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**THIRTY YEARS ON: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?**

## Contents

Chapter 1: Economic transformation and development – negative impact of neo-liberalism .....	3
Chapter 2: Objective conditions and Party Strategy and Organisation .....	9
Chapter 3: The National Question, non-racialism and ethnicity .....	20
Chapter 4: Towards the 2026 local government .....	27
Chapter 5: COSATU and the entire trade union movement in the current conjuncture .	42
Chapter 6: Social transformation, including health and education sectors and community struggles – with proposals for a way forward under current circumstances	51
Chapter 7: 30 years on – What is to be one in the struggle against patriarchy in general and capitalist patriarchy in particular .....	56
Chapter 8: The international situation and solidarity .....	61

## Chapter 1: Economic transformation and development – negative impact of neo-liberalism

*Thirty Years of Struggle for a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism...and proposals for a way forward under current circumstances*

On the economic front, the past thirty years have witnessed successive ANC-led governments importing and adopting significant elements of the globally dominant neo-liberal paradigm. This paradigm has itself passed through various iterations over the nearly half century it has sought to shape and reshape the capitalist global economy, and for the past decade and a half at least it has found itself in deepening crisis and facing growing “discontent” from popular class forces both in the imperialist core and the periphery of the “Global South”.

Dating back to the 1980s and greatly reinforced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War by the claims of the dominant imperialist power, the USA, that it had emerged as the undisputed hegemon of a unipolar world order, market fundamentalist policies came to be promoted and imposed through various mechanisms on both industrialised and underdeveloped countries. Based on a “one size fits all” model deemed to be universally applicable to all countries at any stage of development and in any circumstances, these emphasised that the universal apex priority was the achievement of macro-economic balances (a budget deficit not more than 3% of GDP and moving towards zero, an inflation rate in single digits and falling as the exclusive target of monetary policy pursued with a single instrument, interest rate adjustments). This pursuit of macro-economic balance was to be complemented with a market determined exchange rate, states withdrawing from the direct provision of a range of public services in favour of procuring these from the “private sector”, deregulation particularly of financial sectors among others. In much read “popular” presentation of the core ideas, US journalist Thomas Friedman described the key prescripts as a “golden straitjacket”, sometimes uncomfortable, pretty much one size fits all, but inescapable in the era of unipolarity and globalisation. The adjective “golden” suggested that once donned the “straitjacket” would lead to a country being looked at favourably by the “electronic herds” of trans national fund managers, who would then respond by channelling foreign investment into the economies of compliant states.

Dating back to the adoption of the GEAR programme in 1996, the SACP has long critiqued the ANC-led government’s domestication of such policies, whether through conviction or a sense of there being no alternative. The SACP argued that the adoption of GEAR was premised on a highly dubious assumption that foreign investors would “like” its proposed neo-liberal macro-economic reforms and respond by channelling in sufficient foreign investment to raise the GDP growth rate to 6% and create 400.000 net new jobs each year – a dream that of course never materialised. The SACP also argued that adoption of GEAR was championed and promoted by domestic bourgeois class interests. These included the increasingly dominant finance capital and an aspirant bourgeoisie with the broader ANC alliance dubbed “the 1996 class project”.

More recently, the SACP has critiqued the embrace of fiscal austerity and the importation of perspectives on “structural reform” of network industries, deriving from recommendations by the World Bank and OECD.

Our critique of fiscal austerity was that it prioritised the attainment of pre-ordained ratios (derived from the neo-liberal playbook) over all other considerations and sought to achieve these through expenditure cuts. We indicated that we were not arguing for spendthrift policies, nor calling for tolerance of the vast amount of wasteful expenditure that occurs. Our problem, we argued, was that austerity driven cuts were being imposed in ways that were leaving too many priority programmes significantly under-funded and were also being imposed at a time of economic stagnation, thus having a debilitating effect on a languishing economy. We argued indeed that austerity was leading to a vicious cycle – cuts imposed to achieve pre-defined fiscal ratios were having a contractionary effect on an already constrained economy, leading to less revenue collection, resulting in turn with yet further cuts.

The combined effect of neo-liberal fiscal and monetary policies, we concluded, was that government's responses to the deepening economic and social reproduction crisis (such as the post-Covid Economic Rehabilitation and Recovery Programme) had been constrained to the point of being ineffective. Where potentially important initiatives like the Presidential employment programme, or the social relief of distress grant were adopted, their impact was blunted as budgets were cut.

On the notions of “structural reform” of network industries, we located our critique in the experience of other jurisdictions. As indicated earlier, neo-liberal doctrine has passed through several iterations. One of these was the transition from what has been called the Washington Consensus to the more recent Wall Street Consensus. The former, whose title was meant to convey that it was the consensus of the Washington-based multi-lateral institutions, the IMF and World bank, as well as the hegemonic USA focussed, as we have indicated, on donning the “golden straitjacket” in the hope that this would be looked favourably by foreign investors. The Wall Street consensus argued that governments, while maintaining the neo-liberal version of macro-economic “stability”, needed also to go further and actively work to create conditions that would encourage profit seeking, mainly financial sector, investors to fund projects mainly in liberalised “network” sectors. Part of the message of the Wall Street Consensus was thus to offer a supposed carrot. Austerity strapped governments facing underfunded infrastructure programmes could now, if they acted appropriately, access resources under the control of domestic and international fund managers. Various tools were identified, including creating conditions to allow profit-seeking private sector operators in network industries to access such resources and “blended finance” arrangements in which governments would build partnerships enabling them to add to the resources they could mobilise in other ways. Progressive economists have argued that acting to attract into infrastructure or other public programmes investible funds seeking a rate of return no less than could be obtained through financialised speculation requires governments to provide costly subsidies and extensive guarantees (not just against possible losses but to ensure a “market rate” of return). In addition, they need to allow a restructuring of pricing models that in practice pivots towards serving higher income customers. Our own experience over the past five years where we have seen little of the promised “massive” infrastructure build through “blended finance” confirms the experience of other jurisdictions that this is indeed a high cost, low yield option. Moreover, the experience of countries that have undertaken the extensive privatisation implied by this model (though now more usually in the form of concessions, joint ventures and PPPs rather than outright sale) suggests that this has led to higher costs affecting consumers often combined with poorer services and marginalisation or exclusion of lower-income people.

Instead of neo-liberal “structural reform”, the SACP has repeatedly called for “structural transformation”. A central element of this is overcoming the structural location which colonialism and imperialism assigned

to Africa in the global “division of labour” as a producer and exporter of raw materials used in value added production in the capitalist core. This reality, which imperialism seeks to continue to reproduce to this day effectively confines countries of the “Global South” to the least lucrative position in global value chains, with the value of the raw material as a percentage of the final price of value-added products even diminishing as technology advances. Dating back to Kwane Nkrumah who described the global regime that underpinned this as “neo-colonialism, the highest stage of imperialism”, progressive forces in the Global South have identified transitioning from primary commodity to higher value-added production through industrialisation as a central component of development strategy. The experience of those few countries of the Global South (East Asia and China) that have successfully navigated this transition is that it needs to be driven by a development state adopting and implementing high impact industrial policy. While we welcomed various efforts by our government to promote industrial policy since around 2007, we argued that these were not operating at scale, had not become the key driver of overall economic policy, and in particular were not influencing and shaping macro-economic policy. They were also inadequately resourced and not excluded from austerity driven budget cuts. These observations underpinned our repeated call for a higher impact, properly resourced industrial policy at the centre of a strategy of structural transformation. We also agreed with those progressive economists who argued that micro-economic policies cannot compensate for problems in macro-economic policy. From that, we critiqued notions either that industrial policy should be subordinate to macro-economic policy, or that macro-economic policy should be insulated as a “stand alone” prioritising “stability” as defined in the neo-liberal play book. Rather, we argued, macro-economic policy (along with many other complementary policies) needed to be shaped and reshaped according to the overriding priority of promoting industrial development.

While structural transformation of the kind called for above remained a distant dream, we noted that the South African economy had undergone significant structural change of a different kind over the past thirty years – financialisation. This is only partly reflected in the fact that the “contribution” of financial services to GDP rose from 6% in 1994 to over 20% today. Financialisation is also associated with a growing requirement on both consumers and non-financial companies to engage in financial transactions (medical aids, defined contribution pension funds being examples of the former, and the prioritisation of share price value, coupled with rewarding managers and directors with tradable share options and practices like share buy backs examples of the latter). Combined with burgeoning trading in paper over a range of “new” financial products, securities and derivatives among them has underpinned a reality where the “top companies” in South Africa today are no longer mining houses (let alone industrial companies) but banks and fund managers and in which thus a large and increasing part of the surplus value created in the economy is “transferred” to financialised capital. According to one estimate, banks and funds of one sort or another control assets with a value equivalent to three times the GDP. It is not that these funds are not being invested in some kind of investment strike. They definitely are being invested, just not in productive sector activity in South Africa, but rather in asset trading of one sort or another, including a large part abroad. Financialisation also underpins the financial bourgeoisie’s emergence as the dominant and hegemonic force within “business” and the influence it has built with NT and the SARB.

All of the above identified acts of omission and commission by successive administrations underpin, in our view, the deepening crisis of social reproduction confronted by the majority of the working class and the poor. Statistical reports point to continuing extreme levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Indeed, all still remain significantly above the levels that prevailed at the time of the “crisis before the crisis” of Covid meaning that whatever may have happened to share prices or financial sector profits there has been no recovery from the Great Lockdown Recession for many working people and the poor. On a longer time horizon, figures for unemployment since 1994 show a disturbing trend. After some improvement during the period when policy focussed on the RDP before GEAR, the trend line for unemployment has been up, with of course cycles but never a reduction, even in the best of times, to a level below that recorded before the most recent crisis. If evidence-based decision making really was the basis on which policy choices were arrived at, these realities should surely point to the imperative of a major course correction.

Over the past three decades, the SACP has argued its case consistently, including drawing on the expertise and analyses of a variety of progressive and heterodox researchers. Apart from the financial sector campaign which in its early years succeeded in ensuring the inclusion of low-income customers into certain banking services and some significant court victories protecting mortgage payers repossessed, most engagements have been through the publication of policy documents and statements and processes within the tripartite alliance. A sober assessment of the latter points to our influence being uneven and certainly diminishing in more recent times. We have regularly participated in numerous makgotla and other alliance or ANC convened meetings. Sometimes through hard work and mobilisation we have managed to insert some or other progressive proposal into an alliance or ANC policy document, though usually as part of an ambiguous formulation and mostly without real follow up in implementation. Macro-economic policy in particular has been a no-go area, with any “consensus” amounting to vague generalisations that allow neo-liberal business as usual to continue.

Where are we now...and what is the way forward?

Our current reality is that our ANC alliance partner is in coalition government with parties to its right, with the outright bourgeois and neo-liberal DA being the partner on which the current coalition depends for its parliamentary majority. That being the case, the influence of its coalition partners will more than likely be towards an even stronger adherence to key neo-liberal policy prescripts – including stricter austerity (justified as a more determined push to meet in particular debt reduction targets) and notions of “working with” profit seeking capital in the hope of leveraging funds to fill an infrastructure “funding gap” now said to be north of a trillion Rand. Acting to deploy policy tools like prescribed assets or community reinvestment requirements to leverage resources in the hands of finance capital on better terms than the Wall Street Consensus-recommended model seems more remote than ever.

In seeking to chart a way forward to build greater influence, we need, as Marxists, to begin by assessing the balance of class forces, both globally and domestically. Ironically, just as neo-liberalism looks set to strengthen its stranglehold domestically, it is weakening globally.

The big events underpinning the weakening of its stranglehold globally were the ongoing massive existential crisis of the hyper-globalisation/neo-liberal model beginning with the Great Recession of 2007/8 and rise of China. China’s rise to becoming the world’s second largest and most industrialised economy as well as a technology leader in areas of both digital and low carbon products coincided with the period of hyper globalisation and was indeed driven initially by exporting manufactured goods to the imperialist world. But critically China never adopted the neo-liberal policies foisted on much of the Global South. All its policies, including its carefully calibrated strategic “market reforms” were guided by its all-

encompassing industrial development policies. State-owned enterprises were leaders in development, macro-economic policy was subordinated to the needs of industrial development (a good example being the way China's financial authorities used a variety of policy tools to maintain a competitive value of its currency that supported the export of its products abroad and limited access of imports to its domestic market). In contrast to countries like the US, UK and South Africa, which extensively financialised and underwent de-industrialisation, China disciplined its financial institutions to ensure they provided resources for industrialisation and never became the speculative traders in paper their imperialist counterparts became.

The result is not just that China has become a major economy and a peer competitor to the erstwhile global hegemon in an increasing number of areas, but that China's rise and the reaction to it is reverberating on the structures, institutions and doctrines of the global economy. A highly contested and uneven transition from the unipolar global order that was established at the end of the Cold War to one that will be more multipolar is underway and unstoppable. In this context, the US has defined recovering industrial policy and developing a competitive edge over China in areas of digital and low carbon technology as matters of strategic priority. This has led to it deploy large resources to support its own industries and to significantly raise tariffs – particularly against China's products. In the process, it has disregarded in an uneven and partisan manner several of the WTO trade rules it itself was the main force in crafting in the 1980s and 1990s. The "free trade" doctrines of the 1990s, which South Africa embraced on steroids during the GEAR phase, are also quietly being jettisoned. Some countries of the Global South have recognised this reality and begun to carve out additional "policy space" for themselves to good effect. Indonesia, for example, has imposed restrictions on the export of raw nickel (a strategic mineral needed for low carbon products), which a divided and manifestly less powerful WTO has been unable to overturn. This decision has led to the emergence of industries engaged in at least some level of beneficiation, creating both industrial capacity and jobs.

The enlarged BRICS grouping is exploring an increasingly ambitious agenda of decoupling from the US dollar. Having begun as a programme to promote trade among members without resort to third country currencies, this is now reaching into the area of seeking to build gold-based alternatives to dollar reserve holdings – partly spurred by the outright theft of Russian and Iranian assets held in the US. A key question that arises given South Africa's position as a founding member of BRICS is we actively spearheading these potentially paradigm shifting processes, or are we acting as something of a laggard behind other partners?

These developments are, of course, not emerging in a benign global environment. Strategic economic competition is rapidly morphing into inter-state security contestation. Imperialist aggression in Ukraine, the Middle East and elsewhere poses real threats of escalating war. The world economy is gripped in stagflation and looks likely to soon enter a severe downturn or even financial crisis. The threat of catastrophic climate change looms large as more extreme weather events are wreaking havoc across the world. All of this is leading an increasing number of analysts to use the term "polycrisis" to describe the multiple, intersecting and deepening crises afflicting the disentangling unipolar imperialist global order.

What all of this pointedly suggests is that the emerging global conjuncture is creating both a new imperative and opening up further opportunities for a country like South Africa to find alternatives to discredited and increasingly discarded neo-liberal policies.

Achieving this will depend on acting to build greater working-class power and influence. Without in any way suggesting that we abandon the struggle to influence the ANC and alliance through the kind of activities we have been involved in up to date, we need to recognise that the old adage “we won’t be able win in the boardroom what we have not won on the ground” is likely to be even more true in the circumstances we now find ourselves in. We need to acknowledge that working class power and influence has been declining for some time, and that we are likely to face even more difficulties in asserting even the level of influence we have managed up to now in circumstances in which our alliance partner depends for its position in government on its coalition with parties to its right strongly committed to neo-liberalism. To put it bluntly without building more power on the ground, left alliance partners are likely to have less influence on government economic policy than does the DA.

It is not that the electorate voted for neo-liberalism. The May 29 election result, including the large stay away by potential voters, needs to be understood as an expression of discontent by the masses with the status quo delivered by neo-liberalism. The problem is that this discontent was expressed in abstentionism and the rise of parties mobilising on the basis of ethno-nationalism. While some of these may say similar things to us on some issues, their positions are located within a broader framework of ethno-nationalism and problematic personal agendas.

Moving forward requires that we build a popular left front to spearhead a campaign to build more influence on the ground as well as in the space of the “battle for ideas” for a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism. This will require that we reach out to similar minded groupings and organisations beyond our existing comfort zone of alliance partners (whilst not, of course, excluding those). These could include trade unions in various of the federations that now exist, progressive NGOs, and research bodies. We need perhaps to begin by identifying specific issues. These might include, but not be limited to:

- the fight for a universal basic income grant
- a push for a massive public employment programme, including one linked to climate proofing communities and infrastructure against the inevitable future extreme weather events
- a campaign against identified budget cuts of particular relevance to working people and the poor
- building on the financial sector campaign to challenge notions that the only way to access for developmental priorities funds in the hands of the “private sector” is to offer extensive guarantees for profits at levels compatible with financialised trading. While the ultimate goal would be to seek some socially determined defined percentage of total funds channelled for such purposes with a more modest rate of return and greater risk taking, this could perhaps begin by seeking to strengthen enforcement of Financial Sector Charter obligations
- Identifying issues around which to campaign for a higher impact, properly funded industrial policy

Building a popular front for a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism could perhaps begin by building coalitions on specific issue campaigns that would require setting out by identifying potential partners and engaging in discussions with these about the content and details of such campaigns. A complementary stream of work would be to try to draw potential partners into a workshop or conference to define key parameters of a broader progressive alternative to neo-liberalism. Linked to this must be the search for

ways to improve communication for our broad ideas, including establishing a left podcast or YouTube channel that draws in a variety of progressive voices on economic policy questions.

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## Chapter 2: Objective conditions and Party Strategy and Organisation

*“Correct revolutionary theory assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement” - Lenin*

Historically, communist parties, including the Communist Party in South Africa have paid considerable attention to:

1. the kind of a communist party that is required to advance
2. a programmatic strategic agenda
3. with relevant strategic tasks and tactics that are appropriate to the prevailing material/objective conditions (national, regional, global).

It is important to have a **dialectical** understanding of the relationship between these three axes – for instance, a communist party will be impacted upon by the material conditions within which it is operating, but if it is effective, it can also play a role in changing those material/objective conditions.

**Without the correct identification of the principal strategic tasks, and the relevant organisational approaches within a specific objective situation, errors and even serious defeats are likely to occur.**

**The question arises whether, over the past decade or so, the SACP has sufficiently analysed the inter-relationship between these three axes and sufficiently aligned strategic objectives and tasks, shifting material conditions, and the kind of party we are/should be building.** It is not being suggested that these are easy tasks, but we should also be critically and self-critically alert.

At a fairly basic level weaknesses might be reflected symptomatically in the fact that at CC’s and even congresses we have two separate secretariat/CC reports – a “political report” and an “organisational report” in which the alignment between them is not always apparent. We even have a separate “financial report” in which the connections between strategy, party political organisation and resourcing are often not realistically interconnected. This can result in political voluntarism (aspirations to achieve some political goal, regardless of the objective realities and regardless of the subjective weaknesses and challenges – in other words, regardless of the related organisational capacity, the quality of cadreship and the funding resources).

### **What is the SACP’s current strategic agenda?**

As our congresses dating back at least to the early 1960s right through to the most recent 2022 congress have all affirmed and re-affirmed our overall programmatic strategic agenda is:

**To seek to be a vanguard party of the working class in the context of a national democratic struggle “as the most direct path to socialism” in the South African reality.**

Our principal programmatic strategic task is therefore to build a powerful national democratic movement in which the class interests of the broad working class become hegemonic with a view to achieving socialist advances in the midst of advancing, deepening and defending an ongoing NDR.

Over the last five decades the manner in which the SACP has sought to achieve this strategic agenda, the kind of Party we have organised, the objective conditions in which we have worked, and how we have conceptualised the NDR have changed considerably. To take one example – in the past few years we have asserted that there is no mechanical/automatic equivalence between the ANC and the NDR, “the ANC doesn’t own the NDR”. Put another way the broad ANC-alliance movement in its current reality may not be Lenin’s “truly mass and revolutionary movement” within which a Communist Party seeks to be a vanguard force of the working class. Which is not to say the ANC or alliance, or our collective legacy are irrelevant to the re-building of a “truly mass and revolutionary movement”.

Considering all of this, it might be useful for comparative purposes to reflect back over the changing character of the SACP since the 1970s in the context not of a changed overall strategic perspective but of what are or should be changing strategic tasks and tactical priorities and appropriate organisational approaches in these changing material conditions.

In order to reflect on our present situation, this discussion note will first consider three (quite different) periods in which the SACP achieved considerable success in effectively aligning its organisational character (including its cadreship) and its strategic tasks and priorities with the prevailing material conditions. These earlier periods of important Party success have left a legacy for the present, but also a potential danger of seeking to apply Party approaches in the past to a significantly changed reality.

### **The Party in the 1970s**

In the 1970s, the SACP identified as the key strategic task for advancing the NDR in SA – the re-building (initially largely in exile) of the ANC and MK, following the near fatal strategic defeat that our movement had suffered in the mid-1960s.

In this difficult period, indeed, the SACP achieved a high point in its vanguard capacity and influence **WITHIN the ANC and MK in exile** but **not**, at this stage, **within the country (where our presence and visibility had virtually disappeared) and therefore NOT within the working class and broad popular masses**. (Although the SACP and ANC were not entirely absent in the 1973 Durban Strikes, or the 1976 youth uprising – other ideological currents – workerist and “new left” in the former case, BC in the latter were dominant).

The objective conditions that made possible this vanguard influence within the largely exiled ANC at that time included:

- Subjectively - the fact that the Party’s leading cadres had operated in the underground through the 1950s and were better prepared than the broader ANC leadership, not to mention ANC membership, for the post-1960 realities of ANC illegality and exile.
- Also, subjectively, key Party leaders in exile, notably Moses Kotane and JB Marks, were an integral part of the most senior ANC leadership – key advisors and confidantes to then acting ANC president, OR Tambo.
- Also at the subjective level, there was the reality that key Party members like Slovo had pre-existing military experience from their service in WW2, and (for obvious social reasons) there

was also often a greater fundraising capacity and international contacts among non-African members in the broad Congress movement most of whom were also Party members.

- The prestige of the Soviet Union (and the fact that the Soviet bloc was the only supportive state group of the ANC at the time) had a profound impact on the sympathy for the international communist movement among the broader ANC (as with other progressive NLMs at the time like the MPLA, PAIGC, Frelimo, etc). Anti-communist sentiments did exist within the ANC in exile. But these were easily marginalised, notably with the expulsion of the Gang of 8, senior ANC members at the time. This expulsion reflected the strength and prestige of the SACP within the ANC at the time (To state the obvious: Clearly the situation currently both globally and in regard to the SACP's influence upon and within the ANC has shifted negatively).

Organisationally, the Party operated in tight units (even in exile), with the exception of the GS and chairperson, Party identities were not known to the broader ANC leadership or even to other Party unit members. Recruitment was tight and targeted, and a period of probation had to be served.

The Party focused on ideological work within MK and more broadly within the wider ANC, while respecting the organisational integrity of the ANC (i.e. without being “entryist”). In the 1970s the SACP's membership was never more than a few hundred. Most were in exile, although there was a Party presence on Robben Island and in a very small and vulnerable underground inside the country.

**Strategically** the Party's key focus was on re-building the ANC and MK and helping to ensure that it was the ANC that was able to assert itself as the principal and unifying South African NLM (many international forces in independent Africa sought to project, for instance, equivalence between the PAC and ANC, or – in the case of some Western powers - build Buthelezi's Inkatha as the alternative.)

In this context the Party's **small size**, and its virtual **public invisibility** were not an impediment to **the principal strategic task**. What counted was the general quality and ability of communists as ANC and MK cadres, in their own right, to win the trust of rank-and-file ANC members and to be in the front line of dedication, bravery and clarity of perspective.

The relative success of the Party in this period (largely in exile and largely within the ANC) laid the basis for future Party advances. **But it has also sometimes contributed to certain Party cultures and nostalgic illusions into the present when conditions have changed dramatically, and when we are dealing with a very different ANC both in terms of its changing social composition, and related ideological tendencies.**

**The objective and subjective conditions that enabled the Party to “punch above its numerical weight” in terms of exercising constructive influence within the ANC in the 1970s no longer exist.** This does not mean that we should abandon the ANC. Nor should we easily forfeit the major (and internationally unique) reality of the practice of dual SACP/ANC membership. Dual membership is a right and practice that was won through decades of selfless Party activism. The Party's immense contribution to the ANC surviving its major strategic defeat of the mid-1960s cannot be understated. But we cannot take dual membership for granted or our ability to influence the ANC – whether its leadership collective or its mass base. These must be won in struggle over and over again.

The period of the late 60s through the early 70s with a widely dispersed exile presented many challenges for the leadership of the Party. One such challenge was the fact that the non-African Party leadership, who in that period also could not be ANC members (Yusuf Dadoo, Slovo, etc) were

not allowed by the Tanzanian government to base in Dar es Salaam where the key ANC leadership, including, notably Kotane were located. Location and other realities resulted in a non-antagonistic divergence on emphasis within the Party between London and Dar es Salaam – with the Party comrades in London, while agreeing with the focus on building the ANC, believed that the Party should also project more of an independent profile. Kotane tended to disagree with this believing that nothing should be done to rock the ANC boat and cause divisions.

These inner-Party divergences from the late 60s and early 70s, were not strategic differences at the time, but concerned emphasis. They concerned the degree to which we should (or should not assert) an independent Party voice.

It is useful to remember this inner-Party history now because how the Party relates to the ANC (and the ANC to the Party) has continued to reverberate into more recent decades and tensions. The fact that we are dealing with a considerably changed ANC and changed objective conditions also means that the Party has had to change, including in its posture towards the ANC. For instance, in the mid-1990s through into the 2000s the Party was openly and publicly criticised (often quite viciously) by some leading ANC personalities (especially the Mbeki circle). We were told that we were “no longer the Party of Kotane” – which was true. After all, the ANC we were relating to in the 1990s and beyond was no longer the ANC of Tambo, Kotane and JB Marks. Not only had global and national realities changed considerably, but the ANC had also changed significantly.

Again, most recently, there have been senior ANC voices critical of the Party’s concerns about the GNU. Essentially their criticism is that the Party shouldn’t raise these concerns publicly but rather reserve them for bilateral engagements behind closed doors. Clearly the Party must not allow itself to be muzzled publicly. On the other hand, however, in its tone and content, SACP criticism of the ANC should, at all times, guard against unifying the entire ANC leadership and much of its mass base against the Party. Rather we should help to consolidate progressive tendencies and isolate negative ones. An excellent example of this was how from around 2016/7 the SACP was able to provide leadership across the Alliance and particularly within a paralysed ANC in our active mobilisation against state capture.

### **The Party in the 1980s**

A bit schematically (the ebb and flow of the struggle doesn’t neatly correspond to decades), the 1980s presented the SACP with widening possibilities and duties. The emergence of a broad mass democratic movement (assuming an organisational form under the umbrella of the UDF) and an increasingly well-organised and militant trade union movement – meant that the **“home front” and popular and working-class mobilisation could now become the major strategic focus of party work and organisation.**

**The Party’s significant vanguard role within the ANC in exile (and in the MK) persisted through this decade.**

But a new challenge presented itself to the party. The emerging progressive trade union movement which began effectively with the Durban strikes of 1973 had now grown significantly. Much of the leadership within FOSATU and its affiliates projected themselves as socialists, but many were suspicious of the ANC and of the Party, or even anti-communist.

The Party’s low public profile (in fact virtual invisibility) through the 1970s had served the strategic priorities at the time very well. But now with a large and militant trade union movement advocating socialism but often dismissive of the Freedom Charter, and of a NDR strategy, it became imperative for

the Party to greatly increase its **independent** visibility, voice and presence within the popular and working-class movement. Internal underground Party recruitment grew significantly, particularly targeting the trade unions and the emerging MDM. Umsebenzi was launched in 1985 and the Party under its newly elected GS (Slovo) deliberately broke with the earlier low-profile Party role of the 70s.

Underground Party networks played the leading organisational role in much popular community-based struggle and in the key ideological work within the UDF and its affiliates. Umsebenzi in this period and into the early 1990s in style and content sought to speak directly and practically to a popular base. In other words, apart from providing broad strategic analysis, it also carried series focusing on organisational working. There were series on how to outwit the security police, on building organs of popular power, or self-defence units. It also addressed strategic issues in an accessible way using graphics and cartoons. It advised on how to set up reading groups and, in this way, it achieved a much wider readership than its actual publication numbers.

### **The Party 1990-1994**

From an SACP perspective three critical developments occurred between the formal unbanning of the Party (1990) and the democratic breakthrough (1994):

1. The unravelling of the Soviet bloc of countries (from 1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991);
2. The resignation in 1990 of around half of the CC elected just a year earlier in the Cuba 1989 SACP congress (resignations included 2 future presidents Mbeki and Zuma);
3. Yet despite these two related realities – there was a massive growth of the Party's popularity (40,000 attended our coming out rally in Soweto in 1990) with a 500% increase of Party membership reported at our 1991 Congress.

The growth in membership of the Party was resisted by some within the Party leadership (those under a Mbeki influence, some of whom had stayed on within the party perhaps as “Trojan horses”?). They sought to keep a tight control over the Party and objected to the new concept of a **mass vanguard party**. This objective was defeated, which allowed for a major recruitment of thousands of seasoned comrades from the TU and MDM formations who had identified with the Party through the 1980s without being recruited formally into underground structures.

The expansion of the Party and the nature of the new cadreship corresponded with the principal strategic task of the Party at this point – to ensure the negotiations process did not become an elite pacted event behind the backs of the popular movement. The strategic task was to ensure that, as much as possible, the negotiations were people-driven, that local community and sectoral demands featured centrally and not just the national negotiations demands. This also included correctly identifying the escalating, so-called “third force”, “black-on-black” violence as a deliberate “first force” strategic agenda of the apartheid regime and taking a lead as the Party in helping communities establish self-defence units in response.

The second strategic task in this period, as the prospect of a democratic breakthrough approached, was to ensure that the programmatic electoral platform of the ANC was progressive and also embodied a people-driven approach to development. The SACP working with MDM comrades many now in the Party played a leading role in drafting the RDP, which was enriched by the sectoral perspectives of a wide range of mass democratic struggles of the 80s (civic struggles, land issues, women's rights, education and health-care struggle, etc)

Despite, then, the global setback of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, by 1994 the SACP had succeeded in playing an effective vanguard role with its organisational form and cadre capacity proving to be well aligned with the principal strategic tasks of the conjuncture.

### **Mid-1990s – 2007 the Party and the 1996 class project**

In April 1995, on the occasion of the first anniversary of SA's democratic breakthrough, then state-deputy president Mbeki was interviewed by The Star. Amongst other things he was asked: "How long will the ANC's alliance with the SACP last?". Mbeki didn't answer the question directly, but his view on the matter was perfectly clear. He said that as SA's "democracy normalised" over the next period, even the ANC itself would split into "normal" political parties, a social democratic party, a liberal party, etc. Mbeki's agenda (at least at that time) was not just to end the alliance, but even to end the ANC as we know it. This involved an increasingly open battle both between the Party and the Mbeki grouping, and within the ANC itself (where the Party continued to still enjoy considerable prestige). One of the opening shots in this battle was Mbeki's address to the 1995 Party national congress at Shaft 17, followed the next day by an equally abrasive address (clearly instigated by the Mbeki circle) by Mandela himself.

This political onslaught from within the Alliance coincided with the SACP facing difficult internal/subjective challenges. We had lost our two outstanding communist leaders in quick succession Hani in April 1993 and Slovo in early 1995. After Mandela, Hani and Slovo had the highest popular profiles and respect in South Africa. The impact of these losses at that time cannot be underestimated. Apart from having lost around half of our 1989 elected CC with the 1990 walk-out of Mbeki, Zuma, etc - it meant the Party was now effectively confronting a full-blooded assault from the Mbeki circle with a second layer national leadership.

Matters were further complicated with the targeted recruitment by the Mbeki circle of some of this second layer leadership into the new ANC-led government cabinet. Many of these deployments may well have been deliberately intended to compromise Party positions (e.g., our new deputy chairperson, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi was appointed as minister of public administration with a mandate to downsize the public service, etc).

The crunch point came with the mid-1996 unilateral announcement by government of the "written in stone", "non-negotiable" GEAR macro-economic package. In effect this was self-imposed shock-therapy, a neo-liberal structural adjustment programme. But GEAR was only one dimension of what the Party has called "the 1996 class project".

The 1996 class project was not just a macro-economic programme. It was also, necessarily, about a major offensive against the organised working class, an attempt to marginalise the SACP, to restructure the class composition of the ANC through targeted BEE promotion, and the transformation of the ANC from a movement into a narrow electoral party. It was a project that was executed with considerable coherence, and discipline and with the backing and input from the more strategic elements of the established capitalist class in South Africa and aided and abetted by a network of global NGOs and policy advocacy units. It involved also its own version of "cadre development" with selected ANC individuals spending spells in the IMF, World Bank and Goldman Sachs for onward deployment into Treasury, the Reserve Bank, etc.

This is what the SACP was up against from the mid-1990s, and in many (although changing) respects, this strategic class agenda remains the principal challenge for our Party and country.

Between the mid-1990s and 2007 the 1996 class project, although dominant, never succeeded in achieving a stabilised and uncontested hegemony even within the ANC itself. This was partly because much of the promised growth, employment and redistribution in the acronym GEAR predictably was not forthcoming. But it also had to do with **sustained anti-GEAR campaigning by the SACP and (importantly) COSATU**. At this time the SACP also had a sizeable number of ANC NEC members able and prepared to engage critically from within.

In response to the continued anti-Party offensive, the SACP continued to grow its membership numbers. The Party's subjective campaigning capacity was reinforced by:

- **A cadreship still with mass-based campaigning experience and community and trade union rootedness from the 1980s and early 1990s – although this was steadily diminishing.**
- The re-deployment of the GS (cde Blade) from parliament to full-time in the Party in 1999, a re-deployment that soon bore fruit with the Party launching by far its most successful and sustained campaign since 1994 – the Financial Sector Campaign.
- The Party's public and campaigning profile was also sustained by a high-level of public visibility in the print media and in public forums in general.

After 1999 the most important Party strength was the consolidation of the SACP-COSATU "left axis", spearheaded by the almost daily interaction of the two general secretaries at the time (Nzimande and Vavi) with the HQs of both formations literally in the same building.

Throughout this period there were, however, more or less open tensions within the Party's CC between those seen as "more ANC than Party", and those who were "more Party". Many (but not all) of the "more ANC than Party" people were in cabinet or legislatures or NECs/PECs and who were happy to use the Party as a ladder into deployment, but unwilling to rock the ANC boat. But there were also Party comrades in these deployments who clearly advanced a consistent Party perspective within an ANC-led cabinet, or parliamentary caucus, or ANC NEC/PEC while having to accept the reality of, in the end, respecting the discipline and decisions taken in those critical locations.

The complexity of this dynamic, how to hold deployed Party cadres accountable, remains a complicated but important challenge for the Party.

- Parliamentary Discussion Forums organised by the SACP in legislatures have sometimes served a useful purpose when there are burning and controversial issues confronting legislatures. Interestingly, the national assembly/NCOP PDF sometimes drew more Party members who were parliamentary staff and ANC caucus members (researchers, etc) than actual MPs. But generally PDFs have had a limited impact and limited life-spans.
- The practice of getting Party ministers/deputy ministers to present to the CC on their work in government has generally not been a question of accountability so much as information and updating to CC members. In fact, the actual presentation is often not even made by the minister/DM CC member, but by a government bureaucrat -which might improve the quality and detail of the information provided but doesn't really equate to Party answerability.

**In this regard, as will be argued more generally below, the most effective way to build accountability of Party (and indeed non-SACP) deployed comrades is through active SACP campaigning on the ground. This is the only effective way in which the Party can build a dynamic,**

**mutually mandating relationship with the deployed, learning from the policy and other resources at the disposal of the deployed, while holding them accountable to the perspectives that we are learning from on the ground activism and from our active involvement in a network of activist formations/a PLF. This could apply for instance to the full implementation of the NHI.**

**2007 – 2018**

Looking back on this period and the earlier periods (and without romanticising them) compared to the present reality a number of issues stand out:

The Party's influence upon the ANC and (in the 80s and early 90s) in the wider public was much greater then. The Party was able to advance clear perspectives that had a major impact upon the ANC and broader popular forces to a much greater degree than now.

This is not a question of blaming the current (or recent) Party and its leadership – but it is important to ask what objective, and subjective factors account for this. And, of course, what corrective actions are both needed and feasible.

Has the composition and character of the current SACP's mass membership changed?

- Do we have a mass membership base that is rooted in mass democratic/popular and working class struggles as was the case increasingly in the 1980s and especially the 1990s?
- And, if not, is this related to our recruitment policies and weaker cadre development work?
  - Or to the weakening of the trade unions and the demobilisation of popular democratic formations, civics, etc?
  - Or to the deterioration of the ANC - including narrow personalised politics, narrow electoralist, list politics, and the ANC's increasingly fragmented character with the dominant factions in the RECs and BECs ignoring PECs, let alone the NEC. In many ways, power has shifted downwards but in a perverse manner, not leading to the popular democracy and rank and file participation we had hoped for. In some respects, "command" has shifted to regions and branches with the authority and strategic capacity of the ANC's NEC considerably eroded, making matters in some sense worse, with the "kingmakers" being less sophisticated.
  - If the ANC has become increasingly federalised, or even sub-federalised, what about the Party? Compared to the earlier periods considered, the Party now manages its Congresses through provincial leaderships, and it depends (considerably) on regular organisational reporting on provincial self-reporting. There is also not always transparent reporting on Party provincial funding. These arrangements are not necessarily all wrong, but we need to understand their possible implications for strategic perspectives.
  - For instance, there are not just subjective but objective geographical factors that are likely to impact on the prospects for Party comrades to work with and within the ANC. For example, the ANC in a province like Limpopo still retains substantial electoral support and therefore there are relatively wide deployment possibilities, compared to say the WC. How do we develop unifying strategies across different provincial and other geographical realities like the common task of building a left popular front, rather than ending up with divisions and mutual recriminations?
  - Likewise, have we sufficiently analysed the impact on Party debates and differences on a changing "sociology" of the Party – with a relatively thin leadership layer in employment (in government, legislatures, and as trade union officials) and a youthful and mostly unemployed mass youth membership? Again, different subjective AND objective locations are liable to lead to different perspectives. How do we prevent these from becoming deepening and mutually

recriminating schisms? How do we develop unifying tasks and strategic priorities across such different realities?

- In short, all of these factors in differing degrees are impacting upon and within the Party. Have we sufficiently analysed them to understand what their implications are for building an effective Party capable of addressing the key strategic tasks of the present?
- And what ARE those key strategic tasks? Is it to re-build a radical national democratic movement/popular front? Or is it to reconfigure the Alliance? Or is to contest elections in some mode or another as the SACP?

These are not necessarily alternatives – but prioritising the one will have implications for the others. Contributing to building a powerful NDM/popular front could contribute to reconfiguring the Alliance, it could also greatly enhance the electoral prospects of the SACP individually and/or some broad left electoral front.

Conversely, embarking solo on an SACP election campaign without having built an **organic** connection to a broad NDM/popular front (to what Lenin refers to as “a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement”) could serve to further isolate the Party, would reconfigure the ANC-led alliance in ways that further isolate the Party within the ANC and from the rump of COSATU, and result in party splits. This is not to argue against embarking on this route – but at least let’s do it with eyes wide open.

Returning to the quote from Lenin at the beginning of this note: “*Correct revolutionary theory assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement”.* Can we say that there is now a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement in our country? If not, how does the Party engage in practical activity to (re-) build such a movement? And how do we build a Party that is capable of having (as it once had) a close connection with such a movement?

The following are some provisional theses for further discussion:

### **Does the SACP in 2024 have a clear public profile?**

If a broad survey of South Africa’s working class and popular strata were conducted today asking: “What do you think of/know about the SACP?” – would there be a clear answer? We don’t know, but it is probable that there wouldn’t generally be strong feelings whether positive or negative. At best we might be remembered as the Party of the late Chris Hani. In a less flattering way, certainly among print media reading middle strata we might be thought of as a party that supposedly keeps threatening to break from the ANC, but never does. This is certainly the way in which prominent analysts in the media (black and white) seek to characterise the SACP.

What is lacking is a strong Party “brand” (to use a problematic term), a recognisable identity capable of inspiring not just the Party’s own cadreship, but also the working class and broad popular strata. But developing such a popular profile doesn’t fall from the sky. It requires popular rooted Party activism – in short, a campaigning party.

### **The Party and mass campaigning**

Outside of Red Brigade election campaigning for an ANC election victory, for some years now the Party’s mass campaigning, and therefore public profile, has been uneven at best. Our annual and well-intentioned Red October campaigns have tended to become symbolic rituals characterised by a launch

rally some uneven activity in some provinces and a closing rally. They are driven by the calendar (much like the infinitely better resourced but largely bureaucratic, official, government-driven Women's Month, Youth Month, etc). Because they are calendar-driven they tend therefore not to be organically linked to the ebb and flow of actual class struggle. To put it crudely in 1916 the Bolsheviks didn't plan to have a revolution in October the next year. There is nothing wrong with us honouring the Bolshevik revolution, or other calendar milestones like May Day, or April 10<sup>th</sup> the date of cde Chris Hani's assassination. These "calendar events" provide important platforms from which the Party has always spoken to the pressing challenges of the day. But a rally is not in itself a campaign.

If the Party is battling to sustain popular mass campaigning for most of the past three decades (with the exception of elections) the ANC generally has been much worse, being largely "missing in action". A good example of this is the contrast between the ANC-led government's excellent international lead role in Palestinian solidarity in the face of the Zionist genocide. Contrast this with the virtual absence of ANC-led, mass-based Palestine solidarity actions in the streets.

Nonetheless, there are some lessons we can learn for campaigns in general from how the ANC and alliance engage with election campaigning. Since 1994 significant effort goes into preparation – training of party election observers, preparation of manifestos, choice of slogans and key themes, ongoing polling to test waters, engaging with a range of formations outside of the immediate alliance – faith-based formations, sports bodies, etc. Ideally there is also the convening of local alliance formations and training of volunteers for door-to-door work. The campaign is coordinated through a "war room", and there is (or should be) continuous feed-back and assessments. After the elections (something the ANC is currently involved in) there are evaluations of what went ok and what went wrong. All of this is written up in reports.

Obviously, we are talking here about a scale and about huge resources way beyond the capacity of the SACP. But still there are scaled-down lessons we need to draw from this experience. Do we train and prepare our cadreship ahead of, let's say a Red October campaign? Do we have the capacity in the course of a campaign to evaluate progress and to introduce course-corrections if needed, or different points of emphasis in the light of experience. Do we even conduct a collective assessment of our campaigns identifying strengths, weaknesses, and lessons learned?

This is not to say that all is bleak. There are at least two relatively more recent SACP campaigning moments in which the SACP demonstrated real potential and from which we can draw many positive lessons:

1. The 2000 and forward Financial Sector Campaign, and
2. The SACP's anti-state capture campaign of 2017-18

### **The Financial Sector Campaign**

As already mentioned, the kickstart to the campaign coincided with the then GS cde Blade relocating full-time to the Party. The initial focus of the campaign related to the crisis of black listing by the Credit Bureaux. It was a crisis that was impacting on the unemployed, the employed, the organised and unorganised working class, and on a wide array of middle strata, not least the emergent so-called black middle class, including ANC MPs, and trade union officials. In other words, the campaign was rooted in an organic reality capable of rallying a broad array of popular strata. The campaign could connect the dots between hundreds of thousands of individual households suffering in isolation from the humiliation of black listing.

The campaign at its outset almost unwittingly was beginning to zero in on the key dynamic of neo-liberalised capital – i.e. financialisation

There were already a host of NGOs (like the Black Sash) and university-based law clinics that were dealing with the many abuses of the credit bureaus. But they lacked political and popular support and national profiling. At the outset the Party, for its part, didn't have a deep background understanding of the financial sector – we even thought that there was only one credit bureau. But the Party's vanguard activism and public mobilisation laid the basis for mutually beneficial networking with NGOs, law clinics, professional associations in the financial sector, and policy units, along with support from trade unions – many with a much more detailed understanding of the financial sector. This was a case of the Party playing a vanguard role across a network that included some 50 formations.

This is an important SACP experience and a pointer of how we might contribute to the shaping up of future PLFs.

Important for the sustaining of any campaign and the morale of activists is the winning of at least some short- and medium-term gains. And here, too, the FSC was impressively successful – a Financial Sector Summit was held convened by NEDLAC, legislation was passed greatly improving the transparency and limiting the powers of the credit bureaus. The major banks were forced to implement a low-cost Mzansi account. In short, on the consumer side the FSC notched up important if partial victories.

On the more entrenched structural features of an economy dominated by the financial sector predictably progress has been much more difficult. In the FS Charter the industry committed, at least with lip service, to implement prescribed asset contributions (which they preferred to call “community reinvestment” schemes.) This has not happened and nor has the endlessly delayed second FS Summit.

Nevertheless, the campaign injected confidence into popular campaigning and put on the agenda key things like the imperative of forcing the private financial institutions to invest in prescribed assets. It is interesting to note that in September this year Enoch Godongwana expressed frustration at the high cost of borrowing for the Land Bank undermining its role in driving rural development. Godongwana raised the prospect of enforcing prescribed assets on retirement funds holding huge South African wealth but using it for speculative investment. We might consider reviving the FSC by, amongst other things, stiffening Godongwana's resolve to more effectively discipline the financial sector.

### **The SACP's anti-state capture campaign of 2017-18**

A second more recent campaign was the critical and to some extent decisive role the Party played in the struggle against state capture. In the first place, it was the Party that initiated the call for a commission of inquiry into state capture, which became the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. More significantly as the scale of state capture became more and more apparent and there was growing mobilisation against it, the ANC floundered, seemingly paralysed. From at least 2017 it was the Party alone among the Alliance formations that came out unambiguously to condemn state capture and the Gupta-Zuma network. Party officials joined marches, and the Party convened a high-profile anti-state capture forum that drew in a range of formations and received a message of support from the SACC. In this way the Party was able to play a vanguard role within the ANC, giving a voice to many non-Party comrades in the ANC and beyond. The Party's interventions at this time were critical to building confidence within the

ANC, and its parliamentary caucus which in turn was the decisive factor in forcing a reluctant Zuma to step down rather than face a non-confidence vote.

The lessons we can draw from this are:

- The need for bold and decisive action at key moments
  - The value for the ANC itself of having an independent SACP in its alliance preventing the anti-corruption mobilisation from becoming a regime change “colours revolution” as has happened in many other Third World countries.
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## Chapter 3: The National Question, non-racialism and ethnicity

### An overview aimed at action

This is not a comprehensive paper on the National Question, which as part of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), the SACP has been addressing since adopting the 1928 “Native Republic” thesis and in the new conditions that opened out since the 1994 democratic breakthrough. This paper will not cover issues taken up in our previous Congresses. The aim here is to do a brief overview of some issues directed towards action on advancing our approach to the National Question.

The term “National Question” in this paper includes “non-racialism” and “ethnicity”.

### What is the “National Question”?

In its most basic form, the National Question refers to:

- The attainment of popular sovereignty by a country, especially through liberation from colonial or minority rule - in other words, the people exercising control over their own country.
- The political unification of a country, especially if it has been divided territorially.
- The exercise of national self-determination.
- The process of creating a sense of national belonging among the people - especially if they come from diverse backgrounds.

During the struggle against apartheid, the National Question basically referred to:

- The liberation of Blacks in general and Africans in particular from White minority rule as part of the NDR.
- The ending of the Bantustan system.
- The creation of a single South African nation.

The National Question in South Africa flows from the ANC-led Alliance’s definition of apartheid as a “Colonialism of a Special Type” and has to be understood as part of an integrated NDR. Basically, the NDR refers to three inter-related goals. Firstly, non-racialism and nation-building out of our diverse racial, ethnic, regional and other identities (the “N” in the NDR). Secondly, “Democratic” refers not just to regular elections, but citizens actively shaping their future through participation in Ward Committees,

SGBs, CPFs, Hospital Boards and so on (the “D”). Thirdly, the “Revolution” refers to the transfer of economic and political power from a minority to the majority of the people and the reduction of social inequalities (the “R”). Any one aspect of the NDR cannot be effectively implemented unless the other two are, as part of an integrated whole.

Given the nature of the transition from apartheid to democracy and the neo-liberal path the ANC has pursued since 1996 and the way our economy is tied to the global economy, key aspects of the National Question that arose during the struggle against apartheid have not been adequately addressed, so they persist as challenges 30 years beyond our democracy.

As the SACP, we:

- Seek to ensure a radical NDR, led mainly by the working class and poor and their allies, as the most direct route to socialism.
- By “revolution” – the “R” in the NDR – we seek a transfer of class power from the capitalist to the working class, the poor and their allies.
- We locate the National Question and the NDR as a whole to our struggle against imperialism. Racial and ethnic identities in South Africa have been shaped by the manner in which the capitalist political economy of South Africa is inserted within the global circuit of capitalist accumulation and reproduction.
- We are clear that we cannot adequately forge a sense of nationhood without significantly reducing the class and other social inequalities in our country.
- So, for the SACP, the National Question is fundamentally a class question. And its content is shaped, as is the whole NDR, by class struggles. While addressing the National Question means uniting all the people in their diversity, its content must, over time, represent primarily the interests of the working class and poor. And it’s in a socialist society that the National Question and the related need to drastically reduce the social inequalities can be properly addressed.

### **Concepts of “race”, “ethnicity” and “nation”**

The concepts of “race”, “ethnicity” and “nation” are closely related but distinct. This is not just an abstract distinction, but has important practical significance, and influences the strategies we adopt to address the National Question.

The basic distinctions that can be drawn between an “ethnic” and “racial” group:

- An ethnic group comprises people who share a sense of belonging together on the basis of cultural criteria, such as language, religion and customs. A racial group, on the other hand, comprises people who are seen to share certain physical characteristics, such as skin colour.
- Ethnic groups often flow from an in-group feeling of togetherness and usually define their own boundaries. While racial groups self-identify they are also, more than ethnic groups an outcome of external classification.
- Racial groups are more durable (more stable, less changing) than ethnic groups. People usually cannot change their “race”, but the boundaries of an ethnic group are fluid and changeable.

A nation refers to a group of people who share a common territory, economy, independent state, political sovereignty, and a sense of belonging together. Interestingly, within the communist movement, it's Stalin who provided a definition of a nation that is still drawn on: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."

What distinguishes a nation from a racial or ethnic group is sovereignty and statehood. If an ethnic or racial group is seeking an independent state and sovereignty, it is aspiring to be a nation. Nations are usually multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-class.

In the SACP and the broader liberation movement, we use the terms "Africans", "Coloureds" "Indians" and "Whites" - and in the sense used above, these can be understood as racially defined categories. The Zulu, Tswana, Pedi and other national groups would constitute "ethnic" groups on the basis of language and custom.

It must be stressed that there is nothing natural or inevitable about these identities. They are social constructs (an outcome of conditions in society), and they are shaped and reshaped over time. And they are closely related to the way inequalities pan out in a capitalist society. Capitalism contributes to and harnesses these identities to ensure its profits and growth.

Used in the sense above, ethnicity as such is not inherently irreconcilable with nation-building. It is the way ethnicity is politicised, in particular its used to secure economic and political goals, that is divisive and undermines nation-building. This was expressed by the MKP and reflected in the May 2024 election results.

People have multiple identities - and these can be reconciled with each other. One can, for example, be Zulu, African, Black and South African. There is nothing inherently conflictual about this. One of the challenges confronting our democracy is to provide people with the space to express their multiple identities in a way that fosters the evolution of a South African national identity. And the challenge for us as the SACP and also Cosatu is to ensure that class consciousness and a sense of solidarity among the poor supersedes these identities.

While capitalism benefits certain racial or ethnic groups as against others, there are class differences within each of these groups and cutting across these groups. If the working class and poor are effectively organised, their class consciousness or collective sense of being poor supersedes these other identities.

### **Rise of populism and identity politics globally**

There are major shifts taking place in the global terrain. The 2008 global crisis, Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestine crisis, economic and technological fragmentation, trade wars, protectionism, the US-China geopolitical contest, the digital revolution, climate change, an upsurge in global migration and other processes are part of this. In this context, there has been a significant decline in economic growth rates, job losses, higher (if uneven) inflation and food and fuel costs have soared globally. This has contributed to growing class, race, ethnic, religious, regional, gender and other inequalities within countries and increasing inequalities between countries.

The economic and social polarisation has contributed to people retreating into their racial, ethnic, religious, regional and national identities and has given rise to narrow populism and identity politics. Trump's "America First" and "Make America Great Again" and Orban of Hungary's "Make Europe Great Again", the "Europe for Europeans" call by right-wing parties in France, Germany and other European countries and similar anti-immigration, anti-minority group slogans, with their racist undertones are examples of this. It's a growing culture of "us" and "them". Of whom belongs and who doesn't. Of the emergence of demagogic "big men", with their "toxic individualism", who exploit the conditions of the poor and others feeling marginalised and who present themselves as saviours or messiahs of aggrieved "ordinary people" against the "rich corrupt elites". Often, they mobilise along racial, tribal, religious or other divisive lines and this creates the conditions for the emergence of some or other form of an authoritarian populism. In this context, people increasingly vote in elections not so much on the history, policies, performance and potential of political parties but on which party feels and looks most like them.

Traditional dominant parties have been increasingly challenged by populist political parties in elections, With the inability of these traditional parties to get a majority in elections, right or centre-left, often fragile, government coalitions have emerged.

We have seen aspects of this in our own country, and it has been reflected in the 2024 elections

### **A brief overview of the current terrain**

While South Africa has its specific context and circumstances, in many senses, it reflects, in its own forms, key features of the global terrain. It's against the background of a polycrisis (several interlinked economic, political, social, cultural and other crises taking place at the same time), that populism and identity politics are increasingly surfacing in our country too. This also assumes an ethno-populist or ethno-nationalist form. These processes are reflected in the patterns of voting in the 2024 elections.

Among the many challenges in our country are the following:

- Lack of investment, low economic growth, high unemployment, huge inequalities.
- High levels of crime and corruption, including state capture.
- Collapsing municipalities, with very poor municipal services, including electricity and water shedding.
- A weak state overall.
- Factionalism and infighting within the ANC and a measure of paralysis.
- Persistence vandalism, theft and sabotage of electricity, transport and other infrastructure, some of which are aimed at undermining the state.
- Inadequate progress on non-racialism, nation-building and social cohesion, part of which reflects deliberate attempts to sow ethnic and racial divisions.
- GDP growth has averaged 0.8% since 2012. From 2015, population growth rate exceeded the economic growth rate. On average, South Africans are poorer now than they were in 2013. 41,9% of the workforce and 32% of those actively seeking work are unemployed. About 77% of the unemployed are trapped in long-term unemployment.
- These economic, social and political conditions are ideal for the rise of right-wing authoritarian populist parties.

- The 40% vote the ANC got for the elections is a severe setback and led to a GNU and PNUs. The SACP's position is "Neither neo-liberalism nor state capture" and opposes any coalition that includes the DA or MKP. This issue is dealt with in other documents in this SNC.

### **Some relevant election results**

This consideration of the ANC's election results is also a reflection of the SACP in view of our participation in the election campaign and in the Tripartite Alliance.

There are about 42.3 million eligible voters in the country. 27.7 million registered as voters - 65.4%. Of these, 58.5% (about 16.2 million people) voted in the 2024 national, the lowest since 1994. So, only 38.2% of eligible voters voted. Over 11 million of registered voters didn't participate in the 2024 elections. This means that only 38.2% of the eligible voters participated and the ANC received about 15% (6.4 million) of the eligible voters.

### **The turnout points to a significant stayaway of ANC voters, especially in urban areas.**

The ANC's losses were higher in urban than rural areas. The ANC lost the key metros - the major economic centres, with huge budgets for service delivery and development. And where the working class is concentrated and organised in Cosatu and other trade unions. Many public servants are alienated from the ANC government, particularly because it reneged on wage increases and imposed a wage freeze and they stayed away from the elections or voted for other parties. Most members of Cosatu unions in KZN voted for the MKP. Some SACP members, mainly in KZN, also voted for the MKP. The working class voted for the ANC in significant but reduced numbers, creating huge challenges for Cosatu and the SACP.

Basically, the ANC is becoming a "rural party".

There was a major swing from the ANC to the MKP, mainly among isiZulu speakers, mainly in KZN. The ANC won in only 2 of the 44 regions - Greater Kokstad and uMzimkhulu. Interestingly, these regions have significant numbers of Xhosa residents. MKP also won some support among non-Zulus, mostly in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, but here too it was mostly support from Zulu.

In eThekweni, the ANC secured a mere 14.4%.

The MKP is working towards forming a trade union federation. This may undermine not just Cosatu, but the SACP and ANC too, particularly in KZN.

Big business played a major role, including through financing opposition parties, in these elections in pursuit of their profits and a state that would create the space for a more rapid accumulation path.

While people have lost faith in elections and the ANC (and political parties generally), they are pursuing their interests through mass action, especially around the poor municipal services. South Africa is seen as "the protest capital of the world". These mass actions, even though they often involve ANC and SACP members, take place without the involvement, let alone leadership, of ANC and SACP branches.

In a sense, there is a very limited major shift in voting patterns. The ANC's 40,1% and the MKP's 14,5% makes up 54,6%, close to the 57,5% the ANC got in 2019 and if the EFF's 9,5% is added, it gives you 64,1%, close to the 62,6% the ANC got in 1994. The majority of voters still identify with parties that are

seen as committed to fundamental change. Of course, regardless of what they really are, which we are on the record characterising in our volumes of work, including statements, the MKP and EFF are seen to be progressive by most of their voters.

So, Africans voted for these three parties. Whites, Indians and “Coloureds” voted for the DA. A significant minority of “Coloureds” voted for the PA and the National Coloured Congress. The voting reveals the consistent overall racial divisions in voting patterns.

But the new feature of these elections is the role that ethnic identity played in the voting for the MKP. Perhaps, it may be of relevance too that the highest percentage of provincial votes for the ANC came from Limpopo, where Cde Ramaphosa has some ethnic resonance (though Limpopo is multi-ethnic).

While the main reason for the ANC's dismal performance was its own failures, ethnic populism was a key reason for MKP's support.

With the electoral support of just 15% of all eligible voters, the weak state of ANC and SACP branches and Cosatu structures and the ANC hamstrung in coalition governments, the capacity of the Alliance to effectively implement the NDR is severely undermined. And with the persistence of racial identities and the upsurge in ethnic identities, the Alliance is confronted with new challenges in dealing with the National Question as part of the NDR.

### **Elements of a programme of action**

A programme to address the National Question must be integrated into our annual programmes of action, the tasks set out in our “Organisational Renewal and Building the Party” document, our aim of "building a powerful socialist movement of the workers and poor" and our overall programme of “The South African Struggle for Socialism”

It is under conditions of extreme social inequalities that ethnic, regional and racial identities most surface. The rise in xenophobia must also be located in a significant part against this background. Our key task is to deepen the NDR in the difficult conditions after the May 2024 elections, and ensure inequality-reducing, job-creating growth and an acceleration of service delivery and development. This will reduce at least some of our economic and social polarisation.

The most effective way to address the National Question, undermine reactionary ethnicity and build non-racialism is to have mass campaigns designed to benefit the workers and the poor. And more especially, win material gains through these campaigns. We need to steer our Red October campaigns in the direction of more concrete, relatively immediate gains. We also need to escalate our NHI and UBIG campaigns. By bringing together people across the ethnic divides and fostering a class consciousness and greater solidarity among the poor through action, we can reduce ethnic divides. The same approach – more challenging though it is – can be used to bridge gaps between workers and the poor across the racial divides.

Cosatu unions are more capable of achieving material gains more immediately and we need to encourage them to pay greater attention to overcome the ethnic and racial divisions in their ranks in the way they wage their campaigns to improve the working conditions of their members and advance their political and social consciousness.

Within our ranks as the SACP, there is an increasing ethnic and racial identity surfacing and we need to address this more directly, including through political education and publishing relevant articles in our internal med

The SACP also needs to put more pressure on state institutions, like the Section 185 Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights Commission and the Human Rights Commission, to tackle ethnic and racial divides more effectively and contribute to welding a sense of nationhood among South Africans. The more effective they are in doing this, the better the conditions for the SACP to stimulate a class consciousness among the workers and a greater sense of solidarity among the poor.

We should also address racial, ethnic and regional identities by developing a Left Popular Front.

Given the increasing significance of ethnic and racial identities, we need to consider campaigning for greater expression of African culture and customs in the state, the Constitution and society in ways that enhance our democracy, deepen non-racialism and advance nation-building, not divide us and undermine democracy.

It should be compulsory to do an indigenous as one of two languages in school.

Political parties, the private sector, religious, cultural, sport, community, NGO and other organisations and other sections of civil society have key roles to play in reducing the racial and ethnic polarisation in our country. The SACP needs to put pressure on them to play a role.

As difficult as it is, we need to put constant pressure on the Department of Basic Education, SGBs and education and other relevant NGOs to bring learners from different races and ethnic groups together in activities that foster greater cultural and social awareness among them of the communities they come from and to stimulate a sense of non-racialism. The school curricular should also reflect this sense of nation-building more.

In different ways and forms, tertiary education should also seek to do this.

We obviously recognise the influence of traditional leaders, including on the working class and the poor. But at the same time, we need to reduce the extent to which they foster a divisive ethnic identity among the people.

The SABC needs to do far more to encourage greater cultural understanding across communities and a sense of nationhood.

Sport from school level onwards can play a major role in fostering non-racialism and reducing ethnic divides.

Inter-faith organisations can play a far more effective role in creating understanding of different religions and greater acceptance of our multi-religious society.

There are other elements of a programme that can be discussed at the SNC.

We do not have the resources and capacity to do all of this overnight. But we can try to do as much of this as possible over time. In any case, we need to insert the approach set out here and elements of this programme in all the campaigns we wage.

## Chapter 4: Towards the 2026 local government

The SACP recognises the critical role of local government in promoting social and economic development and ensuring the equitable distribution of basic services. As the tier of government closest to citizens, local governments are uniquely positioned to address the immediate needs of communities and are pivotal to the broader NDR. However, the SACP has expressed significant concerns regarding the persistent misalignment of powers and responsibilities within the local government system, which has resulted in considerable governance challenges and widespread failures in service delivery. These issues are further exacerbated by insufficient resources, poor coordination among various levels of government, and a complex legislative framework that often produces confusion rather than clarity.

Historically, the SACP has contested elections through the ANC-led alliance, leveraging this partnership to try to influence policy and advocate for the interests of the working class. While this strategy has been effective to some extent, it also has limitations, particularly in addressing the unique challenges faced by local governments and broadly in advancing socialist transformation measures. To address some of the limitations, the SACP resolved to pursue the reconfiguration of the Alliance, forge a popular left front, build a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor, and to contest the 2026 local government elections either through a popular left front as a possible electoral modality or directly in the event the Alliance continues with no successful reconfiguration. This strategic shift is considered essential for realigning local governance and strive to advance economic and social transformation and development in communities based on socialist principles. While the SACP has conclusively adopted the shift, the actual strategic and tactical approaches – whether to contest wall-to-wall across the country or uphold the 4<sup>th</sup> Special National Congress resolution for provinces to apply to the Central Committee for particular wards and/or districts to contest in line with the text of the resolution is yet to be concluded. This is a key question for the 5<sup>th</sup> Special National Congress scheduled for December 2024.

By standing in the elections accordingly, the SACP seeks not only to assert its influence in shaping local government policies but also to advance the NDR as a *national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution* in pursuit of *non-capitalist development*. This approach is also vital for reconfiguring the ANC-led alliance, making it more responsive to the needs of the working class and more aligned with the original objectives of the NDR. Furthermore, this strategy aims to reconnect with disillusioned supporters of our broader democratic movement who have grown increasingly frustrated without the interrelated reconfiguration of the Alliance and renewal of the ANC and its performance. The SACP believes that by assuming a more direct role in local governance, it can more effectively strive to pursue its socialist programme, encourage democratic public participation and seek more effective service delivery. In turn, this will help restore confidence among the working class and strengthen our movement's commitment to social justice, equality based upon the strategic objectives of the NDR, especially its original mission that has become so much compromised by the rising dominance of neo-liberalism, including unnecessary outsourcing of public functions and thus tenderisation of municipalities or outright privatisation, all badly affecting workers. The party's experience in the Metsimaholo municipality, where it contested local elections and won three seats despite limited resources, underscores the potential of this strategy and reinforces the its determination to expand its electoral presence at the local government level.

### **Background and context of local government in South Africa**

Since the establishment of the democratic local government system in South Africa, local governance has encountered persistent challenges in the allocation of powers and responsibilities among national, provincial, and local levels. These challenges stem from historical inequalities, systemic inefficiencies, and a governance structure that has struggled to adapt to the complex and dynamic needs of a post-apartheid society.

The South African Constitution, particularly Section 7, establishes the framework for local government, emphasising the importance of democratic and accountable governance, sustainable service delivery, social and economic development, and community involvement in local matters. It grants local government specific powers in areas such as municipal health services, water and sanitation, and air quality management. However, overlapping functions across different levels of government, as defined in the Municipal Systems Act, the Municipal Structures Act, and the Municipal Finance Management Act, have led to inefficiencies and confusion.

These overlapping responsibilities frequently result in conflicts over jurisdictional boundaries among local, provincial, and national governments, leading to duplicated efforts and wasted resources. This misalignment of powers and responsibilities hinders effective governance and exacerbates the socio-economic inequalities that the democratic government was originally established to address.

Understanding the historical context of local government in South Africa is essential for comprehending its current challenges. During apartheid, local government structures were primarily designed to enforce segregation and control marginalised communities, with minimal regard for equitable service delivery or democratic participation. The post-apartheid era introduced significant reforms aimed at transforming local government into a vehicle for development and social justice.

However, these reforms have faced numerous challenges, including poor service delivery, financial mismanagement, and inadequate governance. The Municipal Systems Act and the Municipal Structures Act were introduced to clarify the roles and responsibilities of local governments, aiming to create a more efficient and accountable governance framework. The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) and the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) were also enacted to ensure sound financial management and accountability within local government structures. Despite these legislative efforts, local governments continue to struggle to fulfil their mandates, often due to a lack of capacity, inadequate funding, and corruption. The ANC, as the ruling party, has encountered significant challenges in effectively managing local government. Issues such as inadequate service delivery, frequent community protests, and deteriorating infrastructure have become widespread. Furthermore, the performance of local governments under ANC leadership has been compromised by poor audit results, as indicated by the Auditor-General's reports. These reports consistently highlight widespread financial mismanagement, a lack of accountability, and a failure to meet service delivery targets.

The SACP views these challenges as opportunities for transformative action, emphasising the need to establish a socialist-oriented developmental state that prioritises equitable service delivery and empowers marginalised communities. In preparation for the upcoming local government elections, the SACP is actively aligning its initiatives with efforts aimed at transforming local government, reducing social inequality, and enhancing governance structures. The SACP is concentrating on streamlining the number of municipalities, introducing a new local government model, and leading a campaign within the Tripartite Alliance. Their primary focus areas for local governance reforms include fostering public participation, improving service delivery, and ensuring accountability. These efforts are deemed crucial for overcoming the persistent challenges facing local government and achieving the transformative goals envisioned in South Africa's democratic framework.

### **Case study for SACP's 2017 Metsimaholo by-elections experience**

In 2017, the SACP made the decision to contest the Metsimaholo by-elections in the Free State, marking a significant moment in the party's political engagement within South Africa's local government arena, against the background of mass dismissals of workers by the ANC-led local government. Taken amidst various internal and external challenges, this decision serves as a critical case study for understanding the SACP's potential role in future elections, including the upcoming 2026 local government elections.

The Metsimaholo experience offers valuable insights into the complexities of electoral strategy, coalition-building, and the broader implications for the SACP's influence in local governance.

The SACP's decision to contest the Metsimaholo by-elections was driven by political, economic and social factors. A key catalyst for the SACP's involvement was the mass dismissal of – 300 – workers affiliated with the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) by the ANC-led municipality. This event underscored the growing tensions between the ANC's governance practices and the interests of the working class, which the SACP is committed to defending. The termination of these workers, who were protesting against unfair labour practices, highlighted the urgent need for a political alternative that truly represented the interests of the proletariat.

At the time of the by-elections, the SACP's organisational presence in Metsimaholo was minimal, with only three active ward branches out of 21 and fewer than 100 members across these wards. Despite these limitations, the SACP chose to register its interest in contesting the by-elections with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) while awaiting final approval from its headquarters. This decision, made on the day parties were allowed to register by the IEC, reflected the urgency and determination within the provincial structures to assert the party's presence in the local political arena. Approval from the SACP's national leadership was received just one week before the by-election date. During this crucial period, the province, in collaboration with other provinces and with support from the national leadership, launched an energetic campaign that involved drafting a manifesto, establishing the Chris Hani Volunteer Brigades, fundraising for registration, and identifying suitable candidates. Importantly, this campaign persisted despite opposition from within the party, notably as the ANC, under President Jacob Zuma's leadership, actively sought to maintain its dominance in the region.

### **Election strategy and results**

The SACP's strategy in Metsimaholo focused on grassroots mobilisation, working closely with community organisations to build a coalition that resonated with local voters. Despite the party's limited membership, the concentrated efforts and energy behind the campaign were successful. The SACP secured a total of 7,948 votes, a commendable achievement given the circumstances. This electoral success allowed the SACP to obtain the position of mayor and gain control of the municipality through a coalition with several other parties in the council. This outcome demonstrated the importance of implementing Sections 12 and 16 of the Municipal Structures Act in local government, advocating for a collective power-sharing system rather than an exclusive executive model.

### **Lessons learnt and strategic implications**

The Metsimaholo experience underscores the SACP's potential to impact local governance through direct electoral participation. Had the SACP adopted the strategies and principles from Metsimaholo for the 2024 general elections, it might have achieved significant results on a national level. The success in Metsimaholo indicates that, with improved preparation and broader organisational support, the SACP could have secured over 15% of the vote in the national legislature, thus positioning itself as a key player in South African politics.

However, this case also highlights the challenges faced by the SACP, including internal divisions and the party's tendency to signal left while veering right at critical moments. This inconsistency has undermined the party's influence and respect within the broader political landscape. To successfully navigate future challenges, the SACP must adopt a clear and consistent strategy that aligns with its socialist principles and addresses the needs of the working class.

### **Implications for future elections**

The Metsimaholo case study presents a strong argument for the SACP to contest the 2026 local government elections independently. By drawing on the experiences from Metsimaholo, the SACP can enhance its influence in local governance, ensuring that the needs of marginalised communities are effectively represented. Additionally, this strategy could help the SACP reconnect with disillusioned ANC supporters and reshape the alliance to better fulfil the goals of social justice and equality.

The 2017 Metsimaholo by-elections represent a crucial moment in the history of the SACP, demonstrating the party's ability to mobilise, strategise, and achieve electoral success despite significant challenges. As the SACP looks to the future, the lessons learned from Metsimaholo will be vital in devising a strategy that aligns with the party's core values and the broader objectives of the National Democratic Revolution. By leveraging these insights, the SACP can take on a more assertive role in South Africa's political landscape, championing a socialist-oriented developmental state that prioritises the needs of the people over capitalist interests.

### **What is to be done?**

The SACP envisions a local government system that fully embodies the principles of socialism as articulated by Chris Hani. Hani asserted that socialism is not about "big concepts and heavy theory," but rather about providing necessities – decent shelter, clean water, healthcare, education, and a life of dignity for all, particularly for the elderly and vulnerable. His vision aimed to bridge the significant divide between urban and rural areas and to prevent the tyranny of the market, controlled by an unelected and privileged few, from dictating the lives of the many. In this context, the SACP's vision for local government prioritises the fulfilment of these essential needs while fostering a society that emphasises the well-being of all, especially the working-class and marginalised communities.

### **Democratic and accountable governance**

In alignment with Chris Hani's commitment to the people, the SACP advocates for local government that is deeply democratic, serves and is accountable to communities. This involves not only conducting regular elections but also ensuring continuous engagement with residents, whereby their voices and concerns are actively reflected in municipal decisions. The aim is to construct a governance structure that genuinely serves the populace, with transparency and accountability as its foundational principles.

### **Sustainable service delivery**

Hani's vision of socialism emphasised the equitable distribution of resources to meet basic human needs. The SACP's approach to local government mirrors this perspective, prioritising sustainable service delivery. Municipalities must ensure that services such as water, electricity, sanitation, and healthcare are accessible to all and provided in an efficient and sustainable manner. This necessitates sound financial management, strategic planning, and optimal utilisation of available resources to benefit the community as a whole.

### **Promoting safe and healthy environments**

A fundamental aspect of Hani's socialism was the creation of a safe and healthy environment for all citizens. Under the SACP's vision, local governments are tasked with promoting public health and safety, protecting the environment, and ensuring sustainable urban planning. This responsibility is crucial for fostering communities where individuals can lead healthy, productive lives. Community Involvement and Empowerment: Chris Hani believed that socialism must be people-centred, characterised by active grassroots participation. The SACP places significant emphasis on engaging communities and local organisations in the governance process. This engagement strengthens democracy and ensures that

municipal policies and actions align with the needs and aspirations of the populace. Such involvement fosters genuine empowerment, enabling communities to take charge of their own development.

### **Addressing structural challenges and enhancing stability**

The SACP acknowledges that the current local government system faces considerable challenges, including unfunded mandates, over-regulation, and instability arising from frequent boundary redefinitions by the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB). Reflecting Hani's commitment to a fair and just system, the SACP advocates for reforms to stabilise and strengthen local governance:

**Demarcation stability:** The SACP proposes a 20-year lifespan for demarcation decisions to ensure stability and facilitate long-term planning, which is essential for effective governance and development.

**Reviewing the Municipal Property Rates Act:** To enhance the financial capacity of municipalities, the SACP calls for a review of the Property Rates Act No. 6 of 2004. This revision would ensure that municipalities have the necessary resources to deliver services and foster local economic growth.

### **Economic development: municipalities as centres of socialism**

Chris Hani envisioned a socialism where the economy serves the people, rather than the other way around. The SACP sees municipalities as hubs of economic activity that prioritise the needs of the working class. This includes:

**Supporting agricultural cooperatives:** In rural areas, municipalities should drive investment in agriculture, ensuring land is effectively utilised for food security and economic development. The establishment and support of agricultural cooperatives will empower local farmers and create sustainable livelihoods, reflecting Hani's belief in collective ownership and cooperative economics.

### **Infrastructure development:**

Municipalities must also focus on building the infrastructure required to support agriculture and other local industries, ensuring that all economic activities contribute to the community's overall well-being.

In alignment with Chris Hani's definition of socialism, the SACP envisions a local government system that prioritises the essential needs of all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable populations, while simultaneously promoting principles of equality, justice, and collective well-being. Through the advocacy of these reforms and the emphasis on the socialist tenets espoused by Hani, the SACP aims to establish a local government framework that not only serves the populace but also actively contributes to the overarching objectives of the National Democratic Revolution. This conception of governance positions the state as a genuine servant of the people, ensuring that every individual has access to the resources and opportunities necessary for a dignified and fulfilling life.

### **Duplication and overlap of functions**

One significant issue faced by local governments is the duplication and overlap of functions, wherein they are expected to carry out tasks that duplicate those performed by other government entities. This situation often leads to confusion and inefficiencies. For instance, there is often overlap between municipal health services and provincial health services, resulting in a lack of clarity regarding which level of government is responsible for specific functions. Consequently, this duplication of efforts leads to a wasteful utilisation of resources, as different government entities may undertake similar projects without coordinating their efforts. Moreover, it creates a lack of accountability, as pinpointing responsibility for service delivery failures becomes challenging. The SACP considers this issue to be of critical importance, as it

undermines the integrated approach advocated in the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), the South African Road to Socialism, and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. To address this issue, it is crucial to clarify and streamline the legislative frameworks, explicitly defining the roles and responsibilities of each level of government. Achieving this objective necessitates a comprehensive review and amendment of the existing legislation, including the Municipal Structures Act and the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA).

### **Unfunded and under-funded mandates**

Many municipalities encounter the challenge of insufficient funding for their responsibilities. The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) places great emphasis on the importance of prudent financial management, yet municipalities struggle to fulfil their obligations due to limited financial support. This issue is particularly troublesome in rural and under-resourced municipalities, where the demand for services frequently exceeds the available resources. Despite being expected to provide essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity to their communities, these municipalities often lack the necessary financial capacity to do so effectively.

The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP 2030) also acknowledges the underfunding of local government as a significant obstacle to achieving a capable and developmental state. The SACP asserts that addressing this issue is crucial for enhancing service delivery and ensuring that all South Africans have access to the basic services necessary for a dignified life. It is imperative for the national government to reassess the funding model for local governments in order to ensure adequate funding for all mandates, particularly in areas such as disaster management, health services, and environmental protection.

### **Constitutional and legislative ambiguities**

Ambiguities in South Africa's Constitution and related legislation, such as the Municipal Structures Act and the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), present significant challenges for municipalities, especially regarding environmental management and service delivery. For example, while the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act assigns air quality responsibilities to district municipalities, the Municipal Systems Act does not clearly define their broader role in environmental management. This lack of clarity leads to operational difficulties and hampers effective service delivery.

The SACP calls for a comprehensive review of the constitutional and legislative framework governing local government to resolve these ambiguities. The aim is to provide clear definitions of roles and responsibilities at all levels of government, ensuring municipalities are properly equipped with the powers and resources necessary to fulfil their mandates effectively.

Additionally, Section 152 of the Constitution outlines five key objectives for local government, which are vital for promoting democratic governance and sustainable development within a socialist framework. These objectives serve as foundational principles that guide South African municipalities in their efforts to create a society free from capitalist exploitation and inequality. However, local governments often face extra responsibilities that extend beyond these constitutional mandates, resulting in the issue of unfunded mandates. This situation arises when municipalities, seen as champions of grassroots socialism, are required to deliver services or perform functions without adequate financial support from national and provincial governments, often influenced by bourgeois interests.

As a result, the local government system becomes strained, with municipal managers frequently confined to administrative roles focused on meeting bureaucratic requirements rather than providing the strategic leadership needed to empower the working masses and advance socialist objectives. This strain

undermines the ability of municipalities to act as effective vehicles for social transformation and the upliftment of the working class, highlighting the urgent need for legislative and structural reforms to strengthen local governance.

### **“Over-regulation” and the role of municipal managers**

The over-regulation of local government represents a manifestation of the capitalist state's efforts to suppress the revolutionary potential of local governance. Municipal managers, who should spearhead socialist transformation and promote local development, find their roles constrained by excessive compliance requirements imposed by national and provincial reporting mandates (CoGTA, 2016). This administrative burden serves as a mechanism of the bourgeoisie, diverting managers from the vital responsibilities of socialist planning and innovation. By entangling municipal managers in a cycle of report generation, the capitalist state diminishes their capacity to effectively address the unique needs of their communities. This underutilisation of their skills and expertise undermines the revolutionary potential of local government, impeding its ability to empower the working class.

### **Demarcation challenges and the impact on community stability**

In South Africa, municipal boundaries are established and modified under the Demarcation Act, which is overseen by the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB). However, the frequent redefinition of these boundaries – particularly through the biennial delimitation process – acts as a destabilising force within communities, disrupting the collective unity essential for revolutionary progress. Continuous alterations to ward boundaries, dictated by the priorities of the capitalist state, obstruct community planning and contribute to electoral instability, leaving the working class uncertain about their futures (Municipal Demarcation Board [MDB], 2020). This instability undermines municipalities' capacity to plan effectively for long-term socialist development and service delivery, resulting in poor electoral outcomes and diminished community trust. To counteract this bourgeois tactic, it is proposed that the MDB's mandate be fixed for a period of 20 years prior to any boundary changes occurring. Such stability would empower communities to plan with greater certainty and allow municipalities to formulate and implement effective strategies for socialist economic and social development. Furthermore, the MDB's activities should be informed by a comprehensive consideration of economic, social, and political factors, ensuring that demarcation decisions advance the cause of socialism and facilitate the establishment of viable, sustainable municipalities.

### **The role of municipalities in economic development**

As the grassroots organs of the socialist state, municipalities must be central to economic activity, with mayors and councils proactively working to attract investment and stimulate local economies for the benefit of the working class. The SACP should lead a campaign that positions municipalities as the fulcrum of economic growth within a socialist context, ensuring that local government structures are empowered to spearhead revolutionary local development initiatives (SACP, 2017). This campaign could be further strengthened by revisiting the Property Rates Act No. 6 of 2004 and its regulations, which currently favour the capitalist class by exempting national government entities from paying property rates and taxes to local authorities. Amending this legislation would significantly enhance municipalities' revenue base, equipping them with the financial resources necessary to fulfil their constitutional mandates more effectively and advance the socialist cause. This fortified financial position would enable municipalities to operate not merely as extensions of the capitalist state but as independent bastions of socialism, dedicated to uplifting and empowering the working class.

### **Impact on service delivery**

The misalignment of powers and functions has a direct and detrimental impact on service delivery, particularly in rural and under-resourced municipalities. This misalignment exacerbates socio-economic inequalities, thereby undermining the objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the ANC's vision for a developmental state, and the National Development Plan's (NDP) aim of a capable state that provides high-quality services to all. For example, in numerous rural areas, the absence of clearly defined jurisdictional boundaries between local and provincial governments has led to the neglect of crucial infrastructure projects such as road maintenance and water supply systems.

In order to address this issue, the SACP suggests enhancing intergovernmental relations (IGR) structures and processes to foster collaboration and bolster the objectives of the RDP, the NDP, and the broader socialist transformation agenda. By improving coordination among the various tiers of government, we can reduce redundancy, streamline service delivery, and ensure more efficient allocation of resources.

### **Impact of outsourcing municipal service delivery in South Africa**

The outsourcing of municipal services has been implemented as a strategy to overcome the capacity constraints faced by local governments. While outsourcing can bring in specialised knowledge and additional resources, the SACP has raised concerns regarding its impact on service delivery, labour rights, and local economic development.

#### **Diminished control over essential services**

Outsourcing can give rise to a dearth of municipal control over essential services, rendering it arduous for local governments to ensure equitable and satisfactory provision of these services to all communities. For instance, when private firms assume responsibility for waste management services, the municipality may no longer possess authority over the standard of service rendered, resulting in disparities in service quality across different regions. This relinquishment of control runs counter to the NDP's emphasis on establishing an efficient state that is attuned to the needs of its constituents.

#### **Labor Rights and Employment Conditions**

Outsourcing frequently contributes to a deterioration in labour rights. Private contractors tend to prioritise cost reduction, leading to potential job losses, reduced wages, and unfavourable working conditions for employees. This contradicts the NDP's objective of safeguarding workers' rights and fostering dignified employment. The SACP firmly maintains that safeguarding labour rights is crucial for constructing an inclusive economy that benefits all individuals in South Africa.

#### **Service quality and accountability**

Although the aim of outsourcing is to enhance the quality of services, there exists evidence suggesting that this practice can lead to a decline in standards, particularly when the pursuit of profit supersedes the public interest. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the outsourcing of water supply services, where instances of compromised water quality have been reported due to cost-cutting measures implemented by private contractors. The lack of accountability mechanisms inherent in these outsourced agreements undermines the National Development Plan's objective of fostering accountability and transparency within the public sector.

#### **Impact on local economic development**

Outsourcing can contribute to economic inequalities by favouring established companies over local Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). The National Development Plan (NDP) recognises the importance of including local businesses in economic activities to promote inclusive growth. However,

outsourcing municipal services to large companies can prevent local SMMEs from participating in these activities, further marginalising already disadvantaged communities. To address this issue, the SACP proposes reassessing the outsourcing model in local government. Municipalities should explore alternative service delivery models that prioritise public control, protect workers' rights, and stimulate local economic development. One possible approach is the establishment of municipal-owned entities to directly provide services. This would allow municipalities to maintain control over service quality and create opportunities for local SMMEs to participate in economic activities.

### **Professionalising local government in South Africa**

The professionalisation of local government in South Africa is of utmost importance in establishing a competent and developmental state. This process seeks to enhance the skills, competencies and ethical standards of officials to improve service delivery and governance. The SACP, in alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP 2030), the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), and the South African Road to Socialism, underscores the significance of strengthening capacity and professionalism within local government to address the structural challenges faced by municipalities.

### **Rationale for professionalisation**

Local governments have a crucial role to play in providing essential services such as water, electricity, sanitation, and waste management. However, many municipalities in South Africa grapple with considerable capacity constraints, leading to inefficient service delivery (CoGTA, 2016). Professionalisation is vital in bridging these capacity gaps by equipping municipal officials with the necessary skills to effectively manage resources, plan for long-term development, and respond to community needs. According to the NDP, bolstering the professional capacity of local government officials is key to constructing a capable state (National Planning Commission, 2012).

### **Challenges to professionalisation**

Numerous challenges impede the professionalisation of local government in South Africa. One major challenge is the high turnover rate of municipal officials, which causes institutional instability and disrupts service delivery (SALGA, 2015). Additionally, the politicisation of local government appointments often results in the recruitment of individuals based on political affiliations rather than merit, further weakening municipal capacity (Dullah Omar Institute, 2020). This issue is exacerbated by the lack of adequate training and development programs for local government employees, resulting in skill deficiencies in critical areas such as financial management and project implementation (CoGTA, 2016).

### **Legislative framework**

South Africa's legislative framework serves as the foundation for the professionalisation of local government. The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) mandates sound financial management and accountability in municipalities, while the Municipal Systems Act requires municipalities to adopt a performance management system that ensures efficient service delivery (Republic of South Africa, 2003). Additionally, the Public Administration Management Act (PAMA) aims to promote good governance and ethical conduct in public administration, which is crucial for the professionalisation of local government (Republic of South Africa, 2014).

**Strategies for Professionalisation Capacity Building:** In order to professionalise local government, the SACP recommends implementing targeted capacity-building programs that prioritise skills development and training. These programs should align with the requirements outlined in the NDP, which emphasises the importance of skilled and competent officials to drive development at the local level (National Planning Commission, 2012). While the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has made

significant contributions in developing training programs for municipal officials, there is still a need for additional efforts to ensure that these programs receive adequate funding and are accessible to a wide range of individuals (SALGA, 2015).

**Merit-Based Appointments:** The SACP supports the adoption of a merit-based recruitment process to ensure that qualified individuals are appointed to key positions in local government. This recommendation is consistent with the suggestions put forth by the Dullah Omar Institute, which emphasises the importance of depoliticising appointments in order to enhance municipal performance (Dullah Omar Institute, 2020). By implementing a merit-based approach to appointments, local government entities can establish institutional stability and foster a professional culture among their personnel.

**Ethical Governance:** The process of professionalising local government also necessitates strengthening ethical governance frameworks. The Public Administration Management Act stipulates the requirement for ethical conduct and transparency in public administration and encourages strict enforcement of these principles in order to combat corruption and cultivate a culture of professionalism within municipalities (Republic of South Africa, 2014). In addition, the SACP proposes the establishment of independent oversight bodies to monitor the performance of municipal officials and hold them accountable for any misconduct.

**Public Participation:** The inclusion of public participation is an essential component of professional governance. The SACP places great emphasis on actively involving communities in decision-making processes to ensure that local governments are responsive to their needs. The Municipal Systems Act mandates that municipalities establish mechanisms for public participation, such as ward committees and public consultations (Republic of South Africa, 2000). By strengthening these participatory structures, trust can be built between communities and local governments, ultimately contributing to the overall professionalism of municipal governance.

## **Proposals for realignment**

To address the challenges arising from the misalignment of powers and functions within South Africa's local government system, the proposed strategies are aligned with several influential guiding documents and resolutions, particularly those from the SACP 15th National Congress. The SACP has consistently highlighted the necessity of overhauling the local government framework to better serve the working-class and marginalised communities and insourcing all unnecessarily outsourced public functions. This entails advocating for a more robust and equitable distribution of resources, which is currently hindered by systemic inefficiencies and financial constraints.

The 15th National Congress emphasised the importance of transforming local government to counteract the neoliberal policies that have led to financial mismanagement and inadequate service delivery. The resolutions adopted during the congress underscore the necessity for municipalities to be adequately funded and financially viable in order to achieve developmental goals. Furthermore, the congress highlighted the need to address structural limitations within municipalities, particularly those associated with the funding formula and the underspending of service delivery budgets.

In addition, the congress called for the enhancement of financial management and capacity building within local government. This includes advocating for a review of the local government funding framework, which currently fails to address the underdevelopment and inequality between urban and rural areas. By ensuring that municipalities utilise their budgets effectively and serve the population diligently, the SACP aims to advance a socialist agenda that prioritises the needs of the working class.

In line with these resolutions, the SACP is committed to reconfiguring the local government system to align with the broader objectives of the national democratic revolution. This involves fostering public participation, improving service delivery, and ensuring accountability within local government structures. The SACP's focus on local government reform is integral to building a powerful socialist movement capable of challenging the dominance of capitalist forces and advancing the interests of the working class and the impoverished in South Africa.

### **Clarification and streamlining of legislative frameworks**

The SACP advocates for a thorough evaluation and revision of current legislation, such as the Municipal Structures Act and the MFMA, with the intention of definitively defining the roles and responsibilities of each government level. To effectively advance the objectives of a developmental state, it is crucial to establish coherent legislative frameworks. It is imperative to tackle existing overlaps and ambiguities by explicitly delineating the specific functions assigned to each government level. This approach would effectively minimise inefficiencies and bolster accountability.

### **Strengthening intergovernmental relations**

Effective coordination between national, provincial, and local governments is imperative in achieving the goals of the Reconstruction and Development Program, the National Development Plan 2030, and the wider socialist transformation agenda. By enhancing intergovernmental relations (IGR) structures and processes, it is possible to eliminate duplication of efforts, streamline service delivery, and optimise resource utilisation. The SACP proposes the development of more robust mechanisms for consultation and co-operation among the different tiers of government, consequently fostering the formulation of integrated strategies for service delivery.

### **Addressing unfunded mandates**

The national government should reassess the funding model for local governments to ensure that they are provided with adequate financial resources to fulfil their mandates. Unfunded and underfunded mandates place an undue burden on municipalities, particularly in under-resourced areas, and contribute to service delivery failures. The SACP advocates for a more equitable distribution of resources that considers the specific needs and challenges faced by different municipalities. This would involve revising the allocation of funds based on a clear understanding of local government responsibilities and the financial requirements needed to carry them out effectively.

### **Capacity building and professionalisation**

The SACP supports initiatives designed to enhance the capacity of local government officials and to professionalise municipal administration. These efforts should focus on comprehensive training and development programmes that equip officials with essential skills for budget management, long-term development planning, and effective community engagement. Additionally, prioritising the recruitment and retention of skilled personnel within local government is vital for ensuring that municipalities can fulfil their mandates.

Furthermore, the SACP underscores the urgent need to educate councillors on all legislation relevant to local government. This training should include familiarisation with key laws such as the Municipal Systems Act, the Municipal Finance Management Act, the Municipal Structures Act, and other pertinent legal frameworks. By ensuring that councillors are well-informed about these legislative requirements, municipalities can enhance governance, improve service delivery, and ensure compliance with the legal mandates governing local government.

The SACP views these capacity-building efforts as essential components in establishing a capable and developmental state. These initiatives not only aim to improve day-to-day operations but also seek to empower local governments to drive sustainable development and effectively address the needs of their communities.

### **Public participation and community involvement**

Public participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance and is essential for ensuring that local governments are responsive to the needs of their communities. The SACP emphasises the importance of involving communities in decision-making processes, particularly in the development of Integrated Development Plans and other key policy documents. Strengthening participatory structures, such as ward committees, can help to ensure that the voices of citizens are heard and that their needs are addressed in a meaningful way. The SACP also advocates for greater transparency in local government operations, including the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating service delivery.

### **Addressing the energy crisis and promoting a just transition**

As South Africa navigates the complexities of the global energy transition, the SACP acknowledges the growing influence of capital interests aiming to dominate this sector. The rapid expansion of global capital within South Africa's energy landscape, particularly in just energy transition programmes, underscores the urgent need for municipalities to actively engage in ensuring that the benefits of this transition are distributed equitably, particularly to working class and marginalised communities. In light of the recent COP28 resolutions, which emphasise the crucial role of local governments in just energy transitions, the SACP advocates for municipalities to secure ownership stake in energy projects. This stake would be managed on behalf of disadvantaged communities, empowering local governments to enhance service delivery and promote social equity.

However, the introduction of solar rooftop systems and the potential privatisation of water services pose significant threats to the revenue base of municipalities, especially those reliant on industrial electricity payments. Historically, municipalities have passed service costs onto communities, resulting in high prices for essential services such as water and electricity. The SACP calls for a reassessment of the Municipal Finance Management Act to create a more supportive environment for economic development and to align with the principles of a just transition. As the local government sector approaches its 30-year milestone, the SACP urges a renewed focus on combating hunger and poverty through initiatives such as food security programmes. The party opposes the privatisation of Eskom and champions public investment in renewable energy, in alignment with COP28's call for sustainable and equitable energy policies that prioritise the needs of the populace.

### **The role of traditional leadership in local government**

The role of traditional leadership in local government is a complex and sensitive issue, particularly in rural areas where traditional leaders continue to wield significant influence. The SACP recognises the concerns of traditional leaders regarding the potential loss of authority and control over land and resources as a result of municipal boundary re-drawing. However, the SACP also believes that the establishment of primary municipalities in traditional authority areas is essential for promoting development and ensuring that all citizens have access to basic services.

The SACP advocates for ongoing dialogue and negotiation with traditional leaders to ensure that their concerns are addressed in a manner that respects their role in local governance while also promoting the goals of a democratic and developmental state. This may involve the establishment of formal

mechanisms for traditional leaders to participate in local government decision-making processes, particularly on issues that affect their communities.

### **Enhancing accountability and transparency in local government**

Enhancing accountability and transparency is critical to building public trust in local government and ensuring that municipalities are responsive to the needs of their communities. The SACP calls for the strengthening of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating service delivery, including the establishment of independent oversight bodies that can hold local governments accountable for their performance. Additionally, the SACP advocates for greater transparency in local government budgeting and financial management, including the publication of detailed reports on municipal spending and the implementation of public audits.

### **Promoting inclusive economic development**

Local governments play a crucial role in promoting inclusive economic development, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas. The SACP advocates for policies that prioritise the development of local economies, including support for Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and the promotion of public employment programmes. The SACP also calls for the establishment of municipal-owned enterprises that can deliver essential services directly to communities while creating jobs and generating revenue for local governments.

Rural municipalities, in particular, should actively drive investment in the agricultural sector, recognising its significance for local economic development and national food security. The SACP emphasises the need for municipalities to ensure that available land is used effectively for agricultural purposes. This includes supporting the formation and sustainability of agricultural co-operatives, which empower local farmers and communities to collectively manage resources, share knowledge, and access markets more efficiently.

Moreover, municipalities should focus on developing infrastructure for agricultural logistics, such as transportation networks, storage facilities, and market access points, which are critical for enhancing agricultural productivity and profitability. By investing in agriculture, supporting agricultural co-operatives, and developing related infrastructure, rural municipalities can help secure food supply chains, create employment opportunities, and stimulate broader economic growth within their communities. The SACP believes that by prioritising agriculture and fostering co-operative models, municipalities can play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable and inclusive development, thereby contributing to the overall well-being and economic resilience of rural areas.

### **Addressing the challenges of urbanisation**

The rapid urbanisation of South Africa presents both opportunities and challenges for local governments. On the one hand, urbanisation can drive economic growth and development, but on the other hand, it can also lead to increased pressure on local infrastructure and services. The SACP advocates for the development of comprehensive urban planning strategies that address the challenges of urbanisation, including the provision of affordable housing, the development of public transport systems, and the promotion of sustainable land use practices.

### **Overall approach of the SACP toward the 2026 local government elections**

The SACP has delineated a strategic framework for the upcoming 2026 local government elections, building upon the resolutions derived from its 10th Congress and Strategy Conference. This strategy

underscores the critical role of local government in addressing South Africa's socio-economic challenges, particularly in alleviating poverty, generating employment, and fostering social development.

The SACP's campaign will be situated within the broader context of the Tripartite Alliance, while simultaneously incorporating an independent SACP campaign to accentuate specific socialist perspectives. A central element of this strategy is the transformation of local government, particularly through the re-demarcation of municipalities. The number of municipalities has been reduced from 843 to 257, which now encompasses eight metropolitan municipalities, 44 district municipalities, and 205 local municipalities.

The SACP seeks to reinforce the role of District Councils in regional planning and infrastructure development. The existing electoral system comprises 4,468 wards, employing a mixed ward and proportional representation system to ensure overall proportionality. Furthermore, the SACP intends to emphasise public participation, accountability, and the engagement of traditional leaders in local governance.

The party is committed to strengthening its organisational structures, conducting voter registration initiatives, and judiciously selecting candidates to avert conflicts within the Alliance. The SACP's programme will align with the overarching Alliance campaign, incorporating dedicated phases for disseminating the party's socialist message through various media channels. Election structures will be established at all levels to facilitate effective campaign management.

The SACP's approach to the 2026 local government elections aspires to advance the National Democratic Revolution by advocating for socialist principles in local governance, enhancing service delivery, and empowering marginalised communities. The campaign aims to transform local government to better serve the working class and realise the broader objectives of social justice and sustainable development.

**Key features of the new system that will directly impact the election campaign include:**

**Unicity metropolitan municipalities:** These areas are crucial for consolidating political power, fostering economic growth, and promoting development. As urbanisation continues, these municipalities have the highest concentration of the working class, largely due to the ongoing dominance of industries in metropolitan regions. Their strategic importance is significant, as they serve as centres of economic activity and are vital for implementing policies designed to uplift the working class and enhance socio-economic development.

- **Enhanced role of district councils:** District councils will play a crucial role in regional integrated development planning, bulk infrastructure, service provision, redistribution, and building the capacity of municipalities.
- **Powerful executive structures:** The introduction of new executive mayors and committees will lead to increased governance authority.
- **Role of traditional leaders:** Traditional leaders will participate in municipalities as non-voting ex officio members, with their representation limited to 10% of the municipal council.
- **Participatory democracy:** An expanded framework for public participation will be established, facilitated by ward committees and additional provisions in the upcoming Municipal Systems Bill.

**The campaign will focus on the following key components:**

- **Manifesto development:** The SACP will contribute to the Alliance's Election Manifesto for the 2026 local government elections and may also consider issuing a separate "Local Government Statement" to emphasise specific socialist perspectives. This statement will address the unique challenges and opportunities within local governance, highlighting the need to promote socialist principles at the local level. The manifesto will build on themes from the 2019 Election Manifesto while showcasing the advantages of the reformed local government model. The SACP will underscore the importance of democratic accountability, improved service delivery, and the empowerment of marginalised communities, aligning these with the broader goals of the National Democratic Revolution.
- **Focus on local issues:** The campaign will address local issues relevant to each municipality and ward, ensuring that the SACP's message resonates with local communities.
- **Building SACP structures:** The campaign presents an opportunity to strengthen SACP structures from the branch level upwards, targeting workplaces and establishing industrial frameworks.
- **Restructuring challenges:** The restructuring of local government may lead to potential conflicts between ANC-run councils and COSATU, particularly SAMWU, due to concerns about job losses resulting from changes in service delivery systems. The SACP will actively engage in addressing these challenges.
- **Growth, development and democracy:** The SACP will prioritise redistribution and empower the working class to actively participate in local government, collaborating closely with COSATU
- **Traditional leaders:** The SACP aims to address the concerns of traditional leaders about their roles in primary municipalities, ensuring their participation is respected and their contributions are integrated into local governance. The party will also work to manage potential conflicts, highlighting the importance of collaboration between traditional leadership and municipal authorities. Throughout the campaign, the SACP will maintain an open dialogue with traditional leaders to address their concerns while promoting the broader goals of democratic and developmental governance.
- **Voter registration:** A significant voter registration drive will be undertaken, considering the new ward boundaries and the migratory nature of the Alliance's constituency.
- **Choosing Candidates:** The selection of candidates will be conducted carefully to avoid potential conflicts within Alliance structures.

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## Chapter 5: COSATU and the entire trade union movement in the current conjuncture

Our overarching strategic organisational and political task in the present conjuncture, as outlined in the programme adopted by our 15<sup>th</sup> National Congress, the *South African Struggle for Socialism*, is that of building a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and the poor. This echoes COSATU's own historical resolution on building a Movement for Socialism. Hence, at its 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress in 2022, the federation endorsed this SACP's strategic task.

In undertaking such a monumental task, it is essential that COSATU, which remains the main centre of the radical trade unions in South Africa and a component of our socialist-axis, itself becomes powerful and strongly socialist-oriented. However, the federation is currently still reeling from the tragic vortex of internal political divisions, organisational paralysis and indiscipline that engulfed it between 2013 and 2015, two decades since the democratic breakthrough.

It was against this background that in 2014 the Augmented Central Committee considered a discussion paper entitled *On Trade Unions* which was finalised by the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Central Committee, held from 29 to 31 May 2015. This section builds on the perspective of that paper and therefore shall not rehash issues raised such as the historical catalytical role played by the SACP in the formation and development of a radical trade union movement in South Africa and some of the identified tasks that were

facing COSATU at that time. Nonetheless, the thrust of that document and the inherent concern on the part of the SACP with the state of the trade union movement is in keeping with the historical programme of the SACP of building and strengthening a radical trade union movement, for example, as mandated in the programme of the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress, *South African Road to Socialism*, that: “The Party must deepen its work in the trade union movement with the aim of building a red trade union movement, rooted in the Congress tradition, militant and socialist in orientation. Whilst deepening its relationship with and presence in COSATU unions, the Party must actively seek to recruit members from other progressive unions that are not in the COSATU fold, thus contributing towards the goal of one country, one federation.”

## Economic context

In comparison to other countries, especially north America and west Europe where the trade unions have been in decline since the 1970s, for nearly four decades since then there was a paradoxical phenomenal growth of the trade unions in South Africa. The global economic crisis of 1973-1975 killed off the Taylorist-Fordist model of mass production that was already in crisis since the 1960s in the west. This forced the out-shoring productive plants to the global-south, especially to the rapidly industrialising Southeast Asian countries, which in turn caused drastic shrinkage of the industrial workforce in the west, at the time when the militant trade unions burst onto the scene from 1973 onwards in South Africa. Thus, the rise of the low-wage service sectors, financialisation and the decline of the industrial unions were combined with attacks on the workers’ and trade union rights in the west.

Whilst we acknowledge that over the past three decades there have been some positive changes in the inherited political economy of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST), these changes have not been fundamental. In fact, at the systemic level it can be argued that these changes represent a regression in terms of the structure of the country’s economic base. In this regard, what transpired economically since 1994 actually accelerated the long-term negative trends that were already unfolding during the terminal years of the Apartheid regime, especially from the 1980s. Thus, the uninterrupted Neoliberal policy trajectory compounded this regression as it reinforced the trends of de-industrialisation, financialisation and capital-flight. Hence, today unfortunately ours is essentially a services-based rather than an industry-based economy. This means that the structure of the economic base changed upside-down; whereby finance exploded from 13.4% in 1980 to about 22.4% in 2018 - in terms of its share in the economy and thus becoming the dominant economic sector.<sup>1</sup> The surge and dominance of finance is manifested in the bias of the macroeconomic policies of the ANC’s consecutive governments, at the expense of the productive sectors.

By contrast, amidst financialisation and the out-shoring of the internally accumulated capital, the productive primary and secondary sectors suffered severely, in which:

- Mining shrunk from 19.5% in 1980 to about 8.1% by 2018.
- Manufacturing shrunk from 17.3% in 1980 to 13.5% by 2018.

Thus, it can be said that the services as a whole (including tourism), led by finance, constitute 63% of the economy whilst agriculture remain relatively stagnant at 2.6%.<sup>2</sup>

These trends were only compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 and its aftermath from 2020 amidst the implementation of a severe austerity programme over the entire term of the sixth administration. Therefore, the post-Apartheid economic structure is now inverted as the productive base – in terms of the primary (mining) and secondary (manufacturing) components of the economy – which are the primary circuits of value generation, have shrunk in inverse to the expansion of the tertiary component.

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<sup>1</sup> C.Allen, Z.Asmaal et al., 2021. *Employment creation potential, labour skills requirements, and skills gaps for young people*. DPRU Working Paper 202102, UCT.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

This regressive and inverted change in the structure of the economic base has had a direct impact that created objective constraints on the South African class struggle between capital and labour, in terms of:

- The fact that the decline of manufacturing and mining, which are the main sectors in which the blue-collar labour was historically concentrated and were relatively better paid and organised - led to massive job-losses. This gradually affected the character and composition of COSATU as unionisation remained stagnant in the private sector whilst at the same time it increased in the public sector (see Table 1 below).
- In addition to the negative impact of high unemployment in terms of engendering job-insecurity in the workforce amidst the switch of capital from the productive circuits to services, which are characteristically low-wage, high unemployment in turn induced the suppression of the average blue-collar wage in the economy.
- On the one hand, the decline of manufacturing and mining had the effect of the corresponding fall in the number of permanent jobs, whilst on the other hand the shift of employment to service sectors such as transport and wholesale and retail (which grew from 6% to 9.6% and 12.9% to 15.% respectively)<sup>3</sup>, not only caused the rise of low-wage employment, but also the rise of the vulnerable or casual employment.
- The decline of manufacturing and mining is mirrored in the decline of union density in these sectors and thus the corresponding weakening of the power of trade unions, particularly in the private sector.

These structural changes also impinged on the labour market. Recent research has found that where employment is created, there has been an increase in high-income and high-skilled jobs alongside low-skilled jobs, but less increase in semi-skilled and lower middle-income jobs.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the rate of unemployment amongst those without post-school qualification is the highest. This is compounded by the fact that even the state itself has been practicing casualisation in terms of its super-exploitation of the Community Health Workers, workers enlisted to the Extended Public Works Programme who actually permanent performing public service work and in terms of the endemic outsourcing across departments, State-Owned Enterprises and agencies.

The international advent of the disruptive digital technologies has also impinged on the characteristics of the national economies. For instance, the new Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is actually a sector in itself – which has induced externalisation or outsourcing across the economy with its cross-cutting linkages. At the same time the insertion of digital technologies also induced changes in the labour process at the microeconomic level and thus imposing new organising challenges for trade unions. Amongst others, the digital technologies in production and service activities have forced the emergence new patterns of the contracting of work, further eroded job security and rendered redundant many of the labouring activities that were the source and base of shop-floor organisation. For example, the impact of such changes was felt by NEHAWU, whose strike in 2022 in SARS was partially weakened by the fact that the employer issued notices instructing employees to work from home, which debilitated the morale of the strikers and reduced the participation rate.

### **COSATU and the broader trade union landscape**

The formation of COSATU in 1985 was a defiant act in the consolidation of the organisational gains and experiences by the 33 unions that refused to be register with an illegitimate regime. The founding principle of “one-industry; one-union; and one-country; one-federation” became a rallying cry as much as an organisational vision of building and consolidating workers’ power at the shopfloor by uniting workers and their unions across allied

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> O Crankshaw, 2022. *Urban Inequality: Theory, Evidence and Method in Johannesburg*. London, New York, Delhi and Sydney, Zed Books.

economic activities - with a view to set up unions on 12 industrially demarcated basis. At its birth COSATU was almost exclusively a private sector-based federation until the launch of SAMWU and NEHAWU in 1987.

The task of building industrial unions imposed an ambitious programme of mergers upon this fledgling centre. The following are the demarcated organising scope to build industrial unions:

- Food and drink;
- Textile, clothing and leather;
- Paper, wood and printing;
- Mining, electrical energy;
- Metal, motor assembly and components;
- Chemical and petroleum;
- Commercial and catering
- Transport, SA transport services, cleaning and security;
- Local government and public administration including education, health, postal services, and telecommunications; domestic workers;
- Construction
- Agriculture.

By its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1995, COSATU had grown from approximately 460 000 with 33 affiliates to 1.6 million members, with 19 affiliates.<sup>5</sup> The drastic reduction of the number of affiliates underscored the successful implementation of the programme of the mergers at the beginning up to the 1990s. This consolidation of the organisation at the industrial level enhanced the political power of COSATU during the terminal years of the Apartheid regime and after the democratic breakthrough in 1994. However, the admission of the narrow occupationally based unions after 1994 and the grinding to a virtual halt of the mergers in the subsequent decades after the 1990s would later engender one of the acute problems that is debilitating COSATU today.

As a result of the failure to follow through in the implementation of the mergers, today most of the affiliates that organise in the private sector have set themselves organising scopes that span at least four major sectors in terms of the original demarcations set by the founding congress.<sup>6</sup> In fact, some affiliates are caught up in the ongoing feuds over the scopes of organising and this has in fact fermented tensions as accusations of “poaching” of each other’s membership are rife. Similarly, whilst there has been a phenomenal growth of the COSATU affiliated unions in the public sector, their growth potential has not been maximised and they too are caught up in the internecine cannibalisation of each other due to the overlapping organising scopes.

Given the level union density in the public sector, especially in the public service, growth for COSATU affiliates can only mean eroding the presence of the existing yellow unions and the small “independent” ones. Crucially, growth also means organisational consolidation amongst the COSATU affiliates in the direction of fulfilling the organising demarcation set by the founding congress with regard to the public sector, since the employer is essentially the same.

COSATU has not achieved fully fledged industrial unions according to the original demarcations and the envisaged numerical weights across the relevant industries. Actually, there are only few unions that resemble the characteristics and compositions that were envisaged in terms of the organising demarcations set by the founding congress. To be fair, several of COSATU’s unions are structured in a manner that is generally within the designated scopes and have resultantly forged a class identity across their memberships – beyond the limitations of the narrow

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<sup>5</sup> Discussion document on The Unity and Cohesion of COSATU towards COSATU Special National Congress, held from 13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

<sup>6</sup> COSATU, 2023. The changing sectoral boundaries of COSATU’s affiliates: Understanding and Responding to the Demarcation Challenge. Unpublished.

craft or occupational identity. There are still some unions though that remained essentially craft or occupationally based almost in the same manner as when they were admitted. Not only does this state of affairs undermine the founding principle of “one-industry-one-union”, it also impedes the growth of the federation. The prevalence of overlaps in organising scopes has also meant that recruitment gets diverted from focusing on the unorganised workers and the “green fields” in terms of the workplaces that are not unionised or have no COSATU affiliated union.

As at 2023, COSATU had a total membership of 1 558 681.<sup>7</sup> This figure is almost the same as in 1995, when the federation celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, it must be understood against the background of the fact that between 2015 and 2018 the total membership of COSATU took a drastic drop of about 12%.<sup>8</sup> Thereafter, from 2018 to the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress the membership further declined by more than 50 000.<sup>9</sup> Arguably the 12% drop between 2015 and 2018 is partly attributable to the establishment of the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU).<sup>10</sup> For instance, the Food and Allied Workers’ Union (FAWU) left with about 127 000 members at that time. At that time the expulsion of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) in November 2014, which was the biggest union of COSATU, had already left a huge dent on the federation as it consequentially lost more than 300 000 members.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, over an extended period several affiliates have also been experiencing their own splits, with new break-away “independent” unions being formed, a phenomenon that also erodes the membership of the federation. In this regard, SATAWU has been the worst affected as it suffered a massive loss of about 73% of its membership in the period between 2015 and 2018. There are multiple causes for such splits or breakaways, including the ramifications of business unionism, disillusionment and disgruntlement about poor service to members, personality clashes within the leadership structures, opportunism, factionalism, etc.

The formation of SAFTU took place directly on the back of a volatile period of internal instability that acutely engulfed COSATU between 2013 and 2015.<sup>12</sup> In November 2015, NUMSA convened a Special National Congress from which it took resolutions that aggravated the raging divisions within the federation. Amongst others, it called for the break-away of COSATU from the Alliance, it resolved to withhold its subscriptions, and it openly repudiated the federation’s constitution as it unilaterally expanded its designated organising scope - contesting the federation’s affiliates, particularly SATAWU, NUM and CEPPWAWU.

Just as we have seen the detrimental consequences of the internal divisions on the organisational integrity and vitality of the ANC, this unprecedented and tragic developments that culminated with COSATU’s Special National Congress, held in July 2015, together with the combined effects of the negative structural changes that have been unrelentingly taking place at the economic base and the uninterrupted adherence to Neoliberal economic policies provide a historical perspective in conceptualising the current context and state of COSATU as the key centre of radical trade unions and the broader trade union landscape in the country.

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<sup>7</sup> This figure is based on the Book 2 Report of the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress and adapted to 2023 and adapted to 2023..

<sup>8</sup> COSATU, 2023. The changing sectoral boundaries of COSATU’s affiliates: Understanding and Responding to the Demarcation Challenge. Unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> SAFTU was formed as a new federation of trade unions on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 2017

<sup>11</sup> Prior to this COSATU had in the past expelled affiliates such as SADSAWU, SADNU and CWUSA for not honouring their obligation to pay affiliation fees as required by the COSATU constitution.

<sup>12</sup> The formation of SAFTU took place after the expulsion of NUMSA in November 2014 and of the sitting General Secretary in March 2015 who undermined the federation’s Code of Conduct when he refused to perform the constitutionally mandated duties and to account on the findings in the commissioned report of auditors, Sizwe Ntsaluba Gobodo.

In terms of the broader trade union landscape in South Africa, COSATU's cherished goal of a single federation in South Africa is still a distance away. In addition to COSATU and SAFTU, there are three other federations, namely the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Confederation of South African Workers' Unions (CONSAWU). The latest available report on the union membership indicates that as at 2021 the total union membership of the registered trade unions, that are 220 in total, stood at 4 075 645.<sup>13</sup> This means that COSATU, which remains the biggest federations, commands nearly two-fifths of the organised workers in South Africa.

Notwithstanding the fact that all sectors of the economy, except for agriculture and construction, have seen some decline in union membership in the eight years leading to 2022, as a proportion of the total workforce, union membership has remained relatively stable although still on a downward trend. The actual number of union members has declined by just over 100 000, in line with the decline in employment between 2019 and 2022. In fact, in 2022, union density stood at around 30%, which represents a marginal increase over the prior three years.<sup>14</sup>

Year	Private Sector		Public Sector	
	Number of union members	Union members as % of workers	Number of union members	Union members as % of workers
1997	1.813,217	35.6%	835,795	55.2%
2001	1.748,807	30.6%	1.070,248	70.1%
2005	1.925,248	30.1%	1.087,772	68.4%
2010	1.888,293	26.3%	1.324,964	74.6%
2013	1.868,711	24.4%	1.393,189	69.2%

As it relates to the sectors, 'union density in manufacturing remains well below the levels last seen in 1980s and 1990s. In mining, employment has also declined as has union membership, but union density remains high. In transport, the decline of employment has been followed by a more significant decline in union membership and union density remains at a relatively low 27 percent. The wholesale and retail sector are different. Although there has been a loss of employment, the union membership has increased. Union density remains quite low however (21 percent).'<sup>16</sup>

Union density in the public sector is particularly high, despite the relative existence of security of employment. In 1997, union density in the public sector was already higher (at 55.2%) than in the private sector (at 35.6%). By 2010, the gap had widely increased as unionisation declined in the private sector to 26.3% and increased in the public sector to 74.6%. Although there has been a slight decline in union membership between 2014 and 2022, the union density in the public service remains incredibly high at around 98%.<sup>17</sup>

The overarching economic context would suggest that there would be some persistence of uncertainty and anxiety amongst the workers in the medium-term; whilst in the short-term they are having to come

<sup>13</sup> Du Toit et al. Labour Relations Law. 7<sup>th</sup> edition (in press).

<sup>14</sup> Statistics South Africa, Quarter 2: 2022. Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

<sup>15</sup> World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2014. Trade unions in an emerging economy: The case of South Africa. WIDER Working Paper 2014/055

<sup>16</sup> COSATU, 2023. The changing sectoral boundaries of COSATU's affiliates: Understanding and Responding to the Demarcation Challenge. Unpublished.

<sup>17</sup> Frikkie De Bruin, 2018. Presentation on the Public Service Employment Relations in South Africa at the Regional Congress of the International Labour Relations Association (ILERA).

to terms with the pressures from high interest rates and marginal wage increases that are barely keeping up with inflation. In this context, theoretically it could be expected that workers would be enticed to join unions or maintain their membership. However, it is remarkable that there is the persistence of low union-density in many sectors whereby workers are most vulnerable, such as construction and agriculture which have less than 15% union density, respectively.<sup>18</sup> In other sectors, where there are also high proportions of casualisation, such as wholesale and retail, transport and finance remain at below 30% union density. It is nonetheless instructive to note that one of the key trends in the labour market is the declining absorption rate of less skilled blue-collar labour, which has been the militant traditional base of COSATU unions.

The further fragmentation of the trade union movement into five federations logically means that this is the manifestation of the prevalent fragmentation at the trade union or workplace level. Outside COSATU, there is the emergence of “general unions”.<sup>19</sup> These unions recruit wherever and whoever they can, and they vary in size in South Africa. AMCU, NUMSA, FAWU and Solidarity have morphed in this direction and can be regarded as the big ones that have gone multi-sectoral – although all of these unions have their own historical industrial identity.<sup>20</sup> Whereas the medium-seized ones would be unions such as NUPSAW, GIWUSA and UASA and there are numerous other smaller ones with memberships that are around hundreds or a few thousands with the same characteristic and membership composition.

### **Current and future organisational challenges**

The forgoing outlines some of the organisational challenges that have a bearing on the capacity and capabilities of the federation to harness its potential political power. Key amongst the challenges are:

- The fact that there have been multiple factors that militated against COSATU’s founding organisational model of industrial unionism. In this regard, there have been significant structural changes in the base of the economy – with the shift towards the low-wage and the precarious service economy. In the labour market, these changes include the decline of the semi-skill jobs which was the historical base of COSATU’s militant constituency. In addition, there is outsourcing which creates multiple employers in the same workplace, labour broking and casualisation that have the effect of creating differentiation and divisions amongst workers in the same workplace.

In the light of the failure to follow through on the mergers to form industrial unions, COSATU’s September Commission had proposed some flexibility to accommodate “trans-industrial unionism” which is basically the same as working towards sector wide unions.<sup>21</sup> COSATU has already initiated a discussion around how organisationally to respond to the changing economy and labour market as well as a review of the founding organisational model of industrial unionism. To the extent that the party is in an alliance with COSATU, it would be necessarily that itself explores ideas within its commission on how the trade union movement can best to adapt organisationally to the fluid context of the Neoliberal phase of this imperialist stage of capitalism.

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<sup>18</sup> COSATU, 2023. The changing sectoral boundaries of COSATU’s affiliates: Understanding and Responding to the Demarcation Challenge. Unpublished.

<sup>19</sup> General unions do not necessarily base themselves within a specific industry or even a sector, even though because of history or geo-economic dynamics they may be predominantly based in one or more occupation or industry.

<sup>20</sup> COSATU, 2023. The changing sectoral boundaries of COSATU’s affiliates: Understanding and Responding to the Demarcation Challenge. Unpublished.

<sup>21</sup> The impact of out-shoring in the global-north has forced some of the historical industrial unions to recast themselves into even larger unions organising along value-chains and across their sectors. UNITE which was historically focused on manufacturing in Britain is one such union and it remains very influential in the politics of the Labour Party. Another but a different version is UNISON in the public sector.

- The prevalence of overlapping organising scopes, the incapacity of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) and National Office Bearers (NOBs) to intervene in terms of enforcing the demarcations of scopes.
- The constitutional impediment related to the autonomous status of affiliates which disables the CEC and NOBs to enforce the implementation of resolutions at the affiliate level.
- The stalled merger process as part of working towards the vision building industrial unions in pursuit of the goal of “one-industry-one-union” in terms of the resolution adopted by the founding congress. Therefore, the persistence of narrow occupationally based unions, including the continuous admission more of such unions instead of compelling them to be integrated with the relevant affiliates.
- The absence of a systematic and centrally co-ordinated programme for cadreship development for the leadership, especially in terms of ideological education and political training at all levels of the centre and affiliates – with a bias in terms of building women cadreship.
- The generally inadequate but unevenness regarding ideological education, imparting of organisational expertise, roles and functions of shop stewards, officials and administrative personnel in general both at the centre and affiliate level.
- The generally poor and unevenness in terms of the practice of workplace or shop-floor organisation, accountability and service to members.
- The fact that generally the outcomes of collective bargaining do not in the medium to long term necessarily mitigate against the impact of the crises of the costs of living and social reproduction as the inflation rate is an average within a basket of selected items which are not necessarily aligned with the spending patterns of an average worker. For example, the introduction of a National Minimum Wage (NMW) in 2019 was a major victory for COSATU, but since COVID-19, the adjustments to the NMW and the average annual wage increases have been far below food-inflation – when food takes a predominant share in the monthly budget of a working-class household.<sup>22</sup> This is highlighted by the fact that since October 2020 the price of a 50kg of maize meal has increase by 33%, from R549.24 to R729.90 in 2023. This escalation also outpaced the rate at which the NMW has been adjusted, from R20.67 per hour in 2020 to R25.42 per hour over the same period, which is only about 22.5%. As the most representative federation COSATU has responsibility of ensuring that it builds the organisational capacity and ability to work with others to ensure that the wage settlements claw back on the value created during the surplus labour-time performed by workers, just to keep up with the cost of living and social reproduction. Whilst the wage settlement levels surpassed inflation in 2018, 2019 and 2023, they fell below the annual inflation rate in 2020, 2021, 2022. The fact that in the recent past the average wage settlements have not been on a sustained upward trajectory relative to the inflation rate underlines the strategic necessity for the federation to focus on building its strength at the workplace.
- In the last five years, we have witnessed a growing posture on the part of the bosses of undermining of workers’ rights and benefits, not least signified by the government decision in 2020 to renege on the PSCBC Resolution 1 of 2018-2021 Collective Bargaining Wage Agreement. This was coupled with the government’s unilateral implementation of 3% wage increase after collapsing the 2022-2023 PSCBC negotiation. This reckless behaviour on the part of the ANC government, which has been narrowly focused on its public debt and budget deficit targets virtually at the expense of everything has emboldened management in the private sector, as demonstrated by protracted wage negotiations leading to lengthy strikes at Sibanye-Stillwater mine, and the ensuing undermining of collective bargaining process by WALMART Makro, who even went further and dismissed 600 workers embarking on a protected industrial action.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the federation faces the challenges

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<sup>22</sup> Centre for Risk Analysis, 2023. Socioeconomic Survey. Downloaded from the following link <https://cra-sa.com/products/socio-economic-survey/2023>.

<sup>23</sup> COSATU, 2024. Concept Note on Unity of the Workers and Recruitment strategy. Unpublished.

of addressing the functioning of the Joint Mandate Committee (JMC) in the public service and the implementation of the necessary support mechanism for the private sector unions in line with the resolution of the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress. However, ultimately it is the strength of the unions at the workplace that makes the difference and therefore all affiliates ought to get back to building and strengthening workplace organisation.

### **Current and future political challenges**

From its founding in 1985, COSATU always had some underlying ideological and political dissensions within its fold, although its adherence to Marxism-Leninism, political alignment and identity as a component of the congress movement and its overall class-orientation have been hegemonic and unassailable. Typically, the tendencies that have been embedded within COSATU and that also sought to challenge this hegemony have been various stripes of the ultra-left, as elements and versions of Trotskyism or Syndicalism and others.

It is safe to conclude that there is no longer an internally embedded and viable ultra-left tendency in the midst of the abiding hegemony of COSATU's historical ideological and political orientations. At the same time, given the prevailing political environment, including the weaknesses of each of the Alliance components as well as the unevenness and lack of systematic ideological education within the federation, it is difficult to safely conclude that there is a sufficiently shared ideological outlook across the federation at this juncture. There is definitely a semblance of an underlying ideological divergence as manifested during the debate on the international affiliation to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> congresses in the early 2000s and at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2022 on the political resolution pertaining to the SACP and elections. In fact, to this day COSATU is still subject to litigation by its own affiliate over that political resolution and since then the same affiliate has been working against the federation in aligning itself with the right-wing unions in the public service. It would be difficult to even formulate an appropriate approach and task over such a sensitive matter that is not acknowledged and may even be denied as ideologically related.

As stated in the foregoing, our overarching strategic organisational and political task in the present conjuncture is to build a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and the poor. This is a long-held objective in keeping with one of the key political tasks identified in SARS, i.e. to build 'a powerful, class conscious trade union movement – beyond COSATU'. Naturally, our socialist axis in the SACP and COSATU would constitute the flywheel to catalyse the creations of such a movement. At the same time the ongoing collaboration between COSATU and SAFTU in mobilising against the austerity budgets in February and around the 7 October on the World Day for Decent Work is essential in advancing the course of enhancing consciousness and solidarity amongst the organised workers and in pursuit of unity. The unity of the organised workers is more than ever paramount and sacrosanct.

However, the workers on their own, separated from the broader working class, would not be able to build the necessary capacity for such a powerful socialist movement. South Africa is facing the deepening crisis of the mutually reinforcing high employment and poverty rates. Even the NMW is actually well below the poverty line, hence more than 20% of South Africans are food insecure and one in four children are stunted due to malnutrition. This underlines the strategic importance of building working-class and popular power in our proletarian communities through the SACP VDBs and COSATU locals.

In the short to medium term, the socialist axis bears the responsibility of initiating sectoral coalitions with other organisations in the fight against austerity, the privatisation of public infrastructure, corruption and the Neoliberal governance system as part of building a Left Popular Front. These can be around healthcare, education, social security, land, housing, water, electricity, etc. The fulfilment and realisation

of these tasks must position the working class to assert its own independent voice and for the SACP as the socialist vanguard to independently and in alliance with other radical and progressive forces to strategically challenge for political power at the local government level in 2026 and at the provincial and national levels beyond 2026.

COSATU's 14th COSATU Congress reaffirmed the conclusion that the current Neoliberal trajectory embarked upon by the ANC as a ruling party represents a departure from the radical perspective of the NDR geared at realising the vision of the Freedom Charter. In fact, the outcomes of the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of the SACP and COSATU's 14<sup>th</sup> COSATU Congress are complementary. The following is a summary of the strategic outlook and tasks that the federation has set out for itself in this conjuncture:

1. In the immediate period, a key political task is to resist the deepening of the Neoliberal trajectory and to continue to fight for an alternative developmental path around the perspective of the Developmental State. This means that the federation must continue to resist and oppose the unfolding offensive on collective bargaining, pay-cuts and widening wage-gap in the public and private sector, campaign against the current wave of austerity - budget-cuts on public and municipal services and fight against corruption and for accountability.
2. Recognising the reformist limitations inherent in this alternative developmental path, at the same time the federation resolved to combine this immediate strategic posture with anti-capitalist agitation and ideological offensive. This means that there must be a strong critique of Neoliberalism that is combined with practical campaigns on issues and demands that place socialist oriented solutions at the centre and thus challenging the capitalist logic and the system itself.

To practically pursue this agenda, the 14<sup>th</sup> COSATU Congress adopted five elements laying out the immediate to medium-term integrated organisational and political strategy, as follows:

1. Building and strengthening COSATU and its affiliates at the workplace.
  2. Building unity in action with other unions and federations.
  3. Building and strengthening the socialist axis.
  4. Building campaigns with mass-based organisations and progressive NGOs; and
  5. Building and fighting for the renewal of the ANC.
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## Chapter 6: Social transformation, including health and education sectors and community struggles – with proposals for a way forward under current circumstances

The past thirty years have seen successive ANC-led governments put in place significant, if sporadic, elements of social transformation which have undoubtedly changed the lives of many of the historically disadvantaged members of the working class for the better.

To borrow from the introduction to ANC Elections Manifesto in 2024:

Since the historic democratic transition to democracy in 1994, South Africa has made progress towards a more inclusive and equitable society. Centuries of colonial and apartheid rule ended, and a new South Africa was established founded on a progressive constitutional democracy with equal freedoms and rights

for all. Today, we have vibrant democratic institutions, a free media, an active civil society, regular, free and fair elections.

There is free health care to pregnant women and children under six, free housing for the poor, and substantial roll-out of water, sanitation, electricity to those previously excluded. Since 2004 (*albeit* only after vigorous civil society struggles and litigation spearheaded by the Treatment Action Campaign) the South African government has rolled out free antiretroviral therapy at public health care facilities nationwide, making a huge difference to mortality of young people. Also the protection of workers' rights and a focus on the rights of women, youth, the LGBTI+ community, persons with disability, children and older persons.

We now have vastly improved access to education and health, transforming the lives of millions of South Africans. South Africans are more educated, empowered and healthier than they were under apartheid. From pre-schools to schools, colleges and universities, there has been a marked increase in people who are attending public non-racial educational institutions, many of which are fee-free for the majority of learners.

These elements of social transformation were implemented at different times by the ANC majority ruling party, which has also been increasingly embracing fiscal austerity as its macro-economic framework. So, predictably, the demands for the continuation of the social transformation so badly needed by the poor and the working classes soon found themselves heading into a collision course with this increasingly entrenched neo-liberal macro-economic framework.

Internal developments in the trade union movement which led to a split on the COSATU and the establishment of the powerful rival South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) in 2017, left workers with a fragmented trade union movement whose collective capacity to drive bottom-up processes of social transformation had been substantially diminished.

The SACP had relied on access to state power through the tripartite Alliance with COSATU and the ANC as the majority ruling party, for the implementation of the abovementioned elements of social transformation. However, and partly as a result of the abovementioned developments during the 30 years that the ANC has been the majority ruling party, the Alliance has not succeeded in being an effective sustained pathway for the implementation of the SACP's visions for a path to Socialism. Hence it became necessary to develop a revolutionary programme for the reconfiguration of the Alliance, to render it more fit for this purpose. But in the final analysis, buy-in to the SACP's strategy for reconfiguration by the Alliance partners has been less than enthusiastic and not really materialised.

Long-standing structural demands for social transformation, whose implementation has been held back by resistance from the proponents of fiscal austerity including those in the leadership of the ruling party, have included the following:

- NHI (National Health Insurance)
- Universal Basic Income Guarantee (UBIG) or Basic Income Grant (BIG)

During all this time, working-class communities frustrated by the slow pace of social transformation have been regularly taking to the streets to demand the following:

- The right to work for all – beginning with the massive expansion of public employment programmes: where the work is not just temporary, but ongoing; where we care for infrastructure that makes our communities cleaner and safer places to live; where collective work rebuilds social cohesion and overcomes the huge despair and sense of alienation amongst millions of unemployed youth; where public employment work is productive and addresses the crises of social reproduction and poverty. This must include an expansion of public employment in the caring economy, in early childhood learning, in the provision of collective food gardens and food kitchens, in sustaining places of safety for women and children.
- Quality public services, including access to water, electricity, transport, safety and security.
- Effective and inclusive implementation of the township and village economy and the District Development Model, ensuring that these programmes impact positively on the lives of the working-class and poor.
- NO! to corruption.
- NO! to crime, extortion, drugs and substance abuse, GBV, stock-theft, human trafficking.

### 30-year wake-up call

The 2024 national elections after 30 years of ANC majority rule was the occasion where the South African people delivered their message loudly and clearly through the ballot box, forcing the entire political establishment to finally pay attention. In the KwaZulu-Natal province, where the trouncing of the ANC was particularly severe, the shock and trauma of it all was aptly captured and simply characterised as a “bad dream” (*iphuph’ elibi*). This was the moment for the ANC to face what has happened to liberation movements through the ages – somehow always catching them by surprise, no matter how familiar they are with the history of other liberation movements!

The loss of majority support forced the ANC to rapidly adapt. A senior ANC leader<sup>24</sup> wrote, reflecting on the writing of Mao Zedong on the need to manage the contradictions which arise “*now in an alliance between two parties and now in struggle between them, and even during the periods of alliance where there has been a complicated state of simultaneous alliance and struggle*” as the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) had to do during their strategic alliance with the feudalist Kuomintang to resist Japanese imperialism. She reflected further on the severe 1921 defeat suffered by the newly formed Soviet Union on the economic front, forcing them to “*concede working with their strategic enemy, the capitalists, to rebuild the Soviet Union’s economy, thus adopting the New Economic Plan (NEP)*” which was treated by them as a strategic retreat.

Whether the ANC collectively does regard the current Government of National Unity (GNU) in South Africa as a phase of strategic retreat is not all that clear. However, these important reflections on how some of the historic working-class struggles which did finally lead to significant social transformation, had to navigate these sorts of setbacks on the way, are instructive. And it is indeed crucial not to be side-tracked into pointless searches for electoral collusion or conspiracies as a means to reversing or cancelling difficult election results, and rather focus on looking for the best way(s) of moving forward even

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<sup>24</sup> Mmamaloko Nkhensani Kubayi: “A strategic retreat by the ANC to advance its cause” in Sunday Times, 18 August 2024

if this means changing course either permanently or temporarily in order to further progressive transformation.

### **What is to be done by SACP?**

After waking up from that bad dream in May 2024, we found in discussions in SACP structures that we shared widespread recognition that we had indeed seen the writing on the wall before the elections but had failed to really listen to what our members on the ground had been telling us for some time. Electorally, this means that SACP needs to seize the moment to start preparations for independent participation, as per Resolution 7.1 on the SACP and state and popular power adopted by the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress, which states “*therefore resolved (a) that the SACP must actively contest elections; (b) that the modality through which we contest elections may, or may not be, within the umbrella of a reconfigured Alliance*”, in the local government elections of 2026.

It is also abundantly clear that SACP needs to change and do things differently now, i.e. consciously leaving behind any old business-as-usual approach. Now we have to focus on our independent role, in recognition that we are no longer in alliance with a majority ruling party, acknowledging the fact that we still do not have a reconfigured Alliance. And the fact that we have, for now at least, lost the route to state power that we have had at our disposal over the past 30 years.

This means reviewing the South African Struggle for Socialism adopted by the 15<sup>th</sup> National Congress in July 2022, now with a fresh approach to implementation under current circumstances. One of the most obvious revolutionary tasks facing SACP, which has not yet been taken sufficiently seriously in most of the mainstream plans, is the following:

3.4 *A popular left front (or fronts, or a left popular movement) should emerge out of popular mobilisation and campaigning. It should not be seen as first the cobbling together of a variety of formations at leadership level that variously proclaim themselves “left” or “socialist”, and then only launching a programme of mobilisation and action. The building of a left popular movement must be grounded in a network of active struggle – “feeling the stones to cross the river”.*

Where there is already any sort of left popular front, especially working on any of the SACP’s strategic perspectives and tasks, SACP needs to task representatives to join the existing structures and report on the progress in those campaigns to internal structures of the SACP. This applies to both the following campaigns, which have both reached a significant point of official government recognition, and will need sustained and well-co-ordinated popular left pressure from below to progress to full completion:

- NHI (National Health Insurance)
- Universal Basic Income Guarantee (UBIG) or Basic Income Grant (BIG)

Struggle for progressive alternative to neo-liberalism:  
Building a popular front for a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism could perhaps begin by building coalitions on specific issue campaigns that would require setting out by identifying potential partners and engaging in discussions with these about the content and details of such campaigns. Linked to this must

be the search for ways to improve communication for our broad ideas, including establishing a left podcast or YouTube channel that draws in a variety of anti-capitalist voices on social transformation.<sup>25</sup>

The 15<sup>th</sup> Congress Central Committee created a Residential and Community Struggles (RCS) Workstream under the Party-Building Commission (PBC) tasked with building working-class and popular power in proletarian communities.

The SACP 15<sup>th</sup> National Congress Declaration of July 2022 states that proletarian communities are the historic sites of militant class struggles. However, over the past three decades, they have been ravaged by neoliberalism. The RCS workstream is charged with continuing to deepen our campaigns in working-class communities to win the demands of social transformation and has accordingly started to apply its efforts to the building of a left popular movement in line with Clause 3.4 of the South African Struggle for Socialism. The re-purposing of the Red Brigades that were on the ground in the provinces for the elections to move over to social transformation initiatives and campaign tasks, is under discussion in this workstream since July 2024.

Bottom-up community-based initiatives for social transformation:

- Establishing effective networks of community-based co-operatives, including organising community-owned stores and community-owned banking institutions, savings and burial societies.
  - Building a solidarity economy involving workers in the informal economy and expanded public works programmes, starting by engaging with already existing membership-based organisations (MBOs) of workers in these sectors.
  - Active working-class involvement in institutions of participatory democracy, such as the community policing forums, school governing bodies, neighbourhood watches and street committees.
  - Intensifying community struggles for women's emancipation and against discrimination against women and LGBTI+ community.
  - Strengthening international solidarity and social cohesion between South Africans and non-South-Africans in communities, and countering xenophobic, racial, patriarchal, tribalistic tendencies.
  - Strengthening community-based fight against crime, extortion, drugs and substance abuse, GBV, stock-theft, human trafficking, etcetera.
  - Identification of environmental hotspots, which constitute disasters in the making, particularly in mushrooming informal settlements, challenge the state to do something different, and undertake public political education programme on environmental risks.
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<sup>25</sup> Cde Rob Davies – 2024 draft entitled “*Thirty Years of Struggle for a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism...and proposals for a way forward under current circumstances*”

## Chapter 7: 30 years on – What is to be one in the struggle against patriarchy in general and capitalist patriarchy in particular

### Party constitution and programme on gender equality

The SACP Constitution since 1991, has increasingly made the Marxist-Leninist perspective on the struggle for the social emancipation of women from gender inequality and oppression visible in the principles that guide the SACP and in the clauses that reflect on Party work expected by Party members and Party structures at all levels. In summary, the 2022 Constitution embeds the following:

In clause 4.1.1, we note that the foundations of the principles of our ideology, were laid by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin and enriched by other great revolutionaries in many ways, **including crucially, by those recognising the need for women’s emancipation and gender equality from a class perspective.**

We note that we are in the first place concerned with their indigenous elaboration and application to the concrete realities of our own developing situation. The pages of the Party Programmes, African Communist and Umsebenzi, and Congress documentation give testimony to some of this work in relation to our elaboration of our posture on gender transformation.

The Constitution commits the SACP, as part of working to end the system of capitalist exploitation and establishing a socialist society, through the national democratic revolution, to: **“Eradicate patriarchal relations, and weaken and ultimately destroy the economic, political and social power of the capitalist class through struggle for working class hegemony over society, in particular the ownership and control of the economy and the achievement of a united state of people’s power. In this state, working class interests will be dominant and the economic conditions will be created which make it possible to move towards social emancipation and, eventually, the total abolition of the exploitation of one person by another in both public and private spheres of life; to organise, educate, and advance women within the working class, the poor and rural communities in pursuit of the aims of the SACP; to raise the consciousness of the working class and its allies around the integral and oppressive nature of patriarchal gender relations,”** while also strengthening the revolutionary alliance of all classes and strata whose interests are served by the NDR, and to encourage an ongoing national and international dialogue with all organisations committed to peace, transformation of gender relations, non-racialism, democracy and the preservation of our environment.

To this end, the Party expects every member to study Marxism-Leninism, inclusive of the struggle for gender equality, and endeavour to raise their level of understanding, and expects that in all work and at every level, Party structures and members must ensure that the struggle against patriarchy and for the transformation of gender relations is given due importance, including by the creation of appropriate structures empowered to perform this task. At least one third of all executives of the SACP from branch level to the Central Committee must be women. **As Party structures ensure they are fully participating in the national democratic and socialist struggles, the Constitution obliges them to ensure this includes the struggle for gender equality from a class perspective.**

## Key Causes Of Gender Inequality

Moving from our understanding that national oppression, class exploitation and patriarchy have been inseparably intertwined in South African society, the SACP believes the transformation of social relations/class relations underpins the ability of a progressive state and society to secure the social emancipation of women. Capitalist society not only marginalises women in the workplace and economy, but also expects working class women to bear the brunt of social reproduction and asserts patriarchal ideology to justify and rationalise marginalisation of women in society.

If the process of transformation of social relations is to build a gender equal society, the struggle must prioritise solutions to key causes of gender inequality, which are understood to be:

- Unequal participation of and unequal remuneration for women in **productive work**, whether in the private sector, public sector, socialised sector, informal sector or domestic sector.
- Inadequate recognition of and universal access to support for **reproductive rights** of girls and women.
- Unequal **participation of women in society**, in the institutions of political life in legislatures and political parties, in the judiciary, in the administration, and in social institutions, like schools, universities, sporting and cultural institutions.
- Unequal access by adult woman to the **means, skills and protection to be independent**, to express her views without fear and consequences, and to control her own destiny and decisions.
- Lack of full **democracy and equality in the family**, with entrenched exploitative and unequal gender division of labour within it, where the family is considered a “private matter” where any behaviour can be tolerated
- Girls and women are not ensured **safety** in their homes, in their places of learning, in their workplaces, in their places of sports, culture and entertainment, and in their community, which is often exacerbated for people who have non-heteronormative choice of gender identity and sexual orientation.

## 30 years on – What gains have been made and what is to be done?

Gender Inequality index is used to compare gender inequality across countries. It is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice versa.

- South Africa’s gender inequality index in 1992 was 0,484 and by 2023-24 it improved to 0.401, with the country being 99<sup>th</sup> on the list of 193 countries.
- The Gender Inequality Index 2022 per region, with 0 being the preferred status and 1 being total inequality, places Europe and Central Asia at 0.22; East Asia and Pacific at 0.34; Latin America and Caribbean at 0.39; South Asia at 0.48; Arab States at 0.52; and Africa at 0.56 – the most gender unequal region of the world.
- The WEF Gender Equality Report concludes that “In 2024, gender parity inches slowly forward – the pace of travel is such, however, that full parity remains beyond the reach of another five generations. The journey to parity is longest for the economic and political dimensions of the index, with differing speeds of individual progress threatening to lower overall collective advancement.” This is a flawed projection as it ignores that socialism is the future and with that societal transformation to more socialist states, the scope for gender transformation for the women, including working-class women, becomes significantly more possible and probable.

**Right to productive work and minimum income:** Women’s access to and equality in productive work - jobs, self-employment, social capital – trade unions, organising the unorganised women workers,

organising women workers in the informal economy; rural women's movement

- Although overall poverty levels have declined since 1993, the poverty headcounts for women remain persistently higher than the men's rate nationally. Over the past two decades, close to 10% of employed women were living under the national poverty line. The cost-of-living campaign must include the mobilising and mass political education of working-class women around the struggle for sustainable livelihoods and socialised productive work.
- Women in the rural economy tend to be more vulnerable to poverty than those living in the urban areas, and access to land is a key issue. A higher proportion of women in South Africa reside in the rural areas compared to the share of women in the urban areas. More women are employed in the rural areas than in the urban areas. Women are a significant component of the informal economy workers. Overall, men still have an advantage in employment shares across both rural and urban areas compared to women. Our campaigns for decent work include demands to address the specific marginalisation of working-class women in the productive economy.
- The universal dimension of our campaign for the UBIG draws on the right to every adult in a caring society to be assured of a basic minimum income. The implementation of UBIG provide working class women with an independence in their relationships with men, that enables them to take decisions, to walk away from abuse, and to initiate entrepreneurial activities themselves.
- On average, half of the women in South Africa have bank accounts and have savings in formal financial institutions. Of concern from a working-class perspective is that this also means that half of South African women, the vast majority of whom are probably working-class women, do not have bank accounts or savings in formal financial institutions, thus being vulnerable to moshonisa's. The gains made through the financial sector transformation have significantly improved women's access to banking and hence savings, however in the reinvigorating of the campaign the impact of interest rates, of electricity surcharges, on working-class women must be triggers for mobilising women into the campaign.
- In 2019, women made up 56 per cent of the average labour force in Africa, compared to 73 per cent of men, a gap of 13 per cent which is an advance from the gap of 23 per cent in 1990. The highest employment gap is in North Africa, where the female labour force participation rate was about 22 per cent in 2019, compared to 70 per cent for men. While the North African region has lower gender inequality in education, this does not translate into progress for women in the labour market. Countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia prohibit women from working in certain industries. The work to strengthen progressive unionism in Africa and to organise behind demands for women to be included in productive work and trade unions across the continent must be part of the programme of ALNEF.

**Women and girls reproductive rights** is not just an issue of girls and women's access to health education and health care. It has cultural and ideological dimensions. It requires public infrastructural support. It requires labour relations protection for women workers. The women's reproductive rights campaign unites women in workplace, community, political life, education sector, health sector. A socialist approach to women's reproductive rights is a key enable of equal participation of girls and women in society.

- While South Africa has seen progress in maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates, there are provincial differences that reflect the bantustan history of some provinces, and the average progress obscures the greater risks for working-class mothers and babies. The Party should be integrating public health education and screening into our community development programme, linking with Cuban trained and progressive doctors and healthcare professionals to assist in community-based health programmes. We need "barefoot doctors and nurses" to be ready to serve the community. The trends of women with cancer, diabetes, hypertension, HIV/AIDS must be taken up in localised health care interventions.
- The Party structures along with the relevant unions must also strive to enhance the organisation of

women health workers into progressive trade unions and into the Party. Induction of, and ensure that political education, women as patients, working-class women

- The reproductive rights campaign is integrally linked to the campaign for implementation of the NHI and the delivery of a top-quality public health system.

**Gender Parity and Women's participation in all aspects of society.** The gains that have been made of improving women's representation in South African politics, in the economy, intellectually, socially, organisationally, and peace missions is significant.

- Women's representation in South Africa's National Assembly having increased from 27% in 1994, has dropped from 46 per cent in 2020 to 43 per cent following the May 2024 elections. Women in Cabinet has dropped from 50% in 2019 to 44% and from 46% to 44% of deputy ministers in the same period. In relation to MPLs, the trend increasing from 24% in 1994 to 46% women in 2019 has been reversed back to 38% in 2024.
- Apart from the drop in the proportion of women in the legislatures, the electoral decline of the ANC also means that there are fewer progressive women in legislatures. Only the ANC, EFF and 5 smaller parties have 50% or above representation of women: with the more conservative parties of DA, MKP, IFP not observing the principle of gender parity, and 6 other parties having no women at all.
- The 2024 ANC election manifesto can be assessed based on 8 frequently used indicators: In relation to the quota for women's political participation, this is not explicit in the manifesto but is defined in the ANC constitution rule 6. The ANC manifesto did not address gender as a standalone issue, but rather mainstreamed gender across the manifesto. The manifesto makes a clear commitment to LGBTI+ equality and diversity issues and clearly addresses gender-based violence and femicide (GBV&F). Of concern is that the ANC manifesto does not promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, and issue that the Party has identified as a major campaign. The manifesto does address the importance of laws, policies and practice in relation to gender equality, and does address the economic empowerment of women.
- The percentage of registered voters who are women has remained consistent at just over 55%, and is consistent across all age groups of women, except for women over 70 where the percentage of voters who are women is above 60%.
- However, achieving gender parity does not automatically lead to working-class women's lives being changed for the better, particularly when gender parity become linked to individualised careerism. The Party must continue to invest in the ideological and political development of women Party members, women in our alliance partners and particularly in deployed women cadres. The Party elections work must specifically include voter education aimed specifically to working-class women and ensuring that women voters understand how to use their voting power to advance the demands of working-class women.
- In African parliamentary bodies, women hold an average of 24 per cent of seats, while their presence in top executive roles is a meagre 7 per cent. Despite local governments being perceived as entry points for women in politics, only 21 per cent of African council positions are held by women. Some African countries have made progress – Rwanda, Namibia, South Africa and Senegal rank among the top 10 nations globally for female representation in their parliaments, albeit that the recent SA election results have seen a decline in the participation of women in the legislatures.

**Means, skills and protection to be independent, to express her views without fear and consequences, and to control her own destiny and decisions.**

- South Africa maintains near parity in educational attainment, achieving gender parity in educational attainment in 2022. In 2023 was ranked 43rd out of 146 countries with a score of 0.998 / 1.
- Since 2008, girl learners have secured more bachelor-level qualifications in Grade 12 than their male counterparts. However, 40% of all student dropout out before reaching grade 12, and girls make up the vast bulk of this group.

- Programmatically, the Department of Basic Education has introduced several initiatives to combat gender-based violence in schools, offering a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, grounded in human rights principles. These are integrated into the curriculum through subjects such as Life Skills and Life Orientation across all grade levels.
- The share of female enrolments is higher than the male enrolments in all of the Post School Education and Training institutions. In 2019, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) at universities (both public and private) was 1,5, in TVET colleges was 1,4 and at CET colleges 2.2.
- In 2024, women currently hold 71% of all educator roles within ordinary public schools. Women represent 56% of School Management Teams, but only 41% of Principal positions, and 66% of Departmental Heads.
- According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), a gender-sensitive curriculum promotes equal treatment between men and women and between girls and boys, and it encourages them to achieve their full potential. This includes how they interact with learners in and outside the classroom, and how boys and girls are depicted in textbooks. Gender-sensitive attitudes and learning materials promote non-stereotyped images of men and women. This is a goal that goes beyond the universal access to education and is most significant in our transformative programme. Gender in education content has not received the level of attention over the 30 years of democracy that it should have received, despite this being focused on by the Commission on Gender Equality in 2007.
- The African continent has made the most significant progress in reducing gender inequality in education, but girls in sub-Saharan Africa are still the most disadvantaged regarding access to schooling compared to other global regions. A multitude of factors, including widespread child marriage (though on a downward trend), teenage pregnancy, poverty and the social norm of valuing boys over girls, all constrain women's access to education in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The Party must work closely in campaigns with the PYA and in particular the YCLSA to ensure that the access of girls and women to education is sustained, and that the gender equality, anti-patriarchal content of curricula is deepened. As the Party moves to establish private schools, the educational material on socialist alternatives to patriarchal society must be developed.

**Double day and unpaid labour in the family and community;** The role that working class women are obliged to play in capitalist society as part of capital keeping wages low and profits high, obliges working class women to enter the wage economy, and to undertake unpaid labour in both the home and the community. Policy on family – do we have progressive policy on family in SA?

- The Party must mobilise women around these responsibilities and ensure public education about alternatives to what is often portrayed by capitalist ideology, culture and religion to be the “natural role of women”. Unpaid care work is currently an ‘invisible’ dimension of economic life and, therefore, not recognised in public policy. The Party must make this visible!
- The impact of climate change and the more intense and more frequent natural disasters impact directly on working class women and increase the burden that they carry of looking after the family and community. The Party must be agile and responsive to all community disasters mobilising material and social support for those whose lives are disrupted. It is the Party's role to advance community and women's understanding of climate change as an outcome of the destructive relationship between capitalist accumulation and nature.
- The legislative amendments to outlaw child marriage in South Africa must become an integral part of the Party programme, so that the extent of child wives, and worse child widows can be reversed, and girls right to childhood is protected.
- Party member must ensure that in our own families we ensure that divisions of labour are non-exploitative and not driven by patriarchal attitudes and beliefs.
- The effects of climate change further compound gender inequities. Women across the African continent, constrained by their societal roles, economic status, and restricted resource accessibility, find themselves disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

**Women, girls and LGBTQIA+ right to be safe:** The constitution provision to live without fear is far from being realised for South African women, girls and the LGBTQIA+ community. While gender-based violence is more heinous than inter-personal violence between for example two young men, as GBV involves a dimension of violence against someone deemed to be less powerful than the perpetrator, the level of intra-personal violence and killing in South Africa is completely unacceptable and reflects as dysfunctional society, in which human solidarity is undermined.

- The Party launched a Red Card to GBV&F in 2017, and this campaign must be rooted in communities, in workplace organisation, in rural and urban areas, in places of education and in our homes.
- Cosatu and the Party have identified this as a joint campaign area, and it must be taken down to every branch, District and Cosatu local.
- The Party perspective has also been that the scourge of GBV&F cannot be turned around unless the boy child and men are mobilised around this issue and take a strong stand that no woman can be beaten, raped, or killed.
- The Party and Cosatu should be joining any existing fronts against GBV&F and where there are no fronts focused on this area of struggle, we should be taking the lead to bring together the broadest possible front of organisations.
- The conflict that bedevils particular regions of the African continent has significant impact on women. While we have seen women taking the lead in standing up against authoritarian rule, we have also seen women raped, killed and starved through conflict related famine. Extended conflict and war roll back any gains in equality of women, let alone that in the actual conflict women are often direct targets of violence.

#### **Mobilising women into our campaigns and taking gender equality as a central socialist demand**

- PLFs must include mobilisation of women, but also formation of women's left popular fronts on key issues that impact directly on women.
- Building a socialist movement of the workers and the poor must include building a left women's movement that is rooted in the workplace, the community, the educational institutions, the political arena and is integral to popular left front mobilisation.
- The WEF Gender Equality Report analysis and conclusions raise a significant challenge to African Left and Marxist feminists, requiring consideration of the role of the left in Africa on gender transformation and hence on the role of ALNEF, among others. ALNEF role in promotion of the struggle for gender equality in the continent, and through the institutions of Africa in the world.

## **Chapter 8: The international situation and solidarity**

*Thirty Years of Struggle for a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism ... and proposals for a way forward under current circumstances*

The SACP is committed to promoting proletarian internationalism and fostering solidarity among workers in South Africa and worldwide. Proletarian internationalism, a core tenet of Marxist-Leninist ideology, emphasises that capitalist exploitation operates on a global scale, transcending geographical borders. Thirty years into democracy, it is imperative to reflect on the international, continental and domestic balance of forces in order to assess whether any tactical changes in our approach to international relations are required.

## **International context**

The imperialist stage of capitalism, characterised by concentrated social injustices, environmental degradation, and militarism leading to devastating wars, marks the final phase of capitalism. Disrupted supply chains due to pandemics, widespread poverty, inequality and unemployment further complicate the international landscape, particularly in the global South. Instability, environmental damage resulting from capitalist exploitation of natural resources, and the impact of climate change-induced natural disasters contribute to this complex situation.

The destructive conflicts driven by capitalism, resulting in the loss of lives and infrastructure, and environmental degradation, stem from the relentless pursuit of the extraction of profit from the labour of working people, emphasising the urgent need to address these systemic issues.

Historical conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the Korean War, the Gulf War, the Bosnian War, and the Western invasion of Iraq have contributed to global inflation. The recent Russian special operation in Ukraine has further escalated inflation due to the Western sanctions imposed on Russia, leading to a global rise in prices and the exacerbation of poverty, especially in the global South.

Europe is currently facing a critical juncture. The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) has not achieved the desired success. Peripheral economies are experiencing profound crises, while those at the core show limited advancement. The single currency has effectively transformed into a tool for advancing a mercantilist economic policy through wage restraint and implementing structural reforms supported by other economies at the heart of the EMU. The impact of the reforms is economic stagnation, increased poverty, and higher unemployment rates giving rise to a new populism – a phenomenon where anti-establishment, nationalist, and populist values combine in a reaction against economic recession, the migration crisis, and the cultural shifts brought by globalism.

The global situation for working class and proletariat communities continues to be critical. An estimated 712 million people worldwide live in extreme poverty, with Sub-Saharan Africa having the highest rate of children living in extreme poverty at 40% (World Bank, 2022). The United Nations (2023) also indicates that between 691 and 783 million people face hunger, with 2.4 billion people experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity and 900 million facing severe food insecurity. A staggering 3.1 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet.

The struggle against exploitation, oppression, and imperialism remains as critical as ever. The imperialists' strategies have faced resistance from nations and international groups such as the Non-Aligned Movement, BRICS, and progressive global civil society in the northern and southern hemispheres.

The past ten years have seen a decline in US hegemony and increasing multipolarity in the international system. In the aftermath of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine, there has been a revival of the Cold War rhetoric of a bipolar world with 'the West against the rest'. In this case, the West is broadly those states aligned with US foreign policy and interests, while the rest are broadly aligned with China and/or Russia.

However, the world has gradually been moving to a multipolar configuration since the financial crisis in 2008, with power increasingly diffused among different global actors. China has emerged as a major economic and political power to rival the US's superpower status, regional organisations like the European Union (EU) and informal international organisations (IOs) like the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are exerting their power in a variety of international issues, though multinational corporations continue to amass power capabilities that rival those of states.

The dynamism in the global political landscape is captured in President Vladimir Putin's speech at the meeting with senior staff of the Russian Foreign Ministry on 14 June 2024.

Global politics, the economy, and technological competition will never be the same as before. More countries are striving to strengthen their sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and national and cultural identities. The countries of the Global South and East are gaining prominence, and the role of Africa and Latin America is growing ... This new political and economic reality now serves as the foundation for the emerging multipolar and multilateral world order, and this is an inevitable process.

### **Pan-Africanism**

During colonialism and apartheid, the leaders of South Africa's white minority regime aligned the country with the West and positioned it as a protector of Western interests in Africa. Apartheid South Africa had strong economic and military ties with Western countries, even as its racist politics diverged with the post-Second World War consensus on human rights.

Foreign policy under apartheid was reactionary, aimed at justifying and protecting white minority rule and countering isolation. This was done by nurturing historical ties with the West to avoid isolation and sanctions, military intervention in neighbouring states to combat the threat of Soviet influence in Southern Africa and adopting a defensive position in multilateral institutions like the UN and the Commonwealth. By the time Nelson Mandela was released from prison in February 1990, apartheid South Africa was considered an international pariah. With the end of apartheid and the advent of non-racial democracy, South Africa transformed from an international pariah to a respected member of the international community.

South Africa remains committed to the principles of solidarity; human rights; anti-colonialism; anti-imperialism; African unity; Pan-Africanism; and contribution towards a stronger capable SADC and the African Union (AU). Using these principles, South Africa must be able to identify partners to collaborate in the pursuit of its foreign policy.

The history of the South African working class is the history of the African reality – shaped by colonial dispossession and systemic exclusion of the black majority, workers in particular. According to Outreach International (4th July 2024), 'Using the poverty line of \$1.90 per day, Africa's extreme poverty rate was recently estimated to be about 35.5%. This rate is 6.8 times higher than the average for the rest of the world'. This is further confirmed by Statista, earlier report that said, 'In 2024 around 429 million people in Africa were living in extreme poverty'.

This is the African story, a story of historic dispossession that continues to shape patterns of economic and social exclusion for the overwhelming majority of the people, the working class in particular. This picture gets worse as you disaggregate the data to reflect women, youth and people with disabilities.

This is no accident; it's the harsh reality of the persisting demographics of economic exclusion designed by the colonial and apartheid systems, which are also a result of insufficient decisiveness to transform it and ensure the inclusion of the vast majority of our people.

Thus, the fight against capitalism and imperialism in Africa is particularly challenging, with the continent enduring ruthless exploitation and domination by imperialist powers. The relentless extraction of natural resources by foreign corporations, sometimes in collaboration with corrupt local authorities, has perpetuated poverty in Africa, and reduced its control over its resources.

Imperialism in Africa has also led to political instability, as imperialist powers have propped up oppressive regimes, in some countries, to further their interests. This has resulted in a cycle of tyranny, violence, and a deprivation of fundamental human rights for the people of Africa.

This harsh reality is deeply reflected in the current situation within South Africa itself. South Africa has the highest income inequality between the rich and the poor. Income distribution is skewed towards the richest 20% of the population. According to the most recent data, South Africa has the highest income inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of around 0.67.

The South African economy, like the bulk of the global economies, particularly those of the global south, is undergoing challenges resulting in the persisting crises of poverty, inequalities and unemployment. This results from the remnants of apartheid and insufficient transformation towards inclusive growth and industrialisation. The challenges of insufficient power supply, persisting racial and gender inequalities, as well as underdevelopment issues, compound the difficulties facing the majority of the working class in South Africa.

The struggle against apartheid and colonialism in South Africa was waged simultaneously with the struggle for decent work, rights of workers to collective bargaining and a comprehensive social wage for better incomes for all workers. These struggles we shall always defend jealously and link them to our continuous struggle against neo-colonialism and neoliberalism. Our daily struggles are about ending massive concentration of poverty for the majority on the one end, and the massive concentration of wealth for a few, on the other end.

This reality applies to South Africa as it does to the current global economy because capitalism inherently produces and reproduces inequalities of uneven development. Unless we act to regulate the market and unequal access to opportunities and needs, we remain in a time bomb of a global war against hunger and poverty by the working class and the poor.

South Africa is not oblivious to the existence of other foreign powers who were/are influential on the continent, where the USA, French, Gulf countries, and Europe exercise significant influence over certain African governments.

Investment is key to propel Africa's development and to attain the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, global crises have widened the African continent's sustainable financing gap. Africa needs an extra USD 1.6 trillion by 2030 – USD 194 billion annually – to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The sustainable financing gap can be bridged: it is equivalent to less than 0.2% of the value of global financial assets, or 10.5% of the African-held financial assets (Africa's development dynamics, 2023).

Within the geo-political spheres, China's presence on the continent has not only rattled the western super-powers' economic influence but also created ample policy space for African countries. This shift could solidify a multipolar era, offering new opportunities for African development.

The US Strategy Towards sub-Saharan Africa, which was announced in South Africa in August 2022, by Secretary of State Blinken, identifies the region as critical to advancing the global priorities of the US and seeks to advance and elevate Africa's voice on the most critical global issues. The Strategy identifies four key objectives, viz: (a) Foster Openness and Open Societies; (b) Deliver Democratic and Security Dividends; (c) Advance Pandemic Recovery and Economic Opportunity; and (d) Support Conservation, Climate Adaptation, and a Just Energy Transition. Kenya has been successfully co-opted, and most

African countries participated in the US-Africa Command (Africom) Defence Conference held in Botswana at the end of June.

South Africa's status as an AGOA-beneficiary country has come under threat by the US Congress due to the country's perceived close ties with Russia and China. In addition, there is growing doubt in Congress about South Africa's stated non-aligned stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This issue was sharply raised by a visiting US Congressional delegation, in February 2023, with reference to the visit to South Africa, in December 2022, by the sanctioned Russian vessel, Lady R and the timing of the joint military exercises with Russia and China, which was viewed as being inappropriate and insensitive as the maritime exercises took place on the eve of the anniversary of the conflict in Ukraine. In addition, South Africa's positioning in the current geopolitical contestation for global political and economic influence by the superpowers, (including its membership of BRICS) as a counterweight to the liberal international world order dominated by the US and its allies, is frowned upon by some members of Congress who are the view that South Africa should be punished by expelling it from AGOA.

France still continues to control the trade and currency of its former colonies with about 65% of foreign reserves obligated to be kept and under the control of French Treasury. The presence of the country's trojan companies such as Total Energies, is not only in francophone countries but already holding lucrative contracts elsewhere on the continent. As it appears, maintenance of economic domination also manifests into political domination. However, all is not rosy for France and a shift is beginning to occur. The convening of the Paris Summit in May 2021 showed that France was desperate to (re)assert its influence. There are African governments who believe that the presence of France in their respective economies over the centuries has not altered its underdevelopment status, hence, investments are being sought elsewhere. The fact that Rwanda introduced English as one of the official languages shows that there are francophone countries prepared to break away from France's influence. In June 2022, we saw Gabon and Togo taking up Commonwealth membership. This follows Rwanda having assumed Chairpersonship of this organisation from 2022. These countries are beginning to open up their society and, by extension, their co-operation for development to a larger global community compared to a limited French world.

During the March 2022 vote at the UN General Assembly on the Russian-Ukraine war, several African countries demonstrated a newfound independence in their decision-making. They voted seemingly without the influence of France, a sign that despite its economic stronghold, the political grip is beginning to wane. This shift suggests that francophone Africa is increasingly charting its own destiny.

Israel has been able to increasingly gain partners from the African continent in the 2010s. Countries such as Senegal and Chad had altered their position on the Israel-Palestine conflict in favour of Israel. The decision by the AU Commission Chair, Moussa Faki Mahamat, to grant in 2021 Israel an observer status to the AU has shown clearly the support the latter has on the continent. A majority of African countries had expressed their willingness to endorse the action by the AU Commission Chair despite strong objections from South Africa and others.

### **Our response**

We affirm our 15<sup>th</sup> National Congress resolutions with regard to specific expressions of international solidarity.

### ***Russia, China and Korea***

Today, Russia stands – alongside China – as a leading global player in the social, economic, and political arenas. However, the Euro-Atlantic ruling class is unwilling to accept a diminished status causing conflict and wars that are adversely impacting on development across the world.

With regards to Russia, the SACP recognises the right of the people of the Donbas region to self-determination and the right of Russia to defend its territorial integrity. Accordingly, we condemn the weaponisation of unilateral coercive measures against Russia and the continued supply of military support by the West to Ukraine. We further reiterate our call for an urgent end to the NATO-induced proxy war in the Ukraine.

The SACP also notes, with concern, the provocative stance of the US and its allies and its efforts to undermine the one-China policy. We condemn this interference in China's domestic affairs and the undermining of its sovereignty.

Likewise, the SACP notes the continued efforts by the US to undermine the Korean unification process. We strongly oppose the unprecedented and cruel sanctions against the DPRK and demand that the sanctions be removed immediately.

### ***Palestine***

We express our solidarity with the Palestinians for their right to an independent state and stand against the Israeli apartheid occupation. We strongly condemn the genocide currently taking place in Gaza and the West Bank and the aggression being exercised in the region by apartheid Israel, its US partners and their allies. In this regard we call for an end to hostilities, including in the broader West Asian region, and the opening up of all corridors to allow for the provision of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, we call on our government to accelerate the isolation of Israel by closing its embassy in South Africa and penalising companies that continue to trade with the apartheid Zionist regime.

### ***Cuba***

We express solidarity with Cuba against the genocidal American blockade. The SACP fully supports the struggles of communists whose independent activities are sanctioned by repressive laws and witch-hunts and rejects the use of coercive unilateral measures as a weapon of war. We call on the government to undertake concrete programmes of economic solidarity with the people of Cuba and commit to support the implementation of resolutions agreed to at the Africa-Cuba Solidarity Conference held in Mpumalanga in January 2024. We further wish to confirm our support for the re-launch of FOCUS.

### ***Venezuela***

The SACP condemns the financial, diplomatic, economic and political persecution, sabotage and sanctions by the USA against Venezuela and undertakes to increase our efforts to expose such tactics with the ultimate aim to end such measures. We demand and will continue to mobilise for the lifting of sanctions by the USA that are directly affecting the Venezuelan people and for the return of the gold seized by the UK and all other companies and resources that have been illegally expropriated at the cost of the working-class people of Venezuela.

### ***ALNEF***

Imperialism's footprint on the continent continues to expand. To counter this expansion, the SACP reaffirms its commitment to reactivate the Africa Left Network Forum. In this regard we will, particularly, emphasise the plights of the people in Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Western Sahara, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo and develop dedicated programmes towards meaningful changes.

### **Conclusion**

While appreciating developments at a multilateral level, the working class, youth, women, and intellectuals must escalate their roles in this battle. It is the duty of communists to educate and mobilise

these segments of society, under the leadership of the working class, for the cause of peace, socialism, and the social and democratic rights of workers and the general populace.

When effectively mobilised, the youth, women, and progressive intellectuals are not just participants but key players in the struggle against the dominance of the capitalist and imperialist system. The vitality, creativity, and determination of young people, the unique perspective of women in the fight for equality, and the critical thinking and analytical skills of intellectuals can all contribute to a deeper understanding of injustices perpetuated by the capitalist system, thus empowering them to contribute to the struggle.

The current global developments on the international stage are a significant concern; however, these tensions and contradictions are inevitable in societal progression. According to Karl Marx, philosophers have traditionally focused on interpreting the world, but the fundamental objective is to change it. It is noteworthy that, as the old foundations are crumbling, new frameworks are already in the process of being developed. The establishment of an alternative global order is underway, and the SACP is actively involved in this transformative and ongoing process.

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