



The Revolutionising History of African National Congress Youth League

ANC YL POLITICAL EDUCATION MANUAL

Introductory Remarks

- The History of the African National Congress Youth League is undeniably a revolutionalising history of South Africa.
- The young and dedicated activists who gathered at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in 1944 became the true and dedicated revolutionaries who changed South Africa's political atmosphere.
- When the founding generation of the ANC YL proclaimed FREEDOM IN OUR LIFETIME in 1944, few people had the hope that there was a possibility that ultimately, black people and women in South Africa will gain the freedom, rights and independence we currently enjoy.
- The formation of the ANC YL radically reshaped the methods of struggle against oppression and gave new energy to the National Liberation Movement.

The idea of the Youth League

- In SA, there was growing militancy of the Trade Union Movement and the Communist Party of South Africa.
- The Youth felt the need to form a militant youth league of the ANC.
- The youth thereby chose to take a stance opposite to that of their parent organisation, which they increasingly viewed as pacifist and liberal.
- Lionel Mxolisi Majombozi, a medical student at Wits University, was the first to moot the idea of forming the ANC Youth League arguing that it be presented to the ANC old guard as a move to recruit young people and thus hiding its real intentions, viz. Of transforming a moribund organisation into a militant agent of political change.
- During the ANC Annual Conference in 1942, the emergence of militancy amongst the African youth groups was noted, and the conference instructed the ANC National Executive Committee to form the Youth League of the ANC.

The formative years

- There was no apparent progress through the remainder of 1943, and the December 1943 Conference of the ANC again called for the formation of the Congress Youth League.
- This call was followed by the formation of the National Provisional Committee in March 1944, which consisted of the following leaders:
 - William Nkomo (Chairperson)
 - Lionel Mxolisi Majombozi (Secretary)
 - Anton Lambede
 - Oliver Tambo
 - Walter Sisulu (Joint Convenor)
 - Congress Mbatha (Joint Convenor)
 - David Bopape
 - Wilson Z Conco
 - D.V. Maqanda
 - J. Malepe
 - A.B. Sililo
 - And Thabethe

The 1944 Manifesto

- The NPC mandated William Nkomo, Anton Lambede and Nelson Mandela to draw up the founding policy document, and this was to become the Youth League's Manifesto.
- The Manifesto served
 - as a guiding compass for the programmes of the Youth League.
 - As the first document to define the goals of the Youth League and give it its ideological direction.
- The Manifesto was issued and declared that “**AFRICAN PEOPLE ELECTED TO DETERMINE THEIR OWN FUTURE BY THEIR OWN EFFORTS**” and stressed the YL's loyalty to the leadership of the ANC in the National Revolution.
- At this stage, there was strong ideological inclination towards African Nationalism.

The 1944 Manifesto

- The Manifesto also announced a Programme of Action which intended to achieve the following:
 - Draft a Constitution
 - Win over the Youth
 - Mobilise Financial Support for the ANC
 - And make a study of the political and economic challenges facing the liberation movement.

Official Launch of the ANC YL

- The official launch of the ANC YL took place on September 10, 1944 at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg.
- The Manifesto was unveiled the same day.
- Anton Lambede was elected President and Nelson Mandela/Oliver Tambo elected Secretary.
- The National Executive Committee elected in the Congress included:
 - William Nkomo
 - Walter Sisulu
 - A.P. Mda
 - Robert Resha
 - Robert Sobukwe
 - Oliver Tambo
 - Mxolisi Majombozi
 - Dilizintaba Mji

African Nationalism

- The ANC YL was formed to supplement, consolidate and give new impetus to the struggle against racial oppression as championed by the ANC.
- Yet emphasis was placed on African Nationalism, which affirmed the role of Africans as their own liberators within SA and abroad.
- The African Nationalism espoused by the ANC YL did not imply reverse racism, but emphasised the emancipation of Africans as the primary focus of political engagements and programmes.
- Whilst affirming African Leadership, African Nationalism did not suggest the exclusion of whites as interpreted by the PAC in 1959.

The 1948 Basic Policy Document

- Before the 1949 ANC National Conference, the ANC YL was faced with a responsibility to make a meaningful impact on the ANC.
- A Basic Policy Document was then adopted by the ANC YL as a guideline document on how the Youth League leadership intended to shape and influence the ANC.
- The Basic Policy Document was somewhat a revision of the 1944's radical African Nationalism and demonstrated progress within the ANC YL in terms of the quality of debates and original ideas.
- The Basic Policy Document amongst others said: **“The Congress Youth League holds that political democracy remains an empty form without substance, unless it is properly grounded on a base of economic and, especially industrial democracy”**

The ANC YL Impact on the ANC

- In 1948, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu were elected to the ANC National Executive Committee, and became the first Youth League leaders to be elected to the leadership of the ANC.
- After the 1949 Congress of the ANC, there was a call for more urgent and radical methods of waging the struggle prompted by domestic and international realities.
- The ANC YL's call for more radical methods marked the League's parting of ways with then ANC President A.B Xuma, who patronisingly referred to the Youth League leaders (Lambede, Mandela & Tambo) as "my kindergarten boys", when they pressed for an independent approach.
- In turn, the YL leadership accused the ANC leadership of being too concerned with the colonial regime's framework and provisions of the Natives Representative Council, thus compromising the struggle for national liberation.

ANC YL fought despite set-backs

- The first President Anton Lambede died under mysterious circumstances in 1947 and Dr. Mxolisi Majombozi died in a car accident in 1949.
- Despite these realities, the ANC YL successfully introduced the concept of militancy at the ANC Annual Conference in 1949.
- From that time, the ANC put liberalism and pacifism behind it and fought the colonial oppression with dedication and focus.
- The ANC 1949's Programme of Action was an expression of youth's dissatisfaction with liberalism and moderate models of fights repression.
- The Programme heralded an end to deputations and petitions to the colonial Masters, which was part of the methods of gaining freedom for the African majority.
- In 1949, Walter Sisulu was elected ANC Secretary General and Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Duma Nokwe into the ANC NEC.

The significance of the ANC 1949 Conference.

- Despite electing Walter Sisulu as Secretary General and getting a more youth league leaders into the NEC, the ANC YL supported Dr. J.S Moroka to be President of the ANC, although he had just joined the ANC.
- The Programme of Action adopted in the 1949 ANC Conference primarily aimed to destroy, as a matter of priority, all discriminatory institutions of governance, including the Natives Representatives Council (NPC).
- Former ANC President Xuma sought to fight racism within the provisions of the NPC, and the Youth League called for the immediate dismantling of this and all other racist institutions of governance.

The Defiance Campaign

- The ANC led Defiance Campaign grew from the rising militancy of the increasingly agitated and radicalised youth.
- Nelson Mandela was Volunteer in Chief of the Defiance Campaign (later elected President of the Transvaal ANC) and mobilised as many people to join in defying apartheid laws.
- From the Defiance Campaign emerged a programmatic alliance between the ANC, South African Indian Congress, African People's Organisation (Coloured members), and the Communist Party of South Africa.
- Together, these allies called a joint strike on the 1st of May 1950, which was widely supported.
- On the 26th of June 1950, the ANC called and participated in the strike against the "Suppression of Communism Act".
- 26 June was then considered as **South African Freedom Day**.
- During this period, the ANC began to appreciate the reality that the repression, imprisonment and death were part of the struggle against racism.

The radicalisation of the ANC

- The radicalisation of the ANC also had its roots in the workers struggles of the time and the Communist Party of South Africa, which was by and large a radical organisation in its own right.
- The activities of the ANC YL during defiance campaign, and the crisis years of the early 1950s had a considerable on the ANC itself.
- Youth League leaders were focused on a mission which they perceived to be consolidation of radical views and the promotion of militant action of the ANC.
- This led to arrests of many leaders of the ANC, including ANC President J.S Moroka who after the arrest, distanced himself from the ANC during the trial, and was represented by a separate Lawyer.
- This alienated the masses and led to the election of Cheif Albert Luthuli as President of the ANC in the 1952 Annual Conference.
- President Luthuli led the ANC during and towards the mobilisation for the Freedom Charter.

The Freedom Charter

- Proposed by Professor Z.K Matthews at the Cape Annual Conference in 1953, after the Defiance Campaign and militant actions of the time.
- Resolved in the ANC 42nd National Conference in 1953, and re-affirmed in the 43rd Conference 1954.
- Adopted after massive mobilisation across the country in Kliptown on the 26th (**South African Freedom Day**) of June 1955.
- From there forth, leaders of the ANC YL were at the helm of the ANC at National level and various regions of South Africa.
- The constitute a crop that led the ANC in exile, prison and underground and the first leaders of a democratic South Africa.

From Freedom Charter, to Arrests to Military struggles:

- During the post Freedom Charter years, the racist State continued with suppression and in March 21, 1960 massacred 69 Protestors in Sharpeville.
- In the same year, the ANC was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act, and Nelson Mandela was asked by the regime to resign from the ANC before it was banned.
- Nelson Mandela initiated the process that led to the formation of Umkhonto WeSizwe, military wing of the ANC.
- On December 16, 1961, Umkhonto WeSizwe (MK) carried out its first act of military sabotage, and the armed struggle began.
- ANC YL militants were behind the formation of MK.
- Nelson Mandela said at the time: **“IT WOULD BE WRONG AND UNREALISTIC FOR AFRICAN LEADERS TO CONTINUE PREACHING PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE AT A TIME WHEN THE GOVERNMENT MET OUR DEMANDS WITH VIOLENCE”**.

Young people kept the fires burning

- In practical terms, the ANC YL had ceased to exist as a mass based organisation when the banning was implemented in 1960.
- Despite these, young people inside the country and in exile were at the forefront of introducing new methods of struggle against apartheid repression.
- The convening of the first National Consultative Conference in Morogoro in 1969 was a direct result of the impatience of the Young military cadets (including Chris Hani) in exile who drafted a memorandum for the attention of leadership.
- Most battles inside South Africa were led by Young people, and this includes the struggles of NUSAS, SASO, SASM, the 1976 generation, COSAS, SAYCO and other youth formations.

The 1982 ANC Youth League Conference

- The 1982 Congress of the ANC YL was organized by what came to be known as the Youth Section of the ANC, and was addressed by President Oliver Tambo.
- The 1982 ANC YL was led by Comrades Headman Makhonco, Lizwe Nene, Zakes Dube, Siphon Majombozi and Nelson Dumasi, and these leaders began to participate in international forums and organisations such as the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the World Festival of Youth and Students.
- Other leaders of the ANC Youth Section were Max Sisulu, Eddie Funde, Teboho Mafole, Jackie Selebi, Manala Manzini, Siphwe Nyanda and Mandla Msimang.

THE YOUNG LIONS

- During the 1980s, President Oliver Tambo urged the progressive forces in South Africa to make the country ungovernable.
- Because of the bravery of young activists in the face of constant harassment and repression, President Oliver Tambo referred to the youth activists of the 1980s as the "Young Lions".
- The Young Lions kept the militancy of the 1944 founding generation and early 1960s youth when the MK was formed. They were disciplined, fearless, and dedicated to defeat the minority racist regime.

SAYCO

- In June 1986, a provisional committee to revive organized youth activism within the Congress movement was formed to prepare for a Congress of what later became the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO).
- The Committee members included Deacon Mathe, Aleck Nchabeleng, Stanza Bopape, Peter Mokaba, Obed Bapela, Dan Montsintsi, David Abrahamse, Rose Sonto, Frans Mohlala and Cassel Mathale.
- SAYCO was launched secretly in 1987 and Peter Mokaba was elected President and Rapulane Molekane elected as Secretary General. SAYCO became part of the UDF forces that mobilized all South Africans against apartheid repression.
- With the unbanning of political parties in 1990, both UDF and SAYCO were disbanded to give way to the ANC and ANC YL.

The unbanning of political parties and re-launch of the ANC YL

- In Kwa Ndebele in 1991, the ANC YL held its 17th National Congress and elected Peter Mokaba and Rapu Molekane as President and Secretary General respectively.
- The Congress was addressed by then ANC Deputy President Walter Sisulu in the presence of former President Oliver Tambo and other National Executive Committee members, including President Jacob Zuma.
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Kwa Ndebele ANC YL Congress

- The other members elected to the leadership of the ANC YL in Kwa Ndebele include the following leaders:
 - Lulu Johson as Deputy President
 - Mpho Lekgoro as Deputy Secretary General
 - Igbatius Jacobs as Treasurer General
 - Nyami Booi
 - Khaogelo Lekgoro
 - Andrew Dipela
 - Thabo Masebe
 - Thabang Makwetla
 - Parks Makhahlana
 - Jerry Ndou
 - Derek Masoek
 - Febe Potgieter
 - Mzwandile Mhlanzi
- The Congress extensively debated the character of the ANC YL and its relation to the ANC, and the organisational report said, “the ANC YL is an organisational mobilisation and mass political organ of the ANC”.

PRESIDENTS OF THE ANC YL

1944 TO 2008

Anton Lambede (1944 to 1947)

- Born in 1914, and elected first President of the ANC YL in 1944, Lambede was regarded as a daring thinker and articulate leader.
- Of peasant origin, and obtained a BA degree through correspondence with UNISA, and again through self-education, obtained an LLB degree.
- Lambede is known for being militantly nationalistic with very strong views on the Africanness of the struggle.
- He had profound influence on the 1944 Manifesto of the ANC YL.
- Was involved in efforts to build a partnership with the Natal Indian Congress and the coloured African People's Organisation.
- He died in 1947 at the age of 33.

Ashby Peter (A.P) Mda (1947 to 1949)

- Founding member of the ANC YL, and highly respected political organiser and theoretician, A.P Mda was elected President after the death of Anton Lembede.
- Obtained a BA degree through UNISA, and was once a teacher in the catholic elementary school in Orlando Township.
- At the time of Lembede's death, Mda was a deputy speaker of the ANC in Transvaal and ex-officio in the ANC National Executive Committee.
- Under his leadership, the ANC YL expanded to Natal and some areas of the Cape, most notably Fort Hare where the first YL branch was launched in 1948.
- Mda was one of the principal authors of the 1948 ANC YL Basic Policy Document.
- Although he favoured socialist economic principles, he was hostile to the influence of communists in the ANC as he believed that their agenda undermined African nationalism.
- He opposed the Africanists breakaway, but agreed to address the PAC National Executive Committee in September 1959.
- In April 1963, he was exiled to Basotholand and later established a Law practice.

Godfrey Mokgonanae Pitjie (1949 to 1951)

- Born in 1917 in the Northern Transvaal, and obtained an advanced BA degree in anthropology from Fort Hare amidst difficulties.
- Was recruited by A.P Mda in 1948, and became a member of the ANC NEC due to his Presidency of the ANC YL.
- He stepped down from the position of President in 1951 to pursue a career in teaching.
- In the late 1950s, he dedicated attention in Law and served articles with Mandela & Tambo Law firm.
- He was a victim of state sponsored prohibitions on practicing law.

Nelson Mandela (1951 to 1953)

- Mandela became President of the ANC YL in the most difficult period of the time, and was described by Oliver Tambo as “a born mass leader”.
- He graduated from Healdtown with his close friend, and later, “partner in crime”, Mxolisi Majombozi and they went together to Fort Hare University.
- Elected to the ANC NEC in 1949, and was President of the Transvaal division in 1952.
- Volunteer in Chief in the 1952 Defiance Campaign, and a Treason and Rivonia Trialist.
- Founder of MK and spent 27 years in Roben Island as a political Prisoner.
- Released in 1990 and elected first president of South Africa.

Joe Matthews (1953 to 1954)

- Born in 1929, and attended St. Peters College in Rossentenville, and was encouraged by his teacher Oliver Tambo to join the ANC YL.
- Studied in Fort Hare from 1948 and became Secretary of the YL there. Graduated in 1950 and moved to JHB to study Law at Wits University.
- Abandoned studies in 1952 to participate in the defiance campaign, and by this stage he was national secretary of the ANC YL.
- Was sentenced to nine months suspended sentence for participating in the defiance campaign.
- From 1953, the apartheid government banned Matthews from continuing membership in the ANC.

Robert Resha (1954 to 1955)

- Robert Resha acted as President after Joe Matthews was banned by the apartheid regime.
- Aggressive, shrewd and powerful public speaker, Resha was co-opted to the National Executive Committee.
- In 1956, Resha gave a speech where he said that the ANC Volunteers must adjust to the concept of murder, if called upon to do so, and this became a prize exhibit in the treason trial.
- He died in London in 1973, where he had joined Oliver Tambo in mobilising support against the apartheid regime.

Patrick Molaoa (1955 to 1960)

- President Molaoa was the last President of the ANC YL before the banning of the liberation movement in South Africa.
- He is also the first to die as a guerrilla fighter in the Spolile Campaign in 1968.
- He grew up in Alexandra and was part of the Pioneers of the “Azikhwelwa” bus boycott.

Participants are required to give information about these Presidents:

- Peter Mokaba (1991 to 1994)
- Mlungisi Johnson (1994 to 1996)
- Malusi Gigaba (1996 to 2004)
- Fikile Mbalula (2004 to 2008)
- Julius Malema (2008—)

Build and Consolidate Youth Power

The ANC Lives! The ANC Leads!

Amandla!