

SACP deserves a political dissing

The Star, pg 12, 29 April 2013

COMMENT

EUSEBIUS
MCKAISER



There are no communists in the SACP and there are no communists in the cabinet

RAPPER Eminem famously mocked pop culture's manufactured output sold to us as authentic art by tauntingly asking, "Will the real Slim Shady please stand up?" He was interested in that kind of dissing, of course, in part because a white boy didn't fit the template for an American hip-hop star.

He used the genre's own devices to challenge the hip-hop community's shock at his very existence, his jarring presence in their space. It was, and still is, all about identity and belonging – or not belonging, as the case might be.

Popular politics, like popular culture, produces its fair share of fake identities, politicians pretending to belong when in fact they do not.

In South African politics, the communists – correction: the self-styled communists belonging to the SACP – could easily be the subject of political dissing in conscious rap lyrics.

We may well ask, "Will the real communists please stand up?" If the word "real" is taken seriously in the taunt, then no one should stand up from the SACP.

Take the latest posturing from the SACP. It is about to release a document signed off by its top leadership for discussion by party members. The hope is that the content should become the official party position. The document calls for the dissolution of the National Planning Commission. It also expresses deal-breaking dissatisfaction with some ideas in the National Development Plan.

On the one hand, the SACP leadership thinks that the NPC is structurally out of place. It is not quite in government and yet is beginning to have the political gravitas, at least if the ANC's rhetoric is anything to go by, of a government central planning body. But it isn't that. In the best-case scenario, it has done a decent job of offering us a provocative diagnosis of our society's development trajectory thus far, and a vision with which to determine a winning path ahead. It serves no further purpose. Or so the SACP argues.

But the critique is deeper, still. It also undermines some of the content of the NDP. For example, there is profound dissatisfaction with the lack of focus on industrial policy as a site for economic growth. It observes, critically, that the NDP at best focuses on growth but little attention is paid to the social justice question of how we will become a more equitable, as opposed to a wealthier, nation.

And so the SACP concludes we should

McKaiser is author of the best-selling collection of critical essays *A Bantu in My Bathroom*.



CRITIQUE: The SACP's stance on the National Planning Commission is questioned by the author. In the picture are Jeff Radebe, Blade Nzimande, Buti Manamela, S'dumo Dlamini and other members of the SACP. PICTURE: TIRO RAMATHLATSE

dissolve the NPC, and be wary of parts of the content of its work that do not foreground other government documents like those that place greater weight on industry.

Cute criticism, isn't it? The reason I am amused is not because this analysis, and the minutiae of data and evidence in support of it that will be released soon, lacks coherence. In fact some of this stuff is compelling: the proper relationship between the NPC and state departments has not been carefully managed, and politically, quite apart from ideological debates left hanging, clashes between the NPC and many state departments are coming.

What, though, does any of this have to do with communism, I wonder? Where is the communism in these critiques of the NPC and the NDP? If I was an ANC politician, I would chuckle at the fact that Blade

oriented society' has delivered freedom, openness and opportunities for citizens to flourish.

It leaves us, of course, with an embarrassing question to pose to the commies.

What is so communist about the SACP in 2013? Nothing, really, other than socialist crumbs being thrown from the ANC's neo-liberal, capitalism-accepting, economic table.

But welfare states do not exclusively belong to communist or socialist societies. And so even that part of ANC governance can hardly be cited as a communist victory.

The bottom line is more brutal: there are no communists in the SACP and there are no communists in the cabinet.

If not, can the real commies please stand up without fear of being laughed at for inauthenticity?