UMSEBENZI ONLINE

Umsebenzi Online, Volume 19, Number 19, 8 June 2020

Voice of the South African Working Class

In this issue

- Why is economic heterodox being ignored in SA policy and government interventions?
- Who was Moses Mabhida: Lecture in Memory of Moses Mabhida

Why is economic heterodox being ignored in SA policy and government interventions?

By Sithembiso Bhengu

We are now on the third month since the national lockdown began on 26 March 2020. We have been inundated with figures and analyses pointing to the health, social protection and economic ramifications of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The health modelling scenarios suggest the worst is still to come, estimating as much as two million infections and 40 000 fatalities by the end of the year. The economic and social modelling paint their own grim picture of a shrinking economy, with a gross domestic product (GDP) decline of more than seven per cent, estimated seven million in job losses, which obviously mean a social crisis, especially among the already vulnerable, but also extending precarity to the heart of the 'middle class'.

While there seems to be consensus on the health crisis (not withstanding a few dissenting voices) posed by the pandemic, and on the long treacherous road ahead still to be navigated, there seems to be a dichotomy in the social and economic analyses, modelling and intervention options. There is also a protracted war for capturing the hearts and minds of our people, as well as policy makers, on the responses needed to ameliorate the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, including economic and social collapse. I read at least three opinion pieces on the economy, both clearly positioned to advance their narrative.

Marlize van der Merwe titled, in *'SA can't pull itself up by its bootstraps. There isn't money: Why global losses worry experts?'*, quotes much from Morne Mostert, Director of the Futures Institute at Stellenbosch University. Isaah Mhlanga, Chief Economist at Alexander Forbes, penned *'We can't just spend our way out of this economic crisis, debt still matters'*. Dominic Brown from the Alternative Information and Development Centre produced a *'Universal income – an idea whose time has come'*.

At the heart of these three opinion pieces is a continuing contestation over the macro-economic framework, economic policy direction and interventions by government in the economy. There are two narratives.

The first emphasises 'structural reform' with greater focus on liberalisation of the economy, coupled with privatisation of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), stringent austerity measures to 'attract FDI' (foreign direct investment), and drive 'economic recovery'. This narrative represents ideological arguments premised on the dominant neoclassical economics paradigm, from which the notorious Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were based. SAPs were imposed on many countries in the global south by the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) and World Bank, in South Africa 'our' Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, and recent austerity programmes forced on Ireland, Greece and Cyprus following their default post-2008 financial crisis.

The second narrative highlights state-led structural transformation of the economy, to propel it towards a qualitatively different and inclusive growth path, in which case macro-economic policy (monetary and fiscal policies) is used as an instrument to drive this development agenda and/or programme.

The challenge we face in South Africa, and in most of the global south, is that the subject of economics, especially macro-economic framework, is no longer considered intellectual or academic, that is, as premised on hypothesis, research methodology and modelling. Instead, in their hegemony over the field, the neoclassical paradigm has canonised it, turned it into a religious script from which any deviation is castigated as ideological heretics, stripped of any possibility of intellectual and research basis.

What is particularly concerning is that even at this time of unprecedented crisis (which predates the Covid-19 pandemic, but greatly accentuated by it) the dominant neoclassical mantra, with its strong backing from business and mainstream media, has gone to overdrive, as both Apostles and Prophets of doom, warning against any attempt to go beyond the 'script' to offer solutions.

Isaah Mhlanga dismisses economic alternatives as 'having the memory of a fish – very short'. Interestingly, he then uses the cases of Ireland, Greece, Cyprus and broader Southern Europe to warn against overspending the money 'we don't have' (we can add the former Yugoslavia, Chile, Argentina and almost the rest of post-independence sub-Saharan Africa for a good measure). What Mhlanga forgets is that his so called 'crisis they brought against themselves leading to payment default' actually resulted from imposed austerity programmes, which shrunk these economies severely, reduced their productive capacity, resulting in massive increases in unemployment, collapse in national revenue due to liberalisation, with banks and international lending agencies emerging as winners.

We are being warned and admonished by the neoclassical sect to be wary of 'false prophets', straying away from established and canonised script of 'sound economic discipline', almost in the same manner St. Paul warned his disciple Timothy to shun those who reject 'sound biblical doctrine'. What is of concern is that the South African government, which is supposed to be a secular state, seems to be captured and zombified by this religious sect (the neoliberal, neoclassical economics sect). As a result, there's very little appetite or ear for alternative theories, research and modelling on the economy.

It is incumbent upon us to continue to advocate for a return to intellectual discourse, a return to debate, a return to open dialogue, especially on this 'holy grail' called the economy and allow all voices an opportunity to deliberate on models based on rigorous research, comparative case studies as well as historical lessons from the rest of the world.

This is what we know. It was development economic framework that helped Europe rebuild in the aftermath of devastation of the Second World War. It were development policies that enabled Japan to build what became the second largest economy by the 1990s, it was and

continues to be this approach that anchors the German economy. It was and continues to be this approach that has enabled China to become the second largest economy in the world, and is currently growing the economy of Vietnam, as was the case with South Korea and Malaysia. We also know the effects of the Bretton Woods SAPs on Africa, neoliberal austerity measures in Latin America, former Yugoslavia, Ireland, Greece and even Turkey.

Coming closer to home, we know and live with the consequences of the 1996 GEAR class project in South Africa, protracted de-industrialisation, austerity measures with minor interventions in the face of massive unemployment, poverty and inequality, couched in fancy acronyms like AsgiSA (Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa) and the NDP (National Development Plan). As noted earlier, the economic crisis in South Africa and globally has been accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic, but has been lingering from the 2008 crisis unevenly, with the south more negatively affected, in South Africa further augmented by dismal failure of the neoliberal agenda and corruption and capture of the state resulting from it.

The most lingering question remains *'why are heterodox views on the economy ignored, even at this unprecedented time of crisis?'* The answer lies in a correct enunciation of subject itself, the subject of economics inherently about the political economy. Economics is embedded in the politics of production, distribution, control and power. The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the most urgent need for debate and discussion on recovery options across the globe. We have seen the application of heterodox principles and tenets in various economic responses across the globe. Yet, in South Africa, while heterodox perspectives are represented by highly respected scholars, thinkers and activists, many of their well-articulated propositions remain in the periphery, largely because of the class interests influential at the National Treasury, the South African Reserve Bank and swathes of economic reasoning, even within the movement, ostensibly representing a large sway of business interest, especially financial and banking capital.

To this, we need a bolder voice from broader progressive formations. We need a swelling of input from research, analysis and modelling. We also need a coalescing community, labour and civil society *'anti-neoliberal'* mobilisation, what the SACP calls a popular Left front around specific programmatic alternatives in dealing with health, political-economy and social crisis. We need more than the rehashed sermons by neoclassical apostles and their disciples, playing lyrical about 'foundations of economic discipline', as if it was not these that delivered us like an Uber to the global health, economic and environmental catastrophes we find ourselves in.

- *Dr Sithembiso Bhengu is the Director at the Chris Hani Institute*

Who was Moses Mabhida: Lecture in Memory of Moses Mabhida

By Cde Ben Martins

Who was Moses Mabhida, we may ask? And what is his relevance to the South African Communist Party (SACP), African National Congress (ANC) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu)?

What follows is a brief profile of the former General Secretary of the SACP, who led the Party from 1978 until his death on 8 March 1986 in Maputo, Mozambique.

Comrade (Cde) Moses Mabhida was born on 11 October 1923, in Thornville in KwaZulu-Natal. His two early political motivators and mentors were his father Stimela, who was a dedicated member of the trade unionist Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), and Cde Harry Gwala who was a radical teacher at the school which Cde Mabhida attended. Cde Harry Themba Gwala introduced him and other students to trade unionism, socialist ideas and the Communist Party. Cde Mabhida's formal schooling came to an end in Standard 9 when his parents could not afford to keep him in school to complete his secondary school education. Once out of school he immersed himself in trade union work.

In 1942 he joined the Communist Party. Between the years 1942 and 1952 when he did full-time trade union work, he organised scores of workers in Natal. At one stage he led a strike of Durban dock workers. The result of the strike action was that the daily pay system was abandoned and a weekly pay system and minimum wage were introduced.

In the mid-1950's he served as the Secretary of the ANC's Pietermaritzburg branch. It was during this period that he became a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC). From 1958 to 1959 he was the acting Chairperson of the ANC in Natal. Cde Mabhida's close working relationship with the President of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli was well-known and highly regarded.

Cde Mabhida was a central participant in the development of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) and was elected its vice-president at its first congress in 1955. It was at Sactu that he met and worked closely with other liberation movement stalwarts such as Cde Stephen Dlamini and Cde Billy Nair. From the 14 to the 16 April 1958 Cde Moses Mabhida led a successful stay-away campaign. Furthermore, in 1959 he became the acting president of the ANC in Natal and took part in the potato boycott organised by the SACP. In 1960 Cde Mabhida became the Chairperson of Sactu and was a leading member of the "one-pound-a-day" campaign.

A week after the declaration of the 1960 State of Emergency by the apartheid regime, Cde Mabhida was sent abroad by Sactu to represent it internationally. For the following three years, he organised international solidarity activities in Prague with the World Federation of Trade Unions and assisted with the development of African trade union federations.

In 1963, after his re-election to the NEC of the ANC at the Lobatse Conference in Botswana, he was requested by President Oliver Tambo to devote himself to the development of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), the joint ANC and SACP military wing. In carrying out this mandate he underwent military training. As MK Commissar he became the Chief Political Instructor of new military recruits, and later served as the Commander of MK.

Cde Mabhida's repeated re-election to the ANC NEC, and his appointment to the Revolutionary Council on its creation in 1969, and later to the Politico-Military Council which replaced it, reflected and bore testimony to the respect he had among ANC members and leaders. After the ANC's 1969 Morogoro Conference Cde Mabhida was instrumental in setting up the ANC's Department of Intelligence and Security.

In 1979 he served on the Politico-Military Strategy Commission that produced the 'Green Book' policy document. In November 1979, he was elected General Secretary of the SACP, replacing Cde Moses Kotane who had died the previous year. In the 1980's Cde Mabhida continued to carry out his mandate of political and logistical planning for MK. At various times he was based in Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland.

In 1985 while on a mission to Havana in Cuba, Cde Mabhida suffered a stroke. After a year of illness, he had a heart-attack and died in Maputo. In a eulogy at his state funeral, President Oliver Tambo had the following to say about Cde Mabhida: "he was educated in the stern university of mass struggle ...it is rarely given to a people that they should produce a single person who epitomises their hopes and expresses their common resolve as Moses Mabhida did. In simple language he could convey the aspirations of all our people in their magnificent variety, explain the fears and prejudices of the unorganised and sense the feelings of even the most humble among our people." In his tribute, his friend and fellow revolutionary President Samora Machel had the following to say: "We shall be the guardians of his body. Men who die fighting, who refuse to surrender, who serve the people and their ideals to the last breath, are victors. Mabhida is a victorious combatant!"

Cde Mabhida's body was embalmed, in the belief that it would one day be reburied in a liberated South Africa. More than 20 years later his body was exhumed and reburied on 2 December 2006 in Slangspruit, Pietermaritzburg.

What then are some of the lessons, that we as members of the Communist Party, may learn from Cde Mabhida's life as a revolutionary? First and foremost it is his embodiment of a disciplined activist and cadre, who through working in the organisational structures of the ANC-SACP-Sactu Alliance gained the trust and legitimacy of the Alliance members and leaders.

What can we as members of the Communist Party do to keep his legacy alive, over and above retaining a steadfast belief and commitment in the relevance and future of socialism?

Firstly, from a party building perspective it means equipping ourselves with the Marxist-Leninist tools of analysis, namely historical and dialectical materialism in order to be able to analyse the objective conditions we live in and to respond to the rapidly changing socio-economic-and-political events taking place locally and internationally.

A life-long reading and study of dialectical materialism assists in transforming the way we see ourselves – and each other. Dialectical materialism enlightens, inspires debate and enriches with the knowledge of great thinkers, pioneers, radicals and visionaries whose ideas still determine the fate of millions of people.

Who we are and what we do in practice as communists has an impact on how the policies of the SACP are received. We have to square rhetoric with reality at all times. Political credibility can only be established through action matched with words.

Mere faith in the future of socialism is not enough. We have to face our challenges and failures with candour and honesty, and guard against finding excuses for our insipid activism in ANC, Cosatu, South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) and in the Mass Democratic

Movement (MDM) which includes progressive Women and Youth Organisations. Our activism in these organisations should and can be more vigorous.

Making workers aware that no matter how much their immediate conditions might improve, the relationship with their employers remains exploitative and raising their consciousness to fuel the class struggle against capitalist relations of production, is a core part of our responsibility to raise the class consciousness of workers.

In order for the SACP to effectively carry out its working-class mission and mandate, it needs to be united and jealousy guard inner-party democracy against factionalism, without suppressing debate and constructive criticism. It also requires ongoing vigilance against a bureaucratic-authoritarian style of leadership which can denude the Party of its socialist practice and democratic content if leadership and influence becomes concentrated in the hands of factional self-perpetuating elite.

It is now more vital than ever, to subject ourselves to unsparing honest constructive critique, in order to draw the necessary organisational lessons that the Party needs to move forward stronger. We should not allow ourselves to be muted or inhibited merely because an exposure of our organisational challenges and weaknesses will provide venom to our class enemies. To do so openly and honestly is an assertion of our justified confidence to confront, analyse and correct our shortfalls, in order to draw the necessary lessons for the future. But in doing so, we should however not become demobilised by gazing at our navels and taking a day off from fighting our class enemy. We should continue exposing the social inequalities caused by capitalism that are presently being laid bare by the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic locally and internationally.

We can and we should do more to strengthen our branches and to empower our members through regular political education, to explain, defend, exhort and support the policies of the Party. And to be the voice of the voiceless, in taking up community issues, in the communities where they are located.

It behoves the SACP to hold its members who occupy public office at a local, regional, provincial and national government level, to a high communist ethical moral standard of probity and honesty.

Party members should also without fear or favour, not engage in intrigue and factional activity in fraternal organisations and avoid being a part of any faction. The Party has a historic duty to remain true to its communist principles at all times, of fostering working class unity and being its lodestar. Party leadership must be won rather than imposed. The Party cannot earn the title of vanguard by merely proclaiming it.

Communists can only earn their place as a vanguard force by superior efforts of leadership and devotion, to the cause of the working class and socialism. Communists can only win adherence to Marxism-Leninism by demonstrating its superiority as a theoretical guide to revolutionary practice.

In regard to Cosatu, the Party has on the one hand, a responsibility to work with it and to strengthen it and its affiliates. But on the other hand, the Party also has a concomitant and broader working-class responsibility to foster co-operation and unity between Cosatu and

other trade union federations and unions in South Africa. The Party also has the responsibility to reach out to, and to engage non-unionised workers.

The South African Communist Party's orientation to trade unions and their federations has been that, they shall be completely independent and answerable only to the decisions of their members or affiliates, democratically arrived at. Furthermore, that no political party, state organ or enterprise, whether public, private or mixed, shall directly or indirectly interfere with such independence.

At a political party level, it is necessary for the SACP to engage political parties and organisations that have a socialist or progressive orientation, on issues and programmes of action that can be taken up jointly with them, in order to advance the cause of the working class. The life of Cde Moses Mabhida holds a mirror to us and shows us that the future of humankind lies in the socialist development of society.

- *Cde Dikobe wa Mogale Ben Martins is SACP Central Committee member. This is the text of a lecture he presented at an SACP Mpumalanga Political School seminar, held on Saturday 30 May 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