

We can't go on like this . . . together, let's make sure things change

AN SACP OPEN LETTER TO THE ANC MEMBERSHIP

Comrades,

Everything we have fought for together now lies in the balance. As we proceed to the ANC's December 52nd National Conference in Polokwane, ANC branches, regions, provinces, national structures are divided like never before. An unprecedented climate of division and mutual intolerance prevails.

There are worrying indications that sensitive sectors of the state like intelligence, prosecutions and the public broadcaster have been polluted by political factionalism. The damage to our emerging democracy will be immense and it will not easily be undone beyond December 2007.

How did we get here? That, itself, is a matter of debate, but one thing is certain, we can't go on like this. Together, let's make sure things change!

The SACP has declined to endorse any particular set of names for the ANC top six, or for the additional members of the ANC's NEC. This is an ANC process and we have hoped to respect its integrity. Besides, we have, in the recent past, had to deal with our own experience of blatant interference in the SACP's electoral processes by external elements from within the movement. We know the damage this can do.

But this does not mean that we can now be indifferent observers of the forthcoming ANC national conference. As loyal members of the ANC ourselves, and as a longstanding partner in the ANC-led al-

liance, we are gravely concerned about the present reality.

At a national level, following our own congresses, COSATU and the SACP have been endeavouring to secure, as long agreed, bilateral and tripartite meetings with the ANC. Our intention is to engage with our leading ally on the basis of our own congress mandated positions, and to seek to ensure as much unity as possible as we proceed to Polokwane. Now, more than ever, it is important for the Alliance to close ranks and, whatever our differences and debates, to set an example of comradely conduct in the course of a hotly contested ANC electoral process. Sadly, we have the impression that the ANC's national leadership is now so divided there is an unwillingness or incapacity to meet with us.

For years we have had to endure from some quarters of the ANC consistent displays of contempt and disdain for the elected national collective leaderships of the SACP and COSATU. We are told that the problem lies with us, that there have been good relations with this or that Alliance leader in the past – but this response confirms our concern. Our Alliance relations must be based on our shared strategic commitment to the national democratic revolution – and not on favourites, not on personal likes and dislikes. The SACP and COSATU must certainly respect the collective elected leadership of the ANC, regardless of our personal feelings. We are entitled to expect the same from the ANC.

Unfortunately, the contempt and disdain for elected alliance leadership is a style that has often cascaded down to provinces, regions and branches. And Alliance partners are not the only ones to have endured disdain - ANC provincial collectives, loyal but independent-minded ANC ministers (or former ministers), veterans, Youth Leaguers, and many more non-Party comrades know what we are speaking about.

The SACP is calling for an end to a leadership style in which loyalty to individuals over-rides loyalty to the struggle, in which gross incompetence trumps effectiveness, in which favourites are propped up in the midst of endless failure and scandal.

Things must change for the sake of the ANC itself. And this means that either the ANC leadership collective must change, or there must be a change of heart from that collective.

We call on ANC delegates to the Polokwane Conference to send a very strong message in this regard.

Let us elect a leadership that respects (and enjoys the respect of) the ANC in all its diversity.

Let us elect a leadership that engages with its alliance partners, whatever the differences and debates.

Let us elect a leadership that does not continuously mount rearguard actions against the clear policies of its own organisation, whether they be RDP or HIV/AIDS policies.

Let us elect a leadership that deals without fear or favour with corruption, ill-discipline and incompetence. No more one-sided interventions. No more leadership based on having leverage over others. No more buying of delegates. No more money politics.

The ANC's crucial December National

Conference gives us all a chance to lay a new foundation. It gives us all a chance to build an effective ANC capable of leading an Alliance that is no longer dysfunctional.

But on its own, and regardless of electoral results, the ANC National Conference can only be a beginning. Whatever the outcome in December, in January and February 2008 we will still be dealing with an ANC that has been deeply divided. There will be those who regard themselves as "winners" and those who see themselves as "losers". It will be a hollow "victory" indeed for whoever "wins", if we are left with a major disaffected bloc. Our conduct now in the present needs to be based on this sober realisation.

And this means that how we approach December and beyond must be based on **principles and policies** – and not on personalities.

What are these principles and policies? We have already highlighted many of them, and they include:

- **Respect the democratic process, respect the ANC National Conference.** It is crucial that we affirm the need to respect our organisations and their democratic practices. How, for instance, can senior ANC leaders be telling the world at large, including ANC delegates about to attend the highest decision-making structure of our organisation, that "economic policy won't change"? Declaring this as a personal expression of preference, or even as a prediction of what might happen is, perhaps, fair enough. But effectively declaring Conference debate on economic policy as closed, ahead of time and from on high, is out of order.

- **The centrality of mass work.** The ANC's National Policy Conference draft resolution on "Organisational Renewal" correctly

states that: *“In particular, it is proposed that when stating the pillars of the current phase of the NDR, we should re-affirm the position that the ANC is both a national liberation movement and a ruling party. In this regard, mass mobilisation and organisational work should be stated as the primary pillar, followed by the state, the economy, ideological struggle and the international pillar.”*

Certainly for the SACP, this proposal is paramount. An ANC that leads its alliance on the ground in mass mobilisation and organisational work is critical. We need an ANC that re-discovers its true vocation and that empowers its Alliance partners to play their own complementary national democratic strategic roles. But for the ANC to return to its roots requires a leadership collective that understands and appreciates mass work.

● **Re-affirm intra-alliance protocols of conduct and mutual respect.** Limpopo must be used as an opportunity to reflect on strengths, weaknesses, challenges and mistakes made, with a view to correcting them. The Alliance has not functioned as it could have, and many of the stresses experienced could have been avoided. The habit of equating critical engagement with government by the allies as attempts at defeating the ANC, and other similar habits must become the things of the past. The 52nd ANC national conference must send a clear message in this regard, and seek to forge and institutionalise alliance protocols that formerly enabled us to defeat the apartheid regime and embark on the reconstruction of our country. Of particular importance is for the ANC to confidently and proactively (rather than defensively) lead the alliance. It is also important for alliance structures to be meaningfully integrated into all key strategic decision-making,

as well as seeking to strengthen each other's formations, as opposed to taking pot-shots at each other.

● **Build collective leadership.** The attention in the media and even in our own ranks has become far too narrowly focused on the ANC presidency. Let us focus on the need to elect a united COLLECTIVE leadership that strengthens the democratic character of our movement. It must be a collective with a consultative and inclusive style of leadership, encouraging frank, open and comradely debates and engagements. We need an ANC leadership that will consciously act to unite the various strands of our movement - former MK veterans, the allies, the mass democratic movement, women, youth, etc.

● **Build the ANC and its alliance as the political centre.** Let us ensure effective accountability and answerability of ANC (and alliance) cadres in whatever site they are located or deployed. As was strongly suggested by the ANC National Policy Conference, we need to ensure that there is not a technocratic (or even corporate) capture of strategic policy-making. The movement must be the key locus of strategic policy-making, not government. This is not to say that the movement should micro-manage or undermine the necessary autonomy of state structures.

● **Reaffirm the working class bias of the ANC.** This means reaffirming the centrality of the ideological, revolutionary and mass capacity of the working class as the leading motive force of the national democratic revolution. This fundamental position is not in contradiction with the necessity of uniting the broadest ranges of social class and strata making up our movement – in

fact, it is a precondition for achieving this broad unity.

Concerted ideological work and cadre development. The future of our movement and the reproduction of new generations of cadres cannot be left to chance. What kind of cadreship are we building if our branch life consists in little more than internecine factional battles, and individual fights around lists, tenders and deployments? Cadre development is, first and foremost, about activism on the ground amongst our people. This was the school of struggle for all of the revolutionary giants of our past. Activism must complement and be reinforced by dedicated ideological work, comradesly debate and discussion. It is only in this way that we shall be able to build the values and morality of our movement, in which social solidarity and dedicated service to the people without any ex-

pectation of personal gain or reward are the priorities.

Let's focus on policies and not personalities. Even at this late stage the SACP appeals for more focused attention on policies that will address the socio-economic conditions of the overwhelming majority of our people so that whichever collective is elected is guided by those policies. Let us consolidate and build upon the many positive policy and organizational recommendations made by the 2005 NGC and the 2007 National Policy Conference.

The SACP calls on fellow ANC members – together, let us rise to the challenge of the ANC 52nd National Conference. Together, let us re-build an ANC and an alliance of which cdes Albert Luthuli, Moses Kotane, OR Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Chris Hani could be truly proud. That historic responsibility is now in our collective hands. ★