



Bua Komanisi

Volume 15, No.1, March 2026

**Shaping the future of
Alliance reconfiguration:
an SACP perspective
beyond the 'Crossroads'
polemic**



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Shaping the future of Alliance reconfiguration: an SACP perspective beyond the ‘Crossroads’ polemic

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General Secretary of the South African Communist Party

Introduction

There are two publicly circulated documents driving the hostile polemic against the South African Communist Party (SACP). The papers’ opposition to the reconfiguration of the Alliance serves as the entry point or launch pad. An earlier document titled “On the reconfiguration of the South African tripartite alliance of the ANC, the SACP and COSATU (and SANCO)”¹ is dated February 2025. It has no author’s name. The second document but with the added subtitle “At the crossroads in the history of our revolution” is dated August 2025. The latter is the same as the former but includes additional text. One of the sections with the additional text is headed “ANC policy on the Alliance”. It is from page 26 to page 32. Another is headed the “Epilogue”. This is from page 49 to 58.

The names of the authors were perhaps “discovered” later and added to the 58-page extended document. This version has the letters “v6” in its file name. The letters likely stand for the sixth version. This implies that there were five earlier versions in the document’s production process.

The names, described as nominal authors by Jeremy Cronin in his response, “Admit nothing, learn nothing – Mbekism in 2025”, first published by the *African Communist* (3rd Quarter 2025), appear as Geraldine Fraser Moleketi, Mdmiseni Ntuli and Lennox Klaas. However, Thabo Mbeki, South Africa’s deputy president from 1994 to 1999, and president of both the ANC and the republic from 1997 to 2007 and 1999 to 2008, respectively, is a well-known principal architect of the crux of the opinions consolidated, expanded on in and propagated by the document. It is known in one word from its added subtitle as the “Crossroads” since the third quarter 2025 issue of the *African Communist*.

Mbeki advanced the crux in his past speeches and a part of it around the time when the Crossroads was launched in August 2025 and after. He received media coverage, including direct print and internet quotations, and television and radio broadcast clips of what he had to say.² While reflecting his stylistic approach, the Crossroads does

¹ ANC (African National Congress), COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) (and SANCO), the South African National Civic Organisation.

² See, for example, “Mbeki warns of SACP-ANC clash...” by News24 (August 2025). Note the argument separating the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) from the pursuit of socialism and the SACP from the pursuit of the NDR and, based on it, the argument of the “clash” or “confrontation” if the SACP does not follow the separation and if it does not confine itself to some municipalities. What the story does not say is that by resolving to contest elections after many years of engagement within the Alliance in favour of its reconfiguration,



not reference any interviews or other engagements with Mbeki as part of its data-gathering process. It is unfathomable that other names but his appear as its co-authors, if indeed he played any role in its authorship. This is the first sign that there could be something flawed with the Crossroads, which could have unpalatable implications for his impressive calibre. Yes, Mbeki is an honourable and eminent person, although by no means does this suggest that he is 100% infallible.

Nevertheless, engaging with the Crossroads is important, regardless of who is its author, including co-authors, due to its implications for the Alliance, the national democratic revolution (NDR) and the NDR's inherent interrelationship with the pursuit of socialism. This response primarily addresses the central issue of Alliance reconfiguration, though it also touches upon some, but not all, of the other issues propagated in the Crossroads. A response to the other issues raised in the Crossroads would require a more extensive word count, while this paper's aim is to be or not significantly beyond half its total page count, including through the footnotes and the reference list.

Alliance reconfiguration: From a long search for the most effective collective organisation and political leadership

The reconfiguration of the Alliance emerged from a long search for the most effective collective organisation and political leadership of the NDR's motive forces and primary constituencies. This call emerged from many years of the need to address contemporary challenges within our hard-won democratic dispensation, adapt in view of new realities and move with the times. The reconfiguration of the Alliance has never been driven by any alleged sinister motives attributed to the SACP by the likes of the Crossroads. Instead, the call emerged to advance the necessary step of strengthening our collective strategic capacity based on a revolutionary programmatic basis. This effort has been grounded in the revolutionary principle of collectivism, aiming to advance, deepen, defend and secure the ultimate success of the NDR. The alleged sinister motive, such as attempts by the Communist Party at capturing the ANC, exist only in the minds of the Crossroads and their likes who spread the scaremongering against the necessity of Alliance reconfiguration.

As shall be shown, all Alliance partners without exception agreed on the necessity of Alliance reconfiguration. To give effect to this, in practice, the Alliance partners engaged in a structured process. This culminated in a common Alliance reconfiguration document. An appreciation of this historical fact, as well as the content of the common Alliance document, which reflects a shared perspective, is glaringly absent in the Crossroads. Both this omission and the isolation of, and attacks on the SACP driven by the Crossroads to denounce the reconfiguration expose its factional

the SACP was left with limited options, if any, but to exercise the right it has reserved for the past 30 years, since universal suffrage in 1994. The SACP has made it clear that its resolution is to contest elections, not the ANC, which it has backed in every election in the past 30 years. To appreciate this point, one needs to understand that there is mutually reinforcing interrelationship between the NDR and the pursuit of socialism. In this correct understanding, as opposed to the misconception separating the NDR from the pursuit of socialism and the SACP from the pursuit of the NDR, there is no basis for such a "clash" or "confrontation". Besides, elections in our country are not private property owned by any single party. The SACP exercising its hard-won right to participate in elections directly under its own banner or other tactical flexibility alternatives does not amount to challenging any such party, if one ever exists, but rather affirms that elections, a Freedom Charter right allowing everyone to participate freely, are, along with other freedoms enshrined in the charter, a hard-won victory of our collective struggle. Under the conditions of these rights and freedoms, no one's participation in elections should be a cause for another to respond with a "clash" or "confrontation", as this is intolerant, against the Freedom Charter and, more broadly, the "D" for *democratic*, from the founding noun *democracy*, in the NDR.



bias. A part of this, as a critical reading of the Crossroads reveals, appears to stem from old grudges and a lack of *self-reflection*, *self-introspection* and *constructive self-criticism*, as well as a tendency to view situations one-sidedly and partially rather than as a whole. Before concluding on this score, it is critical to highlight some key point about the ANC in particular.

The political report delivered by ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa to its 55th National Conference in December 2022 gave due consideration to the outcome of the Alliance reconfiguration engagement process. He was leading the entire National Executive Committee, the ANC's principal decision-making body between its national conferences. The report set out three key points about the reconfiguration of the Alliance: (1) "The renewal of the ANC will be incomplete without the renewal of our entire movement, including how we deal with the issue of the reconfiguration of the Alliance, the core of the movement"; (2) "The matter of reconfiguration should be seen as leading to improving Alliance relations at the national, provincial, regional and local level; and (3) "...at the heart of this process of improving relations in the Alliance lies the imperative to strengthen the Alliance and build its capacity to achieve its historical mission – to drive and complete our shared strategy, the National Democratic Revolution" (NDR). The report went further, being frank, to state that the ANC "must recognise that there have been weaknesses, lapses and shortcomings in how we have managed this relationship and how we have approached our common tasks and responsibilities". It also acknowledged the tensions that arose within the Alliance, attributing a part of the tensions to "our inability to engage effectively and regularly on key issues".

Also note, above, that, unlike the Crossroads, the ANC 55th National Conference political report neither privatises the NDR to, nor does it regard it as the private property of the ANC. Instead, the political report correctly recognises the NDR as the historical mission of the Alliance. That is, the NDR is a shared historical mission of the Alliance partners. The points highlighted from the political report delivered to the conference by the president of the ANC, Ramaphosa, were also an outcome of a process in which the leadership of the ANC engaged as mandated by its previous, 54th National Conference when it discussed the reconfiguration of the Alliance. The conference resolved, among others, that the ANC "leadership must engage in a humble and listening way with our allies and find constructive ways of resolving current differences". This approach contributed to the process of engagement that culminated in the common Alliance reconfiguration document as the way forward. Besides the Crossroads being ignorant of, or turning a blind eye to all this in its "ANC policy on the Alliance" and throughout its text, its hostile polemic towards the SACP via conservative opposition to the reconfiguration of the Alliance stands opposed to the political report. The Crossroads has also placed itself outside the discipline expected of ANC leadership on this same question, as set out by the 54th National Conference of the ANC in the resolution just highlighted.

The polemic and its methodological weaknesses

One of the Crossroads' weaknesses is that it relies too heavily on quotation mining and copy and paste, rather than original writing to offer an accurate account of the texts in long quoted blocks, entire sections or whole documents it reproduced. The Crossroads is emotionally charged rather than demonstrating analytical clear headedness and a balanced literature review in which an author's own words, whether as a single author or as co-authors, also fairly expounds on or, if necessary, engages with the thrust of the material being reviewed and not as a fixed stone but as historically



produced. Based on these observations, the Crossroads will go down in history as a collection of often lengthy block quotations, alongside extensive reproductions of sections or whole of documents or statements, including speeches by former President Mbeki himself.

The Crossroads' propagation of the opinions advanced by Mbeki when he was at the helm of the government and the ANC, and some later ones, particularly those that are either unrelated or have little, if any, relevance to the reconfiguration of the Alliance, stifle its thematic focus. This at times throws it off course, especially when the approach takes precedence over or overshadows the reconfiguration of the Alliance as its intended focus.

Besides, in its approach, especially to the material from the Marxist literature, the Crossroads does not demonstrate good faith engagement with the SACP but instead buries the Party's positions emotively under the weight of the collected block quotations, entire sections or documents it reproduced. These are often followed by inaccurate and decontextualised interpretation to fit not a demonstrably analytical approach but long held arguments of contempt, notably including untenable opinions. The 58-page Crossroads has 91 quotations, of which 78 are block quotations of one paragraph or more, or a full section of the material, if not an entire document.

The Crossroads' approach is also intellectually problematic. Among others, it seeks to convince the reader, but who can only be a naive one in this sense, through the sheer volume of the block quotations. Implicit in this style of work is that the Crossroads paints for the reader an image of an author who has read more widely, especially, but not only, Marxist writings, compared to the target of its hostile polemic. This tactic collapses under scrutiny, however, when its interpretations are revealed as inconsistent with or even jettisoning the thrust of what is quoted while its entry point is to demonstrate the correctness of the quoted material as an authority.

Leave aside the term reconfiguration, for now, the Crossroads does not even attempt to make any contribution to how best the Alliance can organise or be organised effectively to assert its strategic relevance, match words with deeds and make the maximum possible collective impact towards the goals of the NDR. The Marxist writings it quotes, such as those from Karl Marx and Fredric Engels as authorities, were in fact a methodological outcome of the materialist conception of history and dialectics. Their interpretation outside this revolutionary discipline is bound to falter. Rather than offering an accurate characterisation based on constructive criticism, the Crossroads relies on scaremongering and character assassinating labels. Its resort to uncomradely phrases like "arrogant statement", "dishonest behaviour", "surreptitiously", "blatant falsehoods", "strange slogan" and "litany of misdiagnosis", substitutes reasoned political, needless to mention scientific, critique with the emotional accusations.

The scaremongering and emotionally charged labels unintentionally reveal something about the author's or co-authors' character than the accused target. This is compounded by language that frames the SACP, a working-class formation, as a threat, accusing it of seeking to "capture the ANC", of a "posture" that "can only serve the interests of the right-wing forces" or that has "served the purposes of" the so-called "counter-revolution".

The Crossroads represents an antithesis of fraternal disagreement. In its rhetoric it misrepresents a long-standing ally, one that has even suffered attacks for its part in building, campaigning for and defending the ANC, as a sinister fifth column. This is an



ally correctly described by Nelson Mandela in his *Long Walk to Freedom*. It is an ally that established the first networks that played a foundational role in the formation of the liberation army, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), in the early 1960s. The Communist Party is an ally that has selflessly even organised funds for the ANC, in its support for it, as Mandela is on the record outlining at one of its conferences. This support went beyond what Mandela had to say, extending to funding its active campaigning for the ANC and also defending it in elections.

To be sure, differences in engagements can be helpful depending on their substance and how they are presented and managed, among others, with the best out of them harnessed to inform the way forward. For example, one can differ vigorously on programme, tactics, interpretation or options without resorting to portrayals of a long-standing ally as an existential enemy or character assassinating it. A principled critique grounded in incontrovertible evidence would have been far more compelling and constructive for necessary deliberations not only by the Alliance but also by other forces interested in unity of revolutionary purpose.

Resolution on the South African Question and the formation of the Alliance

Although this response does not reproduce every block quotation, section of a document or statement quoted in full in the Crossroads, one block quotation must be included to highlight some inconsistencies in the Crossroads.

“The Party should pay particular attention to the embryonic national organisations among the natives, such as the African National Congress. The Party, while retaining its full independence, should participate in these organisations, and should seek to broaden and extend their activity. Our aim should be to transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, based upon the trade unions, peasant organisations, etc., developing systematically the leadership of the workers and the Communist Party... The Party should seek to weaken the influence of the native chiefs corrupted by the White bourgeoisie over the existing native tribal organisations by developing peasants’ organisations and spreading among them the influence of the Communist Party. The development of a national-revolutionary movement of the toilers of South Africa against the white bourgeoisie and British imperialism constitutes one of the major tasks of the Communist Party of South Africa.”

This quotation is an extract from the “Resolution on the South African Question” adopted in October 1928 by the Executive Committee of the Communist International (Comintern) following the Comintern’s Sixth World Congress that year and prior engagements with the Communist Party’s delegation from South Africa. Shortly after the adoption of the resolution by the Comintern, the Communist Party in South Africa held its Seventh Annual Conference in Johannesburg on 29 and 31 December 1928 and on 1 and 2 January 1929. This conference ratified the resolution, as correctly stated in the SACP discussion document, “Towards a reconfigured Alliance: The second radical phase of the National Democratic Revolution”, published in *Bua Komanisi* (Vol. 11, No. 1, July 2018).

Related to the above, one of the important points underlined by the SACP discussion document is that meetings, such as but by no means only those of the Comintern and the Communist Party in South Africa that discussed and *formally* adopted the historic



resolution, as did other struggle activities, played a crucial role towards the *formation* of the Alliance. This clarification became necessary as a response to a misinterpretation of OR Tambo's remarks.

Speaking for the ANC as its president at the Communist Party's 63rd anniversary, which was in 1984, Tambo highlighted that "Ours is not merely a paper alliance, created at conference tables and formalised through the signing of documents and representing only an agreement of leaders" but "is a living organism that has grown out of struggle" and was built both "out of our separate and common experiences". To ignore the operative qualifier "not merely" in what Tambo had to say or to render it redundant is to misinterpret him. While still on this score, it is crucial to underline that our Alliance, which Tambo referred to, is an old Alliance. Viewed from a correct historical perspective rather than from the lenses of disconnected and unrelated organisational formation events, the Alliance predates 1990. That year marked yet another phase in its historical development, not its founding, contrary to the Crossroads' claim.

The above brings us to other points about the Alliance's configuration, reconfiguration and evolution in response to changing conditions. It is, however, first necessary to set out the Alliance's theoretical and programmatic origins and principles, the focal point at this stage being the principle of dual membership as outlined in the resolution adopted by the Comintern and the SACP as the Communist Party of South Africa. This is because the Crossroads attacks the link in the SACP discussion document between the resolution and the establishment of the Alliance as the so-called "extraordinary claim" and "obviously false".

The Crossroads argues that the resolution was "solely and exclusively" addressed to the Communist Party as a directive and not "to the ANC for it to use to inform its relations with the" Party. While it is correct that the resolution was addressed to the Communist Party, which discussed and formally ratified it at its Seventh Annual Conference, it was not only about the Party. In fact, it was in advancing the resolution's theoretical guidance and programmatic content, including the Party not merely informing but actively also building its relations with the ANC, that this resolution directly led to the formation of the Alliance.

The resolution explicitly establishes the organising principle of dual membership, which advanced to characterise the Alliance throughout the many years of its existence as one of its pillars. This is obvious in the direction from the resolution: "The Party, while retaining its full independence, should participate in these organisations..." The reference here was to what the resolution characterised as "embryonic national organisations", "such as", as explicitly mentioned, the ANC. Note the plural "organisations" that the resolution used rather than its singular form "organisation" that it did not use here. This made clear that the resolution is not limited to the example given, being the ANC. The same clarity is provided by the meaning of the non-restrictive "such as".

It is through its members that the Communist Party's participation in the organisations referred has taken place through their membership of those organisations in their own right like their other members. To govern this participation in line with the Marxist-Leninist principle of democratic centralism, to ensure unity and cohesion, and to build a trust relationship with its allies, the Communist Party later adopted a clause in its constitution. This prescribed the duty of members active in fraternal organisations or



any sector of the mass movement to set an example of loyalty, hard work and zeal in the performance of their duties within those organisations. It further made clear that those members were within those organisations bound by their discipline and decisions.

The clause underwent some textual adjustments but in principle remained essentially the same for many years. A later addition explicitly prohibited members from creating or participating in caucuses called “SACP caucuses” within such organisations to influence their internal elections or policies. This prohibition made clear that advocacy of SACP policy on any question about the internal affairs of those organisations must be by open public statements by the Party or at joint meetings between the leadership representatives of the Party and those organisations.

The programmatic content of the participation in those organisations, such as the ANC as the example mentioned, was clearly spelled out: “to broaden and extend its activity, with the aim of transforming it into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, based upon the trade unions, peasant organisations, etc...” This made clear another key component of the Alliance, the trade union movement. Before briefly expanding on this point, it is perhaps important to note that, in class terms, the peasants’ organisation envisaged in the resolution did not emerge to, especially, continue up to the present. However, in no way did this mean that the country had no peasants, peasants’ mobilisations or struggles.³ Within our movement, others organised into the ANC, while others also joined the Communist Party. They include those who were proletarianised, converted into wage labourers both when the capitalist system was imposed in our land from Europe as part of its world expansion and enforced by the colonialist and apartheid oppressors and imperialists, among others.

That said, to the extent that the concept “tripartite alliance” refers to an alliance of three organisations, partners or entities, then the resolution in this regard explicitly included the Communist Party, the ANC and the trade union movement. The concept of the progressive trade movement emerged to distinguish it, in our national context, from at least two trade union tendencies: those whose leaders and members supported and defended colonial and apartheid rule and the white privilege that their national group enjoyed while the oppressed workers endured super exploitation, and those that advanced other conservative or even reactionary agendas.

Beyond workplace labour rights and economic struggles, including the fight for equal treatment at work, the progressive trade union movement formed part of the liberation movement. The Resolution on the South African Question, as did the Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions at the Second World Congress of the Comintern in 1920, referred to a “national-revolutionary movement”. This characterisation applied equally to the programmatic content and direction of the movement. When the Comintern adopted it in discussions of the national and colonial question, with colonised and semi-colonised global south countries many of the affected, it did so to distinguish the “national-revolutionary movement” from the reformist bourgeois-democratic tendency opposed in the commission.

As highlighted in the SACP July 2018 discussion document, the reformist bourgeois-democratic tendency in the oppressed nations had, to a certain extent, formed a

³ See, for example, *Govan Mbeki's South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt* first published in 1964.



rapprochement with the exploiting domestic or colonial powers bourgeoisie, or with both. The Indian situation was a classic example discussed in the commission through a supplementary thesis specifically opposed to the bourgeois-democratic tendency. While supporting the national movement, this tendency was in full accord with the imperialist bourgeoisie and joined forces with it against revolutionary movements and classes.

Both independently and as part of the national-revolutionary liberation front, the progressive trade union movement in our country fought against colonial and apartheid oppression and economic exploitation, pursuing liberation and broader social emancipation. For example, the African Mineworkers' strike of 1946 stands as a landmark of the progressive trade union current. Communists such as JB Marks, president of the African Mineworkers' Union from its founding, played a key role in that strike. To be sure, the ANC was also instrumental in the founding of this mineworkers' union.

The activism of the South African Congress of Trade Unions also exemplified the progressive trade union current. Furthermore, the oppressed workers' unions, including those defiantly formed in the 1970s and 1980s, others from mergers of existing ones, continued the progressive trade union current. COSATU, a federation that took up the baton, filling the void left by the South African Congress of Trade Unions after its activists and leaders were banned or exiled, will also go down in history to have taken forward the progressive trade union struggles.

The Resolution on the South African Question is anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, a central programme of the Alliance. To be clear about the NDR. In 1960, delegates representing 81 communist and workers parties, including the SACP, met in Moscow, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This World Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties adopted a statement of key outcomes, with its central thrust including what it conceptualised as the "*national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution*".⁴ in this, just underline, for now, the words "national", "democratic", "revolution". The *anti-imperialist* content of the resolution can *at least* be traced to the theory that exposed imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. This was conceptualised and put forward by Vladimir Lenin. It was first published in 1917. The anti-imperialist content of the resolution can also be traced to the concept "national-revolutionary" adopted by the Comintern at its Second World Congress three years later, in 1920.

The concept of the *national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution* was thereafter first elaborated and adopted in South Africa as the "*national democratic revolution*" (NDR) by the SACP through its programme, "The Road to South African Freedom", in 1962. The programme asserted the Freedom Charter as defining the main aims and lines of the NDR, both articulating and extending the measures set out for the *national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution* in the communist and workers' parties' statement to reflect South Africa's specific historical conditions. This was very much in pursuit of democratic majority rule defined by the *two-republics thesis* in the Resolution on the South African Question: the "independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic" with equal rights for people of all races.

One of the useful ways to understand the interrelationship between the NDR and the pursuit of socialism or at least the two-republics thesis is to appreciate the relationship

⁴ The emphasis is by this paper.



between the national and class struggle. In this context, it is at least crucial to pay attention to what Joe Slovo in 1998 called the “class content of the national struggle and the national content of the class struggle”⁵. The workers’ and peasants’ republic content of the two-republics thesis refers to a socialist republic.

Going back to 1848, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Marx and Engels, will help to build the understanding from the roots. On this point, it is important to pay attention to this line in the manifesto: “The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.” Yet, while faltering in its reformist revisionism, the Crossroads propagates the separation of the NDR from the pursuit of socialism and the Communist Party from the pursuit of the NDR. It also attacks the SACP strategic slogan “Socialism is the Future: Build it Now” as “strange” while claiming to be an authority on Marxist works by mining block quotations.

While the SACP was the first within the Alliance and in South Africa to conceptualise the *national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution* as the NDR, also putting forward the concept of Colonialism of a Special Type to characterise the country’s colonial situation, both seven years before the ANC adopted its first Strategy and Tactics in 1969 in Morogoro, Tanzania, the Communist Party regarded, and continued to regard, the NDR as a process of struggle, transformation and development for the people, among whom the oppressed and working class form the majority in national and class terms. In no way was the NDR conceptualised from its roots as the private property of any one of the Alliance partners. As a shared historical mission, in Alliance organisational terms, the NDR reflects the convergence of the historical missions of the Alliance partners.⁶

The claim that the NDR or leadership within it timelessly belongs to only one Alliance partner, as if it were preordained, is authoritarian. It also severs the NDR from its conceptual origin and collective contributions that shaped its elaboration in our country’s historical conditions over many years of struggle. Not only does the claim ignore historical evidence but also sows a seed of a destructive intra-Alliance conflict. Among others, such claims and authoritarian practices advanced in the name of NDR leadership have made a non-inconsiderable contribution to the rise of divisions and erosion of political support that severely affected our broader movement. This, rather than the Communist Party, has facilitated the direct handover of power to or its capture by right-wing forces: the movement has already seen this in proportion with the lost support.

If allowed to prevail, the claim will continue the same path. It will turn the NDR into a right-wing, reformist bourgeois-democratic project and lead to the ruin of the Alliance.

⁵ “The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution”

⁶ In the process of developing its elaboration based on South African conditions, the Communist Party identified three principal contradictions that it concluded characterised the South African nation, the class, national and gender contradictions. On this basis, the Party defined the strategic objectives of the NDR as integrating the resolution of these three contradictions, which it concluded were interrelated. In this regard, the struggle to eliminate patriarchy, or patriarchal domination, towards gender equality is very much part of the conceptual framework of the class content of the national struggle and the national content of the class struggle, understood comprehensively. The gender struggle is a key struggle, just as the national and class struggles. In its pursuit, it is, in the same vein, essential to appreciate both the national and class content, just as it is essential to appreciate the gender content of both the national and class struggles.



This is the logical conclusion of its agenda to drive out the Communist Party from NDR and separate the NDR from the pursuit of socialism.⁷ The claim asserts that an Alliance partner must not build a campaign to advance the NDR directly and by extension to deepen and defend it. While the claim's principal target is the Communist Party, by no means will the working-class broadly be left unharmed. This is evident in how the right-wing, reformist neo-liberal policy regime was domesticated and imposed in our country while popular working-class struggles were against it.

The claim is seemingly focused on the political struggle taking place on the electoral front, propagating a highly problematic posture, including a hostile attitude towards the Communist Party. However, in its attempt at compartmentalising the NDR within a single Alliance partner, being the ANC, to turn it and its leadership into that partner's private property, and by narrowing NDR leadership to an organisational form devoid of class content and articulation, especially the role of the working class, the claim applies generally to the pursuit of the NDR on all fronts. The dangerous claim also ignores the fact that all along, when the SACP actively campaigned in elections, reserving its right to contest directly in favour of the ANC within the framework of the Alliance, it did so to advance the NDR.

Authoritarian practices such as unilateralism increasingly undermined the Alliance framework. It is under such practices that, following electoral victories, the background of the Alliance's collective efforts in both campaigning for the ANC and voting for it were undermined to varying degrees. The governments in different spheres were led as "ANC governments", a shift from "ANC-led governments", leading to key decisions taken apart from the Alliance or without consultation with other partners. This is, among others, one of the problems that the call for the reconfiguration of the Alliance to function optimally and in a unifying way emerged to address in the interest of the success of the NDR as our shared historical mission.

There are other problems with the Crossroads, which include its inconsistencies. For example, on the one side the Crossroads rigidly asserts that the Resolution on the South African Question was addressed not to the ANC for it to use to inform its relations with but was "solely and exclusively" addressed to the Communist Party. Based on this rigid assertion, the Crossroads argues that there is no basis in the resolution to conclude that it by and large provided the theoretical foundation towards the formation of the Alliance. However, the Crossroads does so having claimed, on the contradictory side, that a proper understanding of why the ANC is referred to as the leader of the Alliance and thus appears to wield "massive" influence within it lies in the resolution.

The Crossroads goes on to claim that the Resolution on the South African Question "correctly identified the ANC as a national liberation movement..." While this claim and the other, that a proper understanding of why the ANC is referred to as the leader of the Alliance and thus appears to wield "massive" influence within it lies in the resolution, appear only to contradict or falsify the assertion it rigidly propagates, that the resolution concerns only the Communist Party ("solely and exclusively" addressed to it), another fact is that there is not a single reference to the ANC in the resolution

⁷ See the statement of the World Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties of 1960 and the SACP programme, "The Road to South African Freedom", adopted in 1962. Their central thrusts include the pursuit of *non-capitalist development* directly aimed at socialism in the strategic objectives of the *national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution* and the *national democratic revolution*, respectively. While the latter takes its cue from the former, it is based specifically on South Africa's historical conditions.



that supports anything the Crossroads asserts in those two claims is either from or in the resolution. Underline the fact that there is no other reference to the ANC in the full text of the resolution except the self-explanatory ones in the introductory quotation to this section. The contradiction between the Crossroads' rigid assertion and the two claims that it turns around to insinuate into the resolution also exposes its unprincipled orientation.

On we go. On the one side the Crossroads insensitively labels the conclusion that the Resolution on the South African Question by and large provided the theoretical foundation of the Alliance or its formation as an "extraordinary claim", "obviously false", "dishonest behaviour", "trying surreptitiously to persuade the ANC to accept the proposal that the Comintern was prescribing a process which would ineluctably mean that the ANC and the friendly and supportive SACP would have to enter into an alliance", and "a very poor understanding by a Communist Party of the approach of the international Communist movement to the important matter of national liberation". The Crossroads then turns these same hostile polemical labels that it propagates on their head by, on the contradictory side, arguing that "it is exactly" in the resolution's thesis of "an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic, with full equal rights for all...", "that we will find the objective reason for the formation of an alliance between the ANC and the SACP".

It does not require rocket science to see that the Crossroads invokes "the objective reason..." to effectively accept the very conclusion it otherwise rejects, namely that the resolution by and large provided the theoretical foundation for the Alliance or its formation. Perhaps the Crossroads does this subconsciously amid its emotionally charged, hostile polemic.

One useful intervention that a theory does is that it explains, offering reasons, why or how a natural or social phenomenon, for example, exists. In social science, among others a revolutionary theory uncovers the material conditions and relations of production that bring about the phenomenon it refers to. It unmasks contradictions, the class forces and interests behind the phenomenon and those opposed, and it organises concepts and guides strategy. A full reading of the Resolution on the South African Question, beyond the extracts quoted, shows that it offers the analysis and direction. To this end, the resolution includes data on the South African situation and analyses it methodologically following the materialist conception of history.

Let us recall. In 1950, the apartheid regime banned the Communist Party under the Suppression of Communism Act, making it the first political organisation to be banned in South Africa. This was a consequence of the irreconcilable and antagonistic contradictions between the successive colonial-apartheid capitalist regimes and the Communist Party, its programme and activist role. The ban changed the conditions under which the Communist Party pursued the theoretical orientation and programmatic content of the Resolution on the South African Question. It was forced to launch a process to reconstitute itself underground to continue the struggle. This culminated in the adoption of the name South African Communist Party in 1953.

The South African Congress of Democrats was founded in the same year, 1953. In 1955, the year the Freedom Charter was adopted, its leaders, who included its founders, included communists like Michael Harmel, Bram Fischer, Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Denis Goldberg and Rusty Bernstein. The South African Coloured People's Organisation, later the Coloured People's Congress, was also founded in 1953. In



1955, its leadership included communists like Alex and James Le Guma. James La Guma had been part of the Communist Party's delegation that met the representatives of the Comintern before it adopted the Resolution on the South African Question. He served as the President of the Coloured People's Congress. The South African Congress of Trade Unions was formed in 1955. Its leaders included communists such as John Nkadimeng, Mark Shope, Billy Nair and Leon Levy. Accused Number 4 in the 1956 Treason Trial, until he breathed his last at 96 on 2 February 2026, Levy was the last surviving signatory of the Freedom Charter.

The Congress of Democrats, the Coloured People's Congress and the South African Congress of Trade Unions, together with the older South African Indian Congress, whose 1955 leaders included communists such as Yusuf Dadoo, who became the National Chairperson of the Communist Party from 1972 until his death in 1983, and the much older ANC, with Chief Albert Luthuli as its president from 1952, constituted the Alliance in the form of the Congress Alliance in the 1950s. While Luthuli was not a member of the Communist Party, Moses Kotane, who served on the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) for a long time, first elected in 1946, and Dan Tloome, elected to the ANC NEC in 1952, were. Walter Sisulu, ANC Secretary-General from 1949 to 1954, became a member of the Communist Party before the Congress of the People in 1955, thereby correcting his earlier error of judgement that there was no need for the Communist Party because, he thought, the national struggle was primary and the class struggle secondary.

JB Marks responded to the error after Sisulu expressed it at one time in the past decade by saying, "You will learn, my boy, of the necessity of the CP" (Communist Party). Sisulu recounted this to his daughter-in-law, Elinor Sisulu, author of his biography with Albertina, *Walter & Albertina Sisulu in our Lifetime*, first published in 2002 and second edition in 2003 with Foreword by Nelson Mandela. His decision to join the Communist Party began to take shape, obviously after he indeed learnt of the necessity of the Party, as Marks did point out, following a five-month trip abroad. Sisulu was part of a delegation. The trip included visits to China and the Soviet Union, and he subsequently attended the underground Communist Party's political education classes. Sisulu was so committed, following his engagements with communists, participation in the Party's political education classes and recruitment process, and was so sufficiently prepared, that he became a member of the SACP Central Committee in 1956.

In 1954, the SACP released a statement under the name of Moses Kotane, its longest-serving General Secretary, from 1939 until his death in 1978. Titled "South Africa's Way Forward", the statement was published in the *Advance*, successor to the banned *Guardian*, on 6 and 13 May 1954. The statement analysed South Africa's situation in its historical context and set out proposals for the people's demands to be included in the Freedom Charter. Under the section headed "Towards a people's democracy", the statement urged the people to write, into the Freedom Charter, their claim to equal rights and equal opportunity, political, social and economic, for *all* men and women.

The people's demands, which the statement called to be proclaimed through the Freedom Charter, included "freedom of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of association and freedom of assembly"; that "the rich farmlands of South Africa be shared among their rightful owners – those who plough them and water them with their sweat"; that "big mining and other monopoly-owned industries of our country become the property of the people"; that "the working people be guaranteed by law their rights



to free recognised trade unions, wages sufficient for a civilised life, leisure and social security in sickness, unemployment and old age”; and that “urgent steps be taken to provide houses for the homeless, schools for the children and hospitals for the sick without discrimination”.

The demands found expression in the Freedom Charter. Even while operating as an underground organisation and further not having the word “Congress” in its name, the Communist Party’s presence was clearly discernible or decipherable in the congress organisations, the Congress Alliance and its activities, through the visible activism and public roles and responsibilities of its leaders and members. This reality required neither open declarations of existence nor formal bilateral meetings, as it also did not require any public disclosure of their underground membership of the Communist Party, for any revolutionary to recognise. Such bilateral meetings, open declarations and public disclosures would obviously have been dangerous and reckless.

Moving forward, it was through our alliance relationship that the Communist Party and the ANC turned to armed struggle in the early 1960s. This was under yet another round of new operating conditions. The new conditions included the apartheid regime’s banning of the ANC, among others, in 1960. Organisationally, the armed struggle took the form of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), as Nelson Mandela discusses in his *Long Walk to Freedom*, first published 1994.

Understood historically and in response to changing operating conditions, the inclusion of COSATU as part of the Alliance a few years following its founding in December 1985 did not translate into the formation of a brand-new alliance from the box in the first half of 1990 but rather continuity. The federation assumed the space formerly occupied by the Congress of South African Trade Unions. To be sure, neither did the inclusion of a civic movement, which took the form of SANCO, constitute a brand-new alliance from the box. It is decontextualising to regard the history of our struggle and its organisational articulations, including the Alliance, organisationally, required in response to changing operating conditions, as a succession of disconnected or unrelated new formations or phenomena.

Our hard-won democratic space, interrelationship between the NDR and socialism

In its quotation mining, the Crossroads compiled a selection of block quotations from the works of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and Vladimir Lenin, among others, regarding the importance of the struggle for a national democratic order, including a democratic republic. However, in doing so, it ignored a crucial historical fact about the introduction of the independent republic with equal rights for people of all races under democratic majority rule in our country as the strategic objective of our liberation struggle. It was the Communist Party, as an affiliate of the Comintern, that introduced this way forward in South Africa, ratifying the Resolution on the South African Question.

In line with the theoretical, strategic and tactical framework set out by Marx, Engels and Lenin in their various works, the independent republic with equal rights for people of all races under democratic majority rule was in no way conceptualised as a right-wing, reformist bourgeois-democratic order or as an end in itself, a cul-de-sac, or even a “Free at last” scenario. It was conceptualised as a means to continue the struggle towards a socialist republic, to expand and develop democracy to its highest possible level. This includes, notably, by systematically eliminating the economic exploitation of the class majority, the working class, by the class minority, the capitalist class.



Between the two it is specifically the latter's role as the category called capital that the Crossroads vehemently demands to see elaborated in a Communist Party programme.

No wonder, in its block quotation mining, the Crossroads excluded an important warning by Lenin if ever it was aware of it, in *The State and Revolution*, first published in 1918. Once captured by capital, establishing its power in it so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties can shake that power, such a republic becomes the best possible political shell for the exploitative system of capitalism. Lenin was historically specific, referring to a republic in a bourgeois-democratic order or form.

In South Africa, revisionism seeks monopoly over the NDR while explicitly denying association with the pursuit of socialism but not with the pursuit of capitalism. This misrepresents the NDR by implying that it is a reformist bourgeois-democratic agenda. The reformist tendency makes codifying capital's profit-making and maximisation conditionalities part of the strategic objectives of what it calls the NDR. Simply put, it is, in the name of access to the resources it has appropriated from production and trade in goods and services (it is never mentioned that it is from exploitation), to toe the line of capital while gathering the crumbs obtainable from the concessions it makes.

While the Crossroads acknowledges the importance of the democratic dispensation for the SACP's pursuit of its socialist historical mission, including engagement in direct electoral contests, a decision it appears to concede was long delayed,⁸ it nevertheless embarks on a U-turn. This involves paradoxically advocating a restrictive interpretation of the geography of our democratic space, the republic, by reducing it to that of "some, not all, the municipalities". In doing so, based on its revisionist separation of the NDR from the pursuit of socialism, the Crossroads insists that the SACP must restrict its direct electoral contest in pursuit of socialism, that is, isolated from the NDR, to "some, not all, the municipalities". It argues that by not observing the isolation or restriction but by instead including the NDR in its direct election participation and contesting across the republic, the Communist Party would be positioning itself as an opponent of the ANC.

The Crossroads pushes the restriction to "some, not all, the municipalities" while quoting the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Marx and Engels, first published in 1848: "We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy." It then claims: "Here, plainly, Marx and Engels advance the idea that the proletariat could accede [ascend was perhaps the intended word] to the position of a ruling class by winning through a democratic contest, and hence the vital importance of the existence of a democratic order to enable the proletariat to take power peacefully – 'winning the battle of democracy'".⁹

⁸ Forgetting other aspects of our history.

⁹ While it is correct to assert the importance of a democratic order, especially, in addition recognising that no democratic order is an end in itself but a means to an end, it is necessary to underline that Marx and Engels never restricted the struggle of the working class to "raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy" to a democratic order either narrowly understood as or reduced to elections. The class struggle, of which the political struggle, including as it takes place in elections, is a part, occurs on different fronts and in



The Crossroads' restriction of the Communist Party confines the entire programme – that is, "...the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class" and as an integral part of the struggle to "win the battle of democracy" – to merely "some, not all, the municipalities" in elections as a front of the struggle. Marx and Engels never said anything of that sort, of a restrictive chain to leash the Communist Party in some municipalities, whether implicitly or explicitly. Instead, considering the relation of the communists to the proletariat as a whole and, within this relation, the communists as "...the most advanced and resolute section...", Marx and Engels said: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."

Also note that of all others, particularly the right-wing, anti-NDR and anti-communist forces, the Crossroads chooses to single out the ANC and stoke an intra-Alliance conflict. This divisive agenda is embedded in a self-contradiction. The contradiction involves, on the one hand, simultaneously professing to value the republic, our hard-won nationwide democratic space, as essential to the Communist Party's pursuit of the socialist historical mission. On the other hand, it involves stoking the unnecessary intra-Alliance conflict instead of thinking strategically about how best, tactically, to elaborate electoral contests by the two principal political partners of the Alliance for Freedom Charter victories in the struggle against the right-wing, anti-NDR and anti-communist forces.

The conflict has no basis in a unifying broader political struggle that is truly committed to everyone's political rights enshrined in the Freedom Charter and gives the inherent interrelationship between the NDR and the pursuit of socialism both theoretical and practical expression. In a shared historical mission perspective where the NDR and the pursuit of socialism are, as originally and correctly conceptualised, inherently mutually reinforcing rather than opposed, there must be complementarity between electoral contest by the Communist Party, which gives theoretical and practical expression to the interrelationship between the NDR and socialism, and electoral contest by the ANC, in so far as its campaign is and will remain an NDR electoral contest.

How to engage in electoral contests requires flexible, not rigid, tactical considerations. Elections – as must be understood from the above and throughout this text – are only one of many forms of contest in and fronts of the broader political struggle. They have no sole potential, on their own, apart from the imperative to intensify the struggle on other fronts, to win the battle of democracy or to advance, deepen, defend and secure the strategic objectives of the NDR and socialism. In a national-revolutionary Alliance worth its salt, the tactical considerations are not an exclusive preserve of one Alliance partner or its leadership only but require regular consensus-seeking democratic consultation and joint leadership reflections. On this score, the Crossroads has also fallen into the pitfall of misconceiving our Alliance not as a strategic national-revolutionary front brought together by the NDR as a shared historical mission but narrowly as an electoralist tactical alliance. This misconception treats the NDR as

different forms. Above all, in their focus on the class struggle, Marx and Engels placed emphasis on revolution. While one front could first play a dominant role in a decisive hour, a revolution requires the intensification of the class struggle on all fronts, including different trenches, in their interconnection. A revolution can take different forms according to the conditions of the time, understood historically, and according to strategy, tactics, analysis, capacity and capability, among others. It is also essential to recognise that a socialist order, if it is to be genuinely socialist, is a democratic order and one of a higher form than the one the Crossroads refers to here.



private property and, at that, as belonging to a single partner or its leadership in the Alliance, the ANC.

Some involved in the misconception elsewhere take one ally supporting another in elections permanently, without the latter ever considering, even for a moment, reciprocating, as the basis of the Alliance.¹⁰ In electoral terms, they regard this one-way support as what holds the Alliance together. They believe the Alliance must end if the one-way support changes. That would also be true if the partner that has consistently received the support were required to consider mutual reciprocity. A section of those who push the misconception seek to alter or have to a particular extent already used the revisionism to alter the Alliance's basis and unity away from our shared historical mission and its basic revolutionary programme, the NDR and the Freedom Charter, respectively. Others treat the Alliance as merely an assemblage of subordinate partners that must rally behind one partner uncritically with permanent support, regardless of which direction prevails between the end of elections, when, among others, unilateralism takes precedence. This is one of the problems that those who oppose the reconfiguration of the Alliance will inevitably monumentalise.

The problems include perceiving the ANC as no longer the liberation formation, which it became during its long transformation process, but as now a modern electoralist party. Some even view our hard-won democratic dispensation no longer in the struggle must continue terms of the NDR but as liberal democracy viewed in terms of the "Free at last" claim. Some elsewhere narrowly view the other Alliance partners as mere components of the ANC's election machinery. They include some who often treat the other Alliance partners as if they were the ANC's leagues.

It is worth noting that although the Crossroads opposes the reconfiguration of the Alliance, it fails to interrogate the political choices that led the ANC to enter what is, in practice, a *government of coalition unity* framed as a government of national unity. This has forged collaboration with right-wing political parties, such as the neo-liberal, anti-Freedom Charter DA. The ANC has itself publicly characterised such political parties not only as its own but also as strategic adversaries of the NDR.

The implications for the NDR and our national-revolutionary Alliance, of collaboration with political parties representing the interests of right-wing forces are profound. These cannot be regarded as either minor or only tactical issues with no strategic implications. The implications include the problematic manner in which the collaboration was forged. For example, other Alliance partners were sidelined from participation in negotiations and determining the content and direction of the "Statement of intent". This exclusion stands in stark contrast to how our Alliance approached the major negotiations in the 1990s and crafted the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

It is inconceivable to argue that collaboration with, or the space afforded to political parties representing right-wing forces, including foreign forces hostile to South Africa, brings no serious compromise to the NDR or the pursuit of any essential national-revolutionary transformation and development measures needed to advance the revolution. Equally implausible is the claim that there are no alternatives, including

¹⁰ This section includes those who insist the Alliance was formed in the 1990s, thereby severing it from its long history before 1994 when South Africa did not even have universal suffrage. Historically, much of the Alliance's existence took place before, rather than after, the hard-won universal suffrage for people of all races and genders realised for the first time in April 1994.



Alliance reconfiguration, to build a more effective approach and adapt to changing conditions.

Barring new electoral strategies and tactics exploration, including the role that a reconfigured Alliance could play in this regard, will reveal itself as a conservative, counterproductive agenda given the new realities that have emerged since 1994, such as the coalitions' environment. Rather than the hostile, intra-Alliance conflict-stoking agendas, the NDR requires innovation and a fresh approach to electoral engagement grounded in mutually beneficial support. This is essential for its future, our broader national-revolutionary movement and, above all, its motive forces and broader constituencies.

There can be no doubt that actual, as opposed to fictitious, opposition arises from the right-wing forces opposed to the NDR and their political parties. Forging collaborations with such anti-Freedom Charter, right-wing forces, while opposing alternatives exploration within the Alliance will give those forces' oppositional tendencies against the revolution advantages. To that extent, it will also prove to be problematic, including by ceding to those forces and the fundamental class adversary that they represent, above all else, any amount of power handed over to them. A comradesly perspective would hold that there is no principled reason why NDR forces cannot continue to relate as allies, since the NDR is their shared historical mission, even as they now independently consider direct electoral engagement tactics and at least one pursues a broader socialist vision, directly linked with the pursuit of the NDR.

A fraternal approach that embraces constructive criticism within Alliance processes, while also allowing for freedom of expression, including critiques of government policies based on fair and, ideally, scientific opinions, does not equate to opposition. Instead, such an approach, including in electoral contests within the framework of a reconfigured Alliance, should foster healthy dialogue and help to advance, deepen and defend the NDR. A revolutionary must recognise that the absence of a direct electoral contest that both clearly articulates the interrelationship between the NDR and the pursuit of socialism and leverages the election periods and campaigns to advance this articulation as widely as possible in the battle of ideas and the theoretical struggle constitutes a strategic disadvantage. The pursuit of the non-capitalist development and transformation path and, in this case as in all other circumstances, the overall socialist struggle, must include a scientific critique of the exploitative capitalist system and its consequences for the people, of whom the working class and poor constitute the majority in our nation. The void created by the absence of such articulation in elections has created conditions that other actors have exploited, some opportunistically, to claim the mantle of South Africa's Left.

It has also been a great disadvantage in the way the Alliance's engagement in elections and post-election leadership conduct was configured. The same disadvantage was embedded in the content and directions advanced in municipal councils, provincial legislatures and parliament, to name but a few centres of power in the state. The disadvantage has particularly affected the working class and even more so those who seek to see the interrelationship between the NDR and the pursuit of socialism advanced, deepened and defended on all fronts and significant centres of power that exist within our nation's governance and economy.

Needless to mention that key mandates in the councils, provincial legislatures and parliament, among others, including which way our representatives should vote on



major questions and policies, such as fiscal policy and the associated budgets, were often decided unilaterally. Under the circumstances, there was no consultation at all within the Alliance. Alternatively, consultation was reduced to nothing but mere information sharing. Such mandates were, however, then assigned to our collective representatives, for whom we both campaigned together and voted, to take forward. Unilateralism or the lack of meaningful Alliance consensus-seeking democratic consultation increasingly became a norm rather than an exception.

Also problematic, moments when the SACP and even COSATU were attacked during debates or statements by opposition parties in institutions such as parliament with no one assigned to defend them highlighted a significant flaw in the configuration of the Alliance. In contrast, all representatives would be assigned to defend the ANC whenever it came under such attacks. This configuration disadvantaged the negatively affected Alliance partners. The situation underlined the need for a more inclusive, reconfigured Alliance approach both in the mandate and the voice our representatives represent, as well as in the functions they are assigned in the spheres of implementation and in their collective composition.

The Crossroads' hostile polemic towards the SACP and the reconfiguration of the Alliance will not only preserve such problematic practices and others to which the reconfiguration became a necessary call in response but will also inevitably strengthen them. Ironically, the ANC signed the "Statement of Intent" with the government of coalition unity partners endorsing a commitment to "take decisions in accordance with the established practice of consensus", yet the proponents of the Crossroads' hostile polemic do not critique that commitment while they oppose Alliance reconfiguration, including the older principle of consensus-seeking democratic consultation.

The glaring omission of the common Alliance reconfiguration document

The common Alliance reconfiguration document states that it is a result of an "extensive process of engagement within the Alliance towards its reconfiguration". It affirms that the reconfiguration is a "deep-going process, rather than an event", agreed upon by all Alliance partners. Crucially, it codifies the shared perspective that the Alliance represents the "strategic political centre of the revolution", referring to the NDR as a shared historical mission for complete liberation, democratic transformation and development, rather than as private property of any one organisation.

Instead of recognising the fact that the Alliance partners jointly produced the common reconfiguration document, to be specific in 2019, the Crossroads casts the reconfiguration of the Alliance as nothing but a sinister SACP attempt, an agenda at capturing the ANC. Meanwhile, the common Alliance reconfiguration document acknowledges the ANC's organisational leadership role within the NDR in alliance with all Alliance partners. The common Alliance reconfiguration document does not end there, however. In its dialectical articulation, it acknowledges the working class as the main motive force of the revolution. A leading position within this framework, consistent with the D for the DEMOCRATIC content of the NDR, is neither preordained nor won by decree. It is also not something that is won once and for all in a single event or even phase of struggle. It must be earned democratically and, to be democratic, continuously.

Broadly speaking, the same democratic principle applies to a "leadership-of-society" position. For instance, if political or broader societal support keeps dwindling, this erosion translates directly into a proportional loss of leadership-of-society position. To



be sure, the same holds for a vanguard role in class struggle. Hence, in its constitution, the SACP does not declare itself to be the vanguard of the working class. Instead, it sets a strategic objective to build itself and pursue the aims and objectives that will enable it to become and serve as the vanguard of the working class.

To dismiss the necessity for the reconfiguration of the Alliance and misrepresent it as a sinister agenda by the SACP is not only to dismiss history as it unfolded but also to drive a wedge. The glaring omission of the common Alliance reconfiguration document or its disregard in what the Crossroads perceives as history clearly appears as not mere oversight but more, one of the bitter premises underlying the content of its entire hostile polemic. This also exposes the Crossroads factional bias.

The Crossroads wrongly assumes that there is only one document on the reconfiguration of the Alliance and that this was produced by a lone partner followed by no Alliance engagement while, in fact, an extensive Alliance consultation and engagement process resulted in four discussion documents and culminated in the common Alliance reconfiguration document replacing all of them as the way forward agreed upon. This process fostered a fraternal dialogue among the Alliance partners. The first discussion document, produced by the SACP in July 2018 after years of Alliance engagement on this question, set the scene for the ultimate stage of this process, outlining the necessity for the reconfiguration to enhance the Alliance's strategic relevance and build its collective leadership impact in contemporary South Africa. It was followed by COSATU's document, which emphasised the importance of worker representation and the need for a united front in the struggle for social emancipation. The ANC then provided its perspective in its document, responding to the perspectives from both the SACP and COSATU. Subsequently, the SACP addressed the ANC's points and arguments in a follow document.

The common Alliance reconfiguration document encapsulated the shared understanding of the shared strategic objectives and outlined structures of Alliance engagement and consultation. In its central thrust, it recognised the NDR as the Alliance partners shared strategy of struggle, transformation and development or an intersection of their historical missions. The aims outlined include dismantling the remnants of colonialism and apartheid towards fully securing all the goals of the Freedom Charter, deepening the advance towards a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous, democratic South Africa.

The common Alliance reconfiguration document outlines several key principles defining the reconfiguration for the Alliance to function effectively and impactfully. These include the principle of *collective leadership* in pursuit of the NDR as the Alliance partners shared historical mission, as opposed to the private property of any one of them. The principle of collective leadership requires the leading component or organs in a collective, in this case the Alliance as the collective whole, to avoid framing or exercising their role in autocratic, authoritarian or unilateral terms. It requires that this role be anchored in and thus exercised from within the collective whole, ensuring that leadership is exercised as a democratic process directed towards the full realisation of and to give play to the Freedom Charter's goal that "The people shall govern". In this democratic process, the leading component or organs facilitate the meaningful involvement of others, working together, as opposed to leading separately.

To give effect to the principle of collective leadership, the common Alliance reconfiguration document outlines the other principles. These include *extensive consensus-seeking democratic consultation* on all major policy decisions. Also



included is the principle of *meaningful inclusivity*, to ensure adequate Alliance representation and give effect to collective participation in implementation and its spheres of activity. To safeguard the NDR as a shared historical mission, the common Alliance reconfiguration document requires the Alliance to uphold the principle of *collective accountability*. This principle is meant to foster trust and integrity both within the Alliance and broader society, to ensure that the directions implemented and conduct of affairs reflect collective will. It has at least two dimensions in its articulation.

The first dimension requires each partner to build stronger accountability for its leaders, members and structures, while, defining the second dimension, the partners have agreed to exercise collective accountability over any leaders and members whose institutional roles and assignments stem from our collective pursuit of the NDR or campaign to advance, deepen and defend it. Beyond the two articulations, the principle of collective accountability requires organising and mobilising the motive forces of the NDR and society at large to hold those entrusted with societal power accountable. This also entails expanding participatory democracy while democratically building leadership within it.

The Alliance reconfiguration principles reinforce the recognition that success in an Alliance context is a shared responsibility. They are also intended to ensure that the Alliance remains true to its foundational revolutionary values and strategic objectives, with the aim of consolidating and enhancing *unity and cohesion* based on the Freedom Charter as the basic programme of the NDR. This programmatic thrust had to be re-asserted and made a key part of the reconfiguration in the common document following a joint appraisal of progress and the general state of our broader movement and the country during the Alliance engagement process.

While appreciating all the major advances since the first democratic elections in April 1994, the Alliance nonetheless recorded serious concerns. These include a lack of epoch-defining progress where the Freedom Charter's goals, notably the economic goals, remain unrealised. This had started causing or accentuating other problems, economic, social and political. The reconfiguration's programmatic thrust therefore emphasised the imperative of pulling all the stops to achieve all those goals, including by decisively advancing the Freedom Charter's ownership transformation goals and the right of all to work, among others, through effective employment creation to overcome the unemployment crisis. In the same vein, the engagement attached great importance to more expanded access to education at all levels, a skills revolution, quality healthcare for all and accelerated land redistribution to tackle the unresolved land question. Factors that caused divisions, weakened the Alliance and led to the erosion of support were also among the serious concerns identified during the Alliance engagement process.

Multiple significant centres of power

The ANC-led Alliance long recognised itself, and not any single component acting separately, as the strategic political centre of the NDR. For example, in the declaration adopted by all partners at its National Summit held in May 2008, the Alliance committed to "strengthen the capacity of the ANC and the Alliance to play this role". SACP and ANC veteran Erick "Stalin" Mtshali, who was in the SACP delegation, proposed the re-establishment of the Revolutionary Council. After engagement, the summit welcomed the proposal but amended it to establish the Alliance Political Council. This addition of a standing collective leadership structure of the Alliance was a key step in the reconfiguration process viewed conceptually in a historical



perspective. The Alliance Political Council was intended to provide a forum for regular consultation, collective leadership and co-ordinated decision-making.

It was strategically consistent for the common Alliance reconfiguration document to uphold the concept of the strategic political centre of the NDR. Within this same context, our situation advanced, culminating in the recognition that each component of the Alliance occupies a primary structural position as a centre itself for its respective historical mission. Therefore, the strategic political centre of the NDR as the Alliance partners shared historical mission cannot structurally lie outside the Alliance. To be sure, it lies inside the Alliance as a collective whole. The dialectical as opposed to a mechanical articulation of the strategic political centre reflects a sense of complementarity while both upholding the independence of each component of the Alliance and also recognising their interdependence based on the NDR as an intersection of their historical missions.

From the perspective of the broader political struggle, with winning the battle of democracy or democratically securing power as a strategic objective and power as the means for transformation and development, the Alliance further recognised the multiplicity of the centres of power that exist in our society beyond itself and its components. In this context, various fronts and institutions, including the economy, the state, the diverse trenches of the battle of ideas and the community, play critical roles in influencing or seeking to influence policy direction and governance as centres of power.

For the record, after the convenor of the common Alliance reconfiguration document joint drafting team paved the way for its detailed presenter through an introduction at the Alliance Political Council meeting where the final draft was adopted with changes, the National Chairperson of the ANC argued that the total strength of the Alliance is greater than the sum of its individual components. According to the notion behind this idea, unified wholes possess emergent properties not found in their components considered separately. The National Chairperson of the ANC was seconded by its president and others among the speakers who followed.

The framework established in the common Alliance reconfiguration document, a synthesis whose existence the Crossroads omitted or ignored, likely because of its hostile polemic aimed at the SACP via misrepresenting the reconfiguration, once again exposes the Crossroads' factional bias. This tendency possibly exploits the weaknesses, centred around the ANC, which have resulted in vacillations, vulgarisation of the reconfiguration and the inability to implement it.

By denouncing the reconfiguration of the Alliance, the Crossroads disregarded the extensive ANC-led Alliance consultative process and the shared commitment to work together even better in practice rather than have this only pronounced in election pamphlets or words of mouth that mean absolutely nothing in practice if not the opposite in reality. The failure to recognise the necessity for and legitimacy of the reconfiguration inevitably not only serves to weaken the Alliance further. It is regressive in that it also serves to undermine the decades-long necessary political work to build and strengthen the Alliance as South Africa's national-revolutionary front.

If the ANC can, as it already has in the "Statement of Intent" with its government of coalition unity partners after the May 2024 elections, agree to consensus-based decision-making with parties such as the right-wing, neo-liberal DA, which fundamentally opposes the Freedom Charter and the NDR in its entirety, then there is no justification whatsoever for the Crossroads to reject consensus-seeking democratic



consultation within the Alliance. This is particularly pertinent given that the ANC, as part of the Alliance partners, not only adopted the principle of consensus-seeking consultation in the common Alliance reconfiguration document but also historically through the Alliance engagements that culminated in consensus.

Self-contradictions

The Crossroads' hostile polemic towards the SACP covers a discussion document or report produced by the Party's past commission on state power, treating it as an SACP document. Yet it is opposed to the SACP in its programme, the "South African Struggle for Socialism", highlighting a historically significant analysis from the "Green Book", produced by a commission of the ANC, as a strategic perspective that was shared "within the leaderships of the ANC and SACP". Here is the perspective: "It should be emphasised that no member of the Commission had any doubts about the ultimate need to continue our revolution towards a socialist order; the issue was posed only in relation to the tactical considerations of the present stage of our struggle." This perspective in fact appears in Part Two of the Green Book, headed "Our strategic line". This part of the Green Book also records "the more long-term aims of our national democratic revolution" debated by the commission. It further draws attention to some of the main issues that came up for discussion during the commission's work. Two immediate points about this are worth underlining at this stage.

First, the commission was constituted by the leadership of the ANC as its commission. Second, the SACP clearly shared the perspective, particularly regarding the continuation of the NDR towards socialism. It is a well-known fact that the SACP, consistent with its historical mission and programme, continues to assert the strategic connection and continuity between the NDR and socialism.¹¹ Given the two points, it cannot, therefore, as the Crossroads asserts, be a "false conclusion" that the perspective was shared "within the leaderships of the ANC and the SACP".

The Crossroads' "false conclusion" assertion does not, in fact, dispute whether the Green Book entails the perspective. It argues, rather, that the perspective reflected the views of individual commissioners and was never put to the ANC's principal body, the NEC, when the commission tabled the Green Book. Here there are two points worth highlighting.

First, although the assertion appears confined to its explicit wording, it implicitly expresses ideological opposition to the perspective's content. Compare the Crossroads' "false conclusion" assertion with the revolutionary content that Tambo set out on behalf of the ANC on the SACP's 63rd anniversary: "Today the ANC and SACP have common objectives in the eradication of the oppressive and exploitative system that prevails in our country: the seizure of power and the exercise of their right to self-determination by all the people of South Africa."

Underline that in outlining the "common objectives" that "the ANC and SACP have", Tambo highlights "the eradication" not only of the "oppressive" but equally clear of the

¹¹ In remaining strategically consistent behind the perspective as a core part of its historical mission and programme, the SACP acknowledges the broad composition of the ANC and its implications for the perspective. These are clearly spelt out in what the Green Book refers to as "the tactical considerations of the present stage of our struggle". The implications and, not unrelated, the argument that it is not a party, were spelt out in the conclusions that the ANC had to attract the broadest range of social forces. This meant that it had to avoid unduly narrowing this line-up of forces amongst the oppressed in relation to national democratic liberation. To this end, the Green Book concludes that the ANC could not adopt a direct or indirect commitment to a continuing revolution towards a socialist order at that stage.



“exploitative system that prevails in our country”. This considers the system as a single whole. It would be implausible for the Crossroads’ proponents to argue that Tambo was expressing merely an individual view with no historical background, particularly regarding the eradication of exploitation over and above the eradication of oppression. While the eradication of the exploitative system does not, in itself, constitute socialism in its totality, it is a key strategic objective of any socialist struggle worth its salt.

Second, for all to see, the perspective of the continuation of the NDR towards socialism remained firmly engraved in the Green Book as a historical document of the ANC, produced after a visit by a delegation of its NEC to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in October 1978.

Meanwhile, the Crossroads reproduces, defends or advances one full but short initial statement on the economic policy of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), but furnishes no documentary evidence, such as minutes or any records, demonstrating that the statement was first debated with full access to GEAR, subjected to a comprehensive collective review and formally adopted by the SACP’s principal decision-making body, being the National Congress or the Central Committee between congresses, before it was issued in its name. Given its block quotation-mining style, including quoting full sections or documents, the Crossroads should have included a full copy of the SACP Central Committee minutes or National Congress declarations and resolutions showing that the statement was first extensively consulted and adopted by the principal decision-making body of the Party before it was issued in its name. The problem for the Crossroads is that there is no such.

The existing records of the SACP Central Committee and of its national congresses, special national congresses and national strategy conferences, reject GEAR as a neo-liberal policy and advance or call for alternatives. The declarations and resolutions include those adopted by the first National Congress of the SACP that took place after the government adopted GEAR. That was the 10th National Congress, which rejected GEAR despite President Mbeki defending it in his address to the congress.

The Crossroads’ claim, that the SACP’s rejection of GEAR, and by extension the Party’s campaign against it, is the sinister work of one senior official addressing a small, hand-picked group, is beyond denialism and deliberate selectivity ignoring the bigger picture of the truth. Once again, in this the Crossroads drives a factional view. This disregards the decisions, declarations and resolutions adopted by the SACP’s principal decision-making bodies, including the Central Committee, National Congress, and special national and strategy conferences. It dismisses the freedom of discussion by SACP members during consultation processes and by both delegates and leaders at the Party’s principal decision-making bodies, all openly rejecting GEAR.

Whether the Crossroads adheres to its own logic or contradicts itself, there is no reason why the Green Book should be excluded from any research on or analysis of the perspectives covered in the historical documents of the ANC. In fact, the Green Book is crucial for a study focusing on the philosophical, ideological, political, strategic and tactical perspectives that once found acceptance within the ANC’s membership or leadership ranks. Given the ANC’s broad membership, it would be unrealistic to imply that no other members or leaders, beyond its NEC delegation that visited Vietnam or members of the commission that produced the Green Book, shared the perspectives recorded in it. This brings us to another point in the Crossroads’ inconsistency.



If indeed the Crossroads accepts that the goal of complete economic and social emancipation, understood from the prism of scientific socialism, beyond basic political liberation, is a historical mission of the Communist Party, it would not even waste time and space insisting on a position and role of, or for private capital in a programme of the Communist Party.

The right-wing, neo-liberal reformism

The claim that GEAR, adopted in 1996 without consensus-seeking democratic consultation within the Alliance and as envisaged in NEDLAC's mandate, is not a neo-liberal policy cannot be sustained when subjected to rigorous examination or literature review on what neo-liberalism is, has done and is still doing. Generally, measures in the neo-liberal policy regime coalesce around giving the capitalist market-led primacy and triumph over public participation and socialised distribution in the economy. In our context, the results contradict the people as a whole ownership goal set out in the Freedom Charter. Ideologically, the neo-liberal discourse advanced to include euphonious phrases such as right-sizing, lean and mean state, restructuring of state assets or public enterprises, and so on. These were used by neo-liberal agents, adherents or promoters to roll back or counter state participation in the economy.

Sections of capital in the Western imperialist centres promoted and globalised the neo-liberal shift, both as a policy regime and as a variant of the capitalist system through restructuring, deepening exploitation and curtailing the share of production income going to workers or the labour force. Notably, the neo-liberal class drivers included the most intransigent, finance capital and transnational corporations that pursued market capture in other countries through their financial dealings and exports of finished products. The shift was also pushed by state power and global finance institutions, predominantly pursuing the interests of the ruling class. Those based in Washington, the United States, played the most intransigent role. They include the United States Department of the Treasury, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group. The imperialist United States' Western European allies joined forces with it to push the neo-liberal shift.¹² Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher formed the most intransigent neo-liberal core of the 1980s during their terms of office as the president and prime minister of the United States and Britain, respectively.

While the neo-liberal policy regime was also propagated under the notion of the "Washington Consensus", referring to the Washington-based United States Department of the Treasury, the IMF and the World Bank Group, notably by John Williamson in his "Economic Reform: Content, Progress, Prospects" in 1999, there were others in academia who had long been playing what was perhaps the most defining part in outlining the right-wing, neo-liberal economic thought. They include the Austrian Friedrich August von Hayek. Milton Friedman, leading member of the Chicago School of economics, emerged to be widely regarded as neo-liberalism's chief monetarist.

The key tenets of the neo-liberal policy regime advanced to integrate notions such as "fiscal discipline" and "fiscal consolidation", under which fiscal austerity in various forms and to varying degrees has among others been implemented and enforced. The neo-liberal policy regime advocated trade and financial liberalisation. Its problems in this regard included its disregard of the developmental needs of the affected countries, mainly in the global south. This took place in a history where the imperialist powers of

¹² See, for example, see Richard Prett, Beate Born, Mia Davis and other co-authors (2003). *Unholy Trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO*. London and New York: Zed Books.



the global north invoked “free trade” and, towards it, insisted on liberalisation, deregulation and other measures. Through this agenda, the imperialist centres prevented the affected global south governments from using the mix of development policies they themselves had applied as part of industrialisation on their shores. In our case, financial and trade liberalisation took the form of shock therapy, especially, initially, involving rapid liberalisation. As this happened, manufacturing continued to de-industrialise and to this day imports became dominant in many sectors and households.

Privatisation of public assets and labour market flexibility also became key components of the neo-liberal policy regime. As this developed, its economic policy reforms extended privatisation through liberalisation to insinuate participation and competition by private wealth accumulation interests for maximum profits into areas previously under state control and operations, such as electricity generation and transmission. The network actors favoured in this sector were private power producers or so-called independent power producers. In our country’s energy policy, this was consolidated in the White Paper on Energy in December 1998 under the auspices of GEAR.

As recorded in the White Paper, the choice was made against pursuing self-sufficiency. However, above all, the choice ran counter to the Freedom Charter’s goal of ownership of monopoly industry by the people as a whole. As it further developed, the privatisation by liberalisation in favour of insinuating participation and competition for maximum profits by private wealth accumulation interests in the network infrastructure previously under state control and operations extended to railways, ports, water and telecommunication infrastructure. Included in this is the high radio frequency spectrum that has since been privatised to the highest bidders.

Under the yoke of the imperialist United States hegemony, the IMF attached neo-liberal policy conditions to its loans. The World Bank Group later followed suit. The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development also moved to prescribe neo-liberal policies in its recommendations. Many governments in the global south found themselves coerced to implement policies that weakened public sectors and in favour of private capital wealth accumulation. The structural adjustment programmes typified this part of the neo-liberal policy regime’s globalisation. While many think that the state was withdrawn, it was in fact used to guarantee the conditions for the neo-liberal private wealth accumulation regime.

GEAR will go down in South Africa’s history as the first major step through which neo-liberal policies secured entry into the domestic policy space after the hard-won transition from the era of colonial–apartheid regimes. In *Shadow of liberation: Contestation and Compromise in the Economic and Social Policy of the African National Congress, 1943–1996*, published in 2019, Vishnu Padayachee and Robert van Niekerk remind the readers of how GEAR was later after it was adopted also framed as a home-grown response or “structural adjustment programme” to the challenges of economic growth and employment. In 2010, Jay Naidoo pointed to an attempt to assuage sentiment amid the way GEAR was adopted. This involved the framing of GEAR as a home-grown structural adjustment policy. What is evident is that this referred to the character of GEAR’s content and direction.

The structural adjustment programmes used to frame GEAR in the attempt to assuage sentiment were neo-liberal. In our country, the reformist class project weakened the unity of the Alliance and the R for REVOLUTION in the NDR. The argument that GEAR



advanced the “macro-economic balances” of the RDP is inconsistent, among others, with the historical fact of the RDP office having been shut down in April 1996 towards GEAR’s publication just afterwards, on 14 June 1996. In the same vein, while the RDP included a commitment to raise the standard of living through policies such as improved wages as its “fundamental objective”, GEAR, also defended as cast in stone or non-negotiable, included “wage moderation”.

For the record, everyone who wishes to verify can see for themselves that GEAR also represented a continuation of the neo-liberal policy agenda already articulated in the fifth section of the 2 February 1990 speech by F. W. de Klerk, the last president of apartheid. De Klerk outlined a clear neo-liberal orientation for South Africa’s economic policy under the notion “structural adaptations” or “adjustments”.

Fiscal and monetary policies were to be co-ordinated to achieve macro-economic stability, among others. While many people would agree as soon as the word *stability* is mentioned, that means something else when the policy instruments to achieve it are *neo-liberal*. A country such as South Africa can be described as having macro-economic stability, for example, while it has glaring macro-economic failures such as its crisis-high rates of unemployment.

Besides, neo-liberals ignore the fact that the instability their macro-economic “stability” policy prescriptions seek to address, such as exchange rate volatility, which affects the value of the currency, originates, among other factors, from their own policies. These include financial, capital account or cross-border capital transactions liberalisation and deregulation, and their refusal to accept strict regulation, capital controls and related transaction taxes. It is, among other factors, in the anarchy enabled by liberalisation that currency attacks, capital flight and illicit transactions take place with relative ease compared to under tight regulation. Some of these activities have negative implications for the value of the currency.

The Crossroads’ claim that “our democracy did quite well during “the first 13/14 years” up to 2007–2008 and started on a downward path from 2008 onwards” is synonymous with suggesting that the democratic dispensation “did quite well” while Mbeki was at the helm as deputy president and then president. Besides selective indicators presented without historical context and beyond the implicit cult of personality, the claim contains glaring gaps and other serious problems. To what extent, for example, did “the first 13/14 years” after 1994 do “quite well” on the Freedom Charter’s goal of “ownership of the people as a whole”? There is absolutely no evidence in the Crossroads’ selective indicators that supports the validity of its “quite well” claim to answer this fundamental question of the NDR.

Although the Crossroads includes Lenin in its block quotation mining about the democratic order, it leaves out his analysis in one of his major works when it propagates its “did quite well” claim. In “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism” first published in 1917, Lenin shows how per capita metrics can be used to obscure underlying class relations of power and exploitation. For example, dividing total wealth or value of output by population, as with GDP per capita, conceals how unevenly that value is distributed. For example, page 17 of the background paper “Twenty-Year Review: South Africa 1994–2014”, produced in and published by the Presidency: Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), has a graph showing that workers’ or the labour share of total income declined substantially, including over the period 1996 to 2007. Statistics South Africa is notably the authority of the data used to design the graph. The Crossroads’ “quite well” claim disregards the fall in the



workers' share of national income – specifically during the “first 13/14 years” after 1994.

The “Twenty-Year Review” background paper, unlike the Crossroads, highlights the specific inequality in income distribution. On the same page it reads: “The relative shares of labour and capital in the national income, known as the functional distribution of income, assist in understand[ing] inequalities in earned income. The share of wages in the national income dropped from just below 55 percent in 1994 to a low of 49 percent in 2008.” Take note of the following from the conclusion of the passage: “It”, referring to the share of wages, “then recovered to 51 percent in 2012. Meanwhile, the share of profits climbed from 45 percent in 1994 to 51 percent in 2008...” If the Crossroads had examined the twenty-year background paper review from the Presidency: DPME, published while Mbeki was president, the Crossroads would, if it were frank, have used its “quite well” claim to cover this specific functional distribution of income. It would then have argued that the workers' share of total income did not do “quite well” during the “first 13/14 years” after 1994, up to “2007–2008”, but that it tried to do “quite well” when it rebounded to 51% in 2012 and fell short of a return to 55% after dropping to 49% by the end of “2007–2008”.

It is important to note that, in class terms, profit as income is commonly largely appropriated by a small capitalist minority while wage workers who produce those profits receive absolutely no dividends or cent from it. Relying on the GDP per capita, as the Crossroads does to back its “quite well” claim, without highlighting the class inequality and distribution is uncritical and misleading. In this context, it is to mask capitalist class domination and the exploitation of the working class as wage labourers. Note that profits are a major component of GDP and of the income approach used to calculate it. It is also important to note that South Africa is ranked among the most unequal countries, the top one in 164 countries. The rise in equality, reaching this point, did not start after the “first 13/14 years”: the data highlighted above from the Presidency: DPME's twenty-year review background paper is clear on this score.

The Crossroads' denialism that GEAR is not neo-liberal rests on a selective reading of its content and an overstatement of its supposed successes. The evidence from GEAR's own targets and performance refutes the “did quite well” notion that the Crossroads claims. In its key targets, for example, GEAR promised an average economic growth rate of 6% and employment creation for 400,000 workers annually by 2000. It failed to achieve both these targets.

In the same vein, the unemployment crisis did not begin after the “first 13/14 years” of our democratic dispensation. After the government adopted GEAR in 1996, unemployment rose above 20% by the narrow definition, which excludes discouraged work-seekers, up from just above 15% in 1995. It has since never fallen below the 20% threshold. The Crossroads manufactured a 19.39% figure for 2007 to argue that unemployment rose to higher rates after that. However, according to Statistics South Africa's *Labour Market Dynamics in South Africa 2008*, the actual overall unemployment rate in 2007 was 22.3%, continuing above 20% in terms of the narrow definition that excludes discouraged work seekers since 1996. It was 25.8% among Black/African people. By the expanded definition, which includes discouraged work seekers, unemployment has had even higher crisis rates.

Also, the Crossroads ignores key historical realities, thus de-contextualising most of the indicators it relies on in propagating its “quite well” claim. This is misleading. The most notable key historical reality that the Crossroads ignores is the 2008 global



economic crisis. This first manifested itself in the financial sector in the United States, revealed itself as a broader economic crisis and had a severe impact in raising the rates of unemployment, poverty and inequality not only in South Africa but also in many countries.

The Crossroads also ignores the global minerals commodity supercycle of the 2000s. This significantly boosted growth in South Africa and other resource-exporting economies while it lasted. China, the key destination for most minerals as raw material because of its remarkable manufacturing industrialisation, grew at roughly double-digit rates in most of the early 2000s, from 2003 to 2007, supporting strong mineral commodity demand. While the commodity boom lasted until about 2014, the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis substantially countered its growth and employment effects. Growth in South Africa, which continued to de-industrialise even during the global mineral commodity supercycle, indicated by the significantly falling share of manufacturing in both national output and employment even during the “first 13/14 years” after 1994, was further negatively affected by the end of the global mineral commodity super cycle.

In the energy sector, no explanation of the electricity crisis that South Africa experienced will be honest without a critical reflection on the impact of neo-liberalism dating back to “the first 13/14 years” after 1994. The direction taken in the White Paper on Energy in December 1998 is an example. The policy decision to favour private power producers, as opposed to pursuing self-sufficiency by immediately implementing new electricity generation capacity in the 1990s and completing the additional power infrastructure in record time, contributed to the load shedding crisis that South Africa has seen. To be sure, a lack of firm-level adherence to original equipment manufacturer maintenance specifications at Eskom, compounded by corruption, including state capture, also contributed to the crisis. The dilapidating electricity supply crisis severely impacted growth and employment creation. The power shortage started, as Eskom states, with supply disruptions in the form of outages in the Western Cape in 2006.¹³ This was not after but within the “first 13/14 years” from 1994. The power shortage problem escalated nationwide in 2007 and early 2008, revealing itself as a long-term crisis.

If the “counter-revolution” claimed by the Crossroads took shape, the policy choices and practices that went against the Freedom Charter’s state ownership of monopoly industry and contributed to the electricity crisis should therefore be regarded as part of it. Neo-liberal reformism in particular cannot be absolved from having formed its considerable part. The direction chosen sought to build and deepen the reach of profit-seeking capitalist market forces into areas that were once under state ownership, such as electricity generation.

Scapegoating of the SACP

In their 2019 work, Padayachee and van Niekerk highlight how the process that led to GEAR involved secret meetings and bypassed democratic policy making, needless to mention the Alliance. The authors record that among the meetings were those held by a small team at the Development Bank of Southern Africa, driving the process without even submitting drafts for discussion at NEDLAC, the Alliance or even the ANC’s own

¹³ Eskom (2023) *Our Recent Past – “Shift performance and grow sustainably”*. Eskom: <https://www.eskom.co.za/heritage/history-in-decades/eskom-2003-2012/>



structures.¹⁴ In this account, senior ANC leader Mac Maharaj underlined that GEAR did not even come from the ANC Economic Transformation Committee on which he served. Another senior ANC leader, Jay Naidoo, also described a process marked by secrecy and the actions of a small group that operated outside ANC structures, the Alliance and parliament.

The account further highlights an eleventh-hour limited-information session, after which GEAR was pushed through the Cabinet with no room for paradigm changing discussion and was presented to parliament the same afternoon as a *fait accompli*. There was no structured, meaningful consultation with the SACP's principal decision-making body but the hurried, eleventh-hour limited-information sharing session with the few who were selected on the eve of GEAR's announcement. Here, Trevor Manuel presented only five slides rather than the full text of GEAR, according to the account.

It is therefore both unsurprising and reasonable that those within the Communist Party who were concerned about the problematic manner in which GEAR was pushed had to take the active step of remedying the situation by reversing the initial brief affirmative-side statement that had been issued as the Party statement. As it became clearer historically, the reversal was not merely concerned with the undermining of timely, extensive, meaningful and consensus-seeking democratic consultation but also with GEAR's neo-liberal policy content, direction and implications for the NDR, viewed from the prism of its interrelationship with socialism, and its disruption of unity within our movement. The Crossroads not only ignores this reality when it factionalises the reversal but also overlooks the historical fact that the SACP's rejection of and campaign against GEAR was and continued to be a legitimate expression of the key outcomes of its principal decision-making bodies.

There were other serious problems during "the first 13/14 years" after 1994. These included the continued de-industrialisation, which began in the 1980s, and HIV/AIDS denialism. This was typified by claims such as "a virus cannot cause a syndrome". Note that HIV is a *virus* and AIDS is a *syndrome*. Meanwhile, many families lost loved ones because of HIV/AIDS.

In the ANC, the core of the Mbeki third-term faction at the ANC's 52nd National Conference in Polokwane split off soon afterwards. It formed a separate party, called COPE. Highlighting this split matters. Treating the ANC's National Conference held in 2007 as if it had only one side at play or even blaming the SACP at that is itself to be typically factional. In fact, these problems have deep roots in the ANC itself.

For example, the document that came to be known as the "Chris Hani Memorandum" in early 1969 discussed some of the concerning problems. The political report presented by President Mandela to the ANC's 50th National Conference in 1997 in Mahikeng was deeply concerned about the concerning problem it characterised as careerism. This problem was to reveal itself as a central element of factionalism, undermining the unity and cohesion of the ANC. Likewise, in 2005, the organisational report presented to the ANC's 2nd National General Council at the University of

¹⁴ NEDLAC, in terms of its establishing Act of 1994, was created as an institution of social dialogue required to promote participation in economic decision making and social equity, to seek consensus and conclude agreements on social and economic policy, to consider all proposed labour legislation before it is introduced in Parliament, to consider all significant changes to social and economic policy before they are implemented or taken to Parliament, and to encourage and promote the formulation of co-ordinated policy on social and economic matters. The way GEAR was adopted undermined the Act, particularly the purpose for which NEDLAC was created.



Pretoria by Secretary-General Kgalema Motlanthe had a critical focus on the problem of factionalism within the ANC.

While the SACP engaged in genuine self-reflection and in this regard its leaders are on the record publicly articulating the self-critical perspectives that emerged, the architects of the Crossroads chose to scapegoat the SACP, persisting in stubborn denialism. The Crossroads shows no willingness to introspect, including regarding the failure to resolve the problems outlined by President Mandela in the political report to the ANC's 50th National Conference. The SACP's critical self-reflection, with its 15th National Congress in July 2022 its new zenith, did not end in mere perspectives proven by nothing in practice. In this regard, the Party's well-known role, going back earlier, in exposing the existence of state capture, which culminated in the process to recall the president who was at the helm, cannot be erased from historical records by a factional worldview or any other one-sided or different tendency.

In its hostile polemic against the Communist Party, the Crossroads covers other besides misinterpreting and opposing the reconfiguration of the Alliance. The issues include its own version of how or why others left the Communist Party in the late 1980s or early 1990s, including two future presidents. Whether by failing to renew their membership or by other means, the effect was the same: they left the Communist Party. This was also the period when the Soviet Union faced disintegration. Some within the handful minority interpreted that disintegration as signalling the end of the future of socialism and the case for the Communist Party's continued existence. There was absolutely no need for the Communist Party to disband. The struggle for complete liberation and social emancipation, towards a society free from class exploitation, had to continue, as it still has to, as one of the fundamentals to realise lasting freedom on a universalist basis.

Membership of the Communist Party is voluntary as part of its democratic principles. Those who left and with this neither adopted nor co-ordinated by the Party as a tactical consideration did so of their own accord. The Communist Party was the first political organisation to be banned in South Africa. It fought for freedom of association and other freedoms and rights. There was no need to abandon any of these rights and freedoms in order to appease the apartheid regime's forces after six decades and beyond. In fact, historical records will also show that some within the handful minority who left the Communist Party later turned against it and abandoned the socialist historical mission. In doing so, others would even propagate the flawed separation of the NDR from its inherent interrelationship with the pursuit of socialism, among others, further arguing that the Communist Party must not take up a campaign in pursuit of the NDR. That these ones left was therefore a mission drift and not merely a tactical posture.

Persistence and resilience, guided by strategic consistency, tactical flexibility and analytical alertness

Among the issues covered in the Crossroads' last section, the epilogue, is the Socialist Revolutionary Workers' Party (SRWP). The SRWP was formed by the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) before the 2019 national and provincial elections. It contested the elections and could not secure a seat in parliament. The Crossroads suggests parallels between the SRWP and the SACP. It implies "the same fate at the hands of the electorate" for the Marxist-Leninist Party while explicitly saying that is not what it does. However, it does not give a compelling reason for why it referred to the SRWP while its focus was on the SACP. To



substantiate its approach on this score, the Crossroads acknowledges that the two are not equivalent, given the SACP's long history in the revolutionary movement and the esteem it commands among both the working class and the wider population.

To be sure, the Communist Party has studied and will continue to study national and international cases and developments. This is one of the reasons why the SACP would not comment on NUMSA's leadership without making genuine efforts to reach out and engage with them, not just regarding their own efforts but also the necessity to forge the widest possible working-class unity, a popular Left front and a socialist movement of the workers and poor, working together with other worker and Left formations, including our allied federation, COSATU, and its affiliates. The SRWP's case is among the crucial subjects for untiring study, examination and re-examination to identify lessons. The same applies to the case of the ANC's decline "at the hands of the electorate" despite the support it received from all Alliance partners: the Crossroads says nothing about this case and the factors underpinning the decline of the ANC in the passages where it refers to the SRWP's "fate at the hands of the electorate" and implies future parallels with the SACP on this score.

The ANC's decline, particularly in terms of *headcount votes*, did not begin after the "first 13/14 years" from 1994 but within this period. In 1994, the ANC received 12.2 million votes. It declined by 1.6 million in 1999, down to 10.6 million votes. There was a slight recovery of 0.3 million votes in 2004 but this fell far short of returning to the 1994 peak, needless to mention improving to surpass it. Notably, a more significant recovery came after the "first 13/14 years" from 1994, even against the COPE split. That was in 2009 when the ANC received 11.9 million votes, which was higher than in 2004 and edged closer to the 1994 peak. While it declined to 11.4 million votes in 2014, this was still higher than the votes it received in 2004. The downward trend then saw the ANC receive 10 million votes in 2019 and the significantly lower 6.5 million votes in 2024.

While discussing the SRWP but with the SACP as its target, the Crossroads seems to turn a blind eye to one of the many key realities in the ANC's decline. That is, it is difficult to secure an increase in headcount votes if you lose part of your campaign capacity and, with it, both the direct votes from that lost capacity and a part of the votes that those campaigners once mobilised successfully. This is one reality which, as a unity and cohesion imperative, the Alliance reconfiguration sought to address before it was abandoned without implementation and later returned to but only in words of mouth, although still without implementation.

That said, the NDR and socialism as a struggle demands persistence and resilience, guided by the principles of strategic consistency, analytical alertness and tactical flexibility, despite lacking the financial resources that other parties report to the Independent Electoral Commission. To be sure, a Communist Party that disengages and thus abandons its historical mission in the face of a bourgeois-dominated economy and the distorting influence of bourgeois-dominated political party donations and bourgeois-dominated media coverage on elections has not grasped the very basis and core of its historical mission. That is, to wage the struggle against the bourgeois exploitative system and its consequent forms of domination under the same and other associated unfavourable circumstances. The SACP is not part of what Lenin correctly denounced as an "infantile disorder", defined in political terms, but against it. If the Crossroads had been consistent, it would have used its quotation-mining approach when discussing the Communist Party and elections, to draw attention to what Lenin had to say about communists and elections under the circumstances.



In his work “‘Left-wing’ Communism: An Infantile Disorder”, first published in 1920, Lenin guides Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries on elections in bourgeois-dominated national realities. When contesting elections, the Communist Party must do so to expose the limits and contradictions of the capitalist system, challenge bourgeois and reformist parties, tendencies and policies and strive to win supporters who would otherwise remain under the influence of the ruling class. By no means must it reduce the multiple fronts and vast trenches of the struggle to the single front of, or an exclusive focus on elections. The Communist Party is not a narrow electoralist party but a Marxist-Leninist Party.

While contesting elections, the Party must continue to strengthen its all-round capacity and intensify the struggle on other fronts. It contests elections so that it can also work in institutions such as parliament if it wins seats, not because such institutions have any sole potential to bring about socialism but because they are among the essential platforms for reaching and educating the masses who still believe in them. Boycotting elections or abstaining when conditions demand otherwise, even if there is no prospect of winning a seat, simply abandons the political battlefield to the enemy and isolates revolutionaries from the real political development of the working class, which must be advanced through experience rather than through claims of revolutionary purity.

It is clear from the above that Lenin is implicitly categorical that a Communist Party is not opportunist but against opportunism. The point is that, while the Party can use such institutions, it must not compromise its principles or subordinate the broader revolutionary historical mission to short-term gains. Here, if you like, the principle of democratic centralism requires subordinating short-term gains, if those are possibly available, to the long-term goals of the revolutionary struggle. Such engagement is tactical, not opportunist. It cannot be reserved for moments when victory is as easy as a walk in the park, if such a moment can ever exist in a bourgeois-dominated political economy and broader societal reality, including, in this case, the elections environment. The engagement should aim to strengthen the capacity to educate, organise and mobilise the working class without abandoning its core revolutionary mission.



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