

ANC and working class:

A shared history

In a statement at centenary celebrations **Sdumo Dlamini** spoke about the strong historic links that exist between the ANC and the working class.

On behalf of the over two million members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and all its structures, I bring congratulations and best wishes to the African National Congress (ANC) as it reaches this historic milestone – its centenary.

Cosatu is extremely proud to be in alliance with Africa's oldest liberation movement, the fountain of hope to millions of the oppressed and exploited masses of our people, a giant whose track record in the struggle is unparalleled anywhere in the world.

We are celebrating not just the institution called the ANC, but the struggle whose collective experience it embodies. We are celebrating the unity of the African people, which extended to all the oppressed including white democrats who hate oppression and love freedom. We owe the cohesion and unity we currently enjoy to the principles and struggles of the ANC.

The history of the working class and the history of the ANC are intertwined. As the working class grew from strength to strength, so did the ANC. It is one of very few liberation movements that evolved towards a class perspective, understanding that black people's

oppression was not only based on their colour, but on the inherent exploitative nature of the colonial capitalist system. The ANC's policies and actions reinforced it as a pro-working class and pro-poor anti-imperialist liberation movement.

When we sing 'Hamba nathi mkhululi wethu' (go with us our liberator) we mean this literally. The ANC promised to liberate us. It may have taken longer than most African countries; it may have been more costly, with far too many casualties, but, as the ANC promised, it brought the political freedom in our lifetime. The 27 April 1994 breakthrough will always be remembered fondly, not only by South Africans, but also by the peoples of the world, whose own contributions to our freedom should never be underestimated.

Under the leadership of the ANC we have made tremendous strides in building a better life for all South Africans. We are celebrating the protection of workers' rights in the Constitution and a range of progressive labour laws that have helped us to address some of the three interrelated antagonistic contradictions – poverty, class oppression and exploitation.

We are celebrating improved health-care, with the progressive introduction of the National Health Insurance. We are particularly



pleased that 1.4-million people are taking part in the government's antiretroviral drugs programme and 15-million will be tested for HIV by June this year.

We are also celebrating improved access to education, and the improvement in this year's matric (high school) pass rate. We shall be celebrating the fact that 15-million South Africans have a roof above their heads, and that millions receive support in the form of grants without which they would simply die of starvation.

Our task is to consolidate and multiply these advances. The biggest challenges we face are unemployment, poverty and inequality. With 36% or 7,504,000 people still unemployed, South Africa's rate of unemployment is higher than any other middle-income country.

Between 40% and 50% of the population live in poverty. We have become the most unequal society in the world, with 50% of the South African population living on 8% of the national income.

Cosatu agrees with the ANC that we can only overcome these economic challenges if we restructure the economy inherited from our ugly past and end its domination by mining, finance and heavy chemicals. We must end ownership and control of strategic sectors of our economy by a handful of people, be they black, white, foreign or domestic.

We must prioritise the expansion of the manufacturing industry so that we benefit our own resources, using them to add value by turning them into manufactured goods and begin to reach the government's goal of creating five-million decent jobs in the next 10 years.

In addition, we must return to our time-tested values and principles of selflessness, and promote integrity and honesty, particularly among leaders of the

Alliance, who must be beyond reproach! One of the biggest challenges of our time is the cancer of greed and selfishness within our ranks, which is eating away the heart of our democracy, and is driven by the capitalist culture of 'me first' and 'get as rich as possible, as fast as possible'.

Together we must reverse the spread of crass materialism, fraud and corruption and defeat the ill-discipline, political arrogance and ideological backwardness that is compromising our revolutionary movement. We must draw a line in the sand on revolutionary morality that no one will cross.

Our task is to defend the space we created for ourselves in the historic 52nd national conference of the ANC. We must continue to campaign for full implementation of the conference resolutions. We must defend the current

leadership collective from those who would want to put it on the back foot, undermine its authority and create divisions.

Notwithstanding all these and other challenges, we salute a movement that has led so gallantly for over 100 years. Happy birthday to the people's movement – may you grow stronger and last for another century! Long live the ANC! Long live Nelson Mandela and all our stalwarts! Long live the memory of all our heroes and heroines! Long live Oliver Tambo and all soldiers of our glorious army Umkhonto we Sizwe. The ANC lives – The ANC leads! ^{LB}

Sdumo Dlamini is the president of Cosatu and gave this address at the Centenary Gala in Mangaung, Bloemfontein where the ANC was formed in 1912.

William Matlala



ANC supporters at Women's day celebrations, 2011 in Pretoria.