

South Africa: The SACP soldiers on

Flying in the face of international trends, the South African Communist Party (SACP) has emerged re-invigorated and with a growing roster of young members after events of the past five years. Its strongest recruiting point is the conception - widely held in the townships - that apartheid is umbilically joined to capitalism. The apparently apathetic attitude of South African business to social investment and even to training schemes further helps the SACP's recruitment.

Up from its grassroots strengths, through its cross-membership with the national executive committees of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the party wields considerable influence in negotiations with the government, including via the Conference for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa). For example, SACP pressure bumped **Thabo Mbeki** out of the ANC negotiating team at Codesa. (He had been an SACP member but had long ceased to be active in the party). The SACP strength in COSATU will be particularly important as the trade unions formulate their longer-term strategy to take account of an ANC presence in government.

The Party has shown it means business by withdrawing its major asset in the ANC, **Chris Hani**, to focus, as its new General Secretary, on the SACP's organisation and survival. Contrary to the assessment by countless pundits, his election is a strategic SACP calculation that could prove useful when communism's worldwide fortunes have reached their nadir.

By latching itself to the political fortunes of the ANC's leading populist, the Party may reap a windfall: it can now count on the support of the retinue of militant Hani loyalists in the movement's youth and labour wings. This is the ANC's most numerous and mobilised constituency, whose voice matters in ANC political life, especially at Congresses. The Party seems to be pursuing a twin strategy vis-à-vis the ANC. One track is the remaking of its image as a high visibility organisation powered by Hani's popularity; the other is to leave a corps of some of its best cadres, such as **Peter Mayibuye** and **Cheryl Carolus**, entrenched in key ANC decision-making bodies.

The SACP's objective is to keep the ANC a radical leftist organisation whose programme would be consistent with the Party's long-term goal of a communist South Africa. There was alarm within SACP ranks after ANC President **Nelson Mandela** said during his recent visit to the **United States** that the movement was rethinking its position on the nationalisation of the economy's commanding heights. Party spokesmen were quick to point out that such a revision of policy could be made only at an ANC National Congress. The Party is counting on the general dominance of ANC branches by militant youth and on Hani's charisma, which would virtually ensure the failure of revisionist measures that do not have full SACP support.

The critical arena for the battle between revisionists and hardliners such as Hani will be that of policy. The Party is fighting for the survival and retention of the Freedom Charter as the basic ANC programme. The Charter, which espouses

radical transformation in the economic area, is the lynchpin of Party influence in the ANC. Hani recently warned that any tinkering with ANC policies as enshrined in the Charter would lead to communists such as himself reassessing their future role in the ANC.

The Party held its eighth congress on 4 December 1991 - the first since the SACP was legalised and went partially public in 1990, and the first inside South Africa. It was marked by an unbendingly militant posture and rhetoric. Conference deliberations were presaged by a savage attack on **Mikhail Gorbachov** by new Party Chairperson **Joe Slovo**, who accused the former Soviet leader and ally of losing his way in the reform process and behaving in a Stalinist fashion in his decision to dissolve the Party as if it was his personal property. That set the tone of the conference, which went on to reject any name change for the SACP. A proposal that the Party adopt the slogan 'Democratic Socialism' was voted down on the grounds that the word 'democratic' was tautological since socialism was inherently democratic. Both proposals had enjoyed the support of both Hani and Slovo, showing how the Party's partial democratisation has in fact hardened its posture: in the old days, the Politburo would have been able to push through such changes unopposed.

The new SACP Central Committee elected by the 413 delegates to the conference is:

Joe Slovo: Chairman. Member of the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) and outgoing Party General Secretary. Slovo had served as SACP Chairman from 1984-86, becoming General Secretary in 1986 after the death of **Moses Mabhida**.

Raymond Mhlaba: Deputy Chairman. Member of ANC NEC. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964 at the famous Rivonia trial, together with Nelson Mandela. He had succeeded Mandela as *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK)'s commander in chief after Mandela's arrest in 1962.

Chris Hani: General Secretary. Member of ANC NEC, formerly MK chief of staff. Will make up in passionate commitment and populism what he lacks as a theoretician.

Charles Nqakula: Deputy General Secretary. A protégé of Hani, former United Democratic Front (UDF) National Executive member. Left the country in 1984, joined the party in 1985. Served as Regional Political Military Committee (RPMC) chief in Lesotho, also served in Operation Vula in July 1990 (AC Vol 31 No 22). Nqakula has a disdain for political theory and elocution and is generally militaristic. He has probably never read **Marx**, let alone **Gramsci**, **Luxemburg** or **Habermas**. His forte is impeccable organisational skill. Ran unsuccessfully for ANC NEC in July.

Kay Moonsammy: Treasurer - was South African Congress of Trades Unions (SACTU, the exiled Trade Union organisation, dissolved in 1990) treasurer until 1986. Left SACTU to head ANC Treasury finance department; is a skilled 'money changer' who will serve the Party well in the lean years following the collapse of its major backer, the Soviet Union.

Jeremy Cronin: leading Party intellectual, member of ANC NEC. Has a Catholic background and trained as a priest. Studied in Paris and taught philosophy at University of Cape Town until he left the country in 1987.

Ronnie Kasrils: member of ANC NEC; MK military intelligence chief. Tough and popular with the radical grassroots.

Chris Dlamini: COSATU vice president; member of the Party's interim leadership group.

Sidney Mufamadi: ANC NEC member, former assistant Secretary General of COSATU. Formerly member of Party's

interim leadership group.

John Gomomo: COSATU President, former member of Party's interim leadership group.

John Nkadimeng: ANC NEC member, former General Secretary of SACTU. A longtime Party politburo member.

Billy Nair: ANC NEC, spent 20 years on Robben Island; Operation Vula operative, longtime Party politburo member.

Moses Mayekiso: General Secretary of COSATU's biggest affiliate National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), formerly member of interim leadership group; ran unsuccessfully for ANC NEC.

Blade Nzimande: top Party official in Natal, although a relative newcomer to SACP. Has just finished PhD in industrial psychology at the University of Natal. Ran unsuccessfully for ANC NEC.

Harry Gwala: ANC NEC, head of ANC's Natal Midlands region. Party's leading Stalinist; applauded the August coup in Moscow.

Sizakele Sigxashe: ANC intelligence analysis chief; Stalinist, nicknamed **Beria** because of his penchant for using intelligence data to neutralise opponents. Voted off the ANC NEC at the July Congress. Became a member of Party politburo in 1985 to replace **Josiah Jele** who was demoted after losing a power struggle.

Essop Pahad: PhD from Leeds University; for years was Party representative at the *World Marxist Review* in Prague and former party treasurer. Brother of **Aziz Pahad** (a member of ANC NEC). Member of previous central committee.

Geraldine Frazer-Moleketi: SACP head office administrator.

Raymond Suttner: ANC NEC and head of ANC political education department. Law professor at University of Witwatersrand; spent about seven years in prison in the 1970s for Party activities, with Jeremy Cronin, with whom he later wrote the book *25 Years of the Freedom Charter*.

Jenny Schreiner: comes from a prominent intellectual background: grandmother **Olive Schreiner** corresponded with Karl Marx regularly. Was member of ANC underground in Cape Town; arrested in 1987. Tried in the marathon **Yengeni** trial.

Tony Yengeni: ANC NEC, Western Cape ANC regional secretary. Co-accused with Jenny Schreiner.

Sam Shilowa: new COSATU assistant General Secretary.

January Masilela: Also known as **Che Ogara**, MK regional commissar in **Angola**, later head of RPMC in **Botswana**.

Garth Strachan: SACP Western Cape regional organiser, son in law of **Ronnie Kasrils**.

Thenjiwe Mthintso: a former lieutenant of the late **Steve Biko**. For a long time campaigned against the ANC-SACP alliance, finally joined the ANC in 1980 and SACP in 1986. Comes from the Black Consciousness tradition and was not trusted by the Party for a long time on account of her suspect ideological tradition.

Stan Nkosi: full time ANC official in Johannesburg.

Brian Bunting: former editor of SACP journal *African Communist*; son of founder member of the Party **Sidney Bunting**; member of previous central committee.

Govan Mbeki: Rivonia trialist, father of **Thabo Mbeki**, and a longtime central committee member.

Matthew Makalima: Party official in the Western Cape.

Nosizwe Madlala: former head of Natal Organisation of Women.

This is a talented team drawn from across the spectrum of South African resistance politics. COSATU is a veritable fief of the Party which gives it an edge in the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance. COSATU General Secretary **Jay Naidoo** is surrounded by Party placemen.

The SACP does not appear to have an independent position on the unfolding talks beyond that of the ANC. It represents the radical strain in ANC thinking. According to **Chris Hani**, the Party's aim is: 'to hold the ANC to radical ideas on socio-economic matters' such as nationalisation and a thorough transformation of the economy. They are the guardians of 'political correctness' in the ANC. Beyond that the Party's role remains unclear.

Botswana: Where the eagles fly

The **United States** requirement for a regional base to monitor and react to events in **South Africa** and the plans of Major General **Ian Khama**, now acting Chief of Air Staff, to upgrade the Botswana Defence Force (BDF)'s air capacity are behind the construction of a US\$350 million secret airbase scheduled for completion next year. The airbase development, which is being built by **France's** Spie-Batignolles and **South Africa's** LTA, the construction arm of the Anglo-American conglomerate, is at three sites. The main site is 35 kilometres north-west of a small town called Molepolele and 105 km. north-west of the capital, Gaborone; one other site is at Chobe in the far north near the border with **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe** and the other is in the north-west, near the Okavango delta and the border with **Namibia's** Caprivi Strip separating Botswana from **Angola**.

The main base is much bigger than Gaborone's Sir **Seretse Khama** International Airport. Spie-Batignolles, one of the most aggressive foreign contractors in Africa, may have been given the airbase contract in compensation for having been shut out of the contract to build the Gaborone airport, despite having submitted the lowest bid at the tender. French involvement in the project - through the granting of export credits - could also help sales of French military hardware to the BDF and other forces in the region. The completion of the airbases will mark the development of the BDF air wing into

a small but fully fledged air force.

Although the cost of the airbase is more than 20 per cent of Botswana's 1991 gross domestic product, it is calculated that the BDF would be able to recoup much of the cost by leasing facilities at the bases to the US Air Force (USAF) and other US agencies. Relations between Gaborone and Washington have warmed appreciably in the last decade. The USAF flew in a company of 200 airborne troops from Europe to take part in joint field exercises with the BDF from 19 to 29 January this year. The joint manoeuvres, code-named Operation Silver Eagle, were one of the largest-ever US operations in sub-Saharan Africa. Most Botswanans first heard about the operation through a BDF press release warning them that there would be some skirmishing around Gaborone, but no danger to the public.

Gen. Khama has been the driving force behind recent improvements in the quality and sophistication of the BDF's military hardware as well as its military capability. The BDF was created in 1977 to counter the overspill of the Rhodesian civil war. It grew to a small force of some 5,000 men in the 1980s but is still militarily insignificant compared to the South African Defence Force (SADF) with around 105,000 men and some 40,000 in Zimbabwe's armed forces. The BDF became more visible after the mid-1980s, when military spending increased after Botswana suffered several SADF