

# Introduction

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This volume of documents has been produced to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the South African Communist Party on July 30, 1921. Our Party, the oldest Communist Party on the African continent, has a long and proud history of struggle to its credit—struggle against the inhumanity and injustice of race and class oppression flowing from the pursuit of private profit, struggle for the achievement of a saner and juster non-racial and non-exploitative society in which all South Africans will enjoy equal rights and opportunities based on the common ownership of the means of production and distribution.

Officially the Communist Party of South Africa (as it was called during its legal period) was formed on July 30, 1921, with the merging at a conference in Cape Town of a number of like-minded organisations based in the main centres of the country and proclaiming the philosophy of Marxism. The most important of these founding bodies, the International Socialist League, was formed in Johannesburg in September 1915, and it was this date that was often referred to by the early leaders of the Party as its birthday. In fact, the separate existence of what we may regard as a Communist nucleus came about even earlier, in September 1914, when the true socialists within the Labour Party formed the War on War League inside the Party to give expression to their opposition to capitalism and war and their determination to uphold the international solidarity of labour in the fight for socialism.

‘Socialism’ and ‘internationalism’—these have been the watchwords of the South African Communists from that day to the present. Above all, the socialism for which the Communists strove was not utopian but based on the scientific principles of Marxism. It was because of their adherence to Marxism that the South African Communists, who started their crusade as a minority of whites among the white minority, were able to weld together in their ranks representatives of all the various sections of the population opposed to racism, white domination and capitalist exploitation. It was because of their Marxism that the South African Communists have remained one of the staunchest components of the international Communist movement aiming at the elimination of imperialism and the achievement of a world socialist order.

It has often been argued by our opponents that Communism was brought to our country by whites and foreigners, that it is an alien importation unacceptable to the indigenous majority. Our reply to this is that the concept of the brotherhood of man, of the sharing of the fruits of the earth, is common to all humanity, black and white, east and west, and has been

formulated in one form or another throughout history. As Marx and Engels put it in *The Communist Manifesto*:

‘The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes’.

The composition of the South African proletariat was something dictated by history, by white conquest and settlement, the importation of capital following the discovery of gold and diamonds, the immigration of skilled white labour from abroad, the press-ganging of unskilled labour from the ranks of the dispossessed blacks. *The Communist Manifesto* also pointed out:

‘The Communists are distinguished from other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole. The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement’.

The immediate aim of the Communists, said *The Manifesto*, is the formation of the proletariat into a class, the overthrow of bourgeois supremacy, and the conquest of political power by the proletariat who constitute the immense majority of the population. Under the circumstances prevailing in South Africa at the time, it was inevitable that it was whites who would take the lead in the formation of a Communist Party. But it is a matter of record that the whites who pioneered our movement, men like W.H. Andrews, D. Ivon Jones, S.P. Bunting and their colleagues, realised from the outset that, if it was true, as they proclaimed, that ‘socialism, to be effective, must be international’, it was equally true that ‘an internationalism which does not concede the fullest rights which the Native working class is capable of claiming will be a sham’.

From the outset the Communists sought to bring the black workers into their movement, held aloft the banner of equal rights for all. They helped form some of the first black trade unions, sought cooperation with the various black organisations like the African National Congress and the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU), the African People’s Organisation (APO) and the Indian Congress, involved themselves in the day-to-day struggle of the people against oppression. As blacks consolidated their position in the ranks of the proletariat, so the composition of the Communist Party was altered. Whereas in 1915 the International Socialist League had been composed only of whites, 15 years later the overwhelming majority of Communist Party members were



Africans, and men like J.B. Marks, Albert Nzula, Moses Kotane, Edwin Mofutsanyana, John Gomas, James La Guma, Johannes Nkosi and others were to be counted among the leaders, responsible for framing policies and implementing decisions. Today our party faithfully reflects at all levels the composition of the working class and liberation movement of our country.

Our Communist Party was always a party of militants and activists and we never had room for passengers. Our Party members have been in the thick of every people's struggle since the First World War – in the ceaseless campaigns against the pass laws, the fight for higher wages and better working conditions, the fight against fascism and war, the mineworkers' strikes of 1920, 1922 and 1946, the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the campaign for the Congress of the People and the adoption of The Freedom Charter, the bus boycotts, the resistance to apartheid, segregation and dispossession. The mass movement against white domination headed by the African National Congress which has assumed such vast proportions today, striking ever more effective blows against the racist enemy, extends far beyond our ranks, but we are an essential part of it, and the unique value of our contribution is recognised by friends and enemies alike. Our Party members have been tried and tested in battle. Thousands of them have been arrested and jailed, many have died at the hands of the police. We have proved ourselves in action as the party of the working class.

Decade after decade we have campaigned and fought, organised and mobilised, taught and propagandised, carrying our message into every corner of the land, holding aloft the banner of Marxism-Leninism at the head of the people's army. The course we have followed has not always been smooth. We have had our setbacks and reverses; we have endured the disasters of repression and dissolution, the self-inflicted torments of sectarianism, but we have succeeded in reforming our ranks and revitalising ourselves. Rooted in the working class of South Africa whose mission will not be completed until capitalism is overthrown and replaced by people's democracy leading to a socialist society, the Party has proved itself to be a vanguard organisation in the best tradition, constantly seeking the way forward to the new South Africa outlined in its programme, steadfastly testing in action the theories formulated at our conferences. Our members have shown themselves resourceful, courageous and adaptable, winning for the Party the confidence of its allies in the liberation struggle. And we have had our victories, steadily advancing the cause of the workers and the forward positions of our freedom fighters.

The principle which has guided all our efforts has been the need to build up the broadest united front of patriotic and anti-racist forces in the struggle against white domination. It was in pursuit of this aim that our Party explored the relationship between the national and class struggles in South Africa, and formulated in its 1962 programme the concept of 'colonialism of a special type' which provided the theoretical basis for yoking together the forces of national liberation and working class revolution. At this, the stage of the national democratic revolution the main component of which in the South African context is the national liberation of the

African people, the main thrust of the revolutionary forces is to forge the broadest possible unity of the masses and of all strata of the people for the overthrow of the hated racist regime. In pursuance of this objective the Freedom Charter adopted at the Congress of the People in 1955 has become the immediate programme of the national liberation alliance and the short-term programme of our Party. At its augmented Central Committee meeting in 1979 the Party declared:

‘Our Party is a vital component of the revolutionary alliance for national liberation headed by the African National Congress. As such it has no interests separate from any contingent of that alliance which we have always worked to strengthen. This approach does not stand in conflict with our belief that our Party has an independent role to play as a constituent part of the alliance, but also as the political vanguard of the proletariat whose special historical role as the grave-digger of capitalism and the builder of socialism we have always safeguarded’.

In the formulation of our policies, and in their implementation, we have benefited immeasurably from the guidance and assistance of the international communist movement, and are confident that in turn, through our own work and experience, we have contributed our share to the storehouse of international revolutionary theory and strengthened the cause of proletarian internationalism. At a time when the desperation of the imperialists and the adventurism of the Chinese hegemonists threaten the world with war and nuclear destruction, it is our unshakeable belief that it is the duty of every communist party to strengthen its ties with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries and to consolidate the ranks of the international communist movement. In the words of our 1979 Central Committee resolution:

‘There is no room for “neutrals” in the struggle to eliminate from the world the last vestiges of colonialism and racism, to win for all peoples the right to real freedom and independence, the right to live in peace and security from the cradle to the grave’.

This book is not a history of the Communist Party in South Africa. Our publishing house, Inkululeko Publications, has already issued a number of works interpreting our past and present roles, and new contributions appear regularly in our journal *The African Communist*. What we present here is the raw material of our history – the statements, articles and speeches of leaders and members of our Party, the relevant sections of our past constitutions and programmes, the reports and resolutions of our conferences and central committee meetings, so that the present-day reader can see events, not with the sometimes biased or patronising wisdom of hindsight, but in the context in which our predecessors (and some of us at the time) viewed them. We do this, not with a view to passing judgment or making excuses, but to enable the reader to understand the reasoning and motives of our Party leaders and members in reaching the conclusions they did, what led them to formulate this policy or pass that resolution. Historians often err in assessing the past according to the standards and perspectives of today, without asking themselves whether the options which are open today were available at the time. We hope this collection of evidence will help to explain our history. To be



able to listen to our Party spokesmen stating their case at the various crisis points of the past will, we hope, deepen appreciation of their efforts and achievements, their persistence and determination.

We Communists, being human, are fallible and often make mistakes, but one thing which can never be held against us is that we have failed to act in the spirit of the words of Marx inscribed on his grave:

**‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.’**

We have never ceased striving to change South Africa from the hell that it is today for the majority of our people groaning under the vicious burdens of apartheid, into a free society in which class and colour discrimination and exploitation will be abolished once and for all. At all times when our people have been faced with a challenge from the enemy backed by his brutal, trigger-happy armed forces, our Party responded to the challenge with the appropriate course of action decided upon after careful analysis of the objective conditions at the time. This is what led our Party in 1961 to allocate some of our members to join with their counterparts in the African National Congress in the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, now grown into an effective liberation force striking ever more effective blows against the enemy’s laager.

Looking back on our history, perhaps this can be reckoned the hallmark of our achievement – that, guided by the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, we have never ceased to organise the South African working class and lead them in the struggle for liberation. Confident in the justice of our cause, that we speak and act in the interests of the overwhelming majority of our people, we have always looked to the future with optimism. We are convinced that the record of our work contained in this book will justify the confidence placed in us by the South African working class and inspire greater efforts from all freedom fighters in the struggle for liberation.

The documents reproduced in this book have been selected and edited by comrade Brian Bunting. The result is a fighting record of more than 60 years of struggle of which the South African Communist Party can be justly proud.