

P91/215
Box 13d



GARDENS YOUTH CONGRESS

PROPOSED CODE OF CONDUCT FOR GAYCO ACTIVISTS

PROPOSED CODE OF CONDUCTINTRODUCTION:

The aim of this Code of Conduct for activists is to provide a set of basic guidelines as to how activists and members of our organization should conduct themselves; both inside and outside the organization.

We feel that it is important in 2 respects:

(i) It highlights the dangers of negative tendencies and the desirability of good qualities. In this way we hope to improve the quality of activists' involvement in our organization by providing them with a set of rules and methods that will allow them to achieve their political goals easily and effectively.

(ii) Activists represent not only their own organization but the cause of the national democratic struggle in general. As such, the way we behave and conduct ourselves reflects on this cause. Activists must therefore be seen to act in a comradely, disciplined and democratic fashion.

It must be pointed out that although this code of conduct applies to all members of our organization it is obviously more relevant to those activists who play an active role in the decision making process, regularly come to meetings and volunteer for the different tasks at hand.

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SECTION 1

1. INTERNAL CONDUCT

1.1. DEMOCRACY AND THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A fundamental goal of our struggle is the implementing of democracy and democratic structures. As such our organization, and the way in which we make our decisions, must reflect this commitment to democracy. By this we mean decisions must be based on the will of the majority(i.e. a simple majority of those members present at the meeting).

All decisions (or where possible) must be mandated by all members present. This occurs through a process of discussion and debate. It goes without saying that such discussions must be conducted in a democratic way. by this we mean:-

- (a) each individual present has a right to be heard(irrespective of their viewpoint),
- (b) each individual has a right to differ.

It is the role of the chairperson to ensure that these rights are respected by protecting speakers from being shouted down and by allowing all points of view to be given an equal hearing.

A decision taken in this way is binding on all members concerned, even on those who opposed it. The right to differ then falls away and it becomes incumbent on an activist to implement that decision with the same vigour and commitment as if he/she had approved of it.

When a decision needs to be taken in an emergency situation i.e. by the executive or without discussions, these must be reviewed as soon as circumstances allow and either formally passed retroactively or changed.

1.2. CANVASSING OPINIONS

The canvassing of member's views within the organization/branch with the object of persuading them to adopt a particular view, either for personal motives or for the purpose of altering or overturning a decision already taken, is absolutely inexcusable. If a comrade disagrees with a decision or if it validly warrants altering, the correct constitutional procedures and channels should at all times be followed.

Equally, if a particular branch, or section of a branch holds a particular view on an issue, it is politically incorrect and inexcusable for that branch or section of that branch to approach other branches, groupings etc. with a view to canvassing their opinions in an attempt to win them over to it's own view.

Comrades should bear in mind that each branch has the ability to reach its own, independent conclusion and this must be respected. Unchecked and undisciplined canvassing leads to division in the organization and will therefore affect its efficiency and ability to make decisions. As such it must be avoided.

1.3. CLIQUEES AND FACTIONALISM

The formation of exclusive little cliques/groups inside an organization for the purpose of influencing others or imposing their views is unacceptable and must be avoided at all costs.

Comrades should bear in mind that in a democratic organization they have the right to express different views and the channels available for this should always be used.

Factionalism can lead to confusion, in-fighting and break-away groups within the organization. All this reduces the ability of the organization to run smoothly and effectively.

1.4. DIFFERENCES AND GRIEVANCES

It will not be uncommon that at times, one or other activists will have a grievance that he/she wishes to air or be made known.

It will also not be uncommon that these grievances will be valid and based on well-founded reasons. It is desirable that if and when such grievances do occur that they be aired and resolved openly as soon as possible.

It is important that grievances are aired through the proper channels. An activist who has a grievance must refer the matter to the executive or some responsible official with a view to having the matter resolved.

It will not help at all for comrades to air their grievances to all and sundry, even people who are not members of the organization. This opens the way for confusion, mistrust, hostility and back-biting. Besides all this, it is very un-comradely to do so.

1.5. COMRADELY DISCUSSIONS

Comrades should at all times conduct discussions with other comrades, whether in meetings or not, in an open, honest and friendly manner. The basis of these discussions lies in mutual respect and equality amongst activists. Honesty and frankness, the willingness to concede a point made by another activist, the readiness to withdraw uncalled for remarks and to apologize sincerely and with humility when necessary- all these qualities will allow for discussions in and out of meetings to become meaningful and fruitful. It will also lead to the strengthening of bonds and relationships between activists.

1.6. PUNCTUALITY

Punctuality is the quality or condition of being on time. A committed activist should take all measures to ensure that he/she is always on time, whether for a meeting, an appointment or if there is a task to be done.

By not arriving on time, activists are, in the first instance, showing a lack of discipline. Secondly, they are showing disrespect and a lack of consideration for those activists who were on time and who are now kept waiting. Time is valuable, and time spent waiting for late-comers could have been used for more constructive activities. Thirdly, since the meeting (or whatever) started later, it will end later and the business of the meeting will either remain unfinished or will be discussed hurriedly without the consideration and debate it deserves.

All this reduces the efficiency of the organization and its ability to reach informed decisions. Lack of punctuality on the part of a few activists also encourages an attitude amongst other activists to also come late in the future. In addition, it encourages the attitude that one can put off doing other things (i.e. organizational tasks) for a later time. All this leads to the progress and efficiency of the organization being retarded.

It may of course happen that an activist will have a valid reason for arriving late. It is at all times desirable that such explanations be formally made (if possible, before the meeting is due to be held) and the necessary apologies tended. REPEATED infringements of punctuality by activists, without a valid explanation which is accepted, will incur an official reprimand.

It may also happen that an activist has a valid reason for leaving

a meeting early. In such a case, the particular activist should inform the chair before the meeting and explain why he/she has to leave early. Besides being common courtesy, this will avoid the unnecessary disruption of a meeting.

1.7. TAKING INITIATIVES

Activists in our organization are at all times encouraged to take the initiative in starting something new which is in the interests of the organization and which will be taking forward its goals and objectives. Taking an initiative involves the readiness and ability of an activist to take the first steps in furthering such aims. This in fact, in the form of novel and creative ideas, forms the life-blood of our organization.

However, a word of caution: new and creative initiatives only become meaningful if such initiatives are properly discussed and approved of by the members of the organization. In other words, there is a distinction between the thinking up of a new initiative, on the one hand, and acting on that initiative in one's individual capacity without having first discussed it, on the other. Although at times this is obviously done in all sincerity and good faith, individual activists do not have a mandate to act in their individual capacity on behalf of the organization in this manner.

Failure to discuss a new initiative encourages activists to act individualistically and they lose the capacity and the willingness to work as a collective.

1.8. DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

The question of discipline in an organization is of the utmost importance. Although all activists are expected to behave and conduct themselves in a manner that is fitting and proper as ambassadors representing our organization, there will however be times when an activist will overstep the bounds of what is considered to be acceptable behaviour. It is therefore necessary that we have some kind of procedure by which such an activist can be brought to order. Failure to do this can lead to a lack of accountability which can very seriously damage the organization.

Comrades should in no way at all equate the notion of discipline with excessive punishment, the use of force or humiliation. Such notions of disciplinary action are unacceptable in our organization. For us, disciplinary action is aimed primarily at correcting and building better activists and not at punishment and humiliation. The most important aim of discipline (for both major as well as minor offences), is re-education. It is only by showing a comrade what he/she did wrong and why we consider it wrong, that that person can learn from the experience so as not to behave in that way again.

The first step in this process is to make the activist aware of his/her conduct and to outline the adverse consequences of his/her conduct and to dissuade him/her from repeating it. Thus persuasion is the key-note of this step.

Should the activist continue with his/her conduct, the next step in the process is to have him/her officially reprimanded.

Should this reprimand still fail to have the desired affect, then suspension from meetings and the activities of the organization for a period of time (depending on the seriousness of the offence) will be considered.

The final step in this process will be to expel the activist from our organization.

To summarize: persuasion, reprimand, suspension, expulsion, in that order.

Some activists have the notion that senior activists, by virtue of their leadership position and past contributions, are beyond disciplinary measures. This myth needs to be dispelled. In our organization we do not apply different standards and levels of discipline to different levels of activists. Senior activists are, like all others, subject to the abovementioned disciplinary procedures. However, it must be pointed out that misconduct by senior activists will be seen in a more serious light.

SECTION 2

2. GENERAL CONDUCT OF ACTIVISTS

2.1. POLITICAL ETHICS

It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that each and every activist must, at all times, consider him/herself an ambassador of our organization, and as such, represents not only that organization, but all democrats working for a united, just, democratic and non-racial South Africa.

It is therefore incumbent on all activists, from leadership level to grassroots level, to conduct themselves in a manner that not only enhances the standing and image of our organisation, but

also advances the cause of our struggle in general. When an activist conducts him/herself in accordance with the principles of democracy, non-racialism and non-sexism, then such actions will be in complete conformity with the principle of political ethics.

It therefore goes without saying that any conduct by an activist which diminishes the stature and image of the organization, and which conflicts with the aims and objectives for which we are fighting will be considered unacceptable. Comrades must remember that in the eyes of the public at large an activist's public life is inseparable from his/her private life. One's conduct in private life therefore, must be such that it confirms the above-mentioned principles.

2.2.POLITICAL MORALITY

Whether an activist operates as a full-time functionary of the organization or on a part-time basis, he/she is expected to do so with dedication and sincerity, irrespective of the odds and personal consequences to them. As an activist, the struggle comes first - personal considerations are of secondary importance! Although this is one of the most difficult of codes to adhere to, we need only to look back on the history and tradition of our struggle to find many examples of how men and women have selflessly dedicated their lives to the struggle. Their conduct is said to be the highest expression of political morality.

2.3.CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM

To criticise somebody means to find fault with them. This obviously

involves passing unfavourable comments and judgements upon other activists, their ideas and actions.

Fault-finding in a manner that is offensive or that is intended to belittle or undermine ideas and suggestions of other activists (i.e. destructive criticism) serves merely to undermine the basis of comradely discussions (see 1.5. above) and gives rise to hostility and antagonism. This must be avoided!

When criticising another comrade, activists should always strive to make this criticism as constructive as possible. This involves not only pointing out the weaknesses and faults of the idea put forward, but also presenting alternatives which will remove that weakness or fault.

The most difficult type of criticism to level, however, is self-criticism. This means finding fault with one's own ideas and with oneself. It requires objectivity and the willingness and courage to admit faults and weaknesses in oneself. Activists are encouraged to nurture this trait.

2.4. SELF EDUCATION AND CULTIVATION

Every activist needs to ensure that he/she is well-informed about the history and traditions of our struggle, current events, theory, and economic issues. This enables us to make accurate analyses and gives us a basis on which we can draw, to meaningfully contribute to the formulation of policies, political direction and political activity.

Activists would do well to discuss these issues with other activists. In this way one not only educates oneself but also passes on knowledge to other activists. Remember the famous saying:

"Theory without practice is sterile, and practice without theory is blind."

i.e. there must be a good balance between the two.

2.5. POLITICAL LOYALTY

This heading refers to faithfulness to the organization's policies, leaders, activists etc., and is therefore a desirable trait in any activist. Activists must make sure they can defend their organization and its policies against hostile influences. Activists are expected to show loyalty in a public way, especially when under attack.

A word of caution here: activists are not expected to display 'blind loyalty' i.e. to defend policies etc. irrespective of valid criticisms and weaknesses in these policies. However such criticisms can and must be raised in private e.g. in a meeting.

2.6. POLITICAL AMBITIONS AND OPPORTUNISM

It is well known that some activists have a strong desire to seek political fame, success and positions of political power for their own personal motives and self-gratification. This kind of ambition lacks sincerity and commitment and is therefore unacceptable.

On the other hand, however, an activist who is sincere, dedicated, committed and is willing to work hard and make sacrifices, must not be construed as harbouring political ambitions. Such an accusation can cause great harm and damage to the organization, as well as being an insult and an injustice to such an activist.

Political opportunism consists of the practice of using any and every opportunity for one's personal (or organization's) advan-

2.7. SECURITY CONSCIOUSNESS

Lastly, but by no means least, this is a matter of crucial importance which affects both activists and our organization.

A lack of understanding and awareness on the part of activists of the many risks and dangers they present, not only to themselves but also to their fellow activists, by careless and irresponsible actions and behaviour can easily lead to harassment, detention and untold harm and suffering — never underestimate the powers of the State!!

Despite the fact that we are a legal organization, and therefore operate at all times within the law, activists are required and expected to conduct themselves with the necessary degree of restraint and caution that is needed in this period of severe and persistent repression.

A few examples of serious violations are listed below and are to be avoided:

(i) LOOSE TALK:- the tendency by activists to talk loosely and freely in public about our activities, times and places of meetings etc. must be guarded against. It is difficult to say where such information eventually ends up!!

(ii) PASSING ON CLASSIFIED INFORMATION:- passing on information that is restricted to closed circles e.g. the exec. or to some committee only creates the impression that it is supposed to be passed on and in the process becomes 'un-classified!'

(iii) CLEAN INFORMATION:- although legal, such information could be of a sensitive nature e.g. minutes of meetings, diaries, records of decisions. To leave such information lying around

is careless and irresponsible, as it can then easily fall into the wrong hands.

THE TELEPHONE!!! - this is by far the easiest and most convenient means of communication. Suffice it to say that the State thinks so too and it is no secret that telephones are tapped!! Activists should therefore guard against what they say on the telephone.

Remember: Security consci^uness is a matter that can never be over-emphasized as lack of it has led to the demise of many activists and organizations.

LAST REMINDER!!

Being members and activists of an organization within the democratic movement we have a responsibility to act at all times and wherever we are in a disciplined, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist manner.

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