



YCLSA 5TH NATIONAL CONGRESS

DISCUSSION PAPER ON LEADERSHIP DOCUMENT

1. WHY SHOULD WE DISCUSS THIS ISSUE?

As a communist youth organization, the Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA) has to elect leaders at its congresses and at various levels. The YCLSA's 5th National Congress will take place after number of experiences and lessons. We are now in the position to confidently assert that we learned lessons in the past four terms.

What kind of leadership the YCLSA need? These leaders, whilst young, still learning, energetic, enthusiastic, excited and so on, they must be equal to the challenges posed by continuously building an organization of young communist within the context of the contemporary and future phases of the National Democratic Revolution and the struggle for socialism.

The YCLSA should serve as a critical school of the revolution and a source of cadres to build and lead our great and glorious South African Communist Party. For this reason alone, the YCLSA cannot dare to fail in rising to the challenge of approaching the leadership question correctly and getting it right from the onset.

It must be apparent clear to all that YCLSA leadership must be distinct (based on its Marxist- Leninist organizational character) from the reactionary practice of entitlement traditional political leadership which has become a significant trend in many progressive organizations. It has become fashionable that even opportunists would state that “to become a leader of the people is not entitlement and is not about an easy process attached merely to status” and yet actual practice shows these individuals differently.

Those in leadership positions should unite and guide the YCLSA to be the head of youth and young workers struggles for radical change (revolution to socialism and ultimately communism). Those in leadership responsibility should lead the YCLSA in its mission to inspire, excite, conscientise, train, educate, mobilize and organize young people for socialism and ultimately communism. YCLSA leaders and members should be driven by the continuous desire to acquire first knowledge and information about societal matters. YCLSA leaders should be driven by the desire and commitment to serve the people, to lead and mobilize young people for socialism. YCLSA leaders should lead the communist cause and build revolutionary socialist moral renewal of our society and movement; and increases the confidence of the young and the broad masses in themselves and in our broad movement. These are difficult and enduring tasks which require a tight unit; a dynamic, portable, flexible, mobile, disciplined, exemplary and dedicated strike force that the YCLSA must be, and ready for any eventuality in the struggle for socialism.

Consequently, those in leadership should not be there for status but as humble servant dedicated to lead, handle and cherish the work and legacy of: Hani, Slovo, Mabhida, Kotane, Andrews, Tamana, Matomela, First, Papiyana, Jobane, Nkosi, Nzula, Bunting and Makabeni as the only jewel of their eyes. They should lead with

diligence and together they should reflect continuity of a revolutionary, tradition and renewal which sustain the revolutionary, working class, youth and socialist movement in long-term.

How do we ensure that this happens in actual practice? How do we ensure that the YCLSA conducts the task of electing leadership in a revolutionary and disciplined manner? How do we ensure that the electoral processes build consensus, unity and strengthen the YCLSA? As the YCLSA we must get this right from the beginning in order to ensure that we deal a decisive blow to political opportunism, individual ambition, negative lobbying, promotion of friends, pursuit of selfish interests and using organization as a step-ladder towards self-enrichment, status and so on.

The above do not mean that the YCLSA must close off internal democracy. Instead, internal democracy must be used to approach the question of organisational leadership from its correct communist foundation. However, the young membership of YCLSA has to find the answers maturely with revolutionary communist determination and discipline. To fully understand this challenge, let us first outline the following as critical political questions that preface the discussions on leadership:

- What is the historical mission of the YCLSA?
- What are the political and organizational challenges and tasks of the YCLSA?
- What is the political and organizational state of young people and youth movement in general?
- In broad terms, what are the critical challenges facing the working class and broad democratic movement at this stage?
- What is the role of the YCLSA in this context? What is the role of leadership in this context?
- What kind of YCLSA is required to meet these challenges?

- What informs the principles of YCLSA organizational democracy?
- What then are the broad requirements of leadership?
- What are the negative challenges that have emerged in the new terrain?
- How do members take charge?
- How “natural” is the selection process?

2. WHAT KIND OF YCLSA DO WE SEEK TO BUILD?

In broad strokes, we have said the following:

- A revolutionary communist mass youth movement –“tight unit, a dynamic, portable, flexible, mobile, discipline, exemplary and dedicated strike force ready for any eventuality in the struggle for socialism”.
- Democratic and mass –based YCLSA- within its ranks, the YCLSA ensures the participation of members in shaping the movement’s policies and programmes.
- A non- racial organization.
- A non-sexist organization and conscious agent for gender equality.
- A revolutionary leader in the broad youth movement.
- A champion of progressive youth and working class internationalism.
- An exciting organization.

3. WHAT INFORMS THE PRINCIPLES OF YCLSA ORGANISATIONAL DEMOCRACY?

The collective practice and experience of revolutionary organizations everywhere has distilled the following basic principles for organizational democracy:

- Elected leadership.
- Collective leadership.
- Effective, disciplined and working leadership.

- Branches as basic units.
- Consultations and mandates.
- Criticism and self-criticism.
- Democratic Centralism - in both directions.
- Duties, roles, rights and obligations of every member-high level of communist discipline.
- Duties of delegates at Congresses.

4. WHAT THEN ARE THE BROAD REQUIREMENTS OF LEADERSHIP?

As a revolutionary communist youth organization, the YCLSA needs revolutionary leaders and cadres. It should put in place leadership collectives that satisfy the character of the YCLSA. Broadly and collectively, YCLSA leaders should represent the nature and character of South African Youth which is overwhelmingly working class- despite recent attempts to suggest otherwise, the working class, because of its main grievance against exploitation, material interests, numbers, strategic location, organizational and revolutionary experience, is the only consistent class force in society capable to struggle against and defeat capitalism. In its theory and practice, the YCLSA cannot be any other class force other than this class.

A YCLSA leader should understand League and Party policies, basic communist ideology and programmes and be able to apply these creatively under all conditions and phases of our revolution.

Even bourgeois political parties claim that a leader should constantly seek to improve her/his capacity to serve the people; s/he should strive to be in touch with young people all the time, listen to their views and learn from them. Yes, these same parties also say that a leader should be accessible and flexible; and not arrogate to her/his status of being

the source of all wisdom. We need to think about what appears to lofty ideals mean. As the Communist League, we will have to think about this by asking the question first: what shapes a communist leader? What is the meaning of serving the people, being in touch with young people all the time, accessibility and flexibility, and collective wisdom? What class forces and struggles shape these values?

A leader should win the confidence of the people in her/his day-to-day work. Others in our movement have said that where the situation demands, a leader should be firm and have the courage to explain and seek to convince others of the correctness of decision taken by constitutional structures even if such decisions are unpopular. In justifying this, an emphasis must be made that a leader should not seek to gain cheap popularity by avoiding difficult issues, making false promises or merely pandering to popular sentiment. Without dismissing this thought, how should the Communist League rise to the leadership challenge by guarding against organizational degeneration and bureaucratization without misleading and underestimating objective constraints?

As said above, all political parties preach week in and week out that a leader should lead by example. They proceed to shout that a leader should be reproach in political and social conduct. Through force of example, they claim, a leader should act as a role model to members and non-members alike. What do these mean for the Communist League? At the most basic level, we should underline that leading a life that reflects commitment to Communism includes being free of, and actively fighting against sectarianism, dogmatism, intolerance, dishonesty, corruption, patronage, individualism, selfishness, sexism, racism. Because of the capitalist base of our country and the world, these virtues are meaningless and idealistic if not approached from the standpoint that in the process of struggle we are building a new society, culture and civilization.

In the Communist and youth movements, there are no ready-made leaders, but evolve out of the class struggle. In these battles, cadres will stumble and some will fall. However, the abiding quality of leadership is to learn from mistakes, to appreciate one's weaknesses and correct them. A leader should seek to influence and to be influence by others in the collective. S/he should have the conviction to state her/his views boldly and openly within constitutional structures of the movement; and without being disrespectful not to cover before those in more senior positions in pursuit of patronage, nor to rely on cliques to maintain one's position.

An individual with qualities of leadership does not seek to gain popularity by undermining those in positions of responsibility. Where such a member has a view on how to improve things or correct mistakes, s/he should state those views in constitutional structure and seek to win others to her/his own thinking. S/he should assist the organization as a whole to improve its work, and not stand aside to claim perfection out of inactivity. These are even more important in the communist movement.

5. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES CHALLENGES THAT HAVE EMERGED IN THE NEW TERRAIN?

In broad strokes, the post-1994 period has seen the following negative trends:

- Excessive demands on time and energy arising from government commitments and trappings.
- Opportunism to get into government and for public profile and status.
- The private sector and its trappings.
- Members of members' phenomenon and obedience to the "leader".
- Corruption, mismanagement and abuse of power.
- Liberalism.

Labelling as means to score political points and win debates positions and arising out of various factors-seeking to displace socialist organization, strategy and analysis; factionalist interests; etc.

6. HOW DO MEMBERS TAKE CHARGE AND HOW 'NATURAL' IS THE SELECTION PROCESS?

The selection and election of leaders should reside firmly in the hands of the membership. This can only happen if there is open and frank discussions on these issues in a formal structure of the organization. Quiet and secret lobbying opens the movement to opportunism and even infiltration.

In debating the composition of leadership collectives, what factors should we take into account? How important are the following factors?

Non-sexism - there is no reason whatsoever that the collective of office-bearers and national committee of the YCLSA should have less than 40% women in its composition

Non-racialism-we have not yet reached out to coloured, Indian, White and other youth stratum? It is correct to use the based on the lessons and experience on the period of our existence after re- establishment of the YCLSA to make a statement in this regard.

What about the political, ideological and organizational factors briefly outlined in the above sections?

How then does selection of candidates happen? Is it "natural" for leaders emerge out of some mysterious selection, or is it a conscious act on the part of members? Should member canvass for those they support and/or should individuals promote themselves? Is there a place and for lobbying?

NB: In the first instance, the YCLSA Constitution asserts the right for individuals to stand for and be elected into formal positions of responsibility. However, the conduct, behaviour and commitment of an individual should be thoroughly scrutinised. Members should not be discouraged from canvassing for those they support. In addition, technically, individuals should be allowed to canvass for him-/herself. However, the latter has the potential of sending negative fillers about the candidate in question.

Selecting candidates and ultimately electing leaders is not a “natural selection” of evolution where things develop by chance. It must be a conscious and well-considered act on the part of each YCLSA member. How will the YCLSA achieve this?

Nominations should take place at constitutional structures on the basis of fairness and based on predetermined rules and procedures. The following should be taken into account when assessing the individuals nominated for leadership:

- Role and character of the YCLSA.
- Tasks and programme of the YCLSA.
- Understanding the broad requirements of YCLSA leadership in the current period.
- Balancing the political, organizational and ideological skills of the leadership collective.

Finally, how should the YCLSA scrutinise individuals standing for leadership positions? Should “motivation and demotivation” of nominated individuals be allowed? Will this not harm the persona of those comrades? Following branch discussions, how should districts and provinces interact? How should they conduct lobbying and influencing each other in a matured political manner? What are the rule for nomination and election?