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The SACP – the communist tail that wags the ANC dog and its mythical future for SA



[7th January 2020](#) by [Linda van Tilburg](#)

Visitors to the few remaining Communist countries like Cuba or North Korea are amused by the quaint old cars and the cities that appear to be stuck in a time warp. It is all very interesting when you are a tourist but it is a totally different experience when you are a citizen that has to live and work in a communist country. I visited Moscow in the early nineties and it was very interesting historically but it was also a very depressing place even though the Soviet Union was a mighty super power with the ability to launch people into space and destroy entire continents. Even in this symbol of Soviet power;

wearily people were standing in long queues for products; sometimes before they knew what was on offer. I went to the well-known department store Gum on St Peter's Square and the only thing you could buy was Marx and Lenin memorabilia from largely empty shelves. With the adoption of more market friendly policies, Gum is now a thriving store with many international brands. [Sara Gon writes](#) about the history of communism in the Daily Friend and she wants to know how the South African Communist Party, which has advocated the benefits of communism to South Africa in its New Year's message, is going to transform the country to prosperity with their policies. – Linda van Tilburg

The myths – and horrors – of communism

By Sara Gon*

Daily Friend columnist Andrew Kenny and I entered into an unintended competition for whose holiday reading was the most depressing. Andrew read *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, which he wrote about in his Sunday column. I read *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–62* by Frank Dikötter.

What inspired me to put pen to paper, however, was the 'New Year's message' to the nation by the South African Communist Party (SACP). It was full of clichés and tropes about the benefits of communism which the SACP – presumably through the African National Congress (ANC) – would bring to the benighted masses. The release was almost a parody of itself.

It promised ongoing, never-ending revolution against 'capitalist exploitation'. It also urged unions to redouble their efforts in 'defending state-owned enterprises against the resurgence of the neo-liberal agenda of private profiteering, exploitation and associated wealth-accumulation practices'. This is going to be interesting to watch when retrenchments at state-owned enterprises (SOEs) become unavoidable.

It's unlikely that the SACP and ANC will inflict the sort of horrors that the Soviet Union and China wrought on their millions of people, but a consideration of my holiday reading and Kenny's lays bare the horror that communism can produce.

There are similarities in the ways Josef Stalin ruled the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong ruled China. Most compelling is how these individuals could govern such large countries without resistance. First, they had psychopathic personalities and were thus completely undaunted by the scale of their ambitions. These were enacted by the arousing of terror at every level down the state hierarchy, from the leader himself to the lowest managerial level. This fear served to fuel the personality cult of and obedience to the supreme leader.

Pressure from each superior on his or her subordinate to produce results that were often unattainable, together with the fear of incarceration or death in the event of failure, led to people being capable of doing the most unspeakable things to others. Constant humiliation,

criticism and shaming of subordinates, by Mao downwards, played a debilitating role in achieving compliance, as did constant purging in the ranks.

The aim of committing unspeakable horrors to achieve bizarre goals was never about what was good for the state: everything was about the party. So it is, too, with the ANC and the SACP.

The death of Stalin allowed Mao to become the leader of the communist world. Mao employed an 'anti-rightist' campaign that left few party leaders daring to oppose him. Mao then announced his ambition to outstrip Britain as an industrial power within 15 years. He bragged about raising steel production from 5.2 million tonnes in 1958 to 30 to 40 million tonnes fifteen years later. Thus Mao launched 'The Great Leap Forward'. Propaganda, meetings and conferences persuaded provincial leaders to embark on a whole range of economic activities.

The first activity was a water-conservancy drive and, since the masses of people were the country's real wealth, tens of millions of farmers joined irrigation projects. These projects were the first of many to fail over the next five years. Slow starvation, slave labour and physical punishment were the conditions people were forced to endure for these failures. The provincial and country leaders had to make sure the targets were met in any way possible.

Mao set targets for steel production and wheat harvests, where Stalin had only aimed at industrialisation. To achieve his lofty aims, Mao ordered the collectivisation of people into giant communes. This profoundly unworkable principle so beloved by the ANC and SACP resulted in millions losing their work, their homes, their land, their possessions and their livelihood.

Crucially, collectivisation destroyed the family unit. Stalin had done the same, thereby upending the natural order in which human beings live their lives. The projects mostly failed, but, by most recent estimates, between 50 and 60 million people were killed because of these gargantuan follies. Collectivisation contributed to the man-made famine Stalin inflicted on about 8 million Ukrainians – the Holodomor – in the 1930s.

In China, a rough estimate suggests that 6% to 8% of those who died were tortured to death or summarily killed – at least 2.5 million people.

Household pots and pans were confiscated to advance the new steel industry. Food rotted at an astonishing rate while people starved.

Mao's ambitions resulted in the near collapse of an entire social and economic system. An absence of individual incentives destroyed any presumed incentive to collaborate. Working for the collective good is one of the great myths of communism.

The communal system established nurseries which allowed women to go out to work. The carers were inadequately trained and overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of children. Neglect

was such that in one facility, 3 to 4 year olds weren't able to walk. Corporal punishment included burning a three-year old with a hot iron. Infection and consequent death rates were high. Adults stole food rations from nurseries.

Children who were old enough were sent to work. A 13-year-old boy who looked after ducks was caught digging up roots for food. He was forced to assume the 'aeroplane position', was covered in excrement and had bamboo inserted under his nails. He was crippled for life. Judge a society by how it treats its children.

The party is king; the people serve the party. The SACP (together with the ANC) needs to provide concrete detail as to how – as it promises – 'transforming the financial sector' and 'nationalising the Reserve Bank' under the communist state will benefit the people. Included in this question is where the money from taxes is going to come from, because many taxpayers won't live under a communist regime.

Perhaps the answer to the latter is going to be that taxes will be paid by workers who work for the 'prosperous publicly owned sector'. But, given the unassailably disastrous management of SOEs that once ran effectively, we need to know how they are going to do things differently.

Feel free to use the right of reply, Dr Nzimande.

Reference:

Gon, S. (2019). [The myths – and horrors – of communism](https://www.biznews.com/thought-leaders/2020/01/07/sacp-communism-anc-sa-future) from *Biz News*, 7 January 2020. Available at <https://www.biznews.com/thought-leaders/2020/01/07/sacp-communism-anc-sa-future> online.

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