

Build Socialism Now

In South Africa we are in the phase of advancing, deepening and defending the NDR. But there is no Chinese Wall between this phase and the consolidation of socialism. In our conditions, the two are deeply interconnected. The NDR is not a detour but the most direct route to socialism. On the other hand, as socialists we are not riding on the back of the national liberation struggle. Socialist values, socialist analysis, and socialist organisation are critical, not just for the future, but for the success of the struggles of the present.

What is socialism?

Socialism is a transitional social system between capitalism (and other systems based on class oppression and exploitation) and a fully classless, communist society.

The socialist transition may well be of long duration. The transition may also be marked by contradictions, stagnation and major reverses. History is never a smooth process, nor does it have a guaranteed outcome.

Socialism requires working class hegemony, and it is characterised by four core features:

- Democracy,
- Equality,
- Freedom, and
- The socialisation of the predominant part of the economy.

Each of these core features is important, and they are all interrelated and interdependent.

Democracy

For the SACP socialism stands for the radical deepening and extension of democracy into all spheres of society. Socialism is not about the abolition of those aspects of political democracy (one person one vote, regular multiparty elections, a bill of rights, a justiciable constitution, and independent judiciary, etc.) which are sometimes (and inaccurately) referred to as “bourgeois” democracy. In South Africa, we have fought long and hard for the realisation of these basic democratic rights. It was popular struggle that achieved the democratic breakthrough of April 1994. Democracy was not bestowed from above by the bourgeoisie. We shall fight to defend these gains, and we are not seeking to abolish them in the name of some higher socialist “model” of democracy.

But these democratic achievements will be largely formal if we do not move beyond the April 1994 breakthrough to a broad advance and deepening of democracy in every sphere of our society, to embrace a wide range of representative, participatory and direct democracy institutions and practices. This, inevitably, will carry us into conflict with the capitalist class.

Equality

For the SACP, socialism is also about equality. We seek to abolish the huge differences in income, wealth, power and opportunity that characterise capital-



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ist societies. In espousing egalitarianism we are not arguing for a mechanical, and enforced “grey” uniformity between all individuals – as our opponents like to claim. We do not ignore that under socialism there will be a division of labour, and that a managerial function, for instance, will still have to be performed. Nor do we ignore the relative uniqueness of all individuals. People have different skills, aptitudes, tastes, aspirations, cultures and sexual preferences. It is capitalist inequality, marginalisation and commoditisation that stifle people’s individuality.

Freedom

Thorough-going democracy and egalitarianism are also the basis of freedom. Advocates of capitalism talk a great deal about “free choice” and “individualism”. But capitalism, with its immiseration of the overwhelming majority, greatly diminishes their real-life choices and opportunities. Socialism is about increasing, not decreasing, the individual and collective choices available to the majority of people. Socialism is about freedom from poverty and hunger, freedom from indignity and illiteracy, from the fear of joblessness, and the depredations of class, gender, race and ethnic oppression.

Socialisation

Fourthly, and critically, for the SACP socialism is about the socialisation of the predominant part of the economy. This is an essential condition for the achievement of thorough-going democracy, substantial equality and the expansion of freedom. This conviction is central to our strategic outlook.

In the past, we tended to see socialism as nationalisation plus state planning. Socialisation of the economy is a much broader and qualitatively richer concept. It shifts the emphasis away from a simplistic concentration only on the legal forms of ownership, towards emphasising the real empowerment of working people. This empowerment of workers must include the increasing control over the powers of possession – that is:

- Expanding workers’ real ability to impact on work-place decisions, for instance on the organisation and management of the production process, product development, etc;
- And, increasing worker control over the social powers of economic ownership – that is:
- Increasing workers’ power over decisions around the allocation of social surplus – investment policies, national budgetary priorities, etc.

Clearly, legal ownership forms are one (but not the only) factor in achieving socialisation. Socialisation of the economy needs to embrace a wide range of social ownership forms, including:

- A predominant and varied public sector, with enterprises owned and managed by the central state, by provincial and municipal authorities. These public sector enterprises would need to be subject to various forms of democratic control, including the scrutiny of trade unions, work-place forums, parliamentary committees, consumer councils, and the media.
- A significant and growing co-operative sector.
- The active use of social capital – for instance, worker-controlled pension and provident funds.

There will also be a private sector under socialism, mainly made up of small and medium enterprises, with an important role to play, notably, in the provision of goods and services.

Planning and markets in a socialist economy

Modern capitalist economies cannot function without significant levels of government planning and coordination. Under socialism, with a predominant socialised sector, much more effective and rational planning will be possible. The socialist government will set targets for key sectors of the economy – notably infrastructure and public utilities – and will plan for the provision of training, education and other services. Planning will be subject to a variety of democratic processes, including negotiation. It will also be subject to regular assessment and adjustments.

Markets will continue to have an important regulating and distributive function in a socialised economy, but they will not have the ultimate say. Significant areas of society will need to be wholly or substantially decommodified (that is, substantially removed from the market-place). Such areas would include much of healthcare, education, public housing, posts, communications, urban public transport, water, electricity, and significant sectors of culture. This does not mean that services, for instance, will not have to be paid for (directly or indirectly through taxation, for instance). It does mean that their price and distribution will not be determined by sheer market forces.

Socialism is the future

A socialist democracy is a society in which

- The socialised sector of the economy is predominant,
- Democratic, rational planning is increasingly possible,
- A democratic culture and practices reach deeply into every sphere of social life; and in which
- There is a substantial equality in income, wealth, power and opportunities for all its citizens, and thus a growing freedom for all.

Such societies, and only such societies, will be able to face up adequately to the enormous challenges of the new millennium. Critical among these challenges is the growing vulnerability of the earth's environment. Without the planned, rational, equitable and sustainable use of our globe's resources, the physical survival of humanity itself is at risk. It is a socialist democracy and not the casino economy of capitalism that can lay the only effective basis for addressing challenges of this kind.

Build it Now!

Socialism for the SACP is not just a vision, an ideal located in some distant future of which we can only dream. As the SACP we seek actively to build capacity for socialism, momentum towards socialism, and elements of socialism, here and now. This is why we say: Build Socialism Now!

But what, in practice, does this mean? There are several dimensions:

- **Advancing, deepening and defending the NDR** – building people's power is not a separate task from the struggle for socialism in the present. Building people's power builds capacity and momentum for, and elements of socialism.
- **Rolling back the market** – the decommodification of basic needs – healthcare, education, housing, the environment, culture and information should not primarily be commodities. The SACP is committed to struggle against



the overbearing supremacy of the market which seeks to turn everything into a commodity, and all of us into simple buyers and sellers. We must struggle for the decommodification of increasing spheres of society.

- **Transforming the market** – the decommodification of key areas of our society does not mean abolishing the market altogether, but rather the rolling back of its empire. Insofar as markets continue to be an important regulator of distribution, we must also engage with them. Markets are not some “neutral” reality, and there is no such thing as a “free market”. Present markets reflect the accumulated class power of capitalists. We need to intervene with collective social power on the market to challenge and transform the power relations at play within it. Struggles to transform market power relations include:
 - developing an active labour market strengthening the power of trade unions, skills training and adult basic education. These are all measures which change, to some extent, the terms on which workers confront capitalists on the labour market.
 - the effective use of state subsidies, tendering policies, regulatory controls, and the use, on the market, of public sector corporations to transform and democratise markets.
 - the establishment of effective consumer negotiating forums and watchdog bodies, and the re-introduction of more effective Rent Boards.
- **Socialising the ownership function** – we have already noted the several ways in which the ownership function must be socialised:
 - building a strong public sector in the context of fostering a national democratic, development state;
 - fostering an extensive co-operative sector;
 - assuming much more effective strategic worker control over social capital (like pension and provident funds)
- **Socialising the management function** – again, in other sections, we have elaborated on this. Socialising the management function includes:
 - in the public sector struggling against bureaucratic, but also new public management/neo-liberal managerialism, and ensuring that we develop a public sector managerial ethos that is attuned to our political and developmental agenda.
 - in the private sector ensuring that the monopoly of management is not one sidedly dominated by profit-seeking objectives. The effective use of work-place forums, and safety-committees are among the ways in which the management function can be socialised from the bottom up.

The struggle to build socialism now is, in short, deeply connected to the struggle to

empower working class and popular forces. Neither national liberation nor socialism are events that are delivered to the people. They are, rather, ongoing processes of popular and working class self-emancipation.

Build People’s Power!

Build Socialism Now!