



EDUCATING OURSELVES

A sub-regional structure of SAYCO has been running education and training programmes. Isizwe discussed the programmes with two SAYCO comrades involved in this work.

ISIZWE : Welcome comrades. We know that all over South Africa, in branches of UDF affiliates, comrades are battling with the question of political education and training. But this ET is often not very systematically planned and carried out. Could you please share with our readers how you have approached this question?

Cde. Vusi : Well the first point to be made is the question of organisational approach. We have 20 branches and 9 regions plus our central structure - I am talking just within our particular sub-region of SAYCO. At each level (branch, region and centre) there are

elected ET officers. So far our programme has targetted these ET officers themselves. We hold weekly ET sessions, bringing nearly 30 ET officers together.

ISIZWE : Do you expect these officers to be feeding what is read and discussed back into their regions and branches?

Cde. Vusi : Ja, that is correct.

Cde. Sally : In fact, at each week's session we start with reports from regions to see how the programme is being carried over to a branch and regional level. And what problems are encountered.

Cde. Vusi : So you see that for us ET is centrally linked to developing organisation, and to deepening the ideological unity of our organisation. ET is not just for self-advancement. Every participant is a delegate from his or her branch, with responsibilities to their base.

ISIZWE : Could we move on to discuss the actual content of your programme?

Cde. Sally : We have six basic sessions and they cover the following topics :

1. The nature of society.
2. The history of our struggle in S. A.
3. The strategy of National Democratic Struggle.
4. The Freedom Charter.
5. Other tendencies - we consider black consciousness and workerism.
6. Women and the struggle.
7. Capitalism and Socialism.

Cde. Vusi : With each three hour session we try to include, also, about half an hour on a more directly organisational topic - like Discipline, Democracy, the problems of Factionalism, Leadership, and so on. Again, even in the material covered we believe that theory and practice must always be linked.

ISIZWE : Could we return to some of the general topics and hear how you handle them? In particular, the history of our struggle. That is a huge area. How do you manage to cover it?

Cde Vusi : You are right. Our first attempts at this did not work out too well because we were trying to do everything, and it was just a mass of details. We now approach this topic by setting definite goals that we want to achieve by studying our history. This is what we try to achieve :

1. We want our youth to understand the continuity of struggle from the very early days of armed resistance against colonial settlement. We also put special stress in this part on early resistance in our own region here. You can't do everything, but select some good examples.

2. Moving up to the twentieth century, we trace the development, step by step, of what we call the three main strands of the national liberation movement : the national strand, the socialist strand and the labour strand.

But maybe Comrade Sally can say more on this, because this has been an area she has presented.

Cde. Sally : Okay. With the three main

strands, our main purpose is to show that when they come together, as they did in the middle 1920's, in the 1950's, and again in the 1980's, then each of the three strands, and our overall national liberation struggle are greatly strengthened. At other times, like in the period around 1928 to the early 1930's, they came apart ...

ISIZWE : Sorry, can you just explain that to our readers?

Cde. Sally : Well, very briefly, in the late 1920's the ANC fell for a time into conservative leadership and progressive nationalists like Josia Gumede lost their leadership position. At the same time the ICU, the main labour movement of the time, expelled communist leaders from its ranks. It came under the influence of a mixture of populism and a more reformist workerism. For its part, the CPSA in the early 1930's also went into a decline for a few years. It adopted an ultra-left sectarian direction, and failed to seriously understand the crucial need to work in and through the national democratic movement. So each of the three strands went their own way, and each was weakened. As you can see, there are many lessons for the present.

Cde. Vusi : We would have to write a whole paper to illustrate everything about the content of this section! But perhaps we must say something about teaching style. What we have said so far might sound like it is a question of giving a long, long lecture. But we believe it is very important to get participation and discussion. For the nature of society section, for instance, you can ask everyone to say briefly what they know about

their grandparents, how and where they lived, their work etc.

You can usually illustrate a lot about the nature of society, its history and the different forms of economic production, from just hearing about different backgrounds- peasants, tribespeople, migrants, tenant bywoner, and so on. You can use different grandparents as examples right through the session.

ISIZWE : Could you mention any particular problems that you have experienced?

Cde. Sally : One difficulty is a tendency for ET to be separated from our actual daily organisational work. We have seen a tendency to present issues in a way that is abstract and removed from our concrete experiences. For instance, NDS (National Democratic Struggle) is presented as something timeless. We don't see immediately how it relates to the other tasks we must perform that same day or week.

ISIZWE : How can this tendency be corrected?

Cde. Vusi : Well, NDS must be related to the actual problems we as youth in a particular township are facing. Not just youth, but also our parents, the workers. So, before beginning the session on NDS maybe it is best to get members to say what are the problems facing them and their families - unemployment, the distance to the local hospital, transport costs, gangsterism, or whatever. In the course of the session, the challenge is to show how these problems are connected together. And how they are best solved by mobilising and organising around a strategy

of NDS.

Cde. Sally : With more organisational topics, relating the theory to our concrete experiences should be easier. But even there it doesn't happen automatically. For instance, in the first part of a session, a comrade presented a paper on Discipline. He was more or less repeating an article from ISIZWE on this topic. That was fine, but the comrade failed to show how the article helped us to understand and correct the actual concrete examples of bad discipline in our own branches. As a result, we listened to the paper, everyone agreed, and that was all. No discussion. We failed, in that session, to see how to correct the lack of discipline or to see how this lack was holding our work back.

ISIZWE : Any other problems come out of your ET sessions?

Cde. Sally : Well, what I've just said brings me to the question Vusi was raising just now - participation in the discussion. At first there was a tendency for one or two "leading theorists" in our organisation to dominate all the discussions. They did not mean to do this, but they had read more than the rest of us and had more confidence. So the rest of us just agreed with whatever they said.

ISIZWE : Has this been corrected?

Cde. Vusi : As a matter of fact this correction happened in an unfortunate but interesting way. Two of our leading comrades got detained under the emergency. We thought that we could never continue with the ET. But, after hesitations, we continued. And

a funny thing happened. Suddenly everyone was talking in the discussion! Before the input might be 40 minutes long, and then only 10 minutes of discussion with only a few talking. Now, things went the other way, with much more discussion. We were even going deeper into the questions raised because we could not take short cuts by using long words and ideas we did not really understand. We asked ourselves why this happened. It was because it was now less developed members giving the input. Everyone thinks, if he can do it, then I can also have something to say on it. We now make very sure that everyone, especially the less developed members, take a turn to present an input. You always remember best those parts you have presented, or where you have been fully part of the discussion.

Cde. Sally : It is also good to get comrades who have not thought much about a problem to do the presentation. Maybe it's a good idea for a male comrade to do the presentation on Women in the Struggle! That way comrades don't hear me, Sally, doing the input on women, and think to themselves : "Ja, ja, that's all very well" but just seeing this topic as one for women only to take seriously.

ISIZWE : Earlier you mentioned reading material. What material do you use?

Cde. Sally : If we tell you that the next thing the boere will ban the lot!

Cde. Vusi : It's true we have a lot of problems tracing useful stuff.

Cde. Sally : WE can mention some things that

people may find useful. We find that Volume 2 of The Struggle for South Africa (Zed Press) by Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara and Sipho Dlamini has useful, short reliable information on the major organisations. Another article we have used is one called 'Strategy and Tactics of Talks' which was published in Work in Progress.

ISIZWE : Ummm, ...and ISIZWE?

Cde. Vusi : (laughs) Sorry com, ja, we were forgetting!

Cde. Sally : Yes, we in fact have used most of the articles from ISIZWE, especially those on NDS, organisational topics, the short pieces on economics, those on other tendencies.

ISIZWE : Any criticisms of ISIZWE?

Cde. Sally : It doesn't come out often enough.

