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South African Institute of Race Relations NPC

Submission to the Department of Basic Education regarding the

DRAFT NEW HISTORY CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENTS (CAPS)

19 April 2026

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1 INTRODUCTION

This submission on the Draft New History Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) (“the draft curriculum”) is made by the South African Institute of Race Relations NPC (“the IRR”), a non-profit organisation formed in 1929 to oppose racial discrimination and promote racial goodwill. Its current objects are to promote democracy, human rights, development, and reconciliation between the people of South Africa.

2 UNCONSTITUTIONAL “TICK-BOX” PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation in the legislative process is a vital aspect of South Africa’s democracy, as the Constitutional Court has repeatedly reaffirmed in many judgments. The Department of Basic Education (“the Department”) has nevertheless adopted an unconstitutional “tick-box” approach to public consultation.

Among other things, the Department has allowed only 30 days (effectively 19 working days) for public comment on complex proposals for curriculum change that are to be introduced not only in Grades 4 to 6 and Grades 7 to 9 but also in Grades 10 to 12. This is far too short a period for proper assessment – and especially so when history may well be made a compulsory subject in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase from Grades 10 to 12.

In addition, the proposed changes cannot be adequately assessed without much more information as to what the current history curriculum covers in Grades 4 to 12. Since the amount of teaching time in the school year is finite, the additions to the draft curriculum require exclusions from the current one.

Without a full understanding of what is being left out, as well as what is to be included, the full impact of the changes cannot be evaluated. South Africans have thus been denied the information they need to “know about” the issues raised by the draft Curriculum and then to have “an adequate say”, as the Constitution requires.¹

Moreover, the government’s own *National Policy Development Framework of 2020* emphasises that policy makers must “inform and engage stakeholders” on “the nature and magnitude” of proposed policy shifts and their likely “impacts and risks.” These assessments must be “informed by the best available evidence, data, and knowledge,” it adds.²

In a section dedicated to “Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Making,” the *Framework* notes: “Chapter 10 of the Constitution prescribes that people’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making. Therefore, the involvement of the public in policy making is a constitutional obligation that government institutions must respect and institutionalise.”³

3 THE CONTENT OF THE DRAFT CURRICULUM

The short time allowed for public comment makes it difficult to provide detailed comment on particular provisions of the draft curriculum. All that can be done is to highlight some important

¹ [2006] ZACC 12; 2007 (1) BCLR 47 (CC); 2006 (6) SA 416 (CC); 2016] ZACC 22; [2023] ZACC 14.

² National Policy Development Framework, 2020.

³ Ibid, p. 19.

omissions from the draft curriculum for Grades 10 to 12, along with various other shortcomings that need to be addressed.

3.1 A merited, but skewed, focus on Africa

There is much to like about the broadened focus on Africa. Pre-colonial African kingdoms such as Mali and Great Zimbabwe, and the social history of African societies before the colonial encounter, are stories worth telling. South African pupils should learn them. Schools in this country have no business teaching the history of the world as if Africa were a footnote, says IRR CEO Dr John Endres.⁴

Dawid Olivier, a lecturer in history in education at North-West University, also supports a more Afro-centric approach, saying: “For many years, school history privileged colonial and Eurocentric interpretations of the past while marginalising African voices, experiences and knowledge systems.” Now the aim is to adopt “an African-centred approach [that] recognises that the African past is knowable and [which] pursues the history of Africa through multiple methodologies to reconstruct the histories of Africans on the continent and in the world.”⁵

Olivier cautions, however, that though a curriculum that “foregrounds” African perspectives is “necessary and welcome,” an appropriate balance must also be maintained. The emphasis on Africa “should not come at the expense of learners’ exposure to global historical contexts that remain essential for understanding contemporary geopolitics.”⁶

“By all means broaden the curriculum,” adds Endres. “Bring in Mali and Great Zimbabwe. But don’t let the broadening narrow the world a pupil can see.”⁷ A better balance has been retained in the draft curriculum for grades 7 to 9, where the proposed curriculum continues to cover the Industrial Revolution in Grade 8 and the Second World War in Grade 9. Notes Endres: “The real displacement of key global developments happens at the top, in the curriculum for Grades 10 to 12. Yet these are the final years of study in which pupils have the maturity to grapple with more complex material and would benefit from doing so.”⁸ These are also the grades in which the study of history could be made compulsory in all South African schools. This possibility makes it all the more crucial that the curriculum in the FET phase should be adequately balanced.

There is also a risk that the draft curriculum, despite its increased emphasis on Africa, will leave out essential aspects of the continent’s history. Disturbing elements – including the role of African rulers in capturing and trading African slaves over thousands of years – need to be incorporated to give pupils a more accurate understanding of the past. Britain’s role in largely ending slavery in Africa in the nineteenth century is a particularly notable development and should be included too, rather than ignored. Similarly, an honest account of history requires showing what happened in African countries after decolonisation, a history often featuring

⁴ John Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” Daily Friend, 12 April 2026. <https://dailyfriend.co.za/2026/04/12/the-trouble-with-the-new-history-curriculum/>.

⁵ Pregs Govender, “End of an era: Jan van Riebeeck will no longer dominate school history books,” News24.com, 8 April 2026. <https://www.news24.com/southafrica/education/end-of-an-era-jan-van-riebeeck-will-no-longer-dominate-school-history-books-20260407-1236>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” op. cit.

⁸ Ibid.

rapacious elites, political repression, and a marked lack of economic development compared to other parts of the world.

3.2 The omission of important historical developments

3.2.1 Major global developments left out

Under the current curriculum, Grade 11 covers the Russian Revolution, the rise of Nazi Germany, the Great Depression, and the ideological contest between capitalism, communism, and fascism that defined the twentieth century. Grade 12 covers the post-war world order, including the Cold War as a global phenomenon. Under the proposed draft curriculum, by contrast, all of this is gone. The entire FET phase becomes a study of pre-colonial African civilisations, European colonisation of Africa, the liberation struggle, and the transition to democracy.⁹

In Grade 10 history, as Olivier notes, “the rise and fall of ancient African empires, including the empire of Mali as a case study, is expected to replace the French Revolution, while the achievements of African people since ancient times will replace the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902.”¹⁰ In Grade 11, he continues, “the topic ‘Communism in Russia’ will be replaced by ‘Europe comes into contact with the wider world during the 15th to 18th centuries,’ while ‘Capitalism in the USA’ will be replaced by ‘Europe comes into contact with the wider world during the 16th to the 19th century’.”¹¹

These omissions are damaging. For example, the French Revolution gave the world the language of rights and equality that the ANC itself drew on in 1994, yet it appears nowhere in the proposed FET curriculum as a standalone subject.¹²

The exclusion of Communism in Russia is disturbing too. If pupils are to have a balanced understanding of vital developments in the 20th century, they must be given an accurate overview of the failures of central planning in the Soviet Union and the extent of the repression it helped unleash. Pupils should also be informed of the mass deaths that occurred under 20th-century totalitarian systems, including Stalin’s purges and Pol Pot’s killing fields.¹³ The deaths of some 94 million people under communist rule in Russia and elsewhere is too important to be ignored, as the draft curriculum proposes to do.¹⁴

3.2.2 Major developments in South Africa excluded too

The draft curriculum frequently indicates that the African National Congress (ANC) was solely responsible for ending apartheid. That is incorrect. Vital contributions were also made by liberals, the Black Consciousness movement, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Inkatha, and the tens of thousands of ordinary black South Africans who made key apartheid laws “unworkable” and so compelled their repeal.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Govender, “End of an era,” op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” op. cit.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jean-Louis Pannè, Andrzej Paczkowski and six others, *The Black Book of Communism*, Harvard University Press, 1999; see also Kristian Niemietz, *Socialism: The Failed Idea that Never Dies*, London Publishing Partnership, 2019.

3.2.2.1 *The liberal contribution*

Liberals in South Africa played a crucial role in exposing the injustices of racial discrimination, pushing for an end to apartheid laws, and lobbying for the introduction of liberal democracy. The South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR) – an independent non-governmental organisation (“NGO”) established in 1929 to oppose race discrimination – was particularly important here. So too were many other liberal NGOs, liberal political parties, liberal newspapers, liberal universities and liberal churches. These organisations were invaluable in promoting liberal ideas and paving the way for liberal democracy.

Liberal ideas aim to empower the individual, not the state. They also underpin core principles of Western democracy, including equality before the law and respect for property rights. They seek to uphold fundamental civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and association, and oppose violence and repression. They emphasise the need to limit governmental power, safeguard judicial independence, support competitive free markets and promote self-reliance rather than dependency on an interventionist state.¹⁵

Liberals in South Africa played a key part in delegitimising apartheid laws and condemning repression. They also helped to bring about many important reforms in the 1970s (an end to “petty” apartheid and job reservation, and recognition of the rights of black workers to strike and join trade unions); in the 1980s (the repeal of the pass laws and the restoration of South African citizenship to millions of black people in the four “independent” homelands); and in the early 1990s (the unbanning of the ANC and other organisations and the repeal of the Population Registration Act of 1950, under which all South Africans had been classified by race).¹⁶

Liberals also played a vital role in communicating liberal ideas and popularising them among all South Africans. They were so successful in doing so (writes a former IRR CEO, John Kane-Berman) that there was “huge support for liberal principles” right across the country by the time that constitutional negotiations began in February 1990. As Kane-Berman points out, “solid liberal ideas were familiar right across the South African political spectrum...because organisations such as the IRR, people like Helen Suzman, and liberal newspapers and universities had put a great deal of energy into promoting them.”¹⁷

This also explains why liberal ideas permeate South Africa’s Constitution. Examples include its founding value of non-racialism; its emphasis on the rule of law; its checks and balances on executive power; the guarantees of fundamental freedoms in its Bill of Rights; its respect for judicial and prosecutorial independence; and its partial devolution of powers to lower tiers of government. Unfortunately, however, the ANC has undermined many of these liberal principles, often by deploying its loyal cadres to institutions supposed to be independent of the ruling party’s control.

¹⁵ John Kane-Berman, “Planning versus liberalism”, Address to the IRR Council, July 2013.

¹⁶ Anthea Jeffery, *People’s War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2009 and 2019.

¹⁷ Ibid.

South Africa's liberals commonly drew on the work of liberal thinkers and organisations elsewhere. Particularly important here were the many abolitionists who helped end slavery across the globe, as outlined below. Also influential was the civil rights movement in the United States (US), along with its key leaders and especially Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

South Africa's current Grade 12 curriculum covers the contribution made by King and the US civil rights movement. However, this important topic is now to be excluded from the FET curriculum.¹⁸ Dr Alvin Riffel, a lecturer from the University of the Western Cape's education faculty, regrets this proposed omission, saying: "The civil rights movement offers powerful comparative value, enabling learners to situate South African struggles within a broader transnational history of civil rights."¹⁹

However, the problems with the draft curriculum extend far beyond the downplaying of the US civil rights movement. More seriously still, the vital contributions made by liberals in South Africa over more than a century are excluded altogether. This is a substantial shortcoming which needs to be corrected.

3.2.2.2 *The Black Consciousness contribution*

The existing Grade 12 syllabus covers the aims of the Black Consciousness Movement, the role of Steve Biko, and the legacy of Black Consciousness ("BC") in South African politics. Now, however, "Steve Biko's struggles against the apartheid government will no longer be a standalone topic in the Grade 12 history syllabus," as News24.com reports.²⁰

This proposed omission is a serious weakness. The BC movement was vital in:

- raising the political consciousness of young black South Africans and giving them a greater sense of pride;
- sparking the 1976-77 Soweto revolt that shook the country to its core and showed that internal insurrection was still possible;
- reawakening Soviet interest in South Africa;
- prompting the exiled ANC to embark on a "people's war" aimed largely at destroying its black rivals in BC and elsewhere; and
- building up the ranks of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and so resuscitating an "armed struggle" that had long been moribund.²¹

The BC youngsters who left South Africa to fight had little wish, however, to join the ANC – which Biko had long dismissed as "powerless". Tsietsi Mashini, the first head of the Soweto Students Representative Council, had likewise regarded the ANC as ineffective, corrupt and "internally extinct." BC exiles would have preferred to join the Pan-Africanist Congress ("PAC"), but found that it lacked the resources to house or train them. In addition, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was adamant that they should join the ANC. In response, Khetani Nkabinde, a student leader from Soweto, likened the ANC to "sharks," saying: "If you are swallowed up by them, you

¹⁸ Govender, "End of an era," op. cit.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jeffery, *People's War*, op. cit.

will never escape. They infiltrate everywhere, even the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, where you have to register when you arrive from home.”²²

These telling criticisms of the ANC help explain why the BC movement is now to be excluded from the curriculum as a standalone subject. The ANC has also long pretended that its own leaders and supporters were responsible for sparking the Soweto revolt, rather than the BC movement. That claim is false – and the ANC has little wish for this to become more widely known. However, South African pupils deserve to be told of the true significance of the BC movement, as well as organisation’s disdain for the ineffective and corrupt ANC.

3.2.2.3 *The contributions made by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Inkatha*

The draft curriculum ignores the vital contributions made by Inkatha and its leader, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. In the 1970s, Buthelezi became chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland with the support of the ANC. He then used his control over KwaZulu to reject the spurious “independence” which other homeland leaders – in the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, the Ciskei and Venda – were willing to accept. Independence for these “TBVC” states, as they were commonly called, resulted in some 7 million black people losing their South African citizenship. If KwaZulu under Buthelezi had followed suit, some 7 million Zulus would likewise have been deprived of citizenship. In these circumstances, smaller homelands would have had little choice but to accept “independence” too. The National Party’s “grand apartheid” strategy might then have succeeded in hiving all black South Africans off into “independent” homelands while simultaneously depriving them of their South African citizenship – and of any claim to political rights in the common area.²³

Instead, however, Buthelezi’s refusal to accept independence for KwaZulu shattered the National Party’s “grand apartheid” strategy. It also made it clear that some 7 million Zulus would always outnumber roughly 5 million whites. Some means of including black South Africans in national government would therefore have to be found. In August 1985, the National Party finally acknowledged this when it said that black people would remain South African citizens and would have to be “accommodated within political institutions” within the country.²⁴

Buthelezi formed Inkatha in 1975 and used its control over the KwaZulu legislature to strengthen his rejection of independence for the homeland. Inkatha was strongly committed to the liberation of black South Africans, but believed that this could and should be achieved by non-violent means. Inkatha’s support for non-violence resonated strongly with most black South Africans and was a major factor in its rapid growth. By 1990, thus, when the ANC was unbanned, Inkatha had roughly 2 million members in KwaZulu/Natal and in the Pretoria/Witwatersrand/Vaal (PWV) area, now known as Gauteng. This made it by far the biggest black political organisation in the history of the country. Yet Inkatha is almost entirely ignored by the draft curriculum, while Buthelezi is not mentioned at all.

²² Mark Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2007, pp. 320, 377, 380.

²³ John Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1977, p. 100.

²⁴ Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit; see also <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/the-rubicon-speech>.

3.2.2.4 *The contribution made by ordinary black South Africans*

The draft curriculum also ignores the story of how tens of thousands of ordinary black South Africans helped bring about the repeal of major apartheid laws. Three factors were particularly important here. First, following rapid economic growth in the 1960s, it was evident that the white population was too small to meet the needs of the economy. Second, with the economy growing further, black people began moving into more senior posts and expanding their labour and consumer power. Third, for many years, tens of thousands of black people broke apartheid rules on a daily basis, making it ever more difficult for the National Party government to enforce them. Ordinary black South Africans thus succeeded in making many apartheid laws unworkable well before the ANC sought to make South Africa “ungovernable.”²⁵

This “silent revolution,” as Kane-Berman called it, was not an organised campaign of defiance. Nor was it driven by the ANC or any other political organisation. How it worked is evident from the story of the “pass laws.”

Under these laws, black people needed permits (or “passes”) to remain in supposedly “white” towns and cities for more than 72 hours. Those found without their passes were generally arrested and brought before courts that mostly convicted them, punished them with fines or prison terms, and ordered that they be sent back to their “homelands”. However, the people “endorsed out” in this way were often so desperate for jobs and incomes that they simply turned around and came right back again.²⁶

This quiet resistance made it ever more costly and time-consuming for National Party government to compel compliance. Over time, sustained grassroots resistance made the pass laws unenforceable. Once the rules had become “meaningless” (as state president PW Botha said of them in 1986), there was no point in retaining them on the Statute Book and they were repealed in 1986.²⁷

The draft curriculum ignores this “silent revolution”. It nevertheless played such a key part in bringing apartheid to an end by peaceful means that it surely merits inclusion. Its incorporation would also give the lie to those intent on portraying black South Africans as helpless “victims.” Instead, it would help celebrate the achievements of all the ordinary black people who helped to end apartheid in this way. This would give pupils a more rounded and more accurate picture of how apartheid ended.

3.3 No reference to an African slave trade lasting some 5,000 years

The draft curriculum’s strong focus on Africa requires that it include the most important developments on the continent. The most significant of all was the African slave trade – and yet the curriculum largely ignores this.

Slavery in Africa dates from at least 2900 BCE, as Martin Plaut writes in *Unbroken Chains: a 5,000-Year History of African Enslavement*, published in 2025. In the relatively short period from 650 CE to 1900, he adds, more than 41 million people are known to have been enslaved in

²⁵ John Kane-Berman, *South Africa’s Silent Revolution*, 2nd edition, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1991.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Africa. Of these, some 12.58 million Africans were shipped across the Indian Ocean, while some 12.52 million were sent across the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, 9.4 million Africans were captured and sent to slave markets via Trans-Sahara routes, while some 4 million were enslaved by the Fulani in the Sokoto Caliphate (in what is now northern Nigeria) and 1.3 million were enslaved by the Ottoman Empire. Also relevant are the roughly 1 to 1.2 million whites who were captured in England and elsewhere in Europe by the Barbary Corsairs and brought back as slaves to North Africa. In addition, roughly 147,000 Africans were enslaved in Iran and some 300,000 in Ethiopia. This list is far from complete, however, for other evidence suggests (as Plaut writes) that the overall total was significantly greater than 41.2 million. Hence, “a figure nearer 50 million may not be an exaggeration.”²⁸

A focus on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade alone, as the draft curriculum proposes, is thus far from sufficient. It is also misleading in what it leaves out. First, it obscures the extent to which slavery was the norm across the world for much of recorded history. For example, as Nigel Biggar writes, “all the ancient Mesopotamian civilisations practised slavery in one form or another, starting with Egypt in the third millennium BC. To the west, around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the ancient Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans followed. To the east, slavery could be found among the Chinese from at least the seventh century AD, and subsequently among the Japanese and Koreans. In the Americas, the peoples of the Pacific North-West practised it from before the sixth century AD, the Incas and the Aztecs extracted forced labour from subject peoples from the fifteenth century, and the Comanches ‘built the largest slave economy’ in what is now the south-west of the US from the eighteenth century.” In addition, “from the time of Muhammad, slavery was practised throughout the Islamic world.”²⁹

Secondly, the emphasis on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade leaves out most of the history of slavery across the African continent. And yet the evidence shows that “Africans were busy enslaving other Africans and selling them to the Romans and Arabs centuries before British merchant ships appeared off the coast of West Africa in the mid-1600s.”³⁰

Focusing solely on the Trans-Atlantic slave is misleading in other ways too. Among other things, it allows the draft curriculum to portray slavery as a white-on-black phenomenon driven largely by white racism and a sense of “white supremacy”. However, there was no white racism in issue when Africans enslaved other Africans, when Egyptians enslaved Africans from at least as early as 2,900 BCE, when Arabs enslaved Africans over many centuries, or when the Barbary Corsairs enslaved British and other whites.

The draft curriculum’s narrow focus on the Trans-Atlantic slave trade is also used to buttress other false claims. These include the assertion that slavery played a key part “in the accumulation of capital by both Holland and Britain,” thereby helping these countries to finance their industrialisation and embark on lengthy periods of global domination.³¹

As regards Britain, the claim made in the draft curriculum echoes a thesis set out by Eric Williams (a Trinidadian historian and later prime minister) in his 1944 book, *Capitalism and Slavery*. Here, Williams argued that profits from the slave trade provided a major source of

²⁸ Martin Plaut, *Unbroken Chains: A 5,000-Year History of African Enslavement*, Hurst & Company, London, 2025, p. 2; Nigel Biggar, *Reparations: Slavery and the Tyranny of Imaginary Guilt*, Forum, 2025, p. 38.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 31.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 31, 32.

³¹ Draft curriculum, pp. 54 – 55.

capital for financing Britain's world-leading industrial revolution. However, Williams himself never claimed that the slave trade was "solely and entirely responsible for industrial development." Since then, moreover, Williams's thesis has been refuted by various other writers, including Roger Anstey, David Richardson, David Eltis and Stanley L Engerman. Eltis and Engerman, writes Biggar, have shown that "the slave trade engaged only 1.5 per cent of British vessels and 3 per cent of tonnage." They have also demonstrated that "sugar was just one of hundreds of industries in a complex economy" and that its role as an "engine of economic growth "compares poorly with textiles, coal, iron ore" and other items.³²

It is both misleading and damaging for the draft curriculum to focus on a small part of the history of slavery in Africa, to use this as proof of pervasive white racism, and to assert that Britain's wealth and industrial development were based on its exploitation of African slaves. Instead of misinforming pupils on these vital issues, the draft curriculum should focus on telling the full story in a balanced and objective way.

3.4 Little reference to the abolition of the African slave trade

The draft curriculum refers briefly to the French Revolution as having contributed to the growth of the anti-slavery movement. Its main focus, however, is on the Haitian Revolution that led to the establishment of an independent state in 1804. The draft curriculum states that the Haitian Revolution had a significant impact on "on American slave resistance, the US government and American slave owners." However, it brushes aside many other relevant developments in the US in the run-up to the American Civil War (1861-1864), as well as the hundreds of thousands of Americans killed in the quest to end slavery in the southern states.

The draft curriculum adds that "the Haitian Revolution advanced a universal conception of freedom that demanded that liberty and equality had to include the emancipation of Black slaves." This is both true and important. However, this was not in fact the first time that such concepts had been put forward, as the curriculum implies.³³

This curriculum ignores, for example, the formation in London in 1787 of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. It overlooks the fact that "in 1791, about 30 per cent of the adult male population of Britain signed anti-slavery petitions." In addition, it brushes aside the persistent campaigns mounted by William Wilberforce and others in England to bring an end to slavery. The Haitian Revolution in 1804 was of course important, as Biggar writes, in "helping to give abolition the appearance of historical inevitability." It nevertheless took place only after the abolitionist movement in Britain was already well in train.³⁴

Moreover, it was not long after the Haitian Revolution (as Biggar writes) that "the efforts of [British] campaigners finally bore fruit in 1807, when [the British] Parliament legislated to abolish the slave trade. In 1833, moreover, it followed up by passing the Slavery Abolition Act, which came into effect 12 months later." On 1 August 1834, thus, "slaves throughout the British Empire were formally emancipated."³⁵

Britain also put enormous effort and resources into ending the slave trade in most parts of the world. In 1814-1815, it used its considerable influence to secure the support of all the major European powers for a general abolition treaty. Though this attempt failed, Britain later

³² Biggar, *Reparations*, pp. 40 – 41.

³³ Draft curriculum, p. 57.

³⁴ Biggar, *Reparations*, p. 57.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 58.

succeeded (as Biggar writes) “in getting nearly all the states involved in the Atlantic slave trade to agree in principle to end it – including Portugal, Spain, France, Brazil and the US.”³⁶

Britain also began deploying the Royal Navy to police the seas and compel an end to the trade. Writes Biggar: “Up to ten ships of the Royal Navy were stationed off the coast of West Africa to disrupt the export of slaves until 1833. Over the next ten years, the number rose as high as 19, from 1844 to 1865 it seldom fell below 20, for several consecutive years it stayed at over 30, and it twice reached a peak of 36.”³⁷

Britain also came to believe that the key to ending the slave trade and slavery in Africa was to promote alternative and legitimate forms of commerce. In Biggar’s words: “This led to the setting up of trading posts in West Africa and then, when the merchants complained of the lack of security, a more assertive colonial presence on land.” In 1851 the British attacked Lagos and destroyed its slaving facilities, having tried in vain to persuade its ruler to terminate the commerce in slaves. “In 1861, when an attempt was made to revive the trade, they annexed Lagos as a colony.”³⁸

On the eastern side of Africa, many steps were likewise taken to end slavery there. “The British brought persistent diplomatic pressure to bear on the Sultanate of Zanzibar, which was the main port for the Great Lakes slave trade, but which also depended on the Royal Navy to protect its shipping from pirates in the Indian Ocean. Treaties were signed banning trade in slaves to the Americas in 1822 and to the more important Persian Gulf in 1845.” In 1873 the Sultan finally agreed to halt the export of slaves from the African mainland altogether and the slave market was “shut down once and for all.” However, “the institution of domestic slavery was tolerated until Zanzibar became a British protectorate in 1890.”³⁹

The full story of how Britain largely ended slavery in Africa in the 19th century is a far longer one. It also involved considerable costs for Britain and its taxpayers. Some analysts “estimate the economic cost to Brit[ain] of the anti-slave trade effort at roughly 1.8 per cent of national income over sixty years from 1808 to 1867.” For context, in 2021 the UK spent just over 2 per cent on national defence.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, despite Britain’s major efforts to bring slavery to an end throughout Africa, the abolition of slavery happened only in 1902 in Cameroun, in 1903 in Mali, in 1919 in Tanganyika, in 1922 in Morocco, in 1924 in Sudan, in 1928 in Sierra Leone, in 1935 in Ethiopia and 1981 in Mauritania.⁴¹

Information of this kind is necessary to give pupils a more accurate and more nuanced understanding of the past. The draft curriculum should thus include all these important developments, instead of ignoring them.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 66.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 67.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 67 – 68.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.72.

⁴¹ RW Johnson, “The Reparations for Slavery Debate,” The Common Sense, 12 April 2026. <https://www.thecommonsense.co.za/Editorials/the-reparations-for-slavery-debate>.

3.5 A skewed portrayal of the transition to majority rule in Southern Africa

The draft curriculum's description of liberation struggles in Angola, Namibia and South Africa is also deeply flawed.

3.5.1 *An inaccurate version of events in Angola and Namibia*

As regards Angola and Namibia, the draft curriculum provides the following brief account: "In southern Africa, the USA and Zaire supported Holden Roberto of the FNLA; South Africa supported Jonas Savimbi of UNITA; and Cuba and the USSR supported Agostinho Neto of the MPLA."⁴² That it was Soviet help to the socialist-oriented MPLA that reportedly triggered interventions by other countries is not explained.⁴³

Instead, the draft curriculum goes on to say that teachers should introduce discussion of "anti-colonial struggles in southern Africa: South Africa's invasion of Angola in 1975 and the war in Quito (sic) Cuanavalle (1987-88); Involvement of USA, Cuba and Soviet Union (5 hours)."⁴⁴

This suggests that the information to be provided to pupils will exclude key developments, including the crucial Battle of the Lomba River in August 1987. This occurred after MPLA forces began a major thrust towards Mavinga, a strategic point on the route to Unita's headquarters in Jamba. The MPLA attack was launched with substantial Soviet assistance and a force of about 50,000 to 60,000 men, buttressed by 500 tanks, a hundred MiG and Sukhoi Su-22 jet fighters and bombers, and 60 attack helicopters. Since Unita could not hope to defeat an offensive of this magnitude by itself, the South African government gave permission for the South African Defence Force (SADF) to provide limited military assistance to Unita leader Jonas Savimbi.⁴⁵

A decisive battle took place at the Lomba River near Mavinga in October 1987, when some 3,000 South African soldiers, backed by Savimbi's fighters, thwarted the advance on Mavinga and forced the Angolan/Soviet forces into a chaotic retreat. Huge quantities of Soviet equipment were destroyed or fell into SADF hands as MPLA forces fell back towards the point from which the offensive had been launched, a town called Cuito Cuanavale. Between 7,000 and 10,000 MPLA soldiers were killed, in what was one of the largest land battles ever fought on the African continent.⁴⁶

Though the SADF and Unita thereafter failed to dislodge the MPLA's forces from a stronghold to the east of Cuito Cuanavale, it was nevertheless apparent to Cuban president Fidel Castro (as he told a domestic audience in a speech largely ignored by the media) that tens of thousands of Angolan soldiers were "in danger of being wiped out" by the SADF.⁴⁷ The Soviet Union, which had helped plan the offensive from the outset, suffered a major humiliation and lost its appetite for war in Angola. So too did Cuba. To save face, however, Cuba began announcing that it had inflicted a crushing defeat on the SADF at Cuito Cuanavale. Soon the myth of South Africa's

⁴² Draft curriculum, p. 73.

⁴³ Jeffery, *People's War*, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Draft curriculum, p. 72.

⁴⁵ Jeffery, *People's War*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, pp360-361,367-368; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp624,615; Van Zyl Slabbert, *The Other Side of History*, p38; Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, pp211-217,227-229,250-251,290-291; Bridgland, *The War For Africa*, pp368-375.

⁴⁷ Bridgland, *The War For Africa*, pp368-369.

defeat had taken firm hold, partly because Pretoria could not easily counter Cuban propaganda and partly because it did not wish to draw attention to its military role deep within Angola.⁴⁸

The Lomba River defeat nevertheless played a key role in prompting a negotiated settlement. A major breakthrough came in January 1988 when Angola and Cuba told the US they now accepted the need for the withdrawal of all 50,000 Cuban troops from Angola. Talks on how the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola could be linked to independence for Namibia began in earnest thereafter.⁴⁹ The principles that would govern the peace process were agreed in New York in July 1988 and further refined at Geneva the following month. In December, the negotiating process culminated in the signing of three peace agreements. These accords obliged the South African government to withdraw all troops from Angola by 1 September 1988 and to set 1 April 1989 as the date for the implementation in Namibia of UN Resolution 435. Namibia would thereafter proceed to independence via an internationally sanctioned process. In return, Cuba agreed to withdraw its 50,000 soldiers from Angola over a 27-month period also commencing on 1 April 1989. The MPLA government undertook to close all ANC camps in Angola, while the Angolan, Cuban, and South African governments pledged to respect the sovereignty of all states in southwestern Africa.⁵⁰

The draft history curriculum should include a comprehensive and accurate account of the events in Angola that led to negotiations and then to independence for Namibia in 1989. Information of this kind is vital in giving South African pupils a sound understanding of key developments in southern Africa.

3.5.2 Skewed coverage of the ANC's people's war from 1984 to 1994

The draft curriculum's brief account of the political transition in South Africa is deeply flawed. For example, the draft curriculum says that Oliver Tambo, as president of the ANC in exile, was "instrumental in the ANC's adoption of what the ANC called the 'Four Pillars of the Struggle for National Liberation', namely (1) the Underground Struggle; (2) International Solidarity; (3) the Armed/Military Struggle; and (4) Mass Mobilisation!"⁵¹

This brushes over the fact that these four "pillars" were key elements in the formula for people's revolutionary war, as developed by legendary North Vietnamese strategist General Võ Nguyên Giáp. Giáp's formula – which was based on the Soviet Unified Military Doctrine for the defeat of all capitalist countries – was successfully used to establish communist rule first in North Vietnam and then (in 1975) in South Vietnam too. It was largely because of these victories that Tambo and other ANC and SACP leaders visited unified and communist Vietnam in 1978. Their aim was to learn Giáp's formula and then use this to wage a people's war in South Africa that would eliminate all the ANC's rivals and give the organisation undisputed hegemony over post-apartheid South Africa.⁵²

⁴⁸ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, pp360-361,367-368; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp624,615; Van Zyl Slabbert, *The Other Side of History*, p38; Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, pp211-217,227-229,250-251,290-291; Bridgland, *The War For Africa*, pp368-375

⁴⁹ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, pp316—320.

⁵⁰ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, pp 499 – 511.

⁵¹ Draft curriculum, p. 76.

⁵² Jeffery, *People's War*, op. cit.

The draft curriculum also overlooks the fact that the “four pillars” in practice included:

- terror attacks on black civilians, often in the form of necklace executions;
- intimidation and coercion of black people reluctant to participate in “stayaways” likely to cost them income and jobs; and
- targeted attacks on the leaders and members of the BC movement and Inkatha, many of whom were ambushed and killed during the people’s war.⁵³

The draft curriculum is also wrong in claiming that “the four pillars remained the official policy...of the ANC...until its unbanning in February 1990.” In fact, the ANC persisted with its people’s war throughout the negotiations period. It also greatly intensified the people’s war after February 1990. This explains why political killings totalled about 15,000 in the period from 1990 to 1994, while the death toll in the period from 1984 to 1989 was roughly 5,500.⁵⁴

South African pupils deserve to know this far more complex truth. They should not be misled by a skewed draft curriculum that seems intent on concealing the ANC’s role in political violence, while putting all the blame for this on the ANC’s political rivals, both black and white.

3.5.3 Misleading coverage of ANC propaganda in the people’s war

According to the draft curriculum, “the Cold War was characterised by conflict between the two superpowers carried out through proxy wars, the manipulation of more vulnerable states through extensive military and financial aid, espionage, propaganda, rivalry over technological weapons, space and nuclear arms races, and sport.”⁵⁵

That propaganda was a core element in the Cold War is correct. However, the curriculum fails to mention that most of this propaganda came from the Kremlin, which devoted vast resources to *dezinformatsiya* (disinformation) campaigns aimed at spreading false narratives useful to Moscow and its drive for global domination. This fact needs to be acknowledged, not overlooked.

The draft curriculum also refers briefly to one of the key propaganda themes used by the ANC during the early 1990s. In a Grade 12 course, entitled “*Freedom and Democracy in South Africa: Coming to Terms with the Past*,” the draft indicates that “the context of violence” at that time included “‘third force’ or low intensity warfare.”

This description is misleading. The third-force theory was a vital part of ANC propaganda, especially in the period from 1990 to 1994, when political killings went up three-fold. This propaganda had two main purposes. The first aim was to divert public attention from the 13,000 armed and trained Umkhonto we Sizwe (“MK”) fighters the ANC had brought back into South Africa by 1991 under the cover of the peace process. The second was to stigmatise the ANC’s political rivals and especially Inkatha.

These 13,000 MK fighters – whom the ANC refused to disarm or disband – clearly had both the means and the motive to attack Inkatha (now renamed the Inkatha Freedom Party or IFP) and its roughly 2 million members in KwaZulu/Natal and on the Reef. However, the ANC successfully

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Draft curriculum, p. 71.

deflected public attention from MK's possible culpability by blaming mounting political violence on a sinister "third force". This "third force" was said to comprise the IFP and its allies in the South African Police (SAP), both of whom were supposedly working together to destabilise the ANC and derail the transition to majority rule.

The media and other commentators gave splash coverage to the "third-force" theory, while ignoring its two major weaknesses. First, the theory could not explain the killing of hundreds of IFP leaders and thousands of IFP supporters – many of whom were gunned down in premeditated ambushes. In addition, the theory could not explain the large number of police deaths (roughly 1,000 between 1990 and 1994) and police injuries (more than 1,700 in the first six months of 1993 alone). A third force that killed a small number of its own supporters to stir up hatred, provoke counterattack and try to derail the negotiations process might have some logic behind its actions. But a third force that killed or wounded thousands of its own supporters made no sense at all.

Second, though both the IFP and the police arguably had the means and the motive to attack and destabilise the ANC, they drew no benefit from the mounting political violence. On the contrary, every attack that could be dubbed a third-force one weakened State President FW de Klerk and undermined his credibility. Every attack of this kind also stigmatised Buthelezi as an apartheid "collaborator" and further isolated him from his supporters. There was thus no political advantage to the IFP or SAP in persisting with their alleged third-force attacks.

Again, pupils deserve to be given a more accurate account of the political transition. If they are to be equipped to "come to terms with the past," as the draft curriculum proposes, then the critical role of ANC propaganda in skewing perceptions must be included in the draft curriculum, not swept aside.

3.5.4 A defective account of the negotiations process

Also in this section, the draft curriculum refers to "the white right wing that threatened the negotiation process." It adds that "the PAC and AZAPO's boycott of negotiations and the IFP's walking out of the negotiations will be looked at; as will the eventual success of the negotiations and the holding of the first democratic elections. The topic ends with the choices made in the process of coming to terms with the past and includes investigating the drawing up of the democratic Constitution (1996) and the various chapter 9 institutions."⁵⁶

This summary includes many distortions and seems calculated to mislead. The negotiations process was deeply flawed because the ANC used the violence and propaganda of the people's war to help it control the talks. It was the ANC's effective domination that prevented any genuine deliberations on the best way forward and prompted the IFP and others to walk out. Moreover, though the ANC made some concessions, these compromises were insignificant and were soon abandoned.⁵⁷

As for the first "democratic" (more accurately, the first all-race) election in April 1994, this was so tainted by the people's war – and the 1,000 political killings recorded between January and April 1994 – that it was neither free nor fair. In addition, the conduct of the election was so

⁵⁶ Draft curriculum, p. 79.

⁵⁷ Jeffery, *People's War*, op. cit.

chaotic, largely because of interventions the ANC had insisted upon, that no accurate count could be computed in the end.⁵⁸

The 1996 Constitution was also flawed, in that it further consolidated ANC hegemony by weakening important checks and balances on executive power. From April 1994, moreover, the ANC began deploying its loyal cadres to Parliament, the judiciary and most Chapter 9 institutions, thereby deepening its control over what it terms the “levers of power.”⁵⁹

3.5.5 Other distortions regarding the political transition

The draft curriculum goes on to say that the teacher should introduce the following topics:

- “The depression and fall of the South African economy in 1985 as a precipitant of negotiations between South Africans (media, big business, political opposition in parliament; lawyers, academics, The Eminent Persons Group, etc.), Bantustan leaders, trade unions and the ANC-in-exile (3 hours).”⁶⁰

The South African economy did not “fall” in 1985, nor was the temporary debt standstill the main reason for the acceleration of informal negotiations.

- “Talks to find a solution: secret negotiations with the ANC-in-exile and negotiations with Mandela 1985 to 1991; the end of the Cold War, transition to democracy and the role of the International Community (Harare Declaration and the role of the OAU, the Non-aligned Movement and the United Nations); unbanning of organisations; release of political prisoners; release of Nelson Mandela; debates around negotiations; the role of the labour movement in negotiations; and the ANC giving up the armed struggle (4 hours)”⁶¹

Moscow was largely responsible for drafting the Harare Declaration and securing its approval by the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement and the UN. It did this to ensure that negotiations would proceed on terms likely to give the ANC the advantage. In addition, the ANC did not end what the draft curriculum euphemistically called its “armed struggle” when it was unbanned. Rather, it persisted with the people’s war all the way through to the April 1994 election.⁶²

- “CODESA, Breakdown of negotiations: ‘Whites only’ referendum – De Klerk solution; violence in the 1990s and debates around the violence, including white right-wing violence (e.g., Piet ‘Skiet’ Rudolf); the Record of Understanding; Joe Slovo and the ‘Sunset Clause’ – concessions made during negotiations (3 hours)”⁶³

The ANC engineered the collapse of Codesa in June 1992. It did so because it had been significantly outvoted at Codesa 2 on the crucial issue of a federal future for South Africa. In addition, the “right-wing” violence the draft curriculum emphasises was minor. It was always far less important than the ANC’s persistent attacks on the IFP, in particular.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Anthea Jeffery, *Countdown to Socialism: The National Democratic Revolution in South Africa since 1994*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 2023.

⁶⁰ Draft curriculum, p. 79.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 79.

⁶² Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit.

⁶³ Draft curriculum, p. 79.

⁶⁴ Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit.

- “Multi-party negotiations process resumes; the murder of Chris Hani; Ongoing violence: attempts to derail negotiations flare up after agreements are reached; AWB invasion of World Trade Centre; St James Massacre; killing at the Heidelberg Tavern; etc. (3 hours)”.⁶⁵

This list overlooks many important attacks, including those on IFP hostels on the east Rand as well as the Wadeville massacre and the Heidelberg Road killings in September 1993. It also overlooks the links between MK and Apla, and is clearly intended to deflect attention from the ANC’s culpability for violence.⁶⁶

- “Finally ... the road to democracy in 1994: violence again; unravelling of the Bantustans (e.g., fall of Oupa Gqozo and the Bhisho Massacre; the fall of Lucas Mangope, the right wing and the Bophuthatswana shootings, etc.); Inkatha Freedom Party march and the Shell House shootings; the Interim Constitution and the Bill of Rights; Freedom Front, PAC and IFP join the electoral race; the Government of National Unity; 27 April 1994 elections (3 hours).”⁶⁷

Again, this brushes aside the ANC’s role in toppling homeland leaders that opposed it in order to cement its hegemony over the new South Africa. It also omits to describe ANC attacks on IFP marchers not only at Shell House but also in the Library Gardens, outside the ANC’s regional offices in the city, and at the main Johannesburg train station.⁶⁸

3.5.6 A flawed critique of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Again, the draft curriculum distorts the historical record and makes several false assertions about the TRC reports. According to the draft curriculum:

- “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a moment of reckoning; while it enabled some apartheid atrocities to be revealed, there were major problems with the process, e.g. why the apartheid officials never gave evidence; why white finance capital was never brought before the TRC considering the role it played in the apartheid state by excluding black South Africans from the economy; why the legal fraternity was never summoned for supporting and upholding racist laws; and why South Africa did not use the Nuremberg-style hearings. (3 hours).”⁶⁹

The key issue needing to be covered is that the TRC was partisan to the ANC in a host of ways. For example, the TRC described the limited people’s war waged by the PAC as a breach of international humanitarian law because it had deliberately targeted civilians. By contrast, the TRC largely ignored the ANC’s people’s war, even though this was the primary factor in the killing of some 20,500 people in the period from 1984 to 1994. Most of the victims of the ANC’s people’s war were black civilians, who were hacked, stabbed and shot to death to help the organisation obtain hegemony over post-apartheid South Africa.⁷⁰

As regards “apartheid officials”, these bureaucrats had long stopped enforcing many apartheid laws because these laws had been repealed well before the first all-race election in April 1994. These defunct apartheid rules included job reservation; the prohibition of strikes by black workers; the pass laws; the Group Areas Act; the ban on black land ownership in Soweto and

⁶⁵ Draft curriculum, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Draft curriculum, p. 79.

⁶⁸ Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Draft curriculum, p. 79.

⁷⁰ Anthea Jeffery, *The Truth About the Truth Commission*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1999; see also Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit.

other urban townships in the common area; the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act; and compulsory race classification under the Population Registration Act of 1950. For the TRC to summon officials over laws long since repealed was hardly necessary – especially as the Commission’s mandate was to report on “gross violations of human rights”, such as political killings and torture.

Since political killings, torture and similar gross human rights violations were the focus of the TRC’s work, there was also no reason for “white finance capital” to appear before the Commission. Moreover, it was the ANC’s own rent and bond boycotts – introduced by it as part of its people’s war – that played a key part in choking off mortgage loans to black South Africans in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There was also no reason why lawyers should have been brought before the TRC, especially as many judges voluntarily appeared before it.⁷¹

The TRC’s reports are deeply flawed in other ways too. Among other things, they often rely on unsubstantiated hearsay evidence; they contradict court judgments founded on tested and comprehensive evidence; and they show a persistent bias in favour of the ANC and against the IFP, in particular. Often, moreover, the TRC accepted as true evidence which was clearly false and should have been rejected. This includes the testimony of former Vlakplaas commander Dirk Coetzee. Coetzee claimed to have murdered Griffiths Mxenge in 1981, but he clearly had no knowledge of the wounds Mxenge had suffered (as described in an autopsy report) or of the stadium in which his body had been found. (Coetzee did not recognise the stadium from photographs taken at the time.)⁷²

3.5.7 An incomplete view of apartheid as a “crime against humanity”

The draft curriculum refers at various times to the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, which was as adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1973. Here, it says, for example, that “the strength of a multipolar world became evident in 1973 when countries under the auspices of the OAU and the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) voted against Western countries at the UN and declared apartheid a crime against humanity.”⁷³

The draft curriculum goes on to say that the “USA and Britain voted against” this General Assembly resolution, whereas the “USSR, African countries and others voted in [its] favour.” It also suggests that pupils should be required to write an essay on “why and how the UN voted on apartheid as a crime against humanity in 1973 and how this impacted the Cold War.”⁷⁴

Again, the draft curriculum’s treatment of an important issue – the 1973 Convention – is one-sided and incomplete. Various factors are relevant here, including Moscow’s role in formulating the wording contained in the 1973 Convention. That wording is also often flawed. For example, it relies on terms such as “domination” even though this is a political concept with no clear legal meaning.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Jeffery, *The Truth About the Truth Commission*, op. cit.

⁷² Jeffery, *The Truth About the Truth Commission*, op. cit.; Jeffery, *People’s War*, op. cit.; Anthea Jeffery, *The Natal Story: Sixteen years of conflict*, South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1997.

⁷³ Draft curriculum, p. 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Statement by Ambassador Clarence Clyde Ferguson, Jr., U.S. Representative to the 28th Session of the UN General Assembly, in the Third Committee, October 26, 1973, as reprinted in *The Department of State*

Terms of this kind lack a necessary precision and therefore conflict with the rule of law. In addition, the Convention seeks to punish individuals severely (by life imprisonment, for instance) not only for perpetrating apartheid (as vaguely defined), but also for “abetting” or otherwise facilitating it. Again, the wording used is impermissibly vague, while the potential penalties are disproportionate. These factors explain why the US and other Western nations have declined to endorse the 1973 Convention.⁷⁶

In addition, the draft curriculum fails to mention that the flawed 1973 Convention was overtaken in 1998 by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This also identifies apartheid as a crime against humanity, but it defines the crime in precise legal terms that comply with the rule of law. Pupils need to be informed of *both* the 1973 Convention and the 1998 Rome Statute. They should also be provided with an accurate assessment of their relative pros and cons.

Accurate assessment of both treaties is particularly important now that the ANC is seeking to give precedence to the flawed 1973 Convention. It ratified this convention in 2024 and is seeking (with the help of a minor political party in Parliament, Al Jama-ah) to incorporate it into South Africa’s domestic law. The ANC’s underlying aim is to give South Africa’s domestic courts universal jurisdiction to prosecute and punish alleged perpetrators (and supporters) of apartheid crimes committed anywhere in the world (provided only that those accused are present in South Africa for trial).⁷⁷

3.6 Evident ideological bias

The draft curriculum reflects a strong anti Western and anti-capitalist bias. Comments *The Common Sense*, an on-line newspaper in South Africa:

“The Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, has signed off on a draft new history curriculum that takes a starkly anti-Western and anti-capitalist approach to global events, narrows the minds of South Africa’s children, and seeks to cultivate the kind of militancy that threatens the future stability of the country.

At the centre of the changes is a clear shift in emphasis. The draft curriculum moves toward what it describes as an African-centred approach, shaped by the ‘decolonisation of knowledge’ and an effort to ‘de-centre’ Europe and the global North in how history is taught... The issue is not that African history is being expanded, but rather

Bulletin, vol. 69, no. 1799 (December 17, 1973), p. 739; JR Freeland, UN Document A/C.3/SR.2004, October 26, 1973 (afternoon meeting), paras. 19–21.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ South African Institute of Race Relations NPC, Written Representations to the Speaker of the National Assembly regarding the Implementation of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid Bill, 2025, 14 December 2025.

that this is being used as a fig leaf to conceal a turn toward a more ideological and black-nationalist agenda.”⁷⁸

An ideological bias against capitalism is evident elsewhere too, as Endres notes. For example, he points out, the draft curriculum describes “*ubuntu*” as a philosophy that “challenges the ideals of individualism, greed and unhealthy competition, obscene self-enrichment and those destructive forms of human association that have brought the planet to the brink of extinction.” As Endres adds, “whatever one thinks of *ubuntu*, that passage is a political manifesto dressed up as a learning objective.”⁷⁹

An anti-capitalist agenda also seems to underpin the omission from the draft curriculum of important postwar “economic miracles” in various countries. These include Germany and Japan, which arose from the rubble after World War II, as well as South Korea, Singapore and (at a later stage) coastal China.⁸⁰

As Endres comments, telling the stories of these countries would help answer a question South Africa has long overlooked: how does a poor society become a rich one?” Pupils who finish matric without ever engaging with the reasons why some countries have become wealthy, while others (including South Africa) have failed to prosper or even become poorer over time will lack the basic mental furniture for understanding modern politics and successful economics. Nor will they be able to assess how best South Africa could notch up crucial increases in investment, growth and employment.⁸¹

An anti-capitalist animus may also explain the draft curriculum’s flawed views on political and economic freedom in South Africa. This bias is particularly evident in the draft’s claim that South Africa has achieved political freedom while “economic inequalities have remained unchanged and the struggle continues for economic freedom.”⁸²

This claim is false. As *The Common Sense* notes, “economic inequalities have not remained unchanged. South African living standards have improved significantly since 1994, the size of the middle class has more than doubled, and GDP has multiplied, even though counter-productive labour, power, and empowerment policies have helped to sustain a high rate of unemployment.”⁸³

In particular, the ANC’s own black economic empowerment (BEE) policies are the main reason why South Africa’s Gini coefficient of income inequality has increased from 57 in 1994 to 67 in 2024. BEE has greatly enriched a small black political elite while leaving the great majority of black South Africans unemployed and destitute. Intra-African inequality has thus widened

⁷⁸ Warwick Grey, “New History Curriculum Risks Turning Inward as Global Content Cut,” *The Common Sense*, 10 April 2026. <https://www.thecommonsense.co.za/Politics/new-history-curriculum-risks-turning-inward-as-global-content-cut>.

⁷⁹ Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” op. cit.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. South Africa’s average GDP growth rate exceeded population growth from 1994-2007, but has languished behind it since then.

⁸² Draft curriculum, p. 78.

⁸³ Grey, “New history curriculum risks turning inward,” op. cit.

greatly, pushing up the Gini co-efficient.⁸⁴ However, these facts do not fit the draft curriculum's anti-white and anti-Western ideology and are thus ignored.

What is disturbing too, adds *The Common Sense*, is that the draft curriculum deals with the issue of economic inequalities in a way that seems "designed to provoke grievance politics and a revolutionary mindset, [to be] set against South Africa's market economy and democratic institutions."⁸⁵

This approach is calculated to "guide learners towards particular ideological conclusions." Sadly, it will also "narrow" their understanding of the world and "make them less able to compete within it." In time, these outcomes are likely to "provoke anger and rebellion against the political and economic institutions that support South Africa's democracy." Since unemployment among young South Africans has already reached crisis levels, "this could prove highly destabilising too," as *The Common Sense* cautions.⁸⁶

This one-sidedness does not necessarily mean that "the drafters have set out to indoctrinate" South African students, notes Endres. It does, however, mean that the curriculum, as written, leans towards producing students who have absorbed a particular worldview rather than students trained to weigh evidence and reach their own conclusions. Parents and teachers should thus ask, while the consultation is still open, whether the curriculum's framing leaves enough room for genuine critical inquiry.⁸⁷

3.7 A new pedagogical approach

The revised curriculum also puts a new emphasis on "oral traditions as historical sources," as well as "archaeological evidence." In addition, its objective is not simply to inform and to stimulate critical assessment. Rather, it aims at "the development of historical consciousness among learners".⁸⁸

Riffel commends this approach, saying: "A key strength of the new curriculum lies in its explicit articulation of historical thinking, historical consciousness, and multi-perspectivity as central organising principles." In his view, "this marks a move away from a content-heavy, event-driven narrative towards a discipline-based approach, where learners are trained to engage critically with sources, interpretations and the construction of historical knowledge itself."⁸⁹

Critical engagement will largely be excluded, however, if the content of the draft curriculum remains as one-sided as now. Success here, as Riffel cautions, will also "depend heavily on teacher preparedness, resource availability, and assessment alignment." In addition, "the increased emphasis on enquiry, oral sources and interdisciplinary approaches may pose implementation challenges, particularly in under-resourced schools," he warns.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Anthea Jeffery, *Breaking the BEE Barrier to Growth*, IRR Blueprint for Growth series, 2 December 2025.

⁸⁵ Grey, "New history curriculum risks turning inward," op. cit.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Endres, "The trouble with the new history curriculum," op. cit.

⁸⁸ Govender, "End of an era," op. cit.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

4 RAMIFICATIONS OF THE DRAFT CURRICULUM

4.1 Putting additional limits on pupils' understanding

The Common Sense sounds an important warning in saying:

“It is hard to believe that the DA, now in government, could have made South Africa’s education system worse. Yet that is exactly what its Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, appears set to achieve with a new history curriculum that is at once militant, nationalist, and deeply ideological. In its current form, it risks dumbing down South Africa’s children, undermining their ability to compete globally, and provoking the kind of anti-democratic and anti-capitalist militancy that neither the country nor the DA can afford.

The department would have you believe that this is being done to accommodate a focus on ancient African civilisations, oral traditions, and precolonial societies (by all means, have some more of that). But that is just a fig leaf to deflect criticism from the fact that the real objective is thematic, and to shift content towards a woke focus on race, gender, and inequality, framed through an explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-Western lens, often extending to provoking militancy against South Africa’s chiefly market-led economic system, and the merits of its democratic order.”⁹¹

Endres likewise cautions that “the consequence is a curriculum that turns inward at precisely the moment the world is becoming more competitive and interconnected. South African pupils risk being left without the intellectual tools to understand global systems, markets, and power dynamics. In their place, they are offered a narrative that emphasises grievance, struggle, and resistance against the Western liberal order.”⁹²

He adds: “That is a dangerous trade. In a country already burdened by extraordinarily high youth unemployment, the deliberate cultivation of militant, anti-capitalist sentiment is not just misguided. It is reckless.”⁹³

4.2 Risks for the DA in rubber-stamping the ANC’s approach

The draft curriculum is largely the product of research commissioned by the previous (ANC) minister of basic education, Angie Motshekga. Motshekga earlier made it clear that she wanted a curriculum that was “Afro-centric” and not based on European history. The curriculum that she envisaged – and which the History Ministerial Task Team (HMTT) she appointed has drawn up – has “now landed on the desk of her successor, Siviwe Gwarube of the Democratic Alliance”, notes Endres. He adds: “The way her department handles this consultation, and whether it is willing to push back on the more constricting choices in the draft, will tell us something about whether the DA’s presence in basic education amounts to more than caretaking another party’s blueprint.”⁹⁴

Clearly, however, it is just such a “caretaking” function that supporters of the draft curriculum would like. This emerged in July 2024, for instance, soon after Gwarube had been appointed as Motshekga’s successor. In response, Dr Paul Maluleka, a lecturer at the Wits School of

⁹¹ Warwick Grey, “It Wasn’t Me, Says Gwarube Over History Curriculum Fracas,” *The Common Sense*, 15 April 2026. <https://www.thecommonsense.co.za/Politics/it-wasn-t-me-says-gwarube-over-history-curriculum-fracas>.

⁹² Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” op. cit.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Education (with a self-described focus on “Africanisation, decolonisation and queer theorisations”) and two other historians wrote in the *Daily Maverick* that they were “particularly worried about the prospect of the HMTT work being derailed or frustrated,” by a new DA minister of basic education.⁹⁵

Wrote the three: “Our concerns centre on the DA’s ideological and/or philosophical orientations and policies on basic education in general (with its promotion of pro-private American Charter Schools and the voucher system).” These were “ideological and/or philosophical orientations and policies that were inconsistent” with the HMTT viewpoint. Dr Maluleka and his co-authors thus “appeal[led] to the [new minister] not to let the moment of political change undo the important work of 10 years and counting by the HMTT.”⁹⁶

The three also stressed that African pupils should be allowed to “identify [them]selves within African geographies and knowledge structures.” This, they added, would help “rehumanise those who had been dehumanised.” It would also make the “school history curriculum...a site where all pupils and teachers could see and feel themselves in the curriculum and in the work they were meant to do.” They discounted the major changes already made to the history curriculum since 1994, saying that pupils continued to confront “a skewed view of our continent and her people” which “needed to be desperately and substantively corrected.”⁹⁷

This assessment assumes that the current curriculum remains deeply flawed, despite the many changes made to it since the political transition. It also implies that the proposed draft will in fact provide the accurate and comprehensive information that pupils need to understand the country, the rest of Africa and the world. However, since the draft is too one-sided – and far too ideologically skewed – to fulfil this requirement, Gwarube needs to evaluate it very carefully. If the ministry she leads has in fact been “rubber stamping” a flawed approach, then “the time has come for the DA to rethink,” as Endres writes.⁹⁸

4.3 Worse damage if history is made compulsory for matric

When Motshekga established the HMTT, a key part of its function was to “consider introducing history as a compulsory subject from grades 10 to 12.” According to Dr Maluleka and his co-authors, the demand that history be made compulsory at the FET stage “remains unresolved.”⁹⁹ This indicates that the proposal has not yet been abandoned – and that it could still be adopted after a flawed new curriculum has been introduced.

Dr Maluleka and his co-authors would clearly welcome it if what they regard as a suitably decolonised history were to be made compulsory during the FET phase. In their view, South Africa puts too much emphasis on “science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.” They therefore welcomed it when Motshekga began to focus on history and a new curriculum with an emphasis on “African-centeredness.” They also seem to see this focus as a vital foundation for the “proposed compulsory school history curriculum” and in “pushing back against Eurocentric lenses.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Paul Maluleka, Sarah Godsell and Paul Hendricks, “Don’t stop the process of Africanisation and decolonisation of South African school history,” *Daily Maverick*, 19 July 2024. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-07-18-dont-stop-africanisation-decolonisation-of-sa-school-history/>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” op. cit.

⁹⁹ Maluleka et al, “Don’t stop the process of Africanisation,” op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

However, playing down STEM subjects in favour of a compulsory history curriculum that is often false and generally ideologically skewed would bring little benefit to South Africa or its people. It would, however, be in line with the socialist-oriented Freedom Charter, which the ANC continues to describe as its policy “lodestar”. According to the charter, “the aim of education” is not to inform pupils or provide them with a sound capacity for critical analysis. Rather, the aim is “to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, and to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace.”¹⁰¹ This objective contradicts the goals of education in most Western democracies – and is likely to harm future pupils in South Africa as much as Bantu Education did.

5 IMPROVED LITERACY AND NUMERACY THE VITAL NEEDS

The government also needs to rethink its priorities. The most recent international reading study has found that about eight in ten South African Grade 4 children cannot read for meaning in any language. For those children, the question of which historical episodes appear in the matric syllabus is academic in the worst sense of the word. They will never sit for a matric history exam. Instead, they will leave school without the basic literacy needed to engage with any text, let alone a contested historical one.¹⁰²

A country with a schooling system that is so defective should be modest about how much it can achieve through redesigning the history curriculum. The deeper and far more important issue is that most of our children are being denied the ability to read any textbooks at all. This is the key problem – and this is what must be fixed before anything else is done.¹⁰³

6 THE WAY FORWARD

Allowing a scant 30 days for public comment on draft curriculum statements containing over 300 pages of dense information is far too short a period. Most people cannot adequately engage with difficult material of this kind in such a truncated time.

In addition, the fact that public commentary has been limited since the draft statements were gazetted shows that the public was generally unaware of the major changes being proposed. At the same time, many of the criticisms that have been made underscore the magnitude of the proposed amendments and how serious their adverse consequences might be. Amendments of this nature are deeply controversial and require proper evaluation and comprehensive debate.¹⁰⁴

Cutting the public consultation process short by imposing an inordinately short deadline creates the impression that the department wishes to avoid real public participation. Yet this is contrary to what the Constitution requires. Inevitably, it will also place the legitimacy of the new curriculum in question.

At the very least, the time allowed for consultation should be extended for another 30 days or, better still, until the end of May. This is essential to facilitate what Gwarube – perhaps in response to public criticism – now seems to support: the opportunity for “as many people as possible to indicate where they believe the draft should be strengthened, corrected, expanded,

¹⁰¹ Jeffery, *Countdown to Socialism*, op. cit.

¹⁰² Endres, “The trouble with the new history curriculum,” op. cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

or refined.”¹⁰⁵ However, this simply cannot be done before the period for comment closes on 19 April 2024.

Gwarube has also said that “our History curriculum should not exclude key events or perspectives on political grounds, nor should it impose any particular ideology on learners.” She is committed, she adds, to “ensuring that the curriculum equips learners to think critically about our past, so that they may form their own opinions,” she adds.¹⁰⁶

The current draft will not help fulfil these goals. At minimum, more time must thus be allowed for comment. Thereafter, the current draft curriculum must be fundamentally rewritten to provide a more comprehensive, objective, and balanced overview of our past. After all, as Gwarube says, “As South Africans we understand how complex our history is, and how important the study of it is for reconciliation and nation-building.”¹⁰⁷ A new history curriculum must reflect that understanding, not undermine it.

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¹⁰⁵ Warwick Gray, “It wasn’t me, says Gwarube,” *The Common Sense*, 16 April 2026.
<https://www.thecommonsense.co.za/Politics/it-wasn-t-me-says-gwarube-over-history-curriculum-fracas>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.