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Revitalise

the

National

Democratic

Revolution



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The struggle for national democratic sovereignty

The Political Report to the SACP's April 2025 Central Committee (published in this issue of the *African Communist*) makes the critical observation that "at the heart of our National Democratic Revolution at present is the urgent task...to secure our democratic national sovereignty". As Trump launches his wrecking ball offensive, attempting to bully all and sundry, US allies and foes alike, the centrality of the struggle in South Africa for democratic national sovereignty is more urgent than ever.

But it would be a mistake to imagine it is just because of Trump that the struggle for national sovereignty has suddenly become a central task of our revolution. Since the late 1920s, the Communist Party in South Africa has understood the "national" in the NDR (National Democratic Revolution) to relate to two interrelated struggle dimensions:

1. The struggle against the colonial and apartheid-era national oppression of the black majority and (in the present) its persisting legacy;
2. The struggle to deepen the capacity for democratic national sovereignty in the face of ongoing imperialist bullying and oppression.

For many decades, the SACP developed the concept of colonialism of a special type (CST) to describe this double colonial reality. The black majority were nationally oppressed and super-exploited by an 'internal', white colonial bloc dominated by a national South African monopoly sector (largely in mining); while, simultaneously, this South African capitalist class was itself considerably subordinate to imperialist monopoly capital. True, South Africa achieved relatively significant industrialisation from the 1930s onwards, but always as a semi-peripheral economy, primarily exporting unprocessed minerals and agricultural commodities to the imperialist North.

The national struggle had (and still has), therefore, both an internal (democratic) and an external (anti-imperialist) dimension. These two dimensions are deeply inter-related. Without increasing our relative de-linking from imperialist domination, the quality and depth of our democracy under, for instance, IMF (International Monetary Fund) enforced austerity, will be impaired. But without deepening the democratic participation and mobilisation of working class and popular forces within our country, the ability to forge national sovereignty in the face of external and internal opponents will be weak.

Following the democratic breakthrough of 1994 it is no longer accurate to describe our current reality as CST strictly speaking, but the deeply embedded legacy of centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid have remained entrenched. Racial and gendered inequalities continue to be reproduced. As a result of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear)-inspired neoliberal restructuring of our economy and of the post-apartheid state, South Africa in 2025 remains a semi-peripheral political economy dominated by the circuits of imperialist capital.

In fact, relative to the high-point of the apartheid regime in which there was an extensive publicly-owned sector, in which there were many features of a (whites-only, of course) welfare state, and, in

which in the 1980s, monopoly capital was subject to prescribed assets and tough exchange control measures, the post-1994 South Africa political economy has arguably become even more vulnerable to imperialist subordination than before.

A major reason for this is the illusion that prevailed in much of South African public opinion, including key parts of the ANC in the early 1990s. In his farewell address to Parliament in February 1999, for instance, outgoing President Mandela said: “For a country that not many years ago was the polecat of the world, South Africa has truly undergone a revolution in its relations with the international community. The doors of the world have opened to South Africa, precisely because of our success in achieving things that humanity as a whole holds dear.”

While Mandela was justly proud of the progress collectively achieved across the 1990s, the idea that South Africa was an errant prodigal now returning to the bosom of a happy, universal family grossly misread the ugly reality of a post-Cold War, US-dominated imperialism. Returning from a 2002 G8 Summit, President Mbeki went even further. He hailed the outcome of the summit as the “birth of a more equitable system of international relations. In historical terms, it signifies the end of the epoch of colonialism and neo-colonialism” (*Sunday Times*, 30 June 2002).

Reflecting ironically on similar illusions in India at the time, the eminent Marxist economist Prabhat Patnaik published a book entitled “*Whatever Happened to Imperialism?*” Indeed, across the 1990s and early 2000s, in most ANC strategic documents, the very idea of imperialism tended to disappear.

Today, that illusion would be hard to entertain. There is now considerable consensus that the US is a declining but still immensely powerful and therefore dangerous imperial power. The dramatic rise of China, the 2007-8 Great Recession, Nato’s stumble into defeat in Ukraine – these are among the causes and symptoms of this decline. The “Again” in Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan, however vainglorious it might be, is also an admission of this decline. In a desperate attempt to reverse the decline, Trump 2.0 has shattered whatever illusions there might have been about a happy global family of nations.

But it would be a serious mistake to imagine that US imperialism has only now made a serious return with Trump’s second coming. It wasn’t Trump who first established over 700 US military bases on foreign soil. It wasn’t Trump who led the illegal Nato bombing of Serbia and the dismantling of Yugoslavia. Nor was it Trump who invaded Iraq or bombed Libya. Trump has ripped off what was left of the benign mask of a Western-based ‘rules-based order’, revealing more clearly the ugly truth always lurking beneath.

And this should make any residual denialism or illusions about imperialism within our broader movement untenable. It is to be welcomed, therefore, that both our ANC-led government and the ANC itself have come out clearly to say that we will not be black-mailed into abandoning transformative policies and legislation like the Expropriation Act, nor will we back-track on our lead role in the International Court of Justice on the horrific genocide in Palestine. But these assertions of democratic national sovereignty need to be deepened and carried much further.

We need as South Africa to much more energetically follow the example of Brics partners like China, Brazil and Russia in seeking to conduct trade in our national currencies, by-passing the dollar. In the face of the Trump offensive, South Africa, like others, needs to diversify trading strategies, we need to work closely with our region and continent, and we need to add much greater impetus to

domestic re-industrialisation.

There are lessons to be learnt from other countries like Indonesia, for instance, which in 2020 banned the export of unprocessed nickel ore. Indonesia has the world's largest reserves of nickel, a critical mineral for electric car batteries. The European Union successfully challenged the move in the World Trade Organisation in 2022, but Indonesia then escalated the case to the WTO's appellate body. In a wonderful irony the appellate body has been rendered dysfunctional since the Biden administration, with the US blocking the appointment of a quorum of adjudicators. The Biden administration (followed by Trump 2.0) crippled the appellate body because China was successfully bringing WTO cases against US protectionist measures. The WTO, an imperialist creation, has been rendered toothless by its own creators and Indonesia has seized the gap and is successfully compelling corporations to smelt nickel in the country.

There are many internal battles to be fought if we are to strengthen democratic national sovereignty. Three decades of neoliberal macro-economic policy have not only resulted in crisis levels of unemployment, stagnant growth and deepening poverty, they have also rendered our country much more vulnerable to imperialist predation and bullying.

In a small but important development, early in August President Ramaphosa told the South African Reserve Bank that its attempt to unilaterally set the inflation target was illegal. The SARB, under its current arrogant leadership, is basically handmaiden to South Africa's private monopoly banking, financial and speculative capital sectors. It is important that the primacy of a democratically elected government be asserted over an unelected institution dogmatically in step with Wall Street's marching band. But SARB's arrogance is matched by that of Treasury; its bungling and undemocratic attempt at foisting a budget through Parliament in April opened up growing criticism from within cabinet and the ANC. The potential for anti-neoliberal momentum on these fronts needs to be sustained and deepened, and the SACP has an important role to play in this regard.

The struggle within our country to consolidate effective national sovereignty goes much wider. In a recent intervention, academic and political commentator Steven Friedman makes several important points. In many countries of the world, Friedman observes, "Donald Trump's attempt to bully countries by slapping high tariffs on their goods unless they do as they are told by the United States has unified the victims. Here, the second biggest party in government [the DA] uses it as a stick to beat the biggest [the ANC]. Parts of the media and business join in, blaming the victim."

Contrary to what is alleged in local opposition circles, South Africa has not been uniquely singled out by Trump. Over 90 countries have been hit with major tariff increases, some much higher than the 30 per cent directed at South Africa, and some on countries that can hardly be regarded as anti-US (Switzerland, for instance, has a 39 per cent tariff). Modi's India, the US's closest ally in the sub-continent, faces a 50 per cent tariff because it is importing oil from Russia. But these realities don't fit the narrative of some leading business representatives. For them, the tariffs are the ANC in government's fault. Trump is not the problem at all.

Jumping on the bandwagon in a thoroughly unpatriotic and supine mode, the DA argues that South Africa should amend the Expropriation Act, or abandon transformative economic and social policies as a sop to avert the tariff. Others pick up on similar cringing themes. Professor William Gumede suggests we should tone down our condemnation of Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, or that we should

cut ties with Russia and Iran. As Friedman neatly puts it, some in our country believe “in the West’s right to rule – if a country runs afoul of the West, it needs to atone.”

Trump’s tariff war against the rest of the world will have serious consequences everywhere, including for South Africa, where 30,000 jobs in the auto sector and thousands more in the fruit exporting sector are at stake. It is not wrong for our government to seek to negotiate better terms, but care must be taken that in seeking to get something less worse than 30 per cent we do not give away more than we gain. The SACP, with a long and principled anti-imperialism, has an important role to play in this context. We must help to build a firm and patriotic stance against imperialist bullying. We must help to expose those who wittingly or unwittingly are undermining the capacity of our country to advance effective development through democratic national sovereignty. ●

Reasserting the *Revolution* in the National Democratic Revolution

This is a shortened version of the statement of the Political Report to the 8th Plenary Session of the 15th Congress Central Committee, 4-6 April 2025

Embracing the outcomes of our 5th Special National Congress (SNC) outlining immediate tasks of the Party and the working class in the struggle for socialism, assessing the state of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) through the lens of thirty years since the historic 1994 democratic breakthrough.

We dedicate this report to the undying revolutionary spirit and memories of our revolutionary martyrs Cdes Chris Hani and Solomon Mahlangu. On Sunday, April 6, 2025, we remember the young MK combatant who was martyred for his people, Solomon Mahlangu, who defiantly gave his life for the freedom our people enjoy today and called on them to continue the fight. We will join the family to visit the gallows this Sunday. They have also requested our full involvement in remembering his memory. They have asked for the inquest leading to his death.

The report covers a brief assessment of the following key areas:

- The SACP SNC resolutions, especially the contest of 2026 local government election, the role and responsibilities of the CC and obligatory political discipline.
- Engagements and outcomes of the bilateral meetings with the ANC and Cosatu
- Working class Program to defend the NDR in the relentless struggle against neoliberal economic trajectory pursued by government and the ANC characterised by austerity measures, therefore strengthening our fight against privatisation of water, sanitation, electricity, roads, transport, and telecommunications.
- Assessing the state of the NDR and its component forces of the state
- The Red Caravan – or the People’s Caravan

Overview

This, the first Central Committee of the year, is convened rather belated at the end of the first quarter of the year, on the backdrop of an unravelling international turmoil after the inauguration of Donald Trump as President in the US. His chaotic leadership started with the signing of 206 decrees within few hours of his inauguration, heralding an unprecedented political and economic crisis within the imperialist camp and bringing uncertainty in the western hemisphere and roiling its onerous ‘universal’ civilisation based on liberal value system - that is in crisis today.

We meet amidst an unprecedented global crisis marked by new imperialist wars, re-armaments and militarism on the one hand and the resurgence of reactionary right-wing nationalism, xenophobic

offensive and anti-people policies exemplified by the fascistic policies of Donald Trump.

These policies, including the imposition of a new US tariff regime, constitute an economic war against the global working class and oppressed nations and reverse many progressive gains of the libertarian struggles. This represents but one facet of the broader expansionist agenda of US belligerent imperialism, which manifests in threats to annex Canada as the 51st state, the continued political, financial and military aid to the Zionist Israel regime to unabatedly commit genocide, killings and subjugation of Palestinians, continue the occupation of their land and now taking over Gaza, the imperialist designs on Greenland as a strategic defensive and offensive military platform aimed at Russia, and the intensified bombing campaigns against the people of Yemen in so called pursuit of the Houthis in Yemen.

These acts of aggression are emblematic of the imperialist drive to consolidate global hegemony under the Trump administration. Certainly, Trump is an ultra populist prime disruptor of note with yet another Executive Order on reciprocal tariffs, and we need to understand what he is disrupting and for what purpose. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz went as far as saying Trump's tariffs are an "attack on the global trade order".

A recent report by the Institute for Policy Studies and the Economic Policy Institute (5 March 2025) reveals that while Trump's actions may appear erratic, they are underpinned by a coherent systemic agenda. This agenda prioritises the enrichment of the capitalist class at the expense of the working masses. The following data exposes the essence of this reactionary program:

- The 2017 Trump-GOP tax law delivered unprecedented windfalls to the bourgeoisie and monopolistic corporations, exacerbating the concentration of wealth within the billionaire class. House Republicans now propose an additional \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts over the next decade, overwhelmingly favouring the ultra-wealthy.
- For the proletariat, the extension of the 2017 tax law offers negligible benefits – less than \$1 per day for the bottom 50% of families – while the wealthiest 0.1% reap annual gains exceeding \$314,000. Even when factoring in Trump's tariffs, the richest 5% owe less, while the poorest 20% face an additional burden of \$800 annually.
- The reduction of the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21% in 2017 represented a historic giveaway to capital, costing \$1.3 trillion over a decade. The Trump administration now seeks to slash this rate further to 15%, at an estimated cost of \$522 billion over ten years.
- Despite promises to use tax windfalls to raise wages, the bottom 90% of workers have seen no tangible benefits. Instead, corporations have funnelled trillions into stock buybacks, inflating CEO compensation while neglecting the working class. Notably, 35 profitable corporations paid less in federal taxes than they paid their top executives during the first five years of the law.
- The House budget resolution proposes even greater tax concessions for billionaires and corporations, contingent on reducing tax credits for low-income families.

Simultaneously, the Trump administration has actively undermined progress on employment, real wages, and labour rights, as evidenced by the following:

- Treasury and Labor secretaries under Trump opposed raising the federal minimum wage, which has stagnated at \$7.25 per hour since 2009. A full-time worker earning this wage makes a mere \$15,080 annually, while 14 million workers (10% of the labour force) earn less than \$15 per hour.
- The slashing of the federal workforce threatens to dismantle public services and eliminate jobs, disproportionately affecting Black workers, who constitute 18.6% of federal employees despite representing 12.8% of the overall workforce.
- Trump's trade policies, centred on retaliatory tariffs, risk escalating consumer prices and deepening macroeconomic instability.
- The National Labor Relations Board, once a bastion for workers' rights, has been systematically gutted under Trump. The illegal removal of its Board Chair for allegedly "disfavouring employer interests" has rendered the body incapable of fulfilling its mandate.

Confronting global imperialism

Our working-class formations should strengthen ties with anti-imperialist movements globally, resisting Western economic domination and building solidarity with socialist allies. Our democratic tasks should include confronting the imperialist collective West, even if Donald Trump has plunged it into internal contradictions. We need to realise that these contradictions are not antagonistic and irreconcilable. The Western imperialist powers are still committed to an imperialist-dominated world with the imperialist US as their leading partner. Yet we must remain mindful that the behaviour of Trump reflects a man presiding over a decaying imperialist superpower, unable to deal with the complexities of the speedily changing world around him.

On the home front

At the heart of our NDR at present is the urgent task of renewal. That is the task to secure our democratic national sovereignty, with the policy space an apex priority, to dislodge neoliberalism and reassert the revolutionary values of our liberation struggle, to tackle the problems the masses find themselves in.

We believe that by building a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor, to build momentum towards the elements of and capacity for socialism in the here and now, and to tackle the hyper-financialisation of our economy, we will make progress in carrying out this urgent task of our revolution. This anti-imperialist struggle is a struggle to safeguard our national independence and ensure that we build a democracy that serves our people, the majority of whom are the working-class and poor.

There is a deepening neoliberal crisis plunging the country into more uncertainty, surely, exposing the trajectory pursued by the dominant and leading neoliberal tendency in the ANC, cajoling everyone to toe the line in support of the Government of National Unity. (GNU). This situation has exposed a worrying anti-communist tendency from inside the ANC, and even broader sections of the movement. We even hear veiled threats on dual membership and the future of the Alliance. A matter we will pay some special attention to as things are unravelling within the GNU and the contest for the leadership of the current is in full traction.

The intersection of fascism, imperialism, and neoliberalism in post-apartheid South Africa

The reactionary forces of imperialism and white supremacist ideology have continued to manifest within South Africa, thirty years since the democratic breakthrough. This phenomenon aligns with the broader global resurgence of fascism, epitomised by the Trump administration's agenda and the neoliberal policies that serve as the ideological scaffolding of imperialism. In the South African context, this agenda is advanced by reactionary forces such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and organisations like AfriForum, who have inherited and continue to champion the ideological legacy of the Broederbond - a clandestine structure committed to entrenching white supremacy by all means necessary.

The Broederbond, accurately described by Dan O'Meara as an "arrogant, self-chosen elite operating by stealth and intrigue," constituted the ideological brain trust of apartheid-era fascism. Its cultural aspirations were ultimately overshadowed by its rabid racial chauvinism and neo-fascist designs. As a covert apparatus of Afrikaner nationalism, the Broederbond embedded itself into the economic, political, and ideological structures of South Africa to sustain white minority rule. Today, organisations such as AfriForum serve as its ideological successors, mobilising international campaigns to undermine South Africa's sovereignty and perpetuate neo-colonial domination.

One of their most insidious recent actions has been the perpetuation of the false narrative that Black South Africans are engaged in a genocidal campaign against the white Afrikaner population. This fabrication found fertile ground within Trump's administration, leading to discussions about granting white South Africans refugee status in the US – a move designed to delegitimise South Africa's democratic order on the global stage.

The resurgence of these reactionary forces is unsurprising. They draw from the long tradition of white supremacist unity that historically bound British colonialists and Afrikaner nationalists. This unity was forged through the ideological construct of *Swart Gevaar*, a fear-mongering tool akin to the anti-Semitic propaganda Hitler deployed in *Mein Kampf*. Both ideologies relied on racial scapegoating to justify exclusionary and oppressive policies. In the case of the Broederbond, *Swart Gevaar* was wielded to entrench apartheid and racial segregation, portraying Black South Africans as existential threats to white cultural and economic stability. Similarly, Hitler framed Jewish people as enemies of German purity, using this narrative to validate the Holocaust and the exterminationist policies of the Nazi regime.

Though the specific historical contexts differ, the ideological foundation remains the same: racial hierarchy, fear-based mobilisation, and systemic oppression. These ideological frameworks laid the foundation for the colonialism of a special type that characterised South Africa's historical trajectory. The persistence of these reactionary forces today underscores the unfinished task of national liberation.

The crisis of the post-apartheid state

The treasonous actions of AfriForum should have elicited a decisive response from the South African state. Instead, we have witnessed a feeble and inconsistent reaction, indicative of the broader inertia that has plagued the post-1994 dispensation. This failure is emblematic of the compromises made during the Codesa negotiations, which resulted in a truncated democratic order incapable of fully

dismantling the colonial and capitalist structures that sustain racial and class oppression.

Compounding this crisis is the spectre of a DA–ANC coalition masquerading under a "Government of National Unity." This coalition represents the consolidation of neoliberal governance, which has systematically betrayed the aspirations of the working class. The contradictions inherent in this arrangement continue to manifest in policy disputes and internal instability, as seen in the recent debates around VAT increases. The DA's opportunistic posturing as defenders of the downtrodden is a façade designed to protect middle-class interests and safeguard corporate privileges, while the ANC's approach has lacked both consultation and foresight.

Assessing the revolutionary trajectory

This year marks 63 years since the South African Communist Party (SACP) adopted *The Road to South African Freedom*, and 36 years since the publication of *The Path to Power*. These documents correctly characterised South Africa as a colonial state of a special type, where the indigenous working class remained subjugated under capitalist exploitation despite political advancements. The strategic objectives outlined in these documents remain as relevant today as they were then:

- The national liberation of the African people and Black South Africans in general.
- The destruction of the economic and political power of the colonial, racist ruling class.
- The establishment of a united South Africa where the working class is the dominant force.
- The eventual realisation of a socialist South Africa, laying the foundation for a classless, communist society.

The central question of the present moment is whether the forces of liberation have succeeded in dismantling the colonial state and replacing it with a truly democratic and socialist order. Have we undone the ideological poison propagated by the fascist intellectuals of the Broederbond? Have we neutralised the economic and political power of the racist ruling class? Have we ensured that the working class has risen to become the dominant force within the South African state? And, most critically, have we taken decisive steps toward establishing socialism, the indispensable foundation for a future communist society?

Some of the answers to these questions will determine the direction of the revolutionary struggle in the years to come.

The scientific framework for understanding colonialism of a special type in South Africa

A proper analysis of the contemporary South African state must begin with an objective, scientific framework that correctly defines its colonial character. The method of inquiry must remain disciplined, rooted in Marxist-Leninist analysis, and aligned with the foundational principles of historical materialism. In this regard, South Africa's colonialism of a special type (CST) possesses distinct characteristics that differentiate it from conventional forms of colonial domination while maintaining the fundamental structures of economic exploitation, racial oppression, and imperialist subjugation.

The NDR – strategic content of the revolution

The NDR in South Africa remains the most direct and shortest path to socialism. Its vision, historical mission and strategic objectives were summarised in the Freedom Charter in 1955. The Freedom Charter is in line with the statement of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties adopted in 1960 in Moscow, the Soviet Union, including the SACP. The statement outlines key national-revolutionary, anti-imperialist, democratic tasks to end all forms of colonial and imperialist oppression, domination and exploitation, and to secure national independence, democratic sovereignty, the fundamental right to self-determination.

In South Africa, this national, anti-imperialist, democratic revolution seeks to dismantle the systematic, structural and tendential legacies of colonialism and CST, including apartheid.

Fundamental characteristics of CST

The coexistence of oppressor and oppressed within one country

Unlike classical colonialism – where the colonisers maintained territorial separation from the colonised – South Africa's CST was defined by the coexistence of the white colonial bourgeoisie and the Black proletariat within a single territorial unit. This dynamic entrenched racial domination as an essential mechanism for class exploitation, wherein gender oppression and spatial segregation reinforced capitalist accumulation.

Economic exploitation as the engine of colonial domination

The colonial state was structured to sustain capital accumulation through ruthless extraction of resources and the super-exploitation of African labour. Mining, in particular, became the backbone of this exploitative order, relying on coerced, cheap labour to generate immense profits for colonial capitalists and monopoly capital.

Imperialist dependence and subordination to foreign capital

South Africa's colonial economy has historically been tied to global imperialist networks, functioning as a supplier of raw materials – such as gold and diamonds – to Western markets while remaining subordinate to foreign investment. Multinational corporations have perpetuated this dependence, dominating mining, finance, and retail sectors while prioritising profit extraction over national economic development.

The racialised class structure of colonial capitalism

Economic and political power was deliberately concentrated in the hands of the white ruling class, ensuring the systemic dispossession and proletarianisation of Black South Africans. The 1913 Land Act played a decisive role in this process, forcing Black workers into low-wage labour and perpetuating dependency on white-controlled capitalist structures.

Apartheid as the institutionalisation of CST

Apartheid was not merely a racial doctrine but rather the legal and structural enforcement of CST. It ensured the permanence of colonial domination by politically disenfranchising Black South Africans, economically marginalising them, and spatially confining them through forced removals and segregation laws. The state mobilised military force, police repression, and ideological control

to suppress any revolutionary challenge to its rule.

State repression as an instrument of bourgeois domination

The South African state functioned primarily as the organ of capitalist and colonial domination. Through military aggression, restrictive legal frameworks, and a propaganda apparatus designed to maintain ideological subjugation, the bourgeoisie ensured that any resistance posed by the oppressed classes would be met with violent counter-revolution.

The colonial foundations of South Africa: the persistence of racialised capitalist domination

The structural evils of colonialism were neither abolished nor diminished with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Instead, colonial domination was reinforced and adapted into a new form – Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) – where the oppressing white bourgeoisie coexisted within the same territorial space as the oppressed Black majority, ensuring continued exploitation, national oppression, and capitalist accumulation.

The industrialisation of colonial domination

The rapid industrialisation of South Africa, particularly during the two World Wars, reshaped its economic foundations. Heavy and secondary industries expanded, positioning South Africa as the leading industrial economy on the continent. However, this transformation did not serve the interests of the working class; instead, it entrenched the economic power of the white ruling elite while exacerbating the dispossession and exploitation of Black workers. The economy shifted from a predominantly agricultural base to an industrial-agricultural hybrid, producing Africa's largest urban proletariat – predominantly Black – who remained locked in conditions of super-exploitation.

The benefits of this industrialisation were exclusively monopolised by the white capitalist class. The concentration of wealth in their hands reinforced the racialised economic structure, wherein labor extraction and land dispossession were maintained as pillars of capitalist expansion.

The bipolar structure of South African society

South African society under CST functioned through a stark duality:

- a) White South Africa: the bastion of advanced capitalism in Africa
- a) White South Africa possessed all the hallmarks of an advanced capitalist state in its imperialist stage.
- b) Industrial monopolies flourished, alongside the merger of industrial and finance capital.
- c) Agriculture was structured along capitalist lines, employing wage labour while producing commodities for domestic and export markets.
- d) The South African monopoly bourgeoisie maintained deep linkages with British, US, and other foreign imperialist interests, exporting capital into Africa while aggressively seeking territorial expansion, including the colonisation of Namibia and control over the Protectorates.

Despite nominal independence, the economic power and political influence of British imperialism persisted, exercised indirectly through a settler-colonial state monopolised by the white bourgeoisie. The fundamental features of colonial domination were reproduced in altered forms but remained intact. The exclusion of Africans from citizenship, the monopolisation of political and economic power by whites, and the racialisation of labour structures ensured the continuity of colonial subjugation.

The 1913 Land Act stands as one of the most decisive instruments of dispossession, confining Black land ownership to a marginal fraction of the country and intensifying the dependency of African workers on capitalist-controlled labour markets.

Imperialist capital and the construction of South African capitalism

Contrary to the organic development of capitalism through revolutionary anti-feudal struggles seen in Europe, South African capitalism was imposed externally – by imperialist centres.

- British imperial capital financed the mining industry, establishing South Africa's economic subjugation to global monopoly capital.
- The colonial state constructed the necessary infrastructure – railways, ports, and communications – to facilitate capitalist expansion.
- The military conquest of African nations provided the conditions for political unification under settler rule, ensuring continued imperialist extraction.
- The racially exclusive capitalist system extended and consolidated itself, guaranteeing increased profitability through land dispossession, labour exploitation, and the institutionalisation of racist legal frameworks.

The revolutionary task of the working class in South Africa

The South African state has never ceased to be a colonial entity. The essential structures of oppression, dispossession, and capitalist exploitation remain firmly in place. As revolutionaries, the central question remains:

- Has the colonial bourgeoisie been overthrown?
- Has the economic and political power of the colonial racist ruling class been dismantled?
- Has the working class risen as the dominant force in shaping the trajectory of South Africa?
- Has the path toward socialism been firmly advanced to eliminate the material foundations of CST?

These questions must guide the revolutionary struggle, ensuring that the incomplete liberation process advances toward its necessary resolution – the establishment of socialism and the complete eradication of colonial domination.

The domination of monopoly capital and recruitment of comprador elites.

Today, monopoly capital exercises hegemonic control over every sector of the South African

economy. The development of capitalist forces of production has resulted in the substantial growth of a modern proletariat, numerically the largest class in the country. Even in rural areas, agrarian labourers and migrant workers form the overwhelming majority. Despite industrialisation, bourgeois class domination continues, stemming from the colonial oppression of the Black, especially African majority.

- In every economic sector – mining, manufacturing, finance, and even agriculture – monopoly capital prevails overwhelmingly.
- Enormous power is concentrated in a handful of corporations that control vast economic empires.
- Afrikaner-controlled monopolies have emerged over the past decades, merging their interests with the historically dominant English-speaking capitalists.

The role of the state in capitalist preservation

The South African state plays a decisive role in sustaining monopoly capitalism. State-owned enterprises in key sectors – armaments, energy, and transport – function as pillars propping up the entire capitalist economy. The collusion between private monopoly capital and the state has intensified over time, ensuring that economic power remains insulated from the working-class demands for redistribution and social transformation.

Faced with deepening contradictions and the threat of a national democratic revolution, monopoly capitalists have sought to restructure racial domination rather than dismantle it. Their advocacy for "group rights" under various political arrangements masks their underlying strategy: preserving their monopoly over national wealth while securing continued economic dominance through neoliberal restructuring.

The persistence of colonial and apartheid structures

The enduring effect has been the survival of the structural foundations of colonial and apartheid-era governance. The intersection of capitalism, imperialism, racial oppression, and gender subjugation remains intact, continuously reinforced through neoliberal economic policies. Despite progressive legal reforms, the core institutions of economic domination remain untouched.

State organs continue to reproduce colonial and apartheid-era relations through:

- Entrenched economic inequalities rooted in apartheid capitalism.
- Bureaucratic inefficiencies inherited from colonial administration.
- Spatial divisions that sustain economic marginalisation.
- Legal and judicial systems that disproportionately favor established elites.
- Educational and ideological structures that perpetuate systemic exclusions.

The revolutionary task ahead

If true national liberation is to be achieved, the monopoly domination of capital must be abolished, and the economic legacy of colonial dispossession must be dismantled. The power configuration that allowed the capitalist class to preserve control while permitting formal democracy must be fundamentally transformed. Only the revolutionary destruction of this economic order can pave the way for socialism – the only framework capable of ensuring genuine emancipation for the working class and oppressed masses.

Breaking the chains of colonial and apartheid-era legacies: a revolutionary path forward. The persistence of colonial and apartheid-era structures continues to define South Africa's political, economic, and social realities. The failure to radically transform these inherited structures has ensured that racialised capitalism, spatial segregation, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and ideological distortions remain firmly embedded within the system. Breaking free from these constraints requires a revolutionary program that prioritises bold policy shifts, economic restructuring, and cultural transformation.

Economic inequality and skewed land ownership

Land remains the foundation of economic power, yet its ownership remains overwhelmingly in the hands of white landowners – a direct continuation of colonial dispossession and apartheid-era legal frameworks.

- **Corporate Dominance** – The capitalist economy remains firmly controlled by conglomerates established during apartheid, particularly in the mining and agricultural sectors. Economic transformation has been deliberately obstructed by monopoly interests.
- **Wealth Disparities** – The racialised wealth gap continues to deepen, disproportionately affecting Black South Africans, particularly Africans. Unemployment and poverty are systematically enforced through the monopolisation of economic structures by the capitalist elite.

Despite interventions such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), ownership structures remain largely untransformed. The exploitation of Black mineworkers persists, evidenced by continuing exploitation, retrenchments at will and the brutal labour conditions and repression, as reflected in the Marikana Massacre of 2012 – a violent reminder of the continuity between apartheid-era state repression and contemporary capitalist violence.

Spatial segregation and unequal development

Apartheid spatial planning deliberately confined Black South Africans to townships far removed from economic hubs, entrenching geographic and economic isolation. Today, these divisions remain intact.

- **Township marginalisation** – Areas such as Soweto, Khayelitsha, and Alexandra continue to suffer from chronic underdevelopment, overcrowding, and lack of economic opportunities, despite neoliberal promises of renewal.
- **Public transport failures** – Colonial-era transport models limit mobility, reinforcing

economic exclusion. Marginalised communities face systemic barriers in accessing job opportunities due to spatial segregation.

- **Infrastructure disparities** – Historically white areas maintain superior access to roads, sanitation, and essential services, while townships remain deliberately neglected.

Despite cosmetic reforms, township development remains stalled. Government policies have failed to dismantle spatial inequalities, leaving the majority of Black South Africans trapped in poverty-stricken areas.

Bureaucratic inefficiencies and the legacy of colonial governance

State institutions operate within frameworks inherited from colonial and apartheid-era administration, ensuring the slow and ineffective implementation of transformation policies.

- Bureaucratic inertia – Colonial governance models still define administrative structures, preventing meaningful systemic change.
- Weak policy implementation – While progressive laws exist, they are routinely undermined by inefficiencies and the deliberate sabotage of transformation programs by embedded reactionary forces.
- Corruption and patronage – The legacy of elite-controlled governance has fostered an entrenched culture of corruption and mismanagement, diverting state resources away from the working class.
- State institutions responsible for service delivery – such as housing and municipal governance – continue to function within outdated bureaucratic structures, leading to the collapse of essential services such as water, electricity, and housing.

Education, cultural imperialism, and systemic exclusion

The colonial education system was designed to serve imperialist interests, marginalising indigenous knowledge and reinforcing Eurocentric ideological hegemony.

- Unequal education – Historically Black schools remain systematically underfunded, perpetuating the inequalities entrenched under apartheid's Bantu Education system.
- Western-centric curricula – The education system prioritises Eurocentric narratives while erasing African knowledge systems, languages, and traditions.
- Economic elitism – Colonial and apartheid-era thinking continues to dismiss indigenous African economic models, ensuring the unchallenged dominance of Western capitalist structures.

The *Fees Must Fall* movement (2015–2016) exposed the entrenched racial and class inequalities within higher education. Black students, largely working class, continue to face systemic exclusion, while access to education in indigenous languages remains severely restricted. This moment for radical transformation was missed and even abused for internal organisational matters than for deepening transformation and entrenching decolonisation of curriculum and the education sector as a whole.

Legal and judicial frameworks: the enduring structures of colonial law. The legal system, rooted in Roman Dutch colonial jurisprudence, remains incapable of addressing systemic racial inequalities, relies on relics of colonial records and thus continues to favour established elites. Every revolution must entrench its law

- **Slow land restitution** – Legal battles over land claims systematically favor monopoly interests, delaying justice for dispossessed communities.
- **Judicial inequalities** – The legal framework remains structurally incapable of addressing historic injustices, ensuring the continued marginalisation of the oppressed majority.

Communities have spent decades navigating a legal system designed to delay and obstruct meaningful land restitution. These deliberate barriers serve to reinforce capitalist control over land and resources. We need to convene a national convention of the communal property associations to consult on a radical way forward to push for concrete land transfer and ownership by the people.

Political and governance challenges: the crisis of neoliberal administration.

The neoliberal governance model inherited from apartheid has resulted in institutional inefficiencies and continued social exclusion.

- **Weak local governance** – The legacy of centralised apartheid governance has ensured the dysfunctionality of local government structures, leaving communities vulnerable to poor service delivery.
- **Failure to involve communities** – Government policies frequently sideline grassroots participation, rendering transformation efforts ineffective.

Working class resistance and revolutionary potential: Worker-led movements and grassroots organisations remain fragmented, limiting their ability to challenge capitalist exploitation and the neoliberal agenda.

Stalled NDR: the NDR has stalled with challenges encountered, with less consensus in the alliance on how to revive it. The ANC-led government – our strategic tool of social transformation - has prioritised capitalist stability over people centred and people driven radical transformation, failing to advance the revolutionary objectives outlined in the *Freedom Charter*.

Given these realities, it is evident that South Africa remains a bourgeois capitalist state, with economic power concentrated in white hands and foreign ownership. The working class continues to bear the brunt of capitalist exploitation, while the liberation movement struggles to maintain its hold on state machinery and a moral social force.

The path forward lies in organising and mobilising the working class for a second revolutionary takeover of power by the working class – as the ANC led liberation movement is terribly faltering. This requires the unapologetic pursuit of a socialist program that dismantles colonial and apartheid-era class structures, redistributes economic power, and establishes a workers' state. Only through the radical transformation of the state and economy can South Africa achieve genuine liberation and escape the grip of neoliberalism and right-wing reactionary forces.

In the context of our situation failure to embrace this may give rise to populist forces to hijack the discontent of the masses and lead the revolution – possibly astray, as it could not guarantee its thoroughgoing nature towards socialism – in other words we cannot be guaranteed the force to win elections will be committed to the NDR project, since we also do not own the NDR as we neither do socialism.

On the People’s Red Caravan – A people’s movement for collective-driven, self-reliant socio-economic change.

You should be receiving a brief conceptual note on the Red Caravan. At this present moment of working-class revolutionary struggle, the Red Caravan should seek to revive revolutionary enthusiasm amongst our cadres and communities to stand up and do for themselves. If well conceptualised and driven, the Red Caravan could constitute the first SACP autonomously led platform (without being isolationist) for building and experimenting, perhaps on a wider scale, basic grass roots socialists’ elements with the community-based incentive system. To this end, it is an interesting project on my part, especially, we hope comrades can find it appropriate.

We should, of course, believe that the community economy could compensate or develop the material base for the development and emergence of a new social consciousness. In other words, we are attempting to build socialism without state power under our control, hence focusing on the elementary features. *“The role of the vanguard Party is precisely that of raising as high as possible the opposing banner, the banner of moral interest, of moral incentive, of the men who fight and sacrifice themselves and expect nothing more than the recognition of their compañeros”* Che Guevara from Carlos Tablada’s, *Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*

We also need to fill the leadership deficit in communities and build an organisational form to lead collectively with the communities. This could simultaneously develop the social and moral consciousness of the revolution and accelerate self-reliance material base and consequent detachment from capitalism, whilst existing in its broad surroundings. Going to communities on the Red Caravan will imbue within us the spirit of exemplary leadership and, perhaps most importantly, give weight to what we demand for our people. The Caravan will also act as a bridge to reconnect the liberation movement with the grassroots economic programs. This can defeat the fatally discredited movement's inability to renew itself and rebuild a social contract with the people. This can happen if the ANC is serious about renewal by undergoing serious radical changes.

This process will attempt to outline key tasks of the Party in the struggle of the working class. We should have an intense honest analysis on how to link a party to its traditional support base rooted in unique mass mobilising and Cadre participation in organising (from a principle of Every Cadre is an Organiser) to build a consistent and conscious mass mobilisation capacity, with a clear objective for mobilisation.

Some of the immediate tasks we have is to embark on elementary grass roots mobilisation on the self-reliance and sustainability of communities, to fight food insecurity for food security and sovereignty and household-based community employment to address the immediate material realities of the working class.

We encourage all comrades to join and initiate the Red Caravan across all districts. We call on members of the CC and provincial executives, the districts, our branches and activists, community

development specialists and professionals able to provide some community services pro bono. Join the national Red Caravan Project to reconnect with the masses and consult them and jointly tackle with them problems they face. Defend the gains of the revolution and advance working-class interest.

This possibility calls on the SACP to develop extraordinary visions of socialist path of democracy, to pursue new different forms of revolutionary community struggles - action based on their common vision and challenges.

To achieve this, our organisation we must build appropriate capacities to pursue our cause, the struggle for socialism. The South African Communist Party will have to confront these challenges for the class. Through in-depth analysis in engaging our ideological foundations to defeat our class enemy capitalism and its proxies like the Democratic Alliance as well as their politics and illusions.

Remarkably, this moment requires party structures to assert ideological hegemony and organisational strength, presence and visibility in tackling social problems in advancing working class struggles. This moment needs deep reflections and serious engagement with the ideological foundations of our Marxist -Leninist tradition as well as deep appreciation for the concrete realities of our societies given current challenges. This should be a research component of this initiative. The SACP need to maintain anti-capitalist class struggle by focusing on transforming economic power relations, economic inequality between black and white, created by colonialism and apartheid.

In this regard *we should avoid unnecessary diversions*, including peripheral debates in the name of internal discussions, theoretical debates reversing just recently agreed decisions, we should strengthen the ideas of how to implement the resolutions of the 5th SNC and be all on the wheel. Equally, we should welcome debates but at least decode what they really – reject those that retains the status quo and worsen the conditions of the working class.

Has it been this way since and what could have been done?

Despite highly commendable political and social advances benefitting millions of our people since 1994, years of neoliberal policies have entrenched the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, reinforcing racial and gender inequalities, deepening economic marginalisation and perpetuating systemic poverty and unemployment. These policies have failed to dismantle the structural injustices of colonialism of a special type (CST) and have weakened the state's capacity for transformative development.

The 2024 electoral loss of the ANC-led liberation forces' majority represents a significant political setback for progressive forces. This outcome reflects mass dissatisfaction with the failure to address capitalist crises, including unemployment, poverty, inequality, the rising cost of living and high crime rates. It underscores the crisis of working-class representation in electoral politics, driven by voter disillusionment with neoliberalism and state capture. This disillusionment has fuelled a dangerous shift towards ethnic populism and race-based politics.

Delegates reaffirmed that the SACP's perspective that the coalition arrangement with the neoliberal DA under the GNU betrays our Alliance Political Council agreement for the Alliance partners, the SACP, Cosatu and Sanco to be represented in the Statement of Intent Technical Committee and the Negotiating Team. The conclusion to the GNU within a coalition arrangement with the DA as a significant player came because of the unilateralism through which the ANC excluded the Alliance partners' input in the drafting of the Statement of Intent and in the negotiations process.

The DA is a neoliberal party against the NDR's transformative objectives and has been the champion of austerity and privatisation policies in Parliament in its opposition to our movement.

The DA has done so under conditions where decades of neoliberal economic policies – epitomised by GEAR and subsequent austerity measures – have entrenched poverty, inequality and unemployment while weakening state capacity for transformative development. These policies have also failed to address environmental degradation, gender-based violence and femicide, and structural racism, deepening capitalist social and economic crises and threatening to derail the revolutionary content of the NDR.

The SACP has rejected the idea that the core of the post-1996 neoliberal policy trajectory represents “good policies” that are failed by a lack of implementation. The neoliberal policy trajectory is an exploitative capitalist path aimed at profit maximisation. It was under this trajectory that the workplace has been restructured, workers dismissed and privatisation and outsourcing entrenched. In major metropolitan municipalities, and at other spheres of the government, as well as in public entities, tenderisation has undermined state capacity.

At present, more so since the undermining of our manifesto after the 2019 elections, the neoliberal policy trajectory has increasingly focused on achieving micro-economic liberalisation to “open up” major state sectors, such as the network infrastructure sectors, for exploitation by private interests through capitalist competition.

It was in this context the high radio frequency spectrum was privatised in an auction to the highest bidders under the pretext of de-monopolising the information and communication sector. This has served to entrench the monopoly as the dominant commercial interests in the sector are the ones that captured the lion's share of the spectrum. The Fifth SNC reaffirmed the SACP's rejection of neoliberalism, no matter how it is disguised.

Report of the 5th Special National Congress

We arguably held a successful SNC – a watershed in the direction of the SACP in the prosecution of the NDR and the struggle for socialism. Of course, this was not without challenges, including financial and political and organisational. We came out with a new impetus to pursue the working-class struggle for socialism. We should give proper feedback to our structures on the outcomes and not spin and even start new debates seeking to reverse what we resolved.

Economic and social crises

South Africa's persistent economic and social crises highlight the structural failures of capitalism. Chronic unemployment, now consistently exceeding 30 per cent, and higher youth unemployment represent a structural crisis condemning millions to economic exclusion. De-industrialisation, precarious and informal work and profit-driven policies worsen the situation. This is the perspective adopted by the Fifth SNC in assessing the conditions facing the working class.

The SNC said the conditions of the working are getting worse under freedom, leading to the masses questioning the value of freedom stolen by the political elites of comprador bourgeoisie.

Our health system remains one of the most unequal globally. Meanwhile, the DA opposed to the advance towards the National Health Insurance, is now the strategic partner in government. A

private healthcare system serves a largely a white minority at 72% and Black people at 10%, while the underfunded and overcrowded public system serves the majority. In other words, the current medical aid schemes represent apartheid practice under democratic government.

This inequality, rooted in neoliberal policies prioritising profits over health, leaves millions, especially the majority of whom are black workers and poor, with women affected the most, without adequate healthcare and delapidating hospital infrastructure. That is why we need the speedy implementation to the NHI and call all our MECs of Health to support hospitals and improve their capacity to serve the people, through appropriate delegation of powers to hospital CEOs to manage hospitals efficiently and properly.

The SNC further reaffirmed the SACP's analysis, that inequality in wealth and income – already among the world's highest – continues to widen. Essential public services, including education and infrastructure, risk collapse under austerity and systemic corruption. Power outages – load shedding and load reduction, water shortages and failing infrastructure expose neoliberal governance failures, further eroding the dignity and quality of life for the working class and poor, majority Blacks – Africans, Indians and Coloureds.

The SNC reaffirmed that capitalism entrenches inequality and poverty while driving environmental degradation, gender-based violence and rising social violence. *Only socialist transformation can dismantle these oppressive systems and build a future prioritising equality and dignity.*

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Key resolutions from the Special National Congress - Reaffirming the NDR as the strategic path to socialism.

The SNC resolved that the SACP as part of the revolutionary working-class movement and its allies in this struggle, especially the Socialist Axis, should:

- Ground the NDR in the Freedom Charter's vision and socialism's principles to address social and economic crises, environmental degradation and CST's structural legacy.
- Mobilise urban and rural workers and the poor around a common programme ensuring working-class leadership in advancing the NDR and socialism.
- Reject narrow nationalist and bourgeois reformist agendas that derail the working class from its historic mission.

Building the socialist axis and the popular left front

Further, the SNC resolve that the Party should:

- Form a left axis for socialism, anchored by the SACP and Cosatu, in partnership with progressive political organisations, trade unions and social movements.
- Establish broad sectoral fronts addressing critical issues such as youth development, environmental justice and gender-based violence.
- Advance campaigns prioritising state-led industrialisation, public employment

programmes and community-driven economic development.

- Promote African unity, resist imperialism and foster global progressive co-operation.

Contesting local government elections

The SNC reaffirmed the resolution of the SACP's 15th National Congress to contest elections if the Alliance is not reconfigured, following the many years we have tried to achieve the reconfiguration through engagements within the Alliance. The continued lack of Alliance reconfiguration has resulted in the working-class partners of the Alliance being undermined and poses an existential threat to the integrity of the working-class allies. The situation where major political developments and policy directions are decided against or without the input or participation of the working-class allies of the Alliance is dangerous to our existence.

After a thorough assessment, the SACP Augmented Central Committee in March and April 2023 decided what the SNC has reaffirmed, to:

- a) Contest the 2026 local government elections independently to address the working class and poor's representation crisis.
- b) Ensure working-class voices and struggles drive local governance.
- c) Challenge neoliberal policies like austerity and privatisation to restore public ownership and prioritise community-driven development.
- d) Empower communities to control local governance through participatory structures.
- e) Reconnect the Alliance with grassroots struggles, aligning it with the NDR's revolutionary objectives.

Promoting National Dialogue through popular mobilisation and participation

After discussing the proposal for a National Dialogue, the SNC resolved to:

- Support national dialogue as a process inspiring active participation from the masses to confront and overcome capitalism's multiple crises.

The SNC tasked the SACP to build working-class consultative momentum as part of the National Dialogue process, to ensure that the outcome will reflect the aspirations of the working-class based on the Freedom Charter and the need to advance, deepen and defend the NDR, using the National Dialogue as a key site of struggle. We have also resolved to use this process to advance our resolutions to forge a popular left front and build a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor. Our ally in the Social Axis of the Alliance, Cosatu, is the first organisation in our consultative approach.

International solidarity: advancing the anti-imperialist struggle

On international solidarity, the SNC reaffirmed our strategic orientation to stand with oppressed peoples and progressive movements worldwide against exploitation, imperialism and neo-colonial domination.

Bilateral meeting with Cosatu

We held our first successful bilateral meeting with Cosatu since the era of the GNU and the joint working-class leadership political school convened by the Chris Hani Institute, which assessed the 2024 general electoral outcome and challenges facing the liberation forces. Importantly, we used the meeting to brief our comrades in Cosatu about the outcomes of our 5th Special National Congress. It was clear that even from Cosatu, such a briefing was long overdue. To this end, we also addressed the Cosatu CEC soon afterwards.

We agreed on the need to develop closer working relations, for the sake of the working class and not much for the leaders, but for rescuing, deepening and advancing the NDR in our advance to socialism. In our discussions with Cosatu we called for a break with the lethargy of collective failure to meet constantly and implement joint decisions from our meetings. And emphasised the need to insist on prioritising the implementation of our agreed manifestos with the ANC even in this reality of the betrayal with the GNU regime choice.

We equally accepts that given a long period of practice, now a way of revolutionary life within our ranks and activists and the general acceptance of leadership from the ANC, and further enhanced by our common program the NDR – with the immediate aim of democratic transfer of power to the oppressed majority - and the common platforms in interdependent leadership, there will never be unanimity and we are not seeking it either.

Cosatu had since posted that address to their CEC issued a statement reflecting on this matter and agreed to convene a Special Central Executive Committee meeting in April to discuss this matter at length and provide guidance to their Central Committee latter in the year. We should also say that the issued statement calls for the SACP to unite Cosatu, a task we have done all through. However, read differently, it may create impressions that by contesting elections we are dividing Cosatu, like we indicated, this matter concerns all components of the alliance.

Since the Cosatu Congress decision, we have relied on guidance from Cosatu on this matter, having decided so from the CC. Cosatu seem to feel excluded from the talks we are having with the ANC. We had assured them that we are discussing in the context of our 15th Congress resolutions modified by the 2023 Augmented Central Committee and reaffirmed by the 5th Special National Congress. This uncertainty about our talks with the ANC should not isolate the federation and even SANCO. So the sooner we move towards the Alliance engagements the better.

We equally accepted that there will be dissonance but within the realm and framework of our democratic mandates and responsibilities. To this extent this matter of the SACP taking part in elections independent of the ANC affects not only the rank-and-file membership across the alliance but even leaders, including inside the SACP itself.

What is clear, though, is that we have broken with the practice of being patronised by the political elites across the alliance, with twisted loyalties to the people and double speak to leaders. We have broken the chains of patronage to defend the working class from state violence through austerity measures and privatisation of strategic services in the hands of the state to capital.

The path forward: reasserting the “revolution” in the “National Democratic Revolution” – or the “R” in the NDR

The crisis facing the NDR can only be resolved through mass mobilisation and working-class

leadership. The following key interventions are necessary:

Reconfiguring the Alliance on a revolutionary basis, guided by the goals of the Freedom Charter: The working class needs to consolidate a left-axis that prioritises socialism, bringing together the SACP, Cosatu, other supportive organisations within our movement, progressive social movements and grassroots formations to regain the lost ground, reposition the SA revolution and advance to socialism. That's the only path assuring workers, and the broader working class and all the people of socio-economic justice and complete freedom without the life of misery imposed by capitalism and its captures political elites – the comprador bourgeoisie.

Not only a class in itself but also a class for itself: The SACP has resolved to contest local government elections in 2026 while remaining part of the Alliance. There is no contradiction between the two positions. The Alliance was founded on a revolutionary programme. Ours is not an electoral alliance but a strategic alliance founded a long time ago based on a revolutionary programme before the ANC contested elections in 1994 with the support of the SACP and other Alliance partners. The situation that has developed, with the ANC choosing compromising coalition arrangements with its strategic adversaries and contradictory parties, necessitate the new tactical considerations with respect to electoral contestation by the SACP.

To confront the crisis of working-class representation that has developed in the absence of progress on the reconfiguration of the Alliance, class conscious workers need to support the SACP's resolution to contest the local government elections in 2026. It is crucial for the working class to realise that it is not only a "class in itself" – a population of people sharing similar economic and social conditions, but also a "class for itself" – a population of people organised and actively pursuing its own interests, demonstrating class consciousness. In class struggle, there is no class except a consciously united working class that will take a lead in advancing, deepening and defending its interests.

We believe that the working class has been undermined as the main social force driving the national democratic revolution and changes and been relegated to a mere periphery of been invited to justify the decided positions of the political elites. We could not further risk the complete disillusionment of the working class to the NDR and the liberation forces as demonstrated by their absence in the general elections.

Bilateral meeting with the ANC

We held a long overdue bilateral meeting with the ANC just couple weeks ago. We had an extensive discussion focused on the state of the NDR, the economy, international developments and the reconfiguration of the Alliance and the SACP decision to contest the coming local government elections.

We issued a joint statement in this regard, which reflected to a greater extend the cordial yet robust discussions we had. We agreed to reconvene at the level of the PB and NWC and possibly have full CC and NEC meetings later to conclude some bilateral matters and rebuild trust and common perspectives on a wide range of socio-economic questions.

For the first time the ANC acceded to driving a neoliberal economic policy in government. This was a good step as we never agreed to this as they vehemently denied it. We agreed to set up an economic task team to prepare an economic workshop to deepen these discussions.

We also agreed to further take up the Alliance reconfiguration matter to an appropriate forum of the Alliance. We could not agree to withdraw our contest of the local government elections. This is a matter they were to seek a mandate from their NEC so we can continue the talks in an expanded form as the PB and NWC.

US African Growth Opportunity Act

Our government must carefully study and calculate the impact US tariff changes and limitations of “African Growth Opportunity Act” (AGOA) trade benefits for South African exports to the US. It is crucial for South Africa to respond based on the careful study and scientific calculation of the impact.

Let us recall. Unlike most countries, South Africa has made multiple trade policy concessions to the US to maintain access the AGOA “benefits” since its inception in 2000. These concessions have been driven by US pressure to liberalise South African markets to American goods. The US has also used AGOA as an economic and political policy instrument to compel South Africa to align its sovereign economic and international co-operation and relations policy interests with those of Washington. Let us highlight some concessions

Agricultural market access concessions

South Africa has made several compromises to allow imports of US agricultural products even when it was unfair for domestic production development and food security, particularly food nutrition, and health and safety, to do so. This has been so despite strong resistance from domestic farmers and workers, and at the expense of employment. In 2015, after intense pressure from the US and subsequent negotiations, South Africa removed anti-dumping duties on US chicken imports.

The concession also allowed the duty-free importation of at least 65,000 tonnes of US chicken portions per year under AGOA. Under this arrangement, the US enjoys the leanest cut, high protein-rich and low-fat chicken portions, such as chicken breast portion, mostly exporting high-fat and less nutritious chicken portions than chicken breasts to South Africa. This concession undermined South Africa’s domestic poultry industry, leading to retrenchments and pressure on local chicken production.

Under the same concession, South Africa relaxed restrictions on US beef and pork imports, resulting in US imports of beef treated with growth hormones and pork previously banned due to disease concerns. These concessions directly impacted South African livestock farmers by increasing competition from the unfair US and so-called “cheaper” meat imports.

In addition, South Africa had to loosen restrictions on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to allow US-produced genetically modified agricultural products. The country modified its sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) regulations to meet US food safety and agricultural trade demands. These changes were controversial – as they raised concerns about local food security and public health impacts.

South Africa modified aspects of its Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) policies in response to US concerns that the laws disadvantage American firms investing in the country. In some cases, the capitalist US businesses sector has received preferential treatment in investment approvals over domestic players.

South Africa has faced pressure from US pharmaceutical companies to prevent the domestic

production of cheaper generic medicines. This is a contributor to exorbitant healthcare costs, especially for medicine. Related to this, South Africa's planned patent law changes, which would have allowed for compulsory licensing and greater domestic medicine production, experiences delays.

Foreign policy concessions and geopolitical alignments

The US has used AGOA as a foreign political tool to extract international relations and co-operation concessions from South Africa. Under AGOA, the US has been pressurising our government to roll back our country's relationship with Russia and China, pushing South Africa to re-align with US foreign policy agenda. This attempt seeks to undermine our hard-won national independence, democratic sovereignty and fundamental right to self-determination. Under this attempt, South Africa's participation in Brics+ co-operation has caused friction with the imperialist US.

The US has also pressured South Africa over its diplomatic ties with Iran, arguing that maintaining economic relations with Tehran contradicts US sanctions policies.

Similarly, South Africa's pro-Palestinian stance and criticism of Israeli occupation have led to US threats regarding AGOA participation.

What it is to be done?

There can be no doubt that there are critical 'benefits' under AGOA given our difficult economic situation. Such "benefits" notably include exports of automotive vehicles by the foreign-owned multinational corporations, with the German-owned BMW and Mercedes-Benz leading in this category of exports, from South Africa to the US. There are also certain domestic automotive components by some automotive component manufacturers that South Africa is exporting to the US under AGOA.

However, the erosion of "benefits" for South African exports – due to both trade tariff hikes and the review of AGOA by the US – at the expense of affected workers in South Africa, while the US continues to enjoy the unfair concessions it has extracted from South Africa under AGOA, is unjustifiable. In this regard, it is also important to note the US steel and aluminium tariff hikes dating back to 2018 under the first Trump administration. The cost of maintaining access to AGOA must not come at the expense of domestic industrialisation and our hard-won national independence, democratic sovereignty and fundamental right to self-determination. Like any country, must never be allowed to undermine and usurp our hard-won national independence, democratic sovereignty and fundamental right to self-determination.

The SACP must call on our government to undertake a full review of both the positive and negative impact of both South Africa's access to AGOA and the rollback of that access by the US, in order to respond effectively. This must include a deliberate review of the concessions granted to the US, in favour of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship that enables South Africa to develop domestic production, pursue industrialisation and safeguard domestic food security – including nutrition, as well as food health and safety. Employment creation is critical here amid the unemployment crisis that impacts millions of the unemployed South African working class.

The Fifth SNC emerged at a decisive moment for our country and the working class. In memory of Chris Hani, at the time when his assassin was released from prison following a November 2022 Constitutional Court order. We have officially written to the president and the Minister of Justice and

Constitutional Development to call for an Inquest on the circumstances leading to comrade Chris Hani's assassination. We rededicated ourselves to defend, advance and deepen the NDR towards socialism. We have committed ourselves to confronting capitalism's crises, challenging neoliberal policies and building a better future based on our commitment to a socialist transition.

Having outlined the challenges of this critical moment, we need to go back to the period in which we defined the moment to consolidate the NDR against the backdrop of a difficult international situation. The document referred to above further said that "the character and tasks of the SACP should, then, be defined to a large extent by the kind of socialism we hope to build, and by the related perspectives we have of the path to that kind of socialism. But the nature and tasks of the SACP also need to be informed by the character of the class we hope to represent".

The NDR is not just at a crossroads, it has stalled. Either it advances towards socialism through decisive rupture with neoliberalism, or it is permanently insinuated into a reformist, bourgeois-nationalist project that serves the interests of a few in collaboration with established capital but in the name of the entire historically oppressed black majority.

Only revolutionary working-class struggle in alliance with categorically supporting forces can reassert, advance, deepen and defend the NDR and chart the path towards socialism, with and for the workers and the poor. ●

Indeed, we should exclaim that for us it is either socialism or capitalist barbarism:

Socialism or death! Victory is certain!

The Red Army's defeat of Nazi Germany 80 years ago – a warning to today's warmongers

Ronnie Kasrils examines the role of the Soviet Union in the victory over fascism in 1945 and the need for anti-imperialist unity now

There is an uncanny repetition in the lineup of Nato forces against Russia today, along a 2,900 km stretch from the Baltic states to Ukraine on the Black Sea and the Balkans beyond. That front was previously breached on 22 June 1941 in Nazi Germany's infamous invasion of the Soviet Union. Hitler's attempt to wipe out communism and impose fascism ended in Nazi Germany's inglorious defeat on 8 May 1945, eighty years ago.

Understanding that history is vital today, with fascist forces on the rise again. In their celebrations, the West delete the Soviet Union's role from history. US President Donald Trump rants on in supreme ignorance that it was America that won the war.

There are many lessons to be learnt from that history, none more salient than a reminder to US and Nato warmongers: beware the fortitude of Russia – and its partners such as China and progressive world forces – be prepared to defend their sovereignty, land and existence.

Back in 1941, Germany's armed forces included fascist divisions from Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, and anti-communist units from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain. Today's anti-Russian Front comprises the expanding Nato alliance in the Ukrainian conflict, engaged in a similar anti-Russian crusade. Make no mistake, the imperialist objective represents the same existential threat to Russia, its people and resources as in 1941.

The victorious Soviet army had expelled the fascist hordes from Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad in the grim days of 1941-42 and, by late April 1945, the red banner flew over the Reichstag as the Berlin garrison surrendered. By then, Hitler, who had dreamed of one thousand years of world domination, had already committed suicide in his bunker.

On 8 May, Nazi Germany signed an unconditional surrender. The following day, Soviet forces proceeded to liberate Czechoslovakia. 9 May marked the end of the war in Europe, celebrated globally as an epic deliverance from fascist tyranny. The war caused incalculable suffering, destruction and the loss of 80 million lives. Particular gratitude was felt for the Soviet Union, which had borne the brunt of the war, lost 27 million people, and had been so instrumental in Nazi Germany's defeat.

As we mark the 80th anniversary of this victory, it is important to grasp the significance of this historic event. We need to examine the causes of the war, who was to blame for it and whether it could have been prevented. This is especially necessary because forces similar to those that built Hitler threaten once again to plunge the world into war as a result of an anti-Russian crusade with China as an ultimate target.

We need to show that the principal force that crushed Hitler's Germany was the Soviet Red Army

and people. Western ideologists constantly falsify wartime events to exaggerate the significance of their side's contribution and diminish that of the Soviet Union. They wish to obscure the power and ability of the Soviet Union, which won such prestige in the struggle against Hitler, so that Russia, the Soviet core, should not be viewed in its alliance with China and countries of the Global South as the champion of peace and security today.

Pre-War events in Europe

The Second World War commenced on 1 September 1939 with Nazi Germany overrunning Poland. Britain and France declared war on Germany. At this stage, the Soviet Union was a non-participant, as was the other wartime ally, the US.

Behind the outbreak of war lay complex events and forces, going back to Germany's defeat, and humiliation at the end of the First World War (1914-18). Most salient was the fact that Nazi Germany and its allies had enjoyed the connivance of the rulers of Britain, France and the US, since the chief aim of fascism was the destruction of the Soviet Union. Sharp contradictions between the imperialist states, however, led in 1939 to the outbreak of armed conflict between fascist Germany and Italy in one camp and Britain and France in the other.

Ever since the advent of Soviet power in October 1917, the imperialists had sought to destroy the world's first socialist state. During the civil war of 1918-22, fourteen invading imperialist armies in support of internal counter-revolution had attempted, in the words of Churchill, "to strangle the Bolshevik baby in its crib".

Alone and isolated, yet enjoying enormous support from revolutionary movements in all countries, the young Soviet Union built socialism under challenging conditions. It was resolute in the struggle to prevent war, following Lenin's principle of peaceful coexistence, and constantly sought to forge collective security pacts to preserve peace between states and prevent fascist aggression.

This by no means meant that the class struggle between workers, and oppressed people of the world against capitalism and imperialism, was over. The Soviet Union and the Comintern (Communist International) did not slacken in efforts to arouse the working class and the masses in class and national liberation struggles for social emancipation.

The rise of Hitler

The outcome of the First World War left Germany losing much of its territory and having to pay enormous reparations to the victorious imperialists. The country was seething with frustration, with sentiments for revenge, stoked by far-right internationalism. The international situation, already tense and fraught with danger after the capitalist economic crisis of 1929-33, worsened with the coming to power of Hitler's Nazi party in 1933, playing on the most backward sentiments, blaming communists and Jews for their problems. Mussolini's Italy was already a fascist state. Hitler was backed by the German monopolists, assisted by foreign imperialists who dreaded the possibility of a socialist revolution in Germany. The crisis of world capital had resulted in four million unemployed in Germany alone, galloping inflation, and the growth in strength of the communists.

What happened in Germany was a classic example of the bourgeoisie dispensing with the niceties of parliamentary democracy and calling to power a fascist dictatorship to protect the capitalist system. Hitler called his party "national socialist" (Nazi for short) to deceive the German people about his

objectives. The first step in his programme was to eliminate the powerful Communist Party and the democratic rights of the German people.

With enormous funding from Germany's capitalist class, reinforced by international capital, he began war preparations and built the country into a gigantic military machine. His declared aim was to crush the Soviet Union and proceed to the domination of the world with the extermination or subjugation, according to his racist creed, of all the "inferior races" such as the Slavs, Jews, Roma (Gypsy), blacks and coloured people.

In the belief that war could be averted, the Soviet Union called for a firm alliance against Hitler, but Britain, France and the US were not interested in seriously opposing him. Hitler proclaimed that his main area of interest lay in finding "lebensraum" (living space) to the east. This was a cover. Then as now, the vast resources of Russia, Siberia and the Caucasus was the objective. Fundamentally, he was backed by imperialist forces, to eliminate the Bolshevik menace.

The attitude of all the powers was expressed during the Spanish civil war, where only the Soviet Union sprang to the defence of the democratically elected republican government, whilst Britain, France and the US followed a policy of non-intervention, which allowed the fascist General Franco, openly supported by German and Italian forces, to succeed in his criminal rebellion. In 1938 Nazi Germany was allowed to annex Austria, and in September of that year came the shameful betrayal of the Munich conference where Britain and France consented to the seizure of Czechoslovakia by Hitler.

In a last effort to save Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union offered tanks and troops to the bourgeois government, but ultra-right regimes in Romania and Hungary refused to allow passage. After the fall of Czechoslovakia, Poland came into the line of fire, with Hitler demanding the return of Danzig (made a free city after the First World War 1) and a corridor giving Poland an outlet to the Baltic Sea but separating the territory of East Prussia from Germany proper.

Poland, itself ruled by a fascist clique, placed obstacles in the way of an agreement between Britain, France and the Soviet Union designed to prevent a Hitler attack — obstacles which Britain and France did nothing to eliminate. When the Soviet Union found that attempts to build a firm anti-Hitler alliance were in vain, it was compelled to take a different course to protect its security.

In August 1939 it signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, winning a breathing space of nearly two years during which it was able to build up its defences and strengthen the socialist foundations of the Soviet state, threatened as it was on two fronts – Nazi Germany to the west and militarist Japan to the east. This non-aggression treaty has been much criticised by the enemies of the Soviet Union, but subsequent events were to prove its validity.

For Britain and France, the agreement was a chilling signal that Hitler was not going to carry out his struggle against Bolshevism on their terms. The Nazi leadership reasoned that it would have to subjugate the whole of Europe before it would be safe to launch an attack against the Soviet Union. After Poland was overrun, the period of the 1939 so-called "phoney war" set in, with Britain and France failing to act, whilst Nazi Germany invaded Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium.

France's turn came next with the bourgeois government capitulating in July 1940. The invasion of Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece followed and in the far east Japan occupied large parts of China and Korea. In all these countries only the communists offered organised resistance, but the speed with

which the fascist forces took over, owing to the lack of resistance by those bourgeois governments, built up the myth of Hitler's invincibility.

At this stage nearly all of Europe, with the exception of Britain, lay at Hitler's feet. At his disposal he had the combined economies of all the occupied countries and the support of the fascist coalition which, apart from Japan and Italy, included such allies as Finland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

The fate of the occupied Western countries and Britain under aerial bombardment was a case of the monster biting the hand that had fed it. Under his command, Hitler had 300 million people, and he had more coal and steel than the USSR. Europe was thus a source of labour and resources for the war; he now felt more confident of waging to the east. Moreover, since his forces were in control of the Atlantic shoreline, he considered that he had secured his rear.

The Soviet Union attacked

The thunderclouds of war had gathered over the Soviet Union. On 22 June 1941, the Nazi generals unleashed a blitzkrieg (lightning strike) across the Soviet frontier. A four-million-strong army had been assembled with 193 divisions comprising the first echelon of attack. The Nazi forces, having overrun many countries, were experienced in modern warfare and, despite stiff resistance, their tank and motorised units sped deep into Soviet territory.

The aim was to knock out the Red Army, and within two months, reach the Ural Mountains, the line dividing the European part of the Soviet Union from the Asian part. Japan was expected to advance on the Urals from the east. So confident was Hitler of success that he already had invitations printed for a victory dinner at Leningrad's (Saint Petersburg) famous Astoria hotel, and the Nazi dictator expected to enter Moscow within six weeks.

Thus commenced the Great Patriotic War, so named because the Soviet people were defending their socialist motherland and the future of all humankind. It was a just war against fascism, representing not just a struggle between nations but a class war aimed at destroying socialism and, with it, the world working-class and national liberation movements.

The enemy advance halted

The early days of the war were grim. The Red Army was compelled to retreat and relinquish large parts of Soviet territory. From the outset, Leningrad had been besieged by Nazi forces operating from Finland. The Baltic states, Soviet Belarus and Soviet Ukraine were overrun, the enemy broke through to the Black Sea, seizing Odessa and the Crimea, and advanced steadily on Moscow. But the time for an easy war for Hitler's forces was over. The small Brest-Litovsk fortress on the Polish frontier had held out for six weeks. By the time the winter of 1941 was setting in, the invasion force was grinding to a halt, with tens of thousands dead on each side.

The Soviet people were shaken but not demoralised by the initial success of the invasion. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union rallied and organised for the war effort. The whole country was put on a war footing under the direction of the State Defence Committee, headed by Stalin. Everywhere communist party members were to the fore, inspiring the soldiers and the people, volunteering for the most dangerous missions and tasks, be these on the battlefields, at the points of production or in the occupied territories, where partisan (guerilla) detachments were formed to harass the aggressors in the rear and make Soviet land burn under his feet. In a tremendous feat of

organisation, 1,360 industrial and agricultural enterprises were moved to the Urals and the eastern Republics of the Soviet Union, where they were soon in operation for the war effort.

Already, Hitler's blitzkrieg had failed, for the Soviet Union was no easy victim like the other countries he had overrun. The fascist offensive began to weaken, whilst Soviet resistance increased and became steadily better organised. The order of the day in this grim opening phase of the war was to halt the enemy, who had to fight for every inch of territory. Besieged Leningrad was turned into an impregnable fortress and was to hold out for an incredible 900 days of starvation and bombardment until its relief. By October, with the enemy 16 kilometres from Moscow, the battle for the Soviet capital had begun.

This was the most critical stage of the war, with the Nazis launching what they hoped would be the final offensive on the city. They had brought up fresh reserves, and a force of 80 divisions converged on Moscow. The traditional 7 November parade was held in Red Square, with columns of infantry, tanks and artillery passing the Lenin mausoleum and going straight to the front. With the Party declaring "The defeat of the enemy must begin at Moscow", the Soviet command brought up fresh organised forces and in December launched its first major counter-offensive.

This was a tremendous test for the Red Army, which crashed through the Nazi lines and, by the spring of 1942, had thrown back the enemy 400 kilometres from the Soviet capital. The Battle of Moscow was a decisive event of the war. It shattered the myth of the German army's invincibility, wrecked Hitler's blitzkrieg strategy and forced him into a prolonged war. It revealed the strength of the Soviet Union in war, gave hope to the world and strengthened the anti-Nazi camp. It created the basis for a historic alliance of world forces against the fascist war.

Anti-fascist coalition

On 1 January 1942, twenty-six states, including the USSR, US and Britain agreed to form an alliance to defeat the Hitler-Mussolini-Tokyo Axis. The more sober British and American statesmen understood the dangers fascism presented to their own countries. They realised that without the Soviet Union, it was impossible to halt Hitler. Moreover, the US had cause to understand the treachery of the aggressors when the Japanese launched a surprise attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, in December 1941.

A compelling motive behind the US and British decision was to see imperialist Germany, as a rival in the world market, crushed. At the same time, they hoped to see the Soviet Union weakened. Senator Truman, the future American President, summed it up when he said: "If we see Germany is winning, we should help Russia; but if Russia is winning, we should help Germany". Put another way, the wish was "to see Hitler in the grave and Russia on the operating table".

But the people of Britain and US, inspired by the heroic Soviet feats, forced their rulers to adopt a more resolute policy. Britain and the US undertook to open a second front in Europe as soon as possible, purposefully delaying the move. It was another three years before they fulfilled that promise when it was evident that the Red Army was well on the way to demolishing Hitler's forces. In all this time, the Soviet Union stood alone in Europe, where 70% of the world war was being waged.

Whilst the Americans fought the Japanese for control of coral islands in the Pacific, Churchill followed the myopic policy of regarding the North African desert rather than the English Channel as the

shortest route to Germany. This conduct prolonged the war and therefore cost millions more lives.

Decisive battles

During 1942, the initiative on the Soviet front still lay with the Nazi aggressor, who built up a new offensive in the south. With a million-strong force, the enemy broke through the Soviet defences and drove on to the Volga. The aim was to seize Stalingrad (now Volgograd) and push on to the Soviet oilfields at Baku. Success would have enabled Hitler to smash through the Caucasus and beyond to the Middle East and India.

On 23 August 1942, the great city on the Volga was flattened, and the fiercest battle of the war took place as every street, house and room was fought for. The fighting raged for months while the world watched anxiously, aware that its fate hung in the balance. The Soviet command planned to wear the enemy down while building up fresh forces on its flanks. By 19 November, Hitler's 6th Army of 330,000 troops were encircled and gradually crushed. In February 1943, 96,000 survivors surrendered. Never before in history had such a large formation of troops been surrounded and destroyed.

The tide of war was turned on the Volga, and the German army could never be the same again. Churchill tried to make out that it was the Battle of El Alamein in Libya that changed the course of the war. It is instructive to note that the German General Rommel had merely nine divisions under his command in the African desert, whereas the German forces at Stalingrad comprised 22 divisions, out of a total of 257 fascist divisions on the Soviet front.

With this victory, the Red Army at last wrested the initiative from the enemy and, in what can be regarded as the second period of the Great Patriotic War, commenced the struggle for the expulsion of the invaders from Soviet soil.

This was no easy task. The fascist beast had been lamed but was not yet beaten. Hitler had built up freshly equipped armies, but so too had the Soviet Union. Soviet scientists and workers improved tank and aircraft design, and developed weapons like the ferocious rocket missile tube system popularly known as Katyushas. Factories functioned around the clock, and a continuous stream of improved arms and equipment flowed to the front. Soviet industry was producing 2½ times more tanks and 20,000 more planes than Germany. Not only was the Soviet Union beginning to produce more weapons, but these were proving to be superior in battle.

By July 1943, the Nazi command sought to reverse their Stalingrad defeat by attempting to launch another powerful offensive. They concentrated forces in the region of Kursk, near the Ukrainian border, and with a battering ram of tanks aimed to smash through the Soviet defence line.

The battle that developed at Kursk was the biggest in history, involving the largest concentration of tanks, planes and artillery ever assembled. The German offensive was not only halted, but the Red Army launched a spectacular counter-offensive which demolished the enemy and hurled them back across the Dnieper River, opening the way for the liberation of Kiev. Kursk placed the German forces in a near-catastrophic position. They were never again able to assume the offensive. The outcome of this battle so significantly altered the balance of forces and capacity between the two adversaries that it is rightly considered the turning point of the war.

The enemy driven from Soviet soil

By the end of 1943, the tide of war was irreversibly changed in favour of the Soviet Union. During 1944, tremendous blows rained down on the enemy formations in Belarus and western Ukraine. This was dramatic proof of the Soviet army's mastery of military art, with generals such as Zhukov and Rokossovsky proving themselves the most outstanding.

The enemy had to contend with the Soviet partisans who came into their own as the Red Army advanced. Chaos was sown among the enemy as they attempted to retreat. The aptly named Railway War, waged by partisans, inflicted five times more damage than allied bombs.

In the summer of 1944, the Red Army mounted a general offensive, driving the enemy off Soviet soil by autumn. Tens of thousands of captured Germans, who had once dreamed of seeing Moscow, received the opportunity as they were marched through the city's streets as captives.

On Soviet soil, the German army lost eight million men, killed and captured, 19,000 guns, 62,000 planes and 55,000 tanks. But the Nazis had exacted a horrific toll in the Soviet lands they had overrun. They had destroyed 1,740 towns and cities, razed to the ground 70,000 villages, slaughtered millions of civilians or driven them into slavery. Wherever they set foot, they left ashes and ruins. Four hundred mines were destroyed in the Donetsk coal basin; 25 million people were made homeless. The loss to industry was 679 billion roubles and the estimated complete cost of the war was 2,5 trillion roubles. The 27 million dead (one million alone in the siege of Leningrad) was on a genocidal scale. By comparison, the US made a profit out of the war of 52 billion dollars and lost only 340,000 soldiers. Car accidents in the US account for this number of casualties every five years. Not a single bomb fell on North America.

Liberating Europe

The Red Army now turned to its campaign of liberating occupied Europe from the yoke of fascism. Eleven European countries, including Poland, were freed by the Soviet forces who were greeted everywhere as liberators. By this stage, the long-awaited opening of the second front in France had taken place in June 1944. There is no doubt this was spurred on by the decisive victories the Soviet Union had been scoring on the Belarus and Ukrainian fronts. By then, the war had already entered its concluding stage. As many as 370 enemy divisions had been wiped out on the Soviet-German front, and Nazi Germany was incapable of making good those losses. The chief consideration of the US and British rulers was to share the victory pie, with postwar alignments in mind, and to shake hands with the Russians as far to the east as possible.

The American and British armies made slow progress from the west, even though they had an overwhelmingly superior force. The German troops they faced were Hitler's second best, for the most experienced divisions were concentrated on the eastern front. At the time of the Normandy landings, there were only 50 German divisions in France and by the time the Red Army was preparing to cross onto German soil in January 1945, Hitler had only 20 divisions facing the Allies in the West.

At this point, the Americans and British were engaged in the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes mountains of France. When things went wrong for them, Churchill appealed to Stalin to advance the date of the proposed Soviet offensive, and Stalin obliged. Hitler was forced to transfer another 12 divisions to the eastern front, and the Germans thus had only eight divisions to face 1,000,000 American and British troops.

It is salutary to note in passing that Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia tied down 16 German divisions. In the closing period of the war, Hitler and his henchmen were hoping that the Western allies would do a deal with them and save their skins from the advancing Red Army. The Nazis were putting up token resistance in the west and desperately digging in against the advancing Soviet tide. In the bitter fighting for Berlin, 300,000 Soviet soldiers gave their lives, but nothing could prevent the final collapse of Nazi Germany under the hammer blows of the Red Army.

Germany was defeated, and the fascist leaders and war criminals suffered the grim retribution of popular justice. As a result of the Yalta Conference, the Soviet Union undertook to declare war on Japan to bring the war to a speedy end. The declaration was made on 8 August 1945, and Soviet forces immediately acted against the 1.3 million-strong Japanese army in Manchuria. This force was routed by September, and all its equipment was handed to the Chinese communists. However, on 6 and 9 August 1945, the US dropped atomic bombs on Japan, killing hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was an act of barbarism for which there was no military necessity. Japan was already finished as a fighting force.

The main reason for dropping the bombs was to warn the Soviet Union that the US had an unanswerable weapon.

Source of Soviet victory

The Soviet Union played the chief part in ending the war. It saved humanity from fascist slavery, fulfilling its internationalist duty. The gains of the socialist revolution and Soviet power had been protected, and socialism was turned into a world system. With the defeat of the most reactionary capitalist country and the weakening of others, the world balance of forces was radically altered. Many countries in eastern Europe and Asia were set on the socialist path. The weakening of imperialism and the enormous desire for freedom led to the collapse of the colonial system.

The source of victory in the Great Patriotic War and the crushing of Hitler in Berlin is clear, despite attempts to attribute it to the Russian winter. The Red Army matched the Nazis in all conditions, whether summer or winter, on Soviet soil or German soil. The Soviet people triumphed because their socialist system enabled them to mobilise the necessary human and material resources for victory. They defended their way of life and the gains of the October Revolution against an imperialist aggressor. The Soviet soldier embodied patriotism and internationalism. As Lenin prophetically stated: "The workers and peasants can never be defeated if they are fighting for socialist power".

The Soviet people, united and determined, withstood tremendous hardships, displaying remarkable endurance, sacrifice and heroism to make their victory possible. The inspirer and organiser was the Communist Party, which welded together the army and the people. Through personal example, the communists inspired the fighting men and the workers to perform heroic feats. "I want to go into battle as a communist" was the sentiment that fired the best of the Soviet people.

The fight for peace today

The Soviet people's great victory, celebrated on 9 May, is also our victory and our celebration. That victory is directly linked to the struggle for world peace today. Now, as then, imperialist warmongering threatens us all with extinction. The victory over fascism back then highlights the need to unite the peoples of the world today in the struggle against imperialism. ●

Cde Ronnie Kasrils is an SACP, ANC and MK veteran and an author

Celebrate but indict – a critical reflection on 30 years of ANC rule

The African National Congress is no longer the same revolutionary organisation it once was, writes **Mickey Modisane**. How has this determined its performance, and what's the way forward?

This article critically reflects on the 30 years of ANC governance since 1994. It is not an academic treatise following standard scholarly protocols but a discussion document to provoke political debate. It offers a modest assessment of South Africa's democratic and socio-economic redress efforts – highlighting achievements, challenges and pitfalls. I hasten to add that this article is not a definitive but an open-ended invitation for debate and reflection by the cadres of our movement.

The title “celebrate but indict” is borrowed from former Congress of South African Congress of Students (Cosas) President, Cde Shepi Mati, now a prominent academic at Rhodes University. It is a clarion call to acknowledge the ANC's achievements while critically examining its shortcomings in fulfilling the historic tasks of the national liberation movement.

For brevity, we outline the historical context that enabled South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, focusing on the 1980s – or what our late President, Cde Oliver Tambo, designated “the decade of liberation”. This decade, by far, represents the culmination of the efforts of the ANC, including a combination of political and military assaults, to bring apartheid to its knees.

We thus investigate the ANC's response to the brewing mass ferment of the 80s, as our people rejected the status quo and rallied under the banner of the ANC. In anticipation of this qualitative turn of events, the ANC developed the Constitutional Guidelines and intensified the armed struggle, signalling our determination to lead a democratic transition.

Due to a confluence of domestic pressures and international isolation, the apartheid regime lifted the ban on the ANC and other organisations and entered negotiations leading to the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa). This process culminated in the April 1994 democratic breakthrough, marking an irreversible shift towards constitutional change that would define the character of the democratic dispensation. Codesa thus provided the critical bridge for advancement.

Thirty years on, this article asks: What is the ANC's record since it took over the keys to the Union Buildings? Have we achieved the goals we'd set as a liberation movement? A generation later is an apt moment for critical reflection.

The 1980s – the decade of liberation

By the early 1980s, the ANC, having survived the 1960s apartheid state's merciless blows and crushing defeats, had re-emerged as an authoritative force leading the struggle for national liberation and social emancipation in our country. Cde Tambo's declaration of the 1980s as the “decade of liberation”

proved prophetic rather than rhetorical. Informed by the after Politico-Military Commission (the *Green Book*) – following the ANC top leadership’s historic trip to Vietnam to learn and draw lessons from the victorious struggles of that heroic country – the ANC determined that it should synchronise Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) activities with popular struggles at home.

In light of these lessons, the ANC began to implement a deliberate programme of leading the revival of the mass struggles reminiscent of the roaring 1950s but, this time, adjusted for the changed conditions of brutal apartheid repression. During this period, the combination of legal and illegal forms of struggle became a central feature of the struggle. The key objective was to draw the masses into the struggle and, combined with MK blows, free them from the fear of the apartheid security forces’ inevitable reprisals.

Through its underground presence and illegal Radio Freedom broadcasts, the ANC, assumed a tangible presence. Each campaign, whether the call for the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, the 1981 anti-Republic campaign, workers’ trade union rights, forced removals, a boycott of dummy institutions, youth and student struggles, emerging women activist organisations, anti-military conscription struggles by our white compatriots, or a cultural and sports boycott bore its unambiguous imprimatur. But these struggles needed an organisational home to nurture and direct them. The designation of 1982 as the Year of Unity in Action was precisely a call for coordinated action to give impetus to the unity of all progressive forces, linking every aspect and instance of isolated struggles into one stream.

Thus, the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in August 1983 became the fulcrum of the ANC’s call for a united patriotic front to rid our country of national oppression. The UDF began to speak and act with the full authority of the ANC. The Vietnam lessons were beginning to impact on the daily struggles of our people. Consequently, the UDF emerged as the best laboratory of participatory democracy that our country had ever experienced.

In its response to the growing crisis of its legitimacy, the apartheid regime began experimenting with divide and rule tactics. The institution of Black Local Authorities (BLA) and a Tricameral Parliament attempted to enlist the collaboration of our people in their oppression. The massive rejection of these enemy stratagems demonstrated that the authority was gradually shifting to the democratic forces. People’s power was permeating all aspects of our struggle.

Through mass action, complemented by the increased tempo of MK operations, our people demonstrated a staying power that was rare in its breadth and depth, adding yet another chapter in the annals of revolutionary theory. In the face of increased apartheid brutality and roaming apartheid killer squads, our people’s resilience remained steadfast. The emergence and sustainability of the phenomenon of the mass democratic movement (MDM) was a testimony that the ANC’s Green Book policy framework was beginning to bear fruit. Thanks to the 1983 re-organisation and revitalisation of its structures, giving birth to a restructured military headquarters and political machinery, the ANC was now better poised to confront the regime on all fronts.

For MK, the setback of losing Mozambique as a key rear base following the 1984 Nkomati Accord was mitigated by the MHQ’s focus on strengthening its combat capability inside the country. As Tambo had said – following apartheid security raids in neighbouring countries in search of MK bases – our bases and forests are our people inside South Africa. MK indeed began to entrench itself among

the masses, its operations fused with the daily struggles of our people. It became a common feature in the songs of that era, to invoke, as part of mass mobilisation and recruitment for MK, the brave deeds of generations of heroic MK commanders and combatants – alive and fallen.

It was only a matter of time before cracks within the ranks of the ruling class would appear. And show up in the most dramatic fashion, they did. In September 1985, Gavin Relly, the head of Anglo-American corporation, SA's biggest conglomerate, led a delegation of senior South African corporate leaders to meet with the leadership of the ANC in Lusaka. This interaction was to open up a footpath to Lusaka for many other delegations representing a diverse group of interests, Afrikaner intellectuals, white liberal voices, MDM leaders and other prominent black voices to engage with the ANC. By now, thanks to our struggles, at home, the ANC had emerged as fundamental and indispensable to the resolution of the South African question – ending white minority rule and its substitution by a democratic state.

The historic visit by white capital followed barely three months after the momentous ANC Kabwe conference, dubbed by Cde Tambo the “Council of War”. Kabwe was infused with an impatient “home-go” spirit; it was clear to the delegates that this would be the last ANC conference in exile. It is fair to say the route back home was plotted at this conference, as testified by its deliberations. Especially significant was, that for the first time since its exile, the ANC began to seriously consider the prospects of a negotiated settlement.

The foremost question posed by Cde Tambo was what would we do if the enemy were to knock on our door pleading for talks with us? Indeed, would we have prepared adequately for that eventuality? Although our strategic perspectives were anchored in the armed seizure of power, we never discounted the possibility, under certain conditions, of talks. The MK manifesto states: “We of Umkhonto we Sizwe have always sought – as the liberation movement has sought – to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash”.

Violence becomes the midwife of history when the doors to peace are shut, and coercive state power is unleashed on the unarmed. Similarly, the prospects of peaceful settlement are enhanced when a regime demonstrates, thanks to an all-round offensive by popular forces, a readiness and willingness to engage in talks with the representatives of the people. A revolutionary movement will explore and exploit every possibility of resolving conflict to reduce the chances of loss of life.

At an international level, apartheid rule was facing unprecedented pressure, signalled by, inter alia, the 1985 Eminent Persons Group (EPG) tasked by the Commonwealth to engage the apartheid regime; the 1986 passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in the US Congress thus overriding Reagan's veto; and the 1985 private international banks recall of outstanding apartheid credit facilities. Through these measures, the anti-apartheid struggle had ceased being a South African matter, becoming a global struggle for justice and freedom in our country.

The 1989 Harare Declaration, which spelt out the framework for negotiations in South Africa, must be seen as a triumph of the diplomacy of the ANC and a tribute to Cde Tambo's sterling stewardship of the movement. It represented a culmination of all the struggles spelt above. True indeed, as Cde Tambo had foretold, the 80s had proved to be a decisive decade in our struggle for our long overdue liberation. “The Four Pillars” crafted at Kabwe, had indeed made their mark in placing our struggle

on an irreversible path where victory was within grasp.

The road to Codesa

The policy positions of the ANC derived from its theorisation of the South African revolution as a national democratic revolution (NDR) aimed at the national liberation of the African majority and blacks in general. Accordingly, the ANC recognised that African liberation would be a sham if not accompanied by the transformation of the economy in a way that would allow for meaningful African participation and ownership of the commanding heights of the economy. This elaboration on the Freedom Charter found its concrete expression in the Strategy and Tactics adopted at the historic 1969 Morogoro conference. Given the violent nature of the apartheid regime and the impossibility of effecting any meaningful changes in South Africa, the armed struggle became the principal tactical approach to realise this vision.

Our struggle also formed part of the broader anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle aimed at ending the imperialist subjugation of colonial people. Raising the banner of national freedom and independence, though a necessary condition for statehood, was not on its own a sufficient condition for lasting socio-economic change, hence neo-colonialism was seen as but a continuation of the colonial enterprise by imperialist powers. In this regard, the world socialist system, the collection of socialist countries, was the bedrock and unfailing ally in our struggle, both morally and materially. They were a dependable and indispensable source of solidarity, without placing any reciprocal demands on us.

But the unthinkable happened in 1989 when the world socialist system unravelled, culminating in its implosion. The last apartheid President of South Africa, F.W. De Klerk, cites this phenomenon as one of the principal contributors to his decision to unban the ANC and free political prisoners. According to him, history had blunted communism, thus creating the possibility for a negotiated settlement in South Africa.

On 2 February 1990 De Klerk announced the unbanning of the ANC and other banned organisations, including the SACP and PAC, thus commencing the process of change in the country and the possibility of a negotiated settlement. This announcement was given further impetus with the release of Mandela from 27 years of imprisonment. His release followed the release of his fellow Rivonia trialists months before. The return of the exiles and the emptying of apartheid prisons of remaining political prisoners followed soon thereafter.

Thus, our apartheid interlocutor at Codesa was not a militarily vanquished adversary. This is not to say that the combination of internal mass and underground struggles, international solidarity and armed actions by MK played no part in bringing the apartheid regime to its senses. However, to assume that these courageous actions on their own brought apartheid to its knees would be incorrect. The enemy still had a vast reservoir of coercive instruments at its disposal that could still be unleashed with devastating consequences, such as we saw with the low-intensity war unleashed against our people by the Boers and its Bantustan allies if only to give notice of the lethal power of their arsenal.

Codesa took place against the background of strategic parity. We certainly were not a defeated people, but neither was our adversary vanquished. The moral superiority of our struggle was unquestionable. Western countries that were key apartheid South Africa backers had come to

accept the unsustainability of the apartheid state, thanks largely to the growth of the anti-apartheid movement. But on our side, too, the geopolitics of support in the Southern African region were changing – a major reversal being the relocation of our main military camps further north from Angola to Uganda.

It is a tribute to the leadership of the ANC, especially the figurehead of Nelson Mandela, that this unfavourable balance of forces was turned around to create the necessary bridgehead to engage the Boers, confident of the unwavering commitment of our people, notwithstanding the violence that was a key feature of the transition period. However, the concept of negotiations implies, depending on the balance of forces, give and take. One simply doesn't win on the table what one couldn't win on the battlefield. It is fair to say the Codesa settlement reflected its times. In truth, settlement was a watered-down version of our historical positions. Yet its significance cannot be dismissed as a sellout outcome, far from it. In the circumstances, the settlement gave us a framework for further strategic advancement as the balance of forces changed in favour of the revolutionary forces.

What is this significance? The key one is that it democratised political life in South Africa. Never again would our people be subjected to white minority rule. It created a constitutional framework that guarantees all the standard human rights characteristic of other democratic societies. Moreover, it ensured accountability and transparency, making social rights integral to our constitution. This victory cannot be overemphasised; not only was apartheid rule oppressive, but it was also cruel beyond measure, opaque and fundamentally immoral. It is thanks to this constitution that arbitrary and vile rule is abolished.

But this must not be absolutised to mean our constitution, laudable and progressive as it is, is a *deus ex machina* – it bears all the hallmarks and shortcomings of deal-making characteristic of elite settlements. Marx mentions people making history not merely according to their wishes but under concrete circumstances. It'll be a lie to assert that the national liberation movement in the period 1990-1994 had all the power to institute an NDR. The capacity was simply not there, and no responsible leadership takes its followers to the slaughterhouse with glee. Codesa gave us the azimuth to 27 April 1994, the day the courageous sacrifices and centuries old aspirations of our people culminated in the birth of our democratic republic.

The ANC ascends to power

Somewhere in his book *Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, Che reflects on how the revolutionaries who led by Fidel Castro on the Granma expeditionary ship landed on the shores of Cuba in 1956 were not the same as those who marched triumphantly to Havana on 1 January 1959. Their worldview had to face the daily grind of the struggle in the Sierra Maestra and, as such, be reshaped for the better. They soon learnt armed struggle sans popular participation and political leadership could soon descend to armed banditry. But more importantly, they learnt that revolution and counter-revolution are two sides of the same coin. In consolidating popular power, they realised that romantic notions of revolution are soon superseded by the daily struggle against the dethroned class determined to make a comeback.

When the ANC ascended to power in 1994, it could draw on the policy papers it had drafted in anticipation of its ascendancy to power – from its Constitutional Guidelines, to Ready to Govern, to the RDP Programme but it soon learnt that the nature of the transition did not readily give it the

capacity to implement them. So, the material conditions in 1994 were far from ideal, but our comrades, too, had changed. The collapse of socialist regimes and the failed African socialist experiments of Angola and Mozambique induced a sense of defeatism.

Capital wasted no time in assailing our historic policy positions as anachronistic. This can be seen in how it reacted to the ANC think tank on economic matters Macro Economic Research Group (Merge) proposals released late 1993 and published as *Making Democracy Work: A Framework for Macroeconomic Policy in SA*. It was an ideological contestation by global capital to scupper any attempt at historic redress or fundamental socio-economic change. Soon after its creation, Cde Jay Naidoo's RDP ministry was shut down.

Soon thereafter, we witnessed the introduction and implementation of the Growth Employment And Employment (Gear) programme, marking a neoliberal turn in economic policy. Its adherents will argue that Gear was a response to the macroeconomic challenges facing South Africa and was meant to stabilise our financial capacity by stemming a potential meltdown thus, creating a framework for savings and investments to spur economic growth. It doesn't matter to them that while finances were consolidated and modest economic growth registered, it was not accompanied by increased employment – jobless growth.

Others argued differently, that Keynesian supply-side interventions by the state would have been the appropriate response for a country that, from the perspective of most of its citizens, was starting from a low base and, therefore, should have prioritised programmes that sought to reverse rather than reinforce the legacy of apartheid.

Above, we'd reflected that theory, especially textbook revolutionary theory that invokes Marx and Lenin as a panacea for all the world's ills, sounds great, but true leadership is based on the assessment of concrete reality and the reading of the balance of forces at any given stage, not fanciful invocations.

Any objective critique of the democratic transition in South Africa must factor in the real and sometimes intractable challenges the ANC faced when it assumed power in 1994. Building new state institutions, on its own, was a revolutionary undertaking. For a country that has never had constitutional oversight – the doctrine of the separation of powers – as a cardinal principle, due credit must accrue to the ANC for having steadfastly held to this perspective as a key feature of our democratic dispensation. This is what the ANC, more than anything else, bequeathed to South Africa, a law-governed state. Today, we boast a multiplicity of state institutions and a battery of laws that help sustain our democratic promise, ensuring no reversion to a past of ignominy.

This article does not dwell on the self-evident progressive achievements of the ANC government but will reflect on the extraordinary interventions made in reversing the legacy of apartheid inequality. We can single out its redistributive policies in the field of social grants as but one extraordinary instance of progressive state intervention to redress the historical injustice apartheid inflicted on our people. These have become the most important social engineering scheme ever inaugurated in our country to lift many out of poverty, hence the ANC continues to derive greater support among the poor. This intervention is more remarkable considering that we inherited a racially fragmented social welfare system with Africans at rock bottom. Today, our social policy is comprehensive and comparable with the best in the world, from pensions and grants to guaranteeing access to higher

education for students from poor households.

There's no doubt that the past thirty years have radically changed South Africa's face, thanks to the policies enacted by the ANC government. Of course, the cynic would retort: imagine being invited to a workshop or seminar that demonstrates that fish swim and birds fly. It is the duty of a government that purports to be democratic and responsive to people's needs to deliver; it's doing them no favour. Yet, we know only too well that some governments fail precisely to do the minimum of social delivery to their constituents.

It is fair to say that, on balance, the delivery track record of the ANC government – given the apartheid backlog – has been more than commendable. I will leave it to statisticians to detail the road covered in that period. However, we must acknowledge and emphasise that society has been altered for the better over the past years. Indeed, the process has been uneven, sometimes marred by serious policy lapses and failure to deliver critical services owing, usually, to a lack of institutional capacity in state organs.

The poison of corruption

Human nature is something that successive revolutionaries have either failed to read or appreciate. The ANC often defined itself as a broad church of people brought together by their collective disgust of and opposition to the system of apartheid and a willingness to fight it and inaugurate a democratic society based on the will of the people.

One's ideological predisposition was immaterial. It was enough that one was sufficiently moved to commit to a non-racial and non-sexist national democratic society. However, when that society dawned, we were found wanting in recognising the changes this would bring internally to the ANC. We didn't sufficiently theorise how it will impact the movement and society, especially how the social structure of society will be much more complex than the binary of black and white, that class interests will also come to the fore and will play themselves out. We have yet to reflect on how the changed social composition and structure of society have filtered through to the ANC and how all of these have had a bearing on ANC practices and ideological posture. Here, we argue that current ANC problems directly result from the changing composition of South African society.

As ANC diagnostic reports, one after another, in every conference since the 52nd Conference have reflected, the contemporary ANC is no longer that revolutionary organisation that placed the interests of the people in the forefront. It is seen by some as the premier organisation of power, as a vehicle for access to state power and the attendant material benefits that accrue to office holders. The absence or lack of a filtering mechanism to vet membership and potential leadership ascendancy has opened the ANC, this time not necessarily to counter-revolutionaries accounting to an adversarial force or state actor, but to forces whose sole intention is not necessarily to subvert the movement but see it as the ruling party in charge of government and, therefore, a guarantor of easily earned riches via the state procurement processes.

The organisational design and structure of the ANC have thus not kept up with the changes that have taken place in the wake of the democratic breakthrough. It has remained a broad church rather than converted to a tightly knit organisation with high barriers to entry. It is enough for one to swear loyalty to the Freedom Charter, belong to a branch, pay dues to secure membership, and, after a prescribed period, ascend to leadership. Because the ANC is a democratic organisation, power

resides in its primary unit, the branch. Branches are often composed of many who cannot afford the dues, thus making them vulnerable to the resourced who bulk-buy membership subscriptions on their behalf to ascend to positions of power. This criminal element holds sway in key positions in the ANC and government. It often chants and mouths slogans it hardly believes in and flaunts its access to material resources to gain popularity and thus the possibility of access to power, both in the ANC and in government.

Attendant to this malaise is the ANC practice of linking leadership in the ANC to guaranteed ascendancy to access to state power. A branch leader is guaranteed a place in a local municipality, a regional leader is guaranteed a senior role, often as mayor, in a district or metropolitan municipality, a provincial leader is guaranteed a premier post or a similarly senior state post where the ANC in charge, likewise ascendancy to the NEC and its top executive places one on the trajectory to state office. It shouldn't be surprising that the fierce contestation for ANC positions is driven not by the passion to serve our people but primarily a race for the material benefits that accrue when state power ensues.

It is precisely these conditions that gave birth to the phenomenon of corruption. The shame about this phenomenon is the silence of the ANC, which was at hand to justify every instance of malfeasance unfolding in the country, often dismissing legitimate outcries as alleged counter-revolutionary attacks on the self-proclaimed 'leader of society'. As we celebrate the positive in the past thirty years of ANC rule, we equally indict the lowering of the moral azimuth by the ANC. The poison of corruption is a festering sore and open wound that devours society, depriving it of sorely needed resources. It is a criminal enterprise that, if not checked, can collapse the state.

Corruption should not be narrowed down to a phenomenon peculiar to some government officials. Corporate greed engenders corruption; in fact, it is its primary beneficiary. It is sad that some of these corporate players, all of them white, escaped the purview of the Zondo Commission. Illegal massive capital outflows via complex price transfer mechanisms, money laundering, currency manipulation, asset offshoring, fronting and bribing of regulatory authorities are all gross instances of corruption. Sadly, owing to the dominance and influence of monopoly capital in all aspects of South Africa's life such practices are often ignored, and the focus falls instead on those with no commensurate ideological power to influence and shape the opinions of society.

Losing power

Is there truth in the assertion that the ANC has exhausted its capacity as an instrument for the revolutionary transformation of our society? Does it still subscribe to the NDR? And if it does, what capacity is it building for its realisation? Could it also be correct to say that this premier organisation of struggle is a sad replica of its heroic past? Has it descended into a typical post-colonial vehicle for private accumulation by the ruling elite, with the state over which it presides deliberately weakened, predatory and patrimonial and where ethnicity, regionalism and factionalism are mobilised to protect the status quo regardless of its compromised standing in broader society? These questions speak directly to whether the currently constituted ANC has a moral claim to be a leader of society. What sets it apart from the milieu of political parties populating our political landscape?

It cannot be that we are forever invoking our heroic history as the premier organisation that led the charge for the liberation of our people as a licence to lord over them as if they have no choice. As one

ANC leader in KZN following our routing there proclaimed: our people will come back when they realise the mistake they've committed by not voting for the ANC. Think of Bertolt Brecht's poem *The Solution*.

What material conditions made it possible for the ANC to lose its bearings to a point where our people showed it the middle finger in the recent elections, which we lost? Does this loss demonstrate failure by the ANC to live up to its lofty ideals? If the thesis that an army marches on its stomach holds, then we must accept that the electorate, too, has become wise enough, after thirty years, to make informed choices about its electoral options.

There's no worse indictment. We may camouflage it by claiming the "GNU" is still the ANC in charge. The reality is that the oft proclaimed but invisible "renewal" notwithstanding, we are a party in decline and, worse, infiltrated by criminal elements determined to line their pockets.

We can take comfort in blaming this or that province for failing to deliver the winning votes and threatening to dissolve it, but not the NEC; it won't remedy the descent. This loss of power means loss of confidence and trust by our people. They feel betrayed by our inability to build our delivery capacity and place their interests at the forefront. Gloating over past achievements – and there've been many, and we should be proud of that – indicates a failure to appreciate that precisely because of these past achievements, society is no longer fazed by the launch of this or that project. So, when there is slack delivery amid ostentatious consumption by the political class, the people revolt. In a democracy, they vote with their feet.

Marx, in Thesis Eleven of his *Theses On Feuerbach*, says: "The philosophers have interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it".

The ANC's emergence as South Africa's prime liberation movement, its response to changing material conditions, its 1994 ascension to power and its position as the uncontested leader of society thanks to visionary figures like Cde Tambo have been outlined.

Global shifts such as the implosion of the socialist bloc and the ideological reorientation of former socialist African countries dimmed our prospects of implementing the Morogoro Strategy and Tactics, let alone socialism. The apartheid-era economic legacies, including crippling debt, compelled us to adapt our policy choices to these realities.

Of course, there were contending perspectives in our ranks. Hence the RDP became our consensus policy platform endorsed by all Alliance partners. It informed the White Paper that provided a framework for a redistributive and interventionist state to lead socio-economic transformation in our country. A battery of progressive legislation followed, alongside budget reforms aimed at equity. GEAR was an emergency intervention to obviate the collapse of our fiscal capacity, though it sparked criticism. The "1996 class project" bandied by the SACP was sham sloganeering devoid of content and fuelled divisive politics, including the "Polokwane moment".

Still, the ANC government remained true to its promise of "a better life for all". It has brought real improvements, especially to the poor, and helped create a black middle class. Success bred complacency and corruption – the "sins of incumbency". This is precisely our Achilles Heel. In a sense, the ANC is its own victim, as the election results of 29 May 2024 attest. The GNU may be a

tactical retreat to consolidate and recover lost ground in the next election cycle, but the opposite is also possible – it may collapse the ANC. Its principal partner in this coalition, the DA, remains adversarial and should not be underestimated.

What's the cure to change this reality as Marx enjoins us? Cde Moses Kotane said "revolution ke batho", which translates to Batho Pele. You lose them, you lose the revolution. As ANC and MK veteran Cde Obbey Mabhena, popularly known in our ranks as Jola Camarada, often exhorts us: 'Asikhulumeni maqabane!'. ●

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Victory is not certain: the struggle for fundamental social transformation since 1994

Luyolo Bosman examines the problems facing the NDR and the ANC-led Alliance and asks what would be needed for them to regain traction

South Africa's post-1994 socio-economic reality has not delivered a "better life for all". Many middle and upper-middle-income countries have experienced sustained growth and high investment, while the South African economy has remained dependent on the mineral, energy and finance complex. South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, coupled with racialised unemployment and poverty.

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) is the primary programme of the African National Congress (ANC)-led Alliance. This programme lays the theoretical basis and outlines the strategic objectives the ANC seeks to achieve in government.

This article adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on a literature review of books, journals, online political articles and political party documents. The sources have been selected to ensure a sound theoretical conceptual basis for discussing the NDR in the context of three decades of ANC governance. This article will assess whether the NDR is on track, balancing perspectives that explain its significance with those that criticise it.

The evolution of a theory of the South African revolution

The South African national liberation movement is led by the ANC, a multi-class organisation influenced by two broad ideological currents: nationalism and socialism. The interaction and contestation of these two ideological currents are well documented. The article will thus focus on how these two currents, organisationally represented by the South African Communist Party and the ANC, have complemented each other.

A group of African nationalists formed the African National Native Congress (ANNC), which later became the ANC, to unite Africans and other forces opposed to colonial dispossession and apartheid subjugation (white domination), and the fight for equality and political rights. After half a century of peaceful protests, the ANC was banned in 1960 following the Sharpeville massacre. With the assistance of the SACP, which had a decade of underground experience, the ANC reconstituted itself underground. The ANC transformed from being a mouthpiece of a few black petty bourgeoisie into a principled fighting organ in the hands of the oppressed, upholding their ideals, hopes, aspirations, and political values.

The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was established in 1921 after several attempts by Marxist revolutionary groups. In March 1927, James La Guma represented the CPSA in a meeting of the Comintern where General Secretary Nikolai Bukharin criticised the South African strategy as

weak. This resulted in a programme that would combine the national and class struggles, resulting in the CPSA Black Republic Thesis and its formal resolve to work with national liberation movements.

This racial and class exclusivity had an unintended consequence for African nationalism and socialism. The political programmes of these two organisations dovetailed with what is commonly referred to as the national liberation struggle. Initially, the ANC's political programme was liberal-reformist. At the June 1927 National Conference, Gumede and Khaile (known communists at the time) were elected. This conference adopted a more radical programme that included the "African Bill of Rights". The programme called for the restoration and extension of the Cape African Franchise to other provinces, the abolition of the statutory colour bar, and the rights for Africans to participate in economic activity and own assets.

The genesis of the NDR

The concept of the NDR evolved over decades. It was shaped and adapted according to objective and subjective factors. The NDR is rooted in the characterisation of the system of oppression in South Africa as Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) in the context of white minority rule.

It would be impractical to reduce a living body of theory, a programme, strategy and tactics to a resolution of a conference. Even if the NDR concept or phrase has its genesis in a particular epoch or moment in history, it should be regarded as a revolutionary theory in the ebb and flow of fundamental socio-economic transformation.

The effectiveness of the CST characterisation and thus the NDR is not hinged on, nor negated by, its origins. The concepts require consistent re-evaluation in relation to the theory's ability to maintain consistency and justifiability as a coherent formulation. Objective factors may influence the concepts to take on different meanings at different stages in the struggle and under different conditions. Concepts are, in essence, under constant construction, reconstruction, and contestation. They evolve through the existing or the future balance of power.

The CST characterisation initially faced criticism, particularly from Marxists and nationalists inside and outside the formal structures of the ANC/SACP Alliance. Wolpe (1975) posits that the CST concept regards racial and ethnic groups as undifferentiated and homogeneous, failing to acknowledge the complex class relations and contradictory interests within racial groups. He further argues that the ANC/SACP Alliance held an "instrumentalist" view of the state, which, in a Gramscian sense, assumed a "Bonapartist" form, existing above contending class antagonisms and merely serving as an instrument of class rule.

Slovo defended the NDR theory, arguing that it expresses the collective aspirations of the proletariat and all other classes within the nationally dominated majority. It included the black petty bourgeoisie and the emerging black bourgeoisie. This class collaboration does not make the NDR reformist, however, the working class is indispensable and must be the leading force of the liberation Alliance. The working-class collaboration with other classes and strata does not compel adherence to socialist objectives. The historic programme representing the collective immediate aspirations of the oppressed classes was the Freedom Charter.

Building the South African nation

"Forging one sovereign nation is an integral part of the objectives of the NDR" (Slovo, 1988).

The founding conference of the ANC in 1912 unanimously declared, under the slogan “We Are One People”, the unity of the African people. As the leader of the national liberation Alliance, it is committed to the struggle for the creation of a single South Africa that “belongs to all who live in it, black and white”.

The theory of evolution contends that social transformation can be understood through universal laws of historical development, progressing through defined stages. Two important currents of this theory influenced the Marxist conception of the national question: one is a universal model referred to as the “state-language-nation”. The other examines the ability or inability of concrete national communities to evolve from “lower” to “higher” stages of development, referred to as “historical vs non-historical” nations.

Liberalism’s great accomplishment is to conceptually distinguish between the state, economy, individual, society, culture and productive forces. The SACP’s conception is an abstract and mechanical attempt at separation. It must yield to a concept of “concentration” or “condensation” which is associated with an organic social totality. This approach aligns with historical materialism: form “concentrates” content, super-structure “concentrates” base and productive relations “concentrate” productive forces.

An important aspect of nation-building in a culturally diverse, non-historic nation is the deracialisation of South African society and the abolition of patriarchal relations to create a society in which all individuals, ethnic and racial groups have equal status. Another focus hinged on a consistent programme of gender and economic affirmative action to eradicate the legacies of apartheid and CST. Nation-building includes the building of a capable democratic state that possesses legitimacy and the ability to advance national interests in a hostile, militarised global order. The democratic state should unambiguously pursue and defend foreign, fiscal, and monetary policy sovereignty. In class terms, and if the state is an instrument of class rule, there could be a legitimate expectation from the national bourgeoisie that the democratic state should foster national unity and encourage the less privileged sections of the population to cooperate, create and sustain private sector economic activity.

What is the state of nation-building?

To assess the progress of nation formation, it is important to understand the dialectical interconnectedness between nation-building and social cohesion locally and nationally. This understanding incorporates social aspirations, ideas and cultures. Ideally, various communities at local, broader inter-community and national levels should coalesce around shared values, national interests and norms to ensure cooperation and revolution. Creating a sustainable nation-state is complex. It encompasses integrating groups that may not have historical roots in the designated territory. It is essential to differentiate between nations that possess the natural and cultural capabilities necessary for sustainable nationhood and those that may struggle in that regard.

Friedrich Engels, for instance, distinguishes between nations that possess the capability to effect the course of history and others that are less capable of playing a meaningful role in historical development. The South African liberation Alliance prioritised the building of a united nation and addressing historical injustices. The history of CST compounds this objective. The risk of addressing one aspect at the expense of the other is huge. This may lead to the building of national unity, which

could deepen race, class and gender inequality.

Social fractionalisation or social cohesion

Social interactions are useful in facilitating opportunities to enhance the quality of human life. They serve as a measure to gauge social consciousness and the willingness to undertake national and local struggles. According to the 2008 Macro Social Report, “interactions” and “connectedness” are underpinned by gender, class, race and spatial dynamics. Civil society is vital for cementing social cohesion due to its role as a repository of social values. They lead various social causes and are actively involved in policy advocacy and formulation processes. However, there are social forces that divide, promote xenophobia, crime, racism, and homophobia and undermine the trust and values of the constitution.

These multiple sites of social interaction and dialogue significantly influence value inculcation. They are part of the fabric that provides incentives to and regulates the behaviour of individuals within communities. Occasionally, they demand accountability and transparency from the post-1994 democratic state. The construction of a democratic South African nation may lay a basis for meaningfully eradicating the legacy of colonial South Africa and addressing the interrelated class, race and gender contradictions within a stable democratic order.

The nation-building imperative must address the dangers associated with nationalism and try to mitigate them. The planned National Dialogue should seek to develop a nation based on “One South Africa, many cultures” and, importantly, avoid class domination in the construction of a common South African culture. In such a nation, ethnic identities and practices would not be negated but harnessed and mobilised towards a common national identity. This democratic nation should avoid the pitfalls of national chauvinism, ethno-nationalism, xenophobia and militarism.

The second radical phase of the NDR in the context of electoral decline

The national liberation Alliance’s broad vision for the South African political economy is underpinned by the Freedom Charter, particularly the clause that asserts “The people shall share the country’s wealth”. This informs the government’s transformation programme, that the economy should not only grow but also narrow the income gap, create jobs and transform ownership and control. The NDR seeks to transform the ownership, accumulation, and allocation of assets to benefit the people as a whole.

The 1994 democratic state was preoccupied with the imperative of transforming the structure of the South African economy. The one view advocated for strong state involvement in the economy and socialist oriented measures, such as nationalisation and the establishment of parastatals in key economic sectors, where political control would be translated to economic transformation. The other view was a liberal approach that included trade liberalisation, deregulation and corporatisation. Since the inception of the democratic state, the NDR has made significant advances in deracialising the labour legislation. The social protection basket increased and widened substantially. Despite these advances, the fundamental legacy of colonialism and apartheid continues to characterise the main features of the South African economy.

The death of Merg

Before 1994, there was an open working-class wave in South African formal and informal politics.

This wave existed within the organised formations of workers and “popular democratic” extra-parliamentary movements. The preamble to COSATU’s constitution commits to a “unified democratic South Africa free of oppression and economic exploitation ... this can only be achieved under the leadership of a united working class”. The SACP enjoyed popular enthusiasm and overwhelming support among the working class, youth, civil society and progressive intelligentsia.

A sound foundation for progressive economic policy was being developed as led by the Macro-Economic Research Group (Merg). Though in 1993, the ANC supported the inclusion of the Reserve Bank’s independence in the constitution. This essentially freed monetary policy from democratic leadership and accountability. President Mandela defended this manoeuvre as a demonstration to the domestic and global business community of the ANC’s commitment to market-friendly economic management.

The ANC was technically weak on the economic policy front. To address this challenge, the ANC deployed the likes of Tito Mboweni, Maria Ramos, Trevor Manual, Gill Marcus and Lesetja Kganyago to Goldman Sachs for “training”. This “catch-up” came at the expense of the sound but ill-fated MERG proposals.

The ANC subsequently conceptualised a vision of a “national democratic society”. The political and economic foundations of the envisioned society were to realise the Freedom Charter. It committed to creating a sustainable economy that combines the best attributes of a developmental state, the private sector, cooperatives and leveraging social capital to create jobs for all.

A modest reading of the balance of forces or a neoliberal consolidation?

The conceptualisation and the application of neoliberalism unearth robust points of analytical contention. Neoliberalism should be used to analyse how modern capitalism is regulated to strengthen its reliance on capitalist relations that consistently marginalise, discipline and control ideological dissent. Such manoeuvres include the insistence on market fundamentalism and the necessity to conceal wide-ranging economic exploitation and austerity.

Neoliberalism has negatively impacted the lives of the formerly disenfranchised. It has enjoyed ideological hegemony in the post-1994 democratic state, as advanced by the department responsible for fiscal and monetary policy. Supported by the media and market society, neoliberalism encouraged greed, crass materialism and conspicuous consumption.

Concurrently, an “empowerment” programme attempted to uplift the broader black majority. It included a public sector programme with increased allocation of resources for the development of public infrastructure and the rollout of public employment programmes. The programme facilitated enhanced financial and technical support for SMME’s and the creation of departments to support them. The investment companies of the ANC and Cosatu were among the beneficiaries. At the height of the empowerment phase, ANC personalities declared that they did not struggle to be poor and that black business people should not apologise for wanting to be filthy rich.

South Africa is the most unequal society in the world. The skewed ownership pattern perpetuated that of apartheid because the structural foundations remained intact. A breakdown of this shows that 75% of the country’s wealth is owned by the top 10% of South Africans (largely in financial assets), while only 2.5% is owned by the bottom 50% of the population. The rich got richer, as confirmed by the 166% increase in the market value of listed entities.

The rise in profit for white corporate capital was enabled by the exploitation of black cheap labour. Working conditions have improved substantially since 1994, and the salaries of higher-skilled workers have increased in actual terms. This was exacerbated by the fact that the wage share is highly in favour of white males among professionals and in management. To indicate the extent of the inequality of wages, it would require an average blue-collar worker 94 years to earn the average annual bonus of a corporate Chief Executive Officer.

Victory is not certain

There is a famous Spanish chant attributed to José Martí and the anti-colonial struggles in South America. It is “Patria O Muerte Venceremos”, which means, “homeland or death, people will prevail”. Influenced by its close collaboration with Portuguese-speaking Frelimo, which had the chant, “A luta continua”, the South African liberation Alliance had slogans like “freedom or death: victory is certain” and “the struggle continues”.

In the first two decades following the democratic breakthrough, there was real optimism among the majority that the victory of the NDR was certain provided the struggle was executed. The initial interventions, legislative reform and the introduction of new institutions achieved their intended purpose. However, the economic fortunes of the majority worsened, particularly in the last decade. Evidence of declining electoral support and a decline in public confidence in the democratic state compound this reality. The country’s negative social dynamics are on the increase, including violent social unrest, irrational beliefs, and political opportunism and defiance.

The South African left is fractured to the point that it is ineffective. The outcomes of the SACP’s 5th Special National Congress complicate the matter. The national liberation Alliance has virtually lost the confidence of civil society, the intelligentsia and the middle strata, and the national bourgeoisie has decided to intervene in electoral politics. Organised labour is divided between open support for the ANC on the one hand and petty leadership squabbles on the other. All of these and others point to the victory of the NDR as not being certain.

The South African liberation Alliance should consolidate its unity beyond electoral support pledges. The ANC should concretise its renewal process: what should be renewed, how it will be renewed and who will implement it. The renewal of the Left should include fostering a mass popular programme with NGO’s, left formations, progressive academics, small business formations and churches. Deepening the unity of organised labour should be a priority. It should include meaningful engagement with emerging and unions that organise outside Cosatu. The SACP should actively build and strengthen its organisational capacity to play its vanguard role. ●

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Dialectics revisited – time to abandon the rusty triad of *thesis-antithesis-synthesis*

Marx, Engels and Lenin’s nuanced understanding of dialectics offers us revolutionary analytical approaches that have little to do with any reductive formula, writes **Mark Waller**

...it is always a gain to lose an inadequate concept if the concept gained in exchange is more adequate to real practice. Louis Althusser, *On the Materialist Dialectic*

The usual way of describing the dynamics of history and socioeconomic development in Party discourse is to refer to them as taking place dialectically within a material context – the dialectical materialist approach. We often find that the dialectical part of this is summed up by the seemingly handy formula; thesis-antithesis-synthesis (TAS).

This has become the go-to way of explaining the subject. While rarely discussed or analysed in political debate, the TAS method does get bandied about as the standard ‘formula’ of dialectics. A recent discussion piece in *Umsebenzi Online*, for instance, asks: “This is what Marx teaches us, no? The development and articulation of a thesis, the countering antagonisms that arise through debating the thesis in the form of an antithesis and finally, the refinement of these antagonisms and contradictions to reach a synthesis.”¹

TAS also continues to be used to explain dialectics in some areas of political education, including in the Basic Concepts in Dialectical Materialism of the OR Tambo School of Leadership’s Tools of Analysis. Here, it is presented, confusingly, under the heading “negation of the negation”, which is only one, though an important one, of the ways we can describe dialectical motion. While the curriculum of the Tools of Analysis bravely seeks to describe the ongoing, forward momentum of the dialectic and the nature of contradiction, its adherence to the TAS triad, a reductive formula, means that it is unable to do this effort justice by taking a deeper dive into the subject.

However, we could argue that even though the TAS approach is often considered to be the essence of dialectics, in practice it’s barely noticeable in Party analyses, and in fact the opposite is true, as we’ll see. One reason for this would seem to be that a reading of events and situations as a process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis is simply not fit for purpose. The supposition of fixed stages of change leading to a synthesis of what has gone before carries none of the revolutionary momentum that a more nuanced approach to dialectics describes, one that “brings into range the full focus of changes and interactions that occur in the world”.²

1. Barry Mitchell, *The art of war or the art of dialectics?* Umsebenzi Online, Volume 24 No.1 2025, <https://www.sacp.org.za>

2. Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic - Steps in Marx’s Method*, University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 12.

In current Marxian scholarship, the question of dialectics is studied more expansively and ambitiously. The TAS rubric has little traction because it cannot encapsulate dialectical processes. This was also the view of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Ironically, a formula of analysis that they overtly rejected is nevertheless closely associated in the minds of many communist activists with the praxis these great figures developed. Lenin, citing Marx, scorned the “‘wooden trichotomies [division into three categories]’, which it would be absurd to confuse with materialist dialectics”.³

This article aims to examine why this is the case and to suggest an approach that repositions our understanding of dialectics in a manner that could be more conducive to analysing what is happening in the world and how we act in it, and in a way that better reflects our rich heritage of revolutionary knowledge. The TAS ‘toolkit’ remains interesting, perhaps, only as a misapprehension that has popped up from time to time in the history of political philosophy generally and, more stubbornly, in that of activist-oriented revolutionary theory.

Is the fact that the TAS conception of dialectics has persisted perhaps a reflection of a loss of theoretical impetus and interest in dialectics as a method of analysis? Has its misleading and reductive influence perhaps stultified what should be a revolutionary analytical approach in how we critically and self-critically interpret the conditions in which we find ourselves and in which we act to change?

Lenin, at least, thought the subject of dialectics so important to Communist Party work that one of the reasons he did not consider Bukharin, a leading communist theoretician of the Russian Revolution, as a suitable successor as general secretary of the Communist Party was that “‘he never has learned, and I think never fully understood, the dialectic’”.⁴

Some argue that the TAS approach is a convenient shorthand, a serviceable, though perhaps not totally satisfactory, explanation for a far more complex method of analysis. That’s fine as far as it goes, except that its effect is reductive and does not entail or necessarily lead to a deeper appreciation of dialectics. TAS tends to exist as lip service to deeper theory without being taken much further. It’s a sort of embellishment rather than a route of analysis that would open up more varied understandings of situations, strategies and tactics. At its most banal, the TAS formula is simply reduced to the process of obtaining consensus through argument–counter-argument–agreement.

It tends to fall flat because it seeks to render intelligible in three words the intricate dialectical method Hegel developed to analyse the processes of thought and consciousness. In their early writings on materialism, Marx and Engels criticised the idealism of Hegel and his followers. But, later, Marx returned to Hegel to study the dialectical method Hegel constructs in his vast 800-page *Science of Logic*. Engels did the same – and also drew on another of Hegel’s works, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – in particular when he came to write *The Dialectics of Nature*.

It is in this work that Engels provides a concise but useful entryway to the dialectic, which we’ll come to. Marx never got around to describing his understanding of dialectics in any detail, though he makes some helpful comments in the afterword to the second German edition of Volume 1 of *Capital*. In the first few chapters, in particular, of that work, Marx infuses his analysis with the different movements of Hegel’s dialectics, though with an entirely different purpose than Hegel’s. And he does so with astonishingly creative verve to articulate a penetrating and comprehensive economic

3 V.I. Lenin *Karl Marx - A brief biographical sketch with an exposition on Marxism*, in *Selected Works Vol 1*, p.23. Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/granat/ch02.htm>

4 V.I. Lenin *The Testament of Lenin*, reproduced in *New International*, Vol. II No. 1, January 1935, p. 27.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/ni/vol02/no01/lenin.htm>

description of capitalist political economy.

Marx refined and clarified the first volume of *Capital* to make it as comprehensible as possible (he died before he had time to do the same to manuscripts of the subsequent volumes), but it's still hardly an easy read. Because we don't have a description by Marx of precisely how he made use of Hegel's dialectical approach, we have to discern it – from the work itself.

Lenin was well aware of this and found that the best way he could understand *Capital* was to return to basics by studying the *Science of Logic*. His substantial notes on this work include a 16-point description of the main characteristics of dialectics.⁵ They also contain a disconcerting observation: “It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later [Lenin was writing about 50 years after the publication of *Capital*] none of the Marxists understand Marx.”⁶

This was in 1914-1915, soon after the start of the First World War and the collapse into opportunism and division of the Second International. Lenin took time out to study Hegel to better understand Marx's *Capital* in preparation for writing *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. He doesn't refer explicitly to dialectics in this work, but, like *Capital*, dialectical thinking pervades Lenin's work: the understanding of how the contradictions within capital drive its development into imperialism; that imperialism is not merely a quantitative expansion of capital but a qualitative transformation into a new phase with new features; how competition capitalism transformed into its opposite – monopoly capitalism – while retaining elements of competition; the view of imperialism as a totality, an integrated world system that continues to generate contradictions.

This is all rather superficial background to the main issue here: how the dialectical method developed by Hegel and crystallised as an essential means of producing a multifaceted materialist way of thinking about human development has, in many ways, been so simplified by the use of the TAS explanation as to lose much of its power.

The TAS triad of the Hegelian dialectic was first formulated by the German bourgeois philosopher Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus in his 1837 lectures and later published in book form. The TAS schema soon gained influence as a way of explaining Hegel's dialectical approach. It was adopted in university teaching and textbooks, and in biographical works on Hegel. English translations and interpretations of Hegel published in Britain and the US also frequently used the TAS formula. It entered the discourses of the idealist socialist Young Hegelians in Germany and early socialist workers' education there and elsewhere. The latter has a long history of the TAS simplification that we needn't trace here.

It is easy to see why Marx, Engels and Lenin rejected the TAS formula. It was useless in opening up a dialectical method needed to examine developments in capitalism, science, imperialism and the overall processes of historical materialism. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), Marx mercilessly tears into the economic and philosophical arguments of the French anarchist and socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, including his use of the clumsy triadic TAS formula in his work *The System of Economic*

⁵ V.I. Lenin Collected Works, 2nd English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 38, pp. 220-222

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/summary.htm>

See also V.I. Lenin On the Question of Dialectics in Collected Works, 4th Edition, Moscow, 1976, Volume 38, pp. 357-361

⁶ V.I. Lenin Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic – Book III (Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Notion)

https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/ch03.htm#LCW38_180a

Contradictions, or The Philosophy of Poverty (1846). It is worth looking at one particular paragraph in Marx's critique:

But once it has managed to pose itself as a thesis, this thesis, this thought, opposed to itself, splits up into two contradictory thoughts – the positive and the negative, the yes and no. The struggle between these two antagonistic elements comprised in the antithesis constitutes the dialectical movement. The yes becoming no, the no becoming yes, the yes becoming both yes and no, the no becoming both no and yes, the contraries balance, neutralise, paralyse each other. The fusion of these two contradictory thoughts constitutes a new thought, which is the synthesis of them. This thought splits up once again into two contradictory thoughts, which in turn fuse into a new synthesis. Of this travail is born a group of thoughts. This group of thoughts follows the same dialectic movement as the simple category, and has a contradictory group as antithesis. Of these two groups of thoughts is born a new group of thoughts, which is the antithesis of them.⁷

Oozing sarcasm, this parody of Proudhon's attempts to deploy the TAS formula as an elucidation of the Hegelian dialectic is both comic and serious. It ridicules Proudhon's pretentious attempts to confine the complexity of dialectics to a mechanical TAS formula or recipe. The notions of thesis, antithesis and synthesis certainly feature in the spirals of Hegel's dialectic, but not in ways that can be readily simplified to explain the whole. There is a lot more going on than that. To reduce the dialectic in such a way gets us nowhere except in a twist. And yet, Marx's parodic description also depicts something of the actual complex interplay of dialectical movement.

The Hegelian dialectical approach that Marx, Engels and Lenin studied involves a range of interrelated movements. Here are just some aspects of them:

- **Immanent critique**, where concepts are examined on their own terms to show how their contradictions emerge from their inherent limitations that further impel their own transformation;
- **Determinate negation**, where a phenomenon runs up against its limitations and transforms into something richer while preserving aspects of the original;
- **Self-Negation**, where concepts often contain their own negation within themselves. As concepts are pushed to their limits, they reveal internal contradictions that necessitate their transformation;
- **Negation of Negation** This double negation doesn't simply return to the original position but produces something new that incorporates and transcends both earlier moments. This is crucial to the forward movement of the dialectic;
- **Sublation**, where phenomena are simultaneously negated, preserved in altered form and raised to a new level of complexity;
- **Concrete universal**, where dialectical development moves towards more concrete and comprehensive realisation;

⁷ K. Marx *The Poverty of Philosophy*, by Karl Marx, Progress Publishers, 1955, chapter 2 The method. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02.htm>

- **Recursive or cyclical development**, where the dialectic doesn't just push forward in a straight line but circles back to reinterpret earlier moments in light of later developments. So, events don't just unfold teleologically in a straight predictable line, but more in a spiral-like progression.

There are other characteristics of the Hegelian dialectic we could identify, but we can see that these basic features, if we unpack them, are integral to the materialist dialectical thought of Marx, Engels and Lenin (and of course later Marxist thinkers). As part of a way of thinking about the interplay of material conditions and our existence in them, they can lead us to conceptualising the movements of revolutionary praxis.

But while we can describe aspects of dialectical thinking, the last thing we need is to replace the TAS formula or 'toolkit' with another, fancier one. The descriptions above are merely that – illustrations of an approach to thinking. They are not a set of tools that we should select and then apply to generate analytical meaning. Lenin's 16 characteristics of dialectics are simply that: descriptive features, not prescriptive categories. We cannot think by formula or according to categories or "tools", but we can deepen our critical thinking and analysis of the world by studying dialectics.

We can also fairly easily locate the TAS triad within some of the features mentioned above and understand how it has been codified from them. The TAS categorisation suggests a simplistic process of staged, sequenced progression – at worst a teleology – and none of the complexity or recursive interplay of actual dialectical motion.

But if we were forced to look for a more usable and concise definition of dialectics, we could turn to Engels, who in *The Dialectics of Nature* offers this:

"The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; The law of the interpenetration of opposites; The law of the negation of the negation."

When Hegelian dialectical ideas are used to analyse human history and society, when, as Engels says, they are "turned around" and not simply used as means to trace the movements of thought and consciousness, then "everything becomes simple, and the dialectical laws that look so extremely mysterious in idealist philosophy at once become simple and clear as noonday"⁸.

Engels seems unduly optimistic here. His simple definition of dialectics needs plenty of explanatory work and tells us tantalisingly little on its own, not least if we think in terms of political education. But unlike the TAS formula, Engels gives us a definition that dovetails well with the more intricate concepts of the dialectic and draws more explicitly on the language of Hegel's dialectical explorations.

Lenin's 16 characteristics of the dialectic are a useful addition to Engels' terse definition, and to explaining the features of dialectics listed above, but they are only descriptive headings rather than stand-alone definitions. As such, they manage to convey some of the terrain that dialectical thinking covers. Lenin highlights the importance of the self-movement of phenomena, their internal dynamics, and internal contradiction rather than simply the influence of external opposites; the rejection of fixed categories in favour of fluid, interconnected concepts; and the understanding that dialectics isn't 'applied' from outside but follows from a phenomenon's own development. None of this can be reduced to a formula.

8 F. Engels *Dialectics of Nature*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1986, p.62
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/don.pdf>

As we have seen, the TAS approach has a long history preceding its adoption by socialist and communist movements. Lenin's sophisticated understanding of dialectics was largely buried under Stalinism. The codification of Diamat (dialectical materialism) with the publication in 1938 of Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* reduced dialectics more to a set of rules than a method of analysis, completely contrary to Lenin's more nuanced interpretations of Hegel, that do not remove the human subject from its central role in history and in relation to productive forces. As Lenin remarks in his notes on Hegel's *Logic*, "Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it".

One argument sometimes used for retaining the TAS formula is that it makes an otherwise migraine-causing complexity of ideas comprehensible to comrades unversed in deeper Marxist-Leninist ideas and their antecedents. But is this a good approach, especially if what's on offer is simplistic to the point of distortion? We should also ask whether it helps get to the core of the problem of dialectics or even points the way there. A full explanation of dialectics using the TAS approach would necessarily end up having to dismantle and dispense with it. Perhaps that itself would be a good teaching method, one that retains the TAS formula to show us what not to do, to use critically. It is, after all, not a resident evil, just inadequate.

We should never presume that complex ideas and concepts cannot be taught, learned or communicated. The onus is on us to do it effectively, persistently using communist curricula taught on a long-term basis. That way, we could ensure that, in time, the study and understanding of the dialectics part of dialectical and historical materialism would begin to thrive. Communist praxis could only benefit.

In many ways, it always has, at least within the SACP. The arguments only lightly sketched here concern how the Marxist-Leninist dialectic is expounded as a subject, not whether it is ever put to use. In practice, the Party has a venerable history of analysing global and domestic struggles and developments in ways that have long bested the TAS approach.

We need look no further than the Party's well-known discussion document *Going to the Root: a Radical Second Phase of the NDR – its Context, Content & Our Strategic Tasks* (2014). This transcends the mechanical TAS triad in several key ways, and the document provides, apart from its still-relevant political substance, a valuable masterclass in dialectical analysis.

For instance, it rebuffs the notion of a linear, 'staged' process of transformation, instead presenting the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as an ongoing, contradictory process. This is evident in the explicit rejection of viewing the "second phase" as a separate stage, but rather as a continuous, dialectical development. The first phase isn't simply "overcome" but contains within itself the seeds of its own limitations. The redistributive efforts of the first phase simultaneously advance and constrain transformation – a dialectical process impossible to capture in a simplistic triadic TAS formula. Transformation is not a linear process, but rather a dynamic, recursive or cyclical process, where achievements contain their own limitations and social change involves complex, contradictory developments.

We find in it key features of dialectical method of the kind outlined earlier: recursive trends in socio-economic development, immanent critique (examining contradictions within the process itself), an understanding of how quantitative changes generate qualitative transformations (and vice versa), how new solutions produce new contradictions whereby each moment contains its own negation

which itself can be negated through the progressive changes called for in *Going to the Root*.

The dialectical method is integral to the analysis. Unlike the triadic TAS formula, the dialectical approach reflected in *Going to the Root* enables us to gain a better insight into the many facets of South Africa's transformation and their interrelationships. These are dynamic and recursive, involving progress but also limitations and contradictions. Social advances coexist with the systemic reproduction of poverty and unemployment, or the contradictory effects of the top-down delivery model that both advances redistribution but has a demobilising effect on popular forces, creates new forms of social fragmentation, but also generates new forms of resistance. This isn't a simple sequence of phenomena to be "synthesised" but a complete dialectical process where each element contains its opposite and is in a continual state of motion and development.

The value of this approach lies in its ability to describe the state of society in its shifting, granular detail. We can only start to address the raw crisis of gender-based violence and femicide, for example, by constantly analysing it dialectically. In doing so, we may better recognise that GBV is not a 'problem' awaiting a 'solution', such as a purely crime-fighting approach might suggest, but a complex, contradictory social process rooted in historical material conditions and can only be transformed (not "synthesised"!) through an equally complex dialectical praxis that works through rather than around these contradictions. The issue, of course, deserves a far deeper dialectical analysis than outlined here.

If we articulate dialectics within political education in ways that leave the old TAS approach behind, we'll be better equipped to enrich the intermix of theory and practice that constitutes praxis, not as a formulaic and abstract method that you apply from without but as a way of looking at the world that displaces the 'common sense' of our socially conditioned outlook. It enables us to analyse events and our place within them critically, so that we can best identify strategic points for action, and build counter-hegemonic strategies through what Gramsci termed a "war of position".⁹

Above all, in its material form, the dialectic subverts the ideology of the existing order because it sees that order as necessarily transient. It is, as Marx pointed out "a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state and its inevitable breaking up [...] it regards every historical developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence [...] and is in its essence critical and revolutionary".¹⁰ ●

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⁹ Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, Elecbook, London 1999, p.291.

¹⁰ Marx, Karl, Afterword to the Second German Edition, Capital Volume 1, Lawrence and Wishart, 2003, p. 29

Institutional arrangements of whole-process people's democracy in China

Zhang Xiaomeng examines the holistic, or whole-process' approach to people's to democracy in China

The recently concluded Two Sessions of China serves as a window for the world to observe Chinese-style democracy and a vivid practice of whole-process people's democracy. The institutional arrangements and practical experiences of Chinese-style democracy provide valuable insights and an important inspiration for the world, especially for countries in the Global South.

Democracy is a shared value of all human beings, reflecting the aspiration of the peoples in all countries to stand up, be the masters of their own affairs, and decide their own destinies. At the same time, different countries have varying understandings of the connotations of democracy, and there are significant divergences in the standards for democracy within the international community. This is a normal phenomenon. Democracy is not a commodity produced on an assembly line but grows from the historical and cultural soil of each country. China has its own understanding of democracy, which best aligns with China's actual conditions and the fundamental interests of the Chinese people. We refer to this form of democracy as "whole-process people's democracy," which vividly expresses the advantages of China's democratic system.

The connotation of whole-process people's democracy

Whole-process people's democracy is a distinctive feature of socialist democratic politics. The essence of socialist democratic politics is to ensure that the people are the masters of the country, and to uphold that all state power belongs to the people. Whole-process people's democracy achieves "four unifications": the unification of procedural democracy and substantive democracy, the unification of process democracy and outcome democracy, the unification of direct democracy and indirect democracy, and the unification of people's democracy and the will of the state.

Whole-process people's democracy is a complete-chain, omni-directional, and all-encompassing democracy. It forms a complete institutional chain that runs through all aspects of democratic elections, consultations, decision-making, management, and oversight. Democracy is not only relevant during elections but permeates daily life, allowing people to feel that they are the masters of the country in all the economic, political, cultural, social, environmental and other fields. Whole-process people's democracy adheres to the all-encompassing principle, ensuring that all people are included in the democratic process, with particular attention to institutional solutions for the participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

It can be said that whole-process people's democracy is rooted in the people, with the fundamental

interests of the vast majority of the people as the starting point and ultimate goal of this democratic concept and model. China's Constitution and laws stipulate that the people can manage state affairs, economic and cultural undertakings, and social affairs through various channels and forms, enjoying full rights to information, participation, and expression.

The formulation of the Five-Year Plans is a good example. The Chairman has emphasised that the preparation of the Five-Year Plans involves all aspects of economic and social development and is closely related to the production and lives of the people. It is necessary to open the door to solicit opinions and seek advice online. During the formulation of the 14th Five-Year Plan, the Chinese government solicited opinions and suggestions from the entire society through the internet, receiving over 1 018 million public suggestions covering all aspects of economic and social development.

For instance, nearly 3,000 National People's Congress (NPC) deputies and over 2,000 members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) from various sectors attended this year's Two Sessions, collecting opinions from the public at all levels and integrating them into the top-level design and institutional planning of national development. In 2025, during the drafting of the "Government Work Report," nearly 1,000 opinions were collected, and over 2 million online suggestions were received, broadly reflecting public opinion and realising democracy. Overall, whole-process people's democracy takes into account the elements of "whole-process," stands firm on the people's position, and embodies the broadest, most genuine, and most effective socialist democracy.

Institutional guarantees for whole-process people's democracy

To ensure and support the people's role as masters of the country, China has established a comprehensive and practical institutional system, primarily including the system of people's congress as the fundamental political system, as well as the system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the system of regional ethnic autonomy, and the system of community-level self-governance, forming a complete set of institutional procedures and institutional channels.

1. The system of the People's Congress

Since all state power belongs to the people, how can the people effectively exercise this power? China's system of the People's Congress provides the most important institutional vehicle for exercising the people's power and developing whole-process people's democracy. This is an original institutional design of China, representing a great democratic practice in the world's most populous country.

From a procedural perspective, this system ensures that the people elect deputies to the People's Congresses through democratic elections, forming the National People's Congress and local People's Congresses at various levels. The People's Congresses are both state power organs and organs through which the people exercise state power. In accordance with the principles of equality among individuals, regions, and ethnic groups, deputies to the people's congresses at all levels are elected. The election of each deputy is conducted through a rigorous process, which adopts a bottom-up approach combined with top-down guidance, involving repeated deliberations and step-by-step selection. This ensures both the fairness of the candidates and the quality of their participation in public activities.

In China, to become an NPC deputy, one must start from the grassroots level, go through a process of nomination and recommendation, become a preliminary candidate for deputy, and then undergo a thorough evaluation based on various opinions. After a competitive evaluation and public announcement, the final list of deputy candidates is determined through voting. Deputies to county and township-level People's Congresses are directly elected, while deputies to the National People's Congress and provincial, municipal, and autonomous prefecture-level People's Congresses are indirectly elected by the People's Congresses at the next lower level. Deputies elected through this process are truly representative, accurately reflecting the will and aspirations of their constituencies.

From a functional perspective, the People's Congresses represent the interests and will of the people, exercising state powers such as legislation, decision-making on major issues, election and appointment of officials, and supervision. First, the NPC formulates, amends, supplements, interprets, or repeals laws and regulations in accordance with legal procedures, fully reflecting the will of the people. For example, during the compilation of China's first "Civil Code," multiple legislative seminars and expert consultations were held, and public opinions were solicited ten times through the NPC's website.

Second, state administrative, judicial, and procuratorial organs are elected or appointed by the People's Congresses and are accountable to them. Laws, regulations, resolutions, and decisions made by the People's Congresses must be implemented by the government and all related agencies, and the People's Congresses have the power to supervise their work.

Finally, the People's Congresses exercise their powers collectively according to the principle of democratic centralism. When making major decisions, NPC deputies are encouraged to fully express their opinions, including dissenting views, and decisions are made based on the majority opinion. For issues with significant disagreements, a cautious approach is taken, involving in-depth research, patient consultation, and thorough analysis, ensuring that the laws and resolutions passed by the NPC better reflect the will of the people and carry greater authority.

From an essential perspective, the People's Congresses are accountable to the people and subject to their supervision. The National People's Congress sessions are open to the public, and the content of the meetings is promptly communicated to the public through various channels. During the recess periods, there is a system of deputies keeping in contact with the public. This system requires NPC deputies to maintain close ties with the people, such as by publicising their information to facilitate public feedback, organising research on issues of public concern, through visits, forums, and other means to directly listen to opinions from the society. It is evident that NPC deputies play a crucial bridging role in the practice of whole-process people's democracy.

2. The system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the CPC leadership

Most modern countries practice party politics, and China's approach to handling domestic party relations is highly successful from a global perspective. China's party system is known as the system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CPC, which is a new type of party system with Chinese characteristics. In China, the democratic parties are good advisors, helpers, and colleagues to the ruling CPC, maintaining a relationship of mutual cooperation, mutual supervision, and sharing weal and woe.

This positive interaction among political parties brings different political forces together, making society more united rather than divided. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, 10 out of 21 ministers in the central government were non-CPC members. To this day, members of democratic parties and non-affiliated individuals continue to occupy a certain proportion of seats in People's Congresses at all levels, and some hold leadership positions in state organs, reflecting the broad representation of interests.

China is committed to advancing and improving socialist consultative democracy. On major state policies and important issues in political, economic, cultural, and social life, democratic parties, people's organisations, ethnic minorities, and representatives from all sectors of society can engage in consultations before decisions are made, as well as during the implementation of decisions.

This includes consultations between the CPC and democratic parties on constitutional amendments, reforms, and development (party consultations), consultations between People's Congresses and relevant state organs and social organisations in the exercise of their powers (legislative consultations), consultations between governments at all levels and CPPCC members, democratic parties, relevant people's organisations, social organisations, and public representatives in the performance of their duties (government consultations), and consultations at the community level between mass self-governance organisations and the people on issues related to grassroots social development and the vital interests of the people (community-level consultations).

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), as a specialised consultative body, fully leverages the representative role of various political parties, groups, and individuals from all ethnic groups and sectors of society. The annual sessions of the National Committee of the CPPCC are held concurrently with the NPC sessions. CPPCC members not only discuss issues within the CPPCC but also attend NPC sessions to participate in discussions on legal amendments, government work reports, and reports from the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate. This institutional arrangement truly realises the principle of "everyone taking responsibility and supervising government work," forming a distinctive Chinese-style "Two Sessions" democracy.

3. The system of regional ethnic autonomy

China has 56 ethnic groups, and managing ethnic relations and address ethnic issues are crucial for social unity and stability. The institutional arrangements of Chinese-style democracy are closely integrated with the country's ethnic conditions, providing full consideration and institutional arrangements at the systemic level. Throughout China's history, since the implementation of the system of regional ethnic autonomy, the population of ethnic minorities has entered the best period of development in history. Since the beginning of this century, the Uyghur population in China has grown from over 8 million in 2000 to 11.6243 million in 2020, with an average annual growth rate of 1.67%, far exceeding the average annual growth rate of 0.83% for the national ethnic minority population during the same period. Ethnic minority regions such as Xinjiang have experienced rapid economic development, continuous population growth, and improving cultural quality, stimulating the subjectivity and creativity of ethnic minorities in being the masters of their own affairs, demonstrating the strong vitality of Chinese-style democracy.

The system of regional ethnic autonomy, as a basic political system in China, effectively guarantees the rights of ethnic minorities to be the masters of their own affairs. This includes the following

aspects: First, ethnic autonomous areas have the right to manage their own internal affairs. In the standing committees of People's Congresses in ethnic autonomous areas, ethnic minority citizens serve as chairpersons or vice-chairpersons, and the heads of autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties are citizens of the ethnic groups exercising regional autonomy, maximising the rights of ethnic minorities to self-governance and equal autonomy.

Second, ethnic autonomous areas have the power to enact autonomous regulations and specific regulations. The People's Congresses of ethnic autonomous areas have the authority to enact autonomous regulations and specific regulations in accordance with the political, economic, and cultural characteristics of the local ethnic groups, fully respecting and safeguarding the interests of ethnic minority people.

Third, ethnic autonomous areas have the autonomy to arrange, manage, and develop their economic construction. Ethnic autonomous areas can independently arrange local infrastructure projects, engage in foreign economic trade activities, open foreign trade ports, and enjoy national preferential policies. In terms of financial management, they have the authority to autonomously arrange the use of local fiscal revenues. Through a series of guiding, regulatory, and institutional arrangements, the economic and social development levels of ethnic autonomous areas have been enhanced, stimulating the enthusiasm of all ethnic groups to jointly build a better homeland.

Fourth, ethnic autonomous areas have the right to use their own languages and scripts, freedom of religious belief, the preservation or reform of their own customs, and the autonomous development of education, science, technology, and cultural undertakings. For example, autonomous organs can use local languages in official duties, and autonomous organs in ethnic autonomous areas guarantee the freedom of religious belief for all ethnic citizens and allow them to live and conduct social activities according to traditional customs.

4. The system of community-level self-governance

China's vast geographical differences and widespread population distribution pose significant challenges to effective grassroots governance. As a foundational project for developing whole-process people's democracy, the system of community-level self-governance has become the most direct and extensive way for the people to be the masters of their own affairs, effectively preventing situations where the people have power in form but not in reality.

This system ensures that the broad masses of grassroots people directly participate in the management of state and social affairs, as well as economic and cultural undertakings, in accordance with the Constitution and laws, through grassroots mass self-governance organisations such as villagers committees and urban residents committees, practicing self-management, self-service, self-education, and self-supervision.

Specifically, the chairpersons, vice chairpersons, and members of villagers and urban residents committees are directly elected by the grassroots people. The committees operate under a democratic decision-making mechanism of majority rule, with matters involving the interests of all residents discussed collectively by the people through villagers' meetings or residents' meetings and their representative meetings, following certain procedures, and decisions are made based on the majority opinion. The people discuss and decide on self-governance charters, village regulations, and urban residents' conventions, and engage in self-management. The committees promptly disclose matters

involving public interests and issues of general concern to the people, and accept public inquiries. The institutionalisation, standardisation, and proceduralisation of grassroots direct democracy fundamentally uphold the principal position of villagers or urban residents in grassroots mass self-governance.

The institutional advantages of China as seen through whole-process people's democracy

The world today is undergoing momentous changes of a scale unseen in a century, and the achievements of China's governance are inseparable from the support of whole-process people's democracy. The improvement of whole-process people's democracy not only demonstrates the great success of China's path but also highlights the significant advantages of China's system.

First, whole-process people's democracy not only embodies traditional Chinese political wisdom but also continuously promotes the improvement and perfection of the democratic institutional system in the course of development. China has long had the democratic idea that "the world belongs to the people." In ancient China, Mencius's disciple once asked him, "Did Yao really hand over the world to Shun?" Mencius replied, "No, the transfer of power is not determined by the will of any individual; Shun gained the world because the people gave it to him."

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, hundreds of millions of Chinese people truly have become the masters of the country, society, and their own destinies, and the CPC has begun a long-term exploration of democratic system construction. In the period of reform and opening up, the Party has summarised the positive and negative experiences of developing socialist democracy, emphasising that people's democracy is the lifeblood of socialism, and successfully opened up and adhered to the path of socialist political development with Chinese characteristics, establishing the correct direction for achieving the most extensive people's democracy.

Since entering the new era, the CPC Central Committee has proposed whole-process people's democracy, emphasising the provision of reliable institutional guarantees for its development, continuously improving mechanisms for absorbing public opinion and gathering public wisdom, and increasingly highlighting the advantages of China's system and its international influence.

Second, whole-process people's democracy effectively expands the people's orderly political participation, transforming institutional advantages into practical governance efficacy through comprehensive democratic practices. In China, democratic practices have been deeply integrated into people's daily work and lives. The people participate not only in the solicitation of opinions and suggestions for the top-level design of national development but also in the governance of local public affairs, with the breadth and depth of participation continuously expanding. In 2015, the NPC designated Shanghai's Hongqiao Subdistrict as the first grassroots legislative contact point in the country, with the NPC deputy liaison station set up on the street.

Ordinary citizens participate in the legislative process, able to "zero-distance" engage with NPC deputies, offer opinions and suggestions on draft laws, and more actively use rule-of-law thinking to discuss and solve problems. Using the wisdom of the people to solve their problems, whole-process people's democracy fully mobilises the people's subjective initiative, which is the democratic "code" of China's governance.

Third, whole-process people's democracy ensures the effective restraint and supervision of power, ensuring that the power granted by the people is always used for the people's well-being and that institutional advantages are not eroded. Without the restraint and supervision of public power, abuse of power and corruption are inevitable, harming people's democracy and weakening institutional advantages. China's democratic supervision includes a rich array of content such as legislative, administrative, social, and grassroots supervision, covering every field and corner of the operation of power.

The people can actively participate in various forms of supervision through NPC deputy symposiums, grassroots forums, questionnaires, online surveys, and other "open-door supervision" methods. Especially in the era of rapid internet development, people can use online media to supervise state organs and public officials, making it impossible for officials to escape scrutiny for illegal behaviour. The people's zero-distance, multi-channel, all-around participation in supervision ensures that power operates in the sunlight, providing important support for leveraging institutional advantages.

Fourth, whole-process people's democracy reflects the diversity of democratic realisation, offers new perspectives for evaluating democracy, and supplements key content for a deeper understanding of China's institutional advantages. From the perspective of evaluation subjects, whether a country is democratic should be judged by its own people, not by a small number of external individuals; whether a country in the international community is democratic should be judged by the international community as a whole, not by a small number of countries. From the perspective of evaluation criteria, whether a system is democratic mainly considers eight aspects: "whether the succession of its leaders is orderly and in line with the law, whether all the people can manage state and social affairs and economic and cultural undertakings in conformity with legal provisions, whether the public can express their requirements without hindrance, whether all sectors can efficiently participate in the country's political affairs, whether national decision-making can be conducted in a rational and democratic way, whether people of high calibre in all fields can be part of the national leadership and administrative systems through fair competition, whether the governing party is in charge of state affairs in accordance with the Constitution and the law, and whether the exercise of power can be kept under effective restraint and supervision." These standards answer why China's system has significant advantages and help deepen the understanding of China's institutional strengths. ●

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