



The Shopsteward

The official publication of the Congress of South African Trade Unions

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COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

CELEBRATING 34 YEARS

The Shop Steward Magazine

The Shopsteward Magazine was first published around June 1992, as a voice for workers presenting the unheard thoughts of the working-class communities that are typically absent from mainstream media.



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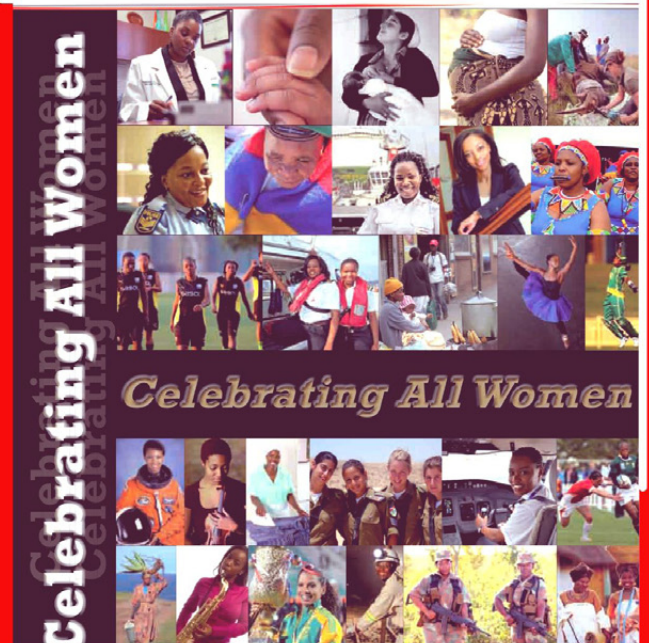
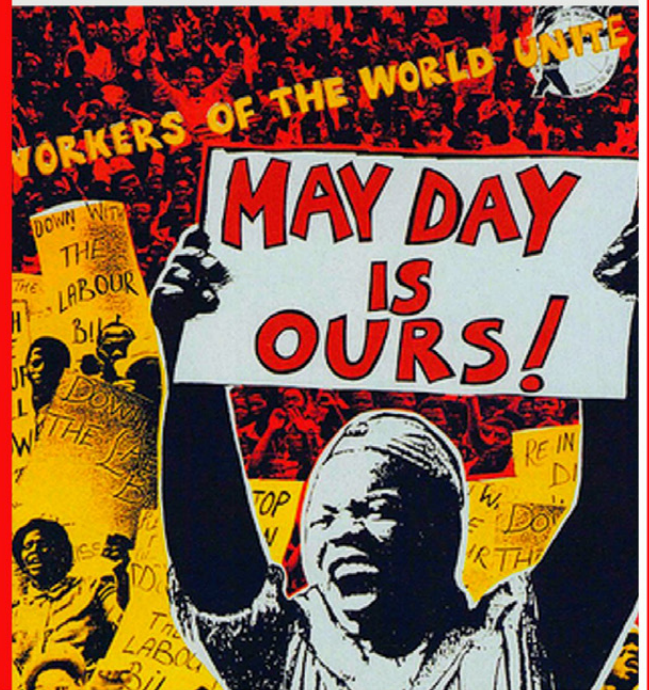
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The Shopsteward

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Contents

Worker Issues

- COSATU marks a historic 40 years – **Page 8**
- COSATU President Zingiswa Losi: COSATU 40th Anniversary Address – **Page 11**

The Economy

- Limpopo and Mpumalanga declared disaster areas following torrential floods – **Page 26**

Gender Agenda

- COSATU mourns the death of 14 learners at a Vanderbijlpark road crash – **Page 27**

Politics

- We declare 2026 as a Year of Decisive Action: ANC 114th anniversary – **Page 30**
- ANC National General Council Outcomes – **Page 34**

The Alliance

- COSATU salutes Comrade Joe Slovo on his

31st anniversary commemoration – **Page 36**

Affiliates

- NEHAWU prepares for its 13th National Congress in 2026 – **Page 41**
- POPCRU welcomes declaration of gender-based violence as a national disaster – **Page 43**
- NUM celebrates its 43rd anniversary at Matlosana – **Page 45**

Commentary

- Hands Off Venezuela – **Page 47**
- Contesting State power is a necessary path by the Party – **Page 49**
- Advancing the National Democratic Revolution – **Page 51**
- What's future of Matriculants, especially thousands who will not be admitted to institutions of higher education? – **Page 55**
- The law of the sea, imperialism and the unfinished National Democratic Revolution – **Page 60**

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Editor in Chief

Solly Phetoe

Big wins for workers in 2026

Having celebrated COSATU's 40th anniversary at Dobsonville Stadium on 6 December, this year promises to be even more eventful as COSATU is set to hold the Workers' Parliament, COSATU's 15th National Congress in September.

Though 2026 is still young there are already big wins for workers to celebrate. The National Minimum Wage (NMW) has finally broken the R30 barrier and from 1 March 2026, workers must be paid R30.23 per hour or more.

Introduced in 2019 at R20 per hour, the goal of the NMW is to protect domestic, farm, security, cleaning, construction, hospitality, transport and retail workers from poverty. The National Minimum Wage Act is clear, the NMW must increase every year to protect it from being eaten away by inflation. Since it was first introduced, the

NMW has brought 6 million vulnerable workers out of poverty.

COSATU will continue to work closely with labour inspectors to make sure all workers are not paid less than NMW. This brings us to the next piece of good news that has happened this year. During the State of the Nation (SONA) address, President Cyril Ramphosa said government would hire 10 000 more permanent labour inspectors this year.

COSATU has welcomed this move because having more labour inspectors will improve conditions of work for workers. Labour inspectors can visit any workplace without telling the employer they are coming.

They can check that workers are paid the NMW, whether the workplace is healthy and safe to work in, and if the foreign nationals working there have the correct papers. Should the inspectors see something wrong in the

workplace, they can give the employer a short period of time to fix it. If the employer does not fix the problem, inspectors can make him pay a fine or even take him/her to court if things are bad.

The third good thing that has happened this year is labour inspectors have been given the power to check if employers are paying workers' pension fund monies that they have drawn from their salaries to the pension fund companies.

Some crooked employers take money from workers salaries but they don't pay it to the pension fund company, they use it for other things.

This is breaking the law. Labour inspectors can now make sure employers don't break the law and steal money meant to take care of workers when they are old and can no longer work.

Another piece of good news is workers in advertising,

artistic and cultural sectors will now enjoy the full rights and protections that other groups of workers have always had, including set working hours, overtime pay, paid leave and formal working contracts. They will no longer be paid less than the NMW and will now be able to claim from UIF and the Compensation Fund.

These are all victories that COSATU has fought hard for over the years and it is very satisfying to see them become a reality. The Federation will continue to fight the hard fight to make sure workers are protected and enjoy the rights that are due to them.

The struggle continues, however, as we battle a very high unemployment rate of 41.1% and the economy is only expected to grow by 1.6% this year, not enough to produce the jobs that the country needs. Crime and corruption are still our biggest enemies.

Aluta Continua! ■



Editor

Norman Mampane

Compliments of the New Year!

Happy New Year, 2026!

COSATU is stepping into 2026 with revived hope and purpose in “Build[ing] Working Class Unity for Economic Liberation towards Socialism”.

This theme has characterised the character of the federation in the period under review, its organisational programmes and international outlook — premised on heightening the need for unity within the federation, its affiliates and building a strong workers’ movement in general in South Africa.

The theme has adjured all trade unions to re-emphasise the critical importance of genuine unity in all aspects of organisational work that could effectively enable

the federation to carry out its mission, advocating for a disciplined and cohesive coordination of worker’s programmes and activities and strengthening international solidarity actions with oppressed toiling classes across the globe.

COSATU affiliated trade unions have over the years provided membership service to workers across all the sectors of the economy, including Listening Campaigns, providing paralegal assistance, psychosocial services to their members, collectively bargaining for better pay and conditions for all workers, working to improve the quality of public services, political campaigning and leading industrial actions.

The cost of living in South Africa is too much.

Workers cannot afford high electricity tariffs, transportation fares to work, food prices, education tuition and healthcare.

2026 will see various affiliated trade unions convening their National Congresses such as SAMWU, NEHAWU and later in the year, COSATU will convene its National Congress too!

DENOSA will celebrate its 30th anniversary in December 2026.

We are looking forward to heightening #CosatuRedFridays and the Listening Campaign to ensure all unorganised workers are organised in trade unions, their labour rights protected and their labour grievances resolved to promote labour peace and stability.

40th anniversary celebrations!

COSATU was instrumental

in the establishment of statutory bodies for collective bargaining and social dialogue since 1994 and continues to participate in negotiations with social partners at NEDLAC.

COSATU has listened to anecdotal accounts on the formation of the federation in 1985 by witnesses, workers who graced the occasion such as Makhudu Ledwaba, Sydney Mufamadi, Jay Naidoo and countless others and the big question is, what more can be done to attain the objectives of COSATU to ‘unite all workers in the labour market’?

Over the years, workers have subscribed through political schools to the concept of criticism and self-criticism to understand class relations and social conflict, inspired by dialectician such as Karl Marx, Friedrich

Engels, Antonio Gramsci, Vladimir Lenin and many others.

Trade unionists have over the 40 years of COSATU's existence courageously shouldered their responsibilities and overcame all difficulties, fearing no setbacks or gibes, nor hesitating to criticize execution of class struggle in every epoch of fighting for decent work and social justice and giving their suggestions

contradictions in the execution of class struggle those between us and the enemy, capitalists and those among the people which are totally different in nature.

On this occasion of celebrating 40 years of candid service to workers, we should and must desist from sowing disunity and chaos.

Similar commentary is levelled against the former

basis of colour, nationality, gender, political affiliation or any other basis.

Genuine engagement is a solution to balance both subjective and objective views.

The workers of South Africa need a united trade union movement in which all sections of working class can play their part unhindered in its course to pursue total economic emancipation of society!

Workers must and should

celebrating the tenacious contributions of COSATU in building a formidable voice of workers nationally and globally.

We have come across remarkable historical books, autobiographies, biographies, and documentaries that highlight the role of labour leaders, workers' unions, and international allies in strengthening the federation's efforts to date. Workers' tenacious contributions to the development and growth of the United Democratic Front's campaigns are highly significant historical facts.

"History has shown that unorganised workers cannot improve their wages and conditions of employment on a lasting basis. Only when workers have organised in effective trade unions have they been able to improve their lot - raise their standards of living and generally protect themselves and their families against life's insecurities and exploitation by employers"- Leslie Massina, 1955.



Comrade Elijah Barayi, COSATU's founding played a catalytic role in 1985 to resist against the State of Emergency imposed by the apartheid regime.

or alternatives.

However, we cannot be silent to unpalatable criticism by the former federation's general secretary, Sam Shilowa's subjective view stating that '...it is not relevant for workers to celebrate COSATU's 40th anniversary'.

Workers appreciated the inherent social

general secretary, Vavi who also disapproved to wish the largest federation of workers well.

COSATU respects everyone's subjective views but attacks on worker's formations is unpalatable, especially from founding leaders. Today like before 1985, trade unions must unreservedly reject any attempts to sow disunity among workers on the

stand for active ideological struggle because it is the weapon for ensuring COSATU remains relevant, vibrant and a home of all toiling classes.

Anecdotal description of COSATU's participation to the liberation movement, is heartwarming!

We have read and received various congratulatory messages from all walks of life,

Reading Jeremy Seekings' book "The UDF: The History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991", was a nostalgic journey through an eyewitness description of COSATU's contributions to community struggles.

Seekings wrote that: "The South Africa's transition to achieving democracy in 1994 is incomplete without recognising that the UDF

played a huge role during the unbanning of political parties such as the ANC. The apartheid regime lost the initiative to the liberation movement: its reform strategy lay in ruins, it had run of ideas and its brutal repression provoked defiance not compliance.

Comrades such as Albertina Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha, Archie Gumede, Billy Nair, Curnick Ndlovu, Henry Fazzie, Edgar Ngoyi, Steve Tshwete, Peter Nchabeleng, Joyce Mabudhafasi, Cheryl Carolus, Noma-India Mfeketo ensured that they carried the traditions of the Congress Movement in urban communities and lobbying the rural masses."

Workers were inspired by Comrades such as Leslie Massina, John Nkadimeng and countless others to live up to the slogan:

"An injury to one is an injury to all".

The UDF led massive public campaigns against the Tricameral Parliament in 1984 and denounced the new provisions for African representation in local government. Popular revolt swelled up in African townships, through schools and drew in the emerging independent labour movement. All organizations declared their membership to the UDF, with devoured UDF-produced propaganda materials and mass media pamphlets flying in every locality where African communities were found.

UDF became a broad symbolic coherence to resistance.

The UDF rendered townships ungovernable and the apartheid regime unworkable. It played a central role in the transformation of South African politics from its launch in 1983 until its disbanding on its 8th anniversary in August 1991. The people's will and ability to destroy the apartheid were on the shoulders of COSATU and the UDF when the ANC and other political parties were banned.

President Oliver Tambo applauded the Federation in 1991 at the ANC National Conference that: "...Our people responded to the call to render the apartheid regime ungovernable and unworkable everywhere in the country. The dynamic growth of COSATU and UDF has strengthened the four main pillars of the struggle against successive tyranny of white supremacy."

Workers must be applauded for their unflinching collegiality in the establishment of Mass Democratic Movement's structures to totally reject monopoly capitalism, Colonialism of a Special Type and racial discrimination in the labour market.

Workers understood that class struggle was also meant to advance the people's power to shift the balance of struggle away from the racist minority towards the democratic majority.

COSATU's revolutionary role was to intensify the struggle but in action, to organise, educate and activate its forces in such a way to achieve permanent strategic

superiority over the enemy, the apartheid regime.

COSATU played a magnificent role in emancipation of women by fighting for gender equality.

Women perform 12.5 billion hours of unpaid care work per day, contributing at least US\$ 10.8 trillion to the global economy. Yet billionaires are turning their fortunes into political power—eroding rights, corrupting elections, and silencing workers.

We have no choice: It's either we organise or starve!

Today, the question we must answer is whether COSATU is gaining influence or losing power?

On the international front, economic crises have worsened since the dawn of 2020.

According to the Global Risks Report 2026, geoeconomic tensions, rising inequality, state based armed conflicts, social polarisation, are cited as pressing immediate global risks. Poverty, unemployment are still threatening social stability as many working-class communities are thrown on the periphery of economic production and sustainable development programmes.

The report further states that 'the world has entered an age of competition, defined by the accelerating scale, interconnectedness and speed of global risks, with inequality being the most interconnected risk.'

Decline in health and well-being, insufficient public infrastructure and social protection, debt, inflation, economic downturn,

involuntary migration or displacement, erosion of human rights or civic freedom, lack of economic opportunity or employment, remains time bombs in every country across the globe.

Global citizens resumed the new year with a confrontation of peace-threatening moments such as the illegal, abduction of a sitting Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro and the first lady, Cilia Flores, have fuelled global tensions and shifted balance of power drastically.

COSATU has participated in various pickets, marches or demonstrations in Solidarity with the People of Venezuela.

COSATU has pledged to stand with Venezuela and all peoples and nations struggling against imperial aggression.

Global labour federations have been unequivocal about defending multilateralism, promoting world inclusive economic growth, and improving global economic governance.

Workers have declared that 'National sovereignty is under attack everywhere. From Palestine to Venezuela, Syria to the Sahel, Iran to Honduras, from Havana, Mexico City, Ottawa, to Greenland'.

Workers continue to reject capitalism, imperialism, fascism and neoliberalism.

Aluta Continua!

Hooray to workers on COSATU's 40th Anniversary!

Class struggle is by no means over.

Forward with proletarian Internationalism! ■



Worker Issues

COSATU MARKS A HISTORIC

40 YEARS

at Dobsonville Stadium in Soweto

Alliance leaders joined together to cut COSATU's 40th anniversary cake at Dobsonville Stadium, Soweto in 2025.

For weeks, the Dobsonville stadium precinct was embellished with posters of what was to be a historic event to be hosted at the venue. Streetlights leading to the stadium displayed red messaging, announcing the day's programme for 6 December 2025, a celebration of the formation of the Federation of workers, born on 1 December 1985.

At the gates, one was met with the bold colour red, visible from the entrance to the walls and inside the facility. Red, a symbol of Marxism, representing the blood and sweat of the working class and revolutionary struggle, could not be missed. The logos of all COSATU's affiliated trade unions were brightly attached to the walls of the stadium, inviting attention to their designs and slogans.

When the gates opened in the morning, there was already a hive of activity. Security prepared for work ahead, marshalls marched to their stations, vendors set up their stalls and attendees trickled in as the day progressed. A Carnival Parade comprising of COSATU unions kicked off the festivities.

They paraded around the pitch with their union flags wearing their regalia. A group of the motorbike riders started the procession, going around the pitch of the stadium orderly as the Master of Ceremonies, COSATU's 1st Deputy President and President of National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), Michael Shingange summoned them.

Following the parade, attendees found their seats on the stage. These included members of the Federation's Central Executive Committee, local and international friends of COSATU as well as members of Alliance partners, the South African National Civic Organisation, the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party represented by leaders Richard Mkhungo, Cyril Ramaphosa and Solly Mapaila respectively.

Delivering a message of support, ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa hailed the Federation for "staying true to its commitment to concern itself with broader community issues and [being] instrumental in mobilising for social protection".

COSATU President Zingiswa Losi delivered the keynote address and amplified key achievements stating, "the freedom to unionise and collective bargaining are guaranteed by the Labour Relations Act, but we dare not let down our guard when some employers, in the public and private sectors, undermine workers' hard-won rights. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act guarantees workers' paid maternity and parental leave, time off and public holidays."

She warned, however, that even though significant progress had been achieved over the years, more still needed to be done. "We are a nation battling to overcome 350 years of the most brutal forms of colonial and apartheid rule. Whilst the Employment Equity Act bans discrimination at our workplaces, we remain a society where 60% of senior management posts in the private sector are held by white men and some see nothing wrong with this."

She expressed appreciation to the attendants. "Thank you for joining us in this historic celebration of your Federation; 40 years is no small feat. This is a giant that has stood the test of time."

The political programme was concluded by the cutting of the cake, a tradition befitting a birthday party.

The day ended with music and dancing. Artists such as Makhadzi, Mzwakhe Mbuli, and Ntando headlined the entertainment, sealing a historic milestone worth celebrating.

The article is written by Nonzuzo Dlamini - COSATU Communications Officer.■

Poem

BE LIKE JOE SLOVO

Obviously, not all Christians are honest,
Obviously, not all Communists are honest,
Revolutionaries on one side,
Counter revolutionaries on the other side,

No middle road!
No fence sitters!
Be like Joe Slovo!

It is obvious, that the black capitalist class favours capitalism,
It is obvious, that the black middle class will jostle for hegemony,
Others become actively passive than critical thinkers,
Others want to destroy hammer and circle inside out,

No middle road!
No fence sitters!
Be like Joe Slovo!

Who is on the side of revolutionary struggle?

Who is on the side of People's Power?
Who is on the side of the working-class?
Who is on the side of the workers?
Whom do you make Alliance with?
What kind of an Alliance?
Who is your friend?
Who is your enemy?

No middle road!
No fence sitters!
Be like Joe Slovo!

People's Charter has to be activated,
Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) has to be activated,
Why forging the minds of the people?
Why mumbling, fumbling around?
Why are the renegades leading the People's Revolution?

No middle road!
No fence sitters!
Be like Joe Slovo!
Be like Comrade JS!

By Thobile Maso

Poem



COSATU marked its 40th Anniversary, reflecting on four decades of labour advocacy in South Africa at Dobsonville Stadium, Soweto.

COSATU President Zingiswa Losi

COSATU 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Address on December 6, 2025

Programme Director, Leadership of the mighty Federation of Elijah Barayi, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa and leadership of the African National Congress, General Secretary Solly Mapaila and leadership of the South African Communist Party, President Richard Mkhungo and the leadership of SANCO, most importantly the membership of COSATU and workers across South Africa, Thank you for joining us in this historic celebration of your Federation. 40 years is no small feat. This is a giant that has stood the test of time. It is the product of generations of struggles from the South African Congress of Trade Unions to COSATU, from the African Mineworkers strike of 1946 to the Durban Strike of 1973.

As we gather today, we remember and honour those heroes who made this COSATU possible, Vuyisile Mini, Neil Aggett, Dora Tamana, Ray Alexander, Nana Abrahams and so many others. We stand upon their shoulders today.

These were not peace time heroes content to type meaningless slogans on social media. These stalwarts of the liberation struggle stood in the face of the most brutal force that the apartheid regime could unleash, and never did they falter.

Some today doubt what has COSATU achieved! It was this COSATU founded by the Elijah Barayi and Jay Naidoo that defied the apartheid regime at its peak in 1985. It was this COSATU that never feared vigilantes or even the bombing of COSATU.

It was COSATU and its predecessors that were formed by workers on our mines, in our clothing factories and on our farms, to give dignity to workers, Black, Coloured, Indian and women, to ensure that all workers could live as equals in a free South Africa.

Today we are celebrating 31 years of a democratic non-racial South Africa. Today we are governed by a Constitution respected across the world, based upon the eloquent vision of the Freedom Charter of a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it, Black and White.

The laws that protect the millions of workers today, are the products of your struggles, the sweat and sacrifices of millions led by Oscar Mpetha and Mark Shope.

The freedom to unionise and collective bargaining are guaranteed by the Labour Relations Act, but we dare not let down our guard when some employers, in the public and private sectors,

who undermine workers' hard-won rights.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act guarantees workers' paid maternity and parental leave, time off and public holidays. But all too often we see waitresses and cleaners forced to work long hours with no extra compensation.

We are a nation battling to overcome 350 years of the most brutal forms of colonial and apartheid rule. Whilst the Employment Equity Act bans discrimination at our workplaces, we remain a society where 60% of senior management posts in the private sector are held by white men and some see nothing wrong with this.

Workers now have the right to work in a safe environment and to compensation for workplace injuries or illnesses. Mineworker deaths at work have fallen from 484 in 1994 to 42 in 2024, because of the tireless efforts of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The 34 workers who died at the George construction site and the 11 Sea Harvest fishermen who drowned are a painful reminder of how far we still have to go.

Whilst we have made great strides since 1994, much more remains to be done. It is not acceptable when

workers are in desperate need of their unemployment or compensation relief, that they are made to queue for days on end. This must be fixed now.

In 2019, the National Minimum Wage, a demand of the Freedom Charter became a reality, raising the wages of more than 6 million farm, domestic, construction and other vulnerable workers. Whilst our critics spent time insulting us, we remember that it was our ANC government that stood with us to make this call come true.

We have made great strides advancing the rights of workers, but more must be done to protect these hard-won victories, including ensuring the CCMA has the resources to defend workers abused by employers.

We remain a Federation guided by the scientific principles of socialism and are heartened that despite the power of capital, step by step we are building a society guided by the principles of solidarity and equality. Today the National Health Insurance Act has been signed into law, laying the path for universal healthcare.

Today 8 million unemployed people receive the SRD Grant, a foundation for a Basic Income Grant.

Whilst we have won many battles, we cannot celebrate when four out of ten South Africans cannot find work. This is a ticking time bomb that requires all of government, the private sector and society to defeat.

It demands a well-resourced state capable of providing the public and municipal services that the working class and the economy depend upon to survive and thrive.

It necessitates a bold and progressive budget that invests in economic infrastructure, supports SMMEs and industrialisation, stimulates inclusive growth and provides employment opportunities for the 12 million unemployed.

It requires a budget that invests in working class communities, provides young people and workers the skills required not only by the jobs of today but of the future. It requires well-run hospitals and properly equipped police stations.

There is no short cut to a growing economy and a prosperous society. Neo-liberalism is a recipe for stagnation not a path to growth. These difficult times require the working class to defend the state's role, the need for public services and the transformation path.

COSATU is a Federation that is not afraid to be led by women, the generations of Gertrude Shope and Connie September are testimony to the power of women.

When COSATU was founded in 1985, women

Comrades like Emma Mashinini, Maggie Magubane, Refiloe Ndzuta, Violet Seboni, Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya, and Connie September paved the way for us. They taught us that the struggle of women workers is not separate – it is the struggle for justice itself.

Comrade Emma Mashinini and other women delegates immediately raised their voices. They said:

“It cannot be that we have a logo that does not depict women. We are part of this movement – we are part of the struggle.”

Because of that intervention, the COSATU logo was redesigned – and today it proudly includes a woman with a baby on her back, representing both women's role in paid work and in unpaid care work.

That image tells a story: that working-class women carry not only tools, but also children; not only production, but reproduction; not only struggle, but care.

That is the essence of feminist trade unionism – and it started right there, at our founding moment.

It is this Federation that worked day and night to ensure our labour and our criminal laws are overhauled to protect the rights of our daughters, sisters, wives and mothers.

This battle against gender-based violence requires all of us as shop stewards, workers and leaders, say enough is enough, hands off our girls and women. No more!

We have achieved many

**This battle against
gender-based
violence requires
all of us as shop
stewards, workers
and leaders to say
enough is enough,
hands off our girls
and women.**

were already leading – in factories, farms, hospitals, classrooms, and communities. They formed women's forums, fought for maternity rights, challenged sexual harassment, and demanded equality in leadership.

When COSATU was launched in 1985, the first draft of the Federation's logo was circulated.

It showed men – strong, proud, marching workers – but not a single woman.

victories that have improved the lives of millions, because of you, the cashier at Shoprite, the domestic worker in Sandton, the mine worker in Orkney.

We are proud of NEHAWU, DENOSA, SAMATU, PAWUSA and SAEPU for defending the rights of workers at our hospitals and demanding all frontline vacancies be filled. We are humbled by the sacrifices of SADTU members teaching our children, POPCRU members defending our communities, and SAMWU members keeping our streets clean.

We honour the members of NUM who keep Eskom working, SATAWU members who drive our trains and run our ports, SASBO who have made our banking industry one of the world's best, SACCAWU members who run our stores and SACTWU members who turned around a clothing industry that was on its knees.

We stand with CWU members at the Post Office who have seen jobs shed, AFADWU members struggling to protect farm workers, CEPWAWU membersexposed to dangerous chemicals in our factories.

We celebrate the launch of SADSAWU and SATDWU and will walk this journey with them as they defend the rights of domestic and taxi

workers. No worker must be left behind. We are proud that this humble giant called today celebrates its 40th anniversary here in Dobsonville, not far from Chiawelo, birthplace of the President of the Republic and a founder of COSATU, Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa.

COSATU remains guided by the call of one industry, one union, one country, one federation. We continue to work closely with our sister federations at Nedlac and beyond. As we head to our Congress in September, our arms and our hearts are open to NUMSA, FAWU, SAFPU and all who left COSATU.

It is time to come home to your Federation.

Our strength is our unity, when we are united, we can never be defeated. When we are divided, we will battle to be victorious.

Our struggles over these past forty years has been a journey where we stood shoulder by shoulder with our Alliance Partners, the ANC, the SACP and SANCO. Together we defeated the apartheid regime and built this proud democracy.

We love the ANC of Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo. We love the SACP of Joe Slovo and Chris Hani.

We need them as we face painful socio-economic challenges, as some at home and abroad seek to undermine our hard-won democracy and transformation path.

COSATU's Central Committee in September was unambiguous.

The Alliance is sacrosanct. Our unity can never be abandoned. It is critical that the issues that distract us be resolved and the Alliance is united.

We are heading towards our most difficult local elections in a year. Victory for the masses of our people, requires an Alliance that is coherent and united.

Our task, as this Federation of JB Marks and John Gomomo, is to ensure the Alliance is united and wins these elections with an outright majority.

We have been humbled by the solidarity and support we received from workers across the world during our darkest days, from the young Cuban volunteers in Angola, to the families in Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and many others who gave us shelter.

Today we extend that solidarity to the people of Palestine, Western Sahara, eSwatini, Zimbabwe, Venezuela and Sudan.

Our freedom remains forever intertwined.

2025 has been a year in which South Africa's young democracy has been tested. We are proud of how we have stood together as a nation when some have sought to spread lies about our young nation.

But we must not be complacent. Where we have faltered, we must be honest, where we must do more, we must act.

We must not take this non-racial, non-sexist democracy as envisaged by the Freedom Charter for granted.

We must collectively work together to make it a living reality for all our people, from the young girl on the wine farms of Upington, to the nurse at Chris Hani Baragwanath, to the soldier on duty at Mussina and the coal miner at Kriel.

We have come far through this giant called COSATU over these past forty years, our journey is not over, much remains to be done.

We dare not and will not fail. Thank you.

COSATU lives, COSATU leads!
Amandla! 🇿🇦

IN MEMORIAM

PETRUS MASHISHI



JUNE 1948 - JULY 2018

COSATU remembers SAMWU founding president, Petrus Mashishi as a Unifier and a revolutionary teacher on the principle of workers control and on unity of the federation.

Melanie Samson, John Mawbey, Joe Spambo, John Ernstzen, Phillip Dlamini, Martin Sere, Petrus Mashishi and countless others are the well-known names associated with the struggle of municipal workers in South Africa.

One such exemplary worker leader was Comrade Petrus Mashishi! An artisan by profession, who was employed by the by Johannesburg City Council in 1969. Comrade Mashishi is highly regarded by workers and peers alike as a role model of what a workers' leader should be – a selfless servant of the workers.

The aftermath of the 1973 Durban Strikes saw formation of various trade unions to challenge the apartheid regime, demand franchise rights, recognition of black trade unions, and eradication of racial discrimination in the labour market such as the Black Municipal Workers Union (BMWU), General Workers Union (MGWUSA), the South African Allied

Workers Union (SAAWU), Comrade Mashishi became an outstanding leader of the municipal workers because of his impeccable role he played in facilitating unity talks of almost five separate unions in the sector to merge and form one national union, the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU).

Mashishi was a central figure in recruiting and negotiating municipal worker unity. Comrade Petrus decried about new threats and danger which sought to divide workers at the shop floor level such as factions, leadership in-fighting, favouritism, nepotism and business unionism.

Equally Comrade Mashishi rejected outsourcing by employers and dedicated his life defending jobs in South Africa. President Mashishi served as one of the long serving members of Cosatu's Central Executive Committee and served in various Sub-Committee earmarked to strengthen the federation.

President Mashishi displayed his prowess by agitating for the establishment of centralised bargaining councils to improve the lives of workers in South Africa. And the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC) was established in 1997 to promote labour peace, improve benefits of workers and maintain sound labour relations between employees and employers.

At some stage, President Mashishi served as a chairperson of the Workers' Library and Museum Board in Newtown. He raised the status of municipal workers at an international level through participation in global labour federations such as the Public Service International (PSI).

Comrade Mashishi was practical about South Africa attaining a socialist future! The founding president of the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU) Petrus Mashishi died on July, 5, 2018 at the age of 82 in Soweto, Gauteng.

Comrade Mashishi passing was a huge loss to the labour movement in South Africa, at a time when we need people of integrity, humility and passion for the working people, more than ever. He was an impeccable human being, down-to-earth and with jokes!

Comrade Mashishi shed a tear when members of Samwu from the Sol Plaatje municipality in Kimberley died in the tragic Saulspoort Dam bus accident in Bethlehem, Free State on their way to a May Day celebration in 2003.

SAMWU renamed Johannesburg Region to be called Petrus Mashishi Region in his honour!

President Mashishi will be remembered as a brilliant union organiser, an organic intellectual, a community activist, a mentor, a dependable trade unionist, an internationalist and a Congress Movement leader to the end!

Lala Kahle President Mashishi! Solidarity Forever!

IN MEMORIAM

CEDRIC GINA



MAY 1971 – JULY 2018

Comrade Cedric Gina at COSATU National Congress at Midrand.

The history of metal workers are incomplete without mentioning the outstanding contributions of the former president of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the former president of the newly formed the Liberated Metalworkers' Union of South Africa (Limusa), Comrade Cedric Gina, representing workers in metal and related industries in South Africa.

Limusa became a COSATU affiliate in 2014, after the federation expelled the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). Few years later Limusa was dissolved and amalgamated into the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) after it extended its scope to cover the metal sector.

Cde Gina was elected as a president of NUMSA in 2008 and led the

union until 2013 after he resigned.

Comrade Cedric is a former shopsteward at South32 which used to be Hillside. It was 1993 when he was first elected a shopsteward and since then Cde Gina served in various structures of Numsa. He was instrumental in contributing to the pushback against the class warfare waged by monopoly capital at local and international level.

Cde Cedric was an embodiment of the Alliance as active member, and he served in structures of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC). He was passionate about reading and writing on political and labour matters.

Cde Cedric as he was affectionately known was a central figure in the formation of Limusa

alongside with the likes of Sifiso Maphumulo, Mawonga Madolo and countless others.

Cde Cedric has dedicated most of his life to the working-class struggle and labour movement in particular.

Cde Gina was part of the critical debates within NUMSA on extending its scope and the majority of its members found that it was not the only union that was considering changing its organisational scope, as some unions in Europe had initiated a similar discussion process.

Pertinent experiences could also be drawn from how unions broadening their scope of activity, such as the IF Metall in Sweden and UNITE in the United Kingdom, arguably contributed to their bargaining power.

Many comrades in the labour movement will

remember Cde Gina for his constructive deliberations geared towards uniting the organisation and also fostering solidarity amongst the working class.

Cde Gina served for many years of COSATU Central Executive Committee.

Comrade Gina passed on the 28th of January 2019 after a short illness at Addington Hospital in Durban.

Long Live Cde Cedric Gina
Long Live!

Forward with the undying
Spirit of Cde Gina
Forward!

Lala Kahle Qabane!

IN MEMORIAM

MYRTLE WITBOOI

AUG 1947 - JAN 2023



Comrade Myrtle Witbooi was instrumental in leading a global campaign to have ILO member states ratifying the Domestic Workers Convention to improve the status of work of domestic workers.

The passing Comrade Myrtle Witbooi, the founding General Secretary of The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) was a shock to everyone in 2023. At her passing, Comrade Myrtle Witbooi was serving as the president of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). SADSAWU was established in 1986 as a result of a merger of SADWA and Domestic Workers Association to represent the South African domestic workers, which remains one of the largest and enduring migrant workers within the country. The sector represents the majority of distinctively international rural-to-urban migrants, with 65% of them migrating to sell their labour power in the domestic sector.

The union was disbanded years later and SADSAWU emerged as a new voice of domestic workers in 2000. At the beginning of the 19th century, domestic workers publicly organized themselves as an expression of class politics into gangs, associations, and unions. By the 1980s, their mobilisation as workers had grown to such strength that they could no longer be characterized

as 'unorganizable'. Comrade Myrtle Witbooi became a domestic worker at a tender age in Cape Town and later was employed in the factories where she cut her teeth as a shopsteward.

She mastered the art and craft of defending workers, fighting for fair wages, job security, social protection and an end to harassment in the world of work. Comrade Myrtle Witbooi was part of the delegation of the International Domestic Workers Federation which led submission at the International Labour Conference around 2011 to champion for the International Labour Organization Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, ILO Convention 189, adopted on June 16, 2011, aims to ensure decent work conditions for domestic workers, recognizing their contributions and protecting their rights. Convention 189 was adopted during the 100th session of the International Labour Organization on 16 June 2011 and it entered into force on 5 September 2013.

South Africa ratified the Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) in 2013.

In 2013, Comrade Myrtle Witbooi was duly elected as the general secretary of SADSAWU. 'The New South Africa must be for domestic workers too,' Comrade Myrtle Witbooi argued!

The role played by domestic workers in the apartheid should never be undermined.

Majority of them were part of the many resistance marches and gatherings such as the 1955 Congress of the People which adopted the Freedom Charter, the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria and other strikes.

In the book, 'From Servants to Workers-South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State,' Shireen Ally exposes how 'paid domestic work reproduced not only labour power for capitalism but also reproduced the racialized logics of apartheid that constructed blacks as a servant class and socialized white South Africans into the 'attitude of racial domination.'

Today, SADSAWU represents a voice of domestic workers and have championed great strides on labour protections and standards such as the ILO Convention 189 and Convention 190 on eradication of violence and harassment in the world of

work.

In 2014, Comrade Witbooi was elected as the first president of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). Comrade Myrtle Witbooi was internationally recognised and accepted the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award of the AFL-CIO, which recognizes international leaders and organizations who have overcome significant hurdles to fight for human rights. Comrade Myrtle Witbooi was one of three recipients of the Global Fairness Initiative's Fairness Award, which honors outstanding leaders who dedicate themselves to bringing economic justice, fairness and equality to those living in poverty and marginalized communities in 2015. Comrade Myrtle Witbooi passed on in Cape Town in January 2023, at the age of 75.

Let's support the tenacious role played by domestic workers such as Comrade Myrtle Witbooi by fighting for fair wages, enforcement of national minimum wages, for the respect and dignity of the toiling classes.

We salute you Comrade Myrtle Witbooi! May your spirit rest in eternal peace! Lala Kahle Sis Myrtle! ———

IN MEMORIAM

EMMA MASHININI



AUG 1929 – JULY 2017

Mam Emma Thandi Mashinini was born on August, 21, 1929 in Johannesburg.

‘Strikes Followed Me All My Life,’ by Emma Mashinini illustrates how patriarchy was challenged by formidable women leaders such as Comrade Emma. “I have always resented being dominated,” she wrote: “I resent being dominated by a man, and I resent being dominated by white people.” Having forced to work at an early age. Her book, “Strikes have followed me all my life”, is a wonderful and inspiring read for aspirant trade unionists.

Comrade Emma became one of the trade unionists at a tender age, working in a clothing factory for almost two decades. she was asked in 1975 to establish a union for black shopworkers.

When COSATU was established in 1985, Comrade Mashinini

strongly supported having women in unions. After looking at several pictures that didn’t show any women, COSATU decided to use a logo that features a woman holding a baby. Comrade Emma was someone who spoke her mind. In her honour, a Mama Emma Mashinini Foundation was launched in 2017.

The former COSATU general secretary, Jay Naidoo conceded at some that: “Emma Mashinini guided me though those difficult years of launching and consolidating COSATU.

Always there as the mother of the modern trade union movement and also being there as a mother to me guiding my values. She would be calling for calm minds and steady hands in dealing with angry emotions and calling for peace, dialogue

and upholding the rule of law.”

Comrade Emma is amongst all brave women who contributed immensely in the liberation struggle for women’s rights and workers’ rights. These were women trade unionists of erstwhile years in the ilk of Ray Alexander Simons, Emma Mashinini, Lydia Kompe and many more.

Comrade Emma steered SACCAWU and the sector under very trying circumstances. They encountered many serious challenges and crises that appeared overwhelming. Time and again they rose to the occasion and showed clarity, strength and leadership.

Many women did the same work as men but were paid much less.

In some places, things

haven’t improved even though we have very good laws for workers. In some places, women still face sexual abuse, low wages, and unfair pay compared to men. In her autobiography, Mma Mashinini talks about the six months she spent alone in prison because of her work with labour unions—Her story shows how she helped fight against apartheid in South Africa.

Mma Mashinini narrated how ‘apartheid police operatives harassed her family, incarcerated her, seized books and papers from her home and office without a search warrant; no formal charges were required for her imprisonment.’

Her union, SACCAWU is regarded as also one of those early trade union to adopt the Freedom Charter, adopted at

IN MEMORIAM

AUG 1929 - JULY 2017

Kliptown on the 26th of June, 1955, where they declared: "We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority

hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave, and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers; Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights

its members and the revolution.

Comrade Emma Thandi Mashinini will be remembered as a trade unionist, worker's leader, freedom fighter and proponent for a fully paid maternity leave. A sexual harassment champion for awareness advocacy in workplaces. A torch bearer of 'One industry, One union and One Federation.'

Comrade Emma received the Order of the Boabab and the Order of Luthuli bestowed to individuals who have contributed immensely to the liberation of the people of South Africa by the South African Presidency.

Comrade Emma was also a distinguished Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and contributed to leading a new pathway to heal Africans the wounds of a painful past of torture, horrific killings and death row meted against comrades.

The Order of the Boabab serves as a prestigious recognition of those who have gone above and beyond in their service to the nation, embodying the spirit of community and

resilience represented by the baobab tree.

This year, 2025, the University of Johannesburg Vice Chancellor, Prof. Letlhokwa Mpedi held another session in Honouring Emma Mashinini's Legacy in South Africa, under the theme: "The Work of Freedom: Mashinini's Legacy and the Urgency of Transformative Leadership."

The event reflected on her enduring impact and the call for bold, transformative leadership today. And indeed, Comrade Emma surpassed her capabilities to push back against intransigent apartheid regime!

Comrade Emma Mashinini has indeed left her footsteps in the sands of shop worker history, and no tide would ever wipe them away. And many comrades agreed: "She was a matriarch."

Comrade Emma died on the 17th of August 2017 in Johannesburg.

**Lala Kahle Comrade Emma Mashinini!
Long Live Comrade Emma Thandi Mashinini! —**



unless it is based on the will of all the people; All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers; The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits; Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work; There shall be a forty-

hour working week; as all others who work; Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished."

Recently, her union, SACCWU launched Emma Mashinini Brigades as a cohort of tried and tested comrades who are well-trained ideologically, politically and organisationally to defend the union,

IN MEMORIAM

ALBERTINA SISULU



OCT 1918 - JUNE 2021

ANC Stalwarts at a rally at the FNB stadium, Nasrec after the unbanning of the liberation movement.

Mama Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu has been honoured by DENOSA as its honorary president because of her work as a devoted nurse, anti-apartheid activist, and pillar of the liberation struggle in South Africa.

Comrade Nontsikelelo played a huge role in the upliftment of working-class communities through her work as a healthcare worker. Comrade Albertina pursued her

training as a nurse after she finished school in 1939 at Mariazell College in Transkei. In January 1940, Sisulu moved to Johannesburg, where she began her long nursing career as a trainee in the non-European section of the Johannesburg General Hospital. She qualified as a nurse in 1944 and later qualified as a midwife too.

She was married to Comrade Walter Sisulu, the former Robben Island prisoner, and ANC

liberation stalwart.

Comrade Albertina was very instrumental in the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), a popular front against apartheid that was launched in 1983. She was part of the cohort of comrades who were tasked to re-establish the ANC Women's League.

She was awarded honorary doctorates by the University of the Witwatersrand in 1999, the University of Cape Town in 2005,

and the University of Johannesburg in 2007.

Comrade Nontsikelelo died on 2 June 2011.

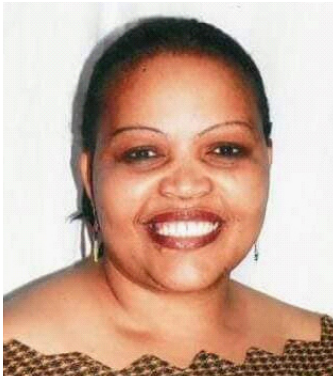
The freeway section of the R24 was named the Albertina Sisulu Freeway to honour her revolutionary collegiality. Her legacy continues to inspire generations.

Lala Kahle Mama Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu!

Lala Ngoxolo President Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu!

IN MEMORIAM

NOMHLE PRETTY SHUPING



SEPT 1966 - JUNE 2008

Comrade Pretty Nomhle Shingonzo-Shuping served as POPCRU National Office Bearer responsible for worker education and skills development programmes.

Comrade Pretty Nomhle Shingonzo-Shuping became a police force in 1986 and served as a detective.

She joined the Police and Civil Rights Union (Popcru) and served as worker's representative in the Free State.

Comrade Pretty was an institutional shop steward at Batho Police Station between 1997 and 1999.

She then served as the POPCRU Free State Provincial of Gender between 1999 and 2001, and then the POPCRU Free State Provincial Chairperson until 2004.

Pretty's powerful personal strength was her ability engage robust fully, respectfully, her organisational

commitment, and willingness to listen to views of others.

Comrade Pretty was duly elected as the Vice-President of Popcru in 2004 where she continued to make a valuable contribution to the organisation's endeavours to fight for workers' rights.

She was in charge of worker's education and skills development in the union for workers in the criminal justice cluster.

Comrade Pretty was the Chairperson of the Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA), and a member of the Safety and Security Sectoral Bargaining Council (SSSBC) Training Committee. SSSBC is a Sectoral Council that

deals with all issues affecting the South African Police Service as the employer which was established in 1998.

Comrade Pretty became a prominent member of the Central Executive Committee member of Cosatu, championing the genuine unity of workers in South Africa and participated in various international solidarity actions with workers across the continent through active engagements led by the Public Services International (PSI).

Today, members continue to receive Pretty Shingonzo-Shuping Award as part of honouring her legacy.

Pretty Shuping Award is awarded to innovative members who have demonstrated success at implementing,

promoting, and advocating for gender equality within the trade union movement.

Pretty Shuping played a pivotal role in South Africa's emancipation from apartheid and in championing women's rights and gender equality within the criminal justice system.

Comrade Pretty will be remembered as a dedicated gender activist, a union leader, an internationalist and a revolutionary.

Comrade Pretty passed away on 10 June 2008 and was buried at Kempton Park cemetery. Lala Kahle Comrade Pretty Shingonzo-Shuping!

Forward with the spirit of Comrade Pretty Shingonzo-Shuping! —

IN MEMORIAM

JOE KOKELA



JAN 1968 - DEC 2024

**Comrade Joe Kokela at the Braamfontein Labour Court
representing Sasbo members in 2019.**

Comrade Joe Kokela was one of the general Secretary to lead the banking and financial sector union, Sasbo for many years.

He understood the essence of progressive trade unions; to organize all workers within a specific industry, regardless of their skill level, to enhance collective bargaining power and improve working conditions.

Comrade Joe was on the ball on appreciating Sasbo's organizational mission; to defend workers' rights, build union power, confront global capital, fight precarious work and promote sustainable industrial policy.

Comrade Joe led various organizational

campaigns against retrenchments in the banking sector as result of introduction of Artificial Intelligence and digitisation and vociferously advocated for creation of decent jobs for all.

He defended worker's rights at the high echelons of power and also at the labour courts.

He was one of the long serving members of COSATU's Central Executive Committee and served in various Sub-Committees such as the Political Commission, Resolution and Finance Committees.

Comrade Joe will be remembered by workers in South Africa as a soft-spoken speaker, a worker's advocate, a passionate

trade unionist and a revolutionary.

Comrade Joe was forthright in managing the resources of workers and ensured that worker's representation against intransigent employers was heightened within the union and the federation.

Cde. Joe was instrumental in ensuring that Sasbo engages in the struggle against capitalism at the global level through candid participation in campaigns and activities of Uni Global Union, Uni Finance and on other platforms.

He led discussions on various platforms on curbing restructuring within the financial sector and led debates on advancement of

proper and fair process, treating workers with dignity and up-skilling the workforce to mitigate against job losses.

Comrade Joe hated with passion the exploitation of workers by bosses and advocated for fair wages for all to mitigate the high costs of living.

Comrade Kokela passed on on the 22nd of December 2024 and was laid to rest in Soshanguve, Tshwane.

**Lala Kahle Comrade GS!
Rest in peace Comrade
Joe Kokela!**

IN MEMORIAM

MPENDULO “SQUIRES” JELE



DEC 1955 - AUG 2022

Comrade ‘Squires’ served with impeccable intelligence in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s in the liberation struggle with many comrades such as late Slow Ramokgoase, Dr Mathebula and countless others.

Comrade Mpendulo “Squires” Jele is celebrated in the Congress Movement, Mass Democratic Movement in general a brave warrior of the liberation struggle, a revolutionary educator and worker leader who fought against separate development in the education fraternity in particular and in society at large.

Comrade Jele was duly elected as Vice President of the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union on 6 October 1990 at its launch at Nasrec, Johannesburg. Like all his peers in the liberation struggle, he fought against racial discrimination imposed by the Nationalist Party in South Africa.

Sadtu described Comrade Jele as a ‘committed

cadre of our movement and a revolutionary professional, who actively participated in the struggle against apartheid as a civic, union and as an underground activist.

Comrade Jele was a pedagogical practitioner by profession and led massive pickets and marches as a worker leader within the Mamelodi Teachers Union-one of progressive teachers’ unions that emerged during the educational and political upheavals between 1985 and 1990.

He played a leading role in the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA), the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) and the formation of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU).

SADTU emerged a formidable trade union in the education fraternity after various teacher’s organisations and Bantustan associations amalgamated to form a single, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic teachers’ organisation in South Africa.

Comrade ‘Squires’ was an active member of the ANC underground and uMkhonto weSizwe.

Many citizens will recall the efforts by the Congress Movement at the Harare meeting in 1988 which facilitated the ‘unity talks’ which is recorded in the South African history books as the ‘Harare Accord on Teacher Unity,’ ushered a trade union which today is celebrating its 35th anniversary. Comrade Jele during the first democratic elections in

the country was deployed as a Diplomat in various countries such as the Russia, United States, and at Islamabad, in the capital city of Pakistan.

Ambassador Jele was tasked, amongst others, in representing the South Africa in those countries, promoting international trade and investment, providing development assistance, representing South Africa in multilateral organisations, and providing consular services to South African citizens abroad.

Comrade Jele passed on in 2022, August and was laid to rest at Mamelodi cemetery.

Lala Kahle Comrade Jele!
Long live the spirit of
Comrade Jele, long live!

**Rest in peace
Commissioner Jele! —**



COSATU 40TH Anniversary Cele



celebration - 06 December 2025

Limpopo and Mpumalanga declared **DISASTER AREAS** following torrential floods

The floods resulted in loss of life, significant damage to infrastructure and property, environmental degradation, displacement of communities, disruption to schooling and agricultural activities, and closures in parts of the Kruger National Park.

COSATU has welcomed the classification of the recent floods that have affected Limpopo and other provinces as a national disaster.

This came after workers and school kids were unable to go to work and resume with schooling in 2026 as a result of severe weather that resulted in lightning, strong and damaging surface winds, heavy rainfall and flooding in the Limpopo, Mpumalanga and other provinces which led to the loss of life, damage to property, infrastructure and the environment, as well as the disruption of basic services.

More than 1 600 homes have been damaged while some have been completely destroyed by the heavy downpours reportedly measuring 400mm in a matter of days. For example, in KwaZulu-Natal about 158 homes, as well as a school, were affected. Many buildings and roads have been damaged in the areas of Buffelspruit in the Nkomazi, Phalaborwa and Thohoyandou. Limpopo Cogta MEC Basikopo Makamu declared that 'The damage to infrastructure is estimated at more than R5 billion with roads swept away and bridges collapsed, leaving communities cut off.'

The January 2026 floods in Limpopo province have resulted in significant loss of life and destruction of infrastructure, with 3 911 households affected: 19,555 people in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. 139 deaths reported: 20 in Mpumalanga, 18 in Limpopo, and 5 missing people. 1 206 houses were completely destroyed. R1.7 billion worth of damage to homes, schools, roads, and bridges. 439 roads were destroyed by flooding and R10 billion is required for full recovery from the floods. 'Following the classification, and

in terms of Section 26 read with Section 23 of the Act, the National Executive assumes primary responsibility for coordinating and managing the National Disaster. Accordingly, all organs of state across the three spheres of government are required to strengthen support to disaster management structures, implement contingency measures, submit progress reports to the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), and ensure a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to prevention, mitigation, relief and rehabilitation.'

According to the Premier of Limpopo, Dr. Phophi Ramathuba, 'the classification will enable organs of state across the three spheres of government to further strengthen their support to disaster management structures to implement contingency arrangements and ensure that measures are put in place to enable the National Executive to effectively deal with the effects of this disaster.'

Solly Phetoe, COSATU General Secretary said, "COSATU commends the Limpopo Provincial Government and Premier Phophi Ramathuba for being on the ground in an effort to mitigate the damage as more rain is expected.

The Federation also appreciates President Cyril Ramaphosa's assurance that the disaster funds will be safeguarded from any potential looting and will be used to rebuild the province's damaged infrastructure." Phetoe said, "COSATU is deeply saddened by the devastation and loss of life caused by the floods in Limpopo and Mpumalanga."



COSATU mourns the death of **14 LEARNERS AT** a Vanderbijlpark road crash

COSATU National Treasurer, Freda Oosthuysen led the Alliance leaders, faith-based leaders and community-based organisations to light candles and lay flowers in solemn remembrance of the learners who tragically lost their lives on the 22nd of January 2026.

Parents and their communities registered their outrage after 14 learners suffered a horrific road crash at Vanderbijlpark, in Sedibeng Region.

COSATU Gauteng Gender Coordinators held a provincial lighting and memorial service at the location of the disaster on Fred Droste Road, R553 Golden Highway, to pray for the families and encourage taxi industry drivers to halt the carnage.

COSATU National Treasurer, Freda Oosthuysen delivered a tribute on behalf of the federation, honouring the lives of the departed learners and conveying heartfelt condolences to their families and communities affected by the horrific accident.

The tragic loss of 14 students in road accident in the Vaal has highlighted significant safety concerns within the scholar transport sector. The minibus taxi they were riding in during the morning hours collided with a truck after the driver attempted to overtake several vehicles.

On January 20, 2026, 12 students were pronounced dead at the scene, while others were quickly transported to the hospital. Subsequently, two additional individuals succumbed to their injuries.

The Department of Basic Education, Gauteng Provincial Government, the Department of Education, Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation in liaison with parents released the following names of the deceased: Thato Moetji, Sagwadi Mathe,



COSATU National Treasurer, Fred Oosthuysen participated in the memorial service alongside ANC 1st Deputy Secretary-General, Nomvula Mokonyane, together with the ANC Women's League, COSAS and other community-based leaders in Sebokeng.

Buhle Radebe, Bokamoso Mokhobo, Sibongile Madonsela, Leano Moiloa, Letlotlo Katlego Makwe, Ofentse Jayden Vinger, Puleng Maphalla, Naledi Motsapi, Phehello Motaung, Lesego Sefatsa, and Bohlale Lekelela.

The driver, Ayanda Dlodla, the 22-year-old appeared on the same day in the Vanderbijlpark Magistrate's Court, as the family want justice for their children. Oosthuysen called upon communities, law enforcement agencies, and social partners to enhance collaboration in order to avert additional tragedies.

He also appealed to the taxi industry to guarantee that only duly licensed drivers are given the responsibility of transporting children.

ANC Treasurer-General, Dr. Ramokgopa represented the African National Congress.

Dr. Ramokgopa said, "The recent developments (learner scholar accidents), deaths and

the state of scholar transport are of grave concern to the county and the African National Congress (ANC).

The ANC takes the nation into confidence, calling for stricter measures for the regulation of the industry through enforcement and revamp of the scholar transport policy.

Since the start of 2026 school year, the country had witnessed harrowing incidents which accounted for the deaths of school children, shattering futures.

Our observation of the industry, including the entire taxi industry has revealed serious shortcomings, unroadworthy vehicles, overloading, non-compliance with the law, reckless and negligent driving and disrespect towards commuters and other road users.

The ANC calls upon parents to choose the best and safer scholar transport services in the best

interest of their children.”

Dr. Mugwena Maluleke, SADTU General Secretary, said in a statement, “The union is deeply shocked and devastated by a tragic accident involving a scholar transport minibus taxi that claimed the lives of 14 learners in Vanderbijlpark, just days after the reopening of schools.”

SADTU reiterates its call for a comprehensive scholar transport plan to ensure that all vehicles are roadworthy and that drivers are vetted and qualified.

“The Union extends its heartfelt condolences to the families and relatives of the deceased learners, their schoolmates, teachers, and support staff,” concluded Dr. Maluleke.

The Congress of South African Students (COSAS) Secretary General, Unesongo Matikinca said, “COSAS expresses its heartfelt condolences to the families, friends, communities of Evaton, Sebokeng, Vereeniging and Sharpeville.

The tragic crash involving a taxi and a truck at the beginning of the year has left us utterly shattered. This tragedy is a direct result of government’s failure to provide safe and subsidised scholar transport, and subjecting parents to greedy and reckless operators and owners.”

“The Department of Basic Education has huge responsibility to put proper measures of safety protocols to curb future incidents.”

COSAS demanded that, ‘The Department of Basic Education and the Department of Transport must collaborate to keep a register of all registered scholar transport vehicles, fix unsafe roads in partnership with municipalities as part of concrete measures to prevent such tragedies recurring.’

Matikinca reiterated that ‘COSAS honours the lives of the 14 learners who tragically lost their lives following a scholar transport accident.’

The Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA) has called on ‘the scrapping of Regulation 260, which stipulates that three children may occupy two seats and calls for ‘one child, one seat.’

The young communist movement has further demanded that the government must establish a national scholar transport safety framework, with community organisations, organised labour, law enforcement agencies and other social partners.

Mzwandile Thakhudi, YCLSA National Secretary said, “Government must demand a scholar transport register, capturing driver details, valid Professional Driving Permit (PrDP), vehicle details, roadworthy status, licence disc and approved maximum capacity of all vehicles transporting learners.”

Other speakers were from SANCO, SACP, SADTU and NEHAWU delivered messages of condolences. ■



WE DECLARE 2026 a Year of Decisive Action to fix local government and Rebuild the Economy' - ANC celebrates its 114th Anniversary in North West

ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa greeting thousands of ANC members and supporters who gathered at the Moruleng Stadium in the North West.

ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the January 8 Statement, at the Moruleng Stadium in the North West on the 10th of January 2026, outlining the movement's priorities and Programme of Action as the ANC renews its commitment to serve the people of South Africa.

The African National Congress marked 114 years since its historic founding in 1912, January 8 at Mangaung, Bloemfontein, Free State, with John Dube, Sol Plaatje, Walter Rubusana, Thomas Mapikela, Saul Msane, and Pixley ka Isaka Seme as its inaugural leaders.

The ANC was formed as

the People's movement against the darkest days of colonialism and apartheid's racial policies of discrimination.

The foundation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 sparked resistance amongst Africans after the passing of the notorious

Natives Land Act of 1913 which led to massive land dispossession.

Ramaphosa utilised the occasion to address some of the challenges raised by communities during the door-to-door campaign and feedback from multi-sectoral engagements throughout

the week as build-up activities by leaders.

Residents raised issues related to 'the high cost of living, poor road infrastructure, potholes, lack of clean water, insufficient sanitation, unsafe communities, lack of job opportunities,

for the few. The National Executive Committee has declared 2026 as a Year to fix the local government."

Ramaphosa reiterated that "The ANC is intensifying its efforts to rebuild capable local government, accelerate inclusive economic growth, create jobs, and restore public

factionalism with the ANC.'

"The ANC remains the only political home capable of uniting South Africans across class, race, gender, and generation in pursuit of a shared future."

The ANC argued that '... geopolitical shift, and a world teetering on uncertainty

January 8 Statement Tasks declared by President Ramaphosa

Ramaphosa said, "...the current conjuncture demands that we build the broadest united front to defend, consolidate and advance the National Democratic Revolution, our Constitution and status as a sovereign country in the family of nations. We must defend, consolidate and advance the rights of workers, the informal sector, small businesses, farmers and the middle strata.

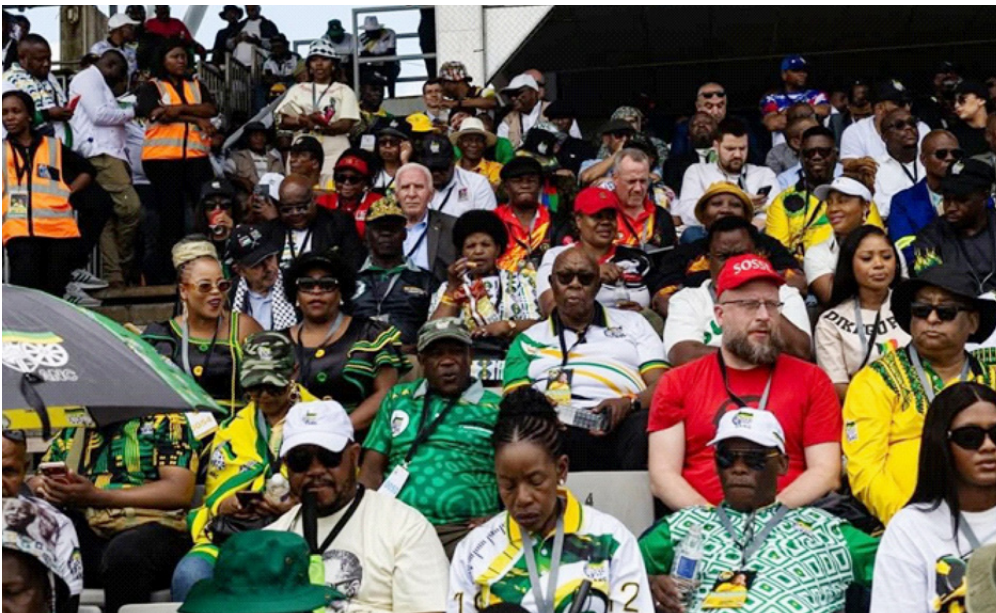
We must defend, consolidate and advance quality basic services and the expansion of housing, education, healthcare, electricity, water, sanitation, the social security net, roads, broadband services and infrastructure to millions of South Africans."

"The first Task for the ANC is to fix local government and

improve basic services;

Second task is speeding up economic transformation, inclusive growth and job creation;

Third task is waging a war against crime, corruption and gender-based violence as a national disaster;



ANC President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered the January 8th statement by declaring 2026 as the 'Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local Government and Transform the Economy.'

corruption, nepotism, state capture through tenders and just lack of community development.'

Ramaphosa said, "We cannot accept dysfunctional local government, and we also cannot afford to have an economy that only works

trust in state institutions. And most importantly to re-instil society's trust and confidence in the ANC as a leader capable of advancing the National Democratic Revolution (NDR)." Ramaphosa emphasised that 'there will be zero tolerance for corruption and

and events that threaten global peace and stability, the ANC calls for restraint to avoid global catastrophe. The world must rise and unite in solidarity and peace to deescalate tensions and to explore solutions to the conflict gripping the world.'

Fourth task is building a South Africa that belongs to all through the National Dialogue and the 30th anniversary of the Constitution; Fifth task is making organisational renewal visible and irreversible; and “The sixth task will be to build a better Africa and better world.

Ramaphosa said, “We must protect our sovereignty and constitutional order both at home and on the African continent. We must urgently silence the guns in the African continent. We forge Africa trade cooperation amongst the nations as part of Africa.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) which is aimed to create a single market for goods and services across Africa, boosting intra-African trade and economic development. We must promote the Freedom Charter injunctions on promoting peace and stability and work towards a more inclusive, and just international order.”

“The African National Congress condemns the recent acts of aggression directed at the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which constitute a serious violation of international law, national sovereignty and the principles governing peaceful relations between states,”

Ramaphosa concluded.

Alliance messages

The federation of workers, COSATU appealed for the ANC to utilise the January 8th to ‘resolve the difficult challenges facing society and in particular the working class, and most importantly provide a call to action for all spheres of government as it prepares for the State of the Nation Address and the tabling of the 2026/27 Budget at Parliament.

It must focus on government’s plans, working with social partners, on how to fix the state, unlock economic growth and tackle unemployment, provide relief to the poor and unemployed, and deal decisively with crime and corruption.

The January 8th statement needs to send a message to workers and society that the leadership of the ANC and government have heard their frustrations and will act accordingly, that it will lead with humility and avoid such tone death blunders of excessive salary hikes for politicians whilst many workers go unpaid.’

COSATU President Zingiswa Losi said, “COSATU wishes the ANC success as it celebrate its 114th anniversary. We are coming here not to cut a cake but to honour the legacy

that built the movement of Comrade Oliver Tambo, and the movement of Aziz Pahad, Ahmed Kathrada, Moses Kotane, JB Marks and countless others. We are celebrating the 32nd year of a democratic dispensation in South Africa. Unemployment still steals the future of our working-class communities.

The people did not struggle for democracy without jobs. They struggled for equality, and the celebrations of the ANC anniversary are inseparable to the Alliance celebrations. We are an Alliance which must be accountable to the working-class.

The Alliance will be weakened by divisions, arrogance, and lack of public service delivery to communities. Workers will not forgive failure. Women will not tolerate insecurity.

Let’s us all renew the movement and ensure that a developmental path is restored on social justice. The people of South Africa are watching us. They are not eating slogans. They are asking for dignity. Let us recommit to ensure social justice prevails.

The year 2025 highlighted the importance of South Africa expanding and diversifying trade opportunities, not only to manage the inevitable

global challenges, but most importantly to expand key economic sectors and create decent jobs. Particular attention must be paid to African Continental Free Trade Area as this is where our greatest growth opportunities lay.

Whilst the long-term interventions are put in place to reach the 3% economic growth rate needed to reduce unemployment, more public and private sector employment opportunities need to be provided, from the Presidential Employment Stimulus to artisanship in the private sector to capital for start-ups.

More must be done to boost compliance with our progressive labour laws, from paying municipal workers their salaries to security guards’ pension fund contributions. We must become a society with zero tolerance towards those who break the law.”

The SACP has used the occasion of the ANC 114 celebrations to re-emphasise the Party’s decision ‘to contest the 2026 local government elections independently’ which they argue ‘does not amount to a withdrawal from the Tripartite Alliance.’

Madala Masuku, the



The Congress Movement women's contribution gallery was held at Sun City, North West, as part of the build-up activities to acknowledge their struggles for gender equality.

1st Deputy General Secretary argued that 'the Alliance partners need to focus on reshaping the ownership of the South African's economy.'

'The emancipation of the oppressed class implies necessarily the creation of a new society and called for the re-organisation of the Left Axis to push ahead with radical socio-economic transformation,' argued Masuku.

SACP said, "As the leadership of the Mass Democratic Movement, we convey our congratulations to the ANC on its 114th anniversary. The years represent the struggles of the people. Alliance

partners must restore the dignity of the movement in the eyes of the working-class communities.

Renewal of the organisation as the leader of society must fulfil its mission and deliver the goals of the National Democratic Revolution. The Party calls for a National Dialogue for the renewal of the Freedom Charter, and the SACP has made tremendous contributions during the liberation of the masses.

Let's celebrate the tenacious legacy that each Alliance partner immensely contributed to the attainment of liberation. Poverty, unemployment,

inequality, crime, corruption, and gender-based violence still undermine human development.

The state must drive radical transformation of society to eradicate all these ills facing our masses. We must deal with issues related to property relations, land redistribution, and industrial revolution. The People's Red Caravan is the only vehicle to lead a radical class-oriented transformation of society."

SANCO President Richard Mkhungo called for the urgent convening of the Alliance Summit to tackle current political challenges.

Anton Lembede Youth Award was awarded to

Andrew Mehlape ANCYL Branch, Ward 25 in Polokwane, Limpopo for consistency in mobilisation, political education and electoral work of the ANC.

The Pixley ka Isaka Seme ANC Branch in the Greater Johannesburg Region and Kwaito Leope Branch in Elias Motsoaledi Sub-Region in Sekhukhune, Limpopo

also received awards for excellence as the basic units of the revolutionary movement.

Ward 27 Vuyani Mabaxa Branch Women's League received the Charlotte Maxeke Award for the Best Performing ANC Women's League Branch.

Members and supporters were entertained by Kamo Phela, Khuzani, Khuli Chana, Jumbo, Budy Radebe, Tumisang Seleke, Mma Ausi Tuks, DJ Karri, DJ Official, DJ Reginald and Siyanda.

ANC NATIONAL GENERAL Council Outcomes

COSATU delegation at the ANC NEC Lekgotla, convened to assess progress in advancing the National Democratic Revolution and to strengthen the effectiveness of ANC deployees in government.

The African National Congress held its ordinary National General Council (NGC) at Boksburg which culminated in the adoption of the ANC 8th January Statement which declared 2026: “The Year of Decisive Action to fix Local Government and Transform the Economy.”

Alliance partners, the ANC, SACP, COSATU, SANCO and the Leagues deliberate on various interventions geared towards the ANC NGC

defined a clear roadmap for advancing the resolutions of the 55th National Conference and propelling the movement’s historic mission s t r e n g t h e n i n g organisational renewal, and sharpening strategies to advance the National Democratic Revolution.

It was a moment of heightening the renewal of the movement, and assessing the balance of forces, guiding the movement’s collective resolve toward organisational

and societal transformation. The ANC presented the Mid-Term Report to delegates at the National General Council, outlining progress, challenges, and key areas of focus of the movement highlighted were recommitting to improving on basic services, addressing the energy crisis and building a capable and ethical state by holding the ANC deployees of the Party in the state accountable and also to eradicate poverty, unemployment,

inequality, state capture and corruption.

The ANC NGC highlighted the critical role of enhancing the financial accountability at all levels of the organisation.

Key outcomes included “addressing challenges such as declining membership, weak branches, factionalism, and erosion of public confidence, taking resolution to stimulate economic growth by expanding the South African

Reserve Bank's mandate beyond inflation targeting to include employment creation and economic growth, deepening a recommitment to developing a "renewal chapter" by 2032 and setting performance targets for the ANC and reiterating the importance of thorough preparation for the seventh local government elections in 2026, with a focus on regaining public support and addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment."

ANC Secretary-General, Fikile Mbalula said, "What emerges unmistakably from the Mid-term Report is a movement that is renewing with purpose, rebuilding with discipline and driving human development with measurable results.

The ANC is sharpening its ideological tools, strengthening its institutions, investing in cadreship and reconnecting with the motive forces of change.

It is demonstrating through evidence; not slogans; that South Africa is moving forward. People live longer; more children and youth are in education; more households have services; more Black South Africans occupy professional and entrepreneurial spaces; and the foundations of

an integrated, future-oriented economy are being constructed with scientific precision."

"The expansion of the social wage is equally demonstrable. Today, 90.2% of households have access to electricity, up from 76.7% in 2002; 87.7% have access to piped water; and 83.1% now enjoy improved sanitation, compared to barely 61% two decades ago.

These numbers reflect a profound transformation in the material conditions of millions of people and reaffirm that the ANC-led state remains the primary engine of human upliftment.

Even in the face of global shocks that have driven increases in food insecurity worldwide, South Africa continues to deepen interventions to protect vulnerable households, strengthen nutrition programmes and expand social protection, again showing that we are grounded in empirical understanding and responsive policymaking.

Life expectancy in South

Africa continues to rise, reaching 64 years for men and 69.6 years for women in 2025, a scientific accomplishment rooted in massive public health investments and the most extensive HIV/AIDS turnaround on the continent.

These numbers reflect a profound transformation in the material conditions of millions of people and reaffirm that the ANC-led state remains the primary engine of human upliftment.

Educational progress has placed South Africa at the forefront of global human-development indicators; the Global Gender Gap

Report 2025 ranks South Africa first in the world for women's enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education, a direct outcome of ANC policies that widened access and dismantled apartheid-era exclusions.

Youth investment has intensified, with 75% of young people now enrolled in education, while participation in higher education has risen, offering a proven protective effect against unemployment. These are not abstract achievements; they are scientific measurements of a society that is moving forward."

We can either Renew or Perish. We can Unite or Face Defeat. We can Return to Serving the People or Betray the NDR.

The ANC 2025 NGC and the 2026 January 8th Statement was followed by the Alliance Secretariat sitting to discuss the joint common Political Programme of the Alliance for 2026, and approach to the developments in the country and the globe.

COSATU SALUTES Comrade Joe Slovo

on his 31st anniversary commemoration

COSATU President Zingiswa Losi pays tribute to a fearless leader, thinker, and stalwart of the liberation struggle, Comrade Joe Slovo at Heroes Acre, Avalon cemetery, Soweto.

Hundreds of members of the SACP, COSATU, ANC, and SANCO gathered at Heroes Acre, Avalon Cemetery in Soweto to commemorate the revolutionary accomplishments of Joe Slovo, the former Party general secretary.

This year, 2026, marks

31 years after Comrade Joe Slovo's death on January 6, 1995.

The communist intellectual died after a protracted fight with bone marrow cancer. He also served as the member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress.

When he died, he was the

Minister of Housing.

The keynote message was delivered by the Party's general secretary, Solly Mapaila, who pledged 'solidarity with Venezuela against US imperialist military aggression.'

The SACP has called on the international community

to stage protests and demonstrations across the globe, to exert pressure on US President Donald Trump, to release the Venezuelan President, President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores.

Addressing the participants, the COSATU

The Alliance

President Zingiswa Losi said, “We are gathered today, 6 January 2026, to honour 31 years since the passing of Comrade Joe Slovo — a revolutionary communist, a cadre of the working class, and a leader who never separated ideas or principles from action. We do so 32 years into our democracy, not to romanticise the past, but to confront the present — and to shape the future.”

Losi reiterated that “Thirty-two years into democracy, capital still dominates the economy, ownership remains racially and class skewed, and the working class continues to be shackled by unemployment, poverty, inequality, and insecurity.

Millions remain excluded from decent work. Young people are denied a future. Women continue to carry the double burden of exploitation and care.

This is not accidental. It is the outcome of structural capitalism, reinforced by neoliberal policy choices that weaken the state, privatise

public goods, commodify basic services and place profit above the public.”

Losi warned about neglect suffered by poor working-class communities as a result of non-rendering of quality municipal services.

Losi emphasised “Municipalities — meant to be the engine of development — have become symbols of failure. Corruption, cadre

delivery, accountability, and principled leadership.”

Losi stressed the importance of a reconfigured Alliance.

“Comrades, the Alliance must not exist only during elections. It must exist in struggle, in communities, in workplaces, and in policy battles. Where the Alliance retreats, reactionary forces advance. Where ideology

struggle,” Losi emphasized.

COSATU has condemned the abduction of the Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro.

“The world has already been plunged into geopolitical turmoil of the kind that if allowed to continue can threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions across the world, but in particular in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

We have been shocked by the brazen military attack on the peaceful people of Venezuela and the kidnapping of its President, Nicolás Maduro.

We cannot return to the days of the Wild West where might is right and the sovereign choices of the world are trampled upon.



Alliance partners unanimously acknowledged that ‘Comrade Slovo was a central figure in dismantling the oppressive apartheid regime.’

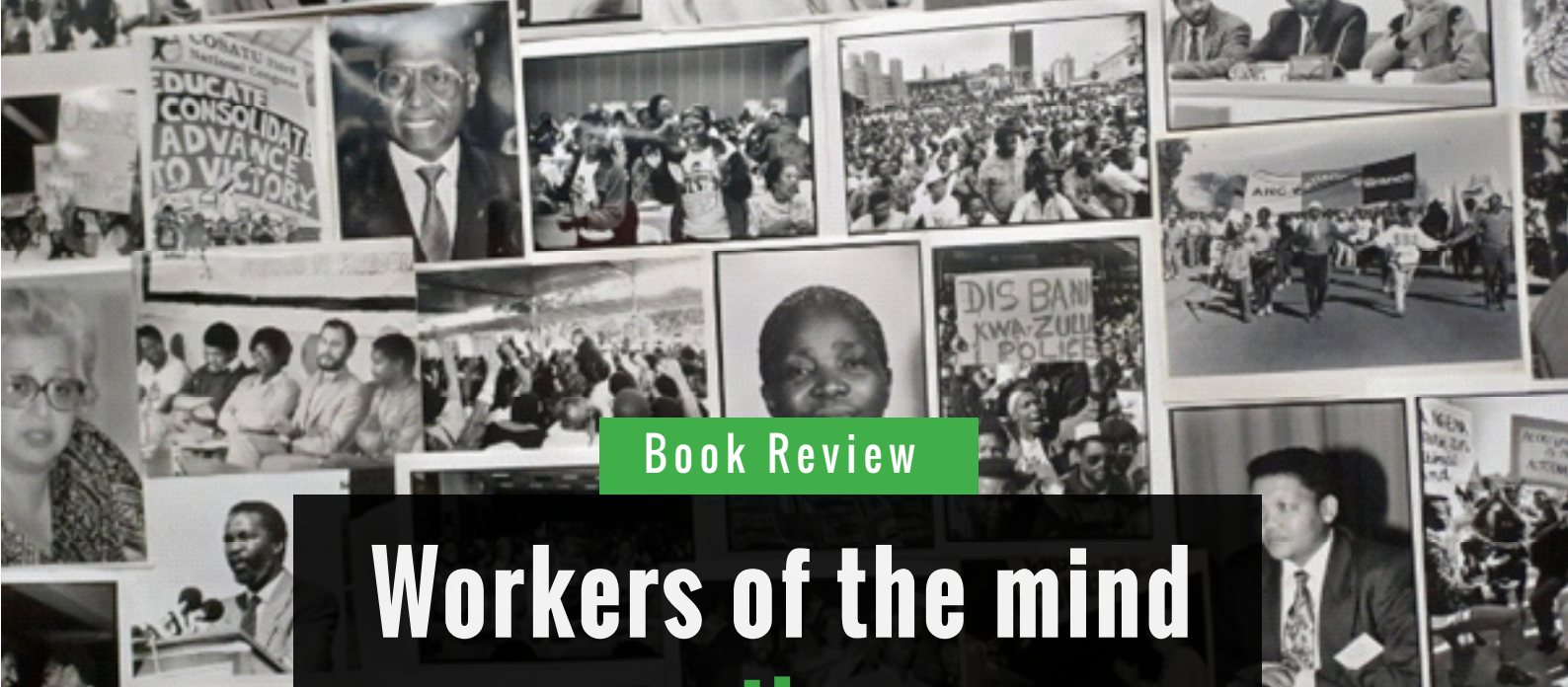
erosion, outsourcing, and administrative collapse have left communities without water, electricity, sanitation, or dignity.

As we approach local government elections, we must be honest with ourselves and with the people. Electoral support cannot be demanded — it must be earned through

weakens, populism and corruption thrive.

And let us be clear; the unity of the working class does not fall from the sky. It must be organised, educated, and led. Joe Slovo was uncompromising on this point. He said: “Socialism will not come by default. It will only come through conscious organisation and

We welcome the principled call of the South African government for the United Nations to be seized with such matters and for all geopolitical and other disputes to be resolved in the appropriate multi-lateral institutions and in a manner that promotes peace not war, that respects and affirms the sovereign and democratic choices of all nations.”



Book Review

Workers of the mind empower the masses:

What more can be done?

The Harare Conference in April 1988 was a pivotal moment that set the stage for the unification of these organizations. It was here that the idea of forming a national and non-racial teachers' union was proposed, leading to the eventual establishment of SADTU.

SADTU was formed in 1990 at Nasrec through the unification of various racially divided teacher organizations, marking a significant moment in the history of teachers' unions in South Africa.

Another must-to-read historical book about South African trade unionism is, **"SADTU and the Struggle for Professional Unionism,"** edited by Michael Cross, Logan Govender and Ahmed Essop which elaborates about the evolution of teacher's unity talks, the formation of a non-racial, democratic trade union for pedagogical practitioners.

The teacher's union, SADTU produced renowned community activists, politicians, educationists, researchers, negotiators, commissioners, ministers and ambassadors such as Randall van den Heever, Matthew Goniwe, Thulas Nxesi, Mugwena Maluleke, Membathisi Mdladlana, Duncan Hindle, B. B. Mabandla, Basil John Snayer, Willie Madisha, Hema Singh, Sally Cohen, Richard Legrange, Lynette September, Wiseman Sorasi, Varas Moreothata, Seth Ramagaga, Foni Mushwana, Sanil Mahabeer, Greg Schalkwyk, Shireen Pardesi, Steve Ntetshe, Pinky

Mbowane, Don Pasqualie, Mervyn Groenewald, Sibongile Kwazi, Tembisi Stofile, Glenn Abrahams, Derrick Ngobeni, Shai Nkomonde, Mandisi Mvimbeli, Niki Xuba, Magope Maphila, Angie Motshekga, Shoes Magabe and many unsung heroes and heroines of the class struggle in South Africa.

One leader then around 1994, Mabandla (first name not mentioned in SADTU Archives) declared that:

"As workers engaged in human resource development, we need to inspire our people with renewed confidence

in our ability to develop a generation of just literate people, but members of society that will sustain the democratic principles on which our struggles were based."

"We have just witnessed the birth of democracy in our country. The Union has a new leadership. We salute our pioneers as we prepare for the second stage of our development both in terms of professional unionism and as a force for democracy." (Reg Brijraj, SADTU Media Vice President, 1994)

"SADTU teachers have a special and awesome responsibility - we are part of

Book Review

the alliance that put this new government in power, and we will stand or fall with this government. We must lead the teachers of this land - the new nation is expecting it."

"Much has been said about the need for "nation building", but this term means different things to different people. To the National Party, it means pretending that we have no differences in our "government of national unity. To businessmen, it means a return to the kind of labour exploitation of the apartheid era - low wages and no means of redress.

To liberals, it probably means that all voices should be recognised, however unrepresentative these may be. The liberation movement, having it probably means that all voices should be recognised, however unrepresentative these may be.

Our task in education is to develop "the new person"; a skilled worker with a social consciousness - a labourer who undertakes his or her duties with pride, knowing it is a contribution to the building of a nation. As teachers, we will have to set an example of unselfish commitment to our social function."

These pioneers were committed to "eradicate apartheid in education

and strive towards a free non-racial, non-sexist, compulsory and democratic education system in South Africa."

The book traces 'the emergence teachers' union in the former Bantustans and in the apartheid Republic of South Africa and development in relation to unity talks which resulted in the formation of SADTU in 1990, at Nasrec, Johannesburg on 5 October.

Various teacher's associations and unions such as the Progressive Teachers' Union (PTU), the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA), Western Cape Teachers' Union (WECTU), Mamelodi Teachers' Union, Progressive Teachers' League, East London Progressive Teachers' Union and countless others were engaged and later amalgamated into one national union to enhance 'the centrality of tackling apartheid regime's Bantu Education policies based on racial discrimination and offering inferior education to the non-whites.

'The Bantu Education System was a subject of intense political debate by political parties and trade unions' in working-class communities, some aligned to the liberation movement, the African National

Congress.

Many were relieved that SADTU was established as a 'necessary response to the political battles with education authorities and relevant vehicle to reimagining the future of education in the new South Africa which is based on non-racialism and will serve to capacitate the working-class communities to eradicate production of cheap labour for the labour market and also resolve socio-economic challenges facing workers.

ANC President Nelson Mandela declared:

"SADTU had a critical role to play in contributing to the transformation of the education system."

Mandela believed SADTU represented a 'beacon of hope.' "It is your duty to be democratic in the classroom. You have to answer the question----Are you initiating a new kind of relationship with your pupils? Is this relationship based on mutual respect, original or trust, or it is one that relies on bullying?"

The book awesomely weaves class struggles, education transformation, and liberation struggle together, giving young teachers a glimpse of where we come as a nation. Great historical pictures, remarkable quotes,

and moving storytelling from authors.

The prominent teething challenges were related whether to affiliate or disaffiliate to political parties or Alliance related blocks such as COSATU.

There are some analysts who argued that Alliance politics were 'Constraining factors preventing the organisation from realising its full potential as a professional teacher's union that prioritises the promotion of education quality in the interest of the public good over the narrow labour and economic needs of teachers.'

But the majority argued that what has made SADTU what it is today is 'its unionist ideology inherited across historical epochs, pre-and-post apartheid era.'

The book elaborates that professionalism versus trade unionism was a huge debate in the early days.

SADTU became a necessary vehicle to "challenge the apartheid regime to address educational, social and economic challenges of the day.'

SADTU and its international allies were upfront that "Education professionalism is critical in championing quality, public education for all as a benchmark for quality teaching and contribute

Book Review

to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

SADTU still argues that “professionalism in education is consciously designed to help raise the teaching and learning bar in many countries, schools, and classrooms, and to strengthen teacher education and development programmes.”

Many regarded militancy within the union as the antithesis of professionalism.

However, acknowledged as being a subjective view.

Over the years, through robust, constructive engagement, there was unanimous consensus that the two concepts complement each other. Many disadvantaged schools suffered over years with poor infrastructure, high learner enrolment, abnormal class size, lack of funding, and insufficient teacher development.

Material working conditions during the apartheid era were geared to deliberately disempower the Bantu people to receive quality learning and teaching.

According to Linda Chisholm argued, “...teacher unions post-1994 have played an important role in teacher development work, and have striven to

keep pace with as well as to influence and shape where possible new (education) policy developments.”

“We are the voice of teachers and education

that “...teacher unions in the post-1994 era have played an important role in teacher development work and have striven to keep pace with as well as to influence and shape where possible new policy

education system for all’?

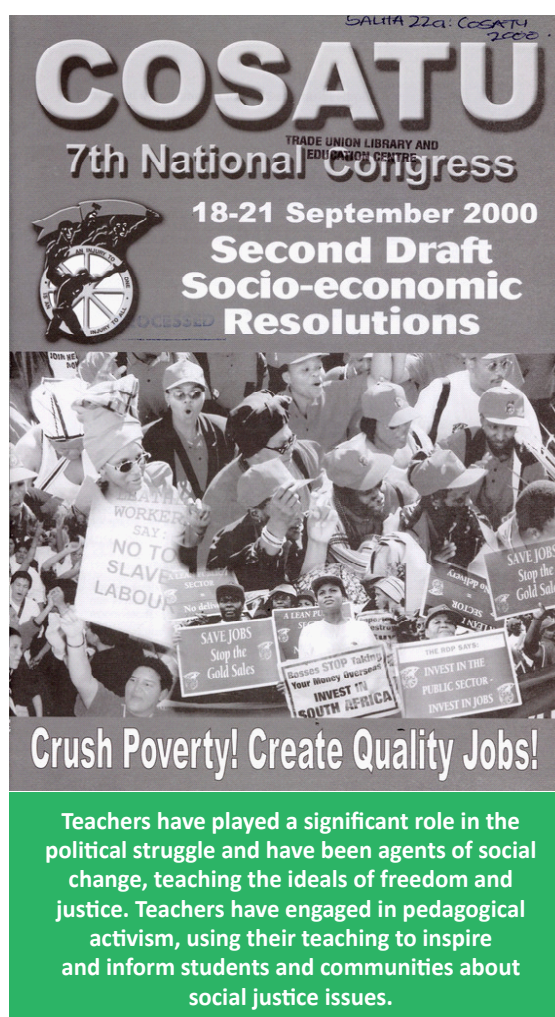
The authors argue that “...the ability of SADTU to reclaim its roots and to reimagine its future as a social movement union, committed to the transformation of the education system, is dependent on the nature and character of its leaders. This requires the active presence of leaders in setting the vision, goals, and strategic direction of the organisation and in mobilising, motivating, and engaging members to achieve the vision and goals set.

It requires transformational leaders who put the public good-the building of a quality education system-above the narrow and material interests of the organisation and its members.

It also requires leaders with the ability to read the pulse of the citizenry at critical junctures in a country’s history and engage in appropriate introspection and resetting of organisational goals and priorities to enable SADTU to remain socially and politically relevant.”

Grab SADTU and the Struggle for Professional Unionism to be empowered about the struggles of pedagogical practitioners in South Africa.

A fabulous read!



workers around the world,” SADTU and its international Federation have declared.

Linda Chisholm argues

developments.”

What type of new leadership is sought to take the vision of ‘a quality, public



NEHAWU prepares for its **13TH NATIONAL CONGRESS IN 2026**

Delegates at NEHAWU ordinary Central Executive Committee
plenary session at Braamfontein.

The National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union held its ordinary Central Executive Committee (CEC) session at Braamfontein, Johannesburg on the 07th until the 09th of December 2025.

NEHAWU resolved to convene its 13th National Congress on the 26th – 29th June 2026 at a venue still to be announced.

The session comes amidst concerns raised by ordinary working-class communities and workers about rising costs of living, poverty, high

unemployment, inequality, corruption, violent killings, political interference in the public administration and budget cuts.

Zola Saphetha, NEHAWU General Secretary said, “The CEC expressed concern that the economy remains stagnant as it is expected to grow by a mere 1.2% in 2025 and this is in line with trend over the past decade due to austerity measures.

The stagnation of the economy is largely as a result of the dogmatic pursuance and implementation of

neo-liberal macroeconomic policies whose foundation were laid by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution [GEAR] strategy concluded that over the past 18 months of the Government of National Unity, in the overall there has not been any change in the direction of macroeconomic policies since the sixth administration, despite the fact that these policies have been reproducing the prevailing crisis-levels in the rates of unemployment, poverty and inequalities.”

According to Saphetha,

“the ordinary Central Executive Committee is the second highest decision making structure in between the National Congress as per the union’s constitution, amongst others, is duly convened to ‘develop the policy of the union between meetings of the National Congress, and has the necessary powers usual for such a body to give effect to the aims and objectives of the union, including the power, to give broad direction concerning organisational, political, educational and policy issues within the union; pass resolutions

not inconsistent with the resolutions passed by the National Congress; establish and determine the nature, membership and scope of sub-committees; ratify decisions of the National Executive Committee; to approve the annual audited financial statements and balance sheet of the union and submit these to the National Congress; determine budget guidelines; establish or dissolve branch, region and provincial structures of the union and demarcate the jurisdiction of such branches and provinces and delegate powers to the Provincial Congress and Provincial Executive Committee.”

“The congress shall look at the work of the national union in the implementation of the four-year Programme of Action (PoA),” reaffirmed Saphetha. Saphetha confirmed that on the strategic way-forward for the Socialist-Axis, “the CEC reaffirmed the correctness of the South African Communist Party (SACP) resolution to contest elections independently in the 2026 local government elections and beyond.

This resolution is an integral part of the Party’s strategic perspective, which include the tasks of building a powerful socialist movement of the workers and poor and building a left popular front, amongst others.

The CEC directed the union to go ahead in

preparing itself to embark on a massive election campaign in the 2026 local government elections in support of the SACP, as a vanguard of the working class.

Furthermore, the union will develop a comprehensive program of action inclusive of political classes, rolling-out massive political education, town-based meetings for office bearers, shop stewards and members at the workplace to keep members abreast on the developments regarding the SACP contesting in 2026 local government elections.

The CEC directed the national union to support and participate in full swing on the SACP Red People’s Caravan, and its participation should be impactful and noticeable.”

NEHAWU has rejected privatisation of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the current conjuncture. Saphetha said, “NEHAWU CEC agreed that under the current administration, there is an intensification of the implementation of the so-called structural reforms that are intended to end the monopoly of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the infrastructure network industries such as electricity, freight rail and the ports, and now these Neoliberal reforms are extended to the service delivery of water, sanitation, electricity and the roads at municipal level.”

NEHAWU celebrated the victory on behalf of Community Health Workers who were ‘declared to be employed permanent’ by the Labour Court. Saphetha said, “The CEC congratulated the union for victory for the permanent employment of the CHWs, who are the foot-soldiers in the strengthening of primary healthcare as a foundation for the creation of Universal Health Coverage.”

Other resolutions

- NEHAWU CEC agreed to convene membership meetings in the public service to obtain a mandate on the review of the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council [PSCBC] agreement that gave rise to the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS). This shall be coupled with a legal opinion for the stay of the implementation of the proposed subscription increments, until a solution is found. The CEC once again condemned the unilateral hiking of the premiums by GEMS without any corresponding positive changes in the benefits.
- NEHAWU CEC directed all provinces to sustain our Public Service Delivery Campaign in healthcare, with the national launch anchored in the Johannesburg Health District at the Helen Joseph Hospital during the first quarter of 2026.
- The union will exert

pressure on the management of health institutions, district authorities and provincial departments with a view to force improvements in service delivery to the certified level of the Office of Health Standards and Compliance (OHSC) in the context of a properly functioning district health system and ultimately to the level of accreditation by the NHI Fund itself.

- NEHAWU CEC agreed that the union must convene the national and provincial education committees in January 2026 to prepare for the convening of the Right to Learn Campaign meetings with the Progressive Youth Alliance and other Progressive Forces to campaign against poor institutional governance for transformation and funding to ensure access in the Post-Schooling Education and Training (PSET) as part of the long-term objective of building a popular front in the education sector.
- NEHAWU CEC directed the union to pay particular focus to State Administration in particular the Department of Home Affairs and Department of Justice and Constitutional Development as part of strengthening workplace organization.



POPCRU welcomes declaration of GENDER-BASED **VIOLENCE** AS A NATIONAL DISASTER

“No to gender-based violence,” declares members of POPCRU in Gauteng

Members of the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU) led a massive silent walk in protest against gender-based violence at the Johannesburg Correctional Centre on 28 November 2025, under the theme: **“From Awareness to Action: Strengthening the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence.”**

The event kicked off with a silent walk from the main gate of the centre,

leading to the venue, and brought together members of the Criminal Justice Cluster, civil society partners, medical aid representatives and POPCRU gender structures for a day of education, empowerment and collective mobilisation.

Mosadiwama Mokokong, POPCRU 1st Deputy President said, “POPCRU is deeply concerned about the scourge gender-based violence and femicide

affecting South Africans which continues to increase at an alarming rate.”

The campaign was a decisive action by workers as part of the annual 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign which takes place from 25 November to 10 December 2025 under the theme: **“Letsema: Men, Women, Boys and Girls working together to end Gender-Based Violence**

and Femicide (GBV&F).”

“Despite progressive laws, specialised courts and national campaigns, the scourge continues to undermine the safety, dignity and wellbeing of women, children, persons with disabilities and LGBTQI+ members.

For POPCRU, which organises workers at the core of the Criminal Justice Cluster—including SAPS, DCS and Traffic—this crisis is deeply personal.

Members encounter GBV daily in their work, while some also experience abuse and harassment in their private and professional lives.

The event acknowledged this reality and emphasised that GBV is not a private matter, but a justice, workplace and societal issue that requires structural, survivor-centred responses," reiterated Mokokong.

POPCRU National Gender Coordinator, Matshediso designated to lead gender mainstreaming within the criminal justice cluster led a candle-lighting ceremony and the reading

of a POPCRU Pledge against gender-based violence, reinforcing the members' commitment to championing gender justice both inside and outside the workplace.

Representatives from the South African Police Services, Department of Correctional Services, Traffic, medical aid partners, and civil society organisations spoke about the mental health, counselling, and trauma support services offered to staff.

They acknowledged the escalating levels of emotional strain among frontline workers, emphasizing the need

to increase access, decrease stigma, and ensure trauma-informed, confidential solutions.

These engagements emphasized the necessity of providing members with tools to deal with stressful situations while also assuring correct reporting of harassment, abuse, and workplace bullying.

They discussed the mental health benefits available to POPCRU members, such as counselling, psychiatric assistance, preventative treatment, and wellness programs.

Their contributions emphasized the

importance of medical support systems in addressing stress, burnout, and trauma-related issues experienced by Criminal Justice Cluster staff.

"POPCRU urges all members of the Criminal Justice Cluster and society at large to play their part in transforming communities, combating harmful gender norms and supporting survivors with dignity and compassion.

Ending gender-based violence is a collective responsibility—one rooted in solidarity, accountability and the pursuit of justice for all," concluded Mokokong.



COSATU CALL CENTER

Monday-Friday Office hours

010 002 2590





NUM celebrates its **43RD ANNIVERSARY AT MATLOSANA**

NUM celebrated its 43 years of existence at the Roman Catholic Church, Jourbeton in Matlosana on December 4, 2025.

The history of class struggle in South Africa would be incomplete without a discussion of the early finding of gold and diamonds in the Witwatersrand and Kimberley.

Migrants from all over Africa, including Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and others, flocked to South Africa to work in mines.

Racial prejudice, separate development, and apartheid regulations prevented mineworkers

from living in harmony.

During the challenging periods of hardship, the establishment of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) marked an important trade union and political movement in southern Africa, created in 1919 in Cape Town.

Black labourers were deprived of the legal right to form their own officially recognized trade union.

The ICU laid a solid platform for workers to fight the disagreeable political landscape of the 1920s, speaking out strongly against the white

supremacist government that dominated labour markets by advocating for higher pay and worker rights.

When the National Union of Mineworkers was founded on December 4, 1982, it was the culmination of years of class struggle by mineworkers to register their voice on the shop floor, bargain better for improved working conditions, and live peacefully in male-only compounds.

The industries in which the NUM operates are undergoing substantial

transformations as a result of digital technology, artificial intelligence, and sustainability initiatives, transforming operations for increased efficiency and environmental responsibility.

The union continues to be a voice of reason for workers!

Today, the NUM has a membership of more than 170 000 spread across the landscape of South Africa. The union was established in Klerksdorp.

Hundreds of NUM members gathered

in Matlosana to commemorate the relentless fights undertaken to end worker exploitation in the mining, energy, construction, and steel industries.

wished the NUM success in its endeavours to fight against capitalism, neoliberalism and imperialism undermining human development by pushing for maximum

(BWI) declared:

"BWI extends its heartfelt congratulations to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) on its 43rd anniversary and advancing worker's

major strides in workplace health and safety, collective bargaining, empowerment of shopstewards, skills development and expansion of worker's rights in sectors



NUM leaders engaging with workers at Matlosana to address their labour matters in 2025.

NUM President, David Vilakazi has called on 'NUM members to unite, address worker's issues in all regions, strengthen the union and advance economic emancipation.'

"The Epoch for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, is underway; Now or Never," Vilakazi reiterated.

Global federations

profits at the expense of workers.

BWI has vowed 'to work side by side with the NUM to persistently fight against unsafe working conditions, reject precarious work, including subcontracting and labour broking and denounce unjust economic transition.'

The Building and Wood Workers' International

rights, defending human dignity and transforming workplaces across South Africa.

The NUM has remained a fearless voice of workers, confronting injustice, challenging exploitation and pushing forward a progressive agenda that has over years shaped labour relations in South Africa. Your historic achievements include

marked by dangerous working conditions and inequality."

BWI applauded the NUM for 'strengthening worker education programmes, forging alliances globally to advance democracy, equality, decent work and social justice.'

#HandsOffVenezuela



South Africans marched to the US Embassy in Pretoria, condemning imperialist tendencies by US President, Donald Trump.

Global citizens are chanting: “Que vuelva Nicolás!” meaning “May Nicolás return!”

This comes after global citizens launched the International Day of Action in solidarity with the people of Venezuela.

Civil society led a massive march against US

imperialist abduction of the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, and the first lady, Cilia Flores on the 8th of January, 2026.

COSATU participated in the march to the US Embassy in Arcadia, Pretoria, to demand the unconditional release of the Venezuelan president and the wife.

Workers denounced the imperialist aggression against seizing of Venezuelan oil resources, neocolonial controlling the Arctic ocean territory and also overthrowing the Bolivarian Republic and Chavista revolution.

COSATU argued that ‘this emergency action marks the first

coordinated public protest in South Africa against the current USA military assault on Venezuela and reflects the growing outrage among South Africans at Washington’s escalating lawlessness.

The actions of the USA are in clear violation of international law, the UN

Charter, and the sovereignty of an independent nation. As peace-loving people, we are appalled by the US' behaviour on the international stage and urge workers to join the lawful protest.

We would also like to thank the relevant authorities for swiftly facilitating this urgent gathering and enabling tomorrow's

emergency protest.

This protest is not only about Venezuela; it is about defending international law, national sovereignty, and the right of peoples to determine their own future without bombs, sanctions, kidnappings or foreign interference from the USA.

We reject the US' ongoing policy of war, coercion, sanctions, and regime-

change operations against poorer countries or those of the Global South.

Venezuela — a country with the largest proven oil reserves in the world — is being targeted not because it has failed its people, but because it has refused to hand over and surrender its sovereignty, resources, and political independence to US corporations and US imperial interests.'

Trade unions have condemned allegations of drug trafficking as a smokescreen by Donald Trump's warmongering administration.

COSATU International Secretary, Bongani Masuku unpacks how the US continued to disrespect International law and United Nation's Charter.

COSATU condemns US invasion and military strikes against the territorial integrity and sovereign rights of the people of Venezuela.

An operation led by the US Special forces commissioned by the Donald Trump Presidency, struck Venezuela and resulted in the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores.

The US attack on the territorial integrity of Venezuela is a direct assault on the rights and sovereignty of all people, particularly in the Global South.

The US is repeating the dark chapter of its cold war aggression in Chile, Nicaragua,

Grenada, Vietnam and on our own continent in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Mozambique in particular.

These outrageous acts of imperialist aggression must never be tolerated or allowed to continue without consequences. We call for accountability and action for any crimes against humanity.

The blatant violation of international law, multilateralism and the principle of equality of states calls for decisive responses from the international community.

From our own experience as Africans, we know what global bullying and colonial occupation means, and we support the global

call for solidarity with the people and workers of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Federation supports the progressive and principled call by South Africa's government through the Department of International Relations and Cooperation for the United Nations' Security Council to be convened urgently to resolve this crisis and ensure that sovereignty and the fundamental rights of the people of Venezuela to determine their own path is respected by all parties.

It is sacrosanct that this is done but that equally all nations, in particular the world's superpowers, respect the role of the United Nations and the

importance of resolving conflicts through multilateralism.

Embarking upon military action, including invading and occupying other countries inevitably results in unmitigated conflict, violence, deaths, refugees and economic devastation.

This is a price that the people of Venezuela should not be made to pay. Those who doubt this lesson need look no further than what happened in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, amongst other long-suffering nations.

COSATU affirms its support for the peace-loving people of Venezuela, and in particular the working class.



The historic Alliance delivered to liberate the working-class against the tyranny of white supremacist regime until at CODESA negotiations where a date for the first democratic national elections was set for April 27, 1994.

CONTESTING STATE POWER is a necessary path by the Party

to eradicate neo-liberal agenda in the current conjuncture in South Africa, argues former COSATU National Educator, Mike Ntutela.

Alliance debates have occupied the better part of 2025 since the South African Communist Party elaborated on its Special Congress resolution to contest State power.

Other arguments were aired out about strengthening the Alliance through a process to finalise the modalities of a Reconfigured Alliance to

maximise efforts to rebuild its hegemony and improve working relationship.

The argued the unity of alliance is sacrosanct, noting the rich political history the allies endured together during the liberation years. The current political challenges faced by the Congress Movement around erosion

of electoral support at the polls still warrant to mend political differences, the divisions and advance unity of action united towards the realisation of the total emancipation of the working-class communities and of outmost importance, the achievement of the National Democratic Revolution.

Mike Ntutela, the former National Educator at FAWU, NEHAWU and an andragogical practitioner argues about contesting of State power to eradicate the trajectory of neo-liberal policies imposed by government which resulted in lesser government intervention, focusing on free-market capitalism and fiscal austerity.

A national desire and higher levels of despondence for political alternatives may present the SACP with an opportunity to stand a chance of winning the hearts and minds of middle-to-old age traditional, the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Congress of the People (COPE) voters, especially organised workers from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), the former liberation war veterans from uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) and the black intelligentsia.

The parties that stand to feel its electoral presence in the left are the ANC, the Economic Freedom Front (EFF), the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP) and Mayibuye iAfrika.

If anyone wants facts to understand this assertion, he or she must follow the ANC's change of character after 2007 Polokwane Conference.

One has made a point about certain generations having been covertly recruited by SACP and MK underground activists into the ranks of the underground movement during the liberation struggle, hence my earlier reference to the middle-to-old age political stratum.

Countless factory workers were covertly organised by unions such as SAAWU, MAWU, MACWUSA, SARHWU, GAWU, HAWU, NUMAROWSA, etc, into industrial units within and outside of the premises of plants such as Wilson's Rowntree, (present day Nestlé), SAMAD (present day VW), CDA (formerly known as MBSA and currently known as Daimler Chrysler South Africa), a blanket manufacturing company mis-remembered as Moberg (present day Waverly Blankets), South African Railways, Ford Motor Company, Willards Batteries, General Motors, Lear Corporation, General Tyre, Dorbyl, Firestone, Leyland, Colgate, Defy, Toyota, Becketts Tea Corporation, Langeberg Fruits and many others.

This was largely as a result of the political work by SACP and MK underground activists.

Again, most former members of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) from the 1980s were carefully identified and thoroughly screened and exposed to 'quiet work' and learning from, disciplined and hardworking SACP and uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) underground activists.

It was not enough to fill-in membership forms and wallah...

Membership is freely granted.

One had to earn the confidence and respect of his or her recruiters before being sent out to undertake or get involved in more complex operations and volatile situations.

They would be given political tasks to undertake and be expected to conduct themselves in ways that would earn the movement community respect, public sympathy and social support, after which they would be expected to report to the structures of the movement.

An aura of physical presence and political respect would be felt as soon as they entered a room, house, hall or church where people would be gathered for political meetings.

That has since been replaced by an indiscriminate and justifiable sense of resentment towards political leaders across the political spectrum.

This was political training in its concrete and practical sense, rather than a hollow rhetoric which maliciously adopts principles of political education, ideological training, and employs revolutionary lingo in its pursuit for selfish interests.

The party just needs to avoid explaining its Marxism-Leninism Political Discipline (MLPD) to

disappointed and betrayed masses in abstract terms, but rather to apply it in concrete and practical terms through tangible community development projects it adopted between the 1920s and 1960s.

Its "red caravan project" seems to be a right step in the right direction, but it started a little later than it should have.

Civic movements, faith-based organisations and patriotic bourgeois formations that do not subscribe to rigid ideological traditions may find themselves sympathetic to the ideals the party may advance as its tangible (rather than abstract) message towards the electoral battle-field as it seeks to defeat the neo-liberal agenda.

All the party needs to do is to engage in thorough leadership screening to filter or flush prospective malice, political opportunism, tenderpreneurship and potential corruption out from its systems.

It also needs to do away with, and unlearn, an alien culture of labelling and ostracising some whilst glorifying others in its ranks in the name of "nationals vs communists dichotomy" - a discouraging legacy of its former general secretary and current chairperson, Blade Nzimande!



SACP members getting ready to lead election campaigns through door to door in 2026

ADVANCING THE NATIONAL Democratic Revolution:

The Urgent Case for the SACP to Contest State Power

by Dloze Matooane

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR), the lodestar of South Africa's liberation struggle, stands at a perilous crossroads. Envisioned as the vanguard of a transformative project to dismantle the edifice of racial capitalism and forge

a non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic society, the NDR is today imperilled by the very organisation entrusted with its stewardship: the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC's descent into factionalism, indiscipline, corruption, and ideological

duplicity - professing left-wing rhetoric while embracing right-wing praxis - has not only compromised the NDR but threatens to derail the historic mission of the South African working class. As the South African Communist Party (SACP), the vanguard of the

proletariat and steadfast ally in the Tripartite Alliance, confronts this betrayal, the revolutionary imperative is clear: the SACP must contest state power independently, starting with the 2026 local government elections, to rescue the NDR and deliver

on the promises of the Freedom Charter.

The NDR: A Revolutionary Framework Betrayed

The NDR, as articulated in the ANC's 1969 Morogoro Conference and refined through the SACP's theoretical contributions, is a Marxist-Leninist strategy rooted in the two-stage theory of revolution. The first stage, the national democratic struggle, seeks to dismantle colonial and apartheid structures, establishing a democratic state as a precondition for the second stage: the socialist revolution.

Joe Slovo, in his seminal 1988 work, *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*, underscored that the NDR is not merely a stepping stone but a class-driven project requiring the leadership of the working class to prevent bourgeois co-optation.

OR Tambo, in his 1985 address to the ANC's National Executive Committee, affirmed that the NDR's success hinges on the unity of revolutionary forces, particularly the ANC, SACP, and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), to advance the Freedom Charter's vision of shared wealth and power.

Yet, South Africa's contemporary challenges - persistent inequality,

unemployment exceeding 33%, land dispossession, and crumbling public services - reflect the NDR's stagnation. These are not mere policy failures but systemic betrayals of the revolutionary project. The ANC's governance has entrenched a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, a parasitic class dependent on state tenders and corruption, as noted in the ANC's own 2007 Strategy and Tactics document.

This class, far from advancing the NDR, entrenches capitalist exploitation under the guise of "transformation." The ANC's failure to nationalise key industries, redistribute land, or decommodify public goods like healthcare and education, as envisioned in the Freedom Charter, reveals a deliberate retreat from the NDR's socialist horizon.

The ANC's Counter-Revolutionary Conduct

The ANC's current behaviour is a frontal assault on the NDR's principles. Factionalism, as seen in the vicious contests for power since the 2007 Polokwane Conference, has fractured the organisation, prioritising patronage over revolutionary discipline.

The Moerane Commission (2018) exposed how factional battles in KwaZulu-Natal,

driven by control over resources like eThekweni's budget, have fuelled political assassinations, undermining the ANC's claim to moral leadership. Corruption, epitomised by the Zondo Commission's revelations of state capture under Jacob Zuma, has siphoned billions from the public purse, eroding service delivery and public trust.

The ANC's electoral decline - plummeting to 40.18% in the 2024 general election - signals mass disillusionment, yet the party remains impervious to self-correction.

Most egregious is the ANC's ideological duplicity: speaking left while acting right. While mouthing commitments to the NDR, the ANC has embraced neoliberal policies, from Gear in 1996 to the austerity budgets of the Ramaphosa era. These policies, which prioritise fiscal discipline over social investment, contradict the SACP's vision of a socialised economy where private profit is subordinated to public need.

The ANC's claim to revolutionary credentials is further undermined by its opportunistic alliances, notably the Government of National Unity (GNU) with the Democratic Alliance (DA), a reactionary force committed to preserving

white monopoly capital.

The ANC's failure to consult its Tripartite Alliance partners before entering this coalition, and its insistence on retaining the DA despite COSATU and SACP opposition, and the DA's reaction to the 2025 budget, reveals a contemptuous disregard for revolutionary unity. As Tambo warned in 1979, "Unity is the weapon of victory"; and the ANC's actions fracture this weapon, treating alliance partners as orphans rather than comrades.

The Democratic Alliance's (DA) brazen opportunism and shameless hijacking of collective victories expose its reactionary character. From the defeat of apartheid to the establishment of democratic institutions, and the progress of progressive policies since 1994, these triumphs were forged through the blood and sacrifice of the broader liberation movement, including the SACP's intellectual leadership and COSATU's mass mobilisation.

Yet, since entering the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2024, the DA's propaganda machine has audaciously claimed credit for progress achieved by prior administrations, peddling a revisionist narrative that

erases the contributions of revolutionary forces. This deceitful appropriation not only distorts history but undermines the collective spirit essential to the National Democratic Revolution's advance, revealing the DA as parasitic hijackers of progress who serve the interests of white monopoly capital.

The SACP: Vanguard of the NDR

The SACP, as the ideological and organisational vanguard of the working class, is uniquely positioned to rescue the NDR from the ANC's betrayal. Rooted in Marxist-Leninist principles, the SACP has consistently advocated for a radical restructuring of South Africa's political economy.

Its 2017 decision to contest by-elections in Metsimaholo municipality marked a historic break from the ANC's electoral monopoly, demonstrating the Party's readiness to challenge the status quo. The SACP's programme, articulated in documents like *The Road to South African Socialism*, prioritises de-commodification, nationalisation of strategic sectors, and land reform - policies that align with the Freedom Charter and address the material needs of the working class.

Contesting state power

independently is not a rejection of the Tripartite Alliance but a revolutionary necessity. The ANC's co-optation by capital and its alienation from the masses have rendered it an unreliable vehicle for the NDR. As Slovo argued, the working class must lead the democratic revolution to prevent its dilution by bourgeois forces.

By entering the electoral arena, starting with the 2026 local government elections, the SACP can mobilise workers, youth, and the marginalised to reclaim the NDR's transformative agenda. Local government, where service delivery failures are most acute, offers a strategic entry point to demonstrate the SACP's commitment to participatory democracy and accountability.

Challenges and the Path Forward

The challenges facing the NDR mirror those confronting South Africa: entrenched inequality, unemployment, and the persistence of colonial economic structures.

The ANC's compromises with capital have exacerbated these crises, deepening the chasm between the ruling elite and the working class. The GNU with the DA threatens to further entrench neoliberalism, undermining the

NDR's goal of economic emancipation.

The SACP must counter these threats by building a mass-based movement that galvanises workers, rural communities, and the urban poor around a socialist programme.

The SACP's electoral strategy must be accompanied by robust grassroots organising, as seen in the 1980s "people's power" movement. By fostering participatory structures, the SACP can empower communities to hold elected representatives accountable, countering the ANC's top-down vanguardism. The Party must also strengthen its alliance with COSATU, leveraging the trade union movement's organisational capacity to mobilise workers against austerity and corruption.

A Revolutionary Call to Action

The time for half-measures is over. The ANC's betrayal of the NDR demands a bold, revolutionary response. The SACP's decision to contest state power is a clarion call to every worker, revolutionary, and South African committed to justice and equality.

As Tambo declared in 1986, "The struggle is our life." By supporting the SACP in the 2026 local government elections,

we reclaim the struggle from the clutches of opportunists and liars. We honour the sacrifices of those who fell under the banner of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Freedom Charter, and the red flag of socialism.

Some of us from within the movement openly calls for all progressive forces to Let us rally behind the SACP, the true vanguard of the NDR, to build a South Africa where the wealth of the land is shared by those who work it, where the doors of learning and culture are open to all, and where the people govern.

The revolutionary road is arduous, but as Slovo reminded us, "Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement." With the SACP at the helm, the NDR will triumph, and the socialist future will dawn. Forward to 2026! Forward to socialism! Amandla.

Dloze Matooane is the former National Spokesperson and International Relations Secretary of the Liberated Metal Workers Union of South Africa (LIMUSA), former National Spokesperson of the Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA), and current Editorial Board Member and Assistant Editor of *The International Magazine*. 

DIGITAL CONNECT

Another Cosatu Initiation

WHY JOIN A LABOUR UNION

A labour union is an organized group of workers who come together to collectively bargain with employers in order to protect and advance their rights, interests, and working conditions. Unions represent workers across various industries and sectors and work to ensure fair treatment for employees. Here are some key reasons why joining a union can be important:

- Improved Wages and Benefits
- Job Security
- Workplace Safety
- Stronger Voice in the Workplace

Just to name a few...



Img:Application form by Cosatu Media

Labor unions can also engage in political and legislative activities to advocate for policies that benefit workers, such as fair wages, improved labor laws, and protections against discrimination or exploitation.

COSATU DOCUMENTS



COSATU NATIONAL CONGRESS RESOLUTIONS



UNIONS CONTACT DETAILS





What's the FUTURE of Matriculants,

especially thousands who will not be admitted
to institutions of higher education?

Rural-based provinces such as Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape continue to be at the bottom of Matric result's race due to lack of adequate education infrastructure, reduced public funding and insufficient teacher development programmes.

The National Development Plan's (NDP) vision for 2030 is that South Africans should have access to training and education of the highest quality, characterised by significantly improved learning outcomes.

Education then becomes an important instrument in equalising individuals' life chances, ensuring economic mobility and success and advancing our key goals of economic growth, employment creation, poverty eradication

and the reduction of inequality.

The NDP places education at the forefront as the tool to realise positive results over the triple threat of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

The National Development Plan (NDP) recognises that education is the cornerstone upon which a nation that provides opportunities for social mobility, equity, social justice and democracy will depend.

For example, by 2030, the NDP envisages an education system that has the follow attributes:

- High quality early childhood education, with access rates that exceed 90%;
- quality school education with literacy and numeracy at globally competitive standards;
- Higher Education and Further Education Training (FET), that provides people with real opportunities to reach their full potential;
- An expanding higher education sector that is able to contribute towards rising incomes, higher productivity and the move towards a more knowledge-intensive economy.

South Africans are still trapped structural quagmire in spearheading ongoing evolution of educational systems to better meet the needs of students and society, emphasizing inclusivity, technology integration, and personalized learning.

With Matric Class of 2025 having achieved 88% pass rate, difficult questions are still not answered around how to overhaul the education system in the post-apartheid era, to produce learners with requisite skills and

knowledge needed by employers in the labour market or produce learners who can open their own entrepreneurial ventures and create jobs for the jobless youth?

The NDP further elaborates that “....improved performance in the schooling system is at the heart of building the skills base for economic growth and development and ensuring that the society is able to achieve equity and development goals.

The President of South Africa has made a call to the nation to join hands in improving the education system and make partnerships a priority to achieve this.

The challenge is to strengthen and monitor the established ‘social contract’ between government, teacher unions, teacher training institutions, parent and School Governing Body (SGB) organizations, business and civil society organizations.”

However, majority of social partners have denounced budget cuts as a major stumbling block to attain some of the goals set up in the NDP.

South African matriculants continue to

set up higher standards of academic achievement, especially with 2025 unprecedented 88% National Senior Certificate pass rate.

KwaZulu leads with a 90.6% pass rate, followed by the Free State at 89.33%, Gauteng at 89.06%, North West at 88.49%, Western Cape at 88.2%, Northern Cape at 87.79%, Mpumalanga at 86.55%, Limpopo at 86.15% and the last is Eastern Cape at 84.17%

The 2023 matric pass rate in South Africa is 82.9%, marking a significant increase from 80.1% in 2022.

The Free State province had the highest pass rate at 89.03%, followed by KwaZulu-Natal at 86.36% and Gauteng at 85.38%.

In the 2024 matric exams, approximately 900,000 matriculants sat for the exams, marking the largest class in the history of the exams.

In the 2023 matric exams, a total of 897,775 matric students registered, with 691,690 of them writing the exams. In 2023, a record 337,158 matriculants qualified for Bachelor’s admission, but only around 202,000 first-year places were available across all public universities in South Africa.

In 2024, 337,158

matriculants achieved a bachelor pass, qualifying them for university admission. However, only 202,000 spaces are available at South Africa’s 26 public universities for first-year students, leading to a significant shortage of higher education capacity.

Where will the un-absorbed Matriculants go to?

Many citizens share a perspective declared by SASCO that, “ongoing socio-economic pressures, inequality and poverty are continuing to undermine the positive developments attained since 1994,” despite an economy that has never surpassed 3% growth.

A world that tolerates ever widening inequality, poverty and unemployment cannot hope to achieve lasting peace, prosperity or sustainability.

Inequality is one of the world’s most urgent concerns, generating many other problems in education, economies, societies and politics, including humanity’s ability to deal with planetary challenges. Given its seriousness, there is a strong need for a national response.

Admission Monareng, the South African

Students Congress (SASCO) unpacks “how education transformation must address deep structural challenges inherited from the Bantu Education system years in post-apartheid era.”

Monareng argues that ‘education success cannot be reduced to symbolic celebration or statistical announcements. It must be consolidated through real access, adequate funding and systematic support, so that no learner who has earned the right to study is left behind due to poverty, institutional bottlenecks or administrative exclusion. Anything less would undermine both the promise of democracy and the aspirations of a generation ready

to contribute to the country’s future.”

Meanwhile, The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr Buti Manamela ‘welcomed the Class of 2025 as they transition into the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector.

This transition marks the beginning of a new phase of learning, skills development and personal growth. South Africa’s universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, private higher education institutions and skills development institutions stand ready to receive students across a wide range of post-school

pathways.”

Minister Manamela alluded that “...The Class of 2025 has surpassed the previous overall record pass rate, marking an important milestone for the basic education system and reflecting sustained improvements in learner retention, throughput and equity, including improved performance in many no-fee schools. the 2025 NSC results reflect both progress and emerging pressures for the post-school system.

Approximately 927 000 learners wrote the NSC, with more than 760 000 passing and about 345 000 achieving bachelor’s passes.

At the same time, South Africa’s public universities

can accommodate approximately 230 000 first-time entering students in any given academic year. This gap between eligibility and available places underscores the importance of diversified post-school pathways and realistic planning across the entire PSET system.

More than 15 000 SETA bursaries have been made available to support students who do not qualify for NSFAS funding, particularly those in the “missing middle” and in scarce skills areas critical to economic growth.

Every route of learning matters, and each contributes to building a capable, inclusive and productive society.”

Monareng indicates that “SASCO extends its revolutionary congratulations to the Matric Class of 2025 on achieving an unprecedented 88% National Senior Certificate (NSC) pass rate, the highest in the history of the democratic South Africa.

This achievement is a

moment of pride not only for the learners themselves, but also for their families, educators, communities and the broader South African society.

The class of 2025 wrote their examinations under conditions not devoid of challenges—both historic and contemporary, shaped by the long shadow of inequality as well as ongoing socio-economic

pressures, yet measurable progress has been made in expanding access, learner support and system-wide performance.

That learners have nevertheless produced the strongest national performance on record, is a testament to their resilience, and collective determination to succeed against structural odds, but equally the

commitment of educators, administrators, parents and communities, to ensure that the youth exist within more prosperous and progressive conditions than themselves.

SASCO further notes the continued growth in Bachelor-level passes, which reflects expanding access to higher education opportunities for the working-class and

Commentary

poor students.

Every learner who has passed, regardless of the category of a pass, must be affirmed and supported in their next steps, whether through university, TVET colleges, skills programmes, or other post-school pathways.

SASCO reiterates that education in South Africa has always been a site of struggle. The legacy of Bantu Education, racialised resource allocation, and curriculum exclusion continue to shape outcomes in basic education today.

While apartheid education has been dismantled institutionally, its material and economic afterlives remain deeply embedded in the schooling system.

Quality education is not a luxury it's a human right and a powerful driver of a better future.

The performance of the Matric Class of 2025 reflects both progress and contradiction. On one hand, the record pass rate demonstrates the cumulative impact of democratic reforms under the African National Congress-led government — including within the context of the Government of National Unity, expanded access to schooling, improved learner support programmes

and commitment of educators.

The fact that all provinces and all districts achieved pass rates above 80% marks a significant national milestone and points to a more even spread of basic achievement across the country.

On the other hand, SASCO remains concerned that structural inequalities persist beneath the headline figures. Learners from historically disadvantaged schools continue to face overcrowded classrooms, weak dysfunctional literacy and numeracy, inadequate infrastructure and limited subject choice, particularly in Mathematics and Physical Sciences.

These realities mean that success is often achieved in spite of the system, not because of it.

The quintile schooling system, private sector encroachment into education and unequal funding models continue to reproduce class-based outcomes.

SASCO warns that the growing influence of neo-liberal economic logic in education policy threatens to hollow out the transformative gains of the National Democratic Revolution, particularly for the working-class and

rural learners.

SASCO therefore reaffirms its support for progressive legislative and policy interventions in basic education, including curriculum reform, expanded early childhood development, equitable resourcing and state-led interventions that strengthen public education.

Education must remain a public good, not a commodity.

For several years, the Democratic Alliance (DA) has anchored its critique of basic education on a familiar set of talking points that declining standards, 'cadre deployment', weak accountability, union influence and the alleged inefficiency of the public sector are the primary causes of poor educational outcomes.

These arguments were routinely advanced to delegitimise public schooling, undermine educators and promote market-oriented alternatives such as private sector participation and outsourcing in education.

Yet, with the basic education portfolio now under DA's political leadership, these same critiques have notably receded from public discourse.

The systematic challenges that were previously framed as evidence of state capture are now acknowledged as complex, long-term issues shaped by history, inequality and socio-economic conditions.

This abrupt shift reveals a fundamental contradiction. The DA's earlier critiques were not grounded in a principled or developmental analysis of education, but in opposition politics designed to erode confidence in the democratic state.

SASCO rejects the narrative that South Africa's education challenges can be reduced to simplistic explanations of governance failure or educator culpability.

The performance of the Matric Class of 2025 demonstrates that sustained public investment, policy continuity and collective effort yield results, even within a context of inherited inequality.

Attempts to retrospectively dilute or abandon earlier DA talking points now that responsibility rests with them, confirms their ideological inconsistency.

SASCO further warns against rebranding of neo-liberal education reforms under the guise of 'efficiency', 'choice', or

Commentary

‘accountability’.

The push for privatisation, commodification and the weakening of the state’s developmental role in education remains fundamentally incompatible with the goals of equity, redress and mass access.

Education must serve social transformation, not market logic.

As thousands of learners transition from the schooling system into the post-school education and training, SASCO welcomes the Matric Class of 2025 into higher education, and organised student life.

Universities and TVET Colleges must be ready institutionally and financially to absorb this growing cohort of successful learners.

SASCO is acutely aware that academic success alone does not guarantee access.

Financial exclusion,

accommodation shortages, registration delays and historic debt remain significant barriers for many students, particularly those from poor and working-class backgrounds.

For this reason, SASCO recommits itself to the Right2Learn Campaign, which exists to ensure that no deserving student is excluded from higher education due to financial or administrative barriers.

Across the institutions of higher education, SASCO cadres are mobilised to assist prospective and returning students with registration, funding challenges and campus integration.

The organisation remains firm in its position that higher education must be assessable, adequately funded and socially responsive.

Flowing from the resolutions at its 23rd National Congress in 2024, SASCO continues to advance a programme

of systemic reform in higher education, aimed at addressing student debt, funding shortfalls, institutional capacity and the overall transformation of the post-school education system.

The success of the Matric Class of 2025 is first and foremost a triumph of individual learners — their resilience, discipline and determination under often difficult conditions.

Yet it is also a collective national development, shaped by the sacrifices of families, the unwavering labour of educators and the enduring belief of communities that education remains the most powerful instrument for social transformation.

SASCO once again congratulates the Class of 2025 and reaffirms that this achievement must not become an endpoint, but a gateway.

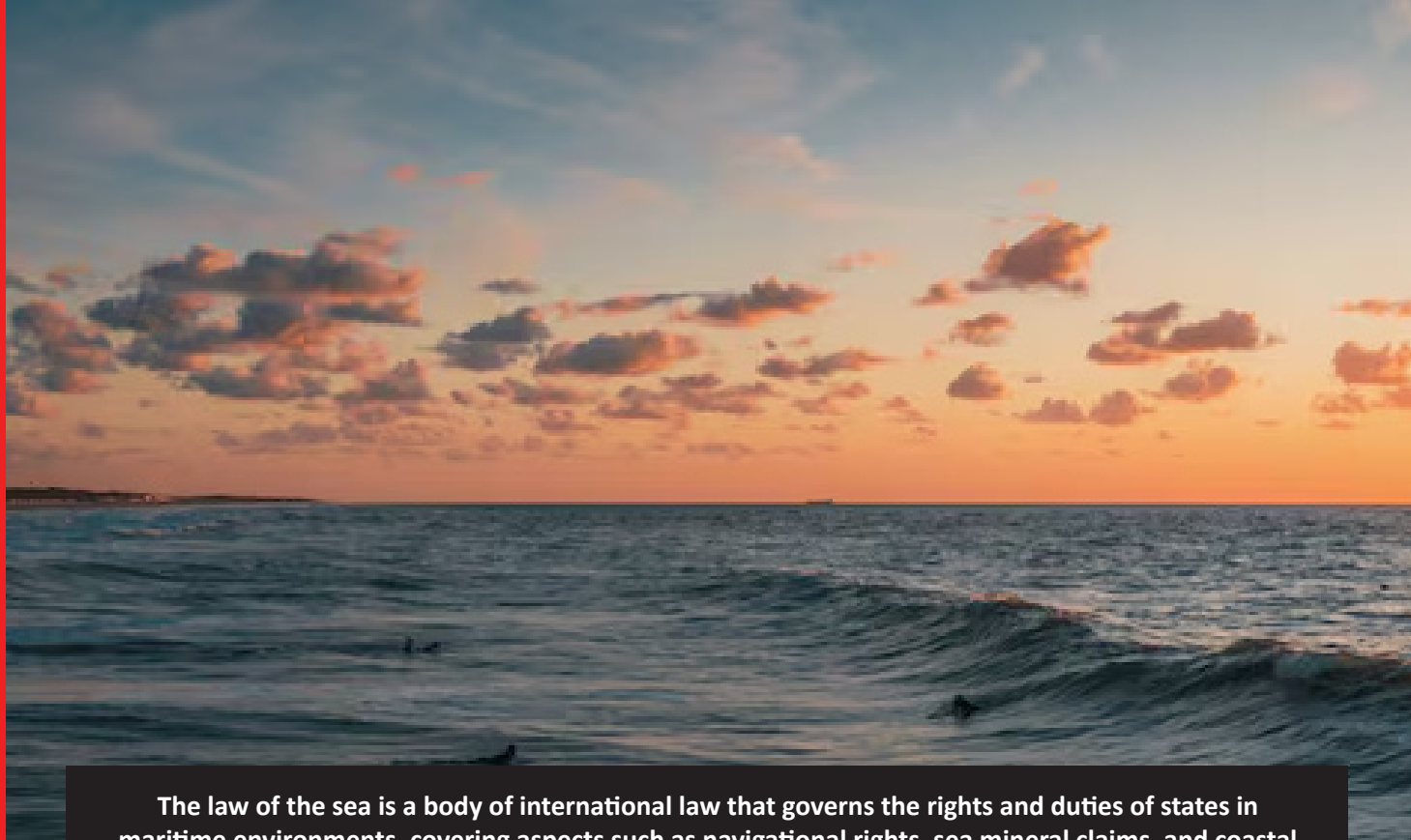
We therefore call on the state, higher education institutions and society at large to ensure

that every deserving learner is afforded placement, whether in CET Colleges, TVET or Universities.

Educational success cannot be reduced to symbolic celebration or statistical announcements.

It must be consolidated through real success, adequate funding and systematic support, so that no learner who has earned the right to study is left behind due to poverty, institutional bottlenecks or administrative exclusion.

Anything less would undermine both the promise of democracy and the aspirations of a generation ready to contribute to the country’s future.”



The law of the sea is a body of international law that governs the rights and duties of states in maritime environments, covering aspects such as navigational rights, sea mineral claims, and coastal waters jurisdiction under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, established in 1982.

THE LAW OF THE SEA, Imperialism and the Unfinished National Democratic Revolution

by Zakhele Cele

An Intervention on Ocean Governance, Ownership, and Socialist Strategy

Preface

This document proceeds from the understanding, central to Marxism–Leninism, that law is

never neutral, abstract, or universally human in character, but is always a historical expression of material relations of production and power.

The Law of the Sea, often presented as a technical, consensual, and progressive body of

international law, must therefore be approached not as a benign regulatory framework but as a juridical crystallisation of a specific world order expressed as the rise, consolidation, and reproduction of European capitalism and imperialism on a global scale. Its

origins, evolution, and contemporary operation cannot be separated from the history of colonial conquest, merchant capital, naval militarism, and the unequal incorporation of the Global South into the capitalist world system.

Historically, what is

today called the Law of the Sea emerged not from a universal human need to manage shared resources, but from inter-European struggles over trade routes, naval supremacy, and overseas expansion. From the sixteenth century onward, as European merchant capital began to burst the confines of feudal production, the sea became the primary terrain through which surplus could be accumulated beyond Europe.

The doctrines of *mare liberum* and *mare clausum*, often taught as early legal-philosophical debates, were in reality juridical weapons wielded by competing imperial powers.

The doctrine of *mare liberum* and *mare clausum* actually means the free sea and the closed sea respectively.

Mare liberum is the doctrine that the seas are open to all states for navigation and trade, and cannot be owned by any one power. *Mare clausum* is the doctrine that a state may claim exclusive control over certain seas, sea routes, or maritime zones.

These are often presented as neutral, philosophical disagreements about legal principles. In reality, they were strategic doctrines developed to justify imperial expansion, depending on who was winning and who was losing.

These doctrines emerged in 16th–17th century Europe, at the height

of colonial expansion, the slave trade, armed maritime capitalism and violent competition for global trade routes

This was the period of the Portuguese and Spanish empires claiming exclusive control over sea routes to Asia and the Americas. This was a period of the rise of the Dutch and British merchant bourgeoisie, who wanted to break those monopolies.

So, the question was never about ‘what is the just nature of the sea?’ The real question was “Which empire gets to plunder which parts of the world?”

In essence *Mare clausum* is the law for monopoly and enclosure advanced by early colonial powers like Portugal and Spain, and later by Britain when it suited them.

It was used to claim exclusive sea routes to colonies, justify naval blockades, criminalise other European powers’ access to “their” colonial trade and protect monopolies over spices, slaves, gold, and land.

In practice, *mare clausum* meant “We arrived first, therefore we own the sea”. It meant Naval violence was converted into legal entitlement and it was Law following conquest, not the other way around

From a Marxist perspective, this is primitive accumulation at sea which is violent seizure, later rationalised through law.

Mare liberum means law for breaking rivals’

monopolies, articulated most famously by Hugo Grotius in 1609, writing on behalf of the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

It is crucial to note that Grotius did not write as a neutral philosopher but he wrote as a legal advocate for a corporate colonial enterprise, to justify Dutch intrusion into Portuguese-controlled trade routes and to legalise VOC piracy and seizure of ships.

Mare liberum argued that Seas cannot be owned, Navigation must be free and Trade must be open.

But in reality, it meant “Your monopoly is illegal, ours is freedom”. “Our ships may enter your colonial waters” and “Our cannons enforce free trade.”

So, *mare liberum* was not anti-imperialist but it was pro-competition between imperialists, favouring the rising bourgeois powers.

Lenin would later describe this dynamic precisely as competition between monopoly capitals leading not to freedom, but to new forms of domination.

These were doctrines “juridical weapons” deployed as legal arguments designed to legitimize violence. They translated naval power into legal rights and masked class and imperial interests in universal language

Law did not restrain empire. But it armed the empire. In this configuration, whoever had the strongest navy, the most advanced ships, and the most capital could impose

their preferred doctrine as “international law.” This is why Marxists insist that law reflects relations of production and power, not abstract justice.

South Africa was not colonised because Europe “discovered” it.

It was colonised because the Cape was a strategic maritime chokepoint in which control of the sea route meant control of global trade and the VOC used *mare liberum* logic to justify docking, fortifying, and settling.

Jan van Riebeeck’s arrival was a maritime act before it was a land act, a corporate-military occupation justified by “free navigation” and followed by land seizure once the naval foothold was secured. Thus, maritime law enabled land dispossession.

How this logic survives today in the Law of the Sea

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) appears neutral, but it inherits this tradition in that “Freedom of navigation” protects imperial navies, EEZs exist, but without technological sovereignty they are hollow. Strong states patrol African waters freely whilst weak states are told to comply with “international norms.”

So, when US, French, or British naval forces operate near African coasts, they are acting in continuity with *mare liberum*, enforcing imperial mobility while African people face hunger beside resource-rich seas.

Mare liberum and *mare*

clausum therefore were never about freedom or sovereignty but they were legal forms of class struggle at the international level, and they served merchant capital, then monopoly capital, now imperialism

They show us the core truth that imperialism does not abolish law, but it reshapes law to serve domination.

This is why the oceans cannot be “reformed” through legal tweaks alone, but they must be politically reclaimed through struggle, or the law will continue to serve those who already command ships, capital, and guns.

These doctrines reflected the needs of dominant trading nations to either open or close sea routes in accordance with their material interests. Hugo Grotius’s defence of the “free sea”, for example, cannot be understood outside the context of Dutch commercial expansion and the interests of the Dutch East India Company, one of the earliest and most violent embodiments of monopoly capital fused with state power.

As Lenin demonstrated in his analysis of imperialism, capitalism in its monopoly stage requires not only the export of capital, but the political, military, and legal mechanisms to secure conditions for its reproduction.

The Law of the Sea became one such mechanism. It developed alongside the rise of colonial empires, codifying the right of imperial powers to move

goods, troops, and capital across vast maritime spaces while denying colonised peoples any meaningful sovereignty over the same oceans that were used to invade, enslave, and extract from them. The very categories that structure the Law of the Sea today, including territorial waters, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones, and the high seas, emerged through negotiations dominated by imperial states whose economic and naval power allowed them to universalise their particular interests as global norms.

These Law of the Sea categories were not neutral, but they were political settlements among powerful states which emerged through inter-imperialist compromise, reflecting the balance of naval, commercial, and extractive power at specific historical moments.

European maritime empires needed legal rules that would protect their merchant fleets and naval mobility, secure access to distant resources and prevent weaker coastal societies from asserting meaningful control over surrounding seas. Thus, imperial powers universalised their own material interests as “international law.”

Africa, colonised and militarily weak, did not co-author these rules. It was incorporated into them.

Territorial Waters: Minimal Sovereignty by Design

Historically, imperial powers insisted on narrow territorial seas (first

3 nautical miles, later expanded to 12) precisely to limit the sovereignty of colonised coastal societies.

This undermined Africa in that African polities were denied meaningful control over nearby waters even as European fishing fleets and trading vessels operated freely. Coastal communities lost authority overfishing, trade, and navigation long before formal colonisation. Colonial states inherited these narrow zones, locking post-colonial Africa into constrained maritime sovereignty.

Long before formal colonial rule was imposed on African territory, African coastal societies exercised effective authority over fishing grounds, near-shore navigation, trade routes, and maritime access. Along the East African coast, Swahili city-states such as Kilwa, Mombasa, and Sofala regulated port access, levied dues on foreign traders, and controlled fishing and dhow traffic through customary law enforced by local rulers and merchant guilds. Fishing rights were embedded in lineage systems and communal norms, while navigation was governed by locally enforced rules regarding anchorage, seasonal access, and tribute.

Similar systems existed along the West African coast, where polities such as the Kingdom of Benin and coastal Akan societies regulated maritime trade, restricted foreign access, and treated near-shore waters as extensions of territorial authority rather than open commons.

This authority began to erode not with formal annexation, but with the arrival of European maritime powers asserting doctrines of free navigation and open seas backed by naval force. From the fifteenth century onward, Portuguese, Dutch, and later British fleets-imposed access through coercion, bypassing African authority at sea even when African rulers retained control on land. European ships anchored without consent, fished without tribute, and traded directly with selected intermediaries, undermining indigenous systems of regulation. These practices were not accidental violations but deliberate strategies to weaken African maritime sovereignty while avoiding the costs of territorial conquest.

By the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company had institutionalised this process at the Cape. Indigenous Khoi coastal communities had long exercised control overfishing, shoreline access, and maritime trade with passing vessels. VOC records show repeated conflicts overfishing and anchorage rights, with the Company asserting that the sea could not be owned and therefore lay outside indigenous authority. This claim was enforced through violence, exclusion, and legal proclamation, effectively severing Khoi communities from maritime control decades before full land dispossession was complete.

The loss of fishing rights was not a by-product of

colonisation; it was one of its earliest mechanisms.

British imperial maritime doctrine further entrenched this process. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain aggressively promoted narrow territorial seas precisely to prevent coastal societies from asserting control over maritime space. British courts and Admiralty law treated African coastal waters as open to British navigation and fishing, regardless of local custom.

One clear example is the systematic dismissal of African claims to maritime tolls and fishing rights as illegitimate restraints on trade. Where African rulers attempted to enforce coastal authority, naval bombardment or treaty coercion followed, forcing acceptance of “free navigation” clauses that stripped maritime power while leaving rulers nominally in place.

This erosion of authority was later formalised through colonial law.

When colonial administrations were established, they inherited a maritime order in which African coastal control had already been nullified. Colonial legal systems codified narrow territorial seas and excluded customary marine tenure from recognition. Fishing, navigation, and trade were

reclassified as matters of imperial regulation rather than community governance. African fishers were transformed from rights-holders into regulated subjects, required to obtain permits or face criminal sanction for activities that had previously been governed by custom.

In southern Africa, this

subsistence activity and pushed off productive grounds. Navigation and small-scale trade by sea were curtailed through port regulations designed to serve imperial shipping rather than local exchange. These measures were justified as matters of safety and order, but their material effect was to transfer maritime access from communities to capital.

Crucially, when African states gained formal independence in the twentieth century, they inherited these colonial maritime frameworks wholesale. The narrow territorial seas, licensing systems, and centralised port controls were not dismantled but absorbed into post-colonial legal orders.

The newly independent state became the formal sovereign over maritime space, but the substance of that sovereignty

remained limited by international norms shaped by imperial powers. Customary marine tenure systems, having been excluded for centuries, were rarely restored.

This continuity is visible in post-colonial fisheries law. In South Africa, customary

fishing rights were never recognised in common law. Under apartheid, African coastal communities were criminalised for fishing outside tightly regulated zones. After 1994, despite constitutional recognition of customary law in principle, fisheries legislation continued to treat the ocean as state property allocated through quotas and permits.

The landmark South African Constitutional Court case *Gonggose v Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries* confirmed that customary fishing rights had survived colonial and apartheid repression, but the very need for litigation demonstrates how deeply those rights had been erased from formal legal consciousness.

The case revealed that communities had continued fishing practices for generations despite being rendered “illegal” by colonial and apartheid law, illustrating how authority had been lost juridically long before it was extinguished socially.

Across Africa, similar struggles have emerged. In Senegal, Ghana, and Namibia, coastal communities have challenged industrial fishing licenses granted to foreign fleets in waters traditionally used by artisanal fishers.

These conflicts are not new disputes over resources but the resurfacing of suppressed claims to authority that predate colonial rule. In Namibia, post-independence reforms partially reversed this legacy

**Colonial
legal systems
codified narrow
territorial seas
and excluded
customary
marine tenure
from
recognition**

by asserting strong state control and prioritising national development, precisely because colonial maritime regimes had excluded local authority for decades.

What unites these cases is the historical sequence. African coastal societies did not lose maritime authority because they lacked governance systems. They lost it because imperial maritime powers deliberately separated sea from land sovereignty, declaring the ocean a space of freedom for capital and coercion for the colonised. Colonial states then codified this separation, and post-colonial states inherited it as international law.

The result is constrained maritime sovereignty:

African states are legally sovereign but structurally limited; coastal communities are culturally maritime but juridically marginal; and oceans that sustained societies for centuries are governed by rules developed to exclude them. This is not an accident of history but a durable outcome of how maritime law was formed, enforced, and transmitted across generations.

In this sense, the loss of authority overfishing, trade, and navigation long before formal colonisation is not a forgotten prelude to colonialism. It is one of colonialism's foundational acts, whose legal architecture continues to shape the limits of African sovereignty today.

In South Africa colonial and apartheid regimes-controlled ports and

shipping, not for national development, but to service imperial trade routes. Post-1994 South Africa inherited a legal framework where sovereignty over waters is shallow, while dependence on foreign shipping remains deep.

The result is that formal sovereignty exists, but practical control over trade and marine wealth does not.

Contiguous Zones: Policing for Capital, Not Protection for People

The contiguous zone was developed to allow states to enforce customs, fiscal, and security laws, not to protect livelihoods or ecosystems.

Imperialist powers enabled colonial states to police smuggling and protect imperial revenue but did not grant powers to regulate foreign fishing or extraction.

The impact of this was that African states can police customs violations but cannot prevent foreign ecological harm. Enforcement capacity is costly and militarised, benefiting navies and security contractors rather than communities.

In South Africa, this reinforces criminalisation of small-scale fishers, Militarised coastal enforcement and protection of trade flows rather than people.

The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): A Partial Concession that Preserves Dependency

The EEZ, often presented as a Global South victory, was a compromise, not a decisive departure

and break from colonial power configuration.

Yes, African states gained rights over resources up to 200 nautical miles. But control is conditional and capital-dependent.

Structural limitations of the EEZ are that rights exist only if the state has technical, financial, and scientific capacity to exploit and monitor resources. Imperial states and corporations possess that capacity; African states largely do not. "Use it or lose it" logic pushes African states into joint ventures with multinational capital.

In South Africa, offshore oil, gas, and mining depend on foreign technology. Fisheries management relies on export-oriented, capital-intensive firms and EEZ wealth flows outward through shipping, insurance, and finance.

The result is that the EEZ becomes a site of neo-colonial extraction, not autonomous development.

The High Seas: Legalised Imperial Freedom

The most revealing category is the high seas, declared the "common heritage of mankind" while remaining effectively governed by the powerful.

How imperialism operates here is that freedom of navigation benefits states with fleets and not land-based or capital-poor societies. Flag-of-convenience regimes allow corporations to evade labour, tax, and environmental regulation. Distant-water fishing fleets (European, Chinese, Japanese) plunder resources beyond African

EEZs that African states cannot reach.

The consequences are the African continent fish stocks migrate out of EEZs into the high seas and are harvested by foreign fleets. African coastal communities bear ecological collapse without legal remedy and enforcement is impossible without naval power.

South Africa, despite being regionally powerful, does not control the high seas economy. It is a rule-taker in a space structurally designed for imperial mobility.

Knowledge and Science as Hidden Instruments of Control

Law of the Sea categories are operationalised through science, but science itself is unevenly owned.

Key mechanisms include stock assessments, hydrographic mapping, and seabed surveys are expensive and technical. Data is often produced by foreign institutions or corporations. Legal rights depend on scientific proof that African states struggle to generate independently.

This produces epistemic dependency in which Africa owns the zone on paper and Imperial capital owns the knowledge that makes ownership real

Dispute Resolution: Law as a Weapon of the Powerful **Maritime disputes are settled through international tribunals, Arbitration panels and Legal processes requiring elite expertise**

Imperial states possess specialised maritime lawyers, can afford long litigation and shape

jurisprudence through precedent. African states face resource constraints, often avoid litigation and accept settlements that preserve capital flows.

Thus, the law reproduces asymmetrical power, even when formally equal.

Continuity of Colonialism to neocolonialism: The continuity from colonialism to neo-colonialism is evident in the persistence of structural mechanisms that maintain global dominance, albeit in transformed forms. During the colonial era, imperial powers relied on gunboat diplomacy to enforce their will, whereas today this coercion is expressed through legal universalism, with international law and trade agreements often favoring powerful states. Similarly, chartered companies such as the British East India Company once spearheaded colonial expansion, a role now assumed by multinational corporations that control global supply chains and resources. Where colonial powers deployed naval coercion to secure trade routes, contemporary dominance is maintained through shipping monopolies that dictate maritime commerce.

The establishment of colonial ports in strategic locations has evolved into neo-colonial logistics hubs, such as Singapore or Dubai, which serve as critical nodes in global trade networks. Finally, the direct rule imposed by colonial administrations has been replaced by the subtler mechanism of market discipline, where

financial institutions and global markets regulate the economic sovereignty of weaker states. These parallels illustrate how the structures of control have shifted in form but remain continuous in function, perpetuating unequal power relations across eras.

The categories of the Law of the Sea translate imperial power into legal permanence.

9. South Africa's Specific Position: Formal Sovereignty, Structural Subordination

South Africa owns its ports but not shipping lines. Controls its EEZ but not extraction technology. Applies maritime law but does not define it. Enforces regulations against the poor while accommodating capital. This is the essence of neo-colonial maritime sovereignty.

It must be concluded that the Law of the Sea did not merely fail Africa but it was designed within a global balance of power that marginalised Africa from the outset.

Its categories limit sovereignty, enable extraction, protect imperial mobility. Reproduce dependency and criminalise survival.

For the NDR, this means the struggle is not to "apply" the Law of the Sea better, but to politicise, reinterpret, and ultimately transform it, aligning maritime law with democratic ownership, social need, and genuine sovereignty.

Without that decisive break with colonial structures and its attendant skewed power

configuration, Africa remains surrounded by oceans it does not truly control — legally independent, materially subordinate.

While European and later North American states inserted themselves into the maritime order as authors, enforcers, and primary beneficiaries of these legal regimes, the Global South entered this system through conquest and subordination. Colonial territories did not participate as equal subjects of law but as objects of administration and extraction. Their coastlines, ports, and adjacent waters were reorganised to serve imperial trade networks, with local economies reshaped around export-oriented production and import dependency.

Even after formal decolonisation, the inherited Law of the Sea framework remained largely intact, limiting the capacity of newly independent states to assert full control over maritime space, resources, and security. In this sense, the law functioned as what Samir Amin would later describe as a mechanism of unequal exchange extended from land to sea.

The contemporary architecture of the Law of the Sea, particularly as consolidated under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, must be understood as a modernised form of this historical process. While framed in the language of sovereignty, development, and cooperation, its substantive effect has been to stabilise an international

maritime order favourable to advanced capitalist states and transnational capital.

Freedom of navigation, protection of global shipping lanes, and the insulation of maritime commerce from national political struggles are treated as sacrosanct principles, while the ability of coastal states in the Global South to transform ownership patterns, regulate capital, or prioritise social needs is constrained by legal, financial, and military pressure. The law thus mediates between formal equality of states and material inequality of power, resolving this contradiction consistently in favour of imperialism.

Maritime studies, as an academic and policy-oriented field, have developed in close symbiosis with this legal order. Far from being a neutral or purely technical discipline, it has historically served as an ideological apparatus of imperial maritime power. Its dominant framework prioritises efficiency, security of trade, logistics optimisation, and risk management, while systematically excluding questions of class, colonial history, dispossession, and popular sovereignty. By treating the ocean as a space of flow rather than a site of struggle, maritime studies reproduce what Antonio Gramsci identified as hegemony which is the ability of a ruling class to present its worldview as common sense.

Within this framework, the domination of foreign and monopoly capital over ports, shipping, fisheries,

and offshore resources appears natural, inevitable, and even desirable.

Marxist-Leninist thinkers and revolutionaries have consistently challenged this mystification. Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation already identified the central role of maritime plunder, slavery, and colonial trade in the birth of capitalism. Lenin exposed how naval power and control of sea routes were integral to imperialist rivalry and war.

Later anti-colonial theorists and leaders, including Amílcar Cabral and Kwame Nkrumah, recognised that political independence without control over economic and strategic assets, including maritime space, amounted to a hollow victory. Contemporary Marxist political economy has extended this insight to show how global value chains, logistics networks, and ocean-based industries function as key sites of surplus extraction under neoliberal capitalism.

This document is written in that tradition. It approaches the Law of the Sea and maritime studies not as specialised technical domains reserved for experts, but as contested terrains of class and national struggle. It insists that the oceans are not external to the National Democratic Revolution, but central to its completion. By situating South Africa and the African continent within the historical political economy of maritime law and imperial power, this analysis seeks to arm cadres, activists, and policy-makers with the theoretical clarity

necessary to confront one of the most enduring and least challenged pillars of colonial and imperial domination. Without such clarity, the NDR risks reproducing on the ocean what it claims to overcome on land which is formal sovereignty without real power, and freedom in name alongside dispossession in fact.

Methodological Note for Cadres

This document must be read and used in the Leninist sense of theory as a guide to action, not as an academic commentary or a closed policy text. Cadres are urged to approach it concretely, historically, and politically, always asking the question Lenin insisted upon, which is, what is to be done under given material conditions? The analysis of the Law of the Sea and the ocean economy presented here is not intended to enrich abstract understanding, but to sharpen revolutionary practice by revealing a terrain of struggle that has been systematically excluded from the National Democratic Revolution.

Cadres should read this document with constant reference to lived realities in their own localities, especially in coastal provinces and communities. The purpose is to connect the historical and international political economy of maritime law to concrete struggles over unemployment, hunger, informalisation, dispossession of small-scale fishers, port privatisation, logistics monopolies, and the militarisation of maritime

space. The document should therefore be used as a tool for political education in branches, districts and sectors, to rupture the technocratic common sense that treats the ocean economy as neutral, inevitable, or beyond popular control.

In applying this analysis, cadres must guard against two deviations that Lenin consistently warned against. The first is economism which is reducing the ocean question to narrow sectoral demands without grasping its role in the totality of imperialist domination.

The second is abstract radicalism which is denouncing imperialism in general terms without identifying concrete leverage points for struggle against monopoly ownership, colonial law, and comprador policy frameworks. The correct approach lies in uniting national and class struggle, recognising that reclaiming the oceans is simultaneously a fight for popular sovereignty and for the socialisation of strategic means of accumulation.

Finally, cadres should use this document to test and challenge existing policies, programmes and alliances within the state and the broader liberation movement. Any strategy that leaves untouched the ownership, control and legal foundations of the ocean economy must be recognised as objectively reproducing neo-colonial relations, regardless of its stated intentions.

In this way, the document is not an end in itself,

but an instrument for sharpening ideological struggle, strengthening working-class leadership, and advancing the unfinished tasks of the National Democratic Revolution.

Executive Summary

The National Democratic Revolution cannot be completed on land while remaining defeated at sea. South Africa's oceans, ports, shipping lanes, fisheries, and offshore resources constitute one of the most decisive but least contested terrains of imperial domination in the contemporary period. The Law of the Sea, far from being a neutral or technical framework, represents the juridical consolidation of centuries of maritime conquest, monopoly capital, and imperial power.

To ignore this terrain is to accept a truncated sovereignty, one in which political independence coexists with structural economic subordination. The South African Communist Party must therefore decisively locate the oceans economy and the Law of the Sea at the centre of the NDR, not as a sectoral issue, but as a strategic front in the struggle against neo-colonialism and for socialism.

From a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, law reflects material relations of power. The Law of the Sea emerged historically from inter-imperialist rivalry over trade routes, naval supremacy, and colonial expansion, not from universal human consensus. Doctrines such as *mare liberum* and *mare clausum*, later refined into modern

categories such as territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, and the high seas, were juridical weapons used to translate naval power into legal entitlement.

Those who commanded fleets and capital universalised their interests as “international law,” while colonised peoples were excluded as objects rather than authors of the legal order. Africa, including South Africa, entered this system through conquest and coercion, not consent.

This history has direct contemporary consequences. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea formalised sovereignty for post-colonial states while preserving imperial mobility and monopoly accumulation.

expertise; and the high seas remain a space of effectively unregulated extraction by powerful states and corporations. The result is a structural contradiction: African states possess oceans on paper but lack effective control over the wealth generated within and beyond them. This is not a failure of implementation but a design feature of an imperial legal order.

South Africa exemplifies this contradiction with particular clarity. The country controls some of the most strategic ports and sea routes in the Global South, yet its maritime economy is dominated by foreign shipping monopolies, multinational extractive corporations, and historically entrenched domestic

concentrated in a handful of capital-intensive firms, while small-scale fishers are criminalised or marginalised despite centuries-old customary practices.

Offshore resources are explored and extracted through joint ventures that export value outward through finance, insurance, shipping, and technology contracts. Formal sovereignty exists, but material control does not.

This neo-colonial maritime order is reproduced not only through law and capital, but through knowledge. Maritime studies, ocean economics, and the Law of the Sea are dominated by Eurocentric frameworks that prioritise efficiency, competitiveness, and risk management while

foreign science, data, and legal expertise to make their rights legible.

In this way, epistemic dependency reinforces economic dependency. Africa owns the zone, but imperial capital owns the knowledge that makes ownership real.

The struggles of coastal communities expose this contradiction sharply. Long before formal colonisation, African coastal societies regulated fishing, trade, and navigation through customary systems rooted in collective authority. These systems were systematically undermined by European maritime powers asserting doctrines of free navigation enforced by naval violence.

Colonial states then codified narrow territorial seas and excluded customary marine tenure, transforming fishers into regulated subjects rather than rights-holders.

Post-colonial states inherited this framework intact. The Constitutional Court case of *Gongqose* confirmed that customary fishing rights survived colonial and apartheid repression, but the very need for litigation reveals how deeply these rights were erased from formal legal consciousness.

Similar struggles across Africa, from Senegal to Namibia, demonstrate that today’s conflicts are the resurfacing of suppressed claims to authority that predate colonial rule.

For the National Democratic Revolution, these realities carry decisive implications. The task is not merely to improve



Cape Town Terminals is one of the cornerstones of South Africa's exports and imports through to other continents.

Freedom of navigation protects imperial navies and shipping cartels; exclusive economic zones offer conditional rights that depend on access to foreign technology, capital, and

monopoly capital. Durban and Richards Bay function as critical nodes in global logistics, but freight rates, shipping schedules, and trade flows are determined in Copenhagen, Geneva, and Marseille. Fisheries remain

erasing colonial history, class struggle, and popular sovereignty. Indigenous and customary maritime knowledge is treated as informal or anecdotal, while African states are rendered dependent on

compliance with the Law of the Sea, but to politicise, reinterpret, and transform it. The oceans economy must be reclaimed as a site of democratic ownership, social need, and working-class power.

This requires confronting shipping monopolies, challenging export-oriented fisheries regimes, asserting state and cooperative control over port infrastructure, and breaking epistemic dependency through the development of indigenous maritime science, law, and training rooted in popular experience rather than imperial benchmarks.

The SACP has a distinct and irreplaceable role in this

struggle. As the vanguard of Marxist–Leninist theory and working-class politics, the Party must expose the oceans economy as a continuation of colonial accumulation in neoliberal form. It must contest the ideological mystification of the “blue economy,” revealing it as the modern expression of VOC logic: accumulation without liberation.

It must insist that maritime sovereignty is inseparable from land reform, industrialisation, food sovereignty, and worker control. Without transforming ownership and power relations at sea, the NDR will reproduce formal freedom alongside

material dispossession.

Strategically, this means placing the oceans question firmly within the programme of the NDR. It demands state-led and cooperative interventions to break dependence on foreign shipping, prioritise community-based fisheries, and integrate port development into national industrialisation rather than global value chains. It requires defending and expanding customary and small-scale fishing rights as a matter of class justice and national liberation.

It calls for building continental and South–South solidarity to challenge imperial control of maritime

law, science, and dispute resolution. Above all, it requires recognising that the struggle for socialism in South Africa will be fought not only in factories and farms, but in ports, on coastlines, and across oceanic space.

The unfinished tasks of the National Democratic Revolution demand nothing less. As long as Africa remains surrounded by oceans it does not truly control, political independence will remain hollow. To reclaim the oceans is to strike at one of the deepest foundations of imperialism. In this sense, the oceans question is not peripheral to the struggle for socialism; it is one of its decisive fronts.

This document is dedicated to the South African Black and African communities, to the ordinary people whose courage and persistence have carved new paths in the law of the sea and the oceans economy. Their struggles, both in courts and in daily life, have become living testimony that transformation is not only possible but necessary.

They remind us that the colonial paradigm and jurisprudence upon which the oceans economy has been built must be dismantled, and that justice rooted in the lived realities of communities must take its place.

The landmark case of

Gongqose & Others v Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in 2018 stands as a beacon of this transformation.

When subsistence fishers from the Hobeni and Cwebe communities were criminalized for exercising their ancestral right to fish in the Dwesa-Cwebe Marine Protected Area, the Supreme Court of Appeal recognized that customary fishing rights are protected under the Constitution.

This judgment affirmed that communities are not trespassers in their own waters but rightful custodians, and it set a precedent for integrating customary law into the

broader framework of the law of the sea. It demonstrated that conservation cannot be divorced from community livelihoods, and that marine governance must be shaped by the voices of those who live closest to the ocean.

Equally significant is the ongoing struggle of the Port St Johns coastal communities against seismic surveys and offshore drilling by multinational oil companies. Here, ordinary fishers and residents have risen to defend their ecosystems, their cultural heritage, and their food security.

Their resistance raises profound questions about environmental justice, about the right to free, prior, and informed consent, and

about the future of ocean governance in South Africa. The case is not only about protecting local waters but about challenging extractive industries that threaten to turn the oceans economy into another site of dispossession.

Beyond the courts, countless ordinary struggles continue to shape the ocean economy. Small-scale fishers across the country face exclusion from quotas, suffocating bureaucracy, and competition with industrial fleets, leaving many in poverty despite living along resource-rich coastlines.

Their fight for recognition and reform of the Marine Living Resources Act is a demand for equity and

dignity. Coastal communities from KwaZulu-Natal to the Eastern Cape confront the rising seas and storm surges brought by climate change, their homes and fishing infrastructure at risk, their resilience calling for adaptation policies that put people before profit.

In Durban and Cape Town, communities resist the pollution and displacement caused by port expansion, insisting that maritime trade must be bound by environmental safeguards and social justice.

Together, these landmark cases and everyday struggles form a tapestry of resistance and renewal. They affirm that customary law and constitutional rights must be the foundation of marine governance. They show that the oceans economy cannot be reduced to an extractive agenda but must be reimagined as a space where communities negotiate their place with dignity and power. They remind us that South African maritime law, and indeed the global law of the sea, must be reshaped by the voices of those who have long been silenced. In their courage lies the inspiration to continue the work of transformation, to build an oceans economy that is just, equitable, and rooted in the lived realities of the people.

Maritime Law, Colonial Conquest, and the Long Shadow of Imperialism

The colonisation of South Africa was neither accidental nor inevitable. It was the direct outcome of a skewed and violently

imposed maritime order that preceded modern international law, but whose logic is preserved and refined in what is today known as the Law of the Sea. Long before the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, European maritime powers had already asserted unilateral doctrines over the oceans, declaring themselves bearers of a so-called right of discovery, navigation, and trade.

These doctrines, enforced through naval power and commercial monopolies, constituted an early form of international maritime law designed to legitimise conquest, plunder, and permanent settlement.

The oceans were transformed into highways of capital and violence, while Africa was reduced to a stopover, a refuelling station, and ultimately a site of annexation.

Jan van Riebeeck did not arrive as an isolated settler.

He arrived as an agent of the Dutch East India Company, a chartered corporate arm of European imperialism endowed with quasi-state powers, including the authority to wage war, occupy territory, and administer law. The seizure of the Cape was made possible precisely because European powers had already arrogated to themselves control over maritime space.

Indigenous African societies, despite inhabiting and using the coastline for centuries, were rendered legally invisible by a maritime order that recognised only European

sovereignty. In this way, colonial maritime law did not merely accompany land dispossession; it enabled it. Control of the sea route preceded and guaranteed control of the land.

This logic has never been overturned. It has been modernised, codified, and sanitised through contemporary international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. While UNCLOS presents itself as progressive and universal, it remains rooted in the same imperial assumption which is that global maritime space exists primarily to facilitate capitalist accumulation, secured by naval power and monopolised technology.

The African continent, including South Africa, is formally recognised as sovereign, yet substantively subordinated. Our oceans are adjacent to our shores, but they are not under our control. They function as open theatres for imperialist manoeuvre, military projection, and corporate extraction.

This reality is lived daily. The United States Navy and other imperialist forces freely deploy warships, submarines, and surveillance infrastructure in oceanic zones adjacent to South Africa and across the African continent. These deployments occur without democratic consent from African peoples and without regard for continental security interests.

They are justified under the doctrine of freedom of navigation, a cornerstone

of the Law of the Sea that in practice means freedom for imperialist militaries and monopolies, not freedom for oppressed nations. The oceans surrounding Africa have become militarised corridors through which imperial power is projected, reinforcing a global balance of forces tilted decisively against the Global South.

This imbalance is not abstract. It shapes the material conditions of life in South Africa and across Africa. Provinces situated along the coastline, including KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, and the Western Cape, are positioned at the heart of global maritime circuits, yet their people experience unemployment, hunger, and exclusion. In KwaZulu-Natal, the Indian Ocean economy is dominated by foreign and white-owned monopolies controlling shipping, port services, offshore logistics, and fisheries. In the Eastern Cape, transnational corporations and historically white capital dominate port-adjacent industrial zones and marine resources, while coastal communities remain marginalised.

In the Western Cape, fisheries and maritime tourism are concentrated in the hands of a narrow capitalist class, reproducing apartheid-era ownership patterns under democratic rule. Similar dynamics prevail across the African continent, where foreign monopolies extract value from ocean resources while local populations are dispossessed, criminalised, or reduced to

precarious labour.

These outcomes are not the result of market forces alone. They are produced through specific laws, processes, and institutional mechanisms. Maritime legislation prioritises capital-intensive operators. Licensing and quota systems favour established firms with access to finance and technology. Investment treaties and trade agreements protect foreign capital while constraining state intervention.

Environmental regulations are selectively enforced to exclude small-scale producers while accommodating large corporations. International arbitration mechanisms discipline states that attempt to assert sovereign control. Together, these legal and procedural instruments function as modern tricks of empire, reproducing colonial power relations without the need for formal annexation.

The consequences are stark. South Africans go hungry despite living alongside some of the richest fishing grounds in the world. Young people remain unemployed while global shipping lines generate vast profits from our ports and sea routes. Coastal communities are displaced in the name of development that never reaches them. This is not merely a failure of policy; it is a structural feature of imperialism operating through maritime law.

From a Marxist–Leninist perspective, this reality exposes the inseparability of national liberation and

class struggle. The denial of maritime sovereignty is a denial of national self-determination. The monopolisation of ocean wealth by foreign and white capital is a form of class exploitation layered onto national oppression.

The working class, particularly maritime workers, fishers, and coastal communities, experience this domination both as exploited labour and as oppressed people.

The international balance of forces is thus materially shaped by control of the oceans. Imperialist states maintain dominance not only through land-based institutions, but through maritime supremacy that secures trade, military reach, and ideological authority. As long as Africa remains excluded from real control over maritime space, its development will be constrained and its sovereignty hollow.

This document proceeds from the understanding that reclaiming the oceans is not a secondary or sectoral concern. It is central to completing the National Democratic Revolution. The task before the South African Communist Party is to expose, contest, and ultimately dismantle this colonial maritime order, identifying leverage points within law, state power, worker organisation, and international solidarity to return the oceans to their rightful owners— the people.

The Law of the Sea as an Imperialist Legal Regime

From a Marxist–Leninist standpoint, law is not a

neutral arbiter standing above society. It is a crystallisation of material relations of power, reflecting the balance of class forces at a given historical moment. International law, in particular, expresses the interests of dominant states and monopolies operating at a global scale. The Law of the Sea emerged not as a rupture with maritime imperialism, but as its juridical reorganisation under conditions of formal decolonisation.

UNCLOS presents itself as a universal framework regulating territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, continental shelves, navigation rights, and deep-sea resources. While it formally recognises the sovereignty of coastal states, it simultaneously entrenches the principle of freedom of navigation, protects the interests of global shipping monopolies, and limits the capacity of states to fundamentally restructure maritime accumulation.

Imperialist powers, with their advanced navies, technological dominance, and control over shipping and finance, are structurally positioned to benefit from this regime. Formal equality between states conceals profound material inequality.

For semi-peripheral economies such as South Africa, the Law of the Sea offers jurisdiction without power. Exclusive economic zones exist on paper, yet the capacity to exploit, process, and industrialise ocean resources remains constrained by dependence on foreign capital,

technology, and markets. In this way, the Law of the Sea reproduces the classic contradiction identified by Lenin which is that political sovereignty without economic independence, a hallmark of imperialism.

Maritime Imperialism and South Africa's Historical Formation

Capitalism's expansion was inseparable from maritime domination. Primitive accumulation unfolded through conquest, slavery, piracy, and the violent seizure of trade routes and coastal territories. In Southern Africa, Dutch and British imperialism established maritime control to secure the Cape Sea route, transforming the region into a strategic chokepoint in global trade.

Ports such as Cape Town and Durban were not built for local development, but as instruments of imperial logistics and naval power.

This maritime foundation shaped South Africa's entire political economy. The Dutch East India Company was not merely a trading entity; it was a proto-imperialist corporation combining military force, legal authority, and capital accumulation. Its legacy persists in property relations, spatial planning, and economic structures that survived colonialism, apartheid, and now neoliberalism.

British colonial rule deepened these patterns, integrating South Africa into global commodity chains while entrenching racialised labour systems.

The formal end of colonial rule did not dismantle this

maritime political economy. Instead, it was rearticulated through international law, global markets, and multinational corporations.

The Law of the Sea did not overturn unequal exchange; it stabilised it. Shipping cartels, distant-water fishing fleets, and offshore extraction corporations continue to dominate maritime accumulation, while formerly colonised states supply labour and raw materials.

The Ocean Economy, Neo-Colonial Ownership, and the Living Legacy of the VOC In South Africa

South Africa's oceans economy, stretching across KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, and the Western Cape, is routinely presented by the state and capital as a neutral development opportunity under banners such as the "blue economy" and Operation Phakisa.

From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, this presentation is ideological mystification.

In reality, the oceans economy is deeply embedded in global monopoly capitalism and reproduces colonial and apartheid patterns of ownership, control, and exclusion. Shipping, ports, fisheries, offshore minerals, oil and gas, and

These corporations set freight rates, control shipping schedules, and dominate logistics chains, ensuring that value created in South Africa is realised elsewhere

coastal tourism generate enormous value, yet this value is overwhelmingly appropriated by foreign imperial capital and entrenched domestic monopoly capital, while African working-class and poor coastal communities remain dispossessed, criminalised, or reduced to precarious labour and informal survival.

These patterns are not accidental or transitional. They are the contemporary expression of a historical logic that runs from the Dutch East India Company (VOC), through British colonialism and apartheid racial capitalism, into the

neoliberal ocean economy of the present. The oceans economy therefore represents not a break with colonial accumulation, but its continuation in new forms.

Neo-Colonial Ownership and Control in the Ocean Economy

KwaZulu-Natal illustrates these contradictions with particular clarity. The ports of Durban and Richards Bay are among the most strategic maritime assets on the African continent, functioning as critical nodes in global trade between East and West and as chokepoints for

coal, minerals, containers, and manufactured goods. Formally, these ports are owned by the state through Transnet.

Substantively, however, trade flows are dominated and controlled by foreign monopoly shipping capital, particularly Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) headquartered in Geneva, Maersk headquartered in Copenhagen, and CMA CGM headquartered in Marseille. These corporations set freight rates, control shipping schedules, and dominate logistics chains, ensuring that value created in South Africa is realised elsewhere.

Around these ports, logistics and infrastructure contracts are embedded in private capital, including firms such as Grindrod and Bidvest, while coal exports are dominated by multinational mining houses such as Anglo American, Glencore, Exxaro, and South32.

In marine manufacturing and energy, refineries such as Sapref and Engen are owned by imperial oil capital, including Shell, BP, and Petronas. Workers in these sectors face casualisation, outsourcing, declining job security, and exposure to environmental harm, while surrounding communities in eThekweni, uMkhanyakude, and uMkhambathini remain excluded from ownership and decision-making.

In fisheries, the continuity of colonial logic is particularly stark. Small-scale fishers, whose livelihoods long predate colonial conquest, are marginalised, criminalised, or pushed into informality, while quota systems overwhelmingly favour capital-intensive operators oriented towards export markets.

Dominant firms such as Sea Harvest and Oceana Group, both headquartered in Cape Town and historically white-owned, exercise decisive control over fishing rights affecting KwaZulu-Natal waters.

The Eastern Cape exhibits similar dynamics.

The ports of Ngqura (Coega) and East London are formally controlled by Transnet, while Coega IDZ hosts foreign investors integrated into global value

chains. Shipping flows are again dominated by MSC, Maersk, and CMA CGM. Fisheries and aquaculture remain corporately controlled, with Sea Harvest and Oceana Group holding significant quotas, despite repeated state promises under Operation Phakisa to empower small-scale fishers. Along the Wild Coast, in areas such as Port St Johns and Coffee Bay, African coastal communities face dispossession through conservation regimes, mining concessions, and tourism development, echoing older forms of colonial enclosure.

The Western Cape functions as the command centre of South Africa's fishing monopoly capital. Cape Town and Saldanha Bay ports are state-owned but deeply penetrated by foreign capital in oil, gas, and ship repair. The fishing industry is dominated by historically white-owned conglomerates headquartered in the province, including Oceana Group, Sea Harvest, I&J (AVI Group), and Viking Fishing Group. While empowerment structures and minority black shareholding exist on paper, they do not translate into real control. Decision-making power, capital accumulation, and strategic direction remain firmly in the hands of monopoly capital.

Across all three provinces, a clear racial, class, and national pattern emerges. Foreign shipping capital is overwhelmingly European, imperial, and monopolistic. Domestic

fishing and agrarian-linked capital is historically white-owned South African conglomerates. The excluded class is the African working class and poor coastal communities, whose labour sustains the system, but whose lives are rendered disposable.

From the VOC to the Neoliberal Oceans Economy Marx described primitive accumulation as the violent historical process through which capitalism is born, characterised by land theft, enslavement, and dispossession.

In South Africa, primitive accumulation never ended; it was institutionalised. The VOC's seizure of land, control of sea routes, use of slave labour, and genocidal violence against indigenous peoples were not isolated historical episodes but the foundation of property law, racial hierarchy, and class power. Stolen land was converted into private property titles, passed down through settler families, entrenched under apartheid, and largely preserved after 1994.

Today, the agrarian base of white commercial farming and agribusiness represents VOC accumulation fossilised into law. The VOC seized the Cape not primarily as a settlement, but as a maritime chokepoint. Control of sea routes was control of accumulation. This logic persists. Durban and Richards Bay function as modern chokepoints for global trade. Although the South African state owns the harbour walls, it

does not control the ships, trade flows, or logistics chains. Concessions, private terminals, and foreign shipping dominance reproduce a system in which sovereignty is formal, while accumulation remains externalised.

Historically, VOC forts became British colonial ports. British colonial ports became apartheid industrial enclaves. Apartheid spatial planning entrenched port cities as white-controlled zones of industry and capital, with black labour confined to peripheral townships. This geography remains largely intact. Durban Harbour and Richards Bay continue to exclude surrounding working-class communities from ownership, reducing them to wage labour, informal activity, or environmental sacrifice zones.

VOC ships were absorbed into Dutch and British merchant fleets, whose descendants today are the global shipping giants dominating South Africa's trade lanes. This is the modern form of VOC power: capital with containers instead of cannons. Similarly, VOC settlers became the agrarian base of Afrikaner capitalism, feeding into apartheid's racial accumulation regime. Post-1994 land reform, affecting less than ten percent of land, has barely dented this structure.

The contemporary "blue economy" reproduces this logic. Operation Phakisa treats oceans as sites of extraction for capital rather

than collective ownership and social need. Small-scale fishers are criminalised, just as Khoi pastoralists were dispossessed. Multinational oil, gas, and shipping firms dominate, just as the VOC monopolised spice and slave routes. Liberal environmentalism often masks this continuity, transforming conservation into enclosures that exclude the poor while preserving access for capital.

Solidarity, Informality, and Resistance

Yet monopoly ownership does not exhaust the ocean economy. Beneath and alongside formal capital lies a vibrant informal economy and networks of solidarity that sustain working-class communities and generate resistance. Dockworkers in Durban and Richards Bay organise through unions that link wage struggles to broader campaigns against casualisation and racialised labour hierarchies. Small-scale fishers in the Western and Eastern Cape form cooperatives to resist exclusion from quotas and assert customary and historical rights to the sea.

Community-based tourism, including informal guesthouses, township tours, and cultural initiatives, challenges elite coastal tourism by redistributing income locally. Women in rural and coastal communities organise against patriarchal exclusion from land and fishing rights, linking gender liberation to broader struggles for economic justice. Informal traders sell fish, food, and crafts outside formal port

and tourism zones. Informal transport networks connect workers to ports and coastal industries where the state has failed.

Families engage in subsistence fishing despite criminalisation, sustaining livelihoods where formal employment has collapsed. In moments of climate disaster, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, informal rebuilding and mutual aid demonstrate the material reality of solidarity economies.

A dialectical contradiction is evident. Monopoly capital dominates ownership, but its exclusionary practices generate resistance, informality, and alternative forms of social reproduction. Formal industries depend on informal labour and survival economies to function, even as they criminalise them. These informal and solidarity practices contain transformative potential if consciously linked to organised working-class struggle.

The National Democratic Revolution and Programmatic Tasks

The National Democratic Revolution cannot be reduced to formal political sovereignty. It must confront the living legacy of the VOC: land ownership rooted in colonial theft, port cities functioning as neo-colonial chokepoints, shipping dominated by foreign capital, and fisheries law that criminalises survival. Without breaking these structures, the NDR remains incomplete.

Programmatically, this requires reframing agrarian reform as the undoing of VOC theft, not technocratic redistribution. It requires demanding genuine state and cooperative control of port terminals rather than concessions to foreign capital. It necessitates building a state-owned shipping line to break dependence on MSC, Maersk, and CMA CGM. Fisheries legislation, particularly the Marine Living Resources Act, must be amended to decriminalise small-scale fishing and prioritise cooperative and community-based quotas.

Spatial planning instruments such as IDPs and SDFs must be transformed into tools to dismantle apartheid coastal geography rather than reproduce it. Ideologically, the “blue economy” must be exposed as VOC logic in neoliberal form: accumulation without liberation.

South Africa’s oceans economy reveals the persistence of colonial and apartheid accumulation in contemporary neoliberal guise. Foreign monopoly shipping capital and entrenched domestic conglomerates dominate ownership and control, while African coastal communities are marginalised.

Yet within this system, solidarity economies, informal survival strategies, and organised resistance persist. The strategic task of revolutionary forces is to connect these lived struggles to a coherent programme that reclaims the oceans economy for the working

class and poor, completing the unfinished tasks of the National Democratic Revolution and laying the material foundations for socialism.

Addressing what is wrong with current knowledge production in the Ocean Economy and Law of the Sea

1. Knowledge Is Produced for Capital, Not for Society

The dominant body of knowledge in maritime studies, ocean economics, and the Law of the Sea is produced to facilitate accumulation, not to serve social needs.

Maritime economics focuses on efficiency, competitiveness, and trade facilitation, assuming global shipping monopolies as natural actors rather than class forces. Port studies prioritise throughput, logistics optimisation, and investor confidence, marginalising labour, health, and environmental impacts on surrounding communities.

Fisheries science is structured around maximising sustainable yield for commercial operators, not protecting livelihoods or food sovereignty. This is not neutral science. It is knowledge designed to make extraction orderly, predictable, and profitable for capital.

2. The Law of the Sea is built on Colonial and Imperial Foundations

The modern Law of the Sea emerged

from negotiations dominated by naval powers, maritime trading states, and capital-exporting countries.

Core doctrines such as freedom of navigation, flag-state control, and open seas historically served imperial shipping and naval expansion. UNCLOS recognises state sovereignty in form but structurally protects global shipping lanes and capital mobility. Dispute resolution mechanisms are privileged states and corporations with legal, financial, and technical capacity.

As a result, coastal communities appear in law only as objects of regulation, not as rights-bearing economic actors.

3. Eurocentrism and Epistemic Exclusion

Maritime knowledge production is overwhelmingly Eurocentric.

Canonical legal texts, case law, and academic journals are dominated by European and North American institutions. Indigenous and customary maritime practices are treated as informal, anecdotal, or pre-modern. African coastal knowledge is rarely cited unless mediated through Western scientific frameworks.

This reproduces what decolonial scholars call epistemic violence: the systematic invalidation of non-European ways of knowing.

4. Professional Gatekeeping Reproduces Class and

Racial Power

Access to maritime law, marine science, and port management is controlled through elite institutions, high costs, and credential barriers.

Training pipelines favour middle-class and elite students, often disconnected from coastal communities. Practical knowledge held by fishers, dockworkers, and coastal women is excluded from formal recognition. Regulatory bodies and expert panels are dominated by professionals aligned with industry interests.

The result is a self-reproducing expert class that speaks on behalf of capital while claiming neutrality.

5. Fragmentation of Knowledge Conceals Totality

Capitalism thrives by fragmenting reality. The oceans economy is studied in silos:

Shipping is separated from labour studies. Fisheries science is separated from political economy. Environmental protection is separated from class and race. Maritime law is separated from colonial history.

This fragmentation prevents an understanding of the ocean economy as a single system of accumulation, making exploitation appear technical rather than political.

6. The “Blue Economy” as Ideological Knowledge

The “blue economy” is not just a policy framework; it

is a knowledge regime.

It frames oceans as underutilised assets rather than already exploited social spaces. It speaks the language of sustainability while enabling enclosure and privatisation. It depoliticises extraction by presenting it as innovation and growth.

In this framework, inequality becomes an implementation problem, not a structural outcome.

7. Absence of a Historical Materialist Method

Most maritime studies lack historical materialism.

Colonial conquest is treated as background, not as constitutive of current property relations. Apartheid spatial planning is rarely analysed as shaping port cities and coastal exclusion. Primitive accumulation is discussed as past, not ongoing.

Without historical materialism, continuity between VOC plunder, apartheid logistics, and neoliberal shipping disappears.

8. Reproduction Through the State Itself

The state reproduces colonial knowledge unintentionally:

Policy documents rely on international consultants and foreign benchmarks. Universities chase global rankings rather than national relevance. Legal reform adopts international “best practice” without class analysis.

Thus, even post-colonial states become vehicles for

epistemic dependency.

In Summary: The Core Problems

Current knowledge production in the ocean economy and Law of the Sea is:

Class-biased – aligned with monopoly capital. It has colonial in origin – rooted in imperial legal and economic logic. It is Eurocentric – marginalising African and working-class knowledge. It is Technocratic – depoliticising exploitation. It is fragmented – obscuring systemic relations. It’s reproductive – training elites to manage, not transform, the system.

Why this matter for the NDR?

The National Democratic Revolution cannot succeed if it accepts the intellectual infrastructure of colonial capitalism. Ownership can change in form, but power will remain with those who define legality, expertise, and “common sense.”

Repossessing the oceans economy therefore requires a rupture not only in property relations, but in how knowledge itself is produced, taught, and legitimised.

In Lenin’s terms, without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary practice—especially in a sector as technically mediated and legally fortified as the oceans economy.

Reclaiming The Oceans Economy through Knowledge, Law, and Ideological Struggle: The Tasks of the National Democratic Revolution

Knowledge as a Terrain of Struggle

In Marxist–Leninist theory, control over the means of production is inseparable from control over the means of producing knowledge and ideology. The oceans economy is not only structured by ships, ports, and quotas, but by legal doctrines, technical expertise, scientific classifications, and professional monopolies that naturalise colonial ownership and render exploitation “lawful.” The Law of the Sea, maritime economics, marine science, and port logistics have historically been developed as instruments of imperial accumulation, not neutral sciences.

For the National Democratic Revolution, the task is therefore not only to transform ownership relations in the ocean economy, but to reconfigure the production and reproduction of knowledge itself, so that law, science, and skills serve national sovereignty, working-class interests, and democratic control over marine resources.

1. Democratise and Nationalise Knowledge Production in the Ocean Economy

The first task of the NDR is to break the monopoly of colonial and imperial epistemologies in maritime knowledge.

South Africa’s oceans economy knowledge base remains dominated by Eurocentric legal doctrines, foreign technical

standards, and professional gatekeeping that privilege imperial shipping capital and multinational extractive firms. Maritime law curricula, port management training, and marine science research overwhelmingly reproduce international norms shaped by the interests of the Global North.

The NDR must intervene by:

Establishing state-led centres of excellence in maritime law, marine economics, fisheries

scale fishing knowledge into formal research and policy frameworks, ending the false hierarchy between “scientific” and “traditional” knowledge.

Namibia’s post-independence fisheries policy deliberately rebuilt national fisheries science and management capacity, replacing foreign expertise with state-trained Namibian professionals. This enabled the country to regain control over its fisheries, dramatically increase local employment, and reduce

economy cannot be repossessed without a conscious layer of organic intellectuals rooted in the working class and coastal communities.

The NDR must therefore develop targeted scholarships and cadre programmes in maritime law, ocean governance, naval architecture, marine engineering, fisheries management, and logistics. Tie training directly to state deployment, cooperatives, and public enterprises rather than private multinational firms. Ensure

and planners aligned to national objectives rather than foreign capital. This is an uncontested material fact of China’s development trajectory.

3. Reconfigure the Law of the Sea as an Instrument of Sovereignty, Not Imperial Order

The Law of the Sea is often presented as neutral international law.

In reality, it reflects the balance of forces at the time of its codification, privileging maritime powers, shipping monopolies, and capital-exporting states.

The NDR must pursue a counter-hegemonic legal strategy by developing a progressive national interpretation of UNCLOS that foregrounds developmental rights, food sovereignty, and environmental justice for coastal communities.

Rewriting domestic maritime and fisheries law to prioritise social ownership, cooperative

access, and national industrialisation, rather than abstract “market efficiency.” Training a generation of maritime lawyers capable of contesting imperial interpretations in international forums, arbitration panels, and treaty negotiations.

Brazil’s assertion of national control over offshore oil through

science, and port logistics, explicitly mandated to serve national developmental objectives rather than global capital. Reorienting public universities, TVET colleges, and maritime academies to prioritise working-class access, coastal communities, and historically excluded groups. Integrating indigenous, customary, and small-

foreign plunder.

This is a widely recognised success in the Global South.

2. Build a Cadre of Organic Intellectuals of the Ocean Economy

Lenin emphasised that revolutions require trained cadres capable of administering, planning, and defending new social relations. The oceans

that dockworkers, fishers, and coastal youth are not merely labour input but future planners, regulators, and legal experts.

China’s maritime rise was underpinned by systematic state investment in maritime universities, shipping academies, and legal training, producing a large cadre of engineers, lawyers,



Durban Terminals continue to be critical export zone for citrus fruits to other parts of globe which boosts South Africa’s Gross Domestic Product.

Petrobras was supported by a strong domestic legal and technical capacity that resisted foreign contractual domination for decades. Similarly, Norway — though not a Global South country — provides an uncontested example of how national law can subordinate multinational oil and shipping interests to public ownership and social benefit.

Mexico and PEMEX

Mexico's creation of Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) in 1938, following the expropriation of foreign oil companies, stands as a defining precedent. By nationalizing its oil industry, Mexico asserted full control over offshore and onshore resources, embedding energy sovereignty into its constitution. This move not only resisted foreign contractual domination but also ensured that revenues from hydrocarbons were directed toward national development priorities.

It remains a powerful example of how domestic law can override external corporate interests in the governance of natural resources.

Indonesia and Archipelagic Sovereignty

Indonesia's successful campaign in the 1950s–70s to have its archipelagic principle recognized under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was transformative. By insisting that waters between its islands be considered internal waters, Indonesia

secured control over vast maritime zones, fisheries, and shipping routes. This precedent illustrates how a Global South country reshaped international law to protect its sovereignty and economic interests against external shipping and fishing powers.

India and Coastal Regulation Zones

India's Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) framework, though contested, represents an attempt to subordinate industrial and real estate interests to community and ecological rights. By legally restricting development along coastlines, India has sought to protect fishing communities and fragile ecosystems from displacement and degradation. While enforcement has been uneven, the principle reflects a precedent of national law prioritizing social and environmental benefit over unfettered capital expansion.

Chile and Copper/Ocean Governance

Chile's assertion of national control over copper through CODELCO parallels its maritime governance stance. By nationalizing copper in 1971, Chile resisted multinational mining domination and redirected revenues to social programs. In ocean governance, Chile has also pioneered large-scale marine protected areas, asserting sovereign stewardship over its maritime commons.

This dual precedent shows how resource nationalism can extend from land

to sea.

Ghana and Local Content in Offshore Oil

Ghana's discovery of offshore oil in the Jubilee Field led to the establishment of local content laws that require multinational oil companies to partner with domestic firms and employ Ghanaian workers. Though implementation remains a struggle, the legal framework asserts national sovereignty over offshore resources and seeks to ensure that benefits flow to local communities rather than being siphoned abroad.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that nations have asserted control over their maritime and offshore resources, reshaping the law of the sea and the oceans economy to resist foreign domination. They show that strong domestic legal frameworks, political will, and community mobilization can transform extractive industries into instruments of sovereignty and social benefit.

4. Align Skills Development with Repossession, Not Labour Export

Skills development under neoliberalism trains workers for insertion into global value chains dominated by monopoly capital. The NDR must reverse this logic.

This requires linking maritime skills training to state-owned and cooperative enterprises, including ports, shipping, fisheries, and marine manufacturing. Prioritising artisanal shipbuilding, repair,

and coastal infrastructure, reducing dependence on foreign contractors. Embedding training programmes within public employment and industrial policy, not private sector "employability" schemes.

South Korea's shipbuilding industry was built through deliberate state planning, skills development, and protection, transforming the country from a peripheral maritime actor into a global industrial power.

This was not market spontaneity, but conscious developmental strategy.

5. Transform Ideology: Break the Colonial Common Sense of the "Blue Economy"

The "blue economy" discourse functions ideologically to obscure class relations, presenting extraction, enclosure, and foreign ownership as sustainability and innovation. The NDR must wage an ideological struggle to expose and replace this narrative.

This includes producing popular education materials, cadre schools, and worker education programmes that explain the oceans economy in class terms. Reframing environmental protection as collective stewardship, not enclosure or criminalisation of the poor. Challenging liberal legalism that treats existing property relations as neutral or eternal.

In several Latin American countries, popular movements successfully reframed extractive debates

around sovereignty and social rights, forcing constitutional and legal reforms that recognised collective and indigenous ownership. While uneven, these shifts demonstrate the power of ideological struggle in reshaping law and policy.

6. Knowledge, Power, and the Completion of the NDR

Without transforming who produces knowledge, who interprets the law, and who holds technical authority, ownership transformation will remain superficial. The oceans economy shows clearly that formal sovereignty without epistemic and legal power reproduces colonial accumulation under new flags.

The NDR must therefore treat universities, law schools, research institutes, training colleges, and professional bodies as strategic sites of struggle, just as important as ports, ships, and quotas. Repossessing the oceans economy requires repossessing the ideas, laws, and skills that govern it.

The oceans economy will not be reclaimed through policy declarations alone. It will be reclaimed by systematically dismantling colonial knowledge systems, building a working-class and national cadre of experts,

These corporations set freight rates, control shipping schedules, and dominate logistics chains, ensuring that value created in South Africa is realised elsewhere

and transforming maritime law from an imperial instrument into a weapon of democratic sovereignty. The experiences of Namibia, China, Brazil, South Korea, and others demonstrate that this is neither utopian nor unprecedented. It is a matter of political will, class alignment, and revolutionary clarity — the core tasks of the National Democratic Revolution.

The NDR, Sovereignty, and the Limits of Formal Ownership

The National Democratic Revolution recognises that political liberation without economic transformation

is hollow. Real sovereignty resides not in legal titles, but in the capacity to direct accumulation in line with the interests of the working class. In the maritime domain, this capacity remains severely constrained.

While South Africa possesses formal jurisdiction over vast ocean spaces, it lacks the integrated industrial base, technological sovereignty, and regional alliances required to exercise meaningful control. Global shipping alliances determine freight rates and logistics terms.

Offshore projects are financed through international capital markets, with repatriated profits. Fisheries management prioritises export earnings over food security. These mechanisms reproduce unequal class relations domestically and unequal exchange internationally.

The Law of the Sea thus functions as a structural brake on the NDR. It narrows policy space, disciplines state intervention, and normalises capitalist exploitation of ocean resources. The result is a form of sovereignty that is juridical but not material, political but not economic.

KwaZulu-Natal as a Strategic Front of Struggle

KwaZulu-Natal occupies a decisive position in this contradiction. As a maritime province with deep historical layers of colonial dispossession, apartheid spatial planning, and contemporary political fragmentation, it concentrates the unresolved questions of the NDR. Traditional authority structures, ethnic patronage, and uneven development complicate proletarian unity, while neoliberal governance has failed to resolve corruption, inefficiency, and inequality in ports and logistics.

Yet these contradictions also create revolutionary possibilities. Maritime workers, dockworkers, seafarers, and fishers occupy strategic positions within the circuits of capital. Their labour is essential to global accumulation.

Organised, politicised, and armed with socialist consciousness, they can become a decisive force in contesting imperialist maritime domination. The struggle for maritime sovereignty is therefore inseparable from the struggle for militant unionism, political education, and class unity.

The SACP in KwaZulu-Natal has a responsibility to foreground this terrain, linking maritime struggles to broader campaigns against unemployment, land dispossession, and neoliberal austerity. This requires exposing how

international maritime law reproduces colonial relations and mobilising workers and communities around an alternative socialist vision of the ocean economy.

Breaking the Historical Continuum of Maritime Domination

The continuity from the Dutch East India Company, through British colonialism, apartheid logistics, and contemporary global shipping capital reveals that primitive accumulation never ended. It was legalised, institutionalised, and globalised. The same logic that seized the Cape to control a trade route now operates through container terminals, shipping alliances, and investment treaties. The instruments have changed, but the relations of power endure.

Post-1994 reforms have barely dented this structure. Land redistribution remains limited, port cities retain apartheid spatial geography, and shipping remains dominated by foreign capital. The blue economy discourse risks reproducing this logic by framing the ocean as a site of extraction rather than social ownership. Environmental rhetoric often masks new forms of enclosure, excluding the poor while securing access for capital.

To complete the NDR, this historical continuum must be broken. Maritime sovereignty must be reclaimed as part of a broader project to dismantle colonial capitalism in

all its forms.

Towards a Socialist Maritime Strategy

A Marxist–Leninist approach demands that the ocean be treated as a strategic site of class struggle and socialist construction. This requires a decisive shift away from technocratic compliance with imperialist legal regimes toward conscious political contestation. Maritime policy must be integrated into national planning, industrial strategy, and working-class organisation.

Public and cooperative ownership, worker control, and regional solidarity must replace concessioning, privatisation, and dependency.

South Africa cannot pursue this path in isolation. Imperialism is global, and resistance must be coordinated. Building alliances with African and Global South coastal states is essential to challenge unequal maritime norms and advance a developmental, anti-imperialist agenda. Such solidarity strengthens national sovereignty while weakening monopoly capital's global reach.

Conclusion

The Law of the Sea is not a peripheral technical matter. It is a central mechanism through which imperialism reproduces itself in South Africa's economy. By leaving this terrain largely uncontested, the National Democratic Revolution has been structurally stalled.

Political freedom has not translated into control over strategic resources, and the crisis of the transition deepens.

For the SACP, reclaiming the ocean is part of renewing revolutionary strategy under contemporary conditions. It requires recognising that imperialism today operates through law, markets, and institutions as much as through overt force. It requires expanding the terrain of struggle beyond land and factories to include ports, shipping lanes, and maritime resources.

Only by confronting these realities can the NDR move beyond formal sovereignty toward real economic emancipation and lay the material foundations for socialism.

Any National Democratic Revolution that fails to confront the question of the oceans as a terrain of struggle is not merely incomplete but objectively counter-revolutionary. This is not a rhetorical claim but a material one. The sea has historically been the primary vector through which colonial domination, merchant capital, and later industrial and finance capital inserted themselves into South Africa and the African continent.

To treat the ocean economy today as a neutral space of "growth", "efficiency", or "logistics reform" while leaving untouched the ownership patterns, legal regimes, and military arrangements

that govern it is to accept the continuation of colonial relations by other means. In this sense, contemporary state programmes that claim to advance transformation of the ocean economy without disrupting monopoly ownership and imperial control function as instruments for stabilising, not dismantling, the colonial capitalist order.

Operation Vulindlela exemplifies this contradiction in its most distilled form. Presented as a reform initiative to unlock growth in sectors including ports, logistics, shipping and the so-called oceans economy, it does not address the fundamental question of who owns, controls, and accumulates surplus from the sea.

Its interventions are confined to regulatory streamlining, concessioning of port operations, public-private partnerships, and the further integration of South Africa's maritime infrastructure into global value chains dominated by transnational capital.

In practice, this has meant opening space for foreign and monopoly capital which is overwhelmingly white, male and also foreign to deepen its grip over ports, shipping services, offshore logistics, fisheries value chains and marine infrastructure, while the working class and coastal communities remain dispossessed spectators in an economy that exists literally at their doorstep.

No transfer of ownership, no socialisation of strategic maritime assets, no rupture with the colonial legal architecture of the Law of the Sea is contemplated. What is presented as reform is in fact a consolidation of comprador accumulation under the banner of efficiency.

This failure cannot be separated from the historical role of merchant capital in South Africa's class formation. From the sixteenth century onward, European-based merchant capital, operating through maritime law, naval power and monopoly trading companies, inserted Southern Africa into a world commodity market on violently unequal terms.

The logic was simple and brutal and it was bought cheap, sell dear, and where exchange failed to deliver the required surplus, deploy force. The Dutch East India Company's arrival at the Cape was not an isolated event but an expression of this global system, in which control of sea routes and maritime law enabled the transformation of indigenous, pre-class social formations into reservoirs of labour, land and tribute.

Merchant capital did not initially revolutionise production; it drained surplus through trade, plunder and coercion, destroying existing modes of production and preparing the conditions for slavery, settler agriculture and later capitalist accumulation.

The merchant class that emerged at the Cape, tied to shipping, provisioning and long-distance trade, represents the embryonic form of a comprador bourgeoisie whose wealth derived not from production but from control over circulation and monopoly access to the sea.

As merchant capital evolved and was subordinated to industrial and finance capital in the nineteenth century, its maritime foundations remained intact. Control of ports, shipping lanes, insurance, naval protection and maritime law allowed imperial capital to reorganise South Africa's economy around its own reproductive needs.

The ocean thus became a decisive site in the reproduction of cheap labour, the export of minerals, and the import of manufactured goods, entrenching a pattern of dependent development that persists today. The present dominance of foreign and white monopoly capital in the ocean economies of KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape is not an aberration but the continuation of this historical trajectory.

In KwaZulu-Natal, shipping lines, terminal operators, offshore service providers and large fishing corporations remain overwhelmingly foreign-owned or white-controlled, extracting value from Durban and Richards Bay while

surrounding communities face unemployment, hunger and ecological degradation.

Similar patterns prevail along the Eastern Cape coastline, from Ngqura to small-scale fisheries, and in the Western Cape's fishing and maritime services sector, where concentration, quota systems and financialisation exclude the majority.

The legal and procedural mechanisms that sustain this configuration are well known and uncontested. International maritime law treats the ocean as a space of formal sovereignty but material subordination, where freedom of navigation for capital is sacrosanct while national control is tightly circumscribed.

Domestically, licensing regimes, quota allocations, concession contracts, capital requirements, and global compliance standards systematically privilege large, established firms over working-class and community ownership.

Militarily, imperial powers such as the United States freely deploy naval forces in waters adjacent to African states, including South Africa, under the guise of securing trade routes and global security, reinforcing an international balance of forces in which African sovereignty over the sea is nominal rather than real.

For the NDR, the implications are profound. National liberation that does not extend to the sea leaves intact one of the core pillars of imperial

domination. Class liberation that ignores the ocean economy abandons a vast terrain of surplus extraction to monopoly capital.

The leverage points for change therefore lie not in technocratic reform but in political struggle which is about asserting popular sovereignty over maritime space, transforming ownership of ports, shipping and fisheries, breaking monopoly control, and challenging the colonial Law of the Sea through collective action by coastal states of the Global South.

Without this, the NDR remains trapped on land, while imperialism continues to rule from the sea.

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