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Umsebenzi

June 2023

Voice of the South African Communist Party



**Youth Month:
CARRYING THE TORCH OF '76
FORWARD TO SOCIALISM**

YOUTH MONTH

June 16: Have we done you justice?

Exlira Giose, Lucian Davids and Tsietsi Letsebe report on the struggle and mission of today's youth for urgent social-economic freedom

Although we may not be greeted by apartheid public security officials, their dogs and guns, the 47th anniversary commemoration of 16 June was filled with youth anger and focused on issues that are killing the spirit and will of young people.

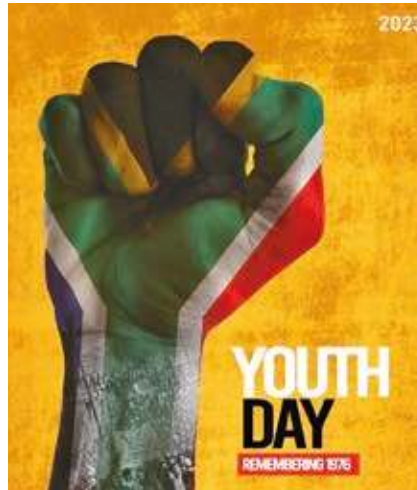
These include unemployment, being born into poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, gangsterism, lack of skills to functionally help young people earn an income or enter the market, overcrowded schools and problems with NSFAS.

We live in a society underpinned by socio-economic and political crises that wage war on young people. Like the generation of 1976, we cry: We have no hope! No future! In some instances, the government has failed to listen to our plight and has failed to implement programmes that seek to capture and occupy the currently growing young population.

The YCLSA engaged on a variety of programmes to observe the youth month, beginning in the province of Moses Kotane with the film screening of *Kalushi: The Story of Solomon Mahlangu*.

Cde Mogale Matsose, the YCLSA Provincial Secretary said that their rationale was to take Youth Day to school learners, who had been the main actors of 16 June 1976 "The aim was to build political consciousness of kids at school level."

The screening was preceded by a dance performance and a message from the YCLSA Provincial Secretary, followed by an engagement with the students. They spoke openly and frankly about their thoughts and opinions on the film. They also expressed their concerns about where the youth of South Africa



Youth are in dire straits – the struggle is far from over

are today. Discussions of dissatisfaction with the school curriculum, persistent racial inequalities, youth unemployment and community poverty emerged as the learners shared their perceptions of life in South Africa.

In Limpopo, under the theme "Students of 1976 compared to students of the 21st century", the approach was to educate young minds on the relevance of June 16 and to motivate them to prioritise education as a stepping stone to their liberation.

In the Western Cape, YCLSA provincial leaders visited COSATU Young Workers on 16 June for a commemorative event entitled "Unite in style, redefining unionism for the young generation" and attended an event hosted by the NUM Youth Structure in the region entitled "Empowering youth to advocate for their generational struggles". Among the key

issues raised in the YCLSA's engagement with young workers were (1) the rise of liberalism and its mindset and its influence on the reluctance of young people to unionise; (2) the right-wing and liberal criticism of the new National Health Insurance Bill on universal health insurance and the commodification of health; (3) the issue of land and the continued control of mineral resources in the post-colonial situation; (4) crime and the role of the PYA in crime prevention; and (5) the maintenance of colonial borders that continue to hinder Africa's common development.

The YCLSA's 12 Youth Fronts for Socialism outlines a programme for and speaks to our generational mission of socio-economic emancipation and to fight the status quo that is kept intact by the proponents of capitalism. Below, we look at the two fronts that we believe are central in deepening our campaign.

A Youth Front on Enterprise and Cooperative Development.

We have not done much to confront and hold the state to account for its reluctance to even touch the Land Expropriation Bill without compensation.

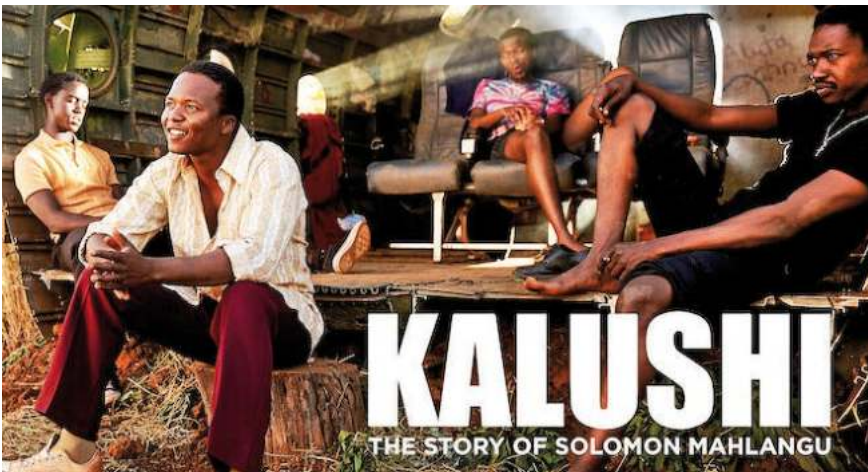
With the expansion of our economy and shared prosperity lies the solution to the land question - land for agricultural development, land for subsistence and land to house our people. We would like to remind the government that the land is still dominated by whites, as it has been historically. Young people in rural areas are challenged by the lack of land and often migrate to urban areas in the hope of more opportunities.

In most cases, young people do not



Above: Cry for help – mass youth joblessness is killing hopes for a better future

Left: Poster for the biopic of struggle hero Solomon Mahlangu, screened by the YCLSA in Moses Kotane Province



survive the social ills associated with the social and economic conditions in urban areas. It should not be the case that young people have to leave the comfort of their homes and families to find opportunities to participate in the economy.

While youth may be hindered by this structural obstacle, we are happy to report that the YCL has established a cooperative in Moses Kotane Province. The success of this cooperative has not come without challenges and hardships, and we hope to inspire our fellow youth.

Youth Front on Access and Success in Education.

The majority of our young people are functionally illiterate, as expressed by a study conducted by Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) stating that 85% of South African students in grade 4 cannot read for meaning. This does not mean that young people cannot read at all, however that they are unable to relate to or even un-

derstand what they have read.

This puts us in a dangerous position. It is as if the struggle for education has not ceased to haunt today’s generation. We need to assess how far we have come in our struggle to decolonise education in South Africa. We must add that the labour market should stop discriminating against TVET graduates. These are graduates who have practical skills but are still considered inferior to those who have a university degree. This, along with several other structural inefficiencies in the sector, seeks to drive a wedge into the cohesion of the student movement and ultimately the young workers of our country. We oppose this variant of the “divide and rule” regime.

Furthermore, it would be naive to think that our call for NSFAS to speed up the review process to help students will make any difference. We are well aware of the chaos this has caused for students on campuses across the country. We focus on the Western Cape, at UWC and

CPUT, where students have been protesting about accommodation and registration processes since the beginning of the first semester.

Many young people at NMU George have also been without accommodation, food or anything else. Naturally, protests broke out among the students, and what was the reaction of these universities? They used public security and the courts to suppress the plight of the young people. Our cries for help are being silenced by the same institutions we hope to protect. The devil is in the details and we can safely say that the bourgeois devil is running amok in these corridors of our government.

As we reflect on these few points, the call to honour our generational mission must be clearly heard. In particular, as YCLSA, we must not stop the campaigns around the 12 Youth Fronts. This is a concise and focused programme that seeks to change the lives of young people in practical and concrete ways. In general, our influence and programmatic campaigns can be shared with the PYA to develop programmes around the 12 Youth Fronts for Socialism.

Now that we know what to do, what can stop us? ●

Cde Letsebe is the First Deputy National Secretary of the YCLSA and Cde Giose and Cde Davids are National Committee members of the YCLSA

YOUTH MONTH

Carrying forward the torch of '76

Thabile Lenkwane surveys the enduring example of the heroes of the Soweto uprising in galvanising action for youth rights and empowerment



In the tapestry of South African history, youth have always played a pivotal role in driving social change. The generation of 1976 stands as an indomitable example of courage, unity and determination in the face of oppression. Today, as we confront our own unique challenges, we must draw inspiration from their indomitable spirit. By understanding the contrasting realities between the youth of 1976 and the current generation, we can harness the power of the past to create a better future for South Africa.

The youth formations of 1976 in South Africa emerged as vanguards in an epochal struggle against the inherently unjust education system perpetuated by the apartheid regime. Their collective mobilisation exhibited an unwavering determination to challenge the oppressive status quo, as they valiantly undertook street demonstrations and selflessly laid down their lives in pursuit of fundamental rights and an improved trajectory for the nation. Their unparalleled valour in the face of relentless police brutality etched an indelible imprint upon the annals of history, engendering a transformative paradigm. Rooted in an unyielding spirit of resilience, activism, and unity, the movement served as the catalyst that ultimately reshaped the contours of society.

The streets of Soweto bore witness to the grim tableau of lifeless bodies strewn across its roads; tragic symbols of the human cost exacted during the height of the Soweto uprising. The youth formations, propelled by an unassailable sense of moral conviction, navigated a



A young boy gazes at the famous photo by Sam Nzima of the mortally wounded Hector Pieterse carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo, accompanied by Pieterse's distraught sister Antoinette Sithole, 16 June 1976 (archive photo, Hector Pieterse Museum)

treacherous landscape, resolute in their conviction that their struggle for justice and emancipation was worthy of such profound sacrifice. Their willingness to confront the brutality of the state machinery demonstrated an unparalleled bravery that defied the odds, fuelling the flame of resistance that burned brightly amidst the darkest of circumstances.

The activism espoused by the youth formations was not just a rhetorical exercise. It was a determined commitment to bring about societal transformation.

Their repertoire of protest tactics encompassed a wide spectrum, ranging from mass rallies and demonstrations to impassioned calls for action. By leveraging their collective voice and mobilising their ranks, they fashioned a symphony of dissent that reverberated across the nation, transcending the boundaries of race, tribe, gender and socio-economic stratification.

Perhaps the most salient hallmark of the youth formations lay in their ability to forge a united front in the face of inherent divisions that threatened to undermine their cause. They recognised that their shared struggle for justice transcended the artificial barriers imposed upon them by a discriminatory system. By setting aside differences and fostering solidarity, they harnessed their collective strength to become an unstoppable force, a living testament to the power of unity in the pursuit of a common goal.

Today's youth face a transformed landscape of challenges. While apartheid is no longer the legal system, inequality, unemployment and a lack of access to quality education persist as barriers to progress. However, we possess distinct advantages that can enable us to bring about meaningful change. Our generation has a remarkable array of tools at our disposal, including social media, technology, and global connectivity. By harnessing these resources, we can amplify our voices, raise awareness, and mobilise for change more effectively than ever before.

Youth formations were the lifeblood of the revolution in 1976, providing a platform for organising, strategising, and mobilising. Similarly, today's genera-



Young people marching to the Union Buildings in Tshwane, 16 June 2023 (Photo: Thoshstudio)

tion must actively engage in meaningful youth organisations and movements. By joining forces, we can address the root causes of inequality, demand a quality education for all, and advocate for economic opportunities. These formations can serve as platforms to amplify our voices and drive the necessary changes in policy and society.

To contextualize the present struggle, we must draw a parallel with the #Fees-Must-Fall Generation—a watershed moment that reverberated throughout the nation. This movement arose from the fervent desire to dismantle the barriers that hindered the children of impoverished backgrounds from accessing higher education.

The resonating call for free education not only galvanised the youth but also propelled the socio-political discourse toward an ardent examination of the systemic inequalities perpetuated within the education system.

The #FeesMustFall Generation exemplified the power of collective action, as multitudes of students united in protest, demanding a more equitable tertiary education landscape. Their activism, bolstered by social media platforms and online mobilisation, served as a catalyst for awareness and transformative

dialogue. By compelling the nation to confront the structural inequalities that marginalized the less privileged, they not only reshaped the discourse surrounding education but also laid the groundwork for tangible policy reforms that sought to alleviate the burdens faced by economically disadvantaged students.

The revolution we seek today is not one of violence or division but rather a revolution of ideas, compassion, and inclusivity. We need a revolution that dismantles the structural barriers that perpetuate inequality, that fosters economic empowerment, and that ensures equal access to quality education and healthcare. We must be the architects of a revolution that recognises the value of diversity, promotes social justice, and establishes a society that embraces its people as equals, regardless of race, gender, or socio-economic background.

As inheritors of a rich legacy, the South African youth has the responsibility to

**We need a revolution
that dismantles the
structural barriers that
perpetuate inequality**

steer our nation towards a brighter future. Drawing inspiration from the youth of 1976, we can recognise the power we possess and the tools at our disposal. The heroic youth of 1976 courageously battled against a discriminatory education system, fighting for access to quality education and the abolition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Their struggle serves as a powerful reminder that education is not a privilege, but a fundamental right that must be accessible to all. Building upon their legacy, the #Fees-Must-Fall generation valiantly fought for access to higher learning, ensuring that economic constraints would not hinder the pursuit of knowledge.

Now, it is incumbent upon the current generation to carry the torch forward and fight for #TheRightToWork. We must strive for a society where every young person has equal opportunities for employment, where skills and talents are nurtured, and where dreams can be realised. Let us unite in this endeavor, harnessing our collective strength, and demanding a future where #TheRightToWork is not a luxury, but a fundamental right for all. ●

Cde Lenkwane is a National Committee member of the YCLSA

YOUTH MONTH

For youth to thrive, we must stand up against capitalism

Youth unemployment, underdevelopment and graduate joblessness are a catastrophe for the country, writes Mwzandile Thakhudi



The focus here is on a critical issue that plagues our nation and threatens the future of our youth. It demands a comprehensive analysis, rooted in the Marxist-Leninist tools of analysis, as we examine the global and South African economies. Youth unemployment, underdevelopment and graduate underemployment are catastrophic for South Africa. We will also critique the macroeconomic policy outlook since 1994.

To understand the global economic context, we must first acknowledge the dominance of global capitalism and its impact on South Africa. Capitalism, driven by its inherent contradictions and the pursuit of profit, has engendered an unequal and exploitative world order. A Marxist-Leninist analysis provides us with a lens through which to dissect the structural inequalities and contradictions inherent in the global capitalist system.

In this global context, South Africa's integration into the global economy has been shaped by the historical legacy of colonialism and apartheid. The transition to democracy in 1994 brought about a promise of liberation and socio-economic transformation. But the macroeconomic policies pursued since then have largely adhered to a neoliberal framework, reinforcing the very systems of exploitation and inequality inherited from the past.

The ANC-led government embraced a macroeconomic policy framework that prioritised fiscal discipline, market liberalisation, and privatisation. These policies, guided by the Washington Consensus and international financial insti-

tutions, were implemented under the banner of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and later the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.

While these policies were intended to stimulate economic growth and attract foreign investment, their impact on the lives of the majority, especially the youth, has been deeply concerning. The promises of a better future have remained elusive, with youth unemployment rates soaring, underdevelopment persisting and graduate underemployment becoming the norm.

What are the consequences of these policies and their impact on youth unemployment? The pursuit of fiscal austerity and market-driven policies have resulted in limited job creation, particularly in labour-intensive sectors. The looming privatisation of state-owned enterprises, such as Eskom and Telkom, not only compromised our national sovereignty but also led to job losses and precarious employment for workers, further exacerbating the youth unemployment crisis.

The neoliberal policies embraced since 1994 have perpetuated a dualistic economy characterised by stark inequalities. The wealth and resources of our nation have been concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority suffer the consequences of poverty and underdevelopment. The Marxist-Leninist critique

of capitalism provides us with a framework for understanding the mechanisms through which wealth is extracted from the working class and concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The impacts of these policies are felt most acutely by the youth, who bear the brunt of unemployment and underdevelopment. Official statistics reveal that the youth unemployment rate in South Africa hovers at around 50%, one of the highest in the world.

This dire situation denies our youth the opportunity to realise their full potential, stifles their creativity and innovation and perpetuates a cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Graduate underemployment has become a systemic issue in our society. Many young people, despite investing time and resources in acquiring higher education, find themselves trapped in low-skilled jobs that do not align with their qualifications. This mismatch between education and employment opportunities is not the result of individual inadequacy but rather a consequence of a capitalist system that prioritises profit over the genuine needs and aspirations of our youth.

The capitalist mode of production, driven by its inherent contradictions, necessitates a reserve army of unemployed and underemployed workers to maintain the profitability of capital. The surplus labour created by this reserve army serves to depress wages and exploit the working class, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and deprivation.

To address these catastrophic consequences, we must turn to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and advocate for an alternative economic path. We call for

Neoliberal policies since 1994 have perpetuated a dualistic economy characterised by stark inequalities



Cde Mzwandile Thakhudi speaking at an SACP Youth Month meeting held in Cokonyane, Greater Taung-SubDistrict, Moses Kotane Province

a fundamental transformation of the South African economy, one that places the needs and aspirations of our people, particularly the youth, at the centre.

– Firstly, we must re-evaluate our macro-economic policies. Instead of adhering to a neoliberal framework that prioritises fiscal austerity and market forces, we must pursue a path of economic democracy and socialism. This entails reclaiming the commanding heights of the economy through nationalisation, strategic planning, and the establishment of a mixed economy that prioritises social welfare over private profit.

– Secondly, the state must play an active role in directing economic development and promoting inclusive growth. We must invest in key sectors such as infrastructure, manufacturing, and agriculture to stimulate job creation and foster industrialisation. Strategic state interventions, including state-owned enterprises, can drive economic transformation, create employment opportunities and ensure that the wealth of our

nation benefits the majority.

– Thirdly, we must prioritise the development of a comprehensive and free education system that equips our youth with the skills necessary for a rapidly changing world. Education should not be a privilege reserved for the few but a fundamental right accessible to all. This requires increased investment in quality public education from early childhood development to tertiary level, the provision of free higher education and the development of vocational training programmes that align with the needs of the economy.

We must also challenge the commodification of knowledge and ensure that education is liberated from the grip of

Education should not be a privilege for the few but a fundamental right accessible to all

profit-driven forces. Intellectual property rights and patents must be reimagined to facilitate the transfer of technology and knowledge, enabling us to address the structural inequalities perpetuated by capitalism.

And we must prioritise the empowerment of young workers and promote their active participation in trade unions and workers' movements. By organising and mobilising, our youth can collectively demand better working conditions, fair wages, and improved social protections. Trade unions must embrace the concerns and interests of young workers, advocating for their rights and fighting against the exploitation and precariousness that define their working lives.

Lastly, the struggle for youth empowerment and emancipation cannot be divorced from the broader struggle for social justice and the eradication of all forms of oppression. The Marxist-Leninist framework calls on us to recognise the interconnectedness of the class struggle, gender oppression, racism and other forms of discrimination. We must forge alliances with other progressive movements and fight against all forms of exploitation and injustice that perpetuate the suffering of our youth.

The catastrophic levels of youth unemployment, underdevelopment and graduate underemployment in South Africa are not isolated incidents but rather systemic consequences of the capitalist system. The Marxist-Leninist analysis provides us with the tools to understand and critique the macro-economic policies pursued since 1994, which have perpetuated inequality and undermined the prospects of our youth.

To realise a future where our youth can thrive, we must challenge the dominance of capitalism and advocate for an alternative economic system rooted in socialism and economic democracy. It is through the mobilisation and organisation of our youth, guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism, that we can build a society where unemployment and underdevelopment are eradicated and the fruits of our labour are shared equitably among all members of society.

Together, let us march forward in the spirit of unity, determination, and collective struggle, to create a South Africa that truly belongs to its youth and to the working class. ●

Cde Thakhudi is the National Secretary of the YCLSA

YOUTH MONTH

Winning young people to socialism

Youth activism won't guarantee progressive change unless it's guided by revolutionary theory and practice, argues Ramatolo Tlotleng



June 16 always brings into focus the role of young people in the struggle for change in South Africa. The generation of Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela catapulted the ANC into mass activism in the 1950s. The youth of 1976 were the catalyst for the remobilisation and the eventual defeat of the apartheid regime. What about today's youth?

By youth in South Africa, we mean anyone between 15 years and 36 years of age. In other words, young people born between 1988 and 2008. Broadly speaking, these are young people who have no living memory of the dark days of apartheid but who have spent a substantial part of their lives in democratic South Africa.

Young people have the zeal, determination and eagerness to agitate for a different future. That, however, requires conscious organisation and efforts to raise their political consciousness and activism. The words of former secretary of the SACP and leader of the ANC, Cde Moses Kotane are relevant to the generational mission of today's youth:

"At this hour of destiny, your country and your people need you. The future of South Africa is in your hands and it will be what you make of it."

The generation of Nelson Mandela, the youth of 1976 and the Young Lions of the 1980s answered Cde Kotane's call by finding their generational mission and fulfilling it brilliantly rather than betraying it. To paraphrase the words of Franz Fanon, "each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray

it". We pay tribute to young leaders like Brian Mbulelo Mazibuko from Tembisa, whose life was cut short. He was a young anti-apartheid activist in the late 1970s, arrested in 1977, sentenced to Robben Island and released in 1982. Cde Brian was murdered by gangsters in 1984.

The freedom we enjoy today is written in the blood of many of our people who gave their lives so that we could all be free. Young people should be constantly reminded of these heroic sacrifices so that they do not take freedom for granted. Despite misconceptions of apathy, young people continue to play an active role in different areas of our young democracy, including as political activists in schools, universities, workplaces and wider society. It is this energy that should be harnessed and channeled into the struggle to deepen the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and achieve socialism.

Young people have undoubtedly borne the brunt of underdevelopment and a revolution that has failed to deliver on its promise to rid our country of the vestiges of colonialism, apartheid and capitalist exploitation. Young people, especially young black women, are the hardest hit by unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment, especially in South Africa's rural hinterland. Sadly,

**The only visibility
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many young people have unleashed a war on themselves through drug abuse or involvement in crime.

The post-apartheid era has brought a new set of challenges that require youth action, mobilisation, social solidarity and patriotism. Young people need to be reminded that many of their social problems are human-made or a product of a social system based on the exploitation of one person by another. As such, these conditions can be changed rather than giving in to despair and helplessness. This task requires a revolutionary theory that both explains the laws of motion of the current system and guides political action. Youth activism in itself won't guarantee progressive change unless it's guided by revolutionary theory and practice. Experience has shown that young people can be mobilised for destructive and counter-revolutionary purposes.

The second point is that young people should reconnect with the progressive traditions of the struggle against apartheid and colonialism. Many of the issues facing young people are not new and have been theorised and confronted in past struggles. Young people should therefore resist the temptation to think that they are starting afresh. However, they must use their energy and enthusiasm to innovate and find new ways of addressing contemporary challenges.

Socialist forces must counterattack the ideological war that has been unleashed against the youth. It is important for young people to recognise the challenges they face are a continuation and reproduction of the systemic features of capitalism. This does not absolve the ANC-led government of some of its failures and detours. Indeed, the limited progress in the NDR stems from the inadequate transformation of racialised capitalism and colonialism of a particular kind.

Instead of seeing capitalism as natural and unchangeable, young people must be taught about the inherent contradictions of the system that produces wealth and poverty. The YCLSA should take the lead in this, working with the progressive youth movement to teach young people the theory of revolutionary nationalism and Marxism-Leninism. More than that, it must draw young people into active struggles to decommodify basic needs such as education and to agitate for a post-capitalist society. ●

Cde Tlotleng is a National Committee member of the YCLSA and a community activist



Young people need a positive future vision but are being failed on too many fronts

YOUTH MONTH

Seize the moment PYA – the youth yearn for leadership

Precious Banda urges the Progressive Youth Alliance to shape up and respond to the massive challenges facing youth



The weakness of the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA) and its failure to allow democratic processes to unfold without manipulation has created conditions for the emergence of populist demagoguery and sporadic movements. This resonates with frustrated youth and members whose aspirations cannot be expressed unless they are aligned with the parasitic networks that appropriate power and hijack the processes of the organisation.

Most members use Facebook to vent because debates are managed in the or-

ganisation and meetings always have predetermined outcomes. Most of those who hold the organisation to ransom until they get what they want are hypocrites who talk left and walk right. They are decorated comrades of unquestionable standing in the movement, so you can't take them at face value.

**Populist
demagoguery
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frustrated youth**

For young people, their only hope is that history will judge the hijackers correctly. It is difficult to challenge them because it is career-limiting and has consequences that affect our families, so in the meantime young people find legitimate expression in popular voices outside the structures. Political bishops breed liberals. If this is not confronted without being defensive and honest, we will continue to have structures whose capacity to fight is weakened because young people cannot choose the best among them to lead them without interference.

One of the opposition parties is making good use of this vacuum. They held

a national rally on 16 June to tell young people that the liberation movement was against the youth of 1976 and those of the Fees Must Fall movement. This deliberate erasure and misinformation is not being challenged by the young people in our structures whose history is being erased. The good story of the work of the ANC has no youth voice to tell it in this way.

SASCO, COSAS, ANCYL and YCLSA leaders can be seen everywhere in the VIP areas of government Youth Day events. While it's important to support the work of government, it is unacceptable that the PYA didn't engage with young people through events and programmes to mark this historic day. It's only a few branches across the country that have tried sports tournaments and talks, but without a practical articulation of what Youth Day and Youth Month should mean for the young people of the movement and the country this year. This should have been done by our national PYA structures. I'm struggling to work out what the PYA Youth Day message is.

The same opposition party, at its Youth Day rally attended by thousands of young people, declared 2024 to be their 1994, when the ANC must lose elections through youth mobilisation. We have failed to effectively counter the attacks, fuelled by falsehoods from our colleagues

in the opposition parties and on social media, in a principled and programmatic way. As a result, the counter-narratives against the movement are growing daily and finding popular expression among the youth. We are losing the battle of ideas and we must change that.

The only visibility we get these days is from those who are running their congress campaigns to get elected and therefore do not represent the collective imagination of the members and structures of the movement. Our organisations are being reduced to exist only to elect leaders and that's why the level and quality of thought leadership, debate and ideas is very poor. If we don't fix this, we have a serious problem of a youth that is being mobilised daily to be more impatient with the liberation movement beyond their concrete frustrations and lived experiences.

The cost of living is high and we live in debt. Gender-based violence, femicide and abuse of women are on the rise. Children and LGBTQIA+ people are also not safe in our communities. Alcohol

and drug abuse is a problem in all our communities. Young people are having unprotected sex and spreading sexually transmitted diseases. We also need to address mental illness and encourage an open conversation about it. We need programmes that teach young people about patriotism and nation building to respond to all the social scourges we have mentioned.

It is the PYA that must tell the good story of how National Health Insurance (NHI) will improve the currently underfunded and overburdened public health sector. The story of the public education sector with its many dysfunctional schools and poor educational outcomes must be told by us and we must also demand the kind of schooling we believe we deserve to develop our talents, skills and leadership.

It is we who need to talk about how working youth are facing the housing crisis and having their homes repossessed by banks. The people who live in informal settlements and sometimes face eviction are mainly young people. We need to be with them as our movement responds to these economic challenges. The premier of Gauteng has given hope and shown that the ANC can use what we have to change people's lives. More has been done and more must be done.

With all the realities of youth and many more that I have not mentioned, there is great work that the ANC government has done. Young people need to know how far we have come in improving the quality of life in their communities. We need activist and vibrant youth structures that are part of all youth popular fronts to tell the good story of the ANC.

We must seize this moment and rise to the occasion and renew, reposition and reimagine the standing of all PYA structures among the youth for the struggles ahead. 2024 is our 1976, a year of intensified struggle and youth mobilisation against the capitalist onslaught colluding to liquidate the existence of the mass democratic movement and its progressive youth alliance. To defend the gains of the liberation movement and accelerate youth development and economic participation. Aluta continua! ●

Cde Banda (also known as Dora Tamana) is a former YCLSA National Committee member, and has previously held the posts of ANCYL National Commissar, SASCO Treasurer General and National Convenor of the ANC Young Women's League Division

Youth are facing a housing crisis and having their homes repossessed by banks

Umsebenzi

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YOUTH MONTH

Western Cape student protests target poor safety and conditions

CPUT and UWC students have joined forces to intensify their struggle for better living conditions

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) are no strangers to radical protest and radical change. Students from other universities have often criticised the revolutionary actions of CPUT and UWC students, pointing out that their campuses are superior because there are no protests elsewhere. Either these universities are perfect and have no problems, or the students from these universities are usually too liberal or too cowardly to stand up for themselves.

But we find that at UWC students have been protesting since the first day the institution opened its doors to face-to-face learning in February 2023. The first fight of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and the wider student body was about the lack of accommodation (leading to terrible living conditions for resident students), the slow pace of National Student's Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) disbursement (leading to even slower university registration).

We will always be grateful to the ANC government for designing the NSFAS, but it seems that anything given to working class and poor people in this country is inefficient. There are some serious structural problems that we face when services are not meeting the needs of the people for whom they are intended.

The protests began even before the death of UWC student Kamva Dasi, who tragically lost his life in Belhar, a crime hotspot in Cape Town near the university. Initially, the protests were about private student accommodation and the constant robberies of students on their way to and from shops on campus.

Students living in private accommoda-

tion faced the greatest challenges, given the dangers of Belhar. These students use shuttles that the UWC management did not want them to use. The management's response to preventing these students from using the shuttles was to introduce a system whereby students in non-private accommodation could be identified by a sticker, in order to prevent students in private accommodation from using the shuttles to get to and from the university, despite the fact that these students are not far from residences where shuttles are available.

Many students in this accommodation do not receive a travel allowance from the university and are forced to use public transport such as taxis. Non-private and privately housed students united in protest to challenge this and to demand more buses.

In Belhar, where new halls of residence such as Unibell have just been built, there were no shuttles, forcing students to walk to campus. There are also no study areas in the private accommodation, forcing students to study on campus and to travel to Belhar with their equipment, despite the high likelihood of having their belongings stolen.

Then came the death of Kamva Dasi, who was killed because of the lack of security for UWC and CPUT students. And this further intensified the protests against the lack of intervention by the

There are serious problems when services don't meet the needs of the people

UWC management against crime in this area.

During the protest, students were singing, marching and pulling other students out of classes to stop academic activities, when suddenly the police appeared out of nowhere, shot students with rubber bullets, grabbed students by the neck, tear gassed and brutally assaulted unarmed students – these police officers were called by the university management.

The university issued an official statement claiming that conclusions and solutions had been reached in consultation with the SRC, but what the university failed to mention was that they had never implemented the solutions, which is what led the students to resume their protests.

The protesters' demands were simple: they wanted shuttles for all students, 24-hour campus security, and police to patrol the surrounding areas that UWC has allocated to students. Progress has been made on the shuttle services, but at the time of writing the full implementation of the security measures for the affected students has yet to be seen.

The move to online learning did not stop the protests, and although there were no classes to disrupt, the protests continued. The numbers dwindled as students were not allowed on campus. Unfortunately, this was not the case at CPUT, where students were sent home and protests ceased. The struggles of the CPUT students will still prevail because their protest was cut short.

This was a struggle of all student stakeholders: the SRC, the protesting students together with the protesting students of the CPUT. There have also been strikes over shuttles to their many campuses and student accommodation, problems with NSFAS payments, etc.

The violence and vandalism that has occurred on CPUT campuses can never be condoned, but we must recognise when students feel silenced. We support the cause, but never the vandalism. CPUT has suspended all academic activities with immediate effect from 12 May 2023.

UWC has made many positive claims regarding the implementation of student demands, so the protests will die down for now to give the university a chance to successfully implement these programmes, but if the university does not keep its word, best believe that the protesters will pick up where they left off – until all demands are met! ●

NHI

Universal healthcare is our strategy, but why aren't we tactically prepared?

Barry James Mitchell reports on the acute need to address key challenges facing the public health system now, while the NHI bill is still in process

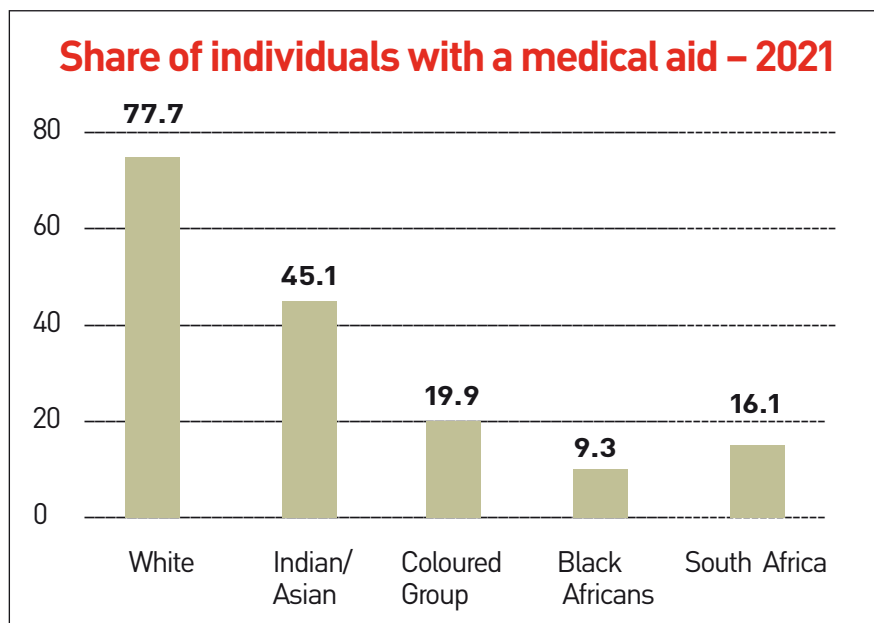


It was a rainy and cold day in Cape Town on 13 June when the National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill was passed in the National Assembly. I believe the bill still has a few storms ahead to navigate. The Freedom Charter, which turns 68 this month, speaks of free medical care and hospitalisation for all, with special attention to mothers and young children.

Section 27 of the Constitution states that “everyone has the right to access health services, including reproductive health services”. It goes on to describe the duty of the State to ensure that this and other rights in the Constitution are fulfilled, within the limits of reasonableness and resources. No person, the Constitution concludes, shall be denied emergency medical treatment.

The next step for the NHI bill is the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), we are likely to hear similar speeches to what were made in the National Assembly, but there has been a strong effort outside of the parliamentary corridors and zoom platforms to dominate the narrative. There is a concerted effort from selfish sections in society attempting to squash an important bill of the people before it even sees the light of day.

This does not include the progressive health experts, activists, worker and community concerns with some aspects of the bill. Universal health coverage is our strategy, but we are losing the bat-



tle due to incoherence and a withdrawal of support by the national treasury. Discovery has hegemony over the fate of the people. This is not a time to make speeches, it is a time to prepare our public healthcare system to transit to the NHI.

Only 16% of South Africans have access to medical aid

Only 16% of South Africans have access to medical aid. The character of this make-up is a microcosm of the race and class inequalities in our health care system, the two-tiered approach is disastrous, proven over-and-over again, it is inhumane and contradicts Section 27 of the Constitution. Those opposed to the NHI bill have established a united front against universal health coverage. The South African Medical Association, who had at least twenty delegates at the recent 2nd Presidential Health Summit, who endorsed the Presidential Health Compact of 2019 and who will also be



a driver of the 2nd Presidential Health Compact have come out condemning the bill on the verge of it being passed.

The bill has gone through years of scrutiny in public participation processes and through engagements of the Portfolio Committee on Health, but take a look at some of the headlines: “National Assembly passes NHI Bill, flaws and all.” (Business Day, June 2023), and “South Africa faces exodus of doctors and other professionals because of the NHI.” (BusinessTech, March 2022, and “The National Health Insurance Bill is a blueprint for disaster.” (Daily Maverick, August 2019).

This does not mean that the bill is perfect, and there are indeed many existing challenges in the public healthcare system that require commitment and resources from the state. The National Education Health and Allied Workers’ Union’s 2020 fact-finding report highlights key challenges in the public health system. Nurses and staff in some clinics and hospitals are forced to relieve themselves in the nearest public toilet because the hospital or clinic toilets do not work and the infrastructure has collapsed.

The never ending lines of people waiting for treatment are not a result of lazy or incompetent workers, they are simply burnt-out, understaffed and unappreciated. In comparison to Brazil and Mexico, South Africa has the lowest number of doctors per 1000 patients and the highest number of patients per doctor. The situation is said to be worsening as in 2019 South Africa had 0.79 doctors per 1000 patients, which decreased to 0.32

doctors. Yet there are glaring policy contradictions between the National Department of Health and Treasury. The Medium Term Strategic Framework 2019-2024 committed to increasing investment in health workers, including Community Health Care Workers (CHWs), yet 50000 CHWs have yet to be integrated into the public health care system.

Workers and the poor are the direct casualties of our beleaguered public health system, with nearly three-quarters of our youth sitting at home, unemployed with no hope for the future, nearly forty people recently dying from cholera, food prices exorbitant and the crisis of social reproduction now cemented and reinforced by neoliberal structural reforms - GEAR reloaded. For the NHI to see the light of day, we need to make sure we understand the bill, as Dr Nicholas Crisp often laments: “The bottom line is that most people have no idea what NHI is about and rely on the media and social media for their information.”

We need to engage with progressive experts, activists, workers and community members about their concerns and recommendations for NHI, and urgently address the key challenges facing the public health system while the bill is still

**Workers and the poor
are casualties of our
beleaguered public health
system**

being processed (and during the expected legal battles). This is how we change the narrative and ensure that we put people’s rights and lives before profit. ●

Cde Mitchell is a member of the SACP Central Committee and is Nehawu’s Parliamentary Officer

Want to join SACP debates?

We’re starting the first of a series of six-month writing courses for SACP members soon.

The courses will be fully virtual – so we’ll cover participants’ basic data costs. Each course involves a monthly workshop plus a few hours’ work a week and regular interaction with the trainers.

eMail Umsebenzi’s deputy editor Cde Buti Manamela at butimanamela@gmail.com.

Include:

- Your name, contact details – email and phone number – and Telegram Messenger or WhatsApp numbers, if they’re different
- Your SACP or YCLSA branch details.
- A brief note 100-250 words on why you want to take the course.

THE ECONOMY

Inflation targeting is anti-working class and anti-poor

Lucian Davids unpacks the ways by which capital uses inflation to squeeze more profits out of society – and it's the workers and the poor who are made to suffer



As South Africans, we are aware of the state of the domestic economy, but we are not clued up about the mechanisms used to manage the economy. Central to these mechanisms are the monetary and fiscal policies employed by the South African Reserve Bank, our central bank, to protect our currency and to oversee the stability of the economy as required by the Constitution. Taking stock of these two very important responsibilities, and the way in which the strength of our currency and overall economic stability have been handled, one could argue that the current situation is unconstitutional.

But it is not as simple as blaming our domestic institutions for the state of the economy. We need to be aware that we are part of the international community and any adverse shocks to the global economy will affect our economy as much as anywhere else. A perfect example of the previous statement would be the Covid-19 pandemic that we experienced.

It is in our interest as communists to understand how the working class is being affected. We are aware that the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) has set an inflation target of 3-6% since it was introduced in the 2000s, and currently the inflation rate or Consumer Price Index (CPI) is 7.1%. While this may not be far above the desired target rate, the fact

remains that this figure (which may not look harmful) has adverse effects on the working class. These include: the falling real value of our incomes (resulting in not being able to buy as many goods/services as before), increasing import trends (resulting in money leaving our economy), and the slowing of the economy – the list is long. Let's look at recent developments through the SARB's increase in the repurchase rate (repo rate) to 7.75% (a 50 basis point increase from 7.25%).

As noted above, the SARB is constitutionally mandated to manage matters relating to economic stability. To this end, it has developed tools to facilitate this process, namely expansionary and contractionary monetary and fiscal policies.

The purpose of contractionary monetary policy is to limit or reduce inflation by increasing the repo rate — the SARB's lending rate to banks. This will have the same effect on the prime lending rate, which is the rate at which commercial banks lend to households and businesses. An increase in the interest rate is essentially an increase in the cost of bor-

rowing, as it is now much more expensive for the average household consumer to borrow from the bank.

The desired result is a 'cooling' of the economy, as inflation is usually accompanied by increased economic activity or growth, as we are taught in economics. This is where we can start to put things into perspective.

World Bank statistics suggest that we have had turbulent economic growth over the last six years. The turbulence can be attributed to the shock of Covid 19, as it shows a sharp decline, but also a sharp subsequent rise in economic growth. Our focus is on the last two sets of information, namely the 4.91% of GDP growth in 2021 from -6.34% in 2020. The difference between the two is 11.25%, which means that if we were to graph this information, we would see a very steep rise from 2020 to 2021. From this information, we can link the theory behind the decision of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to the practice. As mentioned above, when the economy grows too fast, there is a concomitant

ANNUAL ECONOMIC INDICATOR RATES

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
GDP	0,66455	1,15794	1,52232	0,30345	-6,34247	4,913097

Source: World Bank



rise in inflation. Therefore, in an attempt to counteract inflation, economic growth must be slowed by a contractionary monetary policy.

While this is being done to ‘save the economy’, we find that it is all too convenient for the builders of the economy — the working class — to bear the brunt of the effects. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) data released by StatsSA tells us of the hardships being endured by the South African working class. In the released publications, we see that the essential items consumed by households have increased tremendously since March 2022.

Inflation on food and non-alcoholic beverages in March 2022 was 6.2%. This means that we will pay 6.2% more for food than we did last year, for every R100 we spent last year, we will spend R106.20 this year.

On the other hand, wages aren’t rising above inflation, and that’s strategic. As long as workers’ wages go up nominally and people are kept in the dark about the real value, they won’t understand how and why they can’t buy as much as they used to.

The sad part is that inflation not only leaves less bread on the table but also increases the nominal amount of loan repayments and kills small businesses that are there to create employment opportu-

nities and increase the level of national production and income. Our struggle for policies and demands to expand the SME’s (Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises) can definitely be thrown under the bus with the current neoliberal programme and inflation regime.

At the same time, we see that companies are always securing their profit targets, whether at the cost of higher unemployment or not. Despite their profit margin, they cannot ensure that their workers will be able to survive given the state of the economy. What the working class is not told is that high interest rates benefit the propertied classes through ‘investment’ — those who borrow money from the banks to buy the means of production benefit directly. Bear in mind that we’re not talking about small businesses or sole traders. These are only an upper layer of the working class itself. In real terms, the propertied classes pay less in value than the amount they’ve lent, even though the amount may be nominally greater.

This is the main reason why we see the propertied classes always borrowing from the banks. The banks aren’t there to save your money. Like the capitalists, these commercial banks are driven by self-interest and profit maximisation. These commercial banks adorn those

who are already extremely wealthy with even more wealth and adulation. Why? We need to understand the mechanics of how banks create money. They create money by obtaining deposits by making loans. They use the money repaid on a loan to invest in funding other projects and making loans to others. And, as mentioned above, they share a relationship with the capitalist in their method of acquisition.

We know that the average worker cannot buy into this cycle. Workers need the one thing that they do not have — money. Therefore the working class is left out of this process. I argue that inflation occurs not only because of increases in the cost of production, but also because of a concomitant increase in capitalist greed — the function of a corporation is to coordinate the factors of production to maximise profit, not just to make profit at the expense of society — which can be measured quantitatively. We need only look at the consistent increase in profit margins in relation to the inconsistent increase in wages.

May we empower workers by exposing the intricacies of the system that oppresses them! ●

Cde Davids is a National Committee member of the YCLSA

ENERGY TRANSITION

Nothing 'just' about the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan

The switch to green energy is being framed by a strategy serving capitalist interests not those of the working class, writes Barry James Mitchell



How, in just a short article, to spark debate on the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP), locate it within our Marxist-Leninist understanding of the capitalist modes of production, draw attention of the concept of 'green' privatisation, and ensure that the Party is at the centre in guiding a popular climate and energy front? Here goes.

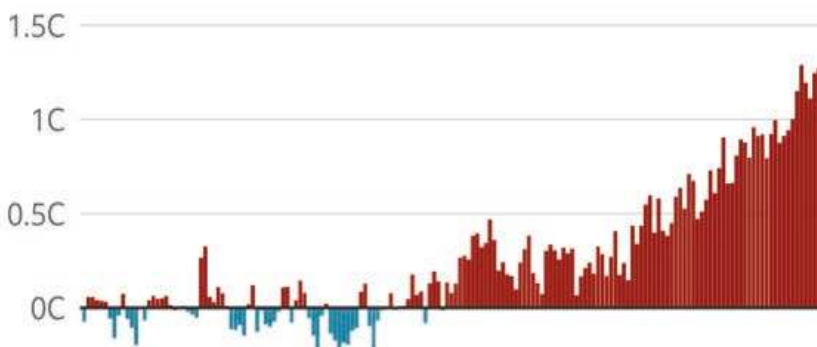
The SACP's perspective on our natural environment is rooted in Marx and Engels' understanding of the integral link between workers and nature, which they referred to as "metabolic". The exploitative and accumulative nature of the capitalist modes of modern production have broken this metabolic link and plunged the globe into an ecological catastrophe. Scientists recently deduced that global warming will reach a dangerous increase in temperature of 1.5c between 2023 to 2027.

It is not just incessant greed and profit-driven motives that have led to this; the left has not been able to coordinate a concrete response to climate change, leaving a vacuum for the emergence of green capitalism under the guise of a 'just' energy transition. (See chart in next column)

The JET IP was presented to the South African public at the Climate Change Conference (COP 27) in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in 2022. We were made aware that a plan was under development and told

The world has been getting warmer

Change in annual average global temperature from pre-industrial levels (1850-1900) in degrees C



Source: NOAA

that a grouping referred to as the International Partnership Group (IPG), comprising the US, UK, France and Germany, had committed billions of dollars to financing our JET IP. The use of the word "just" was repeated and re-emphasised. What we now know is that the billions of dollars committed to by our IPG friends are in fact mainly dollar-denominated loans. And, after studying the JET IP and

the presentations from the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC), it is clear that there is nothing 'just' about this plan.

In 2011, Cosatu's Climate Policy Document encapsulated some clearer sentiments of what "justice" in the context of the energy transition should take: "A 'just transition' means changes that do not disadvantage the working class worldwide, that do not disadvantage developing countries, and where the industrialised countries pay for the damage their development has done to the earth's atmosphere. A just transition provides the opportunity for deeper transformation that includes the redistribution of power and resources towards a

The left has not been able to coordinate a concrete response to climate change

US\$ millions	Grants	Concessional Loans	Commercial Loans	Guarantees	Total
CIF/ACT	0.59	30%	0	0	30.8%
European Union	0.41	12%	0	0	12.2%
France	0.03	12%	0	0	11.9%
Germany	2.34	9%	0	0	11.4%
United Kingdom	0,28	0	6%	15%	21.6%
United States	0.24	0	12%	0	12.1%
Total Investment	3.89% (4%)	63%	18%	15%	100%

more just and equitable social order.” We are not oblivious to the fact that justice is impossible within capitalist modes of production.

The financing of the plan is very concerning, amounting to \$8.5-billion (R128-billion) and requiring another R1.5-trillion to accomplish: 81% of the committed financing is in the form of either concessional or commercial loans, not in Rands, but in US Dollars. This is debt based on a foreign currency (\$1 to R19.38), and if South Africa upsets our IPG friends they could react in a manner that will have serious implications on what remains of our economic sovereignty (see chart above).

The plan is fundamentally disconnected from the workers and communities who will be affected by this transition. Of the \$8.5-billion JET IP funding package, the capital is roughly divided between infrastructure (89.4%), planning and implementation capacity (10%), skills development (0.15%), economic diversification and innovation (0.25%) and social investment and inclusion (0.2%). Comrades can draw their own conclusions from the minuscule share of funding for skills development, social investment and inclusion.

We are already witnessing the impact of climate change and the energy crisis on communities. The emergence of ghost towns, the collapse of infrastructure as mines and factories close. These are all aggravating factors leading to increased unemployment, inequality and poverty. While we must support efforts to decarbonise our atmosphere as one method of mitigating the climate crisis, we must also broaden our perspectives on alternative and mixed energy sources.

We need to rethink the notion of social ownership of the transition, putting our communities and workers at the forefront of this plan.

The unilateral development and implementation of JET-IP has betrayed the consistent demand by some leading countries of the Global South that the West should pay for the transition to a low-carbon global economy, since the West is primarily responsible for the current ecological crisis. Other countries, such as India and Brazil, have rejected this transitional funding model, insisting that they should not be prevented from expanding their industrialisation using reliable fossil fuel energy sources.

There has been some brilliant analysis and action from an emerging pro-

gressive, left energy and climate front. Comrades from the Chris Hani Institute (CHI), the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), Cosatu, Nehawu, NUM and other affiliates have been developing similar critiques of the JET IP and are now formulating alternative perspectives. The global network Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) recently convened a three-day engagement, sharing international perspectives and defining the JET plans within the context of ‘green’ privatisation. This is a start, but greater coordination and participation in this struggle is needed.

Cde Mitchell is a member of the SACP Central Committee and is Nehawu’s Parliamentary Officer.

Essential reads from **RUTH FIRST**

The International Union of Left Publishers has published **Ruth First: Selected Writings**. The collection brings together five essays on topics such as the landmark 1956 Women’s March, the workings of the apartheid state and the history of armed struggle against apartheid, introduced by the labour activist Vashna Jagarnath.



Available for free download at <https://thetricontinental.org/text-ruth-first-selected-writings/>

BRICS

A great achievement of global multipolarity

Seitebaleng Alfred Dikole argues that the upcoming BRICS's meeting will be a major advance for African countries to better control their economies



BRICS will hold its 15th Annual Meeting in South Africa from 22-24 August this year, under the theme BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism.

BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has made a huge political and economic impact on the world. It was inspired by common interests in ensuring coordinated development for the global South. The multipolar nature of the BRICS is increasingly being recognised internationally. The 2008 financial crisis was instrumental in accelerating the urgent need for BRICS to exist. At that time, the economies of the member states began to accelerate, overtaking some of those in the developed world.

For the first time since the birth of capitalism, the economic centre of gravity of the world economy began to shift away from the advanced industrial countries. Talk of US hegemony, globalisation and empire is a thing of the past as BRICS promotes multipolarity. Developing countries are more interested than ever in trading and investing with each other. They have even gone so far as to create alternative financial institutions to the IMF and World Bank.

What was a pipe dream a few years ago has become attractive to other major economies of the South. The urgent task will be to create a new framework that will help countries in the South to join.

BRICS has institutionalised itself by establishing itself as a legal body, har-

nessed by the legislation of each member state, so that it has authentic national sovereignties. The organisation has rejected the notion of the superiority of one nation over another.

This year, the BRICS forum will focus on key issues such as de-dollarisation of the economy, developments in other countries wishing to join BRICS and security issues.

There already exist bilateral relationships between BRICS member countries and many African countries. Their reference point will be much more aligned with the goals and mission of the African Union. The principle of partnership



in the context of BRICS is more about ensuring that the countries of the South are given equal recognition and a role in bringing about fundamental changes in their respective areas.

It is regrettable that the G7 countries have characterised the BRICS as a threat to their own stance of ruthless sanctions against Russia. Despite the institutional threats and arrogance of the US, members have reiterated their call for peace instead of war. Efforts have been made by Western nations to use the Ukraine crisis as a weapon to break BRICS by instructing its members to cut ties with Moscow. Member states have stood firm, calling for dialogue and the promotion of

peace. India has set a clear example by refusing to allow Zelenskiy to attend the G20 summit to be held in India this year.

BRICS member countries are unanimous in rejecting the US dollar as the main form of payment in trade relations. The group will discuss the possibility of a common currency among member states. Russia's expulsion from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) made it easier for Russia to develop alternative payment systems and forced those who imposed sanctions in it to pay for gas and oil in Russian rubles.

The reality is that countries are starting to question why they are trading in dollars instead of their own currencies. The dollar has risen due to US interest rate hikes and geopolitical conflicts. BRICS comprises for 40% of the world's population and a third of the world's economy. Countries within BRICS have developed policies that enhance their interest in trading without the US dollar.

Nearly 20 countries are queuing up to join BRICS and are considered potential candidates. These countries include Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. The multipolar foundation of the bloc will be enriched by the expansion and inclusion of new members. Groups of experts are currently working on the reports that will reflect the possibilities of admitting new candidates.

The 2008 financial crisis created the conditions for countries in the South to innovate, which has led to accelerated development and trade partnerships. BRICS is now on the road to becoming a powerful formation that will over time surpass the G7 countries. For Emmanuel Macron to seek

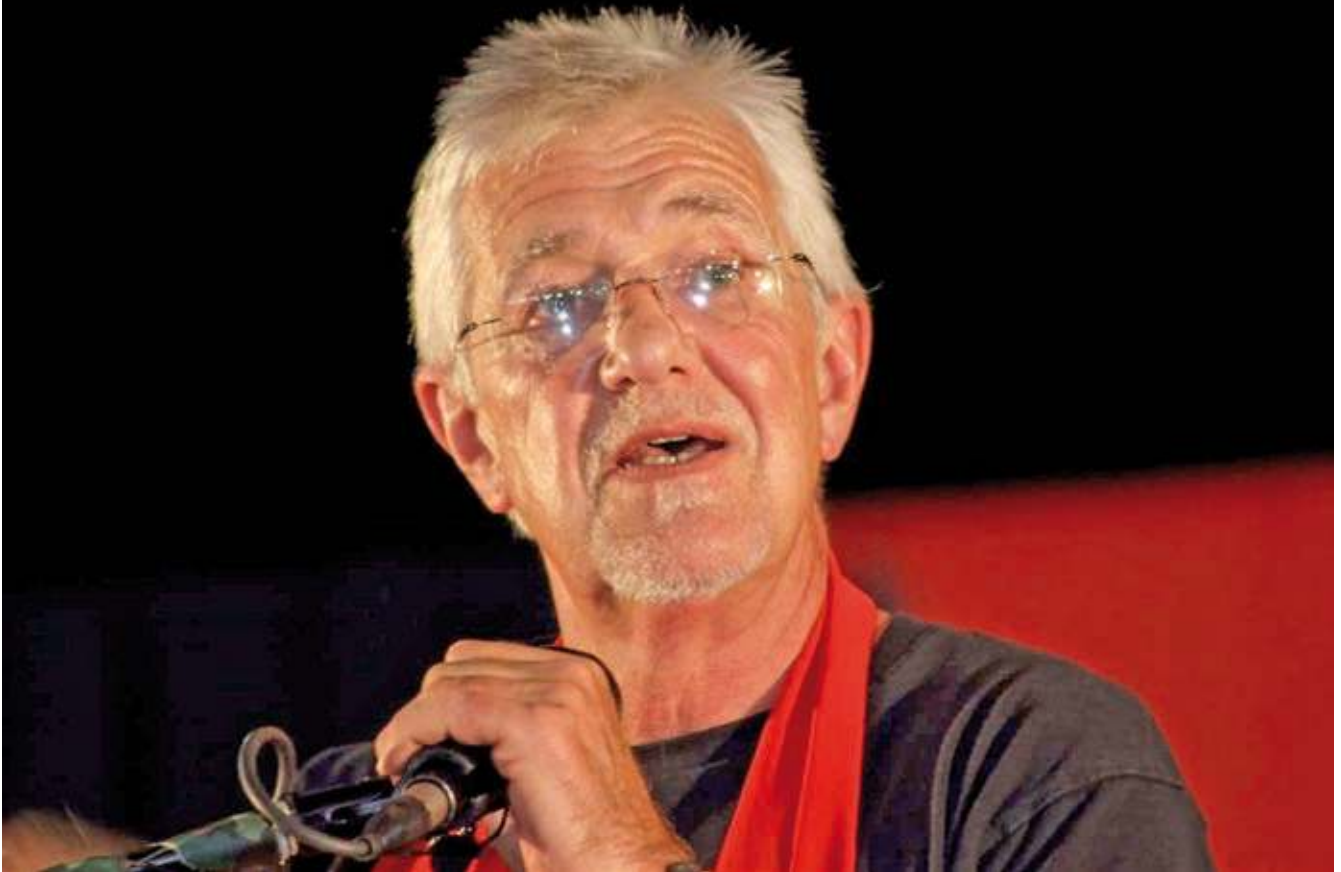
a special invitation to the forthcoming BRICS summit is completely misguided. He is interested in dividing the member states and sending the wrong messages. The arrest of President Putin by the ICC will not take place on South African soil. South Africa is obliged to implement the decisions taken by BRICS.

The de-dollarisation of the economy and the creation of a common currency by BRICS remains an important chapter in the history of the destruction of capitalism. ●

Cde Dikole is the SACP's Second Deputy Provincial Secretary, Moses Kotane Province

"Cde David was a shining revolutionary red star, working in the background, almost invisible, but with a massive influence on the ideological stance of the liberation movement from 1974 onwards"

David Niddrie: Journalist and revolutionary



Special Tributes by

**Solly Mapaila, Blade Nzimande,
Yunus Carrim and Mark Waller**

Plus extracts from his report on
Media transformation in South Africa

David Niddrie

Indomitable, courageous Communist revolutionary, journalist par excellence

He demonstrated the power of red journalism, communist integrity and the impact that one dedicated individual can have, said SACP General Secretary Solly Mapaila at the Party's memorial event for Cde David Niddrie, held in Johannesburg, 29 May

Greetings to Cde Niddrie's family, to his son Cai, who broke the devastating news to me, and to Cai's mother, Collette Caine, a long-time partner and collaborator of Niddrie's. She is also a comrade in her own right. I also send greetings to Cde David's sister, Robin.

To the leadership of the SACP, led by the National Chairperson, Cde Blade Nzimande, whom I must thank for employing Cde David in his twilight years. He was the first person I called when I heard the sad news of Cde Niddrie's death, I did not know how to break the news to Cde Yunus who I knew was very close to Cde David.

I would also like to acknowledge Cde Yunus Carrim, who employed Cde David, despite his protests, as his advisor when he was Minister of Communication. He could not have chosen a better advisor – who was steeped in and highly experienced in the broad media landscape, covering print, radio and television.

I first met Cde David in about 1996-7 when he used to come to party headquarters to work with Deputy General Secretary Cde Jeremy Cronin, who was in charge of SACP communications and publications. Sometimes he would come with the late Cde Akis Apergies who worked on the printing side of things and later less on publications but more on regalia such as T-shirts and the like. Cde Akis had worked with Cde David on the media profiles of black artists during the apartheid period, including the ANC Arts and Culture Conference in Gaborone in the mid-1980s.

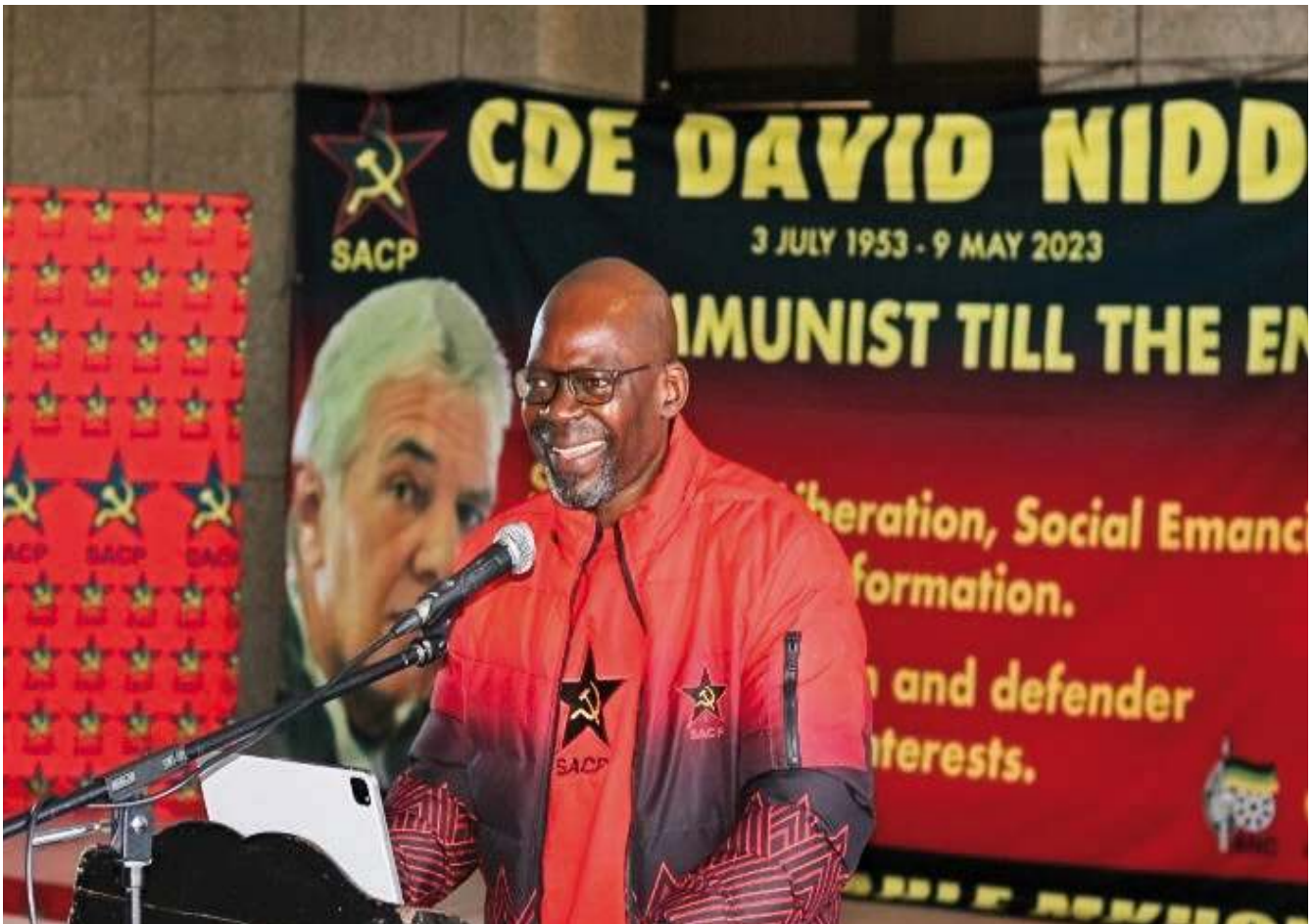
When I joined the HQ staff in about 1998 as the Deputy National Organiser to Cde Langa Zitha, I met him frequently and was shocked by his easy use of expletives even when just emphasising a simple point. At one point I got annoyed when he swore, "why don't you give us the f... bloody provincial membership figures to project our print lot". But soon I learnt it was his way of talking which meant no harm to anyone. He despised laziness and bureaucracy and believed in extreme efficiency: sharp – shoots! This encounter started a long period of

comradeship and friendship with Cde David. I must acknowledge Cde Mark Waller and Tony Sutton for their irreplaceable work on our publications, working with Cde David. I hope we will continue with this wonderful work. In particular, I wish to comment on particular publications of the AC, with the profile of the President Nelson Mandela, the one on the heroic people's army uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), and my most favourites *Umsebenzi* editions are on the profile of Ahmed Kathrada, on Palestine and on the centenary of that colossal victory of the working class against capitalism and Tsarist Russia – the Great October Socialist Revolution.

We still carry these publications to international meetings and they are much appreciated. Thank you, Cdes David, Mark, Tony and the reluctant Editor Yunus Carrim for a wonderful collective, together with the GS and DGS and Cde Alex Mashilo. We should take forward Cde David's indelible red journalism work.

It is a rare occurrence that in the face of adversity, some individuals shine brightest. They are like beacons of truth, courage and conviction that illuminate the darkest corners of our world. Cde David was like that, a shining revolutionary red star, working in the background, almost invisible, but with a massive influence on the ideological stance of the liberation movement from 1974 onwards. He later worked openly for the SACP in media, communications and publications. He knew how to lead from behind. He trained most of our communicators through workshops with the late journalist Cde Karima Brown and Vukani Mde. He had a special affinity for training young people and also trained our communicators from the Young Communist League of South Africa.

As we gather here today to pay tribute to our dear comrade and brilliant journalist, let us remember not only his remarkable achievements but also the indomitable spirit that led him to rise above the rest, renouncing white privilege in apartheid



Cde Solly Mapaila speaking at the SACP's memorial event for Cde David Niddrie



Cde Niddrie's son, Cai Niddrie, speaking at the SACP memorial event for his father

South Africa to join the liberation forces and become one of its outstanding underground activists, who also recruited some of its most dedicated comrades in the pursuit of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa for all its people, black and white. For him, too, class was paramount as the ultimate task of ending all forms of human oppression and exploitation and the sharing of the ultimate natural resources and labour expended on them.

In a world awash with misinformation, journalists like Cde

David wielded their pen like a sword, cutting through the fog of deception and exposing the truth hidden beneath; his fierce and penetrating red pen was a revolutionary weapon. Fearlessly, he and his comrades took on the powerful, challenging the status quo and unravelling the intricate web of apartheid oppression and its corruption that plagued our society.

He continued this wonderful work in the new dispensation, fighting corruption and working to establish media institutions to massively amplify the hidden and suppressed voices of the masses. In this respect, he was a voice of the voiceless. He helped institutions like e.tv, YFM and many newspapers, and he worked for a variety of media houses, demonstrating his versatility in the media spectrum.

He also started his own magazine, *Southern Africa Report*, with Karima Brown and Vukani Mde. It gave the mainstream media a run for their money, but lacked distribution networks and capacity. He also worked to establish SACP media platforms, including pioneering our streaming services under the name SACP TV.

Simply put, Cde David Niddrie was a genius. But his genius was not just in his intellect or his way with words. It was his unwavering commitment to justice for the voiceless and respect and dignity for the working class that set him apart. He was the voice of the silenced, the champion of the oppressed majority and the staunch defender of the marginalised. His written words not only informed but also inspired, stirring hearts and igniting flames of change in the minds of countless individuals

and making our publications easy to relate to and engage with. He wrote for the working class. His humility defied reason. He was so humble and respectful of all people, regardless of their status.

But in the midst of his relentless pursuit of the truth, his piercing red pen succumbed to a tragic illness that sapped his energies in recent years. Despite this, he continued to work for SACP publications for more than twenty years, mostly unpaid. Even when the tragedy of his untimely death struck, he had just finished producing a copy of *Umsebenzi*, despite his ill health. He literally died working for the Communist Party and the working class in pursuit of a socialist alternative to the barbarism of capitalist exploitation. We thank you, dear Cde David, for your wholehearted and selfless service to the people of our country, to the working class of the world, and especially to our beloved country which is being ravaged by extreme forms of free market capitalism.

Cde David leaves a huge void that cannot be filled. But let us not be consumed by grief, for his legacy lives on in each and every one of us. He left behind a treasure trove of knowledge, a roadmap for future Red journalists to follow and an unwritten story waiting to be told.

We must take up the mantle and the spear he left behind – a sacred duty to uphold the principles he fought so fiercely for. We must continue to stand up for the truth, even when it threatens to be buried under layers of deceit. We must strive to give voice to the voiceless, to shine a light into the darkest corners where injustice festers and truth fades, just as he would do, whether it be through a special picture or photo he wanted to tell the story through. He loved his photographs, which complemented his journalism, but only photographs of the highest

quality, for Cde Niddrie he would move mountains in search of the very best photo for a particular story or caption.

Let this tribute be a reminder of the power of red journalism, the importance of communist integrity and the eternal impact that one dedicated individual can have on the world. As we bid farewell to our fallen comrade and brilliant red journalist, let us carry his unwavering fighting revolutionary spirit within us, forever striving for a world where truth reigns supreme and justice prevails, a world without the exploitation of one human being by another.

I am delighted, Cde David, that the SACP honoured your selfless efforts with the prestigious Moses Kotane Award in recognition of your tireless efforts to build a strong SACP and to support the noble course of the liberation movement. We owe it to you to deepen our efforts towards a non-racial, prosperous and equal society. For an atheist like him, let me say that you lived your life so well and ignited the consciousness of the working class to continue the struggle for a socialist society. So I won't say rest in peace, dear comrade, but well done, knowing that your light will continue to guide us in our quest for a better, more enlightened future. Your legacy will forever be etched in our hearts and minds, and your words will continue to echo as a reminder that the (red) pen is indeed mightier than the sword!

Hamba Kahle Mkhonto!

Long Live the Undying and Fighting Spirit of David Niddrie! ●

Cde Mapaila is the SACP General Secretary and a former MK combatant.

David Niddrie

Selfless and self-disciplined

SACP National Chairperson, Blade Nzimande, paid tribute to David Niddrie for his selfless role in the SACP, work on media transformation and as an advisor to him as Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

We are all very saddened by the untimely death of Cde David Niddrie

Our heartfelt condolences go out to the Niddrie family, friends and comrades on the death of this gallant giant who selflessly and diligently served the ANC, SACP, progressive media organisations and both the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Science and Innovation on National Skills Development policies and strategy.

Cde David was advising me in my role as Minister on the

strategic framework and criteria for evaluating the skills development system by the the National Skills Authority (NSA) and on regulations to be made for the implementation of the Skills Act. He also advised me on the reports on the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) liaison regarding the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDP) and Sector Plans.

He was a stalwart of the liberation movement, in particular of the SACP, ANC and Cosatu.

Cde David's media activism dates back to 1972 at the *Beno-*



Cde Blade Nzimande paid tribute to Cde Niddrie's untiring work for media transformation in South Africa

ni City Times as a trainee journalist up until his work with the SACP on *Umsebenzi*, *The African Communist* and other publications.

He was a selfless and self-disciplined leader who was concerned about the welfare of the poor and the destitute. He demonstrated his gracious leadership by always making time to train upcoming journalists. He played a major role in the campaign to transform all aspects of media – newspapers, radio, TV, online publications and other aspects – during the struggle era and into our democracy right up till his sad passing away.

When we were struggling in the SACP to get a sub-editor and lay-out person to assist us with our publications around 2001, I contacted Cde David to help. He did so immediately. No “I’ll think about it and come back to you” as often began to happen in that period. He was ready to go. In fact, I think if we gave him the edited articles there and then, he would have started working on the issue right away! That was David.

When Cde Yunus Carrim, the editor of *Umsebenzi* and *The African Communist*, contacted him the next day I heard from him that Cde David immediately agreed to the sub-editing work and lay-out work and later brought in Cdes Tony Sutton and Mark Waller to assist him. This led to a huge improvement in the look of the publications. *Umsebenzi* began to look like an appealing and polished magazine whereas previously we had relied mainly on its content to attract readers, now it also appealed because of its somewhat glossy, polished look. My role as editor-in-chief also eased after that. Also because the complaints from Cde Yunus about the lack of support ceased!

Cde David would periodically prepare proposals to the editorial committee on increasing the frequency of our publications, their design, the training of writers and other aspects to improve our publications. He wanted to professionalise our publications. He was right. All of these documents were very impressive. But, unfortunately, we just didn’t have the money to give



Cde Niddrie was an SACP activist with a strong sense of duty to the Party

effect to his proposals. He was quite frustrated about this, but he never stalled in his work for us. He was in any case an SACP activist – and he had a strong sense of duty to the Party.

As an expression of our appreciation for his consistent support to the Party we coopted him onto the Central Committee and gave him the Moses Kotane Award. He was deserving of this – even if he didn’t think he was – not just because of his contribution but because he wanted nothing in return, because of his selflessness and humility. That’s what a Communist should be.

May his revolutionarily soul rest in peace. ●

Cde Blade Nzimande is the SACP National Chairperson and Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation.

David Niddrie

The everywhere progressive media activist

Cde David will be sorely missed by those of us who knew him well and even though they won't know it, by those who didn't know him at all, writes Yunus Carrim in this tribute reproduced from Independent Online, 19 May

David Niddrie is well known to the older generation of journalists and others in the media world. But little known is his quiet, very significant role in the SACP and ANC. That's the way David wanted it.

In any case, as an underground activist during the struggle era, he had to be quiet - contrary to his overt role as an activist relentlessly seeking to transform the media space.

David was involved in a remarkably wide range of media activities, including as a reporter, sub-editor and media trainer in the *Benoni City Times*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Sunday Tribune*, *Sunday Post*, *Sunday Express*, *City Press* and other mainstream newspapers. He contributed to a range of international newspapers. And he also formed or joined several alternative news outlets.

He became the editor of the progressive journal "Work in Progress", which was much-read by activists and also Southern Africa Report. He was involved too in the Association of Democratic Journalists.

In the early 1990s he played key roles in the Campaign for Open Media and the Campaign for Open Broadcasting to transform the SABC. And he was head of strategic planning at the SABC from 1994 to 1996 and later served on the Board. He also helped to establish YFM and assisted e.tv.

Journalist Chris Vick, his long-time friend and comrade, whom David recruited into the underground in 1984, said that David "contributed to some of the most fundamental changes in the structure of the South African media" and "was, without question, one of our country's leading media shapeshifters"

David joined the ANC and SACP in London in 1976, and returned to South Africa a year later. He engaged in underground activities, mainly distributing banned literature and providing political reports to Ronnie Kasrils. He also did reconnaissance for Operation Green Vegetables, led by Mac Maharaj, which was meant to target a train carrying army conscripts. The operation was called off by Oliver Tambo as it had too many political and other risks.

In 1989 Mac made contact with David and he became peripherally involved in the underground Operation Vula. In 1990, after the unbanning of the ANC, the police uncovered the operation and when Mac and others got arrested, Ronnie disap-



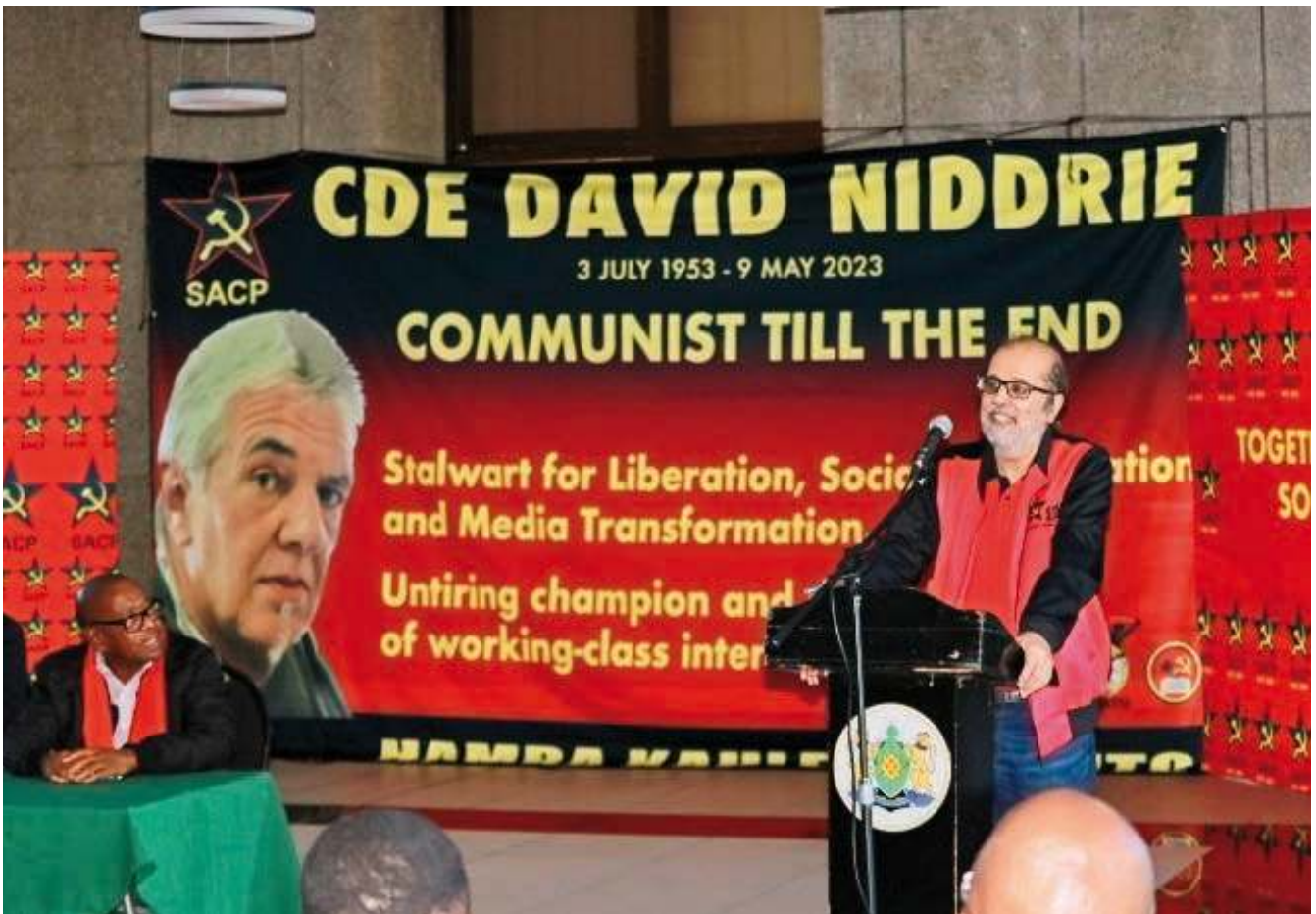
For about 20 years, Cde David was the main sub-editor of *Umsebenzi* and *The African Communist*

peared into the "underground" again - and David and his family provided him a safe house and arranged other safe houses for him.

From the early 1990s David assisted the SACP and ANC on media issues but then went into other activities.

I knew of David, but had no contact with him, until a few months after I was appointed as Editor of *Umsebenzi* and *The African Communist* in about 2002. I was asked by then General Secretary, Blade Nzimande, to contact David to assist with the sub-editing and lay-out of these publications. David immediately agreed - and so began our over 20 years relationship working on these publications.

He worked closely with Tony Sutton, a South African now living in Canada, who edits the left wing magazine *ColdType* -



Cde Yunus Carrim spoke fondly at the SACP memorial event of his long collaboration with Cde Niddrie on the SACP's publications *Umsebenzi* and *The African Communist*

www.coldtype.net – and is a design specialist and, later, Mark Waller, the Finnish activist and journalist, now living in South Africa, who assisted with the sub-editing.

David was cantankerous and idiosyncratic with a huge propensity for the “F” word. Not immune to the “F” word either (I mean, is there a word in English that can adequately replace the passion, emotion, strength of feeling of the “F” word in certain contexts??), I used it far more frequently after meeting him. We would sometimes have robust exchanges - imagine the number of expletives that littered these conversations. In all this time, we have never had a fall-out. He'd blow his top, and 10 minutes later he'd ring and we'd merrily talk as if the previous exchange never took place. I used to tell him that one day I'll write a book: “David, the F-word, the SACP, the working class and I”.

Mostly, our exchanges were about his insistence on the use of only the most high-quality photographs. But our photographers at Head Office are amateurs, I'd say. No, I can't go ahead with this issue – find me the right photos, he'd say. He could be exasperating.

He had a very libertarian streak, and would go for photographs, headings and captions in the publications that could be quite out of kilter with the majority views in the SACP or not attuned to the political and personal sensibilities of key SACP leaders. And he would make these choices on technical grounds, they looked good to the eye – and readability is crucial in the graphic design, he would say. Yes, but as a Marxist you know that form cannot trump substance, I'd cry. But how do

you convey the substance if not through technically good design? And so our roundabout arguments would go many times.

As I got to know his way and temperament better, I began to respect and like him immensely. He was just so very professional. A perfectionist. He demanded a lot of himself – but he expected the same from others. And this seemed to be shape his temperament a lot. He could be very impatient and direct. He certainly didn't suffer fools gladly. He had a deadpan acerbic wit and he could be very funny. I would chortle with laughter at what he'd say; he would rarely even titter.

While he would have his say in small media meetings and workshops, he was not a person for political meetings and endless talk. He came across as almost shy, uncomfortable in bigger meetings and would not say anything. He just wanted to get the media work done.

He was not traditional Marxist and maybe that's also why we chimed.

For about 20 years, David was the main sub-editor of *Umsebenzi* and *The African Communist*. For much of that period he wasn't given a cent and he would just shrug it off when we kept apologising, even when his other contracts were drying up and his income was very limited. And when he did get some money from work elsewhere, he often assisted Tony and Mark. That was David. A big heart. Selfless, caring, humane. He still had many of the values of the struggle era, when this has mostly long faded in our movement.

In 2013 I was appointed as Minister of Communications. As a media specialist with considerable experience, he was an obvious choice as an advisor. No, no, he said, not me, Joe Mjwara. Joe is also being approached, I explained. When he had to sign the contract, there was another hiccup. “This is too much money!” he exclaimed. And it was no false act. Has any advisor ever said that before? Yet he was not earning much elsewhere. I had to nudge him again. “Yes, you’re right, but, well, you can give some of that away to those in need...”

When Nzimande, as Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology hired him as an advisor about three years ago, he got much the same reaction about the salary.

In 2017, in recognition of David’s contribution he was co-opted on to the SACP Central Committee as a veteran and he was also given the Moses Kotane Award. Typically, he said he didn’t feel he deserved it and if we wanted to change our mind, he’d be fine with that.

Very sadly, he died on Tuesday, 9 May, aged 69. We spoke every day between the Friday and Monday, as we were finalising the (overdue) April issue of Umsebenzi and beginning with the May issue. And almost as if he had a premonition, he said on the Monday: ‘We need younger guys to do this now. I don’t want to die doing Umsebenzi. I phoned Buti Manamela,

the deputy editor immediately, and raised the need to ease David out of the responsibility to coordinate the lay-out in the next few months, and he immediately agreed. This was on our agenda anyway.

The next day David sent a message at 15:44: ‘Hi, I’m indisposed. Ij be in touch tomorrow pse tell Mark’. One of the rare occasions he sent a message with a misspelling, cell phone auto-corrects notwithstanding. Odd. And odd too that he didn’t send the message directly to Mark. Just over an hour later he died.

His idiosyncrasies just grew on one and made you even more fond of him. He was quite unique and original in our ranks. He will be sorely missed by those of us who knew him well and even though they won’t know it, by those who didn’t know him at all.

His character certainly triumphed over his personality quirks. There I was, constantly reminding him that substance is ultimately more important than form. Well, in his own life he showed that glaringly. Just by being who he was.

Hamba Kahle, Comrade David Niddrie! ●

Cde Carrim is the editor of Umsebenzi and The African Communist and a member of the SACP Central Committee and Political Bureau

David Niddrie

A deep thinker and great communicator

Astute, imaginative, never dogmatic, always practical – David Niddrie was always a step ahead of the crowd, but happiest working behind the scenes, writes Mark Waller



I was lucky enough to be taken on by Cde David Niddrie some 13 years ago to help him with his work as sub-editor and proofreader of the SACP’s publications. And around the same time, he included me in his gang of journalists who produced the influential but short-lived *Southern Africa Report* magazine, which David edited with the gifted journalists Vukani Mde and Karima Brown. I covered events in Swaziland and Lesotho for the magazine, visiting those countries and reporting back to David.

I found David great to work with. We shared the same can-tankerous approach to everything in life, but our work together always went quickly and smoothly. He had no time for the flunkies and flatterers that tend to overpopulate political life, and was impatient with any behaviour that he felt prevented

the Party’s publications from being both literate and visually striking.

But despite his sometimes sharp tone, David was a profoundly kind and generous person. He would do anything to build the confidence and skills of young comrades who were interested in media and journalism, and he was keen that the Party should develop media training for a new generation of comrades.

The Party, he argued, needs a network of able and enthusiastic activists with strong journalistic and editorial skills who understand the need to communicate its message in ways that are understandable to people far beyond its structures. “Look, it’s not only what you say but how you say it that determines whether anyone will take notice,” he said at the last media training course he ran for Party spokespersons a few years ago.

And he was keen – right up to the end – that old, fading characters like him and me should soon be replaced by fresh, young talent. We need to think about how we can do that while ensuring that the high standards and great journalistic and editorial expertise that David had will be passed on undiminished.

David was also a wonderful writer, drawing on skills he learnt during his long career in mainstream journalism. Maybe the best work we did together, and of which he and I were most proud, was on the special issues of *Umsebenzi* on the centenary in 2017 of the Great October Revolution, and in 2018 on Palestine and on the bi-centenary of the birth of Karl Marx. We spent weeks researching material on these themes and ended up with vast amounts of material and then spend hours on the phone to one another going over what to include. We were given a mandate to do this by the editors without going through the usual process and they only got involved when the first proof was sent to them.

David was great at communicating ideas that are normally considered abstract theory in a clear and immediate way. “What’s the best way of explaining dialectics without a load of abstraction?” I asked him when we were doing the special issue on Marx. “Class struggle”, he replied without hesitation. “Let’s do it that way: you’ve got a confrontation of opposites that generates ongoing dynamics of change.”

He talked once of proposing a special issue of the magazine on Lenin’s Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism, with different sections on Lenin’s nuanced definition of imperialism

related to developments in the world today. But this was just one of masses of ideas he had for the publications. He had a restless, inquiring mind, was intellectually astute, never dogmatic, always practical.

His written work on the Party’s vision for media transformation in South Africa remain crucially important to efforts to dismantle the monopoly over the media by outfits that gained their advantage under apartheid.

“For a society still trying to reconstruct itself as an equitable participatory democracy”, David wrote in 2015, “it can only be described as counter-productive that the content of the print media, audio services and video services is generated in a handful of corporate environments geared towards, and rewarding, profit-maximisation rather than quality and excellence.”

David’s influence was immense but he always kept a low profile. He was, as his long-time comrade and colleague Chris Vick recalled recently “a deep, deep thinker – that quiet guy in the corner, scribbling in a Moleskine notebook, that you couldn’t quite work out.”

To my mind, his quietness and lack of appetite for the podium and the titles of Party work came from a mix of shyness or personal diffidence and a preference for working behind the scenes to make the Party’s message clear, understandable and elegant. He felt that this was where he could excel – and he did, always to distinction and far beyond the call of duty. I’ll miss him always. ●

Cde Waller is the sub-editor of Umsebenzi and The African Communist

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David Niddrie

Champion of media transformation

De-monopolise, diversify and raise standards of reliability – the position paper detailing the crises and challenges facing the media in South Africa, written in 2015 by Cde David Niddrie for the SACP, is more relevant than ever. The following are extracts from the paper

News24, publishers of nearly half the daily newspapers sold in South Africa and of the biggest “news” website, argued in the South Gauteng High Court that it could – and did – legitimately copy stories from rival media, without even a cursory check on the accuracy of the content

Concentration of ownership and control of the means of intellectual production is higher today than it was in dying days of apartheid. Existing policies and the manner of our digitisation is ensuring that this trend will accelerate.

In place of the choice of perspective envisioned in the 1991 ANC Media Charter giving all South Africans access to the range of ideas, information and interpretation necessary to enable them to make informed choices about their participation in society, the media today offers us but one choice of perspective – even if it does so in hundreds of different formats.

Reversing this trend, and liberating our media from the sole objective of profit maximisation, will take time and a concerted and sustained effort by all progressive forces in our society.

The quality of content in South Africa’s media continues in sharp decline. There are many reasons for this – tighter and tighter concentration of ownership; deskilling and sustained staff-cutting to achieve short-term profit maximisation; an obsessive resistance to providing content targeting the mass market (South Africa’s poor and working class majority). Most can reasonably be described as ill-conceived management decisions that damage any prospects of sustainable operation, thus perpetuating the media’s content crisis – and its struggle to maintain the audience figures they need to sustain operations and satisfy the voracious appetites of their shareholders.

The approach adopted in the most substantial democratic-era intervention in the media – opening the broadcast frequencies to private operators – has ensured that, with few, exceptions, radio has done little more than replicate the hegemonic perspectives of traditional print platforms. Likewise with the explosion of web-based media – non-hegemonic voices remain on the periphery.

The consequence has been a unipolar media perspective and an increasingly inadequately informed

South African public, forced to rely on rumour, gossip and social media, in response to increasingly unreliable information, analysis and interpretation from the formal media, both digital and traditional. The extent of this unreliability was graphically demonstrated in April this year when News24, publishers of nearly half the daily newspapers sold in South Africa and of the biggest “news” website, argued in the South Gauteng High Court that it could – and did – legitimately copy stories from rival media, without even a cursory check on the accuracy of the content. Our biggest publisher thus acknowledged that it routinely publishes material without knowing if it is true, partly true or complete fabrication.

With this as a foundation, the SACP has identified two key focal points in the need to transform our media:

- Diversifying the range of our media voices, through decisive action to break down the massive monopolies dominating information generation and distribution on all media platforms, and what the Media Charter refers to as “affirmative action” to achieve “equitable distribution of media resources, development programmes and a deliberate effort to engender a culture of open debate”. This will add new media voices to the sector, able to report on the world from other perspectives than that currently offered by South Africa’s largely homogeneous media; and

- Raising the standard of accuracy, reliability and credibility of the content offered by South Africa’s media through a combination incentives and sanctions to motivate allocation of greater resources to the production and distribution of more reliable, accurate and credible information.

What is essential, however, is not the development of good ideas – South Africa has those in abundance, languishing in forgotten files in dusty offices. What is essential is that, as South Africans, we follow through, ensuring that we achieve a diverse, dynamic and sustainable media, able to “arm” South Africans

with the “necessary information ... and the contesting options” they need to make informed choices.

Profit-making at the expense of quality

AS THE ANC Media Charter recognised in 1991, South Africa needs a greater variety of media voices, rather than attempting to compel the existing “voices” to reflect the diversity of South African opinion.

Of arguably more immediate concern is the presence of Naspers as a super-monopoly in South Africa’s media sector, with its roots reaching back more than a century, into the heart of the organisation that gave birth to apartheid, the Afrikaner Broederbond.

More than two decades after the 1994 democratic breakthrough, Naspers continues to control nearly half the daily newspapers sold to South Africans; two-thirds of the weekly newspapers and magazines read by South Africans; the country’s biggest internet service provider and information websites; more than 99% of pay-television programming watched by South Africans; and has effectively assumed control of our country’s public broadcaster, the SABC.

More broadly, all the daily newspapers read in South Africa, well over 90% of the weekly papers and more than three quarters of the magazines and websites are owned and controlled by four media houses, two of which have significant overlaps into control of the radio stations available to South Africans.

This is unhealthy. But, for a society still trying to reconstruct itself as an equitable participatory democracy, the implications of a circumstance in which the content of the print media (digital and hard copy), audio services (traditional broadcast and web-based) and video services (ditto) is generated in environments geared towards, and rewarding, profit-maximisation rather than quality and excellence, are of serious concern.

Two distinct initiatives are necessary to address this circumstance (significantly more extreme today than in 1994), both used fairly commonly throughout the world to address media sector and economic distortions: de-monopolisation and diversification.

De-monopolisation

SOUTH AFRICA has two groupings of statutes and common-law precedent to prevent the development of economic monopolies generally, and to ensure diversity among licensed (mainly broadcasting) operators – a sufficient arsenal, at least in theory, to keep monopolies at bay. The first is overseen by the Competition Commission and the Competition Tribunal; the second by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa).

In 2005, Icasa adopted a policy on satellite television broadcasting in terms of which statutory cross-media ownership restrictions did not apply to satellite-TV broadcasters. Cross-media ownership restrictions exist precisely to prevent excessive in-

fluence in two traditional media sectors (print and radio, print and TV, TV and radio) of an individual “voice”. The logic is both political and economic, and until recently was rigorously enforced with respect to non-satellite-based operations. The result has been the explosive growth of MultiChoice, Naspers’ pay-TV subsidiary.

Icasa’s decision has allowed a media house launched by the Broederbond – and which was the only media house to refuse to appear before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – to dominate both traditional print and television sectors of South Africa’s media. More recently it has expanded its dominance to encompass the South African internet market (while at the same time arguing in court it had no obligation to verify the accuracy of its platform’s content).

Perhaps by coincidence, the policy instrument was signed for Icasa by a man who left the Icasa council a month later and, two years later, joined the board of MultiChoice. With respect to all media, the SACP recognises the Media Charter provides direction: “Ownership of media resources, production facilities and distribution outlets shall be subject to anti-monopoly, anti-trust and merger legislation.”

Diversification

THE SACP’S approach to diversifying South Africa’s media recognises that diversity of ownership is not an end in itself, but a means to an end – the ultimate objective being to ensure, in the words of the Media Charter, that all South Africans are “armed with the necessary information and have access to the contesting options they require to make informed choices”, through provision of a diversity of perspectives – of a diversity of content. We do not consider the occasional appearance of communist writers in the opinion sections of staunchly pro-capitalist media “diversity”. Rather the concept of diversification refers to the availability of media informed by a world view that differs from the hegemonic perspective in the current media – that recognises that the choice of stories that interest readers differs according to the class of the target audience, as does the angle taken in reporting events and processes.

Nor is the race of the reader (or the editorial decision-maker) of primary importance. Post-1994 “diversification” initiatives have tended to assume that shareholding by black South Africans will somehow translate into a growth in black audiences.

Yet there are concrete examples of individuals and trade union investment vehicles securing significant shareholding in media houses and having their nominated directors paying attention exclusively to the bottom line and dividend flow. Content has not shifted perspective to align with the communities on whose behalf the individuals and trade unions notionally secured the shares. South African media content very rarely addresses the issues and concerns of most South Africans, the majority of whom live in urban and rural townships and villages.

There are concrete examples of individuals and trade union investment vehicles securing significant shareholding in media houses and having their nominated directors paying attention exclusively to the bottom line and dividend flow

We must learn from this history: it is not because of a lack of ideas on how to do it better that our media is in its current critical condition. It is because we, as a country and as a ruling alliance, have failed to turn those ideas into practical instruments of change.

A similar position holds with editorial appointments of black people – three of South Africa’s four major business titles have, or have had, black editors. Whatever the personal impact, the titles have continued to serve a commercial and economic elite, often against the interests of the majority of working class and poor black South Africans.

Here it may be useful to point out despite the staggering growth of Zulu-language newspaper readership (and their web-based digital content), the South African mainstream media retains a knee-jerk antagonism to publishing in languages other than English or Afrikaans. Readership of their newspapers is thus in depressingly consistent decline.

To be “armed with the necessary information and have access to the contesting options they require to make informed choices” means, for most South Africans, having access to media in their mother-tongue.

Diversity thus includes dramatically expanding the language base of our media.

The SACP’s approach also recognises that current forms of media ownership contribute to the concentration of ownership and thus to the lack of diversity.

While all existing print titles are owned and controlled through conventional corporate mechanisms, our broadcasting system entrenches commercial, profit-maximising forms of ownership by setting up three tiers of ownership:

- Public (the SABC),
- Commercial (all privately-held regional or national radio and television licences), and
- Community (low frequency, small footprint, local stations, theoretically but seldom in practice controlled by the communities they serve).

In a country in which the vast majority of citizens do not possess the means to participate meaningfully in commercial ownership structures, and thus to exercise any influence on content, intended audience and so on, this has had the effect of turning privately held radio and television licenses into money-making ventures, rather than (as the Icasa Act requires) being regulated “in the public interest”.

The poor, working class and un- or underemployed majority in South Africa is left in the margins, with some (often unsustainable) “community” services.

More broadly, in the traditional print and emerging digital sectors – for both content production and distribution – the SACP takes the view that support for new entrants able to offer new perspectives not currently available to South African audiences is necessary, in the form referred to in the Media Charter, and specifically the commitment to its statement that “affirmative action will be implemented to provide financial, technical and other resources to those sectors of society deprived of such means”.

The primary and overriding objective of the SACP is that of building and strengthening media platforms that advance and reflect the perspectives and inter-

ests of the workers and the poor, the majority in our country.

SA’s newsrooms – towards fact checking, not profit maximising

SOUTH AFRICA’S newsrooms and its journalists and media workers have been under sustained siege for decades – beginning in the 1980s when, across the world financialisation began to infect media ownership.

In the name of ‘cost efficiencies’ proprietors have juniorised and de-skilled newsrooms while requiring fewer journalists, with fewer skills and less experience, to produce more stories for their core employer – the hard copy editions (of newspapers), audio or audio-visual platforms – while simultaneously preparing content for websites (written, audio and audio-visual) and contributing to social media. They have, in consequence, virtually no time to ensure that what they produce is accurate, credible or reliable. And they are particularly vulnerable to input from spin-doctors and other would-be influence peddlers.

The situation is worsened by the absence of a national union in South Africa, primarily organising media workers responsible for production of editorial content.

It is significant that many of our positions are not new. They draw on the rich history of analysis and proposals our liberation movement, our democratic government and our country have produced in the last quarter-century on how best to create an enabling environment for a vibrant, dynamic media able fully to serve the people of our country.

We must learn from this history: it is not because of a lack of ideas on how to do it better that our media is in its current critical condition. It is because we, as a country and as a ruling alliance, have failed to turn those ideas into practical instruments of change. We have, instead, left it to the commercial market to decide what should be done and how – despite the overwhelming evidence that the market alone is simply not up to the task. To leave it to its own devices today, as we have done in the past, is to invite yet another market failure.

The ANC’s 1991 Media Charter recognised this:

“The ANC asserts that mere declarations of media freedoms on their own are not enough. These freedoms must be underpinned by an equitable distribution of media resources, development programmes and a deliberate effort to engender a culture of open debate. This requires policies of affirmative action to redress the inequalities in our society.” ●

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