



African Communist

3rd Quarter 2025

Issue 213

Mobilising for **Socialism**



from the Ground up!

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Send editorial contributions to: communications@sacp.org.za,
or to African Communist, PO Box 1027, Johannesburg 2000

As neoliberalism implodes, we must defend, deepen and advance the NDR

The wheels are coming off two interlinked historical trajectories that have lasted just over three decades, the one global, the other South African. Internationally, it is increasingly obvious that the era of relatively unchallenged, US-imperial unilateralism that began with the fall of the Soviet bloc in 1990 is unravelling. A new multilateral, or perhaps multinodal world (dis?)order is emerging. Within South Africa, the post-1994 trajectory that dominant factions of the ANC have placed us upon is showing signs of increasing decrepitude, reflected in electoral trends, in organisational lassitude, in daily press reports of one corruption scandal after another, and above all in the socio-economic realities – near-zero economic growth, and chronic, deepening, crisis levels of unemployment and poverty.

To say that the era of US-led imperialist unilateralism is ending is not to say US-led imperialism is about to end. It still wields immense military, economic and cultural power. As its unilateral sway is challenged, it is likely to become more dangerous, more arbitrary and unpredictable. But the rise of China, Nato's effective defeat in Ukraine, the consolidation of Brics, economic stagnation in Western Europe, the likelihood of stagflation in the US, and the evident political crises in the heartlands of so-called liberal democracy are all elements of this loss of unilateral hegemony. The Trump administration is deliberately wrecking the ideological envelope within which imperial unilateralism previously asserted its hegemony – the so-called "rules-based world order", where they made the rules and they gave the orders.

What about South Africa? For several reasons to be touched on below, South Africa is less well positioned than some of our Brics partners to more fully exploit the developmental prospects opened up by the decline of US imperialist unilateralism.

To understand why, to understand our present reality as the clock seems to run down on the trajectory we've been on since the mid-1990s, it is useful to reflect back on the four decades that preceded our 1994 democratic breakthrough. From the early 1950s, the apartheid regime sought to position itself as a regional anti-communist policeman acting on behalf of Western "civilisation" in the new Cold War two-bloc global reality. The 1950 banning of the Communist Party of South Africa, ten years before the outlawing of the ANC, was part of this strategy. Apart from being a back-handed compliment

to generations of South African communists and their struggle to build a non-racial democracy, it was a signal to Washington, London and Paris.

For almost four decades, apartheid-South Africa successfully positioned itself as imperialism's anti-communist watchdog in sub-Saharan Africa. It received military, political and economic support from Western capitals in the struggle against a supposed advancing Soviet red tide. A US State department strategic document of the early 1970s (the "Tar Baby" option), proclaimed Portuguese colonial rule in Angola and Mozambique, white-minority rule in Rhodesia and, especially, apartheid South Africa were here to stay. Whatever their blemishes, it advised continued all-round support to buttress imperialist interests in the southern African region.

Despite large-scale imperialist-supported, apartheid-led proxy wars in which an estimated one million southern Africans died in the 1970s and 80s, the advances and victories of the national liberation forces across our region challenged these strategic assumptions. The worker and youth uprisings in South Africa in the 1970s helped to build a massive global anti-apartheid solidarity movement. This, in turn, put increasing pressure on Western politicians and led to important United Nations resolutions characterising apartheid as a crime against humanity and the imposition of sanctions. Right-wing politicians like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, while feigning anti-racist views, continued to support apartheid-South Africa as a fortress against the "global spread of communism" and against "Kremlin-supported terrorist organisations" like the ANC.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc of countries in 1990-1 removed this fig-leaf. A regional policeman in the shape of a criminal apartheid-regime was now dispensable for imperialist circles, at least in southern Africa. (A reality not tragically at play in the oil-rich Middle East, where the apartheid Zionist State of Israel continues to be a genocidal instrument of US imperial interests.) Here in South Africa, pressure was placed on FW De Klerk's government to "reform" and to negotiate with the ANC, or at least with the "doves" inside the ANC, to the exclusion of "hawks" like Chris Hani. It is no accident that our democratic breakthrough occurred in the same early-1990s moment that US-led imperialism achieved its unilateral global hegemony.

We are not saying that our 1994 democratic breakthrough was solely, or even mainly, the result of imperialist pressure on Pretoria following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Our breakthrough would not have occurred without decades of popular struggle and global solidarity. Nonetheless, the changed global reality from the early 1990s, with the rise of US-led imperial unilateralism, was a significant factor.

This, in turn, led to illusions within South Africa, including within our own movement and among a wider range of progressive forces. The misreading of the new imperialist reality was most clearly and naively expressed by the chairperson of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In his foreword to the interim report of the TRC, Tutu claimed that the end of apartheid marked the final demise of the "three great evils" of the 20th century – Nazism, communism and apartheid. Leaving aside his anti-communism, what is absolutely missing in Tutu's perspective is any understanding that apartheid was one variant (of not just the 20th century, but of six centuries) of unending Western colonial and imperialist exploitation and oppression of Africa and the global South. Imperialism didn't disappear because of the collapse of the Soviet bloc – it grew stronger, more self-confident.

No leaders of any consequence in the ANC in the early 1990s would have shared Tutu's historical illiteracy, but there was a strong ANC current that believed the West was now an essentially benevolent force. Key tendencies within the new ANC government did not, of course, signal to the imperialist bloc that we wished to be the new regional policeman. But what was signalled was that post-apartheid South Africa wished to be seen as a loyal partner within the new, post-1990 neo-liberal reality. South Africa was "open for business" was a leading theme. We would even run ahead of the IMF, imposing upon ourselves our own structural adjustment programme. This was the 1996 Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) programme. It needs to be understood as much more than a macro-economic programme and part of a whole strategic pivot, a revisionist understanding of the tasks of the National Democratic Revolution.

This neoliberal pivot, this attempt to position post-apartheid South Africa at the global high table, rubbing shoulders with the Blairs, Mitterands, Clintons and Schroeders, was always resisted by the SACP, Cosatu and other progressive forces. But the 1996 class project largely prevailed within the ANC and especially within government and key institutional spaces like National Treasury and the Reserve Bank. Despite some rhetoric to the contrary, the Zuma presidency years did not displace the neoliberal hegemony in key locations. Corporate state capture long preceded the Zuma-Gupta axis, with the latter simply deepening private primitive accumulation, further weakening the state and its capacity to drive sovereign national development in an imperialist-dominated world.

This is the track in which South Africa remains stuck. In the face of ballooning unemployment and sickly growth, the Reserve Bank governor doubles down on administering more poison with an even tighter inflation target, with persisting high interest rates. The Minister of Finance briefly asserts some

autonomy only to cravenly back down a few weeks later.

The financial sector, the only sector that has grown exponentially, applauds, while key capitalist voices in retail and manufacturing timidly wonder whether the Reserve Bank is not overdoing things. The mainstream media's dominant narrative was that our crises were the result of the "nine wasted years" of the Zuma presidency. According to this narrative, a Ramaphosa ANC would get us back on track. When this didn't pan out, the new hope was that an ANC-DA tie-up would do the job. But it is a tie-up that is simply reinforcing neoliberal austerity and deepening our crises.

This is the general context in which the SACP has been calling for a reconfiguration of our Alliance – not to weaken the ANC but to revitalise it. It is the general context in which the Party has decided to independently contest next year's local government elections – again, not to undermine our nominally shared commitment to advancing a National Democratic Revolution, but to defend, deepen and advance that strategy. It is the context in which we have resolved to build a broad, non-sectarian left popular front, not as some paper formation at the top, but as a reality grounded within working-class communities. And this is the context in which the Party has undertaken its People's Red Caravan campaigns, working with local communities in towns and villages to rebuild collective self-reliance and community ownership over local resources.

In the words of the Political Report to the August Central Committee: "the real measure of progress will be the Party's ability to mobilise from the ground up, linking electoral work, community struggles, and work-place organising into a unified campaign for working class power and systemic transformation." ■

Socialism is the future – build it now from the ground up!

The following is a shortened version of the Political Report to the 10th plenary session of the 15th Congress Central Committee, held 29-31 August 2025 in Johannesburg

Comrade National Chairperson, allow me, with a brief digression from the onset, to dedicate this 10th Plenary Session of the 15th Congress Central Committee political report to pay special tribute to a wonderful, resilient and strong woman Archbishop Morwesi Rebecca Mabote–Mamoruti (we affectionately called her Mme), 04 August 1942 – 25 August 2025 She was laid to rest this past Saturday. This was my other mother who embraced us all in her home and house of worship, accommodated me and other young activists who were forced to leave their homes fleeing the apartheid police, who constantly raided her house, harassed her family including our father her late husband the late Bishop Mabote; they unfailingly provided for us without complaints despite the harsh economic conditions. She gave four of her five children to the liberation movement – three in the armed struggle – Mahlomola Mabote – alias Marshall Khawule, Johnny Mabote alias Tenneson Rangwane and Phineas in the internal machinery and Maria, a special courier in the underground. She was a very special human being who made us what we are today. Both Mme and Ntate Mabote handled our underground and military logistics with unmatched distinction, including hiding our weapons and protecting many of us and further solving our youthful social problems. On behalf of our generation of activists, please allow me to express our deep gratitude and eternal appreciation for her gallant resistance in the struggle for national liberation and freedom. We say, thank you Mme, and may your resilient fighting spirit live on to inspire a new generation to continue the struggle. Hamba Kahle Mkhonto! Thank You Comrades!

“Not a single class in history has achieved power without producing its own political leaders, its prominent representatives able to organise a movement and lead it ... our principal and fundamental task is to facilitate the political development and political organisation of the working class” V.I. Lenin, The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement.

This report is dedicated to the revolutionary spirit of a great woman who took me in as her own son, commonly just called Mme. Mrs Mamoruti Mabote,

who was buried last weekend.

Against forgetting and for preserving the heroic history of the working class and the world against Nazism and fascism, in defence of humanity and for peace

The 80th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War in defence of humanity: the end of WWII was a major turning point in the history of humanity and precipitated a new trajectory of development across the world and the establishment of the United Nations and subsequent adoption of the United Nations Charter for Human Rights. We remind ourselves of the massive efforts and untold sacrifices of millions of people, especially the Russians in defence of humanity. We remain indebted to the role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Russian people for their gallant fight against Nazism and fascism and freeing humanity from the calamity of human greed.

This victory is ours. We must celebrate it and never forget it.

We have just also celebrated the 80th anniversary of the World Federation of Trade Unions, established by the communist and workers all over the world to champion the interests of workers and all humanity and to end capitalist exploitation and imperialist subjugation of humanity. We thank our trade unions, especially Nehawu and other affiliates of Cosatu and other federations who took part in recent celebrations this week to remind us of the inseparable connections of the trade unions with the people's camp.

The upcoming Cosatu Central Committee – CC (mid-term congress)

We wish the mighty workers' federation great success as they convene an important CC in the context of socio-economic challenges faced by the workers and the working class. This mid-term congress of Cosatu is very important and we are confident it will make a significant contribution to the solutions of many challenges facing the liberation forces and the people's camp.

Seventy Years of the Freedom Charter and Thirty Years since 1994—promises deferred, struggles renewed

This year, April marked 30 years since the democratic breakthrough of 1994. It was a moment that carried the hopes and sacrifices of millions who had struggled against colonialism and apartheid. Many of those who downed tools, embarked on mass boycotts, faced bullets, were detained, and even killed in the trenches of class and national liberation.

The 1994 democratic breakthrough was never meant to be the end of struggle it was a new beginning. It opened up space for the working class to deepen the national democratic revolution and to transform South Africa into a society of freedom, equality, and shared wealth. But comrades, thirty years later, let us be honest: many promises of 1994 remain largely unfulfilled for the majority of our people.

Yes, we have won the vote. Yes, we have formal democratic rights. But we are not yet free in any meaningful material sense. The land remains in the hands of the few. The wealth of our mines, our banks, our industries is still controlled by a minority white dominated capitalist class, often backed by global finance capital.

What does this mean for a mineworker today? It means having to fight retrenchments even while commodity prices soar. It means working long hours underground while company CEOs rake in millions. It means struggling to access healthcare, to build a home, while the minerals you extract make others super rich. There is no doubt that this is not the freedom we fought for, but what did our people fight for? How to reconnect with the original mission of the people?

The Freedom Charter declared: There shall be Work and Security. Yet today, we have mass unemployment, job insecurity, casualisation, labour brokering, and unsafe workplaces. This is not merely a policy failure it is a betrayal of the working class by those who have chosen to manage the capitalist system rather than dismantle it.

The Freedom Charter declared: The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth. Yet the wealth produced by mineworkers, energy workers, and construction workers continues to flow into the pockets of a few, while the majority remain in poverty.

The Freedom Charter declared: The People Shall Govern. Yet millions of working-class people have lost faith in the electoral system. They see politicians come only at election time, make promises, and then disappear. They see local government captured by corruption, incompetence, and neglect. This is a political crisis.

This political crisis is not a sign of apathy; it is a sign of isolation and alienation. The working class does not see itself reflected in the state. And that is why so many workers and poor people have stayed away from voting. We must not scold the masses for abstaining; we must win them back through principled struggle, grassroots organising, and programmes that meet their real needs. That is what the SACPs' People's Red Caravan seeks to do. That is why we support the building of food sovereignty, cooperative enterprise, and peoples

power on the ground, of community leaders, of political activists who can help to chart a new path for the entire working class.

Together, let us renew the call of the Freedom Charter, not as a slogan, but as a revolutionary programme. Let us declare: There shall be work, food, land, energy, and public ownership! Let us affirm that socialism is not a distant dream, it is the only solution to the crisis of capitalist decay and greed.

Let the next thirty years not be remembered for more unfulfilled promises. Let them be remembered for the rise of a new socialist movement of workers and the poor organised, militant, and ready to govern society in their own way.

The true scale of the unemployment crisis and the by capitalist misrepresentation interests

In June 2025 the now retired Capitec Bank chief executive officer, Gerrie Fourie, claimed that South Africa's unemployment rate is closer to 10 per cent than the far higher rate consistently reported by Statistics South Africa. This was not only false, but it was also an attack on the scientific survey methods of Statistics South Africa. Those methods are internationally tested and based on employment and unemployment definitions adopted by the International Labour Organisation.

Fourie's assertions were not grounded in evidence but in the interests of finance capital. Unlike his pursuit of private accumulation through financial exploitation, Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey is guided by scientific principles of reliability, replicability and representativity. The survey is not shaped by capitalist class interests or power relations.

The facts are clear. Employment is defined broadly. It covers formal and informal work, survivalist activity and service in private households, where there is payment in money or in kind or both combined for the service rendered with or without a written contract of employment. While the official definition of unemployment excludes discouraged work seekers, the expanded definition includes them and therefore balances the broad definition of employment from the other side of the equation compared to the official definition of unemployment. Beyond this balance, the expanded definition captures the true extent of unemployment.

That said, by any definition, whether official or expanded, unemployment in South Africa is catastrophic. It is the direct product of the worldwide expansion of the capitalist system and its unequal power relations, including imperialist domination and exploitation. In our country, historically, the capitalist system was imposed from Europe and entrenched through colonisation and apartheid.

Among the methods through which capitalist relations of production were imposed in our land was the proletarianisation of our people, stripping them of any means of production of their own and forcing them into wage labour.

Historically, before proletarianisation, our people were not wage labourers in the context of the colonially entrenched, apartheid reinforced, and neoliberalism intensified capital relation and therefore did not depend on being employed by capitalist bosses and finding work only if their labour could produce capital for those exploitative bosses. Proletarianisation processes generated the conditions of unemployment, and once entrenched, it grows during periods of the capitalist system's crisis.

The violent and legislative methods of colonial and apartheid land dispossession and forced removals, together with the expropriation of other means of production and assets tied to the land and its political economy, played a central role in the proletarianisation of our people, who were stripped of these along with the stolen land. Added to this were the prohibitions and restrictions that denied the colonised and the oppressed the right to produce, to own and to exercise management control. These were the foundations on which the capitalist system generated the conditions of unemployment, along with productive asset poverty for the Black majority, and its growth, most of all affecting the oppressed and super-exploited under colonial and apartheid oppression. While the beneficiaries of this system passed wealth and privilege from one generation to the next through inheritance, white privilege and its legacy, the system transmitted the misery of unemployment, poverty and class inequality to the future generations of the oppressed and now formerly oppressed. Hence fundamental to economic redress is the acceleration of land redistribution, public ownership of the land and effective land use especially for food production and economic development.

Unemployment was reinforced post-apartheid by the domestication of neoliberal policy choices and the imperialist relations that produced the neoliberal policy regime. Entrenched mass unemployment and poverty, rooted in racialised, gendered and spatially enforced class inequality, cannot be understood outside the capitalist system. They are not only the conditions and products of capitalist wealth accumulation but also the very levers through which it is maintained. Instead of confronting this systemic source of the crisis and arguing for evidence-based policy change, the Cabinet ministers chose to side with the retired Capitec chief executive officer's misinterpretation of the facts.

Through the high levels of unemployment, the capitalist system excludes millions of black workers, overwhelmingly African, from employment, to sustain the deep levels of exploitation of those employed. At the same time,

the system depends on unpaid domestic and social reproduction, care labour, largely performed by women. These are the realities of which the KwaZulu-Natal provincial police commissioner, Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, appeared oblivious when he strayed into the wrong terrain and claimed that trade union demands for wage increases are a principal cause of unemployment.

Contrary to the distortions of the retired Capitec Bank chief executive officer and his ministerial and Parliamentary backers and those who informed or take their cue from them, the Quarterly Labour Force Survey has long laid bare the unemployment crisis, exposing its scale years before he attempted to trivialise it.

According to the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey, which is for the second quarter of 2025, over 8.3 million people who want to work are unemployed, compared to 16.7 million in work. When discouraged work seekers are included, the unemployment population rises to 12.6 million. Nearly 43 per cent of the labour force has been discarded as the so-called surplus population to capital accumulation requirements, the reserve army of labour for capital to tap in when so required.

The burden of unemployment falls unevenly. Black Africans face the highest rates of unemployment, at 40.2 per cent by the official definition and 51.4 per cent by the expanded definition. They also shoulder most of the invisible weight of unpaid domestic work. This is part of the legacy of triple oppression: racial oppression, gender domination and class super-exploitation. Black African men are next most affected, at 34.5 per cent in terms of the official definition and 43 per cent in terms of the expanded definition.

The high unemployment rates of Black African women and men are followed by those of Coloured and Indian/Asian women and men. Using the official definition, the rates are 24.4 per cent and 23.5 per cent for Coloured women and men, and 17.5 per cent and 13.5 per cent for Indian/Asian women and men. Using the expanded definition, the rates rise to 35.6 per cent and 33.5 per cent for Coloured women and men, and 26.1 per cent and 18.2 per cent for Indian/Asian women and men.

The lowest unemployment rates are among white South Africans, at around 8 per cent by the official definition. Broken down by gender, the official unemployment rate is 8.8 per cent for white women and 7.6 per cent for white men. Using the expanded definition, the rates are 12.2 per cent for white women and 10.4 per cent for white men.

Since the imposition of the neoliberal economic policy called Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) in 1996, unemployment has never fallen below 20 per cent. Public investment was cut, industries were gutted

by cheap imports and large-scale employment was destroyed across mining, agriculture and manufacturing. Finance capital increasingly shifted into speculation and offshore investment. Meanwhile, the working class was trapped in casualisation, labour brokering, poverty and slave wages, and persistent employment and related income insecurity. Every major economic policy since 1996 has reproduced, overseen or maintained the paradigm of the same outcome: high unemployment, deep poverty and entrenched inequality. It is time to stop this capitalist crisis not by complicit approval but by outright rejection and setting an alternative system.

Unemployment is not accidental. It is the product of class power. Breaking with this trajectory requires confronting the dominance of finance capital, monopoly corporations and their allies in the state. Evidence must serve a class strategy. This means linking immediate demands, such as investment in broad-based industrialisation and an adequately resourced state-led industrial policy, to the wider struggle to defend, advance and deepen the national democratic revolution, to move towards a socialist transition from the misery imposed on the working class by capitalism.

The struggle against unemployment cannot be separated from the broader political and working-class struggle to achieve the transition from capitalism to socialism. This is central to the National Democratic Revolution. Full employment under decent work conditions, including remuneration concomitant with one's labour in value creation, and social protection, including through a universal social security system, are not optional. They are among the essential instruments through which the working class can build the organisation, power and consciousness to advance the struggle for universal emancipation.

The SACP must develop its capacity to lead this working-class struggle with revolutionary militancy and clarity. Every campaign for the right to work for everyone, every battle for decent work, every step that strengthens worker organisation, should be part of building socialism. Only the organised working class can end mass unemployment and the exploitation on which capitalism depends.

Developmental monetary policy and the South African Reserve Bank

The South African Reserve Bank should be a critical institution in shaping the trajectory of the economy through monetary policy, yet its current trajectory stance continues to fail the constitutional imperative of achieving balanced and

sustainable growth. The central issue is the myopic, neoliberal interpretation of its mandate, which prioritises the narrow policy inflation targeting at the expense of broader developmental objectives such as employment creation through industrialisation, poverty eradication and a radical reduction of inequality.

Since the adoption of the Constitution, South Africa has not realised balanced and sustainable growth. This is despite the explicit requirement that the Reserve Bank exercise its powers and functions in the interest of this objective. The Reserve Bank has recently announced, albeit in different terms, its intention to pursue an even more conservative monetary policy stance.

Proponents argue that the Reserve Bank's recent announcement to target 3 per cent does not constitute a policy shift. However, a mathematical analysis and evidence indicate otherwise. The inflation target range of 3 per cent to 6 per cent set by the National Treasury allows for variability and flexibility, albeit limited and because of this, also problematic. By effectively focusing solely on the lower bound of 3 per cent, the Reserve Bank is disregarding the upper portion of the range. This reduction from a spectrum to a fixed, lower bound figure has significant economic implications, especially insofar as the Reserve Bank will pursue it through interest rate hikes.

While the Reserve Bank did not openly declare its approach, historical trends indicate that its preferred inflation targeting instrument are interest rate increases. Regardless of the rhetoric of its proponents, high interest rates and their increases are unacceptable in an economy marked by de-industrialisation, persistently high unemployment, widespread poverty and deepening inequality. It is within this context that our Financial Sector Campaign emphasised opposition to high interest rates and advocated for mechanisms such as a dual interest rate framework, designed to support productive investment as an employment creation driver.

A clearer redefinition of the Reserve Bank's mandate, explicitly including maximum employment, is therefore necessary. This process should be anchored in constitutional principles and democratic accountability, ensuring that monetary policy supports structural transformation and industrialisation as employment creation drivers. Employment creation must be recognised as a core component of the Reserve Bank's mandate and accountability. In this regard, the National Treasury, as the co-ordinating authority for the implementation of macro-economic policy in terms of the Public Finance Management Act, is constitutionally obligated to play a better role.

Although we disagree with the Minister of Finance on account of his adherence to a neoliberal trajectory, his statement of 1 August 2025 was correct in affirming that monetary policy is principally determined by the executive authority. The

minister's response to the Reserve Bank's recent announcement was therefore not without basis given the prevailing circumstances.

As the SACP we have been calling for a developmental approach to monetary policy, which should be designed to support productive investment and the sustainability of co-operatives and small enterprises through more favourable terms in the context of a dual interest rates framework. The short-term and long-term duality does exist but it is not developmental. This must be reviewed to ensure that it is developmental, actively supports productive investment and protects and promotes industrialisation and employment.

This duality should include a provision for a long-term moderate interest rate framework. In this context, there must be a review of the financially exploitative, exorbitant compound interest rate regime on essential social reproduction expenditures, such as expenditure for homes bought through home loans. We have called for this in our Financial Sector Campaign proposals. Within the short-term and long-term interest rate duality, short-term rates should be differentiated between those applied to consumerism and those applied to productive investment and support for production continuity. The rates should be in favour of productive investment and support for production continuity.

Repositioning the Reserve Bank to fulfil its constitutional obligations is not a technocratic adjustment. It represents a strategic shift towards an inclusive developmental path that addresses the structural roots of unemployment, poverty and inequality. This reorientation is indispensable for achieving a more equitable and sustainable economy.

In calling on the National Treasury to finalise a review of the Reserve Bank's mandate, this process must be anchored within a developmental and employment-creating framework, including the principles just outlined.

In addition, particularly from our perspective given the campaigns we have advanced, a review of the Reserve Bank's mandate should be understood as an integral part of our broader efforts to achieve macro-economic policy change, including through our struggle against austerity in fiscal policy.

Industrial policy lessons from the People's Red Caravan

Experience from the People's Red Caravan highlights that the development of the rural economy requires a multisectoral approach, including, but not limited to, agrarian transformation, supported by a coherent industrial policy. Central to this, required, is the promotion, encouragement and support for

domestic production of essential productive equipment and machinery, which must include tractors, borehole drilling machinery, planters, irrigation systems and fencing systems.

South Africa's dependency on imported productive equipment and machinery undermines both industrialisation and rural development. By building capacity to produce these means of production domestically, the country can create employment, develop technical skills and strengthen local production networks or value chains. Participation in global production of strategic productive equipment and essential machinery should be pursued strategically, ensuring that industrial policy drives both economic diversification and structural transformation.

Therefore, extending the scope of the South African Automotive Masterplan and the Automotive Production Development Programme Phase 2 to cover domestic tractor production and other instruments of production is essential for fostering local industry, reducing dependency on imports of machinery and generating employment. Alternatively, a dedicated industrial policy to achieve the same objective should be adopted.

A dedicated industrial policy to promote productive equipment and technology manufacturing localisation in this era of deepening and widening technological revolution in production and products is essential. In terms of the South African Automotive Masterplan, this should include revising tariffs, particularly but not exclusively on medium and heavy commercial vehicles, to reduce import dependency in this category while incentivising their domestic production development with long term production guarantees and commitments.

The same proposal applies in terms of a dedicated industrial policy of productive equipment manufacturing localisation, including encouraging research and development. By orienting these measures towards employment creation, rural development and the expansion and diversification of the rural and township economy, South Africa can simultaneously confront the challenges of de-industrialisation, stimulate productive investment and strengthen the resilience of both its rural and industrial economies.

Context on the organisational side: This Central Committee takes place 79 months from the 14th Congress, 31 Months after the 15th Congress, 15 months after the 2023 Augmented CC 7 months from the 5th Special National Congress. We are making reference to these events, because they immediately give us practical measures of the performance of the Party and its leadership, the Politburo in particular. This CC today must reflect on all the decisions that have been made in the past 18 months and evaluate the progress made,

our role and conduct in our task to provide leadership to the Party and the National Democratic Revolution, as a whole..

Unite for gender equality and to end GBV in all its forms

In this National Women's Month of August, we reaffirm that our struggle is a struggle for gender equality, a struggle to end patriarchy and the discrimination of people based on their sexual orientation, and a struggle against gender-based violence and femicide. This struggle is a central pillar of the National Democratic Revolution.

It is intolerable that South Africa continues to rank among the most dangerous places in the world for women. For example, between January and March 2025 alone, police statistics recorded 966 women murdered and more than 9 000 reported rapes. Most of the gender-based murders are intimate partner femicides, and in most cases, the perpetrators are not imprisoned.

We are not just talking about figures here. We are talking about people, human beings. Gender-based violence is a national disgrace and a brutal assault on the lives of working-class women, girls, mothers and sisters who have played decisive roles in our liberation struggle. As a tribute to their courage, the SACP calls for an all-out mobilisation in every community, workplace, campus and rural village, to end the scourge and ensure an effective state response.

We call for safety, justice, resources for survivors and an end to impunity. Let us build socialist working-class power to dismantle patriarchal oppression and capitalism, which thrive on exploitation and violence.

A call for decisive action against crime and corruption and support for Lt. General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi

While the SACP has welcomed President Ramaphosa's decision to establish a judicial commission of inquiry to probe the allegations made by KwaZulu-Natal police provincial commissioner General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, the President's response must not be allowed to distract from the broader crisis.

Whilst this action was timely, it was still too late. A few years ago, we made a similar call for the judicial commission on the state of the police and the crime-fighting capabilities without being listened to. We were responding to the high levels of crimes and siege of our communities by criminals, gangsters and drug lords, mass killings and an exponential rape and gender-based violence crisis. This call was ignored. It took Lt. General Mkhwanazi with far-reaching revelations for him to set up a commission. We must from the outset, welcome Commissioner Masemola for reinstating the 121 dockets on political

killings that have been effectively withdrawn. We condemn the administrative bungles invariably seeking to sabotage the work of this commission from starting and welcome the President and the Minister for their decisive action in making those responsible accountable.

The crime and corruption crisis that we face as a nation demands decisive, far-reaching action, beyond what the President has announced. Additional measures must include, but must not be limited to, the following:

- Urgent interventions across the entire landscape of the police, crime intelligence and the criminal justice system at large. These interventions must include forensic auditing and consistent monitoring to isolate and hold unscrupulous and captured elements to account.
- Stringent measures to enforce full accountability, focusing on all office bearers and officials within every law enforcement authority.
- The neoliberal fiscal policy that has contributed to the weakening of law enforcement capacity must be scrapped. Capacity gaps, crime intelligence failures and forensic delays must be addressed. SAPS and other law enforcement authorities must be adequately resourced to win what is now a war declared by criminals, mafias, gangsters, syndicates, and corrupt public office bearers and officials, with the corrupting private sector interests.
- A clear plan to ensure public safety and security and rebuild public infrastructure, without which millions will continue to live in fear and economic stagnation.
- Overhaul transformation in law enforcement governance and administration.

There can be no dispute that crime in South Africa has reached intolerable levels and is, in many instances, escalating unchecked. This is coupled with corruption. Conservative estimates suggest that crime costs South Africa at least 10 per cent of total annual output or gross domestic product.

Between October and December 2024 alone, the SAPS recorded 6,953 murders. South Africa is not in the state of war, yet these murders are higher than numerous wartorn regions.

Our communities, particularly in the most affected, high-risk provinces like KwaZuluNatal, Gauteng, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape, remain under siege. Entire townships and parts of suburbs operate as de facto lawless zones. Major crimes, including gang violence, kidnappings, construction and taxi mafia activity, and extortion, have flourished with virtual impunity. Illegal mining by so-called 'zama zamas' has entrenched. Criminal syndicates have not merely escalated street crime; they have infiltrated sectors such as state-owned enterprises and, according to the allegations by General Mkhwanazi,

also law enforcement authorities, including high-ranking officials and office bearers.

Rail infrastructure was stripped to skeletons, now commissioned to the private sector. This includes the two-thirds of overhead rail cables, costing billions, that were looted. This looting rendered Metrorail and Transnet infrastructure and operations inoperable or nearly inoperable in many corridors across the country. This has badly affected workers and the economy.

In too many areas, law enforcement is paralysed or compromised. Local communities are virtually defenceless, while top public office bearers enjoy 24hour state provided armed protection. Dockets languish, prosecutions falter and criminal networks tighten their grip, all sabotaging justice. The justice system, prisons included, is rife with bad influence, crime and corruption, while top criminals continue business as usual. Conviction rates in major crimes remain shockingly low, often around 10 per cent or less.

Let us all rise, protect ourselves and defend our country against the criminal, mafia, syndicate and gangster networks, as well as against the failure of the government and law enforcement authorities to stop the rot and guarantee public safety and security. This must be an immediate objective of our present struggle to achieve complete freedom and social emancipation. Let us build maximum working-class unity and mobilise the broadest possible patriotic and popular Left fronts.

Tracing our trajectory of development

As we do so we may need to go a little bit back to the 11th Congress in 2002 that reflected much on the state of the NDR and the Party since the 1994 breakthrough and concluded that the SACP must continue to theorise and debate the SACP relations with State power, while taking into account that true power does not reside with the state only, but in many sites of the struggle—in the Community, Workplace, economy, ideology and international spheres. This Congress adopted a Medium-Term Vision (MTV) programme that directed communists to build working-class power in all sites of the struggle above.

The 12th Congress in 2007, which reviewed the MTV, added the Environmental site and upgraded it into the South African Road to Socialism (SARS). It is this congress that concluded that for the South African Road to Socialism to succeed, the SACP needs to establish itself where it matters at the Voting District level, so that its impact can be measured, hence the Voting District (VD) based branches. The review of SARS in the 13th Congress 2012, upgraded it into the

“South African Struggle for Socialism” programme and was accompanied by a resolution to practicalise the establishment of the VD-based branches.

We can go all the way to the 14th Congress in 2017 that adopted an organisational renewal programme to strengthen the Party's ability to vanguard struggles for the NDR, the shortest route to Socialism a more solid resolution ground breaking resolution the SACP and state power relations: **“the SACP to actively contest elections”**, leading to the 15th Congress that gave a six-month ultimatum to the consultation process on the reconfiguration and an Augmented Central Community that effectively concluded that the 2024 general elections were the last elections, in which the SACP shall contest elections under the banner of the ANC. The 5th Special National Congress mandated the CC to finalise the modalities for the 2026 elections and to develop an election plan.

All these, in their nature, were complete, clear and straightforward resolutions to be implemented, starting:

- From contesting power in all sites of struggle as per the MTV adopted in 2002.
- Pursuing reconfiguration of the Alliance as per the resolution of the 12th Congress in 2007; establishing of VD-based branches as from the 13th Congress in 2012.
- Implementation of organisational renewal programme adopted in the 14th Congress 2017
- Building a Party that safeguards its independence on policy direction and programme
- And now organising and positioning itself to contest elections directly as per the 15th congress in 2022 and its consolidation by the 5th Special National Congress.

The leadership role of the CC or absence thereof:

We have been sitting down and reflecting on these in the midst of what is developing into chaos and ill-discipline, encouraged and promoted mostly by the leadership of the SACP. Right throughout the period between 2002 and even earlier periods we seem to have tolerated the creeping in of foreign tendencies that seek to undermine Party decisions in favour of individuals than collective interests. It is therefore my considered view that this CC must reflect on all these and measure our impact and conduct to the Party work. It is our considered view that the CC has not exerted enough on its responsibility to hold members of the Party accountable for the Party decisions and conduct.

This CC has, over a long period of time, neglected its main duties to exercise leadership over the CC and structures of the Party guided by Congress decisions and programme. The CC has allowed itself to be the weakest link of the organisation by rationalising wrong tendencies and overly accommodating deviations even when they posed fatal damage to the Party. We wasted too much time nursing feelings of individuals, begging and accommodating deviant behaviour, misconduct and perhaps correctly that we follow that path, because time and space always resolve some suppressed contradictions and they are bound to come out in the open. We have been sensitive and respectful to the historical role and seniority of individuals, even when their behaviour was completely far outside the scope of our confluence of discipline, morality, conduct and even general behaviour, including self-conduct, we tolerated that, we even published some of their views. Now it is clear we cannot go further in this form without emaciating the SACP of its soul, its ideology and turning it into an instrument of selfish service of leadership interests.

Have we been too accommodating and lax in our discipline?

If we are honest, we can really agree that we have been overly accommodating, but we can trace these defiant tendencies, as we should avoid repetitions without swift action.

Comrades will recall that some of our positions post the 15th National Congress have not been easy to manage. On its first plenary session, the 15th Congress Central Committee, there were matters that we had to deal with emanating from sharp differences from Congress, with some comrades calling for heads of others for sharp differences that arose from Congress.

These matters strained relationships in the organisation. An observation I made during this period is that we failed as a collective in the process of analysing the actual source and nature of the division. However, we saw a strong move for punishment and expulsion of other comrades, energy which we do not see when implementing Party programs and dealing with other similar phenomena in the organisation.

A major concern is that of late we have seen the emergence of what seems to be an organised effort hellbent on destabilising the SACP, whose roots seem to be traced back to the sharp differences on approach to matters pre and in Congress, albeit, now with interfacing interests. We saw this tendency raising its ugly head towards, during and now after the 5th Special National Congress. We have seen several buildup processes addressed by leaders of the Party, who failed to stand by the SACP and its resolutions. Of real concern is that these comrades seem not to have the heart of revolutionaries but thrive on vindictive and spiteful revenge-seeking tendencies blended by deeply rooted

animosity and elements of self-importance.

For us, no revolutionary can be taken seriously for holding a debilitating grudge against another comrade for differences in approach within the same ideological terrain, let alone grow from hating your own comrades for political differences; you can only degenerate, unfortunately. We thought that we all learnt out of this, but as things stand, we hasten to think that the message arising from our posture was not heard. We would not be worthy of the name of the Party when such things happen, and we derive no lessons from them.

However, we must say that the SACP continues to be put under strain by what are no different opinions of comrades, but sheer distortions of Party decisions to undermine the Party's authority over its decisions. Having outlined the clear and straightforward decisions from previous congresses and other decision-making platforms, we cannot have members of the Party, worse at the level of leadership as ours to seek to reverse them, because no political or ideological sound reason can be advanced for this, except for self-serving purposes or sabotage.

Surely the Party is bound to free itself from the internal throttle of the spectre of distortions of its ideas and aims from within. Either it purifies its immediate objectives and long-term mission by purging its impurities or digs its grave, as it will never be trusted by the working class.

Recently, we have had a string of actions that border on breach of Party discipline and poor leadership conduct. We have heard pronouncements contrary to SACP positions, and we have confronted these tendencies. In some cases, we have been met by remorseful responses and corrective actions and sometimes by silent defiance and continuation of the very practice.

So, the spike of opinion points contrary to the Party stances. This has to be dealt with, and the CC needs to grow a backbone to confront these tendencies that seek to sink the Party. One of the things that we have continuously raised with the CC is the tendency of comrades leading or participating in fraternal organisations choosing to lead a charge standing on those platforms instead of taking an opportunity to clarify positions of the Party. We have now given enough lead and guidance on how to handle the complexities of dual membership, but some comrades continue to dare the SACP to act.

On the role of the SACP publications today.

The Party publications are not an abstract platform devoid of existing socialist struggles and differing with Party strategic decisions. The publications should realign with the immediate and long-term Party mission accordingly. Our publications should also expand on the theory and practice of the SACP's vanguard role within and beyond the National Liberation Movement (NLM),

confronting racial domination, patriarchy, and class exploitation as a unified struggle that garnered the support of the NLM by the people.

We further need editions of our various publications that examine the 2026 local government elections in the context of the Party's decision to contest independently, drawing on decades of electoral experience while cautioning against treating elections as an end in themselves.

They should situate this in the broader strategy of building a powerful socialist movement of workers and the poor, strengthening Cosatu and the broader trade union movement, reconfiguring the Alliance, strengthening our internationalism and reflecting international realities and our positions and raising critical questions to be explored and indeed advancing a Left Popular Front.

While engaging allies is important, we should stress that the real measure of progress will be the Party's ability to mobilise from the ground, linking electoral work, community struggles, and workplace organising into a unified campaign for working-class power and systemic transformation. That is where the momentary focus should be, to clarify the confusion and not exacerbate it.

The CC and Organisational Renewal Commitments

The Organisational renewal document adopted at the 14th Congress is very clear and instructive on the conduct of a communist and revolutionary practice of Party structures and provides for an extensive elaboration of principles that guide revolutionary Party operations.

To reposition the Party to be responsive, repositioning to keep pace of the revolution, build capacity to wage a relentless struggle against ourselves (subjective interests) and mining the ground in our broad movement to respond to political decay. From the above-mentioned observations, it is very clear that we are very far from proving our readiness and fitness to lead a revolutionary organisation.

If we want to live up to the expectation of the renewal document, we cannot sacrifice our revolutionary soul on the altar of convenience and selfish interests to protect a corrupt and captured elitist leadership of the movement. We cannot be complicit to the betrayal of our revolution to please a comfortable minority. We exist for the working class to rule itself free from the brutality of capital. We now have the erudite elite claiming rationality, but all for self-interest.

We must set the record clear that we are not going to tolerate ill-discipline

and distortion of Party position without recourse or consequence in the name of some amorphous independence and freedom of speech. We are all equal members of the SACP bound by common Party discipline. Neither academic nor intellectual autonomy should provide cover for members of the SACP and its leaders. The first task of a communist intellectual is to elaborate, and illuminate clearly SACP positions to be properly understood by its members, that's also the task of leadership no matter how difficult the positions are, that's why you are elected to develop our positions and not obfuscate and bring confusion and chaos with dramatic speculations, fabrications and outright lies relying on irrelevant quotations. What kind of education is this meant to confuse the masses of our people and fabricate diverse new theories away from our collective resolutions? What kind of democrats are these who reject collective decisions?

Members and leaders of the SACP must know that the working class is our main servant, not our interests. It will no longer be possible to remain silent with the obviously persistent violent attack on Party discipline in the name of debates. We should proclaim loudly that those who believe in selling out the SACP to the bourgeoisie and the corrupt political elites must be firmly told to sell their corrupted souls and not the working class and their vanguard Party.

On the policy of dual membership

For a long time, the SACP has been calling for and engaging within the Alliance on its reconfiguration to ensure it functions optimally, and its impact is enhanced based on the principle of collective leadership. Underpinning the call and engagements for the reconfiguration of the Alliance has been the need to advance our shared strategy, the National Democratic Revolution, which has brought us together as allies in the struggle for complete liberation and social emancipation. We agreed on the necessity to deepen the NDR into a second, more radical phase, and to defend it.

The principles for a reconfigured Alliance included extensive democratic, consensus-seeking consultation on all major questions, collective accountability and Alliance inclusivity in all processes relating to the governance of our country across all spheres of the state. These principles, together with the emphasis on anchoring the reconfiguration of the Alliance in a revolutionary programme, the Freedom Charter as the minimum platform, and the imperative to deepen the NDR to achieve all the Charter's goals, were agreed upon in the common Alliance reconfiguration document adopted by the Alliance Political Council in 2019, as mandated by their respective elected national leadership collectives.

Especially when looking at the past 30 years of our transition into the hard-

won democratic dispensation we achieved in the 1990s, the economy and economic policies leave much to be desired in terms of progress towards the realisation of the Freedom Charter's economic principles and goals.

Worse, if scrutinised from the standpoint of a principled, revolutionary critique based on strategic consistency, some choices go in the opposite in the dominant economic policy thrust in relation to what the Freedom Charter says we need to achieve. It was clear, therefore, that there would be a programmatic and policy paradigm shift if all Alliance partners stood firm behind Alliance reconfiguration, with none embarking on a U-turn, revision or forgetting our commitments on this question.

We are now advanced to a point where two of the Alliance's primary formations will be contesting the 2026 local government elections, with the SACP, in line with its historical, Marxist–Leninist mission, having to advance and defend socialist transformation and development measures, ideological and political theory on all fronts of the struggle, including the electoral terrain. This tactical shift, which may have a strategic impact to advance the NDR, was guided by a thorough appraisal of the post-1994 realities, the operating environment and the implications for the SACP amid the many changes that have occurred without a reconfiguration Alliance. Again, the Alliance is called upon to give collective leadership, as opposed to the weaknesses we discussed in the last bilateral session with the ANC, which culminated in the scenario we are in right now.

Among the issues we need to give collective leadership to is the question of dual membership, which, along with bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral relations, has been a key pillar of the Alliance. This pillar of the Alliance is embedded in our constitutions in different ways.

Not only do we share a particular proportion of our membership but, along with this, we also share particular sections of our constituencies. This is what we need to bear in mind when we respond to the need to give the principle of dual membership collective direction, given the new scenario, and we should do so not only guided by the fact that we have, over the decades, developed interdependence, thus becoming interdependent, but also by the fact that we have done so as independent formations.

No part of the independent historical mission of the Alliance's primary political formations must be excluded from any front of the struggle, including the electoral terrain, especially given the changes that have taken place over the

past 30 years of our democratic transition. Such exclusion, if we were to allow it, going forward, will not only pose an existential threat to the affected Alliance partner but will also create disadvantages in numerous ways to the Alliance, including in governance and legislative bodies, which are both ideological terrains and key sites of the broader class, inclusive of the political struggle.

In the circumstances, any unilateral decision or conduct affecting any pillar of the Alliance, including dual membership, would not only reflect poor judgment and a lack of collective leadership but would also be destructive. If, for example, one believes they are removing SACP members from a process we have shared for the past 30 years, it must be understood that they are also removing ANC members in their own right. This has far-reaching implications. Hence, collective leadership in responding to the situation at hand is crucial, as opposed to unilateralism or arrogance.

Beyond the points just made, among the notions we must address is the problematic idea that the ANC's election achievements, whether still high or reduced as a result of declining electoral support, are the ANC's private resources. Both within the frameworks of dual membership and bilateral relations, we have campaigned for, resourced our campaign for and voted for the ANC.

There has never been a time when the ANC single-handedly contested elections, to justify claiming that anything it has gained in terms of resources (pointing to deployments, among others) through the support of the entire Alliance, is its private property. A failure to appreciate this will lead to serious errors and new problems, which we all need not wait to see emerge in order to solve, but need to avoid through giving collective leadership, also appreciating that no single Alliance partner has withdrawn from or intends to leave the Alliance.

In the context of existing attitudes and arrogance of the ANC, which have begun to discriminate against our comrades, we need a strategy to equally respond.

A call to action – what is to be done?

Self-revolution and self-correction, the cornerstone of the renewal agenda, which should start with us in the SACP, should be implemented vigorously. The Chinese have followed this path with vigour and are poised to surpass the Soviet Union in the maintenance of political power, as they harnessed the proper purpose and reason of political power – to serve the people and improve

their living conditions and never get satisfied with your achievements.

This CC should reflect that. Because, as the Chinese findings indicate that the tragedy that has repeated itself was because *“The ruling party lacks effective supervision and lacks the courage and determination for self-revolution. When the ruling Party exercises public power without supervision, it will inevitably become corrupt, and the result of corruption will inevitable be the destruction of the Party and the country. This is the iron law of historical development”* Mao Zedong explored the first method of mastering self-revolution as *“Letting the people to supervise the government”*

In this regard, the following should be considered:

- All those with reservations about our decision to contest local government elections be censured from representing the Party in public until after the local government elections and those who have deviated from this position issue a public apology for distorting SACP positions to the public or duly face a disciplinary hearing and its consequences.
- We met with the Gauteng Provincial Executive Committee on why it did not immediately correct the distortion of the SACP 15th National Congress and the Special National Congress by the Linda Jabane District Congress and subsequent public positioning of the DS and the district against the SACP positions. This matter has since been rectified.
- We also met with the Moses Mabhida PEC, in which they committed to fulfilling all congress resolutions, including that of contesting the local government elections. This is after media reports from the PEC that generated confusion, as per our decision to contest elections. Although the meeting was overdue. We will process the discussions properly through the Secretariat and the CC.
- We should make a call for all CC members to acquaint themselves with the policies, decisions - positions and principles of the SACP and to elaborate and develop them further for broader mass understanding than to attack them, vilify them and generate confusion.

A resurgent belligerent imperialism and nuclear weapons mobilisation

We are witnessing the sharpening contradictions of global capitalism and imperialism. Equally, today, can perhaps give a new meaning to the concept of a rising multipolar world system with the meeting between the arrogant US President Donald Trump and President Putin of the Russian Federation.

Their meeting in Alaska today practically ends US unilateralism and unipolar world system, at least from an imperialist point of view, with the possibility for a diversifying world multi-polar system based on practically changing power relations in the world security and economic relations. It is not a typical capitalist versus socialist world bipolarity per se, but it is a promising development.

- As it is, the world economy remains unstable, at times spinning into chaotic gyration based on the US President's pronouncements on tariffs and other measures that have plunged the global supply chains into turmoil and unpredictable with consequential rising inequality, inflation, debt crises, and slow growth across the world especially in the Global South, these measures requires the global south to relook into practically strengthening intertrade and collaborations amongst themselves.
- The US and Nato are intensifying militarisation, fuelling conflicts in Europe, West Asia, and Africa, while preaching democracy and enforcing economic coercion through sanctions,
- Resource wars, energy competition, and tech imperialism are accelerating - all to preserve capitalist hegemony in a multipolar world,
- Meanwhile, the climate crisis - itself a product of unsustainable capitalist growth - threatens life everywhere, while global elites evade responsibility. Socialist and progressive governments - from Cuba to Venezuela, Bolivia to China, Laos to Vietnam - continue to resist and build alternatives under siege. We draw from these lessons. South Africa's future cannot lie in capitalist restoration or IMF-style adjustment - it lies in a democratic, sovereign, and socialist transition, led by the working class.

Rebuilding from the ground up, building a powerful movement of workers and poor in action

That is why we say: Socialism is the future. Build it now – from the ground up, in practice, with our own hands. Through the People's Red Caravan and our Party-related institutions, building working-class self-reliance, we are already:

- Establishing village-based agricultural co-operatives across the country
- Opening community-owned retail stores in rural towns and peri-urban settlements
- Reviving local production through co-op bakeries, milling stations, and poultry projects
- Running political and co-operative education programmes for unemployed

youth and co-op leaders. This is practical, democratic, change, driven not by capital, but by people's power.

The People's Red Caravan: Building the socialist future from the ground up

In June this year, with allied organisations and progressive local structures, we launched the People's Red Caravan in Motlhabe Village, North West Province. This initiative marks a bold and practical step toward building the socialist future from the ground - through collective ownership, self-reliance, and the organised power of working-class communities. It will not be exaggerated to say that indeed in this country going forth, we cannot talk about building socialism without the mention of Motlhabe Village, such will be an injustice to the real construction of organic people's socialism.

Since its launch, the Red Caravan has helped to lay the foundations of a new people's economy. From the building of community-owned stores through consumer co-operatives to the expansion of Village Agricultural Co-operatives (VACs) focused on food production and agro-processing, the initiative is aimed at reclaiming rural and township economies from corporate and elite domination. These are not isolated projects – they are building blocks of a new social order anchored in community development, self-reliance, collective community ownership and cooperative system. Beyond locally based economic transformation, the Red Caravan has also mobilised communities to repair and rebuild social infrastructure - including schools, clinics, ECD centres, roads and access bridges.

These efforts, supported by traditional councils and grassroots leadership, are reconnecting development to democratic participation and local initiative. Arts and culture, community heritage, and youth involvement have been key pillars of this renewal, although not sufficiently mobilised. At the same time, the PRC is advancing a campaign to establish a co-operative banking network, ensuring that people's savings and credit facilities serve local development, not the profit motives of commercial banks. These efforts are directly linked to increasing household based incomes, creating household based food production, household based employment, and strengthening self-reliance through street and section-based buying clubs, worker and producer co-operatives and community asset ownership

As we commemorate 104 years of unbroken struggle, the People's Red Caravan shows that the socialist future is not an abstraction - it is being built, step by step, in our villages and towns. It is being shaped through struggle, solidarity, and the conscious organisation of the working class. The Party remains committed to advancing this transformative programme, anchored

in grassroots power and collective ownership, as the pathway to a just and equal South Africa.

Real co-ops, not pseudo co-ops

We must emphasise that the co-operatives we support are not pseudo ones. We have consistently opposed the abuse of the co-op model to undermine worker rights and bypass labour laws. We supported amendments to the co-operatives Act to stop this practice. Our vision is clear: worker-owned, democratically governed co-operatives, serving their members and communities — not tenderpreneurs or private profiteers. These co-ops are not a substitute for unions. They are an extension of worker power into the economy itself.

Co-operative banking – taking on capital in the financial sector

We are also actively building a co-operative banking movement. We cannot build socialism while remaining trapped in capitalist debt and financial dependency. Our vision includes worker-owned cooperative banking institutions, as part of a national network of cooperative banks, owned by workers, trade unions and co-ops and a financial system built around access, fairness, and democratic control - not the private greed of capitalist banks.

On contemporary imperialism in the era of Trump 2.0

Since Trump's second election, debate often focuses on his persona and accusations of promoting "global white supremacy". The Trump administration's policy conduct in relation to the rest of the world must be understood within the broader context of US imperial decline, though still powerful, rooted in the falling profit rates in the US since the late 1960s to date. Just like all capitalist firms and corporatist states compete against each other in every possible way, including through their respective nation-states in search of low labour costs, markets and raw materials; through neoliberal imperialism, the US capital sought to extend neoliberal capitalist relations, which gave capital more freedom in the name of universal freedom. In other words, neoliberalism has been an expression of the needs of developed capital in search of profit on a global scale, through amongst others, acquisitions of public sector economy into private economy through privatisations and public-private partnerships and other state concessions that favour private capital over public capital.

Trump's attempts to "Make America Great Again" (that is to restore the falling

profit rate in the US, also reflects the waning feasibility of and the crisis of classical imperialism - colonialism, given limitations in territorial expansion although Trump has threatened to take over Greenland (by all means USA controls it militarily), Panama Canal, the US just attacked Iran's nuclear installation in June 2025 and have just surrounded Venezuela as we speak and continue to occupy Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, albeit its long-term military occupation strategy is declining, with the withdrawal from Afghanistan but the USA has kept soldiers to date in the Korean peninsula and has almost a million soldiers outside its borders. Trump has made more open military threats and before he held a meeting with Vladimir Putin deployed his nuclear bombers to the Pacific Ocean and has just recently named his Department of Defence as the Department of War. Today, economic tools such as sanctions, withdrawal of aid, trade exclusions, and restricted access to capital are more actively utilised and thus other viable instruments of imperialism.

South Africa and global South relations

The shift to a multi-polar world does not end inter-state coercion; it increases the space for economic imperialism, reading the USA reaction with constant attacks on Brics countries and threats of tariffs. Such measures include sanctions, denial of loans or debt relief, exclusion from trade agreements like AGOA, and investment restrictions.

We need help building an alternative economic bloc rooted in the working class to counter superpower dominance and end the neo-colonial global division of labour. This requires transforming relations with both the Global North and Global South.

Our working-class-led strategy should rest on three pillars. We should continue the struggle to transform power relations with key countries in the global north, especially the USA and Europe. Secondly, we need to reshape and transform into mutually beneficial relations with and amongst BRICS partners, including the BRICS Plus components, particularly China, Russia and even Brazil. Lastly, we should promote African regional and continental integration.

From the SA practical cooperation side, we are perhaps one of the weakest links in Brics' potential as a counter-hegemonic bloc, which is still uncertain, but the other members are fully cooperating and making it a formidable counter-bloc. While initiatives like the New Development Bank and joint positions at the WTO are promising, proposals for a Brics currency face major practical and political challenges. Trade within Brics is uneven: South Africa's trade with Russia is minimal, while China dominates both as a buyer

of raw materials and as a supplier of manufactured goods. Non-tariff barriers further disadvantage South African exports and destroy our manufacturing capabilities and independence. Historically, due to colonialisation, South Africa's trade with the EU and USA remains more diversified and includes more manufactured goods than with Brics. However, overall, exports are still dominated by primary commodities. Increasing manufactured exports to all markets is essential.

On international solidarity

We stand with the people of Swaziland in their struggle for democracy and call for an end to the war in Sudan. The SACP stands firmly with the people of Western Sahara in their struggle for national self-determination, democratic sovereignty and an end to the occupation of their land by Morocco, which is backed primarily by imperialist powers as well as sellouts who have turned against the Sahrawi people after years of pretending to support their struggle.

The SACP expresses its unwavering solidarity with the heroic people of Palestine in their just struggle against genocide, land dispossession, colonial occupation and apartheid. The apartheid Israeli settler regime continues to massacre Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and injuring many others. This atrocity is part of the continuing genocide that has already claimed the lives of 62,034 martyrs since 7 October 2023, with a conservative estimate of 150,000 others injured. Among those murdered are patients killed in or while seeking care in hospitals and other healthcare centres, as well as children, the elderly and women.

The cruelty of the apartheid Israeli regime is further shown in its deliberate targeting of civilians seeking food and humanitarian aid. By 29 July 2025, 1,179 civilians had been killed while trying to access aid, with another 7,957 wounded in these criminal attacks. These acts are not only war crimes, but they are also crimes against humanity. They expose the true nature of the apartheid Israeli settler regime, which continues its genocidal project with impunity, backed and armed by imperialist powers such as the US, which are complicit in this ongoing slaughter.

Instead of addressing the genocide against Palestinians by the apartheid Israeli settler regime, which has also destroyed Palestinian social and economic infrastructure, including hospitals, healthcare centres, schools, learning institutions and places of worship, Donald Trump, the President of the US imperialist regime, has chosen to fabricate a false claim of white genocide in South Africa.

Not only did Trump and his administration seek to divert attention from the real genocide against the Palestinian people by the apartheid Israeli settler regime, but he also arrogantly displayed his racist attitude by turning a blind eye to the plight of the landless black majority in South Africa, who were dispossessed under colonisation and apartheid, while falsely elevating claims of land confiscation from white people.

The SACP calls for worldwide unity of the working class and all progressive forces against the United States-led imperialist war-mongering offensives, including direct military and trade wars. The SACP reiterates its support for the Brics Plus partnership, which must become a vehicle to build a just and better world and systematically end uneven global development and the exploitation of one country's resources and people by another.

The SACP expresses its solidarity with the peoples of Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and others resisting the attacks of the Zionist Israeli settler regime, fully backed by the USA, including the recent 12 Day war by Israel and the USA against Iran. Now the USA has surrounded Venezuela with warships and over 4000 US Marines, including a nuclear warship, to effectively remove a democratically elected President Nicolás Maduro Moros. We will join a program at the US Consulate to protest this unacceptable action. We call on the SA government to denounce this action by the US on a sovereign state. Similarly, we stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela against United States-led imperialist suppression and illegal sanctions

We express our solidarity with the people and government of Cuba in their struggle against the United States' illegal sanctions and criminal economic, financial, trade and investment blockade. We call on the US to end these sanctions and the occupation of Cuba's Guantanamo Bay.

New and persisting challenges of the Global South

In the context of existing geostrategic challenges and imbalances, with the countries of the Global South struggling for a place at the table and to end poverty and decolonise. We are called upon to enter the principal terrains of struggle. We should reconnect with the international working-class movement that we have deviated from its postures, as we started courting the West, chasing Northern capitalism and investment temptations.

- We should join the international anti-colonial platforms and, in this case, for instance, be deliberate in support of the Sahel countries defying imperialism and provide political support where possible. We should develop a programme to support the new wave against imperialism in the Sahel region with President Traore in Burkina Faso, President Goita

in Mali, and President Tchiani in Niger who are leading an important anti-imperial front.

- We need to strengthen Africa Left Network Forum (Alnef) and establish of a new international forum the Southern Front of Solidarity, a platform of the left forces, unions, social movements, communist parties and progressive organisations and governments in the Global South to resist imperialist war, strengthen peace and rebuild an active, anti-imperialist internationalism.
- We must continue to support the people of Sudan, currently facing the worst human catastrophe, with over 11 million people affected and displaced from their homes because of wars, with less attention by the media and imperialists, because they are Africans. After meeting former Prime Minister Hamdok, we agreed to provide some assistance to the little of our abilities to the fighting forces in Sudan. We had also agreed to do so for Swaziland. What we should perhaps consider is setting up an International Solidarity Unit to coordinate several interventions on the solidarity front.
- We should be clear about our position concerning the reparations movement against slavery and colonisation, reconnect with it and develop possible interventions in this regard.
- We should stop the naivety of over-reliance on bourgeoisie democracy and play the international book of neoliberalism, which the liberals themselves are no longer following.
- The National Dialogue and the Conference of the Left should not leave our attention given both their urgency and necessity to strengthen the working class movement and intensify its struggles. We have already finalised the concept note of the Conference of the Left and are now working on setting up the steering committee and starting to work on the conference.
- On the National Dialogue, we agreed on the possibility of identifying a leading personality to coordinate work jointly with us and maximise the space for resource mobilisation that is fully linked with our interventions. We will try and engage with the various foundations to review their stances, not to engage in the National Dialogue. It is our view that the union movement, as one of the most important mass movements of the working class, should effectively take part in the national dialogue to focus its direction on the interests of the workers, with a minimum framework of the Freedom Charter and bettering it even.

General Maphanywa's visit to Iran

We have noted the disgusting hypocrisy of the DA and its cohorts' parties

for condemning his visit to Iran owing to geostrategic considerations. But most concerning was the position of the SA Presidency and the Minister of International Relations. We have affirmed our national sovereignty and the fact that we have military relations with the imperialist camp, and yet are denied doing so with the people's camp. Despite our differences, our sovereignty must always be protected.

Worrying developments from the GNU

There seems to be an accelerated reaffirmation of the private sector role in the network industries by this administration without engagement. The Minister of Social Development just dropped the use of the Post Bank for the payment of social grants. This is a death knell for the Post Bank. We need to condemn this action and never allow the collapse of the Post Bank.

Just a week ago at the Water Summit, the President called on the private sector role in the water sector. This is what has been promised to us a: stealth neoliberalism forced down our throats, of bringing competition in the network industries, basically contesting the state with private capital, in the name of bringing investments when they are selling our democracy, public mandate and the state to capital. This action must be condemned even so, for the record, as we cannot justify to the working class when such a basic source of life is now commodified in our country without action. They have done with the destruction of local government, the next thing they will sell the cities and towns to the private sector.

In another development of concern was the announcement that the World Bank has approved a US\$1.5 bn (R26.5 bn) "Development Policy" loan. Part of this will be used to support "private sector" involvement in the production of renewable energy and the construction of transmission lines to inject this into the grid. The latest World Bank loan follows two others (in 2022 and 2023) bringing the total amount borrowed from the World Bank to US\$3.25 bn (R57.7 bn). These loans (which must be repaid in foreign currency) are being taken even as Treasury continues to insist that the top priority of fiscal policy is to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio.

The Minister of Transport just announced another subtle privatisation of the railroads to private sector players. We should guard that such loopholes and poor policy will not allow the leasing of Transnet locomotives to run them as the private sector on the Transnet rail. It will certainly be an abuse of the public railroad for nothing whilst building special networks for themselves, we have fought against this since 2019 in our battle with the then Minister of Finance and the ANC, in our battle against neoliberal structural reforms. We need to

condemn this wholesale of the state and its functions by the GNU to private capital, basically taking from the people to capital. We need to condemn all these terrible measures. We have almost become too clueless in running the state, with the collapse of services as an overt testimonial.

Let us build from the ground up

The working class must act.

- Supporting People's Red Caravan - to build working class self-reliance and chart a people driven sustainable livelihoods and people's economy
- Launching and linking co-operative banks
- Preparing to reclaim political power in local government
- Defending socialism at home and abroad
- Building unity in struggle- not paper unity.

Conclusion

In his 1905 March 8 (February 23) article *New Tasks and New Forces* V.I. Lenin had this to say, "...while the revolution itself is nothing but the break-up of old superstructures and independent action of the various classes, each striving to erect the new superstructure in its own way. But do not debase our revolutionary science to the level of mere book dogma, do not vulgarise it with wretched phrases about tactics as process and organisation as process, with phrases that seek to justify confusion, vacillation, and lack of initiative." *Collected Works Vol.8 pp 211-20* ■

Socialism is not an event. It is a process. A class struggle. Let us build it - from the ground up, in practice, with our own hands

Forward to People's Power! Forward to the People's Red Caravan! Forward to International Solidarity! Forward to Social

The current period and the crisis in the NDR*

Rob Davies on how the emerging global situation highlights the need for South Africa to find alternatives to discredited and increasingly dangerous neoliberal policies

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) is facing an existential crisis more profound than any encountered since the democratic breakthrough of 1994. This is being propelled by hostile actions of US imperialism, opportunistically seized on by both the most reactionary domestic opponents of transformation and the most ardent local champions of neoliberalism. It is being facilitated by the increasingly evident failure of the policies of austerity, liberalisation and privatisation by stealth to make any positive impact on the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality – all of which, on the contrary, remain worse than they were at the time of the “crisis before the crisis” of Covid.

Recent revelations also point to the possibility that state capture – the seizure of state institutions to support looting – was not limited to the culprits fingered by the Zondo Commission, but could well now involve multiple competing syndicates linked to organised crime with tentacles well entrenched in factions operating both in the state security apparatus and party politics.

Threats and hostile actions by the US

The general background to the threats now emerging from US imperialism is clearly the long-term demise of the US as the dominant capitalist and imperialist power at the end of the Second World War, and as the single uncontested global hegemon after the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War in 1991. The unipolar global order, within which policies of neoliberalism and a programme of hyperglobalisation were imposed and driven, is undergoing a highly contested transition to a more multipolar global order. The main factor propelling this has been the rise of China not just as a global manufacturing power, but also as a peer competitor and technological leader in important areas of both the digital and low-carbon economy.

China’s rise occurred during the era of hyperglobalisation and neoliberalism, following the implementation of “market reforms” after 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. But China decidedly did not follow the neoliberal policy prescriptions imposed on much of the Global South in the

name of the Washington Consensus. Instead, it followed a development path more akin to that of other industrialising economies before it – involving the formulation and implementation of active and effective Industrial, Trade and Technology (ITT) policies, and the placing of these at the heart of its economic policy, including subordinating its trade and macro-economic policy to the needs and requirements of its industrial policies.

China's planning process included the development of Sector Strategies, the resourcing of these, and the use of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to build capacity and allow for experimentation. Critically, it also ensured that Industrial Policy would guide a calibrated opening up of its domestic market. While China (like other successful industrialisers before it) took advantage of any opportunities available to export (beginning with the phase out of the Multi-Fibre Agreement and later from the broader opportunities to access global markets created by ongoing globalisation), its approach to allowing external access to its domestic market was gradual and calibrated according to the development of its domestic capacity.

Any "opening up" was a strategic beginning by allowing foreign investment into SEZs, and then liberalising imports of machinery and equipment. China's industrialisation involved much "continuous improvement" – taking an existing technology and "improving" it – and this was supported by a "flexible" and developmental approach to Intellectual Property, something which became a point of contention with the US. Strategically important State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) played a major role in driving the creation of value chains, and this was also driven by strong localisation requirements, particularly at the early stages of the process, requiring up to 70 per cent of inputs from local suppliers at one stage.

China's financial sector was strongly regulated and was never allowed to engage in the type of financialised practices that led to the 2007 Global Financial Crisis. Its central bank had a broad mandate that reached beyond inflation targeting and it intervened to maintain a competitive exchange rate that acted as a protective buffer for its infant industries – even as World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession in 2001 obliged it to reduce tariffs.

By 2006, China's real GDP was about 13 times the level it had been in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping's reform programme began. By 2010 it had become the world's second largest economy and is poised to become the largest by 2030.

By the second decade of the 21st Century (C21), China set out on a path to becoming not just a major global manufacturer but also a technological leader and innovator in critical sectors. Its digital tech companies became serious competitors and leaders in significant niches, beginning with 5G infrastructure

and consumer products such as smart phones and batteries, digital platforms (Ali Baba, Ten Cents Tik Tok, etc.) and more recently in Artificial Intelligence (DeepSeek being best known). It did the same in areas of low carbon products and technologies beginning with solar energy equipment and components and more recently becoming both a major battery manufacturer and a leading producer of competitively priced New Energy Vehicles (NEVs) - with BYD being the world's largest producer for the past three years.

In addition to this, Russia's advances in the proxy war in Ukraine, despite extensive NATO support, have led to its partial and grudging recognition as a third global power (even now it seems by the Trump administration). Less acknowledged (but an inevitable part of the architecture of any future global order) is the emergence of regional powers – consisting of a number of so-called emerging economies, whose significance has been tacitly acknowledged in their membership of organisations like BRICS or the G20.

Antonio Gramsci's well-known dictum: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born. In this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms", well describes many of the features of the global interregnum we are now living in. The actions of US imperialism to both attempt to arrest its decline and assert its influence over what it now acknowledges will be a more multipolar world order are being shaped by its domestic politics – which are currently dominated by widespread discontent with the realities created by neoliberalism and hyperglobalisation expressed in the form of populist ethnic nationalism.

In the US, as in many other parts of the world, neoliberalism produced widening inequality: a handful of ultra-rich dollar billionaires emerged, while working people endured wage suppression and falling living standards, and the "middle class" faced growing economic insecurity. In the 2018 edition of his best-selling book *Globalization and its Discontents*, Joseph Stiglitz argued that globalisation's opponents in the Global South had been joined by large numbers of people "...in the middle and lower classes of the advanced industrial countries". These had formed the base of anti-globalist populist nationalist movements springing up in the developed world, and which had then just won the Presidency of the United States. Stiglitz argued that behind the ideologies of such movements were real socio-economic issues. The incomes of most Americans had essentially been stagnant for three decades and life expectancy was falling. The American dream of regular decent work, a comfortable retirement and inter-generational upward mobility was "increasingly out of reach for a large part of the population... While moving up the ladder seems increasingly difficult, everyone knows someone who has fallen down".

In addition, the US had undergone extensive financialisation as its industrial economy was hollowed out. Financialisation means more than the growth of the financial sector, although the mushrooming of the Wall Street colossus in part through deregulation was part of this. Financialisation also represented a reversal of the roles of finance and productive capital. Instead of finance capital providing resources and services to support the development of productive, industrial capital, it prospered by diverting value and surplus value from productive sectors. Non-financial (including industrial) capital began to derive an increasing part of their profits from financial transactions, including share buy-backs and the share price became the key performance indicator. A company like Boeing, a prime example, came to prioritise “financial engineering” over aircraft engineering. Not surprisingly, US manufacturing companies became less competitive than Chinese alternatives even in the US market.

The policies of the second Trump administration need to be understood in that context, The tariffs it has imposed – both the “reciprocal tariffs” and those on specific sectors (automotive products, steel and aluminium) are justified as an attempt to reduce the deficit in trade in goods that the US has (or thinks it has) with almost all other countries. It is defining a reduction of this deficit and re-industrialisation as a matter of national security and is seeking to use its raw unfiltered power as a tool to achieve this. In this process it is disregarding and discarding the global multilateral trade rules it itself was at the forefront of crafting in the era of hyerglobalisation. Unilateral departures from such rules actually date back to the first Trump administration and were not reversed by the Biden administration which, on the contrary, added to them. Now, however, the entire edifice of WTO rules is being upended with “deals” sought from countries negotiating limited relief from “reciprocal tariffs” being blatantly in violation of multiple WTO rules as well as leading to something far short of a return to the status quo ante.

While the sector-specific and “reciprocal” tariffs both derive from the economic factors outlined above, they also include an element of tariff policy merging with politically motivated sanctions. For example, the letter confirming the imposition of a 50% “reciprocal tariff” on Brazil (with which the US actually has a trade surplus) begins by demanding the cessation of the court proceedings against former President Jair Bolsonaro – often dubbed the “tropical Trump”.

As things stand, South Africa is, from 1 August 2025 subject to a “reciprocal tariff” of 30% on all imports into the US, except raw materials such as Platinum Group Minerals (PGMs) the US needs for its own industries. In addition, automotive products will face a 25% “national security” justified (Section 232) tariff, with a similar 50% tariff on steel and aluminium. Also threatened is a

10% additional tariff on Brics members. Such rates would exclude from the US market many if not all of the value-added products South Africa has been exporting to the US in the recent past (including autos, wine and citrus).

Part of this effective (partial or total) exclusion of South African value-added products from the US market derives from national security justified economic policy considerations (arising from the decline of the US) and are in line with similar measures directed at almost all other countries, including the US's closest allies. But there is also clearly a politically motivated (sanctions) element as well. This is reflected in the relatively high value of the "reciprocal tariff" (30% vs the minimum of 10% that will be applied to many other countries). This figure clearly includes a policy/political/sanctions weighting beyond the trade deficit calculation. The presence of such factors is also reflected in the fact that the US has not agreed up to now at least to grant South Africa any tariff quota relief on the sector specific tariffs of the type it has agreed with the UK.

At the forefront of these more directly politically motivated restrictions is the correct and principled stance taken by our government on the genocide in Palestine. The ICJ case, although not resulting in all we had asked for, was a high watermark in solidarity with the Palestinian people and a major blow to the impunity Zionist perpetrators of the genocide had come to take for granted. It is well known that the Israeli lobby is extremely powerful and well entrenched in the US Congress, the security apparatus and White House. Indeed, even some in the MAGA movement say that the reality in US security and foreign policy is not "America First" but rather "Israel First". Hearings in Congress, proposed Bills and statements at various levels of the US government have made it clear that the lobby is extremely aggrieved at South Africa's role in the ICJ case and related solidarity.

The preposterous allegations of genocide against white farmers levelled at us are manifestly, in part, a tit for tat retaliation to the well-founded case of genocide by the Israeli state that we have tabled at international courts. But they also speak to the way "replacement theory" is very influential in MAGA circles. This holds that white people are being "replaced" in the US and elsewhere by "other" people and/or that "European civilisation" (allegedly the highest and most advanced) is being "replaced" by other cultures and civilisations. The repeal of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) measures through an executive order is one indication of the roll back of the alleged replacement agenda by the administration, which also includes opposing the inclusion of any of the DEI terminology in UN documents.

The application of this reactionary stance to South Africa has elements both of farce and of tragedy. The exodus of 60 odd white South Africans as refugees,

most of whom will find themselves battling at the bottom of the US class hierarchy, may be farce. But the tragedy (or at least more significant threat) is that the most reactionary forces in our own country now have unprecedented access to significant levers of power in the US state that they are using to magnify and strengthen their demands for reactionary domestic policy changes back home. The recent Vryheidsfront-led delegation is a good example of this. It returned from a meeting with White House Officials with a list of requirements to “reset” relations between South Africa and the US. These are: 1. Declare killings of white farmers a priority crime to be investigated by the Hawks. 2. The ANC to publicly denounce the song, “kill the boer”. 3. Repeal the Expropriation Act and ensure all expropriation and land reform is at full market value. 4. Exempt all US companies operating in South Africa from BEE.

Examining all these factors together, it seems to us that retaining our existing level of market access into the US (let alone increasing it) is unobtainable. None of the “deals” that have emerged after the reciprocal tariffs were announced – even with the US’s closest allies – have involved anything like that. At best, favoured partners have received some tariff quota concession on specific products leaving them still in a position less favourable than the status quo ante. In return they have made significant concessions to the US not just on tariffs, but on other policy issues or commitments to procure US products. For example, the “deal” with the UK gives Britain a reduction of the tariff on autos from 25 to 10% for a quota of 100 000 vehicles compared to the pre-existing duty of 2,5% without any quota. A further tariff quota on steel and aluminium is still to be negotiated and in return the UK agrees to provide an increased quota for US beef as well as facilitate the purchase by British airlines of Boeing Aircraft.

Even abstracting from the politically motivated sanctions dimension, indications are that any “deal” would require us to pay significantly on economic policy issues, including permanently renouncing any duties on digital transactions and/or refraining from asserting any claim to digital sovereignty. In return we could expect at best a somewhat less punitive application of “reciprocal tariffs” and a tariff/quota on Section 232 tariffs that would, nevertheless, still leave us with a level of access to the US market less favourable than that which has obtained up to now, or even than if we had been excluded from African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa) and subject to the pre-existing Most Favoured Nation (MFN) tariffs. For example, the UK case suggests we would be lucky to get a tariff quota of 10% on autos vs duty free under Agoa and 2,5% on the MFN tariff. (What tariff levels would completely cut out auto, wine, citrus, etc, exports urgently needs to be established, as a benchmark above which it is not worth making any concessions at all.)

But we are not dealing only with economic issues, as indicated above. Making concessions on domestic policy and political issues seem to be integral to the Trump administration's negotiating agenda. Conceding on several of these would, in our view, impact significantly on our ability as a movement to advance the NDR. Our understanding of the NDR is that it was a concept developed within an anti-imperialist framework, whose advance therefore depends on our ability to maintain an anti-imperialist policy stance. Stepping back from our solidarity with the Palestinian people facing genocide would amount to a strategic defeat and abandonment of fundamental principles at precisely a moment when the perpetrators of the genocide are at their most isolated and the need for solidarity with the Palestinian people is greater than ever.

While we could perhaps renounce the "kill the boer" song or raise the priority of farm violence (against farm workers as well) that in isolation would probably not be enough. The demand that any expropriation or land reform must take place at full market price, would amount to a retreat from the hard-won (but not implemented) provisions in the Constitution, and for that reason would require an unavailable 2/3 majority. Exempting US companies from BBEE obligations (several of which are equity equivalent) would soon be followed by similar demands from other foreign investors. While we are critical of BEE deals that have merely enriched a few at the expense of broader transformation, abandoning BBEE to appease an administration that has a little more than three more years in office would entrench existing ownership patterns and be a bridge too far.

This suggests to us that we should consider an approach that seeks to buy time and limit damage, while working energetically to reposition our trade and investment relations first to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and then Brics while also seeking out whatever other mutually beneficial opportunities may exist elsewhere. This would imply us insisting that we want to continue negotiating a new trade and investment framework with the US and not acceding to threats or caving in to deadlines. At the same time, we should be actively diversifying away from a market that even in the best-case scenario will be less accessible than it has been.

On this point, while we could hope that a future US administration might be less hostile on direct political and domestic policy issues, we should not imagine that it would be likely to restore market access to the levels that existed up to now let alone abide by the WTO rules it itself was at the forefront of crafting during the heyday of hyperglobalisation and neoliberalism. There are good reasons to doubt that Trump's agenda will succeed in reversing the long-term decline of the US as a global power. The Trump tariffs are being levied without

any coherent industrial policy and in a broad-brush manner that takes little account of the dependence of US companies on Global Value Chains. As such they look set to raise costs both to businesses and consumers in the US more than they propel reindustrialisation – at least on a scale that re-establishes US dominance over China in critical digital and low carbon industries. Nor does this agenda address financialisation which is in fact a major impediment to industrial development in the US. Moreover, retaining the role of the US Dollar as a global reserve currency, seems to be an imperative for the entire US ruling class. Dollarisation of world trade lies at the heart of the wealth and power of US finance capital (Wall Street), but the inflows of foreign capital it promotes also sustains an overvaluation of the US\$ that tends to make US manufactures uncompetitive.

Besides, the Biden administration decidedly did not reverse the unilateral departures from established trade rules introduced by the first Trump administration. It also refrained from acting to restore the enforcement capability of the WTO hobbled by the decisions of the first Trump administration to veto appointments to the WTO Appellate Body. Instead, the Biden administration added to Trump's "national security" justified actions against Chinese companies and introduced its own further measures that contravened WTO rules.

For all these reasons, it is unlikely that Trump will be able to reverse the reality of a long-term decline in the power and influence of the erstwhile global hegemon and the rise of China as an increasingly powerful force and contender for global power. This in turn makes it unlikely that any future US administration will restore the level of market access into the US to that which prevailed before the second Trump administration.

A vulnerable domestic environment

As indicated above, the Trump administration's increasing hostility to aspects of policy in South Africa, has been seized on both by the white nationalist and neoliberal right as a weapon to enhance their influence in the domestic political scene. This, of course, seeks to build on the increased power and influence such forces had already acquired by their inclusion in the governing coalition established after the 2024 election.

Our own view as the SACP, often stated, is that our ability as a movement to advance the NDR and resist threats to it is being constrained by a combination of corruption and neoliberalism. The SACP, like most South Africans, is gravely concerned at the allegations made by the KwaZulu-Natal Police Commissioner, Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi. Whatever the merits or otherwise

of specific allegations they point to a divided and dysfunctional police service and the possibility that state capture is a phenomenon far more pervasive and pernicious than imagined after the release of the Zondo report.

If we are now confronting a reality of competing networks embracing organised crime, elements of the security apparatus and political office bearers capturing parts of the state with a view to looting them, we are facing a threat to the NDR that is indeed dire. Such an environment would provide fertile ground for covert intervention into our political system by US imperialism and even possibly Mossad. As indicated earlier, the current environment is already seeing closer ties being forged between a more aggressive US administration and the domestic South African white nationalist and neoliberal right. It is not hard to imagine funds beginning to flow, or even “black ops” seeking regime change.

Neoliberalism is most evident at present in policies of fiscal austerity and liberalisation leading to privatisation by stealth of network industries (called “structural reform”). The fact that “fiscal consolidation” was the cloak under which austerity operated for several years, though denied at the time, has now been acknowledged even by National Treasury.

Our critique of fiscal austerity is that it prioritises the attainment of pre-ordained ratios (derived from the neoliberal playbook) over all other considerations and seeks to attain these through expenditure cuts. We have indicated repeatedly that we are not arguing for spendthrift policies, nor calling for tolerance of the vast amount of wasteful expenditure that occurs. Our problem, we have argued, is that we act as though we have no confidence in our ability to actually deliver growth – and hence reduce the still not crisis level debt to GDP ratio by increasing GDP. Instead, we resort to austerity driven expenditure cuts that have been imposed in ways that are leaving too many priority programmes significantly underfunded. These also are being imposed at a time of economic stagnation thus having a debilitating effect on a languishing economy. We have argued indeed that austerity creates a vicious cycle – cuts imposed to achieve pre-defined fiscal ratios have a contractionary effect on an already constrained economy; this leads to less revenue collection, resulting in turn in yet further cuts.

We acknowledge that the latest budget recognises (partially and inadequately in our view) that persistent and growing underfunding of virtually all programmes is unsustainable and that the budget thus seeks to add resources to health and education programmes. But it does this, within the self-inflicted constraints of fiscal anchors. It is this that led to the ill-judged fiasco around the proposed VAT hike, during which the ANC was portrayed as anti-poor by its DA coalition partner – several of whose members publicly proclaimed

that their alternative was to follow the example of Argentina's Javier Milei and take a chainsaw to government programmes.

On the notions of "structural reform" of network industries, we have located our critique in the experience of other jurisdictions. Neoliberal doctrine has, in fact, passed through several iterations. One of these is the transition from what has been called the Washington Consensus to the more recent Wall Street Consensus. The former, whose title was meant to convey that it was the consensus of the Washington-based multi-lateral institutions, the IMF and World Bank, as well as the hegemonic US focussed on the achievement of macro-economic balances held to be applicable to all countries and under all circumstances. These included a budget deficit not more than 3% of GDP and moving towards zero, an inflation rate in single digits and falling as the exclusive target of monetary policy pursued with a single instrument, interest rate adjustments.

This pursuit of macroeconomic balance was to be complemented with a market-determined exchange rate, states withdrawing from the direct provision of a range of public services in favour of procuring these from the "private sector", and deregulation particularly of financial sectors, among others. In a much-read "popular" presentation of the core ideas, US journalist Thomas Friedman described the key prescripts as a "golden straightjacket", sometimes uncomfortable, pretty much one size fits all, but inescapable in the era of unipolarity and globalisation. The adjective "golden" suggested that once donned the "straightjacket" would lead to a country being looked at favourably by the "electronic herds" of transnational fund managers, who would then respond by channelling foreign investment into the economies of compliant states. Such ideas clearly informed the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) programme. The SACP argued that the adoption of Gear was premised on a highly dubious assumption that foreign investors would "like" its proposed neoliberal macro-economic reforms and respond by channelling in foreign investment. This, of course, manifestly failed in its quest to attract the FDI on the scale required to propel 6% GDP growth and the creation of 400,000 jobs per year.

The more recent Wall Street consensus argues that governments, while maintaining the neoliberal version of macro-economic "stability", need also to go further and actively work to create conditions that will encourage profit seeking, mainly financial sector, investors to fund projects in liberalised "network" sectors, among others. Part of the message of the Wall Street Consensus is thus to offer a supposed carrot. Austerity-strapped governments facing underfunded infrastructure programmes can supposedly, if they act appropriately, access resources under the control of domestic and international

fund managers (supposedly allowing billions to become trillions).

Various tools have been identified including creating conditions to allow profit-seeking private sector operators in network industries to access such resources and “blended finance” arrangements in which governments build partnerships enabling them to add to the resources they could mobilise in other ways. Progressive economists have argued that acting to attract into infrastructure or other public programmes investible funds seeking a rate of return no less than could be obtained through financialised speculation requires governments to provide costly subsidies and extensive guarantees (not just against possible losses but also to ensure that private-sector investors receive a “market rate” of return). In addition to outright subsidies, tax holidays, or the provision of government-guaranteed cheap loans, this guarantee of profitability inevitably also involves allowing profit seeking operators of network industries to restructure pricing models that in practice pivot towards serving higher income customers and/or under-serve lower income clients.

Our own experience over the past five years where we have seen little of the promised “massive” infrastructure build through “blended finance” seems to confirm the experience of other jurisdictions that this is indeed a high cost, low yield option. This appears to be confirmed by figures from Eskom’s 2024 Report. These indicate that IPPs produced 9% of Eskom’s electricity output, but cost the entity 27% of its energy budget. This is not fundamentally because the product supplied was renewable energy, but because it was supplied through contracts that guaranteed high rates of return to profit seeking entities. Moreover, the experience of countries that have undertaken the extensive privatisation implied by this model (though now more usually in the form of concessions, joint ventures and PPPs rather than outright sale) suggests that this has led to higher costs for consumers often combined with poorer services and marginalisation or exclusion of lower income people.

Claims that the higher rates of more inclusive economic growth delivered by the current policy mix are “just around the corner” are by now widely perceived as ringing hollow in the face of increasing evidence that the crisis of reproduction affecting working people and the poor is, in fact, deepening. Unemployment figures from Stats SA’s surveys tell us that unemployment is higher now than it was at the time of the crisis before the crisis of Covid – 32,9% vs 29,1% on the narrow definition or 43,1% vs 38,7% on the more realistic expanded definition. In the the first quarter of 2025, Stats SA also reported an increase in unemployment compared to the previous quarter (Q4 2024) – an increase from 31,9% to 32,9% on the strict definition, and from 41,9% to 43,1% on the expanded definition. The percentage of young people

aged 15 to 34 not in employment, education or training also increased from 43,8% to 45,1%. Such increases occurred at a time of significantly reduced load shedding, meaning that one explanation hitherto widely cited could no longer be valid.

Statistics for poverty – where half the total population and more than half of the female population subsist on an income less than the upper bound poverty line-or inequality – where we continue to be measured as having one of the highest levels in the world measured by the Gini coefficient – likewise show little sign of any real improvement.

In this regard, we express our concern at attempts to meddle with statistical methodology in an ill-disguised attempt to conceal the plight of the poor with voodoo economics. We are often told that we need evidence-based decision-making. This we have been led to believe should mean that if the evidence tells us that a particular policy or programme is not achieving its stated objective, that policy or programme should be subject to an honest review that could lead to it undergoing substantial change or even cancellation. Now, however, we are witnessing the emergence of an alternative narrative – if the evidence doesn't support the paradigm, the evidence must be changed.

The first shot in this salvo came from the Capitec CEO, Gerrie Fourie, who suggested that the actual unemployment rate in South Africa was closer to 10% than the 32,9% “strict definition” level recorded by Stats SA. The basis of Fourie's argument was that the official figures did not adequately account for the informal sector where many South Africans were involved in entrepreneurial activity. What the CEO of a bank, which has made its founders super rich by formalising mashonisa lending, wants us to accept is that a person without a job who sells a few vegetables on a street corner is not an unemployed person struggling to survive, but a township entrepreneur.

While we might dismiss Fourie's absurd suggestion that the real rate of unemployment is less than a third that recorded by Stats SA, it is a matter of concern that the underlying argument that official figures are delivering a number that is “too high” was echoed by the Minister of Employment and Labour. In a piece published in News 24, she argued that Fourie “had touched a nerve, one we can no longer afford to ignore”. She agreed with Fourie that Stats SA data underestimated the impact of the informal sector by focussing dogmatically on the formal sector. She indicated her Department would express its concerns to Treasury and Stats SA and seemed to suggest that an immediate target would be the “discouraged worker” category that is integral to the expanded definition.

As the SACP, we full heartedly oppose any such exercise in massaging statistics to deliver “more palatable” results. The statistics may not be perfect, but they have been generated following an International Labour Organisation (ILO) methodology that is used in many countries and is subject to peer review. The headline figure published in its quarterly surveys focuses on the so-called strict or narrow definition. This records, through statistical sampling, the percentage of the so-called economically active population aged between 15 and 64, who are not in work and who have actively looked for employment in past month. This definition excludes discouraged work seekers who have given up on actively seeking employment, so a more realistic, expanded definition that includes these is also published. This typically adds around 10% to the number recorded in the strict definition, and it is this figure that the labour movement and SACP regard as the more accurate indicator of the extent of the unemployment crisis in the country. While Stats SA’s methodology is not necessarily without flaws, it is based on widely accepted statistical practice that has been generally accepted in South Africa for many years as providing a reasonable approximation to the reality on the ground.

Rather, than trying to sweeten the pill, the defence of the NDR demands honest reflection on why we have got here and what are the alternative ways forward. We need to remind ourselves that it is not just in the US that discontent with the reality created by neoliberalism has delivered “morbid symptoms” in the political arena. The 2024 election recorded the lowest voter turnout in any democratic election – surely a symptom of discontent with established politics. It also saw the rise of parties drawing support through at this stage covert ethnic mobilisation – MK, PA and the VF-- with the DA also being a party defending white privilege as well as the claims of monopoly capital.

Also like the US, we note that the South African economy had undergone significant financialisation coexisting with premature de-industrialisation. This is only partly reflected in the fact that the “contribution” of financial services to GDP rose from 6% in 1994 to over 20% today. Financialisation involves the reversal of the role of finance capital – from a provider of resources and services to benefit capital in the productive sector to a predator on productive sector capital that ends channelling increasing quantum of value and surplus value into financial trading yielding large profits to fund managers. Financialisation is thus associated with a growing requirement on both consumers and non-financial companies to engage in financial transactions (medical aids, defined contribution pension funds being examples of the former, and the prioritisation of share price value, coupled with rewarding managers and directors with tradable share options and practices like share buy backs examples of the latter). Academic research has demonstrated the ways in which the activities of companies like SASOL and

Shoprite have become increasingly financialised.

The burgeoning development and trading of an ever-expanding range of “new” financial products (securities and derivatives among them), has led to a new reality where the “top companies” in South Africa today are no longer mining houses (let alone industrial companies) but banks and fund managers to whom a large and increasing part of the surplus value created in the economy is “transferred”. According to one estimate banks and funds of one sort or another control assets with a value equivalent to three times the GDP. It is not that these funds are not being invested in some kind of investment strike. They definitely are being invested (if they were not, they would cease being capital). The issue is that it is the smallest and declining part that is invested in productive sector activity in South Africa, with the lion’s share is devoted to asset trading of one sort or another, including a large part abroad. Financialisation also underpins the financial bourgeoisie’s emergence as the dominant and hegemonic force within “business” and the influence it exerts in maintaining a paradigm of neoliberalism that is so evidently failing the working class and the poor.

Alternatives proposed by SACP and heterodox economists

Instead of neoliberal “structural reform”, the SACP has repeatedly called for “structural transformation”. A central element of this is overcoming the structural location which colonialism and imperialism assigned to Africa in the global “division of labour” as a producer and exporter of raw materials used in value-added production in the capitalist core. This reality, which imperialism seeks to continue to reproduce to this day, effectively confines countries of the “Global South” to the least lucrative position in global value chains, with the value of the raw material as a percentage of the final price of value-added products in fact diminishing as technology advances.

Dating back to Kwame Nkrumah who described the global regime that underpinned this as “neo-colonialism, the highest stage of imperialism”, progressive forces in the Global South have identified transitioning from primary commodity to higher value-added production through industrialisation as a central component of development strategy. The experience of those few countries of the Global South (East Asia and China) that have successfully navigated this transition is that it needs to be driven by a developmental state. The essence of a developmental state is that economic development in general and industrialisation in particular is its top priority, infusing the actions of all parts of government. A developmental state subordinates other aspects of economic policy, including trade and macro-economic policy, to the needs and requirements of industrial policy. It disciplines its financial sector and ensures

that it provides resources to support industrial development. It “governs the market”, leads a planning process and is willing to “get prices wrong” where this benefits industrial development. It maintains and builds a tool-box of instruments to intervene, guide and lead the process. These include SOEs which need to respond to a developmental mandate.

While we have welcomed various efforts by our government to promote industrial policy since around 2007, we argued that these were not operating at scale, had not become the key driver of overall economic policy, and, in particular, were not influencing and shaping macro-economic policy decisions. Industrial policy has also been inadequately resourced and not exempted from austerity driven budget cuts. These observations underpinned our repeated call for a higher impact, properly resourced industrial policy at the centre of a strategy of structural transformation. We also agreed with those progressive economists who argued that micro-economic policies cannot compensate for problems in macro-economic policy. From that we critiqued notions either that industrial policy should be subordinate to macro-economic policy, or that macro-economic policy should be insulated as a “stand alone” prioritising “stability” as defined in the neoliberal play book. Rather, we argued, macro-economic policy (along with many other complementary policies) needed to be shaped and reshaped according to the overriding priority of promoting industrial development.

In the current conjuncture a decisive pivot in this direction is an urgent priority. It is made even more imperative as we face the challenge of adjusting to the global transition to a lower carbon economy. We are concerned that the current approach appears to be rooted in seeking loans denominated in foreign currency from governments in the Global North and institutions like the World Bank to support “private sector” involvement in production of renewable energy and the construction of transmission lines to inject this into the grid – with a small component to assist workers and communities in carbon intensive sector to relocate and adjust. The recent announcement that the World Bank has approved a US\$ 1,5 bn (R 26,5 bn) “Development Policy” loan follows two others (in 2022 and 2023) bringing the total amount borrowed from the World Bank for these purposes to US\$ 3,25 bn (R 57,7 bn). These loans (which have to be repaid in foreign currency and are subject to policy conditionalities) are being taken even as NT continues to insist that the top priority of fiscal policy is to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio.

Our view as the SACP is that unless the low-carbon transition becomes a platform on which to advance industrialisation, it will be highly unjust. Africa and South Africa have deposits of critical minerals needed in the production of low-carbon products and technologies. This is fuelling what some have called

a new scramble for Africa – a scramble for access to these raw materials. Access to critical minerals through contracts and policy commitments is an important element of many of the “deals” Trump has been seeking on the back of his “reciprocal tariffs”. The idea that Africa needs to use its endowment of critical minerals to decisively break out of its colonially defined role as producer and exporter of raw materials by adding value to minerals before export is now widely proclaimed as an ambition by many leaders and analysts. The question is how this is to be achieved.

The weakening of the unbalanced WTO rules through the unilateral actions of the US and other blocs in the Global North has been identified as inadvertently opening up additional policy space, which some developing countries have already seized to good advantage. Indonesia, for example, successfully warded off a challenge brought by the EU against regulations requiring specified levels of local beneficiation of nickel before export by filing an appeal to the WTO’s Appellate Body, disabled by the US wary about possible challengers to tariffs and restrictions justified as matters of national security. According to published reports, Indonesia’s restricting of exports of unprocessed nickel led to investments of US\$ 14 bn in nickel smelting, double digit growth in nickel processing provinces and a 30-fold increase in earnings from exports of nickel value chain products. Indonesia’s is an example that needs careful study and emulation.

In addition, the Biden Administration’s provision of a tax credit for purchasers of electric vehicles with batteries manufactured in the US – later extended to batteries manufactured in other countries with whom the US had a Free Trade Agreement – was manifestly in breach of WTO rules. But it has also created a precedent for ambitious local content regulations that could be extended (at least as a second choice to other members of the AfCFTA). The EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Measure (CBAM) has likewise created a new precedent for the addition of climate justified levies on top of tariffs, that could be extended to a levy on imports from the EU to raise funds to support climate change adaptation measures in Africa.

It is imperative, in our view, that we build all of these opportunities into programmes and strategies to reindustrialise at home and also work to build Regional Value Chains in the AfCFTA. As a bloc AfCFTA countries have a combined GDP equivalent to that of the 8th largest economy in the world. This potentially offers a scale that could support deeper and more inclusive industrialisation than that achievable in any one country.

We also need to recognise that the most immediate challenge we face from climate change is what is termed adaptation – that is adapting to the inevitable proliferation of extreme weather events witnessed each year. The most

dramatic extreme weather events in South Africa to date have been floods in various locations, but climate science tells us that we will also face increased water scarcity, desertification and rising sea levels. To say we are ill-prepared is an understatement. We were appalled to learn that communities displaced from their homes by floods in KZN a few years ago were again inundated by floods in the areas to which they were relocated.

We need an ambitious and properly resourced adaptation programme that includes proactively “climate proofing” both communities and infrastructure. If we do not do this proactively, we will face emergency after emergency, where we will have to act after lives have been lost and damage done. Every municipality, we believe, should examine what climate science identifies as the risks in its area and, from this, develop an adaptation action plan. Much of this is susceptible to being carried out by public employment programmes. Such initiatives cannot be underfunded, including through a climate-justified levy on imports particularly from countries doing the same through CBAM.

The enlarged Brics grouping is exploring an increasingly ambitious agenda with the potential to prefigure an alternative global order. South Africa is a founding member of a grouping around which an increasing number of significant countries are grouping. BRICS has the potential to develop systemic alternatives to US-dominated arrangements. For example, having begun with a programme to promote trade among members without resort to third country currencies, it is now building institutions and systems to eventually become systemic alternatives to the US-dominated ones currently in existence. Our view is that South Africa needs to be actively spearheading these potentially paradigm-shifting processes.

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

**This article was prepared for discussion within the Alliance Political Council.*

Cde Rob Davies is a SACP Central Committee and Politburo member, former Minister of Trade and industry and an author.

Admit nothing, learn nothing – Mbekism in 2025

Jeremy Cronin writes that the recent intervention 'On the Reconfiguration of the South African Tripartite Alliance...' is a grossly inaccurate, anti-SACP polemic that is blind to the causes of South Africa's current challenges

In August, a 58-page intervention made its appearance within ANC circles. It has a long title: "On the reconfiguration of the South African Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, the SACP and COSATU (and SANCO) – at the crossroads in the history of our revolution." The nominal authors are Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Mdumiseni Ntuli and Lennox Klaas. I say "nominal" because in style, content and its obsession with rescuing a particular legacy, it has all the hallmarks of a Thabo Mbeki intervention.

Anyone familiar with the past three decades will know that Cde Mbeki has a track record (even when he was ANC president) of producing organisationally unmandated and lengthy polemical interventions – but behind the screen of nominal authors. Regardless of its actual authorship, the current document is certainly notable for its frequent, reverential, paragraph-long quotes from diverse Mbeki articles and speeches. Given the length of its title and its uncertain authorship, for convenience, let's simply refer to the document as "Crossroads".

Crossroads is an intervention into a specific context with which, sadly, we are all too familiar. Three decades after the ANC's historic April 1994 landslide electoral victory, opening the way to a post-apartheid South Africa, the organisation's electoral performance has been in dramatic decline. Current polls suggest an even further steep decline in the upcoming local government elections. The immediate contributing factor to this ANC electoral decline is growing electoral scepticism, coupled with volatile electoral breakaways into ethnic demagogic mobilisation. Large swathes of lower middle strata, the working class and marginalised youth see little purpose in voting. At the root of this groundswell of disaffection and anger are, of course, the crisis levels of unemployment, deepening inequality, and chronically insecure personal and community safety.

Within the broad ANC, there is a consensus that the ANC needs to "renew itself". In fact, in one form or another, this has been a theme of successive ANC national conferences for over 15 years. But little progress, if any, appears to

have been made in this direction. The hopes that the ousting of Zuma as ANC president would produce a significant turnaround have not, as yet, borne much fruit, and the negative trends in electoral prospects and in the social conditions of the majority continue.

Give or take some nuance, there is probably agreement across the ANC and its Alliance partners on these general features of our current situation. But why have we ended up here? And what, therefore, needs to be done? It is here that sharp differences emerge, and this is, critically, what lies at the heart of Crossroads' sustained polemical attack on the SACP.

The Crossroads intervention should be understood as part of a wider play by the Mbeki circle. With the ANC's December National Policy Conference on the immediate horizon, there is a clear attempt to use, amongst other things, the Thabo Mbeki Foundation to blindside Ramaphosa's leadership in government and marginalise his ANC presidency. I will not dwell on this wider agenda. The focus here will be on the Crossroads intervention, directed as it is against the SACP.

What has occasioned Crossroads is the Party's call for a reconfiguration of the Alliance and the related decision to independently contest elections. As the SACP we should welcome critical debate within and across our Alliance around the implications of our electoral decision. We should not be in denial that there are many unknowns and risks involved. Interestingly, Crossroads does not object to the SACP's decision as such. Indeed, it even seems to encourage it, asserting that the Party should have broken electorally with the ANC already back in 1994 – something the bourgeois media was avidly advocating at the time. For Crossroads, the sore point is not that the Party is independently contesting elections, but the Party's strategic electoral posture as a co-defender of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR).

Crossroads takes us back once more to a debate about what we mean by the NDR. This goes to the heart of long-standing differences between the SACP and the Mbeki circle, with both sides invoking the NDR but meaning substantially different things. It would be pointless to engage once more with these matters if it were simply a matter of rehashing our views, of point-scoring for its own sake. However, it is critical to revisit these matters from the perspective of the poly-crisis within which we find ourselves in 2025. A critical reading of the Crossroads intervention will help us understand better how we got here, and, therefore, what needs to be done.

As the SACP, we have a particular collective responsibility to engage once more with this debate because the approach of the Crossroads intervention is to invoke at length the "authority of Marxism-Leninism" and particularly the

Communist International's 1928 resolution on South Africa to argue that the Party of the present does not understand its own tradition. So, let's take a brief dive into history.

The 1928 Comintern thesis on the South African question

Following the 1928 6th Communist International Conference, the executive committee of the Comintern adopted a critical resolution entitled "The South African Question". In January 1929, the CPSA (as the SACP was then named) at its annual congress adopted the thesis (as it was bound to do by Comintern protocol). The 1928/9 resolution marked a major strategic shift for the Party, outlining a national democratic revolutionary perspective for the struggle in South Africa as the most effective route to socialism.

Crossroads' entry-point into its current polemic against the SACP is based on two quotations in a recent SACP document, *Towards a reconfigured Alliance*, that referred to this 1928/9 resolution. At one point, the recent Party document correctly describes the Comintern thesis as "by and large", having established, from a Party perspective, "the theoretical foundation of our Alliance." At another point, the Party document says the resolution "formally established the Alliance" as if the ANC/SACP alliance was constituted all the way back in the late 1920s. This latter claim is inaccurate, and Crossroads is correct to be critical, although it makes a huge meal of this misstep, accusing the Party of "dishonest behaviour". But let's not get distracted by irritation.

The 1928 Comintern resolution was essentially a criticism of the recently established CPSA's strategic orientation and organisational practice. While saluting the Party's pioneering work in trying to build non-racial unity between white and black workers since its 1921 launch, the Comintern noted:

"Unfortunately, the CPSA did not give evidence of sufficient understanding of the revolutionary importance of the mass movements of the native workers and peasants. The CPSA carried on a correct struggle for unity of the native and white workers in the trade union movement. But at the same time the CPSA found itself in stubborn opposition to the correct slogan proposed by the Comintern calling for an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full, equal rights for all races."

Based on this strategic perspective, the Comintern resolution continued:

"The Party should pay particular attention to the embryonic national organisations amongst the natives, such as the African National Congress. The Party, whilst retaining its full independence, should participate in

these organisations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity. Our aim should be to transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, based upon the trade unions, peasant organisations, etc., developing systematically the leadership of the workers and the Communist Party in this organisation. The Party should seek to weaken the influence of the native chiefs corrupted by the white bourgeoisie over the existing native tribal organisations by developing peasants' organisations and spreading amongst them the influence of the Communist Party. The development of a national-revolutionary movement of the toilers of South Africa against the white bourgeoisie and British imperialism, constitutes one of the major tasks of the Communist Party of South Africa."

I hope readers will forgive these longish quotations. The very same passages are quoted (and misread) in the Crossroads intervention, and these misreadings form the basis of its key arguments. It is, therefore, important to have these Comintern passages in plain sight as we proceed.

While these and other passages from the Comintern resolution were and remain of great strategic value, we shouldn't, of course, treat them as timeless Holy Writ. Nearly a century later, things have obviously changed globally and within our country. US-led imperialism rather than British imperialism is manifestly the principal global threat to consolidating sovereign democratic, or, which is essentially the same thing, national democratic transformation. An independent African peasantry in our country, decimated by capitalist expropriation (as the Comintern predicted would happen), whilst not insignificant, is no longer a major revolutionary motive force, at least within South Africa. The capitalist class in South Africa remains disproportionately white (and male), but is it still useful or accurate to speak of a "white bourgeoisie"?

Bearing all of this in mind, the essential strategic thrust of the Comintern resolution nonetheless remains valid. Clearly, the Crossroads intervention also thinks so - it relies heavily on its own (distorted as we will soon see) reading of it.

The role of the Party

"Let us draw attention", Crossroads tells us: "to the fact that in its 1928 resolution the Comintern correctly identified the ANC as a national liberation movement...". Well, not quite. As we have just seen, the resolution identified the ANC as one of the (that is, not necessarily the only) "embryonic national organisations amongst the natives" that had potential. This would turn out to

be particularly far-sighted in subsequent decades.

But, as the resolution makes abundantly clear, in its view this embryonic potential would only be realised if the CPSA actively campaigned to “transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation”. This, in turn, would require that the Party develop “systematically the leadership of the workers AND [note well] the Communist Party in this organisation.” And all of this would, in turn, require that the Party conduct a class struggle inside of the ANC “to weaken”, for instance, “the influence of the native chiefs corrupted by the white bourgeoisie...”

As the actual alliance between the SACP and ANC matured and deepened through the 1960s, 70s and into the 80s, for instance, some of this leadership role of the Party inside the ANC envisaged by the 1928 Comintern resolution was tempered, quite correctly in the circumstances. The Party certainly still sought to play a leading role in influencing the ANC and was proud of, if cautious about announcing, the actual numbers of communists in leading ANC and MK positions. In fact, through these decades, until at least the mid-1980s, the SACP kept an exceedingly low public profile.

Party members were instructed not to behave in an entryist manner within the ANC, not to conduct themselves as a factionalist force arriving, for instance, with pre-determined Party positions into ANC structures. From my own personal experience, this line of conduct was generally observed in practice, although there is some debate about whether it was always the case. The Crossroads document is correct to remind us of these practices that served both the ANC and SACP well in the challenging period of the 1960s and 70s.

But the point here is that you will not find justification for the claim that the 1928 Comintern resolution canonised the ANC as leader and chief proprietor of the NDR in South Africa as Crossroads now baldly asserts: “The ANC is the principal political formation in the NDR and its leader”. Guaranteed? And forever? But the mis-reading of the 1928 resolution goes much further. Returning to the Crossroads argument that we began to consider above, this is how it proceeds:

“[L]et us draw attention to the fact that in its 1928 resolution the Comintern correctly identified the ANC as a national liberation movement, its strategic task therefore being the emancipation of the oppressed from national oppression and to the *contrary* [my emphasis], the strategic task of the SACP, like all Communist Parties, is class emancipation – the emancipation of the working class from domination and exploitation by the capitalist class: hence its task of organising for the victory of the socialist revolution.” (p8).

This is a complete distortion of the central theme of the 1928 resolution. The

Comintern's criticism of the CPSA is precisely that it was too narrowly focused on socialism and working-class organisation, and that it was neglecting the revolutionary potential of the "mass movements of the native workers and peasants". The 1928 resolution is explicitly not instructing the CPSA to stick narrowly to its own socialist lane, leaving the question of national liberation to others. It is calling on the Party to play a leading and not just ancillary role in the national liberation struggle.

Crossroad's entirely mechanical separation of class struggle and national democratic struggle is asserted even more baldly later: "Marxism-Leninism and therefore the international Communist movement have always insisted that the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions are two separate processes of socio-political transformation, each with *its own strategic objectives and motive forces*" (my emphases) (p.21).

Nothing could be further from the truth. While in the Marxist-Leninist tradition, the national democratic and socialist struggles are not conceptualised as synonymous realities, they are understood to be deeply and inextricably interlinked. Moreover, rather than having separate motive forces, in the classical Marxist understanding, the very success of a national democratic revolution depends upon working-class leadership.

Intriguingly, at one point, Crossroads even forgets its own argument about the national democratic and socialist struggles having separate motive forces. In passing, it quotes from Mbeki's address to the ANC's July 2007 National Policy Conference. Mbeki told the NPC: "The objective reality in our country is that the National Democratic Revolution cannot succeed if it does not contain amongst its motive forces our country's socialist, trade union and civic movements." (p.29). But perhaps this momentary wobble had everything to do with context. The July 2007 NPC was convened in the run-up to the December Polokwane National ANC Conference and Mbeki was seeking to woo over the SACP and Cosatu in the looming ANC leadership battle.

Despite its extensive historical quotations, Crossroads is symptomatically silent, for instance, about other landmark Party documents, like the SACP's ground-breaking 1962 programme, "The Road to South African Freedom". In this programme the Party recovered and renewed the 1928/9 strategic perspective, developing, amongst other things, what was implicit in 1928/9, the concept of South Africa as a colonialism of a special type. So, what does the 1962 programme have to say about the Party's role within the national democratic struggle? "[The] central and immediate task of the Communist Party", it asserts, "is to lead the fight for the national liberation of the non-White people, and for the victory of the democratic revolution." So much for sticking to its own lane.

The question of stages

The 1928 Comintern resolution uses the term “stage”. It advocated for “an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers’ and peasants’ republic, with equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.” This has given rise to much criticism from sections of the non-Party left. We have been accused of being committed to a “two-stage” theory, to “bourgeois democracy”, to delaying the socialist struggle. Indeed, invoking the notion of stages can result in a very mechanical understanding of struggle, but this does not have to be the case.

Much depends upon how exactly we understand, not just in theory but also in practice, a national democratic “stage”? Could it be a staging post, a revolutionary bridgehead opening up the prospects for a contested transitional period, for an “uninterrupted struggle” for socialism?

This is exactly how the SACP’s 1962 programme understood matters. It asserted, for instance, that “in most parts of Africa, the needs of the people will best be met at the present time by the formation of states of national democracy, as a transitional stage to socialism”. In this transitional “stage”, the 1962 programme continued, Marxist-Leninist parties should “play an indispensable role in carrying the African Revolution forward uninterruptedly to its consummation: deep-reaching social revolution and the full emancipation of the African-peoples from bondage.” (my emphasis)

This is one, thoroughly dialectical way of understanding the national democratic “stage”, asserting, as Joe Slovo often repeated, “there is no Chinese Wall between the national democratic and socialist revolutions.”

But there is, of course, another mechanical, anti-dialectical reading of “stages” as if history were a procession of relatively self-contained periods. This is the version of national democracy that Mbekism has sought to propagate over the past three decades.

As we have just seen, Crossroads wants to separate the national democratic and socialist struggles as if they ran along two separate tracks each with its own motive forces. But Crossroads reinforces this undialectical tendency by wanting to quarantine these supposedly spatialised compartments also into distinct, sequenced time zones.

For instance, the Crossroads intervention insists that: “Historically, and not as a political/ideological proposition, the Democratic has preceded the Socialist Revolution.” (p21). That is simply not true. In the iconic socialist revolutions of the 20th century, this supposedly fixed time sequence, first “democracy”, then “socialism” is, arguably, only fleetingly present (Russia, Cuba), or not at

all relevant (China, Vietnam). In a very formulaic way, one might argue that the democratic “stage” in the Russian Revolution preceded the socialist stage, lasting some nine months from February to October 1917. Or, in the Cuban case, you might want to argue that a preceding democratic “stage” lasted two and bit years from January 1959 to the defeat of US proxies at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 with the ensuing announcement of a revolutionary socialist programme.

But even in these cases, lasting mere months or a couple of years, allocating the democratic and the socialist struggles to distinct time-bound and sequenced stages is thoroughly undialectical. Throughout its more than six decades of constructing and developing socialism, Cuba, for instance, has had to fight to advance and defend the most fundamental national democratic task – defending its national sovereignty against unceasing US attempts at destabilisation. The Cuban revolution has always been simultaneously proudly patriotic and consistently internationalist in the most exemplary way. Likewise, socialism is not (should not be) about abolishing or limiting democracy, but about vastly expanding substantive democracy beyond the shallow pool of liberal democracy in which the major competing parties are funded in billions of rands or dollars by an unrepresentative capitalist class.

None of this is to deny that different moments in revolutionary struggle will require different priorities, different phases, and the relationship between national/patriotic mobilisation and consolidation and socialist construction is not necessarily forever sequenced so that the former precedes the latter – see, for example, the Soviet response to the Nazi invasion of 1943 as a Great Patriotic War.

But this is not how Crossroads and three decades of Mbekism want us to understand the national democratic “stage”. For them, the national democratic stage is effectively understood as a stage that must be completed (whatever that means) in all its fullness before embarking upon a socialist transition.

How are we to understand the term “revolution” in the NDR?

When we speak of a national democratic revolution, or a socialist revolution, are we speaking about a process, perhaps of long and contested duration, and that might even be rolled back and defeated? Or are we speaking of an event with a calendar date (the October Revolution)? There is a tendency within Mbekism to play on the ambiguity of the term revolution, and to suggest implicitly that in South Africa the R in the NDR occurred in April 1994. Admittedly, this isn’t explicitly what Crossroads is asserting when it says: “The South African democratic republic was born (fully formed?) in 1994...”

(p17).

But if we go back to 1994, the understanding of the Mbeki circle regarding the April 1994 breakthrough emerges more clearly. The May 1994 cover of the ANC's official journal *Mayibuye* proclaimed "Free At Last!". This was in marked contrast to the May 1994 cover of the *African Communist*, which, whilst celebrating the major electoral victory, read "South Africa after the election. A LUTA CONTINUA!" The editorial inside the May 1994 *Mayibuye* made matters even clearer. It advised caution, calling on popular forces basically to stand down and await the passing of the first budget. Henceforward, revolutionary class struggle could be taken out of the picture. After April 1994, the tasks of the NDR could be left to technical managers, "A luta dis-continua", as one *African Communist* front cover proclaimed polemically.

Strategically, in this perspective, the NDR became a "stage" in which South Africa had to be transformed into a "normal" capitalist, liberal democracy. Governing this was a politics of representative inclusion. There were still national democratic tasks to be achieved, but these would not require the fundamental transformation of the South African political economy. The bourgeoisie, still overwhelmingly male and white, would not need to be rolled back or disciplined in the interests of development, but rather rendered more demographically representative.

The dire persisting racialised economic legacy within our country was described as an excluded "second economy" which simply needed one-off interventions to be lifted up into the "first economy" – as if re-capitalised minibuses would propel the taxi industry and its customers out of their Third World reality. Inclusion became the watchword, as if white minority rule had simply been about the exclusion of the black majority and not also their simultaneous but grossly unequal and enforced inclusion as cheap migrant labour, as expropriated dependents of white-owned retail networks, as the patriarchally oppressed reproducers of a reserve army of labour.

On the international front, in the Mbekist perspective, the ND "stage" was about South Africa integrating into the "family of nations", as if South Africa had not long been "included" within imperialist-dominated circuits of surplus extraction. South Africa would now lead an "African Renaissance", because it was "now Africa's turn" to be included on the world stage – as if Africa's plight was the product of "exclusion", rather than enforced "inclusion" into global surplus extraction – through the slave trade, colonial plantations, extractive mining, unequal trade and debt peonage.

Socialism is the future

Partly in response to this thoroughly revisionist, mechanically stageist understanding of the NDR, in 1995 the SACP officially adopted as one of its strategic slogans: “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!” At the time and repeatedly since, the SACP has explained that by “build it now” we mean not some immediate, entirely adventurist, socialist seizure of state power, hoisting red flags over the Union Buildings. What we do mean is that capacity for, momentum towards, and elements of socialism should be struggled for in the midst of the NDR. This socialist struggle is not against the NDR, but a struggle to ensure that the NDR itself is advanced, consolidated and defended.

Capacity for building socialism is centrally about consolidating working-class unity and organisational strength. Momentum towards socialism is about seeking to sequence struggles and popular advances in a way that is not simply reformist, but which builds structurally transformative advances. It also includes the struggle to advance and popularise socialist objectives and moral values of social solidarity against the avaricious values that have sometimes pervaded our own movement (“I didn’t struggle to be poor”, “To be rich is glorious”).

Elements of socialism that need to be advanced and defended include widening social security measures, building a co-operative movement, and effective and democratic, publicly-owned utilities. None of these abolishes capitalism as such, but they introduce potential countervailing tendencies, capacities and momentum. They have the potential, if rooted in popular and working-class mobilisation, to be more than just reforms, to build momentum that is structurally transformative.

Imperialism

Reacting to our strategic slogan, Crossroads scoffs derisively: “it is absolutely impossible to understand the demand by the SACP, which describes itself as a vanguard of the proletariat, ‘to build socialism’ within the very bosom of a capitalist system.” (p21)

But where else do you begin to build socialism? This declaration of impossibility reveals yet another, and probably the most problematic blindspot within the Mbekist worldview. The capitalist system is not simply the sum of dozens of separate national economies. Capitalism is a global system. We are all, in differing degrees, within its clutches. One of the lessons of the fall of the Soviet Union is that you cannot build and sustain a modern socialist system behind a wall (bearing in mind that the relative isolation of the Soviet Union was from

the start an imperialist, not Bolshevik, agenda).

But nor can you advance national democratic and socialist goals by simply integrating your economy into the capitalist market. China does not shut itself off from the global capitalist system (it is US imperialism that is trying, vainly, to sanction and shut it off). But nor does China, as it seeks to build socialism, simply pander to the Washington/Wall Street consensus. For instance, the Chinese state has a diametrically different approach to macroeconomic monetary policy. State banks allocate funding on the basis of planned strategic priorities. There is no “independent” Reserve Bank, acting on behalf of the private financial and speculative sector as in the US or South Africa.

Crossroads’ blind spot regarding imperialism in its hyper-globalised phase is no accident. For the better part of the 1990s, when Mbeki was the ANC’s leading intellect, the word “imperialism” barely made it into any of the ANC’s strategy and tactics documents. Returning in 2002 from a G8 Summit, Mbeki hailed its outcomes as the “birth of a more equitable system of international relations.” “In historical terms”, he said, “it signifies the end of the epoch of colonialism and neo-colonialism.” (Sunday Times, 30 June 2002).

Given this Mbekist imperialist denialism, it is deeply ironic that Crossroads relies so heavily on the 1928 Comintern resolution on South Africa. A key strategic priority of the 1928 Comintern 6th Congress was to build communist parties that could lead national liberation struggles in what we would now call the Global South against what was analysed as the principal strategic threat to the survival of the Soviet Union – British imperialism. Recall that the central demand of the Comintern resolution on South Africa was that the CPSA should advance the slogan of “an independent Native/African Republic” (my emphasis). Independence here refers to the necessity of an anti-imperialist struggle for national self-determination.

The second sentence of the Comintern resolution captures its key focus: “The development of capitalist relations of production has led to British imperialism carrying out the economic exploitation of the economy of the country with the participation of the white bourgeoisie of South Africa (British and Boer).”

As already noted, in 2025 it would be more appropriate to speak of US-led imperialism. But the essential features described back in 1928 remain in place. South Africa remains a semi-peripheral economy within the imperialist system. In fact, in many respects, our semi-peripheral status has worsened since 1994. Post-1994 and under the tutelage of the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) neoliberal turn, measures to discipline South African monopoly capital, defensively introduced by the apartheid regime, like tough exchange control measures and prescribed assets, have been abandoned. In

the name of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), what we have had, instead, is a massive outflow (both legal and illegal) of domestic capital, and paltry serious incoming direct investment in job-creating sectors.

The Mbekist evolutionist vision of a national democratic stage in which imperialism was wished away was always deeply misguided. It might have mistakenly seemed like the only option in town in the early 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the unipolar assertion of US imperialist hegemony. But in 2025, with the rise of China and the massive expansion of formations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Brics Plus group, contrasting with a declining, but still exceedingly dangerous, more openly aggressive US imperialism, and with the visible corrosion of Western liberal democracies mired in active complicity in genocide, this Mbekist perspective is surely more than ever blatantly inadequate. Yet it is, in essence, what still informs the Crossroads intervention.

Understanding South Africa's post-apartheid multi-dimensional crisis

In Crossroad's telling, South Africa was on an upward trajectory from 1994 to 2007 - "our democracy did quite well during the first 13/14 years up to 2007-2008 and then started on a downward path from 2008 onwards" (p45). Anyone familiar with recent history will recognise this compartmentalisation of our recent history into a period when Mbeki was ANC and state deputy president and then president, with 2007-2008 marking Mbeki's presidential demise. In this version of things, the election of Zuma as ANC president at the ANC's 2007 Polokwane conference, and the recall of Mbeki as state president in 2008 brought an end to the "upward trajectory", to be replaced by the so-called "nine wasted years" of the Zuma presidency (2009-2017), and the subsequent failure under Ramaphosa's presidency to reverse the slide.

It is true that there were important advances in the first dozen years after the 1994 democratic breakthrough. Most of these advances were the result of a common Alliance programme anchored in the Reconstruction and Development Programme, like the non-racial expansion of social security measures, and the mass roll-out of subsidised housing. From the very beginning, however, these RDP-related advances were always constrained and threatened by the Gear neoliberal macro-economic framework, which always trumped them.

The GDP upward trend in this period, and now acclaimed by Crossroads, was largely due to a global commodity super-cycle which lasted from the mid-1990s to around 2011. It was driven, in particular, by the massive

industrialisation process underway in China. But this GDP growth based on mineral exports and in the absence of effective industrial policy, simply locked South Africa's political economy into its semi-peripheral structural position. When the commodity super-cycle ended in 2011, the structural vulnerabilities of our economy were glaringly exposed.

On top of this, through the Mbeki presidential years Gear-inspired financial liberalisation enabled an avalanche of capital flight out of South Africa. In the last years of apartheid, between 1980 and 1993, capital flight as a percentage of GDP had been around 5,4 per cent. It rose to 9,2 per cent of GDP between 1994 and 2000, to 12 per cent between 2001 and 2007, and peaked at a staggering 20 per cent of GDP in 2007. This outward flow of capital, both legal and illegal, deepened South Africa's semi-peripheral vulnerability to external factors.

Superficially, it is of course convenient for Crossroads to select 2008, the year Mbeki was recalled by the ANC as president, as the turning point. But all the above factors are ignored, as is the fact that precisely 2008 was the beginning of the globalised Great Recession triggered in the heart of the US financial sector. If, after 1994, we had built greater sovereign economic resilience through effective re-industrialisation, through re-capitalising key public utilities like Eskom and Transnet, and through building capacity to discipline private capital, then the impact of the global capitalist recession upon us would have been considerably lessened.

For instance, Crossroads boasts that the total amount of electricity rose some 49 per cent between 1995 and 2007, but had then declined 18 per cent from this high point by 2022. What this conveniently conceals is that, despite expert warning, through the 1995 to 2007 period, there was no new investment in electricity. The last major electricity generation build had been completed under apartheid in 1985. The sorry tale of chronic load-shedding experienced in the recent past has this failure to recapitalise Eskom at its heart. Which is not to say that criminal state capture and plundering of Eskom during the Zuma years did not further deepen the crisis.

We should not be in denial about the further devastating social and economic impact that criminal state capture had, particularly during Zuma's second presidential term (2014-17). But we should also not underestimate the extent to which pre-2007 policies and practices directly contributed to what later came to be called state capture.

In its extensive submission to the Zondo Commission into state capture, the Party sought to unpack some of these pre-2007 factors. Among them, and as an adjunct to the Gear neoliberal turn in 1996, was the attempt to reform South Africa's public administration following "new public management"

lines. Essentially, this was about transforming the state and broader public sector from a productive actor in the economy into a contracting procurer of services from the private sector (this was called “steering not rowing”). It is in the interface between procuring civil servants (often guided by politicians) and private sector operators that chronic corruption has proliferated.

Nor should we imagine that high-level corruption in the state suddenly occurred in the Zuma period. For years, former police national commissioner, Jackie Selebi, appeared to be protected by the Mbeki leadership despite ample evidence of serious corruption. There are also still many unanswered questions around the arms deal, and, at the very least, questions should be asked about the strategic procurement choices that were made in terms of naval vessels and fighter planes. Did these procurements reflect naivete about Nato’s strategic agenda? Did the procurements remotely correspond to the strategic priorities of a post-apartheid South Africa? The recent tragic fiasco in the eastern DRC, where South African National Defence Force peace-keepers suffered a humiliating setback, was the product of both crippling financial austerity and a legacy of misdirected mega-budget military procurement during the Mbeki era.

Crossroads’ simplistic contrast between a downward phase (2007 to the present) and an upward phase (1994-2007) in which all was bright and sunny is simply wrong. And I have not even mentioned the devastating socio-economic impact of years of AIDS denialism. We cannot allow Crossroads’ barrage of de-contextualised and misrepresented Comintern quotations to conceal the underlying causes of South Africa’s current challenges. Above all, we cannot allow interventions like Crossroads to distract the SACP and all progressive forces in South Africa from what urgently needs to be done. ■

Cde Jeremy Cronin is a former SACP Deputy General Secretary, Deputy Minister, ANC NEC member, political prisoner, and a published poet.

A failure to put the SACP-ANC relationship in its true context – a reply to the “crossroads in the history of our revolution” paper

Sifiso Gwala argues that the recent paper on the reconfiguration of the Tripartite Alliance is packed with inaccuracies and avoids the key issues it purports to raise

The history of the politics of alliances is as old as the history of society itself. The alliance between the ruling elites of kings and the landlords against the serfs and the workers. The alliance between the landlords and slave owners who bought free workers. Since the advent of property rights, alliances have existed in various forms to achieve short-term gains. Today, the ruling elites in South Africa coalesce in forming short-term alliances to form governments which rule over the people. They rise above the people who elect them. They form these alliances to usurp power for themselves. They get married even though they are ideologically incompatible. These alliances change colours like chameleons; however, the Tripartite Alliance has stood the test of time over decades, through the best and the worst of times. The SACP still stands committed to this revolutionary alliance, without being naive, and committed to the revolutionary struggle of the people of South Africa.

The formation of the ANC-SACP-Cosatu Alliance

To argue as if the Tripartite Alliance was formed in 1990 waters down its history. The first alliance was established between the ANC and the SACP, later joined by the forerunner of Cosatu, and then by Sanco. The paper does not go further to include Sanco in this alliance. The alliance has constantly been in metamorphosis since the early 1920s, starting with the ANC and CPSA (Communist Party of South Africa). The Congress Alliance was not only for the defiance campaign and the Freedom Charter. To leave out the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) does not paint the full picture of the short-term alliances in relation to the long-term alliance between the ANC and the SACP – it only confuses and weakens the argument.

The paper asserts: *“It is historically correct to make references to the Congress Alliance of the 1950s which was coordinated by the ANC and consisted of Coloured, Indian, and White progressive organisations. This Congress Alliance was instrumental in the success of grassroots campaigns against the Settler Colonial State’s repressive laws. Mass actions like the 1952 Defiance Campaign, and the 1955 adoption of the Freedom Charter were based on the sharing of national interests. Complementing the relationship between the ANC and the CPSA was the South African Congress of Trade Unions.”*

While the paper acknowledges some aspects of the Comintern (Communist International) to which the ANC did not subscribe, the CPSA would not have come to the ANC to advance the decisions of the Comintern. We must remember that the ANC’s character as a purely nationalist organisation has always been there. The paper is revising and retelling history in its crudest form, but it remains selective in its analysis with some incorrect claims. The character of the ANC was firstly for cooption as many of its leaders were the ruling elites in society, ranging from chiefs, clergy, and the educated few who sought peace through inclusion rather than a revolutionary struggle to transform society.

The SACP was formed in 1921, nine years after the ANC. In 1928, the Comintern resolved that the Communist Party should *“pay particular attention to the embryonic national organizations among the [African majority], such as the African National Congress. The Party, while retaining its full independence [we repeat: “while retaining its full independence”], should participate in these organizations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity. Our aim should be to transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organization against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, based upon the trade unions, peasant organizations, etc., developing systematically the leadership of the workers and the Communist Party in this organization [we repeat: “developing systematically the leadership of the workers and the Communist Party in this organization”] ...The development of a national revolutionary movement of the toilers of South Africa... constitutes one of the major tasks of the Communist Party of South Africa.”*

To quote the 1928 Comintern resolution and to state that *“we will have seen that nowhere did the 1928 Comintern resolution suggest that the SACP should displace the ANC as a leader of the struggle for national liberation”* is an intentional misrepresentation of the historical truth. It is also a negation and betrayal of the existence and the struggle of the alliance. Even if the Comintern resolution stated that the SACP should displace the ANC as the leader of the national struggle, it would not have been accepted as the gospel truth by the ANC, hence this argument does not hold water.

The CPSA supported the Black Republic thesis and tried to convince the leadership of the ANC of the importance of the alliance. It was the superiority of the analysis of the balance of forces in the world that dictated the CPSA to continue to agree that the ANC should be a leader of the alliance. This was based on the application of Marxist-Leninist theory. The decision of the Comintern directing the CPSA on what it should do as a strategy of supporting national movements as the only form of Alliance relations does not negate the future decisions that any alliance would have agreed to.

The selective presentation of the Comintern is concerning and sophistry at best. A deeper and more comprehensive analysis of actions after the Comintern must be the guiding principle when conducting an analysis of cause and effect relationships in influencing the ANC to accept alliances of all progressive forces, paying due regard to the fact that the Comintern ceased to exist in 1943 after its last sitting in 1935.

Placing history in its proper context

In recent years, there has been a notable trend of attempting to reshape historical narratives to fit contemporary values or ideologies. History cannot be changed, it cannot be altered, it must be understood for what it was. To try to change or compartmentalise history is to betray history itself. It is worse when such a story involves friends, comrades or compatriots; if it is done, it must be viewed with a pinch of salt or the malice it deserves. The first analysis of any relationship is to understand how each component interprets and explains history.

The Moleketi et al paper (referred to as the paper henceforth) from the onset is riddled with contradictions. The paper asserts that the basis of the alliance was not the 1928 Comintern resolution, but it subsequently bases the leadership of the alliance, the influence of the ANC, and the leadership of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) on the very paper and the resolution of the Comintern that they refute, yet it uses the same resolution to support the ANC as the leader of the alliance. Such a relationship that existed between the ANC and SACP in the early 1920s was an alliance. The paper asserts that the alliance is traced to the 1950s. The timelines are worrisome and negate the very struggle of the ANC and the SACP alliance from the inception of the CPSA to the 1950s. At this time, the Communist Party had been banned in 1950 after the passing of the Suppression of Communist Act. (It is inconceivable that the ANC developed such strong ties and relations that led to the formation of the alliance when the then CPSA was in exile. This relationship had long existed, as strongly outlined by Cde Oliver Tambo, in 1981, when he reiterated that our alliance is a living organism born out of struggle. This is a significant

misrepresentation of history. The infant history of the Alliance is rooted in the role that President Josiah Gumede played in advocacy and building bridges between the ANC and the CPSA. Despite many in the ANC who did not share his views, his work was advanced and cemented by succeeding presidents as they learned the commitment of the SACP to the struggle.

The coining of the term National Democratic Revolution was influenced by the CPSA along with the ANC. That is why the SACP recognises the NDR as the direct route to socialism. The contested terrain of membership at the onset of the relation between the CPSA and the ANC as well as the formation of progressive unions cannot be underestimated. A number of members of the CPSA were also members of the ANC and various unions at the time, this was the infancy of what we now call dual membership. The CPSA recruited progressive members across the ANC and unions. The CPSA showed the ANC that it was important to adopt non-racialism which was not one of the principles of the ANC at the time. The party at that point accepted all races, although it was initially formed by whites who were mostly internationalists and workers. After the second and the third Comintern had accepted that non-racialism, and later that the party had to be led by the blacks who formed the majority of the oppressed people in South Africa. The notion that the ANC independently developed the concept is over-simplifying the struggle to advance NDR.

The Black Republic Thesis and the NDR

The Black Republic Thesis is a concept rooted in the political discussions around the idea of a distinct national identity for black populations, particularly following historical injustices such as colonisation and slavery. This thesis has emerged significantly in discussions on the post-colonial identity of several African nations and the consequences of racial oppression. It asserts that a black-led republic should emphasise and celebrate African heritage while addressing the socio-economic disparities rooted in colonial practices. This notion often aligns with the aspirations and strategies of national liberation movements, which seek to challenge colonial legacies and foster a sense of unity among members of African societies.

The concept of the NDR is closely connected to the Black Republic Thesis, particularly in the context of South Africa. The NDR seeks to dismantle systemic inequalities imposed during apartheid and promote a democratic society that reflects the will of the majority. The ANC has been at the forefront of this revolution, using various strategies to realise a society that embraces diversity, equity, and justice for previously oppressed groups. The

NDR embodies principles of democracy, social justice, and a commitment to improving the living standards of all citizens, especially those from marginalised backgrounds.

After the Second World War, pressures for decolonisation and national liberation increased dramatically across the world. Recent developments in countries inspired by the idea of the NDR indicate both progress and challenges, Zimbabwe struggled with land distribution just like South Africa is still in a quagmire to this day, let alone the final resolution of class, race and gender. South remains the most unequal society in the world. The claim is that they are inspired by the NDR, like in Zimbabwe and Namibia]. For instance, South Africa has seen significant legislative changes aimed at promoting affirmative action and land reform. However, issues like economic inequality and corruption have clouded the achievements of the revolution, igniting debates about the effectiveness and direction of the NDR. Citizens are increasingly vocal about their dissatisfaction with political leadership that seems disconnected from their needs, spawning movements advocating for better governance and accountability. Furthermore, the Black Republic Thesis remains relevant today as numerous African nations grapple with their post-colonial identities. Countries like Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo are still in the process of understanding their cultural heritage, considering historical events. Advocacy for representation, empowerment, and acknowledgement of black identity continues to resonate, influencing contemporary social movements throughout the continent.

The two-stage theory and the National Democratic Revolution as a path to Socialism

The two-stage theory, often referred to in the context of South African politics by the ANC, is a framework used to understand the path toward achieving socialism through a NDR. This concept has rooted itself deeply in the political philosophy of the ANC and has become significant in explaining the historical and ongoing struggles within South Africa. The first stage of the theory emphasises the need for an NDR. This involves the dismantling of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic state that promotes equality and justice for all citizens. The ANC, particularly during the liberation struggle, promoted this stage vigorously. The success of the first stage was marked by the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first black president in 1994, signifying a break from years of oppressive rule. The new democratic government sought to address historical injustices and improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalised communities.

Despite the triumph of the first stage, challenges have emerged that hinder the transition into the second stage, socialism. The promises of the NDR have not been fully realised, as socio-economic disparities continue to exist. Unemployment rates remain high, and poverty is rampant in many areas, exacerbated by corruption and inefficiency within governmental structures. The second stage, which advocates for socialism, calls for more radical measures to redistribute wealth and power. The argument is that without addressing the underlying inequalities perpetuated by capitalism, the revolutionary goals of the ANC will be incomplete. Leaders within the party have advocated for policies such as land reform and increased state control over key aspects of the economy as ways to achieve this socialist ideal. However, these proposed solutions often face significant resistance from various factions, including the private sector, which raises concerns about economic stability. Theoretically and practically, the ANC would not give power on a silver platter to the SACP, not now, to pursue socialism. This theory therefore has limitations in practice.

“Socialism is the Future, Build it now” as a direct answer to the two-stage theory

We argue that there is no organisation, even within the Alliance, that will voluntarily yield power to the SACP as postulated by the Two Stage Theory. The SACP was formed to struggle for socialism. Is there a timeline in which the ANC would assess and give power to the SACP to advance the struggle for socialism within the alliance or within any other form of reconfiguration? The ANC has rejected the reconfiguration of the alliance on the basis of dilution in taking decisions and losing the grip of leadership as the ANC in the Alliance, as the paper argues. Such an analysis is myopic in totality because it fails to analyse the ability to articulate and implement alliance decisions within the coalition governments or the government of national unity. The trajectory of the decision-making process isolates and excludes alliance partners.

Let me quote Cde Charles Nqakula in 1993, at a Special SACP Congress: *“To deepen, consolidate and defend democracy in our country means advancing to socialism. In the past few years, the SACP has been using the slogan: “The Future is Socialism”. We have now changed that slogan, or at least we have added to it. “The Future is Socialism, Build it Now!” But what do we mean by beginning to build it now? We mean that in the election campaign, in the reconstruction programme, in our day-to-day struggles, we must be building momentum towards socialism, capacity for socialism and even elements of socialism. We must increasingly displace the political economy of the bosses, of property, of privilege, with the political economy of the working class. A workers’ political economy is production for needs, not for profits. A workers’ political economy is for a society of empowered citizens, where the majority*

are not just units of labour and, at best, consumers of services. Workers are people.

We must increasingly displace the morality of the marketplace and the stock exchange with a working class morality. Our morality is not one of dog-eats-dog, of self-enrichment. Our's is a morality of collective struggle, of shared responsibilities, of solidarity. We have called for an end to unilateral restructuring. Now we must increasingly implement an end to all unilateralism, not just unilateral restructuring, but unilateral ownership, unilateral management, all unilateral power and privilege vested in a minority class."

This Special Congress adopted a slogan, *"Socialism is the future, Build it Now."* This was the move from any notion of the two-stage theory. The party moved to advance a notion of building socialism in the womb of capitalism. It is strange to learn that the ANC views the 32-year-old slogan of the party as strange. What is even stranger than fiction is that these views are being brought forward in 2025 in conceptual papers and they have never been raised anywhere before. The danger of playing to the audience is its populist tendencies to win the battle and lose the war. It moved to advance socialism within the national democratic revolution. The party asserted that the NDR was and still is the direct route to socialism. To advance the two-stage theory, the paper, argues, through vulgarising and undermining Marxism-Leninism, as it argues that *"In the context of Marxism-Leninism, it is absolutely impossible to understand the demand by the SACP, which describes itself as a vanguard of the proletariat, to 'build socialism' within the very bosom of a capitalist system."* In this form of analysis, the paper could easily argue that NDR is not a direct route to socialism, as the paper is rooted in selective revisionist questioning of party positions, in pursuit of a particular narrative and framework.

The leadership of the tripartite alliance in a South African context of a was informed by the material conditions post the fall of the Soviet Union and the outlook of successful and receptive taking power in 1994. The ANC had better appeal and acceptance from apartheid forces and international forces to take over government from the National Party. The Cuban struggle and its model of the seizure of power allowed the revolutionary forces to be led by the socialist revolution. This has received both acclaim and resistance internationally from other nations, which has greatly changed the lives of the Cuban people. The South African reality didn't go for that. In our country, the NDR has fallen short to the many aspirations of our people. However, any debate to advance to socialism within the alliance receives criticism of shortsightedness. The past 31 years are evidence enough that the model of only advancing the NDR has not succeeded, but it is under clear and present danger of being reversed as progressive forces are losing popularity with the electorate.

Contesting the 2026 Local government elections

It has become evident that the title of the paper is misleading. It takes us from what is familiar, which is the reconfiguration of the alliance as a discussion in passing. Yet it does not engage with the core subject of the title. (The paper admits that the Comintern posited the resolution of the national question and the unity and support of the progressive forces, which both the ANC and the SACP have worked together to advance. I argue that it is not the reconfiguration of the alliance that has led this alliance to the crossroads it finds itself in today, but rather the failure to accept that the alliance needs to change with time. The decision of the SACP and its clear preparations to contest the 2026 local government elections is now the albatross. The continued neglect and failure to honestly engage alliance relations is therefore the core problem.) It further asserts that the reconfiguration of the alliance puts the alliance at the crossroads of history. The reference of the paper is to the SACP's Special National Congress decision to contest the 2026 local government elections. By laying out unpalatable misstatements and misrepresentations of history, as well as out-of-context critiques, it pollutes a very significant debate of how the Alliance should manage and provide leadership on the SACP decision and how it should manage the dual membership.

We make the claim that the paper has shied away from the proper analysis and contextualisation of the relationship of the SACP and the ANC in history. This is the principal weakness of the paper. The paper claims to speak of the Alliance but it spends over 95% of the paper on the SACP, seeking to show off inconsistencies, providing no forward-looking proposals. It speaks as a third-party agent in an agency relationship. There is a body of knowledge on the Tripartite Alliance, and it is this that should serve as a guide to this alliance, not shenanigans, not postulations. If the ANC values the relationship between its alliance partners, it should practice caution and restraint on theoretical questions. There is more that binds this Alliance than what divides it. Indeed, we are at a crossroads, not for reconfiguration of the Alliance but for the decision to contest the 2026 local government elections as the main conceptual framework of this paper. Let's not beat about the bush, let's call a spade a spade, and deal with issues of irritation. And then let's be honest about the key questions of what is to be done and how do we move forward? ■

Cde Sifiso Gwala is a member of the Moses Mbhida (KZN) SACP and PWC and is an academic

Vala Umgodi: The dangers of xenophobic populism

Janet Cherry examines the links between the heavy-handed police operation against migrant informal miners at Stilfontein, the political economy of gold mining and the current climate of anti-migrant xenophobia

It is September 2025, and Operation Vala Umgodi continues. Many South Africans have forgotten the terrible events of January 2025, when at least 96 workers died underground in the most appalling circumstances. Nobody has been held to account, and it does not seem that anyone will be. The zamazamas who died were workers, but their deaths were not the result of an accident in the deep-level gold mines. Their deaths were the result of a massive and ongoing police operation to end illegal mining in disused mine shafts. More akin to the Life Esidemeni disgrace than to the Marikana massacre, the deaths at Stilfontein were the result of a planned government operation. For this reason, it should not be understood as a tragedy, but as an avoidable and intolerable cruelty.

As the awful consequences of Vala Umgodi unfolded over Christmas and New Year in the mine shafts of Stilfontein, the debates were raging in the public media, among civil society activists, and in WhatsApp groups of comrades from within and outside the Tripartite Alliance. The existing polarisation between government and civil society was exacerbated, with emotions running high and accusations and counter-accusations being hurled back and forth. Without delving into the emotive rhetoric and the role of social and other media, the responses from progressive activists can be consolidated into a few important arguments, which are outlined here.

Prioritising profits over people

There are three broad arguments, the overarching one being the political economy analysis, which situates Stilfontein in the context of global commodity value chains and regional labour markets. As Ruth First noted in her seminal article *The Gold of Migrant Labour* back in 1961, “The days when each country in Africa was an island are over, and few know this better than South Africa's vast and wealthy gold mining industry.” This analysis is used by the left and the labour movement to understand the problem as lying with the owners of the disused mines, who abandon them when they are no longer profitable,

and are unwilling to spend money on remediation or securing the disused shafts.

Hence, the statement of the SACP laying the blame on the mine owners. The Party “strongly criticised mine owners for abandoning unsealed mine shafts” and condemned the “capitalist-driven mining sector, which... prioritises profits over people and sustainability”. A related argument is the global commodity market, which determines whether or not particular mines are profitable. With the recent global rise in the gold price, the incentive to exploit those resources is obvious; yet it is not profitable within the formal economy. Hence, the integration of a ‘parallel’ economy, which integrates informally and illegally mined gold into global commodity markets.

The political economy analysis of ownership and profit from mining is also integrally related to the understanding of the sub-regional economy, the development of the migrant labour system, and the development of the mining industry in South Africa over the past century. All communists, Marxists and labour organisers are familiar with this history, the history of dispossession and colonial taxation, of labour bureaux and single sex hostels. The wealth of South Africa, and its position as a regional hegemon and the most industrialised economy in Africa, was built on the labour of workers from Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho and elsewhere in the Southern African region, as documented by Ruth First, among others.

The zamazamas now are still migrant workers from the poorest countries in the region; whether or not they used to work in the mines before being laid off, whether or not they are documented or undocumented, they are part of a regional labour market. The narrow nationalist and xenophobic narrative which sees them as foreigners and criminals is counter to any international solidarity, communist internationalism, or Africanist philosophy. The colonial boundaries that divided Sotho, Tswana and Ndebele-speaking societies should not determine our understanding of who these workers are. Who is being exploited, and who are the exploiters? Who is stealing from who?

They are stealing our gold

This brings in the argument about the role of the state in regulating mining, clearly articulated by Minister Gwede Mantashe in justifying Vala Umgodi in January 2025. Mantashe emphasised the loss to the South African economy due to illegal gold mining, which he gave in monetary value as R60 billion in 2024 .¹

¹ (<https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/r60-billion-lost-illegal-mining-2024-says-minister>)

The clampdown on illegal mining in the form of the Vala Umgodi operation – is based on two false premises: i) that there is a quantifiable loss to the South African economy; and ii) that there is an alternative way of realising the value of the “mineral wealth beneath the soil”. There is an obvious flaw in the “loss to the economy” argument, and that is the reason why the mine shafts in Stilfontein and elsewhere are disused and sometimes abandoned. It is that it is not always profitable for mining companies to exploit the gold. South African gold is deep level and involves considerable capital investment. If it is not being mined, then it is not being lost to the economy: it just stays in the ground. If there is an alternative way of realising its value which is both safe and profitable, it has yet to be found.

The people shall share in the country’s wealth

At the Mining Indaba in February, Mantashe stated that “This year’s mining indaba coincides with the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter, which made a clarion call that ‘the people shall share in the country’s wealth’. This gathering is precisely about having discussions about Africa’s mineral wealth and her people sharing in it”.² Mantashe and others have put forward the argument that this can be done through formalisation and regulation of small-scale or artisanal mining, combined with investment in local beneficiation of minerals.

It should be noted that the Minister referred to the people of Africa, in line with the clear argument for all African economies to benefit from minerals – especially “green” minerals and other strategic minerals used in renewable energy and electronics – through beneficiation and industrialisation. This argument, which requires unambiguous policies on localisation and trade at regional and global levels, is not in conflict with an argument that all in the Southern African sub-region – the poorest countries in Africa, if not in the world – should benefit from the great mineral wealth. Surely this includes the poor of Malawi, Lesotho and Mozambique.

After the deaths at Stilfontein, Mantashe restated the view of the South African government as follows: “Our view on illegal mining remains unchanged. Illegal mining is a criminal activity and a war on the economy. There can be no two ways about it.”³

Mantashe’s argument enabled him to shift the blame from the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, and make it a problem of other arms of government, notably police and Home Affairs.

2 (<https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/minister-gwede-mantashe-opening-remarks-investing-african-mining-indaba-03-feb-2025>).

3 (<https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/r60-billion-lost-illegal-mining-2024-says-minister>)

If the problem is one of large-scale international organised crime, which includes sophisticated criminal syndicates involved in the South African economy, then surely this should be the target of police operations. How the gold is refined and transported to the international market, who controls that market – these require high-level police investigation. Vala Umgodi targeted the wrong people: the exploited workers at the bottom of the informal mining business.

Mantashe does not acknowledge that the zamazamas are workers; however, he labels them as criminals or even as enemy soldiers or saboteurs who deserve to die. In 2023 when 31 zamazamas from Lesotho died in a shaft at Welkom in the Free State, Mantashe stated that “This incident has confirmed our view that illegal mining activities are economic sabotage. It is war on our economy and, therefore, those who die there are almost like soldiers dying in combat”.⁴

If it is accepted that illegal mining is primarily a police responsibility, then the second analysis of the Stilfontein matter concerns how this operation was handled. The responses to the deaths in Stilfontein from some critical elements in the government and its allies was not to question the motive or strategy behind Vala Umgodi, but rather to say the way the Stilfontein shaft was handled – as only one part of the Vala Umgodi operation – was a “tragedy” (which cannot be blamed on anyone) or a “mistake” due to failures of intelligence; or unavoidable delays due to resource constraints and government procedures; or to lay the blame on the lack of co-operation between police and “the community” or “civil society”; or even to lay the blame on MACUA and human rights activists for taking the government to court.

The first question to be asked about the handling of the Stilfontein situation is the SAPS use of intelligence. Did the SAPS really engage in such a risky operation without having intelligence on the situation in the mine shaft? If they did have intelligence, then the consequences of Vala Umgodi would have been obvious. The “smoke them out” strategy of closing the shafts was designed to force the miners to the surface, and it succeeded in doing so; it can be assumed that the suffering and deaths arising were a warning to others who may be contemplating becoming zamazamas.

If the SAPS could not get intelligence, and so embarked on an operation to close the mine shafts without understanding the situation, and were unable or unwilling to risk sending their own people down to get information, and did not have good enough relations with the communities surrounding the shafts that they could obtain information from them – then this is not just a reflection on the poor state of intelligence gathering capacity of the SAPS. At best, it reflects the failure of the SAPS to provide leadership “on the ground”

⁴ (<https://thestar.co.za/news/2023-06-23-illegal-mining-is-war-on-the-economy-mantashe/>)

and to relate to the affected communities. Further, it reflects a failure of local leadership to mediate the crisis. Where was the local ward councillor, the provincial government, the local ANC branch? At worst, it reflects a profound compromise of the SAPS; possibly it reflects a deep division in the SAPS, or within government more broadly. This division emerged in public as the crisis deepened.

As Ministers Nshavheni, Mantashe and others stood by the narrative of criminalisation, and their refusal to help the “criminal”, insisting that they could “come out on their own”, there were others who asserted that the government was trying to raise funds for a rescue operation. This lack of coherence could have been decisively dealt with by the President or the Minister of Police. Yet they did nothing, except reject the desperate attempts by the local community, church leaders, MACUA and Lawyers for Human Rights to bring attention to the plight of the trapped miners; in fact, some government officials even went so far as to label civil society as counter-productive and interfering. Some comrades labelled critics of the operation as “promoting anarchy” or “undermining law and order”.

It should be noted that this “crisis” developed from mid-November until mid-January, when it was resolved through the rescue operation. Yet on 12 November, a volunteer went down the Stilfontein shaft and reported that thousands of miners were trapped and that food and water were cut off (Brigadier Mokgwabone, North West SAPS spokesperson, 13 November 2024). This situation persisted for two months over the Christmas period, during which many government officials did not intervene.

There was time: time to save lives, time to raise funds, time to get food to those who were starving. As with Life Esidemeni, this was a government policy that was called out by civil society even before it was implemented, and the response of government was defensive. We could all read – and then hear – and then finally, see on video, the horrifying reality experienced by the trapped men. The crimes that the zamazamas had been arrested for do not seem to justify the deaths, the suffering, and the expense of the rescue operation.

We should be asking a deeper question about the criminalisation of illegal mining, and why it has been identified as a “priority crime” on the list of serious crimes and violent crimes to be addressed; why is this at the top of the list for government resources to be allocated, and why is it important for the President to claim it as a success? The timing of Vala Umgodi may be linked to the politics of the ANC itself. This may be linked to policies

related to undocumented economic migrants; it may be informed by a faction in government that has an interest in minerals markets; it is likely to be informed by those in government concerned with trying to capture or retain the xenophobic populist base of the ANC.

Pierre de Vos posits some answers to the question of “Why were the SAPS and some politicians so invested in continuing the siege at Buffelsfontein?” He posits that the real purpose may have been “to punish undocumented immigrants involved in mining by starving them” as a warning to others. An alternative speculation is that “corrupt SAPS officers in the pocket of one syndicate helped to destroy the hold a rival syndicate had over the flow of gold out of the mine”.

They do not deserve the badge of human rights

The third framework for analysis is human rights and constitutionalism. This has been articulated in the article by the Benchmarks Foundation, ‘Stilfontein massacre: When the state violates the constitution’,⁵ which makes the recommendation that a special tribunal be established to hold those responsible to account. It is also most vociferously expressed in constitutional law expert Pierre de Vos’s article *A case study in state negligence and the erasure of humanity*.⁶

This argument, in its simplest form, is that all people have the same rights in South Africa, from the poorest undocumented Malawian to the wealthiest mine owner. To engage in an operation which causes extreme suffering and death to anyone is a violation of the constitution. It does not matter if they are documented or undocumented, South African born or foreigner, child or adult, trafficked or voluntarily working in the mine: these categories do not grant more or fewer rights. Nobody is a criminal until they have been convicted in a court of law (as the ANC is fond of saying, in protecting its own leadership).

If the zamazamas are indeed trafficked, exploited, abused and controlled by criminal syndicates, are sometimes even children – then they are already victims of grave human rights violation. To add to that violation by treating them as dangerous criminals who “do not deserve the badge of human rights” (as one “comrade” stated) is to be a perpetrator: as the SAPS has become.

De Vos concludes that these events reflect “a callous and frightening belief that when combating crime — even of a minor nature — the state can do as it pleases, with no regard for the lives or dignity of those the state and the public have collectively branded as barbaric and dangerous ‘criminals’”. It

⁵ (<https://www.amandla.org.za/stilfontein-massacre-when-the-state-violates-the-constitution/>)

⁶ (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2025-01-21-buffelsfontein-mine-tragedy-a-case-study-in-state-negligence-and-the-erasure-of-humanity/>)

required the complete erasure of the individual human beings who became the victims of this operation, and their replacement with an imagined collective entity ('illegal miners', 'zamazamas', 'illegal immigrants', 'criminals') whose members the state could then be said to have every right to convict and punish for anything any member of their group might have done".

Foreigners are stealing the wealth of our country

The thinking behind *Vala Umgodi* is based on certain assumptions, in addition to the premise of the value of the gold. One of these is the criminalisation of the informal economy and of illegal or undocumented immigrants. These two things are not the same but overlap in many cases. This thinking is reflected in other campaigns and proposed policies which target immigrants in the informal sector. One such proposal is to close down all unregistered spaza shops – this after the hysteria around “poisoned snacks”, which was blamed on foreigners, whereas it was the result of unregulated pesticides being sold to control rats. The closure of spaza shops will have negative consequences for most township residents.

Another such policy is the setting of a quota/a limit on the number of foreign workers who can be employed in particular sectors. Both of these policies are in support of the xenophobic populist narrative. So, the way forward must be to address the real problem, which is not the poor illegal immigrants who are found in many of the most vulnerable and peripheral sectors of our economy.

The argument about the informal economy is not to justify criminal activity. Rather, it is to emphasise firstly that there are informal sectors of the economy that play an important role in providing livelihoods to millions of South Africans. The residents of the townships around the disused mine shafts are among these: the households providing accommodation, food, transport, even transactional sex – depend on mining activity, whether legal or illegal. When it is no longer profitable for the mining corporations to mine a particular shaft, they abandon the community which has been dependent on that shaft for decades.

Whether those who are now unemployed were migrants from Transkei or from Lesotho, they had built up local families, relationships and economies integrated into the local community. The problems in these communities when the mining stops are evident: unemployment, premature deaths from disease, child-headed households and hunger. As such, the SACP is correct to lay the blame on the mining companies, stating, “The capitalist minerals mining regime, rooted in the ruthless exploitation of labour and natural resources, has left a trail of disused mines and devastated communities. This

greed-driven model has extracted wealth while abandoning communities to economic despair.”⁷

Where Vala Umgodi has now “closed the holes”, what has replaced this economy? The effects of this police operation on income, poverty and hunger have yet to be measured.

Secondly, it is to note that those employed at the bottom of illegal enterprises are themselves victims of exploitation. To take some other examples, in a clothing sweatshop in Newcastle, or a black-market cigarette company, are the exploited workers the ones committing a crime? In such cases the Department of Labour has an obligation to protect them, which it sometimes does, as in the case of the Newcastle sweat shops. The employer is identified as the criminal, not the workers.

In the case of the illicit cigarette companies, the blame also lies clearly with the manufacturer, as outlined by Tax Justice South Africa (2020, Smoking Gun Report): “Illicit cigarette manufacturers are in our view stealing the country’s money and future by dodging their tax responsibilities and SARS is failing to act to prevent the manufacture, supply and open sale of these brands on our streets. The manufacturers of illicit cigarette brands have been proven by this research to be breaking the law with impunity.”

Where the employer is the criminal, should the workers be arrested or even tortured for working in an illegal company? The above cases reinforce the argument that the wrong people were targeted by the Vala Umgodi operation. The state should not criminalise all those who work in informal and illegal businesses, and moreover, the line between illegal and informal is a fine one. The precarious workers in such businesses are the least organised, the least protected, and the most abused and exploited.

If Vala Umgodi was wrongly conceived, and the wrong people targeted – as argued above – the question can be posed: What is the state’s responsibility in the situation of the disused mine shafts? Does the state have a responsibility to regulate such places which are unsafe? Does the state have a responsibility to assist people who are in trouble in such places? The answer must be yes: although owners of businesses (whether mines or factories or hotels) have the responsibility to ensure the safety of their premises; and as noted by Mantashe, many of the mines targeted by Vala Umgodi are not “abandoned”, they do have owners who are not fulfilling their responsibilities. In such cases, perhaps the state should seal all these mine shafts. The gold will remain underground, belonging to nobody (or everybody). There will be little impact on the local and regional economy, as outlined above.

⁷ (<https://www.ofm.co.za/article/sa/334908/minister-defends-operations-against-illegal-mining>).

One of the responses to the Stilfontein situation and Vala Umgodi operation – which continued after the deaths of 96 people – was to shift the blame to Home Affairs and weak border control. This was one of the arguments put forward in the Parliamentary sub-committee held in March.⁶

This argument – that the ‘zamazama problem’ can be resolved through tightening up our borders and keeping out the poor foreigners from our neighbouring countries – is a fallacious one. The idea of controlling the informal economy and keeping economic migrants out is not new: various racist and xenophobic policies have been implemented in Australia, the USA and in some European countries. One only has to listen to Donald Trump’s statements about immigrants from Central and South America to hear the same rhetoric: they are criminals, drug dealers, stealing our jobs, etc.

John Oliver’s show, *Last Week Tonight* (HBO, 10 March 2025), focused on ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) detention centres in the USA, just over the Mexican border (and elsewhere), where thousands of people are held without trial for months or years at a time. Donald Trump’s press secretary is quoted in this programme as justifying the detention of economic migrants from Mexico and elsewhere by saying “They are criminals”. Yet as John Oliver points out, they either have no charges against them except not having “papers” to be legally in USA, or there are minor violations like traffic offences or possession of marijuana.

As with the zamazamas, labelled by Mantashe and Ntshavheni as criminals, their “crime” is to be undocumented. The charges against the zamazamas have been minor: to be in South Africa without a work permit; to be trespassing (on an abandoned property); to be in possession of “gold bearing material”. The act of working in an abandoned mine shaft is disputably not a criminal act, even though it is being done through an employer who does not have a permit to mine. The employer is the criminal in this case; and De Vos notes that even the crime of illegal mining activities (prohibited by section 5(4) of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act of 2002), is “a minor offence that carries – in terms of section 99(1)(g) of the act) a maximum sentence of no more than six months imprisonment” and that “first-time offenders usually receive a suspended sentence or have to pay a small fine”.⁹

The dangers of xenophobic populism and the way forward

In South Africa, unlike in many countries, the hostility to economic immigrants is not an expression of racism; the zamazamas and others who are labelled

⁸ Joint meeting between the Portfolio Committee on Mineral and Petroleum Resources and the Portfolio Committee on Police, 18 March 2025

⁹ (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2025-01-21-buffelsfontein-mine-tragedy-a-case-study-in-state-negligence-and-the-erasure-of-humanity/>)

as criminals share a common African identity with most South Africans. But the inhumanity shown by South Africans to fellow Africans is the same inhumanity shown by the USA to fellow “Americans”, if one thinks of Central and South America as part of the same group of continents that were colonised five hundred years ago, with most of Mexico being stolen and occupied by the United States of America.

We need SACP members in the ANC and in government to stand up to the xenophobic populism which is gaining ground in South African society and within the ANC. The Stilfontein narrative that is perpetuated by Mantashe, Ntshavheni and other senior ANC leaders, is playing into this dangerous trend. While the SACP expressed criticism of mining companies, it has been shamefully silent on Stilfontein, on Vala Umgodi, and has failed to condemn this act against the most vulnerable workers and communities in the region.

While it is difficult to find short-term solutions to the gold mining dilemma (it will be hard to formalise local mining cooperatives and to create local participation in the gold economy, as advocated by some), there are other policies that should be explored. What is needed is a regional strategy around the use of mineral resources for local industrial development, and a humane policy for managing cross-border migrancy from our poorest and most troubled neighbours: Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. A policing strategy around gold (and other minerals, including coal) exports aimed at those who control the syndicates at the top: the international traders and their local allies, some of whom may be in government themselves.

State focus should be on tight regulation and policing of mining companies and their social and labour plans, and policing the corruption involved. We know the corruption within the coal value chain that nearly destroyed Eskom; South African companies are still exporting coal to Israel, among others. The manganese business is also a disgrace in terms of concentrating massive profits in the hands of a rich local elite. One could probably argue the same for platinum. As in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, there is an oligarchic tendency in the ruling party, which is another danger sign for our democracy.

There is no conflict between the political economy analysis of mining in Southern Africa and the human rights analysis of Operation Vala Umgodi. Solutions must be found that comply with our constitution and our commitment to Ubuntu, and at the same time, redress the extreme inequality and exploitation of the extractive industries.

We would do well to remember the analysis of Ruth First, based at the Centre for African Studies in Maputo, who held the regional political economy at the

centre of her work. As her friend, comrade and colleague, Bridget O’Laughlin (2014: 30 cited in Cherry, 2025) wrote: “... she thought and worked with (and drummed into us) the concept of a Southern Africa as a regional ‘system’ historically forged by a distinctive form of capitalist production grounded in migrant labour, concentration of capital in South Africa and racialised political dualism. She knew that most South Africans and Mozambicans did not think about the region in this way, but part of her mission was to explain why an enduring revolutionary project depended on their doing so.”

The conclusion that Ruth First came to in 1961 is worth repeating: “The prosperity of the gold mining industry has been based on the poverty of Africa and her people; but Africa is changing fast and can help to make the mines change their labour policy too.” ■

Janet Cherry is a social justice activist and professor in development studies.

Note on sources:

Ruth First: ‘The Gold of Migrant Labour’, *Africa South in Exile* (1961), republished in *Review of African Political Economy* (1982) *Tribute to Ruth First*. She wrote that “Migrant labour for the Union’s mines-long the fly-wheel of Union ‘Native policy’- is today being drawn not only from the Union, but from nine countries in Southern and Central Africa, reaching as far north as Tanganyika. The Witwatersrand has become the capital of an economic empire which is influenced by events and policy not only in Cape Town, Pretoria and Windhoek, but also in Maseru and Lobatsi, Luanda and Lisbon, Salisbury, Blantyre and Lusaka. Of a labour force of 432,234 African workers recruited in 1959 by the Chamber of Mines, only 182,561 came from the Union. Fifty-eight per cent (a total of 249,673 men) came from territories over which the Union has no direct political control”

Janet Cherry: ‘Ruth First in the Twenty-First Century: Activist Research in the Age of Climate Change’ in Saleem Badat (editor), *Research & Activism: Ruth First & Activist Research* (2025).

The remarkable story of Umkhonto we Sizwe's Special Ops finally told – a crucial oral history

Tebogo Phadu reviews Yunus Carrim's book *Attacking the Heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit*, published by Penguin Books, 2025

Umkhonto we Sizwe's Special Operations Unit, or Special Ops, was never a large force. During its existence, no more than seventy cadres passed through its ranks. Yet its impact on the liberation struggle far outweighed its size. Its operations reverberated internationally, shook the apartheid state's sense of security, and inspired the oppressed majority to believe that liberation was possible. Until now, its history has remained scattered in fragments – mentioned in memoirs, TRC submissions, and passing references – but without a comprehensive account. Yunus Carrim's *Attacking the Heart of Apartheid* fills this gap. Drawing on over a hundred interviews with participants, more than 160 hours of recordings, and wide archival work, the book gives us the most sustained treatment of Special Ops to date. It is at once history, memory-work, and political reflection.

Carrim sets the scene by reminding readers of Special Ops's place in the ANC-led movement's wider strategy. The armed struggle was never imagined as a free-standing military campaign, but as one of four interdependent pillars alongside underground organisation, mass mobilisation, and international solidarity. Special Ops was a specialised unit within MK's machinery, operating under the direct authority of the ANC's National Executive Committee, with Oliver Tambo and Joe Slovo overseeing its work. Its mandate was to carry out carefully selected, high-profile strikes against the regime's most strategic and symbolic targets. These actions were never intended to "win the war" militarily. Their role was catalytic, designed to puncture apartheid's aura of invincibility, embolden the oppressed, and signal internationally that South Africans were fighting for their own liberation.

This distinction – that Special Ops were detonators, not substitutes – runs through the book. Slovo captured the point when he insisted that armed struggle must always be judged by its political effect, not by the size of the explosions. It became the guiding principle of MK commanders and commissars who echoed the same warning against militarism, urging that every bullet fired must be tied to a broader political objective. Armed struggle without mass organisation risked lapsing into adventurism. Mass struggle

without the armed component risked being drowned in repression. It was in the dialectical unity of the two that Special Ops found its meaning.

The operations themselves were extraordinary. The coordinated Sasol bombings of 1980 struck directly at apartheid's synthetic fuel lifeline, undermining its capacity to evade sanctions. In 1981, Operation Blackout plunged vast areas of the Eastern Transvaal into darkness through simultaneous attacks on power stations. In 1982, Koeberg nuclear power station, still under construction, was sabotaged, delaying its commissioning and humiliating the regime on the global stage. The 1983 Air Force Headquarters bombing in Pretoria killed nineteen and injured more than two hundred, showing that even the military's command centre was vulnerable. In 1986, Gordon Webster was rescued from a hospital in Pietermaritzburg in a daring operation that reaffirmed MK's solidarity. In 1987, John Vorster Square – a notorious symbol of detention and torture – was bombed, turning the regime's own headquarters of fear into a target of fear. In 1988, Ellis Park stadium was bombed, striking at a cultural heartland of white supremacy, but again sparking debate about civilian casualties.

Each of these missions is recounted in detail, but Carrim avoids technical fetishism. Instead, he frames them in terms of their political meaning, their human cost, and their role in the wider struggle.

A major strength of the book is in the voices it restores. More than seventy cadres are named, many speaking for the first time about their experiences. Figures such as Barney Molokoane, Abubaker Ismail, Vincent Sekete, Robert McBride, Sue Rabkin, Siphwe Nyanda, Mac Maharaj, Ronnie Kasrils and others are recalled not as distant names but as human beings – disciplined, committed and prepared to act. What emerges is comradeship: an extraordinary solidarity forged in the underground, sustaining people through years of exile and loss.

Among the personal testimonies, Patrick "Hotstuff" Chamusso's story stands out. An ordinary worker-painter, miner, football lover – he was transformed into an active MK combatant not in a classroom but in police cells. Arrested repeatedly for nothing, beaten and humiliated, he was pushed into the ANC by sheer injustice. In October 1981, Chamusso carried out one of the most symbolically powerful missions of Special Ops: the sabotage of Sasol 2 at Secunda. Using limpet mines, he damaged the synthetic oil plant, one of apartheid's crown jewels, built to defy sanctions. The reactor itself survived, but the political impact was immense: apartheid's economic lifeline had been shown to be vulnerable. Chamusso was arrested, tortured and sentenced to twenty-four years on Robben Island. His nickname "Hotstuff," given by Joe Slovo, captured both his courage and his fiery spirit. Later, his life would inspire

the Hollywood film *Catch a Fire*, but in Carrim's book we get the unvarnished story: the fear of betrayal, the mistrust of spies, the courage to act despite it all. His later years, working with AIDS orphans, show another dimension of revolutionary commitment. Chamusso embodies the transformation of ordinary South Africans into combatants by the pressures of apartheid itself.

The book also highlights the contribution of women, often erased from the armed struggle's story. Rabkin's role is foregrounded not only as a logistics organiser but as a full participant in Special Ops. Her testimony reminds us that gender shaped who could move and who could act underground: women, especially white women, could sometimes cross borders or pass checkpoints where African men would have been immediately arrested.

Internationalism is another thread woven throughout. Special Ops did not exist in isolation. It relied on training and weapons from allies – the Soviet Union, Cuba, East Germany – and on solidarity networks across Europe and Africa. Internationalist comrades volunteered, lent their passports, their homes, their skills, and in some cases their lives. This was not charity but recognition of a shared struggle. Apartheid was a system of capitalism (racialised and gendered) with global links, and its defeat required global solidarity. The internationalist dimension of Special Ops situates South Africa's liberation within the broader anti-imperialist movement.

Carrim is also honest about the challenges and limits of Special Ops. The unit was always small. Operations came at a high cost, with cadres captured, tortured or killed. The apartheid state invested heavily in counter-intelligence and adapted quickly to tactics, forcing Special Ops constantly to reinvent its methods. Some missions, like the Magoo's Bar bombing, risked alienating support. Others faltered due to infiltration or logistical failures. The dependence on external support for training and arms was unavoidable, but it limited the ability to scale operations independently. And perhaps most painfully, many veterans of Special Ops were neglected after 1994, left in poverty and obscurity by the very democratic state they had helped to win. One debate that recurs in the book concerns the basing of key commanders inside the country. Having senior figures present gave sharper coordination, boosted morale, and ensured direct political guidance. But it also exposed them to near-certain arrest or assassination, and when they were lost, operations suffered major setbacks. This unresolved tension – between effectiveness on the ground and the safety of leadership – was a limiting factor in Special Ops' durability.

Yet none of these limits diminishes the achievements. They place them in perspective. Special Ops was never equivalent to the entire army of liberation. It was a highly trained vanguard unit, striking surgically at the system's nerve centres. The true power of Special Ops lay in its contribution to the overall

armed struggle's synergy with the other pillars of struggle. Each explosion was a political act, resonating far beyond the immediate damage. Each operation amplified the voices of the masses, the strikes, the boycotts, the uprisings, the international campaigns. Special Ops showed that apartheid could bleed, and by doing so, it helped ensure that apartheid would eventually fall.

The final chapters also point to the unfinished work of memory. By creating not only a book but a dedicated website to continue adding names and stories of Special Ops cadres, Carrim ensures that history remains open, alive and growing. Too often, revolutionary history is reduced to a few canonical names while hundreds of others fade into silence. The website is a collective monument, resisting closure, allowing families, comrades and communities to keep memory alive. Carrim also stated publicly that the proceeds from this book will go to the families of the combatants themselves. He explained that having served thirty years in Parliament and a decade as a lecturer, with salaries paid by the people, and with a secure pension, he did not feel entitled to any personal income from this project. More than that, he emphasised that the book is "more the combatants' than mine," built overwhelmingly on their voices and testimonies. That decision strengthens the book's standing as a collective memory rather than an author-centred account.

The political lesson is clear. Our democracy, as Carrim reminds us, "did not fall from the skies." It was fought for in exile, in underground cells, in prisons and in the streets. The cadres of Special Ops remind us that freedom was won with blood, sacrifice and discipline. Their legacy is not nostalgia but continuity. For militants today, the lesson is to link every tactical method to the broader revolutionary struggle. No single site of struggle can substitute for another. Parliament, community activism, workplace and ideological struggles, international solidarity – all must be linked in a coherent strategy.

Attacking the Heart of Apartheid succeeds as both tribute and tool. It pays tribute to those who dared to strike apartheid at its core. And it offers tools for thinking about struggle today: the dangers of militarism, the necessity of dialectics, the cost borne by ordinary people, the centrality of political leadership, and the enduring power of international solidarity. In reading it, we are reminded that Special Ops was never about glorifying violence. It was about affirming that apartheid could be fought, that the system was not invincible, and that ordinary people could become the detonators of history. ■

Cde Tebogo Phadu is a SACP Central Committee and Politburo member.

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to the South African Communist Party

Cosatu House 4th Floor

110 Jorissen Street, Cnr Simonds Street

Braamfontein, Johannesburg 2017

PO Box 1027 Johannesburg 2000,

South Africa

Tel: +27 11 339 3621

Email: communications@sacp.org.za

& info@sacp.org.za



WHERE TO CONTACT THE SACP

HEAD OFFICE

4th Floor Cosatu House
110 Jorissen Street
Braamfontein, 2017
JOHANNESBURG, 2000
Tel: (011) 339 3621/2
(011) 3393621/2
Website: www.sacp.org.za
Twitter: SACaP1921
Facebook Page:
South African Communist
Party: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Communist-Party/115354128489821>

EASTERN CAPE

Block A Unit 1 Bisho Business Village
Siwani Avenue BISHO, 5605
Tel/Fax: (040) 635 0463
Email: ecape@sacp.org.za

FREE STATE

1st Floor Moses Kotane Building
44 Fichardt Str, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9300
Fax: (051) 430 7571/4480303
Email: freestate@sacp.org.za

GAUTENG

4A Floor Samwu House
Cnr. Frederick & Von Brandis Str
JOHANNESBURG, 2000
Tel: (011) 333 9177
Fax: (011) 331 3017
Email: gauteng@sacp.org.za

LIMPOPO

Jorissen Street, Adams Forum
NUM HOUSE, 0700
Tel: (015) 297 8128
Fax: (015) 297 7643
Email: limpopo@sacp.org.za

MOSES MABHIDA

321 Anton Lembede Street 7th Floor
SADTU House DRBN
Tel: (031) 301 3806/301 3763
Fax: (031) 301 5470
Email: kzn@sacp.org.za
MOSES KOTANE
4th Floor; Room 406, Vannel Building,
Cnr: OR Tambo & Boom Street
KLERKSDORP, 2570
Tel: (018) 462 5675/8230
Fax: (018) 462 5675/4322
Email: northwest@sacp.org.za

MPUMALANGA

NUM Offices, Smart Park Building
WITBANK
Tel: (013) 656 2045/73
Fax: (013) 690 1286
Email: mpumalanga@sacp.org.za

NORTHERN CAPE

17 Graham Street Street,
KIMBERLEY, 8300
Telefax (053) 831 4180
Email: ncape@sacp.org.za

WESTERN CAPE

No 8 Beverley Street Athlone,
Code: 7764 CT
Tel: 021 762 9719/9748
Fax: (021) 421 4170 / 424 4667
Email: wcape@sacp.org.za
WHERE TO CONTACT THE SACP

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