

## *Original Paper*

# “Setting the Free Thinker Free”: The Use of an Activist Archive to Analyze a Pivotal Moment in the History of the South African Communist Party (SACP)

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### ***Abstract***

*This article draws extensively on an activist archive held at the University of Witwatersrand in order to analyze an important historical struggle within the South African Communist Party (SACP). A critical history of the crucial debates taking place within the SACP in the late 1990s is constructed from this archival material in order to explore the expulsion of Dr. Dale T. McKinley from the Party in 2000. The article argues that the expulsion of McKinley was a pivotal moment in the history of the SACP, and helps us understand the post-apartheid trajectory of the Party. Expelling McKinley fulfilled the SACP leadership's goal of managing dissent at the rank-and-file level, and ensured that the Party's loyalty to the ANC would remain an integral aspect of its strategy and tactics. Moreover, the use of this activist archive was absolutely essential in (re)constructing this critical story about the Party's history.*

### ***Keywords***

*activist archives, South African Communist Party (SACP), South Africa, tripartite alliance*

## **1. Introduction**

The South African Communist Party (SACP) has historically been a formidable political force in South Africa. The Party is the oldest communist party on the continent, and was active in resisting white minority rule since the 1920s. Its role in the anti-apartheid struggle is generally well respected, and many of the Party's past leaders are considered iconic heroes of the struggle. During the transition to democracy, the SACP, along with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), supported the

African National Congress (ANC) in its electoral dominance as members of the Tripartite Alliance. However, the late 1990s were decisive years for the SACP, as the former liberation movement, led by the ANC, settled into government and implemented a neoliberal macroeconomic policy called Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) in 1996. This indicated explicitly the ANC's acceptance of the "Washington Consensus" as the chosen way forward for South Africa (Alexander, 2002; Taylor, 2001; Saul, 2001; Marais, 2001; Bond, 2000). After the introduction of GEAR, and the ANC's reluctance to even debate the neoliberal policies contained in this framework, the SACP was faced with a number of unsettling contradictions. This was therefore a time of intense debate between members of the Party as to the way forward. Party members, especially from the rank-and-file, were criticising the ANC's neoliberal trajectory after GEAR was implemented, and the issue of SACP independence vis-à-vis the ANC was also one discussed openly, and debated rigorously, within the Party.

While scholars have carefully documented the history of the Party during the struggle against white minority rule (Maloka, 2002; Drew, 2000; Johns, 1995; Bundy, 1991; Lerumo, 1971), less attention has been focused on the SACP during the years immediately following the end of apartheid. With the exception of Thomas (2012, 2007a, 2007b) and Williams (2008, 2009), the Party's transition from underground movement to key supporter of the ANC's electoral machine remains underresearched. Thus, the purpose of this article is to explore one of the pivotal moments in the Party's history during the late 1990s: the expulsion of Dr. Dale T. McKinley from the SACP in 2000. Moreover, this will be accomplished by drawing extensively on an activist archive at the University of the Witwatersrand, at the *South African History Archive (SAHA)*. This archive contains hundreds of documents collected by McKinley, dating from the mid 1990s to 2000. The archive includes: (1) letters, minutes, position papers, and motions from the SACP Johannesburg Central Branch (JCB); (2) Party programmes, discussion documents, and press releases; (3) newspaper, journal, and magazine articles on the Party; and (4) detailed correspondence between McKinley, the JCB, the SACP Central Committee, and numerous individual Party members. SAHA references the archive as: *The Dale McKinley Papers*, AL 3041. The use of this archive will demonstrate the importance of activist archiving practises in constructing alternative and critical histories of political struggle in South Africa.

This article will argue that this was a pivotal moment for the SACP, and that the expulsion was somewhat indicative of the manner in which the leadership dealt with strong, protracted dissent within the Party. In the late 1990s, vigorous and intense debate flourished within the Party surrounding the issues of GEAR, the ANC's capitalist ambitions, and the manner in which the SACP should challenge neoliberalism in that context. With the departure of McKinley (and subsequently others who left after he was expelled), the threat of a radical, and genuinely socialist challenge (from the Party) to the politics of the ANC-led Alliance was significantly diminished. Expelling McKinley fulfilled the SACP leadership's goal of managing dissent at the rank-and-file level, and ensured that the Party's loyalty to

the ANC would remain an integral aspect of its strategy and tactics.

The article will first introduce Dale McKinley and the role he played within the Party throughout the 1990s. With regard to his expulsion in August 2000, I will detail the following: (1) the charges against McKinley; (2) McKinley's response; (3) the manner in which the overall procedure of the expulsion took place; and (4) the reaction of various individuals and groups of individuals within the Party, and outside of the Party, to McKinley's expulsion. Finally, the significance and implications of the expulsion will be reviewed, followed by some concluding thoughts regarding the importance of this particular activist archive in understanding political events in South Africa at the time.

## 2. McKinley's Activities and Positions Held within the SACP

McKinley joined the Party in 1992 as a member of the Johannesburg Central Branch (JCB). With a history of radical activism in the United States while attending university, McKinley sought to become active in advancing socialism in South Africa. Throughout the 1990s, McKinley held many positions within, and performed many functions for, the Party. His official titles within the Party included: Chairperson of the Johannesburg Central Branch (JCB); Chairperson of the Johannesburg District; and member of the Provincial Executive Council (PEC) for Gauteng Province. In addition, McKinley was a full time employee of the Party from 1995-2000, and performed the following functions in that capacity: operated a bookstore owned by the Party for approximately one year; managed the Chris Hani Library and Resource Centre; sat on the Finance Committee at times; and was a member of the Political Education National Secretariat (McKinley, 2004). In addition to the official positions McKinley occupied within SACP structures, he was also a prolific writer for the Party, and dedicated much of his time to intellectual work.

Throughout the late 1990s, McKinley articulated a consistent and forceful critique of the ANC's post-apartheid macroeconomic policies. As an example of his polemical interventions, McKinley (1997, p. 1) states in the *Introduction* to an unpublished critique of GEAR:

*“Let us be clear about what has happened—the government has chosen capitalism, and it has done so without apology. No amount of pleading about the unfair ‘balance of forces’ or pleas for so-called ‘pragmatism’ can make the bitter pill sweeter. If we understand this, then we can move forward in unpacking GEAR and forging a sustainable political economy that chooses socialism as its partner”.*

According to McKinley (1997, p. 4), the problems of such a macroeconomic framework are evident because “GEAR firmly embraces a **deracialised and mildly reformed capitalism as the foundation for South Africa's socio-economic development** (McKinley's emphasis)”. Finally, he takes indirect aim at the leadership of Cosatu and the SACP by making the following critical comments regarding the South African “left”:

*“The South African left needs to stop acting as though its main role is to act as the custodian cover for mitigating the contradictions of capitalism on the workers and poor. No matter how unfair and unequal the times may seem, the struggle for socialism must not devolve into attempts to co-manage capitalist production and the redirection of its social surplus to the people in a search for some utopian middle ground. A reformed capitalism (i.e., social democracy) is simply not feasible nor sustainable (for the workers and the poor) in South Africa—it is something that many on the Left still have not grasped” (McKinley 1997, p. 6).*

It was customary for McKinley to tackle the most controversial issues within the Party in a vigorous manner, as he believed this to be consistent with the socialist tradition of debate and discussion.

### **3. The Charges against McKinley**

There were two official charges against McKinley, and the Party described these as “Charges relating to bringing the SACP into disrepute and publicly attacking and questioning the bona fides and integrity of the SACP and its leaders” (SACP Central Committee, 2000). More specifically, the first charge reads as follows “Publicly and consistently attacking the ANC, COSATU and the SACP, and the leadership of these organizations, without seeking to raise these matters in the structures, or through the publications of the SACP or those of our Allies” (SACP Central Committee, 2000). In levelling this charge against McKinley, the SACP leadership focused on two specific public interventions by McKinley. The first was published in the *Mail and Guardian* of February 25, 2000. In this article McKinley directs his analysis at President Thabo Mbeki’s State of the Nation Address:

*“All of this is consistent with the historic class politics of the ANC leadership itself and the ANC’s strategic approach to socio-economic change that has evolved as a result. While it might make good media propaganda (and score brownie points with the big capitalists) for ANC leaders to talk about ‘biting the bullet’, the reality is that the ANC has been continuously chewing the euphemistic bullet for the better part of its history...Rather it represents the latest, and possibly most disingenuous, public confirmation of the ANC leadership’s historic, petit bourgeois class agenda...The conception of class power that the majority of the ANC’s leadership has always held is defined by the capitalist class they have aspired to join” (SACP Central Committee, 2000).*

McKinley’s article essentially summarizes several of the arguments he made in his PhD dissertation, published as a book in 1997 (McKinley, 1997), and reiterated McKinley’s analysis of the ANC’s historical struggle against apartheid. The Party (SACP Central Committee, 2000) responded to McKinley’s public criticism of the ANC by retorting:

*“Not only is this a distortion of the history of the ANC but it is completely at variance (with) and undermines the party’s own approach to, and alliance with, the ANC. It is indeed a serious accusation, in a manner that breaks with the protocol of criticism within the Alliance, that the ANC aspires to join*

*the capitalist class. Most seriously this is a criticism raised in the media without raising those matters formally inside the Party or ANC structures themselves”.*

According to the Party leadership, suggesting that the ANC, or at least large segments of the ANC, were aspiring to join the capitalist class violated the code of discipline that all SACP members should follow.

The second intervention by McKinley that the Party leadership took exception to was published in the *Green Left Weekly* on May 17, 2000. In this article McKinley shifted his criticism toward the leadership of the SACP’s other partner in the Alliance, Cosatu. McKinley aggressively attacked the leadership of COSATU in this piece:

*“A large portion of the leadership of COSATU (and its affiliates) are well on their way to becoming bona fide members of the ‘capitalism with a human face’ club, and in the process are laying the groundwork for a fragmented and dispirited worker’s movement... Ostensibly this approach is designed to ensure an acceptable degree of ideological and organisational continuity with the ANC leadership, so as to maintain the ‘national democratic alliance’ that is seen as the only viable political/organisational vehicle that can meet the needs of the workers and poor... These tactics, while bringing some moderate relief for the majority, are more a means of preserving and advancing the personal careers and political futures of leaders across the alliance spectrum” (SACP Central Committee, 2000).*

The SACP leadership again reacted vigorously in their condemnation of McKinley for raising such points of view publicly. They pursued their accusations against him in the following way:

*“Firstly, you make a completely unfounded accusation against COSATU leadership and questioning their integrity and insulting them as becoming capitalists and laying a groundwork for fragmenting the workers’ movement. Again this is done without having raised this inside our own structures nor with COSATU structures”.*

*“An even more serious transgression on your part is to impute personal and career motives in our pursuance of membership of the Alliance. This attack is not only directed at our Allies but also questioning (sic) the very integrity of ‘leaders across the Alliance spectrum’ of being careerists. This indeed also includes the Party leadership of which you are a member and branch leader” (SACP Central Committee, 2000).*

According to the SACP Central Committee Disciplinary Committee (2000, p. 1), it was found that “McKinley has indeed publicly and consistently attacked the leadership of the ANC, and also publicly attacked, but less frequently, the leadership of COSATU and the SACP”. On the other aspect of this first charge—failing to raise his concerns within the structures of the appropriate organizations—it was found that McKinley was not guilty. The Disciplinary Committee found that “On the contrary, he actively sought to do this” (SACP Central Committee Disciplinary Committee, 2000, p. 1). It was in

fact demonstrated quite clearly that McKinley had conscientiously raised all of these issues within Alliance structures before writing publicly.

The second official charge against McKinley asserted that he was “Publicly and consistently promoting positions that undermine the SACP” (SACP Central Committee Disciplinary Committee, 2000, p. 3).

The Party justified this claim by stating:

*“You (McKinley) publicly wrote about Budget 2000, directly in contradiction of the Party’s official response to that Budget. Over and above publicly contradicting the Party’s position, you further directly attacked the Party by saying ‘Even the long-standing organisations of the ‘left’, COSATU and the SACP shied away from open serious criticism’. For a member and leader of the SACP to publicly attack his/her own organisation, whilst simultaneously contradicting, in public, its own publicly stated positions, is indeed a serious offence and is to bring the name of the SACP into disrepute” (SACP Central Committee Disciplinary Committee, 2000, pp. 3-4).*

On this second charge McKinley was found guilty as charged by the Disciplinary Committee. McKinley’s public criticism of the ANC’s Budget 2000 was certainly at variance with the SACP’s official position, and explicitly contradicted the SACP leadership’s supportive position on the budget.

Considering the charges against McKinley, the Party also needed to prove that he had directly violated the SACP Constitution. In this quest, they began by raising Clause 5.4, which states “Every member has a duty, in his or her personal conduct, to act in a manner which will bring credit to the SACP and to be a standard bearer of the highest communist ethic and morality” (SACP, 2002). On this account it was decided that McKinley had committed several acts that did not bring credit to the SACP. The second point of reference in the SACP Constitution is Para 5.1 “All South Africans over the age of 16 who accept the programme and policy of the South African Communist Party, undertake to carry out its decisions and to be active in an SACP structure...are eligible for membership (SACP, 2012)”. Once again, it was ruled that McKinley had not accepted the programme and policy of the SACP. Finally, the SACP invoked Para 4.4, which commits the SACP to working to “strengthen the liberation alliance of all classes and strata whose interests are served by the immediate aims of the national democratic revolution. This alliance is expressed through the liberation front headed by the ANC” (SACP Central Committee Disciplinary Committee, 2000, p. 1). With reference to this Guiding Principle of the SACP, McKinley was also found guilty, as the Disciplinary Committee decided that McKinley was not working to “strengthen the liberation alliance”. McKinley was, undeniably, questioning the appropriateness of the SACP supporting, and working in partnership with, the ANC.

#### 4. McKinley's Response to the Charges

McKinley wrote a comprehensive response to both of the formal charges made against him, as well as a summary reply to the nature and content of the charges more generally. His response includes numerous critiques of the Party leadership, and the trajectory in which they were leading the Party at the time. It is important to examine McKinley's response in detail, as he discusses several perceived contradictions in the SACP leadership's post-apartheid political strategy.

In response to the first charge—publicly and consistently attacking the ANC, Cosatu, and the SACP, and the leadership of these organisations, without seeking to raise these matters in the structures or through the publications of the SACP or those of our Allies—McKinley begins by raising a query regarding the timing of these charges. As mentioned previously, McKinley published his PhD dissertation in the form of a book in 1997. The book provided a critical analysis of the history of the ANC as a liberation movement, and contained the research that formed the foundation for much of what McKinley wrote in the *Weekly Mail & Guardian* article under scrutiny by the Party at the time of his expulsion. McKinley (2000) argues,

*“In the months prior to, and soon after, its publication I had engaged many comrades in the SACP leadership as well as members within the Party structures I belonged to, on the merits and substance of the main arguments contained in the book. Besides these internal debates and discussion, there was also a full-page excerpt from the book that was published in the pages of the Mail & Guardian (Oct 31-Nov 6, 1997) that subsequently stirred some open, public debate.*

*The reason for mentioning all of this is to point out that the contents of the M&G article referred to as the basis for the charges spelt out above, is merely a summary of the main arguments contained in my book. Thus, it is beyond comprehension why, over three years after its publication (followed by vigorous and open debate around its contents, within the SACP and publicly) the very same arguments are now used as the basis for charges against me”.*

There is certainly an outstanding question as to why McKinley's interpretation of the ANC's history, published in 1997, became such a fundamental aspect of the charges against him in 2000, despite the fact that these ideas had been contested and debated within the Alliance for three years.

On the charge that he “accuse(s) the Party (and COSATU) of strategic and tactical confusion in our (the SACP's) dealing with the GEAR policies”, leading to a “serious transgression of Party discipline” (SACP Central Committee Disciplinary Committee, 2000, p. 3) McKinley (2000, p. 11) provided the following defence:

*“As I have already pointed out, there was every reason to argue that such ‘strategic and tactical confusion’ existed right from the introduction of GEAR. What kind of interpretation should a Party member have when, on the one hand the Central Committee releases a press statement ‘welcoming’ GEAR and then several months later issues another press statement attacking GEAR? What should*

*SACP members think (and say) when the SACP General Secretary vigorously and publicly attacks all of the main fundamentals behind the GEAR policy, and simultaneously another SACP leader is seen (and heard) publicly endorsing the very same fundamentals with equal vigour?"*

Here McKinley is referring to the group of SACP leaders serving in the ANC Cabinet who implemented and defended GEAR, such as Jeff Radebe and Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. It appears reasonable for rank-and-file members of the Party to be confused when (1) the SACP's press releases first endorse GEAR, and then adamantly oppose it less than one year later; and (2) some members of the Central Committee write scathing critiques of GEAR, while others enthusiastically implement it. By pointing this out, McKinley publicly highlighted one of the SACP's fundamental contradictions: the Party is officially opposed to GEAR, yet several high profile members of the Party are at the forefront of implementing the neoliberal policies contained in this program.

The second example of McKinley's attempt to refute the first charge is his documentation of the various and multiple ways in which he had raised these issues within Party structures prior to airing them publicly. McKinley (2000) details several of the discussion documents, articles, etc., that he had written with the intention of fostering debate and discussion within the Party. Ultimately, the Disciplinary Committee (2000, p. 1) agreed with this point, and stated that they "did not find that McKinley had carried out these attacks without first seeking to raise these matters in the structures, or through the publications of the SACP, or those of our allies". On this point the Disciplinary Committee conceded that a mistake had been made in accusing McKinley of this offence.

McKinley's response to the second charge against him—publicly and consistently promoting positions that undermine the SACP—addressed the issue of a double standard being applied with respect to leaders of the Party and rank-and-file members. McKinley (2000, p. 12) comments, "Indeed, how is it that the SACP leadership can bring disciplinary charges against me for raising, publicly (in my personal capacity), anti-capitalist positions in opposition to GEAR, while nothing is done to those high-ranking SACP leaders who have publicly taken positions in favour of the capitalist policies of GEAR?" McKinley then proceeded to document the actions of several high-ranking SACP leaders who have acted in ways that McKinley deems inappropriate for a "communist". McKinley also questioned why the Deputy General Secretary of the Party, Jeremy Cronin, had not been brought up on a similar disciplinary hearing, as McKinley (2000, p. 7) recalls "*Just before the SACP 10<sup>th</sup> Congress in mid-1998, the D.G.S., made remarks published in the Saturday Star, in which he declared that, 'the ANC is its own worst enemy...with its fear of dissenting voices...it needs to listen to the fears and concerns of people. Mugabe epitomises where we could end up...(with) swings between demagoguery and managerialism'. Such statements, made by an office-bearer of the SACP, are little different to my own analyses of important aspects of the ANC's history and more contemporary politics*".



The major difference between Cronin's and McKinley's actions is that Cronin, after making such comments, quickly obliged the ANC and apologized for making them. McKinley, on the other hand, was unapologetic and stood firmly behind his criticism of the ANC. In the conclusion to his official response to the charges against him, McKinley (2000, p. 13) posed the following provocative and important questions to the leadership of the Party concerning this issue of a double standard:

*“Is it the privilege of SACP leaders, who happen to be appointed as ANC Ministers/MECs and government officials, to adopt completely contradictory positions and then explain this away as a result of their wearing of two-hats? And yet, when SACP members, who happen not to hold any other position other than those to which they were elected within the SACP, defend and propagandise positions consistent with the SACP Programme and constitutional principles, they are attacked for actually being consistent communists. When the stated programmatic policy of the SACP is to oppose privatization, how is it then that not a voice is raised from the SACP leadership when those amongst its ranks endorse, without apology or apparent contradiction, privatization of the people's property? All of this begs the question as to whether there is a political and organisational double-standard in operation, one for national/provincial leaders and another for lower-ranking leaders and ordinary members?”*

McKinley therefore attacked both the specific details of the charges against him, as well as the larger issues confronting the Party in terms of how to deal with the trajectory of the ANC, which was capitalist and petty-bourgeois. This had been a difficult issue for many members of the SACP since 1994, and McKinley's interventions asked many of the probing and complicated questions that were troubling SACP members at the time. McKinley (2000, p. 3) summarized the crux of the matter as follows:

*“A critical engagement with the political and policy choices of the ANC-led government, and thus with the parallel consequences for an Alliance that claims leadership by, and for, the working class is essential communist work. When such work raises difficult questions centred around the character, meaning and need for the present Alliance, this should not be viewed as a violation of SACP policy but rather as part of necessary, and continual, assessment and critique of the political, economic and social balance of class force”.*

McKinley's overall response to the charges against him was consistent with his previous intellectual work that sought to problematize the SACP's relationship to the ANC in the post-apartheid, and post-GEAR, period. In addition, his response was most likely designed to provoke further debate and dissent within the Party regarding these contentious issues.

## 5. Procedural Issues behind the Expulsion

The procedure involving the disciplinary hearing and ultimate expulsion of McKinley began with difficulty and confusion. On July 25 2000, McKinley received a letter informing and inviting him to an SACP Disciplinary Committee hearing containing the date, time, and venue. Not only was the date for the hearing written incorrectly on the letter—the day of the week did not correspond to the proper calendar day of the month—but also McKinley was given only three days notice (the hearing was to take place on July 28) and the charges against him were not sent to him until the afternoon of July 26, two days before the hearing (Mufamadi, 2000b). McKinley responded in writing on July 27 to the Convenor of the Disciplinary Committee, Thaba Mufamadi, who was a member of the SACP Central Committee and ANC MEC for Finance and Tourism in Limpopo Province at the time. McKinley (2000b) stated “...after having had the time to actually go through the letter and the charges, I have decided to invoke my constitutional right (Clause 23.1) to receive one week’s notice, which, in this case, has not been complied with”. This letter was followed by a reply from Mufamadi (2000a) acknowledging McKinley’s concern and stating, “I hereby wish to inform you that the meeting which was scheduled for Friday 28 July 2000, will be postponed until further notice”.

In response to the letter postponing the hearing “until further notice”, McKinley (2000a) replied to Mufamadi reminding him of Clause 23.1 of the SACP Constitution which states “A disciplinary process should not last longer than 90 days or until the next meeting of the CC from the date of the inception to finalisation by the CC”. As the next CC meeting was scheduled for August 12-13, McKinley pointed out that his hearing needed to be before these dates. McKinley then received a number of communications from Mufamadi in the coming week concerning the date and time of the hearing. After planning, then postponing, the hearing again, Mufamadi (2000c) proposed August 12 2000 as the official date of the hearing. McKinley accepted, and the hearing went ahead on that day.

At the hearing itself, the Disciplinary Committee (DC) consisted of Thaba Mufamadi, Howard Yawa, Joyce Moloji, and Jeremy Cronin, all members of the SACP Central Committee at the time. McKinley was accompanied by comrade Florencia Belvedere, also a member of the Johannesburg Central Branch (JCB) at the time. According to Cronin (2000),

*“He (McKinley) read, for almost an hour, from an extensive prepared submission. He did this without any interruption. McKinley argued the charges against him were ‘completely unfounded’. He accused other SACP leaders of being the guilty ones. He characterised the hearing itself as an act of ‘organisational hypocrisy’. At the end, a few questions of clarification were asked and answered. After careful deliberation, the disciplinary committee recommended the termination of McKinley’s party membership. The central committee agreed”.*

McKinley was then notified in writing that he was expelled as a member of the SACP as of August 13 2000 (Mufamadi, 2000e). Cronin (2000) explained the basis on which the DC's decision was taken further "McKinley is entitled to air his views. His views may even be right. But they are not compatible with the principles of the SACP—that is the nub of the disciplinary hearing's finding". Therefore, Cronin outlines the result of the DC's findings: McKinley has the right to speak his mind, just not as a member of the SACP.

It is important to note that the branch in which McKinley was a member—the Johannesburg Central Branch (JCB)—passed a resolution immediately following the expulsion that highlighted their dissatisfaction with the process. A former member of the JCB, Claire Ceruti (2004) explains,

*"The majority of the branch...said they were unhappy with Dale's expulsion. It was a big meeting, probably the biggest attendance I've seen since the meeting I joined at in those two years, and a very lively debate...So that was the Branch itself coming out against it. I think what we agreed to do about it was to write a letter to the province raising our concerns, which we did, and then which was then basically just ignored. Nothing ever came to it".*

The JCB attempted to raise the issue of McKinley's expulsion at the first Gauteng Provincial Council following the hearing. As Ceruti (2004) explains, they were completely unsuccessful in generating a debate around this issue at the Provincial level:

*"And Dale's expulsion, we as the Branch had asked to put it on the agenda, and it was technically put on the agenda; but what they did, was right at the end when everyone was half asleep and desperate to go, the provincial leadership said right, the issue of Dale's expulsion, we have an announcement: Dale McKinley has been expelled for the following reasons, and the meeting is adjourned now. So that's the sum total of what transpired, and that was the last meeting I went to".*

Thus, the procedural aspects of the expulsion, both before and after the hearing, were problematic on at least two levels. First, the Disciplinary Committee, perhaps unintentionally, violated the Constitution of the SACP in the initial stages of the process regarding the notification of McKinley to the charges being brought against him. This was thereafter corrected when McKinley notified the DC of this problem on two occasions. Second, after the expulsion itself, the Party silenced or ignored any criticism arising from the rank-and-file members of the Party, in particular from the JCB.

## **6. Reaction to McKinley's Expulsion within and without the SACP**

The reaction within the Party to McKinley's expulsion varied from some members being casually dismissive, to others resigning from the Party permanently. In order to explain the overall fallout of McKinley's expulsion, I will briefly outline reactions from a number of sources, including: the leadership of the Party; the JCB; and a handful of perspectives from South African socialists outside of the Party. This section will end by including a reaction to the expulsion from the *Freedom of*

*Expression Institute (FXI) of South Africa.*

At the national level of leadership, Cronin's intervention in the *Weekly Mail & Guardian* entitled "Setting the 'free-thinker' free" demonstrated articulately the position of the Central Committee on the expulsion. In order to pre-empt any claims that the Party was silencing members, or stifling debate, Cronin (2000) explains, "In the first place, we are not silencing McKinley. If anything, the 'free-thinker' is now free. Unencumbered by party discipline, McKinley will be even more journalistically hyperactive. That is his right". Cronin (2000) highlights the central problem regarding McKinley's attitude and actions during his time in the Party by explaining that he "has never accepted longstanding SACP practice in regard to fraternal organizations". This refers to the enduring understanding within the Alliance that the integrity of each political formation should not be attacked or insulted by members of another Alliance partner. For example, SACP members should not publicly insult or condemn ANC government officials, regardless of their actions, or inactions. The fact that McKinley did not hesitate to do so, led Cronin (2000) to note, "McKinley does not accept this way of working within an alliance. For him there is a higher communist calling, a superior morality; it is a total, non-negotiable package, it must simply trump and displace all else".

Cronin (2000) also confronted one aspect of McKinley's critique of the SACP/ANC leadership:

*"If you take the trouble to read McKinley's writing...it is dominated by what the literary critic Elleke Boehmer has neatly called the 'foreclosure of the frozen penultimate'. Every policy pronouncement by the ANC, every comma and hyphen, is a portent of the inevitable 'sell out', which, like the Second Coming, is imminent, always-already among us. But if McKinley felt like this before joining the party, why did we let him sign on in the first place? Because we try not to live, ourselves, in the foreclosure of the frozen pen-ultimate. Individuals, like history, can be influenced, can change and develop. Sadly, McKinley's views have remained frozen".*

Cronin's explanation for the expulsion of McKinley reveals an insightful perspective on the different understandings of political struggle between McKinley and the SACP leadership. The SACP leadership is committed to working within the ANC-led Alliance, regardless of the compromises or contradictions that this might entail, as they believe that progressive, albeit minor, reforms are achieved in this manner. McKinley, on the other hand, is less willing to accept and/or rationalize compromises or contradictions produced by the Party's unwavering commitment to the ANC. Thus, the SACP leadership's official justification for expelling McKinley was articulated quite clearly by Cronin, as McKinley's many attempts to confront the ANC in an aggressive and persistent manner are not compatible with the Party's overall understanding of its relationship with the ANC.

The Johannesburg Central Branch (JCB) was deeply attentive to the issues raised by McKinley's expulsion, and it was here that negative reactions were manifested most virulently. Florencia Belvedere, the Branch Treasurer, resigned immediately, while others such as Ceruti left the Party following the

first Gauteng Provincial Council after the expulsion (Ceruti, 2004). For those who did not immediately resign from the Branch, there was the task of defending McKinley, and asking several searching and difficult questions of the Party leadership. The following captures the general mood of the Branch at the time:

*“Given that our own party programme, as well as our own GS (General Secretary), urges all party members to debate issues in every platform, both internal and external, from a communist perspective, as a BEC (Branch Executive Committee) we are at a loss to understand the charges being brought against Cde. (comrade) Dale. In heeding the call to engage in polemical debate with consistent anti-capitalist, socialist perspectives, Cde. Dale’s interventions are taken as threats rather than as invitations to debate that can inspire fellow party members to become critical thinkers and activists” (SACP Johannesburg Central Branch Executive Committee, 2000a).*

The JCB then made a formal request of the Party leadership to raise these concerns with the Provincial Executive Committee (PEC) in Gauteng Province; however, this request was not granted. The issues raised in this formal request were largely matters pertaining to the procedure of the disciplinary hearing, as the Branch believed that the process was not fair (Jara, 2000).

In addition to procedural issues of concern to the JCB, there were larger political issues at stake. A Branch Executive Statement (2000a) on the issue of McKinley’s expulsion concludes by reiterating much of what McKinley consistently argued for in his intellectual work:

*“It is a sad indictment on the SACP that arguments put forth by a fellow comrade who has given his time as an activist and as a grounded intellectual to build the organisation, are taken as undermining the SACP. If those who are bringing the charges against Cde. Dale find these arguments to be unfounded, why not engage with Cde. Dale and debate the issues with counter-arguments? Why the need to resort to a disciplinary hearing when active and fruitful debate could be more conducive to building a party of cadres who think through the issues and defend their positions in a substantiated way?*

*Finally, it is curious that Cde. Dale is being singled out to appear in front of a disciplinary committee when there are numerous MPs and MPLs in government who are members of the SACP and who continuously, publicly and unashamedly go against SACP policy without being held accountable for their actions. It is the greatest of ironies that Cde. Dale McKinley is being brought in front of a disciplinary committee for bringing discredit to the SACP by upholding a communist ethic and morality and adhering to the party programme while several of our national SACP leaders are not being rightfully disciplined but instead seemingly given the green light to disregard openly both our SACP party programme and constitution”.*

Many members of the JCB appeared to be severely disillusioned by McKinley's expulsion, and as the quotation above explains, directed their anger at those SACP leaders serving the ANC in government.

It is also revealing to examine the reaction to McKinley's expulsion by those outside the Party, but who were considered part of the political "left" in South Africa. In assessing these reactions, there appears to be a consistency with which political activists describe McKinley's dedication to progressive political struggle. For example, Carl T. Brecker (Brecker, 2000), an activist from Cape Town, asserts, "He (McKinley) has through his politics and practice left us in no doubt of his revolutionary credentials". In a letter to Blade Nzimande, Brecker (2000) describes McKinley further:

*"Cde McKinley is known by many of those most closely associated with 'the struggle' as a dedicated and hardworking member of the communist party. His analyses of the historical evolution of the politics of the ANC leadership are well known and respected in political and academic circles for its meticulous attention to detail. In more recent times, his public comments on the rightward lurch in the policies and practice of the ANC government, which simply extended that historical analysis, has earned him the respect of many activists both within the Alliance and beyond, who share that view".*

An activist, and veteran journalist in South Africa, Tony Hall (2000), describes McKinley's participation within the Party as follows: "Dale may have been a pain in the neck to the Party leadership at times. He has also been an effective hard-working activist, and a thoughtful critic. Any Party that cannot find a way to harness the thrust and energy of such a cadre is not doing its job properly". A former lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Franco Barchiesi, wrote a letter to the *Mail & Guardian* in response to Cronin's piece on the "free thinker". In this letter, Barchiesi (2000) defends McKinley by claiming,

*"In fact the 'fault' in McKinley's writings was—rather than just attacking the ANC for its own sake—to have invited the party's grassroots to reflect on elementary contradictions. First, that it is the government, of which the SACP is part, that is violating the principles that the SACP claims to uphold. Second, that the role of SACP leaders in this government is far deeper than 'not publicly disagreeing'. Ministers from the party (Jeff Radebe, Alec Erwin, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi) have played and are playing a decisive, strategic role in the definition and implementation of economic and social policies of a definitely right-wing nature".*

This letter from Barchiesi mentions briefly one of the potential motivations for McKinley's expulsion that will be discussed later in this article: he was encouraging critical reflection among the rank-and-file SACP membership. One final personal account from Piers Pigou (2000) is worth noting at length:

*"So what had McKinley done to deserve the wrath of the Party's leadership, or of those within it who had bothered to engage with the issues that he was raising? And why expel him?...In a nutshell McKinley had upset the sensibilities of some within the SACP, and presumably the ANC, by reminding*

*people that the Party is seriously straying from its stated socialist goals and objectives in a number of areas. He articulated positions that made some in the SACP leadership uncomfortable about the nature of the massive compromises and contradictions they were struggling to reconcile and defend under the banner of securing the national democratic revolution. It seems, however, it is not acceptable to publicly question the schizophrenic nature of the Party's continued alliance with the ANC and its adherence to an economic policy diametrically opposed to the Party's interests, yet implemented in part by some of the Party's most senior members. In effect meaningful ideological debate about theory, strategy and the implementation of the Party's programme has been suspended".*

The personal accounts collected in this study from outside the Party portray a relatively consistent message regarding McKinley's expulsion. They overwhelmingly believe that his membership was terminated because he was openly, and aggressively, questioning the compromises being made by the Party's leadership in the post-apartheid era. More importantly, they also claim that he was encouraging other rank-and-file members of the Party to reflect critically on many of the contradictions found within the leadership of the SACP, and other Alliance formations.

One final account from outside the SACP originates from *The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI)*. The *FXI* in South Africa is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) formed in 1994 in order to "defend freedom of expression, to oppose censorship, to promote access to information and knowledge, and to promote media diversity" (*FXI*, n.d.). Immediately following the expulsion of McKinley, the *FXI* released a media statement addressing the issue. The statement begins by asserting "The Freedom of Expression Institute condemns the decision to expel Dr. Dale McKinley from the South African Communist Party" (*FXI*, 2000). This document highlights several problems the *FXI* found with the Party's actions against McKinley, including: (1) a general concern about what the expulsion means in terms of freedom of expression, and a culture of critical debate within the Party; (2) the Party maintaining two standards regarding freedom of expression, one for the Party leaders and another for regular members; and (3) serious concerns regarding the lack of a fair hearing. The press release ended ominously with a strongly worded indictment of the Party's actions on this matter:

*"According to the FXI...the disciplinary action against McKinley cannot be treated simply as an internal matter, as it is bound to have a chilling effect on a culture of critical debate in the country, and the practice of democracy both within the state and civil society. The FXI feels that freedom of expression must be protected not only with respect to the state, but with respect to civil society organisations as well. This is especially so with respect to political organisations that fall within the ambit of the liberation movement, given that they claim to be the flag-bearers of a higher morality" (FXI, 2000).*

As a respected NGO in South Africa, the *FXI*'s critique of the Party is important to consider. *FXI* raised fundamental issues of democracy and freedom of expression in this document, and also concerns regarding the impact this could have both within, and beyond, the SACP. This added a human rights aspect to the critique of McKinley's expulsion, and stands in contrast to Cronin's assertions that McKinley has been "set free" by revoking his SACP membership.

### **7. Implications of McKinley's Expulsion**

Although many members of the Party appeared to sympathize with McKinley's politics, his expulsion created the impression that this type of direct confrontation with the leadership was not acceptable. Even within the JCB, one of the most radical and active branches in the country, the reaction by some comrades to McKinley's expulsion was mixed and cautious. Former member of the JCB, Ceruti (2004) explains the hesitancy of some JCB members at the time:

*"So there are two lines of argument: one argument that says that Dale's politics are going in the right direction and therefore we should defend him; and then another line that wasn't happy with Dale getting expelled for political reasons, but not, if you'd like, brave enough to actually take the argument head on. They argued it more on a technical basis, saying the way he was expelled wasn't correct...the other thing that happened was that the softer left in the Branch then basically took fright, if they actually pushed it, and fought hard on it, they too would get expelled".*

Thus, by expelling McKinley, the first implication was that the SACP leadership instilled a climate of fear amongst rank-and-file members who positioned themselves in opposition to the prevailing standpoint of the leadership. It became evident that any sustained and direct criticism of the SACP leadership's approach to political struggle could potentially have serious ramifications for rank-and-file members.

The second implication of McKinley's expulsion was that a significant organizational threat to the leadership's vision for the SACP was removed. In the battle of ideas unfolding within the Party at the time, expelling McKinley effectively extinguished one of the key sources of radical, counter-hegemonic thought. McKinley's confrontational approach vis-à-vis the leadership of the Tripartite Alliance was creating space at the grassroots level of the Party to openly question the bona fides of the Alliance. His criticisms of the Alliance were directly at odds with the Party's longstanding tradition of working within the ANC-led Alliance, and were offering rank-and-file members significant pause for thought. McKinley (2004) describes the situation as follows:

*"...we had managed to build up quite a grassroots base, and created an organizational counter-weight to...the leadership...And the leadership saw that as a threat, as a potential organizational threat. And they saw me as central to that, as I had played a role in those things, and as usual...you target the individual and personalize everything. So instead of engaging with the debates and the issues and the*



*problems that were being raised as a part of this struggle, they went for the individual to try to snuff the whole thing out”.*

Without exaggerating the role that McKinley played within the Party, it is reasonable to suggest that he was indeed one of the leading voices in this “counter-weight” to the SACP leadership. By “dealing” with McKinley, one of the major proponents of a more militant approach for the Party was removed. This worked effectively to both eliminate McKinley from the organization, and remind other dissenting SACP members where the limits of internal debate were drawn.

## **8. Conclusion**

McKinley aggressively challenged the fundamental aspects of the SACP’s participation in the ANC-dominated Tripartite Alliance. He was unwilling to accept the compromises and/or contradictions arising from the SACP’s cooperation with the ANC, and called for the Party to take a more confrontational approach toward the ANC. He also refused to follow a code of discipline that did not allow free and uninhibited criticism of the current neoliberal trajectory of the Tripartite Alliance. Indeed, McKinley openly violated and questioned several of the fundamental ideas guiding the organization. Furthermore, he was provoking other comrades within the Party to debate and discuss the appropriateness of supporting the ANC-led Alliance in the post-apartheid period.

Examining McKinley’s expulsion leads to a crucial recognition of the limits of internal debate within the Party at the time. The Party leadership maintained that SACP members are required to “accept the programme and policies of the SACP”, which include a commitment to “strengthen the liberation alliance...expressed through the liberation front headed by the ANC” (SACP, 2000). Despite the implementation of GEAR, and the robust debates taking place within the Party regarding the future of the Alliance, the SACP leadership was able to secure the Party’s position as a faithful ally to the ANC during this crucial period in the late 1990s. Moreover, this critical historical account argues that expelling McKinley was an important element in maintaining this political perspective within the Party. McKinley posed a significant challenge to these core aspects of the SACP identity in the post-apartheid period, and was pushing for genuine change within the organization.

Constructing a critical history of the Party in the late 1990s would not be possible without access to this important activist archive held at the University of Witwatersrand. Most of the documents cited in this article are not available anywhere else, such as e-mail correspondence between McKinley and Party leaders. This demonstrates the importance of activists like McKinley keeping meticulous records and collections of material, and most importantly, making them available to the public so that this type of critical work can be done. Moreover, this case demonstrates the significance of doing the necessary archival work in order to unearth these stories that are so important to understanding the political struggles during the late 1990s within the Alliance. This narrative will hopefully contribute to our

ongoing analysis and recognition of how important activist archives are, so that more of these stories can be preserved and debated.

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