

Address to South African Communist Party Special National Congress

9 April 2005

Comrade
Comrade
other leaders of the Party

General

Chairperson,
Secretary,

Let me say thank you very much for inviting me to speak this morning. I am very glad you did that. In reality, I want to make a confession why I agreed when Comrade Blade asked me to come and speak. I am expecting to eat some cake to celebrate Comrade Brian Bunting's 85th birthday today. Happy birthday! Here we have an outstanding veteran of our Struggle who has guided our movement as a whole for many decades. I am very glad to see him here. I hope, Comrade Charles, I have negotiated successfully for the provision of a cake to celebrate Comrade Brian's birthday.

The other reason I came is that I have a problem with the ANC. The ANC says that it is quite determined to make sure that we honour the Constitution so that I only serve two terms. But I understand that the Party wants to run on its own, independent of the ANC. So if that decision is taken, I am going to join the Party. Provided, of course, comrades, you take a second decision to remove this two-term policy!

Thank you very much indeed for the invitation, and best wishes from your comrades in the leadership of the African National Congress. We do wish the Congress success in the important matters that are on your agenda.

As in the past, we are faced with common challenges. For that reason, we are very interested in what you will discuss and decide. What you discuss and decide will determine what happens in this country and will influence what the ANC thinks and does and what the Alliance thinks and does. We are facing the common challenge of advancing the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), of effecting the process of the reconstruction and development of our country in pursuit of those goals. It would be interesting to see what the SACP says we should do next in order to intensify the process of reconstruction and development in our country.

I was mentioning Cde Brian's presence here. In the 1962 Party programme, they raised the issue of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST). That characterisation of our country, and therefore a determination of the nature of the struggle we had to fight, given that we had colonialism of a special type - that determination came from the Party. It became the property of the Movement as a whole. We all saw the challenges we had to confront and the outcome of the struggle.

It is important that the Party should recall things like that, to say what contribution will it now make to help us to solve the challenges of addressing the legacy of CST. The Party should again say, in the same way as we were able to provide a very focal point, a reference point to understanding the nature of society and the kind of struggle we have to fight, perhaps the Party is challenged once again to ask this question and therefore what our responses should be. What shall we do in order to solve the challenges arising from the legacy of CST.

As I was reflecting on this earlier this week, I remembered a particular part of the history of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). Again, Comrade Brian would be very familiar with this. In 1927, the Communist International raised an issue about the Black Republic. It said that the CPSA must combine the fight against all anti-native laws with the fight against British colonialism, and as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full equal rights for all, black, coloured and white.

The Party programme of 1962 which spoke about the CST marked the conclusion of an ideological debate that had been going on for about 35 years. What was the strategic objective of the struggle being

waged by the Communist Party? And what about the independent native republic as a stage towards a workers' republic? And the Party arrived at the conclusion about CST.

I am mentioning this because the SACP has a task to help us define the period in which we are. Where are we in the process of the NDR? And therefore what are the tasks that we must carry out? I don't know what the process is of people studying Party history, documents, etc. But I think it would be very interesting for people to study this and look at the Communist International, and what the stance was in 1962. It is still of relevance. It raises for instance the question of the relationship between the national and class struggle. This was sorted out in the debate that went on for 35 years.

That question still faces the Party today. What is the relationship, if any, between the national revolution and the socialist revolution? That is a question you only can ask and answer. Was the Comintern wrong? It is the same question about the relationship between the national and the class struggle. It is a question that faces the Party, not the ANC, but the ANC will be interested to hear how you answer this question. A lot of the detail will be outdated in the Comintern and CPSA documents, but these fundamental issues about the relationship between the national and class struggles are still relevant in terms of what happens today.

That was a digression, but an important one, because we hope this Party will do as it has in the past, to help the movement define where we are and where we ought to be. We can't answer that question without raising some of these fundamental questions. Perhaps part of the reason I want to join the SACP is that I want to be part of the formation of the workers' and peasants' republic! Is this the strategic task that faces us now? If not, then what is it? It will help to define the relationship to the ANC. The Party should discuss this issue. Even Leon Trotsky joined this debate and wrote a long paper on the same question.

The National General Council (NGC) of the ANC will take place in June this year. It will review the implementation of the decisions taken in 2002 and see what we have done about implementing those decisions and making sure they are implemented. We generally summarise the tasks of the NDR by saying we have to build a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic SA. So in looking at the decisions of the 2002 conference the NGC must ask what progress we have made to create a non-racial society. Even from a theoretical point of view, familiarity with the theory of CST would show that this is an important task of the NDR.

The NGC must address the creation of a non-sexist society. Amongst other things, I conspired with the president of the ANCWL, that we should raise the issue of gender parity in terms of our elected legislatures. She said I must go first. I stood up and said that when we have our elections this year, it must be on the basis of gender parity.

We conspired to do this because we knew no one in the Movement would have sufficient courage to oppose us! There was no NEC mandate, nothing, but I am waiting for an NEC member to say I am opposed to gender parity!

But broadly, these issues about creating such a society cannot be separated from the issue of our struggle. They are an integrated set of circumstances and therefore, we have to look at the question, what is it we do next in the struggle to eradicate poverty. The eradication of that poverty means a number of very direct things in the struggle for a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa. I am mentioning this to say this will be the ANC's own effort to try to define the central task of the NDR at this stage. There are many questions that have to be answered in the context of this struggle for non-racism and non-sexism. Let me just mention one of them incidentally.

Cde Zola Skweyiya has been issuing figures that are frightening. Last week, he said there were 37,000 civil servants who were being investigated for fraud of social grants. I think on the news yesterday I heard this was 40,000. I am absolutely certain that a significant number of those 40,000 civil servants would say

they belong to the Congress Movement, because they belong to trade unions that are part of the Congress Movement. How can a member of the Congress Movement be involved in theft of resources that must go to the poorest of our country and call themselves members of this Movement? We can't say the struggle against poverty is key and carry in our ranks people who by their actions entrench poverty. This is not possible. I think it's a challenge that faces comrades in the Movement. Cosatu will need to say how do we answer this question of 40,000 people involved in defrauding pensioners and children eligible for grants. And then when they appear among us, they say they, too, are revolutionaries!

Here are these three interlinked matters - building of a non-racist, non-sexist society and the struggle against poverty. What should we do with regard to the capitalists? What sorts of interventions should we make to impact on that capitalist system so that we are better able to fight against poverty? It can't just be a negotiated resolution or act to say: down with poverty! Practically, what is it we do? These are the questions that must be answered.

The other day, one of the questions we discussed, was this question of, as part of this struggle against poverty, what additional things should we do to address the challenge of unemployment. What should we do to address this obvious problem that is emerging regarding clothing and textiles? What should we do with mining, particularly gold mining? What should we do with regard to creating more space for smaller business people who will employ more people without impacting negatively on the rights of the workers? So as we say down with poverty, and pass an act against poverty in the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Legislature, we must also say what are the practical moves we are going to adopt as we move forward. It would be important for the Party meeting in Congress here to say this is where we are with regard to the advance of the NDR. It would help us to answer these questions, what should we do to move forward with regard to all these matters.

The last thing I would like to say, comrades, is that we have, as a movement, an important task to contribute to the progressive transformation of the African continent. We are historically an internationalist movement, and therefore it is natural that we should say what our international response is to this. But many people around the continent do expect that we should make our own contribution to the continent. That also is not easy. What do we mean by a progressive transformation of Africa? What are these forces on the African continent that are mobilised, that should be mobilised? Are they there? A number of the trade union federations around the continent have approached us to say that they believe there is a critical role that we need to play to provide leadership to the organised workers on our continent.

They can sense that there is weakness in the political leadership in their countries, but their sense is that it is possible for that leadership to come from here. Can we take on that responsibility? To what end? We would have to ask many questions. You get reports that something like 3 million people have died in the Congo over the last few years because of the wars that are going on. But the amount of noise that you will hear about Zimbabwe, and no noise about the Congo, must surely raise questions as to why. Why is it so easy to ignore the death of 3 million people and make extraordinary volumes of noise about another country where only a few people have died? There is something not right about it.

The Deputy President has followed Madiba to Burundi. In a period of about 10 years, over 300,000 Africans have died there. If I asked you how many people have been killed there, I think only Cde Blade could answer. It is not spoken about. Three hundred thousand is a lot of people. After Madiba had concluded negotiations in Burundi, he had to go back and they said, quite correctly, 'we need protection. We will help in the process towards peace, but we need protection'.

The world said, 'we will not do that until you finish the war. Let the war end first and then we will provide you with protection'. We said we would take on the responsibility. That is why units of the SANDF went there, with no one's authorisation except the South African government. It was quite clear that if we wanted these Africans to stop killing one another, we had to make sure they moved in the direction that was agreed. But no one cared about all these Africans killing one another.

I am saying that the task to address the transformation of our country requires that we define what that transformation is, what is it that makes it progressive? We shouldn't have to be told by someone else. We have a task to contribute to the transformation of the whole world. These are important challenges.

We took correct positions with regard to Iraq and said we are against the war against Iraq. We are in agreement with the range of problems that there are in Iraq. Our Movement can be very proud that for many, many decades, our Movement opposed the Baath party government because it was very brutal against the progressive movement in Iraq. So we had got to the position that Saddam must go many decades before. But this is not the approach to take. We mobilised to say our people should come out against this war. We failed to stop it, and I hope this is not a movement away from our international responsibilities.

We have a challenge to contribute to the transformation of the world. Blade might say it means a proletarian revolution around the world. He might be right. I am raising this because I believe that if this Congress attends to this and provides some of the answers so we understand better and deeper the stage we are at, if we at this Congress can address all of these matters, it will make an enormous contribution to the strengthening of our country.

And therefore we await the outcome of this congress and wish you success.

Thank you very much!

Thabo Mbeki ANC President 9 April 2005