

Debating economic policy

Nationalising the mines

In the interest of holding an open national debate **Mojalefa Musi** and **Zico Tamela** argue that the South African Communist Party is incorrect in not supporting the ANC Youth League's (ANCYL) call for the nationalisation of the mines.

Since the process that led to the adoption of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) the South African public has never had an opportunity to engage in a national debate on the country's economic policy. The call by the ANCYL for the nationalisation of the mines presents a golden opportunity for a wider debate to take place on the immediate tasks of democratically reconstructing South Africa's economy towards meeting the needs of the masses.

It is not surprising that this important debate has become a victim of dirty politicking within the tripartite alliance and society at large. Those whose class interests are threatened by the debate want to skin alive the ANCYL, particularly its president, in order to bury this debate in its infancy! But this debate must be saved from the precipice where it is currently headed. Working-class organisations and activists should engage in this debate, defend the right of the ANCYL to raise the need for the nationalisation of the mines, and also actively champion this view.

The SACP (South African Communist Party) should also adopt a correct attitude towards the debate and thus provide political and ideological leadership on this important question for the working class and poor.

The call for the nationalisation of the mines is an appropriate intervention in the context of the current economic crisis and the need for a working-class response thereon and on the struggle for socialism generally.

In support of its call, the ANCYL invokes the Freedom Charter, among others. Comrades Jeremy Cronin and Raymond Suttner in *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* argue that the socio-economic clauses of the Freedom Charter imply the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. In the September 2009 edition of *Amandla!* comrade Martin Legassick goes even further, arguing that the Freedom Charter calls for nationalisation under workers' control.

Both in the 1950s and on his release from prison comrade Nelson Mandela defended and championed

nationalisation as ANC policy. Since Polokwane the alliance says the Freedom Charter is back, and the national-democratic revolution (NDR) is on track. The alliance understands the immediate task of the NDR as the implementation of the Freedom Charter. Therefore, the ANCYL is correct to call for the nationalisation of the mines as contained in the Freedom Charter.

Admittedly nationalisation is not alien to capitalism. Certainly its implementation along the lines of the ANCYL or the Freedom Charter would not make South Africa socialist. Cronin is correct that it has been a tool in the hands of fascist and apartheid governments to industrialise especially after the Second World War.

However, it is also true that many post-colonial societies industrialised through nationalisation, among others, and were thus able to leverage state power to address manifold challenges of social deprivation and super-exploitation of their resources. Even though most of them remained capitalist, they still enhanced their industrial and human development compared to what it was under colonial regimes. Also important is that nationalisation is part of the reawakening of democratic and socialist ideology and practice in Latin America.

It is astonishing that the call for nationalisation is met with such disapproval by those in our alliance who should be offering ideological leadership. The city apartheid and fascist economic experiments without regard for the left traditions in our country and internationally

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The ANC's 52nd national conference put the developmental state at the centre of South Africa's socio-economic-political trajectory. While the RDP was not as bold as the Freedom Charter, it also highlighted the centrality of the state in economic transformation. Despite its shortcomings under capitalism, the notion of a developmental state represents a theoretical breakthrough from market economic fundamentalism that has hitherto fixated the South African and world policy-making community.

Nationalisation is a take-over of strategic sectors of the economy by the state. Socialism is a deeper process whereby the exploited classes themselves own and control the means of production. Clarifying the capitalist essence of the socio-economic clauses of the Freedom Charter, Nelson Mandela in the 1950s explained the fundamental difference between nationalisation and socialism very well.

However, there is a false counter-position of nationalisation and socialisation of the means of production, especially of mine and mineral wealth, in the responses of the SACP.

Nationalisation of the means of production can be a stepping stone towards their socialisation on condition that it is either executed by a working-class state (as Mandela pointed out in the 1950s referring to the then Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) or if pursued by a capitalist state it is preceded or followed by workers' control. Therefore, in pursuing socialisation the SACP should support, and

provide the necessary ideological leadership on, the call by the ANC YL for the nationalisation of the mines because this could be a route to their socialisation.

Critical though, is the need to agitate and mobilise for workers' control of the mining industry and ultimately all the key sectors of the economy. Needless to say pursuing this economic goal would necessitate a political struggle for a working-class state.

The 1999 strategy conference of the SACP adopted a resolution on socialisation of the economy as part of the SACP's objectives. Furthermore, the SACP's 11th national congress adopted a programme that accommodated both nationalisation and socialisation of the economy.

The SACP's 12th national congress also adopted a resolution calling for the nationalisation of Sasol and Arcelor Mittal as a prelude to the nationalisation and, ultimately, socialisation of the commanding heights of the economy. This same congress also adopted a resolution on the relationship between the SACP and state power which, in our view is a precondition for the establishment of a working-class state and the realisation of workers' control and, finally, the socialisation of the means of production. Why is the SACP now betraying its own positions?

Lastly, even if nationalisation of the mines is pursued to save or promote black capital currently in crisis in the mining industry, as Cronin alleges, something that needs to be mentioned is that it would still be a progressive economic step

from its current predominantly white character. This would still be part of fulfilling the revolutionary tasks to democratise and transform the economy. Failure to do so would be a monumental betrayal of these democratic tasks!

The working class, as the most consistent fighter for democracy, should definitely lend active support to, and champion and lead, the struggle for the nationalisation of the mines. It should do this even if it remains within a capitalist national-democratic framework for that would mark a radical departure from current racist monopoly ownership.

Having argued the above, certain conclusions could be drawn from the response of the leadership of the SACP to this important debate.

Firstly it is clear that sections of our leadership resent this debate. Secondly comrade Cronin's intervention only helps the cause of those who equally resent this debate within the alliance and, most importantly, renders tacit support to the racist bourgeoisie.

Last, but not least, no amount of interpretations and re-interpretations of the Freedom Charter will settle this question, but only relentless struggle by the working class and the downtrodden masses at large! **LB**

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