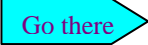
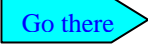
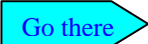


Speeches by Zwelinzima Vavi, Thabo Mbeki and Blade Nzimande to the SACP Special Congress, April 2005

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Speech by Zwelinzima Vavi, COSATU General Secretary

I feel honoured to address the Congress of Communists twice in a row. I bring warm revolutionary greetings from the leadership and members of the Congress of South African Trade Union – COSATU.

The timing of this special congress could have not been better. We face momentous challenges that require absolute theoretical and ideological clarity. We need to ask searching questions about the conditions facing the working class and its future; to review our strengths and weaknesses; and to determine what is to be done in the face of daunting challenges and huge opportunities.

I have no doubt that delegates gathered in this august Congress will be equal to the task. We dare not disappoint workers' expectations in these difficult times.

This Congress comes soon after we have celebrated the first decade of democracy. We must use it to review our achievements and identify the many challenges now faced by workers and the poor. None of us doubts that workers have gained immensely in the first decade of democracy. First, we won democratic space within which to operate underpinned by a progressive Constitution. You only have to look at our neighbours in Zimbabwe and Swaziland to understand the extent of the political space won by the working class and its allies in South Africa. This we must guard jealously.

Second, workers have gained rights in the workplace, as contained in our progressive labour laws. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Labour Relations Act, which was the first salvo fired by the democratic government in its efforts to replace the apartheid labour regime. We recognise, of course, that we must still do more work to translate all these pieces of progressive labour legislation into weapons at the hands of workers and our activists to defend and advance interests of workers at the workplace and in society in general.

The recent much published threat to exempt small businesses from the aspects of labour laws points to the correctness of the assertion that workers gains in any capitalist society are consistently under threat. We welcome the government's more recent assurance that it will not undermine workers' rights. The lesson from this is, once more, that the price of freedom is constant vigilance! The third major gain for the working class was the provision of basic services, including shelter, health care, water, electricity, education and so forth, especially in the rural areas. Roll out of basic

services is critical in the struggle to transform the gendered household division of labour and to relieve the burden currently borne by women. Still, millions do not have access to these basic services and there is a real possibility that rising user fees may cut-off those that currently enjoy access.

Government's income transfers in the form of social grants provide a buffer for millions who otherwise will be plunged into destitution. Coverage is however not universal and there are millions of poor people, particularly the unemployed, that do not have a social safety net. For this reason, COSATU has called for the Basic Income Grant as well as mass job creation. We need real debate on these matters.

Comrades and friends, while we recognise these gains in democratic space, social wage and rights at the workplace, we also recognise that for many workers they have been offset by deepening unemployment and poverty and by the failure to deal adequately with the HIV pandemic. A new tidal wave of job losses is looming in mining and clothing and textile sector due in large part to the strength of the rand. Job losses and unemployment should be declared a national disaster. We have a much higher unemployment than other middle-income countries. Even if we ignore those unemployed people who are too discouraged to seek work, almost 30% of workers here are jobless. That compares to under 10% in comparable economies.

The Minister of Finance says these figures must be wrong because otherwise we would see a revolution. Three weeks ago I was in Secunda. I found a massive stayaway and riot. Not even COSATU knew it was coming. In the past year, a wave of unrest has swept from Diepsloot in Gauteng to the Free State and the Western Cape. The less obvious undercurrent of crime, family killings and HIV infections arises largely out of mass youth unemployment.

True, the past year saw job creation in construction and retail. But these jobs are mostly low-paid and insecure. Moreover, they will not survive long if manufacturing and mining are shrinking. The causes of mass unemployment are easily found. Above all, government has not moved consistently to restructure the apartheid economy. Instead, it adopted a neo-liberal export strategy that left our industries unprotected and unsupported. Job losses resulted on a mass scale while new employment lagged far behind growth in the labour force.

To make matters worse, government simply has no political will to deal with the overvaluation of the rand, which is an immediate cause of mass retrenchments in mining and manufacturing. Moreover, it has not fast-tracked WTO-legal safeguard measures for vulnerable industries. Meanwhile, workers are being thrown onto the streets.

The underlying problem is simple. Business knows one way of dealing with anything that threatens their margins of profitability – retrenchments at the slightest chance. It would rather retrench workers than find alternatives. In particular, we have seen the mining houses move abroad rather than develop our economy. Meanwhile, government has not done much to ensure all its programmes save and create jobs.

The economic growth path since 1994 has benefited the rich and big business. It has largely left behind the working class and the poor who gave their lives to bring this government into power. Government seems to be helpless in face of the scourge of retrenchments and is reluctant to intervene to counteract job losses. This does not suggest government does not care – it has simply does not have ideas on how to avert job losses and create employment outside of the public works programmes.

While unemployment is soaring, workers' pay and conditions have stagnated. The share of workers earning under R1000 a month has remained virtually constant even in the formal sector, at about 25%. That is, even in the formal sector, one worker in four earns under R1000 a month. Even in the unions, half of our members get less than R2500 a month.

Low pay is reflected in the declining share of wages and salaries in the national income. In 1994, workers got 51% of the national income; in 2004, their share had fallen to 46%. That is an indictment for our democratic society. It demonstrates that there is no easy trade off between low pay and jobs – we have got low pay, and we're still not getting the jobs.

Against this background we need to ask the difficult question: Is the NDR on course? There no doubt that the democratic ANC-led government has registered progress in laying the basis for non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa as envisaged in the Freedom Charter. Yet political transformation has not been matched by substantial transformation of economic power. The recent bilateral between COSATU and the SACP concluded that in the economy, capital has gained the most from the past decade. In economic terms, capital scored the most and has reaped massive profits at the back of large-scale retrenchments.

Economic power is still in the hands of white monopoly capital. The aspirant and vocal black bourgeoisie remains numerically small and depends heavily on the state and white business for its survival.

In these circumstances, state power remains both a critical instrument for reshaping the economy, and a key site of contestation between capital and workers, reflected in conflicts within the bureaucracy and political leadership. In this contestation, the working class has in the past five years won some space for change, reversing the dedication to free markets and budget cuts experienced under GEAR.

But we must still go much further. The accumulation path inherited from apartheid and subjected to the chill winds of international competition is now a brake to progress to achieve the economic aims of the NDR. The NDR cannot and will not be pursued on a terrain of an apartheid economy – the time for serious transformation and a new growth path has come.

As our bilateral concluded, the first decade of liberation benefited capital in economic terms. The next decade must above all benefit the working class and the poor,

- by creating employment on a mass scale;
- by ensuring more equitable ownership, including through land reform, development of a co-operatives movement and transformation of the financial sector;
- by establishing an effective, holistic campaign to end the HIV pandemic, including the mass roll out of anti-retrovirals;
- by building working class culture through transformation of the schools, media and cultural institutions; and
- by strengthening participatory policy-making to empower our people in all aspects of life.

The challenge for the Alliance, and in particular the SACP and COSATU, is how we can achieve these aims. This is a critical question of strategy and tactics, which this Special Congress must discuss and enrich.

For our part, as COSATU, we see two linked challenges arising out of the current situation. We have discussed these issues at great length in our 2015 Programme.

First, we must mobilise our power to fight the wave of retrenchments. We need to demand that both business and government do more to protect and create employment. We can no longer sit by and watch as our members lose their livelihoods while their grown-up children stay home, having had no chance of getting a job since they left school.

For this reason, COSATU has brought a dispute on the unemployment crisis to NEDLAC. We are developing a programme of action, including mobilisation for mass action, which will be debated by our CEC at the end of May. Unemployment cannot just be a crisis for the poor and for workers, neglected by leaders in business and the state.

Second, we need to strengthen our organisation. In the past few weeks, I was able to spend a lot of time with comrades in two of our COSATU regions. The biggest lesson I learned is that we need to recognise that the recruitment of workers into the federation depends on a successful organisational development drive to improve service to members and the pick up our gains in terms of workers' rights.

In short, the future of the democratic and revolutionary trade union movement depends on the successful implementation of four interlinked campaigns:

- to strengthen our organisations so as to serve our members and ensure worker control;
- to drive recruitment so that on-going retrenchments and restructuring do not undermine the organisation of the working class;
- to pick up our gains, so that workers really benefit from their rights in the workplace; and
- to mobilise to protect and create jobs for all.

Given these challenges, what does the working class expect of its Party?

At the most basic level, we expect the SACP to support our efforts to build working-class power through organisational development, political debate and mobilisation.

We realise, however, that as a political party the SACP must also define its own role in representing working-class interests. This Congress must discuss and debate these issues. Above all, we have to evaluate the SACP's progress and setbacks in meeting these responsibilities over the past ten years. As COSATU, we obviously cannot dictate your tactics or strategies. But we can see three important questions for discussion.

First, we assume that the SACP cannot simply walk out of government. That means you have to discuss how to link efforts to build power and campaigns outside of the state with work within the state. Usually, this problem emerges as the question of how do we give a voice to our people when the state has undertaken mistaken policies, without undermining long-term relations that can also bring benefits?

Second, SACP members function both in the ANC caucus and the SACP. How do you manage the mandating process?

These are hard questions, without easy answers. But you might want to remember one of COSATU's basic tenets: You won't win in the boardroom what you can't win in the streets. We must all ask, fundamentally, how we can build and use working-class power to ensure that the end decade of liberation brings with it economic transformation.

Working class power will not be constructed simply by declaring it. It must be consciously built and worked for – the ultimate test is to put into practice our declarations. We must work assiduously and tirelessly, building on the victories that we score as we march to socialism. In any struggles there are setbacks, yet the working class does not have the luxury to be despondent. Setbacks must be used to draw lessons and to march ahead. History is on our side!

Address by President Thabo Mbeki, 9 April 2005

Comrade Chairperson, Comrade General Secretary, other leaders of the Party. Let me say thank you very much for inviting me to speak this morning. I am very glad you did that. In reality, I want to make a confession why I agreed when Comrade Blade asked me to come and speak. I am expecting to eat some cake today to celebrate Comrade Brian Bunting's 85th birthday today. Happy birthday! Here we have an outstanding veteran of our struggle who has guided our movement as a whole for many decades. I am very glad to see him here. I hope, Comrade Charles, I have negotiated successfully for the provision of a cake to celebrate Comrade Brian's birthday. The other reason I came is that I have a problem with the ANC. The ANC says that it is quite determined to make sure that we honour the constitution so that I only serve two terms. But I understand that the Party wants to run on its own, independent of the ANC. So if that decision is taken, I am going to join the Party. Provided, of course, comrades, you take a second decision to remove this 2-term policy!

Thank you very much indeed for the invitation, and best wishes from your comrades in the leadership of the African National Congress. We do wish the Congress success in the important matters that are on your agenda. As in the past, we are faced with common challenges. For that reason, we are very interested in what you will discuss and decide. What you discuss and decide will determine what happens in this country and influence what the ANC, the Alliance thinks and does. We are facing the common challenge of advancing the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), of effecting this process of the reconstruction and development of our country in pursuit of those goals. It would be interesting to see what the SACP says we should do next in order to intensify the process of reconstruction and development in our country. I was mentioning Cde Brian's presence here. In the 1962 Party programme, they raised the issue of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST). That characterisation of our country, and therefore a determination of the nature of the struggle we have to fight, given that we have colonialism of a special type - that determination came from the Party. It became the property of the movement as a whole. We all saw the challenges we had to confront and the outcome of the struggle.

It is important that the Party should recall things like that, to say what contribution will it now make to help us to solve the challenges of addressing the legacy of CST. The Party should again say, in the same way as we were able to provide a very focal point, a reference point to understanding the nature of society and the kind of struggle we have to fight, perhaps the Party is challenges once again to ask this question and therefore what our responses should be. What shall we do in order to solve the challenges arising from the legacy of CST. As I was reflecting on this earlier this week, I remembered a particular part of the history of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). Again, Comrade Brian would be very familiar with this. In 1927, the Communist International raised an issue about the Black Republic. It said that the CPSA must combine the fight against all anti-native laws with the fight against British colonialism, and as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full equal rights for all, black, coloured and white.

The Party programme of 1962 which spoke about the CST marked the conclusion of an ideological debate that had been going on for about 35 years. What was the strategic objective of the struggle being waged by the Communist Party? And what about the independent native republic as a stage towards a workers republic? And the Party arrived at the conclusion about CST. I am mentioning this because the SACP has a task to help us define the period in which we are. Where are we in the process of the NDR? And therefore what are the tasks that we must carry out? I don't know what the process is of people studying Party history, documents, etc. But I think it would be very interesting for people to study this and look at the Communist International, and what the stance was in 1962. It is still of relevance. It raises for instance the question of the relationship between the national and class struggle. This was sorted out in the debate that went on for 35 years. That question still faces the Party today. What is the relationship, if any, between the national revolution and the socialist revolution? That is a question you only can ask and answer. Was the Comintern wrong? It is the same question about the relationship between the national and the class struggle. It is a question that faces the Party, not the ANC, but the ANC will be interested to hear how you answer this question. A lot of the detail will be outdated in the Comintern and CPSA documents, but these fundamental issues about the relationship between the national and class struggles are still relevant in terms of what happens today.

That was a digression, but an important one, because we hope this Party will do as it has in the past, to help the movement define where we are and where we ought to be. We can't answer that question without raising some of these fundamental questions. Perhaps part of the reason I want to join the SACP is that I want to be part of the formation of the workers' and peasants' republic! Is this the strategic task that faces us now? If not, then what is it? It will help to define the relationship to the ANC. The Party should discuss this issue. Even Leon Trotsky joined this debate and wrote a long paper on the same question. The National General Council (NGC) of the ANC will take place in June this year. It will review the implementation of the decisions taken in 2002 and see what we have done about implementing those decisions and making sure they are implemented. We generally summarise the tasks of the NDR by saying we have to build a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic SA.

So in looking at the decisions of the 2002 conference the NGS must ask what progress we have made to create a non-racial society. Even from a theoretical point of view, familiarity with the theory of CST would show that this is an important task of the NDR. The NGC must address the creation of a non-sexist society. Amongst other things, I conspired with the president of the ANCWL, that we should raise the issue of gender parity in terms of our elected legislatures. She said I must go first. I stood up and said that when we have our elections this year, it must be on the basis of gender parity. We conspired to do this because we knew no one in the movement would have sufficient courage to oppose us! There was no NEC mandate, nothing, but I am waiting for an NEC member to say I am opposed to gender parity! But broadly, these issues about creating such a society cannot be separated from the issue of our struggle. They are integrated set of circumstances and therefore, we have to look at the question, what is it we do next in the struggle to eradicate poverty. The eradication of that poverty means a number of very direct things in the struggle for a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa. I am mentioning this to say this will be the ANC's own effort to try to define the central task of the NDR at this stage. There are many questions that have to be answered in the context of this - struggle for non-racism, non-sexism. Let me just mention one of them incidentally.

Cde Zola Skweyiya has been issuing figures that are frightening. Last week, he said there were 37,000 civil servants who were being investigated for fraud of social grants. I think on the news

yesterday I heard this was 40,000. I am absolutely certain that a significant number of those 40,000 civil servants would say they belong to the congress movement, because they belong to trade unions that are part of the congress movement. How can a member of the congress movement be involved in theft of resources that must go to the poorest of our country and call themselves members of this movement? We can't say the struggle against poverty is key and carry in our ranks people who by their actions entrench poverty. This is not possible. I think it is a challenge that faces comrades in the movement. Cosatu will need to say how do we answer this question. 40,000 people involved in defrauding pensioners, children eligible for grants. And then when they appear among us, they say they, too, are revolutionaries!

Here are these three interlinked matters - building of a non-racist, non-sexist society and struggle against poverty. What should we do with regard to the capitalists? What sorts of interventions should we make to impact on that capitalist system so that we are better able to fight against poverty? It can't just be a negotiated resolution or act to say down with poverty! Practically, what is it we do? These are the questions that must be answered. The other day, one of the questions we discussed, was this question of, as part of this struggle against poverty, what additional things should we do to address the challenge of unemployment. What should we do to address this obvious problem that is emerging re clothing and textiles? What should we do with mining, particularly gold mining? What shall we do with regard to creating more space for smaller business people who will employ more people without impacting negatively on the rights of the workers? So as we say down with poverty, and pass an act against poverty in the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Legislature, we must also say what are the practical moves we are going to adopt as we move forward. It would be important for the Party meeting in Congress here to say this is where we are with regard to the advance of the NDR. It would help us to answer these questions, what should we do to move forward with regard to all these matters.

The last thing I would like to say, comrades, is that we have, as a movement, an important task to contribute to the progressive transformation of the African continent. We are historically an internationalist movement, and therefore it is natural that we should say what our international response is to this. But many people around the continent do expect that we should make our own contribution to the continent. That also is not easy. What do we mean by a progressive transformation of Africa? What are these forces on the African continent that are mobilised, that should be mobilised? Are they there? A number of the trade union federations around the continent have approached to say that they believe there is a critical role that we need to play to provide leadership to the organised workers on our continent. They can sense that there is weakness in the political leadership in their countries, but their sense is that it is possible for that leadership to come from here. Can we take on that responsibility? To what end? We would have to ask many questions.

You get reports that something like 3 million people have died in the Congo over the last few years because of the wars that are going on. But the amount of noise that you will hear about Zimbabwe, and no noise about the Congo, must surely raise questions as to why. Why is it so easy to ignore the death of 3 million people and make extraordinary volumes of noise about another country where only a few people have died. There is something not right about it. The deputy president has followed Madiba to Burundi. In a period of about 10 years, over 300,000 Africans have died there. If I asked you how many people have been killed there, I think only Cde Blade could answer. It is not spoken about. 300,000 is a lot of people. After Madiba had concluded negotiations in Burundi, he had to go back and they said, quite correctly, we need protection. We will help in the process towards peace, but we need protection. The world said we will not do that until you finish the war. Let the war end first and then we will provide you with protection. We said we would take on the responsibility. That is why units of the SANDF went there, with no one's authorisation except the

South African government. It was quite clear that if we wanted these Africans to stop killing one another, we had to make sure they moved in the direction that was agreed. But no one cared about all these Africans killing one another. I am saying that the task to address the transformation of our country requires that we define what that transformation is, what is it that makes it progressive?

We shouldn't have to be told by someone else. We have a task to contribute to the transformation of the whole world. These are important challenges. We took correct positions with regard to Iraq and said we are against the war against Iraq. We are in agreement with the range of problems that there are in Iraq. Our movement can be very proud that for many, many decades, our movement opposed the Bath party government because it was very brutal against the progressive movement in Iraq. So we had got to the position that Saddam must go many decades before. But this is not the approach to take. We mobilised to say our people should come out against this war. We failed to stop it, and I hope this is not a movement away from our international responsibilities. We have a challenge to contribute to the transformation of the world. Blade might say it means a proletarian revolution around the world. He might be right. I am raising this because I believe that if this Congress attends to this and provides some of the answers so we understand better and deeper the stage we are at, if we at this Congress can address all of these matters, it will make an enormous contribution to the strengthening of our country.

And therefore we await the outcome of this congress and wish you success. Thank you very much!

Response by Blade Nzimande, General Secretary, South African Communist Party

Comrade President, the Deputy General Secretary of the SACP says he has the first measure to solving some of these problems. The first is to pass the Suppression of Capitalism Act! We have a number of MPs here and we hope they will process this piece of legislation as soon as possible.

You are an ANC cadre, Cde President, but an interesting one who understands so deeply the history of its ally, the SACP. Could this knowledge just be from the political schools of the ANC? Very striking!

On behalf of everyone here, we must say thank you very much to the President. Cde President, we take your issues as a very serious challenge and an open invitation for the Party and ANC to engage on some of these matters. We will take that challenge up. If the Party has defined the nature and character of the problem we face under CST, then maybe the Party should also take a lead in saying how we undo that legacy of CST. Your input has also posed a challenge that we need to see this special national congress not in isolation but what is the relationship between this and the NEC of the ANC. We are still going back to commissions to discuss these issues, so your speech is not just a document. The concrete issues around the struggle against poverty, trying to evolve and give meaning to sustainable livelihoods, we want to engage with this as the Party.

On the last set of issues the President is posing around global issues, we must first congratulate you on what seems to be a very important breakthrough on the Ivory Coast. How do we build solidarity, strengthen the working class on the continent? How do we breakthrough? These advances can easily be rolled back. French imperialism is unhappy about Africans trying to find solutions to their own problems, and imperialism only understands one language, the power of people to unite and defend peace and development.