

STOP THE GENOCIDE!

Palestine Solidarity Special with this issue

Umsebenzi

October 2023 Voice of the South African Communist Party



Photo: Rosetta Msimango

FORWARD TO

HEALTH COVERAGE

FOR ALL!

● RED OCTOBER CAMPAIGN TARGETS COST OF LIVING CRISIS ●

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October 2023



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CENTRAL COMMITTEE

End neoliberal austerity, rise up against imperialist aggression

The SACP Central Committee met from 6 to 8 October and issued a statement on a wide range of issues affecting the working class and the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle, which we briefly summarise here

The CC meeting coincided with the 78th anniversary of the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which the SACP lauded for its class-based, anti-imperialist work. The Party also congratulated Cosatu for campaigning on the Decent Work Agenda, and it reiterated the call for unity of the progressive trade union movement in South Africa and organising unorganised workers.

The SACP also welcomed the outcome of the BRICS summit, held in August, its expansion “and the agreement on exploring alternative trading currency mechanisms, including de-dollarisation”.

The 2024 election

The Party’s strategy for the 2024 election is grounded in its determination to “advance the national democratic revolution, to serve the interests of the majority of South Africans”. In this it stands shoulder-to-shoulder with its Alliance partners. The CC has directed the Party’s structures and members to “intensify the struggle for Alliance reconfiguration as our preferred modality for the 2024 election”.

It said that some crucial aspects of this reconfiguration have been hammered out, including consultation and manifesto review and that “our engagements continue on the most critical items, such as consensus on the content and direction of our shared strategy for



SACP General Secretary Cde Solly Mapaila delivering the CC’s statement to the press

the national democratic revolution, collective leadership of the revolution, and accountability to the Alliance, of those assigned with implementation responsibility in all key centres of power.”

In this context, it reiterates the importance of building a left popular front and a powerful socialist movement to bolster working-class struggle on immediate goals and create momentum for socialism.

On the left popular front, the CC states, “A popular left front should emerge out of popular mobilisation and campaigning. It should not be seen as first the cobbling together of a variety of formations at the leadership level that

variously proclaim themselves ‘left’ or ‘socialist’, and then only launching a programme of mobilisation and action afterwards. Forging a popular left movement must be grounded in a network of active struggle.”

Against austerity

The CC denounced government-imposed austerity measures for “cutting government service delivery and development expenditure, including redistributive programmes, and withdrawing from advancing any real economic stimulus. This is done to enforce preordained fiscal ratios deemed by the neoliberal playbook to be universally applicable under all circumstances.”

It takes the example of healthcare: “[T]hose who enforce austerity do so knowing that they will go to the oligopolistic private clinics and hospitals when they need healthcare. The private healthcare sector is dominated by the “Group of Three” oligopolies – Mediclinic, Life Healthcare, and Netcare. It excludes the workers and poor who do not have money to pay.” The CC statement calls for progress for the “full implementation of the National Health Insurance to ensure quality healthcare for all”.

The CC statement contains 10 key demands for ending austerity and reforming the economy, calling for:

- 1. Decisive measures to address failures to spend conditional grants to deliv-

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Forging a popular left movement must be grounded in active struggle

er government services and public goods to the people: in the previous financial year, the underspending amounted to no less than R15 billion, also affecting infrastructure development and maintenance.

● 2. The National Treasury to find new money to fund the public service bargaining wage settlement.

● 3. The government to draw down on funds the Reserve Bank's Gold and Foreign Exchange Contingency Reserve Account owes to it to fund the expected fiscal shortfall: if the funds are reserved for storms and if we are indeed on the edge of a fiscal cliff as the National Treasury claims, then this is a storm.

● 4. Taxing income from wealth and trading financial assets, removing tax brackets for high-income earners and corporate select tax breaks: South Africa is a highly unequal society – a greater amount of tax at the top is imperative.

● 5. A wealth tax and a rollback of the recent corporate income tax reduction.

● 6. Prescribed investment, including community reinvestment-type regulations and various levies.

● 7. Clamping down on illicit financial flows.

● 8. A resource windfall tax and stronger mined minerals verification to clamp down on mis-invoicing, illicit

activity and associated state revenue leakage.

● 9. Review of the mineral royalties' regime to give practical effect to the principle that the mineral wealth of our country belongs to the people as a whole.

● 10. A state-owned bank as a step towards a developmental state banking sector.

The statement highlights the importance of the current Red October Campaign on the theme *Put people first, fight the rising cost-of-living crisis*. It also examines the need for an adequately funded industrial policy, public infrastructure and skills development in order to turn the economy around.

On the struggle for gender equality and women's reproductive rights, the statement says that "the solution to gender inequalities must, above all else, be in the interests of women, girls and non-binary-gendered people. It must tackle both class and racial disparities, with greater emphasis on working-class and poor women." The statement highlights the need to tackle the enduring legacy of the triple oppression – patriarchy, race, inequality – that Black women suffered under apartheid. Unimpeded reproductive rights must be guaranteed, and teenage pregnancy, often due to rape, must be reduced and rapists prosecuted.

International

The CC statement condemns the farcical 'election' that was held in Swaziland, where political parties are banned and pledges solidarity with the people of Swaziland. On Zimbabwe, the CC notes that the recent election "took place under a toxic interaction of domestic and international conditions" and called for the lifting of sanctions by the US and its European allies.

The CC statement stresses the importance of the wave of anti-imperialist sentiment and action across the Sahel, and cautions ECOWAS and the African Union from interventions that benefit imperialist interests. It reiterates the Party's solidarity on the question of Western Sahara.

It also highlights the Party's solidarity with the Palestinian people (see Page??), Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela and Syria in the face of imperialist blockades, sanctions and hostile media campaigns.

On the Nato-provoked war in Ukraine, the CC "condemns the escalation of the war, which has far-reaching consequences, by the US and its NATO allies... The SACP calls on the working-class movement and progressive forces in every part of the world to rise up to end the imperialist aggression, wars and other machinations." ★

The full CC statement is available on <https://www.sacp.org.za/content/sacp-central-committee-statement-10>



Launching Red October: L to R: Pulediso Motsoeneng, ANC Free State Provincial Secretary, Bheke Stofile, SACP FS Provincial Secretary, Solly Mapaila, SACP General Secretary, Febe Potgieter, ANC NEC member, Dibolelo Mahlatsi, SACP CC member, Solly Phetoe, Cosatu General Secretary, Teboho Phadu, SACP CC member

RED OCTOBER CAMPAIGN

All-out action to fight the cost-of-living crisis

Tinyiko Ntini outlines the Party's campaign to tackle the cost of living crisis and government-imposed austerity



Inspired by the 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution, many communist parties, including the SACP, continue to commemorate this historic victory of the working class through community activities. The SACP uses the campaign to respond to challenges facing the working class and poor. In recent years, since its launch, many victories were scored on many fronts to uplift and change the socio-economic conditions of the working class and the poor.

This year's Red October Campaign was launched on 1 October in Thabo Mofutsanyane District in Free State province under the theme Put people first and fight the rising cost of living crisis.

The event was also used to remember Thabo Mofutsanyana, who was General Secretary of the CPSA from 1936 to 1938. This is

also part of our 15th Congress mandate on the Village Development Programme, with Tsetse identified as part of the CPC/SACP Joint Centenary Programme under the guidance of Kgosi Moloji.

About 1200 people, including leaders from our Alliance partners, together with Kgosi Moli and SACP General Secretary Solly Mapaila were in attendance. Mapaila used the launch to call for the South African Reserve Bank's Gold and Foreign Exchange Contingency Reserve to be accessed in response to the fiscal crises. He further called for a wealth tax, clamping down on illicit financial flows and a developmental monetary policy and financial sector.

Mapaila said this year's campaign will focus on fighting government-imposed austerity measures that are at the centre of the fiscal crises and their impact on the cost of living,



Creating food security is key to tackling the cost of living crisis. Cde Bonakele Majuba, SACP Mpumalanga Provincial Chairperson and Cosatu General Secretary Solly Phetoe show produce from a local agri cooperative in Thabo Mofutsanyana District



Mathole Mofutsanyana, grandson of the late CPSA leader Thabo Mofutsanyana at his grandfather's graveside



Red October campaigners, Mofutsanyana District

which has increased significantly over the past decade, especially post-Covid-19.

Prices of basic products have risen by an average of 95,5% since 2008. Fuel prices are on another level, and this influences prices of all products involving logistics, public transport and food. "This is the reason why the SACP must go all out and mobilise the widest range of organisations as part of a left front to fight the rising cost of living," said Mapaila.

This year's campaign will also extend to the commitments we made in the Party's 102nd Anniversary statement and the pillars of the South African Struggle for socialism that encompasses the right to land, food, work and electricity.

Following the successful launch of the campaign, Moses Mabhida (KZN), Mpumalanga, and Western Cape also hosted successful public events, and the Eastern Cape will host the main rally on 5 November in the OR Tambo District.

As part of rolling out the Red October Campaign, these are some of the activities planned for the coming months:

- Moses Mabhida Centenary celebrations coupled with community activism;
- the 60th anniversary of the Rivonia Trialists;
- Jack Simons Party School focusing on the different topics of the Red October Campaign;
- Red October rallies;

- Pickets and marches against austerity;

- Marches against crime, gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) and intra-violence;

- Josie Mpama Webinars;

- Decent Work campaign;

- Chris Hani inquest campaign following an online petition; and

- Michael Harmel Webinar sessions focusing on the different international developments that affect us as a country and the class we represent. ★

Cde Ntini is a member of the SACP Central Committee and Head of Campaigns

2024 ELECTIONS

Crunch time – side with the working class or the bosses

The neoliberal austerity drive threatens the Decent Work Agenda – now’s the time for the ANC-led Alliance to decide whether to side with workers or with business, writes Benson Ngqentsu



September this year was used by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) to convene joint shop stewards’ councils across the country in preparation for International Decent Work Day, which is observed on 6 October. This day marked a campaign for decent work for workers in all sectors of our economy and around the world.

The Decent Work Agenda was formulated by the International Labour Organization in 1999 and the campaign followed and gained prominence. At the 2005 United Nations World Summit, countries agreed to make employment and decent work for all a central objective of development strategies to support fair globalisation. As a result of this campaign, in 2014 the G20 declared job creation as a priority goal.

Locally, at Cosatu’s 9th National Congress, the federation adopted a resolution calling for “a comprehensive plan to create quality jobs and ensure that the millions of unemployed are able to work in conditions of decent work” to address the scourge of casualisation and labour broking, a modern form of slavery, through negative changes in the law.

The Decent Work Agenda has not escaped the attention of the ideological opposition, but despite this opposition from sections of the neoliberals within the body politics of the ANC-led Alliance, the notion of decent work has found expression within the body politics of the Alliance through its Alliance Summits.

As a result, the 2009 manifesto of the ANC-led Alliance included the creation of decent work as one of its five priori-

ties. In fact, it became the number one priority. For this reason, the ANC’s 2009 manifesto conceptualised this issue of decent work as “a foundation for sustainable livelihoods”.

The ANC’s 2009 Manifesto also defined or characterised the decent work agenda as fundamental to the fight against poverty and inequality, and that its promotion should be the cornerstone of all the Alliance’s efforts. The Manifesto also argued that decent work encompasses both the need for more jobs and for better quality jobs. To achieve the goal of decent work, the ANC-led Alliance made a bold commitment:

“The ANC shall make the creation of decent work opportunities and sustainable livelihoods the primary focus of our economic policies. We will make maximum use of all the means at the disposal of the ANC government to achieve this. This objective should be reflected in the orientation and programme of development finance institutions and regulatory bodies, through government procurement and public incentive rules, (and) in industrial, trade, competition, labour market and other policies.”

Against this backdrop, and with the ANC currently engaged in the 2019 manifesto review across the country, what gains have been made, and by South African workers in particular, in meeting the objectives of the Decent Work Agenda? And what is the current situation of South African workers in all sectors of our economy? The ongoing manifesto review processes must be able to answer these questions if the ANC is to be a genuine people’s movement.

However, my preliminary review of the

ANC’s manifesto, which coincides with this period of the decent work agenda, suggests that the ANC-led government has not only failed workers on this front, it has betrayed them. Instead of decent work, the current economic trajectory of neo-liberal austerity, which the ANC government seems to be blindly following, reproduces precarious work.

Such precarious work takes the form of casualisation, labour broking, contract labour and even the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) as a new form of cheap labour. Therefore, this neoliberal and austerity economic trajectory poses a direct threat to the Decent Work Agenda.

Now is the time for the ANC-led Alliance to make a choice: either side with the workers and abandon this neo-liberal economic path or side with business and lose political power. Workers must rise to the challenge and assert their political and organisational authority or risk further fragmentation and annihilation.

It is clear that the forces of neoliberal austerity would not be as strong and brazen as they are if some within working-class organisations were not complicit. Members of both the SACP and Cosatu must wake up and smell the coffee or face being auctioned off by those who have been planted in our organisations to act as proxies for the neoliberal austerity forces. ★

Cde Ngqentsu is the SACP’s Provincial Secretary in the Western Cape and NUM Regional Organiser. This is an edited version of his speech given at the COSATU Joint Shop-Steward Council held in Cape Town on 28 September 2023

SACP 102nd ANNIVERSARY

Crises facing the working class: the forgotten farm dwellers of Salt Lake

Sivuyile Ntamehlo reports on taking the SACP's Land, Food and Work campaign to an oppressed rural community in the Northern Cape



The SACP Joe Slovo District in the Northern Cape held its 102nd-anniversary celebrations at Salt Lake on 26 August 2023. Salt Lake is a farm in the Northern Cape about 40km outside Douglas in the Siyancuma Municipality. The current population of the farm is about 800 people living in about 100 houses with high levels of unemployment and poverty.

Most of the people live on cash transfers from the democratic state in the form of social grants, without which the dire socio-economic conditions of the rural population would be even worse. This farm is one of many in the Northern Cape where farm workers and residents face daily exploitation by white farm owners.

The rural residents of Salt Lake are subjected to all forms of abuse on a daily basis, including violations of their rights in the form of illegal evictions, threatened evictions, constructive evictions (denial of access to water and electricity) and loss of burial rights, among others, including the total disregard for the rights of the workers employed at the salt mine, which is also owned by the farm owner, who is a fourth generation owner of the farm.

Our Party programme started with the Land, Food and Work campaign, followed by a walkabout on the farm where the SACP District leadership and the Provincial Secretary interacted with community members. In the afternoon of the same day, the SACP held its 102nd An-



Homestead life at Salt Lake

niversary Celebration in the community hall; meeting with community members and the workers employed at the Salt Mine to understand their challenges and their living conditions on the farm.

Land, Food and Work Campaign

In line with our campaign for stronger efforts to achieve food security for all and empower working-class communities to increase food production, the SACP visited the Salt Lake Primary School, where the SACP Salt Lake branch formed a community group that established a food garden at a local school. This initiative by the party branch is to support the school nutrition programme and grow it into a community garden to further enhance food security initiatives for sustainable rural livelihoods.

The SACP leadership led by the Pro-

vincial Secretary, Cde Norman Shushu, donated seedlings and garden equipment to the community group as part of strengthening the focus on farm dwellers to address their plight. The seedlings and other equipment were received by the School Governing Body and the Community group responsible for the garden.

Working conditions of farm workers

On this farm, the working class and poor remain on the periphery, existing for the reproduction of cheap labour. The owner of Salt Lake is even more brutal in forcing the workers and poor to live on the periphery, in poverty traps far from resources and much-needed services. The workers have no wage scale, no pension fund and no medical benefits. They are employed on a contract basis to extract the salt and are paid 20 cents per bag of salt.

As part of our immediate intervention, the SACP invited the National Union of Mineworkers to address the workers and begin a process of organising the workers under the banner of the NUM. The NUM, with the help of the Salt Lake branch of the Party, is currently in the process of setting up a branch led largely by young women comrades.

Housing crisis

All the houses are owned by the farm owner and the households pay rent to occupy the houses. The houses are divided into three and two-bedroom houses, with two families living in the same house. Because the families are too large, other families have built shacks in the



Members of the Salt Lake Branch Executive Committee joined by the writer and SACP Provincial Secretary Cde Norman Shushu (fifth from right)



The SACP donates the basics for creating a food garden at Salt Lake. In the foreground District Executive Committee member Cde Richard Maketlo

backyard and are charged an additional R130 a month for rent. The houses are not maintained and are in a very bad state of repair, despite the fact that the owner charges and receives monthly rent. The rural community of Salt Lake is having to dig deep into their empty pockets to repair the very old houses to provide some semblance of a decent living environment.

Overpriced water and electricity

The owner charges each household R130 for water, regardless of how much they use, as there are no meters or readings for water consumption. For electricity, people pay R5,50 per unit, which is well above the normal Eskom range of about R2.01 to R2.76 per unit. His justification for charging the community more than

Eskom, he says, is to offset the cost to Eskom of the transformers. The communities still use a communal toilet system and have no access to municipal services.

Scant health services

Despite the remarkable achievements of our public health system over the past 29 years - including the introduction of primary health care in rural and township areas and the treatment of HIV - the reality is that many people on this farm still do not have access to quality health services. They still rely on an unstaffed clinic where a professional nurse only visits twice a month. In the meeting that the SACP convened with the community on 26 August, it was reported that the last time the professional nurse was available was two months earlier.

What is to be done?

The SACP will ensure that we bring together the various government stakeholders to fulfil the various constitutional obligations that would go a long way in providing not only security of tenure but an overall improvement in the quality of life for the farm dwellers through the provision of housing, municipal services and economic opportunities in agriculture and mining through cooperatives.

We have urged the local Siyancuma municipality to forge a partnership with the farmer in the interim to ensure that basic services are provided to the farming community through the community support plans.

The SACP will also engage with the Department of Labour and Employment on the reasons for the lower rate of inspections under the Health and Safety at Work Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the National Minimum Wage Act at both the Salt Lake mine and the Pikwane diamond mine. We will work with the NUM to ensure that the workers are organised under their union. The Department of Health should ensure that quality health services are provided to the people of Salt Lake.

The Party branch will work with the community and all spheres of government to improve the living conditions of the rural forces for change in Salt Lake. ★

Cde Ntamehlo is the SACP District Secretary of the Joe Slovo District and former Provincial Chairperson of the YCLSA



NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE

Forward to health coverage for all!

The proposed NHI Bill and its implementation are crucial steps towards ensuring universal healthcare for all South Africans and an end to the current system that entrenches health inequality

What is NHI?

- The South African Government has proposed a Bill on National Health Insurance (NHI) that will provide good healthcare for all citizens.

- The NHI Fund will be established by law to ensure that access to healthcare is free.

- Medical aid will only cover extras beyond the health services covered by the NHI Fund.

- NHI will be financed through the principle of social solidarity, with the wealthy contributing more to healthcare for all.

- The NHI aims to unify the health system by prioritising the well-being of all South Africans and directing resources towards the development of more primary health care.

- Implementation will take place over a number of years, with the aim of achieving

healthcare coverage for everyone.

What is wrong with the current healthcare system?

There are many problems with the current healthcare system in both the public and private sectors. But many of these problems lie in our two-tier or unequal healthcare system, in which

- The majority of the country's health funding (51%) is in the hands of the profitable and expensive private health sector, which benefits a minority (16% of the population). Even for those who have 'medical aid', costs continue to rise, forcing patients to pay for health care out of their own pockets. This is not sustainable.

- The majority of our people (84%) rely on an underfunded and under-resourced public health sector.

It is therefore not surprising that our



The all-too-familiar scene of long queues and overcrowding at a public hospital in Tembisa

country's health outcomes reflect this reality - if you are rich or well off, you are more likely to live a longer and healthier life than if you are poor. The burden of disease remains high, with the working class and poor majorities suffering the most.

Above all, the causes of health inequalities in our country are rooted in the existing capitalist-dominated economic system, with its extreme income and wealth inequality leading to poverty, which puts profits before people.

The SACP says our people deserve better!

- Our country must move towards a health care system that is not based on people's ability to pay but on the needs of our people.

- We should unify our health system so that it prioritises the well-being of all South Africans, not a minority. This means spending money on doctors, nurses, dentists and other health professionals who serve people and improve their lives.

- We need to use the country's resources to invest more in the development of primary health care, including

health facilities (clinics and hospitals) and community health workers, and not waste billions of rands a year on profiteering, huge compensation packages for private health company bosses, outrageous administrative costs for private medical schemes and corruption.

Why National Health Insurance?

We need NHI as a sustainable solution to the current two-tier health system and its associated problems. It is not a question of "tackling the public health problem first and the private health sector later" but of dealing with problems that affect the entire health system.

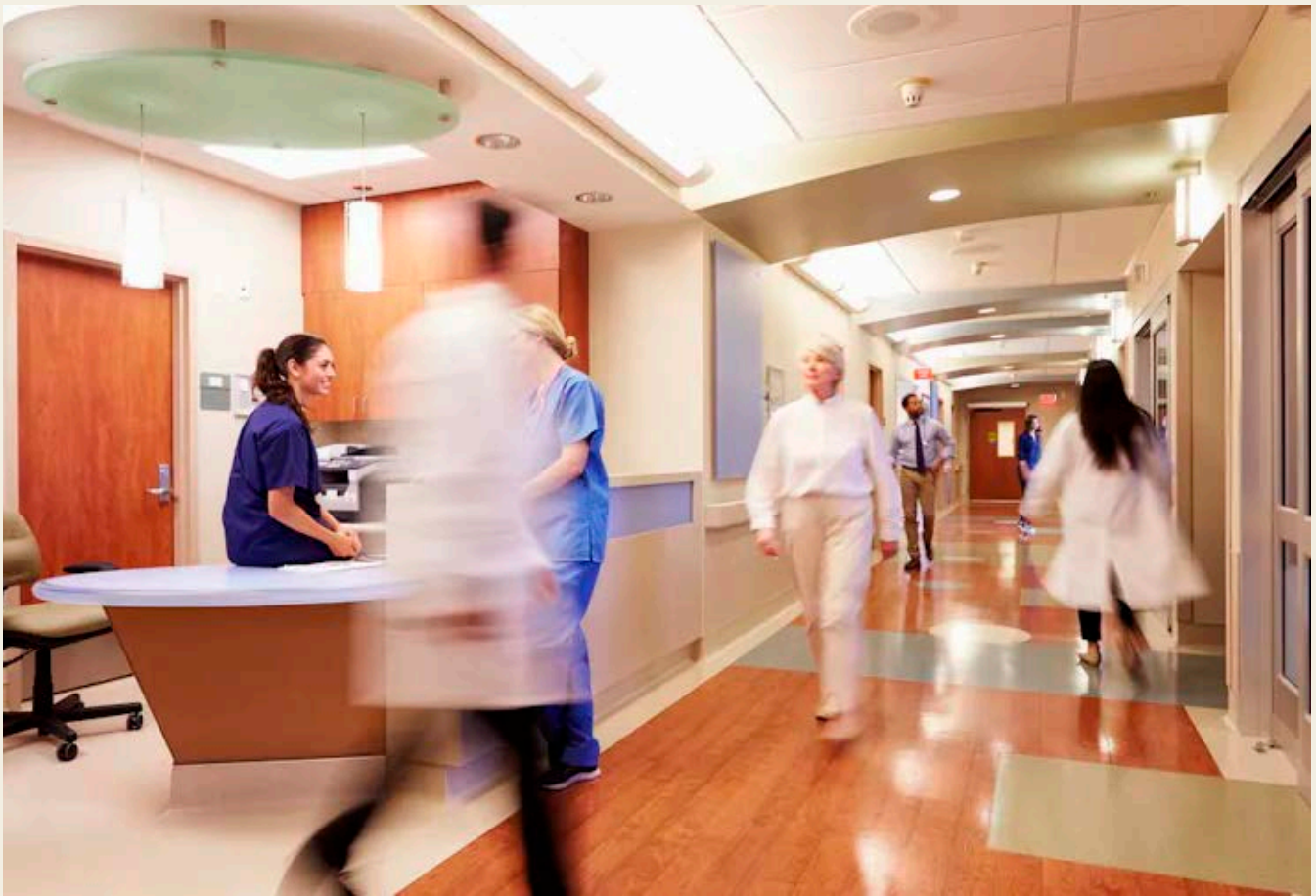
This is why we support the NHI Bill now before Parliament.

Through NHI, we want to change how we fund health care so that the majority of health care resources (including doctors and facilities) are used to improve the health of everyone, not just a minority. This will ultimately end the huge inequalities in health care and create a single and universal health care system.

What guides our support for NHI?

We support the NHI Bill because it is based on the core progressive principles

We want to change how we fund health care so the majority of health care resources are used to improve the health of everyone, not just a minority



Another world – private health care provides quality services for the few, not the many

The proposed NHI fund must be protected from abuse and corruption and ensure that there is no room for looters of public resources

of:

- Treating health care as a constitutional right, not a commodity - meaning that access to health care services cannot depend on whether or not you have money to “buy” them;

- The universality of health care - meaning that health services will be comprehensive and universally available to all people, with primary health care as a solid foundation;

- Social solidarity, which requires the rich or well-off to contribute more to funding NHI through progressive taxes; and

- A single and publicly administered NHI fund - established by law and accountable to the people, not outsourced to profiteers.

These core principles of NHI are also one of the main reasons why we do not support the proposals to entrench the dominance of medical schemes in our healthcare system. Their role feeds into a profit-driven healthcare system and the privatisation of healthcare. The NHI Bill does not support such proposals and makes it clear that medical schemes should play a lesser role in our lives and should not be allowed to provide servic-

es covered by NHI.

Strengthen, not weaken, the public health sector!

The public sector (not the private sector) should be the backbone of the NHI. But it will be a public health sector with more resources - well-funded and with enough doctors, nurses, community health workers and health facilities (clinics and hospitals).

This is why we say down with budget cuts targeting the working class and the poor! Down with austerity!

We also say that the proposed NHI fund must be protected from abuse and corruption and ensure that there is no room for looters of public resources. This includes the need to strengthen accountability and improve transparency in the operation of the NHI Fund, particularly and ensure appropriate persons are employed in its governance and management structures. These looters of public resources include those who are calling for the outsourcing of the management of the NHI Fund to private companies in the name of ‘social pacts’ and ‘economic empowerment’. Parliament must reject such proposals.

To those who ask “Where will the



Photo: Masixole Feni, GroundUp

The queue at Town Two public clinic in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, starts at 4am.

money come from to fund NHI?” and who then go on to say “NHI is not affordable”, we say this:

- South Africa can and should afford NHI, and its implementation can be phased in over a number of years as has been done in other countries;

- Studies show that NHI will cost South Africans less than we currently spend as a country. Our country (not just the government) spends about 8.5% of its gross domestic product on health, which is currently close to R600 billion. Compared to other countries, this is a lot of money and more than enough to provide good health care for everyone. The problem is that, as we have said, these resources are not equitably distributed, and they are highly fragmented and wasted, making today's funding of health care unsustainable. Through NHI, we seek to pool them into a single NHI fund that will have the professional capacity to redistribute health resources equitably and to benefit all people at a reasonable cost;

- Contrary to our detractors and the propaganda in the mainstream media, the NHI Bill clearly sets out where the sources of funding for NHI will come

from. This includes the introduction of new progressive taxes, and it is more likely that those who pay for medical assistance (a ‘stealth tax’) will pay less under NHI than they currently pay for medical assistance.

The SACP says hands off NHI!

Over the past 15 years, those forces that want to profit from the health needs of South Africans have been campaigning to undermine the introduction of NHI. These include certain companies in the private healthcare industry, including ones in the medical insurance sector.

Many of the proposals they have submitted to Parliament on the NHI Bill seek to maintain and expand the current unequal system.

To date, the anti-NHI forces have not been able to come up with a credible and detailed proposal on how we, as South Africans, should work towards ending health inequalities and providing good and universal health care for all South Africans! Together we must defeat them. NHI will happen whether they like it or not. ★

People before profits!

Forward with the implementation of NHI!

Down with healthcare budget cuts!

Anti-NHI forces are unable to say how to work towards ending health inequalities and providing good and universal health care for all South Africans!

ELECTIONS 2024

Reconfiguring the Alliance – a structural perspective

Reneva Fourie looks at the options facing the the Progressive Youth Alliance's SRC ballot performance and the 2024 elections



The 15th Congress of the SACP clearly directed our approach to the 2024 general elections. This approach comprises two options. The first option is that the SACP contests as part of a reconfigured Alliance, and the second is that we contest as part of a broad left front. After extensive deliberations and consultations throughout the organisation, contesting as part of a reconfigured Alliance emerged as the preferred option at the Augmented Central Committee meeting at the end of last year. An option that has not been discussed as extensively is offered here.

This article recognises the need to continue to build a broad left front. However, it argues that another version of a reconfigured Alliance be considered, namely a fundamental change in structure. Thus, while the conditions for the reconfiguration of the Alliance remain valid, the structure of a reconfigured Alliance should not be restricted.

The objectives and history of the Alliance are well documented. It is this joint commitment to fighting for a united, non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous, democratic South Africa that underpins its current structure. The structure of the Alliance includes dual membership, formalised platforms of consultation, presence in key decision-making fora, and contesting under one banner, that of the ANC. A structure yet to be explored is the retention of all existing platforms, except that the SACP contests as part of a formal coalition with the ANC.

Accordingly, while the strategic need for the Alliance is affirmed, a motivation for a tactical but fundamental structural shift in the configuration of the Alliance



Ringing the changes – new strategies needed to boost the national democratic revolution

is presented for consideration as we prepare for participation in the 2024 general election.

Why keep the Alliance?

All arguments justifying contesting as part of a reconfigured Alliance remain valid. Moreover, many of the challenges within the ANC are a consequence of the material conditions that it finds itself in; and, frankly, will apply to any governing political party.

One fundamental problem facing the ANC is discipline within its ranks. While the ANC has made significant efforts to address its internal challenges of cor-

ruption, ill-discipline and careerism, the impact has been minuscule. When the ANC was in exile, it could screen its members and enforce discipline due to the dangerous conditions under which it operated. Post-1990, its unbanning and status as a liberation movement saw tens of thousands flooding into the organisation and millions voting for it.

Once it got into power, many members saw the ANC as a platform to advance their careers or business interests. Decades of inability to contain these foreign tendencies have left the ANC with its current malaise.

A second fundamental problem is

its policy trajectory. The SACP has consistently recognised that ‘the ANC is contested terrain’, given its multiclass character. However, conditions have now heightened the contestation. Not only have the calibre and interests of the members of the ANC changed from the times when the Alliance was first formed. But also, the international socio-politico-economic environment has changed significantly.

After the USSR and Eastern Europe collapsed, neo-liberalism entrenched itself globally, including in South Africa. International and domestic capital have placed tremendous pressure on the ANC, from within and outside, as a governing party, to conform to its policy stances. The preceding decade or so of gross public mismanagement, exacerbated more recently by the Covid-19 pandemic, has significantly strained our economy. While new developments towards creating a more multipolar world order are underway, the continued dire economic situation makes the governing party vulnerable to IMF and World Bank manipulation, negating the SACP’s practical and much-needed policy solutions.

Thirdly, the programme that led to the establishment of the Alliance, namely the creation of a national democratic society, is far from complete. Racism and tribalism still prevail. Accordingly, much must be done to build national unity and social cohesion. Gender parity is still a distant reality. And poverty, unemployment and inequality are rampant. Key to a socialist revolution is addressing the current contradictions that continue to besiege our country. As we prioritise the second, more radical phase of our revolution, we have an obligation to drive the creation of a national democratic society to its logical conclusion, and the ANC shares this objective. Our objective as the SACP goes beyond. However, our premise remains that the national democratic revolution is the most direct route to socialism.

The fourth and most fundamental reason for retaining the Alliance (but with an adapted structure) is that reactionary global players will be most pleased to see our progressive movement removed from government. A myriad of activities are underway to drive our exit out of power. Agent provocateurs are sophisticatedly high-jacking selective, legitimate protests to create destabilisation. Generally, the same funders are establishing multiple opposition parties to weaken our electoral support as a liberation

movement.

Critical network infrastructure is being rendered unworkable. Crime appears to be out of control. The media is daily highlighting the flaws of the democratic government and downplaying its achievements. Our opposition is consolidating its international networks in anticipation of taking over the country. In short, the environment that we find ourselves in is extremely hostile, requiring us to be more united than ever.

Adapting the Alliance to better advance the NDR

The exact reasons why we need to retain the Alliance and maximise unity apply to why the structure of the Alliance needs to change.

Given South African society’s vast economic and developmental challenges, and the continued prevalence of the apartheid colonial vestiges of racism, tribalism, and sexism, we need a multi-class organisation like the ANC. And, as far as the ANC (at least at a national level) is willing to accept, we need to retain a presence within the ANC to drive our historical mission. This is best achieved by retaining the unifying factors, namely dual membership, formally structured engagement platforms and participation in joint decision-making structures.

But given that the objective and subjective material conditions have changed significantly post-1994 and the dire state of the working class and poor, we must also drive a socialist agenda outside of the ANC more openly. This can most effectively be achieved by having a campaigning party rooted in communities with a demonstrable electoral support base. As the SACP, having an electoral support base will also make us better placed to hold the government accountable. Additionally, by contesting, our content-based conditions for a reconfigured Alliance will have a more decisive impetus. Under the current conditions, a strong SACP with a solid electoral support base is the best way to build a strong ANC.

Furthermore, though the ANC is gaining ground, there are projections that the ANC will obtain less than 50 per cent in the 2024 general election. This is not only due to our governance failures as a movement but also due to intensified, deliberate interventions to weaken the movement by forces that want to see us out of power. One way of countering this offensive is for the SACP to contest in the 2024 election as part of a reconfig-

ured Alliance, which has adapted structurally to a coalition of a special type.

The voting choices of SACP, Cosatu, Sanco and ANC members, and the percentage of votes that the SACP obtains, become irrelevant. Because we will be in a formal coalition, our members will be free to vote as they wish for as long as we collectively get above 50 per cent. Our goal, however, should be to get above 60 per cent as a movement to ensure that our policy choices are hegemonic. This option presents the least risk of the current choices before us.

It must be noted, though, that adapting the Alliance structure has more to do with reorganising ourselves to better advance the national democratic revolution in a post-1994 environment than the elections. It’s a historical imperative – the structure of the Alliance cannot be stagnant when the conditions we are operating in have changed so dramatically.

Furthermore, there is no contradiction between participating in the elections as part of a structurally reconfigured Alliance and building a left popular front. The energies around the 20 August 2023 anniversary of the United Democratic Front have garnered the participation of many currently disillusioned progressives and historically progressive organisations. Furthermore, several left formations outside the former ‘Congress’ structures would be willing to coalesce around a joint programme to advance the interests of the workers and the poor and relevant community issues. Accordingly, we should continue to build relationships with these entities.

Adapt or maybe become obsolete

Our approach to the 2024 general elections currently rests on two options: contest as part of a reconfigured Alliance or contest as part of a broad left front. The first option, however, is limited as it presents a reconfiguration based primarily on content and not fundamentally in terms of structure. The current structure of the Alliance has yet to adapt to post-1994 conditions. An appropriate adaptation would be a third option worthy of consideration: namely contesting as part of a structurally reconfigured Alliance. In other words, the SACP should contest in its name as part of a formal coalition with the ANC. The status quo will render every Alliance partner obsolete. ★

Cde Fourie is a member of the SACP Central Committee and Politburo

ELECTIONS 2024

The wheel must turn – organise differently for the battles ahead

Precious Banda reflects on the the Progressive Youth Alliance's SRC ballot performance and the 2024 elections



In 2015, when the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA), led by the South African Student Congress (Sasco), lost the elections to the Student Representative Council on most campuses, as it did again this September, China Dodovu, a former student leader of previous generations, wrote an article entitled “Sasco is limping”. In it, he listed many reasons why the student movement was faltering. Although I disagreed with most of his sentiments and generous insinuations, I admired his articulation of Sasco’s history from its founding congress and how he felt the organisation had developed up to that point.

The main criticism I took away from his article was how the internal leadership struggles and inward-looking factionalism continue to weaken the student movement’s fighting capacity and take away its credibility as an agent of change in the hands of ordinary students from poor families.

Our progressive youth organisations need to share their reflections on the losses on campuses so far and adopt an extensive programme to reposition the student movement. In 2015, the immediate threat to our hegemony was partly because of the emergence of sporadic movements and the rise of fallism.

All these organisations basked in their newness and captured the imagination of students. They also championed sectoral issues that were relevant to students.

By acknowledging these concrete conditions, the student movement reaffirmed its strength, which lies in organisation and a strategic perspective on



Progressive youth organisations must do more to leverage the youth vote come 2024

change, and we managed to regain lost ground.

Today, the movement has to admit that the dynamics of higher education have changed significantly, with some of the new antagonistic actors now established. This calls for urgent interventions that respond to the new balance of forces in higher education. We can no longer use the same strategy and tactics under these new conditions. New conditions are an opportunity for new approaches.

The conversation about how we regain lost ground must be centred on the

**We can no longer
use the same
strategy and tactics**

renewal and repositioning of the movement and its structures.

It is only healthy organisations with the best organisational systems, machinery and re - design that can remain necessary and relevant to students. I am of the view that the renewal agenda must be the basis of all the reflections we make on these losses we are suffering now.

According to Pee and Vululleh in their article “Role of Universities in Transforming Society: Challenges and Practices,” higher education is a determinant of income and one of the most important investments a country should make in its citizens because it provides a workforce with professional, technical and managerial skills - creating attitudes and changes necessary for the socialisation, modernisation and overall transformation of soci-



PYA on the march for free quality education for the working class, the oppressed and the poor. Archive photo

eties. This also confirms why higher education institutions are a site of struggle for the movement.

Moreover, institutions of higher learning remain a microcosm of society. I have understood this as one of the many reasons why our losses on campuses are also attributed to our foreseeable decline or loss of support as an ANC-led Alliance. This is also interpreted as our failure to leverage the youth vote. This is true to a particular extent. That's why these losses are a cause of concern for all of us.

The ANC-led Alliance has a chance to learn from the losses of the Sasco-led PYA. This may be done by reconnecting the people to the vision of the movement post-1994. The movement must continue to set the agenda.

We must use new, exciting, targeted platforms to reach out to young people and still get to the rural areas, townships, farms, informal settlements and suburbs through means that respond to the demographics. The upcoming national elections will be difficult, and that's why we must organise differently this time. We can't run election campaigns the same way we have been doing while our support base continues to reduce.

The backbone of this election cam-



One way to reach out to the youth is encourage them to register to vote for the 2024 elections

paign will be sectoral work, which should be strengthened by reviving organs of people's power.

These organs of people's power will be coordinated by living branches of the Alliance. After the symbolic rallies the ANC is doing on the 2019 Elections Manifesto Reviews, we need to take the reviews to communities where discussions take place. In initiation schools,

taverns, clubs, royal assemblies, gyms, homes, churches, workplaces, schools, and everywhere, we need the manifesto review to continue so that we reconcile with people where we have failed.

As we prepare the ground for battles ahead, the Alliance structures working firmly in branches can be our other solution for not preparing for a coalition government. Living activist Alliance branches not reduced to messages of support alone will be our turning point in oiling the electoral work ahead. Alliance relations are better nationally but worsen as we go to lower structures. This must be urgently addressed.

What stands between the ANC-led Alliance and its majority victory come national elections next year is what we decide to do between now and the elections. How we organise will determine our fate. The ball is in our hands! ★

Cde Banda (aka 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

UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT

UDF: A Popular Front in motion

Yunus Carrim traces the development of the UDF and asks what lessons we can learn from it as we work to build a Left Popular Front today



The late 1960s emergence of the Black Consciousness movement, the 1969 Durban dockworkers' strike, 1971 revival of the NIC (Natal Indian Congress), 1973 Durban strikes and 1976 student uprising opened up space for the revival of mass politics.

In several parts of the country, progressive civic and community organisations began to spring up from the late 1970s, often focusing on local "bread and butter" issues like rents, municipal services, clinics and the like. Trade unions grew dramatically in number, strength and frequency of strikes and other activities. The students' movement waged relentless struggles both at universities and in high schools.

Many of these organisations linked their local and sectoral interests with the demand for a non-racial democracy. As the resistance to apartheid grew, the regime offered a sham Tricameral Parliament in which 'Coloureds' and Indians could vote for their 'own' respective chambers subordinate to the whites' National Assembly, and Africans would be excluded altogether (and would vote in their respective Bantustans). As the mass campaign against this grew, there came a call from various quarters, mainly linked to the ANC, for a broad united front to oppose the Tricameral Parliament elections and to fight for a non-racial democracy. Among them was Allan Boesak who publicly raised the need for such a front at the 1983 Transvaal Anti-South African Indian Council Committee Conference.

On 20 August 1983, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched in Mitchells Plain in Cape Town at a confer-



Zindzi Mandela, daughter of Nelson Mandela, at the UDF rally at Jabulani stadium, Soweto, 10 February 1985, where she read her father's defiant message to the apartheid regime: "I am not prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free!"

ence attended by about 575 organisations and a mass rally of over 10,000 people from different parts of the country.

The UDF waged a slick, massive, innovative anti-tricameral elections campaign in 1984. It was a huge success with very low percentage turnouts among 'Coloureds' and Indians.

This was followed by the highly successful campaign to boycott elections to the toothless local government councils in the African townships.

The UDF drew political, religious, welfare, educational, cultural, professional, trade union, business, residents, community, non-governmental, sports and other organisations. People from every walk of life and across racial, religious, ethnic and class divides. Although the UDF supported the Freedom Charter and the leadership was linked to the ANC,

any organisation could join it as long as it was committed to a non-racial democracy. It was organised around the slogan "UDF Unites, Apartheid Divides".

Although key activists within the UDF, particularly from the younger generation, were Marxists, most linked to the SACP, and there was an emphasis on the important role of the working class and the trade union movement, this was eclipsed by the focus on the need for the maximum unity of all classes and strata in the struggle against apartheid.

THE UDF's great strength was its ability to provide broad national cohesion to a remarkably wide range of organisations and foster non-racialism. It let these organisations retain their identities and work within a broad framework without being unduly prescriptive.

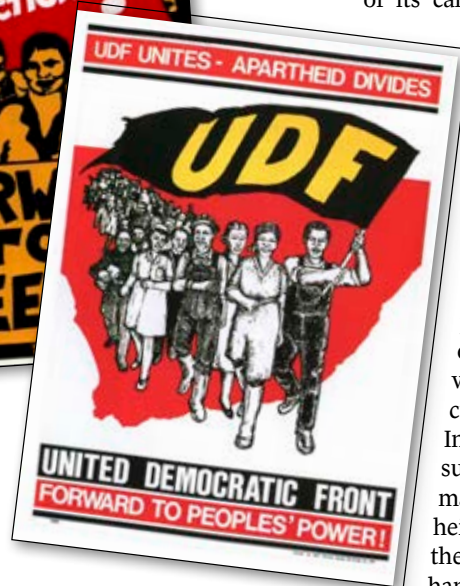
While the UDF was firm in principle

and clear on an overall strategy, it was flexible in tactics. And it recognised the need for different approaches and tactics to be used in different conditions in different parts of the country and among different communities. For example, the increasing radicalism in African communities, especially among the youth, meant a different approach from that which had to be taken in the more conservative Indian, 'Coloured' and White communities.

Among the Indian and 'Coloured' communities, it was emphasised more that if ordinary people, not just the elites, were to be mobilised, the focus should be on 'bread and butter' issues that affected them immediately – rents, water, electricity, rates, housing and other issues. These issues were in themselves necessary to mobilise around, but they also served to make these communities aware that to effectively meet their needs, they needed to be able to elect their own councillors who would have the same power as White councillors. This meant non-racial democratic local government – which meant democracy in the country as a whole.

The UDF's strength was its ability to find the balance for the times between national cohesion and sub-national diversities. These balances had to be struck in myriad ways, for example, between national decisions and provincial and local choices; between the important role of all classes and strata and the weight of the working class; between non-racialism and the racial dimensions in conditions and consciousness of different communities; between the concerns of people in general and the specific needs and interests of women; between the imperatives of the struggle as a whole and that of urban and rural communities specifically; between being broadly part of the ANC tradition and also having a certain independence. The specific answers to these challenges at different times and in different circumstances were sometimes wrong; but overall, the UDF managed these challenges very innovatively and well.

Initially, Cosatu, formed in 1985, remained aloof from the UDF, mainly because its affiliates wanted to build their shopfloor strength more; were wary of its too broad nature and its politics; wanted to avoid greater state harassment; and its members had different political identi-



ties or were not politically aligned.

But some of its affiliates did work closely with UDF structures, especially in certain localities. And even nationally, they drew on organisations in the UDF for community support of strikes, for example the consumer boycotts of Fatti's and Moni's, Simba, OK Bazaars and other retail stores.

Other trade union federations, such as the South African Allied Workers' Union and individual unions, joined the UDF.

A huge debate raged between 'workerists' and 'populists' about how the working class should relate with multi-class political structures, like the UDF. Crudely put, 'workerists' were deeply suspicious of any alliances with such structures, believing that this would distract the working class from socialism. They stressed the importance of workplace struggles and were accused of being syndicalist or economic.

Populists felt that given racial oppression and other conditions in South Africa, the working class had to work with other oppressed and exploited classes and strata and wage a national democratic struggle that, with the overthrow of apartheid, would also advance the conditions for socialism for those pursuing this goal. They were accused of being naïve and simplistic and not taking into account the failures of national liberation movements to meet the needs of the working class in post-colonial societies.

Of course, there were different strands in each approach; this is an oversimplified description of their differing overall

perspectives.

The UDF had many challenges. Some of its campaigns were successful, others not. In 1986 a state of emergency was imposed, and thousands detained. This hobbled the UDF – but its activities continued episodically.

The UDF also had to deal with infighting, the fall-out of some of its affiliate members coercing people to support consumer boycotts and other campaigns; 'necklacing'; violence between comrades; accusations in the then Natal of Indian domination and other issues – but for all that it played a major role in overthrowing apartheid and creating the space for the ANC to win the 1994 elections handsomely.

As the UDF's 40th anniversary on 20 August this year drew closer, it was decided by its former leadership to celebrate its role. Various social media chat groups sprouted in support of this. There seemed to be at least three strands of thinking in these chat groups: to celebrate the UDF's achievements and convey some lessons to the ANC-led Alliance relevant to our current challenges, or to form a mass democratic movement-type civil society structure, or to look into the possibility of forming a political party based on the Freedom Charter and the Constitution. It's the first approach that prevailed.

The UDF was, of course, a Broad Popular Front. The SACP seeks to establish a Left Popular Front oriented towards the needs and interests primarily of the working class and its allies in a very different context. But there needs to be more clarity on what precisely we mean by this and how we intend to implement it. (See, for example, Jeremy Cronin's excellent *The SACP and a left popular front – A brief history of fronts and alliances*, Umsebenzi, September 2023)

But we could do well to look more carefully at the UDF's role and significance to see what lessons we can draw from this for a left popular front in the current context. To move forward effectively, especially in times of crisis, we also have to look at the past more keenly ★.

Cde Carrim is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member and ANC MP

RUGBY WORLD CUP

Springboks' joy can empower our working-class communities

Create a progressive sports movement to translate the brilliant success of our four-times world champions into concrete benefits, writes Palesa Motshoene



It was 28 years ago, following the Springboks' 1995 Rugby World Cup victory, that Nelson Mandela said, "Sport has the power to change the world; it has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite like little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there only was despair."

South Africa has since won two more championships - in 2007 and 2019 - and will look to defend its crown after reaching the quarter-finals of the 2023 Rugby World Cup, where they will face hosts France.

Past Rugby World Cup victories and South Africa's participation have had a huge impact on the country's working-class neighbourhoods. Rugby has a significant cultural impact in South Africa that goes far beyond the sport itself.

Rugby has always had the power to bring together South Africans from different backgrounds. When the national team, the Springboks, participate and succeed in international tournaments such as the Rugby World Cup, it fosters a sense of national pride and unity.

This unity can cross socio-economic lines, bringing working-class communities closer to other sections of society. For many working-class people, rugby provides a sense of belonging and identity. Thus, when the Springboks win, it serves as a source of pride and identity for indi-



Role model for a new generation –Springboks' Captain Siya Kolisi

viduals who may have limited economic opportunities.

The appointment of Siya Kolisi as captain has inspired young people to have someone who looks like them to identify with and look up to. The success of the Springboks has inspired young athletes

from working-class communities to play rugby.

But the huge inequality in terms of lack of infrastructure, coaching staff and access to the sport has been a barrier to children from these working-class communities not having access to these op-

portunities. The likes of Kolisi and other black and coloured players in the national colours provide these young people with visible role models who have risen from similar backgrounds to achieve international acclaim. This can encourage young people to engage in healthy activities and strive for excellence.

South Africa's consistent performance should augur well for an increase in its world ranking, but most importantly, funding to build and improve facilities in rural and township schools and to provide access to the sport for children from working-class communities.

The attention that the sport receives as a result of the success of the national team should contribute to increased investment in sports facilities and infrastructure in working-class areas. This can lead to greater access to sports facilities and coaching, which can help develop talent at a grassroots level.

The success of the Springboks can also be a platform for social change and awareness. It draws attention to important social issues in South Africa, such as racial reconciliation and inclusivity, as rugby has a complex history linked to apartheid.

It is important to note that the impact of the Springbok's success on working-class communities can be mixed. While it can inspire and unite, it also highlights inequalities in resources and access to sporting development. South Africans benefit from what can be described as 'spontaneous sporting unity'.

A temporary unity of cooperation that allows allies to be dropped after short-term objectives have been met. This kind of unity is not sustainable because when the tournament is over, the racial and economic inequalities facing working-class communities return to their default settings.

Sadly, outside of government, there is no sporting group that champions the sporting organisations and institutions of the underprivileged and disenfranchised.

While middle and high fee-paying schools offer students a variety of sporting activities, school sports are either non-existent or extremely limited in the

townships, historically segregated black working-class communities.

This means that black students would have to attend a Model C or private school in order to access and succeed in sports. Efforts should be made to ensure that the benefits of the Springbok's success are shared equitably, including increased investment in grassroots development and community sports programmes.

Overall, South Africa's participation and victories in the Rugby World Cup have the potential to uplift and empower working-class communities, both socially and economically, while serving as a symbol of national pride and unity.

This can only be achieved if sporting organisations join social movements that actively minimise the benefits of excessive wealth and the 'win at all costs' mentality. This is nothing less than a call for a new, forward-looking sports movement that promotes social justice, equality and peace. ★

Springboks' success inspires working-class youth to play rugby

Cde Motshoene is a former publications manager at the YCLSA and an MCom candidate in business management at the University of Johannesburg

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BRICS

A challenge to US hegemony?

The ideological diversity of BRICS+6 represents a challenge but also a potential asset, argues Jeremy Cronin



The BRICS 15th summit meeting held in Johannesburg in late August admitted six new members, Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. They are now set to join Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The six were chosen from a list of 22 that had formally applied, with as many as 40 countries reportedly expressing an interest in membership. The statement from the BRICS summit indicated further admissions will be considered in the near future. What significance should be read into these developments?

In some quarters, there has been exaggerated hype about BRICS+6 as a new anti-imperialist front. While, in varying degrees, some of the existing and new members have an anti-imperialist stance, this is not remotely the case with others like Egypt, Saudi Arabia or the UAE. BRICS+6 is clearly a disparate group both economically and politically. Moreover, some of its members are involved in relatively serious regional tensions (India and China, Ethiopia and Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia). But with 37 per cent of the global economy and 46 per cent of the world's population, and with a now considerably enhanced presence in the Middle East, a region historically dominated by the US, the significance of BRICS+6 cannot be ignored.

All of this occurs in the context of a changing global conjuncture. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who attended the BRICS summit, recently observed that "the post-Cold War period is over. A transition is underway to a new global order." BRICS+6 needs to be seen as one attempt to influence the

shape of that emerging order. Less than three weeks after the BRICS summit, US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, echoed Guterres ("a new era is ending, a new one is beginning") but, as can be expected, there was a bellicose twist to Blinken's observation. He frankly expressed what has been apparent for some time. Facing challenges to post-1990 US unilateral hegemony, Washington is determined to lead the world "from a position of strength", Blinken said, effectively into a new Cold War in which Russia is cast as the "most immediate threat", with China "posing the biggest long-term challenge."

BRICS expansion is both a response to these shifting tectonic plates and a symptom of the complex and thoroughly uneven nature of the process underway. The 2008 Great Recession with its epicentre in the US, persisting secular stagnation throughout the advanced capitalist world, the failing or, at the very least, the stale-mated Nato proxy war in Ukraine, US attempts to reverse hyper-globalisation through re-shoring and near-shoring manufacturing capacity, and the deepening social, economic and environmental crisis not least through much of the global South, all of these are indicators of the crisis of the US-led, World Bank, IMF and Nato-enforced unipolar global dominance that has prevailed for some three decades.

BRICS offers the potential of bypassing

BRICS offers the potential of bypassing harsh, unilateral imperialist sanctions

harsh, unilateral imperialist sanctions.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the expansion of membership is the obvious strategic intent to consolidate energy security for both producers and consumers in the face of the US-dominated petrodollar empire. New members Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE are key members of OPEC, responsible for over half of its output. Harsh sanctions and the unilateral freezing (in effect imperialist pillaging) of Iranian, Venezuelan and now Russian foreign currency reserves (to the tune of \$300 billion in the case of Russia), will not have gone unnoticed by other oil and natural gas producing countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE with large foreign exchange currency reserves held in Western banks. The Saudis are reported to be considering accepting the Chinese yuan.

The sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 natural gas pipelines, forcing the US's own western European allies into reliance on more expensive US-supplied gas, underlines the importance of energy supply lines. Here the strategic location of some of the new BRICS members at key maritime chokepoints should be noted - Egypt (the Suez Canal), Saudi Arabia (the Red Sea Basin), Ethiopia (close to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait), and Iran (with its direct access to the Hormuz strait).

For countries subjected to harsh, unilateral imperialist sanctions (notably Iran, Russia and China), BRICS offers the potential of further bypassing these. But, indeed, for all participants, BRICS membership in particular, is seen as a means to alter global trade networks.

Bilateral trade among BRICS countries has grown significantly in recent



The Big Five – BRICS leaders at the 15th Summit

years. Notable in this regard has been the soaring Brazil and China trade, while Russian exports to India tripled from April to December 2022 year-on-year. Trade between Russia and China jumped from \$147 billion in 2021 to \$190 billion in 2022. This growing intra-BRICS trading offers other important possibilities. Within the BRICS+6 grouping bilateral trade in local currencies is being actively promoted. Brazil and China have recently entered a local currency trade arrangement, as have India and the UAE. The relative currency values are fixed by agreement among the partners, and the dollar is no longer needed either as a unit of account or as a medium of circulation. This is particularly important for countries with a dollar shortage.

However, as economist Prabhat Patnaik has noted, while bilateral or even multi-lateral trading through local currencies will contribute to some de-dollarisation of global trade and increase the stock of liquidity in the global economy, it will not automatically overcome the problem of external debt arising between the countries involved. Going forward, from a developmental perspective, this will be one of the major challenges for BRICS if its stated commitment to contributing to a more just multilateral world order is to be achieved. The balance of bilateral trade between a likely large creditor (China, for instance) and a weaker debtor (South Africa, say),

even if the trade is in yuan and rands, will result in a growing external debt for the deficit country with further underdevelopment. To counter this trajectory, the surplus country will need to significantly ramp up its purchase of goods and services from the deficit country. Put another way, this will require significant investment in the re-industrialisation of countries like Brazil, Argentina, Egypt and South Africa, and related infrastructure development and technology transfers.

It is here that the BRICS Bank (the New Development Bank) has a role to play. Dilma Rousseff, former Brazilian president and now director of the Bank, has emphasised that, while there is no intention to provide loans for debt settlement, there is to be a strong focus on expanding trade in local currencies and in infrastructure investment, not just to BRICS members but to the Global South in general.

The ideological diversity of BRICS members is an obvious challenge. It combines old enemies, progressives and some of the world's most reactionary regimes. The ability to act with relative strategic cohesiveness will remain a major challenge. Changes to national political parties in power are also likely to impact on the relative dynamism and coherence of the group. The election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2014) and the coup against President Dilma

Rousseff (2016) resulted in both India and Brazil becoming passive in their participation in BRICS. This was a setback, particularly in the case of Brazil, which had been a dynamic champion from the outset. The 2022 return of Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to the Brazilian presidency is, therefore, a positive development. But other uncertainties are looming in the immediate future, with an extreme right-winger, for instance, the reported front-runner for presidency in Argentina's 23 October elections.

If the ideological diversity of BRICS is a challenge, it is also, in some respects, a potential asset. It helps to undercut the strategic agenda of the Bidens and Blinkens who hope to reverse waning US unilateral domination by building a powerful US-led bloc encircling what they hope to be an increasingly isolated Russia and especially China. In this way, they seek to re-play the last Cold War. Like the broad refusal of the majority of the Global South to line up behind a Nato worldview on Ukraine, the Johannesburg BRICS summit at least demonstrated a politically diverse willingness not to be lined up in this way. ★

Cde Cronin is an SACP Central Committee member and former SACP Deputy General Secretary, a former government Deputy Minister and a former political prisoner. He is also a poet

BRICS

South Africa's strategic positioning and role in the global spectrum

Noma Gamede on the aftermath of the successful BRICS summit held in SA and the potential for boosting economic development



South Africa is emerging as a major force in the complex of global political dynamics. It had the rare opportunity to host one of the most important events affecting the global spectrum: the BRICS Summit. The build-up to the BRICS Summit was mired in controversy, particularly with threats of President Putin's arrest, to the point where there was apparent consideration of moving the Summit to one of the other BRICS member countries. As part of the pressure, there were even threats by the US to remove South Africa from the AGOA agreement amid accusations by its ambassador to South Africa.

Nevertheless, the last week of August was one for the history books. We should commend the South African government and the ANC, led by President Cyril Ramaphosa, for their sterling work in hosting the BRICS Summit, which was superbly attended and executed. Representatives from around the world pledged their support for the new powerhouse in town, and the key highlight of the summit was the addition of six new countries to the BRICS formation, with a GDP growth potential of 36%.

The growth and development of BRICS places the 'new East wing bloc' on the global spectrum. It is quite an interesting bloc from a geopolitical strategic standpoint, given the investment power that the countries derive from. Before delving into the paradigm shift that the



new BRICS formation may bring, mention should be made of the G20 Summit, which was held in New Delhi, India (also a member of BRICS), in September.

A crucial, key takeaway from this particular summit is the addition of the African Union, a formation of 55 member states with representation in one of the most powerful global political blocs. In this context, South Africa finds itself in a strategic mediating position. These global political developments not only place South Africa in a mediating role, but also have immense economic spillovers that could have medium to long-term benefits.

In the midst of these developments, a recurring theme is the fundamental strategic role played by President Ramaphosa in placing South Africa at the centre of

global politics. This represents potential investment and socio-economic benefits from the BRICS expansion alone, and could deliver a significant medium- to long-term economic turnaround for South Africa. It is a paradigm shift in changing the unipolarity of global power from one dominated by the US and the West.

It has positioned South Africa as a strategic centre in the geopolitical space and, if well managed, the rewards that could be reaped are immense. The potential for increased foreign direct investment on our shores would reinvigorate economic activity. Furthermore, from an investment perspective, South Africa could enter into trade agreements with the potential to upgrade skills and stimulate local economic development. However, it is one thing to forecast economic potential or benefits; from a real-time perspective, do these agreements deliver fundamental benefits to locals?

Tough questions will be asked of South Africa: have we benefited from BRICS? What can be accounted for in terms of investment and development for South Africa? Are they sustainable in terms of local economic development, or are they just there as peacemakers and mediators? For example, how do we deal with the impact of the Chinese textile industry on South Africa? The mushrooming of KFC and other American fast-food giants, for example, has almost suffocated local food companies.

South Africa has become an important political player in the global sphere, and multilateral platforms such as BRICS have a twofold effect. Either a country becomes a playground for exploitation or a powerhouse of industrialisation and development. Consequently, from the perspective of negotiations, especially those driven by the head of state, the expectation is that the socio-economic spillovers should be positive. To the extent that such engagements and sum-

mits are necessary for the country, for example, access to the Dubai market for South African companies should be facilitated in the coming years.

For any investment or investment coming into South Africa from, say, Saudi Arabia, the first point of entry or question should be, "How will this bring about reformed development for South Africans?" As it stands, strategic positioning in the global spectrum is necessary and good from an economic

potential point of view, but the socio-economic status of South Africa in real time remains dire. Development requires agile and bold steps that will transform the country's conditions. ★

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BRICS

South Africa must convert BRICS opportunities into rands

Gugu Ndima detects positive trends in South-South economic relations, but when will they translate into real change?



The need for strengthened South-South relations has become more urgent against the backdrop of recent destructive unilateral sanctions and long-standing anti-competitive trade practices. BRICS is a platform for cooperation and reconfigured international relations which propels a degree of levelling the playing field.

The focus is on pragmatic cooperation rather than binding commitments. Countries are less committed to forging hegemony and more concerned with diversifying exports towards value-added trade and accelerating growth and accruing value across the BRICS economies. These relations, transforming the face of economic power, are not fostered through imperialist impositions but a mutual agreement between states to reconfigure economic relations and geopolitics in the global arena. Global disruptions over the past decade have reinforced the need for regional supply chains and self-reliance.

The very ethos of BRICS is to open alternative channels of trade and to reduce and subsequently eliminate the heavy reliance on dollar markets. More importantly, this era requires new trade agreements, as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) standards are proving ineffec-

tive in this new economic dispensation. Increasing Membership interest asserts that BRICS is finally expanding its footprint as an influential economic body in the contemporary world, currently representing 41% of the world population.

With the possible expansion of BRICS and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, we could see greater economic stimulation through entrepreneurship and expanded trade relations for South African-based companies in new markets. However, the economic impact of these relations can only be fostered and made possible by the political tenacity of each state.

The greatest bone of contention raised by analysts and opinion makers has been South Africa's trade participation in the BRICS economies. Whilst SA's exports have shown an upward trajectory in 2022 to the BRICS economies by 7,1%, major economies in BRICS, accounted for about 21.3% of South Africa's total trade in 2022, with China having the lion's share of this at almost 68%. On an individual scale, trade agreements in the BRICS economies still favour other counterparts than South Africa. Brazil accounted for 0.4% of SA exports, Russia 0,2%, India was the second trading partner in the BRICS economies, was 4,3%, and lastly, China being the largest trading partner, accounted for 9,3% of SA's

exports to the world. All these countries have seen an increase in imports from South Africa.

A recent cartoon by Zapiro, though humorous, demonstrates the economic muscle of China and how it seized the benefits of the BRICS agreement by expanding exports in these economies. It has strategically centred itself as the key player in the manufacturing industry. South Africa is yet to find a niche in this alliance to drive growth internally and competitiveness externally.

We are still heavily dependent on the export of primary resources. As it stands, our export basket is largely made up of primary products from the mining sector and very little in the way of processed, finished products that drive industrialisation and value chain expansion. But therein lies the opportunity to rewrite the downward economic trajectory that currently characterises the SA economy. To its credit, the government has made efforts to raise awareness of the economic significance of the BRICS agreement. But beyond the PR and talking points, the essence of any trade agreement is to ensure that capital meets product, buyers meet sellers. ★

Cde Ndima is a SACP and ANC member and former spokesperson of the YCLSA

RED READS

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Jacana, 2021

Lodge provides a richly detailed history of the Party's vicissitudes and victories; individuals – their ideas, attitudes and activities – are sensitively located within their context; the text provides a fascinating sociology of the South African left over time.

KOLLONTAI 150

International Union of Left Publishers, 2022

As a communist leader, the first woman in the world to form part of a government since the creation of modern states, organizer of the Workers' Opposition within the Bolshevik party and theorist on love and sexual relations, Alexandra Kollontai is a complex figure. Her texts, especially those written during the early years of the Soviet revolution, provide vital keys to understanding the relationship between gender and class and open up horizons that remain accurate, advanced and radically revealing even today.

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CHE

LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2020

Twenty left publishers from around the world released a joint edition including two essential texts by Che Guevara to mark the fifty-third anniversary in 2020 of his assassination by the CIA in Bolivia. These texts, with insight from Aijaz Ahmad and María del Carmen Ariet García, provide us with a clear and resolute summation of Che's spirit of conviction, scientific insights, human compassion, and unrelenting will to achieve the victory of the oppressed over the oppressors.

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