ANC Youth League
Basic Policy Document
1948

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The African National Congress Youth League established in April 1944 aims *inter alia*:

a. at rallying and uniting African youth into one national Front on the basis of African Nationalism;
b. at giving force, direction, and vigour to the struggle for African National Freedom, by assisting, supporting and reinforcing the National Movement - ANC;
c. at studying the political, economical and social problems of Africa and the world;
d. at striving and working for the educational, moral and cultural advancement of African youth.

In order to rally all youths under its banner, and in order to achieve the unity necessary to win the national freedom of the African people, the Congress Youth League adopts the following basic policy, which is also a basis for its political, economic, educational, cultural and social programme:

**BASIC POLICY**

1. **African Nationalism**

   The African people in South Africa are oppressed as a group with a particular colour. They suffer national oppression in common with thousands and millions of oppressed Colonial peoples in other parts of the world.

   African Nationalism is the dynamic National liberatory creed of the oppressed African people. Its fundamental aim is:

   i. the creation of a united nation out of the heterogeneous tribes;
   ii. the freeing of Africa from foreign domination and foreign leadership;
   iii. the creation of conditions which can enable Africa to make her own contribution to human progress and happiness.

   The African has a primary, inherent and inalienable right to Africa which is his continent and Motherland, and the Africans as a whole have a divine destiny which is to make Africa free among the peoples and nations of the earth.

   In order to achieve Africa's freedom the Africans must build a powerful national liberation movement, and in order that the national movement should have inner strength and solidarity, it should adopt the national liberatory creed - African Nationalism, and it should be led by the Africans themselves.
2. Goal of Political Action

The Congress Youth League believes that the goal of political organisation and action is the achievement of true democracy,

i. in South Africa and
ii. in the rest of the African continent.

In such a true democracy all the nationalities and minorities would have their fundamental human rights guaranteed in a democratic Constitution. In order to achieve this the Congress Youth League and/or the National Movement struggles for:

a. the removal of discriminatory laws and colour bars;
b. the admission of the Africans into the full citizenship of the country so that they have direct representation in parliament on a democratic basis.

3. Economic Policy

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 economic policy of the League can therefore be stated under the following headings:

a. **Land**: - The League stands for far-reaching agrarian reforms in the following directions:
   i. the re-division of land among farmers and peasants of all nationalities in proportion to their numbers;
   ii. the application of modern scientific methods to, and the planned development of, agriculture;
   iii. the improvement of land, the reclamation of denuded areas and the conservation of water supplies;
   iv. the mass education of peasants and farmers in the techniques of agricultural production.

b. **Industry**: - The Congress Youth League aims at:
   i. the full industrialisation of South Africa in order to raise the level of civilisation and the standard of living of the workers;
   ii. the abolition of industrial colour bars and other discriminatory provisions, so that the workers of all nationalities should be able to do skilled work and so that they should get full training and education in the skill and techniques of production.
   iii. establishing in the Constitution the full and unhampered right of workers to organise themselves in order to increase their efficiency and protect and safeguard their interests; particularly the workers should reap and enjoy the benefits of industrial development and expansion;

c. **Trading and Co-operation**: - In order to improve the lot of the people generally and to give strength and backbone to the National Movement, the League shall:
   i. encourage business, trading and commercial enterprises among Africans;
   ii. encourage, support and even lead workers, peasants and farmers, intellectuals and others,
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to engage in co-operative saving, co-operative trading, etc.

d. **General National Economy:** - Generally the Congress Youth League aims at a National Economy which will:
   i. embrace all peoples and groups within the state;
   ii. eliminate discrimination and ensure a just and equitable distribution of wealth among the people of all nationalities;
   iii. as nearly as possible give all men and women an equal opportunity to improve their lot;
   iv. in short give no scope for the domination and exploitation of one group by another.

4. Educational Policy

a. The ultimate goal of African Nationalism in so far as education is concerned, is a 100 per cent literacy among the people, in order to ensure the realisation of an effective democracy. Some of the means to that end are:
   i. free compulsory education for all children, with its concomitants of adequate accommodation, adequate training facilities and adequate remuneration for teachers;
   ii. mass adult education by means of night schools, adult classes, summer and winter courses and other means.

b. All children should have access to the type of education that they are suited for. They should have access to academic, aesthetic, vocational and technical training.

c. The aim of such education should be:
   i. to mould the characters of the young;
   ii. to give them a high sense of moral and ethical values;
   iii. to prepare them for a full and responsible citizenship in a democratic society.

5. Cultural Policy

a. Culture and civilisation have been handed down from nation to nation and from people to people, down the historic ages. One people or nation after another made its own contribution to the sum-total of human culture and civilisation. Africa has her own contribution to make. The Congress Youth League stands for a policy of assimilating the best elements in European and other civilisations and cultures, on the firm basis of what is good and durable in the African's own culture and civilisation. In this way Africa will be in a position to make her own special contribution to human progress and happiness.

b. The Congress Youth League supports the cultural struggle of the African people and encourages works by African artists of all categories. The Congress Youth League stands for a co-ordinated development of African cultural activity.

c. African works of art can and should reflect not only the present phase of the national liberatory struggle but also the world of beauty that lies beyond the conflict and turmoil of struggle.

6. Conclusion

The foregoing policy is largely one of ultimate objectives in general terms; although here and there it throws light on the immediate and/or near-range objectives of the National Movement.

Whilst the general policy remains fixed and unalterable, the programme of organisation and action may
and shall be modified from time to time to meet new situations and conditions and to cope with the ever-changing circumstances.

By adopting this policy the Congress Youth League is forging a powerful weapon for freedom and progress.

THE POSITION OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM

In view of misunderstanding and even deliberate distortions of African nationalism, it has become necessary to re-state the position of our outlook.

1. Historical Basis of African Nationalism

More than 150 years ago, our forefathers were called upon to defend their fatherland against the foreign attacks of European settlers. In spite of bravery and unparalleled heroism, they were forced to surrender to white domination. Two main factors contributed to their defeat: firstly, the superior weapons of the white man, and secondly the fact that the Africans fought as isolated tribes, instead of pooling their resources and attacking as a united force.

2. The Birth of the African National Congress

Thus the year 1912 saw the birth of an African National Congress. The emergence of the National Congress marked the end of the old era of isolated tribal resistance, and ushered in a new era of struggle on a national rather than on a tribal plane. The ANC became the visible expression of an inner organisational plane. However imperfectly it did it, the ANC was in fact an outward expression of the African people's desire for a National Liberation Movement, capable of directing their resistance to white domination and of ultimately winning the African's national freedom.

Yet from the very outset, the ANC suffered from serious defects. The founders, great patriots no doubt, had no grasp of the concrete historical situation and its implications, and they were obsessed with imperialist forms of organisation. As a result the ANC had defects both of form and of matter and as long as these remained the ANC could not

i. create an effective organisational machinery for waging the national liberatory fight;
ii. put forward a dynamic Nationalistic programme which could inspire and cement the tribes, and be a motive power and driving force in the militant struggle for national freedom.

In spite of these serious defects, however, the event of 1912 had provided a solid basis for tribal solidarity, and for a nationally organised struggle against white domination. It was for the more politically advanced rising generations to give Congress such form and substances as would suit the organisation to its historic mission.

3. Recent Tendencies - Their Significance
Far-reaching changes have taken place in the African National Congress within recent times. During Dr A B Xuma's regime, a policy of centralisation has been followed and an attempt made to correct, at least in form, some of the mistakes of 1912. The result has been the gaining of ground of the idea of the National Congress, with dependent provincial branches (Transvaal, Cape, Natal, OFS). Doubtless there is room for more drastic and revolutionary changes in the organisational form of Congress, if this organisation is to live up to the people's expectations. As far as the matter and substance of Congress's outlook is concerned, the year 1944 saw a historic turning point, when the Congress Youth League came into life. From the very outset, the Congress Youth League set itself, inter alia, the historic task of imparting dynamic substance and matter to the organisational form of the ANC. This took the form of a forthright exposition of the National Liberatory outlook - African Nationalism - which the Youth League seeks to impose on the Mother Body. The first clear exponent of African nationalism was the late Anton Muziwakhe Lembede [died July 1947].

4. Basic Position of African Nationalism

The starting point of African nationalism is the historical or even pre-historical position. Africa was, has been and still is the Black man's Continent. The Europeans, who have caned up and divided Africa among themselves, dispossessed, by force of arms, the rightful owners of the land - the children of the soil. Today they occupy large tracts of Africa. They have exploited and still are exploiting the labour power of Africans and natural resources of Africa, not for the benefit of the African Peoples but for the benefit of the dominant white race and other white people across the sea. Although conquered and subjugated, the Africans have not given up, and they will never give up their claim and title to Africa. The fact that their land has been taken and their rights whittled down, does not take away or remove their right to the land of their forefathers. They will suffer white oppression, and tolerate European domination, only as long as they have not got the material force to overthrow it. There is, however, a possibility of a compromise, by which the Africans could admit the Europeans to a share of the fruits of Africa, and this is inter alia:

a. that the Europeans completely abandon their domination of Africa;
b. that they agree to an equitable and proportionate re-division of land;
c. that they assist in establishing a free people's democracy in South Africa in particular and Africa in general.

It is known, however, that a dominant group does not voluntarily give up its privileged position. That is why the Congress Youth puts forward African Nationalism as the militant outlook of an oppressed people seeking a solid basis for waging a long, bitter, and unrelenting struggle for its national freedom.

5. Two Streams of African Nationalism

Now it must be noted that there are two streams of African Nationalism. One centres round Marcus Garvey's slogan - 'Africa for the Africans'. It is based on the 'Quit Africa' slogan and on the cry 'Hurl the White man into the sea.' This brand of African Nationalism is extreme and ultra revolutionary.

There is another stream of African Nationalism (Africanism) which is moderate, and which the Congress Youth League professes. We of the Youth League take account of the concrete situation in South Africa, and realise that the different racial groups have come to stay. But we insist that a condition for inter-racial peace and progress is the abandonment of white domination, and such a change in the basic structure of
South African society that those relations which breed exploitation and human misery will disappear. Therefore our goal is the winning of national freedom for African people, and the inauguration of a people's free society where racial oppression and persecution will be outlawed.

6. Forces in the Struggle for African Freedom

a. Africans: They are the greatest single group in South Africa, and they are the key to the movement for democracy in Africa, not only because Africa is their only motherland, but also because by bringing the full force of their organised numbers to bear on the national struggle, they can alter the basic position of the fight for a democratic South Africa. The only driving force that can give the black masses the self-confidence and dynamism to make a successful struggle is the creed of African Nationalism, which is professed by the Congress Youth League of South Africa. The Congress Youth League holds that the Africans are nationally oppressed, and that they can win their national freedom through a National Liberation Movement led by the Africans themselves.

b. Europeans: The majority of Europeans share the spoils of white domination in this country. They have a vested interest in the exploitative caste society of South Africa. A few of them love Justice and condemn racial oppression, but their voice is negligible, and in the last analysis counts for nothing. In their struggle for freedom the Africans will be wasting their time and deflecting their forces if they look up to the Europeans either for inspiration or for help in their political struggle.

c. Indians: Although, like the Africans, the Indians are oppressed as a group, yet they differ from the Africans in their historical and cultural background among other things. They have their mother-country, India, but thousands of them made South Africa and Africa their home. They, however, did not come as conquerors and exploiters, but as the exploited. As long as they do not undermine or impede out liberation struggle we should not regard them as intruders or enemies.

d. Coloured: Like the Indians they differ from the Africans, they are a distinct group, suffering group oppression. But their oppression differs in degree from that of the Africans. The Coloureds have no motherland to look up to and, but for historic accidents, they might be nearer to the Africans than are the Indians, seeing they descend in part at least from the aboriginal Hottentots who with Africans and Bushmen are original children of Black Africa. Coloureds, like the Indians, will never win their national freedom unless they organise a Coloured People's National Organisation to lead in the struggle of the National Freedom of the Coloureds. The National Organisations of the Africans, Indians and Coloureds may co-operate on common issues.

7. South Africa: A Country of Nationalities

The above summary on racial groups supports our contention that South Africa is a country of four chief nationalities, three of which (the Europeans, Indians and Coloureds) are minorities, and three of which (the Africans, Coloureds and Indians) suffer national oppression . . . It is to be clearly understood that we are not against the Europeans as such - we are not against the European as a human being - but we are totally and irrevocably opposed to white domination and to oppression.

8. Fallacies and diversions that must be expected

a. African Nationalism and Racialism: There is a common accusation that African Nationalism is a one-sided, racialistic outlook. The accusation is based on ignorance of African Nationalism. Ours is the sanest and at the same time the most practical and realistic view. We do not hate other racial
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b. **Pseudo-Nationalism:** African Nationalists have to be on the lookout for people who pretend to be Nationalists when in fact they are only imperialist or capitalist agents, using Nationalistic slogans in order to cloak their reactionary position. These elements should be exposed and discredited.

c. **Fascist Agents:** Still another group that should be closely watched and, wherever possible, ruthlessly exposed, is that section of Africans who call themselves 'Nationalists', but who are in fact agents and lackeys of Nazi and Fascist organisations. Genuine African Nationalists should be perpetually vigilant and spare no effort to denounce and eventually crush these dangerous vipers.

d. **Vendors of Foreign Method:** There are certain groups which seek to impose on our struggle cut-and-dried formulae, which so far from clarifying the issue of our struggle, only serve to obscure the fundamental fact that we are oppressed not as a class, but as a people, as a Nation. Such wholesale importation of methods and tactics which might have succeeded in other countries, like Europe, where conditions were different, might harm the cause of our people's freedom, unless we are quick in building a militant mass liberation movement.

e. **Tribalism:** Some people mistakenly believe that African Nationalism is a mere tribalist outlook. They fail to apprehend the fact that Nationalism is firstly a higher development of a process which was already in progress when the white man arrived, and secondly that it is a continuation of the struggle of our forefathers against foreign invasion. Tribalism itself is the mortal foe of African Nationalism, and African Nationalists everywhere should declare relentless war on centrifugal tribalism.

**Conclusion drawn from above exposition**

The historic task of African Nationalism (it has become apparent) is the building of a self-confident and strong African Nation in South Africa. Therefore African Nationalism transcends the narrow limits imposed by any particular sectional organisation. It is all-embracing in the sense that its field is the whole body of African people in this country. The germ of its growth was first sown within the bosom of the African National Congress, and it found its clear crystallisation in the Congress Youth League. It should now find concrete expression in the creation of a single African National Front. The strength, solidarity and permanence of such a front, will, of course, depend not on accident or chance, but on the correctness of our stand, and on the political orientation of our front. Granting that this would be anchored on African Nationalism, we should build the most powerful front in our history.

**Conclusion**

The position of African Nationalism has been made as clear as possible. It remains for us to stress the fact that our fundamental aim is a strong and self-confident nation. Therefore our programme is, of necessity, a many-sided one corresponding to the varied activities and aspirations of our people, and to the various avenues along which they are making an advance towards self-expression and self-realisation. Our great task is to assist and to lead our people in their Herculean efforts to emancipate themselves and to advance their cause and position economically, culturally, educationally, socially, commercially, physically and so on. But, of course, the most vital aspect of our forward struggle is the political aspect.

Therefore African Nationalists should make a scientific study and approach to the problems of Africa and the world, and place themselves in a position to give the African people a clear and fearless political leadership.
