

Report on the decisions of
a Commission of the
ANC National Language Workshop (27 February 1993)
responding to the SA Akademie language submission,
***The viewpoint of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en
Kuns on the position of Afrikaans in a new political
dispensation.***

1. **The brief:** The brief of the Commission was to analyze and discuss the said document and to make recommendations about a suitable response to the Akademie.
2. **The documents:** Beside the main documentation (SAAWK 1992) three written responses were submitted for consideration: "Proposed text for letter" (Sachs 1993), "Comments on SAAWK Document on the Retention of Afrikaans ..." (Walker 1993) and "Comments on The Viewpoint ..." (*Ad hoc* Western Cape ANC Language Commission - WCLC 1993).
3. **Observations on the documentation:** It was observed that the main document
 - 3.1 argues the case for the retention of Afrikaans as a countrywide official language;
 - 3.2 obviously tailors its use of "scientific criteria" to serve its main intention, viz. to prove the need for the perpetuation of the current dispensation with regard to Afrikaans;
 - 3.3 seeks to project the position of Afrikaans in isolation of other languages or the needs of speakers of other languages;
 - 3.4 purports to speak on behalf of the whole Afrikaans-speaking community.
4. **Decisions:**
 - 4.1 It was suggested that the debate on this document should not be aimed merely at responding to the Akademie, but at broadening understanding of the ANC's policy on language;
 - 4.2 The response will be structured to coincide with the strategic political position of the ANC, i.e. inclusiveness, rather than political and social division;
 - 4.3 Preference was expressed for a more diplomatic response, i.e. special attention will be paid to the tone and style of the reply;

4.4 A multi-pronged approach was decided on to put these decisions into effect:

4.4.1 A **Memorandum** addressed to the president: In the memo background would be given on the Akademie, i.e. that it is a conservative force within Afrikaans intellectual circles, concentrating on the formulation of policy on Afrikaans; that it is furthermore a *de facto* white organisation who does not speak for the majority of speakers of Afrikaans, i.e. black Afrikaans speakers; that more enlighten members of the Afrikaans speaking community, e.g. writers, are very resentful of the role and importance afforded the Akademie.

The memo will also suggest the draft letter (4.4.2) and include the three submissions to the Commission.

4.4.2 **Letter to the Akademie:** A letter of courtesy to acknowledge receipt, stating that the document is of such importance and that it has been circulated among the regions and that a formal response (4.4.3) will be forthcoming *within two months*.

4.4.3 **Draft response:** In the meanwhile a draft response, based on the present submissions (SAAWK 1992, Sachs 1993, Walker 1993, WCLC 1993) will be circulated to the regions for their attention; their replies should reach the DAC HQ *within a month*; DAC HQ (LC) will collate and integrate the regional responses and submit the final draft to the President for acceptance and execution.

The response should make special mention of the appropriation of Afrikaans and the oft-expressed resentment by black Afrikaans speakers that Afrikaans is associated with the Afrikaner, while their (black Afrikaans speaking people's) contribution and attachment to the language is disregarded.

Envisage the establishment of a pan South African Languages Board - a structure executing future language policy in SA. The Akademie could be invited to discuss and support this idea.

4.4.4 **Response for speakers of Afrikaans other than those of the Akademie:** It is suggested that a conference be held in the Western Cape to invite public discussion and debate between (other) Afrikaans speakers and the Akademie.

4.4.5 **Distribution of SAAWK 1992 to the various language boards:** It was suggested that the

various language boards be invited to a conference under the auspices of the DAC to discuss the document and to gauge their reaction to it, as well as other issues that may arise from the debate.

4.4.6 The Akademie document as a peg: It was suggested that the discussion generated by the document should be used to inform people about the ANC's policy, e.g. approach the *New Nation* or similar newspapers with suggestions on running articles in their educational columns.

Action
for the
DAC HQ
(LC)

5. Questions and recommendations at the plenary session:

The following aspects were commented on at the plenary in response to the oral report of the Commission:

5.1 The Akademie's document should be used as an object lesson and that the ANC should be calling their bluff, with the expressed illustration of the way in which they have been manipulative in their presentation;

5.2 It was pointed out that despite concerns about discerning black Afrikaans speakers a history of silence and neglect has developed over the years which never reflected in any official manner the experience of black Afrikaans speakers;

5.3 It was pointed out that the aims of the envisaged conferences should be established more firmly. Several concerns were raised: will these conferences achieve the desired results? Conferences are expensive and other ways of promoting the language issue should be investigated. Conferences were held in the past, *inter alia Taal en Stryd* (Language and Struggle), Durban 1986, where the same issues were raised and discussed intensively. There is concern that very little new will be added to the broader debate. These conferences usually attract the same people (i.e. academics and language workers) and nothing filters through to the public in general.

6. The documents mentioned in point 2 are considered part of this report.

end

Hein Willemsse
27 February 1993