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OF THE PROLETARIAT

**MAYIBUYE
EDITION**

Mayibuye Uprising

Galeshewe

1952



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SOCIALISM IS THE FUTURE / BUILD IT NOW!

1952

Mayibuye Uprising

By Chris Matlhako



“We must write about our history and tell our stories as part of preventing ourselves from repeating mistakes.”

This historic moment has had much to do with what we are today and therefore, requires constant analysis and study. In fact we must do much more than just commemorate the event, but should develop a programmatic process and related activities, which should bring these events to light but also etch them in the memories of the current generations through a myriad of interventions, both institutional and structural.

The events of that fateful period – both leading up to and beyond the tragic incident which left almost hundreds with an assortment of injuries and 15 fatally wounded, were to be historic and with deep consequences for those struggling for national liberation and democracy. In 1952 black South Africans, slaves in the land of their birth rose up to peacefully throw off their shackles - with fatal results.

Johlene May writes that *“The Mayibuye Uprising in 1952 occurred not as an isolated event but as a result of the culmination of oppressive activities against the African people of South Africa, through the legislated encroachment upon the property rights and citizenship of Africans, by the colonial or Union authorities. These oppressive measures can be seen in the litany of wars that were fought and the mass of laws passed to bol-*

ster what would become apartheid. The discovery of diamonds in 1870 saw the British Imperial government embarking on a process of expansion, which resulted in the ‘Wars of Dispossession’ with many chiefdoms being overpowered.”

Kimberley’s mine owners produced diamonds under a regime of colour bars, pass laws and closed compounds for indentured, migratory peasant workers. The wars, conquest and annexations provided one of the primary requisites of industrialism – an uprooted peasantry available at low cost for rough manual work.

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Peasant communities lost their self-sufficiency under the pressures resulting from the confiscation of their land and cattle, the imposition of taxes, the substitution of traders merchandise for domestic products, the spread of education and Christianity. Wage earning became unavoidable for an increasing number of men and women. Members of the small agrarian societies had to acquire the dis-

cipline and skills of the industrial worker, accustomed themselves to urban society, and learn the laws and language of the conqueror. They learned the hard way - on the job, without formal instruction, by working under employers, supervisors and technicians who neither understood nor respected their language and customs. In the 1950s the African, Indian, Coloured and white democrats realized that the fight against all the oppressive laws could not be fought by one section only. It was a total fight that re-

quired the mobilization of all the people. Also in that year the Suppression of Communism Act was passed and the next year the Bantu Authorities Act resurrected the chieftainships, which had been destroyed after the Wars of Dispossession.

The 1950s saw the ANC going into action in the urban townships to organize workers and in the Bantustans to organize peasants in a peasant-led struggle against the racially inspired monster of Apartheid. People were mobilized to join trade unions. Scores of meetings took place in townships under the cover of darkness. It was a task carried out patiently and consistently. Kimberley, also became one of the main centres of political opposition to apartheid and colonialism as scores joined trade unions and became active in the organisations for national liberation.

On June 26, 1950 a call was made to stay home. Exactly a year later the ANC, the Indian Congress, South African Coloured People's Organisation and the White Democrats launched a joint campaign. A planning council was established and the Defiance Campaign started on June 26, 1952.

As part of the Defiance Campaign in Kimberley, Dr Arthur Letele organized a group of volunteers to defy the segregation laws by sitting on the 'Europeans Only' benches at the Kimberley Station. They were arrested and fined £3 or ten days imprisonment. They all opted for the latter.

In Kimberley on November 8, 1952, years before the Sharpeville massacre (March 21, 1960), another massacre took place – the Mayibuye Uprising massacre. A dozen people were buried in a mass funeral on November 12, 1952, at the West End Graveyard. They were innocent casualties who had been coming home from work. At dawn the following morning the police detained Dr Arthur Letele, Sam Phakedi, Pepys Madibane, Olehile Sehume, Alexander Nkoane, Daniel Chabalala and David Mpiwa who were regarded as the ringleaders.

The Defiance campaign saw 8326 people volunteering to defy unjust laws and facing court im-

prisonment. The benefits of the campaign saw it giving the ANC membership on the ground and an opportunity to be practically involved in the struggle against oppression.

The people shed the fear of jail as they realized the way to freedom passed through jail. The campaign inculcated the idea of the spirit of sacrifice of personal interest for the public good. Out of the campaign came a disciplined volunteer corps of men and women who gave freely of their time and energy without any remuneration in order to build the African National Congress and Alliance.

The Defiance Campaign put an end to deputations pleading with the government to grant rights which it had deliberately, as a matter of calculated policy, taken away from the oppressed and exploited majority. Forty-two years later, in 1994, all South Africans, irrespective of race, creed or colour, would be able to go to the polls to elect their own Government and break down the edifice of apartheid.

In "The Life of Reason" (1905), the Spanish-American philosopher, George Santayana (1863-1952) wrote that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Santayana naturalistic approach means that he sees knowledge and belief as

arising not from reasoning, but through interaction between our minds and the material environment. Santayana is actually making a point about progress. For progress to be possible, we must not only remember past experiences, but also be able to learn from them; to see different ways of doing things.

Apartheid and racial segregation

It is interesting to note that both apartheid South Africa and Zionist Israel were inaugurated in 1948 and around the similar sub-themes in Christian-National narratives. As international opprobrium focused more and more on Israel and apartheid South Africa, so a strategic alliance between the two countries grew stronger. It is for this and other reasons that we argue, that our struggle is interconnected with the struggles of other peoples the world-over. Our solidarity

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with the Palestinian people is much more than just a coincidence of history, but a mutually reinforcing struggle for justice, peace and equality which are the important principles of international law.

In 1950 an amendment to the so-called Immorality Act outlawing interracial sex was passed, extending the scope of existing legislation. This prohibition was enforced with intrusive callousness through most of the apartheid era, providing a rich seam of voyeuristic outrage in newspapers as well as parliament and the pulpit. Another significant piece of legislation passed in 1950 was the Suppression of Communism Act. Its immediate political effect was to drive the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) underground. The insidious measure defined Communism so broadly as to encompass any organisation or individual whose views were considered to be radical. It became a favoured means of controlling dissent as well as a tactic to delegitimise opposition in the eyes of fearful white voters.

Today anti-communism manifest in various ways with the same intent.

The 1952 Mayibuye Uprising were also instrumental in bringing together Africans and Coloureds in the struggles that sought to undermine the apartheid racist legislations. Part of what has been lost in the recent period is the ability of the national liberation movement to transcend the racial fissures of apartheid and contribute towards the formative period of a unique South African nation. There are greater cleavages along racial lines in the democratic South Africa, as the apartheid legacies still persist in our current contexts.

Galeshewe and Kimberley were essentially non-racial in character in that colour, religion played no part in the definition of people. The cosmopolitan character of the town gave it an edge in many aspects including in the command of the languages and as such undermined the rationale of apartheid and its segregationist policies.

Today, we have not been able to relegate to the dustbin of history of tribalism and prejudice – in order to contribute meaningfully to the nascent democratic South Africa.

Burning public property vs discipline struggle
The example of amongst others the Mayibuye Uprising was its inherent discipline, commitment and self-sacrifice. In comparison to what is found today, where much of the struggle is dogged by self-serving so-called leaders whose only purpose is to be predatory, rent-seeking and self-aggrandizement which undermines the struggle for the lofty ideals of freedom.

We should also be rebuking very strongly those who in the name of struggle will burn down public property in the name of advancing their demands.

The burning down of public property, such as universities and hospitals, doesn't in anyway whatsoever contribute towards anything progressive but ostensibly undermines the very basis of the struggle. In the recent period we have witnessed the use of the tactic of burning down public property as an instrument to force the hand of the state in the stalemate of negotiations. This tactic is not only short-sighted but very anti-progress and anti-revolutionary in that its ultimate intention is to reverse the gains of democracy.

The examples of the 1952 Mayibuye Uprising clearly demonstrate the thoughtfulness of the leadership and their tactics at the time. The tactical identification of the appropriate symbols and representation of the system of oppression were done as part of the process of prosecution of the struggle and for wider mobilisation of the masses. Their choice of tactical and strategic targets was informed by the fact that they needed to win over much broader sympathies and thus wider mobilisation so as to bring pressure on the authorities at the time. The wider mobilisation and winning over of the widest possible majority was critical to ensure the pressure on the apartheid regime was sustained.

Kimberley and Galeshewe as pioneers
We always maintain that Kimberley and Galeshewe are pioneers of many things that have become key points of references for societal development. Indeed, we should be proud of these and exalt them whenever possible. For example the fact that the School of Mines was first started

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in Kimberley and subsequently moved to Johannesburg, should continue to be a rallying point to expand the university-rendering at the Sol Plaatje University. Expanding the offerings of Sol Plaatje University must not only take into account the so-called market forces but should also factor in the historic-cultural and related aspects that are key, in societal development generally. What we make of these pioneering works in order to make them relevant shouldn't just be nostalgic, but inserted into our development path and cultural-historic narrative.

What are we doing regarding the fact that Kimberley did pioneering work in aviation? Is there a plan to attract related activities and others around this industry to the town using this point of reference?

Galeshewe Memorial Project (GMP)

We maintain that the GMP must continue to develop into an institution of preference and first port of call for those looking for progressive histories of Galeshewe and Kimberley. Besides being institutionalised, GMP must create a platform for those appropriate recordings of history.

We must write about our history and tell our stories as part of preventing ourselves from repeating mistakes. We must write and record our history from our perspective – the oppressed and exploited! It is important because the majority of actors in those struggles are departing the world of living and as such opportunities to record the events and diminishing.

We must go out and go record the historic event and turn these into popular history.

Cde Chris Matlhako is a Central Committee and Politburo Member of the SACP

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History can help ANC

By Zamani Saul



“The decline in electoral support for the ANC in the 2016 local government elections was a rude awakening for the ruling party and reduced to dust its myth of invincibility.”

Taking a positive view, it heralds the critical juncture the ANC has been waiting for to genuinely embark on organisational renewal.

Despite the erosion of its electoral base, the ANC remains the governing party and by far the most

significant political force in SA, unlike the misfortunes suffered by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Sandinistas) of Nicaragua, the Indian Congress Party and the United National Independence Party (UNIP) of Zambia. These parties were voted out of power as a result of organisational paralysis and rot. Similar to the ANC, their paralysis started showing before their desolate electoral defeats.

Following its poor electoral performance, the ANC committed to a process of deep introspec-

tion. But drawing from the experiences of the ANC's sister organisations, introspection does not automatically result in organisational renewal.

The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 led to harsh disputes in the party, which threatened to destroy it.

The organisational structure of the party was enmeshed with the administrative structure of the state. The loss of government meant the loss of party structures and the dispersal of membership when thousands lost their jobs. The Sandinistas went on a deep and extensive introspection, which involved engagement with all party structures and with progressive social formations. This culminated in a national consultative forum of diverse interest groups to chart the way forward and led to a programme for the modernisation of the party — but not at the expense of its revolutionary social principles.

The modernisation resulted in radical changes to the Sandinistas' leadership structures, the process of acquiring membership and the ideological orientation of the party. This enabled the Sandinistas to regain lost ground and they improved their performance in the 2006 elections, which then increased to 62% in the elections in 2015. The leadership of the Indian National Congress responded differently when the party suffered its first severe electoral defeat in 1979 after three decades in power. During the post-election introspection, it correctly identified two factors that affected the party's performance: corruption and mutating factions that led to internal instability.

There was little political will from the party's leadership to tackle these challenges decisively. Instead, the party became more polarised as factions became institutionalised, resulting in a steep surge in the levels of corruption in its ranks and in states where it governed.

The party retained the organisational structures designed in 1918 and 1920 by Mohandas Gandhi, which inhibited its capacity to boldly challenge factions and corruption in its ranks. In the 2014

elections Congress won only 44 seats of the 543-member house.

It was caged in its legacy of leading the liberation struggle in India and failed to transform itself into a "party of today".

The 1991 elections in Zambia led to the fall of the UNIP, a party that had led the country to independence. After the elections, the UNIP executive held a three-day meeting to introspect, followed by extensive engagements with party structures to establish the cause of the defeat.

The party identified two reasons that contributed to its poor performance: weak leadership and internal tensions. UNIP adopted a political programme aimed at modernising the party.

But central aspects of the programme were not implemented as jostling for power intensified and continued unabated. The insidious internal strife, spearheaded by senior leaders of the party,

weakened the capacity of the leadership collective to rescue the party. Today, the UNIP, like the Congress Party, is a shadow of its former self.

In South African politics, any political party of consequence must have the backing of the metropolitan municipalities. Out of the eight metros, the ANC secured a reduced majority in three: Mangaung, eThekweni and Buffalo City, and lost three

metros to a coalition of opposition parties: Tshwane, Nelson Mandela Bay and Johannesburg.

Losing three metros in one election is tantamount to a political earthquake as they are, historically, strongholds of the ANC. The national share of the ANC vote was sliced from 62% to 54%. Sliding far below 60% is a major psychological defeat for the ANC and has energised opposition parties towards the 2019 general election. In response, ANC leaders called in unison for deep introspection.

After a four-day national executive committee (NEC) introspection meeting, a statement was issued in which the NEC accepted collective blame for the poor electoral performance. It attributed this to a range of issues, among them the internal battles and the perception that the

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ANC is soft on corruption. The statement highlighted 15 key and immediate tasks for recovery. However, the fractious NEC invoked doubts among ANC members and their supporters about its sincerity in accepting collective blame. Hardly two weeks after the introspection, NEC members were talking at cross-purposes about the meaning of their statement and giving conflicting accounts.

Worse, the saga of the imminent arrest of Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan and the early conference proposal by the ANC Youth League drowned the statement. This severely compromised the capacity of the ANC as a selfcorrecting organisation.

The NEC statement said the ANC was a "listening and learning organisation", which suggests that the #OccupyLuthuliHouse campaign should have been dealt with very differently. The ANC should have used the opportunity to explain its position to the protesters and to educate them on ANC internal processes.

Compromised

An ANC policy document on organisational renewal mentions the notion of the "20-year curse" — derived from the generalisation that most liberation movements suffer significant loss of their grassroots support after 20 years in government.

The significant decline in the electoral support of the ANC after 22 years in power requires a deeper analysis than a mere generalisation.

There are six known and pronounced weaknesses that could have contributed to the ANC shedding votes. All can be directly attributed to leadership failures, and to overcome them requires urgent and decisive action to renew the party.

First, there are fierce, money-driven and destructive internal battles for leadership positions in the ANC that might lead to the demise of the party. The threats facing the ANC arise overwhelmingly from within.

The debilitating leadership contests are pursued without sensitivity to the fact that the credit for the liberation struggle is finite and is characteristically exhausted in the minds of the popula-

tion much sooner than leaders recognise.

Second, there is a complacent arrogance in the party that is due to its seemingly unassailable electoral support. The ANC fell into the trap of believing that, by divine right, it alone knows what is good for society.

Political arrogance contributed to incoherent responses and poor management of challenges confronting the ANC. Among these are the disastrous responses to the Gupta landing at Waterkloof air force base, the imposition of e-tolls, the nonsecurity upgrades at the president's private residence, the Marikana shooting, the allegations of state capture, the instability in the security cluster and the removal of former finance minister Nhlanhla Nene.

This turned the tide of public opinion against the ANC and effectively bolstered the narrative of an incorrigibly corrupt government led by scoundrels who are beyond political redemption. Third is the failure to modernise and transform the ANC into a "party of today". Like most liberation movements, there is a fear of modernisation in the ANC. This is derived from a mistaken belief that modernisation will rob the movement of its greatest asset, which is the history of the liberation struggle. The NEC discussion document for the 2007 national conference, entitled

There are six known and pronounced weaknesses that could have contributed to the ANC shedding votes.

Organisation Re-engineering, encapsulated radical and progressive proposals for the modernisation of the party. But the fierce leadership contest at the conference rendered stillborn the proposals because they were viewed with suspicion. The central objective of the document was to increase the capacity of the ANC to enforce discipline, build its cadre base and increase its campaigning capacity. It proposed, among other things, the establishment of ANC branches at universities, in big hospitals and on factory floors. This would have expanded the reach of the party beyond traditional ward-based branches and would have strengthened its mobilisation capacity, particularly in industrial heartlands such as Gauteng.

The fourth weakness is the enthronement of the neoliberal development trajectory, which facili-

tates the growth of capital while imposing severe limitations on government capacity to tackle apartheid inequalities.

Today, 22 years into democracy, SA is the world's capital of income inequality with a race-inclined distribution of ownership. These contradictions generate resentment from the more than 40% of South Africans who are poor, causes a great deal of impatience with the pace of social transformation and explains why SA has a permanent protest season.

Central to attending to the three socioeconomic defects — unemployment, inequality and poverty — is the leverage the ANC government has within the economy through state-owned enterprises. Unlike other developmental states, such as China, South Korea and Malaysia, the ANC government appears to be unable to strategically use the SOEs to direct growth and investment in the country. Instead, the levels of chaos and mismanagement in the SOEs, accompanied by widely held perceptions of runaway corruption, subtract the much-needed credits due to the ANC.

The fifth problem is ideological degeneration. This places the ANC in a precarious position in which its supporters are mistrustful of its motives, and its record and intentions are disputed. This is due to the erosion of the capacity of the ANC's leadership to engage in ideological work. In the past few years the organisational apparatus was propelled into a defensive mode and very little work was done forcefully to present what the ANC stands for.

This opened up an opportunity for the DA to appropriate Nelson Mandela's legacy and for the EFF to place greater claim on the Freedom Charter. Between 2007 and 2012, membership of the ANC doubled from just above 630,000 to more than 1.2-million. There is, however, no systematic and sustainable programme for political training to strengthen the political understanding of the

new members.

To respond to this challenge, the national conference in 2012 adopted a programme, A Decade of the Cadre. Now, four years into the decade, the situation appears worse than when the resolution was adopted.

The sixth problem is the realignment of the ANC political landscape characterised by the grouping of provinces into visible and arrogant factional blocs. These blocs subordinate and eclipse the work of the NEC, weakening it and compromising its position as the highest decision-making structure between conferences. NEC members are under pressure to support and to protect provincial factions in the hope of re-election at the next conference.

Leadership

Introspection alone is inadequate to address these weaknesses and to get the ANC on a path to recovery. The ANC has a choice: follow the path of the Sandinistas, which requires radical reorientation of the organisation underpinned by strong leadership, or take the path of the Congress Party, which will result in accelerated decline.

The NEC needs visibly to demonstrate its capacity to lead the organisation. The public spats among leaders and the incoherent and conflicting messages need to stop.

The ANC needs to build a broad consensus on the way forward among progressive forces. The consensus should be a product of frank and meaningful engagement. Pioneering such engagements will enable the ANC to reassert its role as the leader of society.

An introspection limited to ANC structures and members will be miserably inadequate to serve as

the basis for renewal. An extensive process of engagement will create a platform for mass democratic formations and progressive civil society movements that have felt marginalised for years, to reflect on the state of the party and the way forward.

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The idea mooted by the South African Communist Party and the ANC in Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape to convene a broad national consultative conference or forum is very attractive and deserves further interrogation.

The idea of a consultative conference is informed by the understanding that the ANC is not exclusively for its members; rather, it is a collective living heritage of the people of SA and Africa.

Central to such a review will be to establish whether the current ANC structures are fit for purpose to organise and respond to the needs of a diverse urban population.

Most important is the question of whether a branch has the capacity to effectively respond to modern forms of political engagement by young people, particularly young professionals. This group seems to be averse to the current forms of branch activism marked by leadership battles fuelled by tenders and demands for deployment.

The implementation of conference decisions remains one of the biggest challenges confronting the ANC. The composition of leadership structures is not helpful in attending to this challenge. For example, the current NEC has 86 members, with more than 60 without any clearly defined tasks that the national conference or the NEC cannot hold accountable. The ANC needs

to consider the election of a smaller NEC in which at least half the members are elected to execute certain tasks and must account to the NEC and the national conference.

There is a need to review the process of election of leadership. The ANC is no longer an illegal movement, and there are thus no compelling reasons to have its leadership election shrouded in secrecy. The movement needs to develop mechanisms that allow for an open leadership contest that gives a stronger voice and participation to the branches. The constitutional requirement that branches should constitute 90% of an elective conference is a good starting point.

The ANC needs resolutely to fight corruption and strengthen party discipline to regain the confidence of the people. The campaign against corruption should be pitched at the same scale as the campaign against HIV/AIDS by actively mobilising communities and strengthening the capacity of the state to investigate and prosecute such cases.

All national revolutions at some point or another encounter subjective and objective challenges that result in serious setbacks. This is not unique to the ANC.

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