

## **State Power**

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### **Foreword**

The document that follows is in two parts, and it forms the basis for discussions both inside and outside the SACP on the relationship of the SACP to state power in a democratic South Africa. These documents are official Central Committee Discussion Documents, but they do not constitute the official views of the SACP.

Amongst the issues that our Special National Congress (SNC) discussed in April 2005 in Durban was the question of whether the SACP should contest elections in its own right. Much as there was very fruitful and informative debate and discussions, the matter was not concluded by the SNC. That SNC took a resolution that the Central Committee must establish a commission to investigate the SACP's relationship to state power in the current period and into the future, including the question of whether the SACP should consider contesting elections in its own right.

In discussing this SNC resolution, the Central Committee felt that the best way to guide and conduct this debate must be through a structured discussion document, and this is what this special edition of Bua Komanisi contains. This document has been developed and approved by the Central Committee to facilitate such a discussion.

The Central Committee further decided that the General Secretary of the SACP must head the Commission with members of the Politburo as members of that Commission.

The terms of reference and programme of the Commission has already been adopted by the Central Committee. The work of the Commission will include engagements with all SACP structures, our allies, the broader democratic movement, progressive academics, the progressive NGO movement and the broader South African public that has an interest in one or the other on the question of the SACP's relationship to state power. In addition, the Commission will engage with fraternal parties and movements in different parts of the world.

The key questions through which the Commission will be engaging all these formations, which are also the questions we would like to use in approaching this discussion systematically, include the following:

1. A general political analysis and response to the discussion document, and attitude towards the possibility of SACP contesting elections on its own
2. Experiences of relevant organizations on contesting elections (pro and cons, strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities) and other matters to be taken into account by the left contesting elections in capitalist societies

3. Experiences with alliances, mass movements and the working class and its various formations
4. The importance and methods of mobilizing resources to contest elections
5. The relationship between the party and its public representatives
6. Modus operandi of a Party in power and its constitutional structures and mass mobilization, including the impact of an electoral party on party mobilization, and state and party relations
7. Some key considerations when in power or in opposition
8. Experiences with, and coverage by, media during and outside election campaigns, and the general behaviour and attitude of the media towards left parties

Part I of the Discussion Document broadly deals with the historical evolution and current status of the relationship between the SACP and the ANC, within the context of the three main contradictions that the national democratic revolution seeks to address, the class, national and gender contradictions. It aims to elicit discussions on the changing nature of this relationship, lessons that can be learnt out of it and the challenges in the immediate future.

Part II of the Discussion Document characterizes the kind of state we have built thus far since 1994, within the context of the evolving class struggles since the 1994 democratic breakthrough. This part ends by posing some very specific questions on some of the options facing the SACP on its relationship to state power and its electoral options.

We invite all our structures, our allies and other allied formations and fraternal organisations to engage with this Discussion Document and give us their frank and honest feedback, as part of answering the question of the relationship of the SACP to state power and its future electoral options. The SACP will also consciously seek to create numerous platforms for engagement with this Document and the questions under discussion.

The findings and recommendations of the Commission will be tabled for discussion and decision to the 12th Congress of the SACP, provisionally scheduled for July 2007.

Blade  
SACP General Secretary

Nzimande

**Part One**  
**Class, National and Gender Struggle in South Africa:**  
**The Historical Relationship between the ANC and the SACP.**

“Our claim that we are a vanguard party of the working class is in no way diminished by our close association with the national liberation front headed by the ANC... A Communist Party does not earn the honoured title of vanguard merely by proclaiming it. For example, a working class Party does not exercise its vanguard role in relation to the trade unions by capturing them or transforming them into wings of the Party, but rather by proving that the Party and its individual members are the most ideologically clear and the most devoted and loyal participants in the workers’ cause. The same principle applies to a situation such as ours in which the main immediate instrument for

the achievement of the aims of our national democratic revolution is a mass movement capable of galvanising all classes in an assault on racist power. The African National Congress is such an instrument and our loyal participation in the liberation front which it heads is in the best interests of the class whose vanguard we claim to be”

“It is clear that the dominant force in this alliance must be the working class and it is their supremacy in the new state that will emerge after victory, which will prevent our revolution from grinding to a halt at the point of a formal political take-over.” (“**The Way Forward from Soweto**” – Extracts from political report adopted by the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the SACP, April 1977)

The history of the SACP in South Africa can be captured, simultaneously if not principally, as the history of the relationship between national and class struggles in our country. It is a history of a struggle for socialism in a context where the immediate struggle is that of national liberation.

### **The conception of the national question and class struggles in the history of the SACP**

Our critics to the ‘left’ and right have always criticised the SACP for having either prioritised the national question at the expense of the class struggle, or the class struggle over the national. The ‘left’ has over the decades accused us of subjecting the class struggle to a nationalist, if not petty bourgeois, struggle. The right has always insisted that raising the issue of the class contradiction within our revolution threatens to undermine or weaken the unity of the liberation movement to fight against national, and racially based, oppression. We have of course always (correctly) insisted that the question in South Africa is not about which struggle is primary, the ‘class’ or the ‘national’. It is a question of properly grasping the relationship between the two. In addition we have also argued that the *fundamental* contradiction is the class contradiction – it is the key causal contradiction that helps to explain the underlying dynamics of South African society. The national contradiction remains the *dominant* contradiction – it is the contradiction that dominates virtually all facets of South African society.

Consequently our approach to the class and national struggles necessarily sought to pose the question of the exact nature of the relationship and ‘transition’ between the national liberation phase and socialism. The SACP has consistently, but sometimes not very clearly, proposed a set of answers to these and related questions. Much as there is a close relationship between:

- the articulation between “national” and “class struggle,” on the one hand; and
- the transition from national liberation to socialism, on the other.

These two sets of things are not identical. National and class struggles are always taking place whether consciously or otherwise in any struggle for liberation and independence. But the achievement of formal national liberation and independence may occur without a simultaneous or rapid transition to socialism. The distinction and relationship within and between these two sets of relationships have been a subject of decades of debates

within Marxism-Leninism. They are, perhaps, one of the key defining features of Marxism-Leninism in the era of imperialist colonial domination and exploitation.

For further conceptual clarification, the relationships outlined above are not reducible to the relationship between the ANC and SACP, though it could be argued that the dominant organisational expression of these relationships for most of 20th century South Africa was through the alliance and the relationship between these two formations.

### **From 1928 to 1962 – two stages with an uninterrupted connection**

The original tentative elaboration of the question of the relationship between the national and class struggles, and specifically the question of a transition from a national democracy to socialism was articulated for the South African reality in the 1928 '*Native Republic Thesis*'. This general strategic approach was subject to ongoing debate and increasingly more coherent elaboration, notably in the SACP's 1962 Programme, '*The Road to South African Freedom*':

"South Africa is not a colony but an independent state. Yet masses of our people enjoy neither independence nor freedom. The conceding of independence to South Africa by Britain in 1910 was not a victory over the forces of colonialism and imperialism. It was designed in the interests of imperialism. Power was transferred not into the hands of the masses of people of South Africa, but into the hands of the White minority alone. The evils of colonialism, insofar as the non-White majority was concerned, were perpetuated and reinforced. A new type of colonialism was developed, in which the oppressing White nation occupied the same territory as the oppressed people themselves and lived side by side with them

"On one level, that of 'White South Africa', there are all the features of an advanced capitalist state in its final stage of imperialism. There are highly developed industrial monopolies, and the merging of industrial and finance capital... But on another level, that of 'Non-White South Africa', there are all the features of a colony. The indigenous population is subjected to extreme national oppression, poverty and exploitation, lack of all democratic rights..."

The 1962 Programme thus characterised this political and economic regime as 'Colonialism of a Special Type'. Incidentally the 1962 Programme does not in any way argue for a 'two-stage' revolution, first national liberation and second, a transition to socialism, though a number of indirect inferences and interpretations can be made from the programme to this effect. For example in talking about the SACP's unqualified support for the Freedom Charter, the 1962 programme states:

"The Freedom Charter is not a programme for socialism. It is a common programme for a free, democratic South Africa, agreed on by socialists and non-socialists... (The SACP) considers that the achievement of its aims will answer the pressing and immediate needs of the people and lay the indispensable basis for the advance of our country along non-capitalist lines to a communist and socialist future"

Clearly the relationship between national democracy and the transition to socialism is seen as being incorporated in the implementation of the demands of the Freedom Charter. The 1962 programme further conceptualises this relationship in its economic development proposals thus:

“In order to ensure South Africa’s independence, the Party will press for the strengthening of the state sector of the economy, particularly in the fields of heavy industry, machine tool building and fuel production. It will seek to place control of the vital sectors of the economy in the hands of the national democratic state and to correct historic injustice, by demanding the nationalisation of the mining industry, banking and monopoly industrial establishments, thus also laying the foundation for the advance to socialism”

The 1962 programme distinguishes between national liberation and socialism, but, at the same time, conceptualises these struggles as inextricably linked. It also seems that the Party had anticipated a transition from national democracy within the framework, of a ‘*non-capitalist path*’ in the post liberation phase of the national democratic revolution – although this concept is never explicitly evoked for the South African revolution.

However no real details were provided on how this would concretely unfold, perhaps for the understandable reason that the actual trajectory of the NDR would be determined by the historical conditions, both global and domestic, and, by implication, the nature of the transition itself. Of course we said we would be guided by the classic Marxist-Leninist approach, ‘Concrete analysis of concrete conditions’, which would determine the appropriate course of action. However, and interestingly, the 1962 Programme talks about an ‘*uninterrupted*’ transition from national liberation to socialism, again without any detailed elaboration of the meaning of ‘uninterrupted’.

Perhaps some of the omissions and lack of further elaboration at the time of drafting the ‘Road to South African Freedom’, derived from other contingent factors that shaped its conception of the relationship between the national liberation struggle and the struggle for socialism. It was drafted during one of the most difficult times of our revolution, the banning of the ANC in 1960, exile and imprisonment of many of our leaders and cadres, the declaration of South Africa as a republic in 1961, thus consolidating apartheid rule, and in the process creating many other uncertainties.

Cde Shubin (“The ANC, A view from Moscow”) for instance details some of the many challenges and complications facing the movement as a whole at this time. The priority, under conditions of illegality, was to forge maximum possible unity within the Congress movement and its components, thus for a number of years creating uncertainty as to whether to revive SACP structures, when everything should be thrown into rebuilding structures of the ANC as the prime liberation movement. For instance Cde Shubin hints at another consideration, supposedly suggested by sections of the CPSU to some in the SACP at the time, that perhaps, like in China and Vietnam, the liberation alliance must be headed by the communist party.

## **1962 and Morogoro, a shared assumption about global trends**

The 1962 programme was also premised on what was to be later also elaborated and adopted at the ANC's Morogoro Conference of 1969, that the world was in a transition from capitalism to socialism. Amongst other things, the SACP's "Road to South African Freedom" characterised this global trend thus:

"The SACP regards as a dogmatic distortion of Marxism, the concept that African countries which are in a precapitalist stage of development must necessarily pass through a period of capitalism before achieving socialism. We are living in the epoch of the transition, on a world scale, from capitalism to socialism. The experience of the Soviet Asian Republics, of People's China, Vietnam, the People's Republic of Korea, and People's Mongolia, show that in our epoch it is possible for the people of colonial countries to advance along non-capitalist lines towards the building of socialism"

Clearly the analysis of the SACP and (more or less explicitly) the ANC's Morogoro analysis assumed a 'global' trend that was fostering the possibility of a relatively short and relatively uninterrupted transition period between a national democratic breakthrough and a transition to socialism in South Africa.

From the above it is therefore clear that a particular confluence of developments in the 1960s to the 1980s (possibility of 'non-capitalist' path to socialism or a socialist oriented national democracy against the background of a 'world wide transition from capitalism to socialism', the close resemblance between the SACP's 1962 programme and the ANC's Morogoro Strategy and Tactics of 1969, whose similarity were to be further strengthened in the ANC's 'Green Book' of August 1979<sup>[1]</sup>, and the overlapping leadership of ANC and SACP) embodied a common assumption about the relationship between the attainment of national democracy and a transition to socialism. All this did not necessitate a thorough discussion and elaboration of this relationship and transition.

For instance, the 1979 'Green Book' had, amongst other things, this to say on the longer-term objectives of the national democratic revolution:

"We debated the more long-term aims of our national democratic revolution, and the extent to which the ANC, as a national movement, should tie itself to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and publicly commit itself to the socialist option. The issue was posed as follows:

"In the light of the need to attract the broadest range of social forces amongst the oppressed to the national democratic liberation, a direct or indirect commitment at this stage to a continuing revolution which would lead to a socialist order may unduly narrow this line-up of social forces. It was also argued that the ANC is not a party, and its direct or open commitment to socialist ideology may undermine its basic character as a broad national movement.

"It should be emphasised that no member of the Commission had any doubts about the ultimate need to continue our revolution towards a socialist order; the issue was posed only in relation to the tactical considerations of the present stage of our struggle.

“The seizure of power by the people must be understood not only by us but also by the masses as the beginning of the process in which the instruments of state will be used to progressively destroy the heritage of all forms of national and social inequality. To postpone advocacy of this perspective until the first stage of democratic power has been achieved is to risk dominance within our revolution by purely nationalist forces which may see themselves as replacing the white exploiters at the time of the people’s victory. We emphasise again, however, that, as was the case with organisations such as FRELIMO and MPLA (both of which committed themselves to the aim of abolishing the exploitation of man by man early on in their struggle), care must be exercised in the way we project ourselves publicly on this question.”

Against the back-drop of these assumptions, the ‘Green Book’ made the following further recommendations:

“We are of the view that our fundamental strategic objectives must be thoroughly understood not only at all levels of our movement, but that we should also do more than in the past to convey their content amongst the people in a form which will be understood. We therefore regard our proposed Document as primarily serving the purpose of defining the issues more sharply for ourselves as a movement. The elaboration of the main contents for mass circulation and education will require additional popular elaboration and presentation.”

The convergence of strategic thinking in the senior leadership at the time embraced a common understanding of the trajectory of the NDR post-liberation and a common identification of the principal motive force of such a trajectory. The ‘Green Book’ captured these in the following terms:

“The aims of our national democratic revolution will only be fully realised with the construction of a social order in which all the historic consequences of national oppression and its foundation, economic exploitation, will be liquidated, ensuring the achievement of real national liberation and social emancipation. An uninterrupted advance towards this ultimate goal will only be assured if within the alignment of revolutionary forces struggling to win the aims of our national democratic revolution, the dominant role is played by the oppressed working people.”

The Party had also understood that the main organisational vehicle to achieve the goals of these shared political perspectives beyond just the NDR, was the Alliance, primarily between the ANC and the SACP. During the underground period these shared perspectives evolved into a deeper relationship and conscious collaboration between communists, the ANC, and MK, with communists occupying prominent and leading positions in the latter two formations.

A rupture amongst the leading cadre of our movement in a shared strategic assumption

There has clearly been a significant rupture that dates back to at least 1990 (and probably before) in these common strategic and tactical perspectives. There are, of course, important objective reasons for this. The revolutionary optimism and strong Marxist-Leninist influence in, for instance, the ANC’s Morogoro “Strategy and Tactics,” was not unique to the ANC national liberation movement. In the three post-war decades

between 1945-75, the revolutionary epicentre shifted “southwards” – China, North Korea, Cuba, SE Asia, southern Africa – one after another, progressive national liberation struggles led by Marxists came to power and paved the way for advances (real or apparent) to socialism. However, the 1980s witnessed destabilisation and stagnation in many of these NDRs, and, most dramatically of all, the collapse of the Soviet bloc itself. In Southern Africa, early declarations of bold advances towards socialism in some of our neighbouring countries proved to be unsustainable and ended in open or disguised retreats into compradorist and parasitic brands of capitalism.

These events, often experienced directly by ANC and SACP cadres in exile, naturally had a profound ideological impact on our movement. As the ANC moved towards assuming state power, the leading cadreship within the ANC (and SACP) were faced with a basic choice:

- either reformist-revisionism – affirm that the NDR “stage” was (and had “always been understood as”) a “capitalist” stage, a stage in which capitalism had to be “completed” – i.e. “deracialised” and in which there was no “uninterrupted” transition. In this scenario socialism is a relatively distant and quite separate “second stage.” The role of the Party in the present becomes relatively insignificant. This position, which was chosen by a significant portion of the former leading cadre within the Party itself, has gone on to be the dominant (but increasingly insecure) perspective of the ANC. It is essentially a *revisionist* position (it often invokes Marxist-Leninist categories by way of self-justification, but with their dialectical/struggle content revised out of them). It is also *reformist* (it argues that the NDR can be “completed” through the reform of capitalism);
- or re-affirm the thoroughly dialectical inter-connection in an advanced capitalist formation like SA between the NDR and a socialist transition (essentially the strategic viewpoint of both the SACP’s *Road to South African Freedom* AND the ANC’s *Morogoro Strategy and Tactics*.) However, to re-affirm this perspective in the 1990s also required a struggle for the *renewal* and *revitalisation* of socialism – a project taken up by the leading cadre that remained in the Party after 1990, and the new cadre that joined.

### **Is the present mode of functioning of the alliance appropriate to the new realities?**

Given these developments, in the light of this “rupture” in the former unity between leading elements of the ANC and SACP (as represented in, for instance, *The Green Book*) is the mode of functioning of the Alliance, inherited from the earlier period, still relevant for the current period? Is the organisational form of the Alliance, amongst other things, not based on the array of forces within our movement prior to 1990, but now seeing a qualitatively new dimension in the actual relationship of national and class struggles (and consequently the relationship between the ANC and SACP) in the era after the democratic breakthrough?

Perhaps it could also be argued that another historical reality that had shaped (and continued to shape the character of the SACP throughout the exile years), the SACP’s approach to the relationship between the national and class struggles, and the



'transition' from a liberated South Africa to socialism, was the fact that the SACP had been banned for 10 years prior to the banning of the ANC. This reality forced party cadres, and arguably the SACP itself as an organisation, to operate primarily 'through other structures'. To what extent did this reality also shape the relationship between the SACP and ANC throughout the underground and exile years? In the process to what extent did this create 'the Party of Kotane', somewhat submerging its own identity and independent programmes in favour of building the ANC as the first 'frontline' of contact with the mass of our people, a task the Party nevertheless carried out with distinction?

It is also worth noting that the 1996 class project simultaneously sought to reshape the ANC as a modern political party, whilst simultaneously appealing to past traditions of the pre-1990 alliance ostensibly to 'imprison' the SACP and the left to 'outmoded' alliance traditions and methods as an attempt to 'liquidate' it. This was argued in terms of 'this is no longer the SACP of Kotane' whilst rapidly dismantling the ANC of Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela, largely using the new terrain of ascendancy to state power – another dimension of 'neo-bonapartism' as will be argued below.

### **A brief overview of, and lessons from, the concrete struggles and experiences of the SACP on the relationship between the class and national struggles, 1921-1990**

The theoretical elaborations outlined above were indeed not derived from simply the theory of the SACP, but rooted in a very rich history of struggle and sacrifice by communists on both the 'national' and 'class' terrains. The key strategic and theoretical orientation towards national and class struggles emerged out of a complex and sometimes contradictory history of actual struggle in South African.

The SACP (then CPSA) was born into one of the most challenging and complicated periods in the history of class and national struggles in South Africa. The very first test for the SACP was the 1922 white mine-workers revolt on the Rand, an event that was to leave a lasting imprint on the SACP's approach to national and class struggles in South Africa. The 1922 white miners' rebellion was an heroic rebellion against mining capital, but at the same time it was a rebellion opposing the employment of more black workers into categories of employment reserved for white workers, and the notoriously racist slogan 'Workers of the World Unite, For a White South Africa' was even used. The SACP was faced with a difficult choice of whether or not to support this working class uprising against the mining capitalists, while significant sectors of this working class rebellion were inspired by a racist defence of white workers' interests.

Contrary to some of the historical accounts of the SACP response to this rebellion, the SACP identified with the rebellion, but at the same time distanced itself from the slogan and its content, calling instead for unity between black and white mineworkers. But the aftermath of this strike was to cause a sometimes acrimonious debate within the ranks of the Party for some years to come. It was a debate that at some stage led to some of the Party leaders calling for separate trade union organisation for black and white workers as the best way to respond to the separate national expression of the class struggle at the time.

However the positive outcome from these lessons, was for the Party, largely at the instigation of the Young Communist League in the mid twenties, to focus on recruiting

more black workers into the ranks of the Party, and to focus increasingly on the organisation of black workers into the fledgling black trade union movement (See Bunting, in AC no 169 – 2/3/4th Quarter, 2005). In the process the Party had to sacrifice some of its leaders, who either did not have confidence in organising Africans, and those calling for separate black and white union and CPSA structures.

It was therefore no accident that by 1924 the membership of the Party was more than 90% black African, though senior leadership positions were still dominated by whites. The increasing orientation of the Party towards the African majority, plus the intervention of the Comintern, was ultimately to find expression in the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis in 1928, which called for the establishment of a native republic as a stage towards a socialist republic. The resolution further enjoined the Party to work closely with the ANC, an African organisation identified at the time as having the most potential to become a revolutionary nationalist organisation.

However the Native Republic Thesis was not fully accepted by all within the Communist Party at the time, for various reasons, including disbelief that a largely liberal, petty-bourgeois ANC that was extremely small at the time, could emerge as a significant revolutionary force. Inside the Party there was resistance from some of the leadership and cadres to what they saw as the subjection of the class to the national struggle. This was happening in the wake of a “right” and then “ultra-left” swings (and even serious purges) within the Comintern., with , Stalin led, shift in the Comintern, focused on waging class struggle against class.

On the ANC side, during the 1930s and 1940s there was significant hostility towards the SACP from leading figures in the movement, ostensibly on the grounds of white domination in leading Party structures and hostility towards communism as a ‘foreign’ ideology. Josiah Gumede, President of the ANC in the early 1930s visited the Soviet and returned publicly proclaiming that he had seen the new ‘Jerusalem’ he was removed at the next ANC Conference by a grouping led by Pixley Seme.

All the above marked a contradictory expression between the class and the national question. Resistance (often of a relatively conservative liberal variety) in some quarters of the ANC to working with the SACP continued through the 1940s. In the late-1940s a more radical Africanist anti-communism was articulated by an emerging group of youth leaders, including Anton Lembede, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo, who in 1949 worked together to form the ANC Youth League.

On the side of the SACP the factionalist struggles of the 1930s were brought under control through Moses Kotane taking over the leadership of the SACP in 1939, based on his famous Cradock Letter, which touched on a number of matters relating to the relationship between the national and class struggles as reflected inside the Party at the time. During the 1940s the SACP intensified its mass organisational work both through building non-racial, but predominantly African trade unions, and mass struggles on many fronts, and this brought about higher levels of unity inside the Party. It was during this period – the golden decade of the SACP – that the Party made a lasting mark on the South African liberation struggle, and set the scene and the context for the ANC YL and leading Party members in the leadership of the ANC to impel a shift of the ANC from a petitioning organisation to mass struggle and mobilisation. It was this heightened mass

activism of the Party that drew the ire and attention of the National Party, thus banning it in 1950, only two years after the NP ascended to power.

The launch of the ANC's 1952 Defiance Campaign marked a qualitative improvement in relations between communist activists and the rest of the liberation movement, underlining the important positive impact of mass activism on the alliance's functioning, a lesson equally valid for the contemporary period. As pointed out above, however, it was a period in which, now underground, communists operated through other organisations, not as communist fronts but as legitimate sites of communist participation and activism.

However the ever persistent simultaneous problematic and necessity of the articulation of the class and national struggles in our revolution, as expressed through the relationship between the ANC and the SACP, manifested itself during the 1950s. The then banned CPSA resuscitated itself underground in 1953 as the SACP. After this resuscitation there was an extensive and fractious debate inside the underground SACP on whether to publicly announce its resuscitation, whose resolution was partly achieved only in 1959.

There were two, fairly entrenched, positions on this matter between 1953 and 1959. The one position argued that the SACP should defiantly announce its resuscitation as an underground organisation, partly to express defiance to the banning by the apartheid regime, but most critically to rebuild the confidence of the membership and supporters of the communist party amongst the people. The other position strenuously opposed this on the grounds that this would affect the smooth functioning of communists in other organisations that were legal then, principally the ANC. This position argued that the standing and respect for communist leaders working in other organisations could be compromised as their arguments and positions could be seen as positions canvassed and secretly caucused in the underground SACP structures. It is even rumoured that one of the secret Central Committee meetings immediately after the rebuilding of the Party underground took a majority decision to publicly announce the existence of the Party, but refrained after Kotane and Dadoo, respectively General Secretary and Chairperson threatened to resign as they were adherents of the second position.

The intensity of the debate on whether the Party was to announce its existence or not continued, until a compromise, albeit temporary, was reached in 1959 that at least a publication propagating communist ideas must be published and circulated underground so that the ideas of the Party should not be forgotten by the people. That compromise led to the publication of the first issue of the 'African Communist' in 1959. It was announced not as a publication of the underground SACP, but as a 'Forum for Marxist-Leninist Thought in Africa'. The ANC (and the Indian and Coloured Peoples' Congresses) continued to loom large in the affairs and conduct of the Party, as one particular expression of the relationship of the national and class struggles 'in the concrete conditions' of the South African revolution at the time. What lessons can we learn from this history?

The pronouncement by the Party in the early 1960s – after the banning of the ANC in 1960 – that it existed as an underground organisation, resolved the internal party debate on the pronouncement, but set the Party a new dilemma. All this was happening

in the midst of deeper co-ordination and collaboration between communists and the national liberation movement. Shubin details the resistance by ANC leadership to the re-establishment of Party structures in the underground, as this would divert from, if not compromise, the unity of the movement during one of its most difficult periods. Moses Kotane, then General Secretary of the SACP, was reluctant to permit the rebuilding of the SACP structures in exile as he thought this could disrupt the unity of the ANC, as all communists were in any case members of the ANC.

A similar debate also ensued in Robben Island in the 1970s and 1980s, around a paper written by the High Command, titled "Inqindi ne Marxism" (Nationalism and Socialism). Unfortunately very little has been written about this very important debate except by Cde Ahmed Kathrada in his recently published memoirs. This perhaps became the longest running debate in Robben Island on the character of our struggle, was it nationalist or socialist, as well as on the relationship between the two struggles and consequently the relationship between the ANC and the SACP.

This debate in Robben Island was partly occasioned by reluctance by some of the leadership to permit the establishment of Party cells, as these were seen as having the potential of dividing the energies of the movement, instead of focusing on building the ANC as the leading national liberation movement. This debate also arose within the context of the intake of greater numbers of young black prisoners in the wake of the 1976 student uprisings and intensified mass struggles into the 1980s. The trigger seems to have been around what type of political education should be conducted in the Island, a re-telling of the history of the ANC or Marxism or both.

Although a detailed study and debate about the SACP during the thirty years of its joint underground and exile with the ANC is still urgently needed, it is important to highlight briefly some of the aspects of the articulation and relationship between the national and class struggles, and consequently the relationship between the ANC and SACP during this period, 1960-1990. Two critical periods propelled the rebuilding of the SACP underground structures and its aggressive public stance as an independent party in its own right, though within the alliance.

The first period was the huge intake of young activists into the exile, underground and prison structures of the movement in the wake of the 1976 student uprisings. These were militant young cadres, many strongly influenced by Black Consciousness. The movement identified the need for intense political education to harness the militancy of this generation to the ideological traditions of the ANC alliance. At this time the hegemonic ideology inside the (exiled) ANC was Marxism-Leninism. This ideological hegemony was typical of many radical national liberation movements of the time, but it also reflected the influence of the SACP and of the Soviet Union. These combined realities led to the easing up on the part of the ANC on the creation of SACP underground structures, though this matter had been partly resolved already in the late 1960s. In addition many of these students were sent for both military and political training to the Soviet Union, Cuba and other socialist countries that were firmly supporting the ANC.

A second factor that thrust the SACP forward as an independent political organisation, within the context of the alliance with the ANC and the South African Congress of Trade

Unions (SACTU), was the rise of a mass-based progressive trade union movement and the growing popularity of socialism within the country. The approach to socialism within the organised working class was, however, quite diverse, ranging from pro-SACP perspectives to various “workerist” ideologies, some of which were essentially radical syndicalist perspectives, others were essentially reformist. Many of these latter currents were explicitly or implicitly anti-ANC, anti-UDF and, indeed, anti-SACP. The contest over a correct socialist programme and perspective for the South African reality became a key ideological struggle within the popular and worker movement in the 1980s. It was not a struggle for which the ANC was equipped and it became imperative for the SACP to build a more explicit ideological and organisational presence within South African and within the worker and mass movement.

The rise of workerism was decisively strengthened by the (exiled) SACTU's, supported by the liberation movement as a whole, opposition to the new labour laws after the Wiehahn Commission recommendations of 1978 for the recognition and registration of predominantly black, and independent, trade unions, for the first time since the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1924. The workerist leadership of FOSATU successfully argued and convinced black workers about the advantages of registration despite existing constraints, and used this to build a strong union under FOSATU.

It was this development that, amongst others, led to the revival of the SACP's mass publication, *Umsebenzi*, in the mid 1980s under the leadership of the then General Secretary Joe Slovo. This was immediately followed by the historic *Umsebenzi* discussion pamphlet by Slovo, titled, ‘The working class and the national democratic revolution’. This propelled the party into the forefront of some of the struggles of the organised black working class.

The central difference and debate between the Congress movement and the workerists was precisely on the nature of the relationship between the national and class struggles in South Africa's revolution, as well as the relationship between the struggle for national liberation and the struggle for socialism. Workerism postulated the primacy of the class struggle and that national oppression was primarily a function of (class-based) capital accumulation in South Africa's capitalism. Therefore, according to workerism, the primary form of organisation in taking forward the working class struggle was not the (petty bourgeois and ‘populist’ ANC and UDF) national liberation movement as led by the ANC, but trade union organisation on the shop-floor. This was essentially a syndicalist conception of the South African struggle, as the SACP correctly argued that the immediate terrain for advancing working class and socialist struggle was the national liberation struggle as embodied in the national democratic revolution. Inevitably the primary organisation to lead this ideological struggle against workerism was the South African Communist Party, and not the ANC. Many of these debates were also carried in the journal of the UDF, *Isizwe*. It was this prominent engagement by the SACP that also helped to further revive its internal underground organisation and further raised its prestige amongst workers and the overwhelming majority of our people, who directly and daily felt the consequences of national oppression, irrespective of their class location. It was a majority of South African population who felt the exploitation of capitalism through brutal (racialised) national oppression.

## **The SACP in the 1990s Re-emerging into legality in a contradictory situation**

The SACP re-emerged in 1990 from 40 years of illegality into a thoroughly contradictory situation. On the one hand, within our country, the Party's popularity and legitimacy had probably never been higher in what was, by then, nearly 7 decades of communist organisation and struggle in the southern part of the African continent.

On the other hand, the communist tradition of which we were part, was in the midst of its most serious crisis – with the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the impending break-up of the Soviet Union. Was our communist tradition on its last legs? Was this the end of a tradition that traced its origins to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, and the 1919 formation of the 3rd Communist International? (Of course, our traditions also stretch back to the 19th century development of Marxism and the consolidation of mass worker parties, and to still earlier socialist and revolutionary traditions.)

We did not, as the SACP have the luxury of being able to devote all of our attention to this contradictory reality. For, at the very same time, the SACP and many of its key leading cadres, were actively involved in the complex negotiations process. Our leading cadres were also active in helping communities confront and deal, as best as possible, with the vicious low intensity conflict that was launched against them in the midst of the negotiations. As pressing as the organisational demands on the newly re-emerged SACP were, we also understood that the key organisational priority was the building of a mass-based ANC. Many leading communists devoted their energies more or less full time to this latter task.

But we could not avoid taking responsibility for the contradictory reality in which, specifically as South African communists, we found ourselves. Directly related to this contradictory reality, two issues occupied considerable SACP attention in the early 1990s:

The first question we confronted was around the **organisational form** that the newly legalised Party should assume. For nearly 40 years the SACP had been a relatively small organisation, in exile and in the underground. It was organised as a tight vanguard formation, with membership being accorded only after relatively prolonged probation. This organisational character was partly based on Leninist principles, but it was also very much the consequence of our clandestine character, the fact that we had been banned ten years before the ANC, and a division of labour had evolved within the alliance, in which the Party focused considerably on the ideological formation of cadres within the broader movement. In the debates of the early 1990s, there were many comrades who favoured the retention of a tight, relatively small, cadre party. However, there were two potential problems with this approach –

Tens of thousands of experienced cadres from the workers and other mass movements were clamouring to join the Party at the time. Many of them had been Party supporters through the 1970s and 80s, but had not been able to “locate” underground Party units to be effectively integrated.

If we were to run a tight, vanguard Party based on recruitment by invitation and probation, around what clear ideological basis would this be done, and who would be

the probationers? The fact is that, at that time, there was considerable ideological fluidity and ferment within the Party. Given the second challenge, related to the international crisis of the communist movement, this inner-SACP ideological fluidity was both understandable and necessary. An attempt to run a tight probationary process, for instance, could have risked serious factionalism and endangered the unity of the Party.

However, it was also recognised, in the midst of this organisational debate that, if the Party was to take its commitment to an NDR and its alliance with the ANC seriously, and if it were to add value to these, then a simple duplication of the ANC's broad mass organisational character was not required. The Party had to "add value" as a communist formation, and not simply duplicate.

At our 1991 Congress we "resolved" this particular debate by declaring that the SACP should be a "mass-vanguard" party. As we noted at our 10th Congress, this was not necessarily a very elegant resolution of the debate at the time, but it was a creative and still open-ended approach to the actual realities of our concrete situation.

Since the early 1990s, we have come a considerable way, not just in debating the issue, but also in actual experience of organising significant party political machinery, with an effective presence throughout SA.

But while we were busy with this inner-party debate about our organisational character, we were also confronted with the deepening crisis in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In 1989, the general secretary of the Party, cde Joe Slovo had written an important intervention, "Has Socialism Failed?," in response to the growing crisis. The main thesis developed by Slovo was that it was not socialism that was failing in the Soviet bloc, but a distorted version of it. Essentially, he argued, the socialist systems in those countries had failed to nurture and deepen democracy, and this parting of ways between democracy and socialism was killing socialism itself.

Slovo's intervention was to have an important influence on debate in South Africa – indeed, many communist and left forces around the world used the Slovo pamphlet.

Especially in the first four years or so, from 1990, there was considerable debate within our Party around Slovo's perspectives, there were important differences with, and corrections and amendments made to Slovo's theses. What the pamphlet empowered was, however, an open and dynamic debate, sanctioned, as it were, by the general secretary of the time himself. It meant that our Party was not left speechless in front of the spectacle of a Soviet Union in full dissolution. We were able to keep the flag of socialism flying, without being stuck in a dogmatic rut. Indeed, we came to realise that one reason (not the only, and not the most important) to sustain an SACP was, precisely, to have an organised mass forum in which to assess the communist legacy. If we had abandoned the Party at that time, this necessary collective process of self-criticism, assessment and renewal could never have happened.

## **Part of an international socialist renewal**

It is important, now in 2005, to remember just how important the South African democratic breakthrough in 1994 was for left, socialist and progressive forces around the world. 1994 came against the back-drop of a generalised, world-wide rolling back of progressive forces. It was not just the unravelling of the Soviet bloc, but the progressive NDR strategy in Third World countries had been badly blunted in the 1980s, and even social democracy had been thrown out of office in many of its First World strong-holds. Since 1994, there has been something of a renewal of progressive and even socialist movements, partly against the background of the gathering international capitalist crisis.

The South African breakthrough of 1994 marked a significant fulcrum in this decade, even if it was just to give heart to progressive forces world-wide in the face of an unrelenting and triumphalist neo-liberalism. As a significant actor within the South African transition, the SACP has been called upon, by many forces internationally, to play an active role in helping to renew the socialist project. While much of this work has not been recorded locally, we should understand this role, and continue to accept our internationalist responsibilities, with a due sense of modesty.

It has to be said, also, that the international renewal of socialist and progressive thinking still remains quite limited, and tentative – a long way has still to be travelled.

## **The SACP in the post-1994 reality**

The democratic breakthrough of 1994 presented the SACP with new possibilities and challenges. SACP members found themselves in cabinet, and in significant numbers in provincial governments, and national and provincial legislatures. Hundreds of others were incorporated into government administration, and the new army and police services.

Although these cadres were located where they were primarily as ANC members, or for their professional skills (when in government and the security forces), nonetheless, there was a sense in which the SACP was, partly at least, “in power.” We could no longer conduct ourselves as if we were a purely extra-parliamentary, still less an oppositional, force.

This reality, along with other things, not least our critical review of our socialist legacy, compelled us to think creatively about what we meant by our struggle for socialism. Yes, we all agreed, the present phase of struggle was to advance, deepen and defend the democratic breakthrough, a key bridgehead to consolidating the NDR. But what was the relevance of being communists in the midst of this, why preserve an independent SACP? Were we taking a free ride on the NDR, but with “second stage” intentions? And what would become of our non-communist allies when we got to the second stage?

It was in this context that, at our 9th Congress in 1995, we advanced the slogan; “Socialism is the Future, Build it Now!.” From its inception the Communist Party in South Africa has always believed that socialism is the future – but we were now adding something new to that view.



What do we mean by Build Socialism Now? We are certainly not advancing an adventurist, voluntarist view that a socialist South Africa is just around the corner. A socialist South Africa, to those who keep asking us what we mean by “socialism,” (as if we had forgotten what has been said for more than 150 years now) will be a South Africa in which, overwhelmingly, the ownership of the means of production – factories, land, banks, shops, mines – is socialised, and not in the hands of those whose prime motive is profit-taking. It will be a South Africa in which the dominant ethos is the principle “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.”

Domestic, but above all the global, balance of forces is such that the realisation of a socialist South Africa is, in all probability, still a considerable distance away. But the difficulty of achieving a socialist South Africa does not make capitalism any more attractive, or any less exploitative. In fact, capitalism, and especially capitalism in its rampant speculative form of the present, is increasingly a grave threat to the survival of human civilisation on this planet. Underlying the apparent strength and durability of capitalism, it is possible to discern looming train smashes. Capitalism has managed to perpetuate itself, and to surpass its own inherent declining profitability, by extending its operations to unorganised working classes in distant parts of the world, and by intensifying the destruction of natural resources. On both counts, it is beginning to bump into structural limitations.

In these circumstances, advancing alternatives to the global capitalist system is not a political game, not some kind of electoral point-scoring pastime – it is a necessity for the survival of human civilisation.

But if a socialist South Africa may not be a realisable reality in the immediate future, which does not mean that we should wait around for “our time to come.” As agreed at our 9th Congress, we must assume responsibility for the partial powers and possibilities that we have. We must, as our own value added contribution to the present NDR, seek to build momentum towards, capacity for, and even elements of socialism in the present.

This means doing everything we can to roll back the empire of the so-called “free” market, which, in turn, means developing confidence in our mass constituency to take on what President Mbeki has described as the “soulless secular religion” of neo-liberalism. It means transforming the balance of forces on the market – with progressive labour legislation, with consumer friendly regulation, with an active public sector. It means transforming ownership patterns – by building, precisely, an active, developmental public sector, but also by exploring many other forms of socialised ownership – including using worker funds, and fostering co-operative ownership. It means using, to the best of our ability, state power and popular power to continuously transform and democratise all forms of power – racial, gender and class power. These are just some of the ways in which we have argued that we can, and must, begin to build socialism now.

## **The 'gender' content of the national democratic revolution and the struggle for socialism**

Much as the struggle for women's emancipation (as distinct from the struggle for transformation of gender relations) has always been a component of the national liberation struggle and our perspectives on socialism, it is a truism that it was not until the 1980s that the liberation movement and our Party began to firmly incorporate these into our programmes and perspectives. However until then, the major debates and strategic calculations of the Party and the liberation movement principally revolved around the relationship between the national and class struggles in the national democratic revolution.

The lack of a strategic and programmatic focus on the question of women in our major strategic and programmatic perspectives is illustrated for instance by only one single reference to the ANC Women's League in "Fifty Fighting Years," and the same with reference to FEDSAW. It was not until the 1980s that the question of women's emancipation and gender struggles began to feature more prominently in the programmes of our movement. Even the Freedom Charter, progressive as it is, never really said much about the struggle for women's emancipation and struggles for gender equality.

The reason for this was largely because of the patriarchal nature of our society, which our own organisations inherited, and not due to an absence of women's struggles in the liberation struggle as a whole. This reality led to a much later development of comprehensive gender perspectives within our movement.

Indeed a proper history of the women's struggles in the South Africa's liberation struggle still remains to be properly written and recorded. Women's struggles are as old as the national liberation struggle itself since 1910. But it is a struggle that for a long time tended to take a back seat in key strategic considerations of our movement for a long time. For instance women were only admitted as full members of the ANC in 1943, some 31 years after the formation of the ANC. The situation was however different with the SACP which had always had women as full members right from its inception.

According to Hilda Bernstein, women burst onto the scene in 1913 in a campaign against the carrying of passes in Bloemfontein, though Ginwala points to some earlier forms of women's organisation prior to the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. During the same year, Charlotte Maxeke led the formation of the earliest political organisation of African women, the Bantu Women's League, regarded as the forerunner to the ANC Women's League. These women's struggles deepened in the Free State and led to co-operation amongst coloured and African women, leading to the formation in 1913 of the Native and Coloured Women's Association.

With the huge influx into the black townships in the 1940s also saw the intensification of women's struggle, leading to the revival of the ANC Women's Section in 1941, which laid the basis for the admission of women as full members in the ANC in 1943. The 1940s were years of intensified activism on the political and economic front, with the SACP playing a leading role in many of these struggles. It was during this period that women communist leaders like Dora Tamana in Cape Town were involved in building

co-operatives, the squatter movement and crèches to look after the children of working women. Other heroic struggles by women included the struggles against the beer halls, the most intense being in Cato Manor in Durban.

The launch of the ANC Defiance Campaign in 1952 also gave further impetus to women's struggles, culminating in the historic August 9 1956 Women's March to Pretoria.

However throughout these struggles the gender perspective was less articulated, and these struggles were largely seen in terms of supporting the working men and husbands. The 1980s began to advance very clear gender content to the women's struggles, primarily led by the democratic movement inside the country, culminating in the important Malibongwe Women's Conference in Paris which consolidated the gender perspectives that were to inform much of post 1994 gender struggles, policies and legislation by the democratic government.

Throughout all these struggles communist women played an important role as part of the ANC and other democratic forces, including in the trade union movement. Like many other communist parties, whilst the SACP progressively came to incorporate gender as one of the fundamental contradictions in the national democratic revolution and the struggle for socialism, for a long time it believed that the victory of socialism over capitalism will automatically resolve the gender contradiction. However, the growing influence of feminist perspectives gradually merging with perspectives of women's emancipation of the national liberation movement, led to a much deeper appreciation, at least in the strategic perspectives of the SACP, of the complexities of the gender contradiction in the national democratic revolution.

Our 10th Congress programme provides what is perhaps the most advanced theorisation of the centrality of the gender contradiction in our revolution. It notes that:

"Marxism developed on the foundations (and as a critique) of classical bourgeois economics. In its heyday...bourgeois economics focused upon production and, therefore, on labour. It was this focus that was central to Marxism as well. The focus was not wrong, but it led to a tendency to down-play the critical reproductive side of economies, and societies at large. This, in turn, led to a neglect of the fact that capitalist profit maximisation is based not just on exploitative production relations, but critically on oppressive reproductive power relations. ...The focus on production obscured the central economic and social role played by 'non-economic' activity in the reproduction of society – the rearing of children, caring for the sick and elderly, house-hold management, and shopping. Much of this work is borne by women, and the failure to adequately account for it has led to an historical blindness around gender oppression in many socialist and communist formations...The SACP believes that a key task in taking forward, developing and renewing the socialist project requires a much greater theoretical and practical attention to reproductive labour, and it is here that much of the intersection between class and gender oppression is to be found."

### **"Reproductive" labour and the so-called "second" economy**

In the last two years the Party has begun, both in practical struggle and in theory, to take forward these issues raised in the 10th Congress. While the theorisation from the

10th Congress quoted above remains entirely valid, it is a theorisation that could apply equally to a developed, first world capitalist economy and to a society like our own, characterised by deeply entrenched and racialised underdevelopment and polarisation. In our practical campaigns (co-ops, land and agricultural reform, financial sector transformation) we have been forced to consider whether the economic zone of the so-called “second” economy is essentially a zone of “reproductive” activity. Our conclusions are increasingly that social and economic activities in this zone may well be reproductive **from the perspective of capitalism** (they play the role of “cheaply” providing a range of services that reproduce labour-power for capitalist production – from minibus transport, to stokvel savings, to street vendor meals that the “formal” capitalist market is failing to address). But **from the perspective of the working class** these activities might well be considered as actual or embryonic forms of **production (and not reproduction) of use-values for working people and the poor**. That is to say, precisely because they are partially marginalized and partially de-linked from the capitalist market, it is possible to struggle for a different economic logic on this terrain – a logic of production for social need, as opposed to production for private profit. This is a struggle, but it is a struggle with potential – as we are discovering in our practical campaigns.

What we are also discovering (we have always known this, without necessarily being thoughtful about it) is that large numbers of working class **women** are often in the forefront of these “second” economy social and economic activities – on the land, in own account petty entrepreneurship, in stokvels, in social caring activities. These practical and developing theoretical perspectives of the Party are an important area in which we can take forward our theorisation of the connection between gender struggles and the class and national struggles. It is also an important area (it is not the sole area) in which the centrality of women in the struggle for a different kind of society (based on production for social need – i.e. socialism) is high-lighted.

### **A critical assessment of some of our strategic and tactical perspectives since 1994**

Perhaps it is also important that we as the SACP critically evaluate the way in which our strategic and programmatic perspectives and activities have impacted particularly since 1994.

Whilst our strategic slogan ‘Socialism is the future, build it now’ has correctly positioned the Party in terms of its role since 1994, acting to spur and guide our campaigns and a ‘measure’ of progress or reverses in the struggles waged by the SACP, and indeed the movement as a whole.

However, despite all its strengths, perhaps one gap in our strategic slogan is that it did not strongly factor the question of the working class and political power post 1994, or put differently, the relationship of the working class to state power. Hence it could be unwittingly equating working class power with an ANC in power, or even ‘building socialism with and through the ANC’; that is winning transformative reforms through the ANC in power.

Not only has our strategic slogan informed our campaigns and programmes, particularly since the 10th Congress, but it has also been informed, and perhaps enriched (this might

have to be properly incorporated into the further elaboration of the slogan itself) by these programmes and campaigns especially since 1999. Whilst at the time of the adoption of our strategic slogan at the 9th Congress in 1995, our influence and impact on the post-1994 political terrain was largely seen through our impact on the ANC, alliance (partly a hangover from the pre-1994 alliance 'arrangements' and understandings), and our participation in governance structures, our campaigning and activism from the late 1990s have taught us that independent SACP activism is much more important. This has led now to our conclusion that much as ANC deployment of communist cadres in government and the alliance remain crucial arenas for building capacity for and momentum towards socialism, many of our achievements to-date would not have been realised had we solely relied on these terrains. In fact it has been some frustrations on these terrains since 1996 (and indeed achievements through our independent campaigns) that partly explains a call from within some in our ranks for an independent electoral path for the SACP. Indeed communist deployment in government and engagements within and through the alliance on the one hand, and driving mass campaigns, on the other hand, are not mutually exclusive, but also have their own tensions.

It is this particular gap in our strategic slogan that our Medium Term Vision (MTV) has sought to address. The MTV essentially proceeded from 'Socialism is the future, build it now', to go beyond just attaining transformative/revolutionary reforms, but to use this as a base from which to consciously build working class power in all sites of power and influence. This is not to suggest that there was absence of notions of building working class power in our strategic slogan, but the MTV put this as one of the key objectives of the SACP in post-1994 South Africa.

The MTV itself was informed by the experiences of class, national and gender struggles during the first decade of our democracy, including the consolidation, as well as failures of the '1996 class project', and some of the economic setbacks for the working class. It derived from a realisation of the uneven impact of working class muscle in crucial arenas of power, including on state power.

However, like our strategic slogan, the MTV also proceeded from the assumption of a continuation of an ANC government and the SACP remaining part of this government without contesting the elections in its own right. But the MTV at least began to pose the question of an electoral route, by essentially saying it is a conjunctural question that will be determined by progress/setbacks in the struggle to build working class power in all sites of influence and power in society.

Despite the posing of the question of the relationship of the working class to political power, the MTV perhaps falls short of directly posing the question of the specific relationship of the SACP, as a political party of the working class, to state power. This seems to be the nub of the debate around the issue of electoral options for the SACP, and it is an issue that our debates and discussions will have to specifically explore. Posing this question necessarily raises the ever present question of our revolution, the relationship between the ANC and the SACP, except in this instance, also their respective relationships with regards to state power.

For the purposes of this discussion document it is necessary to briefly explore the question of working class power, the SACP and state/political power. We have in the past correctly drawn a distinction between working class power and the SACP. We have argued that building working class power is not reducible to the SACP. By this meaning that working class power and influence is broader than the SACP wielding state power. However this argument, correct as it is, has the weakness of not exploring the reality that there can be no effective building of working class power in society without the SACP at the head of this struggle. And that whilst working class power is broader than the SACP wielding state power, that working class power cannot be wielded effectively without the SACP wielding state power. This is the debate that requires further exploration and articulation.

A related question is that of the distinction and relationship between state power and political power. State power is the highest concentration of political power, but it is not the totality of political power in any society. Perhaps this was the mistake made by communist parties in power, thus leading to the subsuming of all other forms of independent working class power under the state. For example the destruction of soviet power, independent trade union formations and other working class formations in society led to the bureaucratisation of the former socialist societies, and at the end with no working class power to defend the collapse, but instead that collapse led by workers themselves.

The above question is of fundamental importance to our debates as well as, according to Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, a socialist strategy for the 21st Century. This question is integrally linked to the type of socialist order we envisage, and therefore our path to socialism. For us as the SACP the question of political power, the nature of state power and the transition to socialism must be rooted in our own realities, whilst simultaneously learning from past experiences.

In our situation we have various forms of working class and other mass power located in wider society, independent from the state. Our conception of a socialist society should perhaps involve the four key sites of power identified by our Special Congress: the state (the most important and highest concentration of political power in any society); the workplace, including a progressive but independent trade union movement; the community, including different forms of economic organisations – the burial societies, the stokvels, the school governing bodies, resident's associations, our People's Land Committees, etc; the ideological terrain – which cuts across all the other three spheres, but crucially including the hegemony of the SACP and its ideas in all the other spheres. So the predominant means of production will reside with the state, but not exclusively, with some residing in other forms of economic organisations by the people themselves, eg a large co-operative movement and land and agrarian production in the hands of people's land committees, and a vibrant, but private small business sector.

Within our strategic slogan and MTV, and the above considerations, what is our conception of the relationship between the national democratic revolution and a transition to socialism, in the current domestic and global realities, and within an electoral context? It is indeed building elements of, capacity for, and momentum

towards socialism. But is this adequately conceptualised for current conditions into the future?

From the above conceptions of a socialist society we envision our socialist strategy as a basis for deepening the national democratic revolution in the current period.

Is the Alliance as currently constituted a platform to advance our socialist strategy? Part of answering this question should include development of a strategy to progressively spread and seek to hegemonise socialist ideas in broader society, including inside the ANC itself, not in a narrow, factionalist or entryist manner but through a combination of taking our campaigns and ideological work into the ANC itself. This we can do by directly taking up issues that daily affect the ANC constituency, which all our campaigns do. Much as the ANC is a contested terrain for spreading capitalist ideas, our role is to ensure that we also seek to propagate socialist ideas, not in a factionalist manner, but building on the very progressive perspectives inside the ANC itself.

## **Part Two Class struggles and the post-1994 state in South Africa.**

In Part One of this document the central point that we established was that through the 1960s and 1970s a hegemonic Marxist-Leninist strategic position was consolidated within the leadership of the ANC-led liberation movement. The key documentary reference points are (among many others): the SACP's 1962 programme "The Road to South African Freedom," the ANC's 1969 Morogoro "Strategy and Tactics," and the ANC's 1979 "Green Book." In all of these strategic perspectives you will find the view that there will be a rapid ("uninterrupted") transition in South Africa from national liberation to socialism. Socialism is explicitly mentioned in the SACP documentation, and it is clearly implicit in the ANC's documents of the time.

But why this uninterrupted transition?

Was it because the global and regional balance of forces were favourable?

Or was it because the level of existing indigenous capitalist development in South Africa made it impossible to achieve the goals of the NDR without simultaneously beginning to advance towards socialism?

The SACP's 1962 programme **and** the ANC's 1969 Strategy and Tactics document affirm **both** things – conditions are favourable for a qualitatively new kind of NDR, and, in any case, a radically transformative NDR, led by the working class, is the only way forward in South African conditions.

In the course of the 1990s a rift opened up, first within the existing leadership of the SACP, and then between a dominant grouping in the ANC (many of them former SACP comrades) and the remaining SACP leadership.

Everyone agreed (obviously with varying degrees of emphasis) that the optimism of the late 1960s and 1970s no longer applied. Global, regional and even national conditions were not optimal for a rapid advance to and consolidation of socialism in South Africa.

The debate now turned essentially around what was meant by “**uninterrupted**” – did it mean:

- a **rapid** (and relatively smooth) transition from liberation to socialism? or
- did it refer to the **systemic necessity** of **simultaneously** addressing national, class and gender oppression – however, prolonged and contradictory this process might be?

The school of thought that believed that the former was what was intended by “uninterrupted,” argued that since the balance of forces was no longer so propitious for a socialist advance, we were now located within a relatively prolonged ND “stage” – a stage that involved the stabilisation of capitalism, and the fostering of capitalist-driven growth as the necessary condition for accumulating the resources for a redistributive attempt to address the legacy of apartheid.

From 1996 to the present, this ideological position has succeeded in emerging as the dominant hegemonic position within the ANC-led state. This strategic perspective and its dominance have helped to shape a particular state, a set of class alliances, and a range of practical interventions which we will analyse below. It is also the contention of this discussion paper that there is now a considerable crisis within the post-1996 class project, and we will also seek to analyse this.

### **The negotiated transition**

The present South African state has emerged out of a negotiated transition to democracy. In the late-1980s and early-1990s a complex balance of forces was at play. The apartheid regime could no longer rule in the old way, and the ANC-led liberation movement, while generally growing in strength, was still far from being able to decisively defeat the apartheid regime, the latter retaining a significant strategic advantage in its armed repressive capacity. While the domestic balance of forces generally shifted favourably for the liberation forces in the second half of the 1980s, the international balance generally moved in the other direction.

This overall conjuncture can be described (borrowing from Gramsci<sup>[2]</sup>) as a “state of reciprocal siege.” This crisis-ridden balance of forces impacted severely on all sectors of South African society, including the capitalist class, with negative growth for the better part of the pre-1994 decade, and with an all-round systemic economic crisis manifesting itself from at least the late-1980s. The negotiated transition needs to be located within this overall conjuncture.

It was this conjuncture that impelled the major political (and behind them, the major class) forces into a negotiated transition, which has, in turn, shaped the state that has emerged out of the 1994 democratic breakthrough. One useful entry-point, for carrying forward an analysis of this new state is the concept of “bonapartism” as elaborated in a relatively extensive body of Marxist theory.<sup>[3]</sup> In doing this, however, we should guard against trying to overwork the concept – it is not some ideal-type that materialises itself in concrete conditions, and whose every feature can then be read off, item by item, from the reality in front of us. It is a working concept that helps to alert us to certain objective *tendencies* within particular, concrete conjunctures.



## Bonapartism

Drawing on the key Marxist texts – which do not necessarily themselves use the concept in a single or consistent way – the following are important features of bonapartism:

It tends to arise as a state form in a situation in which there is no clear-cut class victor, in which there is a certain contested and unstable “equilibrium.” Marx locates “bonapartism” in a conjuncture in which “the bourgeois class had already lost, and the working class not yet gained the ability to govern the nation.” Gramsci says something similar: “the forces in conflict balance each other in a catastrophic manner; that is to say, they balance each other in such a way that a continuation of the conflict can only terminate in their reciprocal destruction.” (Gramsci, SPN, p.219).

There are different versions of which key class forces are at play in this state of reciprocal siege. Gramsci tends to use the concept of “bonapartism” interchangeably with “caesarism,” and he extends the concept into a variety of capitalist *and* pre-capitalist formations. In other Marxist writings, the concept “bonapartism” tends to be used more specifically to refer to a state of contested “equilibrium” between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat<sup>[4]</sup>. It is suggested that we use bonapartism in the more restricted way, while noting interesting parallels with earlier, pre-capitalist formations.

This situation of “catastrophic equilibrium” is “resolved” – always only temporarily – by a politics/a state form identified with a “personality” “standing above” the contending forces, and “entrusted with the task of ‘arbitration’” (Gramsci, *ibid.*).

There can be both progressive and reactionary forms of bonapartism. It is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force to triumph, albeit with its victory tempered by certain compromises and limitations. It is reactionary when its intervention helps the reactionary force to triumph – in this case too with certain compromises and limitations. According to Gramsci: “Caesar and Napoleon I are examples of progressive Caesarism. Napoleon III and Bismarck of reactionary Caesarism.” (*ibid.*)

A key aspect of the “standing above” society of the bonapartist state (i.e. its assertion of a relatively significant degree of autonomy) is that it also “stands above” political *parties*. Gramsci notes this tendency in the Italian *risorgimento*:

“The government in fact operated as a ‘party’. It set itself over and above parties, not so as to harmonise their interests and activities within the permanent framework of the life and interests of the nation and State, but so as to disintegrate them, to detach them from the broad masses and obtain a force of non-party men linked to the government by paternalistic ties of a Bonapartist-Cesarist type...the bureaucratic hierarchy replaced the intellectual and political hierarchy. The bureaucracy became precisely the State/Bonapartist party.” (*ibid.* p.227)

These characteristics of bonapartism help us to understand some of the relatively objective (but *not* inevitable) features of the state and political struggle in our own post-1994 situation. They help us to move beyond the merely subjective and anecdotal, which is where many of the studies of the state in the new South Africa remain.

## **A great heroic personality**

In one of his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci sets a task for himself: "*Caesar, Napoleon I, Napoleon III, Cromwell, etc. Compile a catalogue of the historical events which have culminated in a great 'heroic' personality.*" (SPN, p.219)

Mandela is an obvious name to add to the list of larger-than-life personalities associated with the "culmination" of a major historical process. Clearly, Mandela's "bonapartism" owes a great deal to his own outstanding personal qualities (bravery, principle, wisdom, generosity). His "standing above society" and his being "entrusted with the task of arbitration" also owes something to his sometimes arcane, quasi-feudal, pre-capitalist corporatist values (everyone, regardless of station, ethnic background, etc. has a "place in the sun," "there are good men and women in all political parties" – provided we all know "our place," etc.)<sup>[5]</sup>. But while acknowledging the special personal qualities of Mandela, it would be wrong to ignore the ways in which the particular balance of class forces nationally actively helped to *construct* Mandela-ism. The same should be said of the international balance of forces, Mandela came to be a global (and not just national) iconic figure, supposedly symbolising "a new post-Cold War era of hope and shared human values." There is a sense in which, from different and contradictory class-perspectives, Mandela was an objective necessity to preside over the stabilisation and consolidation of our national democratic breakthrough of 1994.

Borrowing from Gramsci's view that bonapartism can either be progressive or reactionary, and accepting that there were at least some significant bonapartist features in the Mandela presidency, then we should also affirm that this was an overwhelmingly progressive bonapartism, at least within its national setting. Mandela used his office and his iconic prestige to over-ride and discipline all forces, including his own ANC mass base. But, predominantly, these interventions favoured the consolidation, the institutionalisation and defence of a major democratic *advance* won by the popular forces. It is true that, for a time, Mandela used his status and office to enforce "acceptance," for instance, of the 1996 GEAR macro-economic policy. But he later expressed regret at the way in which it was done, and the GEAR process needs essentially to be understood as the first decisive step in the launching of a new state/presidential project under the effective direction not of Mandela, but of his successor, then deputy president, Thabo Mbeki. Before we move on to this, however, it is important to note one significant feature of the Mandela presidency that marked it out as somewhat different from classical bonapartism.

## **A mass-driven transition or an elite pact?**

In much of the Marxist literature a defining feature of bonapartism is that the leading bonapartist persona is not associated with a political party, but "stands above" political parties and often neutralises and marginalizes them by building a populist/demagogic support base amongst the peasantry or de-classed urban elements (in the case of Napoleon I and Napoleon III). Mao's mobilisation of a "red guard" youth in the Cultural Revolution in order to out-flank the trade unions and his own party's structures is another example. The bonapartist figure typically seeks to "disintegrate" (Gramsci's word) political parties, cutting off their own organic links to a mass base.

Mandela, by contrast, is essentially the product of an experienced and deep-rooted ANC national liberation movement, and he has, more or less consistently, always endeavoured to present himself first and foremost as an “ANC member.” This has extended to a respect for the alliance.

But, once more, we should not only focus on the subjective inclinations of Mandela. The key point to make is that the South African negotiated transition did *not* neatly follow the “transitions to democracy,” “elite-pacting” paradigm, so beloved by liberal think-tanks in the US, and espoused locally by a number of leading liberal political commentators and academics (Deborah Posel, Frederik Zyl Slabbert, Alistair Sparks). This elite-pacting paradigm, it should be said, was also espoused in varying degrees by elements within the ANC itself, but it was also always challenged by a significant body of ANC and alliance opinion. Above all, it was challenged on the ground in practice. Our negotiated transition was considerably (if unevenly) mass-driven, with popular organisation (self-defence units, shops stewards councils, ANC and alliance branches) and popular mobilisation, like mass stay-aways (the most significant being in the aftermath of Chris Hani’s assassination) playing a critical role. Contrary to liberal opinion, these mass-driven features of our democratic transition were not destabilising anomalies. They were an important factor both in driving forward the process, particularly in moments of impasse or crisis, and in laying down the foundations for a relatively durable democracy.<sup>[6]</sup> But the continued (if uneven) existence of a mass movement in our post-1994 reality has remained a significant, non-bonapartist feature of this reality. Which is why, in our enthusiasm for the concept of bonapartism, we should be careful to qualify what we are saying lest we produce a revisionist reading of the negotiated transition that serves to entrench a liberal, elite-pacting (it was “the work of a few great men”) recollection of that transition. The struggle of memory against forgetfulness about the role of popular power in the negotiated transition is itself an important contemporary, democratic struggle.

### **Over the rainbow – beyond stabilisation and beyond bonapartism**

The stabilisation and temporary “resolution” of an otherwise mutually “catastrophic” “equilibrium” between antagonistic class forces locked in struggle can always only be, precisely, *temporary*. The inherently antagonistic relation of these forces will simply break out again in further crises, unless the breathing space offered by the initial bonapartist moment (in our case the “rainbow” period of national “reconciliation”) begins to be actively shaped in one of two basic directions:

1. a restoration of the conditions for capitalist profit accumulation on a new and supposedly more sustainable basis, or
2. a revolutionary/systemic transformation of society that begins to resolve the inherent contradiction in favour of the working class and its popular allies.

*The central project of the dominant state project since around 1996 has been the former – to drive a process of restoration of capitalist accumulation.* The overriding objective has been to create conditions for a sustained 6% (capitalist-driven) growth path. The assumption is that only such a growth path will provide the resources with which to address the developmental challenges we all agree are critical (racialised inequality, unemployment, poverty, socio-economic duality, etc.).

There have been three different phases within this project:

1. macro-economic policy as the assumed central public sector driver of growth (1996-9),
2. privatisation as the key catalyser of growth (1999 -2002),
3. public sector infrastructural investment to “lower the cost of doing business” – state capitalism – as the key catalyser (2002 to the present).

As each successive phase has failed to deliver fully on its promises, we have seen new central policy themes, but behind the successive changes there has been a steady continuity in the underlying assumption: sustained capitalist growth of around 6% is the only way forward.

This project has been advanced with considerable strategic awareness, skill and determination. This restoration project is not, however, about a return to the apartheid past. It is a modernising, *not* a conservative, agenda. Relative to the pre-1994 reality, the restoration project *is progressive*.

*But relative to the transformational potential of the 1994 conjuncture, this project represents a serious strategic setback for the working class (and the national democratic revolution).*

This is not to say that the 1994 breakthrough suddenly meant that all things were possible. The conjuncture did not present possibilities, for instance, for a rapid advance to a full-blooded socialism (as some on the left might have imagined). Strategic advances or setbacks should not be measured simply against an aspirational ideal, they need also to be measured in the context of a real situation with its actual possibilities *and* constraints. Any left critique of the post-1996 project must appreciate these possibilities and constraints, otherwise our critique will itself simply reinforce the argument that there “are no serious alternatives to capitalist-driven growth.”

In order to carry forward the capitalist-driven growth path project, the leading cadre within the ANC state have appreciated the need to forge a powerful political-technical-managerial centre within the state, focused around the presidency with close ties to key departments, notably Treasury and Trade and Industry. In order to forge this political centre, then deputy-president Mbeki, while moving beyond bonapartism, was able to build on some of the bonapartist features that had emerged post-1994, thanks both to the subjective prestige of Mandela and to the objective requirements of the immediate post-1994 moment.

It is important to appreciate that the key features of the 1996 class project are not merely the result of a particular person with particular subjective traits (the kind of argument that sometimes dominates William Mervyn Gumede’s bio graphy<sup>[7]</sup>, and is also to be found in much of the anti-Mbeki pro-Zuma mobilisation at present). There is a certain “objectivity” about the character and evolution of the post-Mandela presidency, and this can be demonstrated, perhaps, by the interesting parallels between the evolution of this presidency and that of the Lula da Silva presidency in Brazil, for instance<sup>[8]</sup>. However, to argue that there is a certain “objectivity” about the South African and Brazilian presidencies is *not* to argue that their particular trajectories were

or are inevitable. In both cases, while global and national realities impose real constraints, which the South African and Brazilian left need to appreciate, national realities would have allowed (and still do allow) different, much more transformative outcomes.

Building on features of the transitional period of the Mandela presidency, the post-1996 class project has spearheaded a self-styled “developmental” state that might be characterised as “technocratic vanguardist.” The project has rested on three main pillars:

### “A new global era”

The first is the assumption of “**a new global era**” – a post-Cold War world, characterised by a “growing international consensus on human rights and good governance,” a global transition away from “authoritarianism,” the “third wave” of democracy.<sup>[9]</sup> In the 1997 ANC *Strategy and Tactics* document, for instance, we assert that the current global conjuncture:

“is an international epoch in which Africa enjoys **the unique opportunity** to extricate herself from the vicious cycle of these scourges [civil war, coups, political instability], and to strike forth in a continental renaissance” (my emphasis, p.1)

And in the same document we assert that:

“The new constitutional order [in South Africa] and the government based on the will of the people ... **accord with the world trend towards democratic, open and accountable government.**” (ibid. – again my emphasis added)

In line with these views, the South African negotiated transition is held up, both here and abroad, as a pre-eminent example and role model of this global trend, a reality that is supposed to enable us “to punch above our weight” on the international stage. This is a world of “benign globalisation,” in which booming trade is supposedly spurring sustained growth and development, and all that is required for individual countries to benefit is a catch-up and alignment strategy, with “sound economic policies” and “good governance” at its heart. In constructing this first key pillar, leading comrades in government have drawn upon diverse contemporary ideological resources (apart from the “transitions to democracy” paradigm referred to above) – certain Gorbachevian and “Third Way” social democratic themes (about a largely “de-ideologised” post-Cold War era). The Asian developmental states (notably the Malaysian example) have also been an influence. But there has also been the explicit resurrection, from within the ANC tradition, of the early writings of Pixley Ka I Seme – who, at the beginning of the previous century, similarly heralded a new global dawn of shared human values made possible, it was assumed, by the technological advances of that era:

“See the triumph of human genius to-day! Science has searched out the deep things of nature...brought foreign nations into one civilised family...A great century has come upon us. No race possessing the inherent capacity to survive can resist and remain unaffected by this influence of contact and intercourse, the backward with the advanced. This influence constitutes the very essence of efficient progress and of

civilisation...The regeneration of Africa means that a new and unique civilisation is soon to be added to the world.” [\[10\]](#)

This liberal humanism of Seme, which he shared with the majority of his fellow founders of the ANC, informed the early strategies of the organisation, which devoted considerable (inordinate?) time and energy to international deputations.[\[11\]](#) A century later, a very similar assumption of a new global era has underpinned the evocation of an “African century,” and an “African renaissance” (concepts that, by the way, have been evoked less and less in the last two years).

What is radically absent from this pillar of the project is any serious appreciation of the persisting (strengthened) role of imperialism after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and the global reproduction of combined development AND underdevelopment. There have, as a result, been a series of recent South African “disappointments” at the G8, in the United Nations and at the WTO. This pillar of the project has also seriously underestimated the frailty of many “transitions to democracy” (often little more than elite pacts),[\[12\]](#) with the prospects of a sustainable African “renaissance” (for instance) greatly over-estimated.

### **A presidential centre**

The second pillar of the project is a **powerful presidential centre**. Given the assumption that we are embarked upon a new global era, and that modernising alignment with “international best practice” is the holy grail, then the second pillar of the project follows logically. It has sought to build a strong presidential centre within the state, in which the leading cadre is made up of a new political elite (state managers and technocratically-inclined ministers) and (often overlapping with them) a new generation of black private sector BEE managers/capitalists.

What is radically absent from this pillar of the project is any serious appreciation of the manner in which (strengthened) capitalist accumulation within South Africa, rather than innocently providing the resources for sustained “delivery,” is actively reproducing the very crises of underdevelopment, which the best of the technocratic state cadre are, at the same time, valiantly seeking to ameliorate. The assumptions implicit in this pillar of the project have also under-estimated the many entirely predictable and now increasingly burgeoning contradictions between the “good governance,” “international best practice” aspirations of the state managers (and of the president himself) and the largely comprador and parasitic nature of the emerging BEE elite with whom they are often entangled. [\[13\]](#)

### **The “modernisation” of the ANC**

The third major pillar of this post-1996 state project, and again it follows logically, is the **organisational “modernisation” of the ANC**. This has been the attempt to transform the ANC from a mobilising mass movement, into a “modern,” centre-left, electoral party. This has involved, amongst other things, a certain “presidentialising” of the ANC itself, replicating the state presidential centre within the ANC, and reducing the secretary general’s office and organising work to administrative tasks, while “politics” is housed in a separate, more or less parallel ANC dominated by the president. The attempted

“modernisation” of the ANC has also involved a deliberate strategy to marginalise the SACP and COSATU and perhaps (in the pre-2002 years) even to provoke a walk-out from the alliance.

This third pillar of the project has greatly overestimated the ability of a technocratically-oriented presidential centre, organically remote from a popular power base, to control and direct a mass-based organisation with the mobilising and revolutionary traditions (however presently attenuated) of the ANC. The project has also underestimated the persisting popular support for the alliance among its own middle-ranking cadres and mass base.

### **Interacting crises**

There are now interacting crises within and between all of these main pillars of the presently dominant state project. The growing difficulties and internal contradictions of this project have many causes, among them:

- the manifest inability of capitalist stabilisation and growth to resolve the deep-seated social and economic crises of unemployment, poverty and radical inequality in our society;
- the ravages to the ANC’s organisational capacity and coherence caused by the attempts to assert a managerialist, technocratic control over a mass movement; and
- the crises of corruption, factionalism and personal careerism inherent in trying to build a leading cadre based on (explicit or implicit) capitalist values and on a symbiosis between the leading echelons of the state and emerging black capital.

The ANC’s July 2005 National General Council gave vent to these crises in a relatively dramatic if often inchoate manner – with a wide range of quite different grievances and aspirations coming together around support for Jacob Zuma.

There is now both the necessity and possibility for a major internal ANC and ANC-led alliance review of what has happened and on how to move forward. This debate should not be factionalised, nor should it be unduly personalised.

### **The question of emerging black capital**

A key component of the post-1996 state project has been a stratum of emerging black capitalists. The rationale for actively supporting the emergence of this stratum is based on the argument that: since we are living in a capitalist society, and since we “need growth for development,” then those who “control capital” will constitute, for better or worse, a central part of the advance-guard of the revolution. But the “developmental state” needs leverage over capitalists, who are overwhelmingly white or foreign and, so the theory goes, we need to place (deploy) “some of our own people” into the key sites of capital accumulation in the name of overcoming historical disadvantage. Those so “deployed” will “righteously” “represent” “us,” that is to say, blacks in general, Africans in particular. But at what point does a black billionaire cease to be “historically disadvantaged”? Righteous- representative vanguardism has a ready answer – blacks in

general remain hugely disadvantaged, the individual in question is black, therefore he/she is eminently righteous.

However, notwithstanding the “righteous-representivity” argument, emerging BEE capital is (with some possible exceptions) not a typical “national/patriotic bourgeoisie,” for the simple reason that we are dealing in South Africa with a mature – if highly uneven, developed/underdeveloped – capitalist formation in which there has already long been a significant domestic capitalist class. This is a direct consequence of the manner in which South Africa was integrated through the 20th century into the imperialist chain – by way of a colonialism of a special type, in which many of the features of a classical metropole were located within the “colony” itself. These features include developed (if extremely polarised) infrastructure, high levels of capital concentration, an increasingly dominant finance sector, and, in the past decade, trans-nationalisation of South African capital.

In these circumstances, emerging black capital (at least the key faction most closely associated with the ANC and the state) tends not to be involved with an expansion of the national forces of production, including significant job creation. It is, rather, excessively **compradorist** and **parasitic**.

Its **compradorism** reflects its reliance on the patronage of established capital, not just foreign, but also, in particular, established sectors of domestic capital. This emerging class fraction has, typically, not accumulated its own capital through the unleashing of productive processes, but relies on special share deals, “affirmative action,” BEE quotas, fronting, privatisation and trading on its one real piece of “capital” (access to state power) to establish itself. This compradorism also explains many of the cultural/moral features of this emerging class fraction – its remuneration expectations are aligned with an apartheid-era wage gap, and its life-style aspirations are those of the white capitalist German luxury car, country club and golf-estate. It is not involved in primitive accumulation, so much as **primitive consumption**.

Its **parasitism** is reflected in its reliance upon and symbiotic relation with the upper echelons of the state apparatus. It is state policies (BEE charters, with their ownership quotas and tender policies) that are driving the emergence of this class fraction, putting pressure on established capital to cut this emerging fraction “a slice of the action” in order to remain in favour with the “new political reality.”

However, this hybrid comprador-parasitism reproduces its own complex features. Given the unequal economic power relation between private domestic capital (the financial and mining houses that have been in the forefront of promoting ANC personalities) and the state, it is always the compradorist side that is likely to prevail. Unlike with, say the ZANU-PF ruling elite, which has degenerated into a much more straight-forward state-parasitic bourgeoisie, and for whom state power is everything (and therefore not something that can be relinquished or even easily shared), leading ANC black capitalists can fall out of favour with/or be seen as a challenge to the hegemonic faction within government and yet retain significant economic and even political power (see the Ramaphosa/Sexwale/Phosa “Plot” episode of 2001). The more hybrid comprador parasitic South African reality means that accumulation is less brutally one of property seizure. Political tensions within the state and ANC leadership



group are “resolved” (i.e. managed) by allowing some to be “deployed” into the private sector. However, the converse of this is that the leading financial and mining conglomerates are increasingly reaching into the state and the upper echelons of the ANC and its Leagues – actively backing (betting on) different factions and personalities, and seeking to influence electoral outcomes and presidential successions. These different factions are also often linked to different media corporations, and we see all of these dynamics playing themselves out in the war of leaks and “informed sources” around the various corruption scandals (real or alleged).

Because we are talking here not of a genuinely new national accumulation process, but rather of different consortia, alliances and personalities all competing for slices of existing action (privatisation proceeds, mergers and acquisitions, BEE quotas, BEE tenders), this black capitalist faction is not galvanising a national developmental effort. It is, in fact, highly factionalised, incapable of uniting itself, and, therefore, increasingly incapable of uniting a national bloc behind its hegemonic leadership.

### **Dangers of petty-embourgeoisement**

Writing after the 1917 Revolution, this is what Lenin had to say about the petty bourgeoisie and its potential role as support base for a bonapartist counter-revolution:

“The profiteer, the commercial racketeer...these are our principal ‘internal’ enemies...the million tentacles of this petty-bourgeois hydra now and again encircle various sections of the workers...profiteering forces its way into every pore of our social and economic organism. They do not believe in socialism or communism, and ‘mark time’ until the proletarian storm blows over. Either we subordinate the petty bourgeoisie to **our** control and accounting (we can do this if we organise the poor, that is, the majority of the population or semi-proletarians, around the politically conscious vanguard), or they will overthrow our workers’ power as surely and as inevitably as the revolution was overthrown by the Napoleons and Cavaignacs who sprang from this very soil of petty proprietorship.” (“Left-Wing” Childishness and petty-bourgeois mentality, SW, p.438-9)

Lenin is writing here of the Russian petty bourgeoisie post-1917, and sees it as a potential seed-bed and mass base for a bonapartist capitalist restoration. Obviously our post-1994 situation is different. But it is not difficult to recognise in Lenin’s portrayal of this class, the kind of social reality that is forcing “its way into every pore of our social and economic organism.” The dominance of this phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the ANC legislature caucuses, in ANC-run councils, and is a driving force in many ANC branches. Unless the ANC as a mass-based, democratic and self-styled “disciplined force of the left” begins to assert a real revolutionary authority and discipline over its legislature caucuses, for instance, a petty bourgeois cadre focused almost entirely on commercial racketeering will swallow the organisation.

This is not to say that we should condemn small-scale entrepreneurial activity. In fact, it is the only chance of survival for millions of South African households. Much of the SACP’s recent campaigning has been focused on liberating this kind of activity from the suffocating grip of the credit bureaux, the banks, and the white-dominated agricultural sector. But in doing this we should be seeking, in Lenin’s words, to “subordinate” these strata to the popular mandate of the national democratic state and the broader

hegemony of the working class. Hence, for instance, the SACP's emphases on coops, on sustainable communities, on land reform for household food security, on people's land committees and other forms of popular power. The problem with the current petty accumulation tendencies, which are so rife within the ANC, is that they are under the economic, social and moral hegemony of private capital.

### **A second economy?**

The present hegemonic state project conceptualises this terrain as the "second economy," and although the word "under-development" is invoked, it is not really understood as the dialectical consequence of the current "development" path of capitalist accumulation. The so-called "second economy" is, in effect, understood as *undeveloped* – i.e. as a "left-over" from the apartheid past that requires modernisation and "promotion" into the "first economy" – the metaphor of a "stairway" is sometimes evoked. This conceptualisation has taken a strong hold on public discourse, where the "second economy" is variously defined in negative terms as a "marginalized" (i.e. *not* the mainstream) sector, as the "informal" (i.e. *not* the formal) sector, as SMMEs (i.e. *not* yet "fully grown-up" capitalist enterprises), as "under-capitalised" (i.e. needing capitalist capitalisation), as unsuitably skilled (i.e. not possessing the skills that would be useful to a Raymond Ackerman or Bobby Godsell). We should certainly not romanticise the so-called "second economy" – but nor should we mechanically hold up the capitalist-dominated "first" economy as the model to be emulated.

In our own attempts to characterise this underdeveloped pole, some on the left have suggested that it might be considered (at least in part) as the sphere of working class *reproduction*. But this characterisation (which begins to be more scientific) is still approaching this reality *from the perspective of the capitalist mode of production* – i.e. as socially necessary work for the reproduction of wage-labour for capital. But from the *perspective of the working class* these activities might be seen less as re-production, and more as *production of use-values for working class consumption*.

In other words, should we not be considering this reality from the perspective of the political economy of the working class? From a proletarian class perspective, when we are considering the minibus sector, or backyard repairs, or township hair salons and spaza shops, are we not dealing with *productive labour for the worker*? Are we not dealing with a pole of the economy in which it is possible (but not a given) that production for social need can become hegemonic over production for private profit?

So long as capitalism is dominant, nationally and internationally, the relative independence of productive labour for the worker will always be relative. The capacity to create an economy premised on social need and not on private profit will be a relative capacity – whether we are looking at the progressive state and parastatal sector, or at worker household and community economies. Transnet, the community coop, or the family subsistence farm may achieve significant degrees of independence from capitalist markets, but they are unlikely entirely to escape their influence in the present realities.

However, this relative potential for de-linking is absolutely critical, and it helps us to understand a still very under-theorised factor behind the rolling waves of semi-

insurrectionary struggle of the 1980s. The South African liberation struggle never had significant liberated rural zones – a Sierra Maestra, or a Yen-an, or the Zimbabwean Eastern Highlands. What we did have were quasi-liberated zones in townships and squatter camps. When we speak of liberated zones we tend to think of geographical terrain, but we should really be thinking of social terrain, of a socio-economic support base. In the case of China, Cuba, Vietnam or Zimbabwe, this socio-economic support base was, essentially, a semi-independent peasantry that fed, clothed, concealed and supplied recruits to the liberation army in marginalized areas of their societies. In South Africa, another socio-economic reality provided the working class and popular forces with some leverage, with a “reserve fund,” breathing space, quasi-liberated zones – and this socio-economic reality was what is today referred to, disparagingly, as the “second economy.” If we are to properly appreciate the struggle lessons of the 1980s, then we would appreciate that the marginalisation and *relative* de-linking of the so-called “second economy” from the dominant capitalist economy might be a problem, but it is also potentially a revolutionary asset.

The dominant position within the present state have not neglected this terrain. However, the interventions have sought to promote (absorb?) this pole of our society into the dominant (capitalist) accumulation system. The interventions have sought to transform existing community activities (everything from spaza shops and stokvels to church volunteerism) into “business-planned,” “emerging” “SMMEs.” With a barrage of (largely unsuccessful) technical, top-down projects, this “informal” sector has been invoked as a petty (i.e. infant) bourgeoisie, under “incubation” for greater things. Susan Brown and Alta Folscher are closer to the mark when they assert that “The informal sector is unfortunately not a seedbed for enterprise but an ever tougher struggle for survival.”<sup>[14]</sup> According to John Orford and Eric Wood <sup>[15]</sup>, 2,5 million of South Africa’s 2,7 million “private enterprises” employ fewer than five people and most provide work only for the owner. Orford and Wood estimate that 90% of informal businesses are run by black people, and six out of ten by women. Their average monthly turnover is just R1,146 and where they do provide employment for a second person, the average monthly wage is R480. Those informal and micro enterprises that *do* succeed in migrating to the formal economy are mostly owned by whites.

**Other well-intentioned and often large-scale “delivery” interventions from the state have, deliberately or unwittingly, served to demobilise working class communities. This is inherent in the top-down “delivery” paradigm that prevails. But it also exacerbated by the technical means often used, which atomise working class communities. For instance, the introduction of pre-paid water meters into poor communities, while making life for technocrats in local government technically easier, has the potential effect of fragmenting working class communities into atomised households. A poor household with its water cut off is now less likely to find solidarity next door if neighbours’ houses also have water-metres that are ticking down. Local government technocrats hope, perhaps, to deal with aggrieved single and scattered “defaulting” households, while the community at large is de-collectivised and disempowered in the struggle over the politics of water. Pre-paid water metres have been widely resisted by poor communities – successfully in the recent case of the Cape Town metro, where their use in poor communities has now been halted.<sup>[16]</sup> However, these kinds of technocratic interventions into working class communities are likely to persist in**

**one form or another, and the struggle against the “pseudo-petty embourgeoisement” of working class households, and of township activities is critical.**

### **A way forward?**

What the past eleven years demonstrate is not the irrelevance of a national democratic strategy, but that this strategy cannot be *reformist*. If it is to have any prospect of addressing the dire legacy of colonial dispossession and apartheid oppression, a national democratic strategy has to be *revolutionary* – that is to say, it must systemically *transform* class, racial and gendered power (and not just re-allocate, or transfer some power and privilege to a representative racial or female elite). Instead of “lowering the cost to doing business,” it must actively *transform* the persisting capitalist accumulation path whose key features remain those set in place over the past century. In critiquing *reformism*, we are not dismissing the importance of *reforms*. In fact, in the post-1994 South African reality we are essentially operating on a terrain of reforms. The key strategic and tactical question is whether particular reform package carries *transformative* potential, or not. Is it building momentum towards, capacity for, and elements of popular power and working class hegemony? Or is it no more than ameliorative at best, serving to entrench and perpetuate the present accumulation path?

The post-1994 democratic state is not inherently capitalist, it is, in fact, a sharply class-contested reality (which is partly why its bonapartist features have emerged). It is true, however, that established and emerging capital have succeeded in exerting considerable dominance over the state. This reflects the sheer strength of capital, as well as the illusions and emerging class interests of a leading stratum within the ANC. However, capital’s dominance over the state is unstable, partly because of the popular mobilisation trajectory out of which the ANC-led post-apartheid state has emerged, and partly because a capitalist “development” path is hopelessly inadequate in the face of the South African crisis of underdevelopment.

But how do we strengthen a different kind of class hegemony over the state? Not by weakening the state, nor by watering down the ANC’s overwhelming electoral majority (as liberal commentators constantly advise). We need, to strengthen the state, including a wide democratic public sector – but around a different strategic agenda from that which has prevailed since 1996. These objectives will, however, not be accomplished if the great majority of South Africans (workers and the poor) are relatively passive observers, hopeful recipients of “delivery.” A different kind of class hegemony requires the continued mobilisation of these social forces, not so much in opposition to government but in order to empower and hegemonise the state.

All of this also means that a number of more immediate tasks become imperative. These include:

### **Re-building a mass-based ANC**

We need to re-build (which is to say, contest for) an ANC that is capable of leading popular struggles on the ground, an ANC in which organisation and popular politics are

re-connected. This is not just a matter of head-office re-design, but also of ensuring that gate-keeping, narrow careerism, and plain corruption are eliminated from the branch-level up.

In the run-up to the ANC's 2007 National Conference, we need, also, to flag the question of class representivity in the leading organs of the ANC. While there has been some sensitivity to racial and gender representivity in the NEC of the ANC, class has been an absentee. There is currently not a single serving trade unionist in the NEC, for instance.

### **Building a progressive developmental state**

The ANC has in the last several years committed itself to building a "developmental" state. But to build a progressive, developmental state there needs to be an offensive against the problematic axis between ANC elected representatives and state managers on the one hand and emerging (and behind it established) capital on the other.

A sustainable left strategy *does* require effective public sector managers, progressive public representatives and technical expertise. A key part of the 1996 GEAR offensive was to build an alliance between emerging black capital and these state-related technical/managerial strata *against* the left. The left needs to re-connect with those located in the commanding heights of the state apparatus – less through an endlessly repeated (and invariably disappointing) deployment strategy ("getting *our* guy into the job"), and more through a principled and programmatic engagement. This means actively disrupting the political elite/capital axis.

There are at least two dimensions to this challenge. In the first place, the present trajectory of BEE policies is gravely undermining the *capacity* and *coherence* of the new state cadre. BEE targets and score-cards imposed on the private sector now require very significant numbers of new senior black managers. A large number of these appointments have (and will increasingly) come from the new cadre in the state. The public sector has recruited tens of thousands of young black graduates, who have *begun* to acquire public sector managerial and sector specific experience. However, there are extremely high levels of turn-over among this cadre. There is much upwardly-mobile job-hopping within the public sector, but increasingly this cadre is being poached whole-sale by the private sector *and our own policies are encouraging this*. The objective of building a strong development state is, therefore, often being actively, if unintentionally undermined by BEE quota requirements.

But apart from the undermining of capacity and the growing assumption that the public sector is a stepping stone to "better things," there is also the problem of plain corruption. The Zuma crisis, the constant round of scandals, and growing township disaffection with perceived or actual corruption in local government, have created an important opportunity in which a principled ANC-led offensive against corruption becomes possible and desperately necessary. Some important suggestions were flagged at the ANC's National General Council in the Secretary General's *Organisational Report*. These included increased public funding for political parties complemented by transparency around any private donations; much more severe post-tenure restrictions on outgoing senior public servants and public representatives; and a ban on any serving ANC public representatives being involved in business. These proposals need to be

taken up vigorously and understood to be important means for ensuring greater internal popular democracy within the ANC and the state. They also imply that all progressive forces should *defend* (and not undermine or abuse) the constitutional role of the judiciary, the police and intelligence forces. No doubt, all of these entities require ongoing transformation, and public vigilance lest they abuse their authority. At the same time demagogic attacks on these institutions are short-sighted and reckless.

In one of its strategic resolutions, the ANC's July 2005 National General Council reflected on the kind of state we should be building in South Africa. The passage reads:

"In many international cases, the developmental state has been characterised by a high degree of integration between business and government. The South African developmental state has different advantages and challenges. While we seek to engage private capital strategically, in South Africa the developmental state needs to be buttressed and guided by a mass-based, democratic liberation movement in a context in which the economy is still dominated by a developed, but largely white, capitalist class." (para. 20, ANC, National General Council, July 2005, Consolidated Report on Sectoral Strategies)

This sets us on the right line. Of course, the fact that an ANC NGC resolution affirms this vision is no guarantee it will be implemented. Exactly the same might be said of the Freedom Charter's hallowed and often repeated demand that "The People Shall Govern!" These are broad visions for which we have to struggle.

### **Parliamentary democracy?**

Some left critics of the present dispensation have described our new political reality as "parliamentary democracy" (implying that it is, therefore, "inherently" bourgeois). While we now have representative democratic legislatures, the fact is that the technocratic vanguard state has tended to marginalise parliament. Established capital, for instance, by and large boycotts parliament, preferring to deal directly with a series of presidential councils (the Business Council, the Investment Council, etc.). Neither parliament (which meets in public and is, therefore, in principle transparent) nor the ANC receive reports or briefings on the proceedings of these influential committees. If the working class is to assert its hegemony over our state institutions, then parliament is one of the institutions that will have to be greatly strengthened (not weakened) and transformed. This will require, amongst other things, two key matters:

- The implementation of Section 77 of the Constitution which requires that legislation be passed enabling parliament to amend "money bills" (for example, the budget). Unlike most relatively serious parliaments in the world, our parliament still cannot amend the budget. The budgets of different departments either have to be accepted or totally rejected. Since outright rejection is not a realistic option for an ANC-dominated parliament, parliamentary oversight and debates on the budget (and other money bills) are largely formalistic. This means that transparent policy-making on the budget is diminished with key spending decisions being taken in the secrecy of cabinet.
- A review of our current electoral dispensation. The sorry spectacle of opportunist floor-crossing within a one-hundred percent national and provincial

PR system is hardly strengthening working class and popular hegemony over these nominally central institutions.

### **A revolutionary national democratic strategy – with and for workers and the poor**

Above all, a national democratic revolutionary strategy remains the programmatic basis within which, in our concrete circumstances, the advanced sectors of the working class are best able, in principle, to secure a broad hegemony. This is particularly relevant in the context of our own crisis of underdevelopment with levels of real unemployment currently around 42%. At the heart of any revolutionary democratic strategy needs to be a national democratic alliance between the working class and the mass of urban and rural poor – casualised and retrenched workers, unemployed youth, de-classed elements, land-hungry rural and peri-urban households, the black-listed, the red-lined, the vast sea of own-account workers and petty entrepreneurs in squatter camps and townships.

If the working class were to quarantine itself entirely within “pure” working class formations and campaigns, it would be foregoing contestation on this critical terrain and it would be putting itself on to the strategic defensive. In fact, struggle at the capitalist-owned point of production, while absolutely critical and while typically being led by the most advanced, best organised and most experienced detachments of the working class, will in the present conjuncture always be of a largely *defensive* character. The class balance of forces within the key sectors of the capitalist economy is weighted heavily in favour of capital. Particularly with the current levels of liberalisation within our economy and in the context of the current global reality, capital is highly mobile, and this mobility gives it great leverage. In the first decade of democracy, and notwithstanding important formal advances for workers in terms of labour market rights, we have witnessed a massive capitalist-led restructuring with more than a million workers retrenched and many tens of thousands casualised, and significant levels of disinvestment and transnationalisation by major South African companies. Our new democratic state now confronts SAB-Miller, or Anglo-American as foreign companies whose investment must be wooed.

Productive workers within the public sector have also faced major capitalist inspired managerial restructuring and major retrenchments in some sectors. But the actual or potential balance of class forces in the public and parastatal sector is more favourable than the private sector to workers in our present conjuncture. Possibilities for a more *offensive* working class hegemonic struggle therefore exist here.

But, and this is the main point we seek to make in this section, we should never neglect the terrain of the so-called “second economy,” located largely within working class communities. For all its crisis-ridden, under-developed character, in fact, precisely *because of* these features, this terrain is one in which the writ of capital is less secure. The so-called “second economy” is a potential “weak link” in the South African capitalist chain, and it provides considerable scope for an *offensive* posture by progressive working class formations. This has, indeed, been the experience of the SACP over the last five years in our successive Red October campaigns.

## **The role of the SACP**

In our 2002 11th Congress, and in our Special National Congress of July 2005, the SACP re-affirmed our commitment to a national democratic struggle, to the inextricable linkage between the NDR and the imperative of “building socialism now.” We also reaffirmed our commitment to the ANC-led alliance, while asserting the imperative of an independent Party of the working class capable of building a cadre of communists and of leading working class and popular mass-based struggles on the ground. On these core strategic issues the SACP is completely united.

However, these shared strategic and programmatic perspectives still require active adaptation to a complex tactical reality. Emerging from this discussion paper, we suggest that some of the following are among the issues the SACP needs to discuss and debate in an ongoing way as part of the CC Commission as mandated by our Special National Congress:

- How do we interpret the current turmoil within the ANC and its alliance – is it a manifestation of the growing crisis and internal contradictions of the 1996 class project?
- If so, what are the underlying reasons for this crisis?
- How should the Party intervene tactically (and strategically) into this conjuncture?
- Should we seek to engage the widest range of ANC forces, presenting a unifying (but left) strategic perspective for emerging collectively from the crisis?
- Should we align ourselves with some forces within the ANC against others?
- Are the current structures of the Alliance appropriate? Is there the possibility of re-defining them, and if so, what priorities should we have?
- Should we actively back a specific presidential candidate in 2007 and 2009?
- What is the balance of effort that our cadres should devote to the Party itself, and to the ANC? Is there merit in calling on communists cadres to prioritise the struggle to re-build a mass-based ANC in 2006? Or should we rather prioritise consolidating the SACP – while agreeing that these are not necessarily mechanical alternatives
- What should the Party’s medium to longer-term perspective be on electoral participation?

The intention of this discussion paper is not to pre-empt these ongoing discussions within the Party, but to lay a theoretical base for a shared discussion on the way forward.

<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/2006/komani.htm>