



# UMSEBENZI

ONLINE

## The People's Red Caravan –

**building people's power and a self-sustaining future for all!**



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## EDITORIAL

# Reflections, resistance, and the red thread of Titus

**This final edition of *Umsebenzi Online* for 2025 arrives with a deep sense of solidarity, urgency and internationalist commitment.**

**W**e reflect on a world marked by contradictions—where working-class resistance continues to surge against imperialist violence, ecological collapse, and capitalist austerity. In this issue, we explore Cosatu’s 40th anniversary and its fraternal alliance with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), placing worker internationalism at the centre of our gaze. We carry thoughtful reflections on China, Cuba, and Palestine—from comrades Alex Mashilo, Bheki Stofile and Barry Gilder – each probing what solidarity, sovereignty, and socialism mean today. From the legacy of Cuba’s medical brigades to the siege in Gaza, this edition confronts the contradictions and courage of building power under pressure.

But we also turn inward. Exlira Giose-Davids examines gangsterism not as pathology, but as political failure and a symptom of capitalist neglect. Dineo Mojave challenges us to rethink local government with a feminist and care-centred lens, calling for a transformative vision that links political power to human dignity. In doing so, these articles push *Umsebenzi Online* beyond abstract theorising – they speak to the lived crisis and potential of our people. They ask: what kind of socialism are we building, and for whom?

As we prepare for 2026, *Umsebenzi Online* commits to deepening its role as a platform for agitation, education, and a working-class voice. We will cover the lead-up to the Local Government Elections with sharp editorial focus and ideological clarity – framing the ballot as a terrain of class struggle, not just competition. Our coverage will extend beyond press releases and slogans; we will amplify stories from the shop floor, the township, the picket line, and the council chamber. In partnership with the People’s Red Caravan, we will report from the frontlines of popular mobilisation—linking grassroots struggles to national transformation.

We will also strengthen the bridge between *Umsebenzi Online* and *the African Communist*. The ideological rigour of the latter must find fertile ground among younger readers and digital audiences. We reaffirm *Umsebenzi Online* as a school of revolution, not just a publication.

This edition is also marked by loss. We pay tribute to Comrade Titus Mafolo, who passed away earlier this month. Titus was more than a strategist or advisor—he was a thinker, a movement builder, and a disciplined cadre whose revolutionary life traversed the underground, the UDF, and the democratic state. In the Presidency, he helped craft the moral and political narrative of post-apartheid governance. Yet he remained grounded in the people’s struggles, never succumbing to elitism or political cynicism.

Titus was not afraid of political complexity. He believed in the centrality of ideas, in the contestation of visions, and in the need to fuse mass struggle with principled leadership. His political imagination drew from liberation theology, black consciousness, and Marxism—but was ultimately rooted in the lives of the oppressed. He challenged dogma and embraced dialectic. ★

We honour him not with slogans, but with work. As *Umsebenzi Online*, we inherit his belief in political education, ideological contestation, and the power of words to shape futures. May we continue to write in his spirit—unflinching, unbought, and unbending.

To all our readers, writers, editors, and comrades – we thank you. You are the lifeblood of this project. Rest well this festive season. Return with red fire in your hearts.

Red Greetings,  
**Umsebenzi Online Editorial Collective**

## COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY

# Rebuild worker unity and defend the public sector as a pillar of transformation

**SOLLY MAPAILA**

*Address to the Cosatu 40th Anniversary rally, 6 December, at the Dobsonville Stadium, Soweto.*

**Forty years is not a date to tick off on a calendar. It is the measure of a struggle that has shaped the destiny of this nation. Today we stand here, in Soweto – this place of fire, this place of courage, this place of sacrifice, this place where workers and youth together shook the foundations of apartheid.**

It was here, in these streets, that communities and factories joined hands, and the system learned a lesson it can never forget: when the working class organises itself as a class, the world moves.

Forty years ago, the working class gathered at Curries Fountain in Durban to do something historic: to build a single, powerful, class-rooted trade union movement, rooted not in race divisions, not in craft splits, not in ethnic lines – but in the principle of ‘One Industry, One Union,’ under worker control. That moment – the founding of Cosatu – was not born from comfort. It was born from repression, banning orders, factory dismissals, and the blood of martyrs. Cosatu arrived not as an office, not as a logo, but as a weapon in the hands of the working class, forged in strikes, stay-aways, boycotts, night schools, underground structures, and the open defiance of the apartheid state.

Let us honour those who paid everything for this movement. Workers who were dismissed and blacklisted for daring to organise. Miners buried underground because bosses valued profit more than life. Nurses beaten for striking. Teachers arrested for demanding dignity. Farmworkers facing guns for daring to speak. Shop stewards tortured, exiled, and killed. Cosatu is built on their sacrifice. Cosatu stands on their blood. And we say today, with pride and certainty: you did not struggle in vain.

But comrades, let us speak a truth that has sometimes been whispered and sometimes been shouted: countless communists built this trade union movement. They built it in the shadows and in the daylight. They built it in underground cells and on factory floors. They built it while banned, while hunted, while exiled, while imprisoned.

When employers tried to divide workers by race, it was communists who fought for non-racial industrial unions. When the state tried to criminalise worker activity, it was communists who organised worker night schools, who taught Marxism in backrooms, who built factory committees, who

defended workers in courtrooms and smuggled leaflets into mines. When others said African workers should be spoken for, communists fought so that African workers would speak for themselves and lead themselves.

Let us remember the giants of our movement: Ray Alexander Simons, the iron backbone of the Food and Canning Workers Union, who organised farm and factory workers under the most brutal repression. Moses Kotane and JB Marks, organising in the mines became the conscience of our movement. Billy Nair, who built underground worker structures and paid for it with years in prison. John Nkadimeng, who carried the spirit of SACTU through exile. Elijah Barayi, the first president of Cosatu, a communist mineworker whose courage shaped Cosatu’s fighting character. Let us honour Chris Dlamini, John Gomomo, and Violet Seboni – a domestic worker who rose into leadership and fought for the dignity of the most exploited workers in our society.

These comrades understood something profound: a union is a school of socialism. A union produces leaders of the working class. A union is not only a bargaining instrument — it is a political force. This is our tradition. This is our lineage. And it is this tradition that made Cosatu not just a federation – but a movement.

And comrades, as we honour the past, we must salute the women who built this movement, often without recognition, often without protection, often without the privileges that men enjoyed. Women workers have led some of the hardest strikes, built unions from nothing, faced the bosses in boardrooms and police in streets – while carrying the burden of community, of care work, of poverty.

The labour movement in South Africa was built by women as much as men: the women in textile mills in Newcastle, the women in the canning factories of the Cape, the domestic workers in suburban homes, the nurses in overcrowded clinics, the cleaners in hospitals, the teachers in township classrooms. They are the backbone of the working class. And they face capitalism and patriarchy at the same time. That is why a militant union must be a feminist union – fighting equal pay, maternity rights, fighting gender-based violence, fighting for the recognition of care work as work. Let us say it clearly in Soweto: there is no socialism without the liberation of women, and no liberation of women without the end of capitalism.

Comrades, today we face a new class war. It wears different clothes. It speaks a polite language. But it is the same enemy: capitalism, reorganising itself for the 21st century. The battlefield is unemployment – mass unemployment,

especially among young people. The battlefield is the failure of municipalities. The battlefield is austerity strangling hospitals and schools. The battlefield is privatisation by stealth through basic public infrastructure like water, electricity networks and more. The battlefield is the erosion of labour rights. This is not a debate. This is class war. And we must respond as a class.

The tactics of division have evolved. The bosses do not always arrive with guns. They arrive with labour brokers, outsourcing, four-hour shifts, wage caps, vacancy freezes, migration scapegoating, and digital platforms that break worker solidarity. They want the permanent worker to blame the contract worker. They want a community to blame a nurse for failing services, while budgets are being cut. They want locals to blame migrants. They want teachers to blame municipal workers. They want unions to fight each other for shrinking space.

We say here, in Soweto: do not allow yourselves to be divided. Do not allow yourselves to be used to divide others. When workers are divided, capital wins. When workers unite, capital shakes. Unity is not poetry - unity is a weapon. Unity is the reason Cosatu was born. Unity is the reason Cosatu survived. Unity is the reason Cosatu will define the future.

And while we celebrate, we must speak honestly about the problems facing workers today. In the private sector, the attack is naked: casualisation, labour broking, four-hour shifts, union-busting, record profits while families starve, money exported to tax havens instead of investing here. In the public sector, the attack wears a suit: wage freezes, vacancy freezes, collapsing hospitals, outsourcing of essential services, workers being

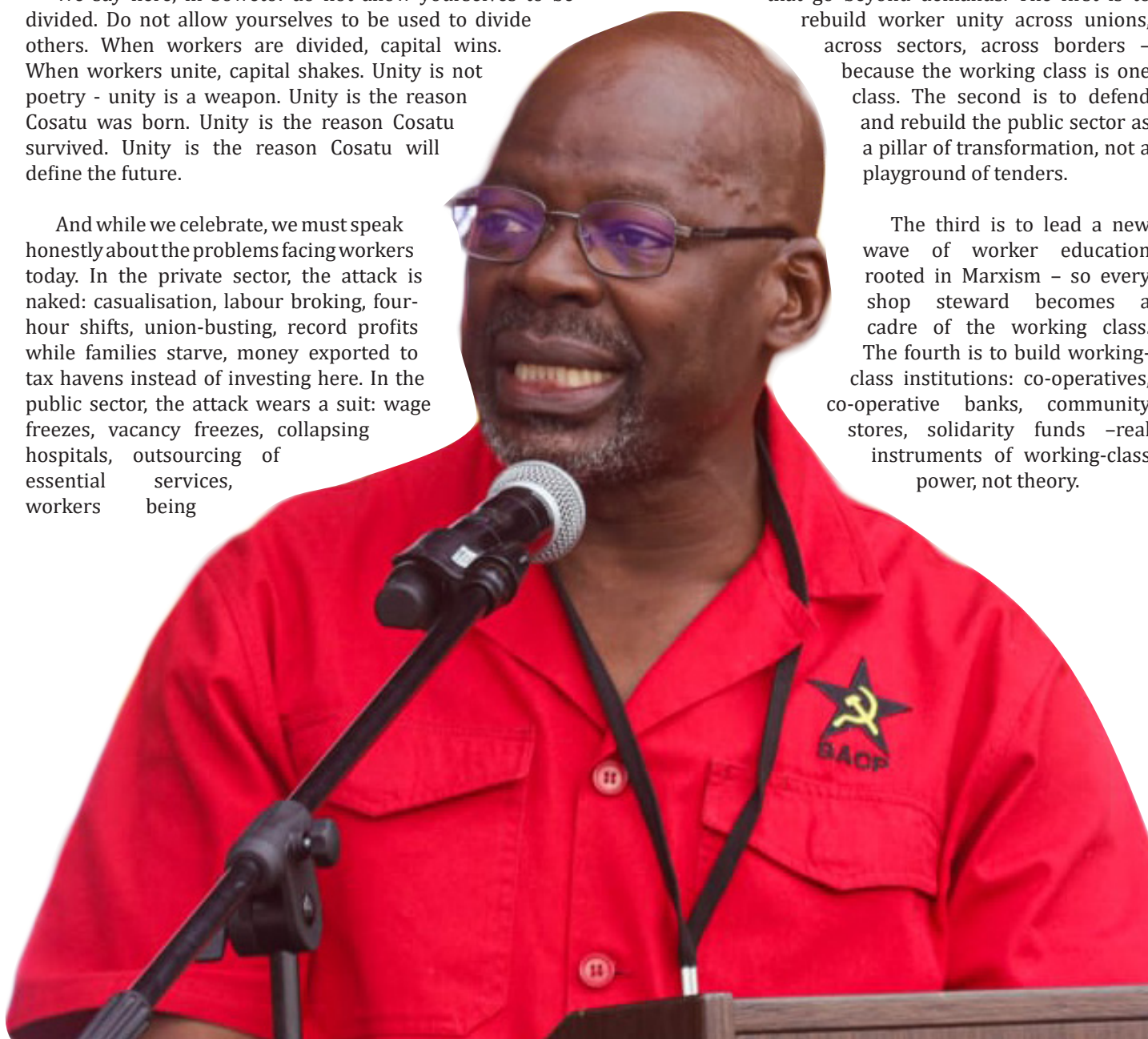
blamed for corruption they did not commit. The truth is simple: in the private sector workers are squeezed for profit. In the public sector workers are squeezed for austerity. It is two faces of the same system.

There is no wall between the nurse and the metalworker, between the teacher and the miner. When the state cuts wages, bosses use it as a benchmark. When the private sector casualises, the state copies it through outsourcing. We face one enemy, with two offices: the boardroom and the treasury.

Cosatu has defended workers for four decades – defended rights, wages, dignity. But today, defence alone is not enough. This moment demands offence. A union that negotiates wages is too small for this crisis. A union that organises society is unstoppable. A union that builds working-class institutions is invincible.

That is why Cosatu has strategic tasks today that go beyond demands. The first is to rebuild worker unity across unions, across sectors, across borders – because the working class is one class. The second is to defend and rebuild the public sector as a pillar of transformation, not a playground of tenders.

The third is to lead a new wave of worker education rooted in Marxism – so every shop steward becomes a cadre of the working class. The fourth is to build working-class institutions: co-operatives, co-operative banks, community stores, solidarity funds –real instruments of working-class power, not theory.



*SACP General Secretary Cde Solly Mapaila addressing the anniversary rally for the 40th Anniversary of Cosatu, held in Soweto, 6 December.*

The fifth is to wage a mass campaign against austerity – to reject the idea that workers must pay for crises they did not create. The sixth is to shape a worker-led industrialisation strategy – to bring production home, create jobs, and shift ownership into the hands of workers and the people. The seventh is to prepare the ground for a broad socialist front — uniting unions, communities, youth, women, informal workers, co-ops – because the future will be won by mass power, not by think-tanks.

And comrades, hear me clearly: the South African Communist Party – the vanguard party of the working class – will be with Cosatu in every one of these tasks – through and through. We will be there in the struggles, in the campaigns, in the factories, in the townships, in the education, in the ideas, in the day-to-day building of working-class power. We will not stand on the side; we stand in the line, as a combat detachment of the working class itself.

The global capitalist system is collapsing into barbarism – droughts, climate disaster, hunger in rich countries, wars for minerals, unemployment in the age of machines, while corporations declare record profits and the poor carry the cost. This system cannot be reformed to save us. It must be transformed to serve us.

Socialism is the future, but we must start building it now. Not in the next election cycle. Not in a distant dream. Now, in the co-operatives we build, in the community stores we run, in the co-operative banks we form, in the public services we defend as rights, not commodities. Socialism is built by

expanding zones of working-class control – by challenging capital at every frontline: workplace, community, economy, and state.

That is why the SACP calls for a National Conference of the Left in 2026 – not as a symbolic event, but as a turning point, to unite workers, communities, youth, women, informal traders, co-ops, social movements, progressive faith structures – one class, one struggle, one programme. Not alphabet soup. Not conferences of egos. A battlefield of ideas that becomes a programme of action. Ten core demands of the working class. A plan for worker-led industrialisation. A socially owned economy based on state enterprises and worker control. Street committees in communities. Co-operative stores as the backbone of township life. A mass campaign to end austerity and rebuild a capable state.

Comrades, we stand today in the place of June 16. The place where youth stood up and changed the world. The place that showed that when the poor unite, history bends. This place made apartheid tremble. This place can make neoliberalism tremble. This place can show us the future – a future with organised, conscious, unstoppable working-class power.

The future will not be written for us. We will write it, with unity, with organisation, with the daily work of building socialism in the present. ★

***Cde Solly Mapaila is the General Secretary of the SACP.***

## COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY

# Urgent tasks as we mark anniversaries of Cosatu and the WFTU

**MZWANDILE THAKHUDI**

**F**orty years of Cosatu and 80 years of WFTU have been characterised by several challenges, victories and, of course, new developments. For us, as the Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA), we look at these years as 40 years of consolidated workers' struggles, especially as led by Cosatu.

It reminds us of the early age of our formation, the Young Communist League, in the 1920s when the young people were playing a key and instrumental role, especially in the mining strikes that took place in those years of the 20s, after that in the 40s. It is indeed for us a reminder of our joint and collective strength in consolidating the work that we do.

We would like to recollect that Marx once postulated that trade unions are schools of solidarity and socialism. And it is for that reason, collectively, we have been able to register certain victories that we are now proud of, and most of them are mainly encapsulated in the legislation, such as the Labour Relations Act, among others, of our country.

We need to mark this day because it is a reminder of the linkage between the contradictions between the class, national and gender struggles. As Comrade Joe Slovo would have said, if you ask which one must be achieved first between the national struggle and the class struggle, you will get a wrong answer. This is because we've got to understand the class content of the national struggle as well as the national content of the class struggle.

And so, we wish to highlight the interconnectedness of these struggles, especially on the question of gender struggles. Therefore, the Party has shown gender-based violence and femicide the red card. It is advocating for female reproductive rights, and we must also acknowledge that the International Labour Organisation adopted a convention in 2019 which recognises the necessity for workplaces to be free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

We do want to remind Cosatu that we've got to, as we commemorate these 40 years, ensure that we are the ones who make certain that this Convention finds expression in our workplaces in South Africa.

We are observing as a Young Communist League of South Africa that the International Labour Organisation is indicating that in South Africa, currently, the unionised workers are below 26% and declining. This is informed by many challenges which we are seeing, part of which includes loss of public confidence and/or worker confidence in our unions, given many sins of incumbency, which we must acknowledge. We must also look at the external factors like insurance companies, such as clientele and others



*The National Secretary of the YCLSA Cde Mzwandile Thakhudi speaking at the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Cosatu, held at the SACP's Augmented Central Committee meeting, 29 November, Johannesburg.*

representing workers, which contribute to this decline.

As the YCLSA, we are in full support of Cosatu, including its young workers' structure. We do understand its mission as that of mobilising the young workers for the trade union movement and also ensuring that there are attractive campaigns, especially noting that the workplaces now are becoming younger.

But what disturbs us the most is the framework of retrenchment which is discriminatory in nature and fundamentally ageist because of the last in, first out (LIFO) policy that is enforced in South Africa. We see this as discriminatory to young people as they will, due to biology, be the last to enter. This is a concern more so when we see a pandemic of youth unemployment.

We are recommitting ourselves also, whilst we challenge Cosatu as well as Cosatu young workers, that we've got to be side by side in waging some of these struggles, together in ensuring that we propel the struggle for socialism forward. We want to challenge Cosatu and say: the federation must not succumb to intimidation, especially by some in our movement who seek to isolate it and distance it from the SACP, which is the vanguard of the working class.

We have identified the following tasks:

Firstly, Cosatu must relieve itself, together with us, from the strategic ambiguity in terms of how we characterise this stage of our national democratic revolution.

Secondly, we've got to unite the principal motive forces, namely the working class, for the battles ahead. We have observed and take collective responsibility for the national democratic revolution, which, if uninterrupted, is the shortest and most direct route to socialism.

*Cde Mzwandile Thakhudi is the National Secretary of the YCLSA*

PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN

# The PRC and a joyful Ganspan community

ALLISTER JACK

**Communal farming initiatives and community gardens are widely documented as fostering a range of social and psychological benefits that contribute to a stronger, more joyful community life.**

**F**rom 8–14 December, the SACP People's Red Caravan (PRC) increased social interaction, fostered a sense of belonging and shared a common purpose among the community to eradicate poverty and build a culture of self-reliance for a brighter future among the community in the town of Ganspan, in the Frances Baard District of the Northern Cape.

Through the PRC, the Ganspan community could learn the following principles of working together to prosper and be the proud owners of the means of production and manufacturing:

**Building Social Capital:** The PRC through face-to-face interactions with the people of Ganspan, created communal and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives to help build social networks and trust among members. These shared activities facilitated the development of both 'bridging' (connecting diverse groups) and 'bonding' (strengthening internal ties) social capital, which is crucial for a cohesive community.

**Shared Identity and Purpose:** Communal farming projects fostered a sense of shared identity and purpose, allowing members to co-create value and build emotional

attachments to their shared spaces. The collaboration amongst the Ganspan community members instilled a sense of hope and confidence for the future, particularly for the displaced ones and those facing everyday challenges.

**Education and Mindful Consumption:** The community's direct involvement in the food production process demystified the 'seed to plate' journey, leading to a deeper appreciation for food, more mindful consumption, and a greater understanding of sustainability. This shared learning experience further strengthened community bonds and also created a lifelong learning culture in the agricultural sector.

**Empowerment and Resilience:** The PRC awakened a collective farming initiative that helped with the empowerment of the marginalised, and to build community resilience against climate and economic challenges through the exchange of agricultural knowledge, collaborative problem-solving, and sustainable solutions.

The PRC has demonstrated how collective action and shared ownership can transform Ganspan into a more connected, resilient, and hopeful community. By strengthening social bonds, nurturing skills, and promoting self-reliance, the PRC has laid a foundation for sustainable development rooted in solidarity and empowerment. These efforts reflect a joyful, forward-looking Ganspan community committed to eradicating poverty and shaping its own prosperous future. ★

*Cde Allister Jack is the 1st Deputy Provincial Secretary in the Northern Cape*



*SACP PRC volunteers and Ganspan residents discuss the ways to develop the community's self-reliance and sustainability. The PRC presence in Ganspan has led to improvements in irrigation and sowing of some two hectares of land, the organisation of mobile social services, improvement to an early childhood development centre and community park, as well as the organisation of food parcels through the Industrial Development Corporation.*

## PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN

# Planting seeds of consciousness, unity and empowerment



*The Red Caravan urges us to mobilise, to organise, to build, recognising that socialism will come through the power of the people rooted in production, solidarity, and struggle.*

### BHEKI CHARLES STOFILE

**W**hen the 15th Congress Central Committee launched the Red Caravan, it did not merely launch a campaign; it revived a revolutionary tradition, a people's caravan of hope, struggle, and transformation.

It became a beacon of light piercing through the pervasive fog of despair that has long suffocated our working-class communities. Revolutionaries inherently illuminate darkness, organise amidst despair, and restore faith where alienation has taken root.

This truth was vividly illustrated in Mqhekezweni, the historic ground of kings and of the people's dreams, where the Communist Party once again took its rightful place among the masses.

Here, young and old alike have endured intolerable conditions, such as hunger, joblessness, and violence not as a consequence of fate, but due to the betrayal of those meant to

act as agents of change.

The revolutionary mission was abandoned, supplanted by the bourgeois instinct of self-enrichment, and the ethos of service evaporated. Those entrusted with safeguarding the people's hopes aligned themselves with class enemies, criminals, tenderpreneurs and the local elite who thrive on exploitation. In this moral vacuum, corruption emerged as a governing philosophy, and the criminal syndicate materialised as the new state.

However, comrades, history teaches us that when oppression reaches its zenith, resistance is born. Thus, the Red Caravan emerged not as a spectacle but as an instrument of class reawakening.

It serves as the vehicle through which the Communist Party reconnects with the masses, reviving the spirit of collective struggle that once defined our liberation movement. Within it lies the essence of our African revolutionary belief *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning that human freedom is realised only through collective solidarity.

In the spirit of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the Red Caravan asserts that the liberation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. We shall not overcome hunger and poverty through charity, but through organisation; not through pity, but through production and the control of the means of life.

In every village it visited, the Caravan reminded the poor that they are not victims of history; they are its architects. It called upon the peasants to till the land with dignity, the youth to reclaim their revolutionary consciousness, and the workers to reconstruct the moral and material foundations of the nation.

When the Red Caravan reached Mqhekezweni, the expressions on the people's faces conveyed a narrative of suffering, yet also of hope. They had long awaited a dawn that they were no longer certain would arrive.

The Communist Party became their dawn, rekindling the belief that the future is not a gift bestowed by the powerful, but a triumph of the organised. It taught that to combat hunger is to challenge capitalism, that to construct roads and schools is to embody socialism in action, and that to demand safety in our communities is to reclaim the people's hegemony over the forces of greed.

Allow me to share a parable that encapsulates this truth. There was once a small town by the banks of a great river, which served as the people's lifeline providing water for their crops, sustaining their livestock, and quenching their thirst for generations. It was the source of their collective strength.

But as time passed, the river began to dry. The rains became infrequent, fields turned brown, and hope dwindled. The people became divided; some blamed nature, while others pointed fingers at each other. Despair enveloped the community. Yet the elders proclaimed, "The river may sleep, but it does not die."

The people united. They dug deeper, cleared the silt, constructed channels, and prepared for the rains. When the skies opened once again, the river returned stronger and

wider than before.

This narrative is not merely about water; it is about revolutionary resilience. It teaches us that no drought be it political, economic, or moral lasts indefinitely. When the working class is united, when the Party leads, and when the masses are mobilised, even the most barren landscape can flourish once more. Our task, therefore, is not to lament what has been lost, but to reconstruct what was taken.

We must confront the adversaries of progress; the neoliberal agenda that seeks to privatise our common goods, the bureaucratic deterioration that exploits the poor; and the ideological disarray that advises the working class to wait rather than act.

The Red Caravan urges us to mobilise, to organise, to build, recognising that socialism will not materialise through rhetoric alone, but through the power of the people rooted in production, solidarity, and struggle.

Across our land, in villages and townships, there exist rivers that have dried up, rivers of hope, trust, and justice. Yet these too can flow again. The Communist Party must remain the vanguard of renewal, the moral and political compass of the revolution.

When that river of hope finally returns when justice flows like water and righteousness like a never-ending stream we will reflect and affirm: our struggle was not in vain.

The People's Red Caravan did not just pass through our villages. It is planting seeds of consciousness, unity and empowerment. On that day, comrades, we will proclaim with confidence and conviction: Yes, there was a time when circumstances improved, and we played an integral role in bringing about that change.★

***Cde Bheki Stofile is the SACP Free State Provincial Secretary, the President of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the co-President of the global United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).***

## PALESTINE SOLIDARITY

# South Africa and Palestine – comrades in arms

**BARRY GILDER**

**I have titled this paper *South Africa and Palestine – Comrades in Arms*, but I use the term ‘arms’ metaphorically in this case, although there was a time when its meaning was very literal.**

**T**hat great propagandist for human rights, democracy and the (not so) free market, Donald Trump, has suddenly developed a passionate hatred for South Africa. He claims we are committing genocide against our white population and confiscating their land. Now, he has announced the US boycott of this year’s G20 hosted by South Africa, at which the chair of G20 for next year is supposed to be handed over to the US. When I read his statements (or worse, watch them online), I can’t shake the image of a petulant child, who takes his ball off the field when his team is being beaten in a football match.

But we all know that the real reason Trump has vilified us is because of our stand on Palestine, and our audacity to accuse Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice, and – one might say – our refusal to back down, modify our stance or otherwise kowtow to the all-powerful ‘leader of the free world’.

Many may ask, ‘Why?’ Why South Africa and Palestine? Why is South Africa so pro-Palestine and so anti-Israel?

At the simplest level, there are three main reasons, reasons that have their roots in history.

First, the South African liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), now the dominant party in government, led a fight against South African apartheid, in which the indigenous people of South Africa were denied basic rights, were restricted in their movement, in where they could live, in work opportunities and, of course, meaningful political rights, except in so-called bantustans, areas set aside for them according to ethnicity. It didn’t take much for us to see that Palestinians were suffering from a similar system, which today many have classified as apartheid – restrictions similar to those faced by black South Africans.

The second reason, of course, is that during our struggle against apartheid, Israel and apartheid South Africa were close allies – cooperating diplomatically, economically, militarily, sharing intelligence, arms transfers, joint weapons development and nuclear collaboration. Although it is ahistorical to believe that apartheid started when the nationalist government came to power (the ANC was formed in 1912 and the Communist Party in 1921), it is perhaps significant that the date of their coming into power coincided with the Nakba – 1948. Some sources claim that the ‘new’

state of Israel was the first to recognise the new apartheid government. One could say, in perhaps emotive terms, that the friend of our enemy became our enemy.

The third is related to our anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and pro-human rights stance.

The ANC, formed in 1912 to unite Africans against the colonial denial of rights, through the influence of the Communist Party formed in 1921, evolved in strategy, ideology and praxis over the decades into the 50s, its banning in the 60s, and from the underground and exile in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, until the final defeat of the apartheid regime in 1994. It has a long history of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. It has a long and principled history of support for other peoples and organisations who were (and some who still are) victims of western imperialism. Thus, its support for the Palestinians and their struggle was politically and strategically natural. We shared with the Palestinians a struggle that involved political struggle, armed struggle, diplomatic struggle, and the organisation of international solidarity.

The ANC President for 30 years, Oliver Tambo, expressed this shared struggle history on numerous occasions. In a speech he gave in 1981, he said:

The African and Arab peoples are confronted with the same problems and the same enemy. The guns used to enslave the peoples of Palestine, Sahara, Namibia and South Africa are from the same source. The crazed assassins who go on murderous rampages in the south of the Lebanon and the south of Angola are the product of the same teacher and the same school. The corporations that plunder our resources feed the same hand.

These are three high-level reasons for the affinity between the South African people and the Palestinians. But there are more down-to-earth, more practical, and even personal reasons for the closeness, particularly between the liberation movement and the PLO.

At a more direct and personal level, many cadres of the ANC and SACP – political and military cadres – shared spaces and times with Palestinian comrades, in the Eastern European socialist countries, in Algeria, in Cuba, and the many other countries that provided practical support to the South African and Palestinian struggles. They also shared spaces and time in the many countries of exile, in the UK, in Europe, Scandinavia, the Americas, Asia, and Africa.

In 1980, the ANC sent me to Moscow for military and intelligence training. For a number of practical reasons, I ended up being trained alone in a safe flat in Taganskaya in Moscow. I was informed by a reliable Russian source that the training was provided by what was called the ‘Northern Training Centre’, a department of the Soviet military that

had been set up especially to provide military training to liberation movements around the world. The centre was headed by a general who had led a Soviet partisan group in Crimea during the Second World War.

This sharing of places and times that South Africans have with their Palestinian comrades cannot fail but to create a sinew of memory and solidarity that transcends the decades of struggle, and emerges in the present as those we shared with face the most heinous suppression, not only of their rights, but of their lives, their dignity, their dreams and hopes, their physical integrity.

It's also important to note that the international organisational developments of the period – the 50s, 60s, 70s and onwards – treated the South African and the Palestinian struggles as two sides, if you like, of the same anti-imperialist coin. This was expressed diplomatically in the various multilateral forums of the time – the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), the UN and its various organs. The ANC's and the PLO's representatives to those forums often shared strategies and lobbying activities, a sharing that continues to this day.

So? Some may ask. That was the past ... ancient history ... you were in an anti-imperialist struggle together, it was the Cold War; you are a state now, a government; surely you can't run your foreign policy on old sentiments?

Well ... these are not sentiments. These are fundamental political, philosophical and strategic roots that do not go out of fashion because we are in a post-Cold War, neo-liberal world. In fact, with the current shift in global dynamics, they

are more relevant than ever.

Nelson Mandela, during his 1990 visit to the US after his release from prison, responded to a question in a televised 'town hall' session with Ted Koppel about the ANC's relationship with the PLO, Cuba and others:

One of the mistakes which some political analysts make is to think that their enemies should be our enemies – that we cannot and we will never do.

We have our own struggle which we are conducting. We are grateful to the world for supporting our struggle. But nevertheless we are an independent organisation, with its own policy, and our attitude towards any country is determined by the attitude of that country to our struggle.

Yasser Arafat, Colonel Gaddafi, Fidel Castro support our struggle to the hilt.

There is no reason whatsoever why we should have any hesitation about hailing their commitment to human rights as they are being demanded in South Africa. Our attitude is based solely on the fact that they fully support the anti-apartheid struggle. They do not support it only in rhetoric. They are placing resources at our disposal for us to win this fight.

Of course, Mandela was addressing an audience in a country that had, until the eleventh hour, supported the apartheid regime in South Africa (and, by the way, was responsible for his arrest in 1962); a country, not coincidentally, that currently provides succour and support to the genocide of the Palestinians, and condemns South Africa for our own 'genocide' of our white population and for



South Africa-Palestine solidarity in action. A solidarity picket in Blikkiesdorp, Delft. Archive photo: Asraf Hendricks, Groundup.

our condemnation of the Zionist genocide before the ICJ.

While we are quoting Mandela, we should consider his now famous quote, given years later at the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in Pretoria in December 1997, well into his term as South African President:

We meet today to reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine.

The UN took a strong stand against apartheid; and over the years an international consensus was built, which helped to bring an end to this inhuman system. But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.

Then, as president of a country that is a responsible member of the international community, and no longer leader of a struggling liberation movement, he goes on to say:

The time has come for all of us to redouble our efforts in support of the peace process, and to do all we can to help the parties find a negotiated settlement, based on UN resolutions and the principles of land for peace.

Only through a negotiated settlement can the people of Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security.

Based on our own experience of a negotiated end to apartheid, post-apartheid South African foreign policy placed great emphasis on negotiations in resolving conflicts on our continent and further afield. Indeed, we tried to facilitate such discussions between the Israelis and the Palestinians, ultimately to no avail. And today, some would ask – are such negotiations even possible?

In short, the spirit of our shared struggle experiences was carried forward into our time in government, especially in our immediate recognition of the State of Palestine and the opening of an embassy there.

Today, we are facing a remarkably changing world, and much of what we're seeing seems to pivot around the genocide Israel is conducting in Gaza and the Palestinian struggle in general. Indeed, we can say that while there are obvious nuances, the division of opposition against, and support for, what is happening in the region is fractured along the old imperialist and anti-imperialist lines of the last century. For example, the difference in the treatment by the Western powers of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to that of Israel's totally illegal attacks on, and occupation of, its neighbours, its disregard for difficultly negotiated ceasefires, its bombing in Doha, its failure to have any red lines at all,

and – most of all – its obviously genocidal devastation of Gaza and its people is the most heinous hypocrisy. This, South Africa cannot bear. Are we back in the last century of cold war between East and West, between South and North? Or even back in the nineteenth century of slavery and rabid colonialism?

What is interesting is that the continued Israeli aggression against the people of Palestine is taking place at a moment of a visible shift in global dynamics, an apparent shift in the global balance of forces – the expansion of BRICS, the initiatives taking place in Asia together with China, Russia, Iran and others to create an alternative balance from the balance that has dominated since the Second World War and the end of the Cold War – we are beginning to see that the Israel-Palestine situation is playing into that change.

South Africa has sometimes been accused (even by some of us) of 'punching above our weight', to borrow a boxing term. The argument is that the relatively modest strength of our country does not justify our role on the international stage. I don't think that's a fair accusation. What is true is that our very struggle during the last century created, if you like, a moral foundation, which is not just relevant to our own struggle but to all anti-colonial struggles and to the Palestinian struggle in particular. It created a foundation of anti-imperialism, of condemnation of human rights abuses that occurred in colonial times and beyond. And it created a foundation for the positions we take on the international stage.

If we are punching above our weight, it's not to aggrandise our country. We do it because it is what our conscience demands.

In effect, we are not punching above our national weight. We are punching at our moral weight. Those who choose silence are complicit and stand condemned by their inaction.

This lecture by H.E. Dr Barry Gilder was delivered on Wednesday 19.11.2025 at an event organised by the Cambridge Centre for Palestine Studies [www.ccps21.org](http://www.ccps21.org) and co-hosted with the Centre of African Studies and the Department of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) at the University of Cambridge, UK. ★

***Cde Barry Gilder is an ANC, SACP and MK veteran.***

**CUBA SOLIDARITY**

# The blockade of Cuba and the legacy of its medical brigades – lessons for South Africa

**SIBUSISIWE THOBELA**

**On 1 January, Cuba celebrates its National Day, which marks the victory of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the beginning of a socialist project that continues to demonstrate remarkable resilience.**

**F**or more than 60 years, Cuba has built social development and international solidarity in the face of one of the most severe unilateral coercive measures in modern history. The United States blockade is designed to strangle Cuba’s socialist system, undermine its sovereignty and force a return to capitalist dependency. Despite these efforts, Cuba continues to strengthen the global struggle for social justice through its Medical Brigades. South Africa has benefited directly from this revolutionary internationalism.

**Instrument of imperialism**

The United States blockade must be understood through a Marxist-Leninist lens. It is not a technical sanction or a disagreement between two states. It is a deliberate class project carried out by the most powerful imperialist state

in the world against a small socialist country. The blockade functions as a weapon of economic warfare. It restricts Cuba’s access to medical equipment, pharmaceutical inputs, technology and international financing. It punishes foreign companies that trade with Cuba. Its sole aim is to weaken revolutionary consciousness by creating hardship, demoralising the population so that capitalism can be restored.

The blockade is a clear example of imperialism as defined by Lenin. It reveals the monopoly power of finance capital, the militarisation of foreign policy and the drive to destroy any example that challenges capitalist domination. Cuba suffers shortages in basic medical supplies not because socialism is inefficient, but because imperialism actively sabotages the material foundations of Cuban healthcare.

**Revolutionary internationalism**

Despite continuous attempts to suffocate its development, Cuba has built one of the strongest public health systems in the world. The Medical Brigades represent Cuba’s practical application of proletarian internationalism. Since the early 1960s more than 400,000 Cuban health professionals have served in countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and



*Practical solidarity: Cuban medical brigade bound for Turks and Caicos Islands during the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo: ACN.*

the Caribbean. Cuban doctors have worked in disaster zones, epidemic outbreaks and rural communities that capitalist health systems ignore because they offer limited profit.

The existence of the Medical Brigades is a direct refutation of the bourgeois notion that international relations are driven only by commercial self-interest. Cuba shows that socialist states can prioritise solidarity with exploited peoples. This is why imperialist powers have attempted to criminalise Cuban medical missions. They fear the moral authority of a socialist project that places human life above profit.

### **Cuba-South Africa solidarity**

The relationship between Cuba and South Africa was forged in common struggle. Cuba played a decisive role in defeating apartheid's military forces in Angola which accelerated the unravelling of the apartheid regime at home. That same solidarity has continued into the era of democratic South Africa.

**Training South African doctors:** the Nelson Mandela-Fidel Castro Medical Training Programme has produced thousands of South African doctors. Many come from working class and rural backgrounds that the apartheid system deliberately excluded from the medical profession. These graduates are trained in Cuba's primary healthcare model which emphasises prevention, community service and human dignity. The blockade affects Cuban medical schools, but it has not stopped Cuba from educating South Africans.

**Cuban doctors serving in rural South Africa:** for more than two decades Cuban doctors have worked in clinics and hospitals that struggle to attract medical professionals. They have strengthened provincial health systems and ensured that poor and rural communities receive services that profit-driven systems do not provide. Their presence has been especially important during moments of crisis such as the early HIV epidemic and the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Influence on South African Health Policy:** Cuba's socialist health model, which prioritises public ownership, preventive medicine and community-based care, has

influenced South Africa's own attempts to rebuild a health system deformed by apartheid capitalism. The Cuban example demonstrates that universal healthcare is possible when it is treated as a social right rather than a commodity.

### **South Africa must intensify the call to end the blockade**

Cuba's achievements show the power of a socialist state organised around the needs of the masses. The blockade does not only harm the Cuban people. It also weakens the global struggle for an alternative to capitalist underdevelopment. If Cuba were freed from economic siege, its capacity to support countries of the Global South would expand dramatically. Its research institutions could collaborate more widely. Its Medical Brigades could reach more communities in need.

As South Africans, we have benefited directly from Cuban solidarity. Our responsibility is to defend the Cuban Revolution and demand an immediate end to the blockade. This stance is consistent with the SACP's historical position that socialism is built through international working-class unity. Imperialism seeks to isolate Cuba because Cuba represents a living example of what a people centred; anti-capitalist society can achieve.

Cuba's National Day is a reminder that revolutionary victories are sustained through courage, clarity and unwavering commitment to socialist principles. The Medical Brigades are not simply a humanitarian programme. They are a manifestation of a political project that puts human beings at the centre of development. Their work in South Africa demonstrates that internationalism is not charity but the shared struggle of peoples confronting capitalism and imperialism. ★

*Cde Sibusisiwe Thobela is the SACP National International Relations Officer.*

**THE ALLIANCE**

# Why the SACP's electoral path should surprise no one

**KHAYA MAGAXA**

It is interesting how people are only now beginning to react to the SACP's 15th National Congress resolution taken in 2022. The SACP further deliberated on this resolution – specifically the proposal to contest elections independently of the ANC – at its 5th Special National Congress in December 2024.

**T**he special congress reaffirmed the resolution with overwhelming support from delegates, including all alliance partners. If our alliance partners, particularly the ANC, had taken the SACP seriously as an equal partner, substantial engagement between 2022 and 2024 would have taken place, and an amicable solution or compromise could have been reached. The SACP leadership repeatedly attempted to raise serious issues with the leader of the alliance, issues which could have helped the two key partners find common ground.

Central to the issues raised by the Party was the need to improve and strengthen our revolutionary alliance through the reconfiguration of the Alliance. Instead, the ANC behaved in its typical “big brother” attitude with arrogance, reducing the entire debate to an accusation that the SACP was seeking positions and undermining the ANC's leadership role. Its National Chairperson used every platform available to ridicule and insult the SACP.

**Reconfiguration of the Alliance**

What does the SACP mean by “reconfiguration of the Alliance” in simple terms? The Party means that the Alliance should collectively determine policy direction and implementation. In other words, the Alliance, as a whole, must function as the political centre in advancing, consolidating, and deepening the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). This perspective was not based on wishful thinking, but on concrete experience since the 1994 democratic breakthrough.

During May Day in 2023, the SACP articulated this clearly, stating that “reconfiguration must make neoliberal policy prescripts, including austerity, as well as state capture and other forms of corruption, a thing of the past.” The call for reconfiguration did not emerge out of nowhere. It was rooted in continuous internal engagement by the Party in response to the serious challenges facing the NDR, including the repeated marginalisation of the Alliance in key decision-making processes.

As far back as the 12th National Congress in Gqeberha (previously Port Elizabeth) in July 2007, SACP delegates



sharply raised the issue of contesting elections independently from the ANC. The national leadership had to intervene to calm delegates who were frustrated by the effects of Gear.

The 1996 Class Project under Thabo Mbeki imposed the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) policy, entrenching neoliberalism, austerity, privatisation and weakening the economic foundations of the NDR.

This shift not only reversed gains achieved by the working class since the democratic breakthrough but actively harmed working-class interests and sidelined socialist forces within the Tripartite Alliance. The Mbeki administration centralised power, marginalised the left, obstructed internal debate, weakened democracy inside the Alliance, and suppressed alternative positions – deepening the exclusion of the working class from key decision-making centres.

It was in response to this experience that the SACP called for a “change of heart” or “change of leadership” leading up to the ANC's 2007 National Conference in Polokwane. Jacob Zuma emerged promising better communication and progressive engagement with alliance partners. However, under Zuma, the state was captured by corrupt networks, resulting in widespread looting, institutional collapse, weakened State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and deep public mistrust.

Municipalities and SOEs were devastated, further eroding the working-class base of the NDR. Zuma, like his predecessor, became increasingly arrogant toward alliance partners. The

era of corruption and patronage entrenched factionalism, paralysed ethical leadership, dismantled governance capacity, and harmed the poorest communities most severely.

Despite repeated calls from the SACP and Cosatu for shared decision-making, the ANC refused to reconfigure the Alliance. The ANC maintained unilateral control over policy and appointments, reducing the Alliance to little more than an electoral instrument rather than a strategic political centre.

President Cyril Ramaphosa took this even further. Under his leadership, the ANC shifted sharply to the right, intensified austerity, and introduced Operation Vulindlela to accelerate neoliberal reforms – pushing privatisation with Ramaphosa as the sole pilot. The ANC embraced coalitions with right-wing, pro-market forces while marginalising and insulting the left. It also failed to combat corruption and crime decisively: from Mbeki’s technocratic elitism to Zuma’s state capture, to Ramaphosa’s selective justice and escalating corruption.

Ramaphosa will be remembered for the collapse of local government – persistent failures in water, electricity, sanitation, fiscal management, criminal capture – and his

inability to act on matters affecting the poor majority, while remaining highly decisive on issues favouring private-sector interests.

Working-class communities, especially in rural areas, now feel politically abandoned. This has contributed to mass voter abstention, unled protests, and the rise of ethnic-populist alternatives.

It would therefore be irresponsible for the SACP to continue acting as though everything is normal, when the ANC has abandoned its historic mission to transform South Africa from a white-minority regime to a society that benefits all, especially those subjected to apartheid oppression and exploitation.

The SACP has a historic responsibility to represent the working class, defend the NDR from neoliberal regression, corruption, and fragmentation, and provide a principled socialist alternative rooted in mass struggle. ★

***Cde Khaya Magaxa is a Central Committee member of the SACP.***

## SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

# Working Class power with a women's and care lens in local government

**DINEO SITOLE MAJAVU**

**The uncertainty and despondency caused by the instituted neoliberal measures from social democracy and the crisis of social reproduction have ensured that the working class remains trapped in the daily fight for survival and the struggle to reclaim fragments of their humanity.**

**U**nder neoliberalism, the urban city has become a space where that very humanity is constantly under threat, whether through the lack of water, exposure to toxic waste, or the danger of collapsing infrastructure and unsafe neighbourhoods.

In acknowledging people's growing disillusionment with neoliberal democracy, their deepening distrust in the state, and the resurgence of racial and ethnic allegiances in South Africa, we must affirm, encourage and work toward the state working for the people.

The state is indeed an instrument of class rule, under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, and aims to suppress the working class at all costs. But of course, then that means that we must ensure the state does not repress the working class into inaction or prioritises the killing of the working class, like in Apartheid.

The SACP must tactically push to work for the people and not just continue to operate as a milk cow for corruption or as a gatekeeper for capital extraction. The state must instead act decisively to ensure safety, provide healthcare, and supply water and electricity as the essential minimum conditions for the reproduction of the working class.

We emphasise the state because capitalism, by its very nature, has no interest in sustaining human life beyond the exploitation of labour, but since insurgency and the smashing of the state is not agreed on now, we must use the state to mobilise the working class in preparation for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The struggle to reproduce life in a way that affirms people's dignity and values labour is constantly undermined by a system that normalises gambling, alcohol abuse, sexism, the gender pay gap, unpaid care work, and unprotected sex as means of survival. This reality compels us to rethink local governance as a critical site for addressing the crisis of social reproduction.

The transfer of power from the people to leaders in 1994 further alienated social reproduction from the broader

struggle. Once in office, leaders seemed to forget that people had been thinking, organising, resisting, and surviving long before them with babies on their backs.

This was not accidental; it was deliberate. Neoliberalism depends on replacing collective power with individual proxies. People were told that others would think, act, and decide on their behalf, that their struggle now belonged to a few, that the ones with care responsibilities must be confined in the homes, while others perhaps add their struggles to the table.

But no one can represent a person better than themselves. True liberation does not delegate power; it multiplies it. This is the reason why local government must be an avenue for multiplied people power.

Social reproductive work is central to urban life. Revolutionary attention must therefore focus on the urban social reproductive sphere to overcome the crisis that exists. Social reproduction is neglected by the state, and women bear the brunt, through long, unsafe commutes; poor water access; and unsafe neighbourhoods that limit their social, economic, and political participation.

The expansion of metropolitan areas has not been matched with investment in industrialisation, care infrastructure, or the funding of public services that ease the burden of social reproduction. South Africa's local government model, shaped by neoliberalism, continues to offload the costs of reproduction onto working-class women and youth, who are deliberately excluded by capitalism to maintain free reproductive labour.

Historically, during colonialism and apartheid, homes and community spaces were central to organising and building power. Political organisations had to engage deeply with social reproduction. Today, many movements organise primarily through state regulations, relying on existing institutional platforms and neglecting human connection.

The focus on social reproduction has been relegated to the private capital, and therefore to the ruling class. We must reassert social reproduction as a central terrain of struggle against capitalism.

- Social reproduction can be understood in three interconnected ways:
- The biological reproduction of people (e.g. pregnancy, breastfeeding).
- The daily and generational reproduction of the labour force (e.g. cooking, cleaning, caring).
- Paid caring labour (e.g. domestic workers, nurses, caregivers).

Local government intersects directly with social



Image: Amandla!

reproduction through housing, sanitation, water provision, ECD centres, schools, clinics, transport, and public spaces. Yet municipalities remain systematically underfunded and depoliticised, designed not to serve the working class but to shift the costs of survival onto women.

As Marxist feminist theorists remind us, capitalists depend on human labour power — a condition of value production they do not themselves produce. Workers, in turn, need wages and social services to meet their basic needs. But in pursuit of profit, capitalists subordinate human needs to accumulation, constraining wages and social spending, and thus undermining the very renewal of life.

It is therefore essential to view people’s power through a women’s and care lens in local government. South Africa’s municipalities are underfunded and structured by neoliberal political-economic that are indifferent to the working class, particularly working women.

Lisa Vogel reminds us that *“Marxism is an insurgent theory, never satisfied with piecemeal reform, but committed to the complete demolition of capitalism.”* Marxists must therefore expose unpaid care work as the backbone of the system and reorganise it as a collective social responsibility under people’s power.

To link social reproduction with people’s power, revolutionary organisations must embody the change they fight for. Meetings and political activities must accommodate women’s care responsibilities, provide alternative participation options for workers unable to attend in person, and actively dismantle patriarchal, white, heterosexual male dominance embedded in our movements. Communication with members must be regular, accessible, and inclusive.

Secondly, planning must be decentralised, shifting power from the state to communities. Community councils should serve as organs of people’s power against neoliberal city policies, enabling residents to prioritise services that reduce the burden of care on women. Even small participatory budgets can address urgent local needs and reorganise social reproduction as a public responsibility rather than a private one. Local government failures are not accidental; they are a capitalist design to keep workers subservient.

Thirdly, communities must collectively own, protect, and co-produce city wards through worker-led industrialisation. This ensures that community-driven plans are implemented, monitored, and evaluated by the people themselves.

Such processes build local knowledge, accountability, protection and solidarity, the foundation for public ownership under the dictatorship of the proletariat, where people own, protect, and sustain their gains. Trade unions across sectors, municipal, education, petroleum, textile, and finance, must work together to free the working class from systemic chains by providing their skills and knowledge to encourage production in communities.

Finally, we must remember that our ultimate goal is the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only through working-class power can we eradicate the ruling ideas and reshape social relations. A truly pro-working class society, one that dismantles exploitation and re-centres care and human life, can emerge only under the leadership of the working class itself.

Women carry the heaviest burdens of reproductive labour; unpaid, invisible, and unending. Capitalism thrives on this exploitation. Our task as Marxist revolutionaries is not only to wage class struggle, but also to understand and connect the struggles of the formal and informal sites of production.

Capitalism is the enemy; reforms and guarding the state are not ends in themselves, but at this time have been steps toward consolidating working-class power and mobilising the working class. Only when capitalism is destroyed will the burden of social reproduction cease to be gendered. ★

***Cde Dineo Sitole Majavu is SACP Linda Jabane District chairperson and YCLSA national committee member.***

## PARTY BUILDING

# Gen Z activism – from gang leader to communist cadre



*Gang salutes. Once in, it's hard to exit a gang. But Cde X found a political home in the SACP. Photo: Dariusz Dziewanski.*

### EXLIRA GIOSE-DAVIDS

**Deep within the libraries of North West University is a master's degree student whose colourful past has shaped a journey remarkable enough to defy expectations. From being a 26 gang leader to a highly educated communist cadre, this is the story of how the South African Communist Party saved Cde X from a life of crime.**

**T**he comrade comes from what he describes as "a very good family". Both his parents were activists, the family attended church and his siblings were law-abiding citizens. "Nobody would of course believe that I would do such things, because my family is a church going family," he reflects. But it wasn't his home environment that led him astray. It was the community dynamics and, more specifically, the school he attended in a different township.

"What really led us to gangs was where we were schooling," Cde X explains. For young men like him attending school in another township, joining a gang became a matter of survival.

"There were already established gangs in that township, so it would be easier for us to join what was already there so that we can defend ourselves from the other gangs that would try to treat us otherwise." He joined the 26 gang in grade 8, in 2012, when he was very young.

What followed were years of living a double life.

"Everyone else would see me as a very good person. I did not smoke, just like I don't smoke now. I did not drink and all those things," he says. At home and in class, he was a good student who passed his subjects. But outside those spaces, he was an active gang member. At first, his role involved stealing cellular devices from other students, however because he was a very intelligent child, he advanced. This advancement meant that he was now in charge of directing others on what and when to steal.

The most dangerous moment came when a gang fight erupted over a stolen phone. What started as a localised dispute quickly escalated.

"When we were leaving school that day, we then found an entire community of gangsters, old people, different ages

waiting for us outside the school," he recalls. "It was by the intervention of the police that nobody died that day." Others were stabbed, and what followed were localised beatings from police who came to the school looking for gang members.

Yet even then, his double life protected him. "It would be easy for people to always defend me. To say, this one is not part of this gang. You are just framing him. Even those who knew I was part of the gang would defend me because I wasn't generally a bad person."

He didn't question the gang life, he already knew what he was doing was wrong, but he did begin envisioning a different way of living. In 2016, he and his father went to campaign for the African National Congress towards elections in his hometown in Gauteng, but that didn't make a difference. It was two years later when Comrade Y recruited him and his cousin into the Communist Party that his mindset began to shift.

"The guy was a comrade that actually made sure that we went back to school and left gangs," Cde X says. Cde Y, almost their peer in age but already in the party, "came to rescue us." He gave them roles and daily tasks – visiting homes, filling out spreadsheets about Operation Khula and other party activities. "He would always fetch us," Cde X remembers. "I didn't remain in the party because I wanted to remain. It was something Cde Y forced on us."

But something resonated. Cde X had never joined the gangs to do wrong – it was peer pressure and a need for protection and belonging. In the Communist Party, he found people who didn't want wrong things happening in the community and actively worked to stop rising crime, illegal dumping, and other issues. "The protection I was looking for elsewhere was always in front of my eyes. I was just too blind to see it."

The transition wasn't immediate. Gang members still saw him as one of their own for years. The last time he interacted with some of his former gang members was in 2023. "When I saw them, I would blatantly tell them I no longer do those things, I'm older now and I can fight back", he recalls.

What made the Communist Party work for Cde X was how it tapped into something from his gang days. The 26 gang had rules – respect and discipline were paramount, even if those values only extended to fellow members.

Cde X took that framework and applied it to his entire worldview. "My day-to-day work in the communist life and community organising was not based on the Communist Party principles initially, but rather on that particular role I took in my gang," he admits. "It was easy even for those who I had done wrong to forgive me."

His first major test as a community organiser came in 2019, just two years after joining the party. A housing project worth R32 billion had stalled, and protests erupted. Criminals were exploiting public anger by looting construction sites. When Cde X saw what was happening, he informed his comrades, who told him to take responsibility and install himself as a leader of the protest.

"I took the podium and I started addressing them and said, look, let us not be destructive, because if we destroy the construction site, we will not get what we want," he recalls. "It was that part that broke the ice in me, and it made me realise that the community had absolved me from all the wrongdoings. In fact, they had accepted me, not just a child who grew up in front of their eyes, but now as a community leader."

Today, Cde X's party work centres on political education. As comrade Jimmy used to say, "every communist must be a community activist." He is passionate about educating others about what the Communist Party seeks to achieve and what communism and socialism are about. "You cannot be a good communist if you do not know what the communist party is about," he insists.

Now pursuing his master's degree at North West University, Cde X has come a long way from the grade 8 student who joined a gang for protection. His position educating others has given him the chance to learn even more. "When you educate others, you have to first learn yourself," he explains. "By preparing, you are learning."

From gang leader to party leader, Cde X's story is one of transformation through community, discipline, and a political home that gave him purpose beyond survival. It's proof that Gen Z activism isn't just performative — sometimes, it's about saving lives, one comrade at a time. ★

***Cde Exlira Giose-Davids is a National Committee member of the YCLSA.***

## CHINA

# Lessons and inspiration from China

**ALEX MOHUBETSWANE MASHILO**

**Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and learning from the Chinese people to defend our democratic national sovereignty, self-determination and independence.**

**T**he Round Table is organised around three thematic questions: 1) What is our general understanding of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, including any specific examples to support our views? 2) Are our home countries able to be independent when formulating and advancing their political party and overall political systems, and promoting democracy? If so, why? If not, why not? 3) What is our perspective on the development of the current world situation, particularly regarding the characteristics of world political parties? We can take any one of these questions and focus on it or, if time permits, take a combination of two or all three.

The journey towards moderate prosperity in China is not a mere economic endeavour; it is a holistic approach that intertwines the advancement of structural economic transformation and development with the well-being of the people and human rights. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Chinese nation has made extraordinary strides in lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty, over 800 million people to be specific, thereby securing the right to an adequate standard of living for all its citizens.

This, along with the overall great achievement of moderate prosperity, was announced in 2021 as part of the celebration of the centenary goals of the CPC. These achievements marked and made clearer the definition of the “New Era” in the process of struggle, transformation and development in pursuit of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”. Hence, “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”.

By the end of 2020, China had successfully lifted all 99 million rural poor out of poverty, along with 832 counties and 128,000 villages classified as poor. This historic achievement represents the largest and most successful extreme poverty eradication in human history, benefiting the largest number of people, over 800 million.

The concept of moderate prosperity in China’s historical context encompasses not only the high rates of economic growth that China has realised but also social justice, greater cultural progress, domestic industrial transformation and development in response to ecological imperatives, among others. It is about ensuring that every citizen has access to quality education, healthcare, housing, and social services. The per capita disposable income of rural residents in poor

areas in China more than doubled from approximately ¥6,100 in 2013 to approximately ¥12,600 in 2020, reflecting a commitment to improving living standards. The Chinese experience shows us that the proceeds of development should be shared, allowing all people both to participate in and benefit from the fruits of progress.

In the context of industrial transformation and development in response to ecological imperatives, China has notably established a leading position in new energy vehicles research and development, manufacturing, and remarkably increasing adoption within the automotive industry.

The country has made notable advances in electric power generation as it transitions to cleaner or green energy. Included in these advances is a shift involving carbon capture from coal-fired power generation, storage, and use as a subject of labour, a constituent elementary factor in other production processes.

China’s advances in the energy transition include the development of new energy or green components for cleaner electric power generation systems, as well as a leading role in their exports, globally. In this regard, I must draw attention to a point in the practical programme drawn up by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, first published in 1848.

That is, it is crucial for communists to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible after winning the battle of democracy. The success of China in new energy or green components, domestic research and development, manufacturing capacity, and exports is part of its broader success in increasing its total productive forces.

This is perhaps most visible in China’s impressive high-quality infrastructure development and maintenance, advanced manufacturing, industrialised agriculture with the massive co-operatives sector playing a key role, artificial intelligence, and other science and technology advances, to name but a few areas. We have personally witnessed some of the impressive achievements at the industrial sites we visited during our fieldwork as scholars and researchers.

These include the giant panda research and development park, advancements in artificial intelligence, mining equipment manufacturing, automotive production, and cultural development parks. Additionally, we have observed remarkable infrastructure from both the ground and the air, to name just a few examples.

We have seen banks in China’s large-scale state-owned banking and public financial sector system. There are large state-owned banks in which a number of banks employ hundreds of thousands of workers. Again, this is in line with the practical programme drawn up by Marx and Engels in the



*Primary school students take computer lesson in Banmu Village of Wa Autonomous County of Ximeng, southwest China's Yunnan Province. Ximeng County in southwest China's Yunnan Province used to be a national-level poor region. By the end of 2020, China had successfully lifted all 99 million rural poor out of poverty, along with 832 counties and 128,000 villages classified as poor. Photo: Xinhua/Yang Zongyou*

Manifesto of the Communist Party. It is unparalleled in the realm of current global trends.

In the New Era, where the CPC aims to achieve a GDP per capita comparable to that of a mid-level developed country by 2035 and establish China as a great, modern socialist country, a key centenary goal for the People's Republic of China, we observe a reinforced commitment to the principles of socialism, guided by the thought of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, which attaches great importance to the rights of the people as a whole. The CPC is clearly working tirelessly to promote common prosperity as a key goal for the New Era in response to what it has identified as a shift in the principal contradiction facing the Chinese nation.

According to CPC reports, the principal contradiction facing the Chinese nation has evolved, with advances in progress, from the one between low levels of national production and the ever-growing needs of the people to the one between the ever-growing needs of the people for a better life, on one hand, and unbalanced and inadequate development, on the other.

Here it is important to recognise the definition of the needs of the people advanced by the CPC towards common prosperity. This definition has an expanded scope from the immediate, programmatic focus on meeting the material and cultural needs of the people, which characterised most of the earlier years of modern China's development, to encompass a broader range of intangible needs.

The definition is in line with the evolution of China's principal contradiction identified by the CPC and reflects the understanding that, as Karl Marx argued in his critique of classical political economy, such intangible needs will become increasingly significant and more attainable with advances in progress towards extensive and full development in increasing total productive forces as rapidly as possible – as part of the socialist revolution.

According to Marx in the last chapter of the first volume of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, that is Chapter 33, the historical mission of the socialist revolution, properly understood in the context of the theory of scientific socialism that he outlined, includes ending the principal contradictions that characterise capitalist society. These contradictions include the one that lies between the increased socialisation of production and the concentration of its proceeds, particularly the wealth created, in the hands of a tiny minority of the capitalist class. This concentration effectively excludes the direct producers, namely the working class, from the distribution and benefits of that wealth.

The historical mission to systematically end this contradiction and the exploitation of labour that underpins it allows more and more people to realise reduced labour time or increased leisure and free time in the true sense of the term – within the context of socially emancipated conditions. This progress then enables the people to focus on higher-order needs and aspirations.

A key aspect of the transformation and development objectives towards common prosperity as part of Socialism

with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as the CPC's programme of action involves addressing the inequalities that emerged in the past, where the strategy of allowing some people to get rich first was a policy lever aimed at involving them in strategies to lift others out of poverty.

It is also important to recognise the CPC's promotion of social justice through the protection of women, children, the elderly and people living with disabilities, as a vital component of China's human rights agenda and programme of action. The various programmes implemented by the government, such as the nutrition improvement programme for children in poor areas, which has benefited over 11 million children, and the healthcare programme for poverty alleviation and expansion of access to quality healthcare for all, are worth noting.

What is particularly striking for me, coming from a country that was colonised by forces from the global north, is that the strides made by China did not involve the colonisation of a single country. Although China did not achieve its milestones without resistance, especially external resistance from the United States and other Western imperialist powers, it has realised its progress peacefully, without attacking any nation.

In stark contrast, we saw on the news last night that the United States has shut down Venezuela's airspace. This act represents war and militarist economic domination aimed at seizing Venezuela's resources, which include the world's largest proven oil reserves as well as significant mineral wealth both beneath the soil and on the surface.

It is no wonder that the imperialist regime of the United States, particularly under Donald Trump, has rejected the existence of climate change and emphasised oil and other fossil fuels as central to its capital accumulation agenda. Venezuela also possesses vast tracts of arable land for agriculture and other land-environmental resources, highlighting its economic potential.

The war launched by the United States against Venezuela serves as a reminder of the colonisation of lands in the global south and the exploitation and oppression of its people by global north powers as a strategy for their own development and the expansion of the capitalist system.

In the global east, the Prime Minister of Japan, representing an imperialist regime, has initiated a political attack on China. This situation manifests as a diplomatic dispute involving her regime's support for Taiwan's separation from China. Similarly, the Western imperialist media, particularly in the United States, has recently lauded its president, Donald Trump, suggesting that President Xi Jinping understood the consequences of invading Taiwan during their recent bilateral meeting in South Korea. Those of us who grasp dialectics and the One China policy view Trump's arrogance as rooted in deliberate ignorance. How could China invade itself? We

asked this question, fully appreciating the historical oneness of China, which includes Taiwan.

I highlight the actions of the two imperialist forces from the global north, one in the west and the other in the east, to illustrate just a small part of the massive resistance and provocations that the CPC has navigated while steering the transformation and development of China towards its impressive achievements. In the Caribbean, Cuba faces an economic, financial, trade, investment, and political blockade imposed by the United States. This blockade is not only illegal; it is also criminal.

The developing global situation highlighted by the actions of the two imperialist forces brings me to the second question, albeit briefly: most countries in Africa are not free to determine their own economic transformation and development paths, nor to articulate new political systems based on these paths. Imperialist powers continue to undermine democratic national sovereignty, self-determination, and independence.

This situation prevents the affected countries' people from determining their own transformation and development paths and their own destinies. This is oppression, not democracy. Through the imperialist-dominated institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the agenda includes imposing structural adjustment programmes as part of loan conditionalities, usurping democratic policymaking sovereignty. Now these include a new round of neoliberal policy or structural reforms.

In conclusion, the achievements of China in striving for moderate prosperity and advancing human rights are not only a source of pride for the Chinese people but also a significant contribution to the global human rights cause. They also serve as an inspiration to many people around the world. As we move forward, let us continue to learn from one another, sharing our experiences and strategies to build a world where poverty is completely eradicated and human rights are universally respected. These include the fundamental rights of democratic national sovereignty, self-determination, and independence.

Together, let us forge ahead into the future, inspired by the successes of our comrades in China, committed to the ongoing struggle for a better world for all.

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