



African Communist

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The struggle must deepen!



Forward to a Left Popular Front, to socialism

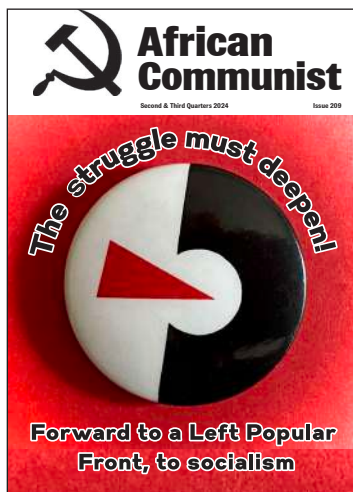
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Cover image: The badge featured is based on the famous 1919 poster by Soviet artist El Lissitzky titled "Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge", which became an enduring symbol of left struggle and solidarity.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

The challenges of the broad left following the elections and the formation of a GNU

This issue of the AC focuses on analyses of the South African national elections, on the significant decline in the ANC's voter share, and subsequent developments. The most notable of these developments is the formation of a so-called government of national unity (GNU). The GNU is in effect a centre-right coalition between the ANC and the DA.

Our analysis from the Central Committee political report and the critical input at the Nehawu political school to analyse election outcomes and other contributions on these interrelated questions, including an official perspective from the National Education and Health Workers' Union (Nehawu), agree on three fundamentals:

- While the misnamed uMkhonto WeSizwe Party (MKP) succeeded in winning away ANC voters, largely in KZN, with an ethno-populist demagogy, this was not the main reason for the ANC's electoral decline. By far the largest reason for the ANC's dramatic loss of votes was a massive voter stayaway of nearly 23 million potential but clearly alienated voters. This tells us that it is not just the ANC that is challenged but the very durability and legitimacy of our hard-won democracy. There are multiple causes for these outcomes including amongst others the continued pursuit of neoliberal austerity measures by ANC ANC-led government amid a deepening crisis of living of the majority and the general crisis of capitalist social reproduction
- There are many reasons for these developments, most of which are well-rehearsed: chronic "state capture" corruption highlighted week after week in the Zondo commission; mismanagement of public resources; and a deepening poly-crisis of inequality, poverty and soaring unemployment. Working class communities have been bearing the brunt of electricity black-outs and water load shedding, and of personal insecurity. It is these communities that typically confront local-level elected politicians some of whom try their best but prove to be helplessly under-resourced. Others are simply indifferent or even flaunt their new

wealth. It is no wonder that a survey conducted last year found that political parties across the board (and not just the ANC) only enjoy approval from 17 per cent of South Africans.

- All the above factors are frequently mentioned including in the ANC's own self-critical evaluations. However, what is absolutely central for a correct understanding, and therefore for correct remedial action, is too often absent. This missing element is what is consistently emphasised in all three discussion documents in this issue of AC. Corrupt individuals, poor 'cadre' deployment, social distance from communities and opulent lifestyles of the political leaders amid mass poverty all play their part. These are further enhanced by a terminal decline of the organisation unable to renew itself, with accelerated moral decay of its top political elites whose weaknesses have made the broader liberation movement more vulnerable and untrusted. They are unaccountable to the masses and their members and are beholden to factions for their self-preservation. But government failures are not just subjective failures - they are structurally enabled. Likewise, world record levels of unemployment and inequality are not disparate facts. These negative realities in their interaction have been driven by three decades of increasingly harsh neoliberal austerity and the dismantling of the state's functionality let alone its developmental capacity in favour of corporations through massive outsourcing of the actual government function and decimation of the public economic capacity and governance.

Where does this leave the left? What is to be done?

These interventions boldly state that the ANC's poor electoral performance, and its effective centre-right coalition with the DA in the GNU, along with its general failure to address the core issues affecting the working class means that the ANC has forfeited any legitimacy to lead an effective national democratic revolution.

Much the same sentiment, from the other side of the street, is advanced by Wits University professor David Everatt who celebrates the fact that: "Cyril Ramaphosa has completely changed the ANC. The broad church has gone (...) he has freed the ANC to become a middle class, pro-business party of all races."

The implication of the Nehawu view is surely right. The left both within the Alliance and beyond needs to play an active role to reclaim the trajectory of radical national democratic transformation – if not, there will be none. But we

all know that leadership of a national liberation movement is not something to be proclaimed. It has to be won in active, broad-ranging, non-sectarian struggle.

The election outcome and the formation of a GNU is a political choice driven by the dominant neoliberal faction in the ANC. This has consolidated a “middle-class, pro-business” as Evarrat says, but has also strengthened this faction for a rightward orientation within the ANC. But it is wrong to assume that this orientation has suddenly emerged out of the blue. Moreover, Everatt, like so many others, too easily assumes that the welcome marginalisation of the state-capture, RET right-wing networks (the pseudo-left) now exiled largely into MKP and EFF, is the same as the marginalisation of an actual left that remains within and beyond the broad ANC movement.

There is little doubt, however, that the leading (neoliberal) ANC tendency now within an effective ANC-DA coalition might often be more inclined to listen to DA counterparts than to SACP or Cosatu in tripartite policy discussions, even if this ANC left is treated with more politeness than during the Mbeki era, or, for that matter, in Zuma’s second presidential term. But much more than any DA counterpart, the key influencers of this tendency, and the true marriage brokers of the GNU, will continue to be leading capitalists, especially in the financial sector. Notable among them is Martin Kingston, a largely publicity-shy person, formerly of Deutsche Bank and Rothschild, and a key enabler of BEE deals going back to the 1990s. Kingston is now chairperson of the steering committee of Business for SA (B4SA).

In mid-August, Kingston and other business leaders met with Ramaphosa and select members of the GNU cabinet. The following day, Daily Maverick carried a headline that says it all: “Business throws its weight behind South Africa’s GNU reform agenda” (14 August 2024). The GNU reform agenda which they are supporting is essentially about introducing profit-seeking investments for private operations into the Eskom space and Transnet’s rail and port infrastructure and operations as well as others like security and now water, continuing the Tito Mboweni legacy project of ‘bringing competition in the network industry’. They claim that this will lead to economic growth and job creation. In their optimistic projections they tell us that by 2030 the unemployment rate (narrow definition) will be down to 28 per cent.

There we have it. Key cabinet ministers in the GNU and leading business personalities are telling us that the horizon of their ambitions is to still have persisting world record levels of unemployment all the way to 2030. This is unsustainable. The ANC will be punished even more severely in the

forthcoming local government elections and the 2029 national elections. Indeed, the DA is also setting itself to be punished for being co-responsible for the dismal outcomes. That is, unless, of course, the DA breaks the GNU a year or so out from the national elections, blaming the ANC for the persisting all-round crisis for the majority of South Africans.

What then is the way forward for the left in these conditions? The SACP has said it will remain sharply critical of the strategic orientation of the GNU. It means, further, that the SACP will not march out of the ANC and the alliance in a petulant huff - as big capital has been urging us to do for the past 30 years and more. Future increasingly dismal electoral results for the ANC, and the multiple crises that will be provoked, make the durability of the GNU questionable. In these circumstances, pseudo-left right wing populist demagoguery (notwithstanding the current organisational turmoil within the MKP and EFF) will rear its head.

For these and other reasons the SACP has a responsibility to recognise both the ANC and government as key sites of struggle, from outside and from within. This is, literally, a civilisational task.

But all of this must be done without naivete. We have learnt from long experience that as the Party we cannot simply await objective factors to produce positive results. Likewise, influence upon the ANC cannot rest alone on endless policy engagements in tripartite meetings, as important as these might be. It is for all these reasons that the SACP has consistently called for the active formation of a dynamic left popular front (LPF).

It is a LPF, or, more likely a series of campaign based LPFs that should be neither dogmatically anti-ANC (sweeping the whole of the ANC into neoliberal clutches), nor dogmatically pro-ANC (marginalising many left leaning progressive formations, particularly involved in sectoral struggles). Here again we find the same useful strategic guidance - to be neither, by self-definition, in opposition to the ANC, nor to be uncritical of the ANC.

All three contributions on the elections and GNU in this issue suggest immediate campaigning areas around which a left popular front campaigns might begin to be consolidated. They include mass-based campaigns around ANC manifesto commitments that under the self-imposed constraints of the GNU will not be met, or at best met in highly diluted forms - a Basic Income Grant, expansive public employment programmes and a National Health Insurance. We should work with the unions to build popular campaigns in defence of public sector workers facing what will now be an intensified

attempt to massively downsize and cut wages. The Minister of Home Affairs admits that the department has only 40 per cent staffing capacity, but doesn't say it due to imposed austerity measures.

As we endeavour to take up this line of march we also need, at least as the left within the ANC alliance, to be asking self-critical questions. Have our own shortcomings, resource challenges, and even divisions, contributed to the crisis of working-class representation so glaringly revealed by the mass popular stay away from the elections?

We trust that this issue of the AC will contribute to the important debates that are happening within our country among left forces and help define the left way forward!



CENTRAL COMMITTEE

A crisis of working-class political representation

– defining the post-election challenges and tasks facing the working class, the SACP and the left broadly

The following is the Political Report presented to the SACP's 28-30 June 2024 Central Committee meeting

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 at that time and the election campaign was intensifying.

The working class was suffering from entrenched multiple crises of capitalist economic and social reproduction, making life just unaffordable for the majority. The cost-of-living crisis persisted amid interrelated crisis-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 around, our revolutionary movement cannot compromise by guaranteeing such profitability without facing a serious 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 both 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 that 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, both 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 in Mozambique and Angola, respectively.

The imperialist West has engaged in a series of manoeuvres to co-opt South Africa to take their side in the war taking place in Ukraine. That war was started by the US-led imperialist West through its politico-economic-military alliance, Nato. South Africa firmly rejected being co-opted into and taking its cue from the imperialist West not only in the Nato-provoked war against Russia in Ukraine but also in the apartheid Israeli state’s settler colonial occupation of Palestinian lands and continuing genocidal war on the Palestinian people.

The referral of apartheid Israel by South Africa to the International Court of Justice on the charge of genocide ruffled feathers in the imperialist camp. We welcome the Cuban government’s decision to join South Africa’s case against the apartheid Israeli settler regime’s genocide on Palestinian people. The US-led imperialist west is unhappy about Cuba’s decision. We must reaffirm our solidarity with the Cuban government and people and deepen it in practical ways.

Regarding the Nato-provoked war in Ukraine, the position we have developed is that while Russia was clearly the immediate target of Nato's expansionist agenda via Ukraine, China was and still is the ultimate target in the US-led imperialist west's agenda to achieve totalitarian world control. Russia's military response, called a Special Military Operation by its government, has proven to be formidable and has highlighted some of its additional capabilities. This has introduced changes in the scenario, although the imperialist west has not abandoned but remains persistent in its agenda.

In provoking China, the US's manoeuvres in China's Taiwan Strait and economic and propaganda wars against China highlight some pieces of the evidence we have considered before concluding that China is the US-led imperialist West's agenda to achieve totalitarian world control.

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. In this regard, Europe's imperialist regimes automatically support the foreign policy set by the US, especially, but not only, through Nato. The US and its European allies and their subordinate states want a South Africa that will toe the same line. Right-wing parliamentary minority and other opportunist parties in South Africa have demonstrated their willingness to subordinate our country to the US-led imperialist west foreign policy interests.

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 now

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.

Let us recall. In one of his many correspondences with Frederick Engels, Karl Marx deals, among others, with motion and change in their dialectical connection, and their impact on social change, including in the economy. He notes that in historical developments of such magnitude, there are times when twenty years are no more than a day and times when twenty years are concentrated in one day, week, month, or year. Related to this, Vladimir Lenin is widely attributed to have said there are times when days become decades and decades become days. This is what our revolution seems to be going through at the moment.

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 well 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, based on voter turnout

1999 – 10,6 million: 66.4 per cent of valid votes, based on voter turnout

2004 – 10,9 million: 69.7 per cent of valid votes, based on voter turnout

2009 – 11,7 million: 65.9 per cent of valid votes, based on voter turnout

2014 – 11,4 million: 62.2 per cent of valid votes, based on voter turnout

2019 – 10,0 million: 57.5 per cent of valid votes, based on voter turnout

2024 – 6,5 million: 40.2 per cent of valid votes, based on voter turnout.

Bear in mind that with population growth the number of potential voters will have increased over this 30-year period. 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 is a drop off in 2019 despite some “Ramaphoria”, and then 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 for the SACP? We will try to raise and answer some of these questions in a later section of 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 is also telling 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 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.

Here, 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 benefits 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.

But 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. In this, it 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 rather 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 had already been around over 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 to not 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, and particularly in its state-capture high-point, has undoubtedly gravely weakened the possibilities of effective national democratic transformation. But 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, 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, to even acknowledge this reality. Asked what he expected would change regarding economic policy after the elections, outgoing (and incoming?) Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana said: “Nothing”.

Was our election campaign uninspiring to lose so many votes?

All of this led to an off-balance and uninspiring ANC election campaign. It was unable and/or unwilling to seriously address the problem of destructive neoliberal austerity. It was unable to clearly identify what we were and are still up against. And given the marginal and slow progress made with internal renewal, the ANC remains off-balance when countering the predominant “service delivery failures caused by corruption” narrative. The shutting down of the disastrous Gauteng e-tolls was too little and far too late. The important but hurried last-minute passing of the NHI legislation did not effectively feature in convincing, on-the-ground campaigning. Popular mobilisation around the right to equal healthcare was not helped by Ramaphosa, saying that he would consider amendments to the legislation, or by Treasury saying any substantive implementation is still years off. While the commitment to converting the Social Relief of Distress Grant into a Universal Basic Income Grant is to be welcomed, it also came at an eleventh hour, despite the fact that it has a strong basis in the manifesto. The commitment should have been a key pillar of sustained, on-the-ground campaigning led by the ANC and the entire Alliance after the introduction of the Social Relief of Distress Grant at the height of the Covid pandemic. The SACP, and also Cosatu, lacked the unequivocal support and participation of the ANC in driving the campaign to convert the Social Relief of Distress Grant into a Universal Basic Income Grant. There was contradictory messaging from within the ANC, with the National Treasury’s influence actively present on the equation. The ANC’s posture was in the rearguard compared to the NGOs that largely developed a key role among the leading voices in the campaign.

Also, the welcome improvement in Eskom’s performance and two months free of load-shedding on the eve of the elections was widely read as a cynical election ploy despite neutral experts assuring us that this was not the case.

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 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.

While many causes of these realities have their origins in global capitalist system trends – the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of the Nato-provoked war in Ukraine, including unilateral sanctions, included, the fact is that the South African economy has “recovered” much more shallowly and unevenly than many peer countries. Thus, while securities exchange prices have risen amidst a quick recovery of financialised trading, and the Gross Domestic Product is now above pre-Covid levels, the GDP per capita is not, meaning that on average our people are still poorer than they were before Covid-19. 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.

Financialisation

At the same time, the financialisation of the South African economy has both advanced and penetrated into new areas. The extent of financialisation of the South African economy is only partly reflected in the fact that the “contribution” of financial services to GDP has increased from around 6 per cent in 1994 to nearly 25 per cent today. Less overtly it has also involved the promotion of an increasing dependence both of non-financial firms and households on financial transactions, the creation of ever more sophisticated processes and “products” leading to a significant transfer of wealth and profits to financial institutions, fund and wealth management institutions increasingly shaping investment decisions and the financial bourgeoisie becoming both the dominant and hegemonic force within “business”.

According to one estimate, funds of various sorts manage capital with a value three times the GDP of the country. This is not capital that is not invested. It most definitely is invested – just not in infrastructure or productive activity in South Africa but in securities and financial assets, including offshore. The past five years have seen a significant ramping up of the influence and claims of finance capital. This has, among other things, included stronger calls for the “opening up” of more areas for profit seeking “opportunities”, including in a growing list of areas in the provision of public goods and services.

Often advanced in the name of creating new opportunities for public authorities to “leverage” additional resources, these have been based on demanding “de-risking” by government – involving not just guarantees against default but also for “attractive” rates of return. A particular example over the past five years has been the resort to “blended finance” as the envisaged main tool for resourcing what was supposed to be a “massive” infrastructure development programme. While this has seen much “de-risking” and “partnership building”, its impact on infrastructure build has been underwhelming, particularly against the background of a sharp fall in public infrastructure build.

At the other end of the spectrum has been stagnation in the productive sectors or so-called “real economy”. Stats SA’s figures on GDP growth also released during the election campaign pointed to contraction of 0,1 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, with agriculture. Mining and manufacturing all contracting by more than the average. Particularly concerning was the contraction of Manufacturing Value Added over the past five years, notwithstanding the implementation of a number of positive Industrial Policy measures.

The SACP's often repeated view of the reasons underlying South Africa's below par performance, particularly in respect of indicators that really matter to working class and poor, is a combination of corruption and the adoption of austerity and other neoliberal policies. There can be no doubt that corruption and mismanagement have severely undermined the performance of public entities critical to development. Addressing this is a key imperative.

In its submission to the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, the SACP argued that part of the challenge required addressing structural challenges that had created opportunities for looting. We pointed out that, in the 1990s, our government had in practice imported much of the "new public management" model being promoted by the purveyors of neoliberal reform.

This involved the state withdrawing from the direct provision of many goods and services in favour of procuring them from allegedly more efficient and cost-effective "private sector" providers. A result of this was that many public officials, instead of becoming front line service providers, became, instead, managers of procurement processes. As we know, "procurement" became, and still is, a major channel for corruption and our view is that part of the struggle to reduce its pernicious influence has to involve restructuring public entities with greater in-sourcing and direct provision of key strategic developmental services.

Regarding the tilt towards neoliberalism, the import of two significant policy frameworks not identified in the 2019 Manifesto was critical. The first of these was the adoption of the National Treasury's policy paper, *Economic Transformation, Inclusive Growth and Competitiveness: Towards an Economic Strategy for South Africa*. The focus of this was on "structural reform" of "network industries" implicitly adopting the definition favoured by agencies like the World Bank and OECD that saw "structural reform" as involving the liberalisation of sectors in which public entities operated as a step towards eventual privatisation of public utilities. Justified as the only alternative to rescue SOCs reduced by mismanagement to effective bankruptcy, this has gone furthest in the case of air transport, where the domestic air travel sector was already considerably liberalised.

Unable to capture a larger share of this market without new investment, a private sector strategic partner for the national carrier was sought, and this has recently acquired a 51 per cent stake relegating the state to the role of minority shareholder. Similar processes are at various stages in the electricity, rail freight transport and ports sector, while entities like the Post Office and Armscor are now almost non-existent. Privatisation Mark II (unlike its 1990s

predecessor which never really got off the ground) thus ends rather than begins with the sale of erstwhile potentially developmental entities to profit seeking interests leaving this until any other option appears unrealisable, and being therefore what could be termed privatisation by stealth. As the SACP we remain convinced that the track record in many other jurisdictions of replacing former public utilities with profit seeking entities has done little to improve the supply of public transport, energy or water let alone to increase their access to lower-income people – which was in fact one of the key achievements of the democratic government in its early years.

The other key policy enunciated in the National Treasury paper was ‘fiscal consolidation.’ This was to prioritise the attainment of the pre-ordained fiscal ratios defined without regard to specific circumstances in the neoliberal playbook, and in particular to bring the debt-to-GDP ratio to below the 60 per cent threshold apparently demanded by domestic and international financialised capital and rating agencies. Under fiscal consolidation, moreover, ratios were to be achieved not by raising taxes or relying on growth-enhancing interventions to increase revenue, but by cuts (hence being austerity). Cuts, and not just corruption, have been a major factor underlying the failure of many progressive programmes to operate at scale.

The other major policy intervention was the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Programme adopted during the Covid emergency. As the SACP we participated in the Alliance-driven process that began work on what became the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Plan (ERRP), but were left aghast when this work was effectively taken out of the hands of the alliance and completed in processes from which we were excluded. When the ERRP finally emerged, we welcomed elements of it – such as the much-improved public employment programme, the declared intention to advance a “massive” infrastructure build and advance support for industrialisation as well as small enterprise and township and rural development. However, in the end, the ERRP was subordinated to “fiscal consolidation” resulting in many of its components being seriously underfunded and the programme as a whole having a much weaker and shallower impact than similar programmes then being implemented in other jurisdictions.

One example, which we cited was that the much better designed and managed public employment programme, despite its short-term impact on unemployment and poverty reduction – had its budget cut by 10 per cent (to re-prioritise raising money for Eskom) at a time when unemployment had reached record levels. Another example was the case of the Social Relief of

Distress Grant (SRD). We welcomed the introduction of the SRD at the height of the pandemic as a minimum measure to assist persons literally then facing starvation. We also welcomed the fact that the government did not succumb to the multiple pressures to curtail it thereafter even though the conditions giving rise to its introduction had not improved even to the extent of returning to those prevailing at the time of the “crisis before the crisis”.

More recently, as indicated earlier, we have criticised the stubborn refusal despite the cost-of-living crisis impacting disproportionately on poor people to raise the SRD Grant above the R350 per month that it was initially set at. Moreover, we have become aware of an apparent attempt to reduce the cost to the fiscus of this programme through the clandestine addition of more red tape, making it more difficult for poor people to access the SRD Grant. This contrasts with the de-regulation (styled red tape reduction) taking place, particularly in the energy sector to encourage more profit-seeking enterprises to enter the electricity generation space.

According to the Institute of Economic Justice, this has led to a sharp drop both in applications approved and payouts as the following figures show.

Year	Applications	Approvals	Paid
10/11/21	14,5 million	9,9 million	9,8 million
15/2/22	15,3 million	10,7 million	10,4 million
30/6/22	11,4 million	5,3 million	3,7 million

These matters are now the subject of litigation which the government, surely, cannot afford to see resulting in further revelations of unjustifiable parsimonious conduct at the expense of poor people.

Equally, we would refer to the absolute stubborn refusal to entertain any of the several heterodox proposals made to increase funding for public investment through prescribed assets, community-reinvestment type legislation, new taxes on wealth or even the vigorous closing of loopholes allowing aggressive tax avoidance and tax evasion or illicit capital outflows. Nor do we seem to be as actively on the lookout for alternative approaches as some of our peers e.g. on de-dollarisation (which could potentially reduce the stranglehold which the extensive integration of the South African financial sector into the US and UK networks has on interest rate policy), or to opportunities to significantly ramp up “localisation” policies in the face of the reality that several developed countries (the US foremost among them) are doing just that with scant regard for the spirit or the letter of WTO rules.

In our submission to the Alliance Manifesto Review Process, the SACP argued that “... the lack of progress over the past five years in improving performance on the indicators that really matter to working people and the poor – unemployment, poverty, and inequality – has reached the point where it has created an existential threat to the advance of the NDR”.

We are among those who contributed to the ANC’s 2024 election manifesto. The manifesto has a strong progressive thrust, in part due to the inclusive consultative process that was followed. This progressive thrust of the manifesto includes commitments to advance industrialisation, align macro-economic policy to become developmental, support industrialisation and expand access to work opportunities – not only public employment programmes but all work opportunities, both explicit and implicit in the full text of the manifesto. The manifesto pledges to protect strategic industries, advance future industries, move towards a [universal] basic income grant, tackle the rising cost-of-living crisis and increase investment in large-scale social and economic infrastructure. There is also support for cooperatives and SMMEs industrialisation across all value chains, empowering youth, women, and people living with disability. In its progressive thrust, the manifesto includes commitments to advance financial sector transformation, revert to and push forward prescribed assets (mandated investment), establish a sovereign wealth fund to support transformation and development priorities, accelerate land redistribution, improve food security and agricultural production, promote rural and urban development, and enable greater access to housing, homes for the people. This is just a summary focusing on selected commitments. The manifesto has been distributed widely, not only for campaigning purposes but also for a full review and, in our case, mobilisation of the working class to give more substantive content in pursuit of its progressive thrust.

While the manifesto includes a welcome progressive thrust, it is important to note that we the Alliance partners were not responsible for the final version, which did not include all our contributions. The process did not take place in a vacuum where there were no other forces impacting it. As a result, some important commitments in the manifesto are often couched in ambiguous language, which is not sufficient to forge a new hegemonic project to advance the NDR.

We therefore cannot overemphasise the importance of strengthening our technical capacity and consistently mobilising the working class to make a desired impact in the class-contested legislative development and policy space. This is especially important given the unfavourable environment resulting from the election outcomes – in terms of which for the first time

since our country's democratic election the ANC-led movement did not win the minimum of 50 per cent plus one to form an outright majority government. While we have faced various degrees of neoliberal class projects since the rise of the reformist agenda in the late 1980s and 1990s within our own movement, which we discuss in detail in our Party Programme, *The South African Struggle for Socialism*, this time around, neoliberal policy reforms have greater support from capital and other forces external to our movement due to the precarious balance of power resulting from the election outcomes.

We are therefore facing a greater challenge, given the apparent apathy within the ranks of the working class, as reflected in the lower voter turnout and fragmentation, highlighted by split and lost votes, as well as tendencies such as the persisting legacy of a racial and a surge in ethnic and tribal identity politics.

Our work is cut out for us. The developing situation could culminate in a rightward shift in government policy, exacerbating the neoliberal policies we have been struggling against, if the working class is not united and better organised in trade unions, other sectoral and community-based organisations, and, above all, politically. This would be detrimental to the radical, socialist-oriented NDR we have been striving to assert against reformist tendencies within our movement and opposition from capital and its political organisations and representatives outside our movement. It is perhaps more crucial than ever for us to labour more resolutely and extensively, with firm determination, to secure broader working-class unity, progressive trade union, other forms of, and political, organisation and mobilisation of the working class..

The global conjuncture.

The global conjuncture may be characterised as a transition from the oppressive, hegemonic, unipolar, neoliberal globalism that arose in the aftermath of the crises of the period from 1970s. The big question is where the developing situation is heading to. Are things heading to a period of anarchic disorder, whose final features are yet to be determined in struggles and processes, but of which some are already underway? Are we in an interregnum, where many of what Gramsci called "morbid symptoms" have emerged? It could be argued that the signs of all these and related problems exist.

One of the problems is the phenomenon in which the growing discontent with neoliberalism by popular classes in the imperialist Global North and the Global South has found its main expression not in class politics but in various

forms of ethno-nationalist populism? In Europe and the US this has seen the rise of populist movements of the far right, espousing both an anti-immigrant racism and an ideology that harks back to a romantic vision of an imperialist past in slogans like “make country x great again”. In the Global South, similar trends have seen the displacement of secular non-sectarian parties by ethnic nationalist populist forces like the BJP in India (although in that case, there was some rollback in the recent election).

Looking dispassionately at our own election outcomes, we can see similar trends. The indelible tarnishing of the non-racial, anti-imperialist, NDR project by corrupt forces and their neoliberal critics who distort what the NDR is, on the one hand, and its association with neoliberalism by a reformist agenda that rose to dominance in our movement in the 1990s, on the other hand, has contributed to significant numbers of voters abandoning the ANC not in favour of working-class politics of any description but in support of narrow ethnic populism and other populist tendencies. The counter-revolutionary Zuma’s MKP project, with its vulgar mixture of anti-white coded in “anti-white monopoly capital” rhetoric and appeal to ethnic nationalists, is the obvious example of this. But the same phenomenon can be discerned in the less spectacular rise of the Patriotic Alliance, or in the concealed ethnic and racial appeal to the white population by the DA.

Hyper individualism

In his book, *The Crisis of democratic capitalism* Martin Wolf in the Chapter titled Perils of populism, within his general critic of toxic individualism and authoritarian populism raise the issue of ‘hyper individualism’. Wolf characterises hyper individualism as: “...the belief that one is allowed to do whatever one wishes – is not new ... in the USA, for example, these attitudes are an aspect of the pioneering spirit on which the country was founded. But it can be toxic, destroying social bonds and social order, creating instead what Thomas Hobbes called bellum omnium contra omnes – the war of all against all.”

This is perhaps a contribution to the characterisation of tendencies, such as the one represented by individuals like Zuma, who disregard the rules and uses liberty as the license to destroy. We should perhaps agree with Wolf when he asserts that “a democratic republic depends on an ordered liberty, rooted respect for the rule of law and, still, more social values”.

He concludes by saying that “politics must respond to the fear and rage that brought populists to power. But it must not surrender to them”. While Zuma never gained absolute power, it would be foolhardy to surrender to a lumpen mentality represented by the hyper-individualism reflected in some of the tendencies he displayed.

OR Tambo warned us against some of these tendencies we still see today. When delivering his political report to the 1985 Kabwe Conference, he had this to say:

“...in this offensive, the apartheid regime and its allies sought, among other things, to utilize a faction which had emerged within our ranks and which posed as the true defender of the policy of our movement.”

He further said:

“This faction resorted to the well-tried counter-revolutionary positions of anti-communism and racist chauvinism, in an effort to change the strategic orientation of our movement, undermine the unity of the democratic forces of our country and win recognition for itself by the most backward forces in world politics. By a policy of vilification and outright lies, it tried to discredit the leadership of our movement and to foment a rebellion from within the ANC in the hope that it would regain the positions it had lost at the Morogoro Conference. For its activities, this faction won the public recognition of the Pretoria regime which showered praises on it as the genuine leadership of the ANC and our people.”

The most immediate task facing our revolution is to unite all the components of our movement and the mass of our people to defeat all form of counter-revolution, no matter how it manifests itself. This will happen if we raise the level of revolutionary consciousness of our members and supporters to understand the challenges at hand and our immediate tasks as a revolutionary force of left.

As communists, we deepen our work to advance the clarion call from the Manifesto of the Communist Party by Marx and Engels: Workers of all countries and the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains. The resurgence of the demon of tribalism and regionalism is something we must fight at all costs. The working class cannot allow itself to be inspired by the backward tendencies such as bantustanism. This is an immediate threat to the National Democratic Revolution. Focus our energies on what unites us than what divides us.

Rolling back neoliberal right-wing tendency, right-wing populism, demagoguery and 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 need to be careful about a situation where others may seem to have moved on, separately framing the National Dialogue with no or limited consultation.

The National Assembly and women's representation in particular and in general

Women's representation in South Africa's National Assembly has dropped from 46 per cent in 2020 to 43 per cent following the May 2024 elections. Although the statistics are not yet available for the Provincial Legislatures, we can anticipate a similar pattern, more or less in line with the percentage decline of the ANC vote.

- ANC: Women comprise 53 per cent of the ANC parliamentarians.
- EFF: has 54 per cent of its parliamentarians are women.
- Five smaller parties have 50 per cent or more women. These include Patricia de Lille's GOOD Party (which won just one seat, a woman); Build One South Africa (BOSA), African Transformation Movement (ATM) and the Patriotic Alliance (PA). GOOD is the only South African political party led by a woman.
- Other more conservative parties have not observed the principle of equality.
- The DA has a pathetic 32 per cent
- The MKP has 34 per cent women.
- The IFP has just 29 per cent women.
- Six small parties, with one to three seats, have no women at all.

Apart from the proportion of women in the National Assembly that has dropped, the electoral decline of the ANC also means that fewer progressive women are in parliament. Apparently, in the immediate post-election period, a coalition of individual women and women's organisations from across South Africa (gender links) made a submission to political parties to "ensure women's equal, effective, transformative participation in all structures and processes" in the ensuing negotiations. They stated: "We are supportive of the call to convene a Multi-Stakeholder National Dialogue in the first quarter of the 7th Administration in 2024 as a constructive way of pulling the country together, collectively developing strategies to deal with South Africa's socio-economic and social cohesion challenges, and for ensuring that peace and stability prevail," The SACP should engage with this grouping of women to fully understand the perspective that they are adopting and their intentions going forward.

REGISTERED VOTERS 2024:					
Age group	Male	per cent	Female	per cent	Total
18-19	250 549	43,4	327 247	56,6	577 796
20-29	2 007 366	45,0	2 453 627	55	4 460 993
30-39	3 158 772	46,3	3 658 842	53,7	6 817 614
40-49	2 842 031	47,6	3 128 168	52,4	5 970 199
50-59	2 048 228	45,1	2 494 695	54,9	4 542 923
60-69	1 309 136	42,2	1 793 464	57,8	3 102 600
70-79	576 474	38,1	936 314	61,9	1 512 788
80+	217 335	29,4	521 572	70,6	738 907
Total	12 409 891	45	15 313 929	55	27 723 820

Of the registered voters in 2024, the trend of more female registered voters than males continues. Of the 27,723,820 voters, 15,313,929 are females and 12,409,891 are males. This means over 55 per cent of registered voters are women. This pattern is relatively consistent across age groups, until the age of over 70, in which the percentage of registered voters who are women is above 60 per cent – consistent with our life expectancy rate.

Progress in gender parity does not automatically translate into gender equality and development

The recent World Economic Forum Gender Equality Gap Report, much as it is ideologically informed by bourgeois agendas, is focused on gender leadership parity in the economy and not on the conditions of working-class women. Nevertheless, it provides useful regional comparators. It measures

4 dimensions of inequality – economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment and representation and health and survival.

They conclude that “In 2024, gender parity inches slowly forward – the pace of travel is such, however, that full parity remains beyond the reach of another five generations. The journey to parity is longest for the economic and political dimensions of the index, with differing speeds of individual progress threatening to lower overall collective advancement.” This is a flawed projection as it ignores that socialism is the future and with that societal transformation to more socialist states, the scope for gender transformation for the women, including working-class women, becomes significantly more possible and probable.

In its regional compactors, the report shows that African gender inequality is the highest globally. This raises a significant challenge to African left and Marxist feminists, requiring consideration of the role of the left in Africa on gender transformation and hence on the role of Alnef, among others.

Gender inequality index 2022 per region, with 0 being the preferred status and 1 being total inequality, is represented as follows:

Europe and Central Asia: 0.22

East Asia and Pacific: 0.34

Latin America and Caribbean: 0.39

South Asia: 0.48

Arab States: 0.52

Africa: 0.56

It will be important to explore the impact of conflict and war on the Gender Inequality Index over time. It is logical to project that extended conflict and war will roll back the equality of women, let alone that in the actual conflict women are often direct targets of violence.

In 2019, women made up 56 per cent of the average labour force in Africa, compared to 73 per cent of men, a gap of 13 per cent which is an advance from the gap of 23 per cent in 1990. The highest employment gap is in North Africa, where the female labour force participation rate was about 22 per cent in 2019, compared to 70 per cent for men. While the North African region has lower gender inequality in education, this does not translate into progress for

women in the labour market. Countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia prohibit women from working in certain industries.

In African parliamentary bodies, women hold an average of 24 per cent of seats, while their presence in top executive roles is a meagre 7 per cent. Despite local governments being perceived as entry points for women in politics, only 21 per cent of African council positions are held by women. Some African countries have made progress – Rwanda, Namibia, South Africa and Senegal rank among the top 10 nations globally for female representation in their parliaments, albeit that the recent SA election results have seen a decline in the participation of women in the legislatures.

The African continent has made the most significant progress in reducing gender inequality in education, but girls in sub-Saharan Africa are still the most disadvantaged regarding access to schooling compared to other global regions.

A multitude of factors, including widespread child marriage (though on a downward trend), teenage pregnancy, poverty and the social norm of valuing boys over girls, all constrain women's access to education in sub-Saharan Africa.

The effects of climate change further compound these inequities. African women, constrained by their societal roles, economic status, and restricted resource accessibility, find themselves disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The precarious situation from our election results

The elections results have given us a non-ideal situation, especially on setting up a government on our own. What it has given, though, looked from a different perspective, is freedom from capital. In fact, we defeated capital in that its primary instruments of right-wing parties, including those they set up for the purpose of forming a winning coalition (a “moonshot pact” or “multi-party charter”), failed to garner enough votes – to set up a government. So, the way forward remains a largely contested terrain. This will test the character of the liberation forces. Now it has thrown the still somehow shocked liberation forces into a cohabitation with their adversaries: even when they have an opportunity for a breakthrough, they seek a difficult way out. Let us engage with the option decided unilaterally by the ANC NEC. It is during times like this that we need to be more assertive about the Alliance to come to the fore as the governing Alliance.

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 on it. 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 struck between the ANC and the DA assures the DA at least some six or so 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.

War scholars assert that during a period of intense standoff between adversaries with immense power, the outcomes depend largely on the balance of interests between them. In this case, it seems the two parties appear to share a lot in common. The ANC seems to fear that independence may lead to disinvestment and a collapsing currency, while the DA seems to be 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 in which achieving completely de-contextualised macro-economic ratios from the IMF playbook 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. For example, on June 4, Fitch rating agency expressed its preference for an ANC-DA coalition because this “...would likely result in policy continuity, the least significant changes to key credit metrics over the medium term and enhance fiscal tightening” (emphasis added). Former Investec CEO, Stephen Koseff has for several years argued that Ramaphosa has “led from the back” urging him to discard the left of his party and take “tough decisions” – “...the first thing I have been saying for months is you fix Eskom. You have to bring private capital in. Now if they hate the word privatisation, use any word, call it private-public partnership, call it anything just do it”.

No doubt many in the bourgeoisie will be seeing the coalition with the DA operating under the fig leaf of a GNU to be 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 cross-roads, 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 of

its mission without constraints of commitments, if any, to capital, which, for decades, has weakened the posture of radical transformation of society?

This moment may give rise to the true meaning of what a revolution is about. For instance, V.I. Lenin on his first letter on tactics (in Pravda, No. 15) says:

“The transfer of state power from one class to another class is the first, the principal, the basic sign of a revolution, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of the term.”

Here he was dealing with the appreciation of the moment post-1917 Great October Socialist Revolution and the preceding period of the February and March revolutions. He advocated for the Bolsheviks to be precise in their analysis of the moment. Which is what we are called upon to do today.

Apart from the many reasons for this electoral setback – mainly the poor exercise of ‘political’ administrative power, our movement almost treated its occupation of political office as mere potentiates of capital. It did not change the class relations but broadened basic serviced to reach the poor whilst power remained in the hands of the erstwhile oppressors, monopoly capital, which in our case was in the hands of the racist minority that oppressed our nation for centuries and imperialist controlled capital.

What more is to be done - having warned of this possibility?

It is worth recalling passages from the SACP’s 2022 programme:

“The prospects for ANC unity and renewal are uncertain, and any such renewal, if it occurs will involve significant struggle. The ANC remains seriously factionalised, and moral and political decay is widespread. Its future electoral prospects are precarious, with a strong likelihood of further decline if no significant turnaround is achieved. Continued decline could lead to the ANC being unable to form governments without coalition partners, risking displacement. This has already occurred in at least one province and several municipalities, including major metropolitan areas.

“However, the ANC remains the largest electoral formation by far, and its remaining support base should not be underestimated. If, after 2024, the ANC is forced into national coalitions, it will likely be the senior partner. The programmatic basis for such coalitions will depend on the character of the ANC at that time and the capacity of working-class and popular forces to shape its direction...For all these reasons, the SACP, along with the organised working class and all progressive forces, cannot remain detached from the struggle for ANC renewal, nor should we place all our expectations on it. Doing so risks marginalising the Party and potentially aligning with a sinking ship.” (p26)

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, 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.

Neo-liberals are likely to seize any cyclical upturn or expressions of “confidence” by (probably short-term portfolio) investors or rating agencies to argue that “there is no alternative” and that progress is being made (even if inequality rises). Economic transformation agenda will be shelved and even the B-BBEE and affirmative action intervention policies for socio-economic redress measures, inadequate as they are, would be a thing of the past. Because, certainly without addressing the economic wellbeing of the people, there is no guarantee we can even make a comeback.

Just on the critical question of the economy and our response as the Party, it is important to remind ourselves of this important reflection by Karl Marx in the preface to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

“In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will: these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that

determines their consciousness.

“At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces in society come in conflict with the existing relations production, or -what is but a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation for entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

Just as our opinion of the individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness: on the contrary this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradiction of material life, from the existing conflict between social productive forces and the relations of production... In broad outlines we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the modern bourgeoisie modes of production as so many epochs in the economic formation of society.”

Such a conjuncture requires working class formations to strengthen their capacity to confront the new challenges that will arise on a terrain that will be 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 important, 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 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.

On the positive side, the number of progressive research organisations and campaigning civil society organisations has risen, in practice offering the potential to serve as part of the leading drivers of campaigns on key issues. However, their capacity is largely, but usefully, focused on policy development, most with a single-issue focus, while their rootedness within working-class communities is limited.

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, but 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 a recognition that the SACP needs to reach out to other formations. Even if we were a powerful campaigning force on the ground, it would not be desirable to act alone. 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, the building of 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 easily 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 what common ground there actually is. 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 conjecture, including a deep-going 30 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 to 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 fully 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 a point of rediscovering the main 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 and 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 then be followed by a broad engagement with our cadres and the left and progressive social forces in general to demonstrate our seriousness in contesting the developing conjecture and give progressive orientation to the GNU as a contested terrain. ●

2024 ELECTIONS

Parliamentary democracy and neoliberalism

The silent majority in the recent elections were non-voters, alienated by a democracy hollowed out by neoliberalism, writes **Jeremy Cronin**. How do we reach these largely working-class South Africans who have given up on electoral politics?

Most commentary on South Africa's 29 May elections has focused on the ANC's dramatic loss of support, on the relative rise of the MKP based on an ethno-populism eroding ANC support in KZN, and on the subsequent inner and inter-party manoeuvres leading to the formation of a GNU. What has not been sufficiently analysed is the trend towards the hollowing out of our parliamentary democracy and the underlying reasons for it.

This year out of South Africa's 38,9 million voting age population only 16,2 million bothered to vote. The ANC received 6,6 million votes, or 16,4 per cent of eligible voters. In other words, with 22,7 million South Africans staying away from the polls, the PNV is by far the largest "party" in South Africa, the party of non-voters.

Who are these 22,7 million? They are overwhelmingly black and proletarian in the wider and more accurate sense of that word, including the unionised and non-unionised, the employed and the unemployed, those working in insecure jobs, and the self-employed in a marginalised informal sector. But the ranks of the non-voters also include hundreds of thousands of black middle strata battered by load shedding, debt, the cost of living, and a general sense of insecurity and deep frustration at government failures. In short, there are millions of South Africans who feel that the democratic promise of 1994 has passed them by and that all political parties, but especially the ANC, have let them down.

And yet the demand for one-person one-vote was a central and popular mobilising focus of our national liberation struggle over many decades. Why now this massive collective self-disenfranchisement? Many interrelated factors are at play in what is becoming widespread electoral scepticism. Most of these factors are well known. They are frequently mentioned, including by

the ANC in its own self-assessments – entrenched corruption, internal ANC factionalism, social distance, mismanagement and “service delivery” failures.

There is, however, something fundamental that too often gets neglected. It is what the SACP has called the “1996 class project”. Three decades of neoliberal austerity have resulted in weak economic growth and unsustainable levels of unemployment. Three decades of Reserve Bank monetary policy have driven upward redistribution of wealth to speculative investors and deepening social inequality for the majority. Three decades of neoliberal new public management restructuring of public administration have turned the post-apartheid state largely into a procuring (and not active doing) state. And it is in procurement, this intersection of state and private sector, that corruption has especially flourished.

Of course there are limitations to the resources we have, but the endless government officials’ shrug of shoulders explanation that “there is no money” is as much an engineered outcome as mere fate. Deepening inequality is not some inevitable reality. Chronic corruption is not only a moral failure. It is structurally enabled. The intersection of all these realities impacts on the daily lives of the majority, underpinning growing electoral indifference.

What is more, in a mutually reinforcing spiral, the neoliberal running down of the developmental potential of the state has resulted in leading politicians believing that it’s not so much the trust of voters they must earn, but the trust of the so-called markets.

Consider what happened immediately after the first cabinet lekgotla of the new GNU. Re-appointed Minister of Finance Enoch Godongwana was a man in a hurry. Emerging from the lekgotla he spoke with the New York headquartered Bloomberg News. On its website Bloomberg boasts to its global asset management audience that it’s “Your source of investing news.” An obviously satisfied Godongwana emerged to reassure Bloomberg that the lekgotla had broadly endorsed Treasury’s Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). Apparently breaching cabinet protocol, Godongwana had jumped the gun on a formal, collective statement from the new GNU cabinet. This is unsurprising. We have come to expect that finance ministers have privileges other ministers do not.

More concerning, however, Godongwana via Bloomberg told the markets not to worry about a key commitment in the ANC’s election manifesto (and in the manifestos of several other GNU partners). A Basic Income Grant (BIG), he said, will not be implemented any time soon - “There is no money for it”.

Here in a small nutshell is an illustration of how the interests of asset managers handling the wealth of the global one-percenters, with their lofty disdain for sovereign countries, their citizens and electoral mandates, erode parliamentary democracy. No wonder, as in South Africa, across many parliamentary democracies in the capitalist world there is falling voter turnout. No wonder there is popular distrust of establishment politicians and their manifesto promises. Two electoral consequences tend to occur – the rise of pseudo anti-establishment right-wing demagogues, insiders pretending to be outsiders (Trump in the US, Milei in Argentina, Le Pen in France, MKP in South Africa) and mass voter apathy, particularly among the most marginalised.

The neoliberal gospel is a mixture of two things. In the first place, there is a banal, false comparison dressed up as commonsense. To avoid falling over a claimed fiscal cliff, the state is supposedly like a single household having to balance income and expenditure. However, unlike a household, the state is, for better or, often, for worse, always a significant player in the space of the economy. For worse, the state may, for instance, implement austerity and hardline interest rate policies that strangle growth but preserve the Rand value of the debt owed to private banks and speculative government bond investors – something our Reserve Bank is currently doing.

On the other hand, for better, states might for instance drive well-directed public spending that increases sustainable shared growth. Increased growth increases revenues. Increased revenues decrease public debt to GDP ratios, moving us back from the supposed “fiscal cliff” that is used to justify growth-throttling austerity and high interest rates in the first place.

When we are not being given banal sermons effectively comparing state resource allocation to household book-keeping, we are presented with macro-economic obscurantism designed to effectively intimidate us and sideline democratic discussion. But, as German scholar Wolfgang Streeck puts it, “the logic that is executed by Central Bank economists is not a neutral mathematical logic, but one of social and economic power relations projected into mathematics.” (“Democracy in neoliberalism”, in Crouch, della Porta & Streeck, *Anthropological Theory*, v16 (4), 2016)

Godgonwana’s Bloomberg reassurances to global asset managers and their clients didn’t come out of the blue. His Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), a document of the previous administration, and now endorsed broadly but probably with even greater vigour by the new GNU, envisages major cuts in health and education budgets. There will be R518 less per public healthcare user, and more than R600 less per school learner over the next three years.

In his address to the opening of the new parliament, Ramaphosa spoke with apparent enthusiasm about public employment programmes and, notably, his own Presidential Employment Stimulus package. But the budgets for these programmes have been slashed by 50 per cent. Which leaves us with an uncomfortable question: did the President not know this when he spoke?

With this level of austerity, with talk in Treasury (loudly supported by the DA) of introducing legislation to place a ceiling on government debt and spending, coupled with the Reserve Bank's punitive interest rates – given all of this, we will be lucky to achieve a miserable GDP growth of 1.5 per cent over the coming three years. This means our world record levels of inequality and unemployment (standing at an incredible 42.6 per cent in the most recent release from StatsSA) will worsen.

External shocks like the Covid-19 pandemic and the wrecking-ball corruption, especially during Zuma's second term, gravely worsened the socio-economic crisis in our country. But if the Zuma network contributed to this crisis, the 'nine wasted years' narrative has also served to mask the underlying contribution of neoliberal policy to the dismal trajectory in which we have been trapped since the mid-1990s. Unemployment in the narrow definition has barely dipped below an unsustainable 20 per cent throughout the three decades of democracy.

True, Treasury's contribution to holding the line against the unconstitutional wrecking ball corruption of the RET faction should be acknowledged. But this contribution is often used to mask the punitive austerity of Treasury and the Reserve Bank which, as a progressive liberal like Thuli Madonsela has noted, is itself anti-constitutional. The Bill of Rights calls for the progressive realisation of social and economic rights. Godongwana's MTEF and Reserve Bank Governor Kganyago's hawkish interest rate regime are actively reproducing the regressive non-realisation of these constitutional rights.

All of this surely has serious implications for the ANC's future electoral prospects in local government elections in 2026 and national and provincial elections again in 2029. In short, with the GNU broadly endorsing the MTEF, with strong signals of an intention to kick key transformative interventions like a Basic Income Grant, or a National Health Insurance, into an indefinite future or, at best, to implement them in a grossly under-resourced and therefore non-transformative way, along with regressive cuts on health, education, and public employment programmes – the Ramaphosa inner-circle is taking a major political and socio-economic gamble.

David Everatt, who has worked closely with the ANC on electoral polling in the past, is upbeat about this gamble (“Ramaphosa’s gamble is paying off – the ANC is dead, long live the ANC”, *Daily Maverick*, 21 July 2024). In Everatt’s telling, months before the June elections, Ramaphosa and his inner circle were well aware from the ANC’s own confidential internal polling that it would likely drop to around 40 per cent. The formation of a GNU with the DA as the ANC’s major partner was not a desperate, last-minute post-election manoeuvre but, according to Everatt, something well-planned in advance.

Everatt writes: “Cyril Ramaphosa has completely changed the ANC. The broad church has gone (...) He has freed the ANC to become a middle-class, pro-business party of all races.” Noting that in 2017 Ramaphosa only won the ANC presidency “with a handful of votes”, Everatt argues that Ramaphosa was hamstrung both within the ANC and in government by the continued presence of the RET faction. “Ramaphosa’s government deadlocked as factions fought it out within the ANC, limiting his options.”

But now, according to Everatt, with a like-minded ANC-DA dominated GNU in place, and with much of the leading component of the RET faction exiled into MKP or elsewhere, Ramaphosa is free to drive a preferred strategic agenda. While noting the RET ball-and-chain around Ramaphosa’s ankle that impeded greater mobility in his first full-term as state president, Everatt conveniently ignores a much larger ball-and-chain constricting any serious and sustained transformation. This ball-and-chain is the MTEF and all that goes with it.

Everatt explicitly implies that the GNU outcome was deliberately planned by Ramaphosa and his inner circle before the elections. I am not sure. But what we can be sure about is that there were powerful (and wealthy) interests that were actively involved in shaping an outcome of this kind. Among the more clear-sighted local and global capitalist strategists Steenhuisen’s moonshot pact was never seen as a realistic majority electoral agenda. It was intended as a vehicle to knock the ANC significantly below 50 per cent and to prevent what they described as a “nightmare scenario”, an ANC/EFF tie-up. Part of the weakness of the moonshot pact was the absence of credible black leaders, hence the hurried and ultimately futile multi-million Rand funding of several Ramaphosa lite projects – Zibi, Maimane, Jardine. In practice, it was not the component parties in the moonshot pact that knocked the ANC – but MKP and, to a much greater extent, the massive electoral stayaway.

In the run-up to the elections the mainstream commercial media also played an active part in shaping the outcome. The long-running anti-ANC critique became shriller and Ramaphosa himself increasingly became the target as a “weak” and “compromised” leader. This level of hostility was particularly

noticeable in the news24 media with their senior political journalists Adriaan Basson and Peter du Toit leading the way. It went to such an extent that at one point they even deployed the dangerous “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” tactic, positively headlining MKP criticising the ANC in a brief reprise of how the same media used to elevate the EFF to bash the ANC.

But by early June some of these excesses began to recede. More thoughtful business-aligned voices could be heard – Peter Montalto, Cas Coovadia, with others more quietly in the background. From their perspective it was all very well to reduce the ANC below 45 per cent and to compel some kind of centre-right coalition. But the country (or rather, from their perspective, private sector investors) could not afford to have a completely fragmented ANC. Whatever his usefulness, a President John Steenhuisen with Helen Zille whispering in his ear, was not going to ensure the modicum of stability required for SA Inc to remain broadly governable and therefore investable. And so, from this perspective, Everatt’s headline “the ANC is dead, long live the ANC”, is entirely appropriate.

But how long-lived is the reborn “middle class” ANC, and, since these things are related, how long-lived will the GNU be?

Natasha Marrian has a more sober reading than Everatt of the GNU’s likely future (“GNU has an expiry date – and it’s not 2029”, news24, 26 July 2024). She writes that the ANC’s entry into a GNU with the DA and FF+ “has angered some ANC structures and its allies, particularly the SACP”.

Marrian predicts that at the ANC’s 2027 electoral National Conference matters will come to a head. In effect, she is suggesting a reprise of what happened at the ANC’s 2007 Polokwane national conference, when Mbeki’s slate lost to Zuma’s, with Zuma elected as ANC president and the premature ouster of Mbeki as state president the following year.

But the internal reality within the ANC and the Alliance is now substantially different. From 1990 Mbeki had waged an aggressive and sustained campaign against the SACP hoping to have its leadership expelled from the ANC, or, as with Holomisa, to force a petulant walk-out. At times the Party, or at least the leadership, were literally accused of treason. Mbeki unleashed right-wing ANC demagogues who, referring to the SACP, called for “the head of the snake to be crushed”. When Mbeki and his deputy president Zuma fell out over arms deal related corruption, a suspended Zuma assiduously courted the SACP but also ANC right-wingers in the Youth League and some provinces. The latter were aggrieved that they were not included within Mbeki’s anointed inner circle of BEE beneficiaries. What the SACP has described as an unholy alliance

between the left axis in the ANC (the SACP and Cosatu) and these right-wingers was what unseated Mbeki at the Polokwane conference.

The reality within the broad ANC Alliance is different now. Everatt is correct, the right-wingers, certainly at a national level, are considerably weakened, scattered and disorganised, while the SACP and Cosatu are not remotely confronting the same level of aggressive hostility from the ANC national leadership. This is not to say there are no substantive differences currently between the Party and the ANC leadership circle, or that criticism by the Party of the GNU for instance is a mere charade. Far from it. Nor, obviously, should the Party forget that there are many ways to attempt our marginalisation. There's the Mbeki ideological knobkerrie way. But there is also, in Roberta Flack's immortal words, a "killing me softly with his smile" approach.

The SACP survived Mbeki's knobkerrie aggression partly because this aggression never enjoyed the wholehearted support of many non-Party members in the ANC, partly at the price of a temporary unholy alliance with ANC right-wingers at Polokwane, but most especially because of our own relative ideological cohesion and campaigning strengths at the time.

In the current much less aggressively hostile reality within the Alliance, the SACP, with many others inside of the ANC leadership, has helped to put key transformative issues like a BIG or the NHI (National Health Insurance) firmly on the agenda – something we never succeeded in doing in the Mbeki years. But, as argued above, support for these, including presidential support, will not translate into substantive implementation as long as suffocating neoliberal macroeconomics trumps everything else.

The SACP must not isolate itself and follow the endlessly repeated mainstream media advice for the Party to break with the ANC. The Party would make a grave error in walking out as an abused partner. The ANC, whatever its weaknesses and challenges, is still by far the largest electoral formation. The ANC remains an important site of struggle. But the SACP must never simply fall into the trap of confining ourselves to inner-Alliance policy debate and manoeuvre. These kinds of internal Alliance interventions will never succeed without major popular, on the ground organisation and campaigning around key transformative policies. How do we reach the 22,7 million non-voting largely working class and popular strata South Africans who have given up on electoral politics? It is surely, not in the first instance, by launching yet another electoral formation to add to the alphabet soup on the ballot paper, when opinion polls tell us that only 17 per cent of South Africans trust political parties in general. The Party's own experience teaches us that the key

priority in our current reality is to work tirelessly to help build a progressive, campaigning, mass-based left popular front and powerful socialist movement of the workers and the poor. ●

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

GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY

The GNU, economic transformation and the existential challenge facing the ANC

Neil Coleman examines the dynamics between the negatives and potential positives presented by the GNU

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Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

Marx, the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte

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There is broad agreement on the left that the GNU arrangement will make economic transformation far more difficult (some would argue impossible), given the position and interests of GNU parties on economic policy issues. The question however is what should the posture of the left be on the battle for economic transformation and social justice, since the GNU is now a reality that we have to deal with.

In addressing the challenges of transformation arising from the GNU arrangement, progressive forces need to consider – what is the dialectic between mobilising against retrogressive economic policies and engaging with aspects of policy which hold the potential for shifting things in a progressive direction? In other words, what is the balance which avoids co-option into a right-wing agenda on the one hand, or reflexive oppositionism, which marginalises the influence of the left?

Under circumstances arising from the GNU, conditions for mobilisation and engagement may have shifted, but the necessity to both mobilise *and* engage politically remains imperative if the left is not to relinquish critical battles, for example, against austerity, or to abandon key opportunities to make progress in important areas of manoeuvre, such as basic income.

We need to bear in mind that despite new constraints in the GNU from conservative parties in government, the ANC is now under huge pressure to deliver. This creates different conditions, both negative and positive, which require greater nuance and more sophisticated political strategies to navigate intelligently.

Examples of issues which on the face of it appear to offer some prospects for advance, providing significant mobilisation and engagement takes place, include:

- The battle for basic income, particularly through improving and expanding the SRD (Social Relief of Distress) grant.
- A more active industrial strategy.
- The delivery of public health.
- Measures to bring down the prices of food and essentials.
- Expansion of public employment.

More difficult but issues with some space for advance include:

- Pushing back against contractionary monetary policy (and lowering of inflation targets).¹
- Proposing coherent alternatives for the rebuilding and strengthening of SOEs (State Owned Entities).
- Building public finance institutions.
- Using unconventional financial interventions, such as prescribed assets.
- Maintaining a progressive geopolitical stance and supporting the restructuring of global financial architecture (also bearing in mind South Africa's role in hosting the G20 in 2025).

Very difficult, but issues requiring creative alternatives include:

- Pushing back austerity, including through advancing fiscal alternatives on debt, progressive taxation, mobilising domestic resources etc. The Institute of Economic Justice (IEJ) and others have made proposals on how this can be done, including through restructuring debt, use of the Public Investment Corporation, the Gold and Foreign Exchange Contingency Reserve Account (GFECRA) etc. Partial success in promoting the release of GFECRA resources shows that space does exist on this front – see below.

Identification of policy space above is speculative to a degree, as we don't know what commitments the ANC has given on economic policy to its coalition partners, and therefore the extent to which it is constrained. Have for example National Treasury and the DA's proposals for new fiscal rules, such as budget and debt ceilings been agreed to? If so, this would entrench and consolidate hyper-austerity, and make much of the above unrealisable.

There is also insufficient clarity on how the principle of "sufficient consensus" will work in the GNU (apart from the fact that on the face of it, the DA will be able to block new policies from being adopted which it opposes, at the same time as not being able to reverse existing progressive policies) and in particular how the deadlock breaking mechanism will operate if sufficient consensus can't be realised – this mechanism is only briefly mentioned in Clause 19 of the GNU Statement of Intent but has not been clarified.

As controversial as it may be, a case can be made that the GNU, with all its inherent problems, may have certain political positives, including better governance and accountability, as a more robust parliament and political contestation between GNU partners keep political parties on their toes, as they feel greater pressure to deliver. This may, ironically, also make the ANC more sensitive to critiques around the negative impacts of austerity.

The jury is still out on whether these potential positives will materialise, and whether the initial honeymoon of contestation and collaboration will hold or fracture, as the inherent contradictions come to the fore, and possibly explode. If the latter, then we will enter a new terrain of struggle, including the possibility of a minority government, or even early elections.

Balance of forces after the May 2024 elections

What are the "circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" under which we are attempting to make our own history?

Key elements of the post-May 2024 environment include:

- A multipronged social and economic crisis in the country, arising directly from failed economic policies, combined with a hollowed-out and dysfunctional state.
- The lack of coherent progressive options, or left political alternatives, in the face of reactionary, right-wing populist agendas increasingly taking root in response to these crises.
- A demobilised and alienated population with large-scale withdrawal from the political process, including by the ANC's traditional support

base, many of whom decided not to vote (over 60% of the voting age population failed to vote, and 4-5 million people who had previously voted for the ANC didn't vote for them, many of whom abstained totally).

- The weakness of left elements in the Alliance, including COSATU and the SACP, and the further splintering of the ANC into populist, and predatory formations - nearly two-thirds of the vote went either to the ANC, or parties historically born from the ANC, including the MK party and the EFF.

Thus the South African left confronts a hostile environment coming out of the elections, with multiple risks and dangers.

But it is also true that this situation creates new possibilities:

- The notion that neoliberal economic policies can provide an answer to the crisis has been comprehensively discredited;
- The severity of the economic crisis, and its translation into an existential threat to the liberation movement, challenges previous complacency in the political elite. This could force a focus on the need for urgent action to address crises such as rising hunger and poverty;
- left forces are being confronted with the need to provide coherent alternatives to navigate a way out of this morass, with some calling for a popular front along the lines of the French left alternative; and
- Increased political competition could provide focus and urgency to introduce immediate measures that have a material and tangible impact on people's lives, and address the need for structural economic transformation.

But the opposite is also true: we could see a doubling down on austerity economics, and the dogma of "structural reforms" as the panacea to the crisis, as well as other measures to please the markets, including large-scale privatisation and commercialisation of public services.

Which of these two trajectories dominate will in significant part be determined by how progressive forces organise themselves in society, particularly in the labour and social movements, inside the Alliance and the state. It remains an open question whether the left has the will and capacity to do this, as well as on the strength of the right-wing project, in all its forms (such as its neoliberal, right-populist and predatory varieties).

I now turn to the question of the ANC's economic legacy, the political consequences of economic policy choices, and the challenge of shifting course.

Political outcome of the ANC's economic legacy?

The shock election results are fundamentally about the failure of the last three decades of economic policies, which have not succeeded in structurally transforming the economy. These policies have instead deepened inequality, worsened unemployment, and failed to address poverty and hunger in society. The election results should thus be seen as the political expression of underlying economic realities.

Periods of modest economic improvement (for example, the mid-2000s, which were however extremely limited in scope) were achieved *despite* these policies, and indeed because of their partial relaxation. Although successive ANC governments have conscientiously implemented the economic policies advised by financial institutions and markets, particularly on macroeconomic policies, these policies have failed on all significant social and economic metrics, and plunged us into a low growth, and stalled development, trap.

The devastating social legacy which has resulted is reflected not only in the collapse of the ANC's electoral support but also in the mass stay away of the ANC's traditional constituency from the elections. This is not surprising given crises facing potential voters, such as persistent, structural youth unemployment, the GBV "epidemic" facing women and girls, collapsing infrastructure and public services, and growing hunger and poverty. The crises in society have affected all strata, particularly working-class and middle-class black voters, amongst whom the stay-away figures were highest.

According to an article² in Daily Maverick a 2023 HSRC survey of voters found that political discontent and disillusionment "emerged as the main reason for electoral abstention". When asked what their main reason would be for not voting if the national elections were held tomorrow, 81% of people responded, "disillusionment". Trust in political parties was at 17%.

This also suggests that an increasingly large number of people feel that none of the parties represent their interests, and there is therefore a vacuum in political representation, particularly by parties of the left and working class. This simply means that our political system is progressively losing legitimacy. It doesn't take an expert to work out that the vast majority of people did not participate in elections, because they see no prospect of improvement in their lives with stagnant wages, rising cost of living, rising unemployment, rising hunger and rising poverty, and without a viable political alternative which they trust in.

These trends raise critical questions about the future of our democracy, as well as social cohesion and development. The underlying crises giving rise to these trends mean that without a change in direction, particularly in economic policy, this trajectory will deepen. We therefore need a decisive shift, not only to address socio-economic conditions but also to build and deepen our democracy.

The multiple socio-economic crises in South Africa are also giving rise to pathologies such as ethnic chauvinism and quasi-feudalism, xenophobia, and misogyny. These mirror trends in other societies facing deep economic and social stress. South Africa, which has a strong tradition of progressive left working-class activism, is now seeing the alarming emergence of right-wing populist elements. Historically concentrated in largely white parties, such trends are now also reflected in majority black political parties, such as the MKP, Action SA and the PA; as well as within parties, including the ANC, which is experiencing a rise in xenophobia.

The answer to such developments is not to condemn the “backwardness” of ordinary people supporting such views, but to advance coherent alternatives, on issues such as employment, immigration and other questions which lie at the root of people’s attraction to such ideas. Secondly, to implement economic policies which combat the social stress which people are experiencing, and which offer real improvements in their lives, in employment, income, living standards and so forth.

What are the key dynamics driving the ANC’s economic legacy?

Fear of the power of international markets in an era of hyper globalisation, and the rolling back of the state’s role in the economy, led in significant part to the displacement of the ANC’s social democratic economic development programme (the RDP – Reconstruction and Development Plan), and the introduction of a conservative, World Bank - inspired macroeconomic programme (GEAR – Growth, Employment and Redistribution) in 1996. Without going into the history of economic policy-making in South Africa, this programme essentially with minor modifications, laid the basis for the government’s economic policy stance over the last thirty years.

Treasury has since then doggedly and dogmatically pursued this policy paradigm with total commitment, irrespective of changes in international economic thinking, or South African realities. Stripped to its essence this paradigm entailed reducing the economic role of the state and the public service, liberalisation and deregulation, the achievement of arbitrarily determined macroeconomic targets, such as deficit and debt ratios and the associated spending cuts.

Largely driven by financial sector interests, contractionary fiscal policies (stagnation or cutting of spending and investment in real per capita terms) were combined with contractionary monetary policies (involving the use of high real interest rates) leading to the choking of economic activity, deindustrialisation, and the suppression of growth. This has led to the pursuit of what economists call *procyclical economic policies* which deepen economic contractions. This has been the general trend, but of course there have been some periods of limited deviation from the strict application of this economic paradigm, often as a result of resistance (for example, from organised labour) and as a result of contestation within the governing party and the state.

There was a period in the early 2000s, after the formal ending of the GEAR programme, of mildly expansionary macroeconomic policies - the relaxation of monetary policy combined with a moderately expansionary fiscal policy - which allowed for greater growth and employment, although at too low a level, and insufficiently inclusive, to address our structural crises, or reduce inequality.

Over the last fifteen years, this conservative fiscal stance has progressively morphed into full-blown austerity, despite denials of its existence by the economic establishment. Even the cautious Public Economy Project at Wits, led by the former head of Treasury's budget office, has argued that there have been three phases of austerity, and characterises the latest phase as "permanent".

This fiscal stance driven by Treasury has been compounded by an equally contractionary stance driven by the South African Reserve Bank (SARB). The use of high real interest rates, while beneficial to the financial sector and financial speculators, has been devastating for the real economy, making it too

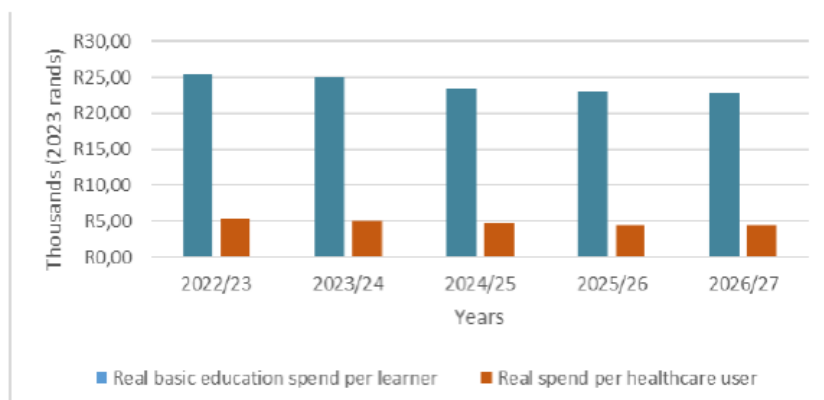


expensive for businesses and individuals to borrow and invest in productive capacity or small businesses. This has had an extremely negative effect on investment, economic development and employment.

The result of this economic policy is the highest unemployment rate globally. South African unemployment (narrow definition) 1994-2022 www.macrotrends.net

Budget cutbacks have had multiple impacts, contributing to deteriorating public services in critical areas including education, health, social security and policing. Austerity simply means that while historic spending levels are already inadequate, cutbacks result in even less money being spent on every child, every patient, and every community member, leading to a crisis in key public services.

The graph below shows that because government aims to decrease real spending on basic education and healthcare by R16-billion and R14-billion respectively in the medium term spending per enrolled learner will fall, in real terms, from R25,387 in 2022/23 to R23,363 in 2026/27; and while an average of R5,326 was spent on each public healthcare recipient in 2022/23, this will fall to R4,525 in real terms by 2026/27³.



The impact of these cutbacks is also clearly evident in the undermining of key public institutions, most recently in the elections with an under-resourced IEC which battled to execute its mandate; and the understaffing and resultant under-capacity in the NPA to fight crime and corruption, amongst many others. This is in stark contrast to the strong performance of SARS, which is relatively better resourced, and thus better able to exercise its mandate. These “savings” therefore come at a huge cost.

It is clear that state capture over the last decade has massively worsened the impact of these misguided policies, but it would be a mistake to think that the hollowing out of state capacity is only the result of corruption and state capture. The dysfunctionality of SOEs, while accelerated by state capture, was in part the result of a lack of investment in these companies, flowing directly from the macro-economic stance of the government. The now infamous example of the (since retracted) apology by President Mbeki for failing to invest in expanding Eskom’s capacity, and the failed strategy of corporatisation, severely undermined an enterprise then rated as the top electricity utility in the world.

Crucially, progressive developmental policies adopted by government, particularly since the early 2000s, including expansion of social security, activist industrial policy, worker-friendly labour market interventions etc, have been heavily constrained, and sometimes completely frustrated by the impact of contractionary macro policies. Without these developmental policies being properly resourced, their impact has inevitably been severely limited. A backward macro-economic policy logic has therefore led to deep contradictions within government and ANC policy, whose inconsistencies have become so notorious.

Narratives attempting to justify conservative macro-economic policy

Attempts to justify austerity economics have been taken to extremes. Some even deny, in the face of all evidence, that austerity exists. Others (SARB, Treasury and their associated economists) claim that public spending doesn’t work because it has negative multipliers, meaning in crude terms that it adds less to the economy than the amount spent. This is contradicted both by the evidence, and common sense.

Research by the IMF and Sao Paulo University show for example that investment in social protection has particularly high economic multipliers in unequal societies such as ours; and recent research on public employment in South Africa also indicates positive impacts. Treasury opposition to public investment strangely contradicts their emphasis on the importance of developing economic infrastructure, but supports their privatisation agenda.

In the face of the damaging effects of these misguided economic policies, Treasury and the economic establishment regularly trot out various mantras in an attempt to justify their stance. Statements about so-called fiscal prudence, lowering or capping debt, reducing consumption, achieving a budget surplus, and so on, often seem to the ordinary person to be attractive and common sense, when compared to the economic pressures on households. But the state is not a household.

The self-defeating character of Treasury's approach came into sharp focus with their decision in the budget to release R150 billion from the Reserve Bank GFECRA fund owed to the fiscus, following the IEJ's advocacy for these funds to be used for development. Treasury instead decided to deploy all the funds to retire debt, without any concomitant expansion in social expenditure. The net effect was to pump resources into the financial markets, with zero benefit to critical social needs. This is a dramatic demonstration of Treasury's skewed priorities and the interests they serve.

In reality, conservative economic strategies achieve the opposite of what is claimed by their proponents, resulting in reckless cutting of public services; increasing the risk profile of the country because of unsustainable social distress; reducing growth, and making it more difficult to contain debt to GDP levels; unnecessarily wasting resources on the financial markets, and hollowing out the real economy; the list goes on. These policies are a recipe for a downward economic spiral and social instability. This is the reality we have witnessed over the last three decades!

Despite government's clear track record of economic conservatism, and despite all evidence to the contrary, much of the financial media has claimed that the ANC government has taken radical economic positions. However prominent journalist Carol Paton recently praised the economic conservatism of the

ANC in government, stating: “The hallmark of ANC rule for three decades has been pragmatic and orthodox fiscal policy...The ANC has a history of taking radical resolutions at its conferences, which the government has repeatedly failed to implement... the ANC has for 30 years fielded smart, pragmatic, and authoritative finance ministers (sic). They have been key to steering the ship based on economic orthodoxy.”

We need to oppose all forms of anti-constitutionalism

Claims by parties of the right to be constitutionalists, including the DA, don't stand scrutiny. As Professor Thuli Madonsela has suggested recently, these parties are in effect economic anti-constitutionalists: They oppose key aspects of the Constitution, including action to redress historical injustices, and support economic policies, and imposition of fiscal rules, which make it impossible to give effect to the constitutional requirements on socio-economic rights.

The DA's economic paradigm would prevent realisation of sections 26-29 of the Constitution requiring government to progressively realise everybody's right to housing, health, food, water, social security and education. Nor can these rights be realised within Treasury's economic policies, which government has pursued for the last 30 years. The DA and other parties of the right, if given the power, would double down on these policies which go against the spirit of the Constitution.

Indeed the key adversary of any progressive developmental project is the DA-Treasury axis.

The DA's proposals to impose arbitrary macro-economic targets; to impose a debt ceiling; to cut back current expenditure, which they advanced as preconditions for participating in the GNU, would plunge SA into a Greek-type economic crisis, if implemented. It would destroy growth, deepen poverty, slash public services, and increase inequality and unemployment.

What are the alternatives?

If successful, the concerted push to shift the ANC even further rightwards on economic policy will only deepen its crisis, and destroy any prospect of recovering its historic position as a leading political force in society. More

importantly, in the absence of a viable alternative, it would threaten to destabilise society and give way to chaotic and unpredictable forces that would not be in the interests of the ordinary working class or poor people.

The ANC is faced with a choice: double down on failed economic policies, or boldly shift direction to embrace developmental economic policies which have a proven track record. The ANC can try to make this progressive shift within the tight parameters of the GNU; or if that fails, find a different governance arrangement which makes this possible.

A progressive shift must address both elements of our current economic crisis and the associated political economy. Developmental interventions are needed that:

- Unleash inclusive economic growth, economic diversification and employment; and
- Open avenues for economic activity, currently closed off, that are not dependent on the state for illegitimate economic accumulation

What could such an alternative economic package look like? In brief, I have argued elsewhere⁴ that we need a package of economic measures that *Stabilise, Stimulate, and Structurally Transform* the economy in a carefully sequenced manner.

Fiscal resources should be mobilised to introduce high-impact interventions, such as basic income, which stimulate economic activity in depressed communities and generate broader economic demand and production; critical interventions to fix strategic areas of state capacity; mobilising capacity to repair and defend infrastructure; and so on. This needs to be coupled with a shift in monetary policy to spur investment in the real economy.

These interventions would aim to get the wheels of the economy moving and restore confidence, while structural economic transformation is taken forward. Some policies will take longer to roll out, including new infrastructure projects and diversification of the economy, and would need to be undertaken in parallel.

Much is made of the economic limitations we face, with some even making the ludicrous claim that “we have run out of money”. There are no doubt serious challenges, but bold and creative thinking will enable us to mobilise resources and make high-impact interventions with the necessary political will and imagination. The IEJ and others have outlined proposals⁵ to mobilise

domestic resources, and have shown that there are many examples of untapped funds, including the GFECRA fund which Treasury had previously claimed to be unavailable.

There is a strong ‘business case’ for these economic alternatives, including the fact that such an approach would create a large demand stimulus across the economy, build important infrastructure and state capacity, stabilise society, and generate opportunities to invest in a broader range of productive activities. Could this constitute a basis for the proposed national dialogue? ●

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**This article is written in his personal capacity. It is a substantially revised version of an article⁶ written for the Daily Maverick before the GNU was formed.*

Endnotes

- 1 Cf the example of Lula campaigning for the Brazilian Central Bank to lower interest rates, and the raising of some voices in South African business against our excessively contractionary monetary policy.
- 2 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-06-07-the-big-no-vote-over-11-million-registered-voters-did-not-cast-ballots-in-2024-polls/>
- 3 IEJ submission to parliament on the MTEF, November 2023
- 4 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2019-06-12-part-two-building-blocks-for-a-new-economy/>
- 5 <https://www.iej.org.za/policy-brief-revenue-options-to-raise-the-maximum-available-resources/>
- 6 <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2024-06-13-tough-questions-for-anc-coalitions-economic-transformation/>

2024 ELECTIONS

Outcomes and implications for the working class

The following discussion paper by the **National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union** (Nehawu) examines the outcomes of the recent elections and the challenges now facing the working class

The seventh national elections took place against the backdrop of the momentous 30th anniversary of our democracy. Over these 30 years and the preceding eight decades, the African National Congress (ANC) was a relatively steady leader of the South African people – firstly in the anti-colonial struggle and secondly upon the demise of the apartheid regime in the transition into the democratic order of today.

As the primary locomotive driving the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), the ANC sought to forge a consciousness of unity amongst the oppressed black majority, a praxis of non-racialism that drew radical whites to the side of the Anti-Apartheid struggle and exercised strategic leadership amongst the formations of the Alliance and the broader Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).

However, the confluence of the balance of class and political forces, together with the ideological realignment in South Africa and the world—which were in transition during the 1990s on the back of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which created a unipolar world order—saw the ANC steering the country’s transition on a Neoliberal trajectory.

From 1996, a cabal called the 1996 Class Project surfaced within the ANC. This was to be the first openly organised faction that would catalyse the ideological dilution and strategic deviation from the shared perspective of the NDR. Consequentially, this tendency provoked counter-reactions within the ANC as well as in the Alliance. Since then, the ANC has been largely characterised by factional politics, detached from the masses of the people,

and has experienced several break-away groups. At the same time, the Alliance drifted along - organisationally in disarray and strategically incohesive whilst some of the formations of the MDM became worn out.

The outcomes of the 2024 national elections represent a monumental failure of the neoliberal trajectory in South Africa's transition. They do not represent the defeat of the NDR as our strategy for political and social emancipation. The outcomes of these elections highlight the political and socioeconomic unsustainability of the Neoliberal trajectory in the context of the national liberation struggle.

This discussion document seeks to make sense of the 2024 election outcomes. To do so, it is necessary to recap the context against which these elections took place, to sift out key features reflected in the election results as a basis to grapple with the possible implications of these outcomes on the NDR and the corresponding strategic perspective in this emerging reality.

Context

The following are some of the key factors that shaped the broader socioeconomic and political context in which the seventh national elections took place.

The ANC entered the 2024 national election campaign already caught up and unable to escape the slippery slope of declining electoral support over two decades as reflected in its performance in both the national and local government elections since 2004.

In 2004 the ANC's electoral popularity scaled two-third majority on the back of the confluence of several positive factors that were prevalent at that time. Amongst these factors were two key interrelated factors: Firstly, it was the backdrop of the ANC's second-term, which was characterised by an uninterrupted economic boom which actually ended the austerity measures that were implemented through GEAR between 1996 and 1999. Secondly, it was the still relatively high voter-turnout of 76,7% after 10 years of the ANC as an incumbent party. This meant that the ANC still enjoyed the confidence of its core constituencies in the major urban centres in which the working class is concentrated.

In 2024 the ANC's electoral popularity collapsed by a massive 17% to a mere two-fifths of the votes. This is on the back of the accumulation and confluence of several negative factors with mutually reinforcing features, including widespread and deep-seated corruption, state capture, crime, austerity, load shedding, organisational disarray and factionalism within the ANC.

In fact, the outcomes of the 2021 local government elections were the actual turning point in the ANC's downward slide as they marked the first time when it could no longer claim to represent the absolute majority of the voters, at least at the level of that sphere of government after it received about 45.5% of the total votes.

To the extent that municipalities provide the services that directly relate to the basic means of life, the performance of a party in managing access to electricity, potable water, sanitation, and roads and in dealing with those who are unable to pay for the services becomes a yardstick for the voters, especially in the working-class communities, in deciding on their choice even in the national elections. It is therefore not surprising that the quantitative decline in the ANC's electoral power started to assume a qualitative form when the ANC could no longer claim absolute majorities in all the metros of Gauteng, i.e. Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni, as well as eThekweni and Nelson Mandela Bay City.¹

The fact that the ANC had already lost decisive majorities in nearly all the major economic centres where the working class is concentrated and that more than a third of our population lives under the control of the DA at the local level is telling when considered in conjunction with this 17% collapse in its share of the vote in 2024.

South Africa has been bogged down in socioeconomic stagnation - exacerbated by load shedding and austerity. This stagnation started in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008/09 and persisted over the past 15 years.² Thus, between 2010 and 2019, GDP growth slowed down to a mere 1,7% per year on average. From 2015, income per head started to fall as the growth rate of the population started to exceed the economic growth rate, which denotes that the average person was getting poor. The Covid-19 years of 2020 and 2021 only served to deepen the country's triple-crises, such that today it is officially acknowledged that on average the South Africans are poorer than they were

in 2013. It was untenable that far too many of our people are languishing in unemployment, as by the last quarter of 2023, the number of unemployed had reached 11,7 million in a labour force of 24,6 million people (in terms of the expanded definition).

Key features of the emerging reality from the 2024 elections results

Table 1 below highlights the correlation between the proportionality of voter turnout and the performance of the ANC – thus underlining a corresponding downward trend between the voter turnout rates and the ANC’s performances since 2009. The ANC understood that if turnout fell below 65% in 2024, it would struggle to surpass the critical 50% threshold needed to continue governing alone. Indeed, the voter turnout of the 2024 national elections was 58%. Hence, the ANC dropped below 50%. In this regard, the ANC received about 53% of the African vote, dropping by a massive 20% from 2019.³

The ANC remains the second most popular party amongst the white electorate, even beating the FF+ in both the 2019 and 2024 elections. However, this is a distant second, with a margin of 66% relative to the DA, which was voted for by 73% of the whites who went to the polls in 2024. Interestingly, the ANC’s white vote declined from the 2019 “Ramaphoria” hype of 13% to 7% in 2024. Only 5% of the registered white Afrikaans speakers voted for the ANC in 2024, compared to 8% in 2019.

The DA kicked out Musi Maimane after it lost five seats from the 2019 elections under his leadership, having received 22.2% of the vote nationally. In 2024, John Steenhuisen delivered for the DA a pathetic 21.8% total votes, in which it remained stagnant at the same 4% of the African vote that it got in 2019 but slipped down from being the third most popular party amongst the African electorate in 2019 to the fourth spot.

TABLE 1: VOTER TURNOUT vs ANC PERFORMANCE

Year	Registered Voters (in Million)	Voters (in Millions)	Voter Turnout (%)	Votes Won by the ANC (%)
2004	20.7	15.9	77	69.69
2009	23.2	17.9	77	65.69
2014	25.3	18.6	73	62.15
2019	26.7	17.6	65	57.50
2024	27.7	16.2	58	40.18

The legitimacy of our democracy is now in question because the voter participation rate is continuously going down.⁴ Over 11 million of the registered voters did not participate in the 2024 elections. Thus, considered together with the 46% of voter-turnout in the 2021 local government elections, this represents a growing crisis of legitimacy.

In 2024, there were about 38,9 million Voting Age Population (VAP) or total eligible voters, 27,7 million registered voters, but only about 16,2 million voters cast their votes. This growing crisis of legitimacy is underlined by the fact that from 2014 to 2019, the number of the total eligible voters grew by about 3,1 million people, and from 2019 to 2024, it grew by about 4,5 million people. This clearly indicates that there is a declining interest even to register, let alone to vote, especially amongst the youth, who should be looking forward to exercising their constitutional right to vote. This also means that only about 35,2% of the VAP actually participated in the 2024 elections, suggesting that our political rulers received their mandate from barely more than a third of the eligible voters. Worst still, this also means that the ANC received support only from 16.4% of the eligible voters.

As illustrated in Table 2 below, the fact that about 13,7 million of the eligible voters did not vote in 2024, many of whom are likely to be former ANC voters and the fact that there was poor voter turn-out amongst Africans, especially in the townships of the metros, can only mean that the ANC’s claim of being the leader of the nation is now questionable.

Election year	Registered Voters	Eligible Voters	Registration Rate	Not registered
2014	25.3 million	31.4 million	80.5%	~6.1 million
2019	26.8 million	38.9 million	74.5%	~9.2 million
2024	27.6 million	38.9 million	74.5%	~13.7 million*

The voter participation rate of whites remained very high at 71% in 2024. Whilst the overall voter turnout declined across all the racial groups from 2019, it dropped more so in the African electorate, especially in the townships of the metros. At the same time, among Africans the voter turnout in KZN was the highest compared to all provinces. In other provinces it ranged from 50% in the Western Cape (which was the lowest) to 56% in Mpumalanga (which was the highest after KZN).

Within the elite circles, this continuous decline in the number of the registered voters who turned out at the polling stations tends to be merely ascribed to “voter apathy”. From a working-class standpoint, it can be argued that, in fact, this signifies the increasing alienation of the masses of our people from the formal political processes. Thus, it can even be ascribed to a conscious boycott of the elections and formal politics in general. It is illustrative that there is a paradox - that alongside the increasing withdrawal of sections of the working class voters from the formal political and electoral processes, there are frequent grass-roots protest actions, especially around municipal services.

These lamentable election outcomes underline the unfortunate reality that in every electoral cycle since the 2004 elections, the ANC has suffered one breakaway group after another, which contributed to gradually eroding its voter base.⁵

Similarly, the ANC faced the 2024 elections with yet another break-away group formed, in the form of the uMkhonto we Sizwe Party (MKP). The establishment of these break-away parties in every electoral cycles partially accounts for the collapse of the ANC’s electoral weight, from the heights of 69.69% (279 seats) in 2004 to 40.18% (159 seats) in 2024, a total loss of 120 seats over three consecutive national elections.

These elections, as much as nearly all the preceding ones, were dominated by agendas based on the centrist ideological gravitational pull, whereby the public discourse was dominated by the centre-left and centre-right politics. In this regard, the media and its commentariat primarily supported the centre-right Multi-Party Charter (MPC) led by the Democratic Alliance (DA). To the left of the centre-left agenda of ANC, it was primarily the populist demagoguery in the form of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).⁶ The point here is to underline the fact that in a country with proud and diverse traditions of Marxist politics, it is a scandal that there was not even one nationally visible and coherent anti-capitalist voice.

Instead, the 2024 elections partially reaffirmed historical experiences elsewhere – that amidst socioeconomic stagnation, deepening crises of reproduction and the cost of living, sections amongst the working class and the poor tend to look

to the populist and demagogic big-men as their saviours or messiahs. Such one-man-show parties tend to thrive on protracted conditions of socioeconomic degeneration. The big men would timely surface to exploit the situation with dangerously divisive, fascist, racist, tribalist, religiously sectarian and generally conservative politics.⁷ Regarding divisive politics, the DA is no different, as it is committed to an openly racist version of liberalism, which has been enhanced by its competition with the FF+. As for the EFF, these tendencies manifest in its pseudo-militarism and inclination towards violently disruptive activities. However, these backward tendencies are more pronounced in the politics of the Patriotic Alliance (PA) and the MKP, with the latter using a fake version of the perspective of radical economic transformation, at the same time wanting to subject the democratic sovereignty of our people to the authority of the traditional leaders. For its part, the PA heavily relied upon its xenophobic message to garner votes, particularly targeting Africans from the rest of the continent, whilst capitalising on the prevalent discontent amongst the coloured people with the ANC and the DA to engender racist consciousness and victimhood, partly in competition with the National Coloured Congress (NCC).

As Table 3 below shows, the ANC received slightly more than 6.4 million votes nationally, becoming the largest party in the NA. In this regard, it is followed by the DA, which remains the main opposition party, with 87 seats.

Province	2019	2024	2019 & 2024 difference
Eastern Cape	69.26%	62.47 %	6.79%
Free State	62.94%	52.88 %	10.06%
Gauteng	53.20%	36.47 %	16.73%
KwaZulu-Natal	55.47%	17.62%	37.85%
Limpopo	77.00%	74.23%	2.77%
Mpumalanga	72.23%	51.89%	20.34%
North West	63.69%	58.53%	5.16%
Northern Cape	58.23%	49.30%	8.93%
Western Cape	31.23%	21.34%	9.89%
Total ANC Votes	10,026,475 (57.50%)	,459,692 (40.18 %)	3, 566, 783 (17.32%)

The ANC only retained decisive majorities in five provinces, namely the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Free State, North West and Mpumalanga, down from eight provinces it held from the previous elections.

It cannot be denied that amongst the more than 2,3 million votes won by the MKP nationally, a significant amount were drawn from of 3, 5 million lost by the ANC, especially in KwaZulu Natal. However, some of the votes gained by the MKP were from other parties.⁸ It is however interesting that whilst the ANC received about 19% of the Indian vote nationally in 2019, in 2024 both the ANC and MKP received 8% of the Indian vote respectfully.

In Gauteng, the DA did not gain anything, it remains stagnant at 27% and the EFF actually lost by nearly 2%. Again, this can be ascribed to the impact of the MKP. But the magnitude of the ANC's loss may be suggesting that it is no longer a hegemonic party in the townships where the voter turnout was by far the lowest, as underlined by its performance in all the three strategic metros of the province in 2021.

Historically, the Western Cape was not always a region of strength for the ANC. However, between 1994 and 2004, a striking shift in the balance of political power ensued as in 2004, the ANC won 45% of the provincial vote, against just 11% for the NNP. A year later, the ANC gained an absolute majority, and all the members of the NNP in the provincial legislature crossed to the ANC, with Ebrahim Rasool becoming the Premier of the province.⁹ It was the post-Polokwane period, in 2008, that decisively shifted the political landscape to the disadvantage of the ANC in the Western Cape after Ebrahim Rasool was removed as the Chair and Premier in favour of Lynne Brown. From then onwards, there was an entrenched shift of the "coloured vote" back to the right. The disappearance of the NNP through the floor-crossing arrangement gave Helen Zille's DA an opportunity to consolidate the white vote and to take over the coloured voters who previously voted for the NNP. Hence, the ANC was unseated in 2009. Since then, the ANC has been on a slippery slope of decline, down to 19.5% in 2024. The fact that the ANC suffered a nearly 10% loss and Al Jama-ah could not even grow by 1% shows that the government's stance on the unfolding genocide in Palestine did not swing the voter sentiment within the Muslim community in the province at all, and even nationally.

Implications for the NDR

The balance of class forces is the most decisive factor in determining how far the outcome of the political contestation in elections can take society forward beyond the limits of a capitalist democracy. The point here is that these elections took place against the background of the balance of class forces being heavily stacked against the working class and in favour of the ruling capitalist class.

Therefore, this drastic collapse in the ANC's electoral support means that even at the level of control of the political superstructure, the balance of political forces has now further shifted negatively. This has major implications for the NDR.

The following are some of the implications that we need to consider in this emerging political reality going forward that:

- Despite the collapse of the ANC support by 17% to 40% of the vote in these elections, in the overall the political sentiment of the South African people who voted is decisively to the left of the political spectrum. This is confirmed by the collective support for the ANC, EFF and MKP, although the political programme espoused by the leadership of the MKP represents a backward semi-feudal political system that runs counter to the NDR and even contradicts its own fake agenda of radical economic transformation.
- The reactionary forces on the right of the political spectrum, which expected to form a DA-led national government and to capture provinces such as Gauteng suffered a major blow from these elections. The DA remains stagnant and many of the parties of the MPC have either disappeared or made poor showings.
- The 2024 national elections reaffirm the fact that the ANC remains the most popular political formation nationally and at least in seven provinces. However, the fact that the ANC as a leading component of the NDR now has ongoing support of only 6,4 million voters out of 27.7 million registered voters and 40% of those who voted in 2024, necessarily

imposes the need to review the current lineup of the forces of the NDR, in terms of the configuration of the Alliance. As highlighted above, the picture becomes worse when all the eligible voters are taken into account. This is hardly an organisation that could be regarded as the leader of the nation or spearhead of the NDR. Put differently, as an incumbent in government, the ANC has squandered its high moral ground that it enjoyed over decades. Such moral bankruptcy can hardly be the basis of insisting on the sole leadership of the NDR, especially given the ANC's dedication to Neoliberal economic policies in government.

- It is undeniable that in the large urban nodes, where the working class is highly concentrated, it has relatively deserted the ANC. This is not so much a switch on the part of the working class to other parties as much as it is a stay-away from the polls, as underlined by the poor voter turnout in the townships or across the metros generally.
- In light of the horrendous outcomes of the 2024 national elections, can it still be up to the ANC alone to determine the agency for providing strategic leadership for the NDR? Since ascending to political office, the ANC has dismally failed to operate as a uniting and representative leader of all the class forces, components of the Alliance and the MDM in the same way as the UDF did internally, although the context was different.
- Individually and collectively as the organisations of the working class, Cosatu and SACP have the responsibility imposed by this historic moment to determine whether the present modus operandi of the Alliance as led by the ANC in the current fashion is taking our revolution forward or backward. The socialist axis has the responsibility to determine whether this dysfunctional mode of strategic leadership of the Alliance would be the best form in which the interests of the working class and the poor would be advanced. Put differently, would the NDR as our own strategy for socialism, but headed by the ANC, be advanced, given this seismic shift in the political landscape?
- The correlation of class forces and the reconfiguration of the Alliance is now a practical question. It is no longer a question that must be resolved

solely through endless debates. The ground has now seismically shifted whilst we continue to tail behind the ANC and indulge in endless sessions of lamentation about how badly and unfairly the ANC is treating us. Our thesis here is that the strategic leadership of the NDR is now a question of rooting the socialist vanguard in the proletarian communities and to take up the struggles that they often face on their own as part of the totality of the party's vanguard role in class struggles on the terrain of the NDR.

- Sensible governments in the world ensure that public sector workers are relatively paid well and have better benefits and conditions of service than other workers in the rest of the economy. They present themselves as ideal or model employers and ensure that the public sector workers are not only proud of their jobs but that they are also loyal politically. This is true in Europe, North America, some parts of South America and certainly in the developmental states of South East Asia and the Arab Gulf Region. Instead, in South Africa, over the entire tenures of the fifth and sixth administrations, the ANC focused on cutting the pay and conditions of public service to address the country's problems of budget deficit and public debt. These ANC governments displayed complete contempt for the workforce, including waging a vicious propaganda warfare against the frontline workers during the Nehawu strike in 2023. We have witnessed the depth of the anger of public servants ourselves during the election campaign in trying to talk about the ANC manifesto on the back of the government's rolling austerity programme, including the non-implementation of Resolution 1 of 2018 in 2020 and the subsequent wage freezes. This was a recipe for disaster, and it is safe to say that many government workers felt betrayed by their employers and wanted to punish the ANC.
- The ascendance of the MKP as a majority party may have implications for the progressive trade union movement in KZN. This pertains to whether or not the MKP wants to form its own affiliated trade union, an agenda which is apparently already in motion. Clearly, many of the members of the Cosatu unions would have voted for the MKP, particularly in KZN, which means that there are some negative implications for the federation. Therefore, the federation and its affiliates have the task of devising a coherent organisational strategy geared at responding to this new political landscape in the province.

The seventh administration

The fact that the ANC could only establish the seventh administration on the basis of a coalition form of government with one or more parties would impose some constraints in so far as it seeks to implement all the six priorities from its 2024 Manifesto. At the same time, we also know from the past that even if the ANC won a decisive majority, there would be no guarantee that any of these priorities would be prioritised for implementation.

In fact, in the 2019 Manifesto, just like in the 2024 Manifesto, the ANC promised a shift away from austerity and the implementation of growth-enhancing macroeconomic policies. But three months immediately after the 2019 elections, the sixth administration released a new macroeconomic strategy that was focused on the implementation of austerity. In addition, an overarching economic strategy called the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) was adopted in October 2020. This plan is focused on engineering the so-called structural reforms in the logistical network industries or public infrastructure such as energy, water, freight rail, ports and telecommunications. In other words, the ERRP is about the privatisation of the public infrastructure using public-private-partnerships, coordinated through the so-called Operation Vulindlela that is housed at the Treasury.

However, it is unclear as to whether the austerity measures to reduce the budget-deficit and to contain the public-debt would continue in the seventh administration, because:

It is expected that the Treasury is going to achieve its fiscal target of a primary budget surplus by the end of the current financial year, which would be for the first in 15 years.

The public-debt is already relatively contained, would peak and start shrinking from the 2025/26 financial year.

It is notable that after the elections President-elect Ramaphosa publicly stated that the continuation of Operation Vulindlela, to privatise the logistical infrastructure, must continue as a precondition for forming a coalition government with any party. Interestingly, in this regard, he did not include the implementation of the National Health Insurance (NHI) and the Basic Income Grant (BIG) as part of the preconditions for coalition partnership.

Given the preconditions that were elevated by the ANC and DA in forming the seventh administration, it would be difficult to deny the fact that the seventh administration represents the consolidation of an elite and centrist Neoliberal consensus, which would effectively entrench the Neoliberal trajectory and its state apparatus. It is not so much about the jointly stated noble policy objectives outlined in the Statement of Intent but about the practical policy instruments or the ways and means of pursuing those objectives that would reflect the class orientation of the seventh administration. For now, the notion of building the Developmental State appears to have disappeared with the decisive majority that the ANC enjoyed over the years.

Immediate strategic tasks

Whatever the permutations in terms of the distribution of the national executive posts of the ANC-led seventh administration and chairs of parliamentary committees, it is our responsibility as Cosatu and SACP, in particular, to ensure that there are no reversals of any of the gains of the workers, the working class and the poor, as well as the broader black middle-stratum. Our immediate and overarching strategic task over the period of the seventh administration, which is constituted based on a negotiated deal with other parties in forming the Government of National Unity (GNU), is to ensure that:

- We fight against any attempt to reverse our hard-won gains in terms of the labour relation regime.
- We fight against attempts to further reduce the public service wage bill (as a proportion of the national budget) by attacking pay, conditions of service, and the implementation of further reductions in personnel headcount or the creation of more vacancies.
- We fight against the continuation of austerity into the seventh administration regarding public services vital to the working class and the poor.
- We fight against the privatisation of the public infrastructure networks.
- We fight for the implementation of the NHI and BIG.
- We fight for progressive macroeconomic policies to support the socioeconomic programmes outlined in the ANC's six priorities.
- We defend South Africa's progressive foreign policy, anchored around solidarity with Palestine, Cuba, and Western Sahara and its sovereignty regarding BRICS and others opposing a unipolar world order.

Endnotes

- 1 In the 2021 local government elections the ANC managed to win 161 municipalities with absolute majorities, in the context whereby the number of councils that did not have a clear majority of any party rose from 18 to 70. Amongst the metros, Buffalo City and Mangaung are exceptions as the ANC still commands absolute majorities in those councils.
- 2 This is in sharp contrast to the period between 1999 and 2008 whereby the country saw an impressive annual average GDP growth rate of 4.0%.
- 3 The demographic dimension mentioned hereunder ought to be appreciated as only indicative. It is drawn from an article by Dawie Schlotz (2024 Political Earthquake: How shock results upended SA's electoral landscape) who as part of his methodology the breakdowns are created by aggregating voting districts with similar demographics where a single group is clearly in majority, even though there would be other groups within that voting district.
- 4 The voter turnout has declined from the high of 89.3% in 1999 to an all-time low of 58.6% in the 2024 general elections.
- 5 The following are the main nationally visible parties that were formed as break-away groups from the ANC, namely the Congress of the People (COPE), Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), African Transformation Movement (ATM), African Independent Congress (AIC) and the African Content Movement (ACM). The point here is to underline some of the key factors that contributed to the steady narrowing of the ANC's voter support.
- 6 However, this included some historical parties on the left such as the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (Azapo) and the Pan African Congress (PAC).
- 7 We know about the socioeconomic contexts in which Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini emerged in Germany and Italy respectively, with their rabble-rousing antisemitic and racist rhetoric. Amidst the current economic stagnation experienced by the European Union (EU) since the global financial crisis in 2008/09, recent reports on the elections for the European Parliament highlights the surge of ultra-right-wing parties across the EU, especially in France and Germany. The same can be ascribed to the politics in the US with the emergence of Donald Trump. Our continent is full of such examples in which demagogic politicians exploited tribal and religious differences.
- 8 The EFF admitted that it was surprised to have performed very well in KZN in 2019. Now it accounts for most of the seats that it has lost in 2024 to the emergence of the MKP, especially in KZN.
- 9 Nomaindia Mfeketo was already re-elected in 2002 as the Mayor during the floor-crossing period, which gave the ANC the necessary majority in the City of Cape Town, ousting Gerald Morkel of the DA.

SACP 103rd ANNIVERSARY

The International Socialist League and the formation of the SACP

Mandla Radebe traces the links between the ISL and the genesis of the Communist Party

In 2021, during the global Covid-19 pandemic, the SACP celebrated its centenary. Now, as our party celebrates 103 years of existence, its enduring influence and contributions to South Africa's political landscape remain as significant as ever. Yet in reflecting on this powerful past, a crucial part of our history is often overlooked - the genesis of the SACP and the spirit behind its formation, the International Socialist League (ISL).

Setting the stage for its rich history, as early as 1921 the party was forging political solidarities that transcended racial and class boundaries within South Africa. Within a decade of its founding, it had embarked on an active recruitment drive, attracting a significant number of black members who not only joined in large numbers but also assumed prominent leadership positions.¹ While the year 1921 holds immense significance in the party's history, solidifying its position as the second oldest political formation in the continent, preceded only by the ANC, it is crucial to recognise that 1915 stands as a pivotal moment for the SACP. It is precisely during this year that its foundation was firmly established with the formation of the ISL, making it an even more profound and influential milestone in shaping this century-old party.

Rifts in the Labour Party

The split within the South African Labour Party (referred to as the Labour Party) precipitated the establishment of the ISL. The Labour Party emerged in March 1910 following the creation of the Union of South Africa, which spurred organised labour in South Africa to engage in discussions aimed at fostering unity. Consequently, the Labour Party attracted a membership comprising trade unionists and socialists, with the latter playing a significant role during the party's inaugural conference.² Notably, they succeeded in embedding certain socialist objectives within the party's constitution.

However, it is important to note that black workers remained largely unorganised during this period, and the Labour Party predominantly consisted of white labour collectives from the four colonies.³ While the party allowed for the inclusion of Coloured members from the Cape, where they possessed voting rights, their membership was subject to discriminatory conditions, including the requirement to uphold “white standards”. Hence, it is unsurprising that the party advocated for the repatriation of Indians upon its establishment.⁴

However, due to the Labour Party’s initial adoption of a conservative policy outlook, internal divisions became inevitable. The “reformist” labour leaders staunchly defended these traditional policies, while the more militant socialists fundamentally disagreed on the party’s relationship with “conservative” trade unions and, importantly, on matters concerning native policy.⁵ The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 further accelerated the impending split, although it was not the conservative racial policies that ultimately led to the breaking point. Instead, disagreements over the war became the decisive factor.⁶ At the party’s annual conference in January 1915, intense debates arose surrounding participation in the war, with the majority of the membership endorsing involvement. However, progressive leaders within the executive, including figures like Cdes Bill Andrews, David Ivon Jones, and Sidney Bunting, vehemently opposed what they viewed as a bourgeois war.⁷

When these socialist individuals faced defeat and were denied the opportunity to express dissent, they collectively decided to resign from their positions and establish a pressure group within the party. This newly formed group, consisting of internationalists within the party, incorporated the pre-existing War on War League, which had been formed by the same leaders and aligned itself with international trends in the labour movement.⁸

However, the Labour Party did not accept this, and these leaders were compelled to sever their ties with the party when certain members insisted that they pledge their support to the government during the war. Consequently, they transformed their pressure group into an independent organisation known as the International Socialist League of South Africa (ISL).⁹ Before this development, the Labour Party had been the sole political entity displaying some semblance of progressive policies.

Emergence and evolution of the ISL

The emergence of the ISL in the South African context engendered significant transformation in the country's labour politics. Functioning initially as a pressure group within the Labour Party, the ISL was the driving force behind the establishment of a weekly publication named *The International*, wherein its inaugural editorial, authored by Cde Ivon Jones, unequivocally asserted, "Here we plant the flag of the New International in South Africa."¹⁰ This publication played a pivotal role in not only consolidating the ISL but also serving as a binding agent that connected the ISL and, subsequently, the Communist Party.

At its core, the ISL's principal objective was to "propagate the principles of international socialism and anti-militarism, and strengthen international working class organisation".¹¹ The launching editorial of *The International* further contended that "not till we free the native can we hope to free the White".¹² With the advent of the ISL onto the South African political landscape, a discernible shift ensued and for "the first time in the history of the organised working class in South Africa" the African people had an organisation that proclaimed solidarity with their quest for freedom.¹³

The ISL displayed unwavering dedication in promoting a shared consciousness among white workers, urging them to recognise their collective interests in alliance with black workers against their mutual capitalist adversary. However, it is essential to acknowledge that certain segments of the white working class remained susceptible to a pervasive white superiority complex. Nonetheless, the endeavours undertaken by influential leaders like Cde Bill Andrews, who advocated for working-class unity transcending racial barriers, hold enduring relevance. Confrontations occasionally erupted between the incipient black nationalists within the ANC and white racist unionists, sometimes escalating to near-violent clashes. These challenges represented initial impediments encountered by the emerging non-racial force in the country. Nevertheless, resolute communists such as Cde Bunting persisted in their efforts to incorporate black individuals into the ISL, an undertaking hailed by Cde Eddie Roux as profoundly remarkable, "something which made some of his fellow socialist gasp."¹⁴

Collaboration between whites and Africans: the incipient indications of an alliance

In 1916, during the ISL's congress, Cde Bunting introduced a pivotal petition focusing on the rights of natives. The petition strongly advocated for the elimination of all discriminatory systems. "This League affirms that the emancipation of the working class requires the abolition of all forms of native identity, compound and passport system; and lifting of the native worker to the political and industrial status of the White" read the petition.¹⁵

While the organisation confronted the complexities of the native question and proactively proposed progressive resolutions, it is imperative to acknowledge that some remnants of racist attitudes from its Labour Party origins persisted. Nonetheless, under the visionary leadership of figures like Bunting, the ISL persevered and engaged in diligent efforts to sensitise its conservative members to the significance of establishing connections with Africans while promoting class-based politics within the African community.

These endeavours laid the foundation for the genesis of the ANC/CPSA alliance. Within the timeframe of 1916-1918, the ISL actively engaged in dialogue with prominent leaders of the South African Native National Congress, subsequently renamed the ANC.¹⁶ An example of their collaborative efforts arose when the government introduced the contentious Native Affairs Administration Bill, aimed at subjugating Africans under the jurisdiction of the Governor-General. Promptly responding to this legislative proposal, the ISL and ANC jointly convened a meeting to register their protest against the bill. The records of this gathering reveal its non-racial composition, consisting of both "Whites and natives", with the attendees firmly resolving to oppose the bill on account that it "foreboded grave danger to the peace of South Africa".¹⁷

During this period, the ISL demonstrated a comprehensive commitment to engaging with its African constituents, an initiative that stemmed from its conference resolution to establish meaningful connections with the Black population. In pursuit of this objective, the organisation arranged lecture series encompassing pertinent topics such as "black liberation", "Native Aspirations", "Trade Unions and the Native Question", and "Links Between Black and White". These sessions featured prominent speakers, including Robert Grendson, the editor of ANC's newspaper *Abantu-Batho*, who were invited to contribute their insights.¹⁸ Concurrently, the ISL took the initiative

in organising Indian workers in Durban and collaborated with the African People's Organisation, an organisation representing Coloured people in the Transvaal. However, it was in its engagement with African workers that the ISL displayed utmost dedication, exemplified by the production of approximately 10,000 copies of leaflets in isiZulu and Sesotho languages expounding on the significance of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.¹⁹

Despite its engagement with the ANC, the ISL was not without reservation on this and offered critical assessments of the organisation. During their attendance at the ANC's annual meeting in 1918, Cde Andrews described the ANC as relatively "moderate nationalist and racist". Despite this critique, he recognised its potential as a significant movement for the African community. Cde Bunting, too, expressed a pessimistic viewpoint. "Our view of the Congress is confirmed," he remarked. "It forms an admirable buffer enabling the ruling class to stave off the real emancipation of the natives."²⁰ Despite these critical observations, it is important to acknowledge that the pioneering communists' characterisation of the ANC's potential for the emancipation of the native population was not entirely misguided.

A historical transition: the evolution from the ISL to the CPSA

The internationalist character of the ISL played a pivotal role in the genesis of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). The ISL enthusiastically embraced the emergence of the Third International (the Comintern) and promptly sought affiliation and representation in its Third World Congress in 1921, distinguishing itself as one of the earliest parties to do so.²¹ Even the challenges posed by the Comintern's "Twenty-One Conditions", which restricted the affiliation of multiple parties from the same country, did not dissuade the ISL's dedication to internationalism. On the contrary, they viewed this constraint as a catalyst, fostering a convergence of all socialist parties and groups within South Africa with the overarching aim of establishing "a single, disciplined and centralized Communist Party".²²

In January 1921, approximately one hundred delegates representing various socialist organisations, with the exception of the Labour Party, convened with the purpose of endorsing the "Twenty-One Conditions". Subsequently, in March of the same year, a "Unity Committee" was constituted to undertake the formulation of a Manifesto and Constitution and to make preparations for the inaugural conference of the Communist Party. Thus, from 30 July to 1 August 1921, the momentous congress transpired, officially establishing the

CPSA. During this congress, an executive leadership, led by Cde Andrews as the General Secretary, was elected to guide the party.²³

It is crucial to recognise that upon its inception, the newly formed Communist Party designated *The International* as its official organ, concurrently assuming control over the ISL's press and administrative facilities. The profound influence of the ISL on the "young" Communist Party was evident in its membership, leadership, and overall perspective. Hence, some have contended that the Party essentially represented a continuum of the League's legacy. In support of this notion, even as late as 1929, the national conference of the Party made explicit reference to its "origin in 1915".²⁴ While there can be no doubt that the year 1921 "marked something far more profound than a mere change of name", that this was indeed a "decisive turning point in the evolution of the Party" is beyond contention or doubt.²⁵ Nevertheless, the spirit and ideological underpinnings of the ISL continue to resonate within the ethos of the SACP.

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