

UMSEBENZI ONLINE

Umsebenzi Online, Volume 19, Number 8, 2 April 2020

Voice of the South African Working Class

In this Issue:

- ★ *Hamba kahle Mthakathi wey'ndaba* – A farewell message to Prof Tandika Mkandawire
- ★ Cuba, coronavirus and peace through medical solidarity

Dr Blade Nzimande | Red Alert 

***Hamba kahle Mthakathi wey'ndaba* – A farewell message to Prof Tandika Mkandawire**

'One important lesson I learnt from the likes of Mkandawire in their analysis of the experiences of Southern Africa with the structural adjustments programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and World Bank, post-1973, was that not a single developing country has ever been rescued from poverty, inequality and unemployment by the IMF or World Bank and developed. In honour of Mkandawire, it would be important to re-open these debates about the role of institutions like the IMF and World Bank in undercutting development in African, South American and other developing countries. In his memory, let us revisit some of his works on the struggles for a developmental state in Africa and the role of African universities and intelligentsia.' – **Tribute to a towering African intellectual giant**

On behalf of the South African Communist Party, SACP and myself personally, I wish to express my most profound condolences to the family and all the colleagues at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, and beyond, on the passing away of Professor Tandika Mkandawire. The sad news was first brought to me by Prof Ihron Rensburg, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg. Rensburg knew Mkandawire very well and respected him immensely.

Indeed the passing away of Prof Mkandawire on Friday, 27 March 2020, imposed a big loss on African and progressive scholarship globally. Prof Mkandawire was a towering African intellectual giant. His departure came at the time when the world and our continent desperately need more voices like his, especially at the time of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the global public health emergency that it has imposed, as well as its wider economic and social implications. I hope that his colleagues at CODESRIA and beyond will build a lasting intellectual monument to honour his contribution to Left and radical social science scholarship in the Southern African region, the African continent and globally.

I first met Prof Mkandawire in Harare, around 1987, in one of the Southern African Political Economy Series, SAPES Trust Colloquia, ably convened by Dr Ibbo Mandaza. In his contributions Prof Mkandawire immediately struck me as someone with unique intellectual depth and analytical capacity. Together with the fellow exiled

Malawian then, Guy Mhone, they were intellectuals of a kind from Malawi, products of the historical conditions in Southern Africa and the continent broadly, and the responses by the people, especially liberation and intellectual struggles.

I found the SAPES Trust to be one of the leading intellectual platforms and think tanks in Southern Africa. It provided some of us with a crucial link to progressive African thought, a body of thought and scholarship which was mainly prohibited by the apartheid regime in South Africa and at the same time ignored by the mainstream white left-wing (mainly that with a workerist bent) and anti-apartheid academia generally in South Africa at the time. As Karl Marx aptly observed in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 'The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.' Indeed, Marx was right that it is not the consciousness of people that determine their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

I will remain forever intellectually indebted to the likes of Mandaza for exposing me to the literature of progressive African thought and scholarship in the SAPES Trust, where I interacted with the likes of Mkandawire. This exposure contributed enormously in shaping my own intellectual outlook.

The SAPES platform, in which Mkandawire energetically participated, debated matters around regional integration, what a post-apartheid Southern Africa could look like, the post-colonial state, as well as the impact of the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and World Bank imposed structural adjustment programmes (today's 'structural reforms') in the region.

Indeed, the struggle for liberation in Namibia and South Africa in the late 1980s provided hope against the backdrop of some of the serious reversals and blows against the forces of liberation in the region. These included the counter-revolutionary warfare and destabilisation led by Renamo in Mozambique, the deadly war by Unita and the apartheid forces in Angola, and the military and economic destabilisation of the Southern African region as a whole by the apartheid regime. I found Mkandawire as one of the leading intellectual lights in the analyses of the experiences of liberation movements in the region and the continent.

As the world confronts Covid-19, and in a Southern Africa facing a massive crisis of social reproduction that is likely to prove to be a huge burden in the struggle to defeat Covid-19, one cannot help but appreciate some of the foresight and insights from platforms like SAPES and the likes of Mkandawire as far back as the 1980s. As South Africa, for instance, faces the challenges of Covid-19 and its downgrading by Moody's rating agency, I cannot help but look back at some of the lessons we can still learn from those debates led by African scholars in the 1980s, scholars like Mkandawire, Ibbo Mandaza, Pallo Jordan, Sam Moyo, Mzala Nxumalo, Guy Mhone, Patricia McFadden, Lloyd Sachikonye, Brian Raftopoulos, Joyce Kazembe, to mention but some. Indeed some of the African National Congress and SACP cadres, like Pallo Jordan and Mzala Nxumalo, engaged and contributed to this Left African scholarship in the 1980s.

One important lesson I learnt from the likes of Mkandawire in their analysis of the experiences of Southern Africa with the structural adjustments programmes imposed

by the IMF and World Bank, post-1973, was that not a single developing country has ever been rescued from poverty, inequality and unemployment by the IMF or World Bank and developed. In honour of Mkandawire, it would be important to re-open these debates about the role of institutions like the IMF and World Bank in undercutting development in African, South American and other developing countries. In his memory, let us revisit some of his works on the struggles for a developmental state in Africa and the role of African universities and intelligentsia.

Mkandawire was a renowned scholar and academic. Amongst some of his achievements is that he was a founder member of CODESRIA, a premier organisation of African scholars in the social sciences and humanities. He served as its executive secretary from 1985 to 1986. He also worked for the United Nations and lectured at universities like the University of Zimbabwe, London School of Economics and the University of Cape Town.

I must also pay tribute to Mkandawire in my capacity as Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation in South Africa.

Soon after I was appointed Minister of Higher Education and Training in 2009, I met Mkandawire in one of the functions during South Africa's State Visit to the United Kingdom in 2010. He pulled me aside and gave me a mouthful about what irritated him about some features of a post-apartheid South Africa. He shared some of his ideas about what was to be done. I will never forget what he said to me. After congratulating me, he said he hoped I will be one Minister of Higher Education and Training in South Africa who will at least invest a lot into upgrading at least one of the historically disadvantaged institutions to become a globally and continentally respected institution.

Indeed, like many African intellectuals of his age, his bias was towards the development of the University of Fort Hare to be such an institution. He was very critical of South Africa's democracy on this score. His view was that the mistake we were making on many fronts, especially in higher education, was that of wanting to develop all of our disadvantaged institutions at the same time, but in the process keeping all of them underdeveloped. In other words, he preferred a step by step developmental approach. Perhaps Mkandawire had a point! It is nevertheless these words of his that keep me going in placing a premium on the transformation of our higher education landscape, with a particular bias towards the rapid development of our historically disadvantaged institutions.

Mkandawire's words might help us to rally around and stabilise especially our historically disadvantaged institutions, HDIs, and develop them to become respectable institutions in their own right!

Mkandawire and his generation of progressive African scholars were in many ways trailblazers who understood that the struggle for complete independence of the African countries was simultaneously a struggle against underdevelopment, just as we must understand today that the struggle against Covid-19 must simultaneously be a struggle against all forms of inequality!

Had not been of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the global state of public health emergency that it has imposed I would have personally travelled to attend the funeral.

Hamba kahle Mkandawire.

You were indeed a towering African intellectual giant!

- *Dr Blade Nzimande is SACP General Secretary, also Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation in South Africa. Sincere gratitude to Dr Ibbo Mandaza's tribute to Mkandawire for some of the highlights on his illustrious academic and research career.*

Cuba, coronavirus and peace through medical solidarity*

By Professor Brian Williams

Peace is intertwined with human dignity and health is a recognised human right. The coronavirus attacks human dignity and ends human life. It creates havoc in personal, economic and global relations. The arbitrary nature of the virus and its blind assault on human dignity across the world, threaten humanity. In the face of this violent force of nature, the Cubans have emerged as global peace champions despite suffering illegal blockades and aggression. The American death rate will escalate, and they have the most people in the world who have tested positive for the coronavirus. The American government must reach out to Cuba to assist in saving American lives.

Pope Francis, Raul Castro and Barack Obama, diverse as they are in ideological terms, have one enduring common factor amongst them. These three leaders contributed to the breakdown of one of the last relics of the cold war by starting a process of normalisation between Cuba and the United States of America. In March 2016, Obama became the first sitting president to visit Cuba since Calvin Coolidge in 1928. An article in the Washington Post, 17 December 2014, stated that "*Barack Obama and Raúl Castro thanked Pope Francis for helping to broker a historic deal to begin normalising relations between the United States and Cuba...which brought a sudden end to decades of cold war hostility.*"

Tensions between the United States and Cuba have re-emerged under President Donald Trump. Cuban mercy medical missions are under attack. On 17 February 2020, the Guardian stated that the "*US secretary of state Mike Pompeo, depicted the deployment of Cuban doctors in countries from Venezuela to Brazil and Ecuador as sinister interference in their affairs*". The deputy secretary of state, Michael Kozak, stated that "*the Castro regime sends...50,000 Cuban medical staff overseas to work in harsh conditions. Stories of abuses abound.*"

Faithful to calls from the current right-wing American administration, Brazil expelled 8 000 doctors in November 2018 but strangely no American doctors replaced the Cubans. Brazilians suffered and the coronavirus ravaged Brazil. On 15 March 2020, Secretary of Health, João Gabbardo, publicly requested the Cubans to return. 5 000 Cuban doctors responded as peace champions to go to the frontlines in Brazil.

There is something obscenely wicked in the actions of those who use structural violence to pressurise countries to abandon medical help from the Cubans. Structural violence can be defined as the violence that arises from those who are entrusted with public power but who use that power in a way that is negative to the human dignity and rights of others. Structural violence is the mobilisation of collective power in the hands of individuals who occupy leadership positions which they prejudicially use to exercise political, economic and social power.

When Hurricane Katrina devastated the United States in 2005, the Cuban government's offer of *"1 600 medics, field hospitals and 83 tons of medical supplies to ease the humanitarian disaster"* was not accepted, as noted by Mary Murray on 14 September 2005. This was a missed opportunity to forge human solidarity across ideological divides and to elevate human lives and dignity above all else.

The coronavirus has hit Italy with deadly intensity and the country faces its worst crisis in modern history. The European Union and the American administration have been unable to send medical expertise needed by the Italians. Cubans have been openly welcomed by the Italian government and its people. The coronavirus sweeping the world has forced humanity to refocus on peace as a transformative force to reshape human relations.

Peace missions are needed because human freedoms and lives are at stake. George Washington University Director of the Cuba Documentation Project at the National Security Archives, Peter Kornbluh stated that *"you have a leading European nation accepting support in the form of a medical team...And it goes to the history of Cuba's deep and long-lasting commitment to humanitarian solidarity. Cuba ...was on the frontlines of the fight against Ebola in Africa. They received the utmost compliments from former American United Nations Ambassador, Samantha Power... And it's a similarly awesome thing for Cuba to be sending doctors to Italy as part of a worldwide effort, really, to fight this pandemic."*

Italy is in a crisis, but the current American administration has not sent their doctors to Italy and neither to any poor countries across the world. Cuba is tiny, the 'David' of the world that the government of Italy called upon during the worst crisis that it faces in modern history. They placed the lives of Italians above ideology and elevated a principle of human solidarity to save lives. Italians and Cubans are the new peace symbols for humanity.

Peace and human dignity are at the centre of the medical missions of mercy undertaken by the Cubans across the world. The response to the coronavirus can help to unite humanity to reveal the best versions of ourselves.

- *Professor Brian Williams is a visiting Professor in Peace, Mediation and Labour Relations, University of the Sacred Heart, Gulu, Uganda; Chief Executive: Williams Labour Law and Mediation; Thought Leader Award Recipient for 2018 (Black Management Forum). *Article first published in the Cape Argus, 31 March 2020.*

ISSUED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY | SACP
EST. 1921 AS THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA | CPSA

Dr Alex Mohubetswane Mashilo
Central Committee Member:
Head of Media & Communications

FOR MEDIA LIAISON & CIRCULATION SERVICES
Hlengiwe Nkonyane
Communications Officer:
Media Liaison, Social & Multi-Media Digital Platforms Co-ordinator
Mobile: +27 (0) 79 384 6550

OFFICE, WEBSITE, SOCIAL & MULTI-MEDIA DIGITAL PLATFORMS
Office: +27 (0) 11 339 3621/2
Website: www.sacp.org.za
Twitter: SACP1921
Facebook Page: South African Communist Party