

# Tainted communist party needs solid spring-cleaning

**T**HE South African Communist Party (SACP) was once hailed as the conscience of the liberation movement. That sentiment no longer holds true, but a spark was once again ignited on the weekend of June 4-5 when it roundly condemned the ANC's decision to shelve its probe into the influence of the Guptas on the ruling party.

The SACP raised some startling truths, but naturally, sidestepped the elephant in the room on the Gupta matter: President Jacob Zuma.

It defended the decision of the banks — its arch nemesis — to shut the accounts of the Gupta-owned Oakbay, whereas the ANC and union federation Cosatu found ways to question their motives, the latter despite having labelled the Gupta-owned ANN7 the "worst employer" at its own congress. Of the alliance partners, the SACP raised the single most important question since the banking saga: why has Oakbay not taken the issue to court if it feels it was wronged?

Naturally, the SACP has been



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accused of taking a factional stance on the matter — by its own former chairman, ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe, no less.

Still, it was a difficult stance to take and the party should be lauded for it. The difficulty for the SACP, whatever position it adopts, is that its leadership has become tainted by their proximity to the Zuma administration.

Its leaders played a frontline role in many of the scandals that have plagued his seven years in office.

SACP deputy chairman Thulas Nxesi led the Cabinet task team on Nkandla, which found no wrongdoing by Zuma, a ruling roundly contradicted by the Constitutional Court judgment at the end of March that ordered Zuma to pay back the money spent on nonsecurity items.

SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin was Nxesi's deputy at the time. Granted, the upgrades were approved by their predecessors, but it was still up to the Department of Public Works to probe the matter, which it failed to do diligently.

SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande's complicity in the wrongs of the Zuma administration are well-known. It was Nzimande who told the nation the Nkandla allegations were "white people's lies". This was after Public Protector Thuli Madonsela had released her report on Nkandla that found that Zuma and his family had benefited unduly from the upgrades.

Other excesses of the Zuma administration were defended by the higher education minister and part-

time general secretary, and speculation is rife that a fallout between him and Number One is at the heart of the SACP's new-found critical voice.

Organisationally, the factional fight within Cosatu has been attributed to the "co-opting" of Cosatu leaders onto the SACP central committee. Axed union boss Zwelinzima Vavi blamed Nzimande for dividing the federation, culminating in the axing of the National Union of Metalworkers of SA and Vavi himself.

Nzimande has been general secretary of the SACP since 1998, amending its constitution to facilitate this. Most recently, at its national congress in 2012, a new position of second general secretary was created to ensure there is a full-time leader.

For the SACP to regain its position as the intellectual heart and conscience of the alliance, a comprehensive overhaul is required. Already, there are calls from the Young Communist League for the party to sever ties with the ANC and contest elections on its own, something the old

guard is resisting vociferously.

But the party will have to reassert its independence that it has lost due to a preoccupation with positions and resources. Nelson Mandela hailed this independence as sacrosanct. Speaking at the SACP's 75th anniversary celebration, he said: "It is this mutual enrichment that has characterised our relationship... There is no patronage in our alliance. There is no trusteeship. There is none who constitutes the sole repository of ideas and wisdom. We are sovereign organisations, and none dictates to the other."

Former ANC deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe has repeatedly said the alliance is dead because it has become "one organisation existing inside the integuments of erstwhile independent organisations".

The most fundamental change the party can effect is to get rid of the tainted voices speaking for it.

It is time for a new guard to lead the vanguard.

■ *Marrian is political editor.*