



African Communist

2nd Quarter 2016

Issue 192



SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUTH

The solution – not the problem



African Communist

2nd Quarter 2016

Issue Number 192



3. **Editorial Notes**
 6. **Effecting a successful youth transition in SA**
Mcebisi Jonas
 16. **Youth development and underdevelopment**
Yershen Pillay
 41. **Venezuela: the toilet paper revolt**
Solly Mapaila, Themba Mthembu and Alex Mashilo
 51. **Cuba-US 'normalisation': trends & dynamics**
Chris Matlhako and Walter Mothapo
 59. **Sylvia Neame's History of the Congress Movement**
Jeremy Cronin
-

The African Communist is published quarterly by the South African Communist Party as a forum for Marxist-Leninist thought.
Send editorial contributions to: alex@sacp.org.za, or to African Communist, PO Box 1027, Johannesburg 2000.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Forty years on – a new youth generation

June 2016 marks 40 years since the historic 1976 youth uprisings in South Africa. The so-called Soweto uprisings (they started in Soweto, but quickly spread nationwide) had been preceded by the 1973 Durban worker strikes and the re-emergence of progressive trade unions. From 1976 and all the way down to the early 1990s, wave upon wave of semi-insurrectionary struggles, often led by the youth, constituted the key pillar of the national liberation struggle against the apartheid regime.

And now, in 2016, 40 years on, and some two decades beyond the 1994 democratic breakthrough, there is a new 18 to 35 year-old youth generation, constituting over one-third of South Africa's total population. In their important contributions to this issue of *The African Communist*, Cdes Jonas Mcebisi and Yershen Pillay both devote themselves to unpacking the challenges, crises, and radical potential of the contemporary youth sector.

In conventional economic thinking, having a “youth bulge”, that is, large numbers of potentially productive workers relative to ageing dependents, is considered to be an asset. Sadly, this is not the case locally given the exceedingly high levels of youth not in education or training, and not in work.

Both contributions correctly locate the key youth crisis in the grinding levels of youth unemployment (over 50% according to Cde Jonas, over 36% according to Cde Pillay, obviously using different measure-

ments, but agreeing on the excessive levels of youth unemployment nonetheless).

Both, in turn, attribute these crisis levels of youth unemployment to the persisting, problematic monopoly capitalist-dominated structure of our political economy. A further contribution to youth employment has been the failures and weaknesses in our post-apartheid education and training systems.

But can the youth crisis be turned into opportunity? Can the anger, frustration, sense of alienation so many of our youth now feel be turned into a transformative agenda? Cde Pillay argues that this will require a society-wide change of perspective. He argues that the youth, particularly in the mainstream media, are continually cast as either consumers or as “a problem”, “a drain on society”, and not a key potential asset. This also leads, he argues, to a patronising view of the youth as, at best, little more than “adults in waiting”.

Cde Jonas voices a similar concern, but from a more party political institutional perspective. Alluding to Robert Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy”, he notes the tendency for incumbent leaderships in political formations, for instance, to use the powers of incumbency to self-perpetuate themselves at the expense of younger generations. Could this be part of the current youth challenges in the ANC and broader movement, as is frequently stressed by the present crop of ANC Youth League leaders who argue that it is “our time” now? Or are some of these problems not more related to how youth structures are actively recruited, if not voluntarily self-enrolled in, rather than excluded from, factional leadership contests? Either way, as the SACP has underlined in the recent period, the ANC needs to pay much greater attention to leadership succession, rather than leaving it to what has increasingly become a disorderly, divisive and at times even violent process at all levels of the organisation.

Cde Jonas's contribution is especially interesting in its reflections on the radical potential of the current youth formations and struggles. Is this a new 1976 generation? No, he responds, at least not yet. Obviously South Africa of 2016 is very different from South Africa of 1976. The objective and subjective realities confronting the contemporary youth in South Africa lack some of the features of the 1976 period, Cde Jonas argues. Youth and student struggles back then were more embedded within other social movement struggles involving civics and trade unions, among others. Jonas also believes that there was a greater link with "organic intellectuals" then, whereas now a larger proportion of organic struggle intellectuals are located within the state and other public institutions.

For the moment, both contributors agree, the sense of anger, alienation and exclusion that much of the youth experience makes the sector vulnerable to both anti-social behaviour as well as short-term bursts of populist political mobilisation without a clear connection to a sustainable transformational agenda.

There is, of course, much more to debate and discuss. Is youth "entrepreneurship" a valid pillar of youth struggle, or a mirage? Do we understand the new stratifications that have developed within the youth sector, partly as a result of post-1994 advances – the massive increase in university enrolments, or the large proportion of black youth now employed in the public service, for instance?

One thing is certain, however, the current generation of youth is central to the resolution not just of its own challenges, but those of our society at large. ★

YOUTH

Effecting a successful youth transition in SA

We need dynamic and potent youth structures to move South Africa forward, writes **Mcebisi Jonas**

South Africa is characterised by high levels of unemployment, economic exclusion, and inequality.

Within our fragmented and unequal society, youth experience the highest levels of social dislocation and marginalisation in a socio-economic system that they perceive as unresponsive to their needs, identity and aspirations. In a very real sense they are outsiders, not by choice, but by circumstance – in many instances undereducated, excluded from the economy, and living on the outskirts of urban centres with few services and opportunities to change their lives. These objective factors drive high risk and anti-social behaviour (substance abuse, crime, unsafe sex), which, in a classic vicious cycle, further reinforce and exacerbate vulnerability and dislocation. The challenge we need to urgently confront is how to break this vicious cycle.

The youth are always at the forefront of social protest and change (think US hippie movement of the 1960s and the Vietnam solidarity struggles; Soweto Uprising; Arab Spring; Tiananmen Square). Having such large numbers of youth in South Africa who have little or no vested interest in the socio-political and institutional status quo significantly jeopardises social cohesion (the so-called ticking time bomb), and provides fertile recruitment ground for populist political movements that

could threaten our democratic gains.

This article outlines two broad sets of strategic issues that require analysis to identify policy implications and immediate actions to be taken. The first concerns the labour market and the economy, and why we are unable to absorb the growing numbers of unemployed youth as economically active citizens.

How do we break with our historic economic path dependency? How do we reconfigure our education and training sector and reform our labour market to ensure millions of unemployed youth find employment or access to entrepreneurial opportunities? The second part of this article looks at youth organisation and mobilisation, pointing both to risks that need to be mitigated and opportunities that must be seized for a successful youth transition in South Africa. Key to this will be the reorientation of instinctive youth discontent towards social change. But this will require a rethink of organisational strategy and the role of organic youth intellectuals.

Youth in the labour market and economy

The vulnerability of South Africa's youth is nowhere more evident than in the labour market. South Africa has an extremely youthful population. Those under the age of 35 constitute about 66% (36-million people) of the total population of nearly 55-million. A staggering 24% of the population, or 13-million, are aged between 15 and 24 (Stats SA, Mid-year population estimate).

Having a youthful population is often viewed as positive for unlocking growth and development potential (the so-called youth dividend). There is strong international evidence to suggest it is the youth who are the most innovative, the most risk taking and entrepreneurial, and as new entrants into the economy the most likely to stimulate both productivity and demand. But with growing structural unemployment

and an economy stuck in a low growth trap, the youth dividend can quickly turn into a youth burden.

Youth unemployment in South Africa among 15-24 year-olds is estimated at 52,6%. In simple terms, out of every 10 unemployed people seven are young people. This is a crisis of epidemic proportions.

The South African economy is best described as being in some kind of state of interregnum – where the old economic order has died or is dying and we have not yet transitioned to the new. The economy remains locked into an historic growth model built around a minerals-energy-complex of mining and finance corporates. The economic logic of this accumulation strategy – built on low cost super-exploited migrant labour and cheap energy – has been unravelling over the past few decades. This has intensified since the (2008) Great Recession with rapidly rising energy costs and insecurities in supply, and the decline in global commodities demand.

There has also been a deepening of South Africa's subordination within the global economic system since 1994, with the intensification of the export of primary commodities and the import of value-added manufactured products. South Africa is a very open economy by international standards (reflected in the ratio of imports and exports to GDP), and remains highly dependent on foreign capital inflows, with foreign savings presently accounting for 30% of our new investment. More than one third of our government bond market and 40% of our equity market is foreign owned. This entails huge risk should we be downgraded to junk status.

It leaves South Africa in an extremely vulnerable position. The global economy is in a period of under-consumption because of a low and declining share of wages in national incomes in advanced economies, as well as the slow-down of China. Prospects for returned up-cycles in commodity prices and capital flows are some years away, limiting

our space to navigate the current downturn through consumption-led growth or counter-cyclical fiscal policy.

But as the old adage goes: never waste a good crisis. The question is how should we use the current moment and its attendant risks to break path dependency and effect radical structural change? How do we navigate a more jobs-intensive, equitable, less energy intensive growth path? And what trade-offs are needed for this to be effected?

In many respects, the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP), National Growth Path (NGP) and the National Development Plan (NDP) all converge around the need for some kind of radical structural change, and have identified sectors in which South Africa is (or could be) competitive – the mining value chain, oil and gas, energy, agriculture and the agro-industrial value chain, advanced manufacturing, labour-intensive light manufacturing, high-tech and financial services, tourism, the creative industries and the infrastructure construction value chain, among others.

Paradoxically the sectors where South Africa is currently most competitive – finance, knowledge services and advanced manufacturing – all require relatively high skills for entry. Increased youth participation rates would require a drastic improvement in education and training outcomes.

The challenges of our current education and training system are well illustrated in this example from the Eastern Cape. Of all grade 2 enrolments in the year 2000,

- 65% reached Grade 10 in the expected year
- Only 16% passed Grade 12 in the expected year
- Only 2% will get a bachelors degree
- Only 0,6% will get science, engineering and technology degrees.

Education is about more than preparation for the job market. Education is a fundamental human right, and provides the basis upon which

we can develop and transform South Africa.

Education outcomes structure the possibilities (or otherwise) of creating new generations of independent and critical thinkers as agents for social change in South Africa. Without quality education, young people will not fulfil their inherent human potential. And if young people do not fulfil their potential, the nation will fail.

We also need to focus more on improving the pace of the transition from school to work. One of the reasons why Germany has seen relative success in youth employment is because of its training system that prepares the youth for the labour market and entrepreneurial activities through experiential on-the-job training. Commitments to experiential learning is one reason why the Chinese have accelerated learning within their firms and ensured skills transfers (and technology transfer) from multinationals investing in China.

In the South African experience, skilling outcomes have been compromised by the poor performance of Sector Education Training Authorities (Setas), as well as the sub-optimal uptake of learnerships and apprenticeships by private sector firms. New incentives (for example, tax allowances) need to be looked at to radically increase the uptake of learnerships and apprenticeships. Active employment services to improve efficiencies of job-searching and job-matching are also key.

Youth also need to be guided towards entrepreneurship. Key here will be more inclusive innovation and technology transfer, special support for start-ups through youth incubators, product development and market readiness support, and targeted financial support with customised instruments from Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) and private banks. The need to address regulatory constraints that limit SMMEs and prohibit transitioning from informal to formal enterprises must be prioritised.

Ultimately though, we must find employment opportunities for

millions of unskilled and low skilled youth who have been failed by our education and training system. This will require a combination of up-scaling direct public employment schemes, as well as opening up opportunities in low skill, labour intensive industrial segments. To achieve the latter would require innovations in our labour market policies, possibly including wage subsidies and productivity-enhancing measures as an incentive for the private sector to increase employment. These innovations and their risks will require robust discussion among employers, government, labour unions, and youth formations.

Youth mobilisation and leadership

Robert Michels wrote about the “iron law of oligarchy” referring to how leaderships in various organisations in society and political parties hold on to their positions and ensure their continued occupation because of the resources and power that come with occupying these positions. We are perhaps confronted by the iron law of oligarchy today where those who were the youth during the struggle and transition have moved into middle and old age and now hold on to positions of power and authority. If we do not find a way of enabling a youth transition in our society to accompany a fundamental economic transformation, we are likely to face worse social instability than we do today.

Youth social movements have not yet come into their own in terms of articulating and channelling their interests towards constructive arenas for engaging in meaningful social transformation. The recent uprisings by students first against symbols of colonialism (#Rhodes must fall) and then against the higher education system (# fees must fall) have met with a number of responses.

The first approach suggests that this student movement reflects a similar historical moment to the 1976 uprisings and its aftermath. Note, for example, these words in one of the commentaries: “As

a student activist of the 1980s, I know instinctively that students are disrupting the relations of power for a much broader aim in society” (*Mail & Guardian*, 13 November 2015).

The second broad approach suggests that the current student uprisings are a reflection of an emerging momentary student movement, which is acting on a few immediate general student issues but is extremely fractured and discordant, and as such not a principled force for driving a youth transformation agenda.

A third view is that there are a significant and complex range of issues confronting the youth today in South Africa which are very different from previous historical conjunctures and that the current youth uprising is but a first step in defining a meaningful youth politics and transformation agenda.

I would argue that we are not yet witnessing a meaningful student movement and the emergence of a transformative youth agenda. These outcomes will only emerge if a new cadre of organic intellectuals emerges who can inspire youth mobilisation by linking the current eruption of youth protests to an agenda of transformation welded to genuine foundations. This requires proper analytical work to prioritise issues and the appropriate strategic response. Reliance on instinctive idealism is unlikely to rescue the youth movement from the seductive populism currently doing the rounds and instead will drive it into its arms. The 1970s student movement, when it rose, found a wide and deep range of analyses of the conjuncture (from historical materialist analyses of political economy, to strong statements of “black consciousness” to archives of research on the South Africa labour movement and civil society). It also found a militant and active labour movement (rising from the 1973 strikes), with strong linkages with progressive university-based intellectuals, as well as community and cultural activists. This enabled the articulation of diverse struggles as a single co-ordinated

national liberation agenda (led by the ANC in exile).

Today, when our students rose in militancy they were not supported by a critical mass of organic intellectuals who could help shape a real and sustained struggle. And they were not supported by a mobilised civil society, which could both defend and advance their interests. Instead the student protestors rose as a rather fragmented mass, coordinated by social media tweets, but without an overarching agenda around which to build alliances with activists from other sectors of society. This unfortunately creates a very real foundation for traction for populist politics.

Partly this relates to one of the unintended consequences of our transition to state power. In our attempts to consolidate power and effect the promises of transformation, the ANC also inadvertently shut down the key sites of grooming organic intellectuals. This includes inadvertently demobilising our youth structures that had historically nurtured a large contingent of our current leadership. These were the core organic intellectuals from the 1970s grown in exile and at home. At the same time the large and vibrant civil society organisations of the pre-apartheid era that had been sustained through donor inflows into the NGO and civil society sector were also phased out with the emergence of a legitimate state. As a consequence most donor funding was redirected away from the sites where organic intellectuals had been historically grown – organised labour, women and youth organisations, and community-based structures. NGOs and other civil society organisations adopted a survival strategy, and increasingly became agents of government service delivery.

In addition, organic intellectuals from communities were demobilised through movement into traditional intellectual positions within the state, and found themselves curtailed by regulations and bureaucratic hierarchy, far detached from the youth realities of today.

The challenge of restoring youth to their rightful position in society must begin by opening up the terrain where young organic intellectuals can thrive and grow, shaping the visions that will inspire other youth to follow and embrace the process of transformation and fundamental change. We must guard against “picking winners” in youth leadership and instead encourage a socially legitimate, critical and inspirational youth leadership that consistently and deliberately influences our policy agenda and holds us to account.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the current objective position of youth in the economy and labour market presents significant risks to social and political stability. Having such high numbers of youth who are not in employment, education or training is a challenge that requires our urgent and unwavering attention. The article has argued that our extremely high youth unemployment is mainly a result of structural weaknesses in the economy (low growth, and the capital-intensive and skill-intensive bias), and also partly an unintended consequence of policy choices we have made, as well as our sub-optimal education and training outcomes. This objective situation of high youth unemployment is in turn encouraging levels of instinctive discontent – sporadic, militant and even violent protests, but which are not linked to a broader transformation agenda. High levels of unemployment and low levels of optimism about the future also fuel anti-social behaviour (crime, drugs, unsafe sex etc), which further reproduces vulnerability. Hard policy choices must be made to break this vicious cycle, especially with regards combatting youth unemployment and fixing our education and training system. More of the same will not help. With such huge challenges and so much at stake, we should be more prepared to venture into new policy terrains and choices – experi-

ment with new instruments, and if successful, run at scale.

We must also acknowledge that we have been somewhat limited in harnessing the energy (and militancy) of youth. The youth are there to agitate and remind us that access to power is not the end game. As leadership, we must use the power that has been bestowed upon us to transform society. And this is never easy, because there will always be powerful interests vested in the status quo. This is the broader struggle into which the youth must become more integrated.

Perhaps we have over-borrowed from the multilateral institutions' policy discourse - establishing youth desks, establishing youth commissions and youth councils, and trying to implement youth mainstreaming - which we must acknowledge has not been as effective as desired. The youth, supported by other progressive sectors of society, must be seized with the ideological work of linking the current issues they confront -referred to above as instinctive discontent - with the broader transformation agenda tied to the National Democratic Revolution. We must guard against populist capture, or becoming populist ourselves in an effort to outdo our political opponents.

As senior leadership within government, business, and civil society, we must be more prepared to confront the issues that the youth puts on the table. Dynamic, effective and disciplined youth structures will, and I would argue should, make us uncomfortable. This is precisely what is required to trigger the innovation and change we need to move our country forward. ★

Cde Jonas, an SACP member, is the Deputy Minister of Finance. He writes here in his personal capacity

YOUTH

Youth development and underdevelopment

Yershen Pillay assesses the impact of South Africa's education system, economic growth rate, health and social services, and state support on its young people

The current state of the youth movement in South Africa can be characterised as youth development evolving side by side with youth underdevelopment, mainly due to the systemic reproduction of challenges brought about by an untransformed economic base.

YCLSA discussion is focused on state power and how best to address the systemic challenges associated with capitalist development. To completely and comprehensively address the challenges of youth unemployment, youth poverty, youth inequalities and youth underdevelopment, the current developmental path must be transformed. Ultimately, the only way to address these challenges is to speed up the transition to socialism.

The legacies of colonialism, apartheid and segregation in the prevailing capitalist system have produced and reproduced the challenges of youth unemployment, poor quality education, lack of skills, high levels of HIV-Aids, and low levels of entrepreneurship among the youth. It is no wonder that despite significant strides since the advent of democracy in 1994, the majority of young South Africans remain doubtful of a better life with education, skills, jobs and opportunities for social and

economic progress. Youth between the ages of 14 and 35 constitute about 42% of the total population in South Africa and the youth population is growing at a faster rate than the adult population. This large youth population cohort can create new socio-economic opportunities if adequately supported. However, if not properly supported, it could result in social and developmental catastrophes.

The population structure will change over time as both mortality and birth rates decrease. By 2037, South Africa will be a large aging population that will need to rely on social security. If the current socio-economic situation of the youth population is not addressed we will reap painful social dividends.

This current 'youth bulge' provides an opportunity for South Africa to reap the economic benefits that may accrue as a result of having a larger working age productive population relative to the non-productive dependent population (known as the demographic dividend). In this discussion document we ask a series of questions – and we attempt to address them.

- Are we in a position to benefit from having a larger working age population, which by extension raises questions around the quality and quantity of our education?
- Are we pursuing policies and programmes that promote employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people?
- Can the current capitalist accumulation path produce opportunities for all young people entering its labour market?
- Can the health system and its programmes support a healthy and productive young nation?

Today many youth find themselves in abject poverty arising from low levels of education, few marketable skills, low productivity and generally poor health. Many young people are trapped in a culture of entitlement and dependency and turn to alcohol and drugs or a life of

crime as an easy escape. Others have taken the opportunities that have come with freedom and democracy and are at the forefront of transformation. In many instances these opportunities have come through state institutions such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (Nsfas) or the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA).

A skilled, productive and socially conscious workforce is essential for a second, more radical phase of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). According to recent data from Stats SA, youth constitute the majority of the current workforce. Approximately 9,3-million young South Africans between the ages of 15 and 34 are economically active. Society can ill afford the consequences, from costly welfare dependency to higher youth prison populations when the economy fails to absorb all segments of the population effectively, especially its youth population.

In the medium term the focus should be on:

- The provision of free, quality and relevant education;
- Meaningful and accelerated skills development;
- Promoting youth entrepreneurship and cooperatives development;
- Promoting the health and wellness of youth;
- The massification of the national youth service.

These are the 'Big Five' of youth development. These five objectives are the 'non-negotiables' of youth development in the medium term. The aim of this paper is to suggest that the focus of youth development in the second, more radical phase of the NDR should be on these five objectives as the 'non-negotiables' of youth development.

Defining youth, youth development and youth underdevelopment

The term *youth* or *young people* have different meanings depending

on the context in which they are used. One meaning is based on a sociological definition of youth as a life stage comprising of a series of “transitions from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence to independence, and from being recipients of society’s services to becoming contributors to national, economic, political and cultural life.” (Curtain, 2003: 74) For the purposes of statistical comparisons, international organizations such as the United Nations define youth as those aged between 15 and 24 years. The African Union and the African Youth Charter defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 35 years.

According to Karen Pittman (1993), development is a process and not a goal and *youth development* is “the ongoing growth process in which youth are engaged in attempting to: (1) meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and (2) build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.” (Pittman, 1993: 8)

The National Youth Policy of South Africa 2020 defines youth development as: *an intentional, comprehensive approach that provides space, opportunities and support for young people to maximize their individual and collective creative energies for personal development as well as development of the broader society of which they are an integral part.* In the context of South Africa and most other developing countries, development has taken a new shape to incorporate sustainable livelihoods. It is therefore argued that personal development and national development should incorporate aspects of sustainable livelihoods and the interventions necessary to facilitate sustainability.

Youth underdevelopment refers to the underutilization or inability to realize the full potential inherent in youth. Youth are not “adults in waiting”. They are capable human beings with abilities that must be enhanced or fostered. If these capabilities are not enhanced or fostered

over time youth underdevelopment may occur leading to a lack of personal development for the individual. This has negative consequences for society's overall development.

In this article *youth* or *young people* refers to every person between the age of 15 and 35 years and *youth development* is defined as: *an intentional, comprehensive approach that provides space, opportunities and support for young people to maximize their individual and collective creative energies for personal development, national development and sustainable livelihoods.*

Social perspectives on youth

Youth constitute a significant, growing and distinct group in society. The way in which society views youth is critical to shaping perceptions of youth in the adult population, and how youths view themselves. There are three contending social perspectives on youth

- Youth as consumers in society;
- Youth as assets to society; and
- Youth as problems to society.

The narrow perspective takes the view of youth as nothing more than consumers in society. This social perspective resonates with the profit-driven motive of capitalist society where the youth group is considered to simply be a market to be influenced and exploited. Youth can therefore be influenced from a very early age in terms of what products they purchase. Hence the introduction of “strategic philanthropy”, whereby private sector companies donate items to schools in exchange for opportunities to display their corporate names. This represents a dimension of marketing to youth that complements and deepens the usual approaches through mass media. In this way youth are seen as a market to be exploited. Not surprisingly, we have seen an increasing number of books dealing with the marketing of products to the youth.¹

Youth-targeted marketing has been approached from many perspectives. Youth as on-line consumers are expected to account for more than US\$1,3-billion in revenues from on-line sales.² It is estimated that young girls spend more than US\$9-billion on fragrances, cosmetics and other beauty products annually.³ Thus the consumer perspective seeks to advance the narrative that youth are a lucrative market and must be viewed as such.

The asset perspective views youth as having the potential to contribute actively and meaningfully to society. Youth are seen as benefactors of development rather than as beneficiaries of development. This social perspective sees youth in a position to help rather than to receive assistance. This viewpoint resonates with youth as agents of change capable of leading their own development with society's support. It focuses on an empowered youth moving away from focusing on youth as victims of problems such as crime, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse to one of enhancing potential. Youth become agents for addressing service delivery challenges such as involvement in the building of houses as opposed to being passive recipients of housing programmes. The decision makers in our society have placed little value in the potential of youth leading to young people becoming undervalued by society and overlooked in policy. This perspective has been beneficial to improving the levels of youth participation and the quality of youth leadership.

The third perspective views youth as victims (unemployed, abused, neglected etc), as criminals or drug users, addicts, promiscuous etc. Youth are categorised as problems to society and a drain on national resources. This viewpoint sees youth as a group to be feared and dependent on development programmes for their eventual graduation into adulthood. Those who adopt such a deficit or problem perspective do not see youth as equal partners or capable citizens but rather as those who 'must still learn' and therefore cannot lead. According to Mc-

Knight (1995), a tremendous amount of resources has been invested in portraying youth as problems to society.

This deficit or problem perspective is dominant in South African society. The media in particular has played a significant role in shaping a dominant perspective of youth as either consumers or problems to society.

South African society is suffering from 'adulthood', the disrespect for the youth based on the assumption that adults are better than young people and are therefore entitled to act upon young people without their agreement. In 1996, John Bell argued that the prevalence of adulthood must be recognised if society is to make effective progress in having youth as equal partners. Young South Africans want to be treated as equal partners and not as adults in waiting. The fundamental belief that adults know what is best for youth often interferes with the development of a genuine dialogue about youth participation and youth programmes. When young people are treated in this way by the older generation, their true potential cannot be achieved resulting in disillusionment leading to greater youth underdevelopment.

According to Rauner (2000), a shift in paradigm from deficit to asset would result in an equally prominent change in the social norms of caring in social relations and interactions. From growing pains to growing gains, youth have the potential to transform society for the better. If we are to develop a more caring youth, improve the levels of youth participation and develop a more capable youth leadership, it is essential for South African society to make the transition from a deficit perspective that is a drain on society to one that views youth as assets to society.

Our social perspective in South Africa must shift to be more dominant in viewing youth as assets to society as opposed to a drain on society.

Challenges facing the youth

The demographic dividend and youth underdevelopment

South Africa is experiencing a youth bulge. It is crucial that we factor this youth bulge into national, provincial and local planning. The South African population is young and there is estimated to be about 20,5-million young people between the ages of 14 and 35. Demographers and economists argue that the youth bulge contributes to swelling the working population relative to the dependent population. Where there is an increase in the working population relative to the dependent population, a country could benefit economically, provided there are policies and programmes that enable this large working-age population to optimally participate in the economy.⁴The economic benefit accrues because consumption will be lower than production, as the economically productive population is higher than the non-productive population. It is argued that this will avail resources for national savings, recapitalisation of the economy and for social investment such as health and wellbeing as well as education and skills development.⁵ This has been termed a demographic dividend. A demographic dividend may provide a strong catalyst for socio-economic growth and development.

A demographic dividend occurs when a falling birth rate changes the age distribution so that fewer resources are needed to meet the needs of youth and more resources are released for socio-economic development and family welfare. According to Mattias Lundberg and David Lam (2007), having a large number of youth can put pressure on schools, labour markets and services but it has been noted that the declining dependency ratios resulting from the demographic dividend reverses this trend, releasing resources for education and family welfare. The demographic dividend can only be realised if young people have the opportunities to be healthy, productive and contributing citizens. To capitalise on the demographic dividend, countries need to pro-

vide high-quality and accessible education, social services and health services to their youth populations. Currently, South Africa's chances of benefitting from the a demographic dividend are narrowed by the high rate of youth unemployment, low levels of youth entrepreneurship, the poor quality of education, the inability of the economy to absorb young economically active citizens and the low life expectancy mainly attributable to the scourge of HIV-Aids. Both the massive government roll out of anti-retrovirals (ARVs) and the significant fertility rate decrease (compared to most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa) have increased life expectancy and productivity especially for the youth, leading to improved chances of reaping a demographic dividend.

However, the severe lack of opportunities and support services may not only mitigate against the possibility of benefitting from a demographic dividend but it may also lead to youth underdevelopment. Youth underdevelopment arises as a result of a lack of enabling conditions that stifle the full realisation of the capabilities inherent in youth. This has been experienced in many parts of the country as young people continue to be deprived of support systems for personal, economic and social development. Thus while many young people will benefit from certain political, economic and civil rights, their full potential may not be realised due to the impact of insufficient employment, education and entrepreneurial opportunities. Thus the country has been unable to reap a demographic dividend.

The systemic failures associated with capitalism have led to youth underdevelopment, while the social programmes designed to develop and empower our youth have not had their intended impact. Some may argue that it is not the institutions, products, services or programmes that are lacking but rather their inability to address the structural causes of the challenges facing youth in a capitalist society. Thus the current set of interventions may only lead to the temporary development of

youth while the system continues to reproduce youth unemployment, youth poverty and youth underdevelopment. Youth development cannot be separated out from the society in which it occurs.

Youth unemployment

The biggest challenge that we face as a country is how to assist young people to walk through the front door of the labour markets into decent jobs as well as to participate in other sustainable economic opportunities. Youth unemployment is the most pressing issue facing young people today and is public enemy number one. One could argue that youth unemployment has become a primary threat to the NDR. To advance the NDR requires a more dedicated focus on job creation for the youth and affirming youth employment creation as an apex priority of the entire society, not just of government. The burden of youth unemployment cannot fall only on the shoulders of government. All social partners must contribute to addressing both demand and supply side causes of youth unemployment.

It is important to contextualise youth unemployment as not something that is new or unique. Youth unemployment in South Africa has been on the rise since the late 1970s rising to almost 20% in the early 1980s. Many countries across the globe are struggling to create jobs for their youth populations. Countries such as Spain and Greece have higher youth unemployment rates than South Africa. As of November 2014, the youth unemployment rate in Spain was 53,5%, in Greece 49,8% and in Italy 43,9%,⁶ whilst the youth unemployment rate in South Africa was 36,1%. Clearly the challenge of youth unemployment is a global challenge and not simply a local one. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates global youth unemployment at over 75-million young people.

South Africa's labour force surveys have consistently shown that

the country is faced with unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment as compared to countries of a similar economic size. According to the most recent data from Stats SA there are approximately 19,5-million youth in South Africa between the ages of 15 and 34. However, 10,2-million are not economically active and therefore not considered part of the labour force i.e. they are not employed nor are they unemployed. There are 9,3-million youth who are considered economically active. Of these, 6,1-million are employed and 3,2-million are unemployed. The challenge therefore is how best to create 3,2-million sustainable jobs or opportunities for these unemployed youth.

About 2,2-million of the labour force is discouraged from looking for a job and of this total of discouraged job seekers, approximately 1,3-million are youth. Unemployment is at its highest between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Some 7,5-million youth between the ages of 14 and 35 are not employed and not in any learning institution. Data from Stats SA shows that African and coloured youth are most affected by unemployment at 53,8% and 43,3% respectively.⁷ Salaries are the main source of income for youth with 73% of youth between 25 and 34 years deriving their income from salaries. This seems to underscore the importance of employment as a source of livelihood.

Data also suggests that wage employment in most countries is not growing fast enough to absorb youth thus forcing them to seek opportunities in the informal sector. In South Africa, the growth of youth as a group is higher than the rate of job growth. The growth rate of employment has not kept pace with the growth rate of the young labour force.

Based on the consequences of youth unemployment in North Africa where youth unemployment was as high as 24%, one could view youth unemployment as the primary threat to political stability and to the NDR. The majority of those who orchestrated, and eventually led, the

revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were young people between the ages of 14 and 35. The young people who helped bring down the regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt are called the *shabab atileen* (unemployed youths).

It is therefore imperative that a pragmatic and comprehensive youth employment policy is developed and implemented during the second, more radical phase of the NDR. The challenge of youth unemployment is an unconventional one that requires unconventional solutions. A silver bullet approach to youth unemployment will not work. What is required is a multipronged approach spearheaded by a multi-sectoral effort.

The quantity and quality of education

Education is the single most important investment to make if we are serious about job creation and sustainable development. However, education must be recognised as an ideology and not as a neutral phenomenon. Under apartheid we saw how education was used as an instrument of oppression. It was only after 1994 that we initiated the process of opening the doors of learning for all and utilising education as an instrument of liberation. Today education is considered a basic need. The implementation of free, quality and relevant education for all must be intensified.

The last 20 years have seen great strides made in opening the doors of learning for all. Today we have more than 7-million youth in no-fee schools, receiving free education and since its inception, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (Nsfas) has provided R41,5-billion in student financial aid to more than 2-million students from poor and working class families.

Although significant strides have been made in providing access to education since 1994, the content, curriculum and quality of education

remains of great concern. Many of our learning institutions continue to produce hard-nosed neoliberals and history books continue to characterise communists as terrorists. South Africa's participation in recent surveys of educational achievement indicates that a large proportion of children are performing at such low levels as to render them effectively illiterate or innumerate. In the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) of 2003, the average score for South African students was the lowest out of 46 participating countries in both mathematics and science at the Grade 8 level.

The majority of young people in South Africa demonstrated a disturbingly low proficiency in key skills such as numeracy and literacy compared to other Southern African countries. South Africa came 10th out of 15 countries in Southern Africa in reading and 8th in mathematics – despite the fact that we spend more resources on education than any of the other countries surveyed. Poor youth in South Africa are performing worse than equally poor youth elsewhere in the region.

It is important to recognise that the low quality of early schooling education of the majority of poor children in South Africa translates into inadequate and unequal outcomes later on. Taylor et al. (2011) demonstrate that very low proportions of poor and of poorly performing children in TIMSS in 2002 went on to achieve adequate outcomes in matric several years later. However, the fact that poor children in South Africa are performing worse than equally poor children in other countries in the region suggests that the reasons for this underperformance may go beyond poverty itself; there must be other features within poor South African communities, schools and classrooms that negatively affect educational achievement.

For example, the issue of language-related challenges could be one factor. South Africa has 11 official languages. Most learners whose home language is not English or Afrikaans begin schooling with their mother

tongue as the language of instruction and then experience a switch of the language of instruction for non-language subjects to English. This should occur at the fourth grade, although it is not always seamlessly implemented, while better materials to support teachers implementing this transition may be needed. Language related challenges clearly disadvantage many learners although the relative importance of this factor in influencing educational achievement is insufficiently researched.

Teachers and classroom practices is another factor driving low-quality education. Until recently, very little was known about the state of content knowledge among South African teachers. Carnoy et al. (2008), found that of the 49 Grade 6 teachers in Gauteng whose content knowledge was tested, the average score was only 60% on both the mathematical content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge parts of the test. This is of concern as the test was set at a Grade 5 level.

The quality of teacher training and the need for more teacher training institutions capable of producing adequately qualified teachers is necessary for improving the quality of education in schools. Of equal importance is infrastructure development. More schools need to be built for the poor and rural youth and new classrooms erected in existing schools. Infrastructure development in the education system cannot be over-emphasised if we are to talk about quality, relevant education.

The content, curriculum and quality of education need to be reviewed to produce highly skilled critical thinkers. The great strides made in access to education and higher education has led to youth development while the low levels and poor quality of education have led to youth underdevelopment. As part of making education fashionable, a culture of academic excellence must be the focus in the second, more radical phase of the NDR. This must include not only prioritising access for youth from poor households and youth in rural areas but should

also emphasise improving the levels and quality of education and addressing the systemic structural challenges in the education system.

Youth entrepreneurship and cooperative development

To address some of the major socio-economic challenges we face – key among them job creation and poverty alleviation – requires a larger cohort of successful young entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs create new enterprises, new enterprises create more jobs and more jobs leads to more household income. The harsh reality is that as a nation we lack a culture of youth entrepreneurship and there are simply too few young entrepreneurs capable of creating jobs for other young people.

The shortage of young entrepreneurs and the lack of a culture of entrepreneurship among the youth of South Africa is borne out by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Report for 2013 which indicates that only 13% of young South Africans had intentions of starting an enterprise. This represented a decline from 15% in 2012. It is a shocking statistic when compared to the region's average of approximately 47%.

The report further indicated that the total early-stage entrepreneurial activity rate (TEA rate) among young South Africans was only 10,6%. In other countries on the continent, among them Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia and Ghana, TEA rates were above 30%. The TEA rate accounted for the percentage of youth in the process of establishing new enterprises or running existing enterprises that are less than 3,5 years old. Only 2,9% of South Africa's population has firmly established small enterprises, the fourth-lowest established enterprise activity rate and well below the average rate of 15,4% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Clearly we need to do more for youth entrepreneurship in South Africa. Various captains of industry and community leaders have echoed similar sentiments. This challenge presents itself against the backdrop

of a value system that is skewed towards producing job seekers rather than job creators. Yet many young South Africans possess high degrees of entrepreneurial talent and can easily be groomed into successful young entrepreneurs.

The availability of financial and non-financial support for young entrepreneurs has increased exponentially over time and today the NYDA, Small Enterprise Financing Agency (Sefa) and Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) partnership that provides loans, business development support and mentorship for youth-owned enterprises is one of the largest state support programmes in existence. A staggering R2,7-billion has been allocated specifically to support aspiring young entrepreneurs.

Another example is the NYDA Youth Entrepreneurship Grant Programme that provides grant finance, business development support and mentorship to micro- and small youth-owned enterprises to nurture a small business culture among the youth. Clearly the availability of support is not an issue. A plethora of financial and non-financial support exists for those young South Africans who want to become entrepreneurs. The major challenge seems to be a lack of information on how best to access this support. The second, more radical phase of the NDR should promote more access to information on youth entrepreneurship for unemployed youth, youth from poor households and youth in rural areas.

Efforts at promoting a culture of youth entrepreneurship should be complemented with further efforts at intensifying the participation of young people in the cooperatives economy. Cooperatives can play an important role in addressing major socio-economic challenges such as job creation, poverty alleviation and social integration.

Many countries have promoted the formation and growth of cooperatives to address unemployment. Cooperatives worldwide have cre-

ated more than 800-million jobs. They create jobs because members are allowed to pool resources, ideas and capital for collective growth and prosperity. Cooperatives therefore have a distinct employment creating potential that differs from other forms of enterprise. Cooperatives can provide decent work opportunities because they allow members to determine for themselves under which conditions they wish to work. This is of course the extreme opposite of exploitation of one by another as experienced under capitalist-orientated forms of enterprise. Thus cooperatives provide a viable option for decent job creation and the realisation of a living wage. It is deeply concerning that recent data from the Companies Intellectual and Property Commission (CIPC) indicated that the number of cooperatives being registered on an annual basis has declined and is expected to decline further in the future.

Ensuring a healthy youth population

The health and wellbeing of young people demonstrates the extent to which the country can achieve its development goals: the youth represent the present and future human and social capital of any country. Despite the efforts and resources invested in South Africa's healthcare system, the indicators of a healthy nation remain unacceptable. South Africa has the highest number of people living with HIV-Aids with the prevalence of this disease being highest amongst young people. As of 2013, the prevalence rate for youth between the ages of 15 to 24 was 8,5%. This represents a decline from the HIV prevalence rate of 13,6% in 2002 but remains unacceptably high.

Vital statistics from Stats SA show that there is a very high mortality rate among young people. The mortality data between 1997 and 2009 shows that there were more than 6-million reported deaths in South Africa. Of these, approximately 1,5-million were young people. The top five leading causes of death among the youth are tuberculosis, acciden-

tal injuries, influenza and pneumonia, HIV and intestinal infections.

Globally we have the highest rate of inequity of access to health services. The public health system serves the vast majority of youth but is chronically underfunded and understaffed. The wealthiest 20% of the population use the private health care system and is far better served. This is a contributing factor to youth underdevelopment.

Studies conducted on health behaviour have shown that young people are starting to have sex at too early an age. This results in an unacceptably high incidence of schoolgirl pregnancies. Data from Stats SA suggests that 37% of learners reported having had sex while 30,7% reported always using condoms. In contrast, 67,4% of out-of-school youth reported ever having sex while only 22,1% of these youth reported always using condoms. The majority of teenage mothers were neither working nor studying, indicating that most teenage mothers are dependent on financial support from wage earners within the household and child support grants. Alcohol use is very high in both in-school and out-of-school youths while the use of tobacco products is very high among school-going youths. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey revealed that 37,6% of Grade 8-10 learners reported having smoked in their lifetime. Significantly more male learners (47,5%) were classified as having smoked, compared to female learners at 28,9%.

As of 2014, 22,5% of youth had access to medical aid.⁸ It is important in that membership of a medical aid increases access to private health facilities. The proposed National Health Insurance would however allow all youth access to free services at the point of delivery.

The health status of youth is related to the level of education and whether or not one is employed. A high percentage of those with higher education and those who are employed report that they enjoy a higher degree of good health compared to those with low levels of education who are unemployed. This reinforces the notion that youth develop-

ment should be approached in a more holistic and integrated manner.

Social cohesion and civic participation

Social cohesion and civic participation can create positive youth social capital by building bridges of social trust and shared values. However, the levels of youth social cohesion and civic participation in recent times have not translated into economic and developmental resources at community and individual levels. For this to occur a higher degree of social mobilisation is required.

Social mobilisation is critical to ensure the active participation of young people in their own development. In the second, more radical phase of the NDR, a social mobilisation strategy must target unemployed youth, youth from poor households and youth in rural areas. It is essential to ensure that these vulnerable groups of young people are prioritised in the second phase of the NDR, because they have largely been excluded from any gains made in the first phase of the transition post-1994.

National Youth Service (NYS) programmes can be used as a platform for young people to develop economic and developmental resources through which they can realise the attainment of a better livelihood. Youth service programmes provide an opportunity for youth to address what they deem wrong in their communities whilst gaining valuable skills, assuming responsibility, learning work ethic and interpersonal skills. Through volunteering, youth become part of the solution and are able to identify strategies to alleviate problems in their communities.

Youth service can be defined as a range of activities that enable young people to participate in civic life to benefit themselves and their communities. The range of youth service programmes can range from formal service through structured programmes in exchange for mini-

mal or no monetary contribution to informal service in which the ethic of service to others is passed on through families, schools, civic organisations and popular culture. Fundamentally youth service is about ensuring young people are at the forefront of promoting development in their communities.

Investing in programmes that promote youth service can have many returns. NYS is an effective strategy for youth development and a critical part of social mobilisation. There have been debates in South Africa about whether or not to legislate the NYS. A better option may in fact be to mainstream youth service into all aspects of society so all government departments, the private sector, labour organisations and community organisations start to develop strategies to develop and implement youth service programmes that coincide with their day to day work.

Mainstreaming youth service is critical to the country's development agenda as it offers many returns to the individual, the community and society. One of the most important benefits is the benefit to the individual in the form of gaining valuable experience, knowledge and skills that will facilitate paid employment. Being part of a youth service programme can improve a young person's ability to successfully make the transition from school to work. Whether acquiring skills through on-the-job training that will serve them in their future career, or simply acclimatising to a workplace environment, service can help young people be absorbed into the open labour market. Thus youth service programmes not only assist in increasing youth employment but enhance the overall employability of youth.

Out-of-school and unemployed youth are at a much greater risk of behaviour that is harmful to themselves and their communities. A sense of hopelessness from being out of school or out of work leads

many young people into a life of crime, social unrest or alcohol and drug abuse. Youth service programmes provide a structured environment in which to learn and work while reducing the space and time to think about risky behaviour providing constructive alternatives to risky behaviour and can provide a means for re-integration.

Participating in youth service programmes empowers young people to become active citizens in addressing a wide range of community needs such as active involvement in cleaning up their communities, tutoring and mentorship or particular forms of social work. This helps in positioning young people as active agents for community development, as opposed to being viewed as passive recipients or being part of the problem.

Youth service programmes can also serve as a cost-effective tool for addressing a wide range of development priorities. With limited budgets and staff, youth service programmes can be used to mobilise and organise young people to build infrastructure, fight HIV-Aids, improve literacy rates and facilitate green economy interventions for protecting the environment. At a societal level the mainstreaming of youth service can reduce the economic and social cost of risky behaviour and build the necessary social resources required for nation building. Ensuring that we take decisive measures to mainstream youth service can have significant returns to the development of our local communities and society as a whole.

What is to be done?

Social perspective of youth needs to change. Society must no longer view young people as problems or a drain on national resources. Young South Africans must be viewed as assets and as equal partners in development. The adultism currently characterising South African society must be replaced with a paradigm shift where young people are seen as

capable citizens whose potential needs to be enhanced. Youth should be seen as being capable of helping and not just in a position of receiving assistance. Society must begin to have more faith in youth as benefactors of development and not just as beneficiaries of development.

In the medium term, this change in social perspective must be accompanied by a focus on the 'Big Five' non-negotiables of youth development. The second phase of the NDR must prioritise education, entrepreneurship, service, skills and health as the non-negotiables of youth development. This will mean embracing a multi-pronged approach to facilitating youth development and alleviating youth underdevelopment. Ultimately, a multipronged approach will achieve a more patriotic, healthy, skilled, educated, employed and empowered youth in the second, more radical phase of the NDR. Factors contributing to the underdevelopment of youth such as poor quality education, lack of information and access to entrepreneurial opportunities and inequity of access to health support services must be addressed.

Youth unemployment remains the biggest challenge and the most important issue for young people in South Africa. To advance a second, more radical phase of the NDR requires a more dedicated focus on job creation for the youth and affirming youth employment creation as an apex priority of society, not just of government. It is therefore imperative that a more pragmatic and comprehensive youth employment action plan is developed and implemented during the second, more radical phase of the NDR. This youth employment action plan must clearly define how the country will create in excess of 3-million sustainable jobs for youth.

To effect sustainable socio-economic growth and transformation, we must provide youth with alternatives to enter into the mainstream economy. Youth entrepreneurship and cooperatives development are critical vehicles through which this can be achieved. The second, more

radical phase of the NDR should promote more access to information on youth entrepreneurship for unemployed youth, youth from poor households and youth in rural areas. Efforts at facilitating more financial and non-financial support for young entrepreneurs must be accompanied with a more enabling environment to foster a culture of entrepreneurship among the youth.

More needs to be done to foster a culture of youth entrepreneurship and cooperatives development to develop youth who are job-creators and not simply job seekers. While greater financial and non-financial support to young entrepreneurs has contributed significantly to youth development, the red tape preventing easy access to such support combined with the lack of a culture of entrepreneurship and cooperativism amongst the youth has contributed to youth underdevelopment.

Given the skills deficit that many youth carry after having left the school system, there is a need to expand second-chance opportunities, technical and vocational forms of training, adult literacy programmes and other post-school educational opportunities. The second, more radical phase of the NDR should be dedicated to further opening the doors of learning and culture for all but with a greater focus on providing better quality education and fostering a culture of excellence in learning institutions. The great strides made in access to education and higher education has led to youth development while the low levels and poor quality of education have led to youth underdevelopment. The focus in the next phase of the NDR should be on improving the levels and quality of education and addressing the systemic structural challenges in the education system.

As part of making education fashionable, a culture of academic excellence and increased access to education for youth from poor households and youth in rural areas must be prioritised in the second, more radical phase of the NDR. The great strides made in promoting access

to education have contributed to youth development but the challenges associated with the quality of education are contributing to youth underdevelopment.

There is a need to intervene in the health and wellness of young people through health education, health promotion, disease prevention and behavioural change using a new model that incorporates all social partners.

We must work towards ensuring a decline in the mortality rate of youth during the second, more radical phase of the NDR through promoting healthy lifestyles and easier, more affordable healthcare for young people. Too many young people fall prey to alcohol, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy. The interrelationship between health status, education and employment must be understood and incorporated into policies and programmes targeting the youth.

There is a need to focus on health systems for youth, health education and behavioural change in the next phase of planning and policy development.

In the second, more radical phase of the NDR, a social mobilisation strategy must be developed targeting unemployed youth, youth from poor households and youth in rural areas. These vulnerable groups of young people have largely been excluded from the gains made in the first phase of the transition post-1994. It therefore becomes important to ensure that they are prioritised in the second phase.

A second, more radical phase of the NDR must seek to institutionalize, mainstream and massify the national youth service as part of creating positive youth social capital. A compulsory, comprehensive, inclusive and skills-driven National Youth Service Programme can have many advantages for youth development, social development and national development.

We need to engage today's youth not as adults in waiting but as ca-

pable human beings with abilities that must be enhanced or fostered. We need to nurture their drive, passion and expertise. More attention needs to be paid to engaging with youth though social networking sites, on the internet and through communication applications such as Facebook and Twitter.

South Africa is a youthful nation with the majority of the population being below the age of 35. This means that the country is experiencing a youth bulge, which is expected to last until 2037. It is therefore of critical importance that we factor the youth bulge into all our discussions.



Cde Pillay is the National Chairperson of the YCLSA

Endnotes

- 1 Acuff and Reiher (1997), Lopiano-Misdorn and Luca (1997) Mcneal (1992), Vechio (1997) and Zollo (1999)
- 2 Howe and Strauss (2000)
- 3 Youth Markets Alert
- 4 Bloom et.al. (2007), Realizing the demographic dividend: Is Africa any different?
- 5 Bloom et.al. (2007), Realizing the demographic dividend: Is Africa any different?
- 6 www.statista.com
- 7 Stats SA
- 8 Stats SA

VENEZUELA

Toilet paper revolt and the regime change agenda

The defeat of Hugo Chávez's PSUV in December's National Assembly elections offers strong lessons for the ANC-led Alliance. **Solly Mapaila, Themba Mthembu** and **Alex Mashilo** spell these out

A delegation of three South African Communist Party (SACP) and one African National Congress (ANC) representatives visited Venezuela in December 2015 on an election observer mission and international solidarity work. This brief overview summarises the domestic and international context under which the Venezuelan National Assembly elections were held on 6 December 2015. Lessons for the SACP, the ANC and South Africa are not presented in a separate section. Rather, they are incorporated into the body of the text, with the assumption that the reader is familiar with the contents of an SACP discussion paper titled *Going to the Root*. The paper discusses the need to move the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) on to a second radical phase.

The SACP released the paper in October 2014, opening a wide-ranging discussion on the context, basic content and strategic tasks of the second radical phase of South Africa's democratic transition. Many of the weaknesses discussed in *Going to the Root* in relation to the first two decades of the NDR in government under the organisational leadership of the ANC are similar to those faced by Venezuela under the

leadership of its government by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The extent of the problems, combined with imperialist aggression against Venezuela, putting it in a worse position than South Africa, provide a basic explanation for why the governing PSUV lost the National Assembly elections.

Unlike in South Africa, where the National Assembly elects the President who appoints ministers to form a government, the Venezuelan National Assembly elections are conducted separately from the presidential elections. In addition, they are based on a direct constituency representation system rather than the proportional representation system used in South Africa. So, as in the United States, it is possible in Venezuela to lose elections for the national legislature while retaining the government based on the outcome of the last presidential elections.

The lack of sufficient production-based radical economic transformation in a revolutionary line of development combined with problems holding back advances in confronting internal and external contradictions explain the challenges in Venezuela.

This is a recipe for weakening the support of the people for any progressive governing party, and for allowing external forces to capitalise on those internal weaknesses or even advance the agenda of regime change.

The 5,7-million member-strong PSUV lost control of the National Assembly in the December 2015 elections. The PSUV lost despite the support it has (and should have) from a broad spectrum of Venezuela's sectors, social movements and community organisations, which together form a wide-ranging front, the Great Patriotic Pole (GPP), led by the PSUV. The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) is allied to both the PSUV and the PSUV-led GPP.

The PSUV obtained 55 seats in a 167 strong National Assembly. In

the previous National Assembly, the PCV, as part of the front, had only one deputy (MP), which was its General Secretary. In the 6 December 2015 National Assembly elections, the PCV increased its representation by one more deputy – both of them are counted in the 55 seats of the GPP/PSUV. The remaining 112 National Assembly seats, forming a two-thirds majority plus one, were won by the US-supported opposition, a coalition of forces called the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD).

Venezuela's electoral system is highly developed technologically and is based on electronic voting and counting. The results are verifiable manually, with highly secure localised systems to prevent manipulation. The system makes it possible for the results to be known locally and nationally even before they are declared. It was developed to reach its current technological level because of referendums conducted for decision making. This became more frequent following the ascendancy of Cde Hugo Chávez to power in 1998.

The December 2015 national elections were the fourth parliamentary elections in Venezuela since the country's current constitution was adopted in 1999, the year after Cde Chávez was first elected.

The 2015 Venezuelan parliamentary elections were the first since Cde Chávez's death in 2013. This is one of the decisive, and perhaps subjective, factors that must be considered in developing an understanding of the defeat of the party he led, the PSUV. The defeat did not come in the form of an event. It was a process that arguably started when he was still at the helm of the PSUV and the government.

Character of governing party & nature of its programme

Other factors to be considered in analysing the Venezuelan situation include that Cde Chávez came from a military background. He was arrested, imprisoned and released two years after an unsuccessful coup

attempt on 4 February 1992 led by the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 or MBR-200), which he and the forces that he worked with had founded in 1982.

The MBR-200 evolved into the sphere of electoral politics when it was transformed into the Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR). Established in July 1997, the MVR was meant to support Chávez's candidacy in the presidential elections to take place the following year, 1998. Efforts to establish a unitary political organisation would only start a while later, but only after extensive efforts, including international advice, had succeeded in convincing Cde Chávez to move in the direction of establishing a political organisation.

This was not a smooth process as many organisations that supported the charismatic Chávez were ordered to dissolve into the PSUV when it was formed. The PCV had decided to back Cde Chávez when he was first elected Venezuelan President and would do so again during subsequent elections. It was therefore one of the organisations that Cde Chávez, perhaps in a militaristic style of leadership, left with no other option but to dissolve into the PSUV. But according to the PCV constitution its Central Committee did not have powers to dissolve the Party. It had to convene an extraordinary congress in a short space of time to consider the new line by Chávez. The line was rejected by the congress, which is why the PCV continued its independent existence while maintaining an alliance with the PSUV and the PSUV-led GPP.

Three of the major differences that led to the decision were the nature and character of the PSUV, the need to ensure meaningful consultation and collective leadership at all times and Cde Chávez's conception of socialism. The PSUV is, in a big way, Venezuela's variant of the ANC rather than a communist party fighting for socialism.

We return to these differences on Chávez's conception of socialism and his notion of "the socialism of the 21st century".

From the time of his 1998 election as president, until his death, Cde Chávez met the PCV only once: when the PCV decided to back him. Until December 2015 the same applied with President Nicolás Maduro. He met the PCV only when it decided to back him.

The PCV differed with Chávez's notion of "socialism of the 21st century", and insisted that there can only be "socialism in the 21st century" and beyond. The difference was not just between the words "of" and "in" which appear to be minor, but have fundamental underpinnings of the conception of socialism. "Socialism in the 21st century" tended towards conceiving socialism more in terms of social (welfare) programmes, a variant of what the SACP in *Going to the Root* calls social redistribution without sufficient, if any, transformation of the colonial or (in the case of Latin American terminology) dependent, features of the economy.

The process through which the PSUV was formed was mainly led by the non-monopoly bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and a military current with Cde Chávez as its chief representative, as the PSUV itself has been. This composition of class and strata meant that the notion of "the socialism of the 21st century" did not extend to a systemic, fundamental change of the prevailing mode of production leading to a revolution which would see development along the lines of scientific socialism. Despite these class contradictions, the PSUV was seen as relatively progressive compared to the outright right-wing forces found in the Venezuelan political spectrum. Its progressive characteristics lay in the anti-imperialist outlook and politics that emerged in the GPP's character and programme.

Context of electoral defeat

Apart from asserting control over petroleum resources and redistributing the income generated to expand social programmes, including

health, education, social grants and housing, there was no systemic pursuit of radical transformation or a revolution in economic production during the Presidency of Chávez. In fact, existing industrial production declined. Many products reached ground zero and were shut down. This was also due to tensions with the US, a dominant imperialist force that exploited Venezuela's labour, resources and markets, and the way those tensions were managed from within Venezuela. The country therefore remained dependent on exports of raw materials, with oil playing an overwhelmingly significant role, and was heavily reliant on imports of finished products.

According to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)¹ and based on Venezuela's own account and that of other international institutions: "Venezuela's oil revenues account for about 95% of export earnings. The oil and gas sector is around 25% of gross domestic product (GDP)". According to World-Atlas, in terms of the world's largest oil reserves by country²: "With over 298-billion barrels of proven reserves, Venezuela is recognised as the country with the highest volume of proven oil reserves in the world today". Apart from petroleum, the country's natural resources include natural gas, iron ore, gold, bauxite, diamonds and other minerals.

The 2015 Venezuelan National Assembly elections took place in the context of the continuing capitalist world crisis, whose sharpest edges were severely affecting the semi-periphery and the periphery of the capitalist world system with raw material prices plummeting – oil being one of the most affected. Venezuela's export earnings were adversely affected even before the death of Cde Chávez in 2013.

In the absence of a strong and diversified domestic productive capacity, the availability of consumer goods, including basic necessities, was dealt a blow by the crisis. An additional blow was the alleged economic sabotage in the import sector. The sector remained in the hands

of forces that, supported mainly by the US, remained hostile to the PSUV-led government, in pursuit of a regime change agenda.

It was alleged that the import sector deliberately held imported products, which Venezuela depends on, in warehouses, and released these on the basis of price speculation. There was no loss, even if the products were not released to retailers and shops. It was alleged that payments made by foreign imperialist backers of the project offset any losses that the import sector bourgeoisie would have incurred and further assisted them to keep making profits. The goods included non-perishables like toilet paper, with no immediate losses in terms of the need to move consumer goods quickly,

When we arrived in Venezuela, the first thing we noticed in the central business district (CBD) in Caracas were very long queues caused by shortages of basic consumer goods. The shelves were mainly empty, without even toilet paper and other toiletries, eggs and other foodstuffs or basic medicines. It was in this context that one of us (Cde Mthembu) characterised the elections results as “a toilet paper rebellion” – the unavailability of toilet paper was a reflection of the unavailability of day-to-day consumer goods that led to a revolt through the ballot against the PSUV.

In addition, widespread perceptions of corruption negatively affected the PSUV and the GPP in general. Some believe that the GPP had become more of an election campaigning machinery than an organic alliance. The PCV nevertheless defined both as important anti-imperialist mass fronts and thus maintained its alliance with them. However, the elections results and the overall direction from which they came about must have posed hard questions to the PCV.

Some of the problems, such as the alleged corruption, nepotism, patronage and other serious allegations, such as complacency in the public service and the poor quality of service delivery facing the PSUV-led

government, necessitated serious reflection and decisive self-introspection after the elections. Some of these allegations were considered by many people, as the elections results showed, to be based on facts. As a result there were even questions from sections of society as to why the PCV maintained its relationship with the PSUV. The PCV's own credibility was questioned although it was not the governing party but in alliance with the governing party. Thus the PCV could not go forward without looking at the issue both to strengthen the wider organisational unity of Venezuela's progressive forces in their diversity and its own position as an independent political organisation.

There are many people who have their own community and social network-based media initiatives – the mainstream media in Venezuela is dominated by the right-wing and routinely carries allegations of corruption. It is in this context that the elections results were announced in the US by US foreign media agencies before they were declared by the electoral commission in Venezuela as valid. Earlier, we noted that the results are easily known locally and nationally (nationally through co-ordination by party agents, etc.) before they are declared by the IEC. The behaviour of the US media agencies must be located in this context, but also in pushing US interests of regime change.

Consequences of electoral defeat

Celebrations were not widespread after the election results were finally declared. The electorate appeared to be shocked and choked by its own decision in a context where there were many people who, while supporting the PSUV government, decided to “punish” the party in the ballot.

After the results were declared, the electorate was worried about the true nature of the right-wing, which had been campaigning against the delivery of social redistributive programmes. In a way, no one could

believe that others had also decided to “punish” the governing party. Surveys conducted before the elections (many by reactionary agencies) showed that the opposition could win the elections, but the extent of the victory appeared to have shocked the victorious opposition as well.

The PSUV had invested massively in campaigning. Its posters were everywhere, as were billboards depicting Cde Chávez. A significant part of its messaging was based on the achievements since he became president. There were also what some national observers characterised as empty slogans based on the heyday of Chávez’s popularity, messages such as “Chávez loves you”, “You are in the heart of Chávez” and “Do it for Chávez”, rather than on a more concrete programme of building a better future for the electorate and the country. According to some national observers, the electorate was not sufficiently educated politically to see through the origins and paths, complexities and material bases of the economic crisis that was affecting their country and them harshly and directly.

The opposition, on the other hand, “praised the dead and condemned the living” in the same way as reactionary forces in South Africa have been praising late leaders of the ANC and the SACP as the basis for condemning their current leadership. The opposition in Venezuela thus “endorsed” or “embraced” Chávez, showered him with praises while condemning the current leadership of his party. This sort of a hypocritical politics is similar to that of the DA in South Africa “endorsing” Nelson Mandela or even Chris Hani among other revolutionaries whose objectives they, or at least their core base despise. They would hardly endorse the revolutionary content of what these leaders stood for.

On 5 January 2016 a new National Assembly was inaugurated. Venezuela is now faced with a national government that is opposed by the decisive majority in its National Assembly. The road ahead has become

difficult because of the antagonism between the two centres of state power. In Venezuela, unlike in South Africa, the National Assembly has more powers, but not the power to elect or recall the president. Its powers include the power to make appointments such as the head of the electoral commission. People then occupying such positions were, in the aftermath of the election, as good as gone. The opposition has always been working on replacing the president and along with him the entire executive government. This requires a referendum, which it was clear they would push for.

As we stated at the outset, the lessons for the SACP and even the ANC are spelled out throughout the article, if not directly, then by inference. They are lessons for the Alliance as whole. ★

Cde Mapaila is the SACP 2nd Deputy General Secretary. Cde Mthembu is the SACP KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Secretary. Cde Mashilo is the SACP National Media Spokesperson and former Deputy National Secretary of the Young Communist League of South Africa

Endnotes

1. http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/171.htm – accessed December 2015
2. <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-world-s-largest-oil-reserves-by-country.html> – accessed December 2015

CUBA

Trends, dynamics and complexities in the 'normalisation' process

Chris Matlhako and **Walter Mothapo** explain the view from Cuba on the 'normalisation' of Cuban-US relations amidst muted but persistent imperialist policy designs on the country and region

During a recent visit to Cuba marking the May Day celebrations as part of the 2016 International Brigade, we met various levels of the Cuban authorities. These exchanges touched on numerous subjects, not least the on-going process of the 'normalisation of relations' between Cuba and the United States, and the declining, yet at the same time, powerful position of the US in world affairs. This process has generated various interpretations both from foe and friend, and it was a great opportunity to get the gist of the process from, as it were, from the 'horses' mouth.

There are legitimate suspicions in some quarters based on the US's historic belligerence and intransigence towards socialist Cuba and recent developments in the Latin American region, particularly in Venezuela, Brazil and Ecuador, where the hand of the US is conspicuous in undermining sovereignty. There is also optimism elsewhere that the normalisation of the frosty relations between Cuba and the US puts Cuba in a position to turn an important page in its socialist trajectory and overcoming the decades old unilateral economic embargo against it.

Since the famous public handshake between Presidents Raul Castro and the Barack Obama at the FNB Stadium at the memorial service for Cde Nelson Mandela, a flurry of exchanges have taken place between Cuba and the US, facilitated by Pope Francis and the Canadian government. A significant movement in this direction was demonstrated by the voluntary release of US spy Alan Gross, fifty-two political prisoners, and an unnamed non-citizen agent of the US in return for the release of three Cuban agents – three of the Cuban Five, who were unfairly and illegally imprisoned in the US.

When Obama visited Cuba, the discussions with the Cuban authorities centred on the contemporary challenges and the recently concluded 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC). Without exception, the Cuban authorities reminded us of the historic relations between the US and Cuba, the US policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean peoples' and the basis of US imperialism on the continent as important indicators of the direction of the US exchanges with Cuba. They argued that the oppressed of the world, particularly the Latin American and Caribbean peoples, victimised for over two centuries while being tenacious combatants against US imperial strategy, believe another world is possible. They maintain that with leaders such as Fidel Castro and Raul Castro and the vanguard force, restless fighters for true independence and unity in 'Our America', they have proved that victory is possible, despite the adversary's economic and military power; and that they have worked to build a society based on justice, the most equitable humanity has known – socialist Cuba.

During President Obama's visit to Cuba, he said "I have come here to bury the last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas. I have come here to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people.

"We both live in a new world, colonised by Europeans", the US President continued, "Cuba, like the United States, was built in part by slaves

brought here from Africa. Like the United States, the Cuban people can trace their heritage to both slaves and slave-owners.”

However, Fidel Castro rebutted in a lengthy article in his *‘Reflections’* column published in Granma: “Obama made a speech in which he uses the most sweetened words to express: ‘It is time, now, to forget the past, leave the past behind, let us look to the future together, a future of hope. And it won’t be easy, there will be challenges and we must give it time; but my stay here gives me more hope in what we can do together as friends, as family, as neighbours, together.’

“I suppose all of us were at risk of a heart attack upon hearing these words from the President of the United States. After a ruthless blockade that has lasted almost 60 years, and what about those who have died in the mercenary attacks on Cuban ships and ports, an airliner full of passengers blown up in mid-air, mercenary invasions, multiple acts of violence and coercion? Nobody should be under the illusion that the people of this dignified and selfless country will renounce the glory, the rights, or the spiritual wealth they have gained with the development of education, science and culture. I also warn that we are capable of producing the food and material riches we need with the efforts and intelligence of our people. We do not need the empire to give us anything. Our efforts will be legal and peaceful, as this is our commitment to peace and fraternity among all human beings who live on this planet.”

This aptly captures the logic of Cuba’s continued engagement towards ‘normalising relations’ with the US.

The new US National Security Strategy (US NSS)

Almost a year into his first presidential term, President Obama made public the ‘new’ US National Security Strategy (US NSS). This paper, regarded by many as the roadmap of the country’s security strategy and foreign policy, was awaited with bated breath across the world. People

everywhere tried to decode its contents and determine its implications for their countries. The strategy has been critical in advancing US interests in the recent period. It offers some key points to understanding the US's perception of its role in the international community and its priorities. Actually, to understand it requires that we read the fine print and look behind the rhetoric. This is the only way to determine its real scope and prevent the explicit messages from confusing our thoughts.

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the document affirms that Washington's association with the region is derived from proximity, market integration and energy interdependence, and from "[...] a widely shared commitment to democracy and elected governments."¹ It recalls that the close historical, cultural and family ties "[...] turn our alliance and cooperation into decisively significant elements to the interests of the United States."²

It then goes on to deliberately underline that the US will hopefully work with the people of the region for "[...] advancement of democracy and social inclusion, to ensure the people's safety and security, to promote clean energy and to defend the universal values of people in the hemisphere."³

It is also telling in the section that deals with democracy. By using a language that is currently vogue, it states; "[...] the United States is committed to civil society and peaceful political opposition", explicitly encouraging US non-governmental organisations to embark on this effort, adding that Washington recognises the 'peaceful democratic movements'.

Simply put, the US will continue offering overt and covert support to destabilising initiatives aimed at preventing the consolidation of political movements and forces capable of jeopardising its domination plans.

In the new US NSS, the White House insists on its war projections

as it lays down that the preservation of its military supremacy has kept the country safe for decades and supported world security, and that its armed forces will remain the cornerstone of its security.

The Obama administration has embraced *smart power* with its combination of traditional instruments of *hard power* – the military and economic actions – and *soft power* – associated with persuasion through diplomacy – the use of ICT, the promotion of the “American Way of life” and foreign aid. In sum the traditional ‘stick and carrot’ policy adapted to the times. Obama’s presidency, the Cuban authorities believe, will on a global scale be tested on various fronts, basically related to ending the war that has lasted over ten years, with the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan (one of his campaign promises). While redesigning his strategy for the Middle East and seeking new formulae to handle the complex Syrian situation and Iranian nuclear programme, he will also have to deal with the debt crisis in Europe. Equally challenging is his handling of relations with China and Russia, and preventing these countries from having the capacity to wrestle global hegemony from the US.

Consequently, President Obama has been ‘forced’, in terms of his ‘policy of change’ on the Latin American region to deliver on his promises, as the US becomes steadily isolated and economically marginalised as the region seeks new and alternative measures of trade, finance, foreign relations and security arrangements as espoused in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and ALBA-TCP (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America).

It is in this context that he has taken certain steps in foreign relations, particularly concerning a change of Cuba policy!

Cuba's exclusion and the failure of isolation

Almost six decades have passed since Cuba was left out of the Inter-America System. Cuba, we were assured, stands firm in its resolution to choose its own path and for that purpose it draws spiritual sustenance from its old and recent history. In the recent period, the roles have been reversed – the master country and its instruments of domination stand alone, while Cuba has broken the isolation imposed by the Organisation of American States (OAS) and its mentor. Cuba, it was highlighted, has diplomatic ties with over 200 states, including every country in Latin America and the Caribbean, and is a member of 83 international organisations.

There is a strong global solidarity movement, with South Africa's Friends of Cuba Society (Focus) and related organisations, being part of over 2000 friendship associations in over 150 countries, including in the US. For over twenty years now, the UN General Assembly has passed resolutions condemning the blockade.

One of the most significant features of the blockade lately has been the persecution of Cuba's international financial transactions. The Annual Report issued by the Treasury Department Office of Foreign Asset Control affirms that, at the end of the fiscal year 2011, the Cuban funds held in escrow by the US amounted to \$245-million, resulting in damages for the economic, social and technical-scientific development of the country⁴. On 12 June 2012 the Treasury Department fined Dutch Bank ING for its financial transactions with Cuba and other countries. The \$619-million fine stands as the highest ever imposed by the US government on a foreign bank for its commercial relations with Cuba. In this connection OFAC (Office of Foreign Assets Control) Director Adam Szubin stated: "Our legal sanctions reflect our main foreign policy and national security interests thoroughly pursued by OFAC. Today's historic announcement should serve as a clear warning to anyone who

plans to benefit from avoiding United States prohibitions.”⁵

Cuba recently, encouraged countries in the region to strengthen strategies to confront imperialist intervention. Speaking in Venezuela, Cuba’s foreign minister Cde Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla called on the ALBA-TCP to strengthen strategies to confront imperialist intervention and coup plots on the continent, this after intensifying external intervention in the internal affairs of Venezuela by the US and the undemocratic constitutional coup of democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil. He stressed: “Latin America and the Caribbean have changed, we are no longer, nor will be, the backyard of the United States, we will not allow for the return of the carrot and stick and I repeat that no one can beguile Cuba, which is still under blockade and whose territory in Guantanamo is still occupied, while attempts are to isolate Venezuela.”⁶

The policy of the Cuban Revolution as affirmed by the 7th Congress of the CPC, backed by the overwhelming majority of its people, has been clearly described by President Raul Castro: “[...] the day they are willing to talk we will talk, on equal footing, without the slightest threat to our sovereignty, and treating each other as equals. We are willing to do that directly, without intermediaries, whenever they are ready. But we are not in a hurry, we are not desperate and we have said, - as Fidel said it a long time ago - that we will not talk under the threat of a carrot and stick policy, that time is long passed, it belongs in a different period of time.”⁷

As Fidel noted in his ‘*Reflections*’ article on President Obama’s remarks in Cuba, President Obama and the US cannot dictate the terms of engagements with Cuba, nor can they determine the basis for normalisation of relations with Cuba and thus, cannot erase history.

Cde Fidel said: “The native populations don’t exist at all in Obama’s mind. Nor does he say that the Revolution swept away racial discrimi-

nation, or that pensions and salaries for all Cubans were decreed by it before Mr Barrack Obama was 10 years old. The hateful, racist bourgeois custom of hiring strongmen to expel Black citizens from recreational centers was swept away by the Cuban Revolution – that which would go down in history for the battle against apartheid that liberated Angola, putting an end to the presence of nuclear weapons on a continent of more than a billion inhabitants. This was not the objective of our solidarity, but rather to help the peoples of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and others under the fascist colonial domination of Portugal.” ★

Chris Matlhako is SACP Central Committee member and Secretary for International Affairs. **Walter Mothapo** serves as a member of the Party’s sub-committee on international affairs.

Endnotes

- 1 A National Security Strategy, May 2010. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Ibid
- 4 <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2012>
- 5 Ibid
- 6 <http://www.democracycuba.com/Blog/cuba-confront-imperialist-intervention-venezuela/>
- 7 Interview with Raul Castro, 31 December 2008. ‘La vida es un eterno batallar’

BOOK REVIEW

History of the Congress Movement: the Unfolding of the Congress Alliance 1912-1961

(in three volumes)

by **Sylvia Neame**

Jeremy Cronin assesses a major work of detailed historical research on the Congress movement

Cde Sylvia Neame's major three-volume history of the Congress movement was finally published last year jointly by the HSRC Press and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The study is the result of several decades of work, starting back in the 1960s at a time of deepening apartheid repression, when Neame, as a young student, embarked on research on the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU). In her Preface, Neame recalls uncovering in 1962 important ICU, Natal ANC and Youth League material in the cellar of a house in Inanda.

Neame's research was disrupted by two periods of detention without trial under the infamous 90-day law, followed by a trial and a prison sentence for her political activity. In 1967 she went into exile, first to Britain and then to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). It was there that she continued her research.

Covering the Congress Alliance from the formation of the ANC in 1912 down to 1961, Neame's work raises many fascinating issues

of relevance to our contemporary challenges. We are now over two decades beyond the critical 1994 democratic breakthrough. It is no secret that the ANC in particular is confronting a range of challenges, not least in regard to its inner-organisational life and character. The SACP Central Committee document to be published in the next edition of the African Communist seeks to open up debate precisely on the organisational challenges the ANC is currently experiencing – in particular the loss of its “movement” character, its reduction to a largely electoral machine both in its outward posture towards South African citizens, as well as in its internal life, increasingly dominated by voting blocs, factions, lists, and the resulting candidate selection turmoil.

Neame’s particular focus through the detailed study across five decades is how a particular organisational form of the ANC has shaped its politics. Building on Thomas Hodgkin’s ground-breaking 1957 study “Nationalism in Colonial Africa”, Neame argues that from its foundation, the ANC was essentially a congress-type formation, which she characterises as “essentially a parliamentary-oriented, bourgeois-democratic organisation of a non-party type.” As such, Neame argues, the ANC’s strategic perspective was essentially one of seeking “inclusion within a parliamentary system”.

She writes: “The fact that Congresses are not geared to the conquering of state power had implications for the methods adopted by the unfolding [ANC] national liberation movement. The question of method, including that of dialogue/negotiation with the government and ruling class circles, is the key...”

This theoretical characterisation certainly enables Neame to chart persisting features of the ANC and its perspectives that were to endure into the post-1994 period. It is interesting to note that many of Mandela’s mid-1990s frequently repeated statements, the invoking of

“good men and women from all walks of life”, for instance, has a long legacy going back to the origins of the ANC.

However, I believe that, notwithstanding the multiple insights that Neame’s theoretical approach helps to alert us to, it is an approach that is unduly “essentialist” in character. The ANC is attributed a more or less timeless fixed essence – it is “bourgeois democratic”, it is “non-class” (rather than multi-class) in character. It was in 1912 (and therefore it was in the 1970s-early 1990s) oriented towards inclusion via negotiations, rather than the overthrow of a repressive state. All of this certainly describes tendencies within the ANC and the broader movement. But they are surely tendencies that have had more or less impact at different times, in different conjunctures. And they are also surely tendencies that have always encountered other, perhaps more radical tendencies, from within the ANC and its broader movement.

Neame is not unaware of these realities. It sometimes results in rather clumsy characterisations (“a kind of non-class-cum-left bourgeois-democratism espoused by Congress leaders”) as she attempts to grapple with the dialectical, contested, and often fluid nature of the Congress Movement. The attempt to portray the ANC as inherently bourgeois-democratic rather than a radical democratic formation also, in my view, leads to misunderstandings about concrete forms of struggle. She argues, for instance, that as an inherently “bourgeois-democratic” formation, the ANC’s preferred strategic weapon was the general stay-away rather than the general strike. But from the 1960s, the general stay-away was the form that a general strike took in South Africa. This had less to do with the essential and timeless “Congress” nature of the ANC, and more to do with the segregated racial realities of colonialism of a special type.

Nonetheless, the particular theoretical entry-point that Neame has chosen, despite its essentialism, provides a very useful insight into

many pronounced tendencies still current within the ANC. But they are tendencies, I would argue, rather than timeless essences. Among these, and again it is something noted in the CC discussion document, is the tendency to seek inclusion rather than radical transformation. This was particularly notable during the Mbeki years within the ANC, in which one of the key pillars (Black Economic Empowerment) was essentially about ensuring a quota of black participation within the commanding heights of established monopoly capital. Likewise, during the Mbeki years, there was a tendency towards denialism about the continued existence of imperialism. The preferred strategic posture was, once more, inclusion – admission to the G20 table, and the like.

The great strength of Neame's three-volume research lies, however, in its detailed historical research. In particular, Neame's account of the ICU is, I believe, pioneering in many respects. Her perspective on the ICU provides a very useful counterpoint to the common portrayal (certainly in SACP-aligned histories) of the ICU. In the latter tradition, the ICU is portrayed as a working class formation that played a radical role in the 1920s, but, partly because it failed to establish itself as an effective industrial trade union, and partly because leading CPSA members were expelled from it under white liberal influence, it inevitably foundered.

Neame has a somewhat different and more persuasive reading of the ICU. She sees it as a more authentic radical-democratic formation than the ANC at the time, while having a major impact on the ANC. Neame notes that the ICU "contributed to widening of the social strata which participated in the unfolding Congress movement... it catered for social strata more or less excluded from top positions in Congress – workers, peasants, but also young people and women." She adds that "to a degree the ICU can be seen as the embryo of an

alternative liberation movement, with a radical-democratic mission ...actually challenging the primary role of the ANC, particularly in the 1920s”. Neame devotes considerable attention to the ICU’s leading role in 1927-8 in the revolt of labour-tenants and squatters in the farming areas against landlords.

All of this is surely pertinent at a time when all three of the major tripartite Alliance formations are battling to effectively mobilise the marginalised rural and urban poor (except electorally). The South African proletariat (in its wider and proper sense) is increasingly unemployed, under-employed, casualised and in precarious employment at best. This poses major challenges to the progressive trade union movement. There is also, surely, a correct sense that the social movement and community based energies of the 1980s, traditions of popular power, have largely been eroded, or displaced into inward-looking and often self-destructive township “delivery” protests, available to demagogic mobilisation.

It is in this current context, that Neame’s three volumes are a major asset as we ask ourselves: how have we got here? And, going forward, what are the lessons we can learn from our past? ★

Cde Cronin is 1st Deputy General Secretary of the SACP and Deputy Minister of Public Works.



Where to contact the SACP

HEAD OFFICE

4th Floor Cosatu House
110 Jorissen Street
Braamfontein, 2017
JOHANNESBURG, 2000

Tel: (011) 339 3621/2
(011) 3393621/2

Website: www.sacp.org.za

Twitter: SACP1921

Facebook Page:

South African Communist
Party: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Communist-Party/115354128489821>

EASTERN CAPE

Block A Unit 1 Bisho Business Village
Siwani Avenue BISHO, 5605

Tel/Fax: (040) 635 0463

Email: ecape@sacp.org.za

FREE STATE

1st Floor Moses Kotane Building
44 Fichardt Str, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9300

Fax: (051) 430 7571/4480303

Email: freestate@sacp.org.za

GAUTENG

4A Floor Samwu House
Cnr. Frederick & Von Brandis Str
JOHANNESBURG, 2000

Tel: (011) 333 9177

Fax: (011) 331 3017

Email: gauteng@sacp.org.za

LIMPOPO

Jorissen Street, Adams Forum
NUM HOUSE, 0700

Tel: (015) 297 8128

Fax: (015) 297 7643

Email: limpopo@sacp.org.za

MOSES MABHIDA

321 Anton Lembede Street 7th Floor
SADTU House DRBN

Tel: (031) 301 3806/301 3763

Fax: (031) 301 5470

Email: kzn@sacp.org.za

MOSES KOTANE

4th Floor; Room 406, Vannel Building,
Cnr: OR Tambo & Boom Street
KLERKSDORP, 2570

Tel: (018) 462 5675/8230

Fax: (018) 462 5675/4322

Email: northwest@sacp.org.za

MPUMALANGA

NUM Offices, Smart Park Building
WITBANK

Tel: (013) 656 2045/73

Fax: (013) 690 1286

Email: mpumalanga@sacp.org.za

NORTHERN CAPE

17 Graham Street Street,
KIMBERLEY, 8300

Telefax (053) 831 4180

Email: ncape@sacp.org.za

WESTERN CAPE

No 8 Beverley Street Athlone,
Code: 7764 CT

Tel: 021 762 9719/9748

Fax: (021) 421 4170 / 424 4667

Email: wcape@sacp.org.za

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief: Blade Nzimande
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Jeremy Cronin
Editor: Yunus Carrim

Joyce Moloi-Moropa
Solly Mapaila
Mluleki Dlelanga
Chris Matlhako
Malesela Maleka
David Niddrie (chief sub-editor)
Mark Waller (sub-editor)
Alex Mohubetswane Mashilo