



UMSEBENZI

ONLINE

PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN – SELF-RELIANCE, SELF-SUSTAINABILITY
SOCIALISM FROM THE GROUND UP!



PRC on the move:

IXOPO VILLAGE THEMBISILE HANI **KZN**

BOTSHABELO CALEB MOTSHABI DISTRICT, **FREE STATE**

SOSHANGUVE GREATER TSHWANE DISTRICT, **GAUTENG**

STANFORD TOWNSHIP, GAANSBAAI, DIMITRI TSAFENDA DISTRICT, **WESTERN CAPE**

MIDORONI VILLAGE HA KUTAMA ALPHUES MALIVHA DISTRICT, **LIMPOPO**

PRC dates are subject to change.

Please check the dates with the Acting National Organiser.

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EDITORIAL

Building hope through organisation and struggle



Image: Sou Mi

SOCIALISM IS THE FUTURE... BUILD IT NOW

Across our country, working-class and poor people know the truth of the crisis we face because we live it every day. Too many households wake up without work to go to and zero income. Too many parents worry about food prices, transport costs and whether clinics, schools and basic services will function tomorrow. For rural communities, farm workers, township residents and unemployed people, life has become harder, more uncertain and more unequal.

These conditions create frustration, especially when promised change feels remote. Many no longer believe voting alone will solve what is broken. This is understandable. But withdrawal and despair are not the answer. History shows real change happens when ordinary people organise, stand together and act.

The working class is strongest when united. Yet today, our struggles are scattered. Trade unions fight on one front. Community organisations stand on another. Cooperatives struggle alone. Progressive intellectuals remain isolated from mass movements.

Apartheid legacies persist and society remains massively divided. Meanwhile, big business and monopoly capital stay organised, coordinated and protected. This imbalance weakens our ability to win victories.

That is why the call for a broad Left front is so important. Unity does not mean losing identity or independence. It means bringing different forces together around common demands and shared campaigns. A Conference of the Left can become a space where workers, the unemployed, women, youth, rural communities and progressive organisations plan together. They can learn from each other and act together. Such unity must be democratic, honest and rooted in the daily struggles of the people.

This approach is already showing results. The People's Red Caravan shows that political work must be visible and useful. Working alongside people in villages and towns, comrades build cooperatives, cultivate land to grow food, repair infrastructure, and face social problems such as drugs, gangsterism and hunger. These efforts do more than meet needs – they restore confidence, reveal skills buried by poverty, and remind people of their collective power.

Self-reliance does not mean abandoning the fight for state responsibility. On the contrary, it strengthens it. When communities organise themselves, they are better placed to demand public investment, land, services and accountability. The contrast between people-led development and the empty promises of corporate social responsibility could not be clearer. While mining giants extract wealth and leave destruction behind, working people are showing what solidarity and cooperation can achieve.

Our movement also draws strength from its history. The life of Cde Joe Slovo reminds us that courage, discipline and clarity of purpose matter. He understood that liberation was not only about defeating apartheid. It was about building a society based on equality, justice and human dignity. His example challenges us to think deeply, act boldly and never separate leadership from the masses.

We are part of a wider world of struggle. When imperial powers attack countries like Venezuela and maintain blockades against Cuba, they are attacking the right of people to choose their own path. Our solidarity is not symbolic. It comes from shared experience and shared enemies. Internationalism strengthens our own struggle by reminding us that we are not alone.

We also bear the loss of school children killed in preventable road accidents. These tragedies reveal how neglect and profit-driven systems endanger working-class lives. Remembering them must harden our resolve to demand safe transport, strong regulation, and a society that values life over profit.

The way forward is clear: we must deepen organisation, build unity from below, and rally together around real demands – jobs through public investment, land reform, public control of essential services and food security.

Through unity, discipline and struggle, the working class can rebuild its confidence and power. We must organise, fight and win the future together!

CONFERENCE OF THE LEFT

Building unity from the ground up – why the working class needs a broad left front



TEBOGO PHADU

History shows that no meaningful change has ever come from above. It has always come from organised people acting collectively.

South Africa is facing a deep and widening crisis. For millions of workers, the unemployed, rural communities, and township residents, life is becoming harder each year. Jobs are scarce, prices keep rising, public services are under strain, and access to land, housing, healthcare, and transport remains unequal. At the same time, many people no longer believe that elections alone will change their lives. This growing frustration is not apathy – it is a reflection of lived experience.

These conditions demand a serious response from the Left. Not slogans. Not empty promises. But organisation, unity and coordinated action rooted in the real struggles of working-class and popular communities.

It is in this context that the idea of a Conference of the Left has emerged. The aim is not to form a new political party, nor to dissolve existing organisations. Rather, it is to create a space where trade unions, community movements, cooperatives, women's and youth formations, progressive intellectuals and Left political organisations can think together, plan together, and act together around shared priorities.

The working class in South Africa is not weak because it lacks numbers or grievances. It is weakened because it is fragmented. Workers struggle at the workplace, communities fight for services, rural people demand land, and young people search for jobs – often in isolation from one another. Meanwhile, capital is organised, coordinated, and ruthless in defending its interests.

Fragmentation benefits those who profit from exploitation. Unity strengthens those who produce the wealth of society. A broad Left front is therefore not a luxury. It is a necessity. Unity does not mean uniformity. Different organisations have different histories, traditions and strategies. But unity means agreeing on common demands, respecting each other's autonomy, and acting together where our interests align.

Any serious Left project must begin from the material conditions of the people. Poverty remains widespread. Unemployment is structurally entrenched, especially among the youth. Many who are employed face insecure, low-paid, and casualised work. The cost of food, electricity, transport, and housing continues to rise faster than wages and social support.

Land dispossession remains unresolved. Urban land is controlled by speculators, while rural communities lack secure access to productive land. Public healthcare is under pressure, even as private healthcare serves a wealthy minority. Education is increasingly commodified, placing heavy burdens on families.

These problems are not accidental. They flow from an economic system that prioritises profit over people, private accumulation over social need, and market logic over democratic planning.

The Conference of the Left framework identifies a set of shared priorities that can unite diverse Left forces. These include jobs and re-industrialisation through public investment; public control over finance to support production and cooperatives; decisive land reform, including a national referendum on land; healthcare, education, housing, and services as public goods; democratic control of technology; and principled international solidarity with peoples resisting imperialism and sanctions.

The Conference of the Left is not meant to be a talk shop. It is a step toward building coordination and continuity. The proposal for a Council of the Left is about creating a platform where organisations can align campaigns, share analysis, and sustain cooperation over time – without replacing or dominating existing structures.

People's democracy cannot exist only at election time. It must live in workplaces, communities, villages, schools, and cooperatives. Organisation from the ground is essential. Without it, frustration can be diverted into division, despair, or reactionary politics.

History shows that no meaningful change has ever come from above. It has always come from organised people acting collectively. Today's conditions demand renewed discipline, patience, and political clarity. The working class and popular strata still have immense power – but only if that power is organised and united.

Building a broad Left front is about restoring confidence in collective struggle, strengthening social solidarity, and shifting power toward those who live and work in this country. The task is urgent. The responsibility is collective. The future will be shaped not by waiting, but by organising.

Cde Tebogo Phadu is a member of the SACP Central Committee and Politburo

PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN

The People's Red Caravan is already bearing fruit



SACP leaders hold a meeting with the Ganspan community at the start of the People's Red Caravan activities in the town. From the left: Central Committee and Politburo member Tebogo Phadu, SACP General Secretary Cde Solly Mapaila, Central Committee Cde Barry Mitchell, and SACP Provincial Secretary of the Northern Cape Cde Norman Shushu.

BARRY MITCHELL

In 2025, the Party officially activated the People's Red Caravan (PRC) in four of our nine provinces. This highly anticipated project of developing community self-reliance and self-sustainability, in the context of worsening socio-economic conditions, broke from the orthodox and often narrowly electoral-focused method of campaigning.

The PRC saw the deployment of Central Committee members to rural villages in the North-West, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, and Northern Cape. However, leaders were deployed not to provide some sort of celebrity oversight of the activations but to lend their different capacity strengths to the PRC workstreams.

It has been incredible to see comrades that played a consequential role in the liberation struggle, now adapted to new conditions and settings, tapping into that amazing experience and knowledge in tackling contemporary community challenges related to gangsterism, drugs, sextortion, food insecurity and malnutrition, among others.

The PRCs have also elevated individuals and collectives with hidden capacity strengths that are awe-inspiring. The Party has some of the most dedicated self-taught artisans, growers and, in particular, community profilers and socio-economic activists. This is the beauty of the organic nature of the PRC.

It permits these untapped or underused skills and capacities to flourish through tackling local-level components in the crisis of social reproduction.

The PRC activations in the four provinces have produced some extremely important successes in the context of state collapse and rising levels of food and income insecurity.

In Matibidi, Mpumalanga, the chicken coop co-operative is producing close to 10,000 eggs a month.

In Ganspan, Northern Cape, which is our most recent activation, close to 7,000 eggs have been produced since 25 December. Ganspan Waste Management Cooperative has also been established, absorbing 28 community members into the functioning and management of the structure.

We have ploughed, irrigated and planted many, many hectares of land, aiming to produce cabbages, spinach, pecan nut trees and other crops relevant to the conditions in the village. Of course, these successes have also produced challenges in maintaining the momentum and dedication needed to see the projects through. We have also experienced the impact that the PRC has had on reversing regressive and negligent practices by state officials or local councillors and their ridiculous reactions to our presence in the communities, in many instances trying to undermine the community's self-reliance that has been built, often through threats and violence.

The contrasts of the PRC can be so abrasively stark. In Ganspan, we found rising levels of malnutrition of children aged 1 to 5 and ridiculously high levels of primary school drop outs. These conditions are allowed to fester, despite billion-dollar investment corporations, mines (Glencore) and major landowners operating and exploiting the very community that suffers from such worsening conditions. These corporations and multinational enterprises are abusing our people and using “corporate social responsibility” policies to do this.

In Ganspan, our team encountered a tiny corrugated iron structure used as an early learning centre, a space not conducive for animals, let alone vulnerable infants. On the window was a poster from the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), a state-owned development finance institution that receives funding from the Public Investment Corporation (PIC), which stated, “Nutrition program proudly sponsored by IDC.”

These corporations and investment firms must be held responsible for their hypocrisy. The IDC could easily construct a safe and conducive early learning centre, rather than proudly and embarrassingly claiming a basic feeding programme. Glencore, which extracts billions of dollars from these communities, could easily maintain the roads in Matibidi or Motlhabe that they destroy as a result of their transport trucks.

The deteriorating social and economic conditions in Ganspan can be contrasted with the brilliant week of work of the PRC: the grading of roads and a netball and soccer pitch, the construction of a beautiful community park and stage, as well as many impactful social interventions. We cannot wait and rely on the state or these corporations to make these critical interventions, so the PRC does.

These challenges and successes have also taught us a lot; we are learning as we progress from province to province. The momentum of the PRC must now take us into 2026, a year that will no doubt be intense for the Party. We must balance the need to monitor the projects of previous PRCs, ensuring the longevity and sustainability of our community farms and cooperatives. We must focus on improving the activation of the PRC in the remaining five provinces, and we must ensure that the PRC also finds resonance within the urban settings.

This year, the PRC must also strengthen our collaboration on joint activities with unions during the PRC activations in the remaining provinces. This forms a critical pillar in bridging the broadening gap between activism on the shop floor and the work needed in supporting our communities.

This is a campaigning year for the Party. We will therefore be mobilising workers and community members to vote for the SACP in the upcoming local government elections. This massive responsibility must run concurrently with the remaining PRC activations. This means that we have a responsibility to ensure that the strategic objectives of the PRC – poverty alleviation, self-reliance, food security, improved nutrition, education, health and social protection – are fully appreciated by workers and community members whilst we also roll-out our elections machinery. These dual and interlinked tasks all form part of building a massive movement of the working class and the poor. The next PRC activation will take place in Moses Mabhida Province (KwaZulu-Natal). Those that would be keen to join us for a day or for the full week, you are welcome!

Comrade Barry Mitchell is SACP Central Committee member. He writes in his personal capacity

The photos here depict some of the different PRC activities carried out in Ganspan. They included land cultivation and irrigation for food security, creating a laying house for egg production, area clean-up, fixing sports equipment so the young basketball team could play, renovating and cleaning school buildings. The activities focus on regenerating communities through self-reliance and self-sustainability.





A heartfelt thank you to Solly Afrika Mapaila and the SACP team!

We, the community of Ganspan, extend our sincerest gratitude for the wonderful initiatives you've brought to our area. The chicken farm, kids' park, road cleaning, and sports field renovation are truly making a difference in our lives.

These projects show you care about our well-being and are committed to improving our community. The chicken farm provides a source of income and food, the park gives our kids a safe space to play, and the cleaned roads and sports field enhance our overall quality of life.

Thank you for listening to our needs and working tirelessly to address them. Your efforts inspire us to work together to build a brighter future for Ganspan.

Siyabonga, Solly Afrika Mapaila, and the SACP team! Baie dankie!"

Glen Engelberg

JOE SLOVO

Remembering Joe Slovo's enduring legacy



Soweto 1991: SACP GS Cde Chris Hani and Cde Joe Slovo walk together after addressing the media on the third day of the first SACP legal congress inside South Africa in 41 years.

SANELISIWE NGUBANE

Cde Joe Slovo remains one of the most influential figures in South Africa's liberation history, remembered for his unwavering commitment to justice, equality and democratic transformation.

Born in 1926, Cde Slovo became politically active at a young age, driven by the harsh realities of racial oppression and economic exploitation under apartheid. As a teenager, he joined the Communist Party of South Africa and later became deeply involved in trade union activities. These early experiences shaped his political consciousness and commitment to working-class struggles, which would remain central to his activism throughout his life.

Cde Slovo emerged as a pivotal figure in the liberation movement, playing a central role in the formation of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), the joint armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) and the SACP. At a time when peaceful resistance was met with increasing state violence, MK was established as a strategic response to apartheid repression. Slovo's involvement in MK reflected his belief that freedom required both political organisation and, where necessary, armed resistance.

For nearly three decades, Cde Slovo lived in exile, during which time he became one of the most influential leaders within both the ANC and the SACP. Despite constant threats to his life and the challenges of exile, he remained a powerful intellectual force in the anti-apartheid struggle. His sharp political analysis and strategic thinking were evident in his extensive writings, which helped shape the ideological direction of the liberation movement and galvanise international solidarity against apartheid.

As General Secretary of the SACP, Cde Slovo played a crucial role in maintaining and strengthening the alliance between the ANC, the SACP and the trade union movement. This alliance proved vital in building a unified front against racial oppression and sustaining internal and external pressure on the apartheid regime. His intellectual rigour, discipline and commitment to principle made him a formidable opponent of the apartheid state.

Following the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP in 1990, Slovo returned to South Africa and became a key figure in the complex negotiations that paved the way for a democratic transition. His pragmatism and strategic acumen were instrumental in navigating the complex process of dismantling apartheid institutions while avoiding large-scale civil conflict. Slovo's contribution during this period demonstrated his ability to balance revolutionary ideals with political realism in pursuit of a peaceful and inclusive future.

In recognition of his contribution to the struggle, Cde Slovo was appointed Minister of Housing in the first democratic government led by Nelson Mandela in 1994. In this role, he sought to address the deep inequalities created by apartheid, particularly the housing crisis affecting black South Africans. Although his time in office was cut short by his untimely death in 1995, his commitment to social justice and transformation left a lasting imprint on post-apartheid governance.

Among the speakers were Young Communist League of South Africa National Secretary Mzwandile Thakhudi; Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa NEC Member Inkosi Siphosizwe Mahlangu; Liberation War Veterans National Convenor Dan Hatto; South African National Civic Organisation President Richard Mkhungwa; Congress of South African Trade Unions President Zingiswa Losi; and ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa. The programme concluded with reflections by SACP General Secretary Solly Mapaila.



Cde Slovo’s life and political legacy were commemorated on 6 January 2026 when the South African Communist Party (SACP) hosted the 31st Joe Slovo Commemoration at Heroes Acre, Avalon Cemetery in Soweto.

The 31st Joe Slovo Commemoration served as both a tribute to his life and a reminder of the values he championed. The programme focused on honouring Slovo’s revolutionary contribution

Speakers consistently emphasised that Cde Slovo played a crucial role in the delicate negotiations that led to South Africa’s democratic transition. His ability to combine ideological clarity with strategic flexibility was a key factor in achieving a negotiated settlement that laid the foundation for a non-racial, democratic society.

The commemoration concluded with the laying of flowers at Cde Slovo’s grave, symbolising respect and gratitude for his immense contribution to South Africa’s freedom. Organisers expressed appreciation to all those who attended and participated in honouring a leader whose life continues to inspire new generations committed to social justice and democratic transformation.

Cde Joe Slovo’s legacy endures not only in history books but also in the ongoing struggle to realise the values of equality, dignity, and freedom for all South Africans.

and his decisive role in negotiations that ended apartheid. Speakers reflected on his political courage, intellectual depth and enduring relevance in contemporary equality efforts.

Cde Sanelisiwe Ngubane is a media intern at the SACP head office

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Solidarity with Venezuela against imperialist aggression



Clear messages for the US at the protest outside the US Consulate, Sandton, 16 January.

AVIWE RAPELANG MOHAPI

In the relentless march of history, the forces of imperialism continue to reveal their predatory nature, preying on sovereign nations that dare to chart a path toward socialism and self-determination. The recent US military incursion into Venezuela exemplifies this barbarism. On 3 January 2026, US forces launched airstrikes on Caracas, culminating in the brazen abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, under the guise of "restoring democracy."

This act is not merely an assault on Venezuela but a calculated strike against the global working class and anti-imperialist movements everywhere. It echoes the long history of US interventions – from the overthrow of progressive governments in Latin America to the ongoing support for genocidal regimes in Israel. We must understand this as the desperate throes of a decaying capitalist empire, seeking to plunder Venezuela's vast oil reserves and crush the Bolivarian Revolution that has empowered millions through social programmes and anti-poverty initiatives.

The South African Communist Party (SACP), alongside allies in the trade union movement, civic organisations, and progressive forces, has long stood in solidarity with Venezuela. Our own liberation struggle against apartheid was bolstered by internationalist support from socialist nations like Cuba and the former Soviet Union.

Today, we repay that debt by mobilising against US imperialism. It was in this spirit that I joined comrades on Friday, 16 January 2026, for a vibrant protest outside the US Consulate in Sandton, Johannesburg. This event, organised by a coalition including the SACP, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, student groups, academic bodies, civic organisations, faith-based organisations and various progressive organisations, served as a beacon for those unable to attend or disconnected from social media platforms. It was a powerful reminder that the struggle for socialism is international, uniting the oppressed across continents.

The protest commenced around midday under a partly cloudy Johannesburg sky, with comrades gathering along Sandton Drive. The atmosphere was electric, charged with revolutionary fervour and a sense of urgency. Protesters, many donning red shirts symbolising the blood of the working class and the fire of resistance, waved red flags emblazoned with the hammer and sickle. Palestinian flags fluttered alongside Venezuelan banners, underscoring the interconnected struggles against US-backed Zionism and interventionism. Estimates placed the crowd in the hundreds, a diverse assembly of workers, youth, elders, and intellectuals, reflecting the broad anti-imperialist front we must build.

As we assembled, the chants began: "*Hands Off Venezuela!*" and "*Stop US Imperialism Now!*" echoed through the streets, drawing curious glances from passersby and motorists. Signs held high proclaimed messages like "*Wipe Out US Imperialism,*" and "*Unite in Solidarity with the People of Venezuela and Palestine*". One particularly striking banner read "*Save Our Sacred Lands*", a nod to the indigenous and environmental dimensions of the Venezuelan struggle against resource exploitation. Police presence was visible, with vehicles parked nearby, but the demonstration remained peaceful, focused on disciplined mobilisation rather than confrontation.

The protest unfolded with a series of speeches that dissected the imperialist agenda. A key speaker from the SACP, the General Secretary Cde Mapaila, highlighted how US actions violate international law and sovereignty, drawing parallels to historical invasions like Grenada in 1983, where a democratically elected socialist leader was overthrown because he prioritised people over profits.

"I'm old enough to remember when the Americans invaded a small island in the Caribbean called Grenada", one veteran protester, Stephen Faulkner, shared passionately, his straw hat shading determined eyes. "The leader of the socialist movement, who had been fairly elected, was simply suggesting that money should be spent on looking after the people and not on arms. They took away the entire political leadership and cast them into, basically, towards assassination." His words resonated, reminding us that Venezuela's "crime" is its commitment to Bolivarian socialism, which has lifted millions out of poverty despite crippling US sanctions.

Another comrade, Claire Ceruti, articulated the global ramifications: "If Trump tramples over Venezuela, then none of us are safe. He did it just for control. Every one of these kinds of mad moves that Trump is making are dragging us all closer to a precipice of a broader conflict than what is already happening in the world."

Her analysis, rooted in dialectical materialism, exposed how US aggression in Venezuela is part of a larger pattern – funding Israel's genocide in Gaza while bombing sovereign states in Latin America. This linkage was palpable; many protesters wore keffiyehs or carried signs reading, "Free Palestine" and "Free Maduro", forging a united front against common enemies.

Interspersed with speeches were revolutionary songs that lifted spirits and unified the crowd. Comrades linked arms, singing anthems of liberation in various languages. One video capture showed the group swaying in rhythm, fists raised, with red attire dominating the scene – a sea of scarlet against the backdrop of the consulate's gates. The energy was infectious; even those on the periphery joined in chanting, "US Out of Venezuela!" and "Free Maduro and Cilia!" This cultural expression of resistance harkens back to our anti-apartheid *toyitoyis*, transforming protest into a collective act of defiance.

The demonstration also featured moments of education and outreach. Pamphlets were distributed explaining Venezuela's achievements under Chavismo – nationalising oil resources, expanding healthcare and education, and resisting neoliberal austerity.

I engaged with young students who drew connections between South Africa's economic inequalities and Venezuela's fight against sanctions that have caused immense suffering. One protester noted, "Everybody here is sick and tired of the bullying that's taking place from the White House." Indeed, the protest was not just a reaction but a proactive call to build an anti-imperialist alliance, urging South Africans to pressure our government for stronger diplomatic condemnation.

As the protest wound down around 2 pm, with no incidents reported, the message was clear: this is but one battle in the ongoing class war. Similar actions occurred in Cape Town on the same day, where demonstrators on Adderley Street chanted, "Free Venezuela!" and demanded Maduro's release. These coordinated efforts signal a growing movement across South Africa, echoing earlier protests in Pretoria on 8 January.

From a Marxist perspective, such protests are essential for raising class consciousness and forging international solidarity. Imperialism, as Lenin taught us, is the highest stage of capitalism, driven by monopoly capital's need for expansion. By standing with Venezuela, we defend the right of nations to socialist development, countering the narrative of "failed states" peddled by bourgeois media. Yet, we must go further: organise workplace committees, educate the masses, and push for a socialist South Africa free from neoliberal chains.

In conclusion, the January 16 protest in Johannesburg was a testament to the enduring spirit of working-class internationalism. For those who could not attend, know that your comrades are on the frontlines, fists raised against the empire. Let us all join the struggle in the next protest action!

Hands off Venezuela!

Free Maduro!

Onward to socialism!

Cde Aviwe Rapelang Mohapi is the National Education Officer at Nehawu. He is also a writer and political activist. He writes in his personal capacity

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

67th Anniversary of the triumph of the Cuban revolutionary



LEBOGANG PULE

Cuba marked the 67th anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 2026, commemorating Fidel Castro's forces overthrowing Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship in 1959.

Celebrations occur annually on this national holiday, known as Liberation Day, with events across the island and at Cuban embassies worldwide. In South Africa the day was celebrated on 11 December 2025, at the embassy of the Republic of Cuba in South Africa, Pretoria. The event was attended by members of the South African government, representatives of diplomatic missions from different countries, members of the country's trade unions, medical doctors who studied in Cuba under the Nelson Mandela – Fidel Castro programme, Cuban personnel who work here, Cuban residents and political entities.

The event was addressed by the ambassador of Cuba in South Africa, H.E. Fakri Rodriguez Pinelo, who mentioned the significance of 1 January. He emphasised the role it played in establishing Cuba's socialist government, influencing global leftist movements and evoking US tensions, including the ongoing embargo. And how grateful he is that South Africa is still standing in solidarity with the Cuban.

The Ambassador also highlighted the numerous bilateral agreements established since diplomatic relations in 1994. This includes the annual Joint Consultative Mechanism (JCM) and sector-specific Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), with health as the leading programme. A key agreement initiated in 1997 deploys Cuban medical brigades to South Africa and funds scholarships for South African students to study medicine in Cuba under the Nelson Mandela-Fidel Castro programme. Over 2,500 South Africans have graduated, and Cuban doctors aided COVID-19 response efforts.

He noted that the ties and comradeship uniting our peoples and governments stems from a deep, historically rooted relationship built on solidarity during the anti-apartheid struggle and ongoing South-South cooperation. Formal diplomatic ties were established on 11 May 1994, following Nelson Mandela's inauguration, marking one of the new democratic government's first foreign policy acts.



Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, delivered a message of solidarity and emphasised the historic friendship between the two countries. He noted that it continues to this day with a significant number of professionals, primarily in the healthcare sector, working in South Africa. He also recognised

the role that Cuba played in the liberation struggle of South Africa, which resulted in the country getting its independence. He further condemned the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba, and reaffirmed South African solidarity with the Cubans.

For the Cubans, the "New Year Day", which is a public holiday in South Africa, symbolises a great victory for the Cubans. They celebrate the 67th anniversary of the Triumph of the Revolution as a renewal of national commitment to sovereignty, resilience and the revolutionary project amid US blockade pressures.

South Africa consistently supports UN resolutions against the US embargo on Cuba, while Cuba serves as a key Latin American partner for Pretoria in multilateral bodies. This year, 2026, marks 32 years of diplomacy between South Africa and Cuba.

Lebogang Pule is the National Committee member of YCLSA and POPCRU International Relations officer. She writes in her own capacity.

VANDERBIJLPARK TRAGEDY

Cosatu and Alliance mourn tragic loss of 14 young lives



Learners in Vanderbijlpark take part in the candlelight prayer for their classmates.

THULILE KUMALO

A horrific road accident in Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng, has left communities mourning the loss of 14 school children en route to school early Monday morning. The scholar transport minibus collided head-on with a truck, marking a devastating start to the 2026 academic year.

The crash occurred around 7:00 am on a narrow road near Vanderbijlpark, known for reckless driving by trucks. Police reports indicate the 22-year-old minibus driver attempted to overtake stationary vehicles, leading to the collision. Initially, 12 learners died at the scene, with two more succumbing to injuries in hospital on Thursday.

The victims attended various primary and high schools in the Vaal area, including El-Shaddai Christian School. Five learners were hospitalised initially, with some in critical condition; one has been discharged. Gauteng Health MEC Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko addressed the survivors' care, while the Gauteng Department of Education confirmed the identities of those who died on site.

The driver, arrested post-hospital discharge, now faces 14 counts of murder, three counts of attempted murder, one count of driving without a valid professional driving permit, and one count of driving an unlicensed motor vehicle.

This incident has ignited outrage over scholar transport safety in South Africa, especially on hazardous Vaal routes. Families, schools, and unions call for stricter regulations amid recurring tragedies just days into the school year.

Candlelight prayer

On Friday, 23 January, in a poignant display of solidarity and grief, Cosatu and its Alliance partners gathered for a candlelight prayer at the site of the devastating school bus accident. The event, organised swiftly in response to the tragedy, drew a number of union members, community leaders, families, and activists to honour the young victims and demand urgent action on road safety.

Eyewitnesses described the horrific accident scene as the overloaded bus collided with a truck, leaving parents and educators in shock. Preliminary reports from authorities point to mechanical failure and poor vehicle maintenance as key factors, issues Cosatu has long flagged in its campaigns for safer public transport, especially for vulnerable learners in under-resourced areas.

Under the flickering glow of hundreds of candles, Cosatu National Treasurer, Comrade Freda Oosthuizen, addressed the crowd, her voice steady amid tears.

Alliance partners, including the SACP) and the ANC, joined in prayers led by local Pastor SL Somtala, with hymns.

Community members shared stories of the victims – bright-eyed Grade 7 learners excited for the new school term – underscoring the human cost.

Comrade Kgomo Makhupola, the National Treasurer of the National Education, Health and Allied Worker Union, focused on education sector workers and highlighted the ongoing struggles with collective bargaining for better school transport funding.

Banners reading “Justice For Our Children” and “Safe Roads Now”, among others, communicated community members’ messages, blending mourning with calls for policy reform.

“This accident must spur us into action to declare our roads safer, and drivers’ behaviour on the roads must improve, especially for new public transport drivers,” said ANC Treasurer General, Comrade Gwen Ramokgopa, at the Vanderbijlpark road crash scene.



Deputy Secretary General of the ANC Cde Nomvula Mokonyane, Cosatu National Treasurer Freda Oosthuysen, and Cosas General Secretary Cde Unesongo Matikinca, together with members of the ANCWL and other mourners, at the candlelight prayer.

As the candlelight event concluded around midday, participants pledged continued advocacy, including pushing for stricter vehicle inspections and expanded public transport subsidies. Cosatu vows this tragedy will catalyse real change, ensuring no child boards a “death trap” again.

Tribute to learners

They rose each morning with backpacks full of promise, small maps of futures folded into lunchboxes and laughter. On the road between home and classroom, they carried dreams, chalk-dusted fingers, bright questions, the ordinary courage of children. Today, the bell rings in a different key; the desks keep their shape, the playground keeps its echoes, and the world keeps the weight of absence. But absence cannot unmake the light they left behind: a homework page with a margin doodle; a joke that still starts a smile; a name that will not be forgotten.

We remember them not as a single moment of sorrow, but as a constellation of mornings, each one a small, fierce life. May their stories be told in classrooms that listen, in streets made safer, in the steady, stubborn work of people who refuse to let this be only a tragedy.

To the families who carry them now: your grief is seen, your love is known. May you find companions who hold you through the long days, and may the memory of these learners become a quiet force guiding hands, changing rules, and keeping other children safe. They remain in the books they opened, the songs they hummed, the futures they imagined.

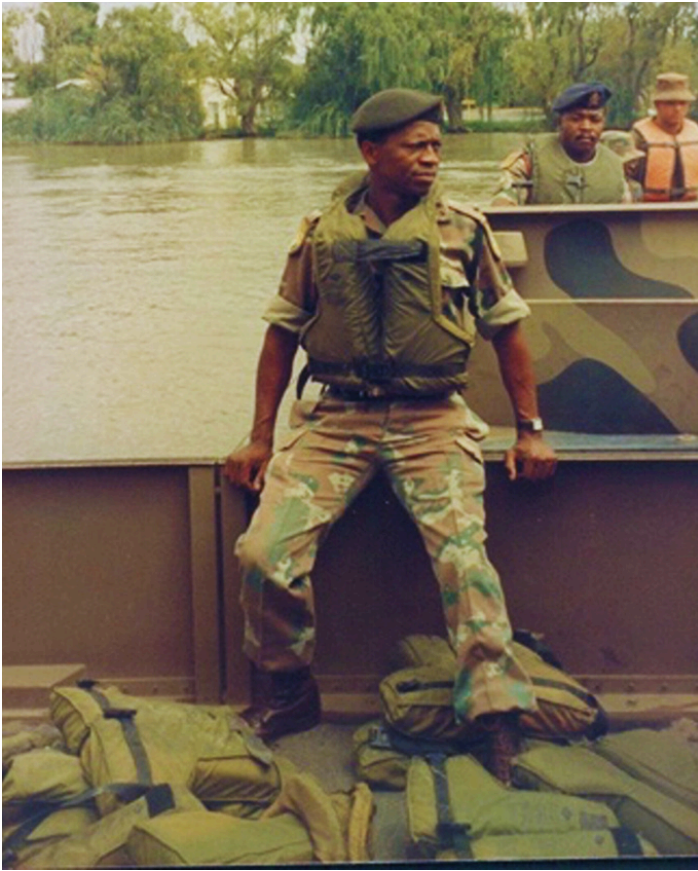
We will speak their names, plant trees for their laughter, and keep a place at the table. In that keeping, they live on small lights that will not be dimmed.

GONE BUT NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

Thulile Kumalo is the National Gender Coordinator for the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union. She writes in her personal capacity.

MK SPECIAL OPS PROFILES

Ernest Pule: Special Ops, a family affair



Cde Pule when he served in the SANDF

The following profile of Cde Ernest Pule, a key leader of MK Special Operations against the apartheid regime, is taken from *Attacking the Heart of Apartheid*, by **Yunus Carrim**

Born in 1955 in Newclare, Ernest Pule (MK names: T-man, Oupa, Vusi, Themba) was from a family of nine children that moved to Soweto in 1960. His father was an 'ordinary worker' and his mother a domestic worker. When he was about six, they separated. His parents and extended family were involved in the struggle in the 1950s.

Ken, a taxi driver, used to tell Pule and other students during lunch times at Naledi High School that in Mozambique FRELIMO was:

moering [attacking] the Portuguese. They are running away. He used to talk politics. He had this beard like Samora Machel. So, we used to call him Frelimo.

About three months before June 16, the security police came to school to arrest a student. The word spread because it was lunch time. And then we said what, who are these special branch, no ways, it's not going to happen, not at our school.

The principal tried to stop the students, but they overturned the Security Branch's Beetle. The police called in reinforcements. They tear-gassed them.

There was no longer normal schooling. On 16 June, we got word that younger students were being harassed by the police at Phefeni School. So, we mobilised other schools and went there.

According to Pule, it was Naledi High (not Morris Isaacson) that was key to the 16 June protests:

[After 16 June], we said to Ken we're sick and tired of this, we want to join the ANC. He said, 'Are you serious?' I said yes. So, he told his connections, 'Hey man, there are people that want to go outside'. So just the following day they came.

He told his oldest brother, Abraham, to tell their mother he was leaving the country. He left, in September 1976, with about twenty others. He was sent to Tanzania. Three weeks later he and others went to Moscow for a commander's course for ten months. They stayed in a flat near the Red Square.

It was extremely cold. But it was very warm inside. Moscow was just fantastic – the treatment we received was super, and we were exposed to things we were never before. During weekends we were taken to the theatre to see ballet, opera and so on. It was eye-opening.

After supper we were free to mingle with people. You wouldn't see people begging like at home. There was plenty food. We ate five meals a day [laughter].

He then went to the Funda camp in Angola, where comrades were 'brushed up and prepared for action' inside South Africa. 'Sometimes people will be brought from the country straight to our camp for a short time and they went back into the country.'

In 1979, he went to Simferopol in the Soviet Union for further training. Five months later he was sent to Caxito camp in Angola as an instructor. He assisted Special Ops cadres with their preparations to go into the country.

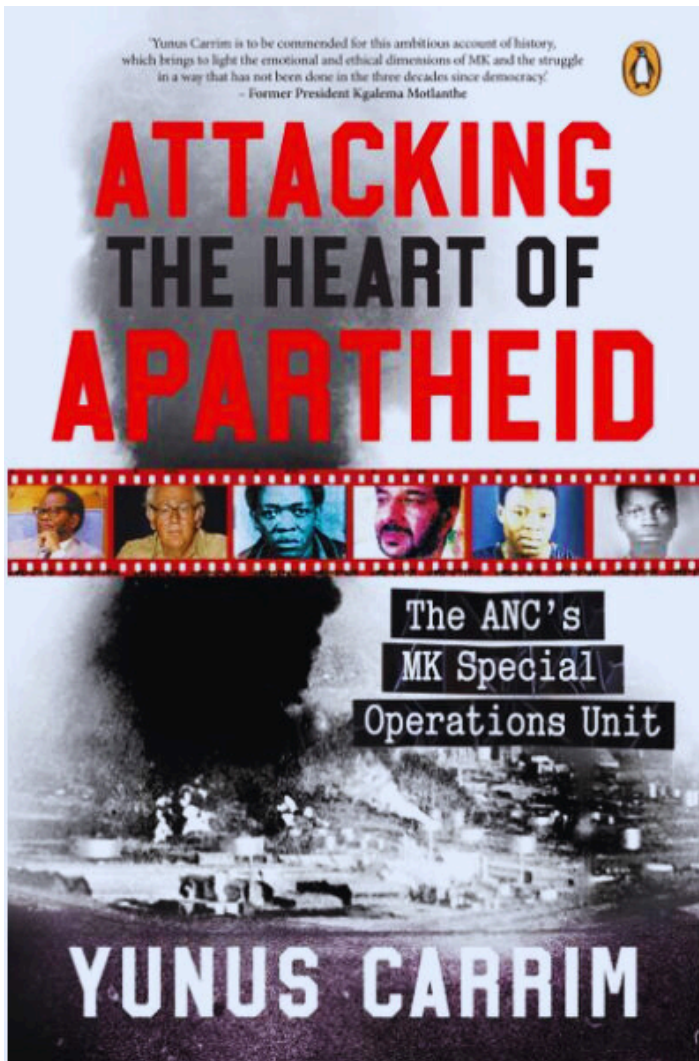
He only knew they hit Sasol when they returned.

Because they had confidence in us as people who are responsible, they used to talk about these things, hey, dah, dah, dah ...

But should they?

No, definitely not, that's a principle of MCW [clandestine work] structures, but then you know people ...

In December 1981, Rashid recruited Pule into Special Ops. He took over from George Nene in Swaziland to prepare places for cadres coming in and out of South Africa. He had to reconnoitre the border areas, store weapons, recruit people from inside the country to take weapons in and create DLBs, recruit others to assist with logistics inside the country, and take comrades into the country.



Attacking the Heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit by Yunus Carrim is essential reading for anyone who wants to learn about the connections between military and political strategy and tactics during the liberation struggle.

He was moved to Botswana as Special Ops' front commander, 'the third in command'.

He also recruited his brother Abraham, a younger brother, Enos, and his sister, Sadi. Abraham took a load into the country in his Ford Capri, which was fitted with a DLB. The second time he came to Botswana he stayed with the Motswana woman who turned out to be a spy (Chapter 19).

She was some distant relative of his wife, and he had a place to sleep there. We loaded the car. But she phoned her bosses in Zeerust, and he was arrested at a roadblock.

In 1986, Abraham was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He was released in 1990.

Pule's other brother Enos wanted to carry out operations, not just manage weapons, but he was arrested. Badly tortured, he was finally released.

Sadi was trained in Angola and assisted the Botswana command.

On 31 July 1990, Pule participated in an operation to hit the Braklaagte military base in Bophuthatswana. This was in support of the struggles of the people in Braklaagte opposing incorporation into the bantustan. There were several clashes between the protesters and the police.

Pule commanded the operation, which included Nyalunga, George Koloi Sibanyoni (Tate), Aaron Mkhwanazi (Take Five) and Mandla.

We passed by Mangope's house, and the guys said we haven't used the bazookas so let's hit it. I said don't be stupid, we don't know the police arrangements here, next time ...

The following day, the transport didn't pitch. Mkhwanazi, Sibanyoni and Mandla hitchhiked a lift, held up the driver, took the car and said they'd return it.

Between 22:30 and 24:00, when they came close to the camp, a police van came alongside them. The cadres fired on them. Four policemen were killed and two injured. The cadres aborted the plan to hit the base, dumped the car and skipped over the fence into Botswana.

At the TRC, Pule apologised to the families of the six victims and said that:

Mangope and his colleagues were responsible and they are now living in luxury ... they created the situation that led to the casualties.^[1]

'The first person I recruited into Special Ops support structures was Pule because he was thorough, dedicated and meticulous,' says Rashid.

Pule was 'very good at his work and how he related to us,' says Lentsoane.

Passtoors recalls Ernest Pule staying in Swaziland for a while with an American sympathiser, Cathy.

There was a security threat and T-man went into hiding. I was sent to clean [Cathy's] place. He had hidden all kinds of small weapons, detonators, plans, maps, documents – in the kitchen, TV, Hi-Fi, in and above and under furniture and in the hems and seams of the curtains!...

T-man loved my kids and they him. When my youngest sons left to join their father, he insisted on saying goodbye to them. I said it was too dangerous. But he got angry and said, 'Comrade, these are not only your children! They are our children too, I must see them before they leave.' So, I took them at the appointed time to play football in a park. T-man slipped out of the bushes, played with the kids, laughed and hugged them, and disappeared again in the bushes.

He had feline body movements, when he was in underground mode – you could hardly see him come and go. Like a cat on the hunt.

Because his role was to facilitate cadres going into the country, he got to know many of them (mostly only by their MK names) and persistently traced them, encouraging them to engage in this book project.

How did Pule survive for so long?

From Botswana it was much easier to get into South Africa than from Swaziland. Especially for me, it's my language there – Tswana. But, overall, it was very difficult, very risky. Sometimes you won't know if a person is an informer. Or will become one. And you take them across the border. I must be one of the luckiest commanders ever. Now, I think maybe it was because of my ancestors. Ancestral protection.

His devotion to the armed struggle shines through in his enthusiastic, lively, rapid responses to questions. He often talks about the struggle era as if he's still in it. As if it's still his life. And it's almost as if he prefers that time.

'When I saw T-man again in 2003', says Passtoors,

he told me he had difficulty adapting. He said that during the struggle it was easy. I asked, easy? He said, 'We didn't have to worry about food, clothing, who was paying the rent for the house – we just had to fight!' We laughed, but it's true. Then he said, 'I know you were also happy in the struggle [laughter]'. Which was true. I was happy, life had meaning.

Cde Yunus Carrim is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member

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