



# African Communist

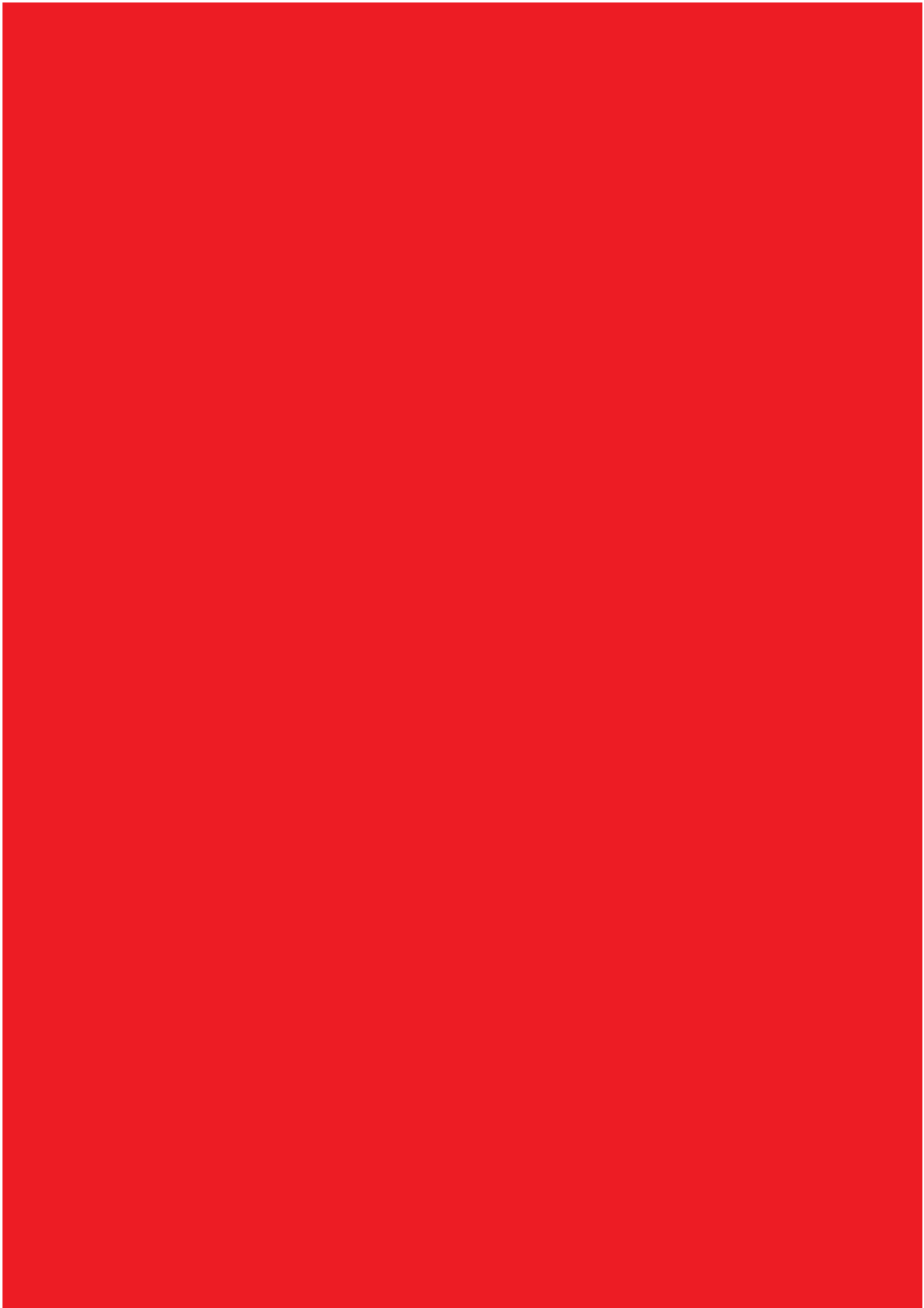
1st Quarter 2011

Issue Number 183

*Forward to the*  
**YOUNG COMMUNIST  
LEAGUE  
3RD NATIONAL  
CONGRESS**



*Political Report to the Congress: The Current  
Situation and the political tasks of the youth*





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1st Quarter 2011

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## **1 Editorial notes**

### **3 The current situation and political tasks of the youth**

*YCL National Congress political report*

### **31 SACP Central Committee political report**

*Report to the 26-28 November 2010 Augmented CC*

### **42 Coming to terms with the legacy of cde Joe Slovo**

*Ronnie Kasrils*

### **53 A guide for Communists deployed by the state**

*Nelson Madela*

### **57 21st century imperialists and neo-colonialists in Africa**

*Andile Lungisa*

### **62 Welfare – well beyond welfarism**

*Mark Waller*

### **75 The Tshwane Declaration**

*Statement of the 12th ICWP meeting in South Africa*

### **68 Bettie du Toit: Altogether a most unlikely Communist activist**

*Andries Nel*

### **81 Book review: The Nazi beast at play**

*Eric Singh*

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EDITORIAL NOTES

## A truly Red December!

Cosatu turns 25, YCL has its third National Congress, the ICWP meets in Tshwane – for the first time in Africa – and the world's progressive youth gathers in South Africa

**T**his is a Red December! As The African Communist goes to print, the 12<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties (ICWP) in Tshwane has just drawn to a close. It was the first ever held on African soil. Cosatu is celebrating its 25th anniversary. The Young Communist League (YCL) is having its third National Congress. And the World Festival of Youth and Students will be held later this month.

On 3-5 December, 102 delegates representing 51 parties from 43 countries, converged on Tshwane for the 12<sup>th</sup> International Meeting, as it came to be referred to. The theme of the conference was: “The deepening systemic crisis of capitalism: The tasks of Communists in defence of sovereignty, deepening social alliances, strengthening the anti-imperialist front in the struggle for peace, progress and socialism”.

For the first time ever, the event was addressed by a Head of State: President Jacob Zuma re-affirmed the working class bias of the African National Congress, and referred to the important role of the SACP and the Alliance as a whole in the ongoing transformation of the country. He raised issues around the

post-2008 global economic crisis and challenged Communists to find effective answers to the crisis.

We carry in this issue the Tshwane Declaration, the statement to which the parties attending the 12<sup>th</sup> International meeting committed themselves.

We congratulate the YCL on its third National Congress, taking place from 8 to 12 December. At YCL's last congress it had a membership just above 33 000. Today it boasts a membership of almost 53 800. The congress, organised around the theme “In praise of Communism”, will be attended by 2 200 delegates and will elect a new leadership. It will also be adopting a programme of action to “restore ownership and control of the means of production to the people as a whole”. Some of the issues that will be examined include:

- The New Growth Path;
- Youth unemployment;
- Building and expanding state ownership and democratic control in the mining sector;
- Nationalising the Reserve Bank and transforming the financial sector; and
- Building a strong co-operative movement.
- A vibrant YCL that clearly champi-

ons the cause of socialism augurs well for the future and is crucial for the success of the SACP. We are sure that the YCL will be a strong, progressive voice at the World Festival of Youth and Students taking place from 13 to 21 December.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), our strong ally, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this month. We extend our warmest congratulations and good wishes!

Cosatu has come a considerable way

since its birth in 1985. Today it is some 2-million strong, and it continues to take up struggles both at the workplaces and in the wider political terrain. The consolidation and advancing of the national democratic revolution and the struggle for socialism depends crucially on a strong and politically astute trade union movement, and Cosatu very ably plays this role. Cosatu can be justly proud of its role over the past 25 years. The SACP salutes Cosatu!

YCL CONGRESS

## The current situation and the political tasks of the youth

This is the draft political report to be considered by the Young Communist League Congress to be held on 8-12 December 2010

The purpose of this political report is to reflect on political developments at the national and international levels. By assessing the political climate we can examine the possibilities and constraints to implement a new paradigm to change the systemic structure of colonial and racial capitalism. We stand at the confluence of new opportunities to advance the NDR and the struggle for socialism in South Africa and the world.

The *first section* of this political report will cover a history of inequality, tracing the origins and interconnectedness of colonial and apartheid rule to the current most unequal society ours has become. It will touch on the fact that for the last 16 years, the state has assumed a 'welfarist' function, and that most of the measures that were adopted did not significantly transform unequal racial, gender and class disparities, but have instead deepened inequality.

This section will then analyse the racial nature of South African capitalism, the tasks we should be engaged with in transforming this society, and how some of the things done in the last 16 years require a political and paradigm change. We will also look into the post-

1994 accumulation regime, and analyse trends in terms of structures of control and ownership, and how these have impacted on the political make up of our society. We will then look at what are the implications for political and socio-economic development, and how the structure of our economic production has streamlined and perpetuated the neo-colonial relationship of our country to mainly the West. We will then flag the issue of the need for economic sovereignty.

The *second section* will touch on the Polokwane moment, what brought about those changes; the meaning of these changes; and how they have had an impact on the political discourse in our country. We will look at how certain things which were done towards Polokwane, as sub-cultures, have entrenched themselves within the ANC and the Alliance, and how the forces that were united towards Polokwane have become disgruntled or fragmented. What caused this? Shared views? What are the implications? The section will also look at the relationship between the SACP and the State (and State Power), and our role in the post-Polokwane period.

The section will also look into and

analyse the resolutions of the SACP from its 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress and the Special National Congress on the question of elections and state power within the background of the YCL 2<sup>nd</sup> National Congress on this question. This section will also look into the state of the Alliance, the manner in which some of the issues within the Alliance has been dealt with. This section will also deal with the battles towards 2012, the mushrooming of an anti-communist tendency that has taken a grip and seem to be fermented by certain sections within the ANC but often tested through certain sections of the ANC Youth League.

Importantly, this section will also discuss the various approaches and thinking within the “left” with regards to our understanding on how we deal with the post-1994 ‘new tendency’.

The *third section* will then deal with the 2009 elections, the trends, the role of young people and generally the role of elections. The SACP and state power, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socialism and the kind of socialism we seek to build are also a significant part of this section. This section will also look at the forthcoming local government elections and the intention to depoliticise the bureaucracy.

The *fourth section* will deal with the political economy post-Polokwane, touching on issues such as the IPAP and the New Growth Path (social and green economy); the crisis of unemployment among youth and the impact of the global capitalist crises. We will here return to the questions of ownership and control in our economy in terms of mining, land etc.

The *fifth section* of the report will deal with the political and strategic tasks of the YCL in the current conjuncture. We

will look into the domestic situation, and locate the strategic tasks of the NDR and the struggle for socialism. We will identify as critical the task of deepening the NDR in the current phase, and bring back its basic facets, non-racism, non-sexism and democracy as critical, in intensifying the struggle for Socialism.

We will also deal in this fifth section of our report with the task of building a united and broad youth movement for the NDR and the struggle for Socialism. The ideological battle and the need for action on the part of the YCL to entrench Marxism-Leninism in our society are also critical in this section in particular and the whole report in general. That represents one of the running themes in this report. This section will conclude by identifying the tasks of building a strong organisation based on campaigns, building structures, engaging into platforms that attract youth to our structures, etc.

## 1. A History of inequality

### **The racial capitalism accumulation regime**

South Africa is one of the most unequal societies among middle income countries. Income and opportunities are unevenly distributed in racial, class, gender and geographic terms. Despite being classified as a middle-income country South Africa has incomparable mass unemployment and poverty. The benefits of economic growth are not equitably shared. Wealth is not trickling down to the poorest half of the population; the reverse is true.

How do we account for this high level of inequality? First, the systemic structure of racial capitalism in our country

explains the mass poverty and unemployment of the majority of the population. Racial capitalism was built on the back of denying black people political rights, systematic destruction of their economic well-being, exploitation and oppression, among others. Black people had to be made poor to be forced to become a docile proletariat and meet the insatiable demand by mining and commercial farming for cheap labour. In particular black females suffered all three injustices that characterised this accumulation regime, class exploitation, racial oppression and patriarchy. This accumulation regime largely remains intact notwithstanding a number of important changes that have taken place in the democratic dispensation.

A battery of legislation and other state interventions were deployed by various white minority governments to expropriate black people to create a mass of cheap, docile and migrant labour system out of them. The reserves/homelands subsidised the cost of reproduction for capital in the so-called 'white areas'. Domestic work and subsistence farming performed by African women and old people provided an effective subsidy for white capital for decades. The Chamber of Mines justified payment of low wages to African on the grounds that they have 'wealth' in the reserves. Black and female workers were discriminated against through various policies to reserve certain skilled work to white workers. Unequal and unfair discriminatory investment in education, health care and other social development areas held back black people in general and Africans in particular, with black women abandoned in a generally worse position. The National Party intensified this regime and ensured a large

transfer of wealth, jobs, skills, opportunities and property to the Afrikaner. This constituted the first major distributional regime from the small English wealthy enclave.

It is this legacy of colonial plunder and economic subjugation that accounts for the systemic character of inequality in South Africa. The democratic state has inherited one of the most brutal forms of capitalism. It was an economic system based on mass poverty aimed at serving the interest of a white minority. Racial capitalism helps explain the persistence of racial, class, gender and geographic inequality. Moreover the accumulation regime and, within it, the structure of production is still centred on the extraction and export of mineral and primary agricultural products, mainly to Europe. The relative diversity of the South African economy, compared to other African countries, helps to obscure this fundamental truth about the country's economic base.

#### **The post-1994 accumulation regime**

It is now well recognised that 1994 ushered in a new political order in South Africa. This outcome was a product of several factors including the key role played by young people through internal mass resistance, international pressure, armed struggle and the changed geopolitical world order. The creation of a single polity governed by a fairly progressive Constitution (notwithstanding its weaknesses, mainly compromises which still needs to be addressed, such as the sunset clauses) is one of the remarkable achievements of the democratic revolution. The Constitution combines political, civil and socio-economic rights as a package that defines the essence of the democratic ideal.

Since 1994, the AN-led government has implemented important political, economic and social programmes to realise the vision of the Freedom Charter and the Constitution. These interventions were important in changing the life experience of many poor black people by, for example, improving access to water and other basic services.

It is a matter of debate whether this also heralded substantial changes to the logic of accumulation that characterised the apartheid-colonial political economy. That is, has the structure of production and ownership shifted substantially from extraction and export of raw materials and primary goods to more high value added activities? How is surplus produced and distributed in the post-apartheid economy? Has the structure of ownership changed? Has the dualistic development – two nations in one country – been changed? These questions must be posed to understand the structure and nature of the post-apartheid accumulation regime. Some of the changes in the economy include:

#### **Changes in structure**

The economy has recorded a long period of sustained positive, albeit low, growth since 1994. Capitalist profits have been restored through the redistribution of wealth from the working class and the middle stratum to the rich. Post-1994 growth reversed the stagnation that had blighted the South African economy since the 1970s. Contribution to GDP from the primary sector declined substantially after the 1970s with the services sector gaining momentum

The services sector is now one of the largest contributors to GDP – accounting for at least 60%. Growth in services includes the rise of the dominance of

finance capital and related services and restructuring of jobs from manufacturing as a result, among others, of outsourcing. The bulk of growth in business services is accounted for by the emergence of services such as the mobile phone industry.

There is intense debate suggesting that the shift towards the services sector has increased '*financialisation*' of the economy. This process has been facilitated and supported by the liberalisation of finance and capital since the 1970s, by policies implemented following the introduction of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) macro-economic strategy, and by additional liberalisation measures in the early-2000s. The latter resulted in, among other things, capital flight and the departure of major South African companies for London, New York and Melbourne. Financialisation is basically the rise and domination of finance, mainly money-capital, over productive-capital. In the policy terrain it is manifested for example in the macroeconomic policy through narrow and excessive obsession with inflation targeting to protect financial assets. The dominance of finance on non-financial operations takes the form of increased shareholding by "institutional" investors and other finance institutions. This has spawned the so-called *shareholder-value* movement that places pressure on productive operations to increase returns, always within a short term time span. To solve the principal-agent problem management incentive and pay packages have been aligned to those of the shareholders in the form of share options, bonuses and other incentives. The consequence of financialisation is constant corporate restructuring which includes focus on the so-called

core operations and therefore outsourcing.

Mining and agricultural contribution to GDP is lower than their historical contributions, although minerals still constitute more than a third of all our exports. Of course the portfolio of exports has changed to include autos and heavy chemicals.

Manufacturing has been in a rut for the better part of the post-1994 period. Others have argued that South Africa in fact de-industrialised as many firms could not cope with the rapid trade liberalisation of the mid-1990s. Heavy industry which is capital intensive dominates the manufacturing sector while labour intensive firms have lagged behind. Consequently South Africa exports highly capital intensive goods and import labour intensive goods from the rest of the world especially from the East.

#### **Ownership**

A few conglomerates own a substantial portion of the JSE-listed companies – notably Anglo Plc and the Rembrandt Group of companies, which together control close to 60% of JSE's market capitalisation. There is evidence that the South African economy is highly concentrated – few dominant firms control a substantial portion of several markets. In recent years the competition authorities have also uncovered endemic collusive conduct in several industries – they have uncovered cartels in milling, bread, and fertiliser.

However, some of the conglomerates, like Anglo, have been restructured. This includes divestiture of certain non-core activities. In addition some of the elements of South African capital have been changed into transnational corporations, as a result shifting their base

from South Africa to other countries. Shifting of primary listing from Johannesburg was justified on the grounds that South African capital markets are small and relocating will grant access to international capital market. It was also claimed that the corporations will use the access to capital markets to increase their domestic investment. It was also supported ostensibly in the name of improving South Africa's supposed international competitiveness. In practice, these former South African firms have focused on global expansion and repatriate substantial surplus-value out of South Africa annually.

In comparative terms, black (capitalist) ownership has increased although insignificantly compared to its white counterpart. At the gambling centre, the JSE, black ownership is below 5% of overall market capitalisation. Capital is still predominantly white in post-apartheid South Africa with the objective of transferring wealth to the people as a whole been largely substituted by narrow BEE that benefits a few black individuals. It is also important to take stock of many unlisted firms to understand the full nature of South African capital.

Merger and acquisition activities have resulted in some South African-based companies falling into foreign hands – for example Barclays purchase of controlling stake in Absa, the mooted take-over of Massmart by Wall-mart; and Chinese investors taking 20% in Standard Bank. The latter is presently restructuring among others through retrenchment of thousands of workers and curtailing of sports sponsorships to increase its present levels of profit and therefore realise “shareholder value”.

Liberalisation of capital markets has heightened the role of institutional in-

vestors and private equity funds. South Africa has joined the rest of the Anglo-American world in the growth of this form of investments. State ownership still plays an important role in the form of a number of state owned enterprises in the aviation, transport, electricity and other industries.

Social capital, in the form of investments by the retirement funds, constitutes another important aspect of ownership in the economy. In theory workers through retirement funds own a substantial portion of the economy. However, in fact it is the fund administrators who determine the nature of investment. Retirement funds are currently propping up the proliferation of shopping malls as part of the logic of the current accumulation regime of supporting a consumerist economy – which is a clear misallocation of much-needed investment into the priorities identified by government. Investments by retirement fund globally are typically directed towards economic infrastructure. We have to take further the SACP Red October campaign on financing development to pressurise especially pension funds administrators, towards allocating these resources towards more productive developmental objectives related to achieving the real transformation of our country's structure economic production.

#### **Class structure**

South Africa has also experienced some changes in its class structure. The bourgeoisie remains largely white but a tiny segment of black people has joined the rich. The opening of opportunities has resulted in upward mobility for many black professionals, especially in the public sector. This has led to the growth

of a black middle stratum and a tiny black capitalist class. The black middle stratum is however in a fragile situation because of its high indebtedness. It seems that the black middle stratum and the new rich have been assimilated into the consumerism and crass materialism of the white rich.

It is no wonder that this new 'non-racial' elite is indifferent to the plight of the poorest portion of the population. It also resists any attempts to redistribute wealth, opportunities and skills to the poor through, for example, additional taxation. It is insulated from the plight of the poor by high walls. It is urban, cosmopolitan and globalised while the poor are trapped in grinding poverty.

The working class has also been restructured into a core of permanent unionised workers and a periphery of non-unionised proletariat. The mass dismissal of black "unskilled" and semi-skilled workers since the late 1970s explains the shift of a significant section of the working class into the "informal economy". Many of the poor falls through the cracks – they do not qualify for social grants and the economy is failing to absorb the mass of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

South Africa, with class reconfiguration as one of the drivers, is now faced with a situation whereby 30% of the population accounts for more than 70% of income while the bottom 70% accounts for the rest. Class differentiation is even starker among the black South Africans than among white. Relative to other periods in our history the black group is highly differentiated by class. The black middle stratum formation started long before 1994 but has accelerated in post-apartheid South Africa. The gap between the tiny African middle

stratum/rich and the poorest portion of the population is increasing.

Do these changes constitute a qualitative change in the structure of accumulation? This has been a subject of debate, with some arguing that South Africa has entered a post-industrial, service economy. Alternatively it has been argued that South Africa has embarked on a new growth path. However, taking a long term view, it can be argued that the minerals-finance-energy complex is still the centre of South Africa's economic activities. Surplus may not be extracted from the cheap migrant labour to the same extent as in the past but this does not alter the argument that the accumulation regime has not altered. New forms of extracting surplus include the cheap atypical and sub-contracted forms of labour.

The shock therapy policies implemented by the democratic government in the mid-1990 have worsened unemployment and inequality. Unemployment, measured by both the official and expanded definition, doubled between 1995 and 2000. Today, unemployment has stabilised at levels above 20% for both the official and expanded definition. Income inequality has widened in the past 16 years as wealth was redistributed from the poor to the rich. If it were not for social grants the extent of absolute poverty would have been worse. Still, almost half of the country lives in poverty, especially in the former homelands.

Parallel to the negotiation on the future political settlement there were discussion between the leadership of the movement and captains of industry. A tacit 'deal' was struck that the new government would not attack the property and privileges of the white capital-

ist class (the Constitution made this formal). Rather, the new government will leave economic transformation to the markets and use surplus from the private sector to finance social development. In this fashion the leadership surrendered to big capital its autonomy to determine economic policy. It also tied its hands by limiting the extent to which it can tax the white rich to finance socio-economic development. The new government accepted the ideology of a *liberal global capitalism* promoted by the white corporate sector that excluded the possibility of comprehensive redistributive measures. This correlates with the abandonment of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and its replacement by Gear hardly two years into the democratic dispensation. The liberal capitalist approach that was adopted is premised on the following five assumptions, according to Terblanche (2002: 424-5):

- *South Africa has a high economic growth potential.* The South African economy had a high growth potential that was strangled by apartheid, but its full potential can be realised in the post-apartheid period if the white-controlled modern sector is given the required space and freedom via the policy of neoliberalism

- *Integration into the benign global economy will enhance economic growth.* The international community – which played such a pivotal role in South Africa's democratisation – will be well-disposed towards post-apartheid South Africa, and the country's economic growth potential can be enhanced by integrating the modern sector as fully and as rapidly as possible into the benign system of global capitalism, by lifting all restrictions on the movement of capital

and goods.

- *A high economic growth rate will unlock the labour-absorptive capacity of the economy. If the high growth potential of the economy can be realised through a policy of neo-liberalism and globalisation, the labour-absorptive capacity of the modern sector will be unlocked, which will create enough additional job opportunities to resolve the problems of structural unemployment and under-employment.*

- *The benefits of a high economic growth rate will trickle down to the poor. A high economic growth rate, achieved via a competitive free market and integration with the global economy, will generate a large enough trickle-down effect from the modern or first world sector to the informal or third world periphery to narrow the income gap, alleviate poverty, and resolve the social crisis inherited from apartheid.*

- *The restructuring of the economy should be entrusted to market-led economic growth. Achieving a high economic growth rate is the most-effective – and the least painful – method of ‘restructuring’ the South African economy, and resolving at least in the long term, its dualistic character and structural anomalies after centuries of colonialism and apartheid. Or, to put it differently, the task of fundamentally restructuring the economy as envisaged by the RDP should be entrusted to free market capitalism, neo-liberalism, globalisation, and a high rate of growth.*

These assumptions can be challenged on several grounds both theoretically and empirically. The low economic growth and the intensification of the social crisis in the post-apartheid period provide the basis to reject these assumptions. Higher growth will not necessarily

translate into more jobs or substantial reduction of poverty. It is the content, quality and structure of growth that matters rather than a narrow fixation with a growth target. As pointed out by Terblanche (2002:425), these notions did not take into account the following defining characteristic features of the South African economy:

- *Its dualist character; after 350 years of unequal power relations, unfree labour pattern, and uneven socio-economic development, it is divided into a mainly white-owned and white controlled modern sector, and a black underdeveloped non-formal sector.*

- *The deeply institutionalised inequalities in the distribution of income, socio-economic power, and property and opportunities; and*

- *The emergence – over the past 30 years – of a modern, first world, capitalist enclave that is detaching itself from black labour market and the lumpen proletariat because they are regarded as irrelevant to the enclave’s operation and profitability.*

All these ultimately led to the Gear period, and a redirection to some sort of a welfarist state of the long-held perspective within the ANC about the role of the state as an agent for change within the economy and society. For this neo-liberal mantra to be wholly accepted, necessitated an attempt by the 1996 Class Projects to change the political role and character of the ANC from its mass character. To this end, as we will argue later, the Polokwane moment was more than a defeat of personalities behind the class project but of the project itself. However, what the ‘new tendency’ seeks to do is reverse these gains. Hence, the struggle continues in defence of Polokwane.

**Implications for political and socio-economic development**

It is this social reality that the democratic movement seeks to change. Substantial progress in the NDR will be measured by the extent to which we have made a serious dent on unemployment, inequality and poverty. There is general acceptance that the cautious economic policy – aimed at stabilising macro indicators – is inadequate to the task of economic and social transformation. In addition the political leadership has to regain its sovereignty to determine socio-economic policy from the corporate managerial elite. This must be buttressed by mass participatory democracy.

This is both a political and economic issue. At a political level the question is whether the *balance of forces* favours a change of tack or it constrains the implementation of a radical programme? This question will be discussed below (the political economy of post-Polokwane period). For the moment, it is sufficient to underline the fact that the democratic movement faces a historic political opportunity. In this case there is need for power and paradigm shifts towards an RDP-type intervention in the economy. Mass power is the cornerstone of achieving this power shift in the orientation of the political leadership.

On the economic front the question is what interventions are required to change the economic structure that has characterised South Africa for more than 100 years? Dependence on the current economic structure has exposed the vulnerability of South Africa's growth path. In broad terms it is a basic-commodity export-oriented and import-dependent growth path (with minerals and primary products occupying the centre stage). Notwithstanding the diversification of

the export portfolio in recent years to include vehicles and heavy chemicals, the underlying logic of the growth path is the extraction and export of raw materials.

This growth path is vulnerable on a number of fronts. Post-colonial experiences amply demonstrate the fallacy of dependence on export of raw materials, especially dependency on a single cash crop or minerals. Zimbabwe is a recent example of the failure to transform economic power and structure. Prices of raw materials – determined externally in a liberalised context – are volatile and in the long run tend to be low. During commodity booms (high commodity prices) countries that rely on export of raw materials suffer the so-called 'Dutch Disease'. Capital inflows into the commodity market raises the value of the currency, thereby displacing exports of labour intensive manufactures. The reverse happens during capital outflows. The social dislocation is similar during outflows and inflows of short term capital.

Exporters of raw materials always face balance-of-payments problems. That is, they tend to face trade deficit because of the tendency to import more than they export. Imports of high value manufactured product and capital goods outweighs the gains from export of low-value raw materials. The paradox of raw commodity exporters is that they produce what they don't eat and eat what they don't produce. The commodity boom tends to stimulate transfer of profits and income to foreign countries due to this trade imbalance.

Third, raw material exporters are not equal and compete against each other in the global economy. For example South Africa faces competition from other

developing countries. It also now faces competition from the large developing countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China. Policies like subsidisation in the North also distort trade, reinforcing the uneven division of labour. New materials like fibre optics and synthetic rubber have tended to displace some of the commodities produced and exported by developing countries. For example fibre optic has displaced copper wire on both functionality and cost.

#### **The Polokwane moment**

The 52<sup>nd</sup> ANC National Conference (Polokwane 2007) was historic in the post-apartheid era. The YCL played an active role alongside other forces within the ANC to make the change happen. It is perhaps important to remind ourselves why Polokwane happened. In general, the following reasons can be said to have been behind the Polokwane moment:

- Revolt against the technocratic management of the ANC by leading cadres in government;
- The selective persecution of comrades for corruption and the use of the state machinery to settle internal political, often factional, differences.
- The marginalisation from policy formulation of the ANC, the Alliance in particular and the mass democratic movement.
- Worsening unemployment, inequality and poverty.

All these factors combined created the groundswell for change first expressed in the 2005 National General Council. The revolt against the persecution of comrade Jacob Zuma symbolised the greater dissatisfaction about the state of affairs in the movement. Polokwane unified a range of forces, with op-

posing interest and motives, against the leadership of former President Thabo Mbeki's group. It included those who had grievances against the leadership of the former President, ANC members who wanted internal democracy, and forces agitating for change of direction in economic policy.

The outcome of the conference sent shock waves through South Africa and abroad. A new leadership was elected with President Zuma receiving the most votes. This paved the way opened for the removal of comrade Mbeki as President of the country when the tensions between the newly elected leadership and government became untenable.

Polokwane also signalled the need for a policy shift to address the problem of joblessness, poverty and inequality. However, it did not represent a wholesale rejection of the conservative policies pursued by government, and specifically of macro-economic policy. It did however emphasise the need to subordinate macro-economic policies to the broader developmental goals. Employment creation, education, health and rural development were identified as the key priorities for the movement going forward. The Polokwane conference helped resuscitate the ANC and dislodge the problematic leadership style that had characterised President Mbeki era. It also prompted a walk-out of some disgruntled ANC members who later formed the core that established the misnamed 'Congress of the People' (Cope) COPE. An important question is whether since Polokwane there has been a significant power shift towards progressive change in the movement?

The social and political reality sketched above suggests that calls to end the NDR are premature, misplaced

and dangerous. In fact we need to intensify the NDR to address the historical fault-lines of race, class, gender and geography. Voices calling for the end of the NDR surreptitiously want to impose a liberal reading of the Constitution. In addition they juxtapose the NDR against the values enshrined in the Constitution. They associate the NDR with authoritarianism, corruption, ineptitude and cronyism. This argument is a sham and seeks to protect the status quo and privileges of the rich. It deliberately ignores the ghastly socio-economic and political outcomes if South Africa continues on the current trajectory. Further it distorts the history of South Africa through its gross caricature of the NDR. The current constitution is a production of the national democratic revolution and did not arise by accident. Many died in the struggle to attain the vision of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society. However, the Constitution is a living document and a product of compromise and must be constantly adapted to new realities, and therefore cannot escape amendment if it defeats the ultimate goals of the NDR. If socio-economic disparities in our society persist, and the Constitution is seen as a stumbling block, then so be it.

It is the current reality that will breed the ground for an authoritarian response among the political elite as they will be acting in defence of the wealth accumulated, especially since 1994. To avoid this outcome, it is in the interest of the people that the Alliance should take control of policy processes and shift the discourse towards the project of addressing the historical legacy of apartheid.

## 2. The 2009 general election

Elections are an essential part of a democratic system. Regular elections ensure that political parties renew their mandate and continuously align their strategies to the wishes of the electorate. They also give the electorate an opportunity to remove politicians or political parties that no longer represent their wishes. As such elections add dynamism in political systems to ensure constant innovation among political parties. So every five years a 'revolution' takes place as the electorate is given the opportunity to rank and select a party of their choice. This is supposed to keep political parties on their toes. The example of Kerala, India, is an interesting case study in terms of how political parties including the Communist Parties are forced to continuously align their programmes with that of the electorate.

It is now a matter of historical record that the ANC-led Alliance won the general elections except in the Western Cape. The ANC-led Alliance campaigned on the platform of jobs, education, health care, rural development and fighting corruption. This found resonance with the voters who gave the Alliance a fresh mandate to implement its electoral promises. The popularity and victory of the movement still dumfounded many pundits who had predicted that its majority will be slashed especially since it was facing a new opposition in the form of COPE. The dominance can be both a blessing and a curse. To the extent that a strong ANC-led Alliance is able to use its electoral strength to pursue progressive transformation then this is a blessing.

An electorally weak ANC and Alliance will not be able to deliver on the promises it makes to our people. How-

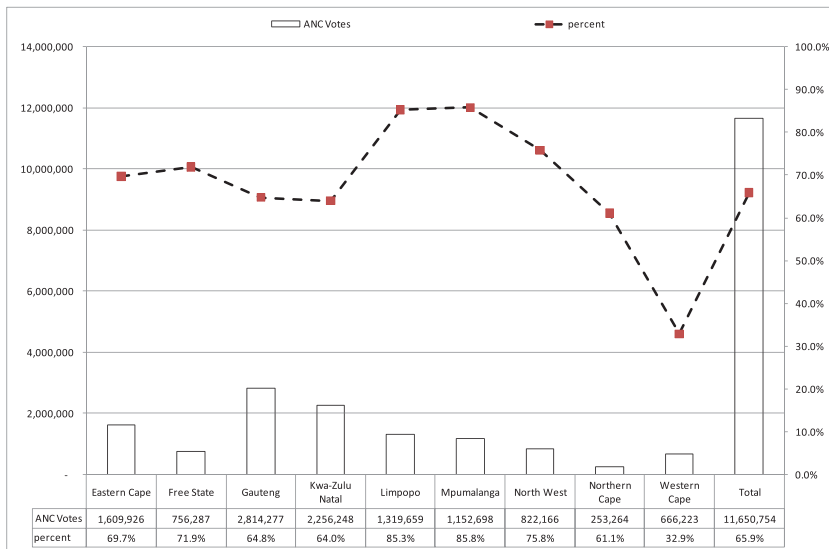
ever, political dominance can lead to arrogance and social distance from the masses. A political party that loses contact with its base will end up losing elections. Such an outcome will be a serious setback for the revolution. The outcome in the Western Cape illustrates this point more effectively than anything could. Below we offer a synopsis of the voting trends and outcomes.

The chart below shows ANC results for the 2009 Elections per province and the national elections (in total numbers and percentage). ANC received 65 per cent of the national vote. It scored the highest percentage, 85% and 84% in Limpopo and Mpumalanga respectively. This is followed by North West, Free State and Eastern Cape. The ANC got the least vote (a third) in the Western Cape.

Four provinces (Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape) account for close to 70% of total votes cast in favour of the ANC. This suggests that ANC votes in the 2009 elections were concentrated in these four provinces. Consequently (to widen breadth of support) we will have to do more to win support in the remaining five provinces.

The one remarkable feature of the 2009 elections (*see chart*) was the unprecedented focus on new voters and the youth. Political parties including the ANC fashioned election campaigns to win over these new voters. The methods used (the glitz and glamour) seem to have found resonance with these young voters. It is however questionable whether this type of campaigning results in long-term sustainable support

**Figure 1: ANC 2009 general election results**



Source: calculated from IEC report on the 2009 elections

for the ANC. This US-style management of perceptions rather than the deepening of consciousness is a doubtful method to win over uncertain voters for the long run. Sure the message and method need to be couched in ways that reach the youth but this must also deepen the consciousness of the voter by instilling values of what the ANC stands for. Otherwise there is a risk that this ephemeral support will not last but also require substantial money to host parties which can be better used in building a sustainable voting base.

The opposition benches continue to fragment—a situation made worse by the emergence of COPE. The big losers to COPE were opposition parties like UDM, ID and IFP. Opposition parties have cannibalised each other rather than make significant inroads into the ANC support at a national level. However in some provinces opposition parties have managed to reduce the ANC's overall majority.

One of the outcomes of the 2009 elections was the reconfiguration of government by President Zuma. New Ministries like monitoring in the Presidency; Women, Children and People with Disability; Economic Development, were established. Some of the departments were renamed for example the old Land Affairs is now known as the Ministry for Rural Development. The changes are a response to the critique that government lacked coherent development planning, coordination, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation capacity.

There are changes into an inclusive approach by alliance partners in the appointment of cabinet ministers and the election of candidates for parliament compared to how the 1996 Class Project engaged into this process. Comparative-

ly speaking, there are more communist MP's and Ministers now as opposed to 1994. As much as these changes should be appreciated, the reality is that these MPs and Ministers remain accountable to the ANC and succumb to its discipline although the alliance partners have – a point that must not be undermined. In 2009 elections, as was the case in 1994, the Alliance worked together to determine the election manifesto and electoral list. However, the case now is that only the ANC can recall members from either parliament or cabinet without consultation with the Alliance.

The YCL debates on the question of the relationship of the SACP and State power, and the debate for the reconfiguration of the Alliance, remain very important. Although both the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Special Congress of the SACP resolved that the Party will contest for elections under the leadership of the ANC, as the YCL, we need to reflect on how this will significantly meet the conditions which necessitated the discussions on the SACP and State Power. In particular, we must debate the question of how the working class can achieve its immediate aims and enforce its momentary interests through the present setup of an Alliance electoral tactic as embraced by the SACP in any alternative that we are to point out.

How do we deal with the persistent contradictions which may be eminent between ANC policy and the approach of the SACP? What is the general role of SACP members who are ANC MP's? Does the question of the SACP standing for elections on its own an issue of the past or even more relevant now? We believe that this question remains important and should constantly be raised by the YCL within SACP structures. However,

that question must not be raised in isolation from critically evaluating the position of the working class being able to achieve its immediate aims and enforce its momentary interest. We also cannot allow the Party to be content with power allocated not directly from the ballot, but from an ANC-led election platform and at the dictate and mercy of the ANC. The fact that things have changed now is mainly due to the personalities who are at the helm of the ANC, especially the President. The internal struggle within the ANC to dislocate communists is there, and this is a fight we should not shy from. However, the role and character of the Party as an independent organisation consistent with popular mass work and influence within the state and the Alliance remains. In the final analysis, our Party is the part of the working class and can never be compromised on the basis of temporary minimum victories and alliances.

This section also begs the following pertinent questions. In the current period, what is the role of the Alliance in taking forwards the struggle for socialism, and how does the continuation of this Alliance, with its unity and contradictions help the working class achieve its immediate and long-term gains? How do we shape the attitude of the Party towards the ANC, and the role of the ANC towards socialism? The party, through its Deployment and Accountability policy and committee, seeks to consistently define the role of communists in society in general, and within the state and government in particular, what should be the attitude of the YCL in this regard? In this Congress, we should be able to take stock of past SACP resolutions and assess them against the current reality and contribute on the debate of the SACP

and its Relationship to State Power.

### **3 The political economy of the post-Polokwane period**

#### **The international situation**

The international report will canvass in full an appraisal of the global balance of forces. For the purposes of this section we will focus on some key salient issues. In general we can conclude that the international situation is much more fluid unlike in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States still remains the only super-power but faces challenge from other developed countries for example the European Union. Its dominance also faces challenge from a significant grouping of developing countries coalescing around the Brazil-Russia-India-China (BRIC) axis. The common issues unifying these disparate countries are the reform of the international institutions like the IMF and the UN, which for many years have been dominated by the US. The second issue is around trade reform which produced a deadlock in the Doha-round as developing countries are resisting further liberalisation in the absence of reciprocal action by the North especially around agriculture.

The emergence of powerful developing countries has also reshaped the core-periphery relations in two significant ways. Traditional relationships whereby developing countries are the net recipients of foreign capital are changing. China for example holds a third of the US treasury's debt while firms from India have taken over some British automobiles. For example the Tata's take-over of Land Rover is reverse capital movement from developing to developed countries.

The relocation of substantial manufacturing from developed countries to low-cost centres like China and Vietnam has changed the historical division of labour between the developed North and the under-developed South. Historically, manufacturing – seen as a high-value activity – was largely concentrated in the North with the South focusing on supply of raw materials. Cheap Chinese imports are behind the lowest inflation in the United State. The North has however moved up the value chain to focus on knowledge-intensive such as product Research and Development as well as governance of global commodity chains or Global Production Networks (GPNs). Indeed capitalist production has become more global and controlled by a few MNC located in the North.

This development adds a new dynamic in international politics especially the relationship between the developed North and the South. The emergence of a powerful group of countries including the Asian Tigers has created a second-tier of pivotal states in the international arena (estimates suggest that China has displaced Japan as the second biggest economy while Korea is regarded as the tenth biggest economy). This economic power gives this set of countries some bargaining power in the global arena relative to other developing countries. It however does not follow that they will wield this power to ensure progressive outcomes. Still, any international strategy cannot ignore the fact that the international situation is far more different than twenty years ago.

It is also important to take into account the mutual interdependence between the new tier of countries on the one hand and the developed North on the other hand. For example it is not in

the interest of China that the US fails, notwithstanding its rhetoric in public. This will wipe off substantial Chinese savings. The US on the other hand needs the cheap imports from China to maintain low inflation. Little wonder that the US has toned down its belligerent attitude to China including on the question of human rights. It is thus apparent that the developed and developing countries are locked into a mutually depended relationship. This has far reaching implication for a strategy to change the balance of forces. Specifically, it is an open question what posture will be adopted by this new tier of developing countries on key questions like the environment, democracy, trade and transformation.

The global economy is still trying to shake-off the after-effects of the 2008-till-present crisis. The recovery is still far from restoring growth to the pre-2008 levels. It is in this context that the US is engulfed in a battle to fight off deflation (sharp reduction in prices to the extent that assets are worthless). As countries try unilaterally to stimulate their economies this has unleashed what has been termed the ‘*currency wars*’. In essence there is an attempt to stimulate exports through for example depreciating the value of currencies. This is what the Fed in the US is trying to do. However, this recent intervention by the US Fed has led to world-wide condemnation.

Manipulating the dollar has triggered flight of short term capital to countries like South Africa that have relatively higher interest rates. Obviously this negatively affects the economies of these countries by raising the value of their currency and thereby rendering their exports internationally in a vulnerable position. As such, the US has displaced the

pain of adjustment to other countries, something it has been doing for the last thirty years. In this context there is pressure on China to slow down its economy by either appreciating the value of the currency or raising interest rates.

Global capitalism is therefore in a serious crisis with no clear short-term solution to kick-start growth. Coordinated global approach is made more urgent by the imperative of saving capitalism from the biggest crisis since the Great Depression. It is ironic that such global coordination is unlikely to emerge and the spectre of tariff barriers being raised across the globe looms large. Capitalism thus not only faces a crisis of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, but it also faces a dialectically-linked realisation crisis as the goods produced are not finding markets due to rising unemployment and trade barriers, thus a crisis of over-accumulation of capital. These crises are likely to add fuel to an already difficult situation. We see global protest in many countries against measures to curtail government spending for example in the UK and Greece.

This brings us to the political question for the left. It is ironic that when capitalism is at its weakest the left is still fragmented and fighting disconnected national struggles. The absence of a cohesive left force internationally undermines efforts to grasp this historic opportunity to drive through radical transformations. The Congress must be seized with the question on how to develop a united left force at the global level to provide leadership to the many disparate national struggles. This vacuum is likely to be filled by right-wing responses as recent elections in Europe and the US have shown. Such a situation is a perfect breeding ground for

right-wing opportunism whether faith-based or political as also the Mid-Term elections in the US illustrate, which were driven by a right-wing Tea Party led by the defeated Sara Palin.

People are also increasingly turning to religion to provide answers and solace in this difficult economic situation. That in itself poses some serious challenges to the left. How do we explain the contradiction where right-wing forces gain an upper hand over the left while right-wing policies and capitalism have and are clearly plunging society into crises? What is to be done? These are some of the questions we must answer in order to emerge from our congress with a clear programme of our tasks both at national and international spheres to advance a left agenda in particular, socialist alternatives.

#### **The domestic situation**

Previous sections have outlined the socio-economic conditions that continue to blight the South African society almost two decades since the 1994 democratic breakthrough. Gains registered by the democratic movement have also been highlighted. In this section we offer a general assessment of the domestic balance of forces. We do this in order to assess the possibilities and spaces available to radicalise the NDR.

The ANC's popularity and dominance of politics is a source of strength for the democratic movement. For that matter the ANC has been put into power on a progressive platform to accelerate change. No political party seems likely to dislodge the ANC from its position of hegemony. For the foreseeable future, notwithstanding isolated areas, the ANC's grip to power seems unassailable. The continuing future of this is condi-

tional upon the ANC making progress in improving the material conditions of the majority of the people.

Electoral strength on its own is not adequate to ensure a progressive outcome. The balance of class forces is the decisive factor that will ensure that the ANC implements measures to change the policy landscape. The ANC was the majority party in 1996 but implemented conservative economic policies. The balance of class forces then culminated in the implementation of Gear. Strategic challenge facing the progressive forces is how to ensure that working class interest shapes the policy discourse in government? That outcome depends clearly on building working class power.

However, no amount of focus on the internal context including balance of forces is sufficient for desired outcomes to be achieved. It is important that we extensively examine South Africa's external position and the impact of the international balance of forces in the country. For example there is a possibility for the working class to still be constrained to make the progress that it wants even if it could win the balance of forces domestically, that being subject to a possibility of unfavourable international balance of forces including the increasingly dominant role of MNCs in our economy. What would be our response to that situation? Is that not what the ANC has partially found itself in over a larger proportion of the period since the inception of the democratic dispensation (irrespective of the fact that in many instances, the conservative economic policies of the ANC were more submissive to conditions set by local capital in its desire to maintain economic control and power? Under such possibilities how would we differently conduct the NDR from what

is going on presently?

That said, we can broadly say that the domestic balance of forces are mostly favourable to a progressive agenda. In the first, instance, the global economic crisis has shaken confidence in the neo-liberal dogma and has also opened up spaces to experiment with new ideas. Unless we occupy this space by articulating a coherent agenda the right-wing may remobilise by for instance recreating their old ideas. This happened in the aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis. The World Bank and IMF were forced to repackage structural adjustment programme by calling them Poverty Reduction Papers.

Within the ANC-led Alliance we have also witnessed an attempt to redirect the course of the NDR by a 'new tendency'. The anti-Mbeki coalition quickly unravelled after the 2009 elections. It is clear that the glue that bound us together was not ideology but common disenchantment with the Mbeki-era. It is clear that what the left had identified as a principled opposition towards the way in which the ANC and the Alliance were run, and the need for change, was used as mere rhetoric by some within the ANC to get rid of former President Mbeki.

The rupture of the Polokwane alliance (to use a term) has manifested in two inter-linked ways. In the first instance is the whipping of anti-communist hysteria within the ANC. This 'red-gevaar' ploy is an attempt to mobilise ANC members against the supposed take-over of the ANC by Cosatu and the SACP. Second, there has been a premature opening of the leadership contestation for the top-six positions. In addition, assertions by those who started this premature election campaign that President Zuma's position itself is not

safe due to the fact that there is no unequivocal stance that he will serve two-terms, has further deepened divisions not only within the ANC but also with its alliance partners. The NGC has called for a moratorium on electioneering for the 2012 ANC Conference, and the need for discipline even among its structures and members. However the die is cast as a grouping within the ANC has now put their colours on the mast in terms of their preference for leadership. In this context the Nationalisation debate has been used to intimidate people from expressing their views for fear of not being supported in the 2012 Conference. There is no doubt that the campaign is being conducted clandestinely, and there is no reason to believe that it would not follow the same lines set out above.

As indicated above, government was reconfigured by President Zuma after the 2009 general elections. It remains an open question whether the hoped for improvement in development planning, coordination and implementation has been achieved. In fact it is too early to evaluate the impact of the changes in government. Recently, the President reshuffled his cabinet by removing seven Ministers and appointing new ones and 4 deputies. Although the reasons for the reshuffling have not been openly stated, it is clear that the President's signal is to accelerate delivery. Some of the former Ministers were dogged by corruption allegations, and this clearly could have also influenced the President's decision to change his cabinet.

The substantial reshuffling of cabinet mid-term is an unprecedented act in the post-apartheid era. There is no doubt however that the President seems to be focusing the energy of government on implementation. Evidence of this in-

cludes the signing of performance agreements with Ministers. We must emphasise that the tradition which began with the appointment of this cabinet, although the prerogative of the President, should be premised with consultation with the SACP and Cosatu. This was one of major problems pre-Polokwane, a commitment towards a strong alliance should not be undermined by continuing with this tradition.

At policy level government and the ANC leadership have been sending mixed signals. On the one hand they suggest that the 'fundamental' of macroeconomic management will be retained. In contrast, there is a signal that policy is likely to change on some questions like rural development, a New Growth Path strategy and reprioritised industrial policy interventions. Is this not the perhaps the time for the Alliance to boldly have the courage on economic questions and wrest control from the corporate sector especially given the fact that the neo-liberal agenda has failed our economy? To what extent does Cosatu's Growth Path and the SACP's interventions of the New Growth Path complement various interventions generated from the ANC NGC on the way forward, and a bold recommitment towards changing the economic trajectory in order to change the lives of our people?

There is clear commitment by the current government to deal effectively with corruption both in the public and private sector. We should however restate, as the YCL, that corruption is inherent within capitalism, and that at the core of capitalist production is the corrupt and exploitative relationship that exists between the capitalist and the workers, and thus, the fight against corruption is also in itself a struggle against

capitalism. Corruption is equally theft from public resources meant to improve the quality of life of our people. There is a distortion that the campaign against corruption is a fight against wealth accumulation by black individuals, and an inference that rich black people are corrupt. This is not true, the reality is that “tenderpreneurship” is a threat to entrepreneurship, and that it should be fought at all levels as it distorts the economy, promotes political infighting and destroys possible job opportunities. We assert that there is a link between corruption and the manipulation of democratic processes within our structures as individuals use their largesse to fund electoral platforms within our organisations.

The campaign against corruption, in the current instance for example when government is looked at from its programme on the matter, is not a fight against legitimate business dealings but against the corrupt nature of some of the dealings under capitalism. We have to also insist that allegations of corruption should never be used as a platform to purge political opponents, as was the case in the build up to Polokwane, but individuals who are accused of corruption should not hide behind this principle, and should rather clear themselves on any corruption allegation.

Finally, we must intensify the campaign to ensure that politicians, in particular public office bearers and representatives do not hold any business interests. If someone wants to be a politician, then they must focus on servicing the people and not filling in tender documents. That is one of the reasons why politicians are better paid.

#### **4 Political tasks of the youth**

The aim of this section is to sketch the political challenges confronting the YCL for debate at this Congress. The YCL straddles two political fronts – i.e. the Alliance and the mass democratic movement. Participating in Alliance processes gives the YCL ‘inside’ privilege to shape the politics of the Alliance and ultimately government policies. At the same time the YCL has an interest in championing youth development as an autonomous formation under the guidance of the SACP.

YCL must continue to find relevance by taking up issues affecting the youth. If it were to lose touch with this constituency it will be hard to mobilise young people under the banner of YCL. The YCL owes its existence primarily to its members and young people in general. While the youth movement must pioneer new ideas it must be careful not to confuse radicalism/militancy with recklessness.

#### **Defending and deepening the democratic revolution**

History teaches us the important lesson that it is not uni-linear but moves in waves bringing progress and setbacks. Sociologists say history is not teleological or does not follow some predetermined path toward an inevitable outcome. Human action or urgency is therefore pivotal in shaping the course and outcomes of history. But as Marx once pointed out, “we make history in condition not of our own choosing”. History can be reversed as attested by the collapse of many ancient civilisations and by the collapse of former soviet bloc and many promising revolutionary projects. Change and progress are not synonymous. There can

be change without progress such as for example descent into fascism.

It is against this background that we ought to approach debates around the trajectory of the NDR. The NDR has reached an important junction – one route is a naked capitalist project with a non-racial minority at the helm or a mass project that substantially addresses the historical fault-lines of class, race, gender and geography. What type of a future will the current crop of young people inherit? The YCL is therefore in a privileged position to contribute towards shaping the future course of the NDR.

It is now trite to appreciate the relative progress of the NDR in the post-apartheid South Africa. The dominant discourse within the ranks of the democratic movement leans towards a mass-empowerment type revolutionary project. It cannot be taken for granted that this project will continue to be hegemonic as illustrated by ongoing debates within the ANC-led democratic movement. The contest is between two schools of thought regarding the characterisation of the NDR and what is possible.

At one end of the spectrum is a nascent view that by dislodging the apartheid regime the NDR has completed its task. Of course this is a gross simplification of the approach that has found favour with a section of the leadership of the mass democratic movement. In this scenario the task of the democratic movement or government are construed in a very 'reformist' fashion. Arguments like 'de-racialising' capitalism – a vague notion – fall within this perspective. In its crude form it includes notions that the 'black' son must eat regardless of how that wealth is generated!

Conceived in this narrow view the aim of the NDR is therefore to insert the black majority and the black working class into the un-transformed structures of white capital. This perspective cannot explain the reproduction of dualistic development – i.e. stupendous wealth co-existing with mass poverty. The perspective also lacks a coherent and systematic programme to eradicate the structural unemployment, inequality and poverty.

The dominant discourse, - at least in the sense of having mass appeal – is the historical position that still insists on the need for a revolutionary transformation of this country. For as long as the structure and institutions that reproduce inequality exist the attainment of the basic aims of the NDR remains in jeopardy. We must recall that the current economic structure was designed to benefit a minority while confining the majority into a position of servitude. It goes without saying that radical transformation will entail changing the structure of ownership, production and distribution. It is inevitable that a minority will reap immediate benefits due its relative skills, connections and so forth. BUT that is not the basic goal of the NDR. The revolution is about mass empowerment which necessitates the remaking of South Africa into a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

The past 16 years may have laid some foundation but much needs to be done to deepen the democratic revolution. This implies that the political task of the *youth movement is to propel the democratic revolution towards a fairly equal and transformed society*. As such, it is important to guard against the hijacking of the NDR by a narrow, acquisitive, muscular and parasitic black national-

ism on the one hand. In class terms this implies that we defeat the ascendancy of the ideology of a minority black capitalist and professional class.

On the other hand it requires defeating white monopoly capital stranglehold over the economy. Capital will continue to play an important role in the current phase of the NDR. The relationship between capital and the democratic movement is one of conflict and mutual dependence. It is also important to understand that capital is not homogenous even though it may be ideologically opposed to a radical democratic project. Capital's long term survival requires that the economy be transformed to draw in a majority of black people into the economic mainstream from extreme levels of disempowerment. For as long as the economy narrowly depends on consumption by a minority capital will seek opportunities elsewhere.

The antidote to the narrow nationalist ideology is the 'liberatory' non-racial politics of the democratic movement. At the core of this non-racialism is the acceptance that we need a project of mass empowerment that addresses the systemic nature of inequality and exclusion. It is against this background, that the YCL has to *defend and deepen the democratic revolution*.

It is important to unpack these concepts. Tyranny and authoritarianism will not announce their arrival. Sitting on our laurels we may wake up one day and find that the political space to operate has been shut down. Many post-colonial societies have slipped into authoritarian regimes – both civilian and military – in which a small oligarchy benefits at the expense of the people by pillaging natural resources and the public purse.

It is therefore of paramount impor-

tance that the youth movement defend the democratic space. The politics of fear, personality cults and authoritarian control of the organisation and the state should be a thing of the past. We must be at the forefront of the struggles to ensure internal democracy in the organisation and defend the political space in which we currently operate.

South Africa's inequality means that many of our people cannot enjoy the political and socio-economic rights enshrined in the Constitution. It is a character of class societies that wealth tends to mediate citizens' enjoyment of democratic and universal rights. Through their monopoly the rich tend to have a disproportionate influence on policy and the political process. Such a situation dilutes the universal equality promised by the Constitution for example the right to vote.

For as long as mass poverty, unemployment and inequality persist democracy will remain shallow as only a minority will have influence. It is from that perspective that we talk about *deepening democracy*. The youth movement is confronted by a big challenge of empowering the masses of our people to take advantage of the democratic space that has been opened. It requires that we organise our people to participate in structures of popular governance and insist on popular participation in policy-making. We must be guided by the slogan – *Nothing about us without us!*

The YCL cannot act alone or in a vacuum. It must build alliances with other progressive youth movement and the broader democratic movement to attain this goal. The league must also be exemplary as a movement characterised by intense internal democracy. Of course this does not mean tolerating a free-for-all

anarchy that does not respect organisational processes and democratic centralism. However, we must be the image of the society we want to build and should stand for democracy even if this makes us unpopular.

### **The struggle for socialism**

A lot has been written about socialism in recent years, mostly why it is not feasible. The YCL's task is to defend and popularise the idea of socialism among the young people to counter this anti-socialist backlash. A useful starting point is a definition of socialism. Socialism is a society in which: "the economy is socially owned (by all), democratically controlled, utilised to meet the needs of all people, subject to democratic and humanistic planning based on the principle that the "free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all, Le Blanc, p.8."

Socialism is fundamentally a post-capitalist society in which the means of production are socially owned, democratically controlled and used to the benefit of all. Elements of socialism can be present in a capitalist society but fully developed socialism can only exist after a rupture with capitalism. This is an important point to stress since social democracy is often confused with socialism. Social democracy is essentially using the capitalist market to improve the living conditions of the working class without altering the private ownership of the means of production. However whether petty ownership and a market (exchange of goods and services) are incompatible with socialism at least in the earliest stage is a moot point.

Socialism is also an ethical and ideological framework in addition to being an economic system. In the first in-

stance is the control of the economy for the benefit of all. Arising from this is an ethic of cooperation and social solidarity which should be distinguished from the selfishness of capitalism and all class based society. Cuba is a prime example of a country that strives to build a socialist ethical society even if the economy may not be fully developed socialism.

By definition socialism is a transitional society in which the working class is raised to a position of the ruling class. The working class has the historical tasks of raising the level of development such that a truly classless society – communism can be constructed. The gradual development of socialism is supposed to lay the basis for the withering away of the state and classes and as such a communist society.

The Soviet experiment was the first historical project to attempt socialist construction *within a given set of particular historical conditions*. Later distortions in the Soviet Union should not obscure the historical significance of the 1917 Revolution. In the South African context we have argued that the NDR is the direct route towards socialist society. However what about the rest of Africa and the world? The YCL confronts the contemporary challenge of theorising about the transition to socialism not only in South Africa but across the globe. The current generation of young communist ought to trouble themselves with the development of a theory of world revolution. In addition, it confronts the task of developing a vision of socialism that is truly democratic (in the sense of proletarian democracy) and is socially owned and controlled.

The soviet experience show that state control is not synonymous with democratic control by society. Rather

an oligarchy used its privilege position to perpetuate itself, exploit the working class and build a huge apparatus to achieve its aims. Hence sometimes the soviet experience is loosely called a state capitalism project. Socialism and communism should be about expanding human freedom in the true sense by ensuring that all people benefit from the social control of the means of production. Anything short of this ideal cannot be defined as socialism.

**Ideological warfare – raising the class consciousness of the youth**

The YCL faces a titanic battle for the heart and soul of young people. Young people are bombarded by the culture of crass materialism and individualism promoted through the mass media and popular culture. The education system support this ideological brainwashing of young people by suppressing critical thought and promoting the values of capitalism.

We need a counter-culture that inculcates the values of the democratic movement and of the working class in the minds of young people. These values include selflessness, social solidarity and caring about what is happening around you. We cannot take it for granted that the ANC dominance of the politics necessarily mean that the values young people are brought under are democratic and progressive. That is why it is important that we launch a conscious programme to change the class consciousness of young people. We need to use political education and cultural programme to deepen the understanding of socialist and communist alternatives among young people.

Of necessity this requires effort to deepen understanding and confidence

in our theory of revolution – Marxism-Leninism. Marxism, according to Le Blanc, drawing on Lenin's three source – can be summarised as having the following five fundamental component: 1) a philosophical approach to reality; 2) theory of history; 3) analysis of capitalism; 4) political programme for the working class and 5) a vision of a socialist future<sup>1</sup>. Annexure A provides a full explanation of these elements.

Marxism can be conceived as a “way of thinking” (*Isaac Deutscher*) and a “guide to action” (*Lenin*). Interpretation of these two ways of understanding Marxism has produced different variants since the death of both Marx and Engels. However, as noted by Le Blanc: “Marx was seeking to resolve a number of inherently irreconcilable dilemmas in the epistemology (theory of knowledge) and sociology of the social sciences”. Schematically, the contradictions are:

- An activity theory of knowledge versus a copy theory;
- Voluntarism, according to which men make their own history versus structural constraints of mechanistic determinism;
- Human nature seen as essence versus human nature seen as re-created by history;
- Class role and persona of persons as against diverse individual motivations, and the mechanisms that mediate between the two concepts;
- The “logic of history” versus moral condemnation of inhumanities;

Scientific inquiry as either theoretical or historical, for it cannot be both simultaneously; thus one has either a logical

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Le Blanc, *From Marx to Gramsci: A Reader in Revolutionary Marxist Politics*, pp.4-9

explanation through a conceptual prism or an empirical explanation seeking to identify actual sequences.

A general theory of “society” and its determining mode (or even requisites) versus a historicist theory of specific, qualitatively different social formations.

Marxism is not a dogma but a dynamic theory that provide tools of analysis. The general conclusion drawn by Marx about the nature of capitalism and the necessity for revolutionary change remain relevant today. However, Marxism is not a formulaic theory that contains set answers for any social phenomenon. Human knowledge in terms of nature, society, history and theory of knowledge has advanced since the time of Marx. Further, capitalism itself has changed from the ‘atomistic’ small scale enterprises to large highly concentrated global enterprises. Marx gave us the tools our task is to find answers in the contemporary period. Lenin argued that practice is the criterion to measure the relevance and usefulness of any theory. Besides, there is a two-way feedback system between theory and practice.

Occupying the space already polluted by the glitz, bling and glamour generation makes it even more difficult for us to challenge the ideological space entrenched by capitalism. Challenging such ideas in society, entrenched on a daily basis by the mainstream media, would require an organisation that is principled and prepared to swim against the ideological tide. What kind of celebrity (and therefore role model) is imposed on society by the media? In our society, celebrities are determined on the basis of what car they drive and what lifestyle they lead, and not on the basis of the values entrenched by revolutionary morality, the ideological warfare and

the real transformation of society is still a distant future. When those within the liberation movement choose to defend flagrant display of wealth and opulence, instead of challenging those who are involved in such a lifestyle, then we are too far from the ideals set by the *Freedom Charter* and the goals of the NDR.

We are the YCL of the *South African Communist Party*, which declared long ago that even though it is guided by the scientific ideology developed or discovered by Marx and Engels, both German Europeans, it finds resonance in the values of *ubuntu*. The simplest and basic weapons of our ideology can even be better explained by pre-civilisation African knowledge expressed through idioms and bed-night stories. Our Marxism is connected to these. The Marxism-Leninism of *African Communist* is embedded in love and respect for fellow human beings, humility and humbleness, equal contribution to production, distribution and exchange of commodities through the battering system, respect and care for the elders and many others. The current ideology, whose foundation is capitalist social relations, promotes disrespect, greed, hatred and arrogance, and relegates to secondary status the values of our forefathers. Thus, for Mandela’s *ubuntu* to succeed, capitalism has to be defeated.

#### **Building alliances**

It is a truism that the working class should win as many supporters to its cause (building working class consciousness) in order to weaken the hegemony of the capitalist. From time to time and under different conditions the working class will form strategic and tactical alliance to advance a particular goal. This is also true for the YCL and that is why

we participate in the Progressive Youth Alliance, and importantly, how we have mobilised various youth forces behind several of our campaigns.

The YCL's objective in participating in and forming alliance is informed by the twin objective to rally as many youth formations around immediate challenges and crucially to win over as many young people in to the cause of socialism. The strategic task facing us is to define a programme of mass activism to unite the broadest coalition of young people around youth development issues. It is through struggles around issues affecting young people that we will find resonance and synergy with the broader youth movement

The coalition of various (sometimes opposing) political and social forces through the Jobs for Youth Summit, and our engagement with formations such as Afri-Forum Youth and the Freedom Front-plus and many other initiatives, are an important platform to ensure that we place our agenda on the table, for engagement with the hope of winning over even those who hate it. It also expressed the confidence we have about the ideas of socialism and of a national and democratic society.

#### **Strengthening the organisation**

The re-establishment of the YCL was an inspired move by the South African Communist Party. It has created a vehicle for mobilising young people along socialist/communist line. We are therefore an important instrument to agitate for socialist ideas among young people. It is important that the league captures the imagination of young people and attract them to socialist ideas. The organisational report will demonstrate the strides that have been taken to build the

league since the Re-Establishment Congress.

A strong and vibrant organisation is one of the weapons in the hands of the oppressed and exploited. The ultimate goal is to draw a mass of young people into the ranks of the league. In particular, we must draw young people from working class communities and other sympathetic youth into the folds of the league.

A programme of building a strong organisation is therefore a necessity. We should draw our strength from the unity and organisation of our members. The elements of an organisation building project should entail:

- Mass recruitment: centred around our Operation Khula and its specific goals and time-frames;

- Building branches and units of the league, together with Youth Clubs: as a basis for a national footprint, and ensuring that young people throughout the country are organised through this structures;

- Campaigns on issues confronting the youth: which is an areas we have always excelled, including our campaigns on *Jobs for Youth*, for Free Education, HIV-Aids, male circumcision and on access to sanitary towels by working class women;

- Political education: this is central to the existence of the YCL as a preparatory school for the SACP. The primary task of the YCL is to introduce young people to the ideals, vision and programme of the SACP, and ensure that we *mobilise, education, agitate, learn and fight* against capitalism;

- Cultural programmes: as a way of life of youth. We cannot afford to build structures of the YCL that will merely become their political home without these

structures being central to the inculcate working class culture. We see culture as a weapon of *working class* theory; and finally,

- International solidarity and work: the struggle for socialism, just like its anti-thesis of capitalism, is an international struggle. We have to ensure that the values of democracy, national unity, freedom of women from patriarchy, social and economic justice, solidarity, collectivism, and environmental sustainability are values which are shared internationally by young people.

- Resource mobilisation: we need financial sustainability in order to service and finance the revolution. Financial independence of the YCL equates to its political independence, and thus, its uncompromising ability to fearlessly confront the challenge facing young people. We have to turn the little contributions by our members into a sustainable financial resource for ultimate stability.

The YCL must also contribute to the building of the broad mass democratic movement in particular the SACP. A strong YCL will not thrive if it is surrounded by weak formations in the democratic movement.

### **Annexure A: five components of Marxism according to Le Blanc**

**ONE:** A philosophical approach to reality, that is

- *Dialectical* (reality is a complex, interacting, developing totality; it evolves through the contradictory interactions among and inherent within its component parts; things can only be understood in their contexts – i.e. their own course of development, and their inter-

actions with other aspects of reality).

- *Materialist* (reality is based on the structure and dynamics of matter and energy; we may not yet understand all the laws of nature, but things that we cannot understand are not the result of “supernatural” or mystical causes; God is a creation of people, not the other way around; human beings and human societies can best be understood not on the basis of their expressed ideas but on the basis of how they live, their way of life);

- *Humanistic* (human beings are – for people – the most important part of reality; essential qualities of being human include: a striving toward self-determination [or freedom], creative labour, and community [or meaningful relations with others]; those things which stunt, mutilate, oppress or degrade people must be fought against; a society should be developed which allows for the free development of each person).

**TWO:** A theory of history which

- Sees human society as having evolved through stages: primitive “tribal” communism; slave civilisations; feudalism, capitalism (with some significant variations in non-European societies – for example, in some cases involving what Marx called “the Asiatic mode of production”); capitalism has not always existed and will not always exist;

- Integrates economics, political science, sociology, anthropology –emphasising that the activities and relationships enter into in order to get things they need and want form a social structure and way of life (including power relationships among people) which must be grasped if we wish to make sense of their religious, intellectual and political practices, precepts and conflicts;

- Give emphasis of technological de-

velopment and economic productivity as helping to shape – often decisively – broader historical developments (for example: the creation of economic surpluses through agricultural innovations made possible the rise of slave civilisations; the creation of even greater productivity through the development of industrial technology under capitalism makes possible a future society of abundance for all);

- Stresses the centrality of class struggle in human history – which from the time of the ancient slave civilisations, has involved ongoing tensions and conflicts (“now hidden, now open”) between exploited, labouring majorities and the privileged minorities who appropriate the economic surplus created by the majority’s labour.

**THREE:** an analysis of capitalism in which (among other things)

- Capitalism can be defined as: an economy that is privately owned (by a minority), and basically controlled by owners, used for the purpose of making profits for the owners; a form of generalised commodity production (that is, in which more and more aspects of life are drawn into a buying and selling – or market – economy);

- It is grasped that under fully developed capitalism a majority of those in the labour force can only make their living by selling their labour-power (ability to labour) to the capitalists, and that the source of the capitalist’s profits can be found in the actual labour that the employers are able to squeeze out of the workers.

- It is understood that capitalism – in its necessary pursuit of profit – is incredibly dynamic, continually evolving (into highly concentrated and increasingly

efficient economic enterprises) and expanding into ever more realms of social life as well as into ever more areas of the globe;

- There is an identification of devastating internal contradictions within capitalism (such as the tendency toward overproduction; and a tendency of the rate of profit to fall, due to utilisation of more and more technology) leaving to periodic economic depressions, and the contradictions between social organisation but private ownership of the economy generating a variety of other problems and dislocations;

- Related to this last point, innumerable social problems – including war, poverty, racism, sexism, erosion of democracy, ecological devastation, etc – are traced to the economic dynamics and the structure of power inherent in capitalism itself.

**FOUR:** a political programme for the working class which insists that the emancipation of the working class can only come from the workers themselves, while at the same time seeing this evolving majority class as the key to the liberation of society from the problems generated by capitalism – but more specifically identifying the advance of the working class as coming from:

- The organisation of increasingly inclusive and socially conscious trade unions to defend immediate interests of the workers;

- overcoming competitive divisions that fragment the consciousness and power of the working class;

- the formation of an independent political party of the working class which will seek to “win the battle of democracy”;

- the struggle for various social re-

forms being blended into a commitment to place power exclusively in the hands of the working class majority (that is, what is sometimes called ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, but workers’ state or workers democracy are clearer formulations);

- an understanding that the capitalists may use violence to prevent the workers from taking power, and that the workers’ movements must be prepared to see such capitalist violence is not allowed to triumph;

- the commitment of the triumphant working class to initiate the socialist reconstruction of society;

- an understanding that the work-

ing class, combating the global capitalist system, must organise cooperatively across national boundaries and organise effective international organisations to advance their struggles; and that socialism too cannot triumph unless it is built on a global scale.

**FIVE:** *a vision of a socialist society in which the economy is socially owned (by all), democratically controlled and utilised to meet the needs of all people, subject to democratic and humanistic planning based on the principle “that the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all”.* ★

## AUGMENTED CENTRAL COMMITTEE

# Political report to the Central Committee

This report was submitted to the 14<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the 12<sup>th</sup> SACP Central Committee on 26-28 November 2010

Over the past year, in the nearly 12 months since the SACP met in last year's Special National Congress, the Party, working closely with its allies, has succeeded in realising a number of key objectives.

In the first place, and above all, we are finally beginning to consolidate within our Alliance and within government, the SACP's long-running battle to win hegemony for the understanding that the key task of the NDR in the present period is to place our economy on to a *new*, job-creating and egalitarian growth path that radically breaks with the semi-colonial economy within which we remain locked.

### The battle for a New Growth Path

The battle within our movement and within wider society to secure hegemony for this perspective goes back to the early 1990s and the debates around the class character of what was to become the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP 1994). Because versions of these debates continue to play a role in our present reality, it is important to recall, briefly, what was at stake in the

early 1990s.

There were various competing views within our movement as to what the RDP should be. On the one hand, there was a **syndicalist** view that the RDP should essentially be a negotiated electoral pact between Cosatu and the ANC. In exchange for labour's electoral support, a future ANC government would deliver on a range of demands. This view was limited and lacked an understanding of the revolutionary Alliance we were seeking to build, of the national democratic developmental state we needed to consolidate, and of the revolutionary transformation of our society that was required. In practice, it represented an adaptation to the post-1990 reality by some of those who had formerly been hostile to the ANC and SACP, and who were involved in various **workerist** currents within Fosatu and later Cosatu. Nonetheless, their proposals for the RDP did, of course, contain many progressive elements but these tended to remain de-linked from an overall NDR (and therefore anti-imperialist) strategy. Some of those most active at the time in advancing this essentially syndicalist

position went on to play a leading (and sometimes problematic) role in former president Mbeki's successive cabinets.

A second perspective on what the RDP should be was, essentially, a centrist social-democratic or "Keynesian" view. In this case, the argument was that we should advance a strategic perspective of growth *through* redistribution. Again, this perspective contained many progressive elements, but it failed to seriously address the revolutionary transformation of the productive economy – and therefore the critical class questions of ownership, control, job-creation, and skills. In the latter part of the 1990s, when questions began to be posed around the ownership and control of the commanding heights of the economy, the illusion that transformation was the equivalent of redistribution played into the hands of an emerging narrow BEE stratum. Some R500-billion of equity was redistributed through statutorily required empowerment deals – but it has manifestly been redistribution *without* systemic transformation of our productive economy. If anything, narrow BEE has further entrenched our semi-colonial economic reality.

The centrist social-democratic delinking of "transformation" from the productive economy, and locating "transformation" largely in the sphere of "redistribution", played into the hands of what was to become the hegemonic current within our movement and the new government – what we might call "redistributive neo-liberalism", or "neo-liberalism with a social conscience" (or "the 1996 class project" for short). Essentially this position grasped onto the mistaken view of the social democrats that the RDP was essentially a "redistributive" programme. Agreeing with

most of the redistributive targets – for example 3-million RDP houses – they then asked: But how will we pay for this redistribution? And this became the door through which a neo-liberal growth strategy (Growth, Employment and Redistribution, or Gear) boldly entered. Gear presented itself as a government macro-economic intervention that would facilitate private-sector driven growth that would create the resources for an "RDP" redistribution programme.

Of course it cannot also be argued that the 'redistribution' measures of the 1996 class project did not aim at redistribution as such, but were measures aimed at ameliorating some of the worst effects of its neo-liberal programme.

And, indeed, within the confines of its paradigm, this (capitalist-led) growth *and* redistribution programme had some successes – sustained (if not spectacular) growth and a whole range of "deliveries". But, because it failed to lead a process of active transformation of the existing growth path, it simply helped to facilitate a return to growth along the old semi-colonial path, which in turn reproduced massive unemployment and a whole range of class, gendered, geographic and racialised inequalities. The reproduction of these systemic problems at crisis levels within our society has, in turn, often simply overwhelmed the impact of the various redistributive achievements (social grants, housing, electricity and water connections, etc.)

It is against this background that the SACP needs to appreciate the major programmatic and policy shifts represented by government's earlier announcement of the Industrial Policy Action Programme 2 (IPAP 2) and, especially, this week's public unveiling of the New

Growth Path plan.

While we should certainly debate the detail of both IPAP and the NGP, this time around we must not allow detail to distract us from consolidating and defending the absolutely critical policy and programmatic shift that these policies now represent. In essence this shift is characterised by the following key features:

- An agreement that we have to radically transform the systemic features of our present productive economy;
- The key objective is not to achieve an arbitrary GDP growth target (for example, 6% or 7%), but job creation and greater equality;
- These outcomes can only be achieved through active state intervention in the economy – through, amongst other things, planning, state-led investment, and the consolidation of a strong, strategically-mandated SOE and DFI sector. This will require a strategically-disciplined, democratic state capable of driving a state-led but people-driven transformation process.
- The imperative of aligning macro-economic policies with our industrial policy and other productive economy objectives.
- The imperative of state-led coordination of and *between* critical sectors of society – the productive economy, education and skills training, infrastructure development and environmental sustainability.
- As much as possible, our redistributive interventions must also contribute coherently to the progressive transformation of the productive economy – for example, land redistribution can no longer simply be guided by principles of civil rights and historical redress (as important as these might be).

- The achievement of a new growth path will not be possible without also addressing the way in which SA has historically been located within the global capitalist system as a semi-peripheral primary commodity exporter and regional sub-imperial power – “a (capitalist) gateway to Africa”. The achievement of a NGP in SA will depend critically on our ability to play a progressive role in the reconstruction and development of our region. It will also depend on our ability to manoeuvre strategically within the context of major structural shifts within the global reality, not least through deepening anti-imperialist South-South relations.

These are the fundamental core features of the New Growth Path. We need to recognise the major victory they represent for a long and persistent ideological and programmatic battle waged by the SACP over the last two decades. Of course, for the moment the NGP is, essentially a document and a series of projects some partially implemented others in the pipeline. We now need to ensure we move towards active state-led people-driven and systematic implementation, and this will require, amongst other things, maximum working-class unity, Alliance unity based on a principled agreement on the key strategic task of our NDR in the present conjuncture, and an ongoing ideological battle on several fronts...which brings us to:

#### **The anti-majoritarian liberal offensive**

Those in our society who are opposed to fundamental transformation, and, therefore, who are essentially opposed to a New Growth Path, naturally seek to shift politics onto a terrain that they calculate is most favourable for them to put us onto the defensive. They seek to pro-

duce a particular reading of South Africa that, they hope, will dominate on the airwaves, in the print media columns, and generally hegemonise public debate. If you succeed in shaping the terrain, then you shape how most South Africans, often unconsciously, begin to understand our challenges and how they respond to them in practice.

As things have shifted, these anti-transformation forces have adapted their tactics. For instance, the break-away of Cope initially fuelled grandiose hopes of being able to pose a serious electoral threat to the ANC on the party political front. With the implosion of Cope, they have once more swung much of their attention away from the party political terrain and back towards “civil society”. But the underlying strategic agenda remains the same – to constrain the democratic state, to weaken and divide the majority, to sow popular demoralisation about government, and to mobilise against what is supposed to be a dire threat to our constitution emanating from the “ruling elite”.

We should, of course, not be in denial about the serious gaps opened up for this line of attack by real weaknesses within the state and the ANC and our Alliance formations. In particular, there is a compradorial and parasitic rent-seeking stratum within our movement, often linked to a demagogic populism that has little respect for legality or the constitution. Anti-majoritarian liberal forces are happy to provide a media megaphone for this demagogic populism – the better to be able to condemn us all. The existence of this phenomenon (what we have called “the new tendency”) creates space for all manner of anti-ANC forces. This is why it is absolutely imperative that the government, the ANC and its

alliance partners together lead the process of dealing firmly, and without fear or favour, with the scourge of corruption and demagoguery.

However, using the gap created by this minority “new tendency” within our own ranks (and seeking to present its antics as the “real” ANC), the anti-transformation forces seek to displace the liberation movement’s strategic hegemony with their own anti-majoritarian liberalism. In essence this consists in trying to displace the idea of an ongoing national democratic revolution with a politics of “civil rights claims”. This is done by establishing a false dichotomy between the realisation of civil rights in SA and the NDR, with the latter portrayed as the “enemy” of civil rights and the Constitution.

In any case we do need to interrogate the notion of ‘civil society’ as essentially a liberal notion. ‘Civil society’ is not inherently progressive, ‘better than the state’, capable of acting as a ‘check upon the state’, as it is composed of a variety of class forces and different political currents even within the same classes. For example AFri-Forum is part of civil society, just as a variety of bourgeois institutions and think tanks are part of civil society, and in fact do seek to shape civil society along its own class interests.

For a variety of reasons, this anti-majoritarian liberalism has managed to build up a fair degree of momentum over the last several years. More problematically, we are also beginning to see a growing convergence between this more right-wing, free market liberalism and a more centre-left leaning, NGO-“social movement” liberalism. In our current reality liberalism (in both its versions) seeks to shift the centre of our national debate:

- From the necessity for a radical structural transformation of our society (basically placing our economy onto a “new growth path”)... to a debate about defending civil rights (as if radically transforming our economy was not fundamental to the real consolidation of civil rights for all South Africans.) Liberalism also tends to reduce freedom only to legalities, important as these maybe, and, depending on what variety it is, tends to be silent about ‘socio economic rights’ (right wing liberalism) or projecting the state as inherently incapable of driving meaningful socio-economic transformation (social liberalism).

- From the necessity of organising and building people’s power both outside and *inside* of the state ... to defending individual rights by organising “civil society” as a watchdog against the state. For right-wing liberalism the emphasis is on restricting the state, for social liberalism the emphasis tends to fall more on demanding that the state “deliver” on its constitutional mandate (an essentially “redistributionist” rather than transformational agenda). This largely redistributionist approach quickly plays into a right-wing liberal agenda that says – fine, but to redistribute you need the private sector to “grow the size of the cake”. Whatever the differences of emphasis, both currents tend to “blame” the state (and ruling party) one-sidedly for all short-comings and problems (whether a lack of delivery or corruption). Linked to this, is the attempt to move the debate and strategic programme –

- From an analysis of *all* power relations in our society including the power of capital... to an analysis that suggests that all (or most) power vests with the state and the rest of society is “civil society” a collection

of powerless individual citizens (or at best minorities) whose private property (according to right-wing liberalism) or basic social rights (the social liberals) are constantly under threat from the state and political elites. We get a politics that masquerades as a-political, an anti-politics politics that regards political-politics as fundamentally “dirty”. This anti-politics politics is, in turn, linked to the attempt to shift us programmatically –

- From a radical and popular *nationalism* that is inclusive (non-racial and non-tribalist), that organises and mobilises on the basis of the black majority’s extensive traditions of struggle and ongoing (and legitimate) sense of national grievance... to a discourse about the “tyranny of the majority” and Afro-pessimism. In this discourse we are increasingly getting choral interplays between right-wing liberals and social liberals, like the duet pioneered by RW “Bill” Johnson and Khehla Shubane (chummy partners in the *Business Day’s* long-running *Dear Bill/Dear Khehla* series). Lately, cde Kader Asmal’s declaration “it is time to scrap the NDR”, has been warmly responded to by a right-wing liberal chorus (eg. Paul Hoffman, “Asmal is right: it’s time to abandon the ‘revolution’”, *Business Day*, 8 Nov 2010). Linked to which is the attempt to displace the national debate and our programmatic agenda...

- From locating our own national democratic struggle within the wider context of an internationalist struggle against imperialism and the head-long destruction of our planet by capitalism’s profit-maximising imperative of resource-depleting

compound growth...to the idea of “post”-colonialism (ie: oppression of the South is supposedly now more or less over, any problems can be ascribed to Third World/African political elites).

**The state of the South African working class**

This liberal chorus is generally sustained by middle strata, professionals, key sectors of the intelligentsia, the commercial media, etc. But to what extent is the working class itself vulnerable to the impact of this incessant chorus?

To answer this question it is necessary to reflect on the possible impact on the political outlook of workers of some 15 years of economic battering. For 15 years the working class has been carrying the burden of the neo-liberal policies pursued from the mid-1990s. During this period, the working class in key sectors suffered mass retrenchments, widespread casualisation, fragmentation, and intensified exploitation, including through the runaway expansion of labour brokering.

The working class has of course never been just a victim. It has waged massive, often heroic struggles to roll back the state and private sector-led neo-liberal offensive. Prior to and immediately following the 1994 democratic breakthrough, the working class notched up important victories. These included the 1996 Constitution, which enshrined the right to form unions and the right to strike, while denying capital any constitutional right to lock-out; the Labour Relations Act and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act; and the powerful Nedlac section 77 notice, which allows the working class to embark on protected strikes on broader

socio-economic issues.

In response to these very significant advances, capital, emboldened by government’s neo-liberal economic policies (“lowering the cost of doing business... for business”), embarked on a massive restructuring of both the work-place and the working class itself, precisely in order to undermine the important political, constitutional and legal gains made after 1994.

Capital’s assault and restructuring of the working class has been partly catalysed by a massive migration out of the South African and southern African rural countryside:

- Over the past decade-and-a-half, over a million farm-workers and their family members have been ejected from the “white” commercial farming countryside – principally due to rapid mechanisation in agriculture and the removal of most apartheid-era protectionist measures in place for white commercial farming. This has created a massive cheap labour reserve in squalid peri-urban and rural settlements, compounding the pressures of an already high rural-to-urban migration that had started to increase in the dying years of apartheid.

- The declining levels of employment in white commercial agriculture has been further compounded by the neglect of the rural areas in general by government post-1994;

- The crisis in Zimbabwe (and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa), with the influx of millions of economic refugees into SA, opened up a further opportunity for capital to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class in sectors like agriculture and the hospitality industry (with “legal” and “illegal” migrants replacing already super-exploited

South Africans).

● These South African and sub-Saharan rural migrations further increased competition within an already over-subscribed and weakly developed informal sector, especially in major urban centres, sometimes providing the spark for xenophobic attacks.

Even during the “good” years (circa 2001-2007) – occasioned by a growth in a local, middle-class consumption boom, the export of primary commodities to China, and government investment in infrastructure – did not make any significant dent on unemployment.

Crisis levels of structural unemployment have persisted, and the share of GDP going to profits versus the share going to wages has seen a significant detrimental shift away from the latter. In short, the “political dividend” of the 1994 democratic breakthrough did not translate into an “economic dividend” for the great majority of South Africans, especially the working class and urban and rural poor.

The economic plight of working class youth has been particularly grave. There are now an estimated 3-million young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who are neither studying, nor in training, nor working.

In many respects it was these objective conditions that laid the material basis for the loss of power by Mbeki and the 1996 class project.

#### **The political effects of this restructuring of the working class**

The question that we need to ask now is what political effects have these developments had on the working class and on broad working class communities?

Despite continued general confidence and hope in the ANC (with the

SACP having played no small role in this regard), we must not underestimate the impact of these economic realities on working class unity, unionisation, attitudes and consciousness. The thousands of (mainly urban) mass demonstrations, though unco-ordinated, are part of the response of the working class and popular strata to their economic conditions. The waged section of the working class is carrying a disproportionate burden (largely through extended family networks) for supporting the poor in our country.

Sheer desperation and a lack of effective leadership and organisation can often lead to the upsurge of various *lumpen* tendencies among the working class, and particularly among the mass of unemployed workers, particularly the youth. But lumpenism is not only manifesting amongst sections of the working class, but also within sections of the petty bourgeoisie, embarking on rampant looting of state resources. These tendencies are, in turn, vulnerable to demagogic and populist mobilisation, and what we have referred to as the “new tendency” can also be located within these developments.

Although also suffering from widespread outsourcing, generally the public sector is the one key sector in which there has been an increase of employment (and an important transformation in terms of gender and race). As a result, this has also been the one major area of significant organisational growth for the union movement. But here, too, there have been serious problems. The hegemonic neo-liberal/redistributionist paradigm displaced what should have been a national democratic revolutionary programme with particularly problematic consequences for the new dem-

ocratic state. Neo-liberal ideologies (and their related “new management theory” approaches) resulted in top-down, bureaucratic practices on the part of political leadership and senior management in the public service (and SOEs). “Right-sizing” and factionally-based “transformation” promotions into the upper echelons led to the arrogant neglect of the critical professional requirements of key vocational, developmental and strategic sectors for the NDR – educators, health-care workers, social workers, agricultural outreach workers, police and soldiers, etc. A shared programmatic commitment to building a national democratic state, in which public sector cadres would be a key factor, was displaced by a monetarised employee/employer relationship. The more these top-down bureaucratic styles prevailed on the one side, the more they tended to reproduce a narrow public sector syndicalism focused on redistributive demands on the other.

Indeed, for a whole range of objective and subjective reasons dealt with above, apart from dangers of anarchic lumpism, there are very real dangers of a stronger re-emergence of a left deviationist syndicalist tendency within the trade union movement. It is a tendency that borrows from the radical global anti-capitalist movements that have a deep suspicion of both the state and political parties. And, while the SACP should appreciate and work with the anti-capitalist and radical sentiments of these tendencies, the syndicalist suspicion of state-power in general and political parties in general, can easily open these tendencies to a hegemonic capture by social-liberal and even anti-majoritarian liberal agenda.

The SACP has welcomed Cosatu’s recent initiative in convening a “Civil So-

ciety Conference”, and we have appreciated the assurance that this was not an attempt to launch an anti-Alliance, alternative “workers’ party”. However, and without being alarmist, the SACP will continue to interact with our Cosatu comrades to express concerns about a failure to engage effectively with Alliance partners prior to the convening of the conference on what exactly the strategic assumptions and objectives of the conference were; on some of the statements made during and after the conference which appeared to suggest contempt for political parties in general; and on some of the contents of the conference declaration which seem to mark a significant departure from Cosatu’s own commitments to a NDR.

The SACP certainly has no intention of becoming fixated with the Civil Society Conference, but we are concerned about what it might be telling us about incipient tendencies. These concerns might also be related to what the SACP has felt is a sometimes erratic and zig-zagging ambiguity in some of Cosatu’s positioning in regard to President Zuma’s administration. There have also been gratuitous public attacks on the SACP and its leadership in the recent past. This is not to say that the present administration led by President Zuma is above criticism, or that there are not real practical (as opposed to principled) challenges that the SACP confronts in effectively combining mass work while taking on joint and collective responsibility for state-power. These challenges are not resolved by making flippant accusations that easily encourage syndicalist tendencies and that fail to appreciate that popular power and working class hegemony have to be forged both outside and *inside* of the state. A nebulous

notion of “civil society” is not a revolutionary substitute for building genuine popular power and working class hegemony.

We are raising these issues not in order, now, to open up some new front of factional struggle within Cosatu, or between Cosatu and the SACP – on the contrary. The unity of Cosatu’s collective leadership, and the dynamic unity between Cosatu and the SACP over the past years has been absolutely critical in defeating the 1996 class project, in rescuing the NDR, and in placing the Alliance on a new footing. Our comradely concerns are raised because we believe that it is our core mandate and responsibility to do so.

More importantly, if we allow fractious syndicalist and other tendencies to develop, we will all fail collectively to respond to the major qualitative changes and opportunities that are now present. We have dealt at some length with the strategic programmatic breakthrough indicated by the New Growth Path document – but the challenges and opportunities of the present conjuncture also relate to the wider global situation.

**Forward to the 12<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties!**

Next weekend, the SACP will be hosting the 12<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties here in Johannesburg. Over fifty parties will be represented from all continents of the world. These meetings are beginning to gather greater coherence and momentum. At the previous two meetings (in 2008 in Sao Paulo, and in 2009 in New Delhi), participating parties naturally focused on collectively analyzing the global capitalist crisis. This year, the deep-

ening crisis of capitalism will remain a key point of focus, while we discuss specifically the role of Communists in this context in the defense of sovereignty, in deepening social alliances, and strengthening the anti-imperialist front in the struggle for peace, environmental sustainability, progress and socialism.

It will be useful for this Augmented CC to engage with some of the main theses in the Draft Declaration under preparation for this year’s meeting.

In the first place, the draft Declaration reaffirms that the present capitalist global crisis is far from over, and that it is characterized by the confluence of three core features – systemic, structural and civilisational:

“**The crisis is systemic** – despite pre-2008 capitalist illusions to the contrary, capitalism is unable to escape its in-built, systemic tendency to go through cycles of boom and bust. The current global crisis is, in part, a particularly severe (but otherwise “normal”) capitalist downturn occasioned by capitalist “over-accumulation”. Now, as in the past, there is no answer, within the logic of capitalism, to these periodic crises other than crisis itself, marked by the massive and socially irrational destruction of assets – including mass job layoffs, factory closures, and the wholesale erosion of people’s savings....

“**The crisis is structural** – the persisting crisis is compounded by significant structural changes in the world capitalist system. In particular, there is the ongoing relative decline of US economic global hegemony, general productive stagnation in most advanced capitalist economies, and the emergence of new global economic powers, notably China. Structural changes on a world scale of this kind are actively resisted by declin-

ing but still extremely aggressive imperialist powers. This active resistance has sharpened in the year since our last meeting. It includes the US-led currency war; the concentration and centralization of economic and political power within the EU; a distinct sharpening of the inter-imperialist struggle for markets and access to raw materials; expanding militarism, including the strengthening of aggressive alliances (for example, the Nato Lisbon Summit), the profusion of regional points of tension (notably in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Horn of Africa), coups in Latin America, and the increasing militarization of Africa through, amongst other things, Africom.

**“The crisis is civilisational** – there is now a well-established international scientific consensus that the current global growth trajectory, with its profit-maximising, headlong destruction of natural resources, is unsustainable. Unless it is reversed it poses a grave threat to the sustainability of human civilization itself. While generally acknowledging the threat, political elites in the dominant capitalist states are unwilling to and incapable of providing global leadership to reverse the present trajectory. Various proposals for “green technologies” and carbon trading at best represent marginal adjustments while deepening the commodification of nature, and the displacement of climate change crises onto less developed countries. The civilisational crisis that we face as humankind is directly linked to capitalism’s inability to reproduce itself except through a voracious pursuit of compound growth. It is a crisis that can only be overcome through the abolition of capitalism itself.

“Faced with these realities, every-

where capital fights back, seeking to preserve profits and to displace the burden of its crisis onto the working class, the urban and rural poor, and a wide range of middle strata. Exploitation is intensified, the state is used to rescue private bankers and financial houses while exposing future generations to unsustainable levels of debt, and there are intensified efforts to roll back social gains. As in all capitalist crises there are also attempts to divert popular insecurity into right-wing demagoguery and xenophobia. Over the recent period there has been an alarming growth of racism and extreme right-wing forces in Europe and the US. At the regional and global scale the same attempts at displacement of the crisis are to be found. Regionally, in the EU for instance, countries like Ireland and Greece are once more being subordinated to a dependent, semi-colonial status. In Africa, Asia and Latin America we are witnessing the imposition on our peoples of new mechanisms of national oppression, including economic, financial, political and military means as well as the deployment of an array of pro-imperialist NGOs.

“However, for the mass of peoples, in particular in Africa, Asia and Latin America, it is important to remember that, even before the current global economic crisis, life under capitalism was a continuing crisis, a daily struggle for bare survival. Even before the current global crisis, one billion people were living in squalid slums, and half of the world’s population was surviving on less than \$2 a day.”

The Draft Document then goes on to note that the capitalist crisis and the imperialist fight-back are being met by active resistance struggles of working class

and popular forces all over the world:

“Across the world, capital’s attempts to load the burden of the crisis onto workers and the poor is being met by working class and popular resistance.

“Over the past year, in the face of anti-civilisational austerity moves, there has been an escalation of popular struggles in Europe – in Greece, France, Portugal and elsewhere.

“Imperialist aggression in the Middle East, Central Asia and Latin America continues to meet resolute popular resistance.

“In Africa and Latin America, democratic governments, trade unions, and social movements have escalated their struggles for sovereign development and the protection of their natural resources

and bio-diversity.

“In the current reality, it is an historic imperative that as Communist and Workers’ Parties we help to strengthen these popular defensive battles and, at the same time, help to transform them into offensive struggles for the abolition of capitalism.

“In advancing this strategic agenda, there are three important areas of activist engagement to which, as Communists, we shall pay particular attention:

- The defence, consolidation and advance of popular sovereignty
- The deepening of social alliances
- Strengthening the anti-imperialist front for peace, environmental sustainability, progress and socialism.” ★

JOE SLOVO MEMORIAL LECTURE

## Coming to terms with the legacy of Comrade Joe

He would have celebrated our successes, but not been surprised at the errors ... he would have rolled up his sleeves and fixed them, writes **Ronnie Kasrils**

**P**remier of the Eastern Cape Province, honourable MECs, mayors, officials; members of the revolutionary alliance, distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen; comrades and friends:

I am greatly honoured to have been invited to give this second Joe Slovo Memorial Lecture under the auspices of the Department of Human Settlements in the Eastern Cape and the MEC, Honourable Nombulelo Mabundla. Thank you for having me here.

Today is World Habitat Day, traditionally celebrated the first Monday in October. It is appropriate to reflect that cde Joe Slovo was awarded the habitat scroll of honour by the United Nations posthumously, in 1995, the year of his untimely death. Joe Slovo was clearly an extraordinary human being. There must be rare instances indeed when a body like the UN has honoured a world communist leader; a foremost commander of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), for many years derided as “terrorist” by the key Western powers; a habitat award recipient, who had been democratic South Africa’s first Minister of Housing for a seven months, until his untimely death on 5 January 1995.

I do not intend repeating much of Slovo’s well-known historic biography, which in any case was outlined in the first of these memorial lectures. My intention is to focus on his contribution to the housing challenge we face in this country. We do, however, remind ourselves of the accolade he received on 17 December, 1994, of Isithwalandwe-Seaparankoe from the ANC. That highest award of our movement was a recognition of a lifetime of exemplary service and leadership. By way of a brief reminder I refer to such milestones as:

- His role in the reconstitution of the underground SACP in 1953 and his leadership throughout the rest of his life which saw him occupy the post of Chairman and later Secretary General of the Party;

- Building the unity in action of the ANC-led Congress Alliance of the 1950s, including being in the thick of the discussions and organisation of the Defiance Campaign, Congress of the People and Freedom Charter;

- The key role he played with cde Nelson Mandela in the creation of MK in 1961 and in personally participating in the initial operations; (by the way it was Joe who coined the term “MK” for what

in effect was a joint SACP-ANC creation of the movement's armed wing);

- His membership of the High Command of what came to be known as the Rivonia leadership and compiling with cde Govan Mbeki the Operation Mayibuye draft document;

- His instrumental and painstaking role in exile over three decades of rebuilding the movement's underground following the Rivonia reverses which saw him being central to the creation of propaganda units inside the country and later armed units;

- The driving force he displayed in exile with the likes of cdes Yusuf Dadoo, Oliver Tambo, Moses Mabhida, JB Marks, Moses Kotane, Chris Hani, in cementing the unity of the Alliance, and in particular the solid relationship between the Party and ANC;

- His key internationalist role, particularly in mobilising support of the socialist countries and developing close ties with African countries such as Angola and Mozambique for our armed and clandestine struggle; this also saw him recipient from the Soviet Union of one of their highest awards (and I am not referring to the South African security police mythology that he was a "colonel" in the KGB – Joe used to quip that he would have been kept at that rank for decades without any promotion!);

- His devotion to MK, becoming Chief of Staff, and being responsible for masterminding many special operations such as the attacks on Sasol, Voortrekkerhoogte, Air Force Headquarters etc.

- His theoretical work including helping to articulate and write the ANC's Morogoro Strategy and Tactics document, the development of our

concept of People's War, his writings such as *South Africa: No Middle Road, and Has socialism failed?* and the SACP's *Path to Power*.

- The skill and dexterity with which he contributed to the handling of negotiations after 1990;

- His inspiring leadership at the helm of the Housing Ministry;

Joe Slovo was my friend. We worked together in exile first in London and later in the Frontline States. In the last few months, with his life ebbing away I asked him what his thoughts were about those years of struggle. He commented that there were not many revolutionaries in history who were as fortunate as we were, to have survived decades of bitter struggle against huge odds, to have seen freedom, and to have had the privilege of serving the people in high government office.

As a communist who did so much to keep the Party alive and relevant as an independent vanguard of the working class, and a highly respected contingent of the world communist movement, he was absolutely loyal to the ANC; he understood that the outcome of the national liberation struggle depended on the extent to which the working class was organised for the struggle for socialism; he was a man of immense moral integrity who was full of concern for people, and had a marvellous sense of humour.

When in the 1950s during the Defiance Campaign, Father Trevor Huddleston remarked "that for a communist you would make a good Christian", quick as a flash Joe responded "and for a Christian you would make a good communist."

He was open-minded, tolerant, respectful, exceptionally modest and egalitarian in his ways. He was greatly

impressed by the modesty of Agostinho Neto and Lucio Lara in Angola, to whom he was close. He was impressed that Lucio Lara, top MPLA leader, drove a yellow Opel when he became Minister. In his pamphlet *Has Socialism Failed?* he saw the collapse of the Soviet system of Eastern Europe in the lack of democracy, and consequent alienation from the people, that he argued was not intrinsic to the ideas of socialism. He decried the extent of corruption that inevitably occurs in a closed system lacking transparency and accountability where the cult of the personality triumphed.

To bring some element of the nature and character of this unique and much loved revolutionary to the fore we can do no better than to listen to the words of the country's first democratically elected president, cde Nelson Mandela, who eulogised about Joe at his funeral in Soweto as follows: "We do draw comfort, cde Joe ... from the knowledge that you left a legacy which we shall all strive to emulate ...When future generations look back on the 1994 breakthrough, they will be justified in saying: Uncle Joe was central in making it happen.

"When the working people start enjoying, as a right, a roof over their heads, affordable medical care, quality education and a rising standard of living, they will be right to say, cde Joe was a chief architect who helped lay the foundation for a better life ..."

Those words are an abiding inspiration for those working in the housing and human settlement arena and indeed all departments of state. On the key question of the unity of revolutionary forces for the objectives we work for in the post-apartheid era, which is a precondition for the way forward in the national democratic revolution, Presi-

dent Mandela noted:

"We shall forever remember Slovo as one of the embodiments of the alliance between the ANC and the SACP. Joe knew that the interests of the working class in our country were intimately bound up with those of the rest of the oppressed majority in pursuit of democracy and a better life. He knew too that, for the working class to realise these interests, it had to play an active role in the liberation struggle and the liberation movement."

While this unity might once have been taken as a given during the bitter struggle to overthrow apartheid, President Mandela highlighted the pressing need for this continuing unity in the new phase of transformational and developmental tasks that were now on the agenda of the new democratic state.

Speaking of the exemplary manner in which Joe Slovo had proceeded to tackle the country's housing and settlements issue, President Mandela observed: "He has left us a legacy which will continue to guide our approach. And that is to mobilise all the role-players in any area of work for joint efforts to build a better life for all. I wish on behalf of Government to reiterate that the course Joe Slovo had charted will continue to guide us in fulfilling the housing programme. His firmness in dealing with obstacles to this programme will remain one of the central features of our work."

Clearly obstacles to the programme remain; just as obstacles to South Africa's overall progress remain. But to the whingers and whiners, the sceptics and the doomsayers, we point out that there is much success to celebrate and that if Joe Slovo was alive he would be celebrating those successes with us today. Every South African citizen should be aware of

the following outstanding achievement:

Since the inception of our democracy in May 1994 government has been responsible for the construction of over 2,3-million housing units providing homes for more than 11-million people. Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale, as a continuum of Slovo's and previous minister's effort, has pointed out: "The scale of government housing delivery is second only to China." (Budget Speech, 21 April, 2010)

Minister Sexwale went on to quote a statement from the Banking Association of South Africa that: "Government's most dramatic intervention in the welfare housing sector has been its national housing subsidy programme. The success of South Africa's housing programme is unparalleled, and we can be proud of our achievements."

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends:

Linked to the roll-out of government's housing programme has been the provision of clean water to some 14-million largely rural people; sanitation to 6-million; connection to the electric-grid of some 3,5-million homes. Whatever the sceptics might like to think South Africa has made enormous strides – an achievement of which any government in the world would be justly proud. We have made significant progress towards reaching the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

I repeat: Joe Slovo would celebrate those successes with us today, yet would not be surprised that some tough nuts remain to be cracked and that there have been errors and disappointments on the way. We live in the real world and Joe was not some bright-eyed idealist who believed that setbacks never occur and everything in the garden is rosy.

And where we are faced with problems from delivery protests to shoddy construction; from dodgy deals to corrupt practices; from lack of accountability to the need to review strategy and business plans – Slovo would roll up his sleeves, consult all role players, be prepared to knock heads together and get on with the business of rectifying things.

I do not believe it remiss to highlight a couple of problematic areas which Joe had perceived as posing particularly tricky challenges, as I intend later on in this address. Neither did he ever grapple with phenomena out of context as so many of our critics are wont to do in this day and age.

Cde Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends:

Our democracy is a mere 16 years young. We are still in our infancy. But even in another 16 or 160 years, in assessing the progress made and the hills still to climb, we must never forget the depths out of which we have struggled and how the negative legacy of the colonial, apartheid, racist era of over three centuries remains a burden on our shoulders, hindering that to which we aspire and what is possible.

As a democratic South Africa determines to eradicate the legacy of poverty throughout our land I am mindful that it is this province that suffered the longest sustained period of colonial imposition and dispossession in our country. From the onset in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch and then the British sought to expand eastwards from their initial base in the Cape in pursuit of land conquest and to break the formidable resistance of the indigenous warrior people's defending their birthright. As we know there were 10 frontier wars in the Eastern Cape covering a century from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to

the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Some of us have referred to this as the Hundred Years War. In fact if we take into account the frontier clashes with the rapacious Boers pre the British colonial onslaught the people of what is now called the Eastern Cape sustained two centuries of bloodthirsty invasion. Little wonder that so many heroes arose from the resistance, stretching right through to the start of the modern period with the emergence of the ANC; little wonder that in the one-time most fertile and bounteous Eastern Cape we have inherited the most devastated, pauperised part of South Africa – which makes the challenges of reconstruction and development all that more acute in this province today.

Profoundly important to this historic context throughout the length and breadth of South Africa is the challenge of adequately housing our people and creating human settlements, in the urban and rural environment, so essential to their wellbeing. When Joe Slovo was appointed Housing Minister by President Mandela in May 1994, he inherited the outcomes thrashed out in a two-year process (parallel to the World Trade Centre Codesa negotiations) by the National Housing Forum, which developed the consensus of all parties on a housing strategy for South Africa. His director-general in the Housing Ministry, Billy Cobbett, had played a leading role in that forum.

I learnt from Billy Cobbett that on the first day of the new government (16 May 1994), Joe Slovo assembled all the staff at 240 Walker Street, the Housing Ministry in Pretoria, to introduce himself (and his new director-general) and to put them at their ease. “The architect of the sunset clause broke the ice with

one of his favourite Che Guevara-Fidel Castro jokes,” Cobbett recalls. Within two days, Cobbett was approached by members of staff who, in comparing the behaviour of the new government with the old, told him that “Had we known you guys were like this, we would have voted for you”.

Please pardon my deviating to recount this Slovo joke which I know very well – for no gathering honouring the man should take place without some reference to his abiding sense of humour. The story goes that soon after seizing power in Havana in January 1959, Fidel Castro assembled his top leadership to assign government portfolios. He asked who was an “economist”, a qualification in short supply among the guerrilla commanders. “I am, chief”, said Ernesto Che Guevara, shooting up his hand. He was duly appointed revolutionary Cuba’s first Minister of Economics. After the meeting broke up Fidel mentioned to Che that he had been unaware that he was an economist. “An error Commandante,” answered a visibly nervous Che, “I thought you asked who was a communist.”

In a sense Joe Slovo found some comparison in Madiba appointing him housing Minister, a portfolio he initially new little about. He confessed to me that he had been somewhat disappointed, for in truth the former respected advocate had his eye on the justice post. Overnight, however, he came to relish the prospect of his new responsibility. As a life-long communist, the idea of delivery of essential housing to the workers, the poor, the homeless, fully suited his sense of service. The extent of the humility which characterised the high office he held was immediately event to his Ministry staff

when he requested that they simply call him Joe. He declined to order a new government limousine and was content to make do with the Japanese Mazda that his predecessor in the job had used. This was quite a contrast to the ostentatious choices of some of his colleagues then and particularly of the Ministers in later government office.

According to Cobbett: “Minister Joe Slovo spent the first couple of months meeting with all the major actors in the housing and construction industry – the banks, builders, trades unions and civic leaders – to obtain their perspectives on the challenge, and the opportunities as he and his team forged the country’s new housing policy.”

- They were confronted with a number of major constraints outlined by me by Cobbett:

- The fact that there was very limited production of new housing, and almost all such production was aimed at the lower middle class, rather than the poor;

- The fact that they were also having to operate within an extremely fluid and confused constitutional / institutional landscape – new Provinces being created, and scarcely democratised local government still in the transitional phase;

- The fact that housing had been consciously used to divide South Africa’s cities and our society; The reality of a very distorted housing market with no consumer protection; widespread bond boycotts, and little or no lending by the Banks;

- On top of which, the housing budget was extremely small.

Cde Slovo’s views at the time, his abiding humanism and deep-seated passion, was movingly illustrated by a speech of 23 July, 1994, at the opening of the Com-

munity Bank in Benoni with the focus to assist the poor with loans:

“I don’t know how many of you read the story at the beginning of the week,” he said, “of the man who was looking for a warm place to sleep the other night in Johannesburg and chose one of those large rubbish containers. The refuse removal people came to collect the container the next morning and the truck automatically started compacting the rubbish in the container when the driver heard screams. When he found the man who had gone to sleep in the container the night before, he had already been crushed to death.

“It is human tragedies like these,” Slovo continued, “which show the magnitude of the task in front of all of us. It is the death of a homeless man whose name was not even reported in most of the media ... we have to do something to help the vast majority of South Africans who are so poor that they cannot even afford to get into the bottom end of the housing market.”

Slovo then came to a defining moment in his view of how the housing needs of the poor should be met. This was through the concept of what he termed starter houses which the homeowner could go on to further develop and enlarge in her/his own time. He stated: “We have got to start developing our ideas for starter houses – basic structures with basic facilities which will give people a roof over their heads and the opportunity to expand as and when their financial circumstances allow them to buy some building materials. This is not about toilets in the veld, and it’s not about the simple provision of serviced sites. We are investigating ways in which the state – especially local government – can play a role in ensur-

ing that the housing process, once begun, will indeed be completed. What it is about is understanding that a good 60% of South Africans cannot afford even to buy a house which can already be called a home.

“It is a challenge to develop a simple, sound starter structure which can be delivered within the limits of the subsidy scheme. It is a challenge for people with ideas in the communities, in the construction industry, among architects and planners, and for all of us in the Ministry of Housing. It is a challenge we are taking up because it is in the interest of ordinary people that we find viable solutions. And one important route is to mobilise even the small people’s savings so as to be able to help people to help themselves.”

I firmly believe that if we had developed and carried through this concept we would have made far greater and more impressive strides in dealing with the country’s housing backlog. It is further important to note the revolutionary concept he described which involved the empowerment of the home owner/builder replacing the passive disempowered recipient of government hand-outs. Slovo then went on to tackle another key issue which bedevils us to this day. He continued: “What became clear in the Western Cape after the recent storms – as it has done in many townships on the Reef – is that too many contractors have for too long been delivering shoddy work. Too many builders have been cutting too many corners, for whatever reasons. They have left people who are struggling to pay off their houses to deal with the extra burden of repair costs for leaking roofs, cracked walls, and subsidising foundations.

“Contractors, whether they are large or small, must know that they are not going to get away with this kind of shoddy work in the future. We are going to make quality control an issue in the interest of the consumer. Home buyers have a right to consumer protection and we are going to see to it that they get it ... There are many issues and many problems facing all of us involved with housing in South Africa. The policies and practices of the past have left us with a legacy which is going to take years to overcome.”

Joe Slovo’s concerns were further clarified when he convened the Botshabelo Summit in October 1994, the most representative housing summit in the history of South Africa. Cde Slovo’s essential idea, as Billy Cobbett has explained to me, was to put up a housing vision, and then challenge each constituency – banks, builders, trade unions, community organisations and international organisations – to spell out what contribution they would make to achieve that vision. Part of the strategy was aimed at bringing the banking sector on board to finance low-income mortgages.

The most controversial aspect of the vision was Joe’s support for an incremental approach to housing – that the state would guarantee security of tenure, access to basic services, and maybe a starter or core house etc, but that housing delivery would take place with individual equity, community support, over time, as and when people could afford it. Cobbett recalls that there was a direct challenge from the floor to remove the word ‘incremental’ from the document, but this was defeated.

Joe Slovo understood, all too clearly, that there was no way in which the state could satisfy the housing demand for all

of the people in a reasonable period of time. Joe explicitly understood that the housing subsidy – alone – was insufficient to buy land, provide services, and build a house.

I mentioned that there were some tough nuts that had to be cracked – suffice to at least highlight some of them here. How clearly have we understood this need for an incremental approach to housing? Have we not placed an undue burden on the state by raising the bar far too high and creating huge frustration as a result while demobilising the people and turning them into passive recipients?

What has happened to Slovo's concept of a "starter" house?

Then there are issues of subsidised housing and the value of land and property; the willingness of the banking sector to finance low-income mortgages; the vexed question of corrupt practices that arise; the problems posed by dodgy contractors, shoddy building work and the manipulation of tenders. These have all affected in one way or another government's best intentions to roll out our housing programme. We need to frankly assess just how far we have succeeded in dealing with such issues and ask how Joe would regard those deficiencies. Certainly he would have been dismayed at the fact that, despite his warnings, we have seen in virtually every province of our country the shoddy, unimaginative houses built by developers from within our own ranks, called *vezinyawo* – matchboxes so small your feet stick out the window when you lie down.

I have touched on some obvious problems as well as thorny issues and will attempt to elaborate further.

Firstly, the danger of disempowerment

through promises of delivery:

No politician has, subsequent to Slovo, had the courage to spell out the truth – that the world over, it is the poor themselves that are the most efficient and effective builders of houses, most times being prevented by their own government. In South Africa, in 1994, the rhetoric was always the search for the quick fix and so, along the way, we had lots of smoke and mirrors or silver bullet schemes – remember Stocks and Stocks selling their plan to Gauteng at the time and then to the Free State? None worked.

We must get this crucial issue straight. I am impressed by some of the initiatives of Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale, but I sincerely hope he does not consider it remiss of me to point out a contradiction in his Budget speech of 21 April 2010.

On the one hand he makes due reference to Slovo's Botshabelo Accord and the reference that the "the people will have access on a progressive basis" to a permanent residential structure and the necessary services. On the other hand he quotes President Zuma's 2009 State of the Nation address pledging that government "will provide suitably located and affordable housing..."

What seems to me problematic is that there is a world of difference between the Botshabelo concept of "access on a progressive basis" and the President Zuma's reference to the "provision" of affordable housing. For me Slovo's "access on a progressive basis" denotes a process of expansion of his "starter home" idea. The word "provision" denotes delivery from government: "Pretoria will provide". The reality is that the constant promises that the ANC/state will "deliver" has arguably disempowered com-

munities, at huge social cost and leaves government with an abiding headache and frustrated citizens feeling that unless they shout loud and long they will not be heard. Inculcating this culture of “delivery”, “expectation” and “entitlement” has seen government creating a hefty stick to beat itself with.

Secondly, I turn to the question of subsidisation of housing for the poor and some of the pitfalls: Subsidisation is necessary but we need to be aware of the negative aspects which need to be firmly controlled to avoid the kind of unintended consequences that have come to pass. I refer to the problem whereby some owners of RDP homes end up selling or renting them out to obtain much needed capital. As we have seen all too often the previous first-time home owner, rents or sells the subsidised property and reverts back to living in a shack.

Joe would have been well aware that subsidised affordable housing in a capitalist society is a highly complex endeavour wide open to the impact of market forces. Having lived for many years as an exile in Britain he was well aware of the abuse in that country where Council homes are often sublet by the beneficiaries.

There are many examples, worldwide, of both corruption and market abuse relating to subsidised housing that we must be made aware of. The development of Dandora in Nairobi is an infamous example of the latter<sup>1</sup>.

Since we must provide a level of subsidies for the poor, and involve the banking and financial sector, let us be involved with eyes wide open, for else as has often been the case there is no win-win situation and government and the poor lose out to the unscrupulous speculators. After the Botshabelo Sum-

mit Joe was elated by the success, but later confided in me that he was frightened by some of the avaricious property speculators and construction wheeler-dealers whom he described as vultures.

“Location, location, location!” is the well-known saying – and truly determines property value. The structure is merely bricks and mortar. Spencer Hodgson mentions that at the UN Habitat “Housing in Development” seminar (Nairobi 1992), a lecturer quoted (tongue in cheek) Marco Polo when he was voyaging in China. The British had sent him a message asking what he thought of the land. “Buy it,” he answered, “they don’t make it anymore”.

There are signs that the hard experience of the past 16 years is forcing positive changes. For instance it is interesting to note that the Department of Human Settlements is finalising a strategy to support in-situ upgrading, which is also captured in Minister Sexwale’s performance agreement with the Ministry relating to the upgrading of 400 000 informal settlement dwellings (shacks) by 2014. And it is to be hoped that the department finally drops the use of the word ‘eradicate’, which conveys the wrong message.

Another sign of more positive thinking is to be found in the Statement of Policy by the Eastern Cape MEC For Housing, Hon Nombulelo Mabandla, where she notes: “the Department does not view traditional dwellings as inadequate and hence constituting a backlog (as StatsSA infers). This, in fact could be quite misleading from a development planning point of view.” She has asserted that appropriate policy measures will be introduced to adequately address this issue. The rural people have always shown a propensity for constructing their own

homes. Ignoring the immense possibilities of harnessing this skill and not involving them in appropriate self-help construction programmes has always struck me as a prime example of disempowerment through the promise of government delivery. What this does is inculcate the culture of entitlement and passivity I have referred to and which has in the past been quite alien to our people. And then we wonder why frustration boils over into non-delivery protests.

It is a testimony to cde Slovo's deep grasp of issues and the talent and energy with which he shouldered his responsibilities and sought to implement his tasks that President Mandela so enthused about his short reign as democratic South Africa's first Housing Minister. It is hard to believe that Joe served in the post for only seven months before the tragic illness brought his life to an end; for a great deal was accomplished. Every minister who succeeded him in this vital and difficult portfolio owed much to his vision and the foundations that he laid. All of those ministers, and indeed all those at national, provincial and local government level, in dealing with the challenges of the portfolio have shown themselves to have been imbued with his abiding humanity and determination to provide, in the words of the Freedom Charter, "housing, security and comfort for all". This of course is a collegial shared responsibility of all in government, from our three presidents – Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma – to successive Cabinets down to provincial and local governments.

We need to take stock of Joe Slovo's legacy and have the sense to revisit his concepts. While Minister Sexwale in his budget address reported that the target

for housing construction is a massive 220 000 units a year between now and 2014, he has been forthright about the challenges, recognising that "the housing backlog has grown in leaps and bounds from 1,5-million in 1994 and now stands at approximately 2,1-million. That means approximately 12-million South Africans are still in need of better shelter.

"As a reflection of the increased demand, the number of informal settlements has ballooned to more than 2 700 ... Our reality is that we are currently only able to clear the housing backlog at a rate of 10% per annum. With the current pace of delivery and the resources at our disposal, and mindful of continued economic and population growth and the rapid pace of urbanisation, it could take us decades to break the backlog.

"In crafting our vision," Minister Sexwale stated, "we are mindful that a child born today will be 20 years old by 2030, and will need somewhere to live. We should be planning for the needs of that future adult."

This is a huge challenge. We dare not be complacent. Joe Slovo was never one to rest on his laurels even when struggling under the burden of a debilitating illness. If we are to do more than simply sit back and listen to fine words in Parliament or at memorial events such as this one, we need to boldly take stock and be brave enough to think out of the box as the saying goes. To take a page from the life of Joe Slovo, we need to get our theory and policy right, and have the energy and will to put it into practice.

I wish to conclude by repeating the following words President Mandela made in his oration at cde Slovo's funeral, for they are as relevant today as they were back in January 1995: "I wish on behalf of government to reiterate that the

course Joe Slovo had charted will continue to guide us in fulfilling the housing programme. His firmness in dealing with obstacles to this programme will remain one of the central features of our work.”

*Cde Kasrils is a former SACP Central Committee and Politburo and ANC NEC member. He is an MK veteran. This is an edited version of a speech he gave in Port Elizabeth recently.*

**Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> Dandora is an eastern suburb in Nairobi. Funded by the World Bank to provide a higher standard of housing and was established in 1977. However, the estate has turned into a high density slum with huge unemployment. This green-field project targeted home-ownership by the poor of 100-160m<sup>2</sup> serviced sites, but has to a large extent transformed into a multi-storey slum with profits extracted by wealthy landlords who reside elsewhere. Conceptualised to enable starter homes,

the homeowner beneficiaries were to rent out one or two rooms to support their mortgage repayments. However, qualification criteria meant that many of the beneficiaries were so poor that while servicing their mortgages, they did not have the resources to even build on the site. With no prospects of ever generating finance, beneficiaries sold the serviced sites (probably for a song) to richer individuals who had the capital to build 6-and 7-storey buildings, renting out rooms to the poor with communal washing and toilet facilities. The Dandora example illustrates how reasonably well located land (intended for ownership by the poor) was bought out cheaply by speculators and developed to multi-storey slum housing. The intrinsic value of the land itself enabled this because of its location. I am indebted to Spencer Hodgson for this example. He is an ANC member who for years has been involved at government level in the construction sector. ★

STATE POWER

## A guide for communists deployed in the state

Deployees must strive to transform the state for the benefit of the majority and struggle for the hegemony of working class interests, writes **Nelson Madela**

**W**e exist for the benefit of the working class. This is accentuated by Karl Marx: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.” For this reason we are charged with a responsibility to advance the class struggle in South Africa without fear.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) has always been committed to the struggle for socialism in our country, a country ravaged by colonialism of a special type. In the course of our struggle, contradictions often emerged and challenged our relationship with the ANC. Sometimes the democratic breakthrough we had in 1994 is projected as merely a consequence of the ballot box, downplaying the contribution made by the mass democratic movement in achieving the democracy we currently enjoy. More often than not, prior to a general election, all components of the Alliance understand the strategic centre of power to be the Alliance led by the ANC. But after the election elements within the ANC, often advocate a view that only the ANC is the strategic centre of power.

There are a number of reasons for the pollution of our post elections political

environment. Some are:

- Trappings of capitalism
- Greed
- Corruption
- Patronage
- Deployment of cadreship
- Access to tenders

The negative pronouncements within the Alliance are also fuelled by the frustrations of those elements who wish to unrestrainedly dish out patronage around positions and tenders. This vexation often comes out as political. When they are criticised some even conflate the criticisms with forays on the organisations that they lead. Comrade Blade Nzimande in *Umsebenzi Online* (2002) cautioned as follows: “It becomes critical to remind ourselves that not so long ago there has been a systemic attempt by a handful of individuals from within our movement to destabilise the Alliance. Where there are difficulties, these individuals rush in, diving in the box, faking fouls, and generally doing their best to deepen contradictions and to inflame emotions. When intra-alliance processes move constructively, the same group attempts to destabilise the process.”

The SACP will continue to advance and propagate campaigns that benefit

the majority of our people irrespective of who is involved. The noise we hear cannot derail our efforts in ensuring that this democracy benefits all our people equally. In as much as we protect the ANC from those who want to use it as a cash cow we must continue to mobilise the popular forces against all those forces who think our people are foolish. The past administration took the concerns of the masses of our people for granted and paid heavily for it.

We are guided by the SACP's political report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Special National Congress and it avers: "Together, led by the ANC and its broad movement, let us ensure that the noble task of black emancipation is not captured by a faction of parasites who use and abuse their political connections for their own private accumulation. Let us defeat javelin throwers and 'tenderpreneurs'. Let us defeat frontiers, go-betweens, compradors who parade their blackness only in order to advance their own private interests by doing the bidding of their masters-well-entrenched monopoly capital."

The SACP cannot over-emphasise its own role in the development of our own revolution as the strategic route to socialism. "Socialism is the future, build it now", means we have to build capacity for, elements of and momentum towards socialism now.

We are charged with the responsibility to assess our own performance in line with our programme of action. This evaluation must include both phases of our revolution pre- and post-Polokwane. Recognition must be given to the fact that some SACP cadres sold out in the midst of carrying out their duties both in the Party and state in earlier administrations.

Polokwane has opened a number of

possibilities for the SACP. A new phenomenon is that almost all the leading cadre of the SACP nationally are also leading in the state. This presents an opportunity for the SACP to consolidate the impact of the working class on the character and direction of the democratic state, however highly contested it may be. Our cadreship is called upon to engage in governance in order to address the needs of the working class and the poor of our country. This phenomenon, however good, may falter if not strengthened further by tried and tested deploying resources and cadres to propel our MTV programme to greater heights.

The SACP analysed its deployment process in Umsebenzi (April 2009:11) as follows: "With changing conditions and balance of forces, the SACP needs to review our structures and how best we deploy cadres to them. The SACP Constitution requires the General Secretary to serve full time ... this need not always be a necessary condition."

Of course the decision of the SACP a year ago may not necessarily be as relevant now. Material conditions change. That was the SACP's carefully considered view at the time and the SACP cautioned as follows: "Forwarding the General Secretary to parliament is a major issue, and we should not be naïve about it. There could be unforeseen consequences. The decision is correct for now. But it may not always be."

As the SACP says we need to continuously review and assess our decisions. It is also important to give direction. This is not only relevant for the deployment of the General Secretary but applies to all communists deployed in key sites of power.

SACP cadres deployed post-Polokwane should serve the interests of the

working class with distinction. It must not be business as usual. Much as they should not be seen as employees who know it all, they should strike a balance between being true representatives of the working class and the poor and good comrades to the range of class forces found in the state and other key power sites. The way they carry themselves and conduct their business should be exemplary so that they are torch-bearers to all. Communists in sites of power should:

- Strive to transform the state and its apparatus for the benefit of the majority of our people.

- Struggle for the hegemony of the interests and aspirations of the working class.

- Contest neo-liberal tendencies.

It is crucial that we elaborate on what are not our expectations of Communist employees. Communist must not:

- Practise patronage

- Abuse power

- Become incorporated in an untransformed situation

- Become a “yes man or woman” to achieve promotion

- Contradict the principles of socialism

Sometimes cadres of Cosatu and the SACP may be confused by a myriad of class forces in their endeavour to deliver for the working class. Cde S'dumo Dlamini, the President of Cosatu, said when he concluded the 10th national Congress of Cosatu: “From now onwards Cosatu’s presence will be felt and our socialist voice will be heard right inside the corridors of power.” Later in December 2009, at the Special National Congress of the SACP, cde Zwelinzima Vavi, Cosatu General Secretary elaborated on this: “Cosatu has through the open doors project defined a clear strat-

**After the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therefore also the antithesis between mental and physical labour has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life, but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual; and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois rights be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs**

– KARL MARX (*Critique of the Gotha Programme, 1875*)

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egy on how workers should ensure that they pick the gains themselves. We do not struggle so that others can be our rulers. We more than ever are presented with an opportunity to deploy our leaders to key levers of power so that they can be in the forefront of the transformation project. We cannot abstain from this challenge nor can we afford to subcontract to others. The victories belong to us. We are not an opposition grouping or an NGO that is not interested in state power.”

Cde Vavi’s sentiments are shared by the majority of the ranks of the left. To the SACP his forthright remarks were:

“The SACP must not be subordinated to the ANC ... guard against the incorporation of the Party into an untransformed situation without clear ideology of how this links to our struggle to build socialism. In that case leaders will become apologists of the status quo. Keep leaders accountable.”

The SACP through its own structures is fully aware of its own revolutionary tasks in the current conjuncture; that the task of building socialism in our country is interlinked with an agenda of building a conscious cadre able to impact on state institutions and policy, economic establishments and mass formations in favour of the working class and the poor.

It is understood by the SACP that the deployment of its cadres in all key sites of power may not always achieve the desired effect. We need always be true to our own decisions and make honest assessments. In *The African Communist* (December, 2009:31), cde David Maseko boldly asserted that “the post-Polokwane elections have not resolved

a number of fundamental questions regarding the independence of the SACP within the state and the Alliance in the context of overcoming the legacy of colonial capitalism. The conditions that generated tensions over the independence of the SACP from the ANC have not been resolved. As a result, the limited power of the SACP’s public representatives will be muzzled not only by the class constraints imposed by capital, but also by their mode of entry into the state, thus further limiting the SACP’s organisational power within the state.”

We cannot wish away the fact that the location of the strategic centre of power remains unresolved. The nationalists say it is the ANC while communists and the left say it is the Alliance.

For communists the issue of state power will forever remain unresolved until such time that socialism is realised in our country! ★

*Cde Nelson Madela is the Branch Secretary for Education, SACP Midlands Branch, Mzunduzi (Pietermaritzburg)*

AFRICA

## 21<sup>st</sup> century imperialists and neo-colonialists

**Andile Lungisa** reviews the USA and China's competing African strategies, and warns that Africa is at risk of being trampled underfoot

This paper examines the increasingly conflictual relationship between the People's Republic of China and the USA as they encroach upon the African continent, a seemingly strategic theatre of operations for both protagonists. This encroachment, which the famed English writer Rudyard Kipling characterised as the 'Great Game', is unfolding in the context of a historic decline of capital, coupled with the diminishing hegemony of the US as the world's only super power, and the ascendance of China as its chief rival for future global dominance.

In the wake of the current global economic quagmire, China has emerged as a significant exporter of capital. Rather than investing domestically, the Chinese state and significant sections of the new industrialist class are making substantial investments abroad, particularly to secure access to raw materials and industrial assets in the African continent. Beijing initiated a "Go Global" policy in 2000, leading to a rapid growth of outward foreign direct investment (FDI). Since the credit crunch took hold in September 2008, the outflow of capital from China has jumped significantly, taking advantage of falling share values, and the demand by many cash-strapped

corporations for finance.

China's state-controlled banking system has been largely protected from the global financial turmoil, putting Beijing in a strong position to push overseas investment. China's main focus has been mineral and energy resources for its huge industrial base. The strategy has been to take advantage of the current weak commodity prices in global markets by boosting certain strategic resource imports and converting some capital reserves into resources reserves. China's relationship with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) best epitomises its general engagement with the African continent.

The DRC is in the process of receiving \$9-billion (R62-billion) of Chinese investment in what has been dubbed Congo's "Marshall Aid Plan", a reference to the American refinancing of Europe at the end of the World War II. The investment is not aimed at rebuilding the economy of the Congo after its destruction in the 1998-2003 war, in which more than 5-million people died, mainly from disease and starvation. The accord between China and DRC signed on 28 January 2010 is meant to provide China with much-needed cheap resources for its booming economy and the Congo

elite with greater opportunities to enrich themselves.

China's Export Import Bank, Exim, pledged finance for major road and rail construction projects and for the rehabilitation of its mining sector, badly damaged by years of war, corruption and neglect. China has reportedly already dispatched 5 000 containers of mining equipment to renovate mines involved in Katanga province. DRC Planning Minister Oliver Kamatu has said \$3-billion will go towards bringing mining back into operation and \$6-billion will be spent on infrastructure projects.

China's Sinohydro Corporation and China Railway Engineering Corporation have negotiated a deal giving them a 68% share in a joint venture, with 32% going to state copper mining company Gecamines. Chinese state companies have been granted rights to two large copper and cobalt concessions representing around 10,62-million tons of copper and 620 000 tons of cobalt. The DRC produced 500 000 tons of copper annually in 1989 at its highest levels of output.

The new infrastructure proposed will consist of 3 300km of road and 3 000km of railway. Mineral-rich Katanga will be connected by rail to the port of Matadi in the west and by road to Kisangani on the Congo River. Transport links to Zambia in the south will also be improved.

Two hydro-electric dams are proposed to facilitate mineral exploitation and export energy to take advantage of power-starved Africa, particularly Southern Africa. Most of the infrastructure construction will be carried out by Chinese companies and labour with very little benefit to the Congolese workforce or to the wider economy. DRC Infrastructure Minister Pierre Lumbi re-

ported to the DRC parliament that the deal included the construction of several hundred clinics, hospitals and schools, but this contribution is small for a country the size of Western Europe.

As with previous sell-offs of mineral rights in the Congo, the value of the concessions to China cannot be easily quantified. No tender process is in place to assess the assets. But Congo businessmen speculate that China will reap at least \$30-billion in profits.

The privatisation programme in the DRC, implemented by the Washington-dominated International Monetary Fund and World Bank after the end of the war in 2003, opened the door for dividing up the nationalised mining industry. Contracts were drafted that gave mining concessions away for as little as \$15-million when resources were valued at \$60-billion.

China's increased role in DRC has displaced the former colonial power Belgium, which has become highly critical of President Joseph Kabila's government. Kabila has forced the Belgian government to close its consulates in Bukavu, withdrew DRC's Ambassador to Brussels and closed the consulate in Antwerp earlier this year. The Belgium diamond industry is said to be horrified by the move.

The other protagonist in the 'Great Game' is the USA. The value of Obama's family background was recognised early in his bid for the presidency of the United States by Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security adviser under President Jimmy Carter and a key figure in the formulation of Obama's foreign policy. In August 2007, Brzezinski declared that Obama "recognises that the challenge is a new face, a new sense of direction, a new definition of America's

role in the world”.

Brzezinski was among major figures in the US foreign policy establishment who saw in Obama a means of giving the USA a “new face” to the rest of the world, something they deemed critical after the blunders and setbacks to American imperialism under Bush.

Obama lived up to expectations in Ghana. He played on his African ancestry, just as he had emphasised his Muslim heritage the previous month in Cairo. The image of the two Obama children walking out into the sunlight from the “door of no return” at Cape Coast Castle, from which so many Africans did not return, was a skilfully exploited photo opportunity. Leaving this scene of so much human suffering, Obama said: “It reminds us that as bad as history can be, it’s always possible to overcome.”

This was meant to imply that no matter what Africa has suffered in the past, and no matter what the continent continues to suffer at the hands of the banks, corporations and Western governments, the responsibility and the fault rests with the African people themselves.

Obama brought an uncompromising message, spelling out in a more open way than George Bush dared to do during his visit to Ghana in 2008, that aid would be made available only in return for the implementation of policies that serve the interests of the US government and corporations and that there would be less of it in future.

“Development,” Obama told parliamentarians, “depends upon good governance. That is the ingredient which has been missing in far too many places, for far too long. That is the change that can unlock Africa’s potential. And that is a responsibility that can only be met by Africans.

But the lecture also carried a threat: “We have a responsibility to support those who act responsibly and to isolate those who don’t, and that is exactly what America will do,” Obama declared. It was a message no pink-faced Western leader could have delivered without arousing resentment in Africa. The provision of aid has always been a political mechanism to force former colonial countries to pursue policies that serve the interests of the imperialist donors. But whereas Bush was obliged to make some token gestures, such as setting up the Millennium Challenge Account and increasing funding for Aids and malaria, Obama used the kudos he derived from his ancestry to point-blank insist that African governments toe the US line.

Obama’s insistence that Ghana and other African governments achieve “good governance” is a demand for more of the free-market measures that are already being imposed with disastrous results for the social conditions of the population. “Good governance” means privatising essential services such as telecommunications, water and power, as well as social services like health and education. It also means removing subsidies from small farmers and abolishing import controls.

Ghana has gone a long way down that route, which is why it has been favoured with visits from two successive US presidents. It is far from being one of Africa’s poorest countries, but 70% of the population in its northern regions live on less than a dollar a day. Life expectancy is only 58 years. Women often have to walk more than 3km to find water, and it is seldom clean. This situation is set to worsen dramatically. The global recession has hit Africa hard. Ghana was among those countries granted debt

relief in 2005, but with the value of its currency falling, it is rapidly sliding into debt once more. The government's response has been to impose an austerity budget in an attempt to balance the books.

Obama has shifted the emphasis of the "war on terror" from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan. But the place of Africa in US global strategy remains essentially the same. First, it is a vital source of strategic resources such as oil and gas, but also of many key minerals. Second, a high proportion of the world's shipping lanes run close to Africa's shores. It follows that any American administration must make the establishment of US domination of Africa a priority.

What was not mentioned on Obama's Africa trip was the new US military command for Africa, Africom, established under the Bush administration. Previously US military operations in Africa were divided between the Middle East and the European commands. The decision to establish a separate African command represented an intensification of US strategic interest in Africa. Currently, Africom's headquarters are in Germany. The intention is to find a base on the African continent, but the Bush administration could not persuade any African country to offer facilities. Obama could not raise such a politically sensitive issue publicly. In conjunction with his visit, however, Africom was carrying out a programme of activities, including the visit of the guided missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and a seminar on "health and security" in Lusaka, Zambia.

This militarisation of US foreign policy in Africa reflects America's inability to deal by economic means alone with the growing rivalry it faces. China has

just surpassed the US to become Africa's main trading partner. America's trade with Africa was worth \$104-billion in 2008, a 28% increase, but China's trade with Africa was worth \$107-billion, a tenfold increase over the last decade.

In conclusion, I would like to discuss the relationship between China and the US. China officially ended its decade-long yuan-dollar peg in 2005, due to pressure from the Bush administration for more "flexible" exchange rates, but continued to maintain tight control over the currency to keep Chinese exports competitive. At the same time, the yuan's gradual revaluation of 20% over the past three years generated enormous pressure on Chinese exporters, even before the collapse of the foreign orders in recent months. Amid escalating job losses and the prospect of social unrest, there are mounting calls within China for the government to devalue the yuan. By last November, 20-million rural migrant workers in China had already lost jobs, with new estimates pointing to 40-50-million more in early 2010. These figures do not include millions of unemployed urban workers. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao blamed the US for "excessive expansion of financial institutions in blind pursuit of profit" and "lack of self-discipline among financial institutions and rating agencies" for the present global economic crisis. While not naming the Obama administration, Wen declared: "Protectionism serves no purpose except to worsen and prolong the crisis".

The US-China tensions have raised fears that Beijing could dump its US assets of more than \$1-trillion, precipitating a devastating collapse of the dollar. It could provoke China into a sudden and

dramatic reconsideration and readjustment of its exchange rate and foreign reserves management, up to and including its willingness to hold US sovereign bonds. It must be remembered that the dollar-yuan link, established in 1994, allowed a real price system to arise in China and created a single economic fabric stretching across the Pacific. Before long, the whole region had adopted what has come to be known as the East Asian Dollar Standard. A significant proportion of Chinese goods are manufactured on behalf of US corporations, boosting their profit rates and temporarily sustaining the consumption of Americans despite the stagnation and, in many instances, decline in real wages. More importantly, China's expanding trade surpluses became a major source for buying US Treasury bonds, helping finance the US trade and balance of payment deficits. China and Japan alone hold a quarter of the \$5,8-trillion outstanding US government debt. The flow of cheap credit and low-price goods from Asia helped the US Federal Reserve Board maintain a low interest rate policy, thus providing the basis for Wall Street to create ever bigger debt and credit bubbles and creating an expanding market for industries in China, including those owned by US firms.

The US and China are playing the 'Great Game' in the same manner that former imperial powers Tsarist Russia and Great Britain played in an earlier

historic epoch. The US strategy is to keep China off balance and to preserve the ever-growing mass of dollars from deflation and displacement. The US must necessarily "ride the tiger" of China's rise; of China's holdings of \$2-trillion in dollar reserves and corporate bonds; and of China's growing involvement in Africa for natural resources. In doing so it hopes either to cement China's involvement in the international status quo that will continue to subsidise America's relentless economic decline in coming decades or, failing that, to exploit the social fissures in Chinese society and have an opportunity to have a client regime in China.

China's strategy is to exploit the blunders and arrogance of past and present US administrations, and employ its relatively strong economic position to strengthen its geo-political position, and thus accelerate the US's already diminishing hegemony.

There is an African idiom that asserts that "when two elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers". In this instance it would appear that Africa will be the grass to suffer in the 'Great Game' of imperialists! ★

**Cde Lungisa** is the ANC Youth League Deputy President, Pan African Youth Union Vice President and Executive Chairperson of the National Youth Development Agency

SOCIAL POLICY

## Welfare – well beyond welfarism

**Mark Waller** reflects on how capitalists and socialists use the same words but mean utterly different things in debates on 'welfare'

**T**his article looks at the development of welfare in one of the world's supposedly strong 'welfare societies', Finland. Creating good welfare that tackled poverty and helped redistribute wealth was a cornerstone of socialist class struggle against capitalism some 60 years ago.

But why did social reform turn into welfarism, and isn't it time socialists reassessed what welfare is all about?

The recession-struck capitalist states of the European Union (EU) are slashing their public spending. In particular, they have their sights set on social welfare, which is usually the first to be cut in times of capitalist crisis. Most EU countries have welfare systems of some sort, ranging from basic safety nets in Eastern and Southern Europe to stronger systems that were, initially at least, envisaged as being much more than last resort measures. Entry to the EU required that applicant countries have some degree of welfare policy. The EU itself has for a long time sought to have a social policy of its own, but the idea has remained undeveloped and is now shelved. Financial and industrial policies take precedence, and practically all areas of social policy are decided nationally, outside EU structures.

The basic thinking of welfare policy under capitalism is that it provides the necessary social stability to stop unrest and dissatisfaction when the system dumps unwanted labour. Welfare cuts away the worst of the poverty that might otherwise threaten the system. In this sense, welfare has a role in supporting the system, and in keeping society running relatively smoothly. This is why even conservative capitalist political leaders pay a little more than lip service to welfare. When in power, they might cut it, as we see at present with the government of the United Kingdom, but they are keen to keep it in some form, if only as a buffer to cushion the effects of impoverishment. Capitalism has found that having a degree of welfare works in its favour. The social democratic forces of liberal capitalism, now in decline in Europe, tend towards a sentimental view of welfare, seeing it as proof that capitalism can have 'a human face' and be socially inclusive.

However, the point here is not to look at ideas of welfare under social democratic or hard-line capitalism, but to stand back a little and take in some of the processes, thinking and developments that led to the creation of the first welfare policies. The Nordic, or Scan-

dinavian, area of Europe is often seen as the home of welfare, and its various countries have tended to follow a similar course of having strong welfare policies. In all cases the development of welfare was the result of strong working class struggles. It was not, as we tend to be given the impression nowadays, that capitalism was keen to grant concessions to make society fair. I look here particularly at the case of Finland because for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that country had the fiercest class struggle among the Nordic group of countries.

Finland was not alone in this respect. It was one of 12 countries in Central and Eastern Europe that from 1917-18 had socialist revolutions of some description. Of these only the revolution in Russia prevailed. The rest were crushed, some more quickly than others, and government returned to the brutal hegemony of the middle class.<sup>1</sup> In Finland, socialist revolution was stamped out by a civil war that tore the guts out of the working class political movement. The war was in many respects a continuation of the counterrevolution that eventually failed in Russia, only in Finland the capitalist 'Whites' were able to get armed help from Germany and Sweden to crush the 'Reds'. The aftermath was terror. Up and down the country, tens of thousands of men and women from the revolutionary movement were slaughtered, and many more perished in concentration camps. One estimate is that 95 000 Finns, the great majority of them socialist revolutionaries, perished in the civil war and terror. This was of a total population of just 3,1 million. Finnish socialists were left in no doubt of what their class enemy was capable of, given the opportunity. Those communists and trade unionists who survived the slaughter went

underground. The Communist Party of Finland, established in exile 1918 after the defeat of the revolution, became legal only in 1944.

Middle class hegemony after the defeat of the revolution entrenched a vehemently anti-socialist and anti-working class ideology and ensured that the mass exploitation of workers persisted. The failure of the revolution left the working class and peasantry in a void, with little recourse to social development. It meant that the prospects of creating tangible improvements for workers and the poor were postponed.

Earlier, there had been widespread agreement among socialists that the immediate tasks of the revolution were to put in place strong measures to end poverty, improve working conditions under workers' control, create workers' housing, develop free health care and ensure basic education for all. For socialists forced underground the possibilities were remote of anything like a situation where these revolutionary changes were possible.

These building blocks of socialism had been spelled out by socialist revolutionaries in strategic programmes formulated at the end of the previous century and just after. One of these programmes was the Erfurt programme of 1891 of the Social Democratic Party of Germany.<sup>2</sup> As a piece of total strategy the programme appears today as incomplete as it did to Frederick Engels, who published a constructive critique of the draft programme.<sup>3</sup> But the Erfurt programme is interesting for other reasons, among them the description of the social changes that socialism would make. These include free education at state expense, free health care and medicines, free legal aid, a graduated income and

property tax to cover public spending, the eight-hour working day, the investigation and regulation of working conditions. These were not all new demands, but they represented a more full collection of socialist social reforms.

If we fast-forward a few years to 1903, when the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party held its 2<sup>nd</sup> party congress, we see an interesting development in the list of social reforms the party stipulated. "State insurance of workers against old age and against complete or partial loss of capacity to work, financed from a special fund to be raised by a special tax on the capitalists."<sup>4</sup> This was a forerunner of state-guaranteed unemployment and incapacity benefits and which are today the remnants of capitalist welfare in EU countries.

By the time of the socialist revolutions of 1917-1918, socialists had a clearer programmatic idea of the social reforms they would enact. In a sense, socialist social policy developed in parallel with the heavier and more contested strategic work of developing party theory and practice. This social policy was integral to the expropriation of capitalism, to righting the wrongs of class exploitation and the poverty and scarcity that capitalism forced on workers and the poor.

Its basic idea was to redistribute wealth to ensure that those in society deprived of health, education, security and leisure would begin to have them. As an integrated sweep of social changes, the reforms designed by the early socialist revolutionaries of this period cut to the heart of much capitalist exploitation. They were seen as being key to dismantling capitalism and to creating the space needed for human development, something that Marx points to when he

writes: "The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production."<sup>5</sup>

Following Finland's failed revolution and the subsequent 'White terror', it took several decades for the left to be able to function as an effective force in society. Anti-left oppression was widespread and deeply entrenched. Many socialists were imprisoned, and their children put into orphanages. People who had any connections with socialists were ostracised. Socialists and communists who remained active hid out and organised in Finland's remote forested areas or in exile in the Soviet Union or Sweden. The bourgeois political leadership of the country maintained control and influence in part through a network of paramilitary organisations.

The government of the time had no social development perspective or policy other than the ideology of the middle class nuclear family as the consummate unit of society. It also encouraged the development of small-scale farming through the distribution of plots to poorer families. This last measure was to be the basis of the poor majority's subsistence, and in some respects was a compromise measure designed to puncture the pressure of class antagonisms that persisted after the civil war.

Finland remained under 'White' hegemony until 1944, when its participation in World War II as an ally of Nazi Germany was brought to an end by its defeat by the Soviet Union. The unbanning of the Communist Party and return to legal activity of the left and the trade union movement in general was assisted by the role of the Soviet government in

Finland's post-war settlement. The transition brought about by this unbanning was reflected in the fairly brisk overhaul that Finnish society underwent in the years immediately after the war.

One of these was a rapid wave of urbanisation that brought many thousands of poor people in search of work in the factories in the south of the country. Rural life offered little scope for social development at that time, and as trade union activity increased and offered the hope of new and progressive working conditions the recruitment of the industrial working class was infused with optimism.

Much of the material basis for this industrialisation was the favourable climate of foreign investments and a state-sponsored programme of domestic industrial investment and buying production equipment. The country also developed strong and beneficial barter trading with the Soviet Union. These developments were promoted by the left, but they were also urged by non-socialist political leaders who recognised an identity of interests at that juncture between nationalisation (or socialisation) and the reconstruction of capitalist enterprise following years of conflict.

Though these developments pointed in the direction of the multi-class consensus politics that has sometimes characterised Finnish policy-making, class struggle remained fierce in the first few decades after World War II. Stronger trade union membership and activity meant more far-reaching demands for better pay and conditions. On several occasions, the police and anti-trade union paramilitaries gunned down striking workers. But industrial action mushroomed and mutual working class solidarity spread. In 1952 the trade union

movement was strong enough to achieve a general strike against poor working conditions and the lack of benefits. This was a decisive victory against the old bourgeois hegemony that had persisted since the failure of the revolution. It was followed by fresh waves of immigration from the rural areas, which were increasingly unable to support what was now a growing population.

Trade union and socialist activity in general during this period placed a strong emphasis on an integrated programme of social reform. This was based on key welfare objectives that drew on those posited by socialists the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In many respects the climate of thinking resembled the present strategic slogan of the SACP, 'Socialism is the future, build it now.'

Now that the left had a firmer influence over the political mainstream, it was better placed to advance more radical demands for social improvements. These concerned comprehensive and free health care, health and safety at work, good quality and amenitised social housing, unemployment, sickness and incapacity benefits, child day care, child supplementary benefits, statutory mechanisms for wage increases, pension security, and free education through a comprehensive and high school system.

These demands were accompanied by numerous other initiatives that were also pioneered by workers: for public libraries, the development of workers' cooperatives, youth pioneer camps for summer vacations, workers' sports and recreation facilities, workers' holiday homes, adult education and workers' cultural resources. Many of these social advances were achieved over years of struggle and involved numerous street

and workplace protests and rallies by working men and women. Much political activity and organisation took place outside of working hours, in political clubs and in the party meetings of communists, social democrats and the left alliance of the time. The core of the social policy, welfare and improvement reforms was realised from the late 1950s through to the end of the 1980s.

The period of social advance achieved by socialists was nevertheless short-lived. It was not accompanied by a revolutionary transition. In part, this may have been due to a labour aristocracy effect latent in the achievement of high degrees of social reform and consensus politics among right and left forces. It may also have been due to a loss of revolutionary perspective amidst the heavy effort of achieving incremental social improvements for working people – or perhaps a revolutionary perspective that was planted too far in the unimagined future.

Of course, Finnish social reform did not take place in a vacuum. On the one hand, it was echoed and accompanied by roughly parallel developments in other West European countries and in the statist socialist countries of Eastern Europe. That the latter provided much competitive incentive for the welfare efforts of the West may be construed from the fact that after the fall of the Soviet Union and its allies, many Western countries began slashing welfare.

This process started from the early 1990s. In Finland it coincided with a massive capitalist crisis and recession and a clear rightward transition in the political landscape. With the demise of the state socialist systems in Eastern Europe, the climate of anti-socialist sentiment in Finland, and the West generally,

intensified greatly amidst a strong interplay of subjective and objective, material and ideological factors.

Social welfare in Finland, which has long been characterised as a Nordic welfare state, is now a fragmentary remnant of its former self. Cuts in social spending have consistently targeted social policy, such as the benefits system. Finnish health spending is now below the EU average, when it was once well above EU levels. The number of children living below the nationally defined poverty line trebled between 1990 and 2004. The wide range of workers' amenities, facilities, programmes, premises, cooperative societies and suchlike have all been dismantled or sold off to private firms. At the same time, governments and political parties have remained more heavily centred on capitalist growth and accumulation practices.

At present, the Communist Party of Finland and the remainder of the broad progressive movement is campaigning to save and bolster the eroded and disappearing welfare system. One aspect of this effort is to prevent the further transfer of public services to private ownership, which because such ownership is profit-motivated has invariably led to weaker performance. However, the left's generally weakened position compared to 20 years ago means that for the moment it has little leverage over the rightward trajectory of current state policy.

The history of socialist and broad left achievements, and particularly the social reforms and changes these achievements created for some three decades, remain a crucial legacy of socialist development. This history offers a mass of instructive points of departure for socialists everywhere, in particular because when we go beyond the national

context of Finnish socialist efforts we can see them as part of the course of global working class achievements that are universally relevant.

This view stands diametrically at odds with the way welfare is depicted by capitalist political forces and their mass media. According to this narrative, welfare under capitalism is something that is a composite of social safety net benefits and greater or lesser degrees of public health care. When times are 'hard', meaning when capitalism is in problems, public spending has to be cut, deficits reduced and handouts scaled back. This thinking pits right-wing and social democratic reformers in opposition to one another, with the former wanting to keep social welfare to a minimum and the latter keen to 'help the poor'. This standoff is now being played out amidst the capitalist crisis in EU Europe and in other capitalist countries.

One characteristic of it is that it attempts to frame the discussion conclusively on what the point of 'welfare' is to begin with. When we look at the history of labour struggles for social development, such as that of Finland, it is clear

that what socialists and capitalists mean by social reform and welfare are utterly different.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia all had socialist revolutionary uprisings between 1917-1918 that were sooner or later stamped out and replaced either by rightwing middle class parliamentary or autocratic governments.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/rsdlp/1903/program.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Marx, Capital Volume 3, Chapter 48

TRIBUTE

## Bettie du Toit: 'altogether a most unlikely Communist activist'

**Andries Nel** is writing a book on Du Toit's life, provisionally titled: *The Kingdom of a Broad Humanity, The Life and Struggle of Bettie du Toit (aka Elizabeth Sophia Honman): 1910 - 2002*

*"One of those ... who surmounted the prejudices of their frontier background and entered the kingdom of a broad humanity." – Nadine Gordimer*

The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 laid the legal and constitutional basis for what our national liberation movement would later characterise as colonialism of a special type - internal or apartheid colonialism.

It brought peace, albeit an uneasy one, among whites, Afrikaans and English speaking, who shortly before had been engaged in bloody warfare, and excluded Africans; consigning them to being foreigners in the land of their birth, thereby providing further impetus for the formation of the African National Congress in 1912.

It is historically significant then, that Bettie du Toit, one of the heroes of our struggle, who devoted her entire life to defeating apartheid colonialism, was born on 15 July 1910 on a farm outside Johannesburg, shortly after the establishment of the Union of South Africa.

Bettie du Toit, trade unionist, communist and freedom fighter, is regarded by many as an icon. Her name is seldom absent when the roll of honour is read

out of those Afrikaner patriots such as Bram and Molly Fisher, and Beyers and Ilse Naude, who turned their backs on apartheid and spared neither strength nor courage to fight for the democratic changes contained in the Freedom Charter.

But her story is complex. Many, including her closest comrades and friends, believed that Bettie du Toit was her real name and that she was born into an Afrikaans speaking family of Huguenot descent.

She was, in fact, born as Elizabeth Sophia Honman, to a mother of German and father of British descent. Her uncles, and most probably her father as well, fought as British troopers in the South African (Anglo-Boer) War.

She and her brother were, however, orphaned at an early age and brought up in orphanages and government "industrial schools." According to some family members her father did not die in the First World War, as she indicates in certain documents and interviews, but suffered "shell shock" to such an extent that he was unable to care for them. According to them he died in the 1950s. She attended the Standerton Industrial School, a government school for poor white, predominantly Afrikaner, chil-

dren. She left school after six years, at the age of 18, with a certificate in Domestic Science (sewing, cooking and laundry).

It is as a result of this upbringing, perhaps, that, years later, when studying in Moscow at International Lenin School and the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, she described her nationality as “Afrikaner”.<sup>1</sup>

One of her formative memories, to which she ascribes her resolve and fighting spirit, is of her father on their farm, “standing with him while he held my hand, and cattle were milling all around us and I was very frightened. I must have been about three or so and he held my hand and said, you must never allow anything to frighten you or panic when you are frightened. Stand. See? Nothing will happen to you.”<sup>2</sup>

At the age of 18, on the eve of the Great Depression of 1929, she moved to Johannesburg and started working as a domestic worker in a doctor’s house, taking care of the children. At nineteen the doctor took her to work at a hospital, where she worked for three years and learned how to take care of patients. Her profession is often described as a nurse.

It was during this period that she met, and started working with, unionists such as Johanna and Hester Cornelius. One of her earliest experiences of trade union work was helping the Cornelius sisters during a textile workers strike.

Her participation in this strike is described in the lawyer, and communist activist, Hyman Basner’s biography, *Am I an African*: “In 1935, still in her early twenties, she [Johanna Cornelius] and four other Afrikaans girls were defended by Basner when prosecuted for after an enthusiastic brawl with strike-breakers at a textile mill. They refused to pay

finer of a pound each, and opted for 10 days in the Johannesburg Fort – the first white women to do such a thing. One of them, Bettie du Toit [...], recalls Basner’s admiration for their decision, and his loud bellows of praise for them in the courtroom. They were tough, but she also remembers how innocent they were. Each one had known real poverty but the prison food, just boiled mealie-meal pap and rancid dripping to be eaten from dirty wooden spoons, reduced them to tears. They were puzzled by the other women who were inside. ‘For what?’ they asked as they sat on the latrines. ‘For soliciting’, was the answer. ‘And what is that?’ they wanted to know and needed a lot of elucidation.”<sup>3</sup>

Du Toit worked side by side with other prominent unionists such as Ray Alexander, JB Marks, John Gaetsewe, Leon and Norman Levy, Oscar Mpetha and Wilton Mkwayi.

She was involved at various times in trade unions as diverse as the Pretoria Match Workers’ Union, the Textile Workers Industrial Union, the Transvaal and Natal Canning Workers, Candle and Soap Workers Union, and assisting Johanna Cornelius to organise tobacco workers near Rustenburg. She served as secretary of, among others, the National Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers Union and the Food, Canning and Allied Workers Union (forerunner to Fawu). She also served as one of the progressive members on the NEC of the South African Trades and Labour Council.

She was, however, strongly opposed to narrow, economic approaches to trade unionism. She practised the understanding that: “It is not sufficient that the trade union shall concern itself with economic issues. It must participate in the political struggle against pass

laws and fight for political rights.”<sup>4</sup>

Her involvement in progressive political struggle started at a relatively young age. By 1933 she had joined the Friends of the Soviet Union, of which she became assistant secretary. In the same year, through Dr Max Joffe, she joined the Young Communist League, serving as secretary for organisation from 1934 to 1936. In 1936 she joined the Communist Party of South Africa.

According to her, she joined the Communist Party because, “I heard Communist speakers at the meetings and as working women understood that the Communists are fighting for the workers.”<sup>5</sup>

Her close friend, the Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer, argues that she, “... learnt her social concern from life and not, in the familiar middle-class awakening, from books. Her political concepts grew out of her intelligence’s need for rational explanation of what she was experiencing.”<sup>6</sup>

Not that she didn’t read. Before going to Moscow she said: “I have no special political training. I have read some of Lenin’s Work, The Little Lenin Library, all of Stalin’s articles in the *Imprecorr* [International Press Correspondence, the weekly publication of the Communist International], a lot of pamphlets. I have been to a number of lectures of our comrades on different political questions, on political economy: dialectical materialism, on Trotskyism ...”<sup>7</sup>

In March 1936 she left for the Soviet Union to study at the International Lenin School and the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), in Moscow. She arrived in July of 1936 and started studying under the alias Mary Davidson.

Many South African communists,

including, Molly Wolton, Albert Nzula, Moses Kotane, Edwin Mofutsanyana, John (JB) Marks and Josie (Palmer) Mpama also studied there during those times.

The remarks made by her lecturers are very interesting. In January 1937 one of her teachers, “Brigadier”, made the following note in her file: “Characterisation. Comrade Davidson [du Toit] has learned to perfection the Introductory Course as shown by the test on 13 January 1937. At the beginning of the school year Comrade Davidson comprehended poorly specific political and theoretical issues, had difficulties in linking theoretical issues with life and with revolutionary practice. In four months Davidson has made great strides forward in this field. In addition, she became much more active as compared with the first month of the training course. There are all grounds to expect comrade Davidson to make a great step forward in her studies in the second half of the year.”<sup>8</sup>

She also conducted herself with seriousness and discipline. In November 1937, the Head of Scientific Department at the KUTV, S Melman, was able to make the following remarks in her file: “Introductory course in political economy and current policy she studied with Brigadier (now exposed as an enemy of the people); part of the course of the problems of her country she studied with Shiykom (expelled from the VKP(b) [All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)]). The main part of the course of the problems she studied with comrade Nauman. Comrade Davidson [du Toit] took her studies most seriously. During her stay in the school she was never noticed in anything negative.”<sup>9</sup>

Bettie du Toit left Moscow for South Africa on 31 December 1937. According

to a report in a her file at the security legislation division at the Department of Justice, it was in 1938, after her return from the Soviet Union, that she started using the name Bettie du Toit. Years later she explained to her niece that this alias was made up using her mother-in-law's maiden name.<sup>10</sup>

At the time she was married to Jan Hendrik van Rooyen. Not much is known about him other than that he was a bank clerk. They were divorced in 1939.

After her return from Moscow she intensified her trade union and political work. In her autobiography, *White Girl in Search of the Party*, Pauline Podbrey recalls meeting Bettie du Toit for the first time at a Communist Party meeting in Durban chaired by HA Naidoo: "Comrade du Toit, the chairman announced, is here from Johannesburg. She has just returned from a visit to the Soviet Union and she will give us her impressions. Bettie rose, smilingly acknowledging our applause. She was neat and trim and everything about her sparkled, her black hair, her red lips, her dark eyes. Her white linen frock was newly pressed and on her feet were high-heeled sandals – altogether a most unlikely Communist activist, I thought. Yet here she was telling us about the marvellous life in the Soviet Fatherland and the need for a strong Party in South Africa so that we too, could wield workers' power, without regard for the colour of a man's skin."<sup>11</sup>

It was also during this time that she met Govan and Epainette Mbeki in Durban. Mark Gevisser writes in, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, that: "One of their closest acquaintances was the glamorous Afrikaner trade unionist Bettie du Toit, who had just returned from a trip to the Soviet Union and had come to

Durban to help organise sugar-workers.

"Despite her conservative upbringing, she was perhaps the least racially encumbered of her generation of white activists, 'an Afrikaner communist who danced unthinkingly with black men,'" as one historian put it. One of these was Mbeki: he had been asked to welcome her to Durban, and they took an instant shine to each other. 'We became great friends, Bettie and I,' he told me. 'She would come to school in the afternoon and we would sit together. We would hug and kiss in public, and that was very unusual. Then I would take her back to her flat, walking hand in hand to get there.'

"It was Bettie du Toit who recruited her [Epainette Mbeki] into the Communist Party, and she recognises the trade unionist as having played the key role in her coming to political consciousness.' Before I met her, the only white women I knew were my teachers, and naturally they had the attitude of teachers. Now when I met Bettie, here's a white woman who takes me as an equal, who can sit down with me, who drinks my tea?"<sup>12</sup>

In December 1942, she married Guy Routh, a communist who would go on to play an important role in the formation of the British Anti-apartheid Movement. They were divorced in July 1946.

She also participated in electoral politics. In line with the Communist Party's strategy at the time, she stood as a candidate for the Party in Rosettenville in the general elections of 1943 and also as a candidate for municipal elections in 1945.

On the international front she visited the Women's International Federation and attended the World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin in 1951, attended a meeting of the Food and Supply Work-

ers Trade Union International in Vienna and addressed the International Conference of Textile and Clothing Workers Berlin in 1952.

In December 1952 the Minister of Justice, CR Swart, issued an order for her to resign as secretary of both the Food, Canning and Allied Workers Union and of the National Union of Laundering, Clothing and Dyeing Workers Union in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act. She was the first union official to receive such an order. She was also prohibited from attending any gathering for two years, an order extended by a further five years in March 1959.

In April 1947 she married Yusuf Cachalia, secretary of the Transvaal Indian Congress and, together with Walter Sisulu, joint secretary of the Defiance Campaign. They were married in Port Elizabeth – in the Cape Province, the province still allowing “mixed” marriages. They were divorced in September 1955.

During the Defiance Campaign of 1952 she, together with Patrick Duncan (son of the former Governor-General), Albie Sachs, Alfred Hutchinson, Peter Molotsi, Percy Cohen, Freda Troup, Manilal Gandhi (son of Mahatma Gandhi) and others defied the Group Areas Act by marching into Germiston location. They were arrested and she was sentenced to a fine of £50 or 50 days imprisonment with hard labour, half suspended for three years. She and others refused to pay their fines and served their sentences in prison.

She served on the committee that organised the launch of the Federation of South African Women (Fedsaw) on 17 April 1954. Despite being banned, Du Toit helped found the Kupugani school feeding scheme in Soweto. She entered

Soweto on a daily basis using a false permit. In an interview she recalls being known among teachers and learners as, “the protein lady.”<sup>13</sup>

She was detained during the State of Emergency declared in March 1960 following the Sharpeville Massacre. The women she was detained with, including Molly Fischer, embarked on a hunger strike which resulted in her becoming extremely ill but she refused to abandon the strike on her own.

In 1963 she was tipped off that she faced imminent detention under the infamous 90-day detention legislation. She went into hiding and, with the assistance of Nadine Gordimer and Ismail “Maulvi” Cachalia, escaped to Botswana where she stayed with Rica Hodgson for a short time before she and Michael Harmel clubbed together to pay a German pilot to fly them to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in a small aircraft.

With the assistance of Nadine Gordimer and her husband she relocated to Accra, Ghana, then under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. With the assistance of her erstwhile lawyer, Hyman Basner, then a political advisor to Nkrumah, she secured positions, first as a researcher for the Ghana Trade Union Congress led by John Tettegah and later as a researcher for the Ghana Broadcasting Association, a position she lost after a CIA-backed coup that deposed Nkrumah in 1966.

She describes her time in Ghana, living in a free African nation, as one of the happiest times of her life. Unfortunately, it was also here that she lost her sight as a result of Stevens-Johnson syndrome, following treatment with antibiotics for an ear infection.

She left Ghana for London where she learned braille and participated in a pro-

gramme to teach others until the Tory government under Margaret Thatcher cut the funding for the programme. She published *Ukubamba Amadolo: Workers' Struggles in the South African Textile Industry* in 1978 with a foreword by Nadine Gordimer.

In 1979 she applied to visit South Africa. It is testimony to the cruelty and the perversity of the apartheid regime that it refused the application of a 69-year-old woman who had been blind for more than a decade, on the basis that she was a security risk.

A note in her file at the security legislation division at Department of Justice states: "The Department does not recommend the granting of a return visa to the abovementioned and is of the view that her residence in South Africa would pose a security risk." Another note states: "It is clear that the real reason for her visit to South Africa has not come to attention. There is no motivation for admission on humanitarian grounds. She will be staying at the home of Nadine Gordimer an anti-South African writer which in itself will pose a security risk"<sup>14</sup>

Of this hero of our struggle, her close friend Nadine Gordimer said: "She represents a further stage in human development qua humanness; she feels as directly responsible for the welfare of any child as a parent does towards his own, she will sacrifice her comfort, disrupt her way of life and endanger her liberty for any individual, oppressed, or in private trouble, in a way the rest of us would consider doing only for husbands, wives, lovers."<sup>15</sup>

She remained a loyal, disciplined and active member of the ANC to the end of her life. In the early 1990s, during one of the last recorded interviews with her,

she speaks at length and with passion about building the ANC Johannesburg North-West Branch in which she served as a member of the BEC and sharing her organising experience with younger members of the branch. She was particularly active in organising workers to join the ANC.<sup>16</sup>

She passed at 92 on 31 January 2002 in Johannesburg. She was cremated. There is a plaque in her memory in the Garden of Remembrance at Craighall Park.

*Cde Nel is a member of the ANC and Deputy Minister of Justice. He is working on a biography of Bettie du Toit. He would appreciate any information that readers can provide. His email address is: andries@anc.org.za.*

#### Endnotes

Only direct quotes have been acknowledged. The author wishes, however, to acknowledge, in particular, the assistance of: Slava Tetekin of the Russian Communist Party, for assisting in tracing Bettie du Toit's files from the International Lenin School and the Communist University of the East; Luli Callinicos for sharing her knowledge and recording of an interview with Bettie du Toit; Nadine Gordimer for sharing her friendship with Bettie du Toit; Mark Gevisser; Leon Levy; and Delyse (Honman) West, Bettie du Toit's niece, for her invaluable information.

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16. Bettie du Toit. Interview with Luli Callinicos

ICWP

## The Tshwane Declaration of the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ICWP

Delegates from 51 communist and workers parties affiliated to the ICWP issued this declaration after meeting in Tshwane on 3-5 December 2010 – their first meeting on the African continent

The 12<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties took place in Tshwane, South Africa from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2010 with theme "The deepening systemic crisis of capitalism. The tasks of Communists in defence of sovereignty, deepening social alliances, strengthening the anti-imperialist front in the struggle for peace, progress and socialism".

102 delegates representing 51 participating Parties from 43 countries and from all continents of the world came together in order to take forward the work of our previous meetings, and to promote and develop common and convergent action around a shared perspective.

### **The deepening capitalist crisis**

The international situation continues to be dominated by the persisting and deepening crisis of capitalism. This reality confirms the analyses outlined in the declarations of our 2008 Sao Paulo and 2009 New Delhi 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> International Meetings. The current global crisis of capitalism underlines its historical limitations and the need for its revolutionary overthrow. It shows the intensification of the basic contradiction of

capitalism between the social character of production and the private capitalist appropriation.

The crisis is systemic – despite pre-2008 capitalist illusions to the contrary, capitalism cannot escape its in-built, systemic tendency to go through cycles of boom and bust. The current global crisis is a particularly severe manifestation of a capitalist downturn occasioned by capitalist over-production. Now, as in the past, there is no answer, within the logic of capitalism, to these periodic crises other than crisis itself, marked by the massive and socially irrational destruction of assets – including mass job layoffs, factory closures, and the wholesale attack on wages, pensions, social security and erosion of people's livelihoods. This is why, at our previous two meetings, we correctly asserted that the current crisis was not merely attributable to subjective failings, to the greed of bankers or financial speculators. It remains a crisis embedded in the systemic features of capitalism itself.

The persisting crisis is compounded by significant shifts in the international balance of forces. In particular, there is the on-going relative decline of US economic global hegemony, general productive stagnation in most advanced

capitalist economies, and the emergence of new global economic powers, notably China. The crisis has intensified the competition between the imperialist centres and also between the established and emerging powers. This includes the US-led currency war; the concentration and centralisation of economic and political power within the EU deepening its character as an imperialist block led by its main capitalist powers; a distinct sharpening of the inter-imperialist struggle for markets and access to raw materials; expanding militarism, including the strengthening of aggressive alliances (for example, the Nato Lisbon Summit with its “new” dangerous strategic concept), the profusion of regional points of tension and aggression (notably in the Middle East, Asia and Africa), coups in Latin America, the intensification of neo-imperialist tendencies of fanning ethnic conflicts and the increasing militarisation of Africa through, amongst other things, Africom.

At the same time it has become clear that capitalism’s trajectory with its profit-maximising, headlong destruction of natural resources, and of the environment in general poses a grave threat to the sustainability of human civilization itself. The political elites in the dominant capitalist states with their various proposals for “green technologies” and carbon trading at best represent adjustments which increase the profitability of capital while deepening the commodification of nature, and the transfer of climate change crises onto less developed countries. The crisis of the capitalist system that we face as humankind is directly linked to capitalism’s inability to reproduce itself except through a voracious pursuit of compound growth. It is a crisis that can only be overcome

through the abolition of capitalism itself.

Faced with these realities, everywhere capital fights back, seeking to preserve profits and to transfer the burden of its crisis onto the working class by intensifying exploitation based on gender and age, the urban and rural poor, and a wide range of middle strata. Exploitation is intensified, the state is used to rescue private bankers and financial houses while exposing future generations to unsustainable levels of debt, and there are intensified efforts to roll back social gains.

In the entire capitalist world, labour, social, economic, political and social security rights are being abolished. At the same time the political systems are being made more reactionary, restricting democratic and civil liberties, especially trade union rights. The retrenchments, including major spending cuts in the public sector are having a devastating impact on workers, especially women workers. There are also attempts to divert popular distress and insecurity into reactionary demagoguery, racism and xenophobia, as well as to legitimise fascist forces. These are expressions of anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies also marked by the escalation of anti-communist attacks and campaigns in many parts of the world. In Africa, Asia and Latin America we are witnessing the imposition on our peoples of new mechanisms of national and class oppression, including economic, financial, political and military means as well as the deployment of an array of pro-imperialist NGOs.

However, for the mass of peoples, in particular in Africa, Asia and Latin America, it is important to remember that, even before the current global eco-

conomic crisis, life under capitalism was a continuing crisis, a daily struggle for bare survival. Even before the current global crisis, one billion people were living in squalid slums, and half of the world's population was surviving on less than \$2 a day. With the crisis these realities have been massively aggravated.

Most of these urban and rural poor, along with family members working as vulnerable migrants in foreign countries, are the displaced victims of the accelerated capitalist agrarian development under-way in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Global capitalism, spear-headed by the major corporates in the agro-industrial sector, has declared war on nearly one-half of humanity – the three billion remaining rural people in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

At the same time inhuman barriers are being set up against immigrants and refugees. There is an ever-increasing mushrooming of urban and semi-urban slums populated by desperate marginalised masses typically involved in a variety of activities for survival. The accelerated capitalist agrarian transformation in countries with a lower level of capitalist development has genocidal implications.

**The importance of the resistance struggles of the working class and popular forces**

Across the world, capital's attempts to load the burden of the crisis onto workers and the poor is being met by working class and popular resistance.

Over the past year the anti-people assault on labour rights, social-security rights and wages provoked an escalation of popular struggles notably in Europe.

Imperialist aggression in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America continues

to meet resolute popular resistance.

In Africa and Latin America, anti-imperialist forces, trade unions, and social movements have escalated their struggles for the rights of the people and against the plunder by the multinational corporations. These struggles have, in some cases, led to the emergence of progressive, popular national governments that declare programmatically for national sovereignty, social rights, development and for the protection of their natural resources and biodiversity, giving renewed impetus to the anti-imperialist struggle.

In the current reality, it is an historic imperative that as Communist and Workers' Parties we participate, to strengthen and transform these popular defensive battles into offensive struggles for the acquisition of broader workers' and people rights and for the abolition of capitalism.

In advancing this strategic agenda, communists stress the significance that the organisation of the working class, and the development of the struggles of the labour movement in a class-oriented direction, have in the struggle for the acquisition of political power by the working class and its allies.

Within the framework of this struggle we attach particular importance to:

- The defence, consolidation and advance of popular national sovereignty
- The deepening of social alliances
- Strengthening the anti-imperialist front for peace, for the right to full-time stable work, labour rights and social rights such as free health and education.

The defence, consolidation and advance of popular sovereignty

In the face of the intensified aggression of transnational capital, the strug-

gle against imperialist occupation of countries, against economic and political dependency and to defend popular sovereignty has become increasingly salient. In these struggles it is important for communists to integrate these struggles with the struggle for social and class emancipation.

Communists, fighting against imperialism, struggle for equitable international relations between states and peoples on the basis of mutual benefit.

The defence, consolidation and advance of popular sovereignty is of particular importance in Africa and for other peoples that have experienced decades and even centuries of colonial and semi-colonial oppression. 2010 marks the 50th anniversary of the commencement of the formal de-colonisation of Africa. Yet everywhere, including in the African diaspora, the grim legacy of the slave-trade, of colonial dispossession and plunder persist. Notwithstanding 50 years of formal de-colonisation, everywhere imperialist interventions are reinforced, the dominance of the monopolies is being strengthened with the aid of domestic capital. The struggle against them requires the active protagonism and unity of the popular masses, and the broadening of popular democratic rights.

#### **Deepening social alliances**

The ongoing crisis of capitalism and its anti-civilisation fight-back are creating the conditions to build broad social, anti-monopolistic and anti-imperialist alliances capable of gaining power and promoting deep, progressive, radical, and revolutionary changes.

Working class unity is a fundamental factor in ensuring the construction of effective social alliances with the peas-

antry, the mass of urban and rural poor, the urban middle class strata and intellectuals. Particular attention needs to be paid to the aspirations of, and challenges confronting youth.

The land question, agrarian reform and rural development are important issues for the development of popular struggle in lesser developed countries. These are inextricably linked to food sovereignty and security, sustainable livelihoods, the defence of bio-diversity, the protection of national resources, and the struggle against agro-industrial monopolies and their local agents.

In these struggles, the legitimate and progressive aspirations of indigenous peoples in defence of their cultures, languages and environments have an important role.

#### **The role of communists in strengthening the anti-imperialist front for peace, environmental sustainability, progress and socialism**

Imperialism's crisis and counter-offensive are leading to the broadening and diversification of the forces that objectively assume a patriotic and anti-imperialist stand. Everywhere, in our diverse national realities, Communists have a responsibility to broaden and strengthen the anti-imperialist political and social front, the struggles for peace, environmental sustainability, progress, and integrate them in the fight for socialism. The independent role of Communists and the strengthening of the Communist and Workers' parties is of vital importance to ensure a consistent anti-imperialist perspective of broader movements and fronts.

Special attention must be given to the existing relation between various resistance struggles and the necessary

ideological offensive for the visibility of the alternative of socialism and to the defence and development of scientific socialism. The ideological struggle of the communist movement is of vital importance in order to repulse contemporary anti-communism, to confront bourgeois ideology, anti-scientific theories and opportunist currents which reject the class struggle, and combat the role of social democratic forces that defend and implement anti-people and pro-imperialist policies by supporting the strategy of capital. We have a key role to play in drawing the critical links in theory and above all in practice between different arenas of popular struggle in the development of internationalist class solidarity.

We are living in an historic epoch in which the transition from capitalism to socialism has become a civilisational imperative. The all-round crisis of capitalism once more underlines the inseparable nature of the tasks of national liberation and social, national and class emancipation.

In the face of deepening capitalist crisis, the experiences of socialist construction demonstrate the conditions of the superiority of socialism.

The strengthening of the cooperation among Communist and Workers' Parties and the strengthening of the anti-imperialist front, should march side by side.

We, the Communist and Workers' parties meeting in Tshwane, in a situation marked by a massive onslaught against workers and popular forces, but also with many possibilities for the development of the struggle, express our profound solidarity with workers and peoples and their intense struggles, reiterating our determination to act and struggle side by side with working

masses, youth, women, and all popular sectors that are victims of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

We reaffirm our appeal to the widest range of popular forces to join us in a common struggle for socialism which is the only alternative for the future of humankind.

We point to the following main axes for the development of our joint and convergent actions:

1. With the capitalist crisis deepening, we will focus on the development of workers' and peoples' struggles for labour and social rights, the strengthening of the trade-union movement and its class orientation; the promotion of the social alliance with peasants and the other popular strata. Particular attention will be given to the problems of women and youth who are among the first victims of the capitalist crisis.

2. In the face of the all-round imperialist aggression and the sharpening of the inter-imperialist rivalries, we will intensify the anti-imperialist struggle for peace, against imperialist wars and occupation, against the dangerous "new" Nato strategy and foreign military bases, and for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. We will extend active internationalist solidarity with all people and movements facing and resisting oppression, imperialist threats and aggression.

3. We will resolutely fight anti-communism, anti-communist laws, measures and persecution; to demand the legalisation of CPs where outlawed. We will defend the history of the communist movement, the contribution of socialism in advancing human civilisation.

4. We affirm our solidarity with the forces and peoples engaged in and striving for socialist construction. We reaffirm our solidarity with the Cuban peo-

ple and their socialist revolution, and we will continue vigorously to oppose the blockade and to support the international campaign for the release of the Cuban Five.

5. We will contribute, within the specific context of our national realities,

to the reinforcement of international anti-imperialist mass organisations like WFTU, WPC, WFDY, WIDE. We particularly welcome and salute the 17th World Festival of Youth and Students to be held in South Africa from 13-21 December 2010.

BOOK REVIEW

## The Nazi beast at play

**Eric Singh** assesses a story of institutionalised sexual abuse suppressed for 64 years

**Das KZ-Bordell (Concentration Camp Brothels)**

*Author: Dr Robert Sommer*

Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh

– Paderborn - publishers

445 pages – €38,00

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**S**S-Chief Heinrich Himmler ordered the construction of brothels in ten of the big concentration camps like Mauthausen, Gusen, Flossenbürg, Buchenwald, Auschwitz-Stammlager, Auschwitz-Monowitz, Dachau, Neuengamme, Sachsenhausen and Mittelbau-Dora. The first of these special constructions within the concentration camps began in 1942 and existed right up to 1945.

The purpose of these brothels was to reward and encourage prisoners to higher efforts in the production and administration of the camps. Many of the camps were run by prisoners with the SS as overseers. Only a select group of “Aryan” prisoners were so rewarded. This was not restricted to Germans. Others who could claim qualification for this “service” were inmates of Polish, Czech and French origin. The criteria were blonde hair and blue eyes. Most definitely for-

bidden were Russian and Jewish prisoners. The SS itself was prohibited from cohabitating with the imprisoned women. But rules are there to be broken, and the SS did precisely that.

Most of the German SS guards were housed with their families on the outskirts of the camps. The situation was different for the foreign guards who served the various branches of the Nazi armed forces including the KZ (Konzentrationslager = concentration camps) and special brothels were set up for them. These foreigners were recruited mainly from the Baltic States of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania; from Ukraine, Hungary, and some of the Balkan countries.

The existence of brothels in the camps was exposed by detainees who survived and the victims of the brothels. One prisoner, Eugen Kogon, published a book in 1946 titled *Der SS-Staat* (The SS-State – state within a state). Other survivors and victims made similar revelations. Apart from a few noises here and there, the subject was swept under the carpet. One of the contributors to this situation was the beginning of the Cold War.

A few years ago German historian Robert Sommer decided to take a closer

look into the allegations that was stifled so many years ago. He was encouraged to use the forced prostitution in the camps as his doctoral thesis.

The camps were built mainly in Germany, and some in Poland, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Millions of people, including women and children, were arrested in Germany and the countries occupied by the Nazis and incarcerated in these hells on earth. Many of the inmates were used as guinea-pigs for all kinds of "medical research". More often than not, these experiments were carried out without the use of anaesthetics. The brutalities of a man called Dr Josef Mengele ("Dr Death") sends shivers down the spine even today. There were many Mengeles experimenting in almost every camp.

Dr Sommer was faced with a daunting task. The subject matter was taboo—in both the East and West. That is why it has taken 64 years for a book with such a theme to make it to the bookshelves. This was only possible due to the determination of the author and his painstaking researches in libraries and archives spread throughout Germany and neighbouring countries. Add to this the difficult interviews with survivors involved in the matter under investigation.

The result is that we are presented in greater detail of an otherwise vague aspect of the terror regime for the first time in its naked reality. Dr Sommer throws light on the darkness of the activities of Hitler and his cohorts in these murderous camps. Few who entered them ever came out alive. Unfortunately, it is not possible to shove all the information within the confined space of this review.

The publishers should seriously think of printing this very important

work into other major languages.

To give the reader an example of what is at stake, here are some figures of the death toll in these murder factories. The inmates, mainly Jews, communists, anti-fascists, Roma (gypsies), gays and lesbians, dragged from all over Europe, were either gassed, hanged, shot or died under the brutal conditions in which they were kept. In the female camp Ravensbrück, 60 000 of the 92 000 who died there were victims of starvation and epidemics.

- Buchenwald - 56 000, Ravensbrück (female KZ) - 92 000,

- Sachsenhausen - 100 167, Dora - 15 000, Bergen-Belsen - 48 000,

- Chelmno - 36 000 (Poland), Dachau - 31 951, Flossenbürg - 73 296,

- Auschwitz (Oświęcim) - 4 000 000 (Poland), Belzec - 600 000 (Poland),

- Maidanek-Lublin - 138 000 (Poland), Treblinka - 800 000 (Poland),

- Theresienstadt (Terezín) - 58 000 (Czech Republic), Neuengamme - 82 000

- Groß-Rosen - 20 000 (Poland), Stutthof - 80 000 (Poland), Natzweiler-Struthof - 25 000 (France), Sobibor - 250 000 (Poland), Mauthausen - 122 766 (Austria).

The rest were situated in Germany. These are the main centres. The Nazis created hundreds of such camps throughout Europe which they occupied.

This list is endless because death reigned in Paris, Amsterdam, Oradour and Lidice as well as the streets, meadows, fields and in the forests. Not taken into account here are the many millions killed in air raids, and the invasion of large tracts of Europe by the fascist army. In the Soviet Union alone, more than 20-million lost their lives.

Over the years much material and information have been dug up about the happenings within the walls of these camps. Whoever went in there was a victim and had to suffer the whims and brutality of the SS guards. These were houses of violence rigorously controlled by the SS. The camp was strictly divided, so that working sites, accommodation, torture and murder sections were separated from each other.

A serious look at the concentrations camps presents a picture of contradiction. In the first place the camps were set up to destroy the enemies of the Dritte Reich. Therefore huge signs were posted at the entrance of the biggest camps "Arbeit macht frei" (work liberates). The inmates had to work hard on the building site, with little food, to extend these camps. Although this slogan was confusing for a while, later it became clear what was behind it. It was a cynical way of saying "work yourself to death".

The camps were a huge and lucrative reservoir of cheap skilled labour which was gratefully and gladly accepted by Germany's industrial moguls who moved part of their production sites close to these camps. The majority of these production sites were involved in supporting Hitler's war efforts which earned the industrialists astronomical profits. So did the SS, which made them economically absolutely independent. Resources, extorted from the misery of helpless people, came in very handy for the SS who took cover all over the world when the war came to an end. With this loot, many of them opened lucrative businesses and lived in luxury, under false names, even in Germany although they were wanted people.

Many of these industrialists were

charged by the allies after the war and found to be guilty of crimes against mankind and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. They were released after serving a few years when the Cold War made its appearance; thereafter it was business as usual. Firms like Krupp, Philips, Siemens, and other well-known names today went on to earn billions and wield tremendous influence on West German political and economy policies..

In May 1939, Ravensbrück was established as the central concentration camp for women. It was about 120km north of Berlin although women were also housed in other camps. It became the main "supply" centre for the brothels spread all over Nazi-occupied territory.

Dr Sommer went about his job with a determination and discretion regarding the living conditions, misery and the survival tactics employed by the women. In Buchenwald, the women were quarantined for about a week. The doors to the camp brothel were opened on 11 July 1943.

The timetable for the day was very strictly regulated. The women were awoken at 07:00 and had to clean their rooms. Between 08:00 and 09:00 they were engaged in physical exercises conducted by a fellow prisoner who herself worked as a prostitute in the camp. From 09:00 to 12:00, they were allowed to attend to personal matters such as washing their clothes, ironing etc. Breakfast was eaten in their rooms before 08.00. Lunch was at 11:30 in the canteen.

Afternoon rest was from noon until 14:00, and they were forced to remain in their rooms. Thereafter, there was needlework, and repairing clothes for the clothing closet. Nevertheless, there was enough time for the women to pursue other activities like ball games or just

sun-bathing in summer.

Perhaps the experiences of Magdalena Walter would suffice to give a picture of the daily routine in all the brothels. She remembers the first prisoner who came to her. She was petrified, and threatened to shred the man with a pair of scissors if he touched her. Of course she had no chance. The register for that day indicates that Magdalene Walter had to “entertain” six men.

Walter describes the daily routine as boring and the wait for the “invasion” in the evening when the male inmates were herded in for their “fun”. She said: “Every evening we had to allow the men to entertain themselves with our bodies for a period of two hours. That means they could come in, go to the doctor, be injected and then go to the room number allotted to them. Then it was in, on the job, down, out, back to the doctor – another injection and out of the building. We had one bath with many toilets (the women had to clean themselves after each visit before taking on the next visitor). There was no shortage in cleanliness. Immediately thereafter came the next ‘customer’. Like a conveyor belt. They were not allowed more than 15 minutes.

Each woman had to accommodate at least six “visitors” each evening although this varied from camp to camp.

There were thousands of women like Magdalene Walter who were forced to employ their bodies to stay alive. But at what cost? What happened to Magdalene and the others? Were they ever compensated for the sacrifice, humiliation and suffering that they endured at the hands of the beast that was the German SS?

This is the next phase of the battle although it can be taken for granted that very few of these heroines are alive today. Maybe the state should seriously consider erecting a monument to these victims of Hitler’s barbarity. After all, the German state is very fond of erecting monuments (some, for very dubious reasons). Why not for these women?

I think it is appropriate to conclude this review with a poem composed by Fritz Löhner-Beda, an Austrian who was a prisoner in Buchenwald and Auschwitz Concentration Camps. He died in Auschwitz.

#### **A Bedtime Story**

*Once there was a dragon,  
Its mouth was wide and large  
Its jaws were like a tiger's  
Its hooves were made to charge.*

*It was always hungry  
It ate the whole town up,  
Ate countries and ate nations  
And looked for more to sup.*

*From morn to noon it gobbled  
At night it quenched its thirst.  
It bit off more than it could chew  
And so at last it burst.*

It is sad that Nazism is regrouping and not only in Germany. The lessons of the past are being thrown to the winds and the horrors of the Holocaust are being denied.

**Cde Singh** is a veteran ANC and SACP activist and freelance journalist who lives in Berlin.



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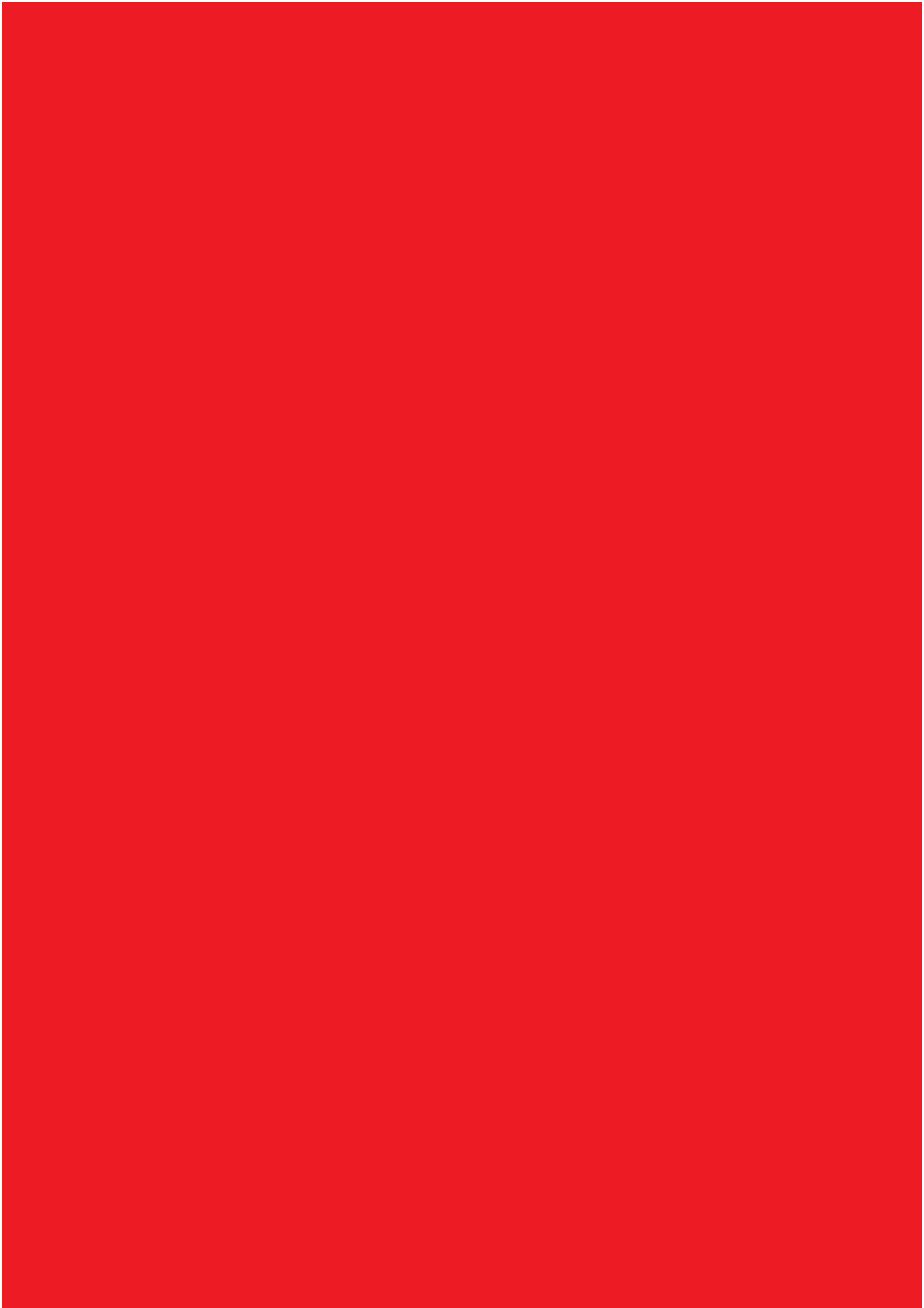
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