

EDITORIAL

A turning point in our struggle?

The key question is not whether things are better or worse. It is a struggle question: What is the dominant and dynamic trajectory of our NDR? Are the working class and the mass of urban and rural poor, supporting and supported by our democratic state, increasingly gaining the upper-hand? Or has monopoly capital been relatively strengthened over the past decade?

This issue of the African Communist appears on the threshold of the ANC's all-important 52nd National Conference in mid-December in Polokwane. It is no secret that this critical conference of the leading formation in our tripartite alliance has led to a climate fraught with many tensions. In the first place these tensions surround the election of an ANC president, top officials, and the national executive committee. In this issue we publish the SACP's "Open Letter" to ANC's members, setting out our general perspectives and concerns around these immediate issues.

However, the turbulence of the present moment is not narrowly about an ANC leadership contest. Since the late 1920s the SACP's strategic perspective has been focused on working for and within a broad national democratic movement. At our July National Congress we once more re-affirmed our strategic perspective that a thoroughgoing, radical national democratic revolution was the most direct route to socialism in our South African reality.

The big question now is: But are we, in 2007, still on that route? What is the trajectory of our post-

1994 society and state? There are, of course, different responses to these questions. Sometimes the debate assumes a fairly simplistic form: "Have things got better or worse since 1994?" Some comrades assert that "things have got worse". From leading quarters of our government we are told, on the contrary, that: "Today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today."

Of course, things are never that simple. On the one hand there have been major improvements and changes – for instance 12 million people are now receiving social grants, and there has been progressive labour market legislation. But, while capitalist profitability and growth have been restored and sustained for a decade, life expectancy in South Africa has dropped to under 50 years, the UNDP's Human Development Index has worsened, and unemployment and social inequality have grown.

The NDR is not a straight-line, a smooth evolutionary process – in which today can categorically be declared to be forever, at least, "not worse" than yesterday, and tomorrow is guaranteed to be "less worse" than today. The NDR is a contested reality, and this

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contest is, essentially, a class struggle over strategic direction. Every ameliorative, and potentially transformative measure (for instance progressive labour market reform), is likely to be met with a class struggle counter – massive lay-offs, contracting-out, casualisation. This is the logic of capital.

Therefore the key question is not whether things are better or worse. The key question is not a redistributionist question (who has got what and how much?), but a struggle question: What is the dominant and dynamic trajectory of our NDR? Are the working class and the mass of urban and rural poor, supporting and supported by our democratic state, increasingly gaining the upper-hand? Or has monopoly capital been relatively strengthened over the past decade and has our state suffered corporate capture? Has the hegemony of the key motive forces of the NDR been deepened within the post-1994 state, or not? Is the brutal colonial-type accumulation of capital in our country under transformation – or is it being ameliorated, stabilised and reproduced? The answers to these questions can never, at least not in the longer term, be both things - contrary to the social liberals within our broad movement who constantly dream of “win-win” solutions. Sooner or later a dominant trajectory will consolidate and prevail.

For some years the SACP has been warning that the NDR has been “re-routed” by a class project that has benefited monopoly capital more than the key motive forces of our revolution. In driving

this “re-routing”, a small but influential stratum of government leadership has flouted the inner-party democracy of the ANC, the collective leadership traditions of our movement, and alliance unity. The turbulence ahead of the Polokwane conference and the broader question of what is our present trajectory are, therefore, closely interlinked. An even bigger question is: At what point does this re-routing become irreversible? Are we approaching a turning point in which the transitional character of our NDR is ended in favour of monopoly capital? Or are we approaching a turning point in which the motive forces of the NDR once more empower themselves to carry forward the democratic revolution? As the Cosatu discussion document on the NDR here puts it: What is it to be – the “logic of capital”, or the “logic of the NDR”. It cannot be both.

In one way or another, all of the articles in the present issue of AC are concerned with these matters. In addition, we re-print in this issue a longish interview with a US-based radical academic, William Robinson, on contemporary revolutionary strategies in Latin America and the challenges of globalisation. This continues our project to introduce into the South African debate insights into current events in Latin America – a continent in which the idea that progressive states are condemned to “managing capitalism” within the “logic of capital” is increasingly being challenged, not just in theory, but in practice. ★