and SAP hooligans are being given powers to act as they please, to use emergency powers, whether there is an emergency or not, killing and maiming our people. The government has said that it intends to make this legal by giving them permanent emergency powers throughout the country. This is a formal declaration of war on the people of South Africa.

The aim of these three methods is to frighten our people and break their morale, thereby leading to the disintegration of their resistance. So far they have only had this effect where our people are not strongly organised. In areas where we have developed strong people's committees, these attacks have been resisted and sometimes frustrated. The people have seen the need to defend their leaders, defend their organisations in order to consolidate and advance.
Why do we use the slogan "Forward to People's Power"? Firstly it indicates that our people are now seeing the day when the people of South Africa shall have the power, when the people shall govern all aspects of their lives, as an achievable reality which we are working towards.

Secondly, it expresses the growing trend for our people to move towards realising people's power now, in the process of struggle, before actual liberation. By this we mean that people are beginning to exert control over their own lives in different ways. In some townships and schools people are beginning to govern themselves, despite being under racist rule.

When our people kicked out the puppets from the townships they made it impossible for the regime to govern. They had to bring in the SADF as an army of occupation. All they could do was to harass and use force against our people. But they couldn't stop the people in some townships from taking power under their very noses, by starting to run those townships in different ways. In other words the struggles which the people has fought, and the resulting situation of ungovernability, created the possibilities for the exercise of people's power.

People exercised power by starting to take control in areas such as crime, the clearing of the townships and the creation of people's parks, the provision of first aid, and even in the schools.
I want to emphasise here that these advances were only possible because of the development of democratic organs, or committees, of people's power. Our people set up bodies which were controlled by, and accountable to, the masses of people in each area. In such areas, the distinction between the people and their organisations disappeared. All the people young and old participated in committees from street level upwards.

The development of people's power has caught the imagination of our people, even where struggles are breaking out for the first time. There is a growing tendency for ungovernability to be transformed into elementary forms of people's power, as people take the lead from the semi-liberated zones.

In the bantustans, for example, struggles against the tribal authorities have developed into struggles for democratic village councils. These councils are actually taking over in some areas, thereby adapting the forms of people's power developed in the townships to rural conditions.

We must stress that there is an important distinction between ungovernability and people's power. In a situation of ungovernability the government doesn't have control. But nor do the people. While they have broken the shackles of direct government rule the people haven't yet managed to control and direct the situation. There is a power vacuum. In a situation of people's power the people are starting to exercise control.
An important difference between ungovernability and people’s power is that no matter how ungovernable a township is, unless the people are organised, the gains made through ungovernability can be rolled back by state repression. Because there is no organised centre of people’s power, the people are relatively defenceless and vulnerable. Removal of our leadership in such situations can enable the state to reimpose control. We saw, for example, the setbacks experienced by our people in the Vaal and East Rand. Despite heroic struggles and sustained ungovernability, the state through its vicious action was able to reverse some of the gains made in these areas. Where, however, people’s power has become advanced, not even the most vicious repression has been able to decisively reverse our people’s advances. If anything, their repressive actions serve to deepen people’s power in these zones and unite the people against the occupying forces. In the Eastern Cape people’s power forced the SADF out of the townships, if only temporarily.

The reason that people’s power strengthens us to this extent is that our organisation become one with the masses. It becomes much more difficult for the state to cripple us by removing our leadership; or attacking our organisations. Instead they confront the whole population and occupy our townships. As our people make increasing gains through the exercise of people’s power, experience the protection of our mass organisations, and frustrate the attacks of the regime, the masses tend to consolidate their position and advance. In other words, people’s power tends to protect us and constantly opens up new
possibilities, thereby taking the struggle to a new level. This explains why people's power is both defensive and offensive at the same time.

Struggles over the past few months demonstrate that it is of absolute importance that we don't confuse coercion, the use of force against the community, with people's power, the collective strength of the community. For example, when bands of youth set up so called "kangaroo courts" and give out punishments, under the control of no-one with no democratic mandate from the community, this is not people's power. This situation often arises in times of ungovernability. We know that this type of undisciplined individual action can have very negative consequences.

When disciplined, organised youth, together with other older people participate in the exercise of people's justice and the setting up of people's courts; when these structures are acting on a mandate from the community and are under the democratic control of the community, this is an example of people's power.

We have seen that people's power, unlike exercise of power by individuals, tends to be disciplined, democratic and an expression of the will of the people. It develops the confidence of our people to exercise control over their own lives and has the capacity to achieve practical improvements in our every day lives.