

PROBLEMS OF THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

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ONE of the criticisms frequently levelled against the Youth Movements of the Congresses is that they have failed to make any impact upon, and to organise the masses of working, peasant and intellectual youth. In fact, the very existence of these youth movements, the A.N.C.Y.L., S.A.I.Y.C. is known only to a small percentage of youth. In the case of the A.N.C.Y.L., its failure to win the confidence of the masses of African youth can only be clearly understood, against the background of its historical development, its tasks and functions as determined by its foundation members and its relationship with the A.N.C.

YOUTH LEAGUE IS FORMED

As a result of the growing militancy of the students which was demonstrated by student strikes at Fort Hare and Lovedale, the A.N.C. resolved at its Annual Conference in 1943 to establish a Congress Youth League, whose tasks would be to organise the youth and prepare them for Congress membership. Thus in 1944 the A.N.C.Y.L. was formed.

From its inception, however, the members of the Youth League focussed their attention upon the weaknesses of the A.N.C., particularly its lack of a militant political theory and programme of action based on actions by the people. Thus "From the outset the A.N.C.Y.L. set itself the task amongst others of imparting a dynamic substance and matter to the organisational form of the A.N.C. This took the form of a forthright exposition of the National Liberatory outlook—African Nationalism which the A.N.C.Y.L. seeks to impose on the mother body." ("Basic Policy of A.N.C.Y.L.")

From 1944 to 1949, the Youth League concentrated on working out African Nationalism, criticising the old methods of struggle of deputations and resolutions to the Government, and tried to impose a militant outlook. This culminated in the adoption of the 'Programme of Action' at the Annual Conference of the A.N.C. in 1949. For the first time in the history of the A.N.C. the National Executive was elected which pledged itself to implement a specific programme of action. The A.N.C.Y.L. played an important part in the adoption of that programme of action. The salient features of the programme were mass political actions, in the form of boycott, national days of protest, and civil disobedience.

During this period (1944 to 1949) the A.N.C.Y.L. had the following features:—

1. It was a small organisation, with very few organised branches, whose members were predominantly intellectual youth, almost all who were above 25 years of age.

2. Its main activities were small meetings in which discussion centred around the Philosophy of African Nationalism and the defects in A.N.C. policy.
3. Its National Conferences or rather caucuses were invariably held at the same time as, and between sessions of the A.N.C. Annual Conferences and the main item which was discussed was the 'line' to be adopted by the Youth League delegates in A.N.C. Conferences.

It can thus be seen that during this period the Youth League was really of a 'party' within the A.N.C. whose members were adherents of African Nationalism. This preoccupation with the Philosophy of African Nationalism and the reform of A.N.C. policy, naturally attracted only intellectual youth. To the Youth Leaguers then, the mobilisation of the vast masses of youth was of secondary importance. There was quite a strong feeling that the League should maintain its purity by not becoming a mass movement.

YOUNG THEORETICIANS

The sharp criticisms of A.N.C. policies from Youth Leaguers resulted in a lack of harmony, suspicion and sometimes open hostility between Congress leaders and Youth Leaguers. A.N.C. leaders like Champion regarded the Youth Leaguers as 'upstarts' who wanted to usurp their positions. On the other hand, Youth Leaguers in many cases despised the old established leadership of the A.N.C. Because of these attitudes, not a single A.N.C.Y.L. branch was established at the instance of the A.N.C.

It is important to realise that the keen interest shown by members of the Youth League at its inception, in matters of political theory and questions of policy is not a peculiar feature of the development of the A.N.C.Y.L. It would be an error to contend that the A.N.C.Y.L. should from its inception have confined itself to youth problems. Such a view ignores the concrete conditions which existed, the serious defects within the A.N.C. in the form of the lack of some form of militant programme of action, and the characteristics of intellectual youth, who invariably have a keen desire for political theory. The contribution of the A.N.C.Y.L. towards introducing reforms within the A.N.C. to establish it as a mass organisation should not be underestimated. It is, however, unfortunate, that whilst the Youth Leaguers were keen to see organisational changes in the A.N.C. they paid little attention to the Youth League as an organisation; whilst they wanted the A.N.C. to become a mass organisation which would unite the people and rely on the strength and confidence of the masses of the people, nothing was done by the Youth Leaguers to make the A.N.C.Y.L. a mass Youth movement, which would unite the masses of youth and rely on their strength and confidence.

From 1949 to 1952 the A.N.C.Y.L. devoted its energies to supervising the implementation of the 'Programme of Action', the boycott of the N.R.C., the National Day of Protest and the Civil Disobedience, aspects of the programme. There was during this period an appreciable

increase in members from the working youth. But there were still, no fundamental changes in the organisational methods and activities of the Youth League.

DISORGANISATION

During the Defiance Campaign, although hundreds of youth volunteered and defied, the Youth League was disorganised at all levels. There were various reasons for the disorganisation of the Youth League, namely:—

- (a) Many Youth Leaguers became leading members of the A.N.C. and were actively engaged in Congress work, with little or no time for Youth League work. Those Leaguers who were not engaged in Congress work at the time just disappeared.
- (b) The A.N.C. had embarked on a bold and militant Campaign, and the primary function of the A.N.C.Y.L. had disappeared. A small clandestine group, however, under the name of "Bureau of African Nationalism" issued a newsletter criticising the Defiance Campaign; and
- (c) New conditions had occurred and there was no definition of the tasks of the Youth League in the new conditions.

The National Conference of the Youth League which was held in the Transvaal in April, 1953 attempted to redefine the tasks of the Youth League by resolving to form a mass Youth movement.

Although the weakness of the Youth League could be attributed to its exclusive political activities, this is not the sole cause. After the A.N.C. resolved that a Youth League should be formed it took absolutely no interest in the formation and development of the movement. Instead, when the leadership was faced with the criticism of their 'baby' some condemned and renounced it, others wanted it controlled and disciplined, but they did nothing positive either way. These prejudices and indifferences towards the Youth League still manifest themselves today.

PROGRESSIVE NATIONALISM

Another source of prejudice against the Youth League arises from the fact that some people believe that it is a reactionary organisation. This charge arises from ignorance of the official policy of the A.N.C.Y.L. The basic policy of the A.N.C.Y.L. clearly rejects chauvinistic Nationalism, and warns against fascist Nationalism and advocates a progressive Nationalism which will take into consideration the inalienable rights of all minority groups. It is true that the full implications of such a progressive Nationalism had not yet been worked out, but concrete activities clearly indicate the trend of development of the policy of the Youth League. In 1947 the Youth League sent a delegate to the 2nd World Festival at Prague. In 1950 the Youth League unequivocally condemned the reactionary National-minded bloc who were opposed to a progressive alliance. An article entitled the "Nationalist Bloc" in the September 1951 issue of the 'Lodestar' states:—

"The A.N.C.Y.L. writes to expose to its members in particular and the African people in general, the character of these (National-minded bloc) backward looking and reactionary elements that hide the real nature of their activities by voicing Nationalistic fulminations and slogans . . .

"The Congress is a National Liberatory Movement, within whose fold will be found many shades of political opinion ranging from extreme right to extreme left, which reflect the development of the African people as an entity striving to overthrow foreign domination. At the present historical stage this organisational form of Congress is politically correct."

The policy of the Youth League is further clearly expressed in the Editorial of the same issue, in which the decision of the Joint Executives of the A.N.C., S.A.I.C. and Franchise Action Council to establish a Planning Council for the purpose of co-ordinating activities is welcomed and further states that:

"We do not advocate the doing of anything which may place at a disadvantage the national and international position of our struggle. Consequently we also welcome the decision of the National Executive to co-operate with the other National Organisations in the country as long as they support our struggle for independence. On this basis we should also welcome alliances with those world powers which are in full accord with our aspirations."

It is on the basis of this policy that the Youth League has jointly with the T.I.Y.C. and Students' Liberal Association, annually organised the Colonial Youth Day Celebrations since 1950.

It is also on the basis of this policy that the A.N.C.Y.L. at its annual conference in 1953, resolved that it supported world peace and was opposed to war against the Soviet Union and also resolved to affiliate to the World Federation of Democratic Youth.

It is unfortunate that these developments within the Youth League which are an expression of its policy have not been carefully observed and given their true significance, and some people have dogmatically adhered to their own prejudices. They refuse to accept, appreciate and encourage the development of the Youth League.

Since 1952, when the old "Party" Youth League was disorganised, the Youth League attempted to redefine its tasks in the light of the new conditions. A small dissident group which regarded itself as a repository of African Nationalism continued to attack the policy of the A.N.C.; the disruptive saboteurs now call themselves the Africanists. Their activity represents a dying feature of the old A.N.C.Y.L. The growing feature is one where Youth Leaguers unequivocally accept the leadership of the A.N.C. and they are attempting to use new methods of organisation in order to build a mass Youth Movement.

At the present stage of the development of the youth movement, it is of fundamental importance that people in the liberatory movement and Youth Leaguers themselves should eradicate incorrect traditional suspicions, prejudices and beliefs. It is only when we have got rid of these attitudes that we can really get down to the historic task of building a mass youth movement.

The importance of mobilising the Youth for the liberatory movement, cannot be disputed. To neglect the Youth would be to neglect a vital and virile force of the liberatory movement. The Congresses must therefore adopt a more positive interest in the development of the Youth Movements.

ONE WAY FOR BOTH

The fundamental objects of the Youth movements must necessarily be the same as the fundamental purpose of the Congresses. This cannot be otherwise since the Youth suffer the same oppression as the people of South Africa. However, because of the peculiar characteristics, needs and interests of the Youth, Youth movements cannot merely be Junior Congresses. The keen interests of Youth in sporting and cultural activities, require that the methods of organisation of a Youth movement should conform to these interests, and the activities of the movement should not merely be confined to political agitation but should extend to cultural and sporting activities. Culture and politics are inextricably bound together and cultural activities properly organised can serve not merely as recreation but can also raise the political understanding of the Youth. The expansion of the activities of the Youth movements will naturally attract younger Youth, and will also unite the peasants, working and student Youth. Youth leaders should study the problems, needs and interests of the various sections of the Youth, in order to unite them. The programme which was adopted at the annual conference of the Youth held on the 30th March, 1956, is an important step in this direction.

Whilst in the past, the growth of the Youth League was partly due to preoccupation with political theory and activities, it would be incorrect to contend that a Youth movement should not concern itself with political theory at all. Political education and activities are essential to raise the political understanding of the Youth. The political education must be provided by the African National Congress. Political education will give life and purpose to the cultural and sporting activities.

The inclusion of the African National Congress Youth League in the African National Congress draft constitution, as an auxiliary body is correct. In the past, leading members of the African National Congress were free to disown the Youth League when it was convenient, and mischievous Youth Leaguers have claimed autonomy and even the right to flout African National Congress decisions.

Although the Youth League was the African National Congress Youth League there was no clarity as regards the exact relationship between the African National Congress and the Youth League. It was this very situation which stimulated the 'party' activities of the Youth League in the past. One cannot agree with Alan Doyle in his article in the February issue of 'Liberation' when he says that the proposal to include the Youth League (ANC) in the constitution would 'perpetuate the unhealthy position of the African National Congress Youth League as a separate political grouping with a platform of its own.' This is exactly what the draft was to avoid. The old constitution did not include the Youth League and it is difficult to understand Alan Doyle's reason-

ing. It would restrict the activities of the Youth League if they were included as "integral parts" of the African National Congress, it would deprive it of an opportunity of broadening its activities. However, to exclude it altogether and to ask the Congress to rely for the exercise of its leadership merely on its political correctness, would be to ask for the liquidation of the African National Congress Youth League, and in fact all the other Congress Youth Movements.

A TRUE YOUTH MOVEMENT

What excuse would there be in establishing Congress Youth movements when there already exist hundreds of Youth Movements, if the Congresses have to rely on their political correctness only?

The solution seems to be that Youth movements should accept as a minimum the aims and objects of the African National Congress, and that they should be independent in regard to their activities, in order to be broad and to organise the masses of the Youth. The Youth movements should report their activities to the African National Congress and the A.N.C. should take an active part in establishing Youth League branches.

There is the other problem of the age limit within the Youth movement. In determining this limit I suggest that we should look for guidance in Youth movements in other countries and also the World Federation of Democratic Youth.

The organisation of the Youth movements on the pattern of the Congresses is correct. The unity of the three sections is growing step by step on the basis of concrete joint activities. It is, however, unfortunate that there are not sufficient cultural and social joint activities on regional, Provincial and National level, on the lines of the Youth Festivals. Such activities would serve to remove the artificial barriers imposed to separate the Youth. The Youth Action Council which was established to co-ordinate Youth activities it is hoped, will consider increasing such joint intercourse and social activities.

The co-ordination of the activities of the Youth movements through the Youth Action Council is no longer sufficient. If the Youth movements have to keep the close contact with the masses of Youth, it is essential that they should keep in close contact with organisations of Youth.

From the organisational point of view the following are the tasks of the Youth movement, if it wants to become a mass Youth movement:—

1. The immediate establishment of a students' organisation which will organise the secondary and university students.
2. The establishment of cultural, social and sporting clubs for the Youth.
3. The formation of a Federal Youth Movement, to co-ordinate the activities of all the Youth organisations in the country. Such a Federation would enable the Congress Youth Organisations to keep in contact with the Youth and it would enrich the experience of our Youth movements in regard to the problems, needs and interests of the Youth.