

A socialist approach to the consolidation and deepening of the National Democratic Revolution

“The proletariat alone is capable of carrying the democratic revolution to the end... the main task of the proletariat at the current historical moment is to carry the democratic revolution... forward to the end... any minimisation of this task inevitably results in the working class being transformed from the leader of the people’s revolution into a passive participant in the revolution tailing behind the liberal bourgeoisie.” (Lenin, 1907)

At the SACP 9th Party Congress in 1995 we identified the consolidation of the national democratic revolution (NDR) as the most important task facing our Party and the national liberation movement as a whole. This strategic perspective was grounded in the new political situation – the ANC’s victory in the South Africa’s first democratic elections in April 1994. At the 9th Congress we characterised this event as a democratic breakthrough that qualitatively shifted the balance of forces in favour of the mass of the people and placed the NDR on a new plane.

This breakthrough marked the political defeat of the apartheid regime, and more generally, the strategic defeat of colonialism of a special type (CST), the specific character that capitalist rule had assumed in our country. This strategic defeat opened up the possibilities for a bloc of forces, led by the ANC, to establish bridgeheads into political power. However, as much as this electoral victory advanced the goals of the NDR, it did not signal the completion of the tasks facing the national liberation movement.

When we adopted this position, we were clear that advancing, deepening and defending the NDR would involve a protracted struggle. Apart from the relatively unfavourable international context, dominated by imperialism, our NDR is also threatened by the weight of the past in the present, by the huge backlog of poverty, unemployment and skewed development we have inherited, and by a range of minority class and other social forces within our country, determined to defend ill-begotten powers and privileges. Though strategically off-balance, for the moment, at the political level, these forces continue to possess significant power, and they are actively endeavouring to regroup. In a sense, the revolution is encumbered by the very things it seeks to overcome.

1. The character of the NDR

Like many third world societies emerging from authoritarian and colonial rule, South Africa’s struggle to consolidate democracy, reconstruction and development has to be directed at several interrelated challenges, key among them are the national, class and gender contradictions.

None of these contradictions can be resolved in isolation. In South Africa, the fundamental basis of CST was the national oppression of the black majority as a necessary condition for the economic exploitation of black workers. These interrelated realities underpinned the specific growth path of capitalism in our society, and have resulted in a society that is one of the most unequal on earth. Patriarchal oppression was integrated into, and vastly extended under,



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CST as an equally necessary component in the reproduction of this minority rule dispensation.

The main strategic objective of the NDR, the overcoming of the legacy of centuries of colonial and decades of special colonial oppression, has to be addressed in the context of overcoming the national, class and gender contradictions in their relationship to each other. It is within this strategic framework that the deepening of the revolution should be approached by our Party.

1.1 Class struggle in the national struggle

In particular, we must guard against a mechanical, stageist approach to these interconnected challenges. We must reject attempts to confine the present phase of the NDR to a simple “deracialisation” of capitalism, which seeks to postpone working class struggle against capitalism to some distant “second stage”.

A simple transfer and more “equitable” sharing of some of the existing whitemonopolised ownership and management powers within the framework of the present capitalist system will only scratch the surface of the legacy of racial oppression in our country. The particular colonial, growth path of capitalism in South Africa involved mass land dispossession, forced labour, and the hostel system. Central to CST capitalism was the coerced and racialised reproduction of a huge reserve army of “cheap” labour (through the reserve/bantustan system, bantu education, forced removals, pass laws, the domination and destabilising of neighbouring countries, and many other features). The legacy of this capitalist growth path is still with us, in land shortages, mass unemployment, homelessness, high levels of illiteracy and low levels of skill development, huge inequalities in physical infrastructure within our country, and our region.

This legacy will not be transformed by the mere deracialisation of the boardrooms. It is not simply the “equitable” sharing of some economic privileges to a new elite that is required. The thorough-going transformation of economic power relations has to be undertaken within the context of the NDR itself. The deracialisation of board-rooms and of the management function can only be justified if it is part and parcel of this broader transformation programme.

Maintaining a consistent class perspective is critical in our present conjuncture. At present, in South Africa there is often considerable sensitivity (at least rhetorical) to race and gender matters – class is all too easily forgotten.

An anti-capitalist class-struggle cannot be held over to some later stage of our transformation process. This is why the SACP has, since our 9th Congress in April 1995, advanced the slogan: “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!”

1.2 Gender struggle in the national and class struggle

Likewise, overcoming gender oppression in our society cannot be delayed as if it were a “side-issue”. Nor, as history has taught us, can we make the assumption that the oppression of women will simply wither away under some future socialist dispensation.

Neither the NDR nor socialism can be consolidated unless we simultaneously and self-consciously attack gender oppression. CST and the specific capitalist growth path in our country involved the appropriation of existing patriarchal customs and traditions, and their articulation into the reproduction processes of CST capitalism. In turn, these patriarchal relations acted as a mechanism to reproduce the particular kind of capitalism we had

in South Africa.

This articulation saw the vast exacerbation of the coercive features of pre-existing patriarchy. In particular, the brunt of the reproduction of a massive army of reserve cheap labour was borne by the unpaid (and hidden) labour and effort of millions of women. The reproductive functions often carried (at least to some extent) by society at large in other developed economies (by way of pensions, public education, health-care and housing, and municipal water and power infrastructure) has been borne, at huge personal cost, by millions of black women in our country (and in our region). It is they who have had to care for the young, the sick, the unemployed and the aged. It is they who have had to spend their lives fetching water and fuel. The legacy of this continues to impact dramatically upon the life-opportunities, resources, and general marginalisation of the women of our country and region.

We must reaffirm our view, as the SACP, that there can be no true national liberation nor socialism without the progressive eradication of gender inequality and patriarchal practices and institutions.

The resilience of patriarchal institutions and practices has largely, though not exclusively, been reinforced by ideologically projecting women's oppression and gender inequalities as part of "normal", "acceptable" and "long-standing" cultural traditions. The institution of chieftaincy, once a focal point for anti-colonial resistance, is a stark example of how colonial oppression and racialised capitalism can appropriate, preserve and transform "traditions", subordinating them to the purposes of national oppression and class exploitation. While "traditional" values, however distorted they may have become, need to be handled sensitively, the SACP must be prepared to speak up honestly about and deal fearlessly with the abusive character of many "traditions".

It would be wrong to attribute patriarchal practices only to the oppressor or to dominant ruling blocs. Within the working class and the poor, these practices are prevalent and harsh. The heaviest burden of the social conditions under which the working class and the poor live falls mainly on women. Patriarchal attitudes, coupled with the general social distress and dislocation felt by the poor of our country, also results in extremely high levels of domestic violence and abuse, directed against women and children. Hence the importance of consciously combating patriarchy as a necessary component of mobilising and strengthening the working class as a political force for itself. In fact, the working class cannot be raised to the level of a political class for itself, without at the same time consciously challenging patriarchal attitudes and practices within this class.

1.3 The national question in the class and gender struggles

The relationship between national (or gender) oppression and class exploitation is not a relationship of "form" to "content". National and gender oppression are not merely formal, they are all too real in themselves. They have a history, they are institutionalised, and they have a relative autonomy from class exploitation. The one cannot simply be collapsed or explained by the other. Likewise, one or the other oppression will not simply wither away because another of the oppressions has been overcome.

These three realities are, as we have been arguing above, deeply interconnected. For this reason, the SACP also believes that the struggle against these oppressions cannot be separated out into different "stages" of struggle.

However, the SACP continues to affirm the centrality, in the present South African reality, of the national question. The legacy of racial oppression direct-



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ed at blacks in general, and Africans in particular, continues to be the dominant feature of our society. It is for this reason that, as Communists, we have worked over decades with non-Communist comrades to build a powerful ANC. It is for this reason that, as South African Communists, we recognise the leading role of the ANC. It is a leading role that we seek to constantly build, as Communists.

When we argue that the national question is central to the present South African reality we are essentially recognising the major base around which a massive social movement needs to be sustained, in order to ensure the ongoing momentum of transformation. It is no accident it was a national movement, led by the ANC, that strategically defeated the political ruling bloc in the early 1990s. It is no accident (nor is it an “unfortunate historical legacy”) that the mobilised mass base of the ANC (and SACP) is overwhelmingly black in general and African in particular. A sense of black and particularly African national grievance, and of national identity and pride remain crucial motive forces for our ongoing democratic and socialist transformation struggles.

Of course, in the decades-long history of the Communist Party in South Africa, and indeed of the ANC, these national traditions have always also been non-racial and open in character. Our nationalism has nothing to do with chauvinism, or with the sectarian denigration of other cultures, languages or traditions. Our national traditions are also dynamic and evolving. Our strategy as the SACP, for the present conjuncture, is to help organise all socialists, all democrats, all working people, black and white, into the struggle for democracy, reconstruction and development within the context of the African realities of our country, and our continent.

2. The social and class realities of South Africa

The national, class and gender oppressions of our past have shaped a South Africa that remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. Income inequality is sometimes measured by the Gini co-efficient, which allows for comparisons across countries. In terms of this measurement South Africa has “among the highest income inequality in the world” (*Key Indicators of Poverty in SA*). In 1992 the World Bank calculated that 51,2% of annual income went to the richest 10% of the population (it was 8% in 1975). Less than 3,9% of income is earned by the poorest 40% of the population. Similarly, in 1995 the RDP Office reported that the poorest half of the population accounts for only 10% of consumption, while the richest 5% accounts for 40% of consumption.

These gross inequalities in our society correspond largely (but not exclusively) to race. In 1993, 54% of Africans, 25% of coloureds, 8% of South Africans of Asian origin, and less than 0,5% of whites were calculated to be living in poverty by the World Bank.

Nevertheless, there have also been some fairly dynamic changes within this general pattern. Over the last two decades huge disparities have begun to open up among Africans. The mean income of the lowest-earning 40% of African households declined by almost 40% between 1975 and 1991, while the richest 20% of African households (representing 5,6 million people) soared by 40%. In 1975, less than 10% of the richest 20% of households in South Africa were African, by 1991 that figure had risen to 26%.

These very significant shifts within the majority African population of our country reflect important class dynamics that the SACP must understand very clearly.

In part, the shifts are the consequence of the capacity, from the second half of the 1970s through to the 1990s, of increasingly organised African workers (drawn largely from the semi-skilled ranks of the working class) to make significant wage gains. However, it would be a grave error to argue (as some do) that redistribution through effective wage negotiations, has created a “black labour aristocracy”.

Organised African workers are, typically, connected to the unorganised and to the unemployed by extended family networks. This occurs in the context of a society in which there is very little effective social wage, and in which the potentially cushioning capacity of independent peasant farming (for the unemployed, the young, sick and old) has been reduced to a minimal reality. Urbanisation levels in South Africa are as high as 50 or even 60%. In the context of all of this, the wage packet of an employed African worker is typically redistributed through an extended family network, and is made to cover high costs for items like transport (exacerbated by apartheid geography and an undeveloped public transport network).

Much more significant in the acceleration of inequalities among the African population have been:

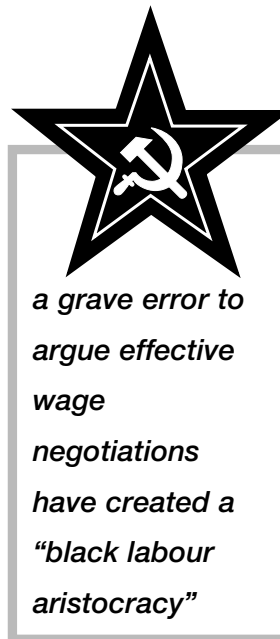
- Co-ercive reform efforts to create black buffer classes in the final wage decade-and-a-half of apartheid. In particular, a narrow but avaricious bantustan elite was fostered in this period;
- The rapid promotion, in the 1990s, of tens of thousands of African professionals into the ranks of middle and senior management in the public and private sectors; and the rapid rise of a small but not insignificant black bourgeoisie; and, on the other hand
- Capitalist restructuring of the work-force over the last two decades. On the one hand, levels of employment in the formal sector have dropped drastically over this period. Unemployment has, concomitantly grown massively. Depending on the definition used for unemployment, anything between 20 and 35% of people over 15 years are unemployed. About 1,7 million people now, also, work in the so-called informal sector. Among workers employed in the formal sector there has also been growing stratification.

All of these shifting class dynamics remain markedly racialised and gendered. While half of the South African population lives in rural areas, almost two thirds (63%) of Africans are in these areas, against a far smaller proportion of coloureds (16%), Indians (5%) and whites (9%). It is African women, more than any other group, who suffer most from unemployment (47% are estimated to be unemployed). Likewise, it is Africans generally (1,03 million) and African women in particular (772,000), who make up the majority of people (1,7 million) working in the typically low-wage or unpaid informal sector.

While there have been some significant shifts in the 1990s in terms of the upper middle strata, the 1995 October Household Survey of the CSS still found that fewer than 4% of African males and 2% of African females were in managerial posts. The corresponding figures for Coloureds was even lower (3% of males, 1% of females).

Interestingly, the same October 1995 survey found that approximately one third of all South African workers were unionised, with membership being highest among African male (39%) and female (36%) workers, with white female workers (17%) being the least likely to be members of unions.

It is on the terrain of these still highly racialised and gendered, but nonetheless shifting, class and social realities, that our ANC-led national liberation movement, but also a variety of other political formations and agendas, have been seeking to shape the post-1994 South African reality.



3. Assessing the present conjuncture

Part of the strategy of our opponents is to sow demoralisation about the “lack of progress” since the democratic breakthrough of April 1994. Sometimes the implied message of this campaign is racist (“blacks are incompetent”). There are also some on the left who, unwittingly perhaps, take up the same demoralisation campaign, with loose talk about the “betrayal” of the revolution. The fact that such a campaign exists should not deter the SACP from making an honest assessment of progress, or the lack of it, since April 1994. There have, undoubtedly, been hesitations and mistakes, and the medium and longer-term outcome of the transformation process is deeply contested.

3.1 Achievements

It would be strategically and historically stupid, however, not to grasp the massive process of transformation that is under-way in our country. Without going into substantial detail, there are several broad areas that must be highlighted:

- **Political democratisation** – our liberation movement has successfully steered our country into representative democracy. There has been steady, if still uneven, consolidation of national, provincial and local tier democratic structures, within the context of an innovative co-operative governance approach, that sees these three spheres are inextricably united in an overall national transformation process. The victory of the ANC in a large majority of local government elections in 1995/6 has helped to consolidate the 1994 breakthrough, and it has extended democratic participation to hundreds of localities that were racially divided in the past. We have adopted a new and extremely progressive constitution. The constitution enshrines basic democratic rights, and also, importantly, socio-economic rights. Although major transformation struggles are still under-way, generally most state institutions, including the legislatures and the criminal-justice system are starting to be more accessible and more attuned to the needs of the majority. Most importantly, the overwhelming majority of South Africans, regardless of their political affiliations, broadly accept the reality and necessity of the new political dispensation;
- **Peace and stability** – there has been a dramatic curtailment of political violence in our country. In the nine years immediately preceding April 1994, over 15,000 people were killed in political violence. There was an immediate cessation of political violence after April 1994 in virtually all parts of our country (with the partial exception of KwaZulu/Natal). This abrupt halt underlines the strategic nature of that violence (it was a deliberate component of the apartheid regime’s strategy, including its coercive reform strategy of the 1980s, and its negotiation strategy between 1990 and 1994). The virtual cessation of this violence also underlines the incontestable legitimacy of the ANC electoral victory, and the marginalisation of those forces behind the violence. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, fully supported by the SACP and its alliance, has also contributed to fostering the political and moral conditions for sustainable peace and stability in our country. Although the truth about gross human rights abuses in the apartheid period has only emerged very partially, the patterns and obvious high-level responsibilities for these gross abuses (including systematic assassinations, disappearances, torture and dirty tricks of all kinds) have deepened the crisis of the National Party, and other elements of the old ruling bloc, including its bantustan adjuncts.
- **Socio-economic transformation.** The strategic defeat of CST, marked by

the April 1994 democratic breakthrough, was, essentially, a political and moral defeat. It is on the political and moral fronts that we have best been able to advance, deepen and defend our breakthrough. Predictably, on the front of social and economic transformation, change has often been harder to bring about, we are up against powerful vested interests and powers. Transformation on this front has often been either negligible or frustratingly slow. Nevertheless, there are many areas in which significant gains have been made. These include:

- **Major infrastructural programmes** – the most notable of which have been the mass electrification of poor households (over 2 million households in the first three years); and the provision of safe drinking water to poor communities.
- **Health-care** – primary health-care is increasingly available to all, and it is now free for the first time. Major struggles are being waged, led by government, against the transnational pharmaceutical companies to ensure that drugs are available and affordable.
- **Land reform and land restitution** – are beginning to gather momentum, and the rights of labour tenants on commercial (usually white-owned) farms have been substantially improved in law.
- **The transformation of the labour market** – in the face of substantial opposition from the capitalist class and the media that supports it, the ANC-led government and its alliance forces have piloted progressive legislation through the National Assembly, including, notably, the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. This legislation greatly extends the empowerment of workers in the labour market, and at the point of production. Other institutions, like NEDLAC (the National Economic, Development and Labour Council) and the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (the CCMA), also help to restrict the monopoly of management over work-place practices, and over broader economic policy issues.
- **Women's emancipation** – significant progress has been made in setting up the national machinery for gender equality in line with the constitutional provisions and our movement's commitment to place this high on the agenda of social transformation. Apart from other socio-economic transformation processes, noted above, which have a direct bearing on alleviating the material basis of women's oppression (like land reform, electrification and water provision programmes) the new Right of Choice and Termination of Pregnancy Act should be singled out. In the past, tens of thousands of women died, or suffered serious injury, each year, as a result of back-street abortions. The SACP salutes the legalisation of abortion, and commits itself to playing an active role in deepening popular understanding for and support of this progressive advance.
- **Educational transformation** – legislative and policy measures have been taken to ensure that the education system is transformed from a racist, ethnically based system into a non-racial, non-sexist and high-quality public education system. Huge problems and inequalities persist, but the education system is slowly moving out of its apartheid crisis.

There are numerous other areas in which there have been significant, or at the very least partial advances – from the deracialisation and more strategic targeting of pensions and other welfare grants, to the progressive transformation of the public broadcaster and the licensing of numerous community radio stations. There is not a single area of South African life, from sport to transport, that is not in some way caught up in the struggle for transformation.

The SACP forcefully rejects the idea that “nothing has changed” in South Africa, or that “the revolution has been betrayed”.



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However, the SACP is also deeply conscious of the massive crises that still afflict our society – the crisis of mass unemployment, of poverty, and of high levels of criminal violence, in particular. All of these problems have their roots in the objective legacy with which we are having to deal. Resolution of these problems is also hampered by the still active presence in our society of class and other social forces that are determined to defend their own illbegotten powers and privileges from the past.

3.2 Strategic shortcomings

But the question must also be asked: Have there not been strategic, subjective shortcomings on the side of our own alliance-based, liberation movement in the period since the April 1994 breakthrough? Have we used the relatively more favourable balance of forces within our country to maximum effect?

The SACP believes that there have been such strategic shortcomings, and that these shortcomings relate, essentially, to four broad and interrelated areas:

- **3.2.1 Misunderstanding our location within global realities** – We will elaborate, in the chapter on the international conjuncture, on what we consider to have been strategic uncertainties and illusions that have tended to afflict our approach to contemporary global, and specifically economic, realities. These strategic uncertainties are, in turn, directly related to:
- **3.2.2 Macro-economic policy** – while accepting the need to manage the economy in a sustainable way, while accepting the need for fiscal discipline (we are dealing with public resources, after all), and the need to effectively manage government debt – the SACP is convinced that government’s macro-economic framework policy, GEAR, is seriously flawed in certain important respects.

We believe that the budget deficit reduction targets are arbitrary, based as they are on macro-economic models derived from a largely unreconstructed Reserve Bank. GEAR embodies, in its core fiscal and monetary policies, a neo-liberal approach that is at variance with our reconstruction and development objectives. Much of GEAR marks a shift away from ANC economic policy in the first half of the 1990s, which underlined the interconnectedness of growth and development, which envisaged a major emphasis on growth led by domestic and regional infrastructural development. More and more, there has been a shift towards the assumptions of an export-led growth, based on the myth that deregulation and liberalisation, more or less on their own, will make the South African economy “globally competitive”.

Above all, macro-economic hopes are increasingly pinned upon the massive (but unpredictable) inflow of private sector investments. The role of the new democratic government is more and more centred upon creating an “investor friendly” climate, rather than on leading an economic reconstruction and development process. The economy also continues to be held hostage by a Reserve Bank implementing narrow monetarist policies, focused on very high interest rates.

The SACP acknowledges that some progress has been achieved on the economic front. Growth, even if it is still very low growth, has been restored to the South African economy, after over a decade of negative growth. A much more progressive and transparent budgeting system has been introduced, and important work on budgetary reprioritisation is taking effect. There has been progressive (if not sufficient) reform of the tax system.

However, in acknowledging all of this, the SACP believes that nearly two

years of GEAR are beginning to confirm our concerns. Growth targets are not being met, the arbitrary budget deficit targets are wrecking havoc on all of the other good work we are doing in socio-economic transformation, and, above all, the small growth that has occurred has been accompanied by persistent structural unemployment, indeed there have been net job losses, with hundreds of thousands of workers losing their jobs in the last two years.

- **3.2.3 Lack of consistency in building a strong, developmental state** – although the official policy of government and of the alliance is that the state should play an active and developmental role in the economy, in practice this strategic standpoint is often not pursued. “Privatisation” is still often proclaimed to be official government policy and an end in itself, notwithstanding the National Framework Accord on the Restructuring of State Assets. The transformation of the public sector is often reduced to a narrow cost-cutting, budget-deficit reduction exercise. And the role of the state in the economy often amounts to little more than pleas to the private sector.
- **3.2.4 The tendency to demobilise the mass popular movement** – although the RDP and many other policy perspectives and campaign programmes, including, nominally at least, the Masakhane Campaign, recognise the need for a people-centred, but also people-driven transformation, the mass popular movement in our country has been considerably demobilised since April 1994. There have been many factors at work in this –
 - The redeployment of tens of thousands of cadres from their township, sectoral and work-place structures into the new institutions of our developing democracy (legislatures, administrations, security forces, and also into private sector positions). While these redeployed comrades are not lost to struggle, nor even necessarily to their original constituencies, this major and progressive transformation process has destabilised mass and community based organisations.
 - The need, on the side of mass and community based organisations to re-orient themselves, to grapple with new challenges, with greater emphasis on developmental struggles, in tandem with and not in opposition to public structures and institutions. Our mass formations have sometimes found it difficult to give fundamental strategic support to our democratic government without turning themselves into toothless “sweetheart” sectoral formations, conversely, their attempts to genuinely articulate the concerns of their sectors are often castigated as “irresponsible”. Maintaining the mass mobilisational capacities of our movement (as we must), but in the new conditions of governance, has often proved difficult.
 - Confusing, demobilising signals to the mass base that “we are now in power”, and “we shall deliver”. This is related to tendencies to adopt narrow technicist and managerialist approaches, that are impatient with consultation and other essential elements of a developmental approach to transformation.
 - Directly related to this is the increasing marketisation of the relationship of communities to governance. There is a tendency for local government, for instance, to see communities as little more than individual household “consumers” and “clients” of services. Not only does this bureaucratise governance, but it fragments communities into individual households, and poverty becomes, not a collective concern, but an atomised household responsibility.

These four inter-related areas of strategic uncertainty (in locating ourselves globally, macro-economic policy, the developmental state, and in how to sustain the mobilisation of our mass base) are matters of serious concern to the SACP, and indeed to many within our broader alliance. We have taken up these ques-



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tions systematically within our alliance, and in public debate. We welcome the agreement that no policies are cast in stone, and that there should be ongoing intra-Alliance discussion on these and other key strategic matters.

The SACP, for its part, commits itself to playing a constructive role in the unfolding NDR. Thousands of SACP members are active in government at all levels, and in the legislatures. The SACP, together with its alliance partners, has been prepared to assume collective responsibility for governance. Insofar as the Party expresses robust criticism, it is not from some safe, holier-than-thou, comfort zone. Nor do we level criticism in order to score points. Our critical concerns have one principal motivation only – a failure to address weaknesses in governance and in our broader alliance could pose a threat to the very deepening and consolidation of the NDR itself.

4. Threats to national democratic transformation

In propagating the perspective: “Advance, Deepen and Defend the Democratic Breakthrough”, the SACP acknowledged in 1995 that the trajectory of the transitional process was uncertain, and that our strategic goals would have to be struggled for in the face of opposition forces.

The 1994 democratic breakthrough represented a strategic political defeat of CST, white minority rule was no longer viable. But the breakthrough did not of itself affect substantial powers and privileges accumulated in the past. Positioned powerfully within the economy, some of our state institutions (like the judiciary and security forces), and in parts of the media and other important civil society structures, are social forces from the former ruling bloc.

These forces have, basically, three strategic options:

- To mount an active counter-revolutionary struggle, to reverse the democratic breakthrough of 1994;
- Or to work within the post-1994 constitutional and institutional framework (either as constitutional opposition forces, or from within the liberation movement itself), in order to block substantial change, to preserve powers and privileges from the past.
- Or to throw in their lot wholeheartedly with the national democratic transformation effort (a choice that some have made);

These strategic choices are, obviously, outlined here in a very schematic way. In particular, some political forces often pursue the first and second options simultaneously. Social forces also do not necessarily act with complete political clarity, often there is a hedging of bets between different options, and there are interconnections between different forces pursuing different agendas.

Bearing all of this in mind, it is still useful to seek to define from which quarter the most serious threat to our NDR is posed. It is precisely confusion in this regard that can lead to strategic differences within our national liberation movement.

4.1 A counter-revolutionary threat?

In a society in the midst of a far-reaching transformation process, it would be naïve to ignore the danger of counter-revolution. This applies even more forcefully to a country (and region) like our own, emerging out of three decades of armed conflict. Apartheid, in attempting to prolong itself, developed a host of dirty tricks networks, disinformation structures, a culture of subterfuge and the abuse of state resources, the vast expansion of private security forces of all kinds, and the amassing of large quantities of weaponry. Much of this legacy is now at the heart of the violent crime problems that we confront.

The SACP believes that the counter-revolutionary threat should neither be underrated nor over-stated in our present situation. Disinformation about an elaborate right-wing (and sometimes even a “left-wing”) counter-revolution has been one of the ploys used by the old apartheid intelligence structures, in an attempt to extract concessions from the ANC.

Counter-revolutionary forces currently lack any serious mass base, nor do they enjoy any significant economic backing. Neither the major imperialist powers, nor the major South African corporations, are seriously considering this option. Clearly we need to monitor and deal effectively with pockets of potential counter-revolution. Above all, we need to ensure that, through our own conduct, we do not create room for manoeuvre for these forces. This means, amongst others things:

- Handling issues relating to culture and tradition with sensitivity, without being held hostage by these factors;
- Showing the greatest respect, ourselves, for the new constitutional and democratic order; and, above all
- Pressing ahead with massive reconstruction and development, in which the most marginalised areas of our society are brought into the process of transformation.

Vigilance is certainly required. Counter-revolutionary networks still exist, from time to time deliberately instigated political violence occurs, parts of the security forces and the judicial system remain untransformed, there are links between counter-revolutionary political forces and criminal syndicates, and our own southern African region remains relatively unstable. On the other hand, it would also be a serious strategic miscalculation to project our liberation movement and our new democratic government as besieged, as threatened on all sides. Our liberation movement enjoys massive support, and extensive legitimacy nationally and internationally. We must foster with confidence the political and moral hegemony that we do, in fact, enjoy. The ultimate defence against counter-revolution is the ongoing mobilisation of mass forces.

4.2 Constitutional opposition forces

In the present conjuncture, our multi-party electoral dispensation is basically aligned around a national liberation movement (the ANC), enjoying overwhelming majority support from those historically oppressed by CST, and various political formations that represent (or seek to represent) classes and other, social forces that benefited, or believe they benefited, from the past.

The PAC is a minor anomaly within this general alignment. The PAC seeks to represent the same constituency as the broad ANC-Led alliance, but since its formation as a break-away from the ANC in 1959, it has lacked any serious (still less consistent) politics. Since 1959 it has manoeuvred back and forth, tactically, seeking to project itself as somehow different from the ANC, while awaiting for some mass disillusionment within ANC ranks to swell its own. In short, throughout its history the only real consistency in PAC politics has been opportunism. A similar opportunism, for the moment even more vague than that of the PAC, is to be found in the newly launched UDM. More than a year after its launch, the UDM has still to announce its political programme, or even basic manifesto.

The central dynamic of our National Assembly (and of other legislatures) is the engagement of a national liberation movement, striving to advance the momentum of transformation, with other political parties (notably the NP, IFP, FF and DP) that, in various ways, seek to slow the pace of change, and to preserve islands of pre-existing power and privilege (whether in education, resi-



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mass forces*

dential areas, in “traditional” customs, or in the economy). These parties do, indeed, represent actual, albeit relatively small, constituencies.

It is in the interests of the consolidation of the NDR that these various constituencies are represented within the new, non-racial democratic dispensation. The SACP is unambiguous in its support for our multi-party dispensation, and in its support of the right of a range of political formations to be represented therein.

The ANC-led alliance should, however, not assume that constituencies are unchanging, or that they are timelessly in the pockets of this or that political formation. For a variety of reasons, significant numbers of historically oppressed people still vote for parties like the NP and IFP. Without abandoning our principled, strategic commitments, the ANC-led alliance must constantly seek to broaden its base (including its electoral base).

The SACP believes that for as long as the realities of South African society are marked by vast disparities between a large majority who remain the victims of the legacy of the past, and a small minority with hugely disproportionate economic power, the present fundamental alignment of electoral forces should be sustained. In other words, ensuring a massive, numerical majority within the framework of a common (but broad) progressive electoral platform is essential. The SACP believes that not only should our tripartite alliance be sustained, but that (at least for the foreseeable future) the SACP should not mount a separate electoral effort, albeit within the context of an ongoing alliance. Naturally, this position is one that will be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances.

But what threat to the NDR do the constitutional opposition parties represent? In themselves these parties are able, in certain respects, to play a blocking, obstructionist role – often relying on provincial or local level powers to do so. But they are incapable, in their own right, of developing a strategic project with any hope of redefining the social and political terrain. Part of the reason for this incapacity is their inability to sustain support in their own core constituencies on the one hand, and yet simultaneously put together a feasible appeal to a broader (usually non-racial) constituency that could mount a serious electoral challenge. By and large, all are operating on the terrain of diminishing constituencies and the partial if miniscule growth of one (the DP, for instance) is usually at the expense of another of these minority parties.

Strategically these parties are positioned, therefore, little differently from the PAC and UDM. They are all dreaming of some cataclysmic shattering of the ANC and its alliance. For this reason, the breaking of the alliance is a central and strategic objective of these forces.

However, constitutional opposition forces are not confined to political parties – more significant are a host of economic, cultural, sports and media institutions, often with substantial power completely disproportionate to the actual numbers they represent. Included in these opposition forces are a range of networks in strategic places, like the judiciary and the Reserve Bank which, either consciously or from habit, seek to obstruct the policies of the ANC-led government.

It is important to understand that, whatever their sympathy for these various oppositional forces, the capitalist class in South Africa, and the major international imperialist powers, are well aware of the improbability (in any foreseeable future) that they will ever, singularly or collectively, mount a majority political project. The support for these forces from the side of big capital is muted by this strategic consideration.

The threat posed to the NDR by these forces is not remotely insurmountable. The SACP believes that the best means to meeting the challenge posed by these forces are, in any case, in line with the general tasks confronting the

NDR. We need to foster the unity of our own alliance, we need to press ahead with reconstruction and development to undercut pockets of privilege and to draw those most vulnerable into the process of democratisation. We need to ensure that institutions like the Reserve Bank and the judiciary, as well as key civil society structures – like the private media, and sports bodies – become increasingly representative and aligned to our developmental objectives.

For all of the above reasons, the SACP believes that the political challenge posed to the NDR by these various constitutional forces can only assume serious strategic significance if our own alliance becomes significantly disunited, and strategically confused. It is in this regard that the final threat to the NDR needs to be viewed:

4.3 Capital's attempt to transform the liberation movement and to re-define the trajectory of change

The most serious long-term strategic threat to the NDR is the attempt by capital to engage and transform our own liberation movement with a view to stabilising a new, “deracialised” capitalist ruling bloc. Central to this strategic project is the attempt to re-define the NDR as a struggle:

- To “modernise” the South African economy, to make it “more competitive” on the “global stage”;
- To “normalise” South Africa’s political dispensation; and
- To stabilise and surpass the present crisis within a new capitalist order in our country.

Around this attempted re-definition of the “NDR” is a potential new ruling bloc in formation, dominated by old and emergent new fractions of the bourgeoisie.

Within the calculations of this project, the old and emerging bourgeois factions will not (and could not) go it alone. The new bloc will seek to present its interests as those of a broader range of middle strata, especially the rapidly forming new black middle strata – professionals, private and parastatal managers, middle and senior level civil servants. “Modernising”, “normalising”, “globalising”, “black economic empowerment” and plain self-enrichment will be among the major themes around which this bloc will attempt to consolidate itself. Socialism, more substantial transformation, and the Freedom Charter are viewed as “baggage from the past”. Real issues, like gender oppression, are picked up within this project, but are then largely confined to elite concerns and resolutions, such as ensuring that a quota of women are represented within the emerging public and private sector elite.

This project will not ignore the organised working class. It will seek to incorporate the more organised, more skilled sections of the working class as junior partners within its ruling bloc. Ironically, the very forces that castigate COSATU as an “elite”, are the ones that most actively seek to transform strategic sections of this organised working class into an elite. This is the logic of the “first tier” of the proposed “two-tiered labour market” advanced by leading sections of South African capital. This is also one implication of the insistence on whole-scale privatisation – the net effect of which would be to render housing, effective transport, health-care and training accessible only to a small, relatively advantaged section of the working class. This kind of objective is the strategic purpose that these forces give to the idea of a “social accord”. Of course, the powers and numerical strength of a co-opted tier of the working class will be eroded by the simultaneous extension of a more right-less, more flexible, more temporary, more casualised second-tier of workers.

The strengths of this “modernising” version of the ND transformation



the most serious threat is the attempt by capital to transform our liberation movement

process should not be underrated. They include:

- this ideology has a spontaneous self-evidence about it, especially for the hundreds of thousands of new professionals, public and private sector junior and middle managers, and newly elected representatives in all spheres of government. These are the individuals who, at a subjective level, are the most obvious beneficiaries of the 1994 breakthrough. There has been a very sudden and generally well-deserved increase in the possibilities for professional advancement, with accompanying increases in power, privilege and authority for tens of thousands of black professionals. What makes these developments particularly significant is that these tens of thousands have constituted the core cadre base for our movement. The structural limitations of their advancement are not always apparent at present. It may only be a few years before there is a dramatic decrease in the intake and promotion of individuals into the non-racial middle strata. Those who have not yet “made it”, can still dream of succeeding. But, without major transformation struggles, the majority will not “make it”. It must be emphasised immediately that we are not condemning the progressive emergence of a new, non-racial, middle strata. We are not advancing a moralising, “the poorer the better” thesis. Our concern is that unless we self-consciously tackle new realities, this development will give rise to a self-satisfied and limited version of our revolution.
- This version of ND transformation is also strengthened by the prevailing (although now less triumphalist) international hegemony of neo-liberalism. However, whatever advantages this version of “ND” transformation might enjoy, it also suffers from major weaknesses:

- it is likely to prove unstable and unsustainable. In practice, it amounts to a 30%-70% solution – an attempt to overcome the present post-apartheid crisis by stabilising a new capitalist order around about 30% of the population, while the great majority remain marginal in a “flexible”, “unregulated” and substantially “rightless” second tier. This majority would be overwhelmingly young, female and black – and its best hope, in this version of “ND” transformation, would be of some trickle-down from a “modernised” and “normalised” new South Africa. This path towards “ND” transformation is unjust and unworkable, and therein lies its second weakness and danger:
- its instability might lead to a growing emphasis on law and order, discipline and sacrifice (none being wrong in themselves, but an emphasis where these qualities are expected of the poor, and not of the elite becomes a diversion from real problems and from the need for deepening and speeding transformation). As the structural (and sheer numerical) limitations on upward mobility for the previously oppressed majority become more apparent and pressures mount for “more delivery”, there are dangers that the newly arrived, taking their place alongside an older white elite, will increasingly identify with top-down managerialism (in the name of professionalism), and the use of authority. They might see in the excluded 70% less the motor force for ongoing transformation, and more a threat to newly acquired privilege and power.

The project to forge a new capitalist-dominated, non-racial ruling bloc has other contradictions that we should understand. This bloc is likely to marginalise some of the class fractions and strata that were part of the old apartheid ruling bloc. These social forces are, therefore, likely to be threatened by the deracialisation of South African society. While the more strategic white capitalists have the vision and also the manoeuvrability to foster the emergence of black capitalists and managers, this cannot be achieved without impacting upon the vested interests of elements of the white middle strata. The white capitalists might be committed to some form of (co-optive) affirmative action,

but they cannot afford to lose the expertise and loyalty of a white managerial stratum. Hence the often slow progress in affirmative action in the private capitalist sector, despite an increase in number of black faces in the corporations.

5. The ND transformation as a thorough-going revolutionary transformation under the hegemonic leadership of the workers and the poor

The trajectory of the post-1994 South African transformation process depends upon many inter-acting factors. Viewed from a class perspective, there are two fundamentally different outcomes that are possible. The first is the scenario we have just considered – the consolidation of a new bourgeois order, based upon persisting class, race and gender inequality, but presided over by a new, non-racial ruling bloc. The alternative is a profound, national democratic process, hegemonised by the working class and poor.

But working class leadership must not, in the first instance, be understood as the mechanical equivalent of leadership by this or that worker organisation (the SACP or COSATU, for instance). Neither trade unions nor working class parties are immune from the dangers of being co-opted into other class agendas. The working class hegemony of which we speak is one that has to be constantly elaborated and contested for within working class organisations themselves, and within the broader liberation movement.

In the effort to build working class hegemony, within our formations and within society at large, the SACP considers the core social constituency of the Party (and of COSATU) – organised workers in the formal sector – as the crucial social force. It is this stratum of the working class that has the collective numbers, and the strategic economic location, as well as the revolutionary organisational traditions, to provide effective social weight to any progressive agenda. The SACP needs to pay special organisational and ideological attention to this critical contingent of the working class.

But the SACP (and COSATU and the ANC) must constantly struggle to ensure that this revolutionary core of the working class does not isolate itself into a narrow syndicalism or workerism. The battles this core working class takes up, the programmatic perspectives it advances (through our organisations) must provide leadership to and help voice the aspirations of the vast numbers of workers who are unorganised, in the informal sector, or unemployed. The organised working class must constantly deepen its organic links with the urban and rural poor.

The organised working class must draw to its side the great majority of youth, students and professionals who, in their majority, continue to suffer the legacy of class, race and gender oppression. For these social forces, as with the working class, change will be meaningless if it is not a thorough-going transformation of the power relations of our society.

The organised working class must also seek to win over to its transformational perspectives key elements occupying managerial positions in both the public and private sector. Many of these are drawn historically from the ranks of our liberation movement, and many have professional and moral reasons to associate themselves with a thorough-going national democratic transformation process. There is no reason why social productivity and transformation, rather than profit maximisation, should not be the principal organising concerns of many managers.

The organised working class must even endeavour to provide leadership to the bourgeoisie. This means, amongst other things, engaging diversely with different fractions of the bourgeoisie. The emerging black capitalist stratum



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must be engaged, and not only on the basis of sentiment, and appeals to black solidarity and “patriotism”. The general economic dependency of this stratum on the new democratic state must be used as leverage to ensure that the investment decisions and productive activities of this black capitalist stratum enhance the reconstruction and development agenda. This, indeed, will be the real test of their “patriotism”. Many of the deals engaged in by this emergent faction are also dependent on partnerships with various social funds (notably those controlled by trade unions). It is important to ensure that, in the process, it is the social agenda of the collective owners’ of the funds, and not the profit agenda that becomes hegemonic.

Organised workers and their formations must also seek to exert influence over other factions and sectors of capital. There are those sectors that are most dependent upon the growth of the domestic (or regional) market, and those that are less so. There are those sectors of capital that are most involved in productive and infrastructural development, and whose interests are not necessarily identical with other more speculative or finance-based sectors. Organised working class formations must be prepared to engage tactically with these potentially more progressive sectors and factions of capital. They must be drawn, as much as possible, into the agenda of thorough-going national democratic transformation.

Above all, the working class must dare to become the hegemonic class force in our society. While waging a consistent class struggle to progressively abolish capitalism, the working class must not slip into a narrow oppositionist mentality. The working class, and the organisations that seek to represent it, must dare to assume power, to engage with, transform and hegemonise the state, the legislatures, and key institutions (economic, cultural, and social) of society. This is not an easy, still less an “evolutionist” struggle whose progressive outcome is guaranteed. But this is the working class struggle, within the context of an unfolding NDR, that the SACP, with its allies, must be prepared to wage.

The organisational means for ensuring the simultaneous class-conscious organisation of workers and the broadening of their class agenda to embrace the whole of society, necessitates:

- working class, socialist formations (the SACP and COSATU) – and, of course, an increasing strategic unity among them; as well as
- a broad liberation movement, the ANC, and a range of mass and community-based formations; and
- class conscious activity from within the state, as well as within broader civil society.

Working class hegemony in all of these organisational and institutional sites cannot be taken for granted, it needs to be constantly fostered, organised and struggled for. We are engaged in a massive historical struggle to transform our society, on the terrain of an unfolding NDR, from a society based on the logic of private profit, to a society based on social need. Critical for the success of all of this are clear sectoral programmatic perspectives, which will be elaborated in the following chapters of this programme.