



# Bua Komanisi

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Towards the 15<sup>TH</sup> Party Congress

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**THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
STRUGGLE FOR  
SOCIALISM**



# **Bua Komanisi**

**Volume 14 No. 1, April 2022**

**PEOPLE BEFORE PROFITS!**

**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
BEFORE PRIVATE ACCUMULATION**

## WHY WE NEED A COMMUNIST PARTY

Never before in history has the need for a different, a humane world been more desperately required. Today the central task of all progressive forces is the struggle to put people before profits, to put the environment before private accumulation, to put internationalist solidarity before deepening inequality and imperialist militarism.

Today, a single inter-linked, world economy is dominated by a tiny minority of exceedingly powerful transnational corporations. This system is buttressed by a declining but still powerful US hegemony. The continued domination of this world system is characterised by mutually reinforcing environmental, economic and social crises.

### **The environmental crisis**

We live in an era in which the very possibility of human civilisation is now threatened by planetary collapse. This is not the result of human behaviour in general but of a particular system. That system is capitalism. As Marx long ago recognised, it is a system based on an insatiable drive to “accumulate, accumulate”, regardless of consequences.

After five centuries of dramatic expansion and world-wide accumulation, the global capitalist system is now approaching a series of systemic limitations – physical, biological, social and economic. The signs of dramatic climate change are everywhere. This decade has been the hottest in recorded history. Sea levels are rising, wildfires are raging on an unprecedented scale, the frequency and ferocity of hurricanes is increasing, desertification in sub-Saharan Africa has already wiped out the livelihoods of millions provoking instability, resource wars, and waves of desperate climate refugees.

Capitalist accumulation has unbalanced our relationship with nature. Vast logging operations are depriving us of the green lungs that replenish our atmosphere. Intensive agro-industrial production

processes, and the reckless corporate invasion of undisturbed natural areas are unleashing new and dangerous pathogens into society. These are then quickly spread along the world-circling trade networks, so-called “value chains” that vacuum up surplus from low wage enterprises in the South. Covid-19, and the deadly H1N1 swine flu pandemic of 2009, are likely to be the forerunners of more deadly pandemics.

The wealthiest capitalist countries are those most responsible for this environmental devastation. But they are the ones with the resources best able to mitigate its effects. Already the poorest regions of the world, not least sub-Saharan Africa, are those most severely impacted. But even in the US, the richest capitalist country, public health care is rudimentary. There was a major failure of care for the great majority of its population in the face of the Covid pandemic.

## **Capitalism’s economic crises**

At the beginning of this century, neo-liberal economists (including our local capitalist praise-singers) asserted that the days of capitalist booms and busts were now largely over. The market was now supposedly on a smooth, forever upward path. The SACP at its 12<sup>th</sup> national congress in 2007 correctly asserted that this belief was delusional. Within months the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US was to trigger the largest global capitalist recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

At the heart of capitalist economic crises, with their massive destruction of jobs and loss of assets, are endemic features in-built into the way in which capitalism functions. These endemic features of capitalism were already extensively analysed over 150 years ago by Marx.

They include the tendency for the rate of profit to fall as machines and technology increasingly displace the source of capitalist profits – the exploitation of waged labour. Over the last several decades, with rates of profit tending to decline, capital has increasingly been

diverted out of the productive economy and into volatile financial speculation. This process of financialisation has accelerated dramatically over the past three decades. It is associated with neoliberal doctrines (for instance narrow inflation targeting, regardless of growth and jobs) that favour the financial sector at the expense of productive investment in plant and economic and social infrastructure. Financialisation (and its flip-side – de-industrialisation) is particularly acute in South Africa with, for instance, the value of speculative capital on the JSE several times greater than our GDP.

Closely linked to and interacting with the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is another systemic feature of capitalism - capitalist crises of over-accumulation. The highly exploitative character of capitalism everywhere produces extremes of mass poverty alongside a tiny, super-wealthy minority. Mass poverty limits market demand. But capitalism is about production for profit, that is the production of commodities to be sold on the market, and not for what is actually socially useful and needed. This means that capitalism is constantly haunted by over-capacity, the capacity to produce more than can be profitably sold. This is what Marx called a “realisation crisis” – a crisis in which capitalists are unable to realise profit on the investments they have sunk into, for instance, factory plant. Capitalist over-accumulation crises result in regular bouts of enterprise liquidations, bankruptcies, job losses and whole regions turned into decaying rust belts. Currently what is left of South Africa’s manufacturing sector is operating at less than 70 percent capacity. It is not that South Africans do not desperately need affordable goods that could be produced locally, and it is not as though there is a shortage of willing workers to operate at 100 percent. These are among the many anti-social illogicalities of a system that puts profits before people.

Everywhere, the crises of capitalism become crises for humanity at large, and particularly for the active working class and the mass of poor.

This is especially manifest in the crises of social reproduction.

## **The rural crisis of social reproduction**

At the beginning of the 21st century, the World Trade Organisation, dominated by imperialist forces, effectively declared war on nearly half of humanity – that is, on the remaining three billion Third World peasant farmers and their families. The dominant forces in the WTO plan to eliminate small-scale, largely survivalist farming through fast-tracking global agricultural liberalisation in the coming decades.

The processes under-way in our own country-side with the liberalisation of agriculture and the agro-industrial sector, import-parity pricing, monopolisation of the food production chain and of seed stock, mass farm-worker retrenchments, forced removals off farms, the closure of many productive farms or their conversion into game farms, all side-by-side with a seriously challenged and slow-moving land reform programme (largely focused on creating a new stratum of black capitalist farmers) – these local realities reflect the impact of a neo-liberal approach to land, food-security and the “transformation” of agriculture and the agro-industrial sector.

The global agenda to transform all farming into capitalist production integrated into a single global accumulation path is advanced in the name of greater productivity and modernisation. We are told that this is how Europe modernised in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We are told that a capitalist agrarian revolution will greatly improve productivity and bring down food prices for all.

So what’s the problem? The problem is that in Europe the capitalist agrarian revolution took over one and a half centuries, not a matter of decades in the way in which the capitalist agro-conglomerates are now proceeding in the Third World. What is more, many of the millions of European peasant farmers who were made surplus by the capitalist revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were absorbed in labour-intensive factories of an earlier period of capitalism.

Millions more “surplus” impoverished Europeans, thrown off the land in previous centuries, migrated as economic refugees to the Americas, to Australasia, some came to South Africa.

But now, under the strictures of global competitiveness, the factories of the Third World, are themselves considerably more capital intensive. They are unable to employ the existing mass of unemployed, let alone absorb billions more newly uprooted peasant farmers. What about the prospects for mass migration from the South to the North? Everywhere, the walls are going up, fences are being reinforced, the border between a wealthy United States and its poorer Mexican neighbour is militarised. The Mediterranean serves as a defensive moat before a European castle. For the billions of poor of the South, the imperialist North is a gated community. The wealthy enclaves of the imperialist world are branded like benches in the apartheid-era – “Whites Only”.

Capitalist modernisation has no sustainable answers to the new agrarian question. In fact, a capitalist agrarian revolution on a world-scale has genocidal implications.

Socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must champion food security for all as a key pillar.

## **The crisis of social reproduction and urban slums**

Related to all of this, at some time in the past two decades, for the **first time in human history, the urban population of the earth outnumbered the rural**. As market pressures, droughts, famines, desertification and social instability have pressed down on rural areas, societies have urbanised much faster than was being predicted in the bravest calculations just a few decades ago. The present urban population (over 3,5 billion) is larger than the total population of the world in 1960. This huge wave of accelerated urbanisation has been unlike any preceding it, not just in scale, but in its very character. It is urbanisation largely without industrialisation.

**Fully one-third of this now urbanised half of humanity is eking out an existence in the great sprawling slums of the towns, cities and megacities of the South.** They have different names in different places – *the bustees of Kolkata*, the *kampungs of Jakarta*, the *shammasas of Khartoum*, the *bidonvilles of Abidjan*, the *baladis of Cairo*, the *favelas of Brazil*, the *villas miseria of Buenos Aires*, the *umjondolos of eThekwin*i. They have different names, but everywhere it is the same basic reality – millions upon millions of rural people and villagers uprooted from their land by a global capitalist accumulation process, cramming into cities, there to join their earlier urbanised brothers and sisters, many of them retrenched workers, or evicted households, or unemployed teachers and health-care workers “down-sized” and structurally adjusted into poverty.

These are the uprooted victims of an era that has invented the Internet and unraveled the secrets of DNA, but which has taken away from more than a billion people their ability to earn a basic livelihood, offering little in return. In a previous century, Marx referred to these de-classed strata of the urban poor as a “lumpen-proletariat”. Many of the features of these strata noted by Marx remain valid. Their relative marginalisation from mainstream production, their fragmentation and their precarious situation make them available to all manner of mobilisation, sometimes by reactionary, demagogic, fundamentalist or xenophobic forces. **But the sheer size and enduring presence of these strata today mean it is no longer possible to think of these one billion people as simply flotsam and jetsam tossed up by a temporary transition to capitalism.**

What is more, the boundaries between the urban and rural poor and the active proletariat are blurred. The working class and the poor are connected by a thousand household and community ties. The wage of a single proletarian in the South or of a migrant worker from the South in the North typically supports numerous extended family members some still back in rural areas. Conversely, the daily needs of much

of the proletariat are increasingly supplied by a web of semi-formal activities. As waged employment becomes precarious throughout the South, with casualisation and retrenchments, and in conditions where formal social security is minimal, working class households adopt numerous survivalist strategies, engaging in a myriad of petty entrepreneurial and cooperative activities – spaza shops, minibuses, backyard repairs, cooperative savings clubs, home-based gardening, or clinging on to a small family plot in a rural area.

Much of the burden for these social reproduction efforts is borne by women. These are not just South African realities, they are to be found in differing ways throughout much of the capitalist world.

**If socialism is to be an answer to the barbarism of capitalist profit maximisation, then it will have to be a socialism that embraces the aspirations, survival skills and community know-how of the hundreds of millions of urban and rural poor of our era.** It cannot just be a socialism of modernisation, of catch-up, of a South mimicking the West, of uncritically emulating capitalism, of simply being capitalism without capitalists.

## **A capitalist hegemonic crisis**

The imperialist global victory of the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the unravelling of the Soviet Union and eastern European Soviet bloc countries and the emergence of a unipolar world under US imperialist hegemony. That hegemony, which has economic, technological, cultural and military dimensions, remains a powerful reality. It should not be underestimated. However, it is common cause, even in conservative circles, that this hegemony is visibly declining.

Neo-liberal financialisation, particularly in the US, with its accompanying relative disinvestment in productive activity, in infrastructure and in social spending on health, housing and education has seen strong tendencies towards low growth and now even stagflation. These and other factors have been contributing to a declining hegemony. In contrast, in China there is a political capacity and willingness to

discipline speculative financial activity, to drive major productive and infrastructure development, including at a regional and continental level with its belt and road programme, and the ability to effectively plan economically, socially, and in consequence also to gear up to face the challenges of climate change.

The US, along with its NATO allies, is of course not standing idly by. To assert its dominance, particularly in key strategic natural resources regions, it resorted to a so-called “war on terror”. This was often directed against the very forces that it had originally armed and trained for use as proxies against the Soviet Union in the Cold War period. Following strategic defeats, but at a huge cost to local populations, the “war on terror” has now been somewhat displaced by an attempt to ferment a new Cold War directed largely at China and the threat it poses to US global hegemony.

Imperialism and militarism have always been closely interlinked. The struggle for world peace and international solidarity remains a central task of communists and of all progressives.

## **The political crisis of contemporary capitalism**

The Cold War victory of neo-liberal capitalism was proclaimed as “the end of history”. Economic and political debates were supposed to be over. Politically, a low-intensity democracy of electorally rotating political party elites funded by corporate wealth, and in which the key decisions were not made in elected bodies (parliaments, congresses, legislatures) but by “independent” central banks and compliant Treasuries, was held up as the global model to be pursued in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and of course in the global South. Even in the South of the North (in countries like Italy and Greece) electoral mandates have simply been displaced by the insertion of unelected technocrats to head governments, or by privatisation and austerity marching-orders imposed from without by the IMF and the European Central Bank.

This low-intensity democracy often discredits progressive left

political parties in government in capitalist countries and gives way to right-wing populism. In much of the global South, where it exists, electoral politics is often little more than a hollow shell, often animated by ethnic mobilisation.

Our major, hard-won victory to establish a non-racial, one-person one-vote constitutional democracy is threatened by a similar hollowing out. Our own national democratic sovereignty must be defended and consolidated. Essential for this is the development of a thriving local, community and popular democracy, including various forms of active participatory democracy so that ordinary citizens are the co-producers of transformation, rather than impatient customers awaiting top-down, state delivery. Essential, also, are social and economic programmes that make citizenship for all a substantial reality, otherwise our electoral democracy will increasingly become an irrelevance for the working class and poor.

### **These crises interact and reinforce each other**

Exploiting low-wage and resource exploitation, under the contemporary, highly financialised and globalised capitalist system integrated production takes place across multiple localities. Often different components of a single commodity are designed, manufactured, assembled, packaged and marketed in different countries and continents. A major characteristic of contemporary globalised capitalism is extensive logistics networks and so-called “value chains”, with just-in-time delivery.

This system is highly vulnerable to disruptions, including disruptions provoked by other systemic features of capitalism. The lock-downs in response to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in major disruptions and supply shocks.

Likewise, economic, military and political interventions to prop up declining US imperialist hegemony – like sanctions imposed upon countries like Russia, China and Iran – are liable to back-fire, disrupting the globalist neoliberal agenda.

The crises of capitalism globally and within our country do not mean that a positive alternative will spontaneously replace it. A struggle for environmental survival and justice, for deep-seated equality, for substantive democracy including democratic national sovereignty, for a morality of solidarity and caring, for an end to imperialist wars – in short, a broad-based struggle for socialism is required.

The struggle for socialism is necessarily an international struggle. But there is no ready-made, single, universal blue-print for the correct strategy and tactics. As South African communists we have to understand both the specific historical conjuncture and our own specific national situation

## **The capitalist crisis in South Africa**

As we approach 30 years of a post-apartheid South Africa, everywhere the interlinked crises of capitalism and their impact upon the majority of South Africans are apparent. Unemployment levels are at horrendous world record levels. Social distress in terms of food insecurity is worse than ever. A staggering 79 recorded murders a day in the last reporting year (2021), and exceptionally high levels of gendered-based violence are symptoms of the further unravelling of social cohesion that had already been brutalised by centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid rule.

South Africa, like the rest of sub-Saharan Africa is especially vulnerable to climate change. The global shift to renewables and disinvestment from coal will impact on our economy, leaving us with stranded assets and will make a just transition particularly challenging.

Continued economic distress, and political instability within our immediate southern African region and in the wider sub-Sahara will continue to create waves of desperate economic migration into our country and a volatile situation in working class and poor communities that bear the brunt of the struggle for scarce resources.

Politically there are signs of a growing popular and particular youth

sense of alienation from our hard-won parliamentary electoral dispensation. Electoral stayaways particularly in the ANC's historical township mass support bases have been growing.

Large numbers of under-resourced and often poorly managed municipalities are in seeming terminal decline. Strategic state-owned enterprises and public utilities like Eskom, Transnet and Prasa have largely lost the capacity to strategically drive a people-centred development process.

Key transformative strategies like state-led industrialisation and infrastructure development are under-funded and are unable to go to scale. Social interventions with a transformative capacity, like public employment programmes, suffer similar a fate.

This dire state of affairs particularly for the working class and poor is, of course, partly the consequence of “external” shocks – the Great Recession and the end of the commodity super-cycle (from around 2007/8), the Covid pandemic, or the disruptive impact of the Russian-Ukraine/NATO conflict. Our crises are also the consequence of the massive impact of state capture plundering of public resources, particularly of key SOEs.

But none of these external or internal factors should disguise the fact that our country has precisely been made vulnerable to these external shocks and to state capture plundering by two-and-a-half decades of neoliberal restructuring of our economy – the liberalisation of capital flows, the failure to implement prescribed assets, privatisation and corporatization of key public utilities, the pursuit of macro-economic policies that favour the banking and financial sector oligopoly, and by the general illusion that private sector investment is the golden solution.

Faced with our current crises the current dominant tendency within government, under the hegemony of Treasury and the Reserve Bank is more of the same.

This is the challenge that the SACP confronts in the present conjuncture. What is to be done?

## THE NDR AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

To develop a programmatic understanding of our strategic and tactical responsibilities as the SACP in this current reality it is necessary to reflect on lessons from the past three decades. To develop an effective strategic and tactical appreciation of our situation we need also to understand the shifting trajectory of global, regional and national realities and how over the past three decades the SACP has developed its programmatic perspectives.

The South African democratic breakthrough in 1994 was the direct result of sustained, semi-insurrectionary, popular and working-class struggles. These struggles were sustained from the mid-1970s into the midst of the 1990-1994 negotiations despite heavy repression. Although the apartheid regime was not defeated militarily, and although established monopoly capital still dominated the South African economy, our popular, mass-based struggles had rendered a constitutionally-entrenched system of white minority rule unworkable. It was these struggles together with international anti-apartheid solidarity that made possible the breakthrough 1994 elections and subsequent 1996 democratic Constitution. The overwhelming 1994 electoral majority for the ANC-alliance and the radical vision entrenched in the new Constitution provided a potential bridge-head for an uninterrupted advance and deepening of a popular democracy based on the broad vision of the Freedom Charter.

However, the democratic breakthrough in South Africa also occurred within a new global context. By 1990 it was clear that capitalism under the hegemony of US imperialism had succeeded in largely rolling back, however temporarily, the three major strategic challenges to its continued hegemony that followed the defeat of fascism at the end of World War 2 in 1945. These three strategic challenges were the existence of a powerful socialist bloc; strong trade unions including in some key centres of capital accumulation; and radical national liberation movements in the global South.

At the time, the SACP and ANC were inspired by (and we located our own struggle in) the context of these three major progressive currents. In our 1962 programme (The Road to South African Freedom) we asserted that “Communism ... is the dynamic social and political force of our times.” Likewise, the ANC’s 1969 “Strategy and Tactics” document declared: “The struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa is taking place within an international context of transition to the socialist system, of the breakdown of the colonial system as a result of national liberation and socialist revolutions, and the fight for social and economic progress by the people of the whole world.”

The degree to which there was a shared strategic perspective within the leaderships of the ANC and SACP is even more graphically underlined in the ANC’s internal document (known as the “Green Book”) which reported back in 1979 on a major ANC leadership visit to Vietnam. On the longer-term objectives of the national democratic revolution the “Green Book” noted:

*“We debated the more long-term aims of our national democratic revolution, and the extent to which the ANC, as a national movement, should tie itself to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and publicly commit itself to the socialist option. The issue was posed as follows:*

*“In the light of the need to attract the broadest range of social forces amongst the oppressed to the national democratic liberation, a direct or indirect commitment at this stage to a continuing revolution which would lead to a socialist order may unduly narrow this line-up of social forces. It was also argued that the ANC is not a party, and its direct or open commitment to socialist ideology may undermine its basic character as a broad national movement.*

*“It should be emphasised that no member of the Commission had any doubts about the ultimate need to continue our revolution towards a socialist order; the issue was posed*

*only in relation to the tactical considerations of the present stage of our struggle.*

It was this strategic perspective shared by the ANC and the SACP that made possible (and was fostered by) the way in which the SACP was able to successfully address its practical tasks, its organisational approach, and key related issues like recruitment and cadre development in this period. While the difficult conditions of illegality and exile played a part, it is important to underline this shared strategic perspective **at THAT time, and in that specific reality.**

Through the 1970s and 80s the SACP focused on being a vanguard party of influence **within the ANC and broader liberation movement.** The Party's independent profile was relatively low-key. The Party's membership was limited to a few thousand. There was targeted recruitment with membership by invitation and following a probationary period. The focus of the Party was to rebuild the ANC as the premier liberation force in our country. Party units inside South Africa were active in the emerging trade union and mass democratic movements, and Party cadres, as ANC members in their own right, played leadership roles within the ANC and MK.

The relatively optimistic strategic view that Communism was “the dynamic social and political force of our times” and that our struggle was “taking place within an international context of transition to the socialist system”, seemed to be borne out in the late 1960s and through the 1970s. In these years, global capitalism entered a period of extended economic, political and social crisis that included mass student and youth rebellions and major worker strikes; the OPEC petrol price shock of 1973; the 1974 humiliating defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam; and stagflation.

However, with the advent of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister in the UK in 1979, followed shortly with the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the US in 1981, a global counter-revolutionary crusade was unleashed. Its objective was to rescue capitalism from its multiple crises. In the developed capitalist centres, trade union

militancy was aggressively confronted and welfare states rolled back with budget cuts and privatisation. Radical advances in the global South were undermined both through military destabilisation and the weapon of national debt, with the IMF and World Bank enforcing brutal structural adjustment programmes. The Soviet bloc of countries that had suffered unceasing destabilisation by the imperialist powers were defensively forced into a spiraling and costly arms race that diverted spending from other sectors including consumer goods. This contributed, along with other factors, to institutional stagnation and eventually to social uprisings that saw the Soviet bloc of countries unravel, generally without violence.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the neo-liberal praise-singers were ecstatic. They proclaimed “the end of history”. Capitalism, they believed, was unchallengeable. It was here to stay forever. The commodification of everything was the new gospel – the environment, health-care, education, housing, public transport. In South Africa, in Eastern Europe and the countries that were spun out of the former Soviet Union, a supposed “Third Wave” of democratisation was said to be underway. It often meant a shallow parliamentary electoralism hollowed out by neo-liberal, macro-economic policies determined elsewhere. In the former Soviet bloc, reckless privatisation ruined the lives of the majority, while a handful of oligarchs reaped billions.

At the very moment, then, that our own national liberation struggle was poised to achieve a major breakthrough, when there was still considerable popular and working-class mobilisation, and with our revolutionary alliance and mass democratic formations still relatively intact, the global and regional realities had changed negatively.

Within and across the SACP, the ANC and the broader movement sharp debates and even divisions on strategic and tactical positioning now occurred. There were some, a small minority, who were in denial about the changed global balance of forces. In these quarters a reckless voluntarism was often in evidence – like the call for a “return to the bush” in the midst of the negotiations, or for an

immediate armed insurrection following the assassination of Cde Chris Hani.

In other quarters, a measure of defeatist reformism set in. There was a loss of faith in the prospects for socialism, or even for serious socio-economic structural transformation of South Africa's distorted political economy. Among those taking this line were some formerly in the leadership of the SACP itself. It included two future ANC and national presidents, elected to the Central Committee in April 1989 who quietly resigned from the Party a year later.

Through the 1990s and into the early 2000s, this reformist tendency succeeded in achieving dominance within the ANC and in government. The formal "non-negotiable" adoption of the neo-liberal, macro-economic policy GEAR in 1996 confirmed the contested domination of this tendency. Determined efforts were waged by this tendency to marginalise, and perhaps even liquidate, the SACP. However, this neo-liberal domination was never stable. It was continuously contested from within the Alliance, especially from the SACP-COSATU axis. This contestation took the form both of working class and popular mobilisation against privatisation for instance, and in terms of programmatic orientation.

At the heart of the reformist tendency's ideological revisionism was an attempt to re-cast the understanding of a national democratic revolution. It was now presented as a "stage" in which a "bourgeois democratic revolution" would be "completed", essentially through "de-racialising" the capitalist class. "Black economic empowerment" (BEE), effectively initiated by Anglo-American in 1990, was adopted as a key pillar. It involved the co-option by established monopoly capital of politically-connected individuals. As the SACP warned, from at least as early as 1997, this ran the danger of setting in train a process of moral and ideological degeneration within our movement. The scale of the degeneration, and the emergence of comprador and parasitic strata within the movement and within government, was to prove much greater and more widespread than we had predicted. Cadre deployment and internal ANC electoral

contests, dominated by moneyed-interests, increasingly focused on primitive accumulation and not on public service.

## **Neither voluntaristic denialism, nor a neo-liberal defeatism**

Faced with these challenges, over the past thirty years, the SACP has actively advanced, renewed and deepened our broad Marxist programmatic position in the struggle for a democratic socialist South Africa.

With the active contribution of the two outstanding communists of the time, Cdes Joe Slovo and Chris Hani, the SACP's 8<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1991 laid the foundation for a programmatic position that was neither denialist about the collapse of the Soviet bloc and its hard lessons and implications for us, nor defeatist about the imperative of a continued struggle for a radical national democratic revolution and socialism in South Africa.

All subsequent national Congresses of the SACP have reaffirmed the Party's strategic perspective that the struggle for socialism in South Africa and the struggle to advance, deepen and defend a national democratic revolution are indissolubly linked.

Over the past three decades the SACP has collectively developed and popularised this programmatic perspective.

An NDR as the most effective path to socialism in the South African reality is not a new programmatic strategy for the SACP. This strategic perspective was clearly elaborated, for instance, in the SACP's 1962 "Road to South African Socialism" programme. Indeed, the strategy in many respects dates back to the CPSA's adoption of the Black Republic thesis in 1929. However, it would be wrong to imagine that there has been no development and enrichment of this approach over the past thirty years.

Over the last three decades, a critical development of this strategy in the light of new realities and challenges has been the rejection of a stage-ist understanding of the relationship between the NDR

and the struggle for socialism. In other words, the Party has moved away from a tendency to understand the national democratic and socialist struggles as if they belonged to two separate and successive compartments – “first an NDR, and only then a struggle for socialism”. In other words, we have also refuted the idea (advanced by some) that the NDR somehow belongs to the ANC, and a later struggle to the SACP.

This strategic reorientation, therefore, understands that the struggle for socialism is a struggle in the present for radically transformative advances (revolutionary-reforms), requiring working class and popular hegemony in all key sites of power in the midst of the NDR.

In other words, the NDR is itself a site of class struggle and that class struggle penetrates our own broad movement.

This strategic re-orientation was captured in the SACP’s slogan first advanced at our 1995 congress – “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!”

## **What do we mean by an NDR?**

The NDR is not a “stage” in which capitalism has to be “completed” (or merely “managed according to its own internal logic”). The meaning and content of the NDR is a class contested terrain, it is not something that will unfold on automatic pilot. The NDR is a struggle to overcome deep-seated and persisting racialised and gendered inequality and poverty in our society. It is a struggle to overcome the vicious impact of patriarchy, not just in some generalised way, but a patriarchy that was sharpened and integrated into capitalist relations of production, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when South Africa’s capitalist revolution was fuelled by the super-exploitation based on the social reproduction of migrant labour in “native reserves”. This social reproduction (the rearing of children, care for the sick and elderly) was carried overwhelmingly by women confined through pass laws in “native reserves” and under the patriarchal rule of largely compliant chiefs and headmen. The vicious legacy of this

colonially entrenched patriarchy lives on in the extreme levels of gendered based violence in our country. It is a class struggle for the wealth of our country to be shared, as the Freedom Charter declares. It is a struggle to place social needs above private profits.

To be all of this, the NDR has to be a revolutionary struggle to transform the underlying, systemic features of our society that continue to reproduce race, gendered and class oppression. Which is to say: The NDR in our present conjuncture has, in essence, to be a struggle to transform the dependent-development accumulation path of our economy, and the chronic underdevelopment that this accumulation path still daily reproduces.

The SACP has consistently believed that it is possible and necessary to advance and develop a national democratic revolutionary strategy of this kind that unites, in action, a range of classes and social strata. We have also always believed that within our South African reality, unless the working class builds its hegemony in every site of power, and unless socialist ideas, values, organisation and activism boldly assert themselves, the NDR will lose its way and stagnate.

## Why a NATIONAL revolution?

Understanding more clearly the key strategic tasks of the NDR helps us to understand why we speak of a **NATIONAL** democratic revolution. The “national” in the NDR has three key dimensions.

In the first place, the NDR is a struggle for **NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION**. It is a struggle to consolidate national popular sovereignty for our country, to ensure that, as much as possible, we as South Africans are able to determine democratically our own developmental path, free of external manipulation or domination.

It is here that **the dependent development path into which we have been locked for over a century presents the major challenge**. Our excessive primary product export dependence, our excessive import dependence for capital goods, our vulnerability

to commodity price fluctuations like oil, for instance, the negligent way in which we have allowed foreign multi-nationals to buy up and to monopolise strategically critical sectors that were once state-owned, like iron and steel production, or the failure to curb the massive often illegal outflow of capital – all of these undermine our national sovereignty.

This is not to say that we should close South Africa off from the rest of the world. That is neither possible nor desirable. But we have to overcome our dependent-development growth path. This requires not just a national effort, but also the consolidation of a vibrant, democratic and developmentally-oriented southern African regional community both at the inter-state and at the popular level. It requires building strategic South-South alliances. It requires striking up ties of solidarity with progressive forces around the world. Internationalism and the struggle for progressive national self-determination are not opposites, they are integrally linked.

The “national” in the national democratic revolution refers also to the task of **NATION BUILDING**. Nation building is, in the first instance, the important task of consolidating a single, **collective non-racial South African-ness**, building unity in plurality. This aspect of nation building is not merely symbolic, it is a necessary task in the struggle to mobilise our forces for the ongoing NDR. But nation building must also critically address **the material infrastructure that can help to build this sense of unity, and whose current highly divisive patterns still often undermine it**. Our national revolution has to be a revolution that addresses, for instance, the skewed nature of our persisting racialised human settlement patterns, evident in the spatial inequities of our towns and cities, and in the divide between developed urban and devastated rural areas. Above all, this kind of infrastructural transformation is not just about technocratic “delivery”, if it is to really be nation-building then it must actively involve the collective mobilised energies of millions of ordinary South Africans.

The third dimension of the “national” in the **NDR** is

**REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM.** One of the great assets of our revolution is an unbroken legacy of popular struggle stretching back over several centuries. This legacy has been constantly drawn upon, replenished and transformed in struggle. It continues to provide a source of collective identity, of popular capacity and empowerment for a majority of South Africa's workers and poor. It is this reality that accounts for the enduring although diminishing popularity of the ANC, whatever the challenges it might be facing. This is not to say that any of us can simply take this popularity for granted. Moreover, the ANC does not "own" the NDR. Leadership in struggle has to be constantly earned.

The SACP's strategic contribution to and decades-long involvement with revolutionary nationalism is very much part of our Leninism. It was **Lenin who first comprehensively analysed the revolutionary character of the nationalism of colonially oppressed peoples, and the imperative of the workers socialist struggle to support and draw strength from this Third World revolutionary nationalism.**

Of course, the meaning of African nationalism in our context is contested by many class and other social forces. The struggle for working class and popular hegemony of African nationalism is a struggle against elite abuse of nationalism for narrow self-promotion, a tendency that invariably reduces African nationalism to an exclusivist ideology, to vacuous and sentimental notions about the uniqueness of one group of people as opposed to others. **Revolutionary nationalism in SA must be contested for, broadened so that it remains the shared non-racial legacy of all South Africans, and drawn upon in the struggle for a socialism that is both patriotic and internationalist.**

## **Why a DEMOCRATIC revolution?**

Democracy is both the goal of, and a critical means for waging the NDR. In the objective reality of our country and world, the South African NDR will have to be thoroughly democratic, or it will not succeed at all.

The **Freedom Charter**, correctly, understands democracy across three mutually reinforcing dimensions

- Democracy as **representative** democracy, with the right of all adult citizens to vote for and to stand in elections to the legislatures of the country;
- Democracy as **equality of rights** for all citizens, regardless of “race, colour or sex”; and
- Democracy as a struggle of collective self-emancipation, as an **active and participatory process** facilitated by what the Freedom Charter describes as “democratic organs of self-government”.

The SACP believes that each of these dimensions is critical, and that a one-sided emphasis on one or the other carries grave dangers. **A one-sided emphasis on democracy as regular multi-party elections**, as important as these certainly are, **can turn democracy into a formulaic and episodic reality dominated by professional elites and money-interests**. It can also transform progressive political movements and parties **into narrow electoralist machines populated by career politicians**.

**A one-sided emphasis on democracy as a rights-based system ends up with a liberal “equal opportunities” perspective** in which the constitutional right of everyone to, for instance, “trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions” (to quote from the Freedom Charter), is elevated above and **at the expense of the need to radically transform the systemic features of our society**. Which is why, in the Freedom Charter, this particular sentence on the right of everyone to “trade where they choose” is subordinated to (but not eliminated by) the preceding sections in the relevant Freedom Charter clause: “The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people. The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole. All other industry and trade shall be controlled

to assist the well-being of the people”. It is only after affirming all of this, that the Freedom Charter then correctly upholds, contextualises AND subordinates the individual right to trade, etc.

In the course of the 1980s and early 1990s, the struggle against apartheid-colonialism saw the semi-spontaneous development of **localised organs of popular power** – street committees, self-defence units, mechanisms for popular justice, popular education endeavours inside the very class-rooms of Bantu Education schools, and worker committees on the shop-floor. These moves in the direction of popular power marked the beginnings of implementing the Freedom Charter’s vision of “**democratic organs of self-government**”. These traditions have been carried forward unevenly into the post-1994 period with a range of institutions intended to advance popular participation in governance. They include community policing forums, school governing bodies, and ward committees. The degree to which any of these have lived up to the possibilities of being active institutions for the consolidation of people’s power needs to be critically assessed. Nonetheless, they represent an understanding that democratic governance is not something which can be consigned to government alone. These and other potential sites of localised popular power have to be contested and transformed through active working class and popular struggles.

But here, too, we must guard against a one-sided elevation of localised (or sectorally based) organs of people’s power to the detriment of the other important dimensions of a flourishing democracy. Such **one-sidedness can lead to a neglect of the struggle to transform the content and character of the central commanding heights of state power. It can also lead to a syndicalist or populist rejection** of representative democracy, or even of a respect for a progressive law-based constitutionality rooted in social solidarity. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is littered with examples of communist, broad left, or national liberation movement rejections of electoral politics, or constitutional rights on the mistaken grounds

that these are inherently “bourgeois” (or “imperialist”). Tragically, but frequently, it has been genuine communist, progressive and working-class forces that have ended up becoming the major purged victims of democracy curtailed in the name of fighting “liberal rights”, or “foreign ideas”.

**For the SACP, representative democracy, the respect for progressive solidarity-based rights, and the consolidation of organs of popular power are ALL critically important dimensions of the national democratic and, indeed, the vibrant socialist democracy we strive to build.**

## **Why a REVOLUTION?**

Our ND struggle is **revolutionary** because it requires a major transformational process to achieve its strategic objectives. In earlier decades the ANC always correctly insisted that ours was not a “civil rights” struggle. While civil rights are critically important, our strategic national democratic objective was never understood to be a struggle simply for the “inclusion” of the black majority, by providing them rights within what were then the **existing structures of power**. It was never a case of struggling to make apartheid structures “more representative”. We understood very clearly that the structures of power (whether racial, class, or patriarchal) had themselves to be thoroughly transformed.

However, since 1994, and particularly (but not only) in the decisive area of **economic** power, there have been strong tendencies to slide backwards into exactly that kind of rights-based, “representative”, inclusion. Thus, “transformation” of the apartheid economy (or more accurately of a capitalist economy shaped by CST) is too often reduced to “de-racialising” board-rooms, share-holdings and senior management structures through the promotion of “representative” blacks or women, without addressing the underlying systemic features of an economy that those very board-rooms, share-holdings and management structures daily promote and reproduce.

It is precisely this notion of “deracialisation” without class content that underpins much of the present elitist “black economic empowerment” model. An agenda of “deracialisation” without a systemic understanding of CST, or of class power, or of patriarchy, also means that there are no national democratic strategic guidelines provided to those who are promoted to board-rooms and senior management positions.

This is **NOT** to say that nothing short of communism, that is, nothing short of abolishing capitalism will enable us to at least **begin** to make major inroads into overcoming the dependent-development and chronic underdevelopment of our society. There is, indeed, both the possibility and the imperative of building a broad multi-class movement around a concrete, national democratic programme of **transformation**.

**At the centre of this multi-class movement needs to be the working class.** But it is a working class that **must exert its hegemony through, in the first place, forging national democratic ties with the great mass of urban and rural poor, and impoverished black middle strata. But a working class hegemony over the NDR must be more ambitious than even this. Emerging strata of capital, and even established capital must be actively mobilised into the transformational agenda. This will not happen spontaneously, and it will seldom happen willingly. Which is why an NDR agenda, including the agenda of mobilising private capital resources, has to be driven by active working-class struggle.**

In broad outline, this is the SACP’s understanding of a NDR. But what do we mean by “building socialism now”?

## **BUILD SOCIALISM NOW**

When in 1995 the SACP first advanced the programmatic slogan – “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!”, our opponents, especially the defeatist reformist tendency within the movement itself, sought to portray this as adventurist ultra-leftism. Referring to the Russian Revolution of 1917 some in these quarters even claimed that the Party was seeking to make an “October insurrection”, overthrowing the democratically-elected ANC-led majority government (the “ANC’s February”).

The SACP has consistently explained what we mean is not some fool-hardy great leap forward. Building socialism now, is about building capacity for, momentum towards, and even elements of socialism in the midst of a broad-based NDR.

### **What do we mean by socialism?**

Socialism is a transitional social system between capitalism (and other systems based on class exploitation and oppression) and a fully classless, communist society. A socialist society has a mixed economy, but one in which the socialised component of the economy is dominant and hegemonic. The socialised economy is that part of the economy premised on meeting social needs and not private profits.

Socialising the economy includes the direct empowerment of workers on the shop floor, by progressively increasing their control over:

- the powers of possession – expanding workers’ real ability to impact on work-place decisions, on the organisation and management of the production process, product development, safety and working conditions, etc.; and
- the powers of ownership – expanding workers’ power over decisions around the allocation of social surplus, including investment policies, budgetary priorities, etc.

Socialising the economy will also involve expanding a **wide range of social ownership forms**, including:

- A **predominant and varied public sector**, particularly in key strategic areas, with enterprises owned and managed by the central state, by provincial and municipal authorities. These public sector enterprises need to be subjected to various forms of democratic oversight and control, including the scrutiny of trade unions, work-place forums, parliamentary oversight, consumer councils and the media;
- A significant and **growing co-operative sector**, including small service and consumer goods providers networked through co-operative and publicly run marketing and purchasing cooperatives.
- The active use of **social capital** to achieve developmental objectives – for instance, worker-controlled pension and provident funds.

The struggle for socialism also involves:

- **Rolling back the capitalist market** – particularly through a struggle to “de-commodify” basic needs – water, energy, health-care, education, the environment, public transport, housing, social security, culture and information, data, and work itself. These are fundamental social rights. They should not be commodities whose availability, and whose price is determined by a profit maximising capitalist market. De-commodification is not necessarily the same thing as making all such basic needs completely free. Some may be free, others not. In Cuba’s socialist economy, for instance, while health-care and education are free, other basic needs like household electricity are charged. However, the price for household electricity in this case is not based on a capitalist profit-making market criterion, nor even on complete cost recovery for the public entity providing the electricity. In the Cuban case, pricing of household electricity is used primarily

to encourage household rationing of a scarce public good.

- **Transforming the market** – socialism is not necessarily about abolishing markets, but rather about rolling back the accumulated class power of capitalists in the market. Transforming the power relations on markets includes:
  - Increasing the power of the working class on the labour market – eliminating unemployment, strengthening the power of trade unions, skills training, an effective social security net, and a massive land reform initiative;
  - The effective use of state subsidies, tendering and procurement policies, regulatory controls, and the use, on the market, of public sector corporations to transform and democratise markets;
  - The establishment of effective consumer negotiating forums and watch-dog bodies, buttressed by the organised (consumer) power of the working class.

Ninety years ago, when the first pioneering efforts at constructing socialist societies began, it was possible to think that socialism, like capitalism, would be constructed on the basis of unlimited natural resources and endless growth. In what were described as societies of “actually existing socialism” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were often strong deviations into an economism of “catch-up” and accelerated “modernisation”, often at a great price to working people, to democracy, and to the environment.

Socialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to think and act differently. Socialism in 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to place a premium on ensuring food security for its people, on sustainable livelihoods, sustainable households and communities and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Clearly, empowering workers on the shop-floor, rolling back the capitalist market by decommodifying basic needs, advancing a

wide array of socially owned and regulated entities, and placing a premium on sustainability none of these measures requires waiting for the NDR to be first “completed”.

Indeed, all of these measures are critical to the effective advance, consolidation and defence of the NDR itself.

## **ALLIANCES, FRONTS, PROGRAMMES OF ACTION AND THE ROLE AND CHARACTER OF A VANGUARD PARTY FOR SOCIALISM**

Since its formation one hundred years ago the Communist Party in South Africa has always aspired to play a vanguard role for socialism in our country. To be a vanguard is not something to be simply proclaimed. Nor is it easily achieved. It is about building capacity to provide leadership locally, nationally and even internationally in the ebb and flow of popular struggle. It has to be earned continuously through the clarity of a party’s strategic perspectives, through the ability to intervene practically based on these perspectives, through a capacity to learn from the collective struggles of the working class and poor, and through the ability to adapt strategic perspectives and tactical choices in the course of active collective practice.

The Political Report adopted by the April 1977 Central Committee meeting of the Party (“The Way Forward from Soweto”) captured with great clarity the meaning of a vanguard role in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto 1976 uprising:

*“Our claim that we are a vanguard party of the working class is in no way diminished by our close association with the national liberation front headed by the ANC... A Communist Party does not earn the honoured title of vanguard merely by proclaiming it. For example, a working-class Party does not exercise its vanguard role in relation to the trade unions by capturing them or transforming them into wings of the Party, but rather by proving that the Party and its individual members are the most ideologically clear and the most devoted and loyal participants in the workers’ cause. The*

*same principle applies to a situation such as ours in which the main immediate instrument for the achievement of the aims of our national democratic revolution is a mass movement capable of galvanising all classes in an assault on racist power. The African National Congress is such an instrument and our loyal participation in the liberation front which it heads is in the best interests of the class whose vanguard we claim to be”.*

It was this understanding of the Party’s vanguard role **at that time** that grounded two of the most successful decades of SACP theory and practice. What made this possible in that context was a broadly shared strategic consensus across the ANC and SACP about the inextricable connection between the NDR struggle and a necessary advance to socialism,

Through the 1970s and 80s, then, the SACP focused on being a vanguard party of influence **within the ANC and broader liberation movement**. The Party’s independent profile was relatively low-key. The Party’s membership was limited to a few thousand. There was targeted recruitment with membership by invitation and following a probationary period. The focus of the Party was to rebuild the ANC as the premier liberation force in our country. Party units inside South Africa were active in the emerging trade union and mass democratic movements, and Party cadres, as ANC members in their own right, played leadership roles within the ANC and MK.

The changed global context after 1990 with the collapse of the Soviet bloc led to debates about the relevance of the SACP in the new global reality. A significant Party leadership breakaway occurred, led by a reformist tendency that was to become dominant within the ANC by the second half of the 1990s. Its outlook was increasingly neoliberal and more or less anti-communist in posture.

However, at the very time that some of the former leadership of the Party was abandoning it and taking this reformist path, the freshly unbanned SACP was experiencing an historical high point

in popular support and acclaim. The SACP's role in the national liberation struggle was well understood by many of the hundreds of thousands of militants who had been active in the trade union and mass democratic struggles of the 1970s and 80s. Key Party leaders at the time, like Cdes Joe Slovo and Chris Hani were easily among the most popular liberation figures in our country. Over 40,000 attended the Party's coming-out rally in Soweto in 1990 and a five-fold increase in Party membership was reported at the Party's 1991 8<sup>th</sup> Congress.

This rapid growth in membership was criticised by some in the Party (and by some former Party members) who saw it as a departure from the tight, "vanguard", "cadreship" organisation that had emerged in the late 1950s following the Party banning in 1950.

The combination of these contradictory dynamics posed new ideological and organisational challenges for the SACP. How was the SACP to play a vanguard socialist role in the new context?

It meant, first and foremost, defending but also contributing internationally to the renewal of communism and socialist vision.

But was it still possible (or desirable) for the SACP to understand its vanguard role as largely focused on being a Party of influence within the ANC, seeking to build a socialist-oriented, pro-working class bias within the ANC-led movement?

For the better part of the 1990s and early 2000s this remained the Party's principal strategic, tactical and organisational focus. But this focus continuously encountered hostile opposition from the dominant tendency within the ANC (and ANC-led government) in this period.

In the second-half of the 1990s, faced with the prospect of a continuous attempt at hostile marginalisation the Party increasingly realised the importance of asserting a much stronger independent voice, of building its own mass-based presence on the ground, and of active campaigning. It was in the early 2000s that the Party's most successful campaigning took place, notably with campaigns

like the Red October financial sector campaign.

Through the 1990s the Party also built a strong ideological and campaigning “left axis” with COSATU and its affiliates. This “left axis” succeeded in advancing progressive labour market policies, in partially preventing privatisation efforts, and in championing key social interventions. But it was always an uphill struggle which, in essence, was a class struggle within and beyond our Alliance itself.

The growing internal crisis within the ANC through the early 2000s was partly the consequence of competing primitive accumulation cabals some of whom (in certain provinces and the Youth League in particular) felt excluded from the inner BEE-beneficiary circle. But it was also a crisis provoked by the deepening failure to address the triple crisis of inequality, poverty, and unemployment.

Organisationally this crisis played out at the ANC’s 2007 Polokwane national conference, and the subsequent 2008 ANC withdrawal of Mbeki as national president. The Zuma presidency of the ANC and subsequent Stat presidency created a more favourable space for the SACP (and COSATU). Consequently, in its strategic, tactical and organisational posture the SACP tended to revert to a much greater focus on seeking to play a vanguard role within the ANC and within the ANC-led government. There was a relative dropping off of the Party’s independent campaigning and mass work beyond the Alliance.

However, the space opened up for the Party from 2007 and with the elections of 2009 was always limited by the Zuma presidency’s deliberate playing off of an accommodation of the left within the Alliance against both the primitive accumulation networks (what we described as the “new tendency”) and the neo-liberal reformists who still remained strongly ensconced in key sites like National Treasury and subsequently the National Planning Commission.

The strains in-built into this volatile arrangement led to a weakening of the SACP/COSATU left axis, and then a major split in the federation. In many provinces, districts and branches the relative

accommodation of the SACP at a national level was not replicated. Old factional hostilities against the Party persisted and, in many cases, became even worse.

It was in this context that increasing pressure and potential divisions built up within the Party. Nominally, the debate was about the “Party and state power”, but in effect it was more narrowly a debate about whether the Party should contest elections independently of the ANC or not.

As the scale of the state capture looting under the Zuma presidency became increasingly apparent, and as the SACP from at least 2017 increasingly took a firm public stand against this corruption, the Party rediscovered a vanguard anti-state capture role within an Alliance that was often flat-footed in the face of the plunder.

This role was central in enforcing Zuma’s forced stepping down in 2017, and in the outcomes of the ANC election victory in 2019. However, while the ANC leadership’s posture towards the SACP is considerably more accomodative than was experienced in the late-1990s and early 2000s, on key policy questions the SACP tends to be politely marginalised, while socially destructive neoliberal policies of austerity and “structural reform” are pursued. For many comrades in the Party there is a sense that we are kept in the fold but managed. These outcomes should not be a surprise. The Party over the past few years has consistently asserted that the immediate struggle “is on two fronts – against state capture and against neo-liberal austerity”.

# **ANC RENEWAL? RE-CONFIGURING THE ALLIANCE? LEFT POPULAR FRONTS? AND THE QUESTION OF THE SACP'S POSITION ON ELECTIONS**

Faced with all of these challenges and internal debates within the Party, our 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress and subsequent Special National Congress passed resolutions on ANC renewal, re-configuring the Alliance and on Left Popular Fronts and on the possibility of the SACP independently contesting elections in its own name.

Whatever the necessary debates within our Party on these strategic issues, there is, at the most general level, a consensus that:

**We reject the idea that state power can simply be reduced to elections.**

We equally reject any in-principle opposition to the SACP contesting elections in its own right, or any position that seeks to suppress legitimate debate in favour of such contesting.

The following are several provisional theses for further discussion:

## **1. ANC renewal**

- 1.1 The prospects for **ANC renewal** are uncertain and the class character of any such renewal (were it to occur) is equally a matter of struggle. The ANC remains seriously factionalised and moral and political decay has been far-reaching. Its future electoral prospects are uncertain with a strong possibility of it achieving less than 50% in 2024.
- 1.2 However, the ANC remains by far the largest electoral formation and its residual support base should not be underestimated. If after 2024 the ANC is forced nationally into coalition arrangements it will be the senior partner. On what programmatic basis it enters into coalition agreements will depend on the character of the ANC at the time and on the capacity of working class and popular forces to influence the programmatic direction.

1.3 *For all of these reasons, the SACP (and the organised working class, and all progressive forces) can neither stand aloof from the struggle for ANC renewal, **nor invest all our expectations in it.** If we take this latter position we risk further marginalising the Party and going down with a sinking ship.*

## **2. The Reconfiguration of the Alliance**

2.1 The reconfiguration of the Alliance and the struggle for ANC renewal on the basis of advancing, deepening and defending the NDR must not be understood as two completely different tasks.

2.2 What the Party understands by alliance reconfiguration must not be reduced to the important but secondary question of who gets to decide on deployments.

2.3 A satisfactory reconfiguration of the Alliance will not happen simply as a result of Alliance summits, or bilateral meetings, or reconfigured organograms that exist on paper, as useful as these might sometimes be. Without effective organised working class and popular power behind the SACP, without an SACP that boldly asserts its independence, and without the renewal of COSATU and the wider trade union movement, effective reconfiguration will not happen.

## **3. A Left Popular Front/Left Popular Fronts/Left Popular Movement**

3.1 For this reason our approach to building Left Popular Fronts, or perhaps, better, a left popular movement (or movements/campaigns) should not be seen merely as an “alternative route” (“Plan B”) – although it might have to become that if the continued degeneration of the ANC persists partly as a result of our collective inability in class struggle to arrest such degeneration.

3.2 Either way, effective left popular mobilisation should not be

developed as an anti-ANC position – but it should certainly be aggressively against some of the dominant trends within the ANC and the ANC-led government (whether neo-liberal austerity or vulgar state capture plundering). Effective left mobilisation should be able to influence and perhaps even mobilise some, if not all, ANC structures and certainly a large part of the ANC’s broad support base.

3.3 Indeed, effective left popular mobilisation should also be able to win over (or win back) many genuine (often youthful) militants who have drifted off into other places. We should not give up on many of these because of a corrupt, demagogic and authoritarian leadership clique.

3.4 In other words, a Left Popular Front (or Fronts, or a Left Popular Movement) should emerge out of popular mobilisation and campaigning. It should not be seen as first the cobbling together of a variety of formations at leadership level that variously proclaim themselves “left” or “socialist”, and then only launching a programme of mobilisation and action. The building of a left popular movement must be grounded in a network of active struggle – “feeling the stones to cross the river”.

3.5 Given the considerable volatility and uncertainty of our situation, a future LPF might become an effective electoral formation (as in Kerala, for instance). However, the objective of consolidating left popular mobilisation with the possibility of consolidating a LPF should not be understood as simply an electoral agenda. This may be the necessary decision to be taken in an uncertain future – but even then the electoral prospects of an LPF will swing on its actual mobilisational, organisational strength and hard-won popular support.

#### **4. The consolidation of the SACP’s fighting strength and vanguard capacity**

4.1 For the SACP to play a vanguard role in this global and

national context, the Party needs to develop a much clearer independent voice, it needs to build an organisation capable of playing an active role in working class and popular communities, it needs to consolidate a revolutionary cadre capable of carrying forward these tasks at all levels of our formation, and it needs to be able to resource these activities materially.

4.2 These **should not be seen as sequential tasks** – for example: “first accumulate financial resources – then embark on campaigns, electoral or otherwise”. An effective campaign (whether electoral or otherwise) has the possibility to encourage crowd-funding. On the other hand, however, we must guard against voluntaristic leaps in which we harbour unrealistic objectives beyond our immediate organisational, cadre and material resource capacity.

4.3 **Should the SACP contest elections independently** and in its own name, in the relatively near or medium-term future, we should be clear that we are not talking about “taking state power”. Such a campaign realistically should aim to place more firmly on the public agenda the prospects and necessity to roll back neo-liberal austerity, for the possibilities and imperatives of a socialist advance, to bring hope to an alienated youth, or to a disaffected ANC support base, and to use our independent presence in legislatures to act as “people’s tribunes”. This will require that we neither tail behind the general mood and aspirations of the great majority of the workers and the poor, nor that we place ourselves so far ahead with left-sound rhetoric that we reduce ourselves to a small clique.

4.4 Whether it is in the struggle to renew the ANC and re-configure the Alliance and more dramatically change the course of neo-liberal consolidation in government, or whether

it is to eventually contest elections independently of the ANC – nothing can be won in the ANC or Alliance forums, or in electoral contests – without the effective, mass-based consolidation in active struggle of popular and working-class forces.



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