



UMSEBENZI

ONLINE



COSATU

40 YEARS OF STRUGGLE

CONTENTS

Umsebenzi Online Volume 24, Number 8

EDITORIAL

1. Long live Cosatu!

POLITBURO

2. SACP Politburo statement on Gain COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY

3. Women's herstories: 40 women, 40 years of the federation

Thulile Kumalo

4. Organising the unorganised – a call to action on Cosatu's 40th anniversary to revive the spirit of the Freedom Charter

Aviwe Rapelang Mohapi

PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN

5. Mqhekezweni – the struggle for resilience and rebirth

Barry Mitchell

RED OCTOBER CAMPAIGN

6. NUM and SACP lead Western Cape's Red October Campaign with mass action

Lizwi Gegula

7. The Red Weekend

Lucian Davids

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

8. What is the NDR and how is it linked to socialism? For study and reflection

Buti Manamela

ART FOR LIBERATION

9. The Intersection of museums, monuments and politics

Ben Martins

PARTY BUILDING

10. Mobilising working-class power and popular democracy – the role and character of an SACP activist

Charley Nkadimeng

COMMUNITIES

11. Pseudo-communities and pseudo-leaders: A crisis of leadership

Monde Nqulwana

DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

12. Reversing our gains: private sector takeover of industrial output and the hollowing out of state capacity

Khaya Magaxa

DIGITAL MEDIA

13. What happens to our democratic societies when lies travel faster than the truth?

Sinoxolo Duma Mthombeni

PALESTINE

14. The effects of the Balfour Declaration continue to prevail

Reneva Fourie

NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT

15. Commodification of solidarity: a critique of the Non-aligned Movement and contemporary struggles

Hlengiwe Nkonyane and Pius Vilakati

CHINA-AFRICA

16. China-Africa commitments to global governance reform

Sithembiso Bhengu

HAMBA KAHLE SUNNY SINGH

17. Sunny Singh: Always, everywhere, anytime – SACP tribute to Sunny Singh

Yunus Carrim

18. Saluting Sunny Singh

Ronnie Kasrils

19. A tribute to Sunny Singh

Ivan Pillay

EDITORIAL

Long live Cosatu!

It began, as most revolutions do, in the shadows of factories, in the stench of hostels, in the bitter silence of mines, in the clenched fists of workers who had nothing but their labour and their resolve.

When Cosatu was born in December 1985, it did not simply announce a new trade union federation. It summoned the past and declared a future. It stood not only on the factory floor, but on a long and treacherous road paved by workers whose names history often forgets — dockworkers in Durban, textile workers in Salt River, mineworkers in the Reef, farmworkers in the Cape.

But these workers knew something the bosses never did: that unity, discipline, and political clarity are stronger than batons and bullets. And so, they built Cosatu not just as a federation, but as a living vessel of working-class power.

Forty years is a milestone. But this struggle is older. Before Cosatu there was Sactu. Before Sactu, the ICU. Before the ICU, there were the Red Unions built by Communists, syndicalists and socialists in the 1920s and 30s, and then crushed by the twin jaws of racial capitalism and colonial violence. And always, moving through this history like a red thread, was the South African Communist Party. Under every name it carried — Communist Party of South Africa, CPSA, the underground SACP — the Party walked with workers, not above them, not behind them, but beside them.

It helped build unions where there were none. It challenged those who wanted unions without politics. It refused to separate class struggle from national liberation. It insisted, even when unpopular, that the emancipation of black workers was not only a political demand, but the key to transforming society itself.

From Ray Alexander and Moses Kotane to JB Marks and Chris Hani, the Party placed its finest cadres at the service of the workers' movement. In the 1940s and 50s it built industrial unions, fought for the Workers' Charter, and forged a revolutionary alliance that would change the face of South Africa. And when the strikes of 1973 lit a flame across Durban, it was not just a revival of industrial protest, but the return of the working class to the centre of history.

From those flames Cosatu would rise — fiercely independent, but never politically neutral. Its founding in 1985 was a moment of defiance, of convergence, and of clarity. It gathered the fragmented, it united the bold, and it reminded the nation that the struggle for democracy could not be separated from the struggle for worker's power.

Cosatu was never just about wages. It was, and remains, a political force. It knew that apartheid was not simply about race, but about the systematic organisation of cheap, disciplined, and disposable black labour. It placed the worker at the centre of the liberation struggle, organised across sectors, and shook the foundations of white capital and its state. And it did not do so alone.

Cosatu walked into the furnace of struggle with the ANC and the SACP. Not as a junior partner, not as a mere affiliate, but as a revolutionary equal. The Tripartite Alliance was not a marriage of convenience. It was born of blood, struggle,

and belief. It was sealed in strikes and funerals and people's courts and underground pamphlets. It was made possible because these three forces — the political, the ideological, the organisational — knew that only together could they dismantle a system built over centuries.

It was in this struggle that *Umsebenzi* was born. Not as a passive recorder of events, but as a political instrument. Folded in back pockets, read under candlelight, smuggled into hostels, taught in study groups, *Umsebenzi* carried not only information but imagination. It taught that the worker was not just a wage-earner, but a political actor. That the shop steward could be a theorist. That the struggle was not only fought in parliaments or negotiations, but in the realm of ideas. And that unless the worker understood their world, they could not change it.

As we mark Cosatu's 40 years, we must also recognise that the terrain has shifted. Capital is smarter. Exploitation is subtler. The factories are smaller or gone. Labour is casualised, outsourced, digitalised. Union density is falling. Young workers are disconnected from the traditions that shaped this federation. The alliance is strained. The bosses are bolder. Inequality is deeper. And the worker, once feared, is often forgotten. But we are not helpless. This is no time for mourning. This is the time for organising.

We must return to political education, not as ritual but as necessity. We must renew the link between the shop floor and the street, between the workplace and the township, between the wage struggle and the broader battle for housing, electricity, transport, food, dignity. We must organise the unorganised, speak to the gig worker, the street

COSATU
celebrates
40 Years
of Fighting for
Workers' Rights

**The Right to form a Trade Union,
Take part in Collective Bargaining
and the Right to Strike.**

trader; the unemployed graduate, the school leaver with no future. We must remember that socialism is not a slogan, but a programme rooted in the everyday. We must take seriously the cultural life of workers — their music, fashion, food, humour — and build from it, not apart from it. We must hold our alliance partners accountable, yes, but also be accountable to the class we claim to represent.

Cosatu at 40 is not a relic. It is a living body, bruised but breathing. It is a force that has bent the arc of South African history. And yet, its task remains incomplete. Capital still

reigns. The land question festers. Women still carry the triple burden. Youth are abandoned to drugs. The revolution is deferred but not defeated.

Let this anniversary be more than a commemoration. Let it be a clarion call. Let it remind us that class struggle is not a metaphor. It is real. It is lived. And it is ours to wage.

Long live Cosatu. Long live the working class. Long live the red thread of struggle that binds us from the past to the possible. The future is still ours to make. And we make it with calloused hands, sharpened minds, and revolutionary hearts. ★

POLITBURO

SACP Politburo statement on Gain

We note with deep concern that the so-called Growth and Inclusion (Gain) strategy, presented as a framework to revive economic growth and create employment, represents neither a new direction nor a break with the failed economic paradigm that has entrenched unemployment, poverty and inequality crises since 1996.

Far from being transformative, the Gain strategy reproduces the same old economic framework that the SACP has consistently critiqued since at least 2019 and going back to 1996. It is the same as before, merely repackaged and rebranded. Hence the SACP’s description of the Gain strategy as the *Same aGAIN*.

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

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

Under the neoliberal paradigm, the economy has recorded devastating unemployment with *minimum* levels above 20 per cent and worsening, defined by the narrow definition that excludes discouraged work seekers. This has been entrenched since 1996 after the adoption of Gear. Inequality has widened and poverty is persistently high.

In the second quarter of 2025, the narrow, official unemployment rate stood at 33.2 per cent, representing 8.4 million unemployed people who are actively looking for employment, while the expanded rate stood at 42.9 per cent, affecting 12.6 million people active and discouraged work seekers combined.

These figures are not the outcome of slow implementation but the direct result of the chosen macro-economic paradigm, including rapid trade and financial liberalisation under Gear, among others. The failure is structural and systemic. It lies in the logic of profit accumulation that most of all prioritises the interests of finance capital while sacrificing productive investment and social well-being and development.

Those who are not excluded from employment are included through being locked into the yoke of exploitation by



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

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

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

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

cuts inspired by the extremist austerity of Argentina's Javier Milei administration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Privatisation now takes many forms, including outsourcing, concessions, public-private partnerships and liberalisation in favour of profit-seeking private interests. These guarantee profits for private operators while shifting long-term risks onto the public. The private power producer models called the "Independent Power Producers" (IPPs) are a clear example. Although later renewable energy bid rounds achieved lower tariffs, Eskom's 2024 report showed that IPPs

generated only 9 per cent of electricity while consuming 27 per cent of Eskom's energy budget.

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

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

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

The high interest rates regime and interest rate hikes that the Reserve Bank has been using as inflation targeting policy instruments have constrained productive investment, maintained de-industrialisation and kept unemployment at crisis-high rates. A central bank that pursues this neoliberal model and fails to help advance industrial development and maximum sustainable employment cannot fulfil the developmental constitutional mandate of balanced and sustainable growth, which must include maximum sustainable employment as a key performance indicator and therefore an explicit monetary policy mandate. The record speaks for itself.

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

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

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

barriers created by an economy that reproduces exclusion from access to work, ownership, management control and accumulation of wealth.

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

The Same aGAIN strategy is rooted in what progressive observers call the transition from the Washington Consensus to the Wall Street Consensus. The former demanded fiscal austerity, deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation to please foreign investors. The latter adds the expectation that governments should actively create profit opportunities for, but by no means only, financial capital through blended finance, public-private partnerships and further privatisation through liberalisation. In both cases, the outcome is the same.

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

country, covering every district, systematically eliminating uneven development.

The Same aGAIN strategy makes no attempt to examine the flawed framework that underlies the persistent failures of the policy trajectory that the government has chosen, dating back to the adoption of Gear in 1996. It merely asserts that the framework is sound and that only implementation is lacking. This is a dangerous illusion. South Africa requires not faster implementation of the same failed ideas but a decisive change in direction.

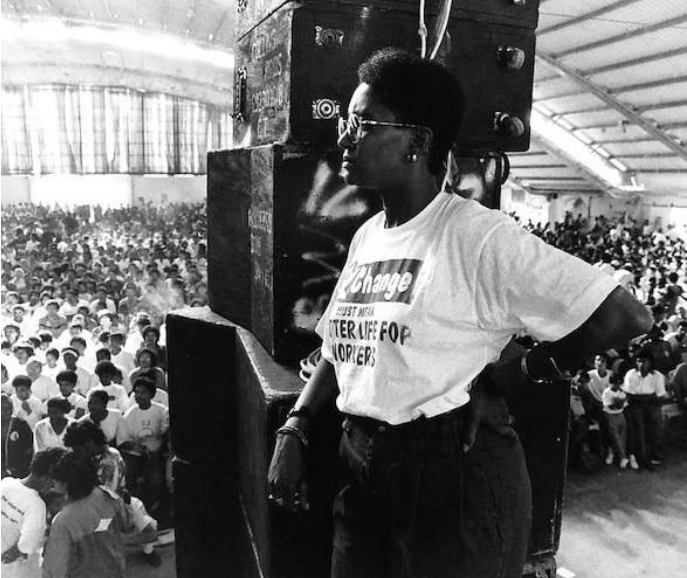
The SACP calls for a developmental alternative anchored in protecting public property rights, building and diversifying thriving public ownership, and advancing democratic control and planning. This must include expansionary fiscal policy to finance public infrastructure, productive and social investment,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

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

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COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Women's herstories: 40 women, 40 years of the federation



Herstory: starting as a shop steward, then Western Cape provincial deputy chair of the Government and Allied Workers Union, Connie September rose to become the national treasurer and in 1993 became the first female deputy president of Cosatu.

THULILE KUMALO

Cosatu's Women's History Project was unveiled on 4 November 2025. The collation of the stories of 40 trade union women stalwarts demonstrates that acts of solidarity remain essential sources of inspiration, reminding future generations of the transformative power of revolutionary feminist organising within trade unions and the broader South African society. One of the stories captured is that of Dr Connie September.

Connie September

Connie September is one of the highly celebrated unionists of South Africa, revered both in the Western Cape, where she was raised and nationally, as well as abroad. She used to work at a clothing factory in Cape Town, where she started her journey towards becoming a trade unionist. At that time, they used to organise workers without mobile phones or any of the technology we have nowadays.

It was a difficult time when patriarchy was at its peak. They did not even have private vehicles and relied heavily on public transport to move from one province to another. For some activists, it was not usual to have a woman standing in front of workers and conscientising them of their right to better working conditions, including better wages and better hours of work.

In 1982, Connie September became involved in political activism through community forums associated with the community newspaper, Grassroots. These experiences led her into the civic and labour movement in the Cape. She

became active in the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU), where she served as national treasurer and Western Cape vice-chairperson. In 1993, she made history by becoming the first woman elected as Deputy President of South Africa's biggest workers' federation, Cosatu.

In 1997, she chaired a major Cosatu initiative known as the September Commission, named after her. This commission explored the future of trade unions in South Africa, considering the political and economic changes in the post-apartheid era. Its report outlined key challenges and proposed strategies to ensure unions remained relevant and effective. The commission's findings and recommendations continue to influence Cosatu's strategic planning to this day.

It is incumbent upon the South African working class today to recall the role that women played in the founding of Cosatu in 1985. Cosatu was founded through the unification of 33 unions and federations, and women continue to play a pivotal role in its growth. Their struggle was not only against apartheid but also for recognition, representation, and rights within the labour movement itself. Cosatu women constantly confronted male domination in leadership and fought for their place in decision-making structures, challenging wage inequalities, advocating for maternity leave rights, and actively combatting sexual harassment in workplaces, among other struggles.

In 1988, Cosatu held its first women's conference, bringing together union-affiliated women and community activists for collective reflection and strategising. That landmark event provided a national platform to address challenges facing working-class women, exchange knowledge, and build networks for ongoing feminist campaigns. Women used

the space to re-evaluate gender programmes, boost union activism, and ensure the inclusion of gender equality in the emerging Workers' Charter.

Grounding in feminist practice

Cosatu women's activism was fundamentally revolutionary feminist, focused on confronting and combatting patriarchy, sexism, and unfair discrimination in unions, workplaces, and broader society. They drew on principles of revolutionary feminist organising—accountability, participation, consciousness-raising, and solidarity. Their campaigns linked workplace struggles to broader issues of social justice, such as fighting amendments to anti-union legislation or mobilizing against value-added taxes that impacted women's economic well-being. Solidarity was defined as a shared commitment to collective action for change, rooted both in socialist and feminist traditions. Cosatu has increasingly promoted the idea of a "solidarity economy," integrating the ideals of Ubuntu, accountability, and sustainability to unite society while eradicating monopoly capital and greed.

Building solidarity and celebrating herstories

These sustained collective efforts have over the years

contributed to building solidarity across social and political lines, enabling women to influence policy and practice both within Cosatu and nationally. Through workshops, forums, and advocacy campaigns, Cosatu has made a fundamental contribution to the development of women leadership and encouraged active participation of women in decision-making at every level.

Cosatu women's "Herstories" include landmark moments such as:

- founding participation in the Women's National Coalition, which shaped gendered outcomes of South Africa's democratic transition;
- leading resistance to sexist labour laws and discrimination, including major strikes for fair wages;
- organising national conferences and forums to strengthen women's voices in and beyond unions;
- campaigns insisting on the explicit recognition of women's demands in union charters. ★

Cde Thulile Kumalo is the National Gender Coordinator for the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union. She writes in her personal capacity.

COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Organising the unorganised – a call to action on Cosatu's 40th anniversary to revive the spirit of the Freedom Charter

AVIWE RAPELANG MOHAPI

On 6 December 2025, COSATU turns 40 at Dobsonville Stadium in Soweto - a ground still sacred with the blood of the 1976 youth.

The anniversary coincides with the 70th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, the revolutionary Marxist programme adopted in Kliptown in 1955 that demanded nationalisation of mines, banks and monopoly industry, land redistribution, and that “The People Shall Share in the Country’s Wealth!”

Born in December 1985 in the heat of anti-apartheid resistance, Cosatu united mineworkers, factory workers, township and village residents into one militant federation - the organised response of a racially super-exploited working class. Forty years later, the objective need for revolutionary trade unionism is sharper than ever, yet organisational strength, class consciousness and combativity have seriously declined.

Seventy years after the Freedom Charter, its core demands remain unfulfilled. Post-1994 ANC governments abandoned the Charter’s socialist vision for neoliberal policies: Gear, the NDP, and now Operation Vulindlela. State assets were privatised, labour markets deregulated, and capital’s interests placed above workers’. Unemployment stands near 33%, youth joblessness exceeds 45%, and a massive reserve army of labour keeps even the employed in fear.

Trapped in an unreconfigured Tripartite Alliance, Cosatu has too often traded class struggle for electoral loyalty, and at times seemed to openly back anti-worker policies. Membership has stagnated, union density in the formal sector is roughly 27.5%, and millions (especially women, youth, migrants, gig workers and rural labourers) remain unorganised. Casualisation, outsourcing and platform capitalism have fragmented solidarity; austerity has eroded wages and fighting capacity.

Cosatu still has 1.8 million members and remains the country’s largest federation, but numbers mean little when the working class is divided and bleeding.

This 40th anniversary must not be nostalgia or self-congratulation. It must spark a militant revival: an uncompromising return to the socialism of the Freedom Charter, ruthless confrontation with capital, massive organising campaigns into every unorganised sector and community, and unbreakable unity with the SACP and all genuine working-class forces.

Only such a turn honours our martyrs and prepares us for the battles ahead.

The crisis of representation: millions of workers left behind

South Africa’s 33% unemployment is a catastrophe, but the real betrayal happens inside employment. Millions work in places where no union exists, no collective agreement protects them, and the basic dignity that trade unionism once guaranteed has been deliberately destroyed. This is the true content of the post-apartheid settlement: political rights for the people, economic power left intact in the hands of the old owners and their new black partners.

After 1994, the Freedom Charter’s demand for radical redistribution was abandoned. Capital did not retreat; it changed form. The old union strongholds - mines and giant factories were shrunk by premature deindustrialisation, automation, outsourcing and labour brokering. Jobs migrated to retail chains, logistics, private security, cleaning, hospitality, call centres and the platform economy: small, scattered workplaces, high turnover, casual contracts, overwhelmingly Black, female and young workers.

Walmart, Amazon and Takealot did not arrive as neutral investors. They imported a savage anti-union model - algorithmic surveillance, psychological terror, and selective dismissals to paralyse resistance. Yet the same centralisation creates choke points: one solid strike at a distribution hub can empty shelves nationwide. The leverage exists. What has been missing is the will inside Cosatu and its affiliates to use it.

The crisis screams loudest in retail. Hundreds of thousands of Black women work as cashiers, shelf-packers and cleaners for Shoprite, Checkers, Pick ‘n Pay, Spar, Woolworths and the e-commerce warehouses. Poverty wages, sexual harassment, unpaid overtime and managerial despotism are routine.

Most have never seen a union organiser; many think unions are only for teachers or metalworkers. SACCAWU has repeatedly been unable to launch serious organising campaigns. When Checkers workers in Pretoria North rose against racist abuse and were mass-sacked, the union and COSATU’s response was feeble - nothing less than class betrayal.

Dismissing these workers as an unorganisable “precarariat” is an abandonment of Marxism. The woman stacking shelves at 4am, the warehouse picker racing an algorithm, the delivery rider risking death for fear of deactivation - these are today’s working class.

Farm workers remain the forgotten layer. Thirty-one years after democracy, many farms still operate like feudal estates: wages below the legal minimum, bonded housing, routine pesticide poisoning, and women treated as sexual property.

Geographic isolation, racist landowner power and the use of desperate migrant labour make organising brutal. Unions

like AFADWU fight heroically with almost nothing, yet Cosatu hardly throws its full weight (organisers, funds, lawyers, national campaigns) behind a serious rural offensive.

Until Cosatu redirects real resources into organising the unorganised, from every supermarket floor to the remotest vineyard, the working class stays divided and defeated. The 40th anniversary must mark the start of a new, uncompromising organising offensive or it will be remembered as the funeral of a once-mighty federation.

Gender, violence, and working-class struggle

South Africa's femicide pandemic is not a side issue - it is a central front in the class war. Working-class women face double oppression: super-exploited by capital, terrorised as women through harassment, rape and murder at work and home.

In retail, where Black women dominate, supervisors demand sex for shifts or job security. On farms, rape is routine; complaints mean eviction. Women are now over 45% of Cosatu's membership, yet endure unequal pay and violence that mirrors the system's gendered brutality. Too often, unions have dismissed GBV as a "women's issue" instead of a direct attack on working-class power.

Materially, gender violence is produced by capitalist dependency, patriarchal ideology that treats women as disposable, and a state that abandons the poor. It ends only when those relations are smashed.

This is why "positive masculinity," as Cde Mike Shingange (Cosatu 1st DP) stated at the 2025 G20 Workplace Dialogue, is a revolutionary demand - not polite reform, but the conscious rejection of patriarchal consciousness. It calls on men in the movement to confront abusers, educate comrades, defend women on picket lines, and make space for women to lead. Manhood must mean disciplined solidarity, never domination.

Unions must act now to:

- Elect far more women into leadership
- Create independent, trusted channels to report harassment
- Enforce real policies that protect survivors and punish perpetrators
- Link workplace organising to community campaigns against GBV

The fight against gender-based violence cannot be marginal - it must be the heartbeat of renewal. Men must be challenged in every branch to break complicity, turn masculine energy into collective liberation.

Only a consciously anti-patriarchal working class can defeat capital. The struggle against GBV is not an extra - it is the precondition for victory.

The Freedom Charter at 70: betrayed promise, renewed fight

Seventy years after Kliptown, the Freedom Charter's core demands - "The People Shall Govern!," "The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!," nationalisation of mines, banks and monopoly industry, land to those who work it, remain almost completely unfulfilled.

We won the vote and the flag. We did not win economic power. South Africa is still the most unequal society on earth.

The ANC government abandoned the Freedom Charter's socialism for neoliberalism: GEAR, the NDP, and Operation Vulindlela. The old apartheid-era conglomerates still dominate, now with a thin Black elite layer added through BBBEE.

For workers this means stagnant wages, mass casualisation, 33% unemployment, collapsing services, and a reserve army of labour used to keep the employed terrified and compliant.

The betrayal proves the dead-end of class collaboration and the illusion that a nationalist party can complete the revolution for the working class. Workers must rely only on their own independent power.

The SACP's People's Red Caravan is the sharpest response: a militant, mobile platform rolling through townships and rural areas, linking daily struggles (water cut-offs, evictions, corruption) to a clear anti-capitalist programme rooted in the Freedom Charter.

When this grassroots fire fuses with Cosatu's remaining strength, a genuine working-class alternative becomes possible. The 2026 local elections are the immediate terrain: workers and communities must stand on a programme of municipal socialism - free services, union rights everywhere, community budgets, GBV-free zones defended by popular structures. Cosatu must choose: stay a conveyor belt for an elite nationalist party, or help build the working class force that will finally enforce the Freedom Charter through struggle.

The coinciding anniversaries - 70 years of the Freedom Charter, 40 years of Cosatu, must not be nostalgia. They must launch the offensive to seize what was promised in 1955.

Cosatu's affiliates: a tapestry of sectors, struggles, and untapped potential

In 2025 COSATU still unites 19 affiliates and 1.8 million members, but union density brutally maps capital's terrain: 82.5% in mining, 72.6% in utilities, 53.9% in community services - yet under 10% in agriculture and barely 20% in retail. These numbers are not statistics; they are frontlines where the Freedom Charter's promise of shared wealth must still be fought for and won.

Mining and Energy

NUM (170,000 members) remains a fortress. It once shook apartheid with 340,000 strikers in 1987 and, post-Marikana, forced real safety and wage gains. Yet 50,000 mining jobs have vanished since 2019, subcontracting eats permanent work, and women underground face rampant sexual violence. Revival means shaft occupations, worker co-ops, turning hostels into anti-GBV centres led by male stewards practising positive masculinity, and forcing the platinum giants to fund genuine community development while renewing the fight for nationalisation. CEPPWAWU (70,000) has won environmental clauses, but automation and fake "green" transitions threaten jobs. One of the answers is worker-controlled just transition campaigns.



This 40th anniversary must not be nostalgia or self-congratulation. It must spark a militant revival.

Metal and Manufacturing

After merging with LIMUSA, NUM fights in steel, engineering and auto, but union density has collapsed to 35%. Imports, automation and the shift to electric vehicles bring wave after wave of retrenchments. Women endure unequal pay and coercion. Revival demands factory occupations, supply-chain blockades, iron-clad GBV clauses enforced by trained male stewards, and nationalisation of strategic plants.

Clothing and Textile

SACTWU (100,000) battles a sector gutted by imports; union density at 25%. Bargaining councils exist, but Shein/Temu warehouses and sweatshops run on migrant women paying a daily tax of sexual harassment. Male workers must become active allies. Revival means militant drives into new logistics giants, protective tariffs, and localisation that prioritises decent jobs.

The pattern is clear: strong where capital is concentrated and male; weak or absent where it is fragmented and feminised. The task is equally clear: flood the precarious zones with organisers and resources, fuse sectoral power with the People’s Red Caravan, turn every workplace into a school of positive masculinity and class combativity. Only then can COSATU become the revolutionary instrument the Freedom Charter demands.

Public Sector: Guardians of Social Reproduction - Under Siege, Ready to Rise

The public sector is capitalism’s daily repair shop of labour power: hospitals, schools, municipalities that heal, educate and provide water, electricity, sanitation. In South Africa, three decades of neoliberal sabotage (GEAR, NDP, Operation Vulindlela) have deliberately run this machinery into the ground, turning sites of potential emancipation into zones of primitive accumulation. Austerity, outsourcing and political appointments have cut union density to 53.9% while creating a huge reserve army of casualised, mostly female workers.

The crisis is class war by design: R63 billion looted yearly in tenders, 60% of wastewater plants collapsed, one nurse per 50 patients in Gauteng, 40% of schools without labs - while private capital profits from the collapse. Yet here lies explosive potential. COSATU’s public-sector affiliates (over 800,000 strong) hold the keys to social reproduction. Their coordinated action can bring the state to a standstill and prefigure real worker-community control, making the Freedom Charter live: “There Shall Be Work and Security;” “The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened;” “There Shall Be Houses, Security and Comfort.”

Nehawu (277,000 members) led the way: the 2023 strike wave forced wages from 4.7% to 7% and exposed R1.2 billion Covid fraud; the January 2025 court victory declared 30,000 Community Health Workers permanent - a template against

casualisation. Women (cleaners, nurses, care workers) are the backbone yet face epidemic violence. Positive masculinity must become practice: male porters on night patrols, administrators protecting whistle-blowers, hospital boards occupied for survivor justice.

Sadtu (260,000) fights against capitalist education, pit toilets and overcrowding while confronting predatory male teachers and principals. Male educators must lead anti-patriarchy school assemblies and use shutdowns for decent infrastructure and equipment.

Samwu (160,000) wages guerrilla warfare against state capture; its 2024 eThekweni wildcat strike paralysed the city and exposed R160,000 salaries of political appointees against R10,000 for general workers. Female cleaners face sexual blackmail; male foremen must run union convoys and depot tribunals.

Denosa (85,000) battles impossible ratios while nurses are stabbed and groped by patients and a variety of male perpetrators. Abusers must be named publicly and there must be enforcement of binding GBV clauses.

The task is clear: build rank-and-file councils across Nehawu, Sadtu, Samwu, Denosa for simultaneous occupations that halt social reproduction until demands are met. Fuse these with the People's Red Caravan, turning patients, parents and residents into joint power assemblies.

For 2026, this bloc must back a genuine working-class organisation on municipal socialism: free services, nationalised utilities, union-run crèches, GBV-free zones policed by shop stewards. Only then will the public sector stop repairing capitalism and become the material base for working-class democracy. The Freedom Charter is the battle plan.

Transport and Communications: Arteries of Circulation

Transport, communications, retail, security and finance are the arteries pumping commodities and surplus value across South Africa's still-racialised geography. Neoliberal restructuring has bled them dry - yet they remain decisive terrains for working-class counter-attack.

Satawu (100,000) and CWU (44,000) face union density collapsed to 30% and 25%. Gig platforms, Transnet looting and Telkom sell-offs have casualised truckers, delivery riders and call-centre agents - mostly Black women and youth. One coordinated blockade of Durban harbour or national rail occupation can still stop commodity circulation dead. Revival means reclaiming public rail, ports and spectrum for nationalised broadband. Gender violence stalks freight corridors and night shifts; male comrades must enforce positive masculinity through compulsory training, binding GBV clauses and gender-balanced strike committees.

Over 1.2 million retail and hospitality workers, 70% women under 35, confront Saccawu's inertia. Algorithmic terror, zero-hour contracts and Amazon/Takealot union-busting keep most defenceless. Sexual coercion is routine: "sleep with the manager or lose shifts." Male stockers must escort women home, name harassers on picket lines, turn every store into a GBV-free zone policed by shop stewards. One 48-hour strike at a Gauteng hub empties hundreds of stores. Saccawu must map supply chains, recruit warehouse-to-checkout, and fuse with the People's Red Caravan to turn

malls into mass assemblies.

Popcru (160,000) fights internal rot and GBV against female officers; male cops must run station tribunals and survivor caucuses. Sasbo (67,000) battles fintech casualisation and sexual extortion. Revival demands nationalising key finance levers and worker control over platforms.

Flood precarious zones with organisers, make positive masculinity daily practice, fuse with the Red Caravan, and back 2026 municipal electoral slates that seize these arteries for the working class. Occupy them, democratise them, and the Freedom Charter's demand that the people shall share in the country's wealth becomes material force.

Strategic Tasks for Trade Union Renewal

Cosatu's 40th anniversary must be a turning point: not nostalgia, but a militant rupture with three decades of neoliberal betrayal.

1. **Aggressive organising in retail, logistics, agriculture and gig work:** hundreds of dedicated organisers, township worker schools, supply-chain mapping, and robust defence of every victimised activist. Organise the unorganised or stay defeated.
2. **Rebuild shop-floor democracy:** rotating leadership, recallable mandates, full-timers back on the factory floor, mass report-backs. Political education must teach that capitalism is the enemy and state power the prize.
3. **Centre the fight against patriarchy and GBV:** immediate 50/50 gender parity, compulsory anti-patriarchy classes, zero-tolerance workplace campaigns, survivor justice committees. Positive masculinity as daily revolutionary practice - men as defenders, never oppressors.
4. **Regain political independence:** "Social dialogue" is surrender. Oppose every anti-worker policy, no matter the party enforcing it. For 2026: an independent working-class programme - nationalisation under worker control, massive public works, universal basic income, land to tillers.
5. **Practical international solidarity:** coordinate real action against Amazon, Walmart and the mining giants with comrades in Brazil, Kenya, Philippines. Solidarity with Palestine is class duty - liberation is international or nothing.

Cosatu must fuse every struggle with the People's Red Caravan and prepare coordinated national strike action for living wages, shorter hours, abolition of labour broking and zero tolerance for GBV.

Cosatu must now choose: manage defeat inside a dying Alliance, or become once again the revolutionary champion of the oppressed. The crisis is ripe; a new generation is ready.

Organise. Democratise. Centre women. Break with collaboration. Link arms globally. Only the organised power of the working class can make the Freedom Charter live.

Amandla! The struggle continues - with vigour or not at all. ★

Cde Aviwe Rapelang Mohapi is the National Education Officer at Nehawu, and is also a writer and political activist. He writes in his personal capacity.

PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN

Mqhekezweni – the struggle for resilience and rebirth

BARRY MITCHELL

From 20 to 27 October 2025, the SACP launched the third provincial People's Red Caravan in Mqhekezweni village, Eastern Cape.

Administered under the OR Tambo District Municipality, with Mthatha roughly 50 kilometres away, this land and this village have had a significant historical impact in shaping the minds and the actions of many leaders, including Nelson Mandela, who spent some of his formative adolescent years in the village.

The SACP identified Mqhekezweni for our PRC launch through an organic process. During a national extended Party Building Commission, a comrade detailed that a mafia racket had been extorting women of all ages to leave R200 on their windowsill each night to avoid being sexually assaulted or raped. The comrade detailed the levels of fear, crime, violence and intimidation and appealed to the Party for intervention.

Mqhekezweni, much like the majority of South Africa's rural settings, astoundingly beautiful. Picture a mixture of traditional rondavels and more modern structures scattered along rolling green hills. Livestock grazing whilst shepherds watch over them. Young men on lean-looking horses sprinting through the valleys. A picturesque and quintessential image of South Africa and Africa's majesty and beauty.

When we arrived, one of the leaders of the Madiba clan pointed to a tree that towers over the Heritage Site and Great Place; "It is shaped like the continent of Africa, do you see?" He looked down at the ground, his sangoma beads on his wrists

and neck clattering together as he reflected, "In 2022, I had a dream that a programme like this to help the community would come here" he smiled, his eyes permeating resilience. Behind the resilient eyes and beautiful village setting is an area grappling with war-like conditions. Our comrades deployed as an advanced team developed a comprehensive community profile of Mqhekezweni, highlighting some of the most severe manifestations of gender-based violence, femicide, social distress and deprivation – all rooted within systemic government failures.

At the clinic, our comrades found staff gripped with fear, unable to even recollect the information related to ongoing threats, violence and intimidation by thugs. Workers were completely traumatised but extremely strong, managing an impeccably well-maintained facility, despite the massive shortfalls in resources as a result of austerity. King Jongintaba High School also reflected the state of the NDR in 2025, with levels of infrastructure decay and collapse that should be criminalised. The school is not a conducive environment for learning or teaching; parents have pulled their children out of the school as a result of the ongoing violence and rape. The Principal and Deputy Principal, sitting in a classroom that had to be converted into an office space, both appear resigned to their fate, not desperate and not hopeful, just accepting the reality that the state has simply abandoned them.

Mqhekezweni Primary School is in a slightly better condition, but like the High School, it has been consistently targeted by thieves. Laptops, computers, projectors and other tools of trade and learning have been consistently stolen, with SAPS acting slowly or not at all. Teachers were forced to construct a barbed-wire cage in the interior roof of



People's Red Caravan comrades in Mqhekezweni.



Among other things, the PRC helped Mqhekezweni village residents renovate their community hall.

the computer lab to prevent thugs from stealing equipment.

How are young people meant to learn in a barbed wire cage? At the Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre, we met the brilliant and creative staff who, despite constraints, have created a really special and inspiring space for the lovely little ones of Mqhekezweni to develop, play and thrive. What is interesting in this province is that ECD resourcing comes from the Provincial Department of Basic Education and not from the Department of Social Development. Whilst leaving our introductory engagement, the ECD manager quietly informed our comrades that not long ago, a four-year-old girl was raped by a fifteen-year-old boy.

With this context, our readers will have a picture of the momentous task at hand for our PRC workstreams. The basis of our intervention is to inculcate the theory and action of self-reliance, people's power, sustainability and community development. We lay the foundation during the week of work and, once we depart, have strengthened existing or established local community-led structures that are supported by our Districts and Provinces.

The PRC deployed its workstreams covering priority areas in food production, local economic activities, psycho-social, health and education support, sports, youth and arts and cultural activities and interventions in community

safety. The account of the work undertaken and challenges that arose through our interventions were presented every evening for discussion, refinement and action for the following day. Just like the PRC launches in Motlabe and Matibidi, this deployment exposed the concrete and material conditions facing our people. Our comrades worked with tireless dedication; acts like this often elevate a new quality of cadre within the Party, despite all of our constraints.

In 31 years, the state could not bring dignity in the form of water to the historical site and living legacy at the Great Place in Mqhekezweni. The PRC achieved this in just 3 days. In the course of the week, all of the workstreams recognised that despite our interventions and progress, the root cause of organised crime will always seek to destroy stability, security and safety. This is the methodology of gangsters, to sow fear through violence, assault, rape and extortion.

As Che Guevara determined, we have to rebuild an entirely new society. Cultivate a consciousness of love, self-reliance and sustainable development. The PRC is a start - kancane kancane/ little-by-little. ★

Cde Barry Mitchell is an SACP Central Committee member and NEHAWU Parliamentary Officer.

RED OCTOBER CAMPAIGN

NUM and SACP lead Western Cape's Red October Campaign with mass action



Part of the mass action in Cape Town, led by the NUM and the SACP.

LIZWI GEGULA

When the struggle of workers and the poor reaches a crossroads, unity becomes not only desirable but sacrosanct—an inevitable reality that demands sober and reliable leadership.

Such leadership must be able to identify the fundamental contradictions confronting the working class and the poor as they fight for full emancipation from poverty, inequality, social injustice, and exclusion from social and economic life, including social ills affecting social reproduction. This is ultimately the struggle for socialism, a struggle that can no longer be confined only to historical alliances whose priorities may have shifted, but one that must extend to broader terrains of struggle and solidarity to attain working-class hegemony.

In this context, the fundamental question is how to expedite programmes that advance the immediate and long-term goals of the working class without being delayed by pseudo-proxies acting in the name of history. The immediate enemy remains unchanged: a ruthless capitalist system that recurrently deepens poverty, widens inequality, sows

division among the working class, weakens resistance, and often leads workers to follow the blind. The working class has long understood that its strength lies in unity.

The commitment to advancing the objectives of the Red October Campaign has compelled deeper cooperation between the NUM and the SACP, particularly in the Western Cape, where capitalism, entrenched in its modern neoliberal form, is most aggressive. Added to this are the remnants of imperialism and colonialism of a special type, all of which continue to deny workers and the poor the full freedoms envisioned in the 70-year-old Freedom Charter. In this environment, the unity of workers and the poor manifests as what Marx and Engels described a necessity in the face of a common adversary.

The pursuit of a fully realised Freedom Charter and a socialist-oriented National Democratic Revolution (NDR) continue to compel cooperation with the SACP. The NUM and the SACP demonstrated remarkable unity during the Red October weekend of 7–8 November 2025. Together, they confronted the lived realities of communities plagued by daily gunfire that claims lives, extortion that terrorises and intimidates residents, and gender-based violence and femicide that tear families apart. Workers and community

members picketed outside the Western Cape Provincial Legislature to deliver a memorandum to the leadership of the South African Police Services (SAPS), the provincial government, and the City of Cape Town. This united action stands as a beacon of hope in the ongoing struggle to achieve working-class hegemony.

Workers vehemently rejected the government's neoliberal, capitalist-oriented posture, which continues to collapse state capacity. Austerity measures have resulted in chronic underfunding, understaffing, and inadequate equipment for the SAPS; insufficient action against police corruption and collusion with criminal networks; political interference in law enforcement operations; and a failure to deliver justice for victims of gender-based violence, hate crimes, and political killings. Working-class communities continue to face deep underdevelopment and social neglect.

The struggle led by the NUM and the SACP seeks to confront the surge of violent crime terrorising working-class communities, regardless of political affiliation or social standing. As the vanguard of workers and the poor, the SACP must continue to unite these forces to push back the intensifying assault of capitalism.

The NUM and the SACP also mobilised workers to confront Eskom on labour-related and socio-economic issues rooted in the capitalist drive toward neoliberal restructuring and privatisation of the network economy – through the government's *Operation Vulindlela*, which includes energy. Representing thousands in the energy, mining, metal, and construction sectors, the two organisations voiced strong opposition to the ongoing transfer of public energy assets into private hands.

The liberalisation and unbundling of Eskom – disguised as reform – pose a direct threat to workers and the poor. The NUM and the SACP insist on a worker-led transformation

of the energy sector, one that prioritises universal access, stability, affordability, and sustainability over profit. Any energy transition that excludes workers or worsens their material conditions cannot be called a “Just Transition”.

The mass action in Cape Town, led by the NUM and the SACP, also targeted the Department of Employment and Labour, which has repeatedly failed to protect workers in key industrial sectors. Workers who build South Africa's essential infrastructure continue to face unbridled exploitation, unsafe conditions, and a collapsed labour inspectorate. The NUM and the SACP demanded stronger enforcement of labour laws and better protection of workers' rights.

The two days of mass action coincided with Cosatu's 40th anniversary celebrations across the country. The federation continues to highlight its critical role in enforcing labour laws and defending workers' rights – central to the fulfilment of the Freedom Charter's declaration that “there shall be work and security for all,” without compromising human dignity.

However, one glaring gap emerged during the Red October rollout: women's participation in the trade union movement remains stagnant, with severe underrepresentation – particularly in the construction sector. This exposes ongoing failures in transformation and inclusion, undermining the Freedom Charter's vision of a society in which all people, regardless of race, colour, or sex, participate fully in governance and social progress. NUM, Cosatu, and the SACP must strengthen collaboration to organise more women workers. And if women's low representation reflects the industry's discriminatory hiring patterns, then the sector must be compelled to employ more women. ★

Cde Lizwi Gegula is the Western Cape Provincial Spokesperson of the SACP.

RED OCTOBER CAMPAIGN

The Red Weekend

LUCIAN DAVIDS

The SACP and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) led working men and women through a Red Weekend. It is characterised as the most direct intervention between communists and Trade Unions on the struggles that workers and the poor face at large. The weekend was a testament to the historic mission that workers and communists must fulfil within their interests, as the drivers of a revolution!

On 7 November, the SACP and the NUM launched their campaign with a powerful picket hosted in Brian Bunting District. Comrades gathered outside of Western Cape Provincial Legislature in response to a long-standing battle between gender-based violence and femicide and general criminality in Western Cape, and the Cape Metro in particular and its population. Party Red Brigades, neighbourhood watches, comrades from NUM and the Party leadership at all levels were all in attendance. Seared by the scorching sun, the dedication of the demonstrators were unwavering!

One important message which stood out in the address by the Neighbourhood Watch member of Kraaifontein/Bloekombos cluster: “They even removed law enforcement in our areas who patrolled with us. They don’t patrol with us anymore. We need stipends. We risk our lives day and night, while the capitalists are sleeping. We will mobilise other neighbourhood watches and show them that we are not scared of them.”

One experiences a strong sense of the frustration of an ordinary community member in pursuit of community safety. In many instances, these dedicated community members are unemployed and unable to perform optimally, yet take the risk, offering life and limb to safeguard the community.

Therefore, the demand for stipends from the Department of Police Oversight and Community Safety to all Neighbourhood Watches is a demand we must take up. In addition to this, all security cluster organisations must be properly supported by government and capacitated to assist in maintaining order in our communities. Communities have long lost faith in the police and any hope of peace in their violent communities.

Thus, the Party must deepen its relations with the



SACP General Secretary Solly Mapaila and NUM President Philip Vilakazi with Party and union marchers during the Red Weekend.

Community Policing Forums (CPFs), neighbourhood watches and Spiritual Crime Prevention teams (SCPs), including public security forces (the South African Police Service and the Law Enforcement Advancement Plan). It must be at the forefront of fighting crime head-on to ensure sustainable community development, with the goal of restoring confidence in our people!

In acknowledging crime as an urgent and pressing problem, we must discuss the root of the issue: poverty. Until we can eliminate, or at least attempt to eliminate poverty, crime will persist. Law enforcement can only suppress crime so much. The people need work, land and food!

The march, led by cde Phillip Vilakazi, President of the NUM and the Communist Party's GS, cde Solly Mapaila, best explains how communists and workers, through the SACP and the NUM, are tackling poverty which disproportionately affects black South Africans.

On 8 November, the red wave flooded the streets of Bellville en route to Eskom Offices against privatisation and corruption. Upon arriving at the office, the revolutionary leaders addressed the sea of people. The comrades reiterated their call for government to desist from privatising our State-Owned Enterprises. Instead, they should strengthen these institutions to build state capacity. There is no need for outsourcing when the country has a fully capable state.

However, the reality is that government officials either directly or indirectly benefit from these private outsourcing ventures through their investments in these companies. The self-enrichment of those who misuse the liberation alliance is one factor that has led to the continued erosion of the political power of the state in the country. Furthermore, in terms of our revolution, one can argue that there are undeniable signs of regression.

Neoliberal policy is an attack against the very motive forces that brought and kept the ANC in power. The working men and women, their children, our veterans and elders and their current, leading victims, the youth, who are yet to contribute their labour and intellect to build the country further, due to lack of opportunities. The youth have been robbed in many ways. Robbed of a good life, robbed of the ability to make South Africa great and robbed of its dignity. All it longs for is the chance to make something of itself.

Organisations like the South African Communist Party are working tirelessly to push back against this offensive. The Party in its document titled *The South African Struggle for Socialism: Programme, Strategic Perspectives and Tasks (2022)*, affirms the building and supporting fronts as its counter-offensive. In it, the Party states that "...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, groupings or organisations outside our movement. We should not give up on many of these because of a corrupt, demagogic and authoritarian leadership clique.

"In other words, a popular Left front (or fronts, or a popular Left 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'."

A manifestation of practical work towards this end, is the continued support of the SACP in events and programmes with People Against Budget Cuts in Cape Town. This work must echo and be replicated throughout the country, as austerity is not just a regional phenomenon but a national one.

The significance of this Red Weekend in the Cape Metro has far-reaching implications. It was means of re-energising the revolutionary spirit of the Cape. It is a call for the residents of Cape Town to reclaim their power. The immediate tasks in the Western Cape province must include, yet not be limited to:

- strengthening and building the organisation within the province and at all levels;
- developing relations with organisations in the public safety sector to take our communities back from criminals and thugs;
- building fronts;
- strengthening relations between diverse cultural and religious groups; and
- sharing of its experience with other provinces with building of fronts against austerity.

Once the Party has successfully conducted this work, it can inspire confidence in working-class communities – confidence that hinges on self-reliance and sustainability. Not the false type of confidence which leads to dependency and decay.

More Red Weekends, until we can have a Red Month!

Cde Lucian Davids is a National Committee Member of the Young Communist League of South Africa.

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

What is the NDR and how is it linked to socialism? For study and reflection

BUTI MANAMELA

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) is the strategic programme of the liberation movement in South Africa. It is not a slogan. It is a process. It is not a substitute for socialism. It is the road to socialism under the concrete conditions of our country. It arises from the specific realities of colonialism, racial capitalism, patriarchy, and class exploitation in South Africa – and seeks to resolve the contradictions that flow from these.

To understand the NDR, we must begin with **what kind of society we inherited** – and what kind of society we seek to build.

South Africa was, and in many ways remains, a **colonialism of a special type**. That is to say: a country where the coloniser and the colonised live in the same territory.

The economy is advanced and integrated into global capitalism, but the political and social order was historically based on the **racial exclusion of the African majority**, land dispossession, and the super-exploitation of black labour. This fusion of **racial oppression and capitalist exploitation** shaped every aspect of South African life.

The NDR is the programme to *undo* this reality. It is a revolutionary transformation that aims to build a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa. It is “national” because it restores the sovereignty and dignity of the oppressed majority. It is “democratic” because it aims to create people’s power and participatory governance. And it is a “revolution” because it requires a **radical restructuring of society and the economy**, not just cosmetic reforms.

But the NDR is **not the end of history**. It is not a resting place. For Marxists, it is a *stage* in the revolutionary process – a necessary phase that clears the road for the socialist transformation of society.

So how are the NDR and socialism connected?

Firstly, **the class nature of the NDR** is rooted in the leadership of the working class. The SACP has always argued that for the NDR to succeed, the working class must be hegemonic – not just numerically, but ideologically and organisationally. This means the NDR must serve working-class interests and not be hijacked by narrow elite agendas or nationalist illusions.

Secondly, **the content of the NDR** includes measures that push against the boundaries of capitalism – such as land redistribution, the provision of universal education and health, the decommodification of basic services, and the

expansion of state ownership and public planning. These are not socialist in themselves, but they create conditions favourable to socialism. They **shift power away from capital**, build a democratic developmental state, and begin to erode the private dominance over social life.

Thirdly, **the forces of the NDR** – the motive forces – are those classes and strata with an objective interest in overthrowing the old order. These include the working class, the rural poor, women, youth, and the progressive intelligentsia. But among them, only the working class has a consistent interest in going beyond democracy to socialism. That is why the alliance between the ANC, SACP and COSATU is not a tactical arrangement – it is a strategic convergence rooted in historical necessity.

Fourthly, **the international context** teaches us that anti-colonial revolutions which failed to deepen their democratic programmes into socialist ones often fell into stagnation, elite capture, or outright reversal. The lesson is clear: without ideological clarity and working-class leadership, the NDR can be hijacked, delayed, or defeated. But if led properly, it can be a revolutionary bridge to socialism.

Fifthly, **the SACP has always warned against mechanical thinking**. We do not move from one stage to the next as if by train schedule. The struggle for the NDR and the struggle for socialism are **dialectically linked**. The class struggle intensifies within the democratic terrain. Reforms generate resistance from capital. Victories expose the limits of the capitalist system. This creates the space – and the necessity – for advancing towards a socialist breakthrough.

Lastly, **the role of the Party**, of political education, of organisation and of theory, **is to guide this process**, to raise consciousness, to defend the class character of the revolution, and to prepare the ground for a socialist transition.

That is why our strategy speaks of *deepening, defending, and advancing the NDR as the most direct route to socialism in South Africa*.

Socialism is not a distant dream. It is the future that must be built from within the present. And the NDR is the terrain on which that struggle is unfolding. It is where the working class must consolidate power, sharpen its instruments of organisation, build popular confidence, and accumulate revolutionary experience.

The choice is not between the NDR and socialism. The task is to understand them as part of the same revolutionary road. ★

Cde Buti Manamela is a member of the SACP Central Committee and the Minister of Higher Education and Training



ART FOR LIBERATION

The Intersection of museums, monuments and politics

BEN MARTINS

Address to the opening of the Still We Rise art exhibition at the Iziko South African Museum in October 2025.

Welcome to this important Art Exhibition titled *Still We Rise* that celebrates South Africa's presidency and hosting of the Group of Twenty (G20) Summit of the world's major economies, to discuss and address global economic and financial issues.

The South African government's overarching priorities include a focus on sustainable development and addressing inequalities, with a particular emphasis on Africa's development as aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

This Art Exhibition mainly brings together freedom struggle-era artworks from two major South African art collections, namely that of the Ifa Lethu Foundation and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

The exhibition also showcases artworks repatriated to South Africa from Australia and other countries by the Ifa Lethu Foundation over the past twenty years.

Included in the SABC art collection are several post-1994 iconic art pieces.

The struggle-era artworks are rooted in resilience and resistance, which show the galvanising effects of art as a medium for social change. The artists utilised diverse methods of expression to highlight apartheid censorship, aggression, suppression and plunder.

Drawings, paintings and sculptures as physical manifestations of lived experience were central to creating and reinforcing a collective freedom struggle ethos of the indomitable spirit of freedom.

Anti-apartheid era art exhibitions during the liberation struggle, served to memorialise people's struggles, cultural work and political narratives.

The Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) provided a platform for artists, writers, actors and musicians.

The Johannesburg Art Foundation in turn, was a network of people, artists, writers and benefactors coming together in a symbiotic relationship.

The 'Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts' which was held at the University of Botswana in Gaborone from 5th to 9th July 1982 was a watershed event, which inspired the creation of many of the artworks on display at this exhibition.

The Symposium and Arts Festival enabled internal and exiled South African cultural practitioners from across political, racial and class divides to engage each other

directly through panel discussions, open debates, fine arts, photography, film, music, dance, poetry, theatre and social interaction.

Each sector of the arts had artists who spoke of their fields of engagement, to name but a few: poets Wally Serote, James Matthews, Baleka Kgositsile; musicians Abdullah Ibrahim, Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa; practitioners in literature Mandla Langa, Bachana Moekwena; and visual artists included Judy Seidman, Gordan Metz and Albio Gonzales.

Discussing the role of cultural practitioners and the milieu in which they operated, the poet Keorapetse 'bra Willie' Kgositsile challenged the notion of "art for art's sake" in a time of anti-apartheid struggle, arguing that cultural practitioners had a responsibility to be part of the fight against censorship, injustice, tyranny and oppression.

In a panel discussion paper titled *The Necessity of Art for National Liberation* I argued that: "As politics must teach people the ways and give them the means to take control over their own lives, art must teach people, in the most vivid and imaginative ways possible, how to take control over their experience and observations, how to link these with the struggle for liberation and a just society free of race, class and exploitation."

At the opening of the art exhibition titled *Art for Social Development*, Thami Mnye a graphic artist founder member of the Medu Art Ensemble said: "What had brought artists together was the indestructible and enduring spirit of struggle, that nourishes the quest for social development and justice."

The Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts galvanised cultural activists to use their creativity for social and political change.

The stunning artworks on display today reflect the themes of human endeavour and assert the vital role played by artists in the liberation struggle. The artworks remind us of the courage it takes to overcome adversity.

As the name of this art exhibition attests: *We still rise* to the revolutionary potential of art, in the expression of hope and conscious understanding and unflinching commitment to the colours of a new day.★

Cde Ben Martins is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member, SACP Secretary for International Relations and former Minister, MK combatant and political prisoner. He is also a published poet.

The 'Still We Rise' exhibition was held from 30 October to 23 November at the Atrium, Keyes Art Mile, Rosebank, Johannesburg to commemorate South Africa's artistic resilience and cultural defiance during Apartheid, and to coincide with the G20 Summit.



Poster for Still We Rise exhibition

PARTY BUILDING

Mobilising working-class power and popular democracy – the role and character of an SACP activist

CHARLEY NKADIMENG

Early in October, an extended meeting of the SACP national Party Building Commission was convened to provide provincial and district leaders across the country with a platform for inner-party introspection and constructive criticism across all levels of the organisation.

The meeting took place at a crucial period characterised by a well-coordinated offensive against the working class, intensified through a confluence of neocolonial capitalist factors such as austerity, ever-rising cost of living, and embarrassingly high levels of unemployment and inequality.

There should be no doubt that this period equally calls for disciplined and grassroots-oriented forms of organisation and mobilisation, for the masses and with the masses – all in the interests of the class we represent (the working class).

Thus, to confront the current neoliberal offensive decisively, Party activists need to take the urgent issue of Party Renewal seriously and ensure that the Party is capacitated at all levels.

This should include consistent political education and ideological training, proper membership management and targeted recruitment, recruitment of workers and the building of workplace units, building the YCL and intensifying our offensive on the battle of ideas.

In *What is To Be Done?* Lenin emphasised that mobilisation is a conscious act of leadership, not just spontaneous awakening. He insisted that class consciousness, of course, much like a Popular Left Front or a Powerful Socialist Movement of the Workers and Poor, had to be brought to the workers (and the working class) by revolutionary intellectuals. In Cuba, the organisational model was grassroots-based, with such organs of people’s power as Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) existing throughout the country. The violent wave of criminality in the country demands that Party cadres take the lead in reviving, strengthening or re-establishing Community Policing Forums, Street Committees and other forms of community organisations necessary to defend communities and bring peace and stability.

In this respect and related to the existence of community crime combatting initiatives, is the call by the SACP for party structures and communities to hold local SACS management accountable for their performance, including demanding explanations for dockets that go missing or lie unattended for years.

The experience of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua of developing mass organisations to anchor popular participation remains instructive. Although the Sandinistas often faced the challenge of balancing grassroots participation with democratic centralism, their model of uniting peasants,

workers, students and church activists through a broad front strategy remains significant to the approach of our Party’s programme on Building a Popular Left Front that will involve broad sections of the progressive civil society to defend the gains of the 1994 democratic breakthrough, as well as building momentum towards socialism in the communities and throughout the society.

Concretely, this enjoins branches to be actively involved in the day-to-day struggles of the community. Party programmes such as the People’s Red Caravan Campaign and the Red October should be used effectively as anchors for communities to take charge of their own development, exercise their own popular power and grassroots democracy, whilst simultaneously building sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance.

Mobilising and organising communities to be self-sustainable and self-reliant concurrently addresses the urgent tasks of mobilising communities to fight against crime, gender based violence and femicide, stock theft, gangsterism, substance and drug abuse, rising cost of living, poor quality of health services, unemployment and landlessness, amongst others. The People’s Red Caravan Campaign (PRC), launched and activated in Metlhabeng village, Rustenburg (Moses Kotane Province) this June, and subsequently rolled over to Matibidi in Mpumalanga in July has been a resounding success in ensuring that the SACP reconnects with communities and energises communities to take matters of community development into their own hands.

For a full week, SACP national and provincial leaders live with the community and together build a solid base for community self-reliance. Amongst others, this was successfully achieved in the two communities by resolving long-standing challenges in food security through community and household farming, improving poor road infrastructure, fixing community halls, clinics and schools, initiating community stores and co-operatives, and tackling gangsterism. Our gratitude goes to hundreds of Party volunteers, including professionals in the fields of engineering and technology, who offer their time and expertise in the service of the neglected working-class communities.

The PRC reactivation in Mghekezweni village, East London, in October 2025, as well as the subsequent roll-out to all other provinces, provides a similar platform for building momentum for socialist communities. The overwhelming success and enthusiasm experienced so far are enough to propel provincial and district structures to roll out the programme throughout the country.

For all these to succeed and remain sustainable, and central to the Party’s approach to issues of organisation and mobilisation, and therefore the capacity to implement the *South African Struggle for Socialism* – the SACP Programme



Photo: Michael Bega.

as adopted by the 2022 15th National Congress – lies the imperative for viable and functional structures at the district and branch level.

Accordingly, all Districts which have not yet gone for Congresses have been directed to go for District Congresses by December 2025, so that Party structures use 2026 primarily for mobilisation and organisation towards the 2026 local government elections – another historic moment in the life of the Community Party. For their part, branches should ensure that their membership status is in order and that they provide weekly reports on their activities in their localities. For the purpose of emphasis, the SACP enters the elections as an independent party of the working class to address the crisis of lack of working class representation (ensuring that the voices and struggles of working class and the poor drive local governance), to challenge neo-liberal policies, to build people’s power in communities, and to expedite the reconfiguration of the Alliance on the ground.

Our approach to the elections calls for a dynamic management of the transition, without compromising principle or undermining national Congress resolutions. Thus, it is the view of the SACP that members who serve in various capacities in the ANC led government should continue to implement the Alliance Manifesto: “... no serious and disciplined communist should agree to implement an anti SACP, anti- working class program. It’s time for every member of the SACP to help defend and promote the independent character and identity of the SACP”. This was aptly echoed by the General Secretary, Cde Solly Mapaila in his closing remarks to the Party Building Commission.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) provides some invaluable lessons for managing the transition (including the post-Tiananmen Square experience) and for championing and sustaining the struggle for socialism. One of the most instructive theories echoed and practised respectively by General Secretary Jiang Zemin and General Secretary Xi Jinping, of course under different contexts and emphasis, is that “...to run the country well, we must first run the Party

well, and to run the Party well, we must run it strictly”.

It continues to be Xi’s core idea that ‘the Party governs the state, and to govern the state well, the Party must govern itself strictly’. Marxist political parties survive and thrive on unity and discipline. Thus, since 1989 to date the CPC remains a leading global champion for strong leadership, for moral integrity and ideological cohesion, and for high-quality development and innovation-driven growth, sustainable development and poverty eradication. Across the political ecosystem, academia, business and the rest of the Chinese society, it is accepted that the success of China’s Socialism hinges on three interrelated pillars, being political conviction, discipline and decisive leadership. We ought to learn from these lessons.

SACP cadres should therefore understand that. SACP structures and councillors who will be serving in municipalities in the country should be the most exemplary so as to contribute meaningfully towards building socialism in local municipalities. The SACP Constitution, the election manifesto and code of conduct for councillors will help in this regard.

Armed with this overarching theoretical foundation, Party structures approach and execute the task of mobilisation and organisation different from all other organisations. There should be no need to lament over the obvious reality of lack of resources. Members should accept the reality that the Party will not receive any funding from our class enemy and apologists. Our resource base remains the workers and communities on the ground.

Having learnt from the experience of the People’s Red Caravan Campaign, the masses are ready and available to share accommodation and the little that they have. All that is required is for the vanguard Party of the Working Class to play and realise its historic role. ★

Cde Charley Nkadimeng is a member of the SACP Limpopo Provincial Executive Committee and Provincial Spokesperson.

COMMUNITIES

Pseudo-communities and pseudo-leaders: A crisis of leadership

Monde Nqulwana

Does a pseudo-community create pseudo-leaders, or do pseudo-leaders create pseudo-communities?

Community leadership is a specific form of leadership. It is frequently rooted in a specific place and is often local, although it can also represent a community of common interest, purpose, or practice. Ideally, communities gather to elect their leaders and call them "community leaders."

While community leaders are expected to guide, organise, and serve their people for the common good, this is no longer the case in many of our townships, particularly in squatter camps. Based on the daily experiences of community members, there is a growing loss of trust in the concept of community leadership. People no longer believe in the proverb that "it takes a village to raise a child."

This reality points to a total collapse of genuine leadership. The so-called community leaders lack the basic tenets of what leadership is. Instead of serving the people, they serve themselves, often at the expense of the broader community.

I am reminded of the apartheid era's job reservation system, where opportunities were exclusively reserved for whites. Today, a similar dynamic plays out, except the opportunities are reserved for "community leaders" and their inner circles. Within the context of the scarcity of job opportunities, community members have, in some cases, accepted this behaviour, some even mimicking it just to be favoured. Everyone now wants to be a leader, regardless of whether they possess any leadership qualities.

This raises serious questions about the calibre of leaders our communities produce and elect, and more importantly, whether they understand their roles as developers and supporters of the people. These pseudo-leaders cannot point to any meaningful development initiatives. Instead, they manipulate opportunities, especially jobs and housing, for personal gain. *"Sithi isintu ayidutyulwa seyotyethwe."*

Can you imagine the creators of a television show designing a fake, self-serving community built on lies and pretence? While this sounds fictional, it mirrors the reality of many of our communities today.

Across working-class communities, particularly in squatter camps (informal settlements), people are subjected to pseudo-leaders. In some cases, even pseudo-councillors. These figures are a reflection of what society has become, a society based on theatrical performance and pretence. Relationships are artificial, and real needs are ignored. Pseudo-communities tend to avoid or mask critical areas of need.

Even when strategies are implemented to develop the community, the true needs are often neglected. The following principles of building a true community are systematically ignored:

- Leaders create an equitable environment
- Leaders develop systems for open and honest communication
- Leaders promote the community, not themselves.

Living examples of a leadership crisis

You don't need to look far to see how this has become a crisis. The City of Cape Town's Jobseeker Policy, which should help fairly allocate employment opportunities through municipal contractors, is often undermined by community leaders. Instead of ensuring equity, leaders promote their "favourites" and cliques.

In these pseudo-communities, leaders pride themselves on communication. Meetings are held, emails sent, but the real issues are avoided. This is evident in some areas of Khayelitsha where waste collection has come to a halt due to the favouritism of these pseudo-leaders. Ward councillors often receive invalid feedback, and the real concerns of residents are dismissed. This pattern repeats itself in Strand, Mfuleni, Delft, and Kraaifontein: manipulation after manipulation.

In 2024, the City of Cape Town appointed an incompetent service provider via a flawed supply chain management process. The company failed to pay workers for over three months. Meanwhile, pseudo-community leaders intimidated workers into continuing with their duties, unpaid. The question is: whose interests were they serving?

Acknowledging Resistance

I commend the bravery of Expanded Public Works Programme workers currently employed by Manandi Services. They stood up against exploitation and demanded accountability from the City of Cape Town's Mayoral Committee Member for Urban Waste Management, Grant Twigg. This stand is an indication that our communities have lost confidence in so-called leaders, councillors, and even celebrated community-based structures.

Even when platforms for dialogue exist, if honest communication isn't consistently practiced, people stop offering honest feedback. They sense that the truth is unwelcome.

Lack of Oversight and Accountability

With the current crop of leaders, there is no genuine oversight or accountability. Instead of safeguarding community interests, services are manipulated to benefit a few. Since 2012, the City outsourced portable toilet and sanitation services, creating platforms for selective employment driven by favouritism. Councillors watch while deserving community members are sidelined for being "unconnected".

What real leaders do in a true community:

- They create equitable systems and question their assumptions;
- They avoid favouritism and understand how personal biases influence decision-making;
- They promote the community, not themselves;
- They focus on right actions, not personal gain.

Problems and disagreements will always exist, but in a true community, members treat each other with dignity, abandon cliques and factions, and work for the collective good.

This is not just an opinion but a lived experience for many. The issues raised here can be confirmed by countless others who have suffered under pseudo-leadership. We must reflect, act, and demand better. Our communities deserve true leaders: those who serve, not exploit and prey on the vulnerability of community members. ★

***Cde Monde Nkulwana, SACP Brian Bunting District.
He writes in his personal capacity.***

DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

Reversing our gains: private sector takeover of industrial output and the hollowing out of state capacity

KHAYA MAGAXA

The concept of revolution within left politics has always centred on the radical transformation of society – politically, socially, and economically – for the benefit of the historically marginalised majority.

Ordinary people participate in revolutionary processes not for excitement or popularity, but because they seek fundamental changes in their lives and those of future generations. A revolution must, therefore, lay the foundation for a developmental state capable of realising these genuine aspirations.

For decades, the African National Congress (ANC), as the leading democratic and revolutionary movement that enjoyed overwhelming support from our people, correctly analysed the nature of oppression in South Africa and concluded that it was Colonialism of a Special Type (CST). CST refers to a form of colonialism in which the coloniser and the colonised live within the same country, with political and economic structures deliberately designed to benefit the white minority while oppressing and exploiting the indigenous black majority and the country’s natural resources. British imperialism did not need to directly administer South Africa, because the white-minority regime fully represented their interests.

The ANC-led Alliance not only analysed this reality but developed a programme to resolve this profound injustice: the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The NDR is the scientific and historic mechanism to dismantle CST and its legacy. What makes the ANC revolutionary is not merely its formal commitment to this programme, but the degree to which it executes it. There is no middle path – either the organisation advances its historic mission, or it collaborates with the enemies of the NDR. Tactics may vary, but the strategic goal must remain intact.

The 1994 democratic breakthrough offered the ANC-led government a mandate to confront apartheid’s structural legacy and use state power to improve the lives of the black majority, who had been subjected to entrenched poverty. This required building a developmental state capable of driving economic growth and development while addressing race, class, and gender inequalities. Strong, well-capacitated state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have always been central to advancing the NDR, precisely because private capital is inherently unreliable and opposed to genuine transformation.

While the democratic state has made significant strides in improving the socio-economic conditions of our people, many gains have been reversed. The 1996 GEAR policy is among the most notable setbacks, with disastrous long-term effects that continue to impede the NDR. Instead of correcting

these mistakes, many leaders today appear determined to deepen them.

Today, the economy is stagnant, with growth projected at less than 1.4% for 2025. Debt-to-GDP exceeds 76%, and debt-service costs stand above 22%. Unemployment hovers around 40%, while youth unemployment exceeds 65%, including graduates. Inequality remains extreme. These crises compound widespread poverty and deepen the crisis of social reproduction. A nation as resource-rich and sophisticated as South Africa requires a radical economic reconstruction agenda, yet government remains locked in market-driven reforms.

One such reform is the highly publicised Operation *Vulindlela*, championed by the President. But what is the class and political content of this intervention? Its name, “*Vulindlela*”, speaks for itself: it opens the way, particularly for private business in SOEs.

The President frames Operation *Vulindlela* as a “bold agenda of economic reform” to address long-standing constraints across energy, logistics, water, telecommunications, and visas. It is presented as a mechanism to promote efficiency, primarily by introducing private-sector participation in state functions.

But the notion that the private sector is more efficient or ethical than the state is a myth. In fact, corruption in the public sector is routinely initiated by private businesses – the primary corruptors – yet only public servants are condemned.

More troubling is the extent to which the Presidency and National Treasury have effectively outsourced economic transformation to private capital. It is not in the nature of private capital to create jobs or drive structural transformation. Poverty, inequality, and unemployment are rooted precisely in the concentrated wealth of global and domestic monopolies.

Operation Vulindlela and other “reforms” must also be understood as part of the structural conditionalities attached to IMF and World Bank loans. South Africa recently secured a R26-billion World Bank loan for infrastructure, with the finance minister celebrating the partnership as essential to accelerating reforms. Among the conditions linked to these loans were the premature closure of coal power stations, contributing to self-inflicted load-shedding, and the creation of crises within Transnet to justify private-sector entry into rail and ports.

Noam Chomsky aptly described the neoliberal tactic: “Defund the public sector, ensure it fails, anger the public, then hand it over to private capital.” This logic now unites many of the neoliberal actors within the Government of National Unity.

The trend is unmistakable: dismantle the state’s developmental capacity, and hand public resources to private

interests – an agenda entirely at odds with a developmental state.

Recent developments exemplify this. Transnet has entered a partnership with the Gibela consortium to manufacture trains for PRASA, despite Transnet itself possessing the industrial capacity, facilities, training institutions, and skilled artisans to do so. Similarly, Denel, once a world-class leader in defence technology – with the capability to produce vehicles and even aircraft – has been allowed to deteriorate through neglect, underfunding, and deliberate de-industrialisation. Instead of supporting diversification and expansion, neoliberal actors propose selling Denel to private bidders.

During my tenure as Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Public Enterprises, it became clear that many legislative and regulatory constraints deliberately undermine SOEs. While post-1994 governments aspired to build a capable developmental state, National Treasury has repeatedly imposed regulations that weaken and incapacitate SOEs. These include:

- excessive regulatory burdens that render SOEs uncompetitive;
- red tape so severe that Transnet or Eskom struggle to purchase basic maintenance parts;
- prohibitions on public-public collaboration – for example, Treasury denying Transnet permission to work with CSIR on research and forcing it to seek private quotations.

Moreover, government is actively breaking SOEs into smaller entities through the neoliberal policy of “deconcentration”, reducing their balance sheets and forcing dependence on the private sector for major infrastructure projects. Competition policy has been weaponised to attack “state monopolies” in network industries, purely to open space for private capital.

The government increasingly promotes public-private partnerships (PPPs) while resisting public-public collaboration – precisely because PPPs offer lucrative opportunities for private profiteering and political kickbacks. This violates both the letter and spirit of cooperative governance and undermines the ability of the state to deliver public goods.

In the final analysis, *Operation Vulindlela* represents not only a reversal of gains made since 1994 but a voluntary surrender of the little economic leverage the black majority has attained. It is an aggressive abandonment of the NDR, entrenching racialised economic inequalities and hollowing out the state’s developmental instruments.

A state that lacks the capacity to implement its policies cannot drive the NDR – and it certainly cannot do so through the private sector. ★

Cde Khaya Magaxa is SACP Central Committee member, former Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises, and former SACP Western Cape Provincial Secretary. He writes in his personal capacity.

DIGITAL MEDIA

What happens to our democratic societies when lies travel faster than the truth?

SINOXOLO DUMA MTHOMBENI

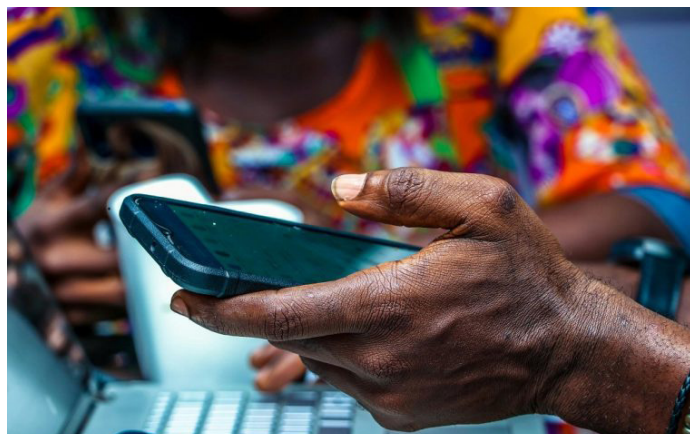
The issue of disinformation cannot be considered without discussing the digital revolution, which has led to the advent of social media and its networking sites.

Early this year US President Donald Trump took to X (Twitter) to make false claims about land confiscation and a “white genocide” in South Africa, both which can only been a figment of his imagination, but recognised as having a deeper political propagandistic aspect. In an attempt to counter this false narrative, the Office of the Presidency immediately released a media statement that seemingly did not generate or garner the same traffic and audience reach as the Trump tweets. This is one of many examples of a flawed information media ecosystem that is smudged by misinformation and disinformation on social media.

Over the years we have seen the weaponisation of social media for producing, manipulating and disseminating information. While this rise also mean we have information at our fingertips, it has completely disarranged and reconfigured journalistic practices and integrity, tainting traditional media as our main source of news and taking away the sole authority of journalists as news gatekeepers.

The aftermath has been an online information highway traffic, defined by a jumble of factual and fabricated content that has left many citizens with the responsibility of sifting through and discerning between fact and fiction. This consequence has revealed that, while social media and its easy access to information have been empowering, it has birthed an information disorder which remains detrimental to our democratic societies. It threatens our already “fragile social construct”.

The long shadow cast by mis/disinformation continues to be witnessed in the targeting of vulnerable and marginalised groups by exploiting existing socio-economic issues. This is often accomplished through the proliferation of distorted



Over the years we have seen the weaponisation of social media for producing, manipulating and disseminating information.

and sensationalised accounts of unemployment, poverty, social inequality and limited access to public services.

The South African Social Security Agency (Sassa) is an ideal example of an institution that has had to bear the brunt of social media misinformation. The wave of disinformation under Sassa has often been underpinned by fake job advertisements and grant updates, with the latest being in May of this year, when the agency had to clarify false social media claims about grant recipients who should expect double payments; much like the old claims of an apparent unemployment grant of R2200.

So, we see how the disinformation continues to pervert high socio-economic pressures to instil fear, to sow distrust among socio-cultural groups and their institutions and to create confusion and scepticism among people. It exacerbates marginalisation by swaying public discourse and using false narratives to stir violence and provoke action. When we look at how this disorder has heightened social divisions and forced people into polarised echo-chambers, the current wave of the immigration discourse cannot be brushed aside. This discourse exposes us to the way in which social media is consistently viewed as an “alternative public sphere” and the way disinformation is being used as both a political and ideological tool to influence real-world narratives and violent extremist conspiracies.

Given this, when we view information as an important resource and an integral component of our democratic societies, it becomes easier to acknowledge that mis/disinformation may be an incessant barrier to civic participation, informed decision-making and social cohesion. As ‘International Media Support’ Director, Jesper Højberg so clearly states, “Informed citizens are the basis of any functioning democracy.”

But for ordinary citizens whose news consumption practices are driven by immediacy and a yearning for constant updates, combating mis/disinformation remains a complex phenomenon. Employing legislative or regulatory frameworks often collides with the dynamics of freedom of expression, where disinformation is used in subjective and prejudiced contexts, often witnessed in the discrediting of information which seeks to hold those who are in power accountable.

As for fostering media literacy initiatives, we should weigh the feasibility of such programmes, especially in contexts where citizens use information (whether manipulated or not) to gratify their psychosocial desires and needs.

After all, it is easy to believe a lie when the lie validates our socio-economic realities, preconceived beliefs and our subject status within economically marginalised societies.★

Cde Sinxolo Odidi Mahlatshana is a Media Studies Lecturer.

PALESTINE

The effects of the Balfour Declaration continue to prevail

RENEVA FOURIE

The Balfour Declaration, issued by the British government on 2 November 1917, announced support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. This brief public statement carried profound historical weight. It was a pivotal act of imperial decision-making that shaped the political and territorial structures of the modern Middle East.

The Balfour Declaration became a heinous tool of colonialism, representing the height of imperial prerogative in which an external power claimed the authority to allocate land and determine the political destiny of communities already inhabiting that land. It created a framework that privileged one population over another and reconfigured sovereignty in deeply unequal ways. While it contained the caveat that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”, this was a meaningless gesture, as the declaration enabled the very opposite.

The Declaration initiated a long trajectory of dispossession and structural transformation. It redefined who counts, who belongs and who decides. Its imprint can be seen in territorial partitioning, population displacement, settlement expansion and the development of systems of military occupation that have endured for generations.

The consequences remain visible. The recent devastation in Gaza, with the deaths of at least tens of thousands of civilians, the widespread destruction of infrastructure, the vast displacement of families and the obstruction of humanitarian aid, is part of a long historical continuum that traces back to the original imperial decision that the Declaration embodied. The violence of today cannot be separated from the structures placed in motion by that act of British policy.

To examine these legacies, it is valuable to consider how the mechanisms that emerged after the Balfour Declaration share features with other systems of colonial domination. The situation between the Zionist entity and Palestine bears significant comparison with the apartheid apparatus once enforced in South Africa. The thread that connects them is the centrality of self-determination. In both cases, an external and later settler power established control through spatial, legal, economic and military systems that entrenched asymmetry.

One mechanism is the organisation of land and space. The Balfour Declaration laid the groundwork for a territorial reordering that later produced highly unequal patterns of land allocation. In South Africa, the apartheid government created homelands that confined the Black majority to marginal territories while maintaining prime land for the settler minority.

In apartheid Israel and Palestine, a similarly uneven geography developed. The occupied territories have been fragmented through incremental Zionist settler land grabs reinforced by checkpoints, barriers, enclaves and extensive restrictions on movement. Space itself became a method of control. This fragmentation shapes rights, mobility, access to services, infrastructure and security. The pattern that grew from the imperial foundations set during the British Mandate continues to structure daily life.

Another mechanism is legal and administrative differentiation. Systems rooted in colonial thinking often create distinct categories of people with different rights. Under South African apartheid, the law classified individuals by racial identity and imposed separate legal frameworks that controlled movement, residence and political participation. In the territory shaped by the Balfour Declaration, a comparable pattern appears.

Different legal regimes govern different populations. Palestinians encounter a permit system that regulates travel, work and residency. Resources and infrastructure are allocated through rules that institutionalise inequality. Domination becomes embedded not only in physical restrictions but also in bureaucratic procedures that treat groups differently and normalise inequity. The origins of these hierarchies lie in the initial act of imperial authority that the Declaration represented.

A further mechanism concerns economic structures. In apartheid South Africa, the economy depended on the exploitation of the Black majority while limiting access to advancement or ownership. In apartheid Israel and Palestine, the economic landscape shows profound asymmetry. Control of land, natural resources, borders and infrastructure places Palestinians in a position of chronic disadvantage. Movement restrictions impede trade and employment. Dependence is reinforced through policies that limit agency. This reflects the broader pattern of structural domination that grew from the colonial foundations laid by the Declaration, which introduced a political order designed to elevate one community at the expense of another.

Harsh repression is also part of this pattern. Under apartheid, the South African state maintained control through militarisation, police violence, detentions without trial and the suppression of protest. In Palestine today, military checkpoints, night raids, administrative detention and the use of lethal force remain common features of life. Armed personnel and surveillance are persistent. Ordinary movement requires compliance with an invasive security regime.

This environment mirrors earlier forms of domination in which physical force cemented the hierarchy created by unequal political arrangements. The Balfour Declaration initiated the restructuring of the territory in a way that made such coercive practices thinkable and subsequently routine.



March in London, UK, in 2017, the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration.

The international character of this system cannot be overlooked. Colonialism rarely functions in isolation. It requires external support, financial backing, diplomatic protection and military cooperation. The Balfour Declaration was itself a diplomatic act through which the British Empire projected its interests and authority onto a land already inhabited by others.

In the decades since, the allies of the Zionist entity, including the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, have reinforced the structures that emerged from the Declaration. Naval power, military assistance, and diplomatic backing contribute to an occupation regime embedded within a global network of security and defence industries. Any effort to dismantle structures of domination requires an understanding of this broader power architecture.

This same international context shapes the politics of ceasefires. A ceasefire in Gaza is supposed to be underway following the extensive genocide by apartheid Israel. Yet, its terms are influenced by the same global forces that underpinned the original Declaration. Peace is not only a process between local actors. It is shaped by those who supply arms, mediate diplomacy and define the agenda for reconstruction.

Western involvement frequently privileges stabilisation over the resolution of root causes. Temporary cessation of hostilities may occur without any shift in the structures of inequality that the Declaration set in motion. Negotiation without parity, continued arms transfers during dialogue and diplomatic preferences for maintaining an unequal status all contribute to a peace process that does not address the fundamental injustice at the heart of the conflict.

The end of apartheid in South Africa demonstrated the potential of international pressure, legal accountability and broad-based mobilisation to transform entrenched systems. This history serves as a reminder that solidarity remains essential. The Palestinian struggle for self-determination requires not only global support but also strong local agency. Unity among Palestinian political factions is vital for advancing collective goals.

The parallels between the South African apartheid regime and the Israeli/Palestinian situation are many but there are also many differences. For example, the fragmentation of territory in the Israeli/Palestinian context is more extreme and variegated than most bantustan frameworks, and the extent of aggression is far worse.

Perhaps one of the main differences between apartheid SA and apartheid Israel is that while the former depended on the non-white workforce to prosper, the latter regards Palestinians as utterly dispensable. This shapes the brutality of Zionist oppression and is a major factor in its genocide against Palestinians. These differences do not weaken the analytical value of the comparison – they sharpen it.

The Balfour Declaration is therefore not merely a document from the past. It is a continuing force that shaped structures of land control, legal inequality, economic dependency and repression. Its legacy remains central to the challenges of the present and to the pursuit of a just and lasting future for all who inhabit the land. ★

Cde Reneva Fourie is a member of the Central Committee and Politburo.

NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT

Commodification of solidarity: a critique of the Non-aligned Movement and contemporary struggles

Hlengiwe Nkonyane and Pius Vilakati

The history of the Non-Aligned Movement is often written as a story of post-colonial assertion and diplomatic resistance. Formed in 1961 by leaders of Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, Ghana, and Indonesia, the movement sought to defend the sovereignty of newly independent states in a world shaped by the bipolar tensions of the Cold War.

It aimed to create political space for oppressed nations to determine their own developmental paths without falling under the domination of imperialism. With 121 member states today, it remains the second-largest intergovernmental body after the United Nations.

From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the birth of the Non-Aligned Movement was a significant response to imperialism. It expressed the demand of the global South to break from direct colonial rule and resist new forms of economic subordination.

Yet, the movement emerged in a world system still defined by uneven development and monopoly capital. For this reason, it has always faced a contradiction. It seeks unity among developing countries while many of these same countries remain structurally dependent on financial aid, foreign investment, and the political influence of major powers. Reaching consensus within the movement is difficult precisely because its members are constrained by the very global capitalist order they ostensibly wish to transform.

The Non-Aligned Movement continues to raise questions of decolonisation, human rights, racism, occupation, and neo-colonialism. Its debates on poverty, sustainable development, and UN reform show that the concerns of the global South remain unresolved. However, its political weight has weakened in a world where many states seek bilateral economic advantages rather than collective resistance to imperialism.

The return of Morocco to the African Union and the deferral of the Sahrawi question to the UN is a clear example. The economic influence of Morocco, including investments in agriculture, tourism and energy, has shaped the positions of several states. This reveals how neo-colonial relations persist when material dependence undermines principled solidarity.³

Commodifying solidarity

A key problem in contemporary international politics is the growing commodification of solidarity. Popular movements develop symbols, slogans, and practices that express the unity of oppressed people. However, these can be appropriated by states, political parties, or commercial actors. When this occurs, the meaning of solidarity becomes diluted. It is turned into a tool for reputation management rather than a commitment to collective struggle.

Solidarity originally referred to the Roman legal idea of obligation in unity.⁴ It expressed the belief that individuals act, or must act, on behalf of the whole. In its political form, solidarity requires that people support each other, especially in times of hardship.

Under capitalism, however, solidarity becomes vulnerable to market pressures. Organisations depend on external funding through grants or donations, which can shape their decisions and priorities. Movements that once stood for justice may shift their positions to avoid losing institutional backing. The tension between genuine, organic solidarity, and the financial realities of a market driven society becomes clear.

The article focuses on South Africa as a case study, as one of the member states of the Non-Aligned movement. This will assist in zooming-in on one of the influential states in Africa and a member of the G20 countries:

South Africa, Morocco and Sahrawi

South Africa has historically supported the struggle of the Sahrawi people against Moroccan occupation. This position aligns with the country's own anti-colonial tradition and its understanding of liberation as an international project. However, recent expressions of support for Morocco from some political actors within South Africa show fractures in domestic solidarity.

The relationship between Morocco's economic influence and the shifting political positions across the continent cannot be ignored. When access to fertilisers, tourism markets, fisheries, or renewable energy cooperation is at stake, some states adopt inward-looking self-interest approaches.⁵ This reflects a transitional world order where material incentives often outweigh principled commitment to national liberation.

Israel, Palestine, and manufactured narratives

The Palestinian struggle against apartheid Israel provides another example of how solidarity is manipulated. Media

¹ Non-Aligned Movement – History (<https://nam.go.ug/history>).

² Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol. 40 pp. 117-144 Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1995. (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kim-ilsung/1986/06/20.htm#:~:text=The%20non%20aligned%20countries%20must%20liberation%20cause%20will%20be%20hastened>).

³ Saddiki S Morocco's Foreign Policy Treads on the Shifting Sands of Africa (Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, April 2018).

⁴ Sommermann K Some Reflections on the Concept of Solidarity and its Transformation into a Legal Principle Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, 2014.

⁵ Fourie R MKP, Morocco Alliance A Betrayal of the Saharawi Struggle (<https://theafrican.co.za/tvbox/2025-07-25-mkp-morocco-alliance-a-betrayal-of-the-saharawi-struggle/>).



Performative solidarity. The Non-Aligned Movement needs to be reconfigured to address current global challenges.

reports indicate that certain organisations have facilitated travel for political or public relations purposes. In August, investigations exposed several South African newspapers that concealed sponsorship of their trips to Israel,⁶ a violation of the ethics code of the press council. When journalists accept funded tours without disclosure, their reporting risks becoming propaganda rather than independent analysis.⁷

Similarly, certain political parties, mainly the DA, PA and ACDP, delegations from South Africa have participated in all-expenses paid trips to Israel described as so-called “fact-finding” missions. These visits included meetings with senior Israeli officials and mirrored earlier initiatives, dating back to 2015, of students who were sponsored to visit Israel under the “South Africa Israel Forum”⁸ and upon return were expected to promote the narrative of a so called “balanced and open-minded” engagement.⁹ Such manoeuvres aim to manufacture pro-Israeli narratives and weaken global solidarity with the Palestinian people. They reveal how imperialist forces use soft power to neutralise criticism and encourage confusion.

Performative solidarity and the crisis of moral authority

The rise of performative solidarity further complicates contemporary political life. Performative solidarity refers to public expressions of support that are motivated by personal image rather than genuine conviction.¹⁰ These acts are easy, visible, and low-cost. They include symbolic gestures such as changes to profile pictures or posts on superficial social media. There is often a gap between what individuals display publicly and the choices they make privately.

A Marxist-Leninist approach recognises that such

behaviour emerges in societies where individualism dominates and where political struggle is turned into a spectacle. Real solidarity requires effort, study, and sacrifice. It involves educating oneself from authoritative sources, participating in difficult discussions, volunteering time, and challenging systemic inequality even when it brings no personal benefit. Genuine solidarity is collective and rooted in material action, not appearance.

The call must be made clear; solidarity cannot be for sale if it is to serve the oppressed. The struggles of Sahrawi and Palestine illustrate the need for a principled, anti-imperialist approach.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains important, but it must confront the structural forces that weaken its unity. Economic dependency, media manipulation, and political opportunism erode the foundations of collective action. Proclaiming non-alignment while at the same time bowing to the pressures of neocolonial Western powers amounts to betraying the oppressed people who require practical solidarity.

A Marxist-Leninist interpretation reminds us that solidarity is not sentiment. It is a material relationship built through a¹¹ common struggle against imperialism and exploitation. The liberation of any nation is tied to the liberation of all. To reclaim the power of solidarity, movements must resist commodification, reject externally funded narratives, and reaffirm their commitment to anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggle. Only then can solidarity regain its historical role as a force that binds people together for the transformation of society. ★

Cde Hlengiwe Nkonyane is an activist of the SACP in Gauteng.

Cde Pius Vilakati is Communist Party of Swaziland’s Central Committee member and head of its research department. They write in their personal capacities.

6 Lorgat H Exposed: The SA media propagandists for Israel
 (<https://elitshaneews.org.za/2025/08/12/exposed-the-sa-media-propagandists-for-israel/>)
 7 Lorgat H above.
 8 Yazeed Kamaldien Row over students’ Israel visit, Independent Online
 (<https://iol.co.za/news/politics/2015-07-12-row-over-students-israel-visit/>).
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CHINA-AFRICA

China-Africa commitments to global governance reform

SITHEMBISO BHENGU

The aftermath of the Second World War coalesced an international effort to build a multilateral system of governance to promote global peace and put an end to global wars and destruction.

The formation of the United Nations and other institutional arrangements was to foster mutual support among nations, to promote international trade, and to bolster international cooperation.

While many problems of conflicts, trade barriers, and strife continued, the multilateral arrangements and the development of global systems of governance and cooperation strengthened possibilities for peace and stability, while promoting trade and growth.

Yet in the last seven to ten years, we have witnessed a regression, a growing undermining of multilateralism, mostly propagated by the politics of hegemonism, conflicts, and war mongering and anti-trade practices by sections of the global North. These cumulatively undermine the entire system of global governance, accelerating possibilities for conflicts, war, and human crisis, taking place on every continent on the earth today.

The protracted genocidal attacks by the apartheid state of Israel, primarily on Palestinians, and their incessant airstrikes and destabilisation of the entire region, through attacks in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Yemen.

In the face of the inadequacy and failure of our existing global governance systems through the UN Security Council to reign-in on Israel, even international judicial institutions like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) are being undermined, when it comes to abuses by those associated with the global North, while nations in the global South are quickly prosecuted by the same institutions.

This is resulting in growing distrust and receding confidence in the efficacy of the current global governance institutions and their ability to regulate international peace and justice.

The weaknesses in the current global governance arrangements are also producing the worst humanitarian crisis in Sudan. The war that reemerged in April 2023 has killed more than 150,000 people, displacing more than 14 million others.

The continuing conflict, mostly because of a lack of decisive response from global governance institutions and agencies, is now seeing a human crisis, in which more than 2 million people face (or are at risk of) famine, and 24.6 million people are facing acute hunger.

Just a few weeks back, the Caribbean region, as well as Cuba, experienced the devastating Hurricane Melissa. The Cuban crisis is compounded by the continued indifference of

the global governance institutions to the continued unilateral embargo and sanctions imposed by the US government on Cuba.

Africa-China's commitment to advancing reform

The global South has consistently made the commitment to advance reforms that should enhance the effectiveness of global governance mechanisms and arrangements, which should produce lasting global peace and stability, and promote equitable and fair global trade, economic growth, and development of all nations.

President Ramaphosa's Keynote Address during the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, UN General Assembly on 25 September 2025, highlighted the need for urgent action on global challenges, including peace, climate change, and sustainable development, while reaffirming South Africa's commitment to multilateralism.

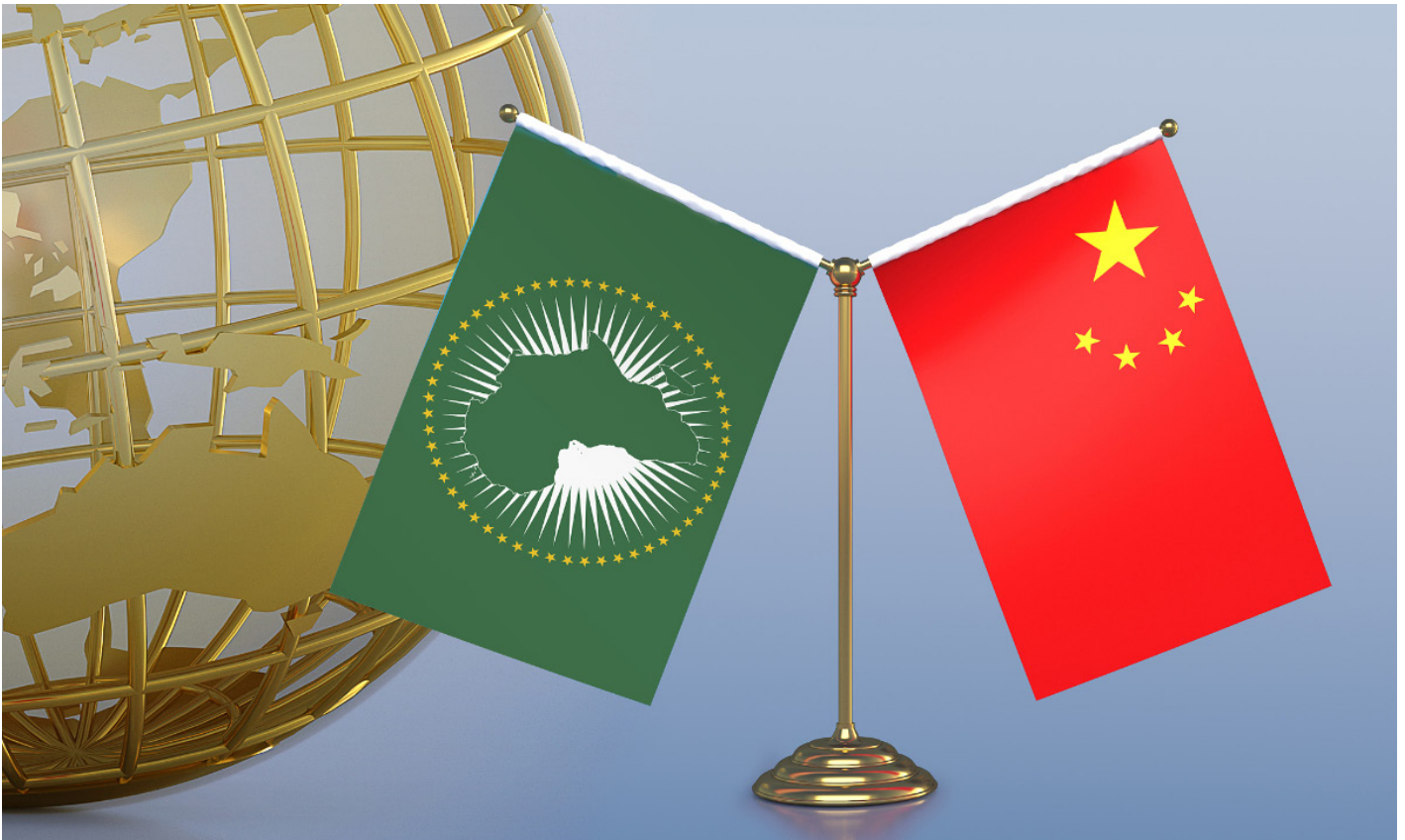
He called for a stronger global economic governance system, faster debt relief and financing for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and reform of international tax rules. He also emphasised the importance of amplifying the voice of the African continent and the Global South in global institutions.

In a similar thrust, President Xi Jinping's speech at the recent APEC CEO Summit on 31 October 2025 stated, "The world has come to a new crossroads – solidarity, cooperation and mutual benefit or return of hegemonism and the law of the jungle; multilateralism, openness and inclusiveness or unilateralism and protectionism. What we choose will profoundly affect the future of the world. We must have vision, step up to our responsibility, and choose what meets the expectation of the people in the Asia Pacific and stands the test of history.

"As the saying goes, 'He who knows the past understands the present.' Since the great victory of the World Anti-Fascist War 80 years ago, the international system with the United Nations at its core has been put in place gradually, and multilateral systems in economic, trade, financial and other areas have been established. A new chapter was opened for humanity's pursuit of peace and development".

President Xi highlighted the deficiency of hegemonism, again recommitting China to the urgent need for global governance reform, the need to recommit ourselves to multilateralism, to win-win principles and practices.

He outlined China's own concrete commitment to this, through the four global initiatives, namely, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilisation Initiative, and the Global Governance Initiative, through which China has provided the most comprehensive package for the promotion of effective multilateralism and global governance institutions, based on mutual respect of all nations and peoples, as well as based on fairness and win-win solutions.



The current crisis in Gaza, with renewed violence and attacks by the Israel Defence Forces, points to the urgency of reform at the United Nations and its Security Council. The UN meeting last month almost unanimously passed a resolution to sanction Israel for its aggression against the Palestinian people.

But just one veto by the US government put the resolution to no effect. This, among a myriad of similar disparities within the Security Council, highlights the need for reform, also because, notwithstanding the inclusion of China and Russia, the UN Security Council represents historic colonial contours of power and control, 8 decades after the formation of a United Nations, that was supposed to build equal representation in global governance.

China’s contribution to safeguarding world peace and promoting common development

China has already led the initiative of world peace through the Global Security Initiative, initiated by President Xi. The release of *Humanity 2050: Comprehensive Development Goals*, which was released by Renmin University at the 2024 Tongzhou Global Development Forum, placed the issue of peaceful coexistence at the centre of China’s development objectives, as part of China’s modernisation.

What is perhaps needed going forward is the continued leadership that China has already begun to show, especially in inviting partners through the numerous initiatives initiated

by the CPC and the government of China, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), as well as China’s continued role in South-South initiatives, in our specific case including the expansion of the work through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (Focac), as well as to extend the significant role of Brics+ mechanism, also as a platform for promoting world peace.

Both Africa, through its African Union and other institutions, as well as China, working collaboratively through institutional bodies like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, should be at the forefront of the push for reforms at the United Nations, especially reforms to its Security Council.

This would ideally produce a UN Security Council that is more representative in its permanent members, which should include representation from Africa. The second required reform in the UN Security Council must entail giving the council more power to prosecution of UN Security Council resolutions.

This must involve altering the current VETO system in the UN Security Council, in which an almost unanimous resolution could be vetoed by a single permanent member of the UN Security Council, thus rendering the entire enforcement of the United Nations resolution null and void. ★

Dr Sithembiso Bhengu is the Director of the Chris Hani Institute.

HAMBA KAHLE SUNNY SINGH

Sunny Singh: Always, everywhere, anytime

SACP message to the memorial for Sunny Singh delivered by Cde Yunus Carrim, Durban, 25 November.

Some people are great for just being who they are. That's Sunny Singh. Inherently and, in a way, genetically good. Lucky for the ANC-led movement that his inherent nature found its fullest expression in the struggle for liberation. And how to.

Sunny was always, everywhere, anytime. Right up to his last breath. His up-and-down health notwithstanding. And he was always there with his wonderful partner, Urmilla, an activist in her own right. If Sunny wasn't at a political meeting you'd be surprised. Maybe he's not well, maybe he's got another more pressing commitment, you'd think?

It was his never-ending political contribution, his character, his personality and his way of connecting to anybody and everybody in and outside the movement that led to this endless, massive outpouring of grief, empathy, respect and adulation for him and a sense of personal loss, even from people who didn't know him well. There must be very few people in our movement who can elicit this spontaneous response.

Clearly, I'm not the appropriate person to speak on behalf of the SACP at this memorial. Cde Ronnie worked with Sunny and knew him for much longer and in much greater depth. And the Party took it that he'd speak on our behalf. But it emerged very late yesterday afternoon that Cde Ronnie will be speaking at the crematorium and it was too late for our General Secretary or any other national office bearer to make it. So, you're left with me. But I bring you Cde Solly Mapaila's, the Central Committee's and the Party's good wishes and our deepest condolences to Cde Urmilla and the family, friends and close comrades of Cde Sunny.

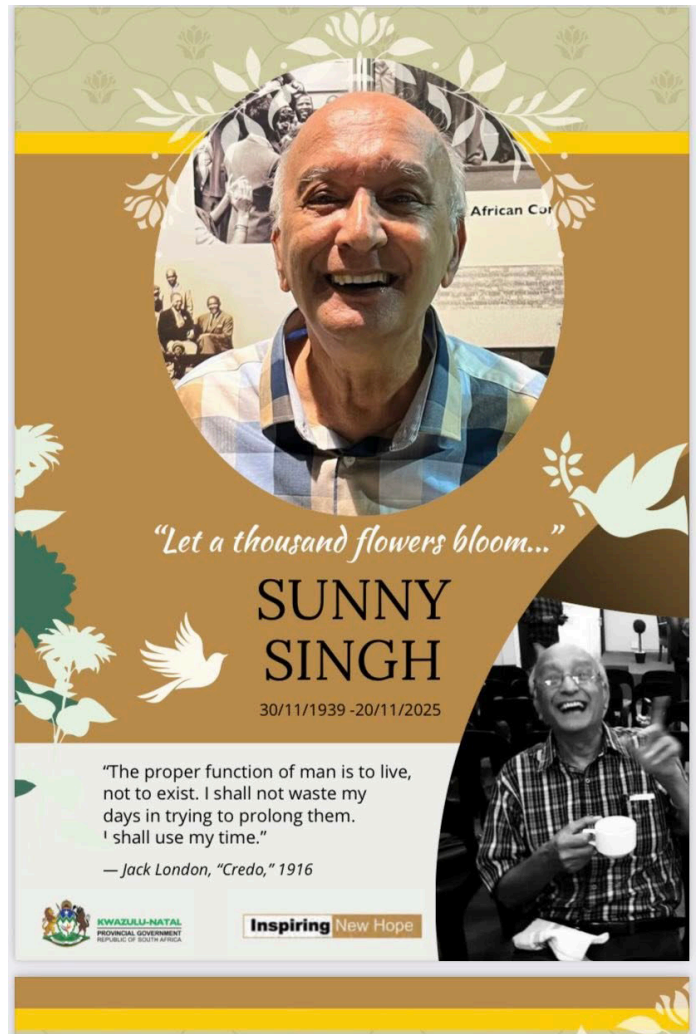
Cde Sunny is known for his ANC and MK roles. But not enough for his role in the SACP to which he remained committed, even if he was not active in recent years.

Born in 1939 in Cato Manor, Durban, Sunny came from a poor family. He started school at 11 and left in standard 6 to go to work. The Group Areas Act removals from Cato Manor and the 1956 Treason Trial were among the reasons he became politically active.

He joined the Natal Indian Youth Congress and Natal Indian Congress and was also drawn to Marxism.

"My political history," he said in an interview with this writer, "started with my first experience of exploitation at age 12. Not consciously, but emotionally; it was the vicious exploitation by Indian landlords. I hadn't come across white people then so it was a class issue within the Indian community, although I didn't realise that until later. It was the evils of landlordism. My father was a rice grower and a flower planter. We leased land and the landlords were very, very cruel, and that's when I began, in my own right, to understand an enemy."

So, his Marxism didn't just come from his extensive reading – but from personal experience of class exploitation.



In 1962, he joined MK. Arrested in 1963, he faced trial with 18 others and was sentenced to ten years on Robben Island. He was responsible for collecting and distributing news despite the ban on this. He and other comrades connected with the ordinary prisoners to smuggle in newspapers, magazines and radios.

On his release from prison in 1974, Cde Sunny was placed under house arrest. But almost immediately he got involved in community, political and trade union activities and began to recruit people into the underground ANC. He left the country illegally in 1976 and played various roles in the ANC, based in Angola, Maputo, Zambia and elsewhere. In 1988 he was appointed the ANC representative in Holland.

He got more involved in the SACP after 1976 and attended its 1984 Congress in Moscow. There was a discussion on whether the ANC's NEC should be open to all races or remain confined to Africans. Sunny contributed to the final position of the Party that the ANC NEC should be open to all – and that was the decision of the ANC at its 1985 Kabwe Conference.

Sunny had an instinctive empathy for the poor and marginalised – so he was impelled into the SACP. And he

would every now and then Whatsapp us articles on Marxism. Some of them came from remote sources.

In recent years he was very active in the Monty Naicker Museum in the Moses Mabhida Stadium.

Cde Sunny could be very argumentative. And he could be very blunt. But you could never get irritated with him. As you would with any other person. Sunny had such an endearing, overwhelming personality and such a moral force that you just succumbed.

Just one example. In an interview I asked him who had recruited Dutch internationalist, Klaas de Jonge, into the ANC political underground.

“Me.”

“I was told it was Indres.”

He spluttered. “Hey, hey, were you there??”

“No, but...”

“So, who are you interviewing? Yourself? Or me...”

“Well...(laughter)...”

“Hey man, how you going to write a book, if you can’t get your facts right??”

As it happens, he had, in fact, recruited de Jonge.

But that’s Sunny for you. Utterly loveable even in his irritations.

Almost always, if Sunny criticised somebody, he’d end up saying but I love him or her. Or he or she’s a lovely person. It came, it seems to me, from a love deep within him for people.

And it’s what bound him to Urmilla and she to him. They were, to use a term long lost, “comrade soulmates”.

Of course, as with so many others, Sunny was obsessed with and angered by the increasing corruption in and incompetence of our movement.

But for all the difficulties in the movement, he never gave up on it. His resilience shone through from the very core of his being.

Thank you Sunny for being who you are. Thank you Urmilla for sharing him with us.

The SACP salutes both of you!

Cde Sunny was born to be pro-poor and progressive. And he has passed on being that. And he will live on through us who stay the course. ★

Hamba Kahle Umkhonto!

HAMBA KAHLE SUNNY SINGH

Saluting Sunny Singh

RONNIE KASRILS

Farewell oration, Claire Estate Crematorium, Durban, 25 November.

The life of Girja Sunny Singh has been a momentous journey, from his birth in the destitute environs of Cato Manor nearly 86 years ago, to the final farewell at this historic crematorium close to where the Umgeni flows into the Indian Ocean, in a vastly changed country and world. Today is five days short of his 86th birthday, and we have listened to many outstanding tributes from leaders of this province, comrades from the liberation movement in which he served, and family members. A day of parting has transformed into a celebration of a life that triumphed over cruelty and oppression, a life of courageous service to our people and country.

I was privileged to know Sunny from 1960, when he was 20, and I, a year older, both born in November, the month of Scorpio: he had a stronger sting in his tail. Within a year we were bombing apartheid targets in Durban. He was captured and went to prison. I was damn fortunate and escaped into exile. We joined up in 1980 and worked together once again. I will strive to avoid repeating what so many others have already eloquently attested to, save for some comments and one particular reflection. I believe when Mac Maharaj declared that Sunny was a better man than he, there was a deep, soulful reflection that the dead open the eyes of the living and cherish those no longer with us.

Girja Sunny Singh was a courageous freedom fighter and patriot, of honesty and integrity, driven by a passion to break the chains of slavery and oppression in South Africa and globally. These are words reflected in countless ways through the outpouring of love and respect for him, seen through social media postings online, with over 20,000 viewers so far. His friend Anu of the Pops Rampersad group, with whom he played the card game Thunee – and raucous by all accounts it was – describes him as a humble and caring person who never saw himself as a “know it all”. Everyone saw him as a kind, compassionate person who cared for others. He was warm and approachable, a raconteur of stories of struggle and life, with a quirky sense of humour. Little wonder that he made so many friends who will deeply miss him. Do note that the Gujarat word for Thunee means water, for I will return to that later --there can be no life without water.

To you, dear Urmilla, Sunny’s greatest love, our deepest wish is that our love for Sunny sustains you with strength evermore in this time of sorrow and grief.

Sunny’s greatest hero, Ernesto Che Guevara, believed that revolutionary love is the guiding principle of a true revolutionary, stemming from a love for justice, the oppressed, and a better world. Che stated that “The true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love...It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.” He defined revolution as being motivated by a deep-seated passion for justice and hatred of injustice. This love is not for personal gain, but for the collective well-being of society and the struggle for a more equitable world. Therein lies the basis for true internationalism.



Cde Ronnie Kasrils with Sunny Singh and his wife Urmilla August 2025.

Sunny Singh embodied such qualities. The kind of movement Che was referring to, and Sunny sought, was one which could lead the people in the struggle for change: disciplined, mass-based, led by revolutionaries who sought to serve the people and solve their problems, a movement of the people, grass-roots, working class and community-based, not remote, not serving personal interests. Not leaders in love with themselves, their own egos, but who demonstrably love the people because they serve and sacrifice for their upliftment, and there can be no real change that is not based on the emancipation of the masses.

Those of Sunny’s generation, building on their predecessors – were notable for self-sacrifice, prepared to court imprisonment, torture and death. That’s love, that’s solidarity. That’s what kept them united and on course. That was his experience in the Natal Indian Congress, Umkhonto we Sizwe, SACP and later the ANC. He was a member of all in that sequence and served with loyalty and devotion.

I believe it is my duty to remind us all that Sunny was a communist struggling for a classless society in which indignity, inequality, racism, oppression, exploitation, conflict and war are consigned to the dustbin of history. As a non-believer, his view was that it is here on earth that a better life for all needs to be struggled for and won, and that it is the destiny of the working class to lead the struggle for socialism. However, he respected all religions and those

with true faith, as he respected all patriots in the struggle to liberate a country.

Maya Angelou, Caribbean poet, stated: "I do not trust any revolution where love is not allowed." This sums up Sunny's concern for the ANC and the SACP, that the ideals, values and principles must survive. The problems lie in those who no longer serve the people but instead are corrupted by love for wealth and power.

As I come to a close, I would like to reveal a rather personal way in which Sunny and I came to address one another. Some years ago, in the passing parade of the old guard, he began to refer to the two of us as among "The last of the Mohicans." The noble native American people of upstate New York, straddling today's Canadian border, caught up in the French and British wars over the conquest of much of North America, were victims of colonial genocide. The meaning of the name Mohicans is "The people of the waters that are never still." It strikes me that is just like Sunny, his character and personality. I did some research and discovered there is an association of over 1,500 Mohican survivors who join with the other indigenous "First Nations" of America, and the growing militancy of a movement from the Amazon to Australasia, in protest for their rights and the saving of our world in unity with the global movement against oppression and discrimination, for human dignity, equality and justice. This was one of the last discussions I had with Sunny, and it strengthened his optimism and hope in humanity.

In closing, may I evoke the people of the waters. Here, near the banks of the Umgeni, I do so through a song, which Sunny loved. "The Four Rivers" as sung by Paul Robeson, whose choice of rivers was contextualised in the hoped-for unity of the Allied Powers involved in the defeat of fascism in 1945, that the world would never again experience that cruelty.

"Here's the story of the four rivers,
That the eyes of the world are on.

They're called the Thames, the Mississippi
And the Yangtse and the Don.

Oh, the four rivers,
Wherever men may be,
They will discover
How to get together,
While the rivers roll down to the sea,
Rivers rolling down to the open sea."

In these challenging times consider the implication of names like Umgeni, Ganges, Amazon, Congo, Nile, Euphrates, Mekong...

All evocative of Sunny's deep commitment to international solidarity and humanity, as reflected in his life, from Cuba, to Algeria, Vietnam to Palestine and Venezuela.

Sunny's ashes will shortly be consigned to the Umgeni River and will drift into the Ocean of India.

Sunny's life is not still. He lives in the memories of all he touched, from those he went to prison with, to those he played the game of *Thunee* with, who have a responsibility to ensure that what he and so many other patriots stood for, lives throughout the ages.

In these dangerous times, where another world war hovers, where people and planet need saving from rampant capitalism and imperialism, and the danger of fascism again darkens the skies, we need the likes of Sunny Singh. For the sake of the ecosystem and humanity, Girja Sunny Singh passes his baton to us all, and particularly the younger generation of young women and men, in absolute equality. His spirit inspires us and lives. ★

Cde Ronnie Kasrils is a veteran SACP, ANC and MK leader, and an author.

HAMBA KAHLE SUNNY SINGH

A tribute to Sunny Singh

IVAN PILLAY

Sunny was one of those rare persons who eschewed self-interest. He placed others before himself and the nation above all else.

I want to relate those parts of his story that I was fortunate to know about. As activists, before we met Sunny, we had tried without much success to connect with the underground ANC. We had met with NIC [Natal Indian Congress], SACTU [South African Congress of Trade Unions] and CPSA [Communist Party of South Africa] – SACP after the banning – members of the 1950s and the 1960s. Most were then not active. This was the early 1970s. Fear of the Security Branch, fear of arrest and detention and imprisonment were palpable.

I first heard of Sunny from an acquaintance who donated to a quarterly publication we produced as a group in Merebank, “The Sentinel”. Concerned that I may get myself into trouble through political activism, this acquaintance told me about his schoolmate who had been jailed on Robben Island, had been released, was banned and was jobless, as a cautionary tale. So naturally, I asked for an introduction.

In the meantime, despite his banning orders, Sunny was in the process of engaging various community activist groups in the townships. Regular meetings took place with, for example, those around Bobby Marie in Merebank, Anban Govender who was active in the Chatsworth area, Terrence

Tryon who was also banned, Shamim Meer and, of course, Pravin Gordhan. The meeting with Sunny was what some of us were waiting for. It wasn’t long before Sunny drew us into his orbit. My brother Joe, the late Patrick Msomi, the late Krishna Rabibal and I joined the ANC.

Sunny left the country just prior to the introduction of legislation that would enable the regime to detain large numbers of people without the need to take them to court: the Internal Security Act. After the arrest of the late Shadrack Maphumalo, to whom they were linked, Pat and Joe left the country in about May 1977, and I followed in July 1977.

I next met Sunny in Angola in a camp in Funda. There, two IRA commanders were training a small group, including Joe and Sunny, in urban guerrilla warfare. Quite rightly, he was disappointed to see me! Sunny had hoped that I would have lasted longer inside the country.

A few months later, as instructed by the ANC, Joe and I surfaced in Swaziland, where we registered ourselves as refugees. Sunny was deployed to Maputo. We were all part of MK structures. In Swaziland, we linked up again with Pat Msomi and Jabu. They were both active in SACTU and Pat was, in addition, involved with intelligence and security.

Sunny and I were members of MK. We were, moreover, critical members of MK. Influenced by pamphlets and books on the struggles of the Philippines, Latin America and Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, we regularly raised our concern that MK was not operating like a political army. There was little or no ANC political underground work that concretely



Sunny Singh with the Mayor of Amsterdam at the opening of the ANC’s Netherlands office in 1989. Photo: Subry Govender

linked with armed activities inside the country, nor with the mobilisation and organisation undertaken by communities and the trade unions. Furthermore, our losses were too numerous for a guerrilla army.

Eventually, in 1979, changes were made. Not exactly in the way that some of us had wished for. But it was a step forward. In what would become a typical ANC response, a new structure was formed – the Internal Political Reconstruction Committee. That committee was headed by John Motsabi, and Mac Maharaj was its Secretary. Both Sunny and I became part of this new structure, he in Mozambique and I in Swaziland.

Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland were what we referred to as forward areas, as in the Southern African situation, neighbouring territories of South Africa could not be classical rear bases. Mozambique provided a limited rear base capability. Our senior regional leadership was located in Mozambique and provided direction, analytics, and training support. Despite the limitations, cadres and weapons were smuggled from further north through Mozambique into Swaziland and into South Africa.

At least four or five times a year, we jumped the fence into Mozambique to go to our Maputo headquarters, Internal House, in transit to elsewhere and or for consultations. I always stayed with Sunny in his flat. The lift didn't work. Food was scarce. It may be difficult to imagine what that was like. There were no fast-food outlets. When you were hungry, even if you had money, you couldn't just go to a cafe. Most retail spaces were boarded up. The government provided rationed goods to its citizens. Citizens planted vegetables on every available piece of land to avoid going hungry.

ANC provided rations and small allowances to its cadres, but these were very basic. Anything more, you would have to get from dollar shops, but these shops only accepted foreign currencies. Sunny, a notable networker, knew what to get where.

On the fateful day when the suburb of Matola was attacked, I also happened to be in Maputo. That night, some alerts had been received about strange movements in Matola. Hours later, we received the tragic news that eleven people were killed, including the Head of the Natal MK command, Mdu, and one of the members of his team, Krishna Rabilal. We had lost comrades. We had also lost a friend, a simple, unassuming, dedicated patriot.

More bad news was to follow. Joe was kidnapped from Swaziland, taken to South Africa and interrogated. Pat Msomi, who was part of the ANC's security and intelligence capacity, worked tirelessly to accumulate bargaining chips while an international campaign to release Joe was initiated with the help of Dutch, English and American aid-workers.

The first chip was a dompas that one of the kidnappers dropped in the scuffle when they overpowered Joe. The second, the clincher, was the arrest some days later of some of the kidnappers who were based in Swaziland. A witness to the scuffle recognised some of the kidnappers in a street in Manzini. They were part of Renamo, an anti-Frelimo movement that was supported by the apartheid regime. A few weeks after the arrests, a blindfolded Joe was dumped in Mbabane, while the Renamo members were released, probably to the South African authorities.

Cadres in Swaziland were under continuous threat of attack from the SA security forces. Most of us lived incognito, travelling at night. Joe was vulnerable because he was a

teacher who stayed in accommodation provided at the school. Pat Msomi and his wife Jabu were also vulnerable. They had four children, three of whom were attending school. So, although they did take precautions, they could not be incognito.

The SA security forces murdered Pat and Jabu. They booby-trapped their vehicle, which was parked outside a "safe" flat. The three surviving children are based in the Pietermaritzburg area. Pat and Jabu received posthumous awards in 2016.

Occasionally, Sunny came to Swaziland, crossing the fence. I will always remember a particular trip when Sunny, having completed his mission, bade farewell to us at about three o'clock in the morning as we moved to his rendezvous point. He was picked up by two comrades. They would drop him at a safe distance from the fence at Nomasha. Once over the fence, he would walk to a safe house. If there were also cadres crossing from Mozambique to Swaziland, then he would be escorted to the safe house.

Sunny attended a congress of the SACP in 1984 in Moscow. Among other matters, the issue of whether the ANC leadership (the NEC) should be open to all South Africans was debated. It boggled our minds then that leading Party members could countenance the notion that the NEC could be restricted to "Africans". As Sunny pointed out at the meeting, not long ago, tens of thousands of mainly black people had marched to demonstrate their defiance of the security forces who had murdered Niel Aggett. In the end, the SACP resolved to support the view that the ANC should be open to all.

There we witnessed the tug of war for the soul of the Party. We celebrated the victory of the progressives that ushered in perhaps the most successful years of the Party in exile. A strong Politburo was elected. The Party machine became more efficient and effective. Umsebenzi, which addressed current events as they unfolded, was regularly published. More Party units were created and operated inside South Africa. When the Seventh Party Congress was convened in Cuba, comrades from Party structures in South Africa were present.

Shortly thereafter, the Nkomati accord between South Africa and Mozambique was signed. Sunny and many others who were formerly resident in Mozambique were forced to resettle in Zambia. Scores of cadres who operated clandestinely in Mozambique had to hastily move into Swaziland to avoid being rounded up and deported to Tanzania. The resultant build-up of our forces in tiny Swaziland led to tensions with Swazi security forces. The apartheid state, using askaris, multiplied its attacks and kidnappings. We lost many experienced cadres. Among them were Cassius Make, a member of the NEC and Paul Dikeledi, a member of the Regional Political Military Committee. Both were well known to Sunny.

Sunny also attended the ANC conference in Kabwe. It was historic for at least three reasons:

- 1) OR [Tambo] briefed delegates that some South Africans wanted to talk to the ANC. At that stage, it was a group of businessmen. He asked for a mandate, which he was given to meet such groups. That marked the beginning of many meetings between civil society organisations and the ANC and perhaps laid the foundation for a negotiated settlement.

2) It was resolved that the leadership of the ANC cannot be restricted to Africans only, but it must be opened to all. The first non-racial NEC was duly elected.

3) Hitherto, MK avoided attacking targets that would lead to the death of civilians. It was decided that while it was not our intention to attack civilians per se, we would no longer avoid a legitimate military target if there might be loss of civilian lives.

In mid-1986 I was redeployed to Zambia, where I linked up with Sunny once again. Zambia is different from Swaziland and Mozambique, and the other forward areas. It was the headquarters of the ANC. There were many ANC people there and a considerable infrastructure. Branches of the ANC called Regional Political Committees existed and operated.

Sunny was then a part of the Department of International Relations and was awaiting his deployment to the Netherlands to open the first officially recognised ANC office there. While in Zambia, he was helpful to Operation Vula as he provided logistical support to us, given my central involvement.

When we returned to South Africa, Sunny was deployed as a colonel in SAPS until his retirement.

In conclusion:

- Since life in exile, even in Southern Africa, was less restrictive than operating inside South Africa, some comrades lost their orientation. Not Sunny. Sunny led the way. He was always ethically grounded.

- Many ex-prisoners told us that Sunny was a critical part of the news and information value chain on Robben Island. Indres Naidoo's book captures that well.

- Sunny was deeply committed through the Monty Naicker Foundation in building awareness of our history and in building a democratic South Africa.

Sunny landed on his feet in any situation and was always moving forward. He was the reason that some of us joined the ANC. And his example is one reason that some of us have questions about the ANC of today. But like Sunny shows, what matters is that we are not paralysed, that wherever we are, we take practical steps to strengthen our democracy. ★

Cde Ivan Pillay is the former commissioner of SARS and was a part-time member of the Secretariat of the SACP Politburo in exile.

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