

**STATEMENT BY THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF THE
ANC, CDE W. SISULU, ON THE 71ST ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SACP**

Cde Master of Ceremonies
Cde Chris Hani, General Secretary of the SACP
Members of the Central Committee of the
SACP and its Polit-buro
Distinguished Guests
Comrades and Friends
Ladies and Gentlemen

For a period spanning almost four decades until the unbanning of our political organisations in 1990, an occasion like this was unthinkable. The South African Communist Party had been banned for that long since the enactment of the infamous Suppression of Communism Act 1950. The apartheid regime, then barely 2 years old had chosen as one of its principal targets, the Communist Party, the veritable vanguard of organised labour. But over the years, even under the most trying conditions, ideals for which the party stands survived and continued to enflame the hearts and give hope to millions

of workers and non-workers alike.

Today as we are gathered here to observe the 71st anniversary of the SACP, it is proper that we should pay homage to the host of men and women who have served and led the ranks of the party with remarkable dedication. We are speaking here of great stalwarts, past and present, the likes of W.H. Bill Andrews, S.P. Bunting, Moses Kotane, J.B. Marks, Johannes Nkosi, Joe Slovo and many others.

The legacy of the SACP is as instructive as it is enlightening. Its forerunner, the International Socialist League was established against the background of epochal developments both at home and abroad. At home South Africa had just become a union, bringing together the British Colonists and

Boer Republics into an arrangement calculated to exclude the black oppressed from the political and economic processes. Abroad, a great Imperialist war was raging with the aim of settling differences about , amongst other things, the distribution of colonial spoils. An era of the rise of the modern nation- state was dawning at a time when in our own country the trend was to put down an entire people and, to hold back their progress. In this milieu, the nascent labour movement, at whose head was the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, was cutting its teeth. With the experience gathered within the ISL and the early industrial actions, as well as improving contact with other socialist and communist movements abroad, the stage was set for a proper, truly South African Workers' vanguard to be formed. Some of the key actors of the time who helped incept the Communist Party,

such as Msane, were also important leaders of the ANC. It is therefore important to point out that the collaboration between the liberation movements has, from the outset, been an experience thrown up by the struggle for freedom rather than formal agreements between leaders.

The history of the SACP is rich with a culture of dedication and a commitment to the overall effort at replacing national oppression with true liberation and democracy. It is for this reason that, especially in the late twenties, the party was pre-occupied with refining the concept of national liberation. Even though the slogan of the "Native Republic" has at time been criticised and disparaged by some, it was in truth a genuine attempt to map out an effective strategy to realise the objective of a non-racial democracy. And thanks to the

educated debates that informed meetings and conferences of the SACP over the years, the theory of the National Democratic struggle in South Africa is today unassailable.

This was possible because the co-operation between our organisations perhaps best epitomised during the leadership of J. Gumede, was a two-way process. The party benefitted from the views and contributions of the ANC in the same way as the ANC did. It was therefore not accidental that both communist and non-communist alike, worked together to bring about the All-African Convention of 1935 in an effort to suffocate the notorious Hertzog Bills.

There are yet countless examples of the many invaluable contributions made by individual communists and the SACP as an organisation to the cause of freedom and justice in our land. Amongst these we recall the heroism of Johannes Nkosi, cut down by racist bullets during a protest demonstration, the indefatigable spirit of J.B. Marks, the calm dedication of Linda Jabane - the lion of Chiawelo, the boundless courage and vision of Moses Mabhida and many more.

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In 194⁶, leaders of the ANC and the Indian Congresses signed the historic Xuma-Dadoo-Naicker Pact. Often when this fact is mentioned, we sometimes omit to add that Dr Yusuf Dadoo was also a great figure in the Communist Party. The 194⁶

Pact was therefore in many ways than one, a victory in co-operation and alliance politics. This is particularly so since once again, the people never queried the ideological leanings of individual leaders - they rightly accepted them as true leaders and were prepared to follow their example.

Following the banning of the SACP in 1950 on June 26, a development which was in effect an attack on all consistent opponents of the system of apartheid, the liberation movement launched a massive campaign of protest and declared that day, South African Freedom Day. The ANC then took a deliberate decision to launch a national campaign of defiance of unjust laws. The Defiance Campaign, as we come to call it, helped accelerate the pace of political activism leading to the Congress of People and the adoption of our programme, the

~~Such tedious attacks have become so commonplace that one begins to wonder at the actual purpose of their authors.~~

~~The point, however, is that even with the well-publicised reversals in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, socialism remains a living ideal that appeals to people on every continent. And, if we are to point a moral within the context of democratic principles, nobody has the right to declare it irrelevant and obsolete since no one, let alone the so-called informed anti-communist ideologies have the monopoly of~~

Freedom Charter.

During the years of exile and the underground, the alliance between the ANC and the SACP grew from strength to strength much to the chagrin of our opponents and detractors. Of late, we of the ANC are bombarded with demands to pronounce ourselves on the fate of the alliance with the SACP. But we have repeatedly stated, as we have done today, that ours is an alliance born out of struggle with the objective of attaining a free and democratic South Africa.

The alliance is not and never was an ideological marriage. But the platform upon which it stands is consistent with our democratic vision.

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alliance has sufficiently rocked the boat of the most intransigent and reactionary circles of the South African power establishment, as well as continue to discomfort their friends abroad. As for us, the fate of our association with the SACP will be informed by the outcome of the transitional process. The people will decide in accordance with their democratic vision, and no dictate, however vehement can tell us otherwise.

It is for this reason, that we remain convinced, that the place of the Communist Party, even in the context of transitional politics and beyond, should be guaranteed.

Cde Master of Ceremonies,

In conclusion, allow me to impress that critics of mass action miss the point completely. They allow the profit motive and at worst active imagination to gain precedence over the fate and welfare of an entire people. Proverbially, some of them wish to wine and dine, whilst the masses starve, weep and bury their dead. Surely, and responsible leadership cannot allow such a situation to prevail.

We are equally perturbed by the continued prevarication by the Nationalist Party and its government. They possess the power and the means to accede to our demands but they refuse to do so and instead choose to insist on unelected fora presiding over constitutional matters. We regard this as but

one way of saying the people have no right to determine the nature of transition. This we reject. We still hope and believe that the government will come to its senses before it is too late.

I thank you all for your attention.