

# Independence of SACP in government

Traditionally the ANC has dominated its alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the SA Communist Party. **David Masondo** argues that this must be changed by amongst other things the creation of an SACP quota system in the legislature, which would provide it with an independent platform to challenge anti-working class decisions.

**T**he ANC's Polokwane conference (2007) and the electoral victory of the ANC-led Alliance this year has given SACP representation in provincial and national legislatures. The party has 9% representation in the National Assembly and a small but important presence in most provincial legislatures. Nine percent of national Cabinet ministers are SACP members. This has placed the party in a position of potential influence.

The SACP's left critics suggest that SACP activists and leaders have joined state institutions to further their material interests. The SACP should deal firmly with careerists, but attempts to guilt it for deploying its cadres in the state should be rejected. The thrust of the right and far left is that the SACP should abandon the class struggle in the state and ANC.

However, this does not mean internal discussion on the SACP's role in the post-2009 state should be banned. And the discussion should not be based on what the ANC thinks and wants. The starting

point must be what the Party wants, so that it can position itself to carry out its tasks.

The post-Polokwane period has not resolved fundamental questions about the independence of the SACP in the state and the Alliance (ANC/SACP/Congress of SA Trade Unions - Cosatu). As a result, its public representatives' limited power will be further constrained not only by capital, but also their mode of entry into the state. These constraints can be addressed if the SACP asserts working-class leadership in society, anchored in an extra-parliamentary working-class offensive based on concrete campaigns.

This is not an argument against SACP participation in the state. Indeed, institutional reforms are needed to create conditions for the SACP to assert its ideological and organisational identity in the legislatures. Without these, and a revolutionary understanding of the SACP's role in the state, the pre-Polokwane conflicts in the Alliance and the Party are likely to recur. SACP members will be expected to

implement problematic ANC policies, and those who rebel will be subjected to ANC discipline.

## STATE DEPENDENCE ON CAPITAL

There is an erroneous view within the SACP that assumes that the state under capitalism is a neutral entity, and that its conduct depends on who is in office. It is often implied that the task is to increase the proportion of communists from 9% to 50%, tilting power towards the working class.

As the leadership around former President Thabo Mbeki has been largely displaced, it is also argued that the working class should abandon strikes because the state is in good hands.

This fails to recognise the power of capitalism over the state. It is incorrect to assume that the problem consists in the leaders who administer it.

The state depends on capital to reproduce itself. To deliver social services, it needs to create conditions for capitalists to invest. It depends on the investments of business to generate income by taxing wages,



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salaries and profits. In short, unless the state goes beyond capital, the state under capitalism is forced to build investor, capitalist confidence.

All post-1994 state leaderships have sought to lure capital to invest in South Africa, and the current ANC leadership is no exception. All politicians are subject to the power of business, and this would be true even if the SACP had a 75% majority in Parliament.

However, business power does not automatically lead to pre-ordained outcomes – neo-liberal policies, for instance. There are alternatives which depend on the balance of power and the class alliances that the working class forge, including the choices of state leadership. The state can divide and rule capitalists by forging alliances based on its developmental goals.

Business can be forced to perform developmental functions, for example, industrial strategy, shaped by the working class. This means developing the institutional and policy apparatus to discipline business by shifting the balance of class power towards the working class. Business will only make concessions if forced to by mass struggles.

The test of the post-Polokwane leadership is whether it will reproduce Mbeki-style black empowerment based on rent-seeking and corrupt political entrepreneurs, or whether, in alliance with the working class, it pursues a developmental path that breaks down our neo-colonial social structure which fosters developmentalist capitalists.

#### **SACP ROLE IN POST-2009 STATE**

That SACP cadres face constraints inside the state is no argument for non-participation. The issues are the manner of their entry, accountability and role. The post-1994 SACP's mode of entry into the state was defective, as were its accountability and recall mechanisms, which generated dependency on the ANC and opportunism.

The post-2009 mode of entry is not fundamentally different. There were significant consultations on the ANC's election manifesto and choice of public representatives, but SACP cadres sit in the legislatures as ANC members and under the ANC whip. Their accountability and tasks in relation to the party's independent role are unclear.

The current SACP discussion document is a major advance, but sidesteps vexing questions. For example, it affirms the SACP's "independence" in the legislatures and argues that some issues will be resolved through practice, without clarifying these assertions.

The SACP should account to the working class and hold its government cadres accountable. Like the Progressive Youth Alliance model of contesting Student Representative Councils (SRCs), the Alliance should determine legislative and executive candidates, including state president. Alliance representatives should also be accountable and subject to recall by the Alliance. One Alliance partner should not have the right to determine policy and hold representatives accountable.

When the SACP contests the national elections under an ANC banner, a quota system should guarantee it legislature seats. Communists should not be placed on ANC lists as ANC members, abandoning their communist conduct and values.

The argument against quotas assumes that committed communists will get onto ANC lists by earning the respect of ANC members. However, the lists are also the product of intra-class struggles, which generate factional alliances and subject SACP cadres to the whims of powerful ANC factions.

The argument that the workers should swell the ranks of the ANC to fight business is sound, but ignores the fact that they are forced by capitalist logic to spend much of their time commuting to work or working, leaving them little time for ANC branch activity. This leaves political space in the ANC to be captured mainly by the middle classes, whose interests are largely

tied to business. The SACP and Cosatu should struggle for more free time for workers to enable them to participate in political life and build the SACP's power and independence.

Allowing the ANC to deploy SACP cadres in the state subordinates the SACP to the ANC leadership. What happens if communists refuse to implement anti-working class decisions? Because of their mode of entry into the state, they are likely to toe the ANC line. In fact, the SACP's constitution and its current discussion document require this.

It is unclear whether the Party can recall its members from the legislature, whether the ANC can do so without its allies' permission, or whether SACP cadres can differ with the ANC on policy. Quotas for the SACP would create conditions for it to maintain its independence and control over deployed cadres.

At all levels of the legislatures, SACP cadres should form revolutionary communist groupings to advocate progressive policies and oppose bourgeois representatives. Party cadres under the ANC mandate should still seek to win policy arguments in ANC caucuses.

To strengthen accountability, communists in legislatures should be under the control of the SACP, which should mandate and recall them. Parliamentary work is not a substitute for mass work, and SACP cadres in the state should work to build support. Communist MPs and ministers should join mass action, even if it is directed against Parliament or the state.

Mass struggles will not weaken the state leadership. They will strengthen it to force business into developmental investments and expropriate its wealth.

The Alliance is functioning better at the national level and in some provinces, and an Alliance political

council is a giant step in this regard. However, in many provinces the ANC consults its allies, but remains the final arbiter on Alliance decisions. The institutional changes, especially quotas, proposed above could help resolve this.

To implement municipal quotas, the Alliance must ensure that certain wards are contested under the SACP's banner, and the ANC should mobilise members to vote for SACP candidates.

Building and reconfiguring the Alliance should be accompanied by strengthening party structures capable of leading popular campaigns. Otherwise, it will be reduced to begging for positions from the ANC leadership.

#### PARTY IDEOLOGICAL TASKS

SACP cadres should defend the ANC's Morogoro Conference 1969 stance on the class question, including the Alliance's institutional form.

Over time the ANC imported different class forces with different ideological orientations. While these cohered around the need for a non-racial, non-sexist South Africa, the pre-Morogoro ANC was ambiguous about whether society should be organised along class lines.

The post-Morogoro ANC acknowledged the movement's multi-class composition, while recognising working-class leadership and identifying socialism as its ultimate goal. Its vision was based on a Marxist analysis of South African capitalism as maintaining racial and patriarchal domination. The fact that the ANC knew that capitalism was linked to racial domination did not make it a communist party. Accordingly, it does not have to be a communist party to fight for socialism.

There are two aspects to the question of how working-class

leadership should be exercised: organisational and class leadership.

Organisationally, an aligned organisation carries out tasks in an Alliance programme without partners abdicating their class programmes. Class leadership is about which class should be prioritised to organise and mobilise for revolution. There is no dispute on this – the working class, and particularly the black working class, is accepted as leading the struggle against national and gender oppression and for socialist transition.

The ANC organises and mobilises all oppressed groups and classes but is not the sole organ of the working class. Cosatu is a union federation which organises workers, not the entire working class. The Party is the organ of the working class, meaning that it should lead the Alliance, the organisational expression of various classes.

During the Defiance Campaign in 1952, the ANC did not lead the Congress Movement. Only later, to ward off anti-communist sentiment in Africa, was it felt that the movement should be led by the ANC. The current form of the Alliance was not predestined.

The Alliance should have a political centre at all levels, like a post-Morogoro ANC conference under 2009 political conditions. Shifting the balance of class power and making institutional change are vital to avoid being carried away by the political mood of the moment. LB

*David Masondo is the Young Communist League national chairperson, and a PhD student at New York University. This is an edited version of his paper presented at a Chris Hani Institute seminar on 7 August this year. See a response from Edward Webster on the next page.*

# Response to David Masondo

The previous article summarised a paper presented by David Masondo, the Young Communist League National Chairperson. **Edward Webster** responds to some of the arguments in his paper.

**D**avid Masondo argues for greater independence within the Alliance of the South African Communist Party (SACP) from the African National Congress (ANC). The foundations of the Alliance were laid over 80 years ago when the forerunner to the SACP, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) adopted, at its seventh annual congress in 1929, the Native Republic Thesis (NRT)

Simons and Simons, in their 1983 classic study of the communist movement in South Africa, saw the adoption of the NRT as decisive in shaping the South African liberation movement: "This - the NRT - was a great advance in the analysis of the relations between national and class forces in the liberation movement. The party had at last found a firm basis in Marxist theory for an unequivocal affirmation of the African's claims to govern the country."

It is appropriate, 16 years into our democracy, that the Chris Hani Institute revisit the NRT and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as strategies of economic and social transformation.

Masondo argues that the Alliance (ANC/SACP/Cosatu - Congress of South African Trade Unions) needs to be reconfigured in two ways.

Firstly, the SACP needs to change the mode of entry of members into

the legislature by introducing a quota system guaranteeing the SACP a fixed number of seats. Furthermore, its representatives should not sit in the legislature as ANC members under the ANC whip. They, and those deployed in the state, should be accountable to, and subject to recall by, the Alliance.

Secondly, he argues that there is a need to shift the balance of class power within the Alliance by the SACP replacing the ANC as the leader of the Alliance.

This is an important and timely intervention. The logic of Masondo's argument is that the electoral strength of the SACP is best tested by it running on its own ticket. But he is ambiguous.

Earlier in the article he proposes that an SACP candidate elected to parliament on an ANC ticket, be accountable to the SACP and not to the ANC. Yet I believe to campaign on an ANC ticket and then vote on a SACP mandate would be dishonest to the voters. I cannot imagine the ANC would accept such a situation either. But then Masondo seems to change track suggesting that the SACP contest certain municipal wards "under the SACP banner, and that the ANC should mobilise members to vote for SACP candidates."

Ever since the 1920s the communist left has accepted the

leadership of the ANC and those who questioned it were labelled ultra leftists. Have the material and political conditions arrived for the SACP to seriously consider contesting on its own ticket a democratic road to socialism?

Surprisingly, Masondo makes no mention of the third component of the Alliance, Cosatu. Is it a silent and passive actor in the Alliance in a struggle for hegemony fought between the ANC and the SACP? Is Cosatu, in Masondo's view, simply the trade union wing of the SACP? If this is his view, then he is ignoring the real divisions within Cosatu over how it expresses its politics.

Most importantly it is not clear how Masondo defines socialism. Does he hold a statist view of socialism at the expense of a society-led development of socialism based on grass roots empowerment?

These are some of the questions that Masondo's valuable contribution to a long overdue debate raises. LB

*Eddie Webster is a Chris Hani Institute board member. This is a response to David Masondo's paper (see previous article) given at a Chris Hani Institute seminar "Native Republic thesis - a precursor to the tripartite alliance" on 7 August this year.*