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DOCUMENT

Political Report of South African Communist Party: Defining the Post-Election Challenges and Tasks Facing the Working Class, the SACP and the Left Broadly

The following are the excerpts from the Political Report of the SACP's Central Committee meeting held on 28-30 June 2024.

During the previous Central Committee Plenary, in defining the contemporary challenges facing the South African working class and, consequently, the tasks of the SACP, we asserted that the South African revolution was facing a defining moment. This defining moment emerged in the context of the May 2024 elections. We were heading towards the elections then, and the election campaign was intensifying.

The working class suffered from entrenched multiple crises of capitalist economic and social reproduction, making life unaffordable for the majority. The cost-of-living crisis persisted amid interrelated crises, such as high levels of inequality, unemployment, and poverty. We called on the liberation movement to embark on a mission to rescue the National Democratic Revolution from a potential setback and the verge of counter-

revolutionary defeat. This was our clarion call, with the interests of the working class in mind, beyond the narrow conception of the class during elections merely as voters.

We indicated that we are under twin threats from counter-revolutionary offensives brewed and fermented both from inside and outside the movement.

MONOPOLY CAPITAL: EXTERNAL THREAT

In no particular order, the one threat, which is from outside, emanates from monopoly capital, which seeks profitability at all costs. Monopoly capital does not regard the ANC as a vehicle to drive and sustain profitability given the deepening crisis of social reproduction and believes that this time, our revolutionary movement cannot compromise by guaranteeing such profitability without facing a severe setback and even ultimate collapse.

In responding to this, the revolution must tamper with the profitability of capital and sufficiently respond to the needs of the masses who are failed by a capitalist economy by building, strengthening and expanding the role of the public sector. We need to see the state actively participating and enhancing its participation in the economy, building and diversifying people-driven economic interventions supported by measures to achieve a thriving public sector. The exploited and poor masses expect such decisive interventions. There is no other better way, lest the masses be led astray by populist forces.

DISUNITY AND COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY SPLITS: INTERNAL THREAT

The second threat, which comes from inside the movement, includes the moral decline of ANC leadership of society, organisational weaknesses, continuing factionalism, lack of progress on organisational renewal to regain some credibility, and

social decay, culminating in a conducive climate for a counter-revolutionary breakaway party, using the joint ANC and SACP liberation army symbols by former President Jacob Zuma in pursuit of self-interests.

We sought to interrupt this counter-revolutionary agenda within the democratic framework of elections. Our characterisation of Zuma's conduct and agenda as counter-revolutionary irked some of our comrades, who believe we are isolating the poor masses who voted for him.

REACTION BY MONOPOLY CAPITAL TO
THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE ALLIANCE

Our call for the reconfiguration of the Alliance to achieve programmatic unity and greater strength poses a threat to monopoly capital's accumulation interests. This dominant section of capital has actively lobbied politically to block the reconfiguration, undermine the strength of our Alliance, and, if they can, as they always try, break the Alliance apart through policies that favour their accumulation interests. Sections of capital have concluded that their accumulation interests will be better served with the ANC out of power.

The dominant sections of monopoly capital have undertaken other efforts to bolster right-wing anti-ANC opposition through funding, electoral pacts, media propaganda and other activities aimed at either displacing the ANC from power or reducing its support from above to below 50 per cent.

The electoral parties, such as the MKP, created by elements who have defined themselves outside and against the ANC from within its ranks, seek to achieve similar ends. Any attempts at pleasing the strategic adversaries of our movement through either conduct or policy, including choices that stand to aid their accumulation interests, will be tantamount to political suicide.

ALIGNMENT WITH CAPITAL

The government chose alignment with capital, disregarding warnings led by the SACP in the Alliance. This happened, for instance, in network infrastructure. While we supported the need to sort out the crisis in network infrastructure, including electricity generation, rail, ports and water, the government chose liberalisation in favour of participation and competition by profit-driven interests and auctioned off, thus privatised, the high-frequency broadband spectrum in the telecommunication or digital connectivity infrastructure sector. The direction that the government has chosen goes the private way.

It is neoliberal, rolling back or systematically diminishing state participation and substituting it with collective private enterprise monopoly or competition among sections of private capital. The role of the state is distorted to be that of paving the way for, and thus being at the service of, private enterprise to thrive. This revisionist agenda in our movement contradicts the Freedom Charter, especially the Chapter's economic clauses regarding monopoly industries.

The issue is whether we are naïve or consciously ignoring the realities that we face. In addition, the problematic direction the government has chosen is compounded by the continued imposition of austerity, also called fiscal consolidation, leading up to the May 2024 elections. For instance, the August 2023 letter by the National Treasury instructing departments, public entities and provincial governments to stop new infrastructure development and recruitment of personnel, among other austerity measures, contributed to driving the ANC out of power.

HIGHLY CONTESTED ELECTIONS

Pundits proclaimed the May 2024 elections to be South Africa's most highly contested national and provincial government

elections since April 1994. In April 1994, our liberation struggle forced the apartheid regime to concede to universal suffrage. We won the first democratic elections with a decisive majority, over 60 per cent.

While many aspects of society have changed since then, others have not changed or have only changed a little. This is especially true for the economy and property relations, more so ownership. Notably, a reformist current that gained dominance in our movement, as discussed in our Party Programme, 'The South African Struggle for Socialism', has embarked on a tangent, shifting away from revolution to reformism. Related to this, imperialist forces have strengthened their agenda to prevent the South African National Democratic Revolution from succeeding.

Recently, the heightened imperialist offensive involves a reaction to the ANC-led South African government aligning itself with the expanding BRICS, now the BRICS Plus. As part of exercising our national independence and democratic sovereignty, the government has established and is continuing to develop its relations with China and Russia within the BRICS Plus international cooperation and through direct bilateral relations. This has led to the imperialist US Congress agreeing on a bill aimed at punishing the ANC-led South African government.

The US-led bloc of the imperialist West and its stooges are opposed to not only South Africa but Global South countries exercising their independence by building relations with China and Russia and strengthening with others.

The stooges include a reactionary network which convened in mid-2023 in Gdańsk, Poland; on a counter-revolutionary basis, they themed, 'Against authoritarianism and in defence of democracy'. Their Poland workshop was attended not only by right-wing elements from South Africa but also representatives from organisations such as Renamo and Unita, which have killed people through counter-revolutionary wars and other attacks and destabilised Mozambique and Angola, respectively.

In our situation, the imperialist West wants a South Africa that follows a different international relations and cooperation policy. Such a policy will be subordinate to and take its cue from what the US-led imperialist west sets as its foreign policy agenda.

To achieve their aims, the imperialist West has been driving a regime change agenda against the ANC and its allies. While the material conditions of millions of the unemployed and poor who live in underdeveloped, least developed and under-serviced areas of our country have contributed immensely, it is a fact the imperialist forces have partially contributed to the ANC's electoral decline through a wide range of strategies and significant resources. The imperialists supported both the old and new right-wing parties and coordinated funding and other material support, including media coverage and research propaganda, against the ANC.

The continued imperialist interference in South Africa's internal affairs, not least the elections, constitutes an immediate and continuous serious threat to our national independence and democratic sovereignty. Having failed to fully dislodge the ANC electorally, given that, notwithstanding its decline, the ANC remains the largest electoral party by voter support. The imperialists have intensified their onslaught against the ANC on the post-election terrain. This attack has been clearly visible in coalition formation. It includes threats by certain sections of capital to withdraw investment and weaken our currency.

We have seen this whenever right-wing forces did not get their way in the post-election negotiation process. There were attempts at forcing the ANC to concede to their demands, effectively seeking a conformist ANC, by stealth and fear-mongering — using the threats by capital to attack our economy. This onslaught is inherently worse against the Communist Party, above all else, and other left organisations in alliance with the ANC in elections.

Now more than ever, our revolutionary working-class Party must emerge and lead the masses — including by deepening our

effort to forge a popular left front and build a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor — to win the battle of the class struggle on the ground. As the organised workers' experiences have shown, the working class cannot win battles in boardrooms if it has not won those battles on the ground. This applies to the SACP as well.

The outcomes of the May 2024 elections highlight that the negatives that have taken centre stage against our will and struggles in the 30 years of our democratic dispensation have reached a point where they overwhelm the positives, culminating in the loss that the ANC has experienced through its electoral decline. The negatives include the turn to neoliberalism by the reformist tendency in our movement in the 1990s, the neoliberal dominance in our public policy space and its results in the material conditions of our people, including persistent high rates of unemployment, poverty, inequality and related high levels of crime, significant de-industrialisation, corporate capture and other forms of corruption. Elevating the negatives at the expense of the positives has become a key feature of anti-ANC politics, opposition and an entry point of imperialist attacks. This has become hegemonic, taking advantage of the impact of the negatives on the material conditions of the people. In the process, the right-wing prescribes more of the same policy measures that have caused the problems.

Despite our efforts at securing a decisive electoral majority to avoid the further decline of the ANC, we are now in it. In addition, depending on how the ANC and the Alliance will handle this situation, the ANC and, by extension, the Alliance might be dislodged going forward. This moment calls for accuracy in our political assessment of the reality we have now entered and tactical and strategic calculations with the utmost clarity. Any error in this process, whose outcomes might as well be determined by the attitude of the forces of reaction (counter-revolution) against our movement as the force of action (revolution), will culminate in consequences with far-reaching implications, which is why an

emotive assessment will be unhelpful.

THE ANC'S ELECTORAL DECLINE BY NUMBERS OVER THE YEARS

The ANC's loss of votes tells a particular story.

1994	12,2million: 62.6 per cent of valid votes
1999	10,6 million: 66.4 per cent of valid votes
2004	10,9 million: 69.7 per cent of valid votes
2009	11,7 million: 65.9 per cent of valid votes
2014	11,4 million: 62.2 per cent of valid votes
2019	10,0 million: 57.5 per cent of valid votes
2024	6,5 million: 40.2 per cent of valid votes

Bear in mind that with population growth, the number of potential voters will increase over these 30 years. Notable is the moderate drop-off of voting numbers through the Mbeki years, although the corresponding per cent performance went up (as a function of the voter turnout), reaching the highest since 1994 based on the reference voter turnout. In contrast, there was a strong surge in the actual votes the ANC received in 2009 (post-Polokwane), which was relatively maintained in 2014. There was a drop-off in 2019 despite some 'Ramaphoria', and then there was an overly dramatic decline of 3.5 million this year.

In terms of participation by registered voters, this year, only 58.5 per cent of registered voters participated. This is the lowest-ever voter turnout in national and provincial elections since 1994. Add to this the current 14 million South Africans of voting age who are not even registered as voters (the great majority being young and black), and you get a massive 40 per cent of potential voters, whether registered or unregistered, who didn't vote in 2024.

One of the great rallying calls of our struggle — 'one person, one vote' — has, it seems, increasingly become an irrelevance for what is now approaching nearly half of adult South Africans. Is this dramatic loss of interest in party political electoral democracy an irreversible trend? What are the implications of this for the

country, for the ANC, and the SACP? We will try to raise and answer some of these questions later in this input.

DISAFFECTION WITH ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION
WAS NOT UNIFORM

The general statistics of growing voter alienation mask a more complex reality. Levels of turnout differed significantly according to race, and given South Africa's realities, also in terms of class and strata within the classes. Some estimates suggest that in the 2024 elections, white turnout was 71 per cent, Indian turnout 61 per cent, Coloured turnout 58 per cent and African turnout just 55 per cent. The 16 per cent difference between white and African turnout is especially noteworthy. It also tells that in class terms, the deepening sense of alienation from party political electoral politics is likely associated with those facing the most severe social and economic marginalisation.

That said, it is important to note that the DA declined in terms of actual votes compared to the May 2019 elections, as did other parties that were represented in parliament from 2019 to 2024 (except for a marginal gain by one party). To appreciate this point, moving from the particular (decline of the ANC) to the general (decline not only of the ANC but also of the other parties that were represented in parliament in the previous term) is crucial to understanding the general sense of voter alienation among all the affected parties.

THE RISE OF THE REACTIONARY TENDENCY OF ETHNO-
NATIONALISM AND THE PERSISTING LEGACY OF RACISM

The MKP's dramatic electoral rise in KZN (and parts of Mpumalanga and Gauteng) and the PA's performance, particularly in Coloured townships and rural areas outside of Cape Town, are an indication that not all socio-economic marginalisation will

necessarily result in electoral apathy.

Social and economic marginalisation can (and should) be mobilised around on a principled class basis, whether for electoral or other campaigning purposes. And this is, surely, a key task of the SACP. But as the MKP and PA cases illustrate, the socially and economically marginalised can also be mobilised on a chauvinistic ethno-nationalism.

For instance, some estimates suggest that the May 2024 election saw a 60 per cent African turnout in KZN. In contrast, African voter turnout in the other traditional ANC heartlands — the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Northwest — was around 51 per cent.

In KZN and parts of Mpumalanga, the MKP was able to mobilise popular strata on the reactionary dream of an ethnic kingdom returned to its 'former glory'. But it also tapped into feelings of marginalisation and alienation. It exploited these legitimate feelings by asking popular strata to identify (and many clearly did identify) their own sense of marginalisation with the 'unjustly persecuted' Zuma, KZN's 'finest son of the soil'.

It is important to note that identity politics and the associated voter response are not limited to the MKP and the PA — and are not always underpinned by social and economic marginalisation. This is highlighted by the continuing shared voter support between the DA and FF-Plus in predominantly white voting districts.

The identity politics that benefit the DA and the FF-Plus is rooted in the history of racism and its lasting legacy. Rather than social and economic marginalisation, the voter support that the DA and the FF-Plus share in predominantly white voting districts — where between the two, it is the DA that leads on a countrywide basis — is anchored in the history and lasting legacy of white privilege and economic advantages, which, it could be said these voters seek to preserve through their vote. In this regard, the DA's neoliberalism serves the same racial agenda as the FF-Plus's conservatism.

Mobilisation against

As these cases illustrate, successful popular mobilisation (whether for election purposes or otherwise) typically depends not just on some vague promise of a better life or lists of past achievements but also on tapping into resentment, fear or anger, and with the identification of some clearly designated opponent. In the case of MKP, anti-ANC mobilisation took the form of demagogic ethnic populism.

However, a wide range of other opposition parties also anchored their electoral mobilisation on negative campaigning based on stirring up fears. In particular, the DA set itself up as the only force capable of preventing the ‘nightmare scenario’ of a tie-up between the RET faction of the ANC and the EFF. On a ticket to ‘Rescue South Africa’, it mobilised around bringing the combined ANC and EFF vote below 50 per cent. This was ably supported by mainstream commercial media, among others, Media24, a subsidiary of Naspers, an apartheid-era mouthpiece of the Broederbond and Afrikaner-controlled monopoly capital. This agenda also received significant funding from capital.

It is important to note that despite all that, the DA did not grow but declined by over 100,000 actual votes, from over 3.6 million in 2019 to below 3.6 million in 2024 on the national ballot. Its marginal per cent terms increase is not a result of additional votes but a function of a significantly declined voter turnout. Therefore, we cannot conclude that its fear-mongering campaign was successful when, in fact, it declined itself.

THE ANC AND SOUTH AFRICA’S PROBLEMS

What increasingly prevailed as the dominant discourse certainly within all the mainstream media was that South Africa’s problems (inequality, unemployment, criminality) were due to ‘service delivery failures’ (that is, basically some form of mismanagement) caused, in turn, by ‘ANC corruption’ and ‘cadre deployment’.

This narrative has already been around for several years and is summarised in the content of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture as a function of the main narrative from the testimonies the Commission heard. But even in this case, it is important not to ignore the contradictions from the May 2024 election results.

For example, the MKP, despite being led by a man heavily implicated in the state capture class project and extensively exposed (including singled out by the political parties that have since declined) in both the media and the Commission's report, still managed to attract a significant number of votes.

This suggests that issues of corruption do not always deter voter support. It highlights the complexities of voter behaviour, where other factors, such as identity politics, loyalty to a cult of a personality, patronage networks, or disillusionment with other political options, may outweigh concerns about corruption. This phenomenon underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the motivations behind voter choices in contexts marked by corruption and political scandal.

There can be no doubt that corruption, particularly in its high point of state capture, has undoubtedly gravely weakened the possibilities of effective national democratic transformation. However, the key determining factor behind South Africa's multiple crises lies elsewhere. Notwithstanding the important role played by the Commission, it singularly failed to unpack, or even mention, how unemployment, inequality, and poverty are reproduced by the untransformed, systemic features of South Africa's highly financialised, capitalist political economy exacerbated by years of post-1996 neoliberal austerity policies. Unfortunately, key parts of the ANC, precisely complicit in decades of anti-people, anti-working-class neoliberalism, are incapable, or simply unwilling, even to acknowledge this reality. Asked what he expected would change regarding economic policy after the elections, outgoing (and incoming?) Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana said: 'Nothing'.

The socio-economic context of the May 2024 election

While there are, no doubt, many factors that explain the ANC's loss of its parliamentary majority in the May 2024 elections, two issues stand out. The first is widespread corruption and looting. As noted, this was the narrative that drove most opposition party campaigns and media coverage, and the fact that this was indeed a reality created a major vulnerability for the ANC. The other set of issues, as noted above, is encapsulated in the phrase 'service delivery', implying a widespread sense among the electorate that too little had been achieved to improve the material lives of the people.

Let us look at the following facts and figures, for example:

- Unemployment on the unrealistic 'strict' definition stood at 32.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, significantly higher than the 29.1 per cent recorded in the fourth quarter of 2019 (which was itself a time that saw a job loss bloodbath leading the SACP to dub it the 'crisis before the crisis'). In fact, the Stats SA report tabled during the election campaign recorded an increase of 0.8 per cent over the level in the third quarter of 2023. On the more realistic 'expanded definition', the unemployment rate stands at 41.9 per cent per cent, while youth unemployment is over 60 per cent. Moreover, Stats SA also reported that the proportion of the unemployed in 'long term' unemployment rose from 67 to 77 per cent — meaning that nearly 80 per cent of the unemployed have been without a job for an extended period. All in all, there are now 12 million people without jobs forced to eke out an existence in survivalist activities of one sort or another.
- Nearly half the population (49.2 per cent) and more than half the female population (52.2 per cent) subsist on incomes below Upper Bound Poverty Level.
- A World Bank study published in March 2022 ranked South Africa as the most unequal of 164 countries surveyed, with

an income Gini coefficient of 0.67 and 10 per cent of the population owning more than 80 per cent of total wealth.

What these figures tell us is that while there may have been some 'recovery' from the Great Recession of the Covid-19 pandemic measured in terms of stock exchange prices or GDP, for large parts of the working class and the poor, there has decidedly been no recovery either from the Covid-19 crisis or from the 'crisis before the crisis' that existed in 2019.

Rolling back neoliberal right-wing tendency, right-wing populism, demagoguery, an ethno-chauvinism

The Party must entrench mass mobilisation to roll back the decline of revolutionary movements and progressive forces on the one hand and the rise of ethno-chauvinist and tribal organisations on the other hand. This could be a terrain to build new fronts to mobilise against the rise of right-wing and populist, fascist forces who easily hoodwink the masses, particularly during a period of economic crisis.

Our tasks must include engaging with all sections of the working class, including those who find themselves in reactionary organisations. We should intensify our work in the trade union movement and rebuild our waning presence. One of the immediate platforms for intervention could be a popular left front towards the National Dialogue proposed by former President Mbeki and endorsed by President Ramaphosa during his inauguration. However, we must be careful about a situation where others may seem to have moved on, separately framing the National Dialogue with no or limited consultation.

A GNU IN NAME, A CENTRE-RIGHT ANC-DA COALITION IN REALITY OR A NEW CLASS ALLIANCE TAKING SHAPE AWAY FROM THE ANC'S HISTORICAL ALLIES?

While the rise of ethno-nationalistic populism was a significant

factor in the May 2024 elections, its impact on the makeup of the government has rebounded. While the ANC's stated preference was for a Government of National Unity, in practice, this appears as an ANC-DA centre-right coalition.

While the actions of the MKP and EFF played a role in leading to this outcome, this was always the preferred option of the neo-liberals within the ANC, as well as of the bourgeoisie in general and finance capital in particular. The last-minute agreement between the ANC and the DA assures the DA of at least six cabinet posts. More problematically, the agreement between the ANC and the DA includes the notion of 'sufficient consensus', with 'sufficient consensus' explicitly defined as 60 per cent. This appears to be connected to the electoral results of the ANC and the DA combined.

Hence, the impression that while there is reference to the NGU in name, in reality, it either appears as an ANC-DA coalition or has the ANC and the DA at its core. In addition, in its manoeuvres, the DA has interpreted the situation to enable it to usurp effective veto, suggesting that the ANC cannot take or implement a decision unless the two as the '60 per cent agree'. We reject this proposition with the contempt it deserves. If it prevails, it will be nothing by a sellout arrangement. The ANC seems to fear that independence may lead to disinvestment and a collapsing currency, while the DA seems concerned about a left influence on the ANC, which has now been rejected by capital.

We should be under no illusions. A coalition arrangement involving a rightwing force such as the DA will seek to lead a sharp shift to the right — including advancing 'on steroids' the kind of neoliberal policies which, the SACP has argued, have underpinned the crisis that led the movement to lose its majority. There were signs of such an ambition even before the election. For example, the recently re-appointed South African Reserve Bank governor argued for a tightening of the inflation target from the current 3 to 6 per cent to between 2 and 4 per cent. The DA's 'framework'

for its participation in coalitions, as well as calling for it to occupy key positions in parliament and 'strategic' ministries, calls for the budget deficit to be brought to 3.5 per cent of GDP or lower in three years and the debt to GDP ratio to be reduced to 67 per cent by 2031 after peaking in 2025/6. It also calls for Eskom to be unbundled, ports to be concessioned, and a mineral rights regime to be 'reformed'.

The implementation of any or all of these and other neoliberal measures would see policies that achieve completely de-contextualised macro-economic ratios from the IMF playbook, which trump all other considerations, and privatisation by stealth proceeds apace. Underlying this is an evident ambition by prominent figures in finance capital that the coalition could finally 'free' President Ramaphosa from the shackles of 'the left' in the ANC and create conditions for a more decisive programme of neoliberal structural reform.

No doubt, many in the bourgeoisie will be seeing the coalition with the DA operating under the fig leaf of a GNU as the vehicle for such accelerated neoliberal reform. This is at the heart of the crisis we face, at the heart of what is possible. We have now fully arrived at the crossroads, and our intention must be clear — to either continue the road of carefulness or adopt outright vacillation, of trepidation, of the fear of capital, of selling out the working class with weak bourgeoisie theoretical justifications. This is the moment that the left itself should see as furnishing an opportunity to deepen and sharpen class contradictions to de-couple the South African revolution from the grip and control of capital.

Our key task in the period now unfolding is to combat any rightward shift in government and the policy space and assert a national-revolutionary democratic transformation programme. This must be backed by mobilising the class on the ground.

Unlike previously, this time around, capital has arrogantly entered the political terrain actively and directly sought to remove the liberation movement headed by the ANC and its allies from the

government. Not only has capital funded several political parties to dislodge the ANC but has unapologetically agitated for a change of government, among others, using a variety of media outlets, social platforms, think tanks and research. The issue is whether the liberation movement sees the opportunity to fully assume responsibility for its mission without constraints of commitments, if any, to capital, which, for decades, has weakened the posture of radical transformation of society?

One of the features of the May 2024 election was the relative absence of working-class politics — except through the influence of the SACP and Cosatu on the ANC Manifesto and as reflected through the distorted prism of the militaristic and personality cult driven by populist and proto-fascist organisations, among others. Others correctly called this a crisis of representation for the working class: in other words, the absence of a clear working-class party contesting the elections and shaping the alternative to the myriads of bourgeoisie parties, old and new.

More than that, these developments have the potential to be seen as an open door for the bourgeoisie to mount a counter-revolution against gains made by the working class on different fronts: the NHI, minimum wages, and social grants among them. While lip service may continue to be paid to the need for Industrial Policy, any assigning of the Department of Trade and Industry to the DA is likely to see active Industrial Policy measures giving way to de-regulation and tariff liberalisation. We must stop this from happening.

Such a conjuncture requires working class formations to strengthen their capacity to confront the new challenges that will arise on a terrain that will significantly differ from that in the recent past. The SACP is committed to building a left popular front as a vehicle for more effectively driving campaigns and building greater working-class influence in all sites of power.

Most importantly, the SACP has to redefine its independent role during this period to tackle multiple challenges on different

terrains. In approaching this task, we may want to reflect on the following:

- Working class influence has declined significantly as a result of both objective and subjective factors. Objective factors include the reorganisation of production during the era of neoliberal globalisation that weakened industrial unions across the world, coupled with trends like outsourcing that also weakened union power. Subjectively, the fragmentation of the trade union movement into competing or even rival unions and federations — the product both of experiences of struggles in particular sectors and issues like the relationship to a governing party — need to be acknowledged as having significantly reduced the power and influence of trades unions.
- The high levels of long-term unemployment reflect a reality that much of our working class is located not only in factories that are easy to unionise but also in survivalist activity in the so-called informal economy and casual work. While good work is being done by some comrades and organisations in this space, neither the SACP nor most of the labour movement have much of an impactful presence in this space.
- Working-class formations, including the SACP and Cosatu, as well as other unions, have, in practice, if not in theory, seemingly prioritised a lot of their activities in the party-political terrain and issues of governance. Campaigns outside of this space have been a lot less impactful, although the SACP has developed a large campaign portfolio compared to other political organisations. Nevertheless, we may want to re-assess what needs to be done to strengthen our capacity to actually operate on other terrains.
- The SACP's own influence within and impact upon the ANC and ANC-led government has steadily declined since at

least the last relative high point in the years following the 2007 ANC Conference and Zuma's first term as national president 2009-2014. This decline is evident, for instance, in declining SACP members elected to the ANC NEC, as well as on the ANC 2024 national election list.

- The relative decline in terms of public impact and of left influence within the Alliance of both the progressive trade union movement and the SACP has left a gap that has seemingly been colonised by external organisations with a blend of crude but potentially popular anti-neoliberalism coupled with demagogic personality cults. With the ANC apparently moving into an effective right-wing coalition with the DA, if that happens, this gap will open even further and the challenges (and class responsibilities) of the SACP will become greater and more challenging.

The emerging conjuncture looks set to be one in which the kind of practice we have de facto prioritised in the recent past — seeking, through Alliance processes, to enhance working-class influence on ANC policy and decisions — is likely to be even less impactful as if its coalition partners will wield power. Without suggesting abandoning that site of struggle and recognising that the ANC is just above 40 per cent but remains the largest party in South Africa by electoral support, this would point to an imperative to re-prioritise our activities and campaigns. We need to focus less on seeking to insert progressive wording into the ambiguities of a succession of Alliance documents and more on building actual working-class power through struggles on the ground.

Put differently; the new terrain will be one where we need to recognise that we are even less likely than before to be able to win in the boardroom what we have not won on the ground. The idea of a popular left front points to recognising that the SACP needs to reach out to other formations. Even if we were a powerful campaigning force on the ground, acting alone would not be desirable. In fact, right now, we confront a reality of pockets of

left activity fragmented in different ways operating in a context of a people facing a deepening crisis of reproduction and deeply disillusioned with the prevailing order. Given these realities, building a popular left front and a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor must be our apex priority, organisationally, politically and ideologically.

While we can learn a lot from the history of similar endeavours by Communist Parties in other places and other times, we must root our own process in our own reality. That reality is one of fragmented organisation and no established organisation around which all will quickly rally. In a sense, we need to engage in coalition building of our own, left and socialist. That means reaching out beyond our existing comfort zone of alliance partners and movement-linked individuals. This might need to begin with conversations on assessments of the conjuncture and key tasks and challenges for the future to identify the common ground. The focus, however, needs to be on campaigns which could range from specific issues to campaigns for alternative macroeconomic policy perspectives.

CONCLUSION AND IMMEDIATE TASKS OF THE LEFT

Finally, let us reposition ourselves and rapidly adapt to the new situation of restrained exercise of political power, but not much of a changed terrain of struggle. We should start with the acceptance of poor electoral performance and the revolutionary setback we suffered. We need to also acknowledge the critical role elections play in shaping the lives of the working class and the revolutionary movement and that the material living conditions of the people determine their choices. In this regard, we need a thorough class analysis of this conjuncture, including a deep-going thirty years of democracy. This analysis should be historical and must deal with the post-1994 errors to address the momentary interests of the working class and lay the foundation for informed strategic interventions.

In the context of these new realities, it is inevitable for the ANC to make even more compromises, but what should be our posture toward the GNU given its limitations, especially the various ministries under the leadership of parties opposed to the NDR and even those that vulgarises the NDR? What are the implications and the real meaning of this setback to the working-class struggle for the NDR, let alone its socialist orientation as a direct route to socialism?

More importantly, as part of the liberation forces, we should debate what this moment and this setback specifically mean that in the era of a weakening and even collapsing neoliberal system, the moral decline and crisis of the liberal order and capitalist hegemony, given the relentless countenance by popular forces and the possible rise of a multi-polar world order system?

Immediate to medium-term tasks of the Party

- We need to seriously rebuild the responsive and campaigning organisational structures of the SACP along new trends and societal development. We need to involve science and technology in the new form of campaigning but still primarily rooting the Party amongst the people, especially the working class, and work and struggle with them to resolve the economic and social challenges they face.
- This aspect is entirely tied to the ability of the Party to renew itself and certainly embrace the Communist Party of China's notion of 'self-revolution', or what Amilcar Cabral called the struggle against our own weakness, to anchor the necessary change and perhaps lead to the point of rediscovering the primary mission of the liberation movement that may enable us to rid the chains of capital.
- We need to unite the liberation forces, especially the Alliance, and deepen the reconfiguration of the Alliance and their mutually beneficial renewal agenda
- Build and consolidate a popular left front based on the

campaign for radical transformation of the material living conditions of the working class and changing unequal power relations in society, including class, race and gender relations and contradictions.

- We should direct our structures not to disband the Red Brigades established for the election campaign to take forward the programmatic campaigns of the SACP and consolidate the socialist movement of the workers and poor on the ground.
- We should convene district, followed by provincial councils, to evaluate the election campaign and grasp what happened and equally give feedback on the setback the revolution is going through and devise the way forward towards the Special National Congress scheduled for December 2024 and ultimately the 16th National Congress scheduled for July 2027. These engagements should also be used to assess the state of the organisation and give new tasks.
- This should be followed by a broad engagement with our cadres and the left and progressive social forces to demonstrate our seriousness in contesting the developing conjuncture and give progressive orientation to the GNU as a contested terrain.