

## LEARNING FROM CHRIS HANI by Ronnie Kasrils

On returning home from exile Chris Hani referred in many a speech of the need for political tolerance. What a contrast to the current leader of the SACP, Blade Nzimande, and the invective he spews at his opponents or those he simply does not agree with. The Public Protector tells "white lies" and comrades who oppose the ANC are insulted as "factory rejects" and "enemy agents" similar insults hurled at Hani in 1969 for speaking out against corruption and nepotism in the then ANC. ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe descends to similar abuse, detracting and undermining serious political debate.

What sad commentaries these two and their acolytes let loose as they rush to divert attention from the real substance of debate and desperately try to cover up the rotten state of affairs in the ruling party and government as the time comes for our fifth national election in a democratic South Africa. What has led to this current situation in which long standing members of the movement have taken a dramatic step to call on the public not to cast a vote for the ANC?.

The massacre at Marikana, the obscene expenditure at Nkandla are two of the most publicised events that come on top of a long series of scandals involving President Jacob Zuma and numbers of senior party and government officials. Good comrades within the structures of the movement have not been able to challenge these developments, let alone speak truth to power.

They believe that remaining within the movement and raising the issues they can alter the disastrous state of affairs, but to many of us the rot has gone too deep. The ANC, which we once thought of as being an exception to the rule, looks like going the route of other liberation movements that have lost their way.

This is why the Sidikiwe-Vukani campaign came into being. It calls on all registered voters to turn out at the polls on May 7 to make their mark in protest at the levels of corruption and the disastrous economic policies pursued by both the governing ANC and the major opposition, the Democratic Alliance.

Contrary to misleading media reports and to similarly misleading and often abusive comments from within the governing party, this campaign does not — and never has — advocated abstention from the electoral process. As democrats, we are encouraging the greatest possible involvement, calling on those millions of South Africans who usually abstain, to come out and vote.

But we say: don't vote for either of the two major parties that have worked in ways that contradict the spirit of the Freedom Charter and the Bill of Rights. At the same time, we are under no illusions that our call will result in the ANC losing the election nationally or the DA probably remaining the main opposition. I personally respect Helen Zille, but as a socialist I reject the DA's economic policies.

So we want to send a warning to the ANC that it can no longer take its traditional support base for granted. Many people are heartily fed up with the way the country is being run and with the policies pursued by both major parties, with the evident corruption at official levels and an electoral system that has alienated millions of voters.

As a result, there seem two choices: either vote tactically for a minority party this time round or spoil your ballot by writing NO across it. Whatever you do: become involved in the democratic process — it is your right.

Many of the matters we are complaining about have been raised within the ANC over the years, but there has been no improvement. In the light of recent scandals, things have become worse and I felt I could no longer remain silent.

From my point of view, therefore, the campaign is an example of tough love: I wish to do all I can to pull back, from the brink of disaster, the movement to which I devoted all of my adult life.

Mandela gave guidance when he said the people have the right to vote us out of power if we fail to deliver. Chris Hani said the same thing when he became secretary general of our once proud communist party.

He once noted: "If that ANC government doesn't deliver, I won't hesitate to march against them." He would then chuckle and add: "Look, it's going to be our government, the people's government, they won't teargas us or shoot us like this apartheid bunch."

How infinitely tragic that last remark.