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for working-class unity in action**



**COSATU 15th National Congress
14–17 September, 2026**

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INTRO

FOR WORKING - CLASS UNITY AND SOLIDARITY AGAINST CAPITALIST EXPLOITATION

The SACP recognises the central role of organised labour in the struggle for working-class power and socialism. In particular, forging class-conscious trade unionism is essential for the working class to move beyond a class in itself to become and act as a class for itself. We are calling on Cosatu to unite behind prioritising better conditions for workers across the economy, in all industries and sectors, rather than being divided along electoral issues. It is crucial to build class consciousness and expand internal democratic space to uphold the workers' right to vote for their class interests.

The SACP will continue to work for unity within the working class and for a trade union movement capable of confronting economic and political exploitation, including on the electoral front, unemployment, casualisation, austerity, privatisation, de-industrialisation and attacks on public services.

*From the statement of the SACP Central Committee,
30.8.2026*

THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE TRADE UNIONS

Key points

- **Different roles, one struggle** — unions organise economic power, the Party organises political power; neither substitutes for the other.
- **Economic struggle must become political** — wage wins are eroded without control over prices, services, ownership.
- **Independence is not neutrality** — both organisations keep their own democracy, unite through persuasion not command.
- **Commandism and economism both weaken the movement** — imposed politics and narrow bargaining are equal dangers.
- **Education builds cadres** — political schools must turn lived problems into organising tools.
- **The socialist axis is built in action** — SACP and Cosatu unity is proven in campaigns, not conferences.

TEBOGO PHADU

A decisive relationship in working-class politics

The relationship between a communist party and the trade union movement is one of the decisive questions of working class politics. Both arise from the conflict between labour and capital, but they are not identical organisations and cannot substitute for one another. Trade unions organise workers primarily at the point of production and around their immediate economic and workplace interests. A communist party seeks to unite the working class politically, connect workplace struggles with the wider struggles of communities and oppressed groups, and advance a programme for the transformation of society as a whole.

A strong labour movement without a clear political

project can win important improvements while remaining trapped within the limits of capitalism. A communist party detached from organised workers can become abstract, bureaucratic and unable to influence the real movement of society. The strategic task is therefore neither to collapse the unions into the Party nor to separate economic and political struggles. It is to build a principled relationship based on working-class leadership, organisational independence, democratic participation and a common programme of action. In the South African context, the SACP and Cosatu must constitute the socialist axis of our broader movement and the organisational basis for building a powerful socialist movement of workers and the poor.

The different roles of the Party and the unions

Trade unions are mass organisations of workers. Their strength lies in their capacity to unite workers across differing political views around

wages, conditions of employment, workplace rights, social protection and dignity at work. Through collective bargaining, strikes, shop steward organisation and worker education, unions limit the arbitrary power of employers and teach workers the practical meaning of solidarity. They are often the first institutions through which workers experience collective power.

The communist party has a broader political responsibility. It must analyse the total system of capitalist power, identify the forces capable of social transformation, and develop a strategy that connects immediate struggles to the goal of socialism. It organises not only around the employer but also around state power, ownership, the direction of investment, land, public services, gender oppression, racism, imperialism and the ecological crisis. Its task is to help the working class act as a class for itself: conscious of its historic interests and capable of leading society.

These different roles require mutual respect. The Party should not treat unions as transmission belts that merely carry decisions made elsewhere. Unions should not reduce politics to collective bargaining or assume that workplace militancy automatically produces socialist consciousness. Workers develop political understanding through struggle, education, organisation and reflection. The Party contributes by learning from those struggles, offering a coherent analysis and helping to turn fragmented demands into a programme for social power.

From economic struggle to political struggle

Capitalism constantly reproduces conflict over wages, working time, job security and control of production. These struggles are indispensable, but capital does not exercise power only inside the workplace. Corporations shape public policy, control investment, move money across borders and influence the media and institutions of the state. Rising food prices, expensive transport, privatised services, unemployment and household debt can weaken a wage victory. For this reason, the economic struggle must develop into a political struggle over who owns, controls and directs the economy.

The connection between the two struggles must

be practical. A campaign for a living wage should be linked to affordable housing, reliable transport and universal public services. The defence of jobs should be connected to industrial policy, public investment and a just transition that protects workers and communities. Opposition to outsourcing should become a wider campaign for insourcing and strong public capacity. Workplace campaigns against harassment must connect with the struggle against gender based violence in communities and society. In this way, workers experience socialism not as a distant slogan, but as a developing programme that addresses the whole of their lives.

Consider a municipal worker who wins a wage increase after collective bargaining. If the worker then faces rapidly rising taxi fares, prepaid electricity costs, food prices and rent, part of the victory is taken back through the household budget. The union must defend the wage gain, but the wider movement must also organise for affordable public transport, reliable municipal services, price stability and decent housing. The practical experience shows why the struggle between worker and employer cannot be separated from the struggle over public policy and the social wage.

The South African historical experience

In South Africa, the relationship between communist organisation and militant trade unionism developed under conditions of colonial dispossession and national oppression and super-exploitation of the black working class. The Communist Party helped advance the understanding that the exploitation of labour could not be separated from racist domination and the dispossession of the African majority. Communists participated in organising African workers, building non-racial working class unity and linking workplace demands to the struggle for national liberation and socialism.

The emergence of powerful industrial unions and the formation of Cosatu represented a major advance in working class organisation. Unions became schools of socialism, centres of resistance and a vital force in the struggle against apartheid. Shop floor organisation, democratic mandates and worker control gave substance to the principle

that workers must be the authors of their own liberation. The alliance of the liberation movement, the Communist Party and the progressive trade union movement helped concentrate social forces against apartheid and contributed decisively to the 1994 democratic breakthrough.

That history remains a source of strength, but it cannot be invoked as a substitute for analysing present conditions. Political democracy did not end capitalist ownership, mass unemployment, racialised inequality or the concentration of wealth. Financialisation, casualisation, outsourcing, labour broking, technological change and weakened public institutions have altered the world of work. Millions survive outside stable formal employment. The historic relationship must therefore be renewed through current struggles, honest debate and a programme capable of responding to today's working class in all its diversity.

The tradition of worker organisation provides a practical lesson. When workers meet in general meetings, elect accountable shop stewards, debate demands and mandate negotiators, they practise democratic power rather than merely speak about it. The same method can be carried into communities through street committees, public assemblies and elected campaign structures. The historical value of the trade union movement lies not only in the victories it won, but also in the democratic capacities it developed among ordinary workers.

Working class leadership in the present

Working class leadership does not mean that unions speak only for their organised members or that the Party declares itself the leader by virtue of its name. Leadership must be earned in practice. It requires the ability to unite employed and unemployed workers, organised and unorganised labour, permanent and precarious workers, rural communities, women, young people and migrants around a common programme. It must also overcome divisions created by racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, occupation, skill and income.

The organised working class has strategic power because workers occupy critical positions in production, logistics, energy, communications

and public services. Yet formal union membership represents only part of the broader working class. If unions focus narrowly on their existing members, they risk isolation from unemployed youth, informal workers and struggling communities. If the Party speaks about the working class without being rooted in workplaces and communities, its politics becomes rhetorical. Both must organise where people work and where they live.

This requires campaigns that join workplace power with community organisation. Union locals, shop steward councils and Party structures should cooperate around public transport, electricity, water, housing, food security, health care, schools, safety and local economic development. The principle should be knowledge and action: investigate conditions with workers and communities, agree on demands, mobilise collective capacity and build durable democratic organisation through the struggle itself.

A mining community illustrates this need. A union may successfully organise workers inside the mine, while unemployed young people, informal traders and workers' families remain unorganised outside its gates. When retrenchment or closure is threatened, a workplace-only response is too narrow. The union and Party should bring workers, affected households, local producers and community organisations together to demand disclosure of the company's plans, explore alternative production, secure retraining and rehabilitation commitments, and build new forms of local economic activity. The workplace struggle then becomes a community struggle over the future of the entire area.

Independence, unity and internal democracy

A healthy relationship rests on the organisational independence of both the Party and the unions. Independence does not mean political neutrality or separation. It means that each organisation makes decisions through its own democratic structures, remains accountable to its membership and enters common action through persuasion and agreement. Communists active in unions must be exemplary organisers who respect union mandates, defend worker control and win support through the strength of their ideas and conduct.

Commandism weakens both movements. When

Party members attempt to impose positions without convincing workers, they damage democracy and create resentment. Economism is equally damaging because it confines unions to workplace matters and abandons the political terrain to capital and professional politicians. The alternative is a relationship of principled unity, constructive contestation and continuous political education.

Factionalism and careerism are serious dangers. Union resources and positions must never become instruments for personal advancement or internal Party contests. Likewise, public office must not be used to weaken independent worker organisation. Leaders must be accountable, mandates must be respected and corruption must be confronted consistently. The moral authority of the socialist movement depends on whether its conduct reflects the society it seeks to build.

In practice, a communist shop steward should be recognised as the person who reports back faithfully, protects members who disagree politically and refuses favours from management. If workers mandate a particular bargaining position, that mandate cannot be changed because a Party leader or public representative prefers another outcome. The communist must return to the workers, explain the political issues, listen and persuade. Authority earned in this way strengthens both the union and the Party; authority imposed from above weakens them.

A common programme of action

The relationship between the Party and the trade union movement should be organised around a concrete programme rather than ceremonial appearances at conferences. Such a programme should defend collective bargaining, protect the right to strike, organise precarious and informal workers, reverse outsourcing and strengthen workplace democracy. It should also confront the unemployment crisis through public employment, industrial development, local production, worker and community co-operatives and a large scale programme to repair and expand social infrastructure.

Public services are a central working class issue. Reliable water, electricity, health care, education, transport and housing constitute part of the

social wage. Privatisation and tender dependence frequently transfer public resources to private accumulation while weakening capacity and accountability. The labour movement and the Party should campaign for well governed public institutions, insourcing, capable municipalities and state owned enterprises that serve social need. Anti corruption work must be joined to the reconstruction of public capacity, because exposing theft without changing the systems that enable private capture is insufficient.

For example, outsourced cleaners, security officers and waste workers may perform permanent municipal functions while receiving lower wages, weaker benefits and insecure contracts. A joint campaign can organise these workers, document the true long term cost of outsourcing and demand their phased insourcing into a properly managed municipal service. The objective is not only a change in employment status. It is to rebuild public capacity, improve service standards and create direct accountability between the municipality, its workers and the community.

A common programme must also address the future of work. Technology should reduce drudgery, improve safety and expand human capacity, not merely displace workers and intensify exploitation. Climate action must guarantee a just transition shaped by workers and affected communities. Pension and provident funds should be treated as workers' deferred wages and mobilised responsibly toward productive, socially useful investment rather than speculation. International solidarity remains essential because transnational capital operates across borders and seeks to make workers compete against one another.

The just transition becomes concrete in a coal town facing the closure of a mine or power station. Workers need more than a promise of training after jobs disappear. They need advance notice, participation in investment decisions, income protection and funded pathways into new industries. Public procurement can support local manufacturing of renewable energy components, while worker and community co-operatives can participate in food production, recycling, maintenance and other services. Such initiatives will not replace industrial employment on their

own, but they can form part of a planned transition in which workers help decide what replaces the old economic base.

Political education and cadre development

No durable relationship can be sustained without political education. Worker education should combine practical knowledge of labour law, bargaining and organising with political economy, history, gender perspectives, ecology, internationalism and socialist strategy. Its purpose is not to replace debate with fixed formulas. It should help workers interpret their own experience, understand the balance of forces and develop the confidence to lead.

The Party must recruit and develop the most committed worker leaders while ensuring that communist cadres remain active among workers. Unions, in turn, must cultivate a new generation of shop stewards able to organise beyond established workplaces. Political schools, workplace study circles, community forums, joint-education programmes and campaign-based learning can help close the gap between theory and practice. Education is most effective when it begins from concrete problems and returns to organised action.

A political education session can begin with a problem workers already know. Municipal workers may report that equipment is unavailable although large amounts are paid to contractors. Participants can trace the budget, identify who owns the contractors, compare outsourced costs with the cost of internal capacity and examine who benefits from the arrangement. Marxist concepts such as class power, accumulation and state power then become tools for understanding lived experience. The session should end with an organising task, such as gathering evidence, briefing members and preparing a public campaign. The question of state power and socialism

Trade union struggles inevitably confront the state because labour law, economic policy, taxation, public spending and ownership determine the terrain on which workers fight. Yet participation in elections or government does not by itself transfer power to the working class. Capital retains enormous power through ownership, investment decisions, finance and control over productive resources. The socialist movement must therefore

combine electoral struggle, mass mobilisation, workplace organisation and the construction of democratic economic institutions.

The communist party should help workers understand government as a terrain of struggle rather than an end in itself. Representatives supported by workers must remain accountable to organised constituencies, advance working-class demands and resist incorporation into elite politics. At the same time, the movement must build power from below through unions, co-operatives, community organisations and democratic campaigns. Socialism requires both the transformation of state power and the development of popular capacity to govern the economy and society.

This principle can be applied in local government. If a councillor is elected with working-class support, accountability cannot be reduced to appearing again at the next election. The councillor should meet regularly with workers and residents, report on budgets and council decisions, publish commitments and explain obstacles honestly. Where a tender is proposed for a service that could be delivered publicly, the community and affected workers should be able to scrutinise the decision before it is made. In this relationship, elected office reinforces organised popular power instead of replacing it.

Renewed relationship rooted in action

The communist party and the trade union movement need one another, but their relationship must be consciously built. Unions give organised expression to workers' immediate interests and collective power. The Party brings a wider political strategy aimed at ending exploitation and constructing socialism. Neither can fulfil the role of the other, and neither will succeed through declarations alone. In South Africa, the unity of the SACP and Cosatu must be developed as the socialist axis of the Alliance and the basis for building a powerful socialist movement of workers and the poor.

The central task is to rebuild an independent, militant, democratic and politically conscious working class movement. This means organising workers in new and old sectors, joining workplace and community struggles, developing cadres,

defending public goods, confronting corruption and capitalist power, and advancing a credible programme for work, production and social ownership. The test of the relationship is not the frequency of meetings between leaders. It is whether workers become more organised, more conscious, more united and more capable of changing society.

A renewed relationship between the SACP and Cosatu must therefore be rooted in action. As the socialist axis of the Alliance, it must enable workers to fight for immediate improvements

while uniting the wider working class and the poor and building the confidence, organisation and institutions required for a deeper transformation. In that movement from defence to advance, from protest to power and from exploitation to collective ownership, the historic mission of the working class takes practical form.

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COSATU AT 40 – THE CONGRESS MUST BE ABOUT MORE THAN WHO WORKERS VOTE FOR

Key points

- **Bigger than the ballot** — the real question is whether Cosatu can organise today's working class.
- **The worker has changed** — casualisation, outsourcing, platform work have fragmented the base.
- **The working class still exists** – the organised working class has weakened.
- **Rethink industrial unionism** — fragmentation and overlap between affiliates must be confronted.
- **Programme before party** — build worker demands first, then judge parties against them.
- **Unity must be organised** — 5 November matters as much as 4 November.

BUTI MANAMELA

Cosatu's 15th National Congress must confront a question bigger than electoral support: whether the federation is still organised for the working class that exists today.

There is an irony about Cosatu's 15th National Congress. It may become one of the most politically contested congresses in the federation's 40-year history because, for the first time in the democratic era, the ANC and the SACP will contest the same municipal election on different ballots. Yet the most important question is not simply which party Cosatu should support.

The bigger question is whether Cosatu remains capable of organising, educating and leading the South African working class that actually exists today.

That working class has changed. Mass unemployment has become normalised. Secure work has steadily been displaced by casual labour,

outsourcing, labour broking, platform work and informal survivalism. Food, electricity, transport and housing costs continue to eat into wages. Working-class women carry an additional burden through precarious employment, unpaid care work and weakened public services.

The Congress must therefore confront how much the worker around whom Cosatu was historically organised has changed. The federation was built through concentrations of mineworkers, factory workers, transport workers, municipal workers and public servants. Large workplaces made it possible to organise thousands, elect shop stewards, conduct political education, build solidarity and exert bargaining power. The union was not merely a bargaining agent. It was a school of politics.

Weakened working class

That world has not disappeared, but it has been profoundly altered. Deindustrialisation has weakened important centres of industrial organisation. Outsourcing has broken large

workforces into smaller contractors. Labour brokers and fixed-term employment have increased insecurity. Digital platforms have created workers who may never meet one another. Millions move between unemployment, temporary employment and informal survival.

The result is a paradox that should worry every trade unionist: the working class has not disappeared, but the organised working class has weakened.

Cosatu must therefore ask not only how to recruit more members into existing structures, but whether those structures are suited to today's working class. How do we organise the Uber driver, the security guard, the outsourced cleaner, the farm worker, the informal trader, the community health worker, the EPWP worker and the young graduate moving between unemployment and temporary work?

This raises the question of industrial unionism. Cosatu emerged with the principle of one industry, one union. Over time, affiliates have crossed sectors while unions sometimes compete for the same shrinking pools of organised workers. There may be historical reasons for this, but the Congress should ask whether fragmentation and overlap strengthen or weaken worker power.

The point is not nostalgia for the 1980s. Capital has changed. Labour must change with it. But adaptation cannot mean abandoning the principle that workers are strongest when organised around the economic structures through which capital exploits them.

The second challenge is political. Cosatu's historical strength did not lie only in numbers. It lay in worker control. Shop stewards became political educators and community organisers. Workers debated national policy. Union locals connected workplace grievances with township struggles. Wage struggles were part of a wider struggle over political and economic power.

Programme clarity

That tradition must be rebuilt. Nedlac matters. Collective bargaining matters. Engagement within the Alliance matters. But none of these can substitute for workers organised at the point

of production and communities organised where they live. A trade union movement can have greater institutional access while possessing less social power.

And this brings us to the elections. There are different views among Cosatu affiliates about the ANC and the SACP. That debate should not be hidden. Nor should workers be treated as voting cattle whose choices can simply be instructed from above. The argument should begin elsewhere: what is the working-class programme?

What does Cosatu demand on employment, industrialisation, wages, social security, healthcare, public transport, housing, energy, land, privatisation, public ownership, labour broking, state-owned enterprises and local government? Once that programme is established, political formations can be judged against it, rather than beginning with a preferred party and constructing a working-class justification afterwards.

Cosatu's independence must mean precisely this: it develops the political programme of workers and assesses political formations against it. Its greatest contribution to the Alliance, the SACP, the ANC and South African democracy is not uncritical loyalty. It is an organised, class-conscious and politically independent working class.

Organise the unorganised

This Congress should therefore produce more than an electoral resolution. It should organise the unorganised; reopen the debate on industrial unionism and affiliate overlap; rebuild shop-floor democracy and political education; reconnect workplace struggles with township and community struggles; and emerge with a clear programme against unemployment, austerity, deindustrialisation and privatisation.

The rights workers enjoy today were not gifts from government or employers. They were won through organisation and struggle. The same will be true of the next generation of gains.

The question before Cosatu is therefore larger than where workers place their crosses on 4 November. The real question is where the working class will stand on 5 November: more organised,

more conscious, more united and more capable of exercising power — or weaker and more fragmented?

The unity of the working class remains our most powerful weapon. But unity is not declared. It must be organised.

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“TEARS FOR THE CREATORS” OF THE GIANT RED TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Key points

- **Ideological degeneration** — Cosatu’s top brass is subordinating class independence to ANC loyalty.
- **14th Congress betrayed** — the resolution to campaign with the SACP is being vetoed and ignored.
- **History as warning** — “Tears for the Creators” and the fate of the ICU, FNETU, CNETU show what happens to unions without proletarian leadership.
- **No “supporting both” trick** — ANC and SACP contest independently; there’s no honest middle ground.
- **Workers aren’t children** — Cosatu was built as an independent workers’ movement, not a ward of the ANC.
- **The call: be wise** — return to Marxism-Leninism, class independence, and the Socialist Axis with the SACP.

ZOLA SAPHETHA

Having celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, it is fair to assume not only that the Congress of the South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) has now come of age but also that it has reached a mature stage. However, as in the evolution of capitalism, inherent in maturation is the dialectic of moribundness. A moribund organism is characterised by a terminal state of degeneration in which there is a fatal struggle between its hitherto vibrant essence, which is succumbing to the virulent outgrowth of its pseudo-self.

Indeed, based on the recent developments since Cosatu’s 14th National Congress in 2022, the inherited practice of organisational and class independence that was historically forged as part of its assimilation of the proletarian ideology of Marxism-Leninism is being substituted by

ideological subordination and political servitude to the African National Congress (ANC).

This may be partially engendered by the suffocating atmosphere of neoliberalism, which has been disruptive to the inter-generational dissemination of Marxism-Leninism within Cosatu. Hence, ahead of its 15th National Congress, it is becoming clear that the federation is ideologically degenerating, as marked by the prevailing strategic confusion, despite the adopted political resolution and the Medium Term Vision by the previous congress.

Abandonment of class struggle

Today Cosatu is not unmistakably identifiable with Marxism-Leninism and the struggle for socialism. The rhetorical masquerades in the reports can no longer conceal the cynical deceit at the practical political level. Unfortunately, we must come to terms with the fact that the glorious years of the

popular assimilation of Marxism-Leninism, which forged the political traditions of class-orientation, shop-floor militancy and worker control, are fast fading behind us.

The top brass of the federation has simply abandoned class independence, as signified by their persistence in subordinating this workers' movement to the same elite political stratum that turned the ANC into a party of neoliberalism. The ANC itself has become its pseudo-self, being strategically at sea, having long abandoned the shared strategic lodestar in the Freedom Charter, in favour of the bizarre vision of the so-called National Democratic Society (NDS).

In the current conjuncture, it may be that the prevalent uneven class consciousness is to be expected amongst the rank and file and even at the level of the Central Executive Committee (CEC), despite the federation's historical background. Unfortunately, this giant federation may be ill-fated when its top brass today even comprises of a bunch of self-conscious ideological flip-floppers who are thoroughly opposed to class independence. Instead, they are hell-bent on undermining the strategic political direction provided by the 14th Congress in favour of ideological subordination and political subservience of this historically radical and proud workers' movement to the pro-capitalist and neoliberal leadership that dominates the ANC.

Neoliberal trajectory

This may partially be a function of the receding momentum of the class struggle as a result of the dialectical intersection of the unfavourable objective conditions and the waning subjective working-class agency. Indeed, the sustained and overwhelming neoliberal economic policy trajectory has enhanced the shift of the balance of class forces in favour of capital. In the midst of the unfolding socioeconomic crises and endemic corruption, a formation such as Cosatu ought to have been regrouping and gearing itself to rebuild and strengthen its capacity to occupy the frontlines of the working-class struggles.

It is a brutal historical irony that Cosatu's constitution and resolutions adopted at the launching congress in 1985 firmly committed it to

the strategic perspective of a "united democratic South Africa, free of oppression and economic exploitation". The delegates and workers of the 33 unions at the launching rally were regaled by the poetry of Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo and Alfred Temba Qabula, who had composed "Tears of a Creator" specially for that historic event. They read out some sorrowful passages about the history of trade unions in South Africa, emphasising that it has been the leaders who led to their demise. They went as far back as the formative years of the trade union movement, which accordingly was "derailed by Kadalie".

Their poem resonated with prophetically chilling words about the gloomy fate awaiting a trade union movement that is left in the hands of leaders without proletarian consciousness and who resultantly would easily become flip-floppers and class collaborators. They asserted that such trade union movements are bound to eventually disappear as much as their compromised leaders, about whom they warned that "they emerged, they poisoned and then faded!". The poetic duo backed up their cautionary tale by challenging the sceptics of their thesis with rhetorical questions:

*If that was devoid of the truth
Where is the ICU of the 1920s to be found?
Where is the FNETU of the 30s to be found?
Where is the CNETU of the 40s to be found?*

Comrades Hlatshwayo and Qabula closed their cautionary tale with a friendly warning to the newly founded federation that "Cosatu today be wise!"

Proletarian mission

It bears reiterating that from its founding congress the ideological orientation of Cosatu was already clear, even though a more elaborate framework was still to be worked out at the 2nd National Congress in 1987. That congress pivoted Cosatu to a radical proletarian mission to fight for:

- The 'restructuring of the economy which will allow the creation of wealth to be democratically controlled and fairly shared.'
- To 'draw people into a programme for the restructuring of society in order to make sure that the wealth of our society is democratically controlled and shared by its people.'

Needless to say, in themselves these two stated strategic objectives constitute a clear synopsis of Cosatu's anti-capitalist stance. Thus, from its birth the federation nailed its colours to the mast as a red trade union movement that is inspired by Marxism-Leninism and committed to the political practice of class-orientation. In this regard, arguably the federation remained relatively consistent throughout its history, culminating at the watershed 14th National Congress in 2022. The delegates not only reaffirmed the ideological inspiration of Marxism-Leninism but also sought to match this with political practice.

Thus, the key outcome was the reaffirmation of the political location of the federation on the side of the working class to which it belongs, as they overwhelmingly voted to campaign in support of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in the country's future elections. Remarkably, this resolution was adopted through the federation's highest democratic means of a secret ballot. Admittedly, it was vehemently opposed by some quarters that are clinging to the coattails of the pro-capitalist and neoliberal ANC leadership.

With the 13th National Congress having passed a resolution to support the SACP when it directly contests elections, if the ANC continued to ignore the call for the reconfiguration of the Alliance, only ideological renegades would have expected a different political outcome at the 14th National Congress. Otherwise, such a different outcome would have been a sign that the federation had finally succumbed to ideological degeneration. Such ideological degenerates want to tie the working people, hand and foot, to the neoliberal ANC and to vote against their own class interests. Yet, they would not dare a resolution justifying such a position.

This shows that indeed there is a limit to forked-tongued politics, in the midst the ANC's crises-ridden neoliberal economic policy trajectory. It has increased inequalities, unemployment, poverty and even hunger, and thus reproduced the inherited settler-colonial society in which the black masses are perpetually subjected to a life of inferiority. Hence, amongst the contradictions that characterise this inherited settler-colonial society, as Nehawu we have concluded that the class content has now become the principal feature

defining the political terrain. This calls upon the organised working class to unite and rally other popular forces to assert their class independence and put their own interests at the centre of political engagement.

Across the board, the parliamentary parties behave as if the horrendous existence of the masses of our people in the isolated spatial and economic margins is normal, despite the vast potential inherent in the country's resources to change their lives. Thus, it would be self-delusional for Cosatu, born of the ideology and political practice of radical socioeconomic transformation, to now still hope that in the present conjuncture of the Government of National Unity (GNU) there could still be the political will within the ANC to drive the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Even the ANC's perverted version, whose end-state is supposedly the so-called NDS has no chance.

Political deceit

Amidst the suffocating neoliberal atmosphere, it is the central task of a radical and class-oriented trade union movement to decidedly be on the side of the working class and the downtrodden broad masses of human beings in our society, practically and not rhetorically. It must forge alliances with formations that have no vested interests in the status quo. It must owe no individual, class or organisation any kind of allegiance or loyalty, other than those that have consistently demonstrated their loyalty to the suffering masses over the past three decades. Hence, we view it as a tragedy that an organised formation of the working class such as Cosatu is now caught up in shameful and poorly disguised political deceit as it seeks to render the workers into ideological subordination and political subservience to an agenda that is against their own class interests.

The last time the delegates at a Cosatu congress resolved to support the ANC was in 2018 at the 13th National Congress. Even so, this was on condition that the ANC accedes to the call for the reconfiguration of the Alliance. Hence, the watershed political resolution of the 14th National Congress directed Cosatu to build and strengthen the Socialist-Axis with the SACP through an integrated joint programme, including in electoral contests.

However, since 2022, the turncoat leaders have been speaking in tongues, displaying their contempt for the decision of the workers. They vetoed a resolution of the federation's highest decision making organ, as they deceitfully pretended that it does not exist. Indeed, they have now asked the affiliates to consult on the resolution of the SACP's 15th National Congress rather than focusing on how to implement their own political resolution from the 14th National Congress. This is indeed divisive!

Ashamed of their subservience to the neoliberal leadership of the ANC and fearful that the delegates could reaffirm their own resolution, they now resort to a weird proposal of Cosatu simultaneously supporting both the ANC and SACP. As to how this would be practically done when these formations are contesting elections independently and on distinct manifestos is unclear. There could be no better epitome of political zig-zagging in trying to foist the worn out ANC on the workers, taking into account the mandate given to the same Cosatu leadership by the 14th National Congress.

Be wise!

Worst still, in their lack of a genuine political case, they resort to disgraceful metaphorical tricks - reducing the organised detachment of the federation's members to children. The workers are

told that "when the parents fight, it is the kids who suffer". For the record, Cosatu was formed on the foundation and vision of an independent workers' movement. Its members are not anybody's kids! Again, there is no better epitome of ideological degeneration. Nehawu can only foresee the ongoing political zig-zagging ending in tears. Unfortunately, it would be the tears on the part of those of us who love and seek to preserve Cosatu and still uphold the ideological commitment of our ancestors – the creators of this giant red trade union movement.

We are unwavering in our defence of the legacy of the founding congress that shaped the federation over the past four decades, as expressed in the constitution and resolutions. We shall not be manipulated by patronage from the elites to desert Cosatu's heritage of consistent adherence to Marxism-Leninism and the struggle for socialism, with the SACP as the vanguard of the working class! As Lenin once avowed, under certain conditions, it is 'better fewer, but better'! Thus, we reiterate the prophetic counsel and caution from this generation's ancestors, that "Cosatu today be wise!" Indeed, never before have these words rung more relevant than today.

Cde Zola Saphetha is the General Secretary of Nehawu

COSATU – BUILDING A MILITANT, REVOLUTIONARY LABOUR MOVEMENT FOR SOCIALISM

Key points

- **Return to the shop floor** — rebuild structures, train stewards, organise the unorganised.
- **Fight the objective crisis** — unemployment, precarity, austerity are class attacks, not accidents.
- **Class independence in the Alliance** — no blank cheque for neoliberal governance.
- **Political struggles are organising tools** — cost-of-living, UBI, NHI, anti-privatisation campaigns rebuild the base.
- **Democratic centralism and internationalism** — worker control, Marxist education, anti-imperialist solidarity.

AVIWE RAPELANG MOHAPI

As Cosatu gathers for its 15th National Congress under the banner “Building a Militant, Revolutionary Labour Movement and Strengthening Anti-Imperialist Working-class Unity to Defend Jobs and Advance Socialism,” the moment demands a clear-eyed Marxist-Leninist assessment of the federation’s strengths, weaknesses and strategic tasks.

The organised working class remains the decisive force for progressive change in South Africa. Yet decades of neoliberal restructuring, de-industrialisation, mass unemployment and the hollowing out of shop-floor organisation have weakened its power. Revitalisation is not optional if Cosatu is to remain a fighting instrument of the working class rather than a defensive pressure group within a crisis-ridden capitalist order.

The objective conditions confronting workers

Unemployment remains catastrophically high, especially among the youth. Permanent jobs

continue to give way to precarious contracts, labour broking and informalisation. Collective bargaining coverage in the private sector has eroded. Public-sector affiliates face relentless austerity and service-delivery failures. Membership has fallen short of targets. These are not accidental setbacks; they are the predictable outcomes of a growth path that prioritises monopoly capital, financialised accumulation and imperialist pressures over the needs of the working majority. Tariff shocks, rising living costs and the dominance of the minerals-energy complex intensify the assault on jobs and living standards.

Trade unions as schools of class struggle

From a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, trade unions under capitalism are schools of class struggle. They organise workers around immediate economic demands while raising political consciousness and preparing the class to act as a class for itself. Cosatu’s founding tradition of militant, independent, worker-controlled unionism embodied this understanding through industrial unionism, democratic shop-floor structures, and an

alliance oriented toward the National Democratic Revolution as a stage toward socialism.

That tradition has been tested and, at times, diluted by bureaucratisation, the absorption of cadres into state and corporate structures, factionalism, and a tendency toward social partnership. Affiliation to the Alliance has at times subordinated independent working-class initiative to the tactical calculations of the governing party, even as neoliberal policies continued to devastate the base.

Return to the workplace: the foundation of rebuilding

Renewal begins with a ruthless return to the workplace. The federation and its affiliates must prioritise rebuilding shop-floor structures, training and holding shop stewards accountable, and systematically organising unorganised and precarious workers. The private sector, services and the informal economy cannot remain afterthoughts.

Without a conscious strategy to organise the “unorganisable”, density and bargaining power will continue to decline. Industrial unionism must be adapted creatively to multi-sectoral workplaces without abandoning class unity. Living-wage campaigns, the defence of collective bargaining, the fight against labour broking, stronger enforcement of the National Minimum Wage, the demand for thousands more labour inspectors, and genuine worker participation in decisions over investment and technology must return to the centre of daily practice. These are not narrow economic demands; they are the concrete means through which workers learn their collective power and confront the limits of capitalism.

Concrete policy struggles as levers for rebuilding power

Cosatu’s ongoing campaigns provide immediate levers for this rebuilding. The cost-of-living crisis - fuel levy relief, lower electricity and water prices, food price controls - must become sustained mass mobilisation that draws in unorganised workers and communities. The demand for a Universal Basic Income Grant, full implementation of the National Health Insurance, an end to austerity, and a bold industrial stimulus package

prioritising localisation, public procurement, public employment programmes and the defence of strategic state-owned enterprises against privatisation are not separate from organisational renewal.

When the federation fights consistently on these fronts - filling vacant teaching and health posts, defending public ownership of energy and logistics, opposing retrenchments driven by tariffs and de-industrialisation - it reconnects with its base, demonstrates relevance, and builds the confidence required for deeper struggles. These battles, waged from the workplaces outward, become schools of class consciousness in practice.

Political independence within the Alliance

Politically, Cosatu must reclaim its independence as a class organisation while strengthening the revolutionary content of the Alliance. The National Democratic Revolution remains unfinished. Monopoly capital still dominates the economy; racialised inequality and the dual character of the state persist. The Alliance cannot be treated as a blank cheque. When government policy prioritises fiscal austerity, privatisation by stealth or elite accumulation over job-creating industrialisation and comprehensive social security, the organised working class has both the right and the duty to mobilise independently.

Ideologically, as a class, it makes coherent logical sense for Cosatu to resolve to support the SACP in the upcoming elections. The SACP remains the organised expression of the working-class and socialist component within the Alliance. Supporting it where it contests independently would affirm the federation’s primary allegiance to class politics and the strategic goal of advancing the National Democratic Revolution toward socialism, rather than managing the contradictions of a governing party constrained by neoliberal imperatives.

Such a position would deepen class consciousness among workers, strengthen the revolutionary pole of the Alliance, and create clearer political space for the unions to act as an independent force. The decisive test remains whether political interventions strengthen class consciousness, deepen democracy inside the movement, and shift the balance of forces toward socialism.

Internationalism and internal renewal

Internationalism is integral to a revolutionary labour movement. South African workers confront the same global forces that drive austerity, precarious work and the climate crisis elsewhere. Solidarity with struggles in the Global South and a clear anti-imperialist stance must guide Cosatu's international work. Organisationally, democratic centralism – free debate combined with unity in action, remains the Leninist method. Worker control must be a daily practice of accountability, transparency and continuous Marxist education that equips shop stewards to analyse the concrete conditions of their industries and the strategic tasks of the present period.

The way ahead

The way ahead is the conscious reconstruction of Cosatu as a militant, class-conscious, anti-imperialist federation capable of leading mass struggles for jobs, living wages, quality public services, land and industrialisation while keeping the strategic horizon of socialism firmly in view. This requires prioritising organisation over

administration, class independence over narrow electoral calculation, and the self-activity of workers over bureaucratic management of decline.

The national congress is not merely an elective gathering. It is an opportunity for the organised working class to reassert its leading role in the unfinished struggle for national liberation and socialism. The objective conditions are difficult. The subjective factor – the clarity, organisation and fighting capacity of the labour movement – remains decisive. A revitalised Cosatu, rooted in the workplaces, guided by Marxist-Leninist principles, and oriented toward the revolutionary transformation of society, can still shift the balance of forces. That is the task history places before the delegates assembled at the congress. The working class expects nothing less.

Cde Aviwe Rapelang Mohapi is an author and a political activist who also serves as the National Education Officer at NEHAWU. He writes in his personal capacity.

OUR REMOVAL FROM THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE BY THE ANC IS A BADGE OF HONOUR

Key points

- **Removed on a lie** — accused of “joining another party” – no truth to it.
- **Badge of honour, not defeat** — no theft, no corruption, just political conviction.
- **Office is a platform, not a prize** — our worth measured by struggle, not position.
- **Attack ignites the LGE campaign** — organise, mobilise, build the Red Base to 4 November.

BENSON NGQENTSU

On Sunday, 30 August 2026, while travelling to Saldanha on the West Coast to launch the SACP’s 2026 Local Government Elections Manifesto and announce our candidates as a leader of the SACP in the Western Cape, I received a call from the ANC Chief Whip informing me that she had been alerted by the Speaker of the Provincial Legislature about my removal by the ANC as a member of the provincial legislature.

Strangely, neither the ANC Chief Whip nor I had been formally informed of the decision. After concluding the SACP programme in Saldanha, I contacted the Speaker to obtain a copy of the letter. In the letter, written by the appointed ANC Provincial Coordinator, I was accused of having joined another political party. This is a blatant and demonstrable lie.

A few days later, several municipal councillors who are members of the SACP faced a similar offensive. The offensive against communists cannot be understood in isolation. It must be located within its broader political and ideological context, particularly as the campaign against communists and the SACP continues to deepen.

When some of us, as communists, were forced to choose between the SACP and the ANC, we made our positions unequivocally clear. We argued that in the face of an intensifying neoliberal capitalist offensive against the working class, our choice will always be the working class and its struggle.

Serving our people

When I addressed the funeral of the late Comrade Wenzile in Ashton, as the SACP’s Provincial Secretary, I argued that if serving in Parliament and municipal councils is reduced to positions of patronage, privilege and personal advancement, then we must be prepared to be removed from those positions as communists. But if these positions are about serving our people, advancing the interests of the working class and defending the gains and objectives of our revolution, then our political record must ultimately be judged by our commitment to that responsibility.

Thus, we regard the removal of communists from the provincial legislature and municipal councils across the province by the ANC’s leadership elite not as a political defeat, but as a badge of honour. As none of the removed communists stole public resources nor got entangled in the tentacles of an underworld criminal network. These communists

were not removed because they betrayed the public trust.

Essentially, as removed communists, we would rather lose a political position than lose our political conviction. And we would rather stand firmly with the working class than surrender our political convictions for the comfort and privileges associated with public office.

Organise and mobilise

For communists, political office is not an end in itself. It is a terrain of struggle, a platform from which we must advance the interests of our people, defend working-class communities and challenge the capitalist system that continues to impoverish, exploit and marginalise the majority.

Our political worth cannot be measured by the positions we occupy, the privileges attached to those positions or the length of time we remain in office. It must be measured by what we stand for, whose interests we defend and whether we remain faithful to the struggle of the working class.

If standing with the working class means losing office, then so be it. If defending socialism means

being removed from positions of privilege, then we must be prepared to pay that price.

We must therefore not mourn as communists; we must organise, we must mobilise, we must intensify our election trail towards 4 November 2026.

SACP leaders have a political and organisational obligation to lead the SACP campaign unflinchingly. We must turn every political attack against the working class and its revolutionary movement into an opportunity to deepen organisation, strengthen political consciousness and build a red base in the new era of our revolution for people's power.

In the final analysis, we argue that wittingly or unwittingly, the offensive against communists in the Western Cape has essentially ignited our SACP election campaign. And our urgent task as communists now is to deepen the building of the Red Base and advance the struggle for People's Power in the New Era of our revolution.

Cde Benson Ngqentsu is the SACP Western Cape Provincial Secretary.

PERSPECTIVE ON THE STATE OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION: THE SACP'S DECISION TO CONTEST ELECTIONS AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR MINING AND INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

Key points

- **NDR unfinished** — the SACP's independent 2026 contest reasserts its socialist goals.
- **NUM's revolutionary lineage** — born in the 1987 strike, forged through SACP ideological support.
- **Gear to GNU — a neoliberal drift** — each era diluted the NDR's transformative promise.
- **Mining's contradiction laid bare** — vast wealth extracted, workers and communities left in poverty.
- **Imperialism is global, so is the answer** — platinum, cobalt, lithium extraction demands international worker solidarity.
- **Vanguard party, not spontaneity** — only the SACP can turn scattered mine-worker struggles into conscious socialist action.

TINYIKO NTINI

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in South Africa remains a cornerstone of the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist, and prosperous society, as envisioned in the Freedom Charter.

The SACP's historic decision to contest the 2026 local government elections independently marks a pivotal moment in advancing the NDR's objectives,

particularly for mining, construction and industrial workers represented by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The Party played a pivotal role in the formation of this gigantic national union.

Historical context of the NDR and the SACP's role

The NDR's origins lie in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles, formalised through the alliance of the ANC and the SACP in the 1950s.

The SACP, founded in 1921 as the Communist Party of South Africa, emerged as a vanguard Party committed to Marxist-Leninist principles, advocating for the unity of the working class across racial lines to overthrow capitalist exploitation and colonial oppression. The Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955, became the ideological cornerstone of the NDR, articulating demands for land redistribution, nationalisation of key industries, and democratic governance - goals that aligned with the SACP's vision of a socialist transition.

The SACP played a pivotal role in shaping the NDR's strategy, emphasising the need for a two-stage revolution: first, a national democratic phase to dismantle apartheid and establish a democratic state, and second, a socialist phase to address class exploitation. This perspective was informed by the SACP's analysis of South Africa's "colonialism of a special type," where racial oppression and capitalist exploitation were intertwined. The working class, particularly mine workers organised under unions like the NUM, was central to this struggle, as their labour powered South Africa's economy while they endured brutal exploitation under apartheid.

The NUM, established in 1982, became a critical force within the NDR. Founded by leaders like Cdes Cyril Ramaphosa, James Motlatsi, and Elijah Barayi, the NUM organised Black mine workers in the mining, energy, and construction sectors, challenging the apartheid regime's labour policies and the mining industry's super-exploitation. The union's militancy, exemplified by the 1987 mine workers' strike - one of the largest in South African history - demonstrated the working class's power to disrupt the economic foundations of apartheid. The SACP provided ideological and strategic support to the NUM, fostering a class-conscious approach that linked workplace struggles to the broader liberation movement.

Developments in the NDR post-1994

The advent of democracy in 1994 marked a significant milestone for the NDR, as the ANC-led government, with SACP and Cosatu support, began dismantling apartheid's legal framework. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), introduced in 1994, reflected the NDR's commitment to addressing socio-economic inequalities through state-led development,

housing, and education initiatives. The NUM played a crucial role in advocating for worker-friendly policies, such as improved wages and safety standards in mines, while the SACP pushed for nationalisation and worker control of key industries.

However, the NDR faced challenges in the post-apartheid era. The adoption of the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (Gear) strategy in 1996 marked a shift toward neoliberal economic policies, prioritising fiscal discipline and market-driven growth over radical redistribution. This shift, driven by global pressures from institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, was criticised by the SACP and NUM as a deviation from the NDR's transformative goals. Mine workers continued to face low wages, unsafe working conditions, and precarious employment through labour brokering, highlighting the persistence of capitalist exploitation despite political freedom.

The SACP, while remaining in the Tripartite Alliance, increasingly voiced concerns about the ANC's policy direction. The 2007 Polokwane conference, where Jacob Zuma was elected ANC president with support from the SACP and Cosatu, was seen as an opportunity to realign the NDR with its socialist objectives. The NUM, under leaders like Cde Gwede Mantashe, played a key role in this shift, advocating for policies to address unemployment and inequality. However, the Zuma era (2009–2018) was marked by state capture and corruption, which undermined the NDR's credibility and strained Alliance dynamics. The SACP's critique of these developments reflected its commitment to holding the ANC accountable to the working class.

Contemporary challenges and the state of the NDR By 2025, the NDR faces a complex landscape. The formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) following the 2024 elections, which includes parties with divergent ideological commitments, has raised concerns within the SACP and NUM about the dilution of pro-worker policies. The GNU's emphasis on economic growth and foreign investment risks perpetuating neoliberal frameworks that prioritise corporate interests over those of the working class. For mine workers, this translates to ongoing challenges such

as job insecurity, environmental degradation from mining activities, and inadequate enforcement of labour protections.

The NUM has consistently highlighted the mining sector's contradictions: it generates significant wealth for multinational corporations while workers and surrounding communities remain impoverished. For example, the 2012 Marikana massacre, where 34 striking mine workers were killed by police, underscored the state's alignment with capital over labour in moments of crisis. While the NUM was not directly involved in the Marikana strike, the tragedy highlighted the broader challenges facing mine workers and the need for a unified working-class movement to advance the NDR.

The SACP's decision to contest the 2026 local government elections independently, announced at its Fifth Special National Congress in December 2024, is a response to these challenges. The party argues that the NDR's goals - particularly the nationalisation of strategic industries and the empowerment of the working class - require stronger representation in governance structures. For the NUM, this decision offers an opportunity to align with a party that prioritises worker interests over coalition compromises. The SACP's electoral strategy aims to build a socialist-oriented local government framework, addressing issues like community development, workplace safety, and equitable resource distribution that directly affect mine workers.

The SACP and the working class - a Marxist-Leninist perspective

From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the NDR's current state reflects the ongoing class struggle within South Africa's capitalist political economy. The SACP views the working class, including mine workers, as the primary force for revolutionary change, capable of dismantling the structures of racial and economic oppression inherited from apartheid. The NUM's role in organising workers in a sector critical to global capitalism positions it as a key ally in this struggle. However, the SACP recognises that without a vanguard party to provide ideological clarity and strategic direction, worker struggles risk being co-opted or fragmented.

Historically, the SACP's Marxist-Leninist approach has emphasised the need for a disciplined, class-conscious party to lead the proletariat toward socialism. The party's support for the NUM during the apartheid era, through ideological training and strategic coordination, helped build a militant working-class movement. Today, the SACP's electoral participation seeks to extend this legacy by creating a political platform that amplifies the NUM's demands, such as the nationalisation of mines, the elimination of labour brokering, and the implementation of worker-led environmental protections.

The global context further underscores the importance of the SACP's role. Imperialist powers and multinational corporations continue to dominate the mining sector, extracting resources while leaving workers and communities marginalised. The SACP's internationalist perspective, rooted in Marxist-Leninist solidarity, aligns with global worker struggles, from Latin American copper mines to Australian coal fields. By rallying behind the SACP, the NUM can contribute to a broader movement that challenges global capitalism and advances the NDR's socialist objectives.

The SACP's decision to contest elections

At its Fifth Special National Congress in December 2024, the SACP resolved to contest the 2026 local government elections, citing the need for authentic working-class representation in South Africa's economic, social, and political systems. This decision is a bold step to reassert the NDR's revolutionary goals and counter the dilution of pro-worker policies in the current political landscape. For the NUM and its members, the SACP's electoral strategy offers a platform to amplify the voices of mining and industrial workers, who face exploitation by transnational mining corporations and inadequate workplace protections.

The SACP's move is significant for several reasons. First, it provides a direct channel for workers to influence local governance, where decisions about labor conditions, community development, and resource allocation are made. Second, it strengthens the NUM's ability to advocate for policies that address the specific needs of mine workers, such as improved safety standards, fair wages, and the

elimination of labor brokering. Finally, it positions the SACP as a vanguard party capable of uniting the proletariat in a broader struggle against capitalist exploitation, aligning with the NDR's ultimate goal of socialist transformation.

Why the proletariat should support the SACP

The NUM and mine workers have a compelling case for rallying behind the SACP. As a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, the SACP is committed to advancing the class interests of the proletariat, unlike other political formations that may prioritize corporate or elite interests. The NUM's historical ties to the SACP, exemplified by leaders like Cdes Gwede Mantashe and Kgalema Motlanthe, and in a previous era, Cde JB Marks, underscore a shared commitment to the NDR and the empowerment of workers. The SACP's electoral participation offers mine workers an opportunity to support a party that explicitly champions their struggle for economic justice and social equality.

The mining sector, a critical component of South Africa's economy, is marked by stark contradictions. Workers produce immense wealth, yet many live in poverty, facing hazardous conditions and low wages. The SACP's platform prioritises nationalising key industries, including mining, under democratic workers' control, which would ensure that the wealth generated benefits the proletariat rather than multinational corporations. By supporting the SACP, mine workers can strengthen their collective power and push for policies that address systemic issues like unemployment, environmental degradation, and community marginalisation caused by mining operations.

Marxist-Leninist analysis of the domestic and global political economy

From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the domestic and global political economy presents a complex interplay of class forces that shape the challenges and opportunities for the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). This analysis, grounded in the principles of dialectical and historical materialism, reveals the entrenched dominance of capitalist interests in South Africa and the imperialist dynamics driving global resource

extraction. Drawing on statistics, organisational documents, and Marxist-Leninist insights from figures like Cdes Joe Slovo, Vladimir Lenin, Moses Kotane, and Oliver Tambo, this expanded section examines how these forces impact mine workers and underscore the necessity of the SACP as the vanguard party to lead the proletariat toward socialist transformation.

Domestic political economy: capitalist dominance and worker exploitation

South Africa's domestic political economy remains characterised by what Joe Slovo described as "colonialism of a special type," where racial oppression and capitalist exploitation are intertwined, even in the post-apartheid era. In his seminal 1988 work, *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*, Slovo argued, "The national liberation of the oppressed Black majority is inseparable from the struggle for socialism, as the economic power of the capitalist class perpetuates the colonial legacy." This perspective remains relevant in 2025, as South Africa's economy continues to prioritise profit over people, particularly in the mining sector, which contributes approximately 7.5% to GDP (Statistics South Africa, 2024) but employs only 2.5% of the workforce, reflecting its capital-intensive nature.

The NUM, representing over 50,000 mine workers (NUM Annual Report, 2024), has consistently highlighted the sector's contradictions. Mining conglomerates like Anglo American, Glencore, and Sibanye-Stillwater generate billions in revenue - Anglo American reported \$30.6 billion in global revenue in 2024 - yet mine workers earn an average monthly wage of R12,500 (Stats SA, 2024), barely sufficient to meet living costs in mining communities. The NUM's 2023 Bargaining Strategy document notes that real wages have stagnated since 2010, eroded by inflation and rising living costs, while company profits have soared due to high global commodity prices, such as platinum (\$1,000/oz) and gold (\$2,300/oz in 2024).

The post-apartheid state's economic policies, such as the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy and the National Development Plan (NDP), have entrenched capitalist interests.

The SACP's 2022 Central Committee Report criticised these policies for "subordinating the developmental state to market imperatives," arguing that they have failed to address the structural inequalities inherited from apartheid. For example, the Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, stood at 0.63 in 2023 (World Bank), among the highest globally, reflecting the persistence of wealth concentration among a small elite, including mining corporations.

This dynamic has led to environmental destruction and health risks for workers and communities. The NUM's 2024 Environmental Justice Report documented that 60% of mining communities lack access to clean water due to pollution from mine tailings, while silicosis and tuberculosis affect over 20,000 mine workers annually (Department of Health, 2024). The state's close relationship with mining companies, evidenced by lax enforcement of environmental regulations - only 15% of mines comply fully with the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) standards (Department of Mineral Resources, 2024) - illustrates what Lenin described in *The State and Revolution* (1917): "The state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another." In South Africa, the state often aligns with capital, undermining the NDR's transformative goals.

Cde Moses Kotane, a former SACP general secretary, emphasised the centrality of the working class in overcoming this oppression. In his 1970 report *The Cradock Letter*, Kotane wrote, "The African working class, particularly in the mines and factories, is the motive force of the revolution, capable of uniting all oppressed strata." The NUM's struggles, from the 1987 mine workers' strike to ongoing campaigns against labour brokering (affecting 30% of mine workers, NUM 2024), reflect this revolutionary potential. However, without a vanguard party to provide ideological clarity, these struggles risk fragmentation.

Global political economy: imperialism and resource extraction

Globally, the political economy is shaped by imperialist competition for resources, particularly minerals critical to advanced technologies, such as lithium, cobalt, and platinum-group

metals. South Africa, holding 80% of the world's platinum reserves (US Geological Survey, 2024), is a key battleground for imperialist powers and multinational corporations. The global demand for these minerals, driven by the transition to green technologies (e.g., electric vehicle batteries), has led to a 25% rise in mineral prices since 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2024), enriching corporations while intensifying worker exploitation.

Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) provides a framework for understanding these dynamics: "Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance." In 2025, multinational mining companies exported capital and profits from South Africa, with Anglo American and Glencore repatriating \$5.2 billion in dividends to shareholders in 2024 (company reports). Meanwhile, mine workers face low wages (global average for miners: \$1,200/month vs. \$700/month in South Africa), unsafe conditions (1.8 fatalities per 100,000 workers, Chamber of Mines, 2024), and union co-optation attempts by companies offering incentives to weaken collective bargaining.

The rise of resource nationalism in countries like Chile, Indonesia, and Zambia, where governments have increased state control over mineral resources, reflects resistance to imperialist exploitation. However, as the SACP's 2023 International Relations Policy Paper notes, "Without a socialist orientation, resource nationalism often serves bourgeois interests, leaving workers marginalised." For example, Zambia's 2022 copper mine nationalisation increased state revenue by 10% but did not improve miners' wages or conditions (Zambian Ministry of Finance, 2024). This underscores Oliver Tambo's warning in his 1985 address to the ANC: "The struggle for national liberation must be linked to the struggle for socialism, lest we replace one form of exploitation with another."

Globally, mine workers face similar struggles. In Australia, coal miners' wages have stagnated despite a 15% rise in coal exports (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024), while in the Democratic

Republic of Congo, cobalt miners earn less than \$2/day despite the mineral's critical role in global supply chains (Unicef, 2024). The SACP's Marxist-Leninist orientation, rooted in internationalist solidarity, positions it to unite workers across borders. Its 2024 Solidarity Statement with the Chilean Miners' Federation called for "a global workers' movement to challenge imperialist monopolies and nationalise strategic resources under democratic control."

Implications for the NUM and the role of the SACP For the NUM, the domestic and global political economy underscores the urgency of aligning with a vanguard party like the SACP. Mine workers bear the brunt of capitalist exploitation, with 40% employed through labour brokers who undermine job security (NUM 2024). The NUM's 2023 Congress Resolution demanded the nationalisation of mines and an end to labour brokering, aligning with the SACP's call for "socialist industrialisation" in its 2024 Election Strategy Document. This convergence reflects Slovo's assertion: "The vanguard party must translate the spontaneous struggles of the working class into a conscious movement for socialism."

The SACP's commitment to socialism offers a pathway to counter imperialist and capitalist forces. Its electoral strategy for 2026 aims to secure local government control to implement policies like public ownership of mineral wealth, which could redirect mining profits - \$12 billion in 2024 (Chamber of Mines) - to fund worker housing, healthcare, and education. The SACP's internationalist approach also supports the NUM's efforts to build solidarity with global mining unions, amplifying demands for fair wages and safe conditions.

The global balance of forces presents opportunities for the NDR. The decline of unipolar US hegemony and the rise of multipolar alliances, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), provide space for anti-imperialist strategies. The SACP's 2024 Central Committee Report notes that "BRICS offers potential for South-South cooperation, but only a socialist framework can ensure resources benefit the working class." By leading the proletariat, the SACP can leverage these shifts to advance the NDR's socialist objectives, ensuring that mine workers, as Kotane envisioned,

remain "the backbone of the revolution."

Why rallying behind the SACP is crucial

The SACP's role as the vanguard party is critical for the NUM and mine workers. Marxist-Leninist theory emphasises the necessity of a revolutionary party to guide the working class toward socialism, particularly in a context where capitalist forces seek to co-opt or suppress worker struggles. The SACP's electoral strategy provides a platform to advance the NDR's goals, ensuring that the interests of mine workers are prioritised in policy-making. By supporting the SACP, the NUM can strengthen its advocacy for worker-controlled industries, improved labour conditions, and the eradication of racial and gender inequalities in the workplace.

Moreover, the SACP's internationalist perspective aligns with the global struggles of mine workers, as seen in strike waves from Chile to Canada. This solidarity is essential for countering the power of transnational corporations and imperialist policies that undermine worker rights. The SACP's leadership can help the NUM build alliances with other workers' movements, amplifying their collective strength.

The SACP's decision to contest the 2026 local government elections is a transformative step for the NDR and the NUM. It offers mine workers a chance to advance their struggle for economic justice, workplace safety, and social equality through a party committed to socialist principles. The domestic and global political economy, analysed through a Marxist-Leninist lens, highlights the urgent need for a vanguard party to unite the proletariat against capitalist exploitation. By rallying behind the SACP, the NUM and mine workers can strengthen their role in the NDR, paving the way for a socialist South Africa where the wealth of the land benefits those who labour to produce it.

Cde Tinyiko Ntini is a SACP Central Committee member and First Assistant Secretary for Organisation, Campaigns and the Trade Union Movement, and a former National Secretary of the YCLSA.

BUILDING PEOPLE'S POWER THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Key points

- **Municipality = councillors + administration + community** — it's the law, not a slogan.
- **Residents have real rights** — to participate, complain, get answers, see the books.
- **Ward committees are power bases** — pack them with worker and poor representation.
- **Councillors answer to the people** — public pledge, monthly feedback, recall if they betray it.
- **"Know and Act in Your Neighbourhood"** — street committees, ward assemblies, participatory budgeting.
- **Rights without struggle are just paper** — People's Power must be built, not assumed.

YUNUS CARRIM

Local government isn't just about potholes and refuse collection. It's a legal and political battleground where People's Power can be built — SACP councillors can seize the tools the law already gives them.

1. A transformative model

1.1. The new local government model that came into effect in December 2000 was mainly the outcome of the major struggles waged at local level during the 1980s, mainly through the UDF (United Democratic Front). Many of its key aspects, particularly those set out in the Municipal Systems Act, flowed from the demands made by progressive civic, residents, ratepayers and political organisations during the 1980s. The model was also, of course, an outcome of the overall national liberation struggle. But it was also shaped by the negotiation skills of ANC comrades, many of whom came from UDF structures.

1.2. The new model had huge potential to significantly advance the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and, even more importantly, create the conditions of socialism. In fact, if the ANC and Alliance had given considered attention to

local government; adopted an appropriate overall strategy and programme; deployed the necessary comrades to this sphere; and not politically degenerated, we would have considerably advanced the NDR and created the conditions for socialism. And there would have been significant progress on some key aspects of the 2026 SACP Local Government Elections Manifesto.

1.3. Inevitably, there have been changes to the local government model, and a Review of the 1996 White Paper is being processed. Some of the provisions of the post-1994 model have been amended. But the fundamental underlying principles and values and most of its key features remain the same.

1.4. The focus here will be on the potential to foster People's Power through the local government model

2. Community participation legally and politically necessary

2.1. Fundamentally important and very original (perhaps the only example globally) is that the legal definition of a municipality is that it comprises not just the councillors and the administration, but the local community as well. Deriving from this definition, each of these inter-related components

has certain specific rights and duties. These are based on the Constitution and set out mainly in the Municipal Systems Act. It's a glorious piece of legislation and carries the values and demands of the UDF struggles of the 1980s.

2.2. Among the objects of local government in the Constitution are to:

- 2.2.1. "provide democratic and accountable government for local communities"; and
- 2.2.2. "encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government"

2.3. In terms of the Municipal Systems Act a municipality "must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance".

2.4. The Act makes it clear that residents have the right to:

- 2.4.1. contribute to the municipality's decision-making processes;
- 2.4.2. submit recommendations and complaints to the council and are entitled to prompt responses to these; and
- 2.4.3. "regular disclosure of the state of affairs of the municipality, including its finances".

2.5. In order to encourage residents to pay promptly for their services, municipalities are required to inform them:

- 2.5.1. about the costs of providing the services;
- 2.5.2. the reasons for the payments of the fees; and
- 2.5.3. the uses to which the monies raised are put.

2.6. Residents also have the right to:

- 2.6.1. give feedback to the municipality on the quality and level of services offered to them;
- 2.6.2. very importantly, to have a say on the mechanisms for service delivery;
- 2.6.3. if a municipality decides to enter into service delivery agreements with outside agencies, whether public or private, the views of the residents have to be taken into account and they have to be informed of the contents of any agreement and any subsequent amendments to it; and
- 2.6.4. request a municipality to review its

service delivery mechanisms.

2.7. Residents are encouraged to participate in the:

- 2.7.1. preparation, implementation and review of IDPs;
- 2.7.2. establishment, implementation and review of a municipality's performance management system;
- 2.7.3. monitoring and review of a municipality's performance;
- 2.7.4. preparation of a municipality's budget; and
- 2.7.5. decisions about the provision of municipal services.

"We are not here to add politicians to councils. We are here to build people's power and turn municipalities into instruments that serve workers and the poor."

2.8. Municipalities have to inform residents about their rights and duties. And have to:

- 2.8.1. establish "appropriate mechanisms, processes and procedures to enable the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality" and inform the community about these;
- 2.8.2. take into account the special needs of women, the disabled, the illiterate and other disadvantaged groups;
- 2.8.3. use their resources and annually allocate funds in their budget, as appropriate, to develop a culture of community participation;

2.8.4. contribute to building the capacity of the local community to participate in municipal affairs and the councillors and staff to foster community participation; and

2.8.5. ensure a municipality's executive gives an annual report on the extent to which the local community has been involved in municipal affairs and must "ensure that regard is given to public views and report on the effect of consultation on the decisions of the council".

"Usually in practice municipalities meet the needs of community participation only in a formal, nominal sense - not in the political and substantive way intended."

2.9. A ward committee has to be established in each ward to "enhance participatory democracy".

2.10. A ward committee may make representations on any issue affecting a ward to the councillor or through the councillor to the council. It can also exercise any duty or power delegated to it by the council.

2.11. A ward committee comprises the ward councillor as the chairperson and up to 10 other people representing a "diversity of interests in the ward". Women have to be "equitably represented" in a ward committee.

2.12. In terms of the Code of Conduct, councillors are required to have at least four public report-back meetings.

2.13. But if residents have many rights in the new system, they also have duties. They have to:

2.13.1. "take responsibility for ensuring that the municipality functions effectively;

2.13.2. promptly pay the municipality monies owed to it, within the framework of an indigence policy for those who cannot pay;

2.13.3. respect the municipal rights of other residents, comply with by-law; and

2.13.4. co-operate with councillors and officials who are fulfilling their legitimate roles."

2.14. Overall, the system of community participation seeks to provide a balance between giving residents the fullest space to participate in municipal affairs and ensuring the right of councillors to ultimately govern.

2.15. Unfortunately, usually in practice municipalities meet the needs of community participation only in a formal, nominal sense - not in the political and substantive way intended. Our councillors need to ensure that this does in fact happen. The Act creates considerable space to ensure community participation and is explicit, as pointed out, that residents have the right to "contribute to the municipality's decision-making processes."

3. Ensuring active community participation and building People's Power

3.1. The SACP Local Government Elections Manifesto urges us to "Build people's power where we live" We want "A municipality that works. A councillor who answers to you. A community with the power to shape its future. We are not here to add politicians to councils. We are here to build people's power and turn municipalities into instruments that serve workers and the poor. This manifesto is our contract with the working class, and our call to organise. A vote can elect a councillor. Only an organised people can change the balance of power."

3.2. Probably the most fundamental responsibility of our councillors is to ensure that they become embedded in the residents and facilitate their participation in the municipality, especially the working class and poor.

“Build people’s democracy through ward assemblies, street and section committees, participatory budgeting, open information, active trade unions, co-operative forums, women’s leadership, youth organisation and community oversight”

3.3. While mobilising the residents in general, the focus of the SACP councillors has to be mainly on the working class and the poor.

3.4. Ward Committees are crucial sites of community participation - and we should seek to ensure that those serving on it are mostly representative of the interests of the working class and poor, even if they need to serve the ward as a whole.

3.5. In terms of our Manifesto, SACP councillors have to convene regular ward meetings and support street and section committees. Councillors will also have to give monthly feedback to the ward

and six-monthly and annual report-backs to the Party.

3.6. The work on ensuring community participation must be linked to the SACP’s “Know and Act in Your Neighbourhood” campaign.

3.7. Councillors have to sign a public pledge to “report regularly, disclose interests, reject tender influence, defend workers and insourcing, explain their votes, and accept recall if they betray the manifesto”.

3.8. Our experiences of the “Peoples Red Caravan” (PRC) have to be drawn on in seeking to build People’s Power. This includes the way in which the PRC tackles food insecurity, the use of idle land, inadequacies in the delivery of water and other services, and contributes to a culture of community self-reliance and the collective capacity of residents. It’s clear that municipalities need to work with communities in the delivery of services and be answerable to them, and communities need to build their capacity through this process.

3.9. Our Manifesto says that the SACP will “build people’s democracy through ward assemblies, street and section committees, participatory budgeting, open information, active trade unions, co-operative forums, women’s leadership, youth organisation and community oversight”.

3.10. Fundamental to the effectiveness of SACP councillors is ensuring that the provisions of the Act are implemented and that People’s Power is built. Municipalities cannot ensure development and delivery without the active participation of the residents, and as the SACP, we need People’s Power to deepen and advance the NDR and create the conditions for socialism.

3.11. Let’s ensure that the Municipal Systems Act is fully implemented – and the masses, particularly the working class and the poor, become central to local government. And that we build People’s Power.

Cde Yunus Carrim is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member.

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