

SACP needs Blade – Mapaila

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“I will never contest Comrade Blade Nzimande.”

With these words, SA Communist Party (SACP) deputy general secretary Solly Mapaila closed the debate on the succession question in the party, despite the silent lobbying calls for him to take over from his mentor.

Nzimande has been at the helm of the SACP since 1998 and he is expected to extend his term by another five years at the party's 14th elective congress tomorrow.

For Mapaila and others in the SACP, the status quo must remain, at least for now. Mapaila said: “I don't believe that the time has come for that kind of strategic change. That change must come, it is important, but it must take its own pace.

“It will not be possible for me to contest Comrade Blade. I won't do it at any time,” he told City Press on Friday, shortly after praising Nzimande's 19-year leadership.

Mapaila has over the last few months been at the forefront as a critical voice against President Jacob Zuma in the SACP and his popularity has grown inside and outside the party.

Those who want him to lead, say that Nzimande has served for too long and should make way for someone new.

Nzimande finds himself in a tight corner as his exit from the party could be the end of his political career.

The threat of the SACP breaking away from the ANC alliance has been described as nothing but a means to bargain for its leaders to feature in ANC leadership structures.

City Press learnt that there was a meeting in the East Rand this week, attended by as many as seven provincial leaders, where some raised concerns about Nzimande serving for too long.

“The provincial leaders were saying they were not consulted and were not happy with some things. But people have accepted that Blade will stay on in the position. Nzimande belongs to a certain generation and that generation stood by Zuma. It has compromised him so much,” said an insider. The insider said that some felt that generation should exit the party and that a completely new leadership should be chosen.

City Press has learnt that the party's first deputy general secretary, Jeremy Cronin, who had intended to retire at this congress, has since been convinced to stay on.

While the decision to keep Nzimande and other officials in their positions stands, questions remain on whether current chairperson Senzeni Zokwana and Politburo member Buti Manamela would return to their positions. Both are seen to be too close to the Zuma grouping. Zokwana ruffled feathers recently after he defended Zuma in Parliament.

Mapaila said it was important for members to appreciate Nzimande's sacrifice, having taken over from slain leader Chris Hani. “In the quest for renewal, you don't deal with what is working. The renewal must reach out to new avenues and make the organisation adaptable to changing conditions, while retaining its principles. That is what our members must appreciate, that we are bringing to them a united organisation under the leadership of Comrade Blade,” he said.

He was comfortable being an ordinary member, making a contribution in his own way within a collective.

He recalled how at some point he was referred to as a Nzimande lackey, adding that he had no qualms about that because he considered him among the “best the SACP has had”.



Solly Mapaila