

# Read, young lion, read

**I**f nothing else, members of the African National Congress Youth League will be constitutional experts by the time the league is formally launched next year. As you read this, many of them are probably grappling with the new 13-page ANC Youth League Provisional Constitution and its Code of Conduct - complete with its classification of 'grave crimes against the struggle' and suitable penalties.

At the beginning of this year, as members of individual youth congresses around the country, they had their own - vastly different - constitutions and programmes of action. Members of the Piketberg Youth Congress, for example, would be bound by Peyco's own constitution and code of conduct.

All that changed in April this year, when the SA Youth Congress (Sayco) national congress resolved to change from a federal structure to a unitary structure, and individual youth congresses became Sayco branches. Peyco then became the Piketberg branch of Sayco, and had to debate and adopt a uniform draft constitution.

Then, a few weeks ago, a new 'bible' arrived for discussion: the ANC Youth League constitution, complete with its proposals for the establishment of a Provisional National Youth Committee (PNYC), with a Provisional National Youth Secretariat (PNYS) and Regional Youth Committees (RYCs), and the guidelines for code of conduct.

'I feel sorry for some of the younger comrades', said a more experienced Sayco activist. 'It's a lot for them to grasp. Youth congress, Sayco branch, now youth league...'

The net effect of all this debate, he pointed out, is that many youth structures have been able to do little campaign work this year. Political organisation has had to make way for political education - and the lack of activity has had a numbing effect on South Africa's 'Young Lions'.

'We are used to campaigning, building, organising. We have lost some of that. Sometimes the youth no longer roar ... we have to remind them the struggle did not end with the release of Mandela'.

But Sayco members are not the only ones grappling with new concepts: the youth league's constituency stretches



**Mokaba ... likely to continue leadership role**

much wider, encompassing the high school membership of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas); the SA National Students Congress (Sansco) and National Union of SA Students (Nusas), which organise at universities; religious youth formations like the Young Christian Students (YCS) and the Catholic Students Association (Casa); and even Jeugkrug, which organises students on Afrikaans-language university campuses. Added to that are members of the ANC in exile, many of them members of Umkhonto weSizwe and the ANC Youth Section, who will join the Youth League at a slight disadvantage: as they will only be able to return home later this year, or possibly even next year, they are missing the crucial process of the next five months.

All, however, are expected to join the new umbrella youth league - although it is obvious that Sayco members will play the leading role in this new body: more than 24 of the 30 national members of the PNYC are Sayco members, as are most of the additional 14 regional youth committee leaders who sit on the 44-member PNYC.

Nobody is expecting the process to be trouble free. A recent pre-Youth League weekend workshop of Sayco and Jeugkrug members, for example, resulted in clashes over nationalisation and other economic bogeys.

The youth league has given itself just over five months to weld together these different traditions. It is to set about forming branches, zones and regions along the lines of its 'mother body', the ANC, and come up with a formation able, as the new draft constitution says, 'to serve not only the purpose of reinforcing the ANC, but also to strive to







*Toy soldier: A younger young lion at the launch of the ANC's Youth League*

achieve the mobilisation of the broadest sections of the youth of our country'.

The deadline set by the PNYC is 6 April 1991 - 10th anniversary of the hanging of MK cadre Solomon Mahlangu. One important issue which will need to be defined before then is the relationship between the Youth League and its 'senior partner', the ANC. According to its draft constitution, the Youth League is 'organisationally autonomous' of the ANC, but still 'liaises closely'.

The commercial media is already making comparisons between the new Youth League and its predecessor, which in the 1940s produced the 'youth rebellion' by Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others. But it seems unlikely that the youth will be given enough leeway to actively push particularly militant positions. Rather, it will probably encourage its members to become involved in ANC branches, and to gather support for their ideas through these branches.

That, too, will not be easy. Already, some ANC branches are experiencing tension between young activists and older, more established ANC stalwarts.

Even now, five months away from that event, it is not difficult to predict some of those who will make up the leadership: current Sayco president Peter Mokaba, for example, is also chairperson of the PNYC and looks likely to continue his leadership role. The same seems likely in the case of many of his colleagues in the Sayco NEC such as general secretary Rapu Molekane (currently in detention), Ignatius Jacobs (who also serves on the Transvaal interim leadership of the SA Communist Party) and Kgaogelo Lekgoro - all of whom are on the PNYC.

The only thing likely to prevent Mokaba's election is his age: at 32, some Sayco members feel he is 'too old' to lead the youth league. At present, the draft constitution allows for membership up to the age of 35 - but some Sayco members are arguing for the age limit to be lowered to 30.

ANC members outside the country, organised into the ANC Youth Section, are also believed to be keen to see a lower age limit. But they have, to a certain extent, been unable to feed in their ideas because they were denied government indemnity and were thus unable to return home. Communication mainly took place through Youth Section leader Jackie Selebi, himself over 40 years of age and also heavily involved in organising the repatriation of exiles. •