

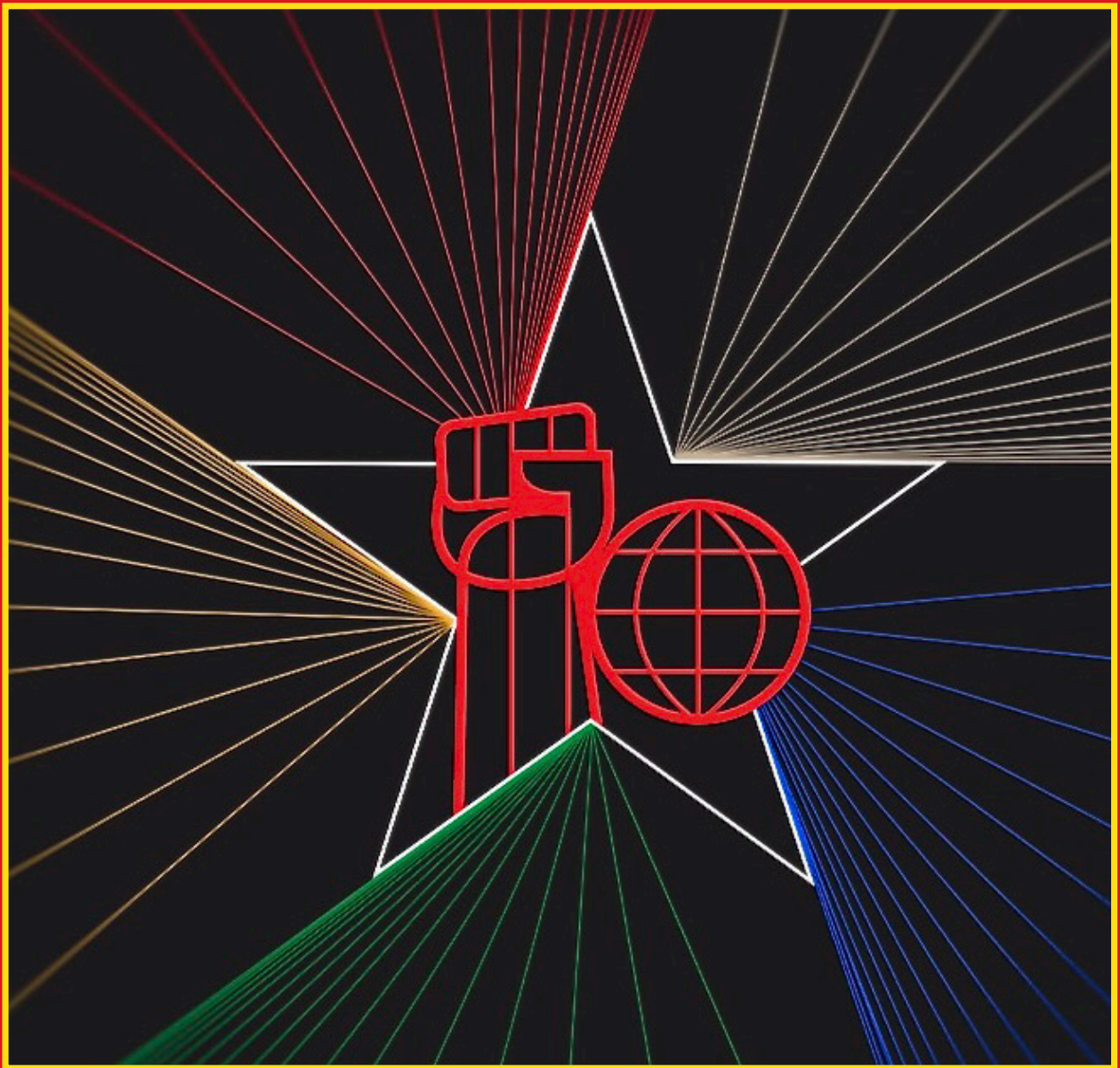


African Communist

4th Quarter 2025

Issue 214

Build working-class solidarity



Drive out imperialist ruin!

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Cover graphic courtesy of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research. The graphic is based on the 1972 poster by Lázaro Abreu Padrón for the anniversary of the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America – popularly known as the Tricontinental Conference, held in Havana, Cuba, in 1966.

Mass action can beat austerity privatisation and imperial domination — but only if we fight

The conjuncture confronting the working class is one of intensifying contradictions and diminishing room for manoeuvre. Globally, a system long presented as the natural horizon of human progress now reveals itself as a source of protracted stagnation, militarised conflict and ecological destruction. The opening contribution to this volume situates the present moment with clarity and purpose. It affirms that the crisis we face is structural, not accidental. The crisis is rooted in the logic of capitalism itself. It is expressed through imperialist domination, financialised accumulation and no-rules-barred competition over resources.

From Gaza to Sudan and Ukraine, war is not an aberration but a mechanism through which a crisis-ridden system seeks resolution. Debt dependency imposed on the Global South through multilateral financial institutions entrenches underdevelopment. Climate catastrophe falls heaviest on those least responsible for it. These global dynamics are not external to South Africa's predicament. They shape, constrain and intensify the domestic crisis confronting the working class and poor.

Locally, this crisis is lived daily through mass unemployment, deepening inequality, hunger, gender-based violence and the erosion of public services. Youth unemployment at catastrophic levels signals not a temporary downturn but a systemic failure to provide livelihoods and dignity. In this context, policy frameworks that promise renewal yet reproduce the orthodoxies of the past must be interrogated without illusion. Fiscal austerity, privatisation of strategic infrastructure, labour market deregulation and the conditionalisation of social support represent continuity with a neoliberal path. This path has entrenched stagnation and inequality. Even when official discourse acknowledges the damage caused by these policies, the absence of a decisive break renders such diagnoses politically sterile.

This volume insists that history offers both warning and inspiration. The experience of building militant, democratic worker organisations under conditions of repression demonstrates that advances are won through struggle, not benevolence. That legacy sharpens the urgency of organising in the present. Capital has restructured production. It has shifted exploitation into capital-intensive, outsourced and informalised sectors where labour protections are weakest. To leave these spaces

unorganised is to abandon a growing segment of the working class. Revitalising worker power requires expanding organisation precisely where capital believes it has insulated itself from collective resistance.

Economic ideology remains a central battleground. Narratives that blame unemployment on individual moral failure obscure the structural nature of joblessness under capitalism. They legitimise exclusion while absolving an economic system incapable of absorbing labour on socially useful terms. Challenging these myths is essential to building solidarity. Advancing an alternative rooted in social ownership, redistribution and democratic planning is necessary.

Critique alone, however, is insufficient. Several contributions emphasise the necessity of praxis that links political education, mass mobilisation and concrete interventions in communities. Initiatives that combine popular organisation with practical solidarity, such as the People's Red Caravan point towards forms of struggle that are rooted, visible and transformative. There is no neutral or technocratic route. Either such efforts are deepened as vehicles for sustained working-class power, or they risk being reduced to episodic gestures disconnected from broader strategy.

Reindustrialisation emerges as a further strategic imperative. Market-led approaches have hollowed out productive capacity while concentrating ownership and control. Rebuilding industry through active state intervention and anchoring production in local communities offers a pathway to employment, skills development and social cohesion. Local government can become a site of developmental coordination rather than mere administration, when aligned with working-class priorities.

International experience reinforces the importance of experimentation from below. Transformative institutional change has often been preceded by popular initiatives that challenge existing relations. These initiatives demonstrate alternative possibilities in practice. The lesson is not imitation but confidence in the capacity of organised communities. With support, organised communities can shape development trajectories.

Underlying all of this is the question of political independence and ideological clarity. Reductionist approaches that subordinate working-class politics to narrow electoral calculations weaken the capacity to confront a systemic crisis. The unresolved tensions within the National Democratic Revolution cannot be managed through accommodation with neoliberalism or the dilution of class struggle. Marxism-Leninism is reaffirmed not as dogma but as a living guide to action. It is essential for analysing concrete conditions and orienting strategy.

Finally, the international analyses in this volume underscore the necessity of principled internationalism. The devastation unfolding in Sudan and the persistent assault on

Venezuelan sovereignty reveal how internal class contradictions are entangled with imperial intervention. Appeals to humanitarianism and democracy often mask struggles over resources, influence and geopolitical control. Solidarity with people resisting domination is inseparable from the struggle against exploitation at home.

Taken together, the contributions argue for a politics that is organised, rooted and uncompromising. The choice before the working class is stark. Build a coherent alternative to austerity, privatisation and imperial domination through mass struggle. Act collectively, organise decisively, and refuse resignation. Otherwise, the present crisis will be resolved in the interests of capital. This volume affirms that history remains open, but only to those prepared to seize this moment and organise to change it. The time for action is now. Our future depends on it. ■

Our duty as the vanguard of the working class: to rescue the NDR and advance to socialism!

The following is a shortened version of the Political Report delivered by the SACP General Secretary Solly Mapaila to the 11th Plenary Session of the 15th Congress Augmented Central Committee, held in Boksburg, 28- 30th November 2025.

In the past few weeks, we buried Comrades Lawrence Pillay, Sunny Singh, Lorna Levy, Oupa Modikoane and Rev. Maphatsoe, as well as three family members of Comrade Madoda Sambatha. We share our grief and condolences with all these comrades and their families, including those not included here. May we observe a moment of silence in their memory and all the comrades who died since our last meeting.

A massive workers' victory that will change health care services in South Africa.

Let us open this Augmented Central Committee (ACC) by appreciating the important victory in the Labour Court by Nehawu and the entire Cosatu in defending the rights of exploited community health workers. This paves the way for improvements in the Public Works Programme, which has been exploited by government for decades without proper pay and benefits. We are happy we joined those class battles with the workers. It is a collective victory, albeit led by Nehawu.

Cosatu 40th anniversary

We also wish Cosatu, our mighty worker's federation, a successful 40th anniversary celebration in the coming week. We will have a moment to celebrate in this ACC tomorrow evening. We have been part of the processes leading up to the celebrations in Dobsonville, Soweto.

On the G20 held in SA

We also wish to commend the President and the government for the successful convening of the G20 summit, even though, in truth, we know it gives nothing better to the working class than to consolidate imperialist hegemony. But to the extent the North can affirm our common future as humanity, we appreciate it, but we don't rely on it for the well-being of our people and the execution of the NDR.

Overall, we welcome the strong exercise of national sovereignty against intimidation by the USA and the embrace of a generally progressive discourse on questions affecting the South, such as the debt crisis, financial inclusivity and digital inclusivity. But we all remain conscious that the source of the problems lies in the imperial North and the capitalist system implemented as neoliberalism here at home.

The conjunctural crisis: a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the global political economy

The crisis we face is not episodic; it is structural. It is not merely cyclical; it is systemic. The international capitalist order, driven by profit accumulation, imperialist expansion and its internal crisis, and ecological extraction, is entering a phase of intensified contradiction. As Mao Tse-Tung reminds us in *On Contradiction*, “*The development of things is due to internal contradictions.*” Today, the contradictions of global capitalism are sharpening across multiple fronts.

According to the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025* by United Nations Conference on trade and development – UNCTAD, global growth remains below pre-pandemic levels, with trade tensions, weak investment and high debt levels weighing heavily on developing economies. Almost half of developing countries faced food inflation above 5% in 2024, while debt servicing now exceeds spending on health and education in many African states. For example: Zambia spends over 30% of its national budget on external debt repayments, while hospitals face medicine shortages and teachers go unpaid. Argentina’s inflation surpassed 200% in 2024, driven by IMF-imposed austerity and currency collapse.

This is not mismanagement, but it is imperialist finance in motion. The Global South is trapped in a debt spiral, enforced by institutions like the IMF and World Bank, which serve as instruments of class domination and imperialist control.

From Sudan to Ukraine, from Gaza to Haiti, militarised capitalism is intensifying. As a living example, the continued war in Gaza has displaced over 2 million people, with UN agencies warning of multiple famines and many genocides. The Sahel region has seen a wave of coups driven by anti-French sentiment and demands for sovereignty yet faces sanctions and isolation from ECOWAS and AU structures. Just two days ago there was another coup d’état in Equatorial Guinea – we are yet to assess this one fully.

These conflicts are not isolated. They are expressions of imperialist crisis management. As Lenin taught, “*Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism*”, a stage marked by war.

Ecological collapse and climate apartheid

The capitalist mode of production treats nature as an infinite resource and a dumping ground. The result is ecological collapse, for example: In Pakistan, floods displaced over 30 million people in 2022, yet climate reparations remain unfunded. Jamaica, Haiti and Cuba were hit by hurricane Melissa with categories five to three in the said countries. These are among the worst storms ever, the biggest in 120 years. Here at home, in South Africa, water scarcity in the Eastern Cape and toxic air in Mpumalanga reflect environmental racism and extractive capitalism.

South Africa: the crisis in lived experience

In South Africa, the crisis is not theoretical; it is a lived reality. It is a theatre of degradation and exploitation of the working class in their stolen land of plenty.

Unemployment: Youth unemployment exceeds 42%. Over 4,000 jobs were lost at ArcelorMittal in 2025. Goodyear, Daybreak Foods, and the Post Office have retrenched thousands more.

Inequality: The richest 10% control over 85% of household wealth. Township economies remain informalised and excluded from industrial policy.

Gendered violence: Femicide rates are among the highest globally. The state's response is underfunded and bureaucratised. We welcome the President declaration of this as a disaster, but what is omitted is that it is a capitalist created disaster and would not be ended by more capitalist measures.

Debt and hunger: Over 60% of households rely on credit to buy food. Food inflation remains above 10% in working-class communities.

These are not policy failures; they are the outcomes of a neoliberal accumulation path that prioritises profit over people, market efficiency over social need, and elite consensus over working-class power.

On the new government and ANC economic policy: GAIN

At the end of September, the ANC lekgotla was presented with a document from the Presidency, which is envisaged as the coalition government's "framework to revive growth and create jobs in South Africa".

Entitled the *Growth and Inclusion Strategy (GAIN)*, the document basically endorses the existing neoliberal policy framework of "fiscal consolidation" and "structural reform" of network industries, while arguing that the poor growth performance to date has been due to "a weak implementation record". Specifically, the document argues that Operation Vulindela has identified the "right reforms" but that implementation has been too slow, that regulatory barriers are too high and that several sectors were overregulated, and that there is consequently an urgent need to create a more "investment friendly" environment.

Among the key (repackaged) Interventions GAIN proposes are:

- A "big-bang" approach to liberalisation of network industries (energy, logistics, water, housing)—including completing the restructuring of Eskom and establishment of a competitive wholesale electricity market by April 2026 and enabling private-sector participation in water infrastructure by September 2026.
- Fiscal consolidation to reduce debt and attract private investment.
- Labour-market shifts toward private-sector employment and deregulation.

- Reform of public employment programmes (Work SA).
- “Linking” of SRD grants to “productive activity” – details to be announced in February 2026 budget.
- Acceleration of green economy, infrastructure, and export diversification programmes, but with no indication of additional resource allocations.

The Same aGAIN Strategy, in short, is basically a recycling of the same policy framework, which for the past six years, has delivered rates of unemployment, poverty and inequality higher than they were at the time of the crisis before the crisis of Covid and GDP growth rates lower than they have been at any time since our democratic breakthrough in 1994.

The SACP has repeatedly indicated that we are not arguing for spendthrift policies, nor calling for tolerance of the vast amount of wasteful expenditure that occurs, however, our economic policy cannot prioritise the attainment of pre-ordained ratios (derived from the neoliberal playbook) over all other considerations.

Government lacking confidence and the mission of its mandate

Our government acts as though it has no confidence in its ability to deliver growth – and thereby reduce the, still not crisis level, debt to GDP ratio by increasing GDP. 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.

Structural reform and the new Washington consensus

Regarding the notion of “structural reform” in 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 USA, focused on the achievement of macro-economic balances held to apply to all countries and under all circumstances.

These included a budget deficit not exceeding 3% of GDP and moving towards zero, and an inflation rate in single digits and falling as the exclusive target of monetary policy pursued with a single instrument, interest rate adjustments.

This pursuit of macro-economic balance was to be complemented with a market determined exchange rate, states withdrawing from the direct provision of a range of public services in favour of procuring these from the “private sector”, 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.

Without structural transformation, South Africa will remain trapped in serious economic challenges. The country needs a revolutionary break with neoliberal conservatism and a reassertion of public purpose in the service of the majority of the people, being the working class and poor. Only through such a break can we build a democratic developmental state capable of guaranteeing the right of all to work and live in dignity.

On the ANC NGC Base Document economic section

Contrary to the ‘Same aGAIN’ Strategy, the political economy sections of the ANC’s NGC Base Document include an interesting and progressive critique of both the content and impact of economic policy over the past 30+ years, while falling short of grappling with the real contradictions between the document’s own diagnosis and proposals and the practice of the ANC led coalition government.

At a broad diagnostic level there is, in fact, considerable overlap between the content of the Base Document and recent SACP resolutions and statements. The Base Document acknowledges that there has been “regression in poverty reduction”, that “South Africa remains the most unequal country in the world by income”, and that unemployment has remained stubbornly high. On inequality, it notes that while extreme levels of inequality in South Africa have persisted, Brazil, starting from a similar base, has made significant progress in reducing its own levels of inequality.

At a very general level and at the highest levels of abstraction, there are things to welcome in the political economy sections of the NGC Base Document. It includes several progressive proposals and goes significantly further than previous ANC documents in critiquing the adoption of neoliberalism and calling for alternatives.

The key problem is that many NGCs and conferences have articulated an intention to move towards a more progressive economic policy without agreeing on any strong nor binding resolution on *changing* macro-economic policy. Too often vague notions that the role of macro-economic policy is to maintain stability or alternatively that macro-economic and transformative microeconomic policy should be “aligned” have

been interpreted as a mandate to continue with the existing neoliberal macro-economic policies.

The emphasis on privatisation in key sectors such as electricity, transport, ports and water is indicative of a broader trend towards the financialisation of the economy, where public assets are increasingly subjected to the logic of profit maximisation. The dominant ideology is that the capitalist-dominated private sector, ironically the driving force of the system that has caused the problems, is the solution. In terms of their defining class orientation and dominant direction, key government policies, such as fiscal policy, monetary policy and neoliberal sectoral reforms, are entrenching the capitalist private pathway. In this context, the definition of privatisation has moved beyond the whole or partial sale of state assets but includes outsourcing and microeconomic liberalisation outcomes, such as in electricity generation and transmission, the ports, rail and water, in terms of ownership and management control.

What is clear now is that South Africa needs a second, more radical democratic breakthrough to bring about a fundamental policy shift and address its principal economic development problems while advancing broader social transformation. This will not come easily, given that the alignment of forces has changed and we are now confronted not only by the primary strategic class adversary but also by a range of comprador policymakers, including those emerging from the same historical background, unfortunately comrades led by the ANC itself, but indeed now we know as a compradorial force as the Harvard document illustrates.

Building a popular left front

We are determined to build a popular Left front and a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor. In this regard, the Conference of the Left is crucial as a democratic consultative process. Therefore, it does not seek to first cobble together a variety of formations at leadership level that merely proclaim themselves “Left” or “socialist” and only thereafter launch a programme of mobilisation and action.

The forging of a popular Left movement, as with the mass socialist movement, must be rooted in an active network of struggle – *“feeling the stones to cross the river”* – as we are doing, for example, through advancing and expanding the People’s Red Caravan. In the same vein, the working-class campaign for a policy shift towards a second, more radical democratic breakthrough is a crucial element of a Left popular front programme of mobilisation and action, in the policymaking space and on other fronts of the class struggle.

According to our programme the ‘South African Struggle for Socialism’, the SACP’s strategic goal in the current phase of the national democratic revolution and the struggle for socialism is to build a powerful socialist movement of the workers and the poor and continue the struggle to place working-class hegemony in all key sites of

struggle and power, guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism whose universal validity has been proven by historical experience.

On the reconfiguration of the alliance

We continue to pursue this matter and have engaged in several meetings with our allies. As the SACP we have committed ourselves to remain available and ready to work with the ANC in pursuit of the NDR as we have always done, and not to betray it. We will never be party to any process that betrays the NDR, no matter how it is couched.

Ideological orientation and the political moment

In the context of some public debates about our Marxism-Leninism from both the public domain and even internal in the SACP, largely sparked by the SACP decision to contest elections. We should start by perhaps clarifying our Marxist-Leninist positions to at least ground our discussions and even provide some elementary responses to some of the debates.

For us, Marxism-Leninism is a guide to action, whether adapted to our conditions or not; it is a theory of revolution, less a theory of leisure. It is elucidated by its practice and thus develops the praxis of our revolution. That's why communists are the most dependable in a revolution, most firm and not the weaklings of the revolution, but the pillar to rely on for the success of the revolution.

It is this socialist praxis that exposes who you are in reality – exposes form and content, distinguishing you from what you say and think of yourself, or at least, understanding you from a clear appreciation of the differences between the two (theory and practice) if not the confirmation of similarities.

However, we have some few fundamental theoretical contributions to make, from one of the renowned revolutionary leaders of the world communist movement, comrade Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in 'What Is to be done?', when he had to say: *'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity'*.

The importance of what Lenin says cannot be overemphasised in so far as we are concerned, and not least with ideological orientation but also in an evaluation of practical activity in relation to one's political and ideological actions.

Another contribution in the debate comes from Lenin in his address at the Congress of Russian Young Communist League in 1920, when he had this to say: *"Without work, without struggle, a routine knowledge of communism obtained from communist pamphlets and books would be worthless, for it would continue the old divorcement of theory from practice, that old separation which constituted the most disgusting feature of the old bourgeois society"*.

Then from Karl Marx in his 1844 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', when he concluded that: "*Practice without theory is blind. Theory without practice is sterile.*"

The profound message coming out of these contributions is that a revolutionary theory is developed and verified in material conditions, and that theory becomes a material force as soon as it enters the realm of practice. The dialectical link between the two cannot be overemphasised.

Also, Marxism-Leninism is not an abstract article of faith. On the contrary, conclusions reached from a Marxist-Leninist analysis, particularly on the question posed by Lenin: 'What is to be done?', depend on a revolution. No amount of analysis alone can alter the character and content of change without action in the direction pointed out from the analysis.

The People's Red Caravan has taken our practice of working amongst the masses much higher and we have witnessed the satisfaction of practising communists in action on selfless service to the poor working with them and their communities.

Taking responsibility to rescue the NDR

The SACP has adopted the dialectical connection between the struggle for socialism and the national democratic revolution as the South African Road to Socialism. In this regard, we seek to advance, deepen, defend, and as our 13th Congress in Ngoye added, take responsibility for the NDR. It certainly did not say take responsibility for neoliberalism, state capture and collaboration with capital to stifle socio economic transformation agenda while pretending doing something. Social science has developed evidence as a test of progress, stagnation or regression.

How do we take responsibility in the context of not only collaboration between the revolutionary forces and forces of capital but where capital has gained ascendancy and driving the policy of national government and the direction of the liberation movement?

The SACP has observed with concern the emergence of an oppositionist tendency within the ranks of some sections of our movement. This tendency has been seeking to dissuade against participation in the implementation of the national democratic revolution, especially through the state. To the extent this tendency isolates the communists, it has become both anti-SACP and a manifestation in our broader

Similarly, the tendency as such is also an expression of factionalism. As a faction, this is oppositionist and anti-Communist Party and has sought to expand itself by creeping in some of our organisations within the broader movement, including in the SACP, with an intention to hijack them towards its agenda, a disorder and chaos agenda of diversions. Its methods of work are entryist and divisive in character.

The oppositionist and anti-Communist infantile disorder focuses, although not exclusively, on capturing individuals without a backbone in leadership structures at the top and using them as a platform of expansion in pursuit of its factional agenda. We must be vigilant and not only keep this tendency in check but reject it by a decisive blow. This tendency uses the historic role in the liberation movement to maintain the status quo of dormant politics and elitism.

Our revolution has made some major achievements and advances since 1994 in different spheres of life. Some have suffered major regressions and others became stagnant. Acknowledging, recognising and celebrating the achievements and advances made by our revolution does not mean that the revolution is completed. On the contrary, that should serve as encouragement to revolutionaries to carry on as there is still more that needs to be done in addressing historical injustices and dealing with new challenges, such as the transfer of land to the people and the sharing of the country's wealth.

The institutionalised mafia getting roots in RSA

Comrades we are very much concerned by the institutionalised form of the mafia in this country. We are glad the police have arrested Cat Matlala, because it is quite clear, and subject to further findings and the Commission of Inquiry by Justice Madlanga, that he has come out a major player in the face of the mafia and cartels with huge influence and in some respects even controlling a certain public security system in South Africa. In other words, we have criminals fully contesting democracy by directing the state and its affairs.

We have welcomed this commission and as we all know also commended Lt. General Mkhwanazi for his bravery to expose these realities. We call on the security services to leave no stone unturned in tracking down and completely eliminating this scourge in our communities. We welcome the assurances by Minister Prof. Firoz Cachalia of the attention to concerns we have raised about the state of crime in the country and especially in Mqhekezweni village and the surrounds in the Eastern Cape. This is not a banana republic.

Strengthening our public health campaign and defending the introduction of the National Health Insurance

In addition to deepening and expanding the gains we have made from our Red October Campaign we are called upon to defend the gains that we have achieved already. This must include ensuring that the National Health Insurance is speedily rolled out and implemented without being captured by the interests of tenderpreneurs, the profit motive and private capital accumulation but remains a public service in public hands and administration. This includes guarding against the capture of the National Health Insurance by, or its slide into the hands of, the exploiters.

Rebuilding and refocusing the Financial Sector Campaign

One of the important outcomes that we secured through the campaign is credit amnesty for the workers and the poor. The importance of this to our economy, including addressing household and social development constraints, unlocking credit extension to the cooperatives, and communal, micro, small and medium enterprises sectors and boosting employment growth, cannot be overemphasised.

As things stand, many people are still listed by credit bureaus with adverse findings and their lives cannot move. Worse is that many of them have been listed wrongfully and are held back by trivial credit bureau adverse listings. Again, the exploiters are trying everything they can to stand in the way. We therefore need to intensify the campaign.

Other than the credit bureaus, as well as the garnishee orders which are holding back many households and reckless lending, there are many practices in the financial sector that need to be uprooted if our economy is to advance. The largest of these practices is financialisation, essentially entailing the capture and dominance of finance capital over economic transformation and development as well as over other sectors.

This has a huge impact ranging from ever shifting investment from the productive sector in favour of the speculative casino economy and intensified neoliberal restructuring of the productive sector to meet the interests of finance capital, resulting among others in ever increasing insecurity for the workers through changing forms of employment relationships towards precarious work, retrenchments and erosion of hard-won democratic gains in the transformation of labour relations. Our financial sector campaign seeks to confront these and other practices such as securitisation which is a toxic mixture in the economy.

This campaign is part and parcel of the Party's contribution in fighting against economic exploitation, from which class inequality, poverty and unemployment are manufactured and reproduced. Taking forward the struggle against all of these in the direction of socialism represents the best way of celebrating the Great October Socialist Revolution through our Red October Campaign directed squarely against capital and its collaborators.

Class development in a capitalist society

Class develops at the point of production between the owners of the means of production and the workers. This is where the original sin of working-class exploitation begins.

The basis of this existence is the political economy – of such a society - which studies the laws of production and their interrelations namely, production relations, exchange relations, distribution relations, consumption relations. In this context we as communists must always pose the simplest but most important basic question – what

causes worker exploitation and subsequent poverty and inequality, rather than just proclaim them.

The sphere of commodity production is the organic cell of the capitalist system and forms the basis for an open war of exploitation against the working class by capital.

Our Marxism is against anarchism and workerism

It is also important to clarify that the relationship between the SACP and the revolutionary trade union movement is anchored in our Marxist-Leninist and the national democratic revolutionary framework in pursuit of our revolutionary struggle, not an anarchic struggle, even some throw labels to the contrary. Anarchy is resembled here in South Africa by the chaotic capitalist economy, cheered on by a compliant, docile government.

It is therefore important to reflect a bit on our Marxism and Leninism in the context of South African conditions. Obviously, our point of departure is based on the South African Road to Socialism, the South African Struggle for Socialism and the Medium Term Vision as our Marxism-Leninism and building a massive movement of the workers and the poor.

On the people's red caravan

We have been excited by the launch and implementation of the People's Red Caravans, the reception by communities and the relevance of community service by the SACP activists and indeed the contribution towards building community self-reliance. We have planted the seeds of communist work amongst the people in three provinces North West, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape. We appreciate the efforts of these provinces, and we call on those who have not started, to learn from others and surprise us when we come to your province. The PRC is theoretical and practical Party work, as foreseen by Karl Marx.

All our branches, districts and provinces should launch the People's Red Caravan even before the roll out by the national, and those provinces we launched should do so in their respective districts. There has been a delay in the roll of this programme. It should constitute the single most implemented and participated in programme of the SACP. It is a programme to reorganise society anew and with our value system.

The recent PRC was in the Eastern Cape province of Mqhekezweni, where President Nelson Mandela was raised by regent King Jongintaba.

We have communicated to the ANC President and SG about the most immediate acute challenges facing that community. We wrote to the Premier and all relevant people, who have not responded except a few with just acknowledgements letters and not on the content issues.

We need urgent action there, starting with the safety of the community and the heritage preservation of the area.

Urgent and strategic tasks on the way forward

- We need to relieve ourselves by coming out of the strategic ambiguity we have been trapped in since 1994.
- We made important interventions, and some were listened to but poorly implemented. We should reconnect with our posture of strategic consistency to rescue the NDR as the direct route to socialism and regain the orientation of our Marxism – Leninism and implement our decisions with discipline, not justify subjugation of our organisation, its theory and practice to forces captured by neoliberalism.
- We must leave here committed to the full implementation our 2026 annual programme of action. At the core of it is the full roll out of the People’s Red Caravan across all provinces, districts and our branches. We must reconnect with the people on a community-led, self-reliant, people-driven development programme, and root the Party amongst the masses.
- Equally, we should set up the election structures at all levels where they are not established and IMPLEMENT our elections campaign.
- We should equally strengthen Party unity and accountability of members and leadership structures at all levels.
- Prepare a leading role in the second more radical democratic breakthrough by harnessing progressive forces through the Conference of the Left.
- We should join our people and communities as they fight the scourge against gender-based violence and femicide and protect our communities from being overwhelmed by crime and criminal activities.

A revolutionary conclusion

Let’s remind ourselves of who we are. We are communists. When we go to other organisations we serve, we don’t cease to be communists. We use our ideology as a tool to engage in those organisations and win the battle of democracy.

We are not only in alliance with the ANC, but we are members of the ANC in our own right as is with Cosatu. There is therefore no ANC without us. Even where the outcomes of strategic and tactical considerations do not go our way in the ANC, we remain and fight, we cannot run away from class battles. Not running away doesn’t mean accepting and abiding with neoliberal deviations by the ANC and championing neoliberalism, which is not our shared programme, nor this ten point plan from Harvard scholars.

Let this ACC rise with one voice and one resolve: To unite the working class. To reclaim local people's democracy. To fight austerity and privatisation. To stand firm against reactionary forces. To build community power. To advance socialism in practice. To act boldly in the electoral terrain. To lead the people in struggle, not from behind, but from the front.

This is our moment. This is our task. This is our duty as the vanguard of the working class, to rescue the NDR and advance to socialism!

Forward to the 2026 Local Government Elections! Forward to people's power in municipalities! Forward with the South African Communist Party! Forward with Socialism, Down with Capitalism! ■

Working-class politics to the fore

This article, by **Yunus Carrim**, on the formation of Cosatu in December 1985, is reproduced from the journal *Work in Progress**, 40, 1986

The recently-formed Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) is South Africa's largest ever union federation. Yunus Carrim examines the union traditions that have come together in Cosatu, and concludes that despite differences within the federation, its formation puts working-class politics firmly on the agenda.

After four years of painstaking discussions, the majority of South Africa's emergent unions came together in Durban from 30 November to 1 December last year to form the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

With 33 unions representing 449 679 paid-up members, Cosatu is the largest ever trade union federation in South Africa's history. It is significant not only in size, but also because it represents unions in almost all major economic sectors, including mining, metal, automobiles, chemicals, textiles, food, transport, wood and paper, municipal services, and commercial and catering.

But its even greater significance is the enormous political weight it will have on the struggle for change in South Africa. As congress convenor Cyril Ramaphosa noted in his opening address: 'The formation of Cosatu represents a tremendous victory for the working class. Never before have workers been so powerful and united, and never before have they been so poised to make their mark in society. In this period of crisis, the question that echoes through every section of society – the state, capital and the democratic movement of this country – is how will the congress make its mark on South African society'.

That Cosatu sees for itself an assertive political role was repeatedly stressed by the newly-elected representatives of the federation. Said general secretary Jay Naidoo: 'Our members are demanding this. Wider political events directly affect them, and they want their unions to respond to this and put the stamp of workers on these struggles'. This was necessary, he said, to ensure that 'the wealth produced by the workers is controlled by them and shared for the benefit of all the people in a future South Africa'.

Cosatu president Elijah Barayi, speaking to over 10 000 people at the public launch of

Work in Progress, established in 1977, provided a platform for radical analysis of South African political economy, labour struggles, and state repression.

the federation, called for the nationalisation of the mines and other major industries, and in interviews with the press said that Cosatu would work towards the creation of a socialist state in South Africa.

The inaugural congress, however, passed no specific policy on Cosatu's general political direction. An enormous debate rages within Cosatu at present on how it should play a political role and what the substance of its politics should be. The emergence of a cohesive perspective and strategy depends crucially however on the extent to which Cosatu is able to establish a synthesis of the two traditions of trade unionism that it brings together: industrial, more class-oriented unionism, and general, more popular-oriented unionism.

The two traditions

Each of these traditions varies widely, and their generalisation here is somewhat crude. Industrial unions organise workers belonging to a specific industry. Most of these unions developed in the wake of the 1973 Durban strikes. They have concentrated mainly on recruiting members, securing recognition agreements, establishing strong shop-floor structures, winning workplace demands and providing workers with skills and experience to effectively assume control of their unions.

In creating powerful national industrial unions, they adopted a tactically flexible approach to official industrial relations machinery, being prepared, for example, to register with the Department of Manpower in terms of the Labour Relations Act, or take part in industrial councils, if this strengthened their organisation.

For the most part, they have avoided overt involvement in wider political and community issues. They have taken up some wider issues directly affecting their members, but through their own structures as far as possible. Joint campaigns with other organisations have been on the basis of their strength on the shop floor and without affiliating to these organisations.

Among the reasons advanced by these unions for not affiliating to the popular movement have been:

- possible divisions in their ranks because members identify with different political organisations;
- differences in structure, organisational practice and politics between mass-based unions and activist-based political organisations;
- the popular movement is not fundamentally committed to working-class interests and would subordinate unions to ends not primarily in workers' interests.

The industrial unions have identified their main political task as developing worker organisation, creating worker unity and developing worker leadership as a basis for a working-class politics, which would provide an alternative to popular movement politics.

Some of the criticisms of this approach, labelled 'workerist', have been:

- it equates the trade union movement with the working class;
- as unions are not political parties, they cannot demand the leading role in the popular struggle, and though they want this role because of their organised strength, they are at the same time afraid of being subordinated;
- they have yet to spell out in what organisational form a working-class politics will be developed, especially as they have not as unions been able to give leadership to the wider political struggle.

Broadly, the industrial union approach has been identified in different ways with the unions in the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu), the General Workers Union (GWU), Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU), Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA), Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (CTMWA), and certain unions in the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA).

The second tradition, general unionism, provides for the organisation of workers irrespective of the industries to which they belong into a single union. General unions sprang up overnight as a result of new legal provisions for African trade unions in 1979, the economic boom and an upsurge of township struggle. Some of them signed on huge numbers of workers, often through strike waves and mass township meetings.

But they have not been able to consolidate themselves on the shop floor in terms of significant paid-up membership, recognition agreements or shop steward structures, as they do not organise along industrial lines.

This has not been helped either by their refusal in principle to register or take part in industrial councils.

Most general unions are based in one region. Some have branches elsewhere, but these operate somewhat autonomously, with links at leadership level rather than from factory to factory.

The general unions have explicitly committed themselves to wider political and community issues, and most affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF). They have tended to blur the distinction between community and workplace as forums for organisation, arguing that 'the workers are the community and the community the workers'. Weak shop-floor structures and constant state harassment have reinforced their 'community orientation', which in turn has reinforced their weakness on the shop floor.

Among the reasons these unions have offered for affiliating to the UDF have been:

- the need to overcome the limitations of trade union activity and prevent a slide into economism;
- the organised participation of workers through their unions will serve to give the popular struggle a working-class content and direction;
- other classes and strata outside the union movement are indispensable to the wider political struggle, and working-class leadership of these can only be ensured by waging struggles together with them in the popular movement.

This approach, labelled 'populist', has been subjected to various criticisms:

- its abstract political approach to trade unionism, which does not recognise the specificity of the trade union terrain, has prevented the development of unions on the shop floor;
- as it does not organise workers specifically as workers and has not been able to develop strong, national industrial unions, it has not been able to give workers a sense of their organised power;
- as it does not have a powerful organised base, it is not able to give the popular movement a working-class content and leadership.

Broadly, this tradition of unionism is identified with the South African Allied Workers Union (Saawu), General and Allied Workers Union (Gawu), National Federation of Workers (NFW), and the recently disbanded Municipal and General Workers Union (MGWU), among others.

Essentially, the two traditions of unionism differ over how to link economics and politics and what the content of the politics should be. This reflects itself in the differences over how to create working-class leadership and the role of trade unions in this process.

The tensions between and within these traditions were reflected in four years of 'unity talks' aimed at bringing the unions together into one federation. Thirteen meetings were held between August 1981 and June 1985. Debates raged over issues of registration, industrial demarcation, participation in industrial councils, when the federation should be launched, its form and voting structure, financing, affiliate voting strength, the role of paid officials, relations with the international trade union movement, and the role of whites.

But the unions drew closer in a context of deepening recession, increasing industrial monopolisation and sophistication of management strategies, tightening state repression and dramatic escalation of township struggles. As industrial unions came under increasing pressure from their memberships to take up political issues, so general unions, with considerably shrunken bases, have been pressured to establish a

strong shop-floor presence.

There are still tensions between the unions. But Cosatu has brought most of them together. Now it has the enormous task of welding these unions into a powerful and effective federation.

Mergers crucial

Fundamental to this task is the merging of unions to create one union per industry. Jay Naidoo stressed: 'It's absolutely essential that we achieve the mergers as soon as possible. We can only be a powerful force on the shop floor and in the struggles outside if we are based in national industrial unions'.

Cosatu's inaugural congress demarcated industrial sectors and set March 1986 as the deadline for mergers. If progress is not satisfactory by then, a special mid-year national congress will be convened to assess developments. The mergers will have to triumph over past hostilities and differences in organising methods, structures, politics and personalities, and splits within Cosatu over this cannot be discounted.

The UDF-aligned unions stressed their commitment to merging into industrial unions. Said spokesperson Themba Nxumalo, general secretary of NFW: 'We accept that Cosatu must be based on industrial unions. That's where the power is. We have already begun merging workers in the municipal and railway sectors ourselves. We only accepted general unions because of the specific conditions we faced, and as an initial strategy in organising workers'.

The UDF will lose most of its union affiliates when larger industrial unions absorb general unions. Is the UDF not concerned about losing this working-class constituency? UDF spokesperson Billy Nair says, 'No, we have urged our unions to go into Cosatu. Union unity is paramount at this stage. We are fully behind Cosatu and look forward to working closely with them. The unions are not our only working-class constituency. The UDF is a force in the townships – and who is the majority there if not workers?'

The most successful merger talks so far have been between industrial unions. GWU and Transport and General Workers Union, and Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union and FCWU are negotiating mergers. Talks are relatively advanced in the motor and metal industry between the Metal and Allied Workers Union, National

Automobile and Allied Workers Union, and the United Mining, Metal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa. Two UDF unions, the Johannesburg-based Municipal and General Workers Union and the Durban-based Municipal Workers of South Africa, merged on the eve of the Cosatu launch, and are to meet the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association to form a single municipal workers union.

If the mergers are successful, Cosatu will have large national industrial unions in excess of 100 000 in mining, 70 000 in metal, 60 000 in commerce, 50 000 in food, 30 000

in transport, 25 000 in textiles and 20 000 in both chemical and municipal sectors.

Workers outside Cosatu

While Cosatu is the largest trade union federation in the country, there are substantial numbers of workers organised outside it and a considerably greater number still to be organised.

The black consciousness-oriented CUSA and the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions are believed to have 180 000 and 70 000 signed-up members, respectively. Their paid-up membership is believed to be substantially less, with the vast majority of these in CUSA. CUSA, a loose federation of 11 industrial unions, is strong in the chemical, construction, food and transport sectors. Azactu is also a loose federation of nine general and industrial unions.

Both these union groupings refused to join Cosatu because of their opposition to its non-racial policy and their commitment to anti-racism instead. There may be practical differences between non-racialism and anti-racism in community organising – for example, the Natal Indian Congress would not be acceptable to anti-racists. But practical differences for union organisation between these two approaches are less clear.

An anti-racist approach, as understood by CUSA, means that white workers can join the unions as members and even assume leadership roles if elected by workers, but white organisers cannot be 'superimposed' as leaders on the unions.

However, workers usually appoint organisers, whether white or black.

Moreover, the involvement of white intellectuals in the union movement does not necessarily negate black working-class leadership, any more than the involvement of black intellectuals necessarily promotes it. Differences between the black consciousness groupings and Cosatu are more abstractly ideological and seem to reflect a concern to maintain individual and organisational identity – and appear to be at leadership level rather than between groups of workers.

Azactu and CUSA have meanwhile established a 'close working relationship' and are exploring a possible merger, but at present Azactu appears more enthusiastic than CUSA. Cosatu, for its part, has stressed that the door remains open to these and other unions to join it.

The other significant grouping of organised workers is in the Trade Union Council of South Africa (Tucsa). Tucsa suffered a loss of over 120 000 members in the last two years, and now has about 340 000 paid-up members in 43 industrial unions. Half of these are coloured and Indian, a quarter African and a quarter white.

More importantly, there are several large unions which recently left Tucsa because of its conservatism. Cosatu representatives say there are 'indications' of support for

Cosatu from some of these unions, but 'internal organisational problems' prevent them from joining at the moment. Cosatu will probably attempt to win some of these unions over in the near future. Talks are under way with one of them.

The federation is weak in the building, domestic and state sectors and has no organisation in the crucial agricultural sector. The inaugural congress decided to establish national unions in construction and agriculture. The organising of farm and domestic workers will take place despite the lack of legal recognition of unions in these sectors.

Cosatu also resolved to intensify its efforts to organise in the bantustans: 'We shall not hesitate to exercise our rights to organise in plants based within the bantustans and we are fully prepared to defend ourselves against repression by whatever effective means at our disposal'.

A decision was also taken to form an Unemployed Workers Union as part of a broader campaign against unemployment that will include support for co-operative schemes set up by retrenched and dismissed workers.

Cosatu will be addressing itself to tasks that the union movement has not tackled before on an organised national basis. It will be interesting, for example, to see how unions of farm, domestic and unemployed workers are fitted into a federation of industrial unions based on strong shop-floor structures.

Democratic structures

Cosatu's structure is based on its five principles of worker control, non-racialism, one union per industry, representation according to paid-up membership and national co-operation between affiliates. Cosatu intends to function as a tight federation. Jay Naidoo: 'There's the onslaught from the state and management. The recession is getting worse. So, we must have massive unity to act decisively'.

The structure of the new federation provides for this unity through democratic national, regional and local structures. The major decision-making body is the biennial national congress, made up of delegates from all affiliates represented in proportion to their paid-up membership. The main tasks of the congress are to adopt federation policies, to consider constitutional amendments and elect office bearers.

Elected at the inaugural congress were:

President: Elijah Barayi (NUM)

First Vice-President: Chris Dlamini (SFAWU)

Second Vice-President: Makhulu Ledwaba (CCAWUSA)

Treasurer: Maxwell Xulu (MAWU)

General Secretary: Jay Naidoo (SFAWU)

Assistant General Secretary: Sydney Mafumadi (GAWU)

The last two are paid full-time posts. The central executive committee (CEC) will appoint two other national full-time office bearers – education officer and newspaper editor. No paid official has voting rights, and workers must constitute a majority in all federation structures and meetings.

Between national congresses the CEC will run the federation. The CEC consists of national office bearers, regional area chairpersons, two delegates from unions of 15 000 or less, and four delegates from unions with more than 15 000 members. The CEC meets at least four times a year. It will consider applications for membership, set up sub-committees, establish regional areas, settle disputes between affiliates and appoint full-time employees.

In between CEC meetings the executive committee, which has very limited powers, will meet at least once. It comprises the national office bearers and four members elected from the CEC. The executive assists the general secretaries and carries out CEC instructions.

The federation will also have regional structures. A region will be established where three or more affiliates have a significant presence. The congress determined these regional areas: Northern Transvaal, Witwatersrand-Vaal, Highveld, Western Transvaal, Northern Natal, Southern Natal, Orange Free State, Northern Cape, Western Cape and Eastern Cape.

Each regional area will have a regional congress comprising affiliates in the region represented in proportion to paid-up membership. While subordinate to the federation's CEC, it will elect office bearers, appoint full-time officials and pass policy concerning the region. Meeting once every four months, its main task will be to encourage co-operation among affiliates and coordinate regional activities.

Between regional congresses, the regional executive committee (REC), meeting at least once a month, will manage the affairs of the region. The REC is made up of two delegates per affiliate in the region and regional congress office bearers.

Shop stewards councils will bring together all shop stewards in a particular locality and will give workers their most immediate sense of identification with the federation.

The regional structures are crucial to workers' sense of control over the federation. Through these structures they will be able to develop a greater sense of unity and the power of being organised into a large federation. The success of these structures in the coming months will be an important barometer of Cosatu's success in welding the different unions into an effective federation.

Unity in struggle

Union unity could also be facilitated by struggles waged together. Cosatu has taken some bold resolutions which, if implemented, could draw the unions closer. The resolution on unemployment called for concerted unity against retrenchments and factory closures.

Cosatu stated its intention to launch a campaign for a legally enforced national minimum living wage – 'one of the strongest points for organising the unorganised'.

Cosatu decided to launch a campaign for the right to strike – to 'continue a relentless campaign which will allow workers full freedom of association, assembly and picketing for strike action. This requires that all forms of security legislation that deny these rights be removed'. The right of unions to strike in 'essential services' and to establish strike funds was also called for.

Cosatu resolved to fight for the end of the migrant labour system and threatened national strike action if migrant workers were repatriated to the 'homelands' or the neighbouring states.

Resolutions were passed opposing the state of emergency, bantustans and federalism as a solution to the country's problems, and a call was made for the unconditional release of political prisoners and the unbanning of organisations as a 'prelude to the creation of a democratic South Africa where all shall live in peace and prosperity'.

While supporting disinvestment, Cosatu committed itself 'to ensure that the social wealth of South Africa remains the property of the people of South Africa for the benefit of all and further commit ourselves to the principle of international working-class solidarity action as the most powerful form of solidarity action with our struggle'.

Cosatu also committed itself to a vigorous campaign against sexual inequality at the workplace, in the wider society and in the federation itself. Progress is to be monitored by a worker-controlled sub-committee of the federation's education programme.

It was resolved to set up a strenuous education programme that 'politicises, mobilises and organises the working class so that it plays the leading role in the liberation of our society and its transformation into an economic, social and political system that will serve the needs of those who are now oppressed and exploited'.

A resolution urged Cosatu affiliates to seek links with other progressive unions in Southern Africa. Another called for the boycott of the Johannesburg Centenary Celebrations and the organisation of an alternative programme 'to highlight the 100 years of oppression and exploitation in Johannesburg and in particular the mining industry'.

Support and opposition

Cosatu was welcomed by a wide range of organisations internally and internationally. Amid the flood of support messages was a message from the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu). In a press statement, a Lusaka-based Sactu spokesperson said, 'We don't see any antagonism between Sactu and the new federation. Sactu has always had a very positive attitude to the new federation and believes that a federation like Cosatu has to exist to unite the trade unions, to unite the working class'. He also called upon CUSA, Azactu and unions that have left Tucsa to join Cosatu.

At a conference in Harare a few days after Cosatu's launch, Jay Naidoo had informal talks with representatives of the ANC and Sactu who approached him. He reported that they welcomed the federation 'as a progressive step in the struggle for workers' rights and as part of the struggle for freedom in South Africa'.

He said they agreed that Cosatu should unite all workers 'while remaining independent and accountable to the needs and aspirations of the working class as expressed through its leadership and the structures of Cosatu'.

Naidoo told the ANC/Sactu delegations that 'we do not want superficial changes – black faces replacing white in parliament, or black bosses replacing white – where the repressive machinery of state and capital remains intact, used in the service of different masters'.

He expressed Cosatu's commitment to a society 'not only free from apartheid, but also free from the exploitative, degrading and brutalising economic system under which black workers in particular suffer. This means a restructuring of society in order that the wealth of the country is shared equitably among the people'.

Cosatu's overt political stance has been broadly welcomed by organisations inside and outside the country. Inkatha, however, has vociferously condemned Cosatu. Buthelezi accused it of being a 'new front' for the ANC and of 'declaring war' on Inkatha. Inkatha secretary general Oscar Dhloomo said, 'We have all along tried to steer clear of politicising labour. Therefore, we have encouraged our own members to join existing trade unions. We feel trade unions have to do with the rights of workers. We do not want to hijack their agendas for our own selfish rights'. But Inkatha has since resolved 'to reserve our right to mobilise the full strength of Inkatha's workers to find alternative means of negotiating for worker rights if any particular trade union abandons this prime responsibility in favour of playing a party-political role'. Inkatha members were also urged to report any 'hostile reference' to Inkatha by trade unionists.

Attacking unions which 'put politics before employees' rights' and 'prey on workers' benefits' at an Inkatha central committee meeting in early January, Buthelezi suggested Inkatha set up branches in every factory, open a labour office and train organisers to deal with workers. He stressed that workers should recognise that unions were vital

to workers and to the country as a whole, but unions had never liberated an African country and would not liberate South Africa.

Replying to Buthelezi's claim that Cosatu was directed against Inkatha rather than Pretoria, Sydney Mafumadi, Cosatu assistant general secretary, said, 'Cosatu is committed to the struggle against economic exploitation and national oppression. We have never stated that we're gearing all our energies to fighting one particular bantustan leader. If he's hysterical about our formation, then we are not answerable to him'.

Jay Naidoo dismissed as 'rubbish' claims that Cosatu is an ANC front. 'We are a front for the workers, but in the present political climate you cannot separate workers' demands from politics'.

On Cosatu's attitude to Inkatha, he said: 'Cosatu has a definite political profile that it will state very boldly and if this comes into conflict with certain organisations that do not agree with our interests then there will be conflict. We will try our utmost to avoid conflict in the interests of building unity among the oppressed, but we will not tolerate anti-working-class activity from any organisation that exists outside the federation'.

He said that if Cosatu was attacked by any organisation for any decisions or initiative taken with a mandate from its membership, 'that organisation will have to place itself in the camp of the enemy and those that are opposed to the liberation of our people'.

Tensions between Inkatha and Cosatu will be most intense in Natal, where substantial numbers of Cosatu workers also belong to Inkatha – though what meaning Inkatha membership has for them is difficult to say.

On 19 January, a group of workers met in Empangeni and decided to set up an alternative federation of trade unions. Spokesperson Philemon Gumede said it would unite workers who 'believed in free enterprise and opposed disinvestment'. It would be linked to Inkatha since 'our objectives are the same'.

At a special congress, Cosatu has 'strongly condemned' this as divisive. It has warned employers, who sponsored buses to the meeting, against supporting these 'potential company sweetheart unions'.

A cohesive politics

The issue of Inkatha will have to be dealt with sensitively, but it re-emphasises the need for Cosatu to forge maximum unity and the workers' firm commitment to Cosatu and to the struggle against both racial oppression and economic exploitation. To do this, Cosatu will have to develop a more cohesive politics and strategy.

What the content and form of this will be is difficult to say. One has to guard against any 'instant analysis', as the situation is much too fluid and there are processes unfolding that have yet to congeal. Crudely, there would seem to be three general perspectives

overall within Cosatu.

The first, probably the least significant, entails uncritical support for the popular movement, of which the trade unions are seen as no more than the industrial arm. In effect, unions must affiliate to the popular movement, as would student, women, or other organisations, without setting any specific terms to this. Since the popular movement automatically represents worker interests, there is no need to develop a specific working-class politics. Union power should be used to boldly confront the state and complement the struggles in the townships. This perspective may be identified with the most conservative shades of the populist tradition in trade unionism.

The second perspective also sees the involvement of unions on the terrain of popular politics but from a distinct working-class position. The popular movement is not necessarily socialist but is a site of class struggle. The power of the trade union movement should be used to give it working-class content and direction. This has become crucial since, in the dramatic upsurge of township struggles over the past 18 months, the youth and the radical petty bourgeoisie, rather than the workers, have been in the forefront determining its pace and direction.

To ensure working-class leadership of these struggles, unions must enter an alliance with the popular movement on terms favourable to workers, on the basis of their organisational strength on the shop floor and without sacrificing their independence. Working-class politics will be developed and the popular movement won over to it through struggles facilitated by this alliance. This perspective can be crudely identified as developing from industrial unionism in a way that avoids the extremes of populism and workerism.

The third perspective sees the popular movement as being unable to represent the interests of workers primarily, and therefore as a whole it cannot be won over to working-class politics. Differences in structures, dynamics, practice of democracy and class interests preclude this. Greater emphasis should be placed on using union structures to develop working-class politics.

The unions' politics should not be determined by the momentum of the popular movement. The unions have painstakingly developed organisation on the shop floor which will be weakened and divided if the unions are pushed by a momentum that they cannot primarily determine. However, this does not mean being aloof from the wider political struggle. Nor does it preclude tactical alliances with the popular movement over issues.

An extreme shade of this perspective, however, sees the populist movement's interest in the unions as aimed at containing them and using them to serve ends not in the interests of workers specifically. The unions should therefore develop their politics independently of the popular movement as far as possible. The organised strength of the union movement should be used to develop working-class organisations outside

the shop floor.

Some adherents of this perspective see this process culminating in the formation of an independent working-class party in the long term. This overall perspective can be identified as a more politically assertive development of the workerist tradition in trade unionism.

There is no simple correspondence between particular Cosatu unions and each of these perspectives. Most are presently heaving with debate, and perceptions are often influenced by regional conditions.

Tensions between the latter two more important perspectives were reflected in differing interpretations of the validity of statements issued by the newly-elected federation's representatives. Adherents of the third perspective expressed concern that the office bearers were expressing views for which they had no mandate. The president's speech at the public rally was criticised, particularly his statement that Cosatu would call for a pass-burning campaign if apartheid was not dismantled within six months. It was pointed out that even if there was general agreement within Cosatu, such decisions had to develop organically out of shop-floor struggles and through the carefully nurtured democratic practices so crucial to the development of a working-class politics.

The office bearers concerned stressed they were reflecting the views and aspirations of rank-and-file members. The statements issued had not deviated radically from the resolutions drafted for discussion at the congress, even if all of these were not finally tabled because of time constraints. They pointed out that what they had said was consistent with the general political direction provided in the constitution, the preamble of which begins: 'We the trade union representatives here, firmly commit ourselves to a unified democratic South Africa free of oppression and economic exploitation. We believe this can be achieved only under the leadership of a united working class'. They said too that the turmoil conditions of the launch of a large federation like Cosatu could not be approached in terms of an abstract, mechanistic concept of democracy.

The tensions within Cosatu could lead to splits and hamper unity to some extent, but overall, a significant degree of unity is likely to emerge. Jay Naidoo said, 'In a federation as large as ours it's natural that there will be differences, especially in the initial stages but also because of the dynamic situation we find ourselves in. There's lots of debate going on at the moment and Cosatu wants to encourage that. But make no mistake, we have enough common ground within Cosatu, despite our differences, to be a very powerful and effective force in this country'.

It is not yet clear how this power will be used. It is clear that Cosatu will use its organisational strength on the shop floor to pursue the interests of workers in the wider political struggle. Cosatu is unlikely to affiliate to any political organisation at this stage. It is more likely to seek alliances with other organisations on terms that are favourable to it.

This could mean joint campaigns around issues like the state of emergency, the effects of the recession, May Day and the ethnic education system.

The UDF will welcome this, according to Billy Nair. 'Although the UDF has not met yet to formally discuss this, we are quite keen to co-operate with Cosatu. They are talking of fighting unemployment and the pass laws and campaigning for minimum wages. We too are committed to this. One thing we should think about is the formation of an even broader front of the UDF, Cosatu and other organisations to take up campaigns together'.

Themba Nxumalo, NFW general secretary, said, 'We need the support of community organisations. Unemployment is one of our biggest problems and we can't fight it without the community organisations. We also need their support for other issues we decided to fight at the Cosatu launch. But we must also give support to the struggles in the townships. It is the workers who are mostly affected there and who must be in the leadership'.

The alliance between unions and community organisations will be significantly influenced by regional conditions.

At a local level, the shop stewards councils are likely to play a more assertive role in issues affecting workers beyond the shop floor. One strand of thinking within Cosatu is that another structure should be formed that brings together local shop stewards and representatives of community and political organisations on an organised basis, to jointly take up economic and political issues but on certain clearly defined terms.

The extent to which Cosatu will be able to determine its alliance with other organisations will depend on its strength on the shop floor. Cosatu has yet to consolidate itself. It will have to invest considerable energy in tasks including: creating one union per industry; setting up federation structures; launching the education programme; trying to organise unorganised workers; defining relations with other unions; developing international ties; fighting retrenchments and dismissals; taking up struggles to extend worker control of the labour process; campaigning to extend the industrial relations terrain; organising support for unemployed workers; and taking up a campaign for a national minimum living wage.

Cosatu's presence is likely to transform not just the industrial relations terrain but the entire political terrain. Cosatu clearly has the potential to give the wider political struggle for change a specifically working-class content and a much more radical thrust – 'to make', as Cyril Ramaphosa said, 'the politics of the working class the politics of all the oppressed people in this country'.

One thing is clear, though. The formation of Cosatu puts working-class politics firmly on the agenda. ■

Cde Yunus Carrim is a member of the SACP Central Committee and Politburo.

High time to organise the unorganised

Aviwe Rapelang Mohapi urges Cosatu to boldly expand unionisation into neglected areas of capital-intensive work where labour rights are constantly violated

The 40th anniversary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) fell on 6 December 2025. Forty years ago, in a Durban hall thick with cigarette smoke, the smell of sweat and defiance, and the certainty of coming confrontation, delegates representing half a million workers from 29 unions hammered together a federation that announced, without apology or equivocation, that the South African working class intended to fight simultaneously against racial despotism and capitalist exploitation.

They did not speak softly. They did not ask permission. They declared that the black working class – mineworkers with lungs full of dust, factory workers with hands scarred by machines, domestic workers who cleaned the homes of their oppressors before dawn – would no longer accept the lie that national liberation could be separated from economic emancipation.

That moment was not an accident of history. Neither was it the product of individual heroism or charitable goodwill. It was the necessary, objective outcome of the sharpening contradictions of late apartheid: super-exploitation organised along racial lines had reached a point of absolute crisis where the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of the racially oppressed proletariat could no longer peacefully coexist. The mines, the factories, the townships, the hostels, the universities, the streets – all had become a single, interconnected battlefield. Cosatu was the organisational expression of that irreconcilability, the moment when the South African proletariat declared itself a class for itself, conscious of its historic mission.

That mission was never modest. From its very first congress, Cosatu placed itself on the terrain of revolutionary politics. It adopted the Freedom Charter not as a liberal wish list but as a minimum programme that pointed inescapably toward the socialist transformation of society. It committed itself to revolutionary principles such as one industry one union, worker control and shop-floor democracy, unity of workplace and community struggles, as well as non-racialism.

Within two years it had mobilised millions in stay-aways and general strikes that repeatedly paralysed the apartheid economy. The 1987 mineworkers' strike, the consumer boycotts, the rolling mass action of the late 1980s and early 1990s – these were not mere industrial disputes. They were acts of dual power that demonstrated,

in practice, that the black working class possessed the concentrated strength to bring the entire system to its knees.

Confronting new challenges

Today, forty years later, the objective conditions that demand revolutionary trade unionism are more acute and more explosive than at any moment since the negotiated settlement of 1994. Unemployment now devours entire generations: over ten million people, the majority of them young, black and female, have been permanently expelled from the possibility of selling their labour power under conditions that allow human dignity. Inequality has reached grotesque, almost medieval proportions – a country where the top 10% own more wealth than the bottom 90%, where CEOs earn 500 times the wage of the workers who create their profits. State infrastructure crumbles while private monopolies feast on tender corruption and captive markets. Electricity blackouts, water shortages, collapsing railways, non-functional hospitals, schools without toilets – these are not administrative failures; they are the material expression of a social order in decay.

The governing party's legitimacy drains away with every collapsed municipality, every leaked audio of cadre deployment, and every revelation of state capture. These are not temporary conjunctural difficulties, not the result of bad leadership or poor policy choices. They are the organic crises of South African capitalism itself – a crisis of over-accumulation, of profitability restored on the backs of the working class, of a bourgeois state that has exhausted its capacity to reproduce consent and now oscillates between repression and collapse.

Yet the federation that once shook the apartheid state to its foundations now often appears as a hesitant spectator, issuing press statements that denounce in the morning what its own alliance partner implements in the afternoon. The organised, conscious power of the working class inside the federation – the subjective factor – has markedly atrophied. Membership stagnates or declines. Militancy is sporadic rather than systematic. Revolutionary consciousness has been replaced by ritual denunciations that change nothing. This is the central contradiction we must grasp on the 40th anniversary: the objective ripening of revolutionary conditions alongside the subjective weakening of the vanguard organisation of the proletariat.

The task, therefore, is not to celebrate a past heroism – however glorious – but to undertake a ruthless materialist critique of the present: to name the political choices, the strategic errors, and the bureaucratic deformations that have brought us to this point; and to outline, in theoretical and practical terms, the road toward a renewed working-class offensive that is adequate to the gravity of the moment. The working class did not disappear. It has grown larger, more concentrated in new sites of exploitation, and more objectively powerful than ever before. What is required is not nostalgia, but clarity, courage and a plan.

The changing composition of the South African working class

Marx revealed that capital, in its restless search for surplus value, continually revolutionises the technical and social conditions of production. In South Africa after 1994 this law asserted itself with particular brutality. The post-apartheid settlement delivered formal political equality while preserving – indeed deepening – the fundamental class relation: ownership of the means of production remained overwhelmingly in the hands of monopoly capital (now increasingly globalised) and a small layer of black bourgeois beneficiaries. The new black political elite became junior partners in accumulation; the proletariat remained the object of exploitation.

The result has been a profound recomposition of the working class. The old sites of working-class concentration – large-scale mining, heavy industry, mass factories – have either contracted or been restructured through outsourcing, automation and labour brokering. Where 300,000 mineworkers could once bring the apartheid economy to its knees for weeks on end, today the same shafts employ fewer than half that number on permanent contracts, while labour-broker firms supply a precarious periphery paid a fraction of the wage and stripped of benefits.

Manufacturing has been hollowed out: the clothing and textile sector, once a bastion of militant organisation with tens of thousands of organised workers, has lost more than 200,000 jobs since 1994 to cheap East-Asian imports and local sweatshops operating beneath union radar. Entire industrial towns – places like Newcastle, Hammarsdale, and Atlantis – have been reduced to ghost landscapes of shattered factories and despair.

Simultaneously, capital has expanded massively into new spheres: retail, logistics, private security, hospitality, call centres, platform “gig” work, domestic labour, and the sprawling informal survivalist economy that now absorbs millions who have been expelled from formal waged labour altogether. These are the sectors where the South African working class is today numerically strongest and, paradoxically, most atomised.

The majority of the new working class is young, black, female, and either unorganised or organised only weakly. Union density in the private services sector hovers below 15 per cent. In agriculture – the oldest site of racialised super-exploitation – it is below 10%. The much-vaunted “formal sector” union density of 27–30%, therefore, masks a far grimmer reality: the majority of those who sell their labour power to live have no collective defence against capital.

From a Marxist standpoint this recomposition poses both danger and opportunity. The danger is obvious: a fragmented, super-exploited class is a weakened class, its bargaining power suppressed by a reserve army of labour that now stands at over 45% among youth and over 60% in many townships. The opportunity lies in the new centralisation that accompanies fragmentation. A single distribution hub outside

Johannesburg services hundreds of retail stores nationwide. A successful two-day strike there leaves empty shelves from Cape Town to Musina. Algorithmic management, for all its totalitarian pretensions, creates new choke points: one coordinated refusal to log in by delivery drivers can paralyse an entire city. The task of revolutionary trade unionism is to discover and seize these choke points, to transform apparent dispersion into concentrated power.

The Crisis of Trade Union Consciousness

The atrophy of working-class organisation cannot be explained solely by objective changes in the structure of capital, however brutal those changes have been. Subjective factors – political line, strategic orientation, and the internal life of the unions themselves – have been decisive and decisively damaging.

The root strategic error lies in the persistent illusion that the fundamental contradiction in South Africa remains national rather than class. From this flows the fatal belief that the working class can advance its historic interests by remaining the junior partner of a nationalist party that has long since reconciled itself to managing capitalism. The tripartite Alliance, conceived in the heat of the transition as a tactical compromise to prevent civil war and white minority sabotage, has hardened into a strategic shackle of historic proportions. By subordinating the independent class interests of the proletariat to the electoral fortunes and governmental responsibilities of a party that administers capitalism in the interests of both domestic and international monopoly capital, Cosatu has repeatedly and systematically disarmed itself. The federation that once brought the apartheid economy to a standstill now finds itself politically paralysed whenever the next dose of austerity is served up by its own alliance partner.

Every major neoliberal restructuring since the adoption of Gear in 1996 – the privatisation of state assets, the deliberate “flexibilisation” of labour markets, the austerity budgets that gutted public services, the National Development Plan with its pious market-friendly phrases, and now Operation Vulindlela, the openly IMF-inspired structural adjustment programme – has been designed, announced, and implemented by ANC-led governments. At each turn Cosatu’s public response has oscillated between muted criticism delivered in closed Alliance summits or bilaterals and outright collaboration dressed up as “engaging to limit the damage”. The federation has become, in practice, a transmission belt for policies that intensify the very exploitation it was formed to combat: casualisation, wage suppression, the erosion of collective bargaining, and the systematic reconstruction of a massive reserve army of labour.

This political subordination has produced bureaucratic degeneration on a grand scale. Full-time officials, increasingly distant from the point of production and the daily lived experience of exploitation, have developed material interests sharply distinct from those of the rank-and-file members whose dues pay their salaries. Some have migrated seamlessly into ministerial offices, parastatal boards, provincial legislatures,

or lucrative black-empowerment directorships. Union investment companies, originally established to secure workers' pensions and death benefits, now manage portfolios worth tens of billions of rands in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, tying the financial health of the organisation to the profits of the same mining houses, banks, and retail conglomerates the unions are supposed to confront. The class enemy is no longer merely outside the gate; it has acquired shares in the union's future.

Shop-steward structures, once the beating heart of worker democracy and the transmission belt for revolutionary ideas, have in many workplaces become hollowed-out shells or, worse, vehicles for individual advancement, tenderpreneurial ambition, and bitter factional manoeuvring. Political education – the indispensable weapon for raising working-class consciousness from the immediate trade-union level to the revolutionary level – has been almost entirely abandoned. New shop stewards receive glossy manuals on labour law and negotiation technique, but rarely a single session on political economy, hardly an honest reckoning with the history of our class, and rarely a serious engagement with the burning necessity of socialism as the only realistic solution to the crisis we face. The result is a dangerous narrowing of horizons: from the grand, world-historic perspective of overthrowing capitalism and building a society based on human need to the parochial, defensive struggle to protect the conditions of a shrinking aristocracy of labour in the remaining “core” sectors. The federation looks inward when it should be looking outward; it defends the organised minority while abandoning the unorganised majority to the wolves.

Gender, patriarchy and the struggle for working-class unity

No Marxist analysis of the South African working class today should ignore the gendered character of the new working class. Women now constitute the majority in many of the fastest-growing sites of exploitation: retail checkouts, hotel housekeeping, factory canteens, security control rooms, call-centre cubicles, agro-processing lines, care work, and the endless queues of domestic workers waiting at suburban taxi ranks at dawn. Their labour is systematically devalued – paid less, granted fewer rights, offered zero-hour contracts that make family life impossible. Their bodies are treated as objects of patriarchal control both inside and outside the workplace: sexual harassment is a daily tax paid by tens of thousands of women simply for earning a wage. Gender-based violence is not an unfortunate cultural residue; it is a material mechanism for maintaining women's subordination within the labour market and the family, thereby cheapening the cost of reproducing labour power for capital.

Patriarchy divides the working class and thereby strengthens capital. A male worker who accepts or participates in the oppression of women workers is a worker whose class consciousness remains incomplete, trapped at the level of craft or racial privilege. The struggle against gender-based violence and patriarchal ideology must, therefore, be elevated from a “social issue” to a central strategic task of trade-union renewal. This

requires far more than policy statements and Women's Month speeches. It demands:

- The systematic recruitment, promotion and election of women into leadership at every level of the union movement – from branch secretary to general secretary – until the leadership reflects the actual gender composition of the class;
- Mandatory political education on the material roots of women's oppression under capitalism and the absolute necessity of men becoming active, self-critical allies in dismantling patriarchy, starting with their own behaviour;
- The integration of ironclad gender-based violence clauses into every collective agreement, backed by elected workplace structures with the power to investigate, discipline and, where necessary, expel offenders – including managers and fellow workers;
- The deliberate linking of workplace struggles against harassment to community-based campaigns against femicide, intimate-partner violence, and the criminal justice system's contempt for working-class women.

Only a working class that is consciously united across the gender divide – where male workers see the emancipation of women as an indispensable condition of their own emancipation – can hope to confront South African monopoly capital in its full strength.

Sectoral tasks and the recomposition of working-class power

A genuine revival of militant trade unionism requires a ruthless focus on the sectors where the proletariat is today most numerous and most exploited.

Retail and logistics must become the new priority. More than a million workers labour in the great mall chains, the discount supermarkets, the e-commerce warehouses, and the delivery fleets. The old model of plant-by-plant organising is inadequate against corporations that manage labour through algorithms and dispersed warehouses. New methods are needed: comprehensive supply-chain mapping to identify the real points of leverage; simultaneous multi-site actions that hit the same company in every province on the same day; international coordination against the same multinational; and the use of consumer pressure and social-media amplification as secondary levers. A serious, sustained campaign to organise the million-plus workers in formal retail and e-commerce logistics would dramatically shift the balance of class forces nationwide.

Agriculture remains a strategic weakness that borders on disgrace. Eight hundred thousand farm workers and seasonal labourers – overwhelmingly black, women and migrants – continue to live under conditions that differ only in degree from those their grandparents endured. Poverty wages, the dop system in new forms, employer-provided housing that creates feudal dependency, pesticide poisoning, and sexual violence as a weapon of labour control: these are the daily realities. The combination

of spatial isolation, labour broking, migrant labour, and direct violence by landowners has kept union density abysmally low. Yet farm workers occupy a critical position in the reproduction of the entire working class (they produce the food we eat) and in the export economy. Intensive rural organising – combining workplace struggle with community-based campaigns around housing, water, electricity, and resistance to evictions – is indispensable. Solidarity with Zimbabwean, Mozambican and Lesotho workers is not charity; it is class defence against divide-and-rule tactics.

The public sector, where Cosatu remains strongest with over 1.2 million members, must be transformed from a defensive rearguard into an offensive battering ram. Nurses, teachers, municipal workers, and state administrators control the essential services without which capitalist reproduction grinds to a halt. Coordinated action across health, education, municipalities, and state-owned enterprises – a national public-sector strike that closes every school, every clinic, every refuse truck, and every traffic light – can pose the question of power in the sharpest possible form. Such action must be linked to community demands for water, electricity, and decent housing, turning the public sector from a site of bureaucratic decay into the material base for workers' and community power.

Platform and gig workers represent the frontier of contemporary exploitation. Here capital appears to have achieved total atomisation, with the worker reduced to an individual entrepreneur competing against millions of others, disciplined by ratings and algorithms. Yet even the most seemingly isolated Uber driver or Takealot picker is part of a networked system whose smooth functioning depends on thousands of individual acts of labour. Log-book campaigns that expose the real earnings after costs, coordinated log-offs that paralyse the app at peak times, and the creation of alternative worker-controlled platforms – these are the embryos of new forms of organisation that correspond to new forms of exploitation. Cosatu cannot afford to dismiss these workers as “unorganisable”; they are the future face of the proletariat.

Toward political independence and the socialist horizon

The central political conclusion is inescapable: the working class cannot advance its interests decisively while remaining tethered to a capitalist government inside the Tripartite Alliance. The ANC, irrespective of factional composition or rhetorical flourish, administers a state that is structurally committed to the reproduction of capitalist social relations within the constraints imposed by global finance capital. Every attempt to “push the ANC to the left” from within the Alliance has ended in the left being pushed back further right – sometimes into government posts, sometimes into silence, always into irrelevance.

The task is not to rescue the Alliance but to reconfigure it – not through bureaucratic pronouncements from head offices but through mass working-class action that demonstrates in practice the irreconcilable antagonism between labour and capital.

The 2026 local government elections offer a concrete terrain for the first decisive steps. Instead of once again mobilising workers to vote for the party that implements austerity, freezes their wages, and privatises their services, Cosatu should support the contestation of municipal power by leftist working-class organisations and community-based structures advancing a clear transitional programme: expropriation of privatised services and their return to public ownership under worker and community control; democratic planning of local economies through elected ward assemblies; the creation of GBV-free zones enforced by residents' committees; and the establishment of municipal cooperatives for food production, housing construction, and maintenance.

Such a programme would pose, in embryonic form, the question of workers' and community power at the local level. It would lay the material basis for a future national constituent assembly of workers' and community councils – the only sovereign body capable of completing the national democratic revolution by proceeding directly to socialist measures: nationalisation of the mines, banks, and monopoly industry under workers' control; expropriation of commercial farmland for co-operative production; and democratic planning of the economy to meet human need rather than private profit.

From defensive corporatism to revolutionary offensive

Cosatu at forty stands at a historic crossroads. One path is the path of least resistance: shrinking membership, bureaucratic inertia, union investment portfolios instead of picket lines, and the slow transformation of the federation into a minor lobbying group within a neoliberal state, politely begging for "social dialogue" while capitalism devours the working class. That is the path of class collaboration institutionalised.

The revolutionary path is far harder. It demands:

- A powerful internal struggle against bureaucratic conservatism: ruthless democratisation of structures, the restoration of the shop steward as the sovereign, recallable voice of the rank-and-file, and the dismantling of a privileged officialdom whose material interests have long diverged from the workers they claim to serve;
- Massive, deliberate reallocation of resources, financial, human, and political, away from defending the shrinking "core" and toward the systematic organising of the unorganised millions who today form the real centre of gravity of the working class: retail workers, logistics workers, farm workers, platform riders, security guards, domestic workers, and the youth of the townships;
- The conscious elevation of women workers, the majority of the new working class, into every level of leadership, and the uncompromising integration of the fight against patriarchal violence into the heart of trade-union practice, so that every strike committee and bargaining team reflects the real composition and burning needs of the class;

- The recovery of complete political independence and the patient construction of a mass working-class political instrument that places socialist transformation squarely on the agenda, without apology, without delay, and without illusions that the ANC can ever be anything other than the administrator of South African capitalism.

The objective conditions for a working-class offensive have rarely been riper. South African capitalism is in organic crisis: stagnant growth, collapsing infrastructure, a ruling party whose electoral support is fracturing, and a generation of young proletarians facing permanent exclusion from waged labour. The bourgeoisie is divided and increasingly authoritarian. All that is missing is the subjective factor, a trade union movement that understands itself not as a “social partner” but as the conscious detachment of the working class preparing to overthrow the system.

Forty years ago, Cosatu proclaimed that the future belongs to the workers. Today that future must be seized, not begged for in boardrooms, not postponed until after the next election, but fought for in every workplace, every township, every delivery van, and every checkout queue. The unorganised millions await their vanguard. The question is whether Cosatu will rise to become that vanguard once more.

The Freedom Charter always pointed beyond itself to socialism. Our generation’s task is to complete what began in 1955 and 1985: the total emancipation of the South African working class and, with it, the emancipation of all humanity in our country.

Amandla!

Power to the working class – organised, conscious, and merciless! ■

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Growth and Inclusion strategy entrenches privatisation

SACP Secretariat on economic policy, Gain and deepening neoliberalism

The following article integrates the November Politburo and December Central Committee discussions on the 'Growth and Inclusion' strategy

There is an emerging contradiction between the Growth and Inclusion (Gain) strategy and the perspectives outlined in the Base Document prepared for and adopted at the ANC's National General Council.

The Gain strategy, presented as a framework to revive economic growth and create employment, represents neither a new direction nor a break with the failed economic paradigm that has entrenched unemployment, poverty and inequality crises since 1996. Far from being transformative, the Gain strategy reproduces the same old economic framework that the SACP has consistently critiqued since at least 2019 and going back to 1996. It is the same as before, merely repackaged and rebranded. Hence the SACP's description of the Gain strategy as the Same aGAIN.

The Gain strategy particularly recycles the 2019 National Treasury document entitled "Economic Transformation, Inclusive Growth and Competitiveness: Towards an Economic Strategy for South Africa", itself a replication of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Economic Policy Reforms 2017: Going for Growth prescriptions. This is the same neoliberal agenda, backed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, that has generated one of the world's highest unemployment rates in the Global South and the world over.

The supposed new framework relies on the concept of "binding constraints", compradorially adopted from the Harvard Growth Lab in the United States. This framework conveniently shifts attention away from the structural contradictions of a capitalist economy marked by deepening labour exploitation by capital, dominance of private over public interest and a neoliberal macro-economic policy under whose auspices macro-economic problems such as unemployment entrenched and worsened to become a crisis. It is under this paradigm that South Africa has seen continued de-industrialisation and rising dominance by imports as a result, among others, of the trade liberalisation shock therapy implemented under Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR).

Under the neoliberal paradigm, the economy has recorded devastating unemployment minimum levels above 20 per cent and worsening, defined by the narrow definition that excludes discouraged work seekers. This has been entrenched since 1996 after the

adoption of Gear. Inequality has widened and poverty is persistently high.

In the second quarter of 2025, the narrow, official unemployment rate stood at 33.2 per cent, representing 8.4 million unemployed people who are actively looking for employment, while the expanded rate stood at 42.9 per cent, affecting 12.6 million people active and discouraged work seekers combined. These figures are not the outcome of slow implementation but the direct result of the chosen macro-economic paradigm, including rapid trade and financial liberalisation under Gear, among others. The failure is structural and systemic. It lies in the logic of profit accumulation that most of all prioritises the interests of finance capital while sacrificing productive investment and social well-being and development.

Those who are not excluded from employment are included through being locked into the yoke of exploitation by the capitalist bosses. Like those locked into unemployment, they too remain excluded from ownership and management control. They have no means of production of their own and no share in the profits and capital their labour creates. In its logic of “inclusion”, the Same aGAIN says absolutely nothing about this economic and social injustice. It does not see it. Hence, it is devoid of a strategy to redress the historical injustice. What inclusion is this?

The Same aGAIN strategy maintains fiscal consolidation as its cornerstone. This is austerity dressed up as prudence and fiscal discipline. It is presented as a path to stability, yet in practice it has suppressed growth, not to speak of shared growth as the cornerstone of inclusion. Fiscal consolidation has constrained public investment and maintained under resourcing in public healthcare, education and social services, leading to underperformances with far-reaching implications. These include patients who die as a result of overcrowding and under resourcing in hospitals, with long waiting lists for critical healthcare.

The government’s continued adherence to self-imposed “fiscal anchors” to enforce austerity under fiscal consolidation demonstrates its surrender to the dictates of monopoly finance capital. Austerity has created a vicious cycle in which expenditure cuts suppress growth, slower growth reduces revenue, and declining revenue leads to further cuts. This cycle has trapped the economy in stagnation and deepened the suffering of the working class and poor in a situation where the government has to intervene to turn around domestic productive capacity, raise the levels of national production and create employment at a scale that will resolve the unemployment crisis.

The fiasco around the proposed value-added tax increase in the first half of 2025 revealed the contradictions within the government of coalition unity designer-labelled “government of national unity”. While the proposal was publicly opposed by the DA, its leadership simultaneously demanded deeper cuts inspired by the extremist

austerity of Argentina's Javier Milei administration.

Behind closed doors, as the public has heard from their government of coalition unity allies, the right-wing, neoliberal DA opposed to the Freedom Charter supported the VAT increase in exchange of power accumulation favours. It was after their demand was not met that they seemed to strongly advance their gimmick in the public.

The VAT fiasco exposed austerity as not merely a technical adjustment but a political weapon that constrains transformation and narrows the role of the state. It has prevented the state from using fiscal policy to drive shared growth, industrialisation and employment creation at the scale that can resolve the unemployment crisis, condemning millions of our people to perpetual stagnation.

The Same aGAIN framework further entrenches privatisation through liberalisation in favour of private profit interests and competition in network industries, presenting this as "modernisation". Calling state control "monopoly", as the Minister of Finance, Enoch Godongana, did in his letter of policy commitment to the World Bank, the approach chosen is an attack on the Freedom Charter's clarion call that "... monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole". He signed the sell-out letter to the World Bank on 3 December 2021.

Instead of the neoliberal agenda preferring private profit-seeking interests, the targeted industries must be owned by the people as a whole through the state under democratic control and developed further. This is what the Freedom Charter calls for, not the opposite for the Gain of the tiny minority of the capitalists, whom the Same aGAIN and its base document from Harvard treat as synonymous with society or the people as a whole. Whenever the name "private sector" is used, reference is to the tiny minority of the capitalist class in terms of ownership, management control, the accumulation of wealth and its meaning of inclusion, while the overwhelming majority of the people, being the working class and poor, is locked out of the four aspects.

The Same aGAIN strategy calls for a so-called "big bang" reform of energy, logistics, water and ports, which in reality means accelerating privatisation in the targeted infrastructure networks to private accumulation. The restructuring of Eskom and the establishment of a competitive wholesale electricity market by April 2026, along with private participation and competition in water infrastructure by September 2026, are part of this agenda.

Such measures, while marketed as efficiency improvements, will reproduce what has already occurred in the telecommunications sector, where the 2022 auction of high-demand radio frequency spectrum enriched the duopoly of Vodacom and MTN, which captured the lion's share, all in the name of de-monopolising the sector. Data in South Africa remains exorbitant, contradicting the promised cost reductions for consumers.

Privatisation now takes many forms, including outsourcing, concessions, public-

private partnerships and liberalisation in favour of profit-seeking private interests. These guarantee profits for private operators while shifting long-term risks onto the public. The private power producer models called the “Independent Power Producers” (IPPs) is a clear example. Although later renewable energy bid rounds achieved lower tariffs, Eskom’s 2024 report showed that IPPs generated only 9 per cent of electricity while consuming 27 per cent of Eskom’s energy budget.

The issue is not renewable energy itself but the contracts that guarantee private returns at public expense. Experiences from other countries, including the United Kingdom’s rail privatisation, show that such policies lead to fragmentation, inefficiency and rising public subsidies for private profit. South Africa risks repeating these failures in rail and other infrastructure sectors.

A particularly regressive element of the Gain strategy is the proposal to link the Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRD) to employment. This idea emerged from the DA’s attempts to roll back the grant and has already resulted in bureaucratic red tape that has reduced the number of beneficiaries.

Linking the grant to employment assumes that work opportunities exist in abundance and that the unemployed are unwilling to work or look for work. This is an ideological distortion. The economy has not been generating employment on any meaningful scale to overcome the unemployment crisis. Millions of people have become discouraged work seekers not because they prefer idleness but because they have found no opportunities to work during the Labour Force Survey’s reference period.

Graduate unemployment at 12.2 per cent and unemployment among those with other tertiary qualifications at 21.7 per cent reveal the structural nature of the crisis. In this situation, although their unemployment is higher, by no means are those who have not completed secondary schooling or who do not have a post-school qualification the only ones affected. It is clear that while still important, having a graduate or other tertiary qualification alone is not enough to secure employment and overcome the systemic barriers created by an economy that reproduces exclusion from access to work, ownership, management control and accumulation of wealth.

To restrict access to the SRD Grant under such conditions is both irrational and unjust. It punishes the unemployed for an economic crisis they did not create and undermines the constitutional imperative of social protection. The grant must be expanded, strengthened and transformed into a universal basic income grant, not reduced or tied to conditions the state itself cannot meet and has failed to meet for 29 years since the adoption of the neoliberal Gear.

The Same aGAIN strategy is rooted in what progressive observers call the transition from the Washington Consensus to the Wall Street Consensus. The former demanded fiscal austerity, deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation to please foreign

investors. The latter adds the expectation that governments should actively create profit opportunities for, but by no means only, financial capital through blended finance, public-private partnerships and further privatisation through liberalisation. In both cases, the outcome is the same.

Under the capitalist regime of neoliberalism, public policy is shaped to serve private wealth accumulation, not the needs of the people. The guarantees given to attract private participation and competition in the targeted network infrastructure raise public costs or contingency liability. South Africa's own experience over the past five years, in which massive infrastructure build promises have failed to materialise, confirms this reality. The billions or trillions of rands in infrastructure pronouncements within the State of Nation Addresses, medium-term budget policy statements and annual budget speeches have virtually never been seen in any meaningful way, on a large-scale in particular, across the country, covering every district, systematically eliminating uneven development.

The Same aGAIN strategy also leaves monetary policy untouched. A mere mention of the benefits of low interest rates without changing the monetary policy mandate to ensure this and to establish a framework of moderate interest rates with a dual mandate that supports productive investment, public infrastructure development, maximum sustainable employment creation and affordable home loans will only reproduce the same neoliberal and compradorial status quo mainly serving the interests of finance capital and imposed through external policy discipline that has blocked shared growth.

The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) tabled on 12 November 2025 took a further step in the march in this direction. Its main content was a proposal to stabilise the debt-to-GDP ratio by cutting non-debt public expenditure by an average of 0.71 per cent in constant prices over the next three years. The MTBPS also signalled the government's intention to lower the inflation target from its current 3 – 6 per cent to 3 per cent with a tolerance of 1 per cent either side. This target is the mandate to which the South African Reserve Bank is required to respond using interest rate policy.

The South African Reserve Bank remains fixated on narrow inflation targeting while it is invisible in the national development imperatives to achieve industrialisation and large-scale employment creation. It has failed to achieve its constitutional mandate of sustainable and balanced economic growth as a policy objective in exercising its powers and functions.

The SACP believes that the tightening of the inflation target is likely to lead to higher interest rates (actual rises or lesser cuts) and that this will further constrain productive sector activity in an already stagnant economy, which the MTBPS itself forecasts will not grow by more than 1.2 per cent next year. Higher interest rates will also add to the cost-of-living crisis confronting the working people, the poor and even much of the middle class. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a paper recently published by

members of staff of that pinnacle of neoliberal fundamentalism, the IMF, concluded that there is no evidence that neoliberal inflation targeting actually reduces the cost of living. Based on a comparison of countries following inflation targeting and those that do not, it found no appreciable difference in inflation outcomes. The only real difference was that those with inflation targeting had higher interest rates.

It is against that background that the political economy sections of the ANC's NGC "Base Document" offer a welcome and progressive critique of both the content and impact of government economic policy over the past 30+ years.

Much of the diagnosis in the Base Document overlaps with several recent SACP resolutions and statements. The Base Document thus acknowledges that there has been "regression in poverty reduction", that "South Africa remains the most unequal country in the world by income", and that unemployment has remained stubbornly high. On inequality, it notes that while extreme levels of inequality in South Africa have persisted, Brazil, starting from a similar base, has made significant progress in reducing its own levels of inequality.

The Base Document attributes the lack of progress in addressing the "triple challenges" to, *inter alia*:

- The prioritisation of macro-economic stability over transformation and the interpretation of macro-economic stability as requiring narrow fiscal consolidation and inflation targeting. This, it suggests, has led to austerity budgeting and under-resourcing of key developmental and poverty reduction programmes.
- The financialisation of the South African economy. The document points to the fact that fund managers control assets equivalent to 33.3 per cent of the country's GDP and that these funds are not invested to any significant extent in productive activities in South Africa.
- The disabling of State-Owned Enterprises, in part by corruption and state capture and partly through the adoption of models such as "new public management" predicated on notions of reducing the role of the state in the economy through liberalisation and privatisation.

Underlying all of this, the Base Document argues, has been the embrace of neoliberalism, "...especially [in defining] our economic development path and the organisation and orientation of the state". This, it suggests, began in the 1990s with a sense that "There is No Alternative" (Tina) to the globally dominant neoliberal paradigm of deregulation, privatisation, austerity and a minimal economic role of the state.

What is clear now is that South Africa needs a second, more radical democratic breakthrough to bring about a fundamental policy shift and address its principal economic development problems while advancing broader social transformation.

This will not come easily, given that the alignment of forces has changed and we are now confronted not only by the primary strategic class adversary but also by a range of comprador policymakers, including those emerging from the same historical background.

The SACP calls for a developmental alternative anchored in protecting public property rights, building and diversifying thriving public ownership, and advancing democratic control and planning. This must include expansionary fiscal policy to finance public infrastructure, productive and social investment, and a monetary policy that supports industrialisation, public infrastructure and large-scale employment creation. South Africa needs more progressive taxation and domestic resource mobilisation, and a state that leads in building a diversified and shared economic growth. The economy must serve the people, and to do so it must be transformed to become the people's economy.

Without structural transformation, South Africa will remain trapped in serious economic challenges. The country needs a revolutionary break with neoliberal conservatism and a reassertion of public purpose in the service of the majority of the people, being the working class and poor. Only through such a break can we build a democratic developmental state capable of guaranteeing the right of all to work and live in dignity.

We are determined to build a popular Left front and a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor.

We have reaffirmed, as we said back on 8 October 2023, emerging from our Central Committee Plenary then, that the popular Left front, and this goes for the mass socialist movement of the workers and poor, must grow out of popular mobilisation and campaigning. In this regard, the Conference of the Left is crucial as a democratic consultative process. Therefore, it does not seek to first cobble together a variety of formations at leadership level that merely proclaim themselves "Left" or "socialist" and only thereafter launch a programme of mobilisation and action.

The forging of a popular Left movement, as with the mass socialist movement, must be rooted in an active network of struggle – "feeling the stones to cross the river" – as we are doing, for example, through advancing and expanding the People's Red Caravan. In the same vein, the working-class campaign for a policy shift towards a second, more radical democratic breakthrough is a crucial element of a Left popular front programme of mobilisation and action, in the policymaking space and on other fronts of the class struggle.



When bourgeois myths masquerade as common sense

Tebogo Phadu discusses how unemployment is not a personal failure but a class weapon

What often presents itself as “plain speaking” or “common sense” is, in fact, one of the oldest ideological manoeuvres in “bourgeois political economy”: blaming the poor for their poverty and the unemployed for their unemployment.

Historically, bourgeois political apologists have always worked to obscure the real causes of mass poverty. Rather than confront exploitation, dispossession, and the violent reorganisation of society in the interests of capital, they shift attention to individual behaviour. Poverty is explained as laziness; unemployment as passivity; inequality as the outcome of poor choices. In this way, a system built on domination and exclusion is recast as neutral, even fair.

But history does not support this fiction. People did not become poor because they failed to show initiative. They were made poor. They were forcibly separated from their land, their livestock, their tools, their communal economies, and their ways of producing material wealth and sustaining life. This separation was not accidental. It was imposed through colonial conquest, racialised capitalism, taxation, enclosure, migrant labour systems, and state violence. Only once people had been stripped of independent means of livelihood were they compelled to sell their labour power to survive.

Unemployment, therefore, is not a moral condition. It is a “structural feature of capitalism”, and in South Africa, a specifically CST capitalism. Capital requires a surplus population of unemployed and underemployed (or precarious) workers to discipline wages, weaken labour, and protect profitability. Mass unemployment is not evidence of individual failure; it is evidence of how the system functions.

It is against this background that the recent remarks by Comrade Gwede Mantashe must be understood. When unemployment is understood as a problem of insufficient effort – when the state is said to have “given a fishing rod”, and individuals are told they must simply catch fish – the implication is clear: those without work have no one to blame but themselves. This is not a progressive argument. It is a classical bourgeois myth, recycled in contemporary language.

In a country with world-record levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth, such language performs a precise ideological function. It diverts attention away from monopoly capital, deindustrialisation, capital flight, financialisation, and the failure to restructure ownership and production. Instead of asking why the economy systematically excludes millions from productive work, responsibility is displaced onto the unemployed themselves - who are instructed to queue better, search harder, and expect less.

The language of a so-called “parcel society” is especially revealing. It articulates legitimate demands for work, income, and social protection as dependency. Yet the working class is not asking for charity. It is demanding its right to work and to live in dignity in a society where wealth is socially produced but privately appropriated. This right cannot be left entirely to the fluctuations and exclusions of the capitalist labour market. Access to work cannot depend solely on whether capital finds it profitable to employ labour. A democratic society committed to socio-economic transformation must guarantee work through conscious public policy, social ownership, public employment, and cooperative forms of production.

This is not a new or radical demand. It is a foundational democratic commitment, clearly articulated in the Freedom Charter, which affirms that “there shall be work and security” and that “all shall have the right to earn a living”. To reduce this historic demand to a matter of individual hustle is to abandon the Charter’s meaning and intent.

Marxism has never rejected effort or initiative. What it rejects is the fiction that effort alone determines outcomes in a capitalist system that structurally limits access to work. Skills without jobs, education without an industrial strategy, and entrepreneurship without access to capital are not solutions. They are alibis - ways of appearing to address the crisis while leaving its foundations intact.

What bourgeois political economy always hides is the violence that produced the present. Capitalism in South Africa did not gently offer opportunities that people failed to seize. It destroyed existing livelihoods and then failed to provide stable employment in return. To now tell the descendants of the dispossessed that their unemployment is a personal failing is to invert history and erase exploitation.

This matters politically. At a time when millions of working-class people are withdrawing from electoral participation, such language does not inspire initiative. It confirms alienation. It signals that structural crisis will be met with moral lectures rather than transformation.

A Marxist political economy position is clear: Unemployment is not a moral failure. It is the outcome of a system that does not require the wage labour of the many to enrich the few.

The task of a progressive movement is not to discipline the unemployed into self-blame, but to confront the class structure that produces mass unemployment - and to reorganise ownership, production, and work around social need.

When bourgeois myths masquerade as common sense, the result is not clarity. It is ideological retreat. ■

Cde Tebogo Phadu is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member

No middle road for the People's Red Caravan

Seitebaleng Alfred Dikole unpacks the strategy, tactics and praxis of the groundbreaking People's Red Caravan

During his closing remarks at the launch of the inaugural People's Red Caravan (PRC), on behalf of Contralesa, Kgosi Mabalane of Mabalastad delivered a pointed Marxist critique: "In seven days, the South African Communist Party has achieved what the elected government cannot accomplish in five years." Speaking on behalf of traditional authorities, Kgosi Mabalane highlighted the SACP's capacity to mobilise the masses through the PRC – a revolutionary praxis grounded in Marxism-Leninism and the dialectical materialist understanding of social transformation.

Under the determined leadership of General Secretary Solly Mapaila, the PRC has found an organic resonance with Kgosi Nyalana Pilane's master development plan for the Bakgatlha ba ga Pilane. This alliance affirms Lenin's insistence on a united front between the proletariat and peasantry: the jubilation of all community beneficiaries of this programme testifies to the Party's success in restoring communal dignity beyond the hollow promises of bourgeois governments, market forces and colonial legacies.

In a demonstration of socialist building blocks – collective ownership, popular democracy and class solidarity – the SACP has resolutely committed to working with traditional leadership to dismantle the colonial yoke of land dispossession. Both movements have coalesced around the demand for a binding referendum on land ownership and redistribution, to be elevated sharply at the National Dialogue.

Since the caravan's inception, the Party displayed Leninist disciplines and democratic centralism by refusing to bow to extortionist intimidation from local business forums. General Secretary Mapaila's directive was unequivocal: no cadre or structure shall yield to capitalist coercion during the People's Red Caravan. This unwavering stance not only embodies the strategic imperatives of socialist construction but also positions the SACP as the vanguard of South Africa's revolutionary renewal.

PRC as a new launching pad for SACP renewal

The inauguration of the PRC represents a watershed moment in the South African Communist Party's evolution, transforming abstract revolutionary rhetoric into concrete, mass-based action. By rolling out the PRC in Motlhaba Village in North West in May, Matibidi Village in Mpumalanga in July, Mqhekezweni Village in the Eastern

Cape in October and Ganspan in the Northern Cape in December, the SACP underlines its commitment to embedding socialist principles within communities long subjected to neoliberal governance and colonial dispossession. This dynamic initiative bridges theory and practice, serving as a living laboratory where the Party's programme for collective ownership and democratic administration of resources is brought vividly to life.

Historical and strategic significance

The PRC revives the spirit of early Soviet agitation and Lenin's practice of taking the revolution to the countryside. It accomplishes several strategic aims:

- Reasserting the SACP's role as vanguard of the working class by organising workers, peasants and intellectuals around a shared socialist vision.
- Demonstrating the Party's capacity to deliver tangible gains – land reform, community infrastructure and social services – outside of conventional state mechanisms.
- Countering the hegemony of neoliberal development frameworks that subordinate popular power to market logics and elite interests.

These achievements mark a decisive departure from mere parliamentary opposition, towards a dual-power strategy in which the PRC functions as an embryonic soviet structure of popular governance.

Practical socialist building blocks

The Caravan operationalises Marxism-Leninism's foundational building blocks through:

- Self-reliance: Local production systems, from food and energy to basic manufacturing, reduce dependence on external markets by meeting essential needs within the community;
- Collective ownership: Cooperative land projects and community-managed farms replace private profit extraction with shared stewardship of means of production.
- Proletarian leadership: Elected local councils drawn from workers' and peasants' ranks ensure that decision-making remains accountable to those most affected by policy;
- Democratic centralism: Open forums channel local debates into coherent collective resolutions, binding every activist to democratically adopted plans; and
- Decentralised decision-making: Community assemblies and household-level planning ensure that control over resources and priorities remains rooted in those directly responsible for sustaining them.

By institutionalising these pillars, the PRC prefigures the structural anatomy of a socialist society, dismantling bourgeois culture at its roots.

Leninist cadre formation and class analysis

True to Lenin's insistence on ideological clarity, the SACP utilises the PRC to cultivate its new cadre through:

- Political education, with workshops on class struggle, surplus value and imperialism, sharpens participants' understanding of capitalist exploitation.
- Practical training, involving task forces in agriculture, infrastructure and cooperative management, allows for skills sharing to implement socialist production and solve problems without reliance on distant authorities.
- Class composition assessment, including detailed surveys of community demographics, guides targeted mobilisation of the working class, while identifying petty-bourgeois vacillations and residual bourgeois tendencies within Party ranks.

This rigorous approach ensures that cadres not only grasp Lenin's definition of class relations but also embody the revolutionary discipline necessary to carry the struggle forward.

Overcoming bourgeois opposition

From its outset, the Caravan has faced coordinated intimidation by local business interests threatened by its anti-corruption and anti-monopoly agenda. The SACP's response, rooted in Leninist discipline, has been to:

- Issue unequivocal directives against capitulation to extortionist demands.
- Publicly expose the collusion between private capital and corrupt officials
- Rally broad-based community support to neutralise economic coercion.
- By confronting bourgeois resistance head-on, the PRC demonstrates the Party's capacity to defend its socialist gains through united popular action.

A path for socialist renewal

As the PRC advances, the SACP must deepen its programme by:

- Scaling cooperative enterprises into regional federations for economies of scale;
- Instituting worker-peasant councils that interface directly with national policy forums;
- Embedding socialist ethics – solidarity, mutual aid, and collective responsibility – within formal education and cultural initiatives.

Through these measures, the PRC will not only catalyse the National Democratic Revolution but also lay the enduring foundations of South Africa's socialist future.

Reinvigorating grassroots engagement

The PRC revives the Leninist principle of taking the revolution directly to working-class communities, moving from parliamentary halls into the lived realities of townships and rural areas. By embedding activists in informal settlements and villages, the PRC restores a culture of face-to-face political encounters – house visits, listening posts, and community assemblies – that counteract elite distance and apathy. This hands-on approach has inspired contemporary socialist groups to prioritise door-to-door canvassing and popular committees over top-down messaging.

Prefiguring dual-power structures

Through cooperative land projects, community-managed farms and local councils of workers and peasants, the PRC functions as a nascent dual-power formation – an embryonic soviet outside the capitalist state. This template demonstrates how socialist movements can build parallel institutions that deliver housing, health care and education directly, undermining the legitimacy of neoliberal governance.

Modern socialist organisations from Latin America to Western Europe now study the PRC's model to develop reader-owned cooperatives and residents' assemblies.

Advancing Marxist-Leninist cadre formation

Aligned with Lenin's emphasis on a disciplined vanguard, the PRC integrates political education, practical training and class-composition analysis. Weekly workshops on surplus value, imperialism, and transitional demands equip cadres with both theoretical clarity and technical skills in agriculture, infrastructure, and cooperative management. This systematic cadre development has been emulated by socialist youth leagues and trade-union schools seeking to cultivate committed organisers rather than episodic campaigners.

Shaping alliance dynamics

By forging a united front between the proletariat and traditional authorities, the PRC illustrates a flexible alliance strategy that transcends narrow partisan loyalties. It has prompted modern socialist movements to reconsider rigid coalitions, advocating instead for tactical pacts with peasant associations, faith-based groups, and civic forums so long as they advance anti-imperialist and anti-privatisation objectives. This practice counters both sectarian isolation and uncritical bloc politics.

Inspiring international solidarity

The PRC's anti-colonial framing and its direct challenge to global neoliberal institutions resonate with socialist currents worldwide. From Burkina Faso's popular committees to labour councils in Southern Europe, groups adopt the Caravan's itinerant format – regional “red convoys” that traverse borders to build transnational solidarity networks.

This networked approach advances a shared repertoire of struggle, uniting local grievances under a common banner of collective ownership and popular democracy.

Through these mechanisms, the People's Red Caravan has become a living laboratory for modern socialist movements, offering a replicable blueprint for building sustained people's power beyond electoral cycles.

Grassroots tactics of the PRC

Direct community engagement: The PRC prioritises face-to-face interaction to rebuild trust between the SACP and working-class communities. Notable methods include:

- House visits, listening posts, and door-to-door canvassing to surface locals' pressing concerns.
- Open-air street engagements and pop-up town-hall meetings that invite spontaneous dialogue and collective problem-solving.
- Community assemblies where residents elect delegates to carry forward agreed resolutions into caravan planning.

Building parallel institutions

- By instituting embryonic people's power structures, the PRC prefigures dual-power relations:
- Formation of worker-peasant councils to co-manage land-redistribution pilot projects.
- Establishment of cooperative farms and community-run microenterprises that bypass traditional market gatekeepers.
- Local solidarity kitchens and communal food gardens demonstrating the viability of collective ownership.

Political education and consciousness-raising

Strengthening class awareness underpins the caravan's long-term success:

- Weekly Marxist-Leninist study circles on surplus value, imperialism and transitional demands.

- Practical workshops in cooperative governance, agricultural techniques and infrastructure maintenance.
- Distribution of simple, illustrated pamphlets on class definitions, land reform and socialism's building blocks.

Service provision and direct action

Tangible acts of solidarity solidify the caravan's credibility:

- Mobile health and legal clinics staffed by SACP-trained volunteers.
- Rapid-response task forces repairing boreholes, constructing sanitation facilities, and upgrading community halls.
- Coordinated petition drives and signature campaigns for the referendum on land ownership and redistribution.

Through these integrated tactics – rooted in Leninist discipline and mass-based action – the PRC effectively revitalises socialist organising at the grassroots, converting revolutionary theory into lived practice.

The world outlook of the People's Red Caravan

The People's Red Caravan (PRC) constitutes the South African Communist Party's (SACP) global experiment in translating Marxism-Leninism from doctrine to praxis. By institutionalising seven interlinked working streams – land reform, cooperative production, political education, health services, infrastructure development, cultural mobilisation, and community governance – the Caravan forges a living template for dual-power structures capable of challenging neoliberal capitalism wherever it takes root.

Theoretical foundations and dialectical scope

Grounded in dialectical materialism, the PRC reframes the National Democratic Revolution as an international revolutionary process rather than a narrowly national reform. It reinscribes Lenin's dictum "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" by ensuring each working stream remains tethered to class analysis and the historical role of the proletariat and peasantry.

This conceptual rigour equips the Caravan to:

- Identify the material contradictions produced by landlessness, unemployment, and privatised social services.
- Chart a transitional programme that moves communities from debt-peonage toward collective ownership of production.
- Ensure that every activity simultaneously educates participants in both theory and practice.

Operationalising socialist building blocks

At its core, the PRC embodies the foundational elements of socialist construction:

- **Collective ownership:** Cooperative farms and community-run enterprises replace commodity exchange with shared stewardship of land, tools, and technology.
- **Workers' and Peasants' Councils:** Elected local bodies direct the allocation of resources, ensuring that surplus is invested back into the community rather than funnelled to private owners.
- **Democratic centralism:** Open debate in study circles and assemblies refines policy, while collective discipline binds all cadres to the agreed course of action.

This structure models the embryonic organs of a future socialist state, demonstrating how popular institutions can outcompete bourgeois forms of governance.

Internationalist praxis and solidarity networks

The PRC's itinerant format – moving from one community to the next – mirrors the Soviet “sovnarkom” ethos of taking power to the countryside. It also extends across borders:

- Joint conferences with socialist parties in Southern Africa, Latin America, and Europe exchange tactics on land expropriation and cooperative federations.
- Digital convoys link remote villages to global solidarity platforms, broadcasting testimonies of dispossession and revolutionary resistance.
- Reciprocal learning tours bring South African cadres to Cuba's cooperatives and Bolivia's land committees, adapting time-tested models of socialist agriculture.

Through these networks, the Caravan projects an internationalist worldview that situates the South African struggle within a broader anti-imperialist movement.

Counter-hegemonic impact

By delivering health clinics, repaired water systems and literacy programmes without recourse to state budgets or NGO funding, the PRC exposes the hollow core of neoliberal governance. It:

- Demonstrates that self-managed social services can be more efficient and equitable than market-driven alternatives.
- Exposes the dependency of ruling elites on private monopolies, thereby accelerating crises of legitimacy.
- Spurs mass consciousness by linking everyday improvements to the broader goal of socialist emancipation.

This counter-hegemonic effect reverberates beyond localities, inspiring similar caravans and collectives among oppressed populations globally.

Strategic challenges and prospects

Despite its successes, the PRC faces persistent obstacles:

- **Capitalist pushback:** Extortion, media smears, and legislative barriers test the Caravan's resilience.
- **Ideological vacillations:** Petty-bourgeois elements within communities may recede from collective projects under economic pressure.
- **Scale and coordination:** Replicating dual-power institutions across diverse regions demands deeper central coordination without sacrificing local autonomy.

To overcome these challenges, the SACP must deepen cadre training in Leninist strategy, forge tighter international alliances, and institutionalise mechanisms for scaling successful pilot streams. In doing so, the People's Red Caravan will not only renew the Party's revolutionary vanguard but also inscribe South Africa's socialist experiment into the annals of global working-class history.

PRC as a catalyst for SACP self-revolution

Marxism-Leninism mandates that a genuine vanguard party continuously engage in collective self-criticism and structural renewal. The PRC is designed as both an instrument of mass mobilisation and an internal mechanism for the South African Communist Party (SACP) to revolutionise itself. By embedding cadres across seven interlocking streams – land reform, cooperative production, political education, health, infrastructure, culture, and governance – the PRC creates daily feedback loops that reveal ideological lapses and bureaucratic stagnation.

People's Red Caravan Workstreams

Workstream 1: Planning

The Planning stream anchors the PRC's interventions in a coherent socialist strategy, ensuring that each community initiative advances collective ownership and popular democracy. Drawing on Lenin's concept of the vanguard party as the architect of revolutionary transformation, this stream translates mass-line feedback into concrete work plans that prefigure dual-power institutions. It diagnoses the material contradictions – landlessness, unemployment, service deficits – that impede communal self-reliance and formulates transitional demands to resolve them. By integrating democratic centralism with participatory mapping, the Planning stream forges a blueprint for sustainable socialist communities.

Expected activities:

- Conduct participatory diagnostic workshops where residents, guided by cadres, identify class-based needs and resources.
- Develop rolling five-year communal plans that allocate land, labour, and capital to cooperative enterprises.
- Convene daily coordination meetings to review progress against socialist benchmarks and refine strategies through self-criticism.
- Produce simplified planning manuals in local languages, linking Marxist-Leninist concepts to tangible community goals.

Workstream 2: Infrastructure Development

The Infrastructure Development stream embodies the socialist building block of collective ownership over the means of production and public utilities. It mobilises proletarian and peasant labour to construct and maintain roads, water systems, and energy microgrids under the supervision of elected worker-peasant councils. Rejecting neoliberal privatisation, this stream institutionalises popular democracy by vesting decision-making authority in mass assemblies rather than corporate boards. Infrastructure becomes both the material foundation and the visible monument of people's power, showcasing the efficacy of a self-managed socialist economy.

Expected activities:

- Organise brigade-style labour teams to repair and build village roads, water pumps, and communal halls.
- Establish community-owned solar and biogas installations, managed by local energy cooperatives.
- Activate cadres and residents in maintenance techniques and workers' governance of technical assets.
- Host public assemblies to ratify budgets, elect oversight committees, and integrate feedback through democratic centralist procedures.

Workstream 3: Food Production and Food Security

Grounded in collective stewardship of land, the Food Production and Food Security stream dismantles capitalist agribusiness by establishing cooperative farms and communal gardens. It applies Marxist agrarian analysis to redistribute underutilised land and organise surplus extraction for communal benefit rather than private profit. Through workers' and peasants' councils, production targets and input distribution are democratically decided, prefiguring socialist planning. This stream not only secures subsistence but also models the transition from commodity fetishism to use-

value orientation in agriculture.

Expected activities:

- Demarcate and allocate land plots to food-production cooperatives elected by local assemblies.
- Provide cooperative members with seed, tools, and training in agroecological methods that maximise collective yields.
- Establish communal storage silos and seed banks under the custodianship of elected food councils.
- Coordinate harvest festivals where surplus is equitably distributed and reinvested in next season's inputs.

Workstream 4: Community Cooperatives, Enterprise, and Local Economic Development

This stream operationalises the building block of collective ownership by incubating worker-run cooperatives and community enterprises. Rejecting the alienation inherent in wage labour under capitalism, it promotes a socialist division of labour where surplus value is reinvested for social dividends. Local economic planning councils democratically allocate credit, raw materials, and technical assistance, reducing dependency on bourgeois credit markets. By linking production with distribution through community stores and barter networks, the stream undermines profit-driven speculation and nurtures a solidarity economy.

Expected activities:

- Assist communities in forming legal cooperative entities with elected management and transparent bookkeeping.
- Facilitate access to cooperative development funds sourced from socialist microfinance pools.
- Conduct worker-training workshops on democratic governance, collective bargaining, and surplus allocation.
- Launch community markets and exchange fairs that prioritise cooperatively produced goods and services.

Workstream 5: Sports, Education, and Culture

The Sports, Education, and Culture stream cultivates socialist consciousness by fusing political education with communal cultural production. It organises sports leagues and cultural festivals that celebrate collective achievements and historicise class struggle, replacing bourgeois individualism with proletarian solidarity. Study circles, performance art, and mural projects make Marxist-Leninist theory accessible,

embedding it in popular memory. This stream thus forges a revolutionary culture that sustains morale, transmits socialist values, and strengthens the unity of theory and practice.

Expected activities:

- Host community sports tournaments managed by youth councils to reinforce teamwork and collective discipline.
- Facilitate weekly study circles on key texts – such as Lenin’s *What is to be done?* – with real-time application debates.
- Commission murals, theatre performances, and poetry events that dramatise local struggles and socialist victories.
- Develop free people’s libraries and mobile education units offering literacy classes, political economy primers, and technical skills training.

Workstream 6: Health

The Health stream establishes community-run clinics and mobile outreach teams to deliver preventative and curative services free from market logics. Guided by Engels’ analysis of public health as a class issue, it prioritises collective well-being over profit. Health committees, elected by residents, determine resource allocation, ensuring that medicines, sanitation, and nutrition programmes reflect the masses’ needs. This stream prefigures a fully socialised health system, demonstrating that workers’ power can outpace capitalist healthcare in efficiency and equity.

Expected activities:

- Set up people’s clinic committees.
- Set up people’s clinics staffed by volunteer nurses, community health workers, and visiting doctors operating under a council of elected health delegates.
- Conduct door-to-door vaccination drives, sanitation inspections, and epidemiological surveys to pre-empt disease outbreaks.
- Organise public workshops on nutrition, hygiene, and workers’ compensation for occupational hazards.
- Establish mobile legal-health aid desks where community members can co-draft petitions for improved public health infrastructure.

Workstream 7: Community Safety and Security

This stream seeks to replace repressive state policing with neighbourhood councils that safeguard collective rights and prevent bourgeois coercion. Rooted in the Marxist

principle that security is inseparable from social justice, it forms elected safety brigades trained in conflict mediation and community patrols. By channelling grievances through democratic assemblies, it curbs vigilantism and strengthens trust between residents and cadres. The result is a people's militia ethos that defends communal property and political freedoms without replicating state violence.

Expected activities

- Elect and train community patrol units in non-violent de-escalation, legal rights, and first aid.
- Convene public safety forums where residents and cadres jointly draft and ratify neighbourhood codes of conduct.
- Establish rotating "guard stations" at critical infrastructure points—clinics, water pumps, community halls—to deter theft and sabotage.
- Develop solidarity networks to support victims of repression, including legal-aid committees and rapid-response teams.

By aligning each workstream with Marxism–Leninism's core building blocks – collective ownership, worker-peasant councils, mass line and democratic centralism – the People's Red Caravan advances concrete steps toward self-emancipated socialist communities.

Leninist self-criticism and democratic centralism

The PRC operationalises Lenin's insistence that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" by institutionalising:

- Regular self-criticism sessions in which each stream audits its successes and failures against Marxist-Leninist criteria.
- Democratic centralism forums where open debate sharpens policy, followed by unified action to implement agreed resolutions.
- Mass-line education, ensuring Party decisions flow from grassroots needs and return as concrete programmes.

Through its seven streams, the PRC captures real-time data on community struggles and cadre performance:

- Daily reporting compacts track resource allocation, programme outcomes, and internal cohesion.
- Rotating oversight teams evaluate each stream's adherence to socialist building blocks—collective ownership, workers' councils, and popular democracy.
- Corrective commissions are convened whenever opportunism, careerism, or neoliberal rhetoric arises, enabling prompt ideological realignment.

In an era of senior cadres serving in a neoliberal state, the PRC's self-revolution addresses:

- Conflicts of loyalties, where ministerial duties clash with Party independence.
- Bureaucratic inertia, marked by a preference for state contracts over community-driven solutions.
- Petty-bourgeois vacillations, revealed when cadres abandon collective projects under market pressures.

By exposing these deviations through the PRC's accountability architecture, purges of unrepentant elements automatically unfold, safeguarding its revolutionary integrity.

The PRC doubles as a cadre-formation school that deepens commitment to socialism's core pillars:

- Collective ownership: Cadres pilot cooperative enterprises within their streams, understanding firsthand the challenges of shared stewardship.
- Workers' and peasants' councils: Monthly elections within local committees train activists in popular democracy and direct accountability.
- Material-ideological unity: Joint workshops on surplus value, imperialism, and transitional demands anchor practical work in scientific socialism.

To prevent the SACP from ossifying into a "political museum", the PRC enshrines an ongoing ethos of renewal:

- Reminders of the Party's character: Propaganda units circulate the SACP's historical banners and Lenin's maxims to rekindle militancy.
- Mass-driven evaluation: Community assemblies rate cadre performance, ensuring that rank-and-file voices guide internal reforms.
- Emergency self-criticism congresses: Convened whenever state co-option threatens Party autonomy, these gatherings reaffirm the SACP's unique vanguard role.

Through these interwoven processes, the PRC not only emancipates communities but also continually refines the SACP itself – ensuring that its theoretical convictions and organisational structures remain aligned with the enduring goal of socialist transformation.

Main focus areas of the PRC

During its seven-day mobilisation, the PRC operationalises Marxist-Leninist principles and socialist building blocks through three interlocking strategic axes. Each axis combines theory and practice to deepen mass work, foster collective ownership, and institutionalise dual-power structures.

Listening to the masses

- Grounded in Lenin’s mass line, SACP cadres have held systematic house visits, market-place forums, and “people’s tribunals” to solicit firsthand accounts of service-delivery failures and systemic neglect.
- These listening posts were not mere data-gathering exercises but constituted collective theory-building sessions, where community grievances were
- analysed through the lens of class contradiction and used to shape subsequent interventions.
- By elevating popular demands into the Party’s agenda, the Caravan reaffirmed the socialist building block of democratic centralism—ensuring that policy flows organically from grassroots realities.

Action for collective emancipation

- Mobilisation centred on residents assuming agency over their own liberation: from repairing communal water pumps to planting cooperative food gardens to setting up sustainable cooperatives such as chicken farming. Every action reinforces the principle of collective ownership.
- Cadres facilitated “transitional demands” campaigns—calling for land-redistribution referenda and community-run health services – that linked immediate material gains to long-term socialist goals.
- This praxis shattered the passive-recipient model of charity, instilling a culture of self-activity and solidarity that prefigures the organs of a future workers’ and peasants’ state.

Organising ourselves into dual-power structures

- Drawing on Lenin’s strategy of dual power, the PRC guided communities to form elected worker-peasant councils and cooperative committees, capable of managing resources outside neoliberal market channels.
- These embryonic institutions have practised rotational leadership, transparent accounting, and collective decision-making, embodying the socialist building blocks of popular democracy and collective stewardship.
- Through continuous political education and daily reporting mechanisms, cadres

and community members alike honed their capacity to defend and expand these dual-power bodies.

By integrating these focus areas, the PRC not only addressed immediate needs but also forged enduring socialist infrastructure, ensuring that emancipatory practice and revolutionary theory remain inseparable.

RC serving as a melting pot

Building on the Caravan's role as a recruitment crucible, the PRC's "melting-pot" dynamic deepens both ideological cohesion and practical capacity by subjecting new and veteran activists to a shared regime of Leninist praxis.

- Immersive mass-line induction
- Recruits are immediately deployed across the seven streams – whether planting cooperative gardens or staffing political-education forums – so that theory and practice fuse from day one.
- Daily study circles to sharpen recruits' grasp of Marxism-Leninism, while joint task rotations teach the discipline of democratic centralism.

Dialectical sorting of tares from the wheat

- Through collective self-criticism sessions and rotating oversight teams, cadres confront opportunism, careerism and petty-bourgeois vacillations in real time.
- This dialectical feedback loop "purges" incompatible elements, reinforcing Lenin's insistence that the vanguard must constantly renew itself from the exploited masses.

Cross-generational and cross-regional cross-pollination

- Seasoned veterans mentor newcomers on both the political heritage of anti-colonial land struggles and the mechanics of cooperative management.
- Fresh recruits, in turn, inject innovative tactics – social-media outreach, digital mapping of community assets, guerrilla gardening – into traditional streams, preventing staleness.

Rapid branch formation as embryonic dual-power

- Hundreds of new branches were launched mid-Caravan, each structured as an elected worker-peasant council with transparent accounting and recallable delegates.
- These nascent organs model the socialist building blocks of collective ownership and popular democracy, laying the groundwork for an alternative governance network.

Strategic integration and Secretariat oversight

- The Secretariat synthesises daily stream reports into a unified mass-mobilisation strategy, ensuring that branch-level innovations inform national policy proposals.
- Benchmarking successful pilots – such as a community-run solar microgrid – guides cadre-formation materials and the Party’s programmatic renewal.

Through this crucible, the PRC does more than expand Party membership: it forges a living unity of theory and practice, regenerates the SACP’s vanguard from within, and institutionalises the revolutionary organisational principles required for South Africa’s socialist transformation.

Political education and cultural mobilisation

Mass-line education: Forging socialist consciousness

The PRC’s political–education template unfolds as a dialectical fusion of Marxism-Leninism and everyday experience. Cadres guide communities through:

- A concise exposition of the SACP’s historical mission, vanguard role and revolutionary character;
- Plain-language explanations of socialism and communism as self-reliant systems that replace capitalist exploitation with collective ownership and popular democracy;
- Collective study circles that analyse local grievances – landlessness, service shortfalls, unemployment, hunger – through class analysis and dialectical materialism;
- Intensive discipline training, instilling Lenin’s concept of communist discipline: unity of theory and practice, mutual criticism and democratic centralism.

Youth power: cultivating a proletarian vanguard

Neoliberalism breeds individualism, depoliticisation, and commodification of youth. The PRC counters this by:

- Celebrating the Young Communist League’s anniversary as a mass-mobilisation ritual, reasserting youth as agents of transitional demands;
- Recruiting and inducting school-leavers and students into political education streams – teaching surplus-
- value theory, cooperative governance and anti-imperialist solidarity;
- Empowering young cadres to initiate cultural projects (murals, theatre, music) that dramatise class struggle and collective emancipation;
- Establishing YCL branches, complete with elected youth councils accountable to community-led committees.

Community-driven solutions and dual-power practice

Every PRC workstream embeds community members as co-owners of the revolutionary process:

- Joint problem-identification forums pin down service-delivery failures and craft “transitional demands” (land-redistribution referendum, community clinics, housing cooperatives);
- Elected worker-peasant councils oversee daily reporting on infrastructure repairs, health outreaches, and legal-aid desks – prefiguring dual-power institutions;
- Regular report-backs empower residents to evaluate cadre performance, ensuring that policy both originates from and returns to the masses.

“After we Leave” – cementing self-reliance and resilience

To prevent dependency on neoliberal charity or state handouts, the PRC equips volunteers to sustain change autonomously:

- Skills training in cooperative agriculture, community finance, and popular governance so activists can counter anti-SACP intimidation;
- Formation of task forces within lower branches to maintain gardens, ovens, and water systems without bureaucratic red tape;
- A cadre-mentor network that defends party resolutions on an independent basis, reinforcing the SACP’s unique vanguard role.

Tangible socialist building blocks

The PRC’s cultural mobilisation yields concrete demonstrations of collective ownership:

- Community food garden: Tribal authorities granted land; cadres and residents ploughed fields, repaired boreholes, and erected cooperative farms to ensure local food security;
- Community oven: Indigenous women revived low-cost, high-quality bread-baking methods, transforming an art form into a communal economic enterprise;
- Cooperative based sustainable livelihood projects: Shared ownership, ecological responsibility and democratic governance operationalised by pooling labour and resources into collectively managed enterprises that generate long-term income while strengthening community resilience and environmental stewardship;
- Road reconstruction: Under the infrastructure stream and the General Secretary’s political intervention, labour-power from cadres and villagers rebuilt Motlhabe’s central artery. Infrastructure development was replicated in other areas, including the construction of boreholes;

- Volunteer corps: Scientists, engineers, nurses and lawyers offered their expertise across streams – exemplifying proletarian solidarity and the unity of labour.

Defining political ecology: Preparing special-type cadres

Marxist-Leninist self-revolution requires a clear political ecology – a framework divorcing Party work from bourgeois dictates:

- Articulating the terrain of class inequalities, environmental precarity, and institutional capture.
- Cultivating cadres with humility, dedication, and unwavering loyalty to socialist transformation.
- Embedding continuous self-criticism so that the SACP remains a living vanguard, not a “political museum”.

Through this integrated programme of political education and practical work, the PRC doesn't merely deliver services, it forges the social infrastructure and cadre capacity essential for South Africa's socialist future.

The PRC stands as the SACP's decisive translation of Marxism-Leninism into grassroots praxis, anchoring the Party's vanguard role in the lived struggles of working-class and peasant communities. By mobilising seven interconnected workstreams – land reform, cooperative production, political education, health, infrastructure, culture, and governance – the PRC has laid the foundations of socialist building blocks: collective ownership, workers' and peasants' councils, and democratic centralism. Embraced by traditional authorities and community activists alike, this initiative has already begun to dismantle neoliberal dependency and reforge self-reliant community power.

Yet the Caravan's revolutionary thrust will encounter concerted resistance from bourgeois detractors and opportunists. To safeguard its emancipatory gains, the SACP must consolidate unity of theory and practice through rigorous cadre formation, continuous self-criticism, and mass-line engagement. Every activist must commit to deepening the seven-day advances into enduring dual-power institutions; those unwilling to uphold this revolutionary mandate should cede space to cadres prepared to advance socialism to its highest development.

As the Party continues the roll-out of the PRC, it must harness its established streams to propel the NDR forward – ensuring that the PRC remains both the instrument of, and the force for, South Africa's socialist future. ■

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Reimagining industrialisation through local government – a working-class pathway

South Africa needs to build its industrial capacity, with local communities transformed into manufacturing hubs, writes **Dineo Majavu**

Industrialisation remains a key route for addressing unemployment, deepening economic sovereignty, and advancing the national democratic revolution. I make this argument not as an economist, but as someone who recognises that the material conditions, economic structure of South Africa, is not a neutral occurrence, but the product of colonisation of a special type, neoliberalism and imperialist domination. These conditions demand a more grounded and historically informed discussion that acknowledges that industrialisation is not just an economic project, but a political and ideological task linked to advancing the national democratic revolution.

This contribution is therefore a small attempt to contribute to the ongoing conversation on industrialisation, drawing on Etienne Vlok's work but widening it to look at how local government, cooperatives and working-class communities can shape a new, people-centred path to industrialisation. Industrialisation, if it is to work for the purpose of developing the productive forces, must not be captured by elites, consultants and corporations; it must become an arena of class struggle, where the working class asserts its interests against both global capital and domestic monopoly capital.

Africa's history reminds us that industrialisation is not foreign to the continent. Long before colonial conquest, many regions had thriving textile production systems. Cities such as Kano exported cloth across Africa and Europe, and textiles formed a major part of early African urban economies. Globally too, textile and clothing production was historically the entry point to industrialisation, partly because it is labour-intensive and partly because demand is constant. By the mid-1960s, developing countries already accounted for a significant share of global textile exports, and by 2000, their dominance in this sector had grown substantially. This shows that when conditions allow, textiles can be a foundation for broader industrial growth.

Colonialism violently disrupted this pathway. African textile industries were deliberately undermined as European goods flooded local markets, while African economies were restructured around the extraction of raw materials to feed European

manufacturing. This legacy remains visible in the structural weaknesses of South Africa's clothing and textile sector today.

South Africa's own experience can be divided into three major periods. Before 1994, the clothing and textile industry was heavily protected, with strict import controls that kept foreign competition at bay. While this created jobs, it also encouraged inefficiency. Many factories produced low-value goods and had little incentive to modernise or innovate. Only a handful were globally competitive.

After 1994, the democratic state opened the economy to international trade and joined the World Trade Organisation. At first this seemed beneficial. The weak Rand made South African exports relatively cheap, and incentives encouraged companies to take advantage of markets like the United States through AGOA or Europe through the SA-EU trade agreement. Export volumes increased, although they were still dominated by low-value garments.

The situation changed dramatically around 2002. The Rand strengthened, making exports more expensive, while South Africa further opened its markets to imports. Cheap clothing from China and other Asian producers entered the country in vast quantities. Local firms, unable to compete on price and still technologically behind, shut down at alarming rates. Thousands of workers, especially women, lost their jobs and entire industrial hubs declined.

Today, the sector continues to face immense pressure. Online retail and changing consumer patterns have increased demand for clothing, yet this is not translating into a revival of domestic manufacturing. The reasons are well known: competition from cheap imports, high local production costs, outdated machinery, limited access to new technology and chronic skills shortages. Government efforts such as the Clothing and Textile Competitiveness Programme have provided some support, but the structural challenges remain deep.

It is within this context that industrialisation must be rethought. One of the neglected areas in the current debate is the potential role of local government. South Africa's master plans for the retail, clothing, textile, footwear and leather sectors speak about alignment with national goals, yet the implementation mechanisms remain overly centralised. The working class, the unemployed, the informal producers, and many struggling manufacturers are all located within the local sphere. It is municipalities that manage land, buildings, local economic development strategies and social infrastructure. It is, therefore, municipalities that can make industrialisation concrete, practical and rooted in everyday life. Municipalities are the frontline where the contradictions between social need and capitalist profit are most visible. Industrialisation without municipal leadership will remain abstract and elite-driven.

A more imaginative approach would require local government to identify unused public buildings and convert them into manufacturing spaces. Many municipalities have old factories, warehouses, depots or community centres that stand empty. These could be transformed into modern production hubs equipped with appropriate machinery for spinning, weaving, fabric finishing and garment assembly. Establishing such facilities lowers barriers to entry for small producers and cooperatives while building industrial capacity where people actually live. It creates the conditions for higher-value production, reduces transport costs and revives local urban economies.

Local government could also serve as a catalyst for the adoption of new technologies. Municipalities are not merely administrative bodies; they control energy distribution, waste systems, digital infrastructure and often training centres. They could use these assets to support producers who wish to adopt sustainable fibres, biotechnology, automation or digital production systems. A healthy sense of competition between municipalities, driven by innovation, sustainability and job creation, could strengthen the industrial base across provinces.

Municipalities are also well-positioned to help secure long-term commitments from retailers. Retailers benefit from local consumer markets and local infrastructure; in turn, they can be encouraged to enter multi-year agreements with local producers. Municipalities could offer modest incentives, such as reductions in waste tariffs or priority access to public marketing platforms, if retailers commit to sourcing from local cooperatives or manufacturing hubs. This helps stabilise demand and gives local producers a predictable environment for growth.

Perhaps the most transformative potential lies in viewing this industrialisation agenda as a major opportunity for women's economic empowerment. The clothing and textile sector has historically been a source of employment for working-class women, especially those balancing unpaid care responsibilities. Manufacturing hubs rooted in communities could offer more flexible working arrangements, reduce travel costs, support cooperative ownership models and provide dignified work. Linking production to local schools – for example, by producing school uniforms at affordable prices – would further strengthen the social impact of such an initiative.

This article is not a comprehensive economic plan, but rather a contribution to a necessary political debate. Industrialisation cannot remain an abstract slogan. It must be grounded in history, aligned with our current realities and driven by the needs of the working class. It must speak to the institutional possibilities of local government and the democratic aspirations of communities. Above all, it must form part of the broader strategy to advance the national democratic revolution by building productive capacity, deepening social ownership and transforming South Africa's economic structure.

This is a small bite of a much larger discussion, but perhaps it can help us move forward in imagining an industrialisation path that belongs to the working class, is built by the working class, and ultimately serves the working class. ■

Cde Dineo Sitole Majavu is the SACP Linda Jabane District Chairperson and YCLSA National Committee member.

Lessons for South Africa from Xiaogang village and the Big Contract

Lukhanyo "Bhanda" Mtshingana looks at how the story of a rural community in China typifies how institutional change can be shaped by bottom-up experimentation

Avillage 46 years ago became a foundation for a framework for growth and development to uplift people from poverty and the idea was institutionalisation into the Household Responsibility System (HRS). The HRS became a national policy that incorporated the values exemplified in Xiaogang village. Contracts that maintained community land ownership while tying rewards to effort were officially approved by the state by the early 1980s. As a result, Xiaogang Village became the norm rather than the exception, transforming practice into policy.

As a country we continue to face challenges of unemployment and low productivity in key sectors of the economy which would greatly assist our country South Africa in attaining rural growth through a bottom-up strategy that involves empowering local communities through participatory planning, bolstering local institutions such as "co-ops", decentralising government for improved service delivery such as infrastructure and extension services and assisting small-scale businesses and agriculture, all while resolving historical injustices like land dispossession to foster social cohesion and economic inclusion for women, the poor and young people.

A compelling example of how grassroots institutional innovation aided China's rural transformation in the early phases of reform is the tale of Xiaogang Village and the "Big Contract."

China's rural economy was structured under the people's commune system in the late 1970s, emphasising centralised planning and community farming. This method resulted in low productivity, inadequate incentives and ongoing poverty in Xiaogang Village and many other rural places. Because produce was given evenly regardless of effort, farmers had little incentive to put in more effort. Food security and rural livelihoods were at risk due to agricultural stagnation. In response to these limitations, the residents of Xiaogang Village introduced what became known as the "Big Contract," a daring and dangerous move. Individual households were given contracts for collective land under this structure. Each home pledged to provide the state and the collective with a set amount of grain or revenue, keeping any excess for personal use.

By directly connecting individual effort to rewards, this informal contract radically

altered incentive structures. This illustrates how formal institutional change can be preceded and shaped by bottom-up experimentation. Higher authorities progressively acknowledged and approved of such arrangements as living conditions improved and productivity increased dramatically.

A more general idea in China's growth route is exemplified by Xiaogang Village's success: Institutions change through practice rather than just design. Local knowledge and necessity, rather than abstract theory, gave rise to the Big Contract. It showed that incentive compatibility, trustworthy agreements and well-defined responsibilities are essential for economic coordination. ■

Cde Lukhanyo "Bhanda" Mtshingana is a PhD student in management studies at Peking University, China

Understanding the conflict in Sudan

Ben Martins examines the source and nature of the civil war underway in Sudan

Since gaining independence on 1st January 1956, Sudan has endured chronic instability marked by 20 coup d'etat attempts, prolonged military rule, and two devastating civil wars.

The First Sudanese Civil War started in 1955 and lasted until 1972, between the northern and southern parts of the country after Britain relinquished colonial control. The war ended in a peace agreement, but underlying issues that were not fully resolved, led to future conflicts.

The Second Sudanese Civil War, which began in 1983 and ended in 2005, started after the government reneged on a promise of autonomy to the Southern parts of the country and imposed Islamic law. The war ended when a comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005, which led to South Sudan becoming the 54th independent African country in 2011.

The Conflict in the Darfur state began in 2003. The conflict has involved government forces and allied militias fighting against rebel groups, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. A 2004 ceasefire did not end the violence, which led to the International Criminal Court issuing arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Circumstances have been dire in Darfur; thousands of families have fled El Fasher, the state's largest city, to join nearly 400,000 displaced persons who have been seeking safety and humanitarian aid in neighbouring Tawila. International Red Cross (IRC) teams in Tawila reported that, based on information received from people who walked from El Fasher mostly at night, they witnessed numerous dead bodies scattered along the route and wounded individuals crying for help. They also reported on the harrowing experience of many unaccompanied and separated children – many too young to state their names or origin – who arrived in Tawila without their parents or relatives.

Despite ongoing humanitarian efforts, basic needs in Tawila are being overwhelmed by demand. Families are living in overcrowded, makeshift shelters with limited access to clean water, food and health care.

Current civil war

The crises of the past decade, including the 2019 popular uprising that overthrew the Omar al-Bashir regime, reflected the contradictions of Sudan's socio-economic situation, namely that of the majority of citizens' democratic aspirations clashing with those of entrenched military-commercial elites. The unstable civilian and military transitional arrangements were consistently undermined by factions within the security establishment beholden to the patronage of competing local and foreign resource extraction networks, of particularly gold.

The current civil war which erupted amid tensions over the integration of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed "Hemedti" Dagalo into the Sudanese Armed Forces following the 25 October 2021 coup d'état led by General Abdul Fattah al-Burhan plunged Sudan into the current full-scale civil war, which was the culmination of decades of militarised financial accumulation, foreign interference and geopolitical interests across the Red Sea, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) represents the traditional military elite aligned to sections of the government bureaucracy and political class. Its economic reach includes military-owned companies and participation in export sectors.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) evolved from the Janjaweed militias into a heavily armed power bloc with its own transnational gold smuggling networks and foreign backers. The RSF's wealth is tied to extractive networks connecting Sudan's gold fields to regional markets.

Both armed factions operate as capitalist military blocs with competing international alliances. Gold traders, logistics companies, arms suppliers and financial intermediaries are the backbone of Sudan's war economy. These networks convert Sudan's extractive wealth into military firepower capacity and political leverage for domestic and international dogs-of-war elites.

Civilians bear the brunt of the conflict, sexual violence is widespread, fighters on both sides regularly target civilians and infrastructure, and child soldier recruitment is common.

Civilians are subject to frequent attacks and human rights violations, while the country's health system has collapsed as life-threatening famine has set in. Attacks on humanitarian aid workers have made it difficult to deliver lifesaving aid to some of the most fragile and vulnerable communities in the world.

International peace efforts, including the May 2023 Jeddah Declaration, failed to stop the fighting, while various rebel groups entered the war:

- the Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-North) al-Hilu faction attacked the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the south;
- the Tamazuj Movement joined the Rapid Support Forces; and
- the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) gained support from factions of the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement.

Rather than advancing peace and diplomacy, some foreign powers are fuelling the conflict by funnelling weapons to the armed factions that they support. Most notably this includes arms shipments by the United Arab Emirates.

Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces leaders appear to believe that the continued conflict best serves their interests, thus fuelling and hastening Sudan's further humanitarian demise and collapse.

The Rapid Support Forces, by late 2023, controlled most of Darfur state and advanced on Khartoum, taking over most of the capital, Kordofan and Gezira. The Sudanese Armed Forces on the other hand, regained momentum in early 2024, making gains in Omdurman and eventually retaking Khartoum, the Presidential Palace and airport by March 2025.

Despite renewed negotiations, no lasting ceasefire has been reached, and the war continues with severe humanitarian consequences, marked by extreme shortages of food, water, medicine and aid access. The near collapse of education and infrastructure has left more than half of the population in urgent need of assistance. The looting of humanitarian supplies remains a problem. In October 2025 the city of El Fasher fell, giving the Rapid Support Forces control over the Sudanese Armed Forces' last stronghold in Darfur.

Despite renewed negotiations, no lasting ceasefire has been achieved. The conflict has worsened the country's fragmentation with both sides creating rival governments.

Sudan has abundant natural resources, including gold deposits which are a major export, along with other minerals like iron ore, copper, chromite and uranium. Control over Sudan's gold resources has become a key funding source for the conflict, with the Sudanese Armed Forces controlling the deposits in eastern Sudan. Despite the ongoing conflict, Sudan's gold production increased to 64 tonnes in 2024. Besides minerals other, exports include livestock and cotton.

The war in Sudan has created extreme levels of displacement, both internally and across Sudan's borders.

- More than 12 million people have been forcibly displaced, including nearly four million women and children, since the conflict began in April 2023, making it the world's largest and fastest-growing displacement crisis.
- More than 30 million people need humanitarian assistance and more people are living in famine conditions in Sudan than in the rest of the world combined.
- More than 70% of Sudan's hospitals have been destroyed, leading to a collapse of the health system and outbreaks of diseases like cholera.

Acting under Article 7 of its Protocol, the African Union Peace and Security Council has expressed deep concern and alarm over the worsening humanitarian and escalating violence reported in Sudan. It has demanded an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities and the opening of humanitarian corridors to allow lifesaving aid to reach affected civilians. It has further condemned any external interference in Sudan which fuels the conflict in violation of all relevant Peace and Security Council communiqués and United Nations Resolutions.

The African Union Peace and Security Council has stressed that there is no military solution to Sudan's civil war and urged the warring parties to engage in dialogue and to commit to a peaceful and inclusive political process.

On 20th June 2025 a delegation of the Democratic Movement of Sudan led by Dr Abdalla Hamdok, held meetings with SACP and ANC delegations led by General Secretary Solly Mapaila and President Cyril Ramaphosa. The meetings addressed the issues of ending the civil war in Sudan, protecting civilians and the reconstruction of Sudan. The meetings further explored South Africa's role in engaging the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council and the need for South Africa to mobilise all possible efforts to end the civil war.

In conclusion, the SACP should remain actively seized with the matter of Sudan attaining sustainable peace, stability, security, socio-economic development and democracy.

The SACP should:

- continue to advocate for a consolidated African mediation process that prioritises civilian participation, demilitarisation and transparency;
- issue a Central Committee resolution that calls for the cessation of hostilities, and the plunder of Sudan;
- ensure that the humanitarian crisis in Sudan finds express mention on the agenda of the Alliance partners and progressive civil society organisations. ■

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