

TWO years ago, the 600 000-strong South African Youth Congress (SAYCO) was launched in Cape Town following intensive consultations and planning despite the repressive conditions that existed at the time.

And today, with SAYCO restricted, youths are still engaged in the struggle for liberation despite the continued existence of the State of Emergency (SOE).

In the long term, the SOE was seen as aimed at "crushing our organisations and to render them ineffective".

On the surface, organisations appear to have been severely crippled by the emergency.

Youth leaders maintain, however, that organisations have begun to adapt to the present repressive conditions.

In this interview, members of the National Working Committee (NWC), a body that coordinates youth structures countrywide, explain how organisations have survived the SOE.

How has the State of Emergency affected the organised youth?

The effect that the SOE has had on organised youth can be seen in many ways. We have seen a lot of people being detained, we have seen the emergence of the murderous death squads, people forced to be in hiding or on the run and many other things related thereto. All this put together amounted to the disruption of organisation. In some areas structures were wiped out completely because their members were detained or on the run.

In other areas, however, structures remained intact despite the repression. In other parts of the country, structures were not necessarily wiped out but were affected to some degree by the SOE. It could only be correct to say



THE YOUNG LIONS: THE ROAD AHEAD

YOUTH FOCUS speaks to members of the National Working Committee on the new organisation's work, and how organised youth have been affected by the banning of SAYCO

that the strategy of the SOE to crush our organisation managed, albeit temporarily, to render our organisations less effective than they used to be.

At the same time, the SOE did not only render us less effective nor throw us in difficulties in as far as organisation is concerned, but we saw our people responding very creatively to new conditions that the SOE imposed upon them.

Our youth, workers, women - everybody - all peace-loving citizens of SA responded to the SOE.

At a mass level our people were prepared to house activists - they were prepared to do this, that and the other - for activists who were on the run, to give them food, to give them clothing in some instances - even to tip them about the presence of the

enemy.

At the level of our activists and organisers as well as the leadership - our people responded by adopting semi-clandestine methods of operation which fit hand in glove with the prevailing conditions to ensure that our strategic objective - which is the mobilisation and organisation of millions of our people into action against apartheid is achieved.

The enemy tries continuously to impose the difficult conditions that are seen as obstacles in the way of organising - on the other hand we see our people responding so positively and so creatively to the conditions imposed by the regime.

By people going underground we nullified the SOE. The most significant example was the launch of SAYCO under the very conditions of

the SOE and at the time when the regime thought they had crushed organisations. We organised that big launch which injected new mood into the democratic movement.

After the detention of almost the entire leadership we saw the formation of the NWC. How do you view that?

For as long as we were outside jail we continued to pursue the objectives of SAYCO with all the energy that we had.

The remnants of our active members from all over the country came together and analysed the situation and then decided that the most appropriate structure to come up with was a national coordinating structure - to coordinate youth activity nationally. That structure was called the NWC. The working committee was not working in conflict with the objectives of SAYCO.

The CEC held in Cape Town in 1987 noted that the need to strengthen the SAYCO leadership was a very urgent one. It remains an important task, not only important but also strategic in the survival of SAYCO in the face of fascism that we are experiencing in SA.

We must reproduce ourselves nationally. All over the regions there must be cadreship that understand our policy, our objectives, our programme of action, our strategic orientation, in general. That should go down to local levels so that we are sure that in the event something happens then we should have enough leadership contingent, that when engaged in war, will be able to take our objectives to their logical groupings.

One the objectives of the SOE was to render popular organisations non-functional. To what extent has this aim been achieved —



'The youth have occupied the foremost trenches in battle'

They will continue to wage the struggle against the racist regime.

Activist are detained because of their political conviction, they are thrown into prison because of their involvement in organisations. In prison they find totally new conditions. However, this does not deter them from engaging in a political struggle, such as the recent hunger strike, for example.

As activists we have a responsibility of exposing the SA government. We see the prison hungerstrike in the context of the national democratic struggle which is being waged by all components of the mass democratic movement. People who have been on hunger strike and putting their lives on the line were mostly the youth. That in itself is an indication that the youth of our country realise its role in the struggle for emancipation. They actively involve themselves in this process of achieving our liberation.

In short this whole struggle of people in prison, escapes to embassies, etc., has proved their genuine commitment to the struggle and the continuation of this struggle in prison.

Our people know that the best place to be in order to wage the struggle properly is

occupied by the African National Congress or the Party. Our "underground" is tactical. The one of the ANC/SACP alliance is strategic. They are banned. They are not seeking to create legal space. Their strategic objective is that of the seizure of power from the racist regime to the revolutionary forces which are themselves.

Our "underground" is tactical in a sense that we are still fighting for this legal space. We want to remain legal and pursue our activities in a legal fashion. We from the democratic movement do not want to remain underground, we were forced there and we are fighting back to occupy the space that we have been occupying all these years. So that our organisations should not disband. They should adapt to new conditions and invariably that means that we are going to employ semi-clandestine or completely clandestine means of operation in order to pursue

our perfectly legal activities.

What forms of organisation should youth structures on the ground adopt given the present conditions? Should they form small cells or should they work as if nothing has happened?

They have adopted new forms already. The fact that they have survived all this long, they have made the SOE necessary for the Boers. They have correctly adapted to the conditions.

At a local, regional and national level our people have adopted new methods which are of higher quality. They are operating in smaller units. They are operating in a more disciplined fashion. Their meetings are shorter and more productive. The question of punctuality is addressed and they are striving to ensure the highest level of discipline to ensure that our people are not being detected by the police. Most activities, in general, are

planned in such a way that the enemy does not know about them in advance but they only know about them when they permeate through mass action. That is the essence of the new forms of organisation that have been adopted.

But concretely it is just smaller units of organisation which is widely spread all over the locals and even the regions, etc., and decentralising work or specialisation, whether you talk about media, political education, women organising, etc.

Could you put the prison hunger strikes, embassies, escapes etc into a broader political context? Among other things, also comment on the refusal of the British embassy to co-operate with the activists who were holed up there.

Our people are taking up the struggle wherever they are, be it in prison, wherever.