

SACP 2004

**Workers Assembly for the 27 July 2004, on the occasion of the 83rd anniversary of the SACP.**

As we celebrate the 83rd anniversary of the founding of South Africa's Communist Party, on 30 July 1921, it is a good moment to recall that the three main strands of our national liberation movement, which nowadays form the ANC-SACP-COSATU Alliance, have been closely entwined since their very beginning.

This common history of working-class organisation and national liberation struggle can be traced back at least as far as the first decade of the last century. In 1909 a "Native Convention" was called in Bloemfontein. It was a forerunner of the African National Congress, permanently founded three years later, on January 8, 1912.

In the same year, 1909, the South African Labour Party was formed within the white working class. This organisation is no longer in existence; within a few years it had split, with the formation of the anti-imperialist International Socialist League (ISL) in 1915. The ISL launched the first industrial African trade union in South Africa, co-operated with the ANC, and in 1917 issued a pamphlet headed "No Labour Movement without the Black Proletariat."

The seeds that later grew and intertwined so strongly had already been planted: those of the liberation movement, the organised labour movement, and the Communist Party.

The ISL was the main component of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) when it became a member of the Communist International in 1921. By 1924 the vast majority of its membership was black, and by 1928 the Communists had become the first party in South Africa to call openly for a "Black Republic" — in other words, majority rule. From that time on, and especially under the leadership of Moses Kotane, relations between the Party and the ANC became ever closer.

Communists were instrumental in forming, in 1927, the first "Non-European Trade Union Federation" and later, in 1941, the Congress of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU), the predecessor of SACTU (formed 1955); and finally COSATU, launched in 1985.

When the CPSA was banned in 1950, the ANC immediately called an emergency conference and resolved on a programme of mass action. "The campaign that followed, and the massive response from all parts of the country, marked a milestone in the development of the *unity in action* of the national-liberation movements of the oppressed people, together with the revolutionary working-class movement, the 'Congress Alliance'." This quotation is from "Fifty Fighting Years," written to celebrate the anniversary of the South Africa's Communist Party, which had re-formed underground as the SACP following the banning.

The SACP never ceased from operating inside the country. In 1961, the same year as the launch of Umkhonto we Sizwe, it published a clandestine anniversary pamphlet called "The Story of the Communist Party." It said:

"The African People will never forget the Communist Party. They remember how, for many years, it led the fight against the pass laws. They recall the name of the great hero and martyr, Johannes Nkosi, who was brutally murdered by the police at the mass demonstration against

passes at Durban on 16 December 1930. They remember that the Communist Party was the first to organise African trade unions to win higher wages, better jobs and better conditions for the working class, led by pioneer trade unionists like Gana Makabeni, Albert Nzula, Moses Kotane and J. B. Marks. Ceaselessly the Communist Party worked to arouse the people to unite, to build the African National Congress, to demand their rights for land, bread and freedom, for votes for all in a democratic South Africa based on equality of rights and opportunities for everyone.

“The key is ORGANISATION. We shall not beat the brutal Verwoerd dictatorship unless we are united in our own ranks.

“Workers! Join your trade unions. Peasants, organise against the traitor chiefs who sell out to Bantu authorities. Build up, everyone, your underground African National Congress and other organisations which fight for freedom. Support your South African Communist Party, the voice of oppressed and exploited South Africa!”

The SACP at that time was only forty years old. Now it is eighty-three years old but the message of solidarity with the trade union movement and the ANC is the same, and is returned in full measure by the ANC and by my organisation, COSATU.

A lot has changed in the last forty-three years. The “black republic” is already ten years old. But the basis of the Alliance has not changed.

Our alliance is not, and never has been, an artificial one. It is based in deep historical realities and in our long common experience.

As in years gone by, the SACP’s programme of today, with its emphasis on securing the livelihoods of the workers and the poor, is entirely in sympathy with the aims of COSATU. The closeness of both COSATU and the SACP to the ANC is also not in doubt. Unity in action was once again demonstrated in this year’s election campaign, which resulted in the biggest-ever ANC victory.

COSATU is a mass organisation of the working class, the biggest in South Africa. COSATU is the first to recognise the continuing need for a disciplined Party of the working class. That party is the SACP.

A huge effort will be needed to eradicate poverty, unemployment, disease and lack of education in our country, and to establish peace in the world. The system of capitalism is not capable of addressing these social ills. Only socialism can do that. As the SACP constantly reminds us, the job of building socialism begins now and it won’t come on a platter.

Building socialism means in the first place, building cadres. By this I mean women and men who, to paraphrase Karl Marx, are able not only to understand the world, but also know how to change it, and are determined to do so.

COSATU looks to the SACP to provide a working-class analysis, a strategic way forward, and education on that basis. This is the only way to ensure mass mobilisation around our long-term aims. Happy 83rd anniversary *kumadlela ndawonye abomvu kaKotane, akaMabhida, ezikaSlovo, uHani noNzimande.*

<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/2004/birthday.htm>