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WHO JOINED THE PARTY? THE CHANGING SOCIOLOGY OF SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNISM, 1921-2021

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Who joined the South African Communist Party during the different phases of its history? From which social groups did it usually find its membership and looser support? And in which ways did the character of Party's social base shape its beliefs, ideas and culture? Finally, how has the shift since 1990 from functioning as an elitist vanguard to becoming a mass organization affected the Party's character and purpose?

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In the first years of its history, the CPSA would concentrate its energies mainly in building support among white workers. From mid-1920, with the local effects of global recession prompting militant reactions from a still formidable white labour movement even those of its leaders such as Sidney Bunting who wanted to recruit Africans acknowledged that black workers needed to have visible organizational strength before whites could acknowledge them as "worthy fellow labourers in the common cause".[1] The departure from the party's main predecessor, the International Socialist League (ISL) at the beginning of 1920 of most of the members of the Yiddish-speaking branch probably strengthened the influence of the English craft unionist grouping. This is rather confirmed by a profile of the new organisation that Bunting's comrade, Ivon Jones provided for Comintern. Here he supplied commentaries about twenty-four prominent party personalities. These biographical notes offer helpful insights into the social nature of the party's leadership and following.

All of Jones' s sketches are of men; in fact Rebecca Bunting was elected as a member of the executive, seemingly at that time the only woman active in the party. The twenty four men on Jones's list included William Thibedi and Bernard Sigamoney but otherwise all the rest were white. Colin Wade, as a dentist, Sidney Bunting an attorney and Ivon Jones, himself a book-keeper were broadly speaking from professional or white collar backgrounds. The rest were mainly skilled artisans, including four fitters, two tailors, an engine driver and three tramwaymen, as well as builders, cabinet makers and two mineworkers. They were mainly aged in their thirties and early forties. The names suggest that they were chiefly of English immigrant origins or descent.[2] Six of the nine executive members were from the ISL and the Witwatersrand as were most of the three hundred or so of the CPSA's members.[3] Though Jones included in his profiles Charles Tyler, Sam Barlin and Abe Goldman, each men with experience in trying to recruit African or coloured workers

[1] HJ Simons and RJ Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 268.

[2] These characteristics seem to have been stable features of the League at that time. In its issue of 19 January 1917,The International contained an occupational analysis of the League's leadership that had just been been elected: 3 carpenters, 2 fitters, 1 electrican, a sampler, a cabinet maker, a pipe fitter, a bricklayer, a blacksmith, and, finally, a book-keeper (David Ivon Jones). The names suggest a mainly British immigrant leadership though the executive included one Afrikaner and three names that may have been Jewish.

[3] Apollon Davidson, Irina Filatova, Valentin Gorodnov and Sheridan Johnsl, *South Africa and the Communist International, Volume 1*, Frank Cass, London, 2001, pp. 85-87.

into unions, most of the people he described would have been active in the League's efforts to shape and influence the white labour movement. In effect, the rupture with the syndicalists in 1920 which had prompted the departure of many of the Yiddish speakers had resulted in the CPSA's main predecessor becoming a body constituted mainly by "English" artisans.

Externally-derived policy considerations helped to persuade the CPSA to concentrate on winning over white workers. The Third Congress of the Comintern, in from 23 June to 12 July 1921 adopted resolutions that acknowledged "the ebbing of the revolutionary wave in Europe", a situation which justified cooperation with labour movements and parties, through the formation of "united workers' fronts".[4] With respect to South Africa, Comintern officials between the two Congresses, between mid-1920 and mid 1921, appeared to encourage the League to engage more with black South Africans; Zinoviev's comment can be interpreted in that light. But by the time the CPSA was founded, the Comintern line had shifted and the South African party would have been expected to follow the course set by Lenin at the Third Congress and attempt to build a "common front of all [workers] parties", advice that Jones relayed back to Johannesburg in his report on the Third International.[5] Though the South African Communists would wait until 1923 to decide in favour of applying for Labour Party affiliation, they would establish their office back in the Trades Hall in Johannesburg, an unwelcoming environment for any black visitors. As Eddie Roux explained in his biography of Sidney Bunting, most members of the new party's leadership felt "their main work was among the [white] trade unions and the Trades Hall was a strategic centre".[6]

And what strategically did the Party hope to promote at this stage? It would still contest elections but with no real faith in any parliamentary road to socialism. A strong vein of syndicalism would persist in shaping the outlook of many leaders; the idea that an emancipatory commonwealth could be established through the workers' councils that would emerge at the helm of an insurrectionary strike movement. To most of the Party's leaders the 1922 white miners' strike appeared to represent such a revolutionary moment, despite the strikers' aim of defending racially coded job reservation. Indeed Party spokesmen were ready to tolerate even the strikers' slogans, albeit with qualifications. "Communism alone can make South Africa a white man's country", is so far as "that Communism alone can secure to every workers – whatever his colour – the full product of his labour", they explained.[7] In any case, as Lenin himself would recognise in Moscow, the Rand Rebellion was a major armed confrontation between workers and capital. How could Communists hold back from an action that literally embodied white working class strikers as anti-capitalist class warriors. Communists were swift to characterise the commandos as "Red Guards of the Rand", in doing so self-consciously drawing parallels between this South African rebellion and the militarised formations that had undergirded successful socialist revolution in Russia and so nearly effective workers uprisings in parts of Germany.[8]

The strikers' defeat and the subsequent incorporation of white labour into a coalition partnership with Afrikaner nationalism would prompt Communists to seek their main support amongst black South Africans. Communists would retain a presence within the white trade union leadership, though, until the Party's prohibition in 1950. White party membership was changing, though. It was younger than in 1920, a consequence of the build-up of a Young Communist League whose

[4] Alexander Vatlin and Stephen A Smith, "The Comintern" in Stephen A Smith (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, pp. 188-189.
[5] "The Third International: Report of the South African Delegates", The International, 2 September 1921, p.2.
[6] Edward Roux, *S P Bunting: A Political Biography*, African Bookman, Cape Town, 1944, p. 90
[7] Allison Drew, *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History, Volume 1 1907-1950*, University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town, 1996, p. 50.
[8] *The International*, 10 February 1922 cited in Hirson and Williams, The Delegate for Africa, p. 228.

founders had joined the Party leadership. Given the League's concentration in Johannesburg on high-school related campaigning as well as the conspicuous role played by university students such as Eddie Roux and Solly Sachs in its leadership, it is likely that the party's white membership was becoming increasingly drawn from educated and professional people, mainly men. Meanwhile, the trade unions in which party members were most likely to officiate were based in the emerging manufacturing sector, particularly clothing, often employing quite recent Jewish immigrants from the Russian Pale, a key group. The Anglo-Australian white labour aristocracy in the workforce on the mines and in the associated engineering trades were less central to Communist leadership than they had been at the time of the Party's inception. The elected branch delegates who attended the fourth congress at the end of 1925 included the Johannesburg group, led by Bunting, an attorney. His companion delegates included a young leather worker (Willie Kalk), a botany student (Eddie Roux), a journalist (Bernard Sachs), a trade unionist (Jimmy Shields) and an ex-teacher (William Thibedi). Cape Town's delegates were respectively coloured (Jonny Gomas), African (Eddie Khaile), Indian (P de Norman) and white Jewish (J Pick). Benoni was represented by Jessie Chapman, together with former mineworker Jimmy Shields from Johannesburg embodying the Party's remaining connections with the white labour establishment

As is evident from this list, among the party's membership and beginning to join its leadership were black South Africans. The earliest identifiable African Communists tended to come from relatively genteel backgrounds, they themselves were well educated. William Thibedi, a teacher and a clergyman's son, would have been a case in point. But by the end of 1926, the party was beginning to draw in larger numbers from former ICU branches in smaller towns in the Transvaal, these new entrants would have included labourers, service workers and farmhands, often people without schooling. In Johannesburg by 1926 the Party was running a night school for illiterate people, in doing so supplying an easily accessible portal for the entry into the Communist movement of Johannesburg-based African workers. From 1927, recruitment efforts would be directed mainly at black South Africans, first through efforts to build trade unions amongst factory and service workers as well as setting up branches in African residential locations including Sophiatown.

African Communists, themselves frequently ex-ICU organisers, often worked through activist networks established by the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union. In Vereeniging, for example, the party took over a disaffected ICU branch that had been led by Communists whom the Union had expelled; a popular night school helped to swell its local organised following.[9] In 1929 and 1930 Vereeniging Communists were active in local protests against a new lodger's tax and new local regulations that required African women living in the townships to carry passes.[10] A local member of the Party, Rapatana Tjelele also helped to establish an embryonic steelworkers union.[11] In Potchefstroom the Party grew after Bunting had succeeded in obtaining an acquittal for Thibedi who had been arrested earlier on an incitement charge. As in the case of Vereeniging, the party's popularity and membership would grow to over a thousand during 1928 as a consequence of Communists' engagement in local opposition to the municipality's introduction of lodgers' fees in the African township. Party headquarters directed Edwin Mofutsanyana and Shadrach Kotu in June 1928 to work as organisers at set up a night school. They did their best to instil a systematic structure, but in the end "We had a big loose party and we called them communists".[12] The lodgers' fees were a measure that women especially viewed as an assault on their families as children over

[9] *South African Worker*, 25 February 1927
[10] *Umsebenzi*, 28 February 1929 and 10 October 1930.
[11] Secretary of Interior to Secretary of Native Affairs, 19 February, 1929, SANA, NTS 181-301, p. 28.
[12] Robert Edgar, *Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana and the CPSA, 1927-1939*, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2005, p. 9.

the age of 18 living at home would now be taxed and in effect have to seek permission to live in the location. The party supplied more legal support in trials of people who refused to buy the permits and local Communists, many of them women, organised meetings and a procession of 300 to the court building when non permit holders were charged. In this vicinity, it was the party's prestige and its apparent embodiment of an alternative source of authority and power to a repressive local administration that were the sources of its local appeal. As Josie Mpama, one of the local party leaders recollected much later: "When one man asked … why he should join, the answer was given that he would be able to carry a briefcase, like the organisers do".[13] Josie Mpama herself looked after Edwin in Potchefstroom; he lodged with her and later they would live as man and wife.

Elsewhere many of the Party's new followers, in the South-East Transvaal for example, were farm workers, attracted to the party for much the same reasons that such people were at that time flocking to the ICU, opposition to freshly imposed local taxes such as lodgers fees and farmworkers grievances. Meetings among these groups were often held "in a religious atmosphere", the party's Central Committee noted in mid- 1927,[14] a mood to which the party's own African organisers responded with their own usage of religious terminology and biblical parallels: "we speak of the love that you Christians speak of and we believe we should protect that love", Edwin Mofutsanyana, reassured his listeners at one party rally.[15] These efforts enabled the Party to record substantial increases in its membership. By mid-1928 it had claimed an organised following of 1750, up from 400 in 1926. 1,600 of this total were not white and by the end of year the total had risen to 3,000.[16] Such claims need to be interpreted in their context: the party was concerned to demonstrate to Comintern that it building a significant African following. A visiting Comintern official found in 1931 that membership claims of a similar order were often based on "one-time contacts" and were hence likely to be seriously inflated.[17] This may have been the case earlier; ballooning local memberships such as those registered by party organisers in Potchefstroom were more likely to reflect transient local excitement rather than durable commitment. As the Party itself noted, retrospectively, in 1932, these local followings were usually based on "loose and indefinite" relationships; the one thousand people signed up at Potchefstroom were all recruited at a single meeting, and many of these too were farmworkers rather than location residents.[18] Really committed and durable membership through the decade would not exceed more than a few hundred.

Strategically, in the late 1920's and the early 1930s, the Party was responding to Comintern injunctions to work towards a black workers and peasants' Soviet republic, though what this would embody and what it would require would shift several times before 1935, alternately requiring the Party to ally itself with African Nationalist leadership or to compete with it or to transform the ANC from below. The Comintern line would shift, though, in 1935, to advocacy of an anti-fascist united front "from above", in practice requiring a reinvigoration of its links with white labour as well as trying to draw in Afrikaner unskilled workers, winning them over from nationalist solidarities.

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[13] Julie Wells, "The Day the Town Stood Still: Women in Resistance in Potchefstroom, 1912-1930" in Belinda Bozzoli, ed., *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983, p. 286.
[14] Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades: identities and loyalties on the South African left*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000, 85.
[15] Edgar, *Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana*, pp. 11-12; Robin D Kelley, 'The religious odyssey of Black Communists in South Africa and the US South: Observations from the 1920's and 1930', ASA annual meeting, Atlanta GA, 2-5 November 1989, p. 3.
[16] Johns, Marxism-Leninism in a multi-racial environment: the origins and early history of the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932, Ph D Dissertation, Department of Government, Harvard University, 1965, p. 399.
[17] Mia Roth, *The Communist Party in South Africa, Racism, Eurocentrism and Moscow, 1921-1950*, Partridge, Johannesburg, 2016, pp. 94-95.
[18] Edgar, Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana, p. 10.

In general, between 1936 and 1939 the Party's membership remained roughly the same and very small. The total figures in party reports in this period, which refer to the organisation's active following, fluctuated between 150 and 250. Moreover, as textile trade unionist and party secretary Issy Wolfson commented in April 1937, any recruitment successes were hard to sustain for organisers were finding it "difficult to retain new members".[19] The minutes of a Politburo meeting on 11 June 1937 contain a list of the party's active groups in the vicinity of Johannesburg: in all the places mentioned - Sophiatown, Ferreira, Doornfontein, Vrededorp, Benoni, Pimville, Eastern Native Township and Prospect - the names of the organisers for each group suggest they were constituted mainly by Africans, with the exception of Doornfontein and Ferrierastown, in which the organisers were both activists with Jewish Workers' Club backgrounds.[20] The organiser for Pimville was listed as William Thibedi, also employed to organise a steel workers trade union, a body that he had helped to start in Vereeniging in 1928.[21]

With the exception of often recently-arrived Jewish immigrants, on the Witwatersrand white workers generally stayed away. Well attended anti-fascist picnics or even Communists holding senior positions in white trade unions did not generate a significant organised following amongst white South Africans. As Wolfson ruefully admitted in his reporting to the Comintern, the Party had not even attempted "to get a foothold… in any of the European working class suburbs in Johannesburg".[22] Anti-Fascist agitation or even events associated with the Party's new front organisation, the Friends of the Soviet Union, did not result in any significant extension of the party's organised base, even in those neighbourhoods or among those groups in which these bodies were active. As Allison Drew has noticed, "amongst white trade unionists, broad sympathy for the USSR could co-exist with dismissal of the CPSA as a significant political factor".[23] Even Garment Workers Union leaders like Anna Scheepers and Dulcie Hartwell for whom the party arranged invitations to visit the Soviet Union tended to remain within the Labour Party, holding back from joining the communists. In Natal and the Western Cape the picture was more encouraging.

In Durban, Communist aligned trade-unionism was supplying a fresh focus for local activism. In 1934 or possibly earlier Eddie Roux had recruited George Ponnen, one of the first Indian South Africans to join the Party, probably during the time when he was visiting with Bettie du Toit, trying to persuade Indian textile workers to come out on a sympathy strike. Ponnen's first encounter with Roux was when he bought from him a copy of Umsebenzi outside the Durban city hall. In the following decade Ponnen would help establish and lead 27 trade unions. Together with another recently joined Indian Communist, HA Naidoo, Ponnen led an arguably successful strike for wage increases and reduced hours at Falkirk Foundry.[24] This involved 400 Indian, coloured and African workers organised by a new Iron and Steel Workers' Union and started on May 26th 1937, lasting thirteen weeks. The workers received strike pay funded by the Natal Indian Congress.[25] Communist-led trade union struggles may not necessarily have extended the local party's membership, though. Wolfson writing to the British Party in October 1937 noted that though Communists maintained an office in Durban, because of the restrictive local political climate they could not "carry on active political work as a

[19] Davidson et al, *South Africa and the Communist International*, *Volume 2*, p. 243.
[20] Davidson et al, *South Africa and the Communist International*, *Volume 2*, p. 252.
[21] Politbureau Meeting minutes, 16 November 1936. Comintern Archive Online, 495/14/350/19
[22] Davidson et al, *South Africa and the Communist International*, *Volume 2*, p. 263.
[23] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 181.
[24] Successful in the sense that wages afterwards did increase and the strike itself prompted the Amalgamated Engineering Union to support the subsequent organisation of unskilled labour. Wolfson to CPGB, 19 November 1937, Comintern Archive Online, 495/14/350/100
[25] Bill Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban, 1910-1990*, James Currey, Oxford, 1995, 60-61; Profile of George Ponnen, Naidoo Papers.

Communist Party… in Durban last year the Party has not been able to hold a single independent meeting.. you cannot say that the party exists in Durban..".[26] Two months later, Edwin Mofutsanyana was telling the Central Committee about "the terrible position" in Durban where the "Native" and white comrades were at odds with each other – the Africans, Mofutsanyana reported, were saying that the whites were chauvinists and Trotskyists. To be sure, the "comrades did good work in the trade unions", but, "there was no party work, no meetings, no propaganda".[27] Much the same point emerges from the most authoritative academic commentary on the Communists' contribution to Indian trade unions in Durban: the Party was too small to really shape the local labour movement despite so many unions being Communist led, and its local Industrial Secretariat was too short staffed to perform its intended coordinating and liaison functions. Party night schools were directed at an elite group of union officials, not ordinary workers. It their public messaging Duran communists joined Natal Indian Congress activists emphasising objections to segregation rather than stressing any specifically working-class-oriented issues. But the basis for an alliance with radicals in the Natal Indian Congress was established in the late 1930s.[28]

In Cape Town, though, the party was more visibly assertive. Ray Alexander worked for the Party as a "full-time functionary" from 1932. In this capacity she made a major contribution to the organisational effort that helped the local party to survive the thirties, and even towards the end of the decade, prosper. Alexander arrived in Cape Town already a Communist, an immigrant from Latvia.[29] While learning dressmaking at technical school in Riga she became involved in clandestine networks. In Cape Town she became a firm supporter of the Black Republic. She joined the CPSA as soon as she arrived in Cape Town aged sixteen, attending its study classes and selling papers after her daily work at a dress shop. By 1933, she had made her first forays into trade unionism organising African laundry workers and coloured bus and tram workers. In 1935 she helped set up a new union for shop workers and the following year she was involved in the formation of a Non-European Railway and Harbour Workers' Union, launched in the same hall in which the ICU had held its foundation meeting. Altogether, between 1937 and 1939, Ray Alexander helped to establish 19 unions in and around Cape Town, many of them under Communist leadership, mostly with Coloured or African membership, often working through Wage Board investigations in order to obtain early gains for their members.[30] Coloured worker organisations were included in official industrial conciliation procedures and this facilitated parallel unionism amongst Africans in the same workforces. In her autobiography, Alexander maintains that the local party's expanding following at this time was largely a result of members recruited from these new trade unions.[31] Communist recruitment of Africans in trade unions in the mid to late 1930s in Cape Town and Durban was in conditions that had become more favourable for African industrial workers, a consequence of the expansion of manufacturing after 1933 and, most importantly, a new Wage Act in 1937 in which the Wage Board was reorganised so that it could more actively set African worker wages; the regulation requiring African workers to all sign any calls for its investigations was removed. Between 1933 and 1939 the annual number of Africans involved in strikes rose from 300 to 4,800 and the claimed membership of unregistered unions rose as well, official figures indicate.[32]

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[26] Davidson et al, *South Africa and the Communist International*, *Volume 2*, p. 263.
[27] Central Committee Minutes, 31 December 1937-3 January, 1938, Cominten Archives Online, 495/14/355/141
[28] Vishnu Padayachee, Vawda, S and Tichman P, *Indian Workers and Trade Unions in Durban, 1930-1950*, Report no. 20, ISER, Durban-Westville, 1985, pp, 159-169.
[29] Ray Alexander Simons, *All my life and all my strength*, p. 44
[30] Ray Alexander Simons, *All my life and all my strength*, p. 91.
[31] Ray Alexander Simons, *All my life and all my strength*, p. 89
[32] Rob Davies, *Capital*, *State and White Labour in South Africa*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1979, pp. 262-265

In Cape Town a fresh channel for recruitment into the party in Cape Town, Alexander has suggested, was supplied by the National Liberation League. The League was formed in December 1935 with James La Guma elected as its organisational secretary. La Guma was the main moving spirit behind the League's formation, composing its anthem, "Arise ye dark folks", using his own savings to buy its office furniture, and corresponding with the League Against Imperialism in Brussels about the details of its constitution.[33] He also edited and produced its newspaper, borrowing much of its content from the Profintern journal, *The Negro Worker*. Despite the presence in its leadership of established working class activists, including La Guma and Johnny Gomas, the League's constituency was rather different from the normal social milieu of Communist Party activism, for many of its adherents came from a "closely-knit" coloured intelligentsia, well-educated and middle class, occupationally. The League's president was Cissie Gool, the daughter of Abdullah Abdurahman. She had obtained an MA in psychology, the first black South African woman to hold such a qualification.[34] Their radicalisation, Lewis suggests, was a consequence of rising expectations among a new generation of university educated coloured men and women, the first real graduate cohort in the Coloured community, confronted with an increasingly segregatory political climate.[35] School teachers were especially conspicuous in the National Liberation League and coloured high school students supplied a high proportion of the attendance at its meetings. The League adopted a list of demands including universal suffrage and equality for all South Africans as well as unity with oppressed peoples in a joint struggle against imperialist control. By the end of the 1930s, then, at least among most of its members "national liberation" at was firmly established at the Party's immediate goal.

During the 1940s, membership would expand especially after the entry of the Soviet Union into the war and the Party's campaigning around the theme of "Defend South Africa". Broader support was evident in successful local electoral campaigning from both white and black voters. Indeed white ex-servicemen would constitute a new base of party support. Its increasingly open organisational character also prompted officials to supply detailed statistics at party gatherings. So for example, in 1949 an overall membership of 2,482 was predominantly African (1,673) with 269 whites, 428 coloureds and 112 Indians making up the balance. Geographically, this membership was concentrated in and around Cape Town (1062) with the 665 Communists in Johannesburg embodying the second largest district.[36] In mid 1950, at the time of the Party's dissolution, other district committee still existed for Pretoria, Durban and the East Rand.[37] Mainly African industrial workers (1,341) constituted just over half the party's following and the membership also included 452 farm or estate workers, 200 professionals and 500 housewives or domestic workers. These are the last detailed membership statistics available. Moses Kotane's report to the 1950 conference contained no numbers, though it noted that in certain areas District organisations had "shrunk to the status of groups". Overall, though, "the people" were "turning up for the Party in greater numbers" and African membership was "growing by leaps and bounds".[38] In Johannesburg, Communists had begun to recruit a new following among the migrant worker communities, especially in the Denver

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[33] Roger Field, Martin Klammer and Blanche La Guma, *In the Dark with My Dress on Fire*, Jacana, Johannesburg, 2011, p. 29, Alex La Guma, Jimmy la Guma, *Friends of the South African Library*, Cape Town, 1997, p. 69.
[34] Drew, *Discordant Comrades*, p. 14.
[35] Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1987 pp. 179-180.
[36] The remaining districts were Durban with 115 members, the East Rand with 305, Pretoria with 133, East London with 113 and Port Elizabeth with 75. There remained thirty Communists in "outside areas". Statistics from Report of the CC to National Conference of the CPSA, 8-10 July 1949, Simons Papers, File 0.12.1
[37] Moses Kotane, Affidavit in the matter of the Petition of Sam Kahn, Supreme Court, Cape Town, 14 September 1950, p. 3 (document included in Moses Kotane's police file, South African National Archives
[38] Report of the CC to National Conference of the CPSA, 5-8 January 1950, Simons Papers, 0.12.1

and Jeppe hostels and here too, in response to party policy, hostel-based communists as well as playing an animated role as trade unionists, also joined the ANC, bringing, in the words of one of the Johannesburg party leaders, "a very particular style of work that wasn't indigenous to these organisations".[39] The 1950 report admitted there was "a big gap between the spread of our influence and our present organisational strength", however. A district committee report from Cape Town confirms that "mass recruiting" was beginning in African townships, mainly among the most settled urbanised residents, though local party groups "were in a deplorable state", meeting irregularly and usually well behind in collecting subscriptions. As Bill Andrews had acknowledged in 1947, the Communist Party was "increasingly looked upon by the downtrodden as 'their party'".[40] This may well have been the case, though often the Party's followers in African townships were animated not so much by the prospect of a socialist alternative but rather the Party's record for "trying to speak for the rights of the Bantu people".[41]

In this decade, Communists accepted their new supporters as they found them, and in doing this they accumulated an enduring following. All the evidence suggests that the Party built its African support around campaigning on local issues and achieving incremental gains and modest victories rather than through mobilising around wider political objectives. It was through "bread and butter" struggles that activists were succeeding in persuading African townships residents that the Communists were, in Bill Andrews' words "their party". On the ground, this often brought it closer to the ANC with local Communist leaders such as Johnson Ngwevela or Raymond Mhlaba often doubling up as Congress notables. Through most of the decade, though, the party's relationship with the ANC was equivocal; indeed its very success in building African support encouraged some Communists to believe that the Party, not Congress could mobilise an African mass movement around a democratic programme. After all, in several local settings such as in the East Rand townships, as well as in Langa and Port Elizabeth, the Party probably had a larger organised activist following than the ANC. It may not have been "the powerful and conscious workers movement directed at socialism" envisaged in 1941 in the People's Programme, but the networks it embodied would often survive intact into the 1950s, underpinning mass campaigning against Apartheid. This was the Party's most important and durable achievement from this era.

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In 1953 the Party would reassemble as a clandestine formation. Who joined it? Much later Brian Bunting suggested that "the majority" of the old CPSA "remained loyal" though he also recalled that before its prohibition the Party "was full of people who were totally unsuitable for illegal work".[42] This may have been so emotionally, but in reality at most a fifth of the old membership was recruited into the clandestine units. Several people refused when they were approached including Edwin Mofutsanyana, Sam Kahn, Jack Simons and Johnny Gomas as well as Jimmy and Alex La Guma, though Jack Simons and Alex la Guma joined later, in exile.[43] In a report he delivered at a meeting of

[39] Lionel ("Rusty") Bernstein, quoted in Peter Delius, 'Sebatakgomo and the Zoutpansberg Balemi Assoociation: the ANC, the Communist Party and Rural Organisation', *Journal of African History*, 34, 1993, p. 310.
[40] Bill Andrews to Solly Sachs, 20 March 1947. Garment Workers Union Papers, AH 1092, Bcc.2.1
[41] The Guardian, 16 January 194y7, cited in Fortescue, "The Communist Party and the African Working Class in the 1940s", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 24, 3, 1991, p. 501.
[42] Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*, Inkululekop Publications, London, 1975, p. 173. Brian Bunting, interviewed by Sylvia Neame, London, 14 May 1986 (Sylvia Neame Papers, A2729, Folder E1).
[43] Brian Bunting, interviewed by Sylvia Neame, 14 May 1986 (Sylvia Neame Papers, A2729, Folder E1).

the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Moses Kotane claimed that by 1961, the SACP had a membership of between 4-500 and this was after a recent phase of expansion.[44] Bernstein notes that a majority of the CPSA's 300-400 membership in Johannesburg were against reconstitution.[45] We know that recruitment was selective and vetted by party leadership and at least one well known Indian CPSA member, Ismail Meer, who wanted to join believed he had been deliberately "discarded".[46] In the process certain key constituencies of the old party were either to fall away altogether or would become more weakly present in the new organisation. It seems likely that, as with the CPSA by 1950, most of the SACP membership would be African. African recruitment efforts especially targeted individuals who held local leadership positions – organisers of residents associations, for example, as well as trade union officials: as Turok noted, in the 1950s the Party perceived its role as a vanguard organisation.[47] Bunting in his biography of Kotane suggests that during the 1960 state of emergency "the party had a team of several hundred activists in the Johannesburg townships" alone, though this team may have also included ANC sympathisers.[48] The hostel-based migrant grouping in Johannesburg remained within the party: these were manufacturing workers, though the other township-based African members were likely to be engaged in either literate occupations or as small businessmen. Moses Kotane and Walter Sisulu, two of the most important African communists in the 1950s, maintained livelihoods as a furniture dealer and an estate agent respectively while Govan Mbeki who joined the Party in 1953 supplemented his salary from New Age by running a shop in Port Elizabeth. Sisulu joined the party in 1955 while serving as the ANC's secretary general after attending Michael Harmel's Marxist study group and one year later he was co-opted onto the Central Committee.[49] Port Elizabeth's communists were led by Raymond Mhlaba, a dry cleaning worker, though as a secondary school graduate untypically well-educated. Through the 1950s, a new emphasis in African recruitment would bring university graduates into the fold, what the party perceived to be a prestigious new intelligentsia: Joe Matthews and Duma Nokwe were early entrants in this group. It was a development that prompted some discomfort among the older African working class membership in Johannesburg.[50] In the late 1950s, African party recruitment efforts also began to focus on high schools.[51] Success in enrolling African "intellectuals" may have encouraged certain recruiters to become additionally restrictive in their selection. Natoo Babenia who joined Umkhonto in 1962 was discouraged from joining the party, being told, apparently that he "was not sufficiently intellectually adept".[52] He joined the party later, in prison.

The CPSA's old presence in the white labour movement was not reproduced in the new party: the most conspicuous white trade-unionist in the CPSA, Danie du Plessis, was among those who opposed reconstitution. White party leaders were increasingly likely to work in liberal professions; they tended to be younger and a significant group had served as soldiers in the Second World War. Many

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[44] Moses Kotane, Notes on aspects of the political situation in the Republic of South Africa, 9 November 1961, Ronald Kasrils Papers, 9 November 1961.
[45] Rusty Bernstein, *Memory against Forgetting*, Viking Penguin, Sandton, 1999, p. 123.
[46] Suttner, 'The Reconstitution of the SACP as an underground organisation', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 22, 1, 2004, p. 50. For another example of the party's early selectiveness in recruitment see Norma Kitson, *Where Sixpence Lives*, London, Hogarth Press, 1987, p. 91
[47] Ben Turok, interviewed by Tom Lodge, London 1985.
[48] Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, p, 257
[49] According to his biographer, his "primary loyalty" remained with the ANC (Elinor Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In our Lifetime*, Claremont, David Philip, 2002, p. 123).
[50] See John Pule Motshabi's remarks about his own and David Bopape's reactions in "Minutes of Africa Group meeting, 13 May 1982", Simons Papers, 08.1.
[51] See J J Jabulani, 'Why I joined the Communist Party', African Communist, no. 44, 1971, pp. 79-81.
[52] Natoo Babenia, *Memoirs of a Saboteur*, Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1995, p. 62.

were themselves Jewish immigrants or their children. More surprising was the cessation of party influence within Indian trade unions in Durban. Indian unions had been a major arena of CPSA activity but "during the 1950s" according to one veteran of the SACP's Durban base, Rowley Arenstein, "Indian workers were left in the cold".[53] This was partly because union officials engaged in this sector who were also CPSA members were among the group that felt that Communists should retain a "class-based" emphasis in organising and concentrate on factory-based labour organisation. Betty du Toit and Mike Muller, key textile worker organisers, were among those who remained at odds with the new party; du Toit had been involved in disagreements with the Cape CPSA leadership over trade union strategy for much of the 1940s.[54] Pauline Podbrey was another key Indian labour organiser who became disaffected with the party in the early 1950s.[55] Indian workers in Durban were discouraged from undertaking politically motivated strikes by the threat of the replacement with Africans as indeed happened after the dismissals of 300 Indian workers following a local ANC-led stay away in June 1953.[56] Whites and Indians were not the only workers left out. In 1955, when busy as an organiser for the Congress of the People, Ben Turok encountered a group of coloured farmworkers in Kraaifontein who had once constituted a CPSA branch and who had never been contacted by any political activists since the party's dissolution.[57] However, the Western Cape-based mainly Coloured Food and Canning Workers Union as well as its African counterpart were important bases for SACP recruitment through the 1950s, though rather oddly, Ray Alexander, its original secretary, was not on the initial list of former CPSA members asked to join the new party. She was invited and became a member in 1954.[58]

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This was the group who would take the Party into an alliance with the ANC through the 1950s, and who at the end of 1960 would pioneer and lead its embrace of armed struggle. Those of its members who would survive or escape arrest and detention in the 1960s would reassemble the Party in exile. Very broadly most of its members believed that through allying themselves with and working within a national liberation movement they could work towards an emancipatory democracy. Prompted by their activism within the Congress Alliance, by the mid-1950s South African communists believed that a transition to socialism could happen incrementally, constructed "from above" as it were, after a socially emancipatory national liberation which could then "push forward to people's democracy."[59] It was a belief reinforced by their visits to Eastern Europe through the

[53] Rowley Arenstein, interviewed by Iain Edwards, Durban 1986. Shamin Marie also noted that "No major effort was made to extend [SACTU] membership among Indian workers" (Shamin Marie, *Divide and Profit: Indian Workers in Natal*, Department of Industrial Sociology, University of Natal, Durban, 1986, p. 76).
[54] Rowley Arenstein, interviewed by Iain Edwards, Durban 1986. Shamin Marie also noted that "No major effort was made to extend [SACTU] membership among Indian workers" (Shamin Marie, *Divide and Profit: Indian Workers in Natal*, Department of Industrial Sociology, University of Natal, Durban, 1986, p. 76).
[55] Pauline Podbrey, interviewed by Maureen Tayal, London, 8 August 1983, African Studies Institute, Oral History Collection, University of the Witwatersrand.
[56] Bill Freund discusses the reasons for declining Indian worker militancy during the 1950s in *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class in Durban*, London, James Currey, 1995, pp. 57-61.
[57] Ben Turok, *Nothing but the Truth*, Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2003, pp. 53-54.
[58] Her autobiography makes only occasional references to SACP activity through the 1950s until her departure into exile in 1955 and it is very evident that despite attending meetings trade unions remained her chief commitment (see Ray Alexander Simons, All My Life and All My Struggle, Johannesburg, STE Publishers, 2004, pp. 196-297.
[59] Sadie Forman and Andre Odendaal, *A Trumpet from the Housetops*, Zed Press, London, 1992, p. 182. For an extended discussion of Forman's ideas see Tom Lodge, 'Lionel Forman's Trumpet: National Communism in

1950s as well as the wartime contacts some of the ex-servicemen had enjoyed with the Italian partisan movement. Party leaders spelled out what a South African version of people's democracy would look like in a pamphlet in 1954. A people's democracy, it explained, would have all the civic freedoms conventionally associated with democracy but it would be more egalitarian. Land would be shared "among its rightful owners", big mining and other monopoly concerns would become the property of the people, there would be good wages, social security and housing for the homeless. [60]

In exile the party would remain a small organisation, its recruitment very selective. Eddy Maloka's history refers to that party's own statistics in April 1989, 340 members in 8 regions, not counting South Africa. Of these, 67 members lived and worked in Lusaka, constituting a total of ten units. In addition, at that time probationers numbered 66, signalling an upsurge in recruitment, a development which worried the Politburo, concerned about too rapid an expansion.[61] As well as the army units, by 1989 transferred from their Angolan bases to East Africa there was a small group at Mazimbu, the ANC's educational centre where a unit was established in 1980, a larger community in London and about 20 party members at any one time were attending the Lenin School or other European training schemes. Within the ANC's exile structures, Party members were especially concentrated within Umkhonto's senior echelons as well as its commissariat.

Inside South Africa where fresh recruitment began in the mid-1970s the number were even smaller. The Party's own records suggest a very limited Communist internal presence: 99 full members and nineteen probationers by 1989, organised in 35 units and supervised by regional and district committees, with the main groupings in Cape Town, on the Witwatersrand and in the Border area. The records kept by the leadership may have be misleading as internal supporters may have considered themselves members even if they had not been recruited formally. As a report would acknowledge later: "In July 1990, as we emerged from 40 years of illegality, our party had just over 2000 members", a figure well in excess of the total cited in internal documentation at the end of 1989.[62] Raymond Suttner with his first-hand knowledge suggests that internal groups "engaged in underground struggle for the SACP" in the 1980s totalled significantly more than the few hundred members that existed in the 1950s.[63]

Around Johannesburg and in the Eastern Cape the party's recruitment was factory-focused with key people active in legal trade unions.[64] Not all these people would have been active inside the UDF; trade unionists tended to refrain from direct engagement with the Front. In the Border region, the UDF convenor was Charles Nqakula, in 1983 a party member.[65] Nqakula's approach was non-sectarian for in the East London areas many of the UDF's affiliates would maintain "nationalist anti communist" predispositions though remaining within the "Charterist" fold. We know from Mac Maharaj's testimony that the SACP's Johannesburg District Committee led by Wits mathematics lecturer and Lenasia activist Ismail Momoniat was sufficiently well established to accommodate and

South Africa, 1953-59', Africa, 63, 4, 1993.

[60] Reprinted in Bunting (ed), *South African Communists Speak*, Inkululeko Publications, London, 1981, pp. 231-241.

[61] Eddie Maloka, *The South African Communist Party, Exile and after Apartheid*, Jacana, Johannesburg, 2014, p. 55

[62] Central Committee Report, SACP 9th Congress, 6-8 April 1995, p. 1 (Simons Papers, 08.2)

[63] Suttner, "The Re-Constitution of the South African Communist Party as an Underground Organisation", p. 61

[64] Maloka, *The South African Communist Party*, pp. 57-58

[65] Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF*, David Phillip, Cape Town, 2000. 313. In his autobiography, Nqakula is vague about when he joined the Party though it is evident that he was active in circulating party propaganda in the early 1980s and knew other activists as Communists. He was in frequent contact with Chris Hani based in Lesotho during this period (Charles Nqakula, *The People's War: Reflections of an ANC Cadre*, Mutloatse Arts Heritage Trust, Johannesburg, 2017).

protect him on his arrival back in South Africa in July 1988 and that he would work very closely with Pravin Gordhan's Party group which had existed in Durban since the mid 1970s: Gordhan was a key figure in reviving the Natal Indian Congress and influential within the UDF. Momoniat and Gordhan were conspicuous in the early 1980s in bringing together Freedom Charter supporters at a key conference in Durban in 1981.[66] There was an influential SACP presence in the Alexandra Youth Congress from at least as early as 1985: Paul Mashitele, a party member, was one of its founders and later joined the UDF hierarchy becoming secretary general in 1989. Party units were active in Cape Town's emerging trade unions from the early 1980s as well as being busy among trade unionists in East London and Mdantsane. David Rabkin had been enlisting supporters for the party in Cape Town from the late 1960s, chiefly targeting the university community, it seems, to judge by his best-known recruits, Jeremy Cronin and Rob Davies. Jeremy Cronin was a philosophy lecturer when he joined the party. Between 1984 and 1987 he was political education officer for the UDF in the Western Cape, editing its national theoretical journal, Isizwe. Working from Botswana, Barry Gilder had been able to support party recruiting efforts inside South Africa, probably focusing on Johannesburg townships, particularly Alexandra with its combi taxi traffic with the Botswana border towns.

A very small number of Communists held a few key positions in the UDF. As a Politburo meeting noted in January 1988, there was then "encouraging evidence of Party leadership work by internally based structures."[67] There was little evidence of party members acting as a collective except perhaps in the case of the closely-knit group assembled around Pravin Gordhan in the Natal Indian Congress which dominated the provincial UDF leadership. By this stage Gordhan was considered an authoritative figure by his associates, in Moe Shaik's words "an active and respected comrade, who excelled in Marxist thinking and methodology".[68] Members of Pravin Gordhan's network often arrived at national meetings "with prepared papers and cogent arguments".[69] That did not mean, though, that their views prevailed, not least because among influential African township-based leaders and activists there was resentment of what they took to be the excessive influence within the Front of a largely Indian "cabal". Communist activists were influential in shaping the UDF's "political education" programmes – both Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin were important in this respect. Jeremy Cronin's poetry, widely read by students, helped to express and sharpen awareness of political continuities from earlier struggles. The almost hegemonic position on English- language university campuses of a left politics that often echoed SACP positions and in which the party's history was a major source of reference was evident in a range of student publications. Campus-generated pamphlets and newspapers also took their cues from UDF propaganda or indeed functioned themselves as media for the broader movement . The extent to which university students supplied a key social base for Party activism remains underexplored. There were certainly key figures in the white student movement who the party recruited: an example would be Gavin Evans who helped found the End Conscription Movement and who by the mid 1980s belonged to a three person Party cell in communicating with the Party leadership through garth Strachan in Harare. Later he belonged to Vula's Johannesburg-based leadership: he was unimpressed with Maharaj, not least because he disagreed with Maharaj's "expectations of an insurrectionary seizure of power".[70] Recruitment on campuses was not a Party priority, though, except perhaps at the University of the North, close-by to one of the Party's historic areas of rural influence. As Moses

[66] Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF*, p 38.

[67] Sylvia Neame Papers, Q2-2.1, 1/3

[68] Moe Shaik, *The ANC Spy Bible*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2020, p.161

[69] Ineke van Kessel, *"Beyond our wildest dreams": The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 2000.

Mabhida noted at the Party's 6th Congress in 1984, Communists had "no organized presence amongst the youth."[71]

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In returning home Communists would expand their following very rapidly. By the end of 1991 the party had experienced a fivefold expansion of its membership over two years. This was modest compared to the ANC's following of 750,000, but the party was not aiming to compete. It needed recruits who would enlist effort into its work, not "bystanders".[72] A 22-person Internal Leadership Group, though predominantly constituted by returning exiles included four very senior Cosatu leaders, Chris Dlamini, John Gomomo, Moses Mayekiso and Sidney Mufamadi. Their presence was crucial, for, as Jeremy Cronin recalled, much of the initial organisational work would be undertaken "through union structures". Membership assembled in 250 branches distributed fairly evenly across the country's main urban centres.[73] Branches were supposed to have 25 to 50 members and were generally located in residential areas though factory groups also existed "with special tasks".[74] Thirty "factory cores", for example were established during 1990 in Port Elizabeth, historic centre of the auto industry. Communist were also busy recruiting mineworkers – Welkom boasted no less than 10 SACP branches, each launched at a different mine shaft.[75] Another source suggests that Welkom at this time had twenty four branches based at mineworker hostels. More generally mining regions in the Transvaal and the Free State became "a bastion of Communist influence".[76] In smaller towns in the border region, where the Party had 30 branches by the close of 1991 most of this new following was young, under 30, drawn from the street Jacobins of the 1980s township revolts, the unemployed school leavers and classroom activists who constituted the rebellion's vanguard. Around Johannesburg and in the Transvaal and the northern Free State mining regions, trade union members embodied the Party's most active following.[77] In its Johannesburg headquarters and its five regional offices, the SACP maintained a modest bureaucracy, not more than a dozen paid staff in Johannesburg. And to judge from the tumultuous crowds that assembled at its launching rallies the party enjoyed rather wider appeal than these details suggest.

Indeed over the next three decades the Party would grow much larger and the nature of its leadership would change.

In we consider the backgrounds of the party's office holders elected most recently in 2017 at its fourteenth congress the most obvious contrast with the 1992 group is how much younger they are. The oldest member of the central committee was born in 1947 and most are much younger, joining the party after initial political engagements during the 1980s. At least one, Joyce Moloi, (national treasurer) is young enough to attribute her politicisation to post-Apartheid 1990s campus activism.

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[70] Gavin Evans, "ANC Spy Bible", *The Conversation*, 29 March 2020. See also Gavin Evans, *Dancing Man is Dead: A Tale of Fighting Men in South Africa*, Doubleday, London, 2020 and Gavin Evans, Interviewed by Howard Barrell, Johannesburg, 28 January 1991 (file:///C:/Users/Tom%20Lodge/Documents/Evans,%20Gavin%20-%20The%20O'Malley%20Archives.html).

[71] Inner Party Bulletin, March 1985, Sylvia Neame Papers, A2729, Q2.2 2/3, p.6.

[72] Joe Slovo quoted in *Business Day*, 26 June 1990

[73] Simon Adams, "The Party that time forgot, the construction of a mass Communist Party in South Africa, 1990-1991", Paper presented at the annual conference of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, Adelaide, 22-29 September, 1996, p. 8.

[74] *Umsebenzi*, 6, 4, 1990: p. 4

[75] *City Press*, 5 December 1991

[76] Simon Adams, "The Party that time forgot", p. 9.

[77] Adams, "The party time forgot", p. 10.

More are women, 13 out of 40 central committee members. Four are white: SACP leadership is today overwhelmingly African. Fourteen have held senior positions in trade unions, especially in the National Union of Mineworkers. A significant number, five, were imprisoned for activity in Umkhonto. For others their "struggle" credentials were obtained through leading township-based civic organisations. The group most under-represented compared to the earlier leadership is people whose political formation was mainly in the exile movement. The two most senior office-holders are Blade Nzimande, Secretary-General since 1998, who belongs to the party's intelligentsia, and the Chairperson, Senzeni Zokwana, ex- president of the mineworkers union. Other top officials include Solly Mapaila, dubbed by the press as "Comrade Crackdown" for his role as Nzimande's "enforcer" , ex Umkhonto and later in the army, and two ex-teachers, both also trade unionists, Thulasi Nxesi, and Joyce Moloi. Former teachers, after mineworkers, embody the largest occupational grouping within the SACP leadership. Twelve central committee members have advanced academic qualifications and most at least completed high school; this is a strikingly well-educated leadership.

So, the party's leadership has become younger and if anything has become more strongly rooted in the trade unions. A share of leaders have higher academic qualifications gained after their entry into government and usually in administrative specialisms. As we will see, key decision-making officeholders are trade unionists and this is in contrast to the party's history in the 1950's and in exile. In exile and before, trade unionists, though conspicuous were in fact kept in check by party leaders suspicious of trade union "economism".

What about the party's following? Membership expanded, many times over the 1992 level, and in particular, in the last decade, growth accelerated. Membership totals moved from 50,000 in 2007, to 150, 000 in 2012 and to 284,000 in 2017, in effect making the SACP then with respect to membership, South Africa's second largest political party.[78] The latest figure was a total of 319, 108 reported at the special national conference in December 2019.[79] The steepest surge was between 2008 and 2009 when membership doubled. In 2005, the party itself had deliberately set itself a goal of recruiting one per cent of the national population, 400,000,[80] a target prompted by the recognition that "the SACP's influence within the ANC has diminished over the last fifteen years" and, moreover, that "between 1996 and 2002 a relatively coordinated offensive" had been launched against the party by key ANC officials seeking to marginalise the left.[81] Under President Mbeki, party leaders believed, the dominant group within the ANC were seeking to promote "a socio-economic project based around modernising the dominant capitalist accumulation path".[82] Recruiting a mass membership then, was primarily a way to expand the left's influence within the ANC, or as one authoritative statement put it, "to build working class influence …in all key sites of struggle and significant centres of power".[83]

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[78] Dirk Kotze,"'Why Communism appears to be gaining favour in South Africa", *The Conversation*, 4 August, 2015, accessed at theconversation.com/why-communism-appears-to-be-gaining-favour-in-south-africa, accessed August 29, 2017; SACP, 2017a. Organisational Report, http://www.sacp.org.za/docs /conf/2017/organisational-report.pdf

[79] Editorial, "Sixty years on; New Challenges for the African Communist", *African Communis*t, no. 201, December 2019, p.8; Alex Mashilo, "Forward to the SNC", Umsebenzi, December 2019, p. 4.

[80] SACP, Proposed workplan for SACP recruitment, September 2005, Vishwas Satgar Papers, Wits Historical Paperds, A332, File 7.2.

[81] SACP, 11th Plenary Session of the 11th Congress Central Committee, Volume 1, 18-20 February 2005, Volume 1, p. 53, Vishwas Satgar Papers, A332, File C.2.13.

[82] SACP, Political Report of the 13th Plenary Session of the 11th Congress Central Committee, 2005, p. 28, Vishwas Satgar Papers, A3332, C2.4.

[83] "Rebuild our movement: political report to the SNC", *African Communist*, no. 202, 2020, p. 51

Anyway, whether as a consequence of deliberate effort or more involuntary sources of attraction, the party now has a mass base. Reporting to a central committee meeting in 2015, Deputy Secretary General Solly Mapaila profiled this membership. About half was aged above 40, and ten per cent were over sixty. He also mentioned 147, 949 students and pensioners. Given the age demographics just cited this suggests that the larger proportion within this group are students, in South African terminology anyone in full time education. About 5,000 specifically university students belong to the SACP, too few, Mapaila acknowledged. On campuses, the Party struggled to compete with the Economic Freedom Fighters, the ANC-breakaway group supplying much of the leadership in protests over fee increases. Blade Nzimande up to 2017 was Minister of Higher Education, an appointment which rather aligned him with university authorities despite his sometimes abrasive encounters with University vice-chancellors. Roughly as many women as men belonged to the party. Though most members were working class, "the majority of workers joining the SACP are unemployed", and, Mapaila noted, the party also needed to make an effort "to increase membership among unionised workers". Finally, just over a quarter of the membership lived in KwaZulu-Natal, a disproportionate share.[84] The party's following also included the 90,000 strong Young Communist League, revived in 2003, not all of whose adherents were full party members. Organisational reports of the League indicated that the Young Communists had an especial concentration in Limpopo province, in its smaller towns and villages, 16,611 members out of a total of a national membership of 53, 794 in 2010.[85] As an earlier report observed, "the YCL is mainly based in the countryside, or is weak in the urban areas, and this our membership is mainly impoverished, excluded from socio-economic activities, and mainly unemployed".[86] From its formation the YCL would was well placed to help swing ANC Youth League branches leftwards and behind Zuma. Under Blade Nzimande's general secretaryship, the SACP and YCL were to undergo a considerable expansion of membership, especially in the KwaZulu-Natal countryside. Rural recruits to the Young Communists may well have reinforced any existing patriarchal dispositions in the Party: Stephanie Kemp, provincial gender coordinator in Kwa Zulu Natal in 2006 was taken aback when "one young male comrade" responding to her efforts to persuade women to speak at meetings protested "that women are not allowed to speak at izimbizo".[87]

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How has the modern party changed from the insurgent organisation that emerged in 1990?

Among its leaders and trained cadres, the party's strategic approach remains rooted in the concept of national democracy, the concept developed by party theorists in the 1950s from the then existing models supplied by post war people's democracies to justify its alliance with African nationalism. But as this historical survey of the Party's shifting social bases has shown, the party has moved a long distance from the elitist character it maintained up to 1990. It's organisation is now based largely on the support of unemployed school workers whose major preoccupations are to do with day to day insecurities. In the meantime, the labour movement which used to supply its main source of leverage for political influence has become increasingly factionalised and oligarchical. Though amongst rank-and-file trade unionists, though class solidarities may persist as internal party

[84] Anon, "Special National Congress: Massive increase in SACP membership'" *Umsebenzi*, July 2015, pp. 4-5.
[85] Young Communist League. 2010. Organisational Report, Third Congress, SACP Website, p. 16.
[86] Young Communist League. 2006. Organisational Report of the National Committee, Second National Congress, 13-17 December, SACP website, p. 11.
[87] Stephane Kemp, *Through an unforgettable storm: the making of a loyal cadre*, Kindle Edition, MYeBook.co.za, 2017, location: 4443

commentaries suggest, many of the party's new members may be primarily motivated by hopes of individual fulfilment rather than egalitarian camaraderie.

The second major shift in the Party's character since its formation a century ago is in its relationship with the state. In 1921 many, though not all Communists were influenced by syndicalist: aiming to establish a workers' Commonwealth in place of a state. Today Communists work within the state; indeed the largest share of its employed members work in various branches. Today the road to freedom primarily runs through bureaucratic channels not industrial confrontations.