

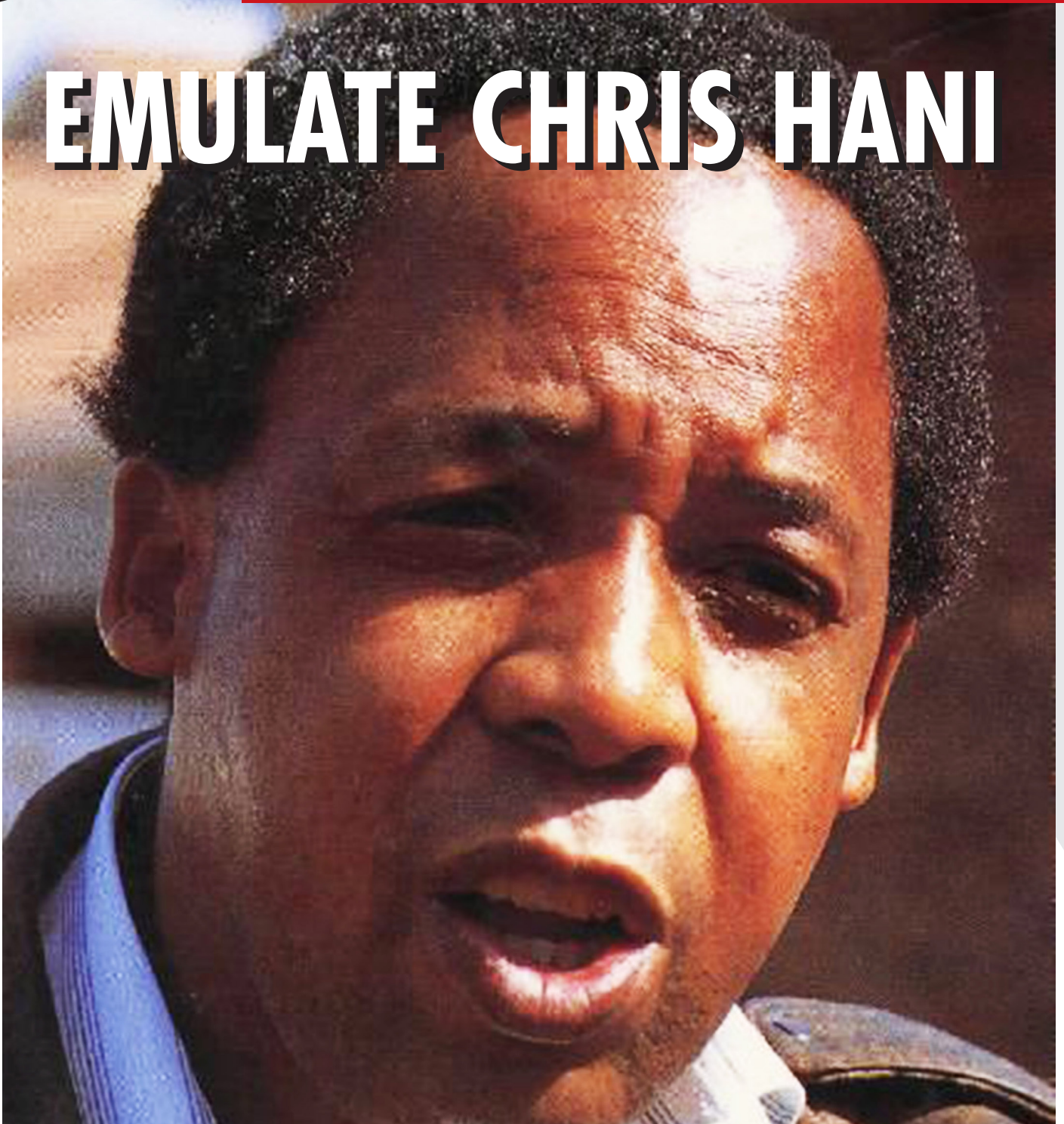


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EMULATE CHRIS HANI



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EMULATE CHRIS HANI

Let us remember Chris Hani properly – not just as a face on a T-shirt – a symbol of vague rebellion used even by those with no understanding of what he really stood for as has happened with Che Guevara. Like Che, Chris Hani was far more than a fashion statement.

Chris Hani was first and foremost a Communist – not only a member of the South African Communist Party, but a man who in every fibre of his being dedicated his whole life to the finest cause in the world – the liberation of mankind.



Belief and actual participation in the struggle go beyond simple emotion, although anger and hatred of oppression are a starting point, in most cases. A real revolutionary, a real Communist not only fights AGAINST oppression: a real revolutionary, a real Communist fights FOR the creation of a better society, a just society in which every individual can recognise his or her true potential as part of a collective sharing rights and responsibilities in a dignified manner.

A person who merely reacts against a system without knowing or understanding how to change it is a rebel. One who understands society, the causes and drivers of the problems it faces, and who seeks to turn the society around – to actually change it – is a revolutionary.

Such was Chris Hani.

To be a revolutionary it is an absolute necessity to be politically educated. As the great Vladimir Lenin taught us, “Without revolutionary theory, there can

be no revolutionary movement.” Like all great revolutionaries, he was a great reader and an intellectual. He held a BA degree in Latin and English, yet he came from a poor home in the Eastern Cape and his parents were hardly literate. He mastered the theoretical works of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and Lenin.

But as Marx himself taught us, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point is to change it”. Or as Marx’s lifelong friend and collaborator, Engels said, “Practice without theory is blind. Theory without practice is sterile. Theory becomes a material force as soon as it is absorbed by the masses.”

Chris Hani understood these principles very well. He never reduced his work to ideas or to abstract “intellectual” utopia stuck in ivory tower offices detached from the masses or without active participation in the key sites of the struggle. Guided by revolutionary theory, Chris Hani took action. He was involved in the real activity of struggle – which is the lifeblood of social change. In 1961, he joined the underground Communist Party, then the scholar became a soldier; in 1962 at the age of 20 he joined the joint ANC-SACP people’s liberation army, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

But Chris Hani also understood the principle initiated by James La Guma and laid down in 1928 by the Communist International, an organisation bringing together all communist and workers parties of the world:

“The Party should pay particular attention to the embryonic national organisations among the natives, such as the African National Congress. The Party, while retaining its full independence, should participate in these organisations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity. Our aim should be to transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, based upon the trade unions, peasant organisations, etc.”

This principle, not at first understood, was the principle put into practice by Moses Kotane, Chief Architect of the Struggle who played a major role in the revival of the ANC in 1937 and became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1939.

Chris Hani emulated the example of Moses Kotane. He had joined the ANC Youth League in 1957 at the age of 15 and by 1982 had become a member of the ANC National Executive Committee. And in 1991 he again followed in the footsteps of the great Kotane by becoming General Secretary of the SACP.

As a true Communist, Chris Hani was a proletarian internationalist. In 1967 he was part of the joint ZIPRA – MK force. ZIPRA, the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army was the army of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union, ZAPU. The joint force crossed the Limpopo from Zambia and began the first armed resistance against the Smith regime in Zimbabwe, then called Rhodesia in the Wankie and Sipholilo Campaigns. Here he worked with the Zimbabwean military leaders Dumiso Dabengwa and Rex Nhongo. He retained a close relationship with the Zimbabweans for the rest of his life. How he would have hated xenophobia and despised those who perpetrate vicious acts against other Africans!

In 1969, he wrote the famous “Hani Memorandum”. This document developed a sharp constructive self-

criticism of our liberation movement in exile and was concerned with the plight of MK combatants and the imperative to push the struggle in the home front. This criticism was useful as it led to the watershed Morogoro Conference of 1969 and the establishment of the Revolutionary Council which was to direct and organise the struggle from then until victory.

It was this exemplary history as a Communist which led the counter-revolutionaries to select Comrade Chris as their prime target in 1993. This choice was no accident: it was (from their point of view) an informed and deliberate choice. Chris Hani, more than any other person at this time, was likely to have led the people far beyond merely ending apartheid – and they knew it.

Today, as we enter the Second, More Radical Phase of our Democratic Transition, as we begin to implement a programme to economically empower the working-class and the poor, the forces of imperialism internationally and within the country have embarked on a co-ordinated campaign of destabilisation. They have been joined by some former “Comrades” intent on dividing the movement and the people. Some of these elements have become the willing collaborators of the anti-ANC headed Alliance and democratic majority. Yet others, the New Tendency, are trying to sell the idea that economic transformation means empowering THEM to become the exploiters of the masses and thus to wear the shoes of those who exploited our people during the era of colonial and apartheid oppression. Exchanging white capitalists by black capitalists – white exploiters by black exploiters, all over the masses who suffer from economic exploitation and its effects; class inequality, unemployment and poverty; that is what they mean.

In remembering Comrade Chris Hani, he must be seen as more than a “struggle icon”. His example must become the template against which other comrades measure themselves. His example must be emulated by our revolutionary youth as they study and analyse the current conditions of our struggle and take resolute and militant action to advance the Second, More Radical Phase of our

Democratic Transition. A transition rooted in the Freedom Charter. A transition in the revolutionary tradition of Chris Hani.

Let us emulate the spirit of discipline and self-discipline set by the example of Chris Hani in his revolutionary life and times. Hani expressed his views without fear or favour, yet he respected the principle of democratic centralism. According to the principle, individual members and leaders must express themselves in democratic decision-making processes. They must respect, defend, and according to the applicable division of work, implement the collective decisions reached at the end of this freedom of discussion. It is this unity in action that is referred to as centralism, with the decisions taken by the highest leading organs binding on lower structures, individual leaders and members regardless of their personal views.

Chris Hani maintained and displayed this revolutionary discipline at a delicate time when the armed struggle was suspended at the beginning of the 1990s. He believed the decision was untimely but despite his personal views he went on to defend it, even against people who shared his viewpoint but did not want to accept the decision of the higher body. In defending the decision, this is what he had to say: "In the current political situation, the decision by our organisation to suspend armed action is correct and is an important contribution in maintaining the momentum of negotiation".

In memory of Chris Hani, let us build, defend and further develop the unity of the working class movement and our ANC-headed liberation Alliance!

Chris Hani Month: Let's re-build trade union unity and working class revolutionary cohesion

On the 31st of March 2015, the eve of the Chris Hani Month, April, Congress of South African Trade Unions' (COSATU's) Central Executive Committee (CEC) announced the expulsion of its long-serving General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi. The CEC indicated that this was a difficult and painful decision. The SACP has consistently argued that COSATU must be allowed the space to conduct its own organisational and internal disciplinary processes, free from any external influences. We therefore respect the decision of COSATU's CEC, without underestimating the ongoing challenges that will continue to confront the federation and the broader working class in South Africa.

In its official statement on the matter, the South African Communist Party (SACP) stated that



"COSATU has for some while now been faced with serious problems of maintaining unity, cohesion and discipline". Referring, amongst other things, to the expulsion of the former General Secretary, the statement said it "cannot be cause for celebration for any progressive or revolutionary organisation". It was important for the SACP to unambiguously state its position in this way, because much of the commercial media has tried to portray the SACP as a factional force within COSATU. Our support for both the independence of the federation and for the importance of a radical trade union formation fearlessly active within the African National Congress-led (ANC-led) liberation alliance is not factionalist. A powerful trade union federation that is prepared to

be critical of government without becoming simply anti-government or oppositionist by definition is what conservatives of all stripes most fear.

However, we need to understand what has been happening as more than the clash of personalities, audit reports and scandals within the union movement. We need to appreciate the complex underlying factors that have led to the current turmoil. The editorial of the African Communist, First Quarter 2015, Issue No 188, which could only sketch in the briefest terms some of the key underlying issues that must be understood assists us in this regard:

In the first place, we need to appreciate the massive, neoliberal-driven global restructuring of the working class, under-way since at least the 1980s. Before the onset of the late 20th century wave of neoliberal globalisation, labour markets that were open to transnational, private corporate investment had about 1 billion workers and work seekers. By 2000, the labour force in these countries had risen to 1.5 billion. Meanwhile, China's liberal reforms from the late-1970s, and the collapse of the former Soviet bloc countries at the end of the 1980s, added a further 1.5 billion according to Guy Standing (The Precariat – the New Dangerous Class). As a result, "the labour supply in the globalising economies trebled. The newcomers came with little capital and with very low wages, altering the world's capital-labour ratio and weakening the bargaining position of workers." (Standing)

The weakened bargaining position affected workers in the advanced capitalist countries themselves. The generals of neoliberalism, United States President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher launched vicious attacks against the union movements in their respective societies from which the unions have never fully recovered to this day. The neoliberal "flexible labour market" lobby intensified, with threats of disinvestment and re-location to low-wage economies if worker rights were not rolled back.

For a variety of reasons, South Africa was at first partially insulated from these global developments. Through the 1980s, South Africa's not insignificant monopoly capitalist sector could not easily follow

its international peer group on the globalisation freeway in pursuit of high profits in low wage economies. Anti-apartheid economic and financial sanctions, as well as apartheid state defensive measures (tough exchange control measures, for instance) made taking the on-ramp to transnationalisation a very difficult proposition for our local monopoly sector. Moreover, the rising, semi-insurrectionary struggles against apartheid, and the complicity of monopoly capital in the apartheid system, added to local trade union strength. Increasingly, work-place, community and wider political struggles reinforced each other and further contributed to South African monopoly capital finding itself relatively off-balance.

Paradoxically, as the Central Committee political report published in the African Communist notes, our 1994 democratic breakthrough changed these realities. The 1994 breakthrough certainly brought a series of real gains for the progressive trade union movement – not least a range of progressive labour laws (including the Basic Conditions of Employment and the Labour Relations acts). However, with the lifting of apartheid-era economic sanctions, complemented by excessive and ill-judged ANC-led government liberalisation from the mid-1990s, South Africa's monopoly capital sector was now able to happily take the globalisation free-way. This has seen massive disinvestment, foreign stock exchange listings, transfer pricing, tax evasion, de-industrialisation and formal sector job losses. At the very moment that South Africa's progressive trade union movement began to reap the labour market legislation fruits of its heroic and decades-long struggle, these gains were being actively eroded in practice.

As has often been remarked, both the South African government and the labour movement, now increasingly confront all of the private sector giants of our economy (the likes of SA Breweries – now SAB Miller, SASOL, De Beers, Investec, Anglo, Old Mutual, etc.) as if they were foreign investors. Further eroding trade union power in our country has been the rapid expansion of so-called "a-typical" work (which more and more has become the norm) – informalisation, casualization, often associated with labour-brokering.

These developments in South Africa have been further advanced by another phenomenon closely associated with the last three-decades of accelerated capitalist-driven globalisation – massive waves of labour migration. Punishing structural adjustment programmes imposed on developing societies (the counterpart of the Thatcherite rolling back of the welfare state in the advanced capitalist economies), and the ongoing accelerated penetration of transnational agri-business into peasant economies in the South have produced massive floods of migration from the countryside to informal settlements in teeming cities in the developing world, and from developing countries into the advanced economies.

Today, the most militarised international border in the world is not between North and South Korea, but between the US and Mexico. It is designed to keep desperate (but “illegal”) work-seekers out. However, as Saskia Sassen and others have eloquently demonstrated, there is a deep hypocrisy in this. Tens of millions of desperate, “illegal” work seekers nonetheless still find their way into the US and Europe. As Sassen writes: “what looks like failure from the perspective of controlling entry is actually delivering results that particular sectors inside the US want from immigrants.” Key sectors of the US economy (like agriculture, retail and hospitality services) require large numbers of low-paid workers. Their “illegal” status means they are prepared to accept low wages and precarious working conditions. While a highly weaponised border sustains the charade of illegality, “US governments, regardless of political party, have repeatedly shown a strong reluctance to allocate funds and create jobs to inspect work-places” (Sassen).

Although our own South African social and regional realities are somewhat different, millions of “illegals”, desperate work-seekers from throughout the continent, displaced by imperialist-driven structural adjustment programmes, climate change, and civil wars, have poured into post-apartheid South Africa. Many hundreds of thousands are super-exploited, non-unionised workers in agriculture, mining and hospitality services. This, too, has impacted on the relative bargaining strength of the South African labour movement. Mirroring, with their own local

characteristics, global trends, these are some of the factors that have weakened the power of the South African labour movement in the face of active monopoly capital strategies.

It would be wrong, however, to think of our trade unions, and of COSATU in particular, as if they were simply passive victims of a global process. Over the past 20 years COSATU, typically in alliance with the SACP, has fought many important battles, some of them rear-guard actions in the face of local neo-liberal inspired interventions. The COSATU-SACP socialist axis, for instance, was absolutely critical in the provisional defeat of the major privatisation strategy unleashed by the ANC-led government in the early 2000s. Likewise, trade union pressure on the ANC-government led to early state-led industrial policy initiatives, which have now been consolidated into the centre-piece of governments’ progressive, inclusive-growth strategies. An early leader in this process and the major beneficiary to date of these policies has been the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and its historical worker base in the auto and auto components sector. It is ironic, therefore, that it is precisely the NUMSA leadership (now expelled from COSATU) that has led the anti-state, regime-change opposition within the federation.

If external factors have played a major role in creating the context for the turmoil and splits within COSATU, there are, of course, important internal factors as well. Critical among these is what Sakhela Buhlungu has described as the “paradox of victory”. The victories of the trade union movement, born out of its central role in the anti-apartheid struggle, have seen significant institutional advances with real dangers of bureaucratisation. In many cases there has been a growing distance between an office-bound leadership and the factory-floor membership.

COSATU affiliates have themselves not been immune to the dangers of the “sins of incumbency” attributed frequently to the ANC as a ruling party. Faced with the restructuring of the working class, unions predominantly active in the private industrial sectors have increasingly become focused on (or defensively confined to) the more formal and better paid worker strata – a challenge confronting both

the two major rivals in the recent past [National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and NUMSA]. Public sector workers (with the exception of municipal workers) have, generally, not been buffeted by the global neo-liberal restructuring of the working class to the same extent as those in the private sector. Membership of these unions has grown significantly post-1994. However, in several public sector unions there are cases of confusion between union functions and public sector managerial responsibilities. In these cases there are dangers of union leadership positions being abused to advance personal careers within the public service, rather than the active servicing of grass-roots members.

An even graver danger for worker solidarity is the phenomenon of “business unionism”. In the recent past the SACP has increasingly spoken out about this problem. The major unions all have nominal control over multi-billion rand funds. These, in turn, have been leveraged to set up union investment arms. In principle, if subjected to democratic worker control and guided by clear strategic objectives, these investment arms have the potential to be a critical pillar of a solidarity economy – investing, for instance, in desperately needed social wage assets like affordable public transport or public housing. Sadly, in practice, they have often become entry-points through which the capitalist class has inserted its DNA into the head-offices of many unions. Much of the recent turmoil within COSATU affiliates is to be located in competing factions seeking to control these resources.

The current challenges within the trade union movement are a wake-up call for all progressive formations in South Africa. As we seek to recover the proud traditions of our revolutionary labour movement there are several basic principles that must be observed:

- We need to appreciate that worker democracy within unions, and the servicing of workers in their daily shop-floor struggles is of paramount importance. Only a determined re-dedication to these tasks will counter the dangers of bureaucratic deviation and business unionism.
- The massive restructuring of the working class, placing large sectors of workers in “a-typical”

employment effectively beyond the reach of traditional unionism, requires innovation. There are at least two dimensions to addressing these challenges. Is the manner in which unions are currently structured appropriate to the globalised organisation of production? This is a question that NUMSA has placed on the agenda – unfortunately in a highly factionalist manner, seeking to justify its cannibalising of membership from other unions. This does not mean, however, that a principled debate should not be undertaken on new forms of union organisation, along productive value-chains, for instance.

- Responding to a massive non-unionised “precarial” also means recovering previous struggle traditions, notably the re-building of active solidarity between work-place and community struggles. This talks not just to internal union weaknesses, but also to the organisational and campaigning challenges of ANC and SACP local-level branches. It also raises questions around the numerous local level struggles in townships and the imperative of linking more effectively with them.
- Finally, above all, it is critical that progressives understand that a timid and uncritical stance by unions towards government, on the one hand, and (the flip-side of the same coin) worker mobilisation on the basis of a regime-change, anti-state oppositionism BOTH play into the agenda of monopoly capital within the current realities of our society.

The trade union movement in our country stands at the cross-roads. The dangers of increased intra-worker contest and of lose-lose union rivalry over membership with ordinary workers treated merely as cannon fodder to be mobilised demagogically into untimely and ill-considered actions on behalf of union head-office ambitions is very real. On the other hand, the traditions of worker solidarity and of militant shop-floor struggle have not disappeared. The SACP is convinced that the great majority of COSATU unionists, the tens of thousands of shop stewards, and the millions of organised workers in the federation’s ranks will, once more, not fail the revolution.



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