

# The SACP: a basis for socialist unity

This is one of two positions set out in a recent NUMSA Bulletin. The other position is similar to that of the WOSA response to Slovo in this edition.

**S**ocialism is under attack throughout the world. In South Africa, countries like Britain, USA and West Germany, local capital and the state will push very hard for a negotiated settlement which does not threaten capitalist interests. All major players including the ANC will come under a lot of pressure to focus on de-racialisation and not class exploitation.

If socialism is to survive and grow in our country, a broad and effective unity of the left is of utmost priority. This unity should be developed in action and socialists at home should steer away from fancy intellectual game-plays which foster divisions and inactivity. The cause of unity will best be served by a democratic, broad-based socialist party which enjoys the support of a large section of the working class.

While the SACP does not currently have all these credentials there are some clear indications of a willingness to transform itself. This process should be supported and encouraged and if real changes are made, the party may well be able to consolidate its working class support into an organised

force and thereby become an effective catalyst for unifying the left.

## Strengths and weaknesses of the SACP

There can be little argument about the fact that the party has played a massive role in building the ANC and in developing its various wings. Furthermore it has been central in sustaining the international sanctions campaign against South Africa.

As a result it has a great deal of influence within the ANC on policy matters and has significant support amongst workers and youth. No other socialist grouping has got the capacity to match this influence or support in the short to medium term.

On the other hand it would be foolish to deny that the party has got many skeletons in its cupboards. These include its:

- support for Stalinism and role as the mouthpiece of the Soviet Communist Party
- poor internationalist record in supporting the Soviet intervention and suppression of popular movements eg Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Afghanistan
- development of "colonial-

ism of a special type" and other positions into dogmas above critical discussion

- attempts to stifle emergent debates on socialism by the progressive trade union movement
- vicious and sectarian attacks on left wing groups who challenged party positions
- purges of party members who disagreed with leadership positions

## Assessing the past

Comrade Slovo in "*Has Socialism Failed*" and the party journal "*Umsebenzi*" have gone some way in tackling the party's historical errors. These are important and bold steps on the road to full self-criticism. They will have to be developed further in order to deal with criticisms which question the party's backing for this position by senior internal leadership.

Most importantly, they will have to address in more detail the manner in which the party structures have fostered authoritarianism rather than democratic practices. This is a matter of urgency as the party re-emerges legally and operates in South Africa.

## Workers take the lead

The SACP has been taught by mass working class organisations in the past and it can learn again. The progressive trade union movement has enshrined within the principles of democracy, accountability, openness, mandates and responsibility. If the SACP is prepared to transform itself in its re-emergence in line with these principles it should be able to consolidate broad support and unify the left. This would involve:

- abandoning the classical Leninist vanguard party in favour of an open, broad based political institution
- democratic election of all office-bearers and representatives and full accountability at all levels
- open debates at all levels of its own policies and programmes
- complete respect for the independence of mass based organisations

Comrade Slovo and others have already endorsed many of these principles. But it would be naive to believe that all within the party, particularly those who have become accustomed to dictates, party posts and the worst of democratic centralism, will do so with equal enthusiasm. One should also not be naive in thinking that implementing democratic practices will come easily to a party which has operated in an authoritarian way in the past.

Equally it must be acknowledged that there may well be some objective constraints on complete openness and democracy. For various rea-



sons it may not be wise to identify all party members immediately.

It is also clear that in particular situations, the party may well need to draw on special resources to defend itself or to advance working class interests. However, these limitations should not undermine basic democratic control of the party by its identified members, nor become an excuse to retreat into unacceptable past practices.

If the party or its key leadership are prepared to drive towards these democratic objectives, then not only do they deserve support, but for socialists committed to building left unity, working within the party must become a first option. This is not an "entryist" position which advocates joining a political party with the aim of transforming (or destroying) that party on the basis of some hidden agenda decided by a secret clique. Our agenda must be to establish an open, democratic party. The position which it adopts must be decided by all identified members within its structures.

On this basis, if thousands of trade union members and organisers were to join the party and to fight for democratic principles established by the labour movement then the

party would be transformed and would be able to effectively unify the left.

## Tasks ahead

A new, transformed SACP would then be able to develop an effective programme for socialism and could begin (by again following the initiative of the labour movement) to develop building blocks for a future socialist economy.

There would also be a number of very important issues a transformed SACP would have to deal with in a way which maintains its own political integrity and democratic functioning. These include how exactly to relate to mass organisations, whether to prioritise developing its own or ANC structures, how to deal with conflicting positions within the strategic alliance (AN/COSATU/SACP), the problem of activists wearing many hats etc.

If it proves impossible to build a broad-based, democratic SACP which can function as a unifying pole on the left, then the option is for those socialist who remain committed to basic democratic principles to leave the party and to establish or seek out other political options.

Finally it must be stressed that joining the party is not a decision NUMSA as a union should make - it is a decision for individuals to consider. NUMSA should never affiliate to a political party, and should always remain oppositional in relation to the state irrespective of the particular party in power. ☆

## NUMSA Political Policy Resolutions

### Resolution on membership of political organisations

The NUMSA CC believes that:

- NUMSA aims to unite all workers in the metal industry.
- The lessons of perestroika show that the trade unions must remain independent of political parties.
- The development of party political groupings in NUMSA will lead to party political dominations of the union and disunity among workers.

Therefore resolves:

- Every NUMSA member and official are free to belong to a political party of his or her own choice.
- All NUMSA members and officials are free to give any point of view in the debates which take place in the union.
- NUMSA members and officials must participate in these debates as individuals. The union will not allow members or officials to participate in debates as a bloc.
- NUMSA will not accept the development of party political blocs within the union.

### The following resolutions will be proposed to COSATU

- That NUMSA supports the Alliance of the ANC/SACP/COSATU.
- That Alliance should func-

tion in terms of the principles set out by the COSATU CEC at its meeting of 5 May 1990.

These are:

- Each organisation is independent and will develop its own positions on various issues and campaigns.
- The task of the alliance to formulate a joint programme on agreed issues.
- The alliance is a strategic alliance with a central objective of dismantling apartheid and building a non-racial, democratic and unitary South Africa.
- this alliance must take on a structured form at national, regional and local level with mandated representatives from each organisation.
- The alliance must work out how it relates to a range of organisations and different class forces outside it.
- The alliance should work to set up independent, non-sectarian civic and rural organisations.
- The UDF was formed to achieve certain goals in a period when the ANC could not play its full political role. The ANC is now in a position to take its rightful place in political activity. NUMSA, therefore resolves that the UDF should phase out thereby bringing to an end the COSATU/UDF alliance and the MDM.

### Resolution on Talks about Talks

On talks about talks we therefore resolve that:

- COSATU should participate in the talks about talks including talks about security.
- For negotiations, the triple alliance should work as follows:
  - COSATU will adopt its own position
  - We will then meet as an Alliance Forum to formulate the position of the alliance. The alliance forum would be in the form of Executive members of the three parties to the alliance, meeting as mandated delegates.
  - The Alliance Forum would be present near the negotiations, at all times to receive reports from the negotiating team and to give fresh mandates.
  - The Alliance Forum will act as a support group during negotiations, facilitating report-backs to and mandates from the constituencies.
  - COSATU team members of the negotiating team will be elected democratically by the COSATU CEC.
  - COSATU must put more effort into establishing effective structures for reporting back.
  - COSATU in retaining its independence reserves its right to put forward and publish to its members and others its own positions, outside the negotiations.
  - The Alliance will operate on the basis of independence of the parties and consensus. ☆