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Introduction

Scarcely a day has gone by since the African National Congress’s Polokwane conference in December 2007 when Julius Malema or the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) has not been in the news for one reason or another. In spite of the fact that he has never occupied a senior leadership position in the ruling party, Malema, until recently president of the ANCYL, has become probably the most recognisable political face in South Africa. His controversial attacks on senior ANC leaders, his treatment of the media, his racially provocative statements, his stance on nationalisation as well as his own conspicuous consumption have fed a media frenzy. He seems to be feared, loathed and adored by various constituencies in equal measure. His expulsion at the end of February 2012 provoked relief and anger, joy and despair in different quarters. But how much does the wider public actually know about
the inner workings of the ANCYL and its relationship with the ANC?

There is little doubt that the ANCYL played a pivotal role in the so-called Polokwane revolution, which brought Jacob Zuma and his followers to power, yet it remains difficult to assess just how influential it is within the ANC. The current Youth League likes to draw comparisons between itself and the generation of Mandela & Co., which founded the movement in the 1940s and effectively seized control of the ANC in 1949. This has focused recent attention on the history of the earlier Youth League. Is the current Youth League comparable? Are there interesting historical lessons that can be drawn from the earlier phase of Youth League history? How has the Youth League evolved over the decades? Not surprisingly, politicians themselves provide only very crude accounts of organisational history, accounts that inevitably suit their contemporary political objectives.

This book offers an alternative history, one which, I hope, highlights the complexities of the ANCYL’s organisational history, yet remains easily accessible to a non-academic audience. At the same time I attempt to do something that has not been done before: to write a history of the entire lifespan of the ANCYL from its inception until March 2012. I have not had the time to conduct in-depth primary research; rather,
I have worked mostly with available secondary sources, published and otherwise, and pulled them together into an overview. If this serves to provoke new primary research on the subject, I would be delighted.

There is a wealth of material on the early Youth League (from 1944 to 1960). Gail Gerhart, Bob Edgar and Tom Lodge have written extensively on the philosophy and personality of the early Youth League, as well as on the 1949 ‘coup’ and the Pan Africanist split. Volumes 2 and 3 of the magisterial *From Protest to Challenge* series are, as ever, invaluable sources. In the mid-1980s Chris Giffard and I wrote unpublished Honours dissertations on the ANCYL, which are still surprisingly useful. Biographies of leading characters such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Anton Lembede, Potlako Leballo and Robert Sobukwe have helped to provide some texture to this story. Aside from these more direct studies, numerous published academic articles have dealt indirectly with aspects of the Youth League’s early history.

Sources on the post-1960 period are, by comparison, sparse. The ANCYL was effectively dormant between 1960 and 1990, but important developments in both exile and internal youth politics laid the foundation for its rebirth in 1990. Literature on youth politics in this period is quite rich, but it has only indirect implications for ANCYL history.
Aside from numerous newspaper reports and several useful websites, two published sources were extremely helpful in reconstructing the history of the post-1990 Youth League: Raphaël Botiveau’s published Master’s dissertation (translated from French), which deals with the rebirth of the League from 1990 to 2005, and Fiona Forde’s recent biography of Julius Malema, *An Inconvenient Youth*. A number of publications dealing more broadly with the politics of the ANC provide indirect insights and context. I am also grateful to Malusi Gigaba, the ANCYL president from 1996 to 2004 and the present Minister of Public Enterprises, who agreed to an interview with me in January 2012.
Thank you for your interest in this Ohio University Press title.

This book is available for purchase online at our website or through other ebooks vendors.