

SACP & LEFT POPULAR FRONTS - A VITAL HISTORY

Umsebenzi

September 2023

Voice of the South African Communist Party



Thoshstudio

WOMEN'S MONTH: Defend rights –
fight gender-based violence & femicide

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Photo: MSF

Rights in practice: access to free, confidential contraception services must be ensured

WOMEN'S MONTH

The fight for women's reproductive rights

The rights of women to choose and to be informed in their choices concerning their bodies are a crucial and continuing political struggle, writes Jenny Schreiner



The SACP 102nd Anniversary Statement reiterated our tribute to the courageous women who fought against colonial and apartheid oppression in our struggle for liberation, freedom and social emancipation, and reasserted our commitment to the ongoing battle for gender equality and the dismantling of patriarchy. In this, the Party must never lose sight of the issue of women's reproductive rights. Let's put it solidly back onto our agenda.

Recently, a leading woman comrade admitted that she had not known that there had been intense women's struggles as far back as the early 1900s. As historical materialists, it is important for us to learn about how society, over the years, over the generations and modes of production, has managed the issues of what we now call women's rights and how cultural practices emerge and change to manage women's practical needs.

The women's movement, globally and in South Africa, has a rich history of mobilising women around what we call women's reproductive rights. Women have fought for the right to control over our own bodies; we have fought for the right to access to reproductive health edu-



On the march for rights, Tshwane, Women's Day, 9 August

ation and access to health care and facilities so we can make informed choices on contraception, on the health of both mother-to-be and foetus during pregnancy, on birthing choices, on choices of breast or bottle feeding, on post-birth contraception, on managing health during and after menopause.

Every society requires that women give birth to the next generation in order to sustain society. A contentious policy issue is how many children should a woman give birth to, and how society manages population growth to ensure that we have the resources to care for our citizens. The world is full of examples where the population rate has been managed along with the implementation of population control to limit the growth of particular sectors of society, often the black, working-class or culturally and religiously different communities from the ruling elite. How society chooses to manage the biological possibility for a woman to carry a child and give birth is a critical dimension of women's oppression and subordination or of women's social emancipation. How society manages this is also directly related to how it uses medical science to control or liber-

ate its citizens and how culture is equally entrenched in a manner that can be oppressive or changed and developed to keep up with the changing science and the changing nature of social relations.

Rights under duress

We live in a society with advanced scientific, manufacturing and health sectors. Why then should a girl child faced with her periods find herself not attending school, or attending school but with the ever-present risk that she may bleed through her clothes? In a society that is the most unequal globally, access for the majority of girl children to sanitary pads when needed, to facilities to be able to dispose of pads hygienically, and to be able to wash when necessary is not a right that is realised. A right it indeed is. If we are committed to a democracy in which there is equality of access to education, to sports, to play, to work, to

The Party must never lose sight of the issue of women's reproductive rights

participation in the community, to participation in the political life of society, we cannot be comfortable that the majority of girl children are constrained by "what happens if I get my period while I am there?" The YCLSA in 2010 had innovatively launched a sanitary dignity campaign recognising the debilitating impact of not having sanitary pads and appropriate toilet facilities. Shockingly a woman Minister – when the Department of Women was proposing that all girl learners, all women who were admitted to health care facilities, women in police station cells or correctional facilities who were in need of sanitary pads should be provided such by the state – warned that the state should be careful because women would expect this as a right!

We should also answer the question as to why teenage pregnancy is as prevalent as it has been shown to be over the past years in a society with the resources, education and health system that we have. Part of reproductive rights is defining as a society at what age children are mature enough, not only physically but emotionally to have sex. But this definition of statutory rape – sex with a child under the consent age, must go hand in

hand with life skills to handle the emotional dimension of sexual relations and the possible outcome of an unwanted or unexpected pregnancy. Seeing schools teach upper primary school girls and boys about the responsibility of looking after a child by giving them a flour baby to care for over a couple of weeks is a useful way of de-romanticising the idea of being a child-parent.

Women's reproductive rights cannot be guaranteed when the rate of mothers dying in childbirth is high, and worse where it is uneven across provinces, with those that are largely rural and historically bantustan areas, the risk of dying giving birth is higher than in those historically "white SA".

The right of girls and women to control our own bodies goes beyond requiring consent in sex. The right to decide whether and which contraception to use, the right to decide whether one wants to bear children and, if so, when, the right to decide to terminate a pregnancy are all dimensions of reproductive rights. As South Africa in our Constitution and our law, we have protected and regulated these rights. But we need to reflect on how these rights are translated into practice and access. This drew a very important line in the sand against the abuse of in particular black and working-class women through the use of enforced contraception if not sterilisation of women by doctors under apartheid. The full implementation of the NHI must go with a deliberate implementation of what is required for these rights to become a reality for all women, and black working-class women in particular, in South Africa.

Robust engagement

Maternity leave is a right hard fought for by organised women workers in South Africa, and again a victory of our post-democratic breakthrough legislature. But as we focus on women's reproductive rights, we must monitor carefully if in fact women are getting maternity leave, if those in dangerous occupations are moved to safe jobs during their pregnancy or laid off instead, and if women who have been on maternity leave come back to the same job, and are not disadvantaged by performance assessment processes in which maternity leave counts against one.

The right to breastfeed and the provision of facilities for this, access to child care facilities near home or work, breastfeeding rooms in public places (why should a woman be sent to a toilet to



Photo: Thoshstudio

Not just a celebration: Women's Day 2023 marchers demanded an end to the rights deficit for women

breastfeed in a public place?) need to be consciously addressed.

For many women, menstruation is stressful, painful and debilitating – and what they often require is medical intervention to address these problems. Without access to clinics, to medical aids, or subsidised health care, to prescribed medication, many women merely bear this monthly pain as normal, as god-given, as a fact of life. Many women going through the change of life, as some politely call menopause, fail to get the medical care, medical information to manage the hot flashes, the erratic periods, the hormonal imbalance that may require treatment, the possible uterine ill-health that may even require a hysterectomy.

The reproductive rights of women, and how the state and society enable those rights to be realised, must be integrated into urban and rural development planning and design, with local government, provincial and national government each

playing their role. Most importantly, the full implementation of the national health insurance system is a pre-requisite to address the class imbalances in the recognition of the reproductive rights of South African women. This is an issue not just of addressing women's practical gender needs, but a strategic and policy issue that affects how women can realise their equal participation in all aspects of society.

It requires the SACP, the YCLSA, Cosatu and its affiliates, the Women's League and the ANC to engage with the majority of girls and women in South Africa to hear what their experience is in relation to lived experience of their reproductive rights, to hear their views on cultural and religious practices that do not enable their right to choice and to social participation, and to ensure that policy addresses their lived experiences and transforms society to enable equality and social emancipation in the realisation of reproductive rights. ★

Control of our own bodies goes beyond requiring consent to sex

Cde Schreiner is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member, and is a former MK combatant and political prisoner. She is currently the Head of the office of the SACP



Working-class women to the front! YCLSAers marking Women's Month this August

WOMEN'S MONTH

A society free from oppression of women is possible

Intensified struggle is needed to end discrimination against women based on race, class, gender and sexual orientation, writes Nonkoliso Ngqongwa



As the SACP celebrates its 102 anniversary and commemorates Women's Month, we must highlight the pioneering role the SACP has played in fighting for an egalitarian society where there is no discrimination based on sex, class, or race. The women's emancipation struggle has been long and protracted, it has seen better and worse days. There have been starts and stops, but out of it all, it has endured and continues.

We salute the women of South Africa and the globe in this important month of celebrating women. We salute women

in all corners of the country, the women in factories, farms, hawkers, casualised women in the retail sector, the unemployed, and those who still must fetch water from streams and burn wood and coal to keep warm.

We salute these women, for we know that in this country, women were at the receiving end of triple oppression. They

Our gains as a movement are being reversed

were oppressed because, overall, they belonged to the class of have-nots; they were also oppressed because they were Africans, and they were also oppressed because they were women, for years they were denied opportunities to realise their full being and potential.

That is why we will forever be grateful for the relentless struggles of the courageous women of South Africa who were at the forefront of the struggle for the liberation of humankind, the likes of Ruth First, Albertina Sisulu, Adelaide Tambo, Bertha Gxowa, Ncumisa Kondlo, Lilian Ngoyi, Dora Tamana and many other heroines of our beautiful land.

The women's struggle must continue because as long as there is still subtle discrimination against women based on their race, class, gender and sexual orientation in our society and workplaces, the struggle has no alternative but to continue. Women are subjected to callous and brutal murders and rapes in the continent and the world on a daily, if not hourly, bases. It is distressing to witness countless scores of women and children subjected to brutal wars in some parts of the continent and the world, whose end result is more starvation and misery for the victims.

It cannot be that in the 21st century and a rapidly modernising world, women are denied the right to education and other empowerment opportunities through some backwards cultural and religious practices informed by nothing else but male chauvinism.

As women, we must equally be alive to the fact that at the core of women's domination is the economic production system of capitalism, which compels the majority who are women to systematic exclusion and domination.

Therefore, for women's total liberation, the production system has to change and favour the majority in society. Such development can only be realised under the socialist system of production. As such, our struggle as women is much bigger and more urgent than representation at the table of the haves, who are predominately men, as our struggle extends to defeating and building a new productive system. This month must be used to locate the current struggles of the masses, especially women who are still marginalised.

As such, we must deliberate in improving rural women's livelihood and unemployment in our community. Women are still marginalised in our society in many ways. Important as it is for women to be represented in all decision-making structures for such representation to have a lasting impact, it must qualitatively change for the better the conditions of women in rural and township, the oppressed and marginalised.

Women are confronted with gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), reversing our gains as a movement. We need to work together as women and men to address the following:

- Support women's initiatives like Cooperatives and ensure that those cooperatives have a direct link with stokvels in communities that are predominantly led by women in our communities, as well as

linkage with burial societies, which also are led by women;

- There must be a link of a cooperative in agriculture to work with burial societies when they need vegetables;

- Rural women need to be part of the economic value chains regarding social and economic activities happening in their localities.

The total liberation of women will happen when we are all united and respect each other as equal partners who are equally capable.

Liberation of women is about the dignity of people and their social needs like water, electricity, and health. For that reason, women must stand together to support initiatives such as National Health Insurance, as women are directly affected by health challenges.

We must pay particular attention to girl children. They must grow up confident and believe that their sex is not an impediment and that, regardless of gender, they can be anything they aspire to be.

It is in this generation that we must infuse a sense of equality among girls and boys. For this reason, women continue to be primary caregivers for their children and have a key role in looking after families. We should note that an investment in a girl child is not just an investment in an individual but an investment in the nation.

As we approach the forthcoming general elections, we must work with progressive social forces, particularly where women are present, whether in stokvels, burial societies, civil society, cultural society, or creatives. As the Party, we must revive campaigns like 'Know your neighbourhood' and bring working-class women to the forefront of creating a society that serves the majority of its people. ★

Cde Ngqongwa is a PEC and PWC member of the SACP Eastern Cape, and convenor of the Economic and Social Transformation Commission of the Party.

REMEMBERING JOSIE MPAMA



A new study by the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research discusses the life and political struggles of **Josie Mpama (1903–1979), a leader in the resistance against colonial oppression and the apartheid system in South Africa.** Josie was a key figure in the history of women organisers in South Africa and a leader in the Communist Party of South Africa. Her life teaches us about the importance of grassroots and mass organising, as well as the challenges that come with that work.

Download at: <https://thetricontinental.org/studies-feminisms-5-josie-mpama-of-struggle-women-in-struggle>



WOMEN'S MONTH

Action on Gender Based Violence & Femicide highlight of annual Ruth First Games



The YCLSA held a silent march on 29 July, against GBVF from the Freedom Park in Ikageng, Moses Kotane Province (North West), to the local sports stadium, where this year's Ruth First Games were held

The League partnered with the National Prosecuting Authority to spread the message that GBVF usually takes place within domestic and workplace settings and that survivors must be sup-

ported in pursuing the criminal prosecution of perpetrators. The YCLSA is building a 'Youth Front' together with local youth organisations in Ikageng to target the area's high rates of crime and substance abuse among young people.

Spectators gathered at Ikageng sports stadium for the YCLSA's annual Ruth First Games, 29 July. Held on the eve of Women's Month in honour of the great revolutionary activist and writer, who

was assassinated by the apartheid regime in August 1982, this year's games highlighted the League's campaign against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). Cde Ruth First was the first woman national secretary of the YCLSA.

The Ruth First Games, which kicked off following the Silent March against GBVF, included not only team events, such as soccer and netball, but also indigenous games and board games. ★



TOP LEFT: previous page: Young Reds in action at the start of the Ruth First Games

LEFT, previous page: spectators gather at Ikageng stadium for the games

TOP: YCLSA silent protest march against gender-based violence & femicide

Above: The Ruth First Games included board games in addition to outdoor team sports



WOMEN'S MONTH

A revolution inside the revolution

Extracts from Ruth First's speech on South African Women's Day, 9 August 1978

I think of that Women's Demonstration - 22 years ago in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria - South Africa's White House. A sea of black women, babies on their backs, sunshades up, in the great sunny amphitheatre, sat for hours in the broiling sun.

They were silent mostly, and their discipline was enormous as the police, guns and batons at the ready, police dogs, kwela kwela vans, circled round them. Those women had already braved enormous obstacles just to get there, from all over the country.

For me, that was the single most memorable demonstration. But there have been many others from the 1913 women's opposition to cattle culling, sheep dipping and land enclosure and the 1917 anti-pass campaign to the strikes of more recent times.

We have to face the implications of the mobilisation of women for the liberation struggle, for the liberation revolution - for we already know that liberation in our country cannot be realised without a social change of the order of a revolution, a restructuring of the society.

The condition of the revolution has to be prepared beforehand. If a movement has an unliberated attitude to women's questions, it will take them with it into the post-liberation period. In the same way, a movement that has bureaucratic methods of work will carry these with it when it has state power.

We already know, that South Africa's oppressed are under a double oppression - class and national. But women carry an additional burden. Theirs is a triple oppression. They are oppressed as Africans; oppressed as workers, as the worst paid, and they are oppressed as women.

Releasing women into the labour market under conditions of equal pay for equal work is part of the battle. But what of the division of labour in the household? Women in fact do double jobs, one outside the home and one inside it.

If we neglect the revolution inside the revolution, we shall have unequal conditions among our members, some more equal than others. Because our movement is the microcosm of our revolution, and of the new society we wish to build. ★

LEFT POPULAR FRONT

The SACP and a left popular front – a brief history of fronts and alliances

*Jeremy Cronin surveys the experiences
of left fronts and alliances in the
broad communist tradition*



In recent years, faced with a range of challenges within the Tripartite Alliance, the SACP has resolved on working to build a Left Popular Front (or fronts). The LPF is not primarily seen as an alternative to the ANC-SACP-COSATU Alliance, but rather as a popular, left movement capable of revitalising, deepening and defending a radical national democratic revolution. An effective LPF might also be a way of reconfiguring the Alliance, partly through its ability to mobilise a significant part of the ANC membership and particularly its support base. The LPF may or may not also assume an electoral form, although this is not the primary objective.

In the light of much debate and, at times

confusion, about an LPF, it is useful to revisit briefly the history of fronts and alliances within the broad communist tradition.

United Front – historically this form of front within the communist movement was seen as a front of **revolutionary working-class formations** (typically a front involving the Communist Party, revolutionary trade unions or factions within trade unions, and non-communist revolutionary syndicalists - as in Italy, for example, in the early 1920s). The executive committee of the 4th Comintern Congress (1922), for instance, adopted a fairly extensive set of resolutions on united fronts.

The strategic perspective was that the struggle was essentially a “class against class” struggle (proletariat vs. capitalists), which should not be diluted with other is-



sues. In this context, communist parties like the German KPD built a massive 'world of its own' – a communist party with its own daily newspapers, its own workers' clubs, its own Red trade union movement, its own artists' movement and its own armed defence cadres.

Although SA was not mentioned in the 1922 resolution (which was largely concerned with the European situation), this idea of a straight proletarian vs. bourgeoisie battle was the general orientation of the newly formed CPSA in the early 1920s (and why it got itself into a heroic but marginal position during the 1922 white workers Rand Revolt).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the left wing of the 'workerist' tendency in South Africa (SA) basically advocated a similar per-

spective untainted by 'populist' nationalism. Likewise, the more recent NUMSA/Jim electoral party adventure perhaps tried to position the supposedly 'pure Marxist-Leninist', Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SA) as leading a united workers' front – predictably with a pathetic electoral outcome.

National democratic movements/NDR

The 1928 Black Republic Thesis emanating from the 6th Comintern (CI) Congress sought to strategically re-orient the CPSA towards the actual South African reality – towards a national liberation struggle. Although the words 'national democratic revolution' were not explicitly used in 1928 – this is essentially what was being advocated with the idea that



The 1973 Durban strikes heralded the emergence of a radical trade union movement

The idea of post-liberation people's democracies became linked with the idea of National Liberation Movements

the CPSA (Communist Party of South Africa, later to become the SACP) should seek to transform ('reconfigure'?) the nascent national movements (notably the ANC) into a revolutionary national formation.

In terms of classes to be mobilised emphasis at this stage was for it to be a working class and peasant front consolidated around national democratic demands (rights of citizenship, land ownership, franchise, etc.).

For several reasons the idea of an NDR didn't substantially take off within the CPSA in the following three decades:

- There wasn't great enthusiasm within much of the Party leadership for the slogan of a Black Republic. It was felt it would divide the working class and bequeath white workers to the racist right-wing; and
- While the 6th CI conference correctly laid out a strategic perspective that would prove extremely fruitful for the SACP in later decades, in some ways the CI's 1928 resolution on SA was out of step with the general drift of the very same 6th CI congress which took a 'hard left sectarian/dogmatic' (Stalinist) turn at this point – which spilled over into SA organisationally with sectarianism and expulsions and counter-expulsions raging within the CPSA.

Anti-fascist Popular Fronts

The 7th CI Congress in 1935 made a major shift within the world communist movement calling for **popular fronts against fascism and for peace**:

- In the light of the emergence of fascism in Italy, Hungary, Germany and Spain, and
- In the light of the failure of the united front strategy which had isolated the communist parties, even the massive and powerful German KPD, and their Red trade unions from both 'reformist' trade union and labour formations, and a broader potential of wide multi-class (and multi-sectoral) anti-fascist mobilisation.

The key theoretician of this strategic shift was the general secretary of the CI at this time, the Bulgarian Georgi Dimitrov.

In SA this international communist call for broad popular fronts against fascism helped the CPSA re-build and (especially after the entry of the Soviet Union into WW2) acquire a significant public influence through newspapers like *The Guardian*, and organisations like Friends of the Soviet Union and later the Springbok Legion. But the national (and working-class) dimension of the South African struggle was somewhat downplayed in the midst of the Second World War with the emphasis being on supporting the Allied ('broad front' UK/US/SU) anti-fascist war effort.

Peoples Democracies

Little remembered these days, but after the liberation by the Red Army of Eastern and Central Europe from Nazi/fascist occupation, the original objective was to form broad patriotic/national, multi-party electoral democracies in countries like Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria etc. And this was initially the reality with electoral democracies involving a range of non-fascist parties including various national communist/workers' parties. However, with the hardening of Cold War hostility and deliberate instigation from the CIA with local reaction, effective one-party states under communist party dominance consolidated in these countries.

However, the idea of post-liberation **peoples' democracies** was combined with the idea of National Liberation Movements based on strategies of national democratic revolutions (NDRs) in the global South from the late-50s.

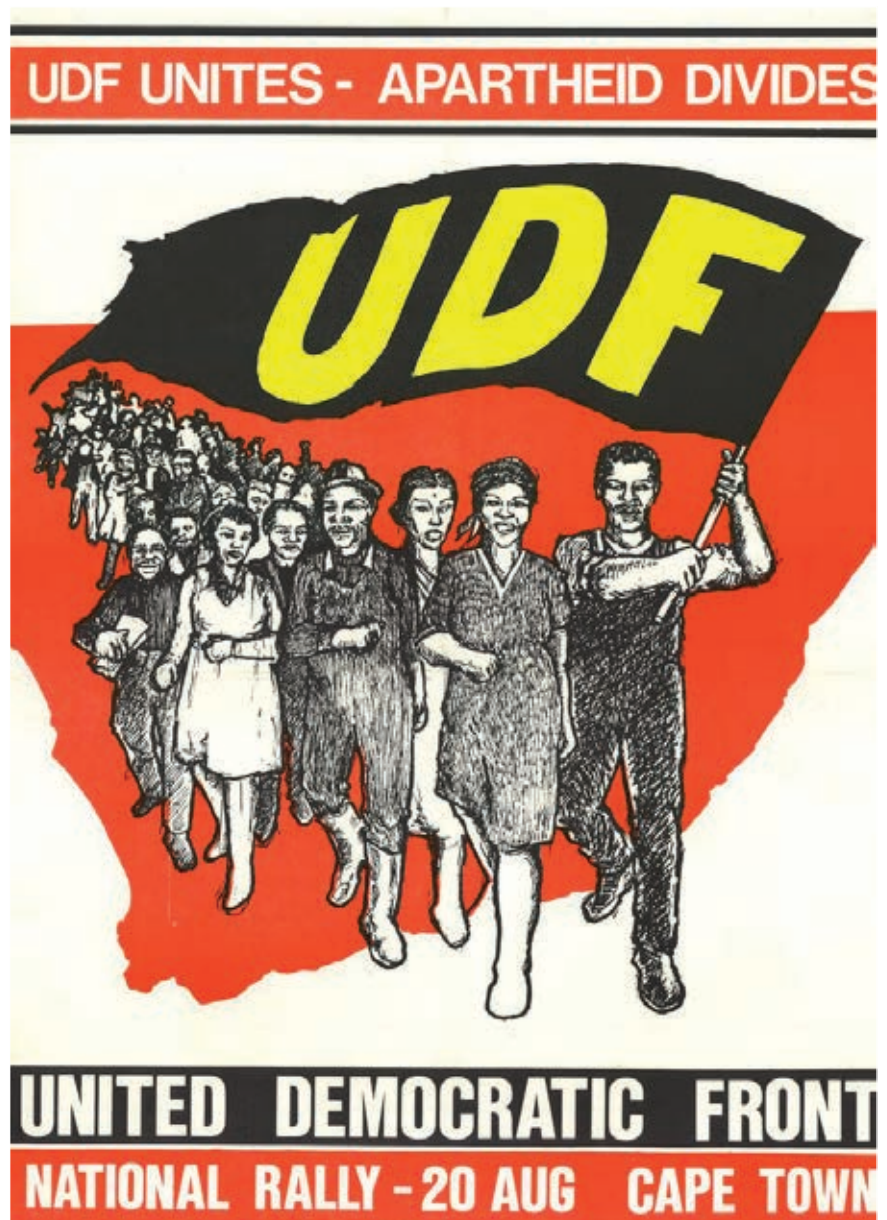
The NDR – late 1950s, early 60s

Attempts to rebuild an international communist movement were resuscitated from 1957 with the inaugural meeting of International Communist and Workers' Parties (ICWP). Against the background notably of the Chinese and subsequently Algerian and Cuban revolutions, as well as an upsurge through much of Asia (Indochina, Indonesia, Malaysia) greater attention was now paid to radical national liberation/anti-imperialist/anti-colonial struggles in the global South. It was in the meetings of the ICWP that the concept of a NDR was formally developed and the perspective of a "non-capitalist path" for countries advancing on an NDR path. Although the banned SA party was not initially formally represented until the early 1960s in these meetings – the resolutions of the ICWP were central in the SACP's landmark 1962 Road to South African Freedom.

Unfortunately, this recovery of a clear strategic perspective by the Party was soon to coincide with the major strategic defeat of the ANC/SACP movement from the mid-1960s.

Rebuilding – 1973 Durban strikes, 1976 youth uprising, 1980s township insurrectionary struggles

The strategic defeat of our liberation movement and of popular activism began to be reversed with the emergence of a radical trade union movement (following the 1973 Durban strikes) and the 1976 youth uprising. However, while



the ANC/SACP underground had some influence within these major developments, there were other, basically progressive (although often explicitly anti-SACP) ideological orientations at play (notably workerist/sindicalist tendencies in the case of the labour movement, and black consciousness in the case of the 76 uprising).

It was in this broad context that a key ANC/SACP initiative was undertaken with a fact-finding delegation to Vietnam to discuss broad strategy and related organisational approaches. The famous Green Book reported on the findings of this key mission. These included:

- Upholding the Vietnamese advice against seeking to transform (and narrow) the ANC into a 'Marxist-Leninist' organisation – something that was done (at least

The idea of post-liberation people's democracies became linked with the idea of National Liberation Movements



Soweto 1976: the uprising was a key moment in broadening and intensifying popular mass action against apartheid

Weakened popular front-type organisation post-apartheid has in turn weakened resistance to the neoliberal assault

in formal resolutions) by the MPLA and Frelimo. It was also something that Cde Moses Kotane had warned against in the internal debates within the SACP at the time. Rather preserve the broad but revolutionary NLM character of the ANC and an independent but allied, workers' vanguard SACP, with dual membership.

- The Vietnamese also strongly advised against the over-militarisation of the struggle (politics must be in command). This was a special challenge given that, at this stage, most of the ANC's cadre were in MK and in exile. The armed struggle needed to be fused with an emerging internal mass movement.

It was in this context that the SACP played a leading role in re-visiting and popularising the strategy of building popular fronts. Dimitrov's 1935 contributions became standard reading within the ANC/SACP in the late 1970s.

The 1980s – the UDF and the building of an MDM

Armed with these traditions and discussions, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the SACP played a key role in helping the emergent workplace, community and sectoral (including workplace, education, health, housing, women, land,

culture, faith-based, anti-conscription) struggles to connect and to develop an effective organisational form – essentially a **popular front**, commonly referred to here as a **mass democratic movement**, and formally inaugurated 40 years ago as the UDF in 1983.

Post-1994 and the demobilisation of the mass democratic movement

Through the 1990s, a significant struggle was fought within the ANC alliance over the direction and character of the struggle. This has often been portrayed (and, in part, correctly) as a struggle around economic policy and particularly macro-economic policy. The contested, top-down enforcement in 1996 of GEAR marked the dominance of a neoliberal faction within the ANC and ANC-led government.

What is, perhaps, less often emphasised is the connection between and inter-dependence of this neoliberal turn and the deliberate demobilisation of a broad mass democratic movement/popular front that had been built in struggle in the previous decade and a half. The neoliberal faction within the ANC/government argued that with the demise of the apartheid regime “an MDM/popular front was no longer needed”, and this

view was often shared by those within the MDM who had seen the MDM simply as a 'stand-in', the 'subs bench' for a largely exiled ANC 'government-in-waiting'. This contested demobilisation involved, amongst other things, the conversion of vibrant and mostly organically localised youth and women structures into unitary national formations under the general "discipline" of the ANC – ANCYL, ANCWL. Similarly, the formerly vibrant civic structures were converted into a unitary (at least in name and aspiration) SANCO. Much (not all) of the former leadership was channelled into new opportunities in government and in ANC leadership structures.

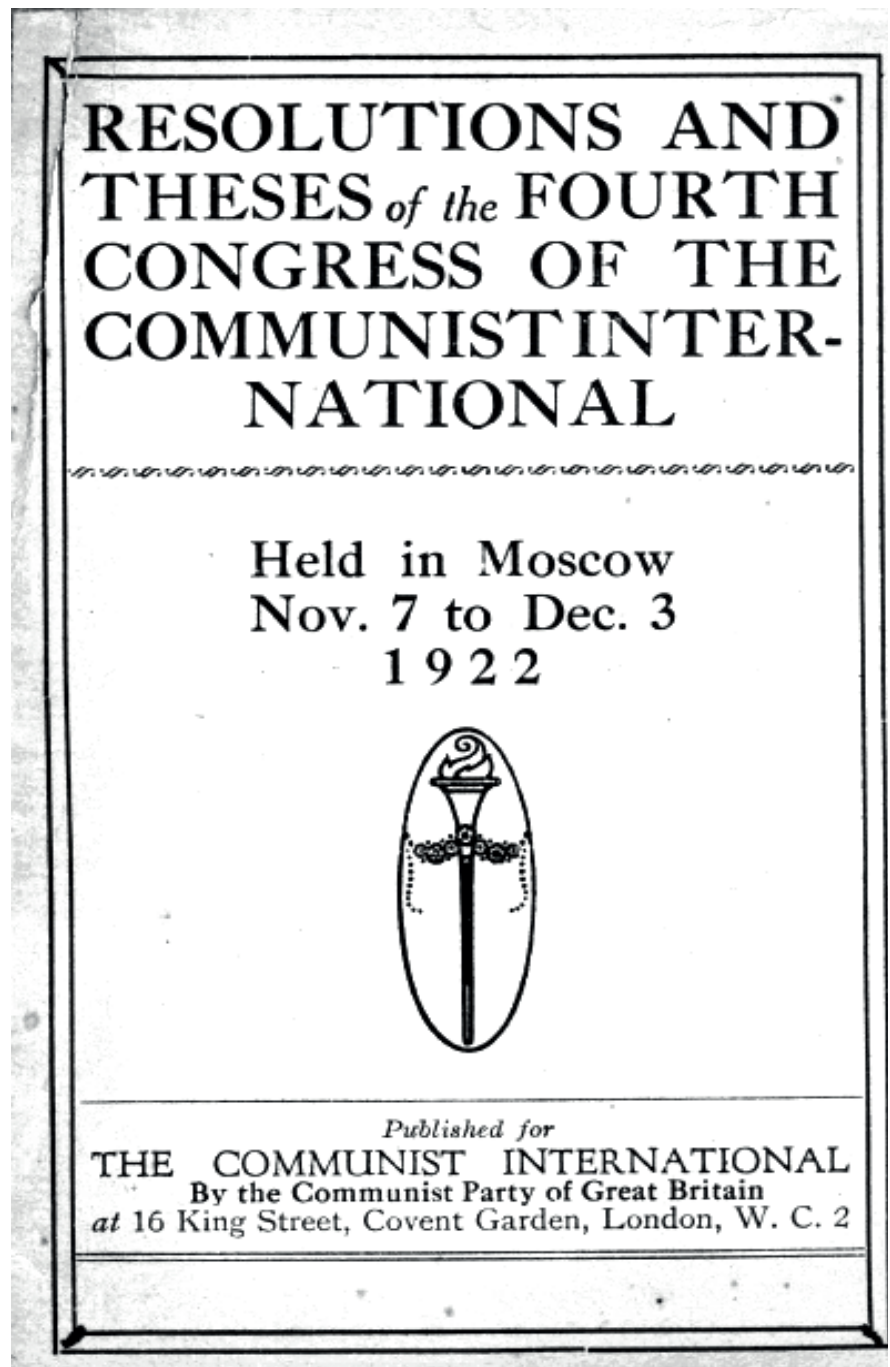
While the infusion of experienced MDM cadres into ANC and state structures was, in principle, not a bad thing, the unbalanced manner in which this occurred and the inability of formerly vibrant but now weakened MDM formations to hold these 'deployees' accountable, resulted in their perspectives becoming increasingly state-centred, narrowly electoralist and careerist. Localised and sectoral activism disappeared or was used manipulatively as factional springboards for personal positioning within ANC and state structures.

There was a similar drift of Cosatu leaders into political positions, but with trade unions anchored in daily workplace productive activity the immediate demobilising impact of the post-1994 reality was (and to some extent remains) less dramatic. However, the 1996 neo-liberal assault with its consequent de-industrialisation, massive job losses, and liberalisation of the labour market (including labour-brokering, casualisation, informalisation), has now had a major destabilising impact on the other key pillar of the MDM – the progressive trade union movement. In turn, with unions increasingly on the defensive, narrow workerist tendencies have crept back, with the community-work place unity in struggle forged during the UDF period now largely absent.

The weakening of popular front/MDM-type organisation in the post-apartheid reality has meant in turn that the ability to resist the neoliberal assault has been weakened. All of this, needless to say, has impacted also on the capacity of the SACP.

The SACP in the 1990s

Already in the early 1990s, the SACP was championing an approach that sought to achieve a dynamic balance and creative



The 4th CI adopted the first resolutions on united fronts

tension between **popular power** and a future **ANC-led** state. Cde Chris Hani's insistence in this period that he would not be taking up a government or parliamentary seat was a clear indication that the Party in this period did not have a narrow, state-centric vision. So, too, was Hani's tireless activism in this period, focused on building grass-roots popular power in the midst of the negotiations, not against negotiations – but to ensure that they were as much as possible people-driven.

The SACP's correct recent strategic

decision to help to build a Left Popular Front can, therefore, draw upon a rich international and South African communist history. There is, however, no simple return to the MDM/UDF of the 1980s. We need to assess courageously the challenges before us, including our own internal limitations and challenges. ★

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



Fightback against neoliberalism: part of Cosatu's national day of action in Cape

COSATU

Class anger at boiling point

Exlira Giose reports from the 'sea of red' march in Cape Town during Cosatu's national day of action against the neoliberal assault on workers' rights



We call for the promotion of local procurement", said Cde Andre Kriel (SACTWU GS) when speaking at the Cosatu National Day of Action in Cape Town, 6 July. He further called workers and progressives to support the Public Procurement Bill, which is before Parliament, saying its passing will help create jobs locally.

Condemning gender-based violence, Cde Kriel hailed the recent ratification of the International Labour Organisation's Convention 190, and called for its immediate implementation as this will deal with gender-based violence in the

workplace.

Calling on the workers to defend their victories, he welcomed the move by the government to grant workers access to withdraw portions of their retirement funds. This was against the backdrop of Covid-19 where workers did not have income and had to scrape through just to get by.

"There is progress in this regard, with Treasury planning to table a bill in parliament", said Kriel. "Workers will be able to exhaust this option without having to resign from work". He, however, warned that financial institutions will do everything in their power to delay this law coming into effect and being imple-

mented early next year, and called on workers to resist this.

Speaker after speaker used the platform to lay bare the plight of the working class and the poor in the Western Cape whilst addressing thousands of workers convened in Hanover Street, a few metres shy of the Castle of Good Hope. The march targeted both the national and Western Cape provincial legislatures. Pity the DA-led legislature refused to receive the worker's demands.

The crowd gathered at Hanover Street and began to roar with song as they adorned the streets named after colonial masters. Walking in between the towering buildings that remind us of our class



The placards say it all: workers demands target a wide range of injustices

disposition in this neoliberal regime. The fever of revolution lurks.

The sea of red finally arrived at the provincial legislature, where the Provincial Chairperson of Cosatu, Cde Motlatsi, aptly summed up the class divide when he addressed the marchers: “If you go to our areas, you will see, the places where we are staying, our people are staying in squalor. Then you go to the affluent areas, it is only then that you will see that really, you are in the Western Cape.”

He spoke firmly of the collaboration of the provincial government with the City of Cape Town in privatising institutions in the Western Cape. He left many in the crowd shocked, as most were unaware that the Good Hope Center, the City Hall, the Parade, and the parking base have all been privatised.

The workers can no longer use these facilities for free. Is this the government of the people. Also present was Lucian Davids of the Young Communist League National Committee, who commended all for being part of the march and for

“taking up your own struggles”.

“You are not at the workplace only complaining about the conditions, but you are laying down your tools and going straight to the employer and telling them what you think of them”, said Davids

When it was Cde Mesuli Kama, spokesperson of the ANCYL, to speak, he said that young people are as much affected by the issues Cosatu is raising. “If you are not paid for the work you are doing at work, we are equally frustrated. Because we receive some of the money for our living from you as workers”.

Cde Kama further said that in the Western Cape, poverty has a colour. “We, as people from the Western Cape are not ignorant about which areas we have been subjected to as a matter of our race.”

The SACP was represented by its provincial secretary, Cde Benson Ngqentsu, who also spoke to the workers and touched on the provision in the provincial government’s budget that caters exclusively to the areas of the rich.

Ngqentsu dismissed those who accused Cosatu that the mass action was just for 2024 elections and said that the march was for the rising cost of living, the attack on collective bargaining and wage restraint.

He pledged solidarity with SACCAWU workers who have been on strike for more than 8 months against Makro, who were offered a measly 4.8% increase.

Cde Wesley Seal from the ANC said that it is ironic that Allan Winde demands the arrest of President Vladimir Putin upon his arrival and yet does not demand that gangsters plaguing poor and working-class communities are not arrested. Children in these communities cannot go to tuck shops without the fear of being shot. Year after year, when it rains, the roads and houses are flooded because the sewage systems are not tended to in these areas.

“En tog is ons gesê dat hierdie provinsie is die beste in Suid Afrika – Dis kak praat!” [And yet we are told that this province is the best in South Africa – That’s crap!] said Cde Seal.

“Our 30 years democracy is facing a crisis that does not affect the rich of Camps Bay but the working class and the poor. It is a triple crisis of unemployment, inequality and poverty. At worst, we face a crises of social reproduction, meaning it is impossible to just live”. These were the words of the SACP Central Committee member, Barry Mitchell speaking in Parliament, where the second memorandum was handed over.

He continued: It is impossible to afford a basket of food nowadays. We don’t have a public transport system, our women and children are at the end of tsotsism in our communities, prayed on by evil elements, comrades. This is the reality we face.”

Mitchell blamed Treasury and said they should take responsibility for the high cost of living, the lack of filled vacancies leading to a strain on existing workers, and the long lines at state institutions like Home Affairs, the state of public hospitals that lack basic infrastructural facilities for medical and general staff to relieve themselves. These institutions have been vandalised, and it is the responsibility of Treasury to replace them.

He gave the national treasury an ultimatum: “Come next year, we want to see a pro-worker budget.” ★

Cde Giose is a YCLSA National Committee Member



Cde Smiso stood out because of his magnetic personality and style

SMISO NKWANYANA

Unique personality, unique contribution

On the 20th anniversary of the untimely death of Cde Smiso Nkwanyana, Yunus Carrim reflects on the enduring example of a dynamic young leader



During the struggle era, many, many youth were slain. As tragic as that was, it became accepted as part of the sacrifices that had to be paid to achieve liberation. The slogan was “Don’t mourn, mobilise!”

Not so with Smiso Nkwanyana’s death! His was such an unnecessary, senseless, unbelievable death. The 31-year-old dynamic SACP KZN Provincial Secretary lost control of his car, crashed into an electric pole and toppled over several times in Durban city centre on 12 August 2003. He was returning from a long trade union meeting.

Smiso’s death was so unexpected it reverberated throughout the ANC Alliance in the province, not just the SACP, and even nationally. Such was the mark he made in the few years he served as the

SACP’s leader in KZN.

“There is not a single major issue in Cosatu in KZN that Smiso did not help to sort out. We don’t know who is going to suffer more now – the SACP or Cosatu?” said Cosatu general secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, at a packed memorial service. Which was also addressed by SACP General Secretary, Blade Nzimande, ANC Deputy President, Jacob Zuma and ANC provincial chairperson, Sbu Ndebele. That such senior leaders turned up conveys how important Smiso came to be in the movement.

I had no sense that’s where he would

**You couldn’t
avoid Smiso.
That loud laugh
of his**

get. It was 1998. The SACP in the province was going through a bad patch. Our paid-up membership had sunk to about 600. Relations with the ANC were not good. Smiso, a student activist, surfaced to prominence at meetings held to revitalise the SACP. He was vociferous, brash, impulsive.

His name surfaced as a candidate for full-time provincial secretary. He was too young, I thought. Too rough on the edges. We needed somebody who would make inroads into the trade unions and also patch relations with the ANC. He would not be credible.

How wrong I was! He plunged into his work with enthusiasm – and within two years, our paid-up membership shot up to over 3000, many of them workers. And the membership continued to grow. It was he who set the momentum for KZN to become the largest SACP Province un-

der the leadership of his very effective successor, Themba Mthembu, still in that position. The current membership hovers around 70000.

Smiso's stature in the unions grew. And unexpectedly in the ANC too. He mended relations with the ANC leadership in the province and came to be respected by Siphso Gcabashe, the ANC secretary and Senzo Mchunu, the deputy secretary. He was also appointed deputy co-ordinator of the ANC's 2004 election campaign.

You couldn't avoid Smiso. That loud laugh of his. So unique. It was a piercing, raucous, crackling laugh that came from deep inside and spread through his whole face, lighting up his eyes. At first, you could find it jarring, but you soon got used to it. And often, you heard it in the distance, long before you saw him. Sometimes you laughed just at seeing the sheer delight he got from laughing.

Crosshead

He was such a positive, lively, engaging person. As he grew in his leadership role, he became more rounded and settled, but he still had a brash, strident side. He would certainly speak his mind unhindered at times and rattle people.

Sometimes he would drive down from Durban to meet me in Pietermaritzburg. Not just because he liked my cooking but because he wanted to talk, and not just about narrow SACP politics, but about much broader issues. What I saw of him then was a more reflective, considered side. A certain political wisdom beyond his years.

We all missed him after he passed on. You couldn't not. He was not just a huge loss to his wife, Gcina, their new one-month-old baby, Akwande, three-year-old Olwethu and other family members. But to many, many others. Not least Nzi- mande, who was very close to Smiso.

Of course, there have been many other strong SACP leaders since Smiso. But Smiso stood out because of his unique personality and style. And so, he gets easily remembered.

But it's his political contribution that ultimately most matters. And that in this 20th anniversary of his death, a Smiso Nkwanyana Centre for Alternative Ideas is to be launched is certainly a fitting tribute to him.

This article was first published by TimesLive, 13 August 2023 ★

Cde Carrim is an SACP Central Committee and ANC MP

SMISO NKWANYANA

Our country cries for his leadership values

Fidel Hadebe remembers Cde Smiso as an unwavering Marxist and leader profoundly committed to the struggles of the poor and the working class



The decision by UNISA to rename its KwaZulu-Natal regional office after Cde Smiso

Nkwanyana was a result of years of lobbying by student leaders to recognise the role played by him in shaping the history of this institution.

The history of UNISA, like many other institutions of higher learning, is shaped by the struggles of student leaders who understand that higher education is not only a place where young people learn and acquire their certificates to enhance their life prospects especially where jobs and class standing is concerned. The institutions are also sites of class struggles, and where future leaders are born and shaped.

When Cde Smiso met his tragic death 20 years ago, he was on a political rise. I am not even sure whether he would be comfortable with me describing his influence in the politics of KZN and nationally in these terms. Cde Smiso was not excited by positions and one only had to be around him to understand the kind of leader he was and his deep commitment to the working class.

When he met his tragic demise on that fateful day, he had been in a night-long meeting with some of his comrades in the province and, having not had any rest, decided to proceed to another political engagement to prepare for a SAMWU (South African Municipal Workers Union) provincial congress.

Cde Smiso was just 31 years old, but already a source for wise counsel within the Alliance structures, in KZN in particular. He was accessible, frank, bore no grudges and was always ready with his signature laughter even during the

most difficult of times. Those of us who had the privilege of working with him in advancing students' struggles know the kind of a revolutionary disciplinarian he was. He was full of jokes, but equally tough and unrelenting when it was time to do business, which was always a great source of frustration for the university authorities.

He showed an incisive mind coupled with a deep understanding of revolutionary theory. Within the ANC he influenced policy debates and discussions on a range of issues, and some of the positions he advocated found expression in government policies and programmes. Who can forget the massive campaign that he led for the banking sector to review their lending policies in relation to township property owners, a massive campaign carried forward by the SACP?

The past 20 years have seen a lot of political changes take place, including the emergence of 'cash-politics' to ascend into higher office and the troubling failures of municipalities to deliver basic services to the poor in particular. With his political star on the rise at the time of his death, one is left wondering how these would have affected him as a leader deeply and genuinely committed to the struggles of the poor and the working class.

Municipalities have been transformed into feeding troughs for local political gangsters who masquerade as activists and leaders. Municipalities are being bled dry as these gangs extract every rand possible to enrich themselves and go back to those communities they fleeced to show off their overnight wealth. But we also have a worrying crisis of trade unions that, in many instances, choose

to look the other way while all this thieving takes place, resulting in situations where municipal employees do not get their salaries timeously or not at all.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of Comrade Smiso's death it is my wish on behalf of the entire students' leadership collective that served with him at UNISA that we see the emergence of the selfless leadership that he displayed.

That is the kind of leadership that truly cares about the poor and those who experience violence and discrimination purely based on gender and class.

We saw recently how the people of the Cape Flats had to walk long distances late at night because of the turmoil and lack of alternative mass transport in Cape Town owing to the minibus taxi strike.

We still see women and girls raped and murdered daily, taking away their rights and denying them of opportunities to meaningfully participate in the country's economy because of limitations on their movements. We still have people in Slovo



Cde Smiso – a source for wise counsel

Park in the south of Soweto who live under sub-human conditions stripping them of their rights, including sanitation. Most

He was a tough Marxist who never shied away from a difficult debate

importantly, we have a mega university that he dedicated his young life to re-building and preparing for a new South Africa being embroiled in leadership controversies that threaten its sustainability.

These are the struggles Comrade Smiso would have been relentlessly pursuing today had he not met his death on that fateful day in August 20 years ago. I am confident that had he been alive today, he would not have accepted any public elected office, which often comes with good leaders sometimes turning their back on revolutionary principles and morality as they settle into a life of comfort.

Cde Smiso was a strategist of note, an excellent theorist and a tough Marxist who never shied away from a difficult debate. ★

Cde Hadebe was a student activist together with Cde Nkwanyana at Unisa and a founder member of the UNISA National Student Representative Council. A former government spokesperson, he is now a communications consultant

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POEM

Lament for the Dead*

in remembering
the time
of the butcherbird

that shadows
the days
of our lives

we mourn silently
lamenting the dead

when midnights
cannot console
or still our
troubled hearts
from turmoil.

under
no sculptor's chisel
or mould
have their heroic deeds
found expression
in marble
or bronze

no cenotaph
no monument
street
school
ship
grand civic centre
freedom square

or heroes acre
bear testimony
to their valour.

there is no tomb
dedicated to
the patriots
whose mortal remains
were buried at sea
or scattered
in disused mines
and crocodile
infested rivers.

there are no
annual parades
in their honour

they remain without laurels



By Ben
Dikobe
Martins

for bravely shouldering
our hopes, aspirations

and fighting
for our glory.

only the rusting
iron corpses
of pretoria's
armoured vehicles

abandoned in hasty retreat
on the fierce battlefields
of front line states

attest to their
unbounded bravery
courage, resolve
and strength
of character
under fire.

many were
tortured to death
at vlakplaas

after which
their bodies
were strapped
to bombs
which blew
arms, legs
and chunks of flesh
about

when god
seemed distracted
not to see
or care.

others
in neighbouring
states

in
horror upon horror

lost
hands, eyes, limbs
and life

to apartheid
letter bombs.

yet many more
were killed wantonly
by men at their vilest

who dipped
their bread
in our blood.

no church bells
toll
for the dead
at dawn

who found
an end to
their hopes

when they swung
at the end of
the pretoria gallows
hangman's rope.

some
fell
where we
left them behind
in the heat
of battle

where
their broken bodies
sprouted burning
roses and petals
of blood. ★

* This is the first half of the poem. The
second half will appear in our next issue.

**Cde Martins is an SACP Central
Committee and Politburo member,
and a former MK combatant. He
is also a poet. The illustration is a
pencil self-portrait.**

UKRAINE

Nato's endless war – a view from South Africa

*Nato is escalating its catastrophic proxy war in Ukraine,
writes Sikhumbuzo Thomo*



A frank assessment of the build-up to what we now see as the Russia-Ukraine 'special operation' and conflict needs an urgent assessment. The fact is Nato is escalating the multi-faceted disaster in Ukraine. This war is a military conflict by proxy means and economic warfare through sanctions against Russia by the Nato.

Until the African leaders' peace plan initiative, there was universal opposition to any peace arrangement that involved any recognition of conflict resolution by means other than war. In fact, it looked more as though Ukraine was almost incidental to the war, in the sense that they were there to impel themselves to the Russian army at the behest of the West until the last Ukrainian. The real goal of this entire war is the destruction of the Russian state and President Vladimir Putin.

Until the African Peace Initiative, no one was prepared to engage, with the hope that Russia and Putin would meet some catastrophe. It has become a Russo-phobic campaign and everyone is on a 'Hate' Russia' programme, regardless of the facts.

Propaganda vs existential threat

It is obvious that Nato wants to protract this conflict as long as possible in the hope that Russia will be defeated. All the information going back to around 2014 is largely being ignored in the discussion, that at least 14,000 Russian souls have been lost in and around the Donbas and Lugansk regions due to Ukraine shelling before the Russian invasion is completely ignored. Until now, this war has been presented as a psych operation, with per-

ceptions and narratives thrown about and propaganda that is devoid of historical facts. Little is said about the origins of the conflict, the nature of the regime in Kiev, zero accountability of all the money that finds its way into Ukraine (for instance, an additional \$6-billion was reported as an accounting error, when it was clearly destined to fund Ukraine).

There is little discussion about the coup that was instigated in Ukraine by the West to bring Ukraine into Nato. To dialectically understand this war within its historical context, we need to examine the geopolitical picture of its concrete terms.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the US found itself in a position for the first time in its history of being the sole geopolitical superpower.

It began pushing forward policies towards Ukraine that Russia saw as an existential threat to its sovereignty, while Russia, on the other hand, went through a period of humiliation and abuse from the US and its allies. US foreign policy was specifically designed to crush any potential resistance to its hegemony. The Warsaw Pact was thrown out of the window. This was because Nato bullishly expanded its borders closer to Russia by extending an invitation to Ukraine and Georgia to become members of its alliance. This was done at the Nato annual summit in Bucharest, Romania in 2008.

That summit took a resolution to in-

Until the African leaders' peace plan, there was opposition to any conflict resolution

corporate Ukraine and Georgia into its ranks. President Putin made it clear then that the resolution as adopted by the summit created an existential threat to Russia and opposed this decision. In the main, the Ukraine-Georgia resolution seeks to archive the following strategic points: the integration of Ukraine and Georgia into the European Union, the conversion of Ukraine and Georgia into a pro-western democracy, and finally, bringing Ukraine and Georgia into Nato.

Relentless expansion

This provocation was force-fed upon Russia despite repeated warnings from President Putin. They are simply unheeded by his warnings. They went ahead with implementing the summit resolutions as they believed that Russia was a weak state. This view has prevailed in the West since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union.

It is noteworthy that only France and Germany at the time opposed the expansionist resolution of Nato as they viewed this as a declaration of war at the Bucharest Summit. And indeed, a war broke out between Russia and Georgia the same year that ended too quickly. But still, Nato pressed on with Ukraine's integration. In response, Russia took Crimea as the US was about to set up its naval base there. Since 2014 Nato has been training Ukrainian troops and conducting joint naval exercises in the Black Sea. This explains in good part what existential threat means from a Russian point of view.

After the Bucharest Summit and the Nato drills in the Black Sea, Putin made it categorically clear: "What they are doing or trying or planning to do in Ukraine is not happening thousands of kilome-



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Road to ruin: Bucha in 2022.

tres away from our national borders. It is on our doorstep. They must understand that we simply have nowhere to retreat to. Do they really think we do not see these threats? Or do they think that we will just sit idly by watching threats to Russia emerge?”

He went on to say on 22 February 2022: “We are categorically opposed to Ukraine joining Nato, because this poses a threat to us, and we have arguments to support this, I have repeatedly spoken about it in this hall that Ukraine has become de facto member of Nato.

The US and its allies continue to pump the current Kiev authorities full of modern types of weapons. If this was not stopped Moscow will be left with an anti-Russia armed to the teeth and this is totally unacceptable.”

Denialism

What now confronts US for the first time in about thirty years is the emergence of a new world order that even has far more superior and accurate weaponry than itself. For the first time in some thirty years, countries have begun questioning the US hegemony openly, including the use of the Dollar as an exchange cur-

rency, while others have already stopped using it. For the first time again in some thirty years Russia and China, when they act in concert, and an alliance in both Brics and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, pose an insurmountable obstacle to the US hegemony.

This is the new reality and reckoning that the West refuses to accept. This denialism has placed the entire humanity in a potential atomic and nuclear war. The closest allies of the US in this conflict are now facing popular protests against the war, an energy crisis resulting from environmental terrorism that saw the Nordstream gas pipelines blown up, and an economic slump.

President Putin recently revealed a shocking peace agreement that was signed in Turkey, but hidden from the world to the African leaders in Moscow. It is an agreement that would have saved

“They must understand that we simply have nowhere to retreat to”

hundreds of thousands of lives and prevented the further destruction of property and famine.

Reversal

Ukraine reversed this agreement after it met with the then UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. This essentially makes Johnson and Zelenskyy war criminals, together with the entire Nato. The International Criminal Court’s silence on the signed peace initiative reversal leaves much to be desired about its integrity and the foundations of the statute.

It is ironic that at the time of the peace agreement, Ukraine did not have either Crimea or the Donbas, losing nothing should they have proceeded. However, the West had to intervene and force Ukrainians into a proxy war with Russia. With friends like the West, Ukraine must understand that they will be the biggest loser. Russia will, at some point, opt to protect all Russian-speaking territories, inclusive of Odessa, which will leave Ukraine a landlocked country. ★

Cde Thomo is a member of the ANC and SACP



Photo: Robben Island/Mayibuye Archive

The rights demanded by the Congress of the People in 1955 were enshrined in the Freedom Charter

FREEDOM CHARTER

The need for new policies and renewed socialist politics

We need clear anti-neoliberal reforms and to learn from other countries' current experiments with democratic socialism, argues Khwezi Mabasa



The adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 marked a significant moment in South Africa's liberation movement history. It built on previous cardinal political declarations like the African Claims (1943), which were largely influenced by debates about the Atlantic Charter and anti-colonialism across the globe. Clauses in the African Claims (1943) and Freedom Charter (1955) documents cover a wide range of demands, calling for socio-economic, political, cultural and national liberation. These demands include fundamental civil liberties and radical calls for economic redistribution, strengthening labour rights, decolonisation, and trans-

forming the international order. South Africa is heading towards 30 years of democratic political rule as a state fully integrated into the international community. The country has experienced some important changes since the African Claims and Freedom Charter were adopted in the mid-20th century. These society-wide reforms are drawn from the specific resolutions contained in both documents.

However, there is no consensus in society on the extent to which these political, socio-economic and cultural reforms resonate with South Africans' daily lived experiences. The reforms mentioned above co-exist with pervasive structural socio-economic inequalities, racism, gender imbalances and racism. This raises a

deeper ideological question: why has our society not fully attained the political visions set out in the Freedom Charter and African Claims?

A primary response to this question is articulated in political economy critiques debating macro-economic and social policy choices implemented since the democratic transition. These accounts primarily focus on the pitfalls of market-oriented neoliberalism and how it reproduces racial capitalism. Padayachee and Van Niekerk's 2019 book entitled: *Shadow of Liberation* provides some useful insights into the policy failures. It argues that the ruling African National Congress (ANC) shifted from a social democratic orientation, which could have resulted in more extensive



The aims of the Freedom Charter need translating into tangible socialist policies

socio-economic redistribution. The policy shifts, according to the authors, were caused by organisational capacity weaknesses, state power political concessions, lack of democratic control in economic policy-making processes, and policy incoherence within alliance structures. All these factors remind society that redistributive policy choices and frameworks are essential for fully realising the Freedom Charter's political demands. These frameworks should preferably be located in heterodox development and political economy outlooks. It is clear that market-oriented development has curtailed Freedom Charter policy aspirations.

An alternative response to this question moves the debate further, focusing on contemporary discourses about the

future of democratic socialism in the 21st century. This response still acknowledges fundamental socialist principles and Freedom Charter clauses. But it equally encourages activists to learn from 20th-century socialism's shortcomings and engage in emerging left political ideas across the globe. The socialist tradition continues to develop and provide alternatives to our contemporary finance-led global capitalist model. These alternative ideas can be found in conventional communist political parties, labour movements, left-leaning social movements, and indigenous community structures with a rich history of communalism. Several examples exist in Africa, Asia, South America and Europe that illustrate how we can implement Freedom Char-

ter goals from below alongside national policy framework changes. These organisations' political demands, activism and practical political experiments point us to some steps for realising Freedom Charter clauses on land access, decent employment, social ownership in the economy, social protection, preserving indigenous knowledge (and culture), and improving access to public goods.

Two prominent examples highlight these points: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil and the Communist Party of India's (CPI) policies in Kerala. The former is a landless rural workers organisation that was formed during the 1980s and has subsequently developed into one of the world's largest agrarian movements. It advocates for radical land reform, restructuring Brazil's agrarian structure, introducing social ownership, ecological sustainability and decommodified food systems.

Similarly, India's Communist Party has introduced programmes such as the Brahmagiri Development Society (BDS) to provide alternative forms of agrarian production in Kerala, with the aim of supporting small-scale farmers and rural households. These farmers and households experienced food insecurity and income loss after successive national governments introduced neoliberal policy reforms in the agricultural sector. This BDS policy initiative is organised around social ownership, such as cooperatives, prioritising social returns over profit, decentralised localised food systems and gender equality. Several reports on the BDS socio-economic impact in Kerala illustrate positive results for household income, food security, participatory decision-making and overall community human development.

Reflections on the Freedom Charter and its translation into the lived reality of South Africans should be based on two factors: anti-neoliberal policy reforms and learning from emerging 21st century democratic socialism experiments. Experiences from nearly three decades of democratic rule illuminate how redistributive clauses in the charter require new thinking on both policy and socialist politics levels. ★

Cde Mabasa is the economic and social policy lead at Friedrich Ebert Stiftung South Africa and a part-time sociology lecturer at the University of Pretoria. His work focuses on labour studies, political economy and racial capitalism

BRICS

Declaration of the BRICS political parties plus dialogue

In the run-up to the BRICS summit meeting, more than 50 political parties from the BRICS countries and those wishing to join the grouping held a dialogue, in Ekurhuleni, 18-20 July, at the end of which they issued the following declaration

We, the BRICS Political Parties Plus Dialogue, gathered in Ekurhuleni, South Africa, on 18 to 20 July 2023 under the theme, 'BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism'. Our meeting coincided with the global celebrations of the Nelson Mandela International Day, as millions around the world recalled his contribution to the global struggles for democracy, peace, human rights, and social justice.

We held the Dialogue in a context of ongoing shifts in the geopolitical landscape, with accelerated movement towards a multipolar world in which countries of the global South are increasingly asserting themselves and their interests on the global stage. We also convened in the context of new and emerging threats to international peace and security.

We agree that BRICS countries and those of the global South should seek to diversify and transform the international financial architecture towards greater inclusivity and equity, including through the New Development Bank (NDB) and encouraging more local currencies financing. We will continue to champion the reform of the Bretton Woods Institutions.

We believe that political parties should shoulder the political responsibility of leading the way, building consensus, promoting development, participatory democracy, boost engagement, encourage investments, strengthening cooperation and improving governance. Political

parties should champion modernisation, the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the empowerment of young people and women.

Parties should jointly advocate robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation, explore the building of a global network for inter-civilisation dialogue and cooperation, enrich the contents of exchanges and expand avenues of cooperation to promote mutual understanding and friendship among people of all countries and jointly advance the progress of human civilisations.

We reaffirm our commitment to a world of peace and stability and continue to support the central role of the United Nations, its purposes and principles as enshrined in the UN Charter and respect for and equitable application of international law.

We believe that political parties should advocate against interference in the internal affairs of countries, that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity of all nations be respected, and that inclusive and mutual security should guide international relations. We support the right of countries to independently choose development paths and social systems, working together in their national interests.

We believe that political parties should commit to strengthening multilateralism, the transformation of global institutions and upholding international law. As an important part of the BRICS mechanism, the BRICS political parties plus

dialogue plays a critical role in building consensus among political parties and promoting BRICS cooperation. We are ready to work together for the continuous development of the BRICS political parties plus dialogue.

We recognise the important complementarities between the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063. To accelerate growth in Africa, we support the implementation of Agenda 2063, especially the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA). We believe this will further enhance the development of industrial capacity, infrastructure and regional value chains across Africa, which will boost the continent's manufacturing capacity, ensure secured supply chains, economic resilience and intra-Africa trade. BRICS countries can play a catalytic role in supporting Africa's development priorities. We therefore support the strengthening of the BRICS-Africa cooperation.

We remain committed to addressing the challenges of terrorism, corruption and natural resource mismanagement, which contribute to instability.

We are committed to counter all forms of disinformation through policy measures, including education, capacity-building for prevention and resilience to disinformation, advocacy and awareness-raising.

We remain committed to resolving tensions and conflicts in a manner that addresses their root causes, in order to sustain peace and stability in our various



Representatives of more than 50 political parties took part in the BRICS Political Parties Plus dialogue

regions, and across the world. We thus welcome efforts by BRICS countries and their partners to find a viable and durable solution to the conflict in Ukraine in a manner that encourages dialogue and diplomacy.

We gathered here having over decades and under different circumstances organized solidarity conferences, mobilized our people and governments to give political and material support to those that needed it most. Solidarity will remain part of our political parties' agenda.

We call on all Parties to honour and implement all UN and UNSC resolutions including resolution 2334 for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian question. We support the two-state solution by the creation of Israel living side by side with an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We stressed that unilateral application of embargoes, economic and other sanctions, other than those approved by the UN Security Council, are incompatible with the principles of international law and have a negative impact on affected countries and on international relations.

We call for the implementation of the UNSC Resolutions, including resolution 1415 for resolving the Saharawi question. We welcome the relaunching of direct talks between the Saharawi and Moroccans under the supervision of the United Nations.

We remain committed to ensuring that BRICS countries facilitate and consolidate trade and investment, including through the regional trade formations in

their respective continents.

We are committed to strengthen economic cooperation and urge the consolidation of the working groups to ensure that areas such as mining, industrialisation, infrastructure, climate change and environmental protection receive additional attention.

We are confident that increased BRICS cooperation will ensure greater complementarity and the sharing of important lessons in sectors where each has capacity and strengths, including in new technologies. We believe commodity exchange mechanisms must be established in participating countries that have a dominance and comparative advantage in specific resources or commodities. We are also committed to supporting SMMEs and co-operatives, leading to a balanced focus on both mega-projects and small businesses.

We agreed to continue to foster exchanges and build the infrastructure of political parties to enable them to enhance party-to-party relations that complement and reinforce the cooperation mechanisms of their respective governments. This will enable political parties to also share important lessons on how they have introduced innovations in governance, fundraising, renewal and political education to ensure they remain relevant to drive transformation in their societies.

We remain committed to further strengthening the cooperation mechanisms of BRICS, which range from finance and economics to science, politics, and cultural exchanges.

We note the support from the Dialogue for BRICS expansion, and the recommendation for the finalisation of principles and modalities for expansion. We also urge government actors to explore the formalisation of a system of dialogue partners in efforts to strengthen internal and external cooperation.

Our commitment to these ideals is informed by the imperative to ensure an improving quality of life among the people in our countries and across the globe. We therefore urge governments to implement programmes that promote this ideal.

We, the participants, applaud the ANC for hosting the 2023 BRICS Political Parties Plus Dialogue and encourage other political parties of BRICS countries to host similar events in the future. Parties pledged their solidarity and support to the ANC as it forges ahead towards sustaining the vision and values of stalwarts such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Albertina Sisulu, Yusuf Dadoo and Charlotte Maxeke.

We, the BRICS Political Parties Plus Dialogue, represented by over 45 countries and their political parties and organisations from Africa, Asia and Latin America, will go back to our peoples and governments to share the vision of a future characterised by a transformed system of global governance, a multipolar world that will contribute to peace and security of all nations, sustainable development and goodwill among nations and peoples of the world. ★

20 July 2023
Ekurhuleni, South Africa



Photo: Dlyan Bushy/Bhekisisa

WATER CRISIS

Day Zero – contrasting realities of the elite and working class

The class divide in access to potable water is most blatant in Cape Town underlines the desperate need for sustainable water use nationwide, explains Lucian Davids



Nothing makes us more aware of the canyon that exists between the working class and the affluent than the ICTJ reports that “South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, with race playing a determining factor in a society...”. Yet we are told by the liberal crusaders of capital that the days of apartheid are gone.

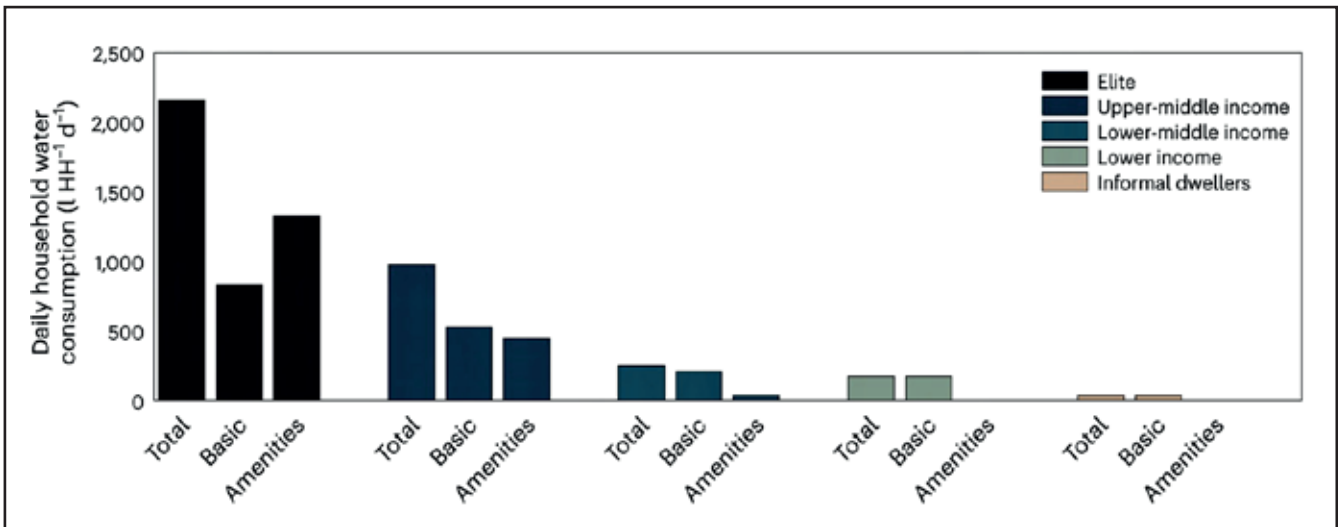
This does not mean that the adverse

effects of apartheid or those who benefited from it have vanished. The government’s inability to address these contradictions is another weight to the already burdening cross borne by the working class. More closely, we wish to expose the hypocrisy of the elites through a study conducted on water consumption among different classes in urban areas.

A recent study published by *Nature Sustainability*, ‘Urban water crisis driven by elites¹ – unsustainable consump-

tion, explains “how social power and heterogeneity in society shape both the way urban water crises unfold and who is vulnerable to them”. It rightly identifies a “problem with these depoliticised analyses” as they “lead to technocratic solutions that are likely to perpetuate the same logic...”

The above-mentioned citation was preceded by statements regarding scientific research suggesting factors beyond human influence that contributed to the



The graphs above and below show water consumption in Cape Town according to social class

water crises, such as climate change.

These are technocratic tricks meant to obscure the underlying power the markets exert over the economic and political functions in a given state. Water is a case in point.

Let's look at what the study finds about Cape Town, the city of 'clean audits', 'good management' and the 'soft life' for all. The Urban water crisis study states: "...the city is marked by stark socioeconomic inequalities and a starkly segregated urban space."

It provides corroborating data of the target groups researched, which comprises 1.4% of the elite, 12.3% being upper-middle income, 24.6% lower-middle income, 40.5% lower income and the informal settlers at 21%.

Over 50% of the water supply in the city is consumed by the 'privileged' in society, constituting 13.4% of the

population.

They use water mainly for swimming pools and hot tubs whilst the working class and the poor, who constitute over 60% of the population, use a measly 27.3% for basic needs like hygiene and for drinking.

Our country is known for its non-perennial rivers and shaky water supply, so one would think that since water scarcity is a reality staring all South Africans in the face, the privileged would be more mindful of their water use. Cape Town, being the centre of bourgeois opulence and pomp, follows trends of liberal cul-

"They must understand that we simply have nowhere to retreat to"

ture and vulgar consumerism. It would not be a stretch to call it the Little America of South Africa.

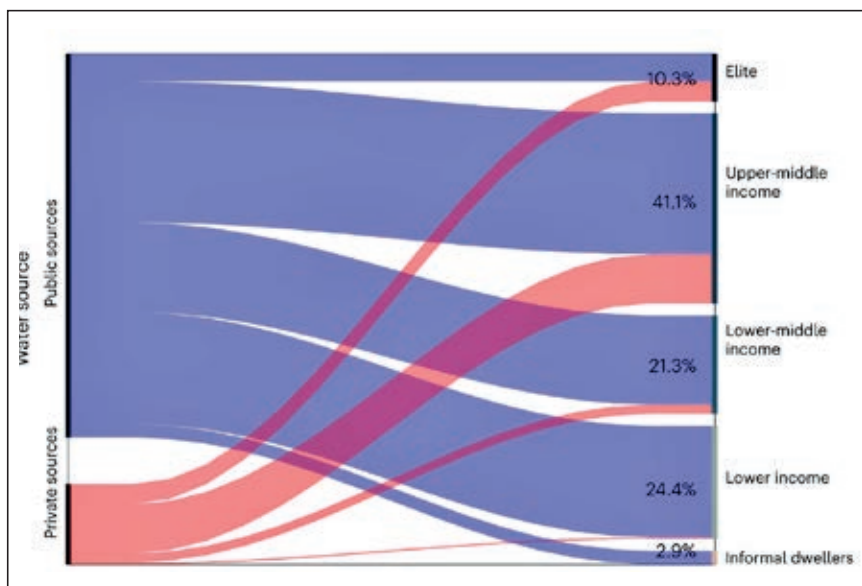
Remember Day Zero, Cape Town, circa 2018? This was news to the rich, but in the townships, Day Zero is a daily reality. Speaking to News24, Tammy Peterson, a community member from Kraaifontein, said that before the water crisis of 2017-18, the average water bill for the family was about R200. This has now shot up to R500, because of the mechanisms undertaken by the City to discourage misuse of water amidst the crisis.

This increase in tariff is both regressive and reactionary and not mindful of the conditions of the overwhelming majority in the municipality who simply cannot afford it. The working class suffer from the irresponsible use of water by the privileged.

A water tax must be implemented for non-essential use of water for those who are looking to enjoy luxuries, especially when the poor must walk to the nearest communal tap to get drinking water.

Water is a scarce resource and will become even more expensive as supply dwindles. This will lead to severe human suffering, famine and death. Unlike the 13.7% of the privileged, having enjoyed most of the water, who can at any time decide to pack up their life and leave us behind, the working class and the poor have no such options. Let us practice sustainable water consumption practices and, most importantly, hold the hypocritical City of Cape Town, together with the privileged, accountable! ★

1. Available at <https://rdcu.be/dkPES>



Cde Davids is a YCLSA National Committee Member

RED READS

Need material for the battle of ideas?
Check these out for branch discussions,
Party education and study

Capitalism in the Anthropocene – ecological ruin or ecological revolution

In this comprehensive study, **John Bellamy Foster** tells us that a globalised system of capital accumulation has induced humanity to foul its own nest. The result is a planetary emergency that threatens all present and future generations, throwing into question the continuation of civilisation and ultimately the very survival of humanity itself.

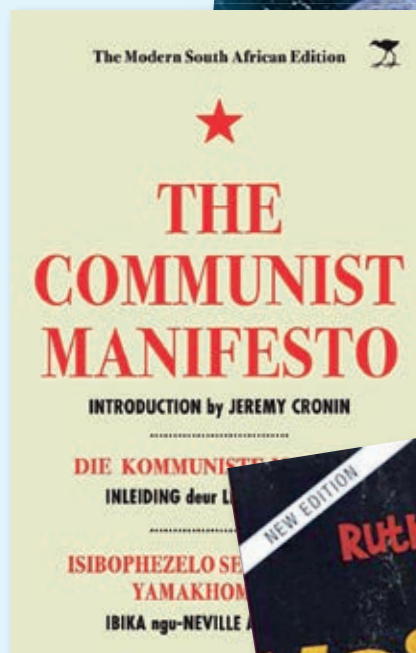
Available from *Left Word Books, New Delhi*
<https://mayday.leftword.com>



The Communist Manifesto: The Modern South African Edition

For Marx and Engels, politics is not just “the art of the possible”. It is also an ever-enquiring science of the probable, and a passionate engagement with what is desirable – a world in which, finally “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”.’

– *From the introduction by Jeremy Cronin.* Available from
Jacana Media jacana.co.za



Ruth First **Voices of Liberation**

This volume by **Don Pinnock** presents a brief biography of Cde Ruth First, followed by a selection of her writings as a political activist, scholar and journalist. The book presents a timeline summary of significant events in Ruth's life within the context of major socio-political events of the time. It concludes with a reflection on her legacy from a current perspective and offers a further reading list.

Available from <https://www.hsrcpress.ac.za>

