

## **COSATU, SACP et ANC post-Polokwane : La gauche marche t'elle droit?**

Devan Pillay

### *Résumé*

*Depuis quelques années, le Congrès des syndicats sud-africains (COSATU) et le Parti communiste sud-africain (SACP), organismes piliers de la classe ouvrière, appuient fortement l'ancien Vice-Président d'Afrique du Sud Jacob Zuma malgré sa réputation entachée. À la conférence nationale décisive du Congrès national africain (ANC) à Polokwane en décembre 2007, leur appui a catapulté Zuma à la présidence du parti dirigeant, aux côtés d'anciens grands syndicalistes et membres du SACP Gwede Mantashe (secrétaire général) et Kgalema Motlanthe (vice-président). Dès septembre 2008, ils avaient réussi à évincer Thabo Mbeki de la présidence du pays, installant Motlanthe comme président intérimaire jusqu'aux élections de 2009, où l'on s'attend à ce que Zuma prenne la relève. Un clivage en est résulté au sein de l'ANC et les principaux partisans de Mbeki ont formé le Congrès du Peuple (COPE), qualifié par certains de scission « de droite ». Dans sa poursuite d'une trajectoire ouverte et démocratique aux retombées plus équilibrées, l'alliance « gauchiste » SACP-COSATU-ANC a t'elle réussi à se servir de Zuma pour capturer l'ANC, ou bien a t'elle fait une grave erreur de calcul en appuyant la coalition Zuma, dominée dans les fait par les intérêts rapaces de la classe dominante? Ou la conférence de Polokwane représente t'elle une évolution encore plus dangereuse par l'essor, sous une apparence de politique ouvrière « gauchisante », d'une politique populiste intolérante et néo-Staliniste?*

## **COSATU, the SACP and the ANC post-Polokwane: Looking Left but does it Feel Right?**

Devan Pillay<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*Key organisations of the working class, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), have in recent years offered vigorous support to the tainted former Deputy President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma. At the momentous December 2007 national congress of the African National Congress (ANC) in Polokwane, this support saw Zuma catapulted into the presidency of the ruling party, alongside key former unionists and SACP members Gwede Mantashe (General Secretary) and Kgalema Motlanthe (Deputy President). By September 2008 they succeeded in ousting Thabo Mbeki as president of the country, installing Motlanthe as caretaker president until the 2009 elections, when Zuma is expected to take over. This led to a split in the ANC, with key Mbeki supporters moving on to form the Congress of the People (COPE), what some characterize as a 'rightwing' split. Has the SACP-COSATU-ANC Alliance 'Left' succeeded in using Zuma to capture the ANC in pursuit of a more redistributive, participatory-democratic trajectory; or has it badly miscalculated by throwing its weight behind a Zuma coalition that in fact is dominated by predatory class interests? Or does Polokwane represent something even more ominous - the rise, under the guise of 'leftwing' working class politics, of an intolerant neo-Stalinist populist politics?*

### **Introduction**

The rise of the Zuma coalition after the ANC national executive committee elections in Polokwane during December 2007 has been heralded by some as a dramatic shift to the left, given the support of key working class formations, the SACP and COSATU. Masterfully engineered from behind the scenes by forces led by SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande, in concert with COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, the view is that at last the rightwing '1996 class project'<sup>2</sup> has been derailed,

and after the 2009 elections the ANC-in-government will place the working class much more decisively at the top of its agenda. Sympathetic observers have detected a renewed emphasis on redistributive politics, and a greater determination to move away from the neo-liberal temptations of the past. This is evident in the ANC's 2007 national conference resolutions (ANC, 2007) as well as its 2009 election manifesto (ANC, 2009).

This, of course, is an optimistic reading of what has been happening in the triple Alliance. A pessimistic account would place patronage politics more at the centre of new developments. Critics argue that the key organs of working class power, the SACP and COSATU, have a compromised leadership that has tied the working class into a symbiotic relationship with the ruling party. Both the membership of COSATU and its leadership are relative *insiders* - i.e. beneficiaries of the post-apartheid order *vis a vis* the unemployed, the informalized and the working poor majority who remain unorganized. Unless it, and the SACP, take the interests of the unorganized seriously, its intention to "swell the ranks" of the ANC (COSATU, 2003b), and return it to its alleged 'working class bias', is an empty promise. The ANC is controlled by bourgeois-nationalist class interests who are adept at using the working class to consolidate their power. The Mbeki-Zuma split, according to this view, is not one over ideology, but primarily a fight over the spoils of 'national liberation', which were until 2007 controlled by those class interests that coalesced around Mbeki. Instead of empowering the working class (broadly defined)<sup>3</sup>, the SACP and COSATU are colluding with hitherto marginalized black business interests (or nascent business interests)<sup>4</sup> within the Zuma coalition, who are only interested in claiming their share of the spoils of state power.

At best, say pessimists, this is a 'hope and pray' strategy, where the SACP and COSATU hope to out-manoeuvre the nascent, predatory bourgeoisie within the Zuma alliance, and hegemonize a working class interest in the ANC and new government elected in 2009. At worst the COSATU/SACP leadership are actively using the working class to promote the interests of a hitherto marginalized black business class (whose ranks they allegedly want to join, as their predecessors did<sup>5</sup>). In either case the essentially neoliberal Mbeki project will remain intact, but with different actors at the helm, albeit articulating a more redistributive developmental discourse.

A third view, no less pessimistic, accepts that the SACP, under the leadership of Blade Nzimande, has indeed masterfully succeeded in asserting its hegemony over the ANC and the Alliance, through the figure of Jacob Zuma. While aware of other class forces within the Zuma camp, the SACP and COSATU, far from 'hoping and praying' that a Zuma leadership will deliver their agenda, have instead ensured that the mass power they command through COSATU will keep Zuma on track. In fact, Zuma, no leftist himself, has become so indebted to COSATU, the SACP, the Young Communist League (YCL) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) that he will have little option but to follow their agenda once in power. But that agenda, according to this view, has little to do with building the participatory-democratic, socialist politics that resonated within the working class movement since the 1970s. Instead, a more reckless, intolerant, neo-Stalinist politics is emerging under the guise of a democratic working class politics - the outcome of which will not be in the interests of the broader working class and democracy.

This article will assess these different interpretations of the meaning of Zuma's rise to power, with the backing of South Africa's organized working class. It will do so within the context of the rise of independent working class politics in the 1980s, when the question of the 'working class leadership' of the struggle for democracy was sharply posed. It will then sketch the return of the exiled ANC as the dominant political force inside South Africa, and the relative marginalisation of the working class during the 1990s. The re-assertion of working class politics after 2000, leading to the election of Jacob Zuma as ANC president in 2007, will be dealt with in more detail. Finally, the article will offer an assessment of COSATU and the SACP's decision to stick with the Alliance, and back Zuma for president. Does this represent, at last, the triumph of working class politics, and the emergence of working class leadership of the ANC - or has the working class, once again, been 'hi-jacked' by bourgeois-nationalist class interests?

### **South Africa's Struggle Legacy:**

*Workerism, Populism and Popular-Democratic forms of Struggle*<sup>6</sup>

South Africa's struggle against apartheid during the 1980s was characterized by an intense debate between what became

known as 'workerists' and 'populists' (see Webster, 1994; Friedman, 1987 and Baskin, 1991). In this picture, 'workerists' were those located within the increasingly powerful trade union movement, particularly the Federation of SA Trade Unions (Fosatu), which was formed in 1979, and placed emphasis on building strong shop-floor organisation. They were labelled 'workerists' by their detractors because they allegedly focused on workplace issues (or what Burawoy (1985) terms production politics), and ignored the broader struggle against the apartheid state (or state-power politics).

On the other hand, those working within the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF), which was formed in 1983, appreciated the necessity of uniting the spheres of 'economic' struggle with the 'political' struggle, in a common assault on the apartheid system. They however were labelled 'populists' by their detractors because they allegedly ignored or under-played the capitalist essence of apartheid by emphasizing the race (black/white) line of fissure rather than that of class (capital/labour). They were also accused of conspiratorial politics which undermined the participatory-democratic practices of the unions. In doing so, they were charged with 'hi-jacking' the working class struggle (Foster, 1982) in order to usher in a new class of black nationalists (or aspirant bourgeoisie) whose main interest was to replace the white capitalist class as the ruling class. They were also called 'charterists' because of their adherence to the ANC's Freedom Charter, a social democratic set of demands adopted by the Congress Alliance<sup>7</sup> in 1955.

This, however, was a rather simplistic depiction of a more complex reality. While the key point of division rested on the attitude each had towards the dominant liberation movement, the exiled ANC-SACP, those accused of 'workerism' were in fact much more differentiated, as were those accused of 'populism'. This will be elaborated below.<sup>8</sup>

### **Varieties of 'Workerism'**

Those accused of 'workerism' feared that the growing working class movement, which were central to re-building since the early 1970s (see Friedman, 1987) would be 'hi-jacked' by black nationalism. They as a result were wary of all political organisations, including the ANC and the 'Stalinist' SACP (who they accused of tailing behind the ANC with their 'two-stage' the-

ory, which postponed the anti-capitalist struggle to the distant future). However, given their non-racial orientation, they were closer to the non-racial ANC-SACP than the harder forms of black nationalism, namely Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism. Eventually, as will be shown later, the 'workerists' joined forces with the ANC-aligned 'populist' trade unions to form COSATU in 1985, whilst the racially exclusive unions went on to form the National Council of Trade unions (NACTU) in 1986.

"Workerists', however, were internally differentiated, and the key lines of demarcation were what was termed 'economism', 'syndicalism', 'partyism' and the 'independent socialist' position. The first current, 'economism', is a form of trade unionism that places emphasis on workplace issues and at best produces what Lenin (1902/1970) called a 'trade union consciousness', namely a narrow worker identity that primarily seeks to advance the interests of workers at the workplace, through militant struggles against employers and/or through institutionalized bargaining processes. Eventually, this form of unionism degenerates into 'business unionism', where members are seen as clients and the union as service providers.

Not all of those accused of 'workerism', however, had such a narrow approach which in effect ignored the struggle for state power. A second current, termed 'syndicalism', involved a broader conceptualisation of struggle, where workers were encouraged to participate in the political struggle against apartheid. However, they were wary of political and community activists who did not understand the democratic, shop-floor processes of the union movement, and sought to engage in broader struggles as unionists. This in effect placed severe limits on their non-workplace involvement, in a context where, by 1984, community, student and political mobilization was gathering apace.

While economism and syndicalism were the dominant forms of 'workerism', particularly up to the mid 1980s, they were not the only forms of workerism. A third current within the broader 'workerist' stream, what can be labelled *partyists*, were those who felt that unions should go one step further, and link up with the broader working class beyond the point of production, and develop a transformatory or revolutionary working class consciousness. This needed to take the form of a union-based political party with an explicit socialist programme, to rival the ANC-

SACP-UDF charterists - such as a mass-based party akin to the Workers' Party in Brazil<sup>9</sup>. Others looked towards a tighter Leninist vanguard party, along Trotskyist-Leninist lines. A variant of this current is the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC, a Trotskyist group whose intention was to transform the ANC into a mass workers' party (in opposition to the SACP).

A fourth current that has perhaps been ill-appreciated in the literature is what one might call the 'independent socialist'<sup>10</sup> position. This position was strong within the union movement in the Transvaal (now Gauteng), in particular amongst key unionists within the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA), the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU), the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) and individuals within the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). While not necessarily ruling out the need for an alternative workers' party in the future, they tended to be appreciative of the power of the national liberation movement, particularly the ANC, which by the late 1980s was unquestionably the dominant political force within the anti-apartheid struggle. They however wanted the union movement to forge alliances with all anti-apartheid political formations, including the Pan-Africanist Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement, whilst simultaneously seeking the independence of the working class movement, in order to make working class politics hegemonic.

All these currents were labelled 'workerist' by their detractors during the heat of the political struggle in the 1980s, because of their alleged over-emphasis of class politics during the national liberation phase of struggle. The key difficulty faced by 'workerists' or independent socialists within the union movement was the salience of a nationalist consciousness among the working class that in general resonated more deeply than a class consciousness. While workers could identify with class-based production politics in their battles with employers, only a few worker leaders and advanced cadres seemed able to comprehend the capitalist essence of apartheid. Capitalism, from a Marxist perspective, may have been the **primary** contradiction, but racism was the **dominant** contradiction. Almost all employers and managers were white, and most workers were black (indeed, white workers were often the most racist, and occupied supervisory positions over black workers, at much higher rates of pay). In the minds of most workers, then, race and class were conflated. It was there-

fore a major challenge to mobilize the black working class purely on a class basis. Nevertheless, of all those considered, 'workerist', the independent socialist current, which gained ground during the late 1980s and early 1990s, came closest to appreciating the dialectics of race and class. However, unlike the 'popular-democratic' current, they were reticent about building broad alliances that included the 'sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie' – namely white middle-class organisations such as the Black Sash and the National Union of SA Students (NUSAS), that gave the UDF and COSATU wider legitimacy, as well as access to resources.

### **The ANC-SACP-UDF: 'Popular Democratic' or 'Populist'?**

The SACP, through its two-stage conception of struggle, claimed to have found a way to effectively combine the struggle against racial oppression with the struggle against capitalist exploitation. It had forged an alliance with the ANC in the 1940s, making it compulsory for members to join and build the ANC as a multi-class national liberation movement which would lead the Alliance with the communist party and the trade union movement.

By fighting against racial domination, some in the Alliance argued, the movement was automatically fighting against capitalist rule, given the intertwined nature of capitalism and apartheid. Until the late 1980s, this was the dominant position within the SACP and the ANC. For others in the ANC, (particularly those inside the country working within the UDF and COSATU) racial domination and capitalism could be uncoupled - that is, a non-racial capitalism was possible (Wolpe, 1988). The key to ensuring a democratic-socialist outcome was the *independence* of working class formations within the broad alliance against apartheid, such that the working class *actually* leads the alliance (as opposed to such leadership being *proclaimed* by a working class party such as the SACP). This is what some have termed a 'popular-democratic' form of struggle (Saul and Gelb, 1981) - where a popular (or nationalist) discourse articulates with a socialist (or class) discourse (see Laclau, 1977).<sup>11</sup>

A 'popular-democratic' approach saw the necessity of the ANC/UDF maintaining its 'broad church' character, and thus maximising its appeal across classes, under the slogan *UDF Unites; Apartheid Divides* (Seekings, 2000). However, in the de-



bate with 'workerists', socialists within the ANC-SACP-UDF conceded that there was a danger of 'popular-democratic' politics degenerating into a narrow 'populism', where race or nationalism was the main focus of struggle, and class, or capitalism, receded into the background. In addition, there tended to be a focus on high profile leaders, and a neglect of building durable, accountable democratic structures within their organisations. This, they feared, would allow the working class movement to be 'hijacked' by the aspirant black elite, as had happened in most national liberation struggles around the world. The key challenge, then, was to ensure that the working class indeed led such a 'popular-democratic' alliance.

It was unclear, however, what organisational form this would take. For the SACP, this meant the vanguard party playing that role within the Alliance. For others within the UDF and COSATU, this meant worker leaders rising to the fore in all the formations of the Alliance, under conditions of mass participatory democracy. For all these currents, a redistributive policy programme that had broad appeal across classes was critical (Pillay, 1989).

There is no doubt that the UDF strategy of maximum unity against a common enemy was highly effective. Internally, the UDF was more differentiated than the ANC/SACP, and had a greater appreciation of new discourses and practices around participatory-democratic forms of politics, gender issues and working class leadership. It was able to maximize the symbolic effect of Nelson Mandela, and use other high-profile religious leaders, such as Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, to generate broad popular support. This resonated with more progressive elements within the ANC/SACP who were not tied to Sovietized 'two-stage' politics, which in effect handed over the struggle to nationalist forces within the ANC in the 'first stage' struggle for 'national democracy' (with a vague promise of an advance to the second, 'socialist' stage).

### **COSATU and the Strategic Compromise**

After COSATU was formed in 1985, bringing together 'workerists' and charterists, both streams competed vigorously to shape the form and character of COSATU. The hitherto dominant 'workerists', however, were faced with the rapidly rising popularity of the ANC in the townships and among the youth,

which inevitably had an impact on union members. By 1987 a strategic compromise was reached when COSATU hitched itself firmly to the Alliance train by adopting the Freedom Charter, but with a firm commitment to preserving its independence and democratic, shop floor character. This gave deeper meaning to the 'popular-democratic' form of politics being pursued by socialists within the UDF, as it brought the organized working class firmly into the popular struggle against apartheid - and the real possibility of forging a working class leadership of that struggle. Although by then a minority within COSATU, 'workerists' were nevertheless quite influential in shaping policy around, for example, the Workers' Charter, a set of working class demands that fed into the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) - a COSATU initiative that pushed forward a substantive-democratic, redistributive agenda for the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance in the run-up to the country's first democratic elections in 1994.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, with the banning of leaders and the weakening or collapse of key UDF affiliates, the more durable COSATU structures survived, and COSATU assumed the leadership of the anti-apartheid struggle. Indeed, a momentum was developing such that working class leadership was being exercised in a very real sense. Before it could mature into a deep, irreversible leadership, the ANC in exile, in concert with powerful international interests, had negotiated an end to hostilities. The working class momentum was interrupted by a negotiations process which began in earnest in 1990, with the unbanning of the ANC and SACP (along with the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)), and the release of Nelson Mandela (see O'Malley, 2007).

The ANC proved itself to be completely hegemonic. ANC exiles took over the leadership of the liberation movement inside the country in 1990, and incorporated UDF and COSATU leaders into their ranks. The irony, as ANC/SACP stalwart Mac Maharaj reveals (O'Malley, 2007), is that by the late 1980s the ANC underground was not at the centre of struggles inside the country. This was carried by the internal movement, in particular COSATU and UDF activists. Those working inside the country, to a large extent, developed a participatory-democratic understanding of socialism, which was at variance with the SACP's admiration of the Soviet, statist model, which by 1990 was exposed by SACP general secretary Joe Slovo as a failure (Slovo,

1990). Indeed, Slovo's highly influential intervention gave added weight to a drift within the SACP towards a more democratic conception of socialism - something the party was gradually learning from the union movement (Pillay, 1990).

However, this exposure of the failures of the Soviet model, coming soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, deepened the crisis of confidence many exiles had in socialism. Along with key internal activists, they were soon drawn into a number of scenario planning exercises funded by large corporations such as Shell Oil Company and Nedbank. The dangers of 'populist' macro-economics were spelt out, and the virtues of fiscal discipline and market economics promoted. The UDF disbanded in 1991, but COSATU strived to maintain its independence even as it formally became part of the reconstituted triple alliance with the ANC and the SACP. However, this was not enough, and the prospect of working class leadership of the liberation movement was emphatically derailed. Even the SACP lost influence as the ANC, along with key COSATU, UDF and SACP leaders, went headlong into a negotiated settlement that allowed political power to change hands, but kept economic power essentially concentrated in the hands of white capital, in particular mining and finance capital that were straining at the leash to transnationalize (see Bond, 1999/2005).

By 1993, the ANC ditched the Alliance's own Macro-Economic Research Group (MERG) report, which promoted Keynesian economics, paving the way for the 1996 adoption of the orthodox Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. The power of big capital, locally and abroad, had revealed itself (see Bond, 1999/2005 and Marais, 2001). The rise of a BEE<sup>13</sup> class in the ANC was actively promoted by big capital as an alternative to the fundamental transformation of capitalism. As Thabo Mbeki (Gevisser, 2007) and more recently Finance Minister Trevor Manuel (*Sunday Times* 25/12/09) concede, a new culture of careerism and greed emerged within the ANC, alongside the corruption of politicians and government officials eager to accumulate as much wealth as possible in the shortest space of time. In doing so, however, Mbeki and Manuel failed to link this to the morality of the neoliberal economic trajectory they ushered in, which glorified untrammelled consumerism and accumulation for the sake of accumulation, and legitimized class inequality by making the de-racialisation (or re-racialisation) of

capitalism the priority of socio-economic transformation. Socialism was off the agenda, and the new ethos seemed to be: if you cannot beat them, join them.

Some COSATU leaders, including many from the 'workerist' stream, went on to become ANC Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, government officials, provincial premiers and ministers, and local government leaders and officials. Key union leaders, such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Marcel Golding, John Copelyn and others become wealthy businessmen, using union investment companies as stepping stones to untold wealth. This only served to even further legitimize capitalism as the 'only game in town', and 'socialism' became an empty slogan at union and SACP meetings - and was almost completely absent from the discourse of the ANC (except in inner party polemics, where Marxist-Leninist terminology was used against the Left to justify the turn to the Right).

In effect, then, despite the fact that COSATU and the SACP won their right to be (relatively) independent whilst remaining within the Alliance,<sup>14</sup> in the main the fears of 'workerists', namely the rise of 'populist' 'bourgeois nationalism' in collusion with transnationalized capital, have been realized. It remains a question of debate as to whether a narrower form of class-based politics could have succeeded, with the support of COSATU (and possibly a non-Stalinist SACP); or whether the popular-democratic approach (a popular alliance under working class leadership) would have succeeded had the mass struggle inside the country been allowed to mature.

The democratic socialist vision, however, did not wither away, but remained within the union movement, the SACP and the ANC - as well as in a number of new formations within civil society that emerged in the late 1990s, as the impact of neoliberal policies manifested itself in the workplace and townships across South Africa. With unemployment rising and widespread poverty persistent, social inequality widened as a new black elite joined their white counterparts in rapidly accumulating wealth (see Borat and Kanbur, 2006). Within the Alliance, COSATU and (belatedly) the SACP<sup>15</sup> challenged the drift to neoliberalism since its onset in 1996. COSATU succeeded in winning important concessions around labour rights, and supported other initiatives which sought to make real the democratic principles embedded in the new Constitution of the country (Webster and Adler, 1999).

However, progressive impulses were swamped by the overarching drift to neoliberalism, and after 1999 (when Thabo Mbeki became president of the country<sup>16</sup>) COSATU (with the support of the SACP) became increasingly strident in its criticism of government policies, particularly around privatization. Nevertheless, it remained within the Alliance, and when local or national elections came, it threw its full weight behind the ANC, which remained overwhelmingly popular amongst its members (see Wood, 2002).

### **The Road to Polokwane**

Given the failure of the ANC to meaningfully address widespread poverty in the country, and rising inequality under a conservative, market-friendly macro-economic policy, COSATU and the SACP increasingly challenged the ANC under Mbeki. This took the form of anti-privatization strikes, challenges over Mbeki's Zimbabwe stance, and the government's HIV-AIDs policies. As a result, COSATU and the SACP faced charges, in 2002, of being 'ultra-left', along with the new social movements that emerge with strength at that time, taking on issues of water and electricity privatization, HIV-AIDs treatment, land rights, evictions and other social issues (see Bond, 2002 and Ballard et al, 2006).

Instead of linking up with these struggles, COSATU and the SACP preferred to stamp their dominance over Left politics, and alienated those who dared to question their continued devotion to its alliance with the ruling party. Eager to distance themselves from the 'real' ultra-left, COSATU kicked the Anti-Privatization Forum out of their offices in COSATU House in 2003, and took action against unionists, like John Appolis, who dared to suggest a referendum of workers on whether to remain in the Alliance or not (see Appolis, 2004 and Ceppwawu, 2004).<sup>17</sup>

It was clear that the dominant faction within COSATU and the SACP were not willing to forge a broader working class unity, because of the fear that it would upset the ANC. Despite rising discord amongst the Alliance partners, voices urging a break from the Alliance remained small. The strategy was to return the ANC to its supposed 'working class bias', which was apparently imprinted at its 1969 Morogoro conference, when it specified a 'leading role' for the working class in the national democratic revolution. This, however, has been disputed by critics,

who claim that the ANC has always been a movement led by the African middle class (Sikwebu, 2007; see also McKinley, 1997).

The COSATU and SACP strategy has been to 'swell the ranks' of the ANC with working class militants, as well as occasional mass action, including militant public sector strikes, and policy interventions at both government and ANC level (COSATU, 2003b & 2006b; SACP, 2006). When the amiable ANC deputy president Jacob Zuma became alienated from Mbeki because of corruption accusations in 2003, and eventually dismissed as deputy president of the country in 2005, COSATU and the SACP decided that their best strategy was to seek change within the ANC by rallying around Jacob Zuma. They felt that, whatever his shortcomings, Zuma was much more likely than Mbeki to give the working class movement a sympathetic hearing (Pillay, 2006) - even more so if he was indebted to them for returning him to high office, and helping to get him off the corruption charges.

Zuma in 2004 was not particularly popular in COSATU. A survey of members (Buhlungu, 2006) revealed that only 5 out of 655 respondents (or 0.76%) thought that Zuma would best represent worker interests. By contrast, 127 (19.4%) chose Nelson Mandela, 100 (15.3%) picked COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, 62 (9.5%) preferred SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande and 47 (7.2%) went for Thabo Mbeki. Indeed, the then Leader of the Opposition, Tony Leon, received 2 more votes from COSATU members than Zuma.

Clearly, when Vavi said in 2005 that only a 'tsunami' would stop Zuma from becoming the next ANC president, he was not talking about a groundswell of support from members that 'obliged' him to support Zuma. Vavi and Nzimande were making a calculated move to marshal the support of organized workers behind Zuma, against Mbeki. Any dissenting voices within these organisations were subsequently dealt with harshly. Willie Madi-sha, COSATU president and SACP politburo member, was eventually hounded out of both organisations, and critical thinkers such as Mazibuko Jara (see Jara, 2005 and Masondo, 2006) and former Gauteng secretary Vishwas Satgar were sidelined in the SACP (*Mail and Guardian*, 13/7/07). Indeed, Jara lost his position as deputy general secretary of the YCL, and in December 2008 Satgar, along with other independent thinkers such as the new Gauteng secretary, Zico Tamela, and veteran unionist and

leader of Streetnet International, Pat Horn, were suspended by the party (*Daily News* 5/12/08). SACP Treasurer Philip Dexter, whose Treasurer's report was not tabled at the party's 2007 congress because it raised questions about the organisations finances<sup>18</sup>, was suspended for writing a critical article on the leadership, and he eventually resigned rather than face a disciplinary hearing in which he had little confidence (*The Weekender* 20/9/08). Dexter went on to become a key figure behind the formation of COPE in December 2008.

The intentions of the COSATU leadership were made clear in 2003, when Zuma was invited to COSATU's congress, and warmly received. By the time of the 2006 congress he was ecstatically received, as Vavi and other COSATU leaders whipped up support for Zuma, and made him out to be the saviour of the working class. Indeed Zuma, a former member of the SACP, responded appropriately by making reference to Soviet-style Marxist 'dialectics' he had learnt in exile.<sup>19</sup>

COSATU and the SACP's repeated and unqualified support for Zuma since 2003 *created* the 'tsunami'. The strategy of the 'Left' within the Alliance, therefore, was at best to use Zuma as a lightning rod to gather together a coalition of class forces that were marginalized by the Mbeki project. These include those who did not benefit from the share of the BEE spoils, as well as the working class that has suffered from the rising inequality and persistent poverty that has characterized Mbeki's reign.

Indeed, by 2006 COSATU and the SACP argued that the ANC was becoming a bourgeois nationalist political party (COSATU 2006b; SACP 2006). This neglect of the poor and marginalized resulted in declining voter turnouts, and declining ANC support at the polls, and opened up new opportunities for forging a participatory-democratic Left alternative to the ANC. Yet the COSATU and SACP leadership were adamant that a 'working class' politics could best be forged through a strategy of re-igniting the ANC's alleged working class bias. To achieve this they used the personality of Jacob Zuma to forge a multi-class coalition of the disaffected, which became dominant within the ANC at the 2007 Polokwane conference, and threw out the Mbeki faction from the organisation's leadership. Alongside Zuma as ANC president stands former NUM general secretary and current SACP chairperson Gwede Mantashe as general secretary, and another former NUM general secretary and SACP member

Kgalema Motlanthe as deputy president.

### **The September Coup**

The dramatic events of September 2008, which saw the ousting of Thabo Mbeki as the country's president and the resignation of several key ministers, is seen by some on the Left as a victory in the fight against neo-liberal economic orthodoxy. The election of Motlanthe as the country's new president strengthens the view that a space has been opened for a move away from the 'Mbeki project' towards a more redistributive socio-economic policy trajectory.

Motlanthe rose to prominence as the general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, a position he held from 1992 until he became secretary-general of the ANC in 1997. Motlanthe served 10 years in prison for being part of the ANC's military wing inside the country, and upon his release in 1987 he joined the NUM, becoming its education officer. As such, Motlanthe was seen as an ANC cadre who moved into the union movement, to further consolidate its adherence to a charterist political orientation. Indeed, although the NUM had its origins in the black consciousness tradition, by the late 1980s it was at the forefront of ensuring that COSATU was aligned to the ANC, and was identified as a 'populist' union by those labelled 'workerists' (Allen, 2003). Nevertheless, although Motlanthe was an SACP member until 1997, and schooled in its sovietized version of Marxism-Leninism, he displayed a high degree of non-dogmatic thinking whilst in the NUM, and had a reputation of being a gentle and sympathetic leader<sup>20</sup>. He took this into his position as ANC general-secretary, where he worked under Thabo Mbeki, but eventually found himself in the Zuma camp.

Motlanthe, of course, is an interim president, and is meant to keep the seat warm for ANC president Jacob Zuma, the ANC's candidate for president in the 2009 general elections - even whilst corruption charges remain hanging over his head. It seems that Motlanthe's ascension was an attempt to keep the ANC together, and to avoid alienating those in the Zuma coalition who are more interested in changing South Africa's policy trajectory, than protecting Zuma from further prosecution for corruption. He failed, however, to convince key ANC leaders such as former chairperson Mosiuoa Lekota and former Gauteng premier Mbhazima Shilowa, to break away from the ANC, and go on to



form the Congress of the People (COPE) in December 2008, taking with them a number of ANC leaders known to be sympathetic towards Mbeki.

Socialists in COSATU who are not aligned to the SACP would prefer to see Motlanthe carry on as president after the 2009 elections, given his leftwing credentials, as opposed to Zuma<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, Motlanthe made a good start by replacing the unpopular Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang with the widely regarded Barbara Hogan, causing the TAC to enthusiastically endorse his leadership. His calm demeanour stood in stark contrast to that of the more reckless members of the Zuma coalition, the most prominent being ANCYL leader Julius Malema, who threatened to 'kill' for Zuma, as did COSATU's Zwelinzima Vavi. However, he also re-appointed Trevor Manual as Finance Minister, and was at pains to say that the macro-economic policies Manual championed since 1996 will remain intact.

Has the Alliance Left succeeded in using Zuma to capture the ANC in pursuit of a more redistributive, participatory-democratic trajectory? Or has it badly miscalculated by throwing its weight behind a leader who has no interest in pursuing a Left agenda - what some have termed a 'hope and pray' strategy, given the formidable array of predatory class forces within the Zuma coalition, who will not allow Motlanthe to usurp the throne that 'rightfully' belongs to Zuma.

### **The Zuma Coalition**

The Zuma coalition captured the ANC at the December 2007 Polokwane conference, where Zuma was elected ANC president alongside key former worker leaders Mantashe and Motlanthe. Indeed, Mantashe, a long-standing SACP leader, retained his position as chairperson of the SACP, to which he was elected in 2007. With SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande widely acknowledged as a key mover behind the scenes, it certainly looks like a triumph of the Left.

The Zuma camp is an alliance of class forces who had a common antipathy towards the relatively aloof (some would say authoritarian) leadership style of Mbeki. Besides COSATU and the SACP, it also includes the Young Communist League (YCL) and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). All of these formations profess a commitment to redistributive social policies that are underpinned by greater state intervention in the economy. How-

ever, the ANCYL seems more committed to the advancement of an aspirant black bourgeoisie through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) that includes a stake for 'youth' in 'de-racialized' private corporations<sup>22</sup>.

A strong, interventionist 'developmental state', as proposed by the Alliance, might be more a battering ram for the creation of a predatory black bourgeoisie, than an instrument for the advancement of a holistic development programme. This possibility is enhanced by the state-centric conception of the developmental state, which draws much on the East Asian experience (which was oriented towards nurturing a national bourgeoisie) but with a dash of Nordic social democracy (ANC, 2007). It is a far cry from the society-centric democratic developmental state in for example the Indian state of Kerala, which, unlike the East Asian models, place the interests of subordinate classes at the forefront of its conception of holistic, balanced approach to 'development' (see Williams, 2008 and Pillay, 2008).

The other components of the Zuma coalition include a range of black business people, including now-established business high flyers such as Tokyo Sexwale, as well as aspirant high flyers such as ANC Treasurer Mathews Phosa, and a range of aspirant bourgeois interests which have been marginalized by the Mbeki project - what some have labelled the 'lumpen bourgeoisie'. Many of these have been implicated in corruption charges of various kinds, the most prominent being Tony Yengeni, the former ANC chief whip in parliament, who was convicted and served a brief prison term (*Weekender* 24/1/09). They obviously hope for protection from the National Prosecutions Authority (NPA) - a key target of the Zuma camp. Indeed, the current ANC NEC has more business people in its ranks than the previous one, which was accused of being captive of the new black elite (SACP, 2008b).

However, the question remains: are COSATU and the SACP using Zuma to achieve 'working class' hegemony, or is Zuma and his aspirant bourgeois backers using the popular power of organized workers to achieve their bourgeois nationalist goals?

In other words, COSATU and the SACP have embarked on a risky strategy of seeking working class hegemony through an ostensibly 'popular-democratic' politics that places the Alliance at the centre, with a compromised populist leader, Jacob Zuma, at the helm. In contrast to the other option of breaking

with the Alliance, and seeking the broader unity of the working class in pursuit of a new, participatory-democratic socialist politics, this looks more 'populist' than popular-democratic. What explains this form of politics?

### **Explaining the SACP and COSATU's Political Choices**

Recent studies have argued that COSATU and the SACP's continued embrace of the alliance is due two inter-related threads that weave through the fabric of working class politics: firstly, compared to unorganized, informalized and unemployed workers mired in poverty, organized workers are to a large extent *beneficiaries* of the post-apartheid order, and seem more interested in preserving and extending their own, narrow gains; and secondly, an increasingly oligarchic leadership at the various levels within COSATU have benefitted from the *patronage* and upward mobility their close links with the political elite brings.

Firstly, organized workers to a large extent form part of the 'insiders' that have benefited from the post-apartheid dispensation. COSATU members are primarily located amongst those with permanent jobs within the formal sector. While it represents 65% of all organized workers, it only represents 19% of all those employed in the formal sector, 14% of all employed (including the informal sector and domestic workers) and about 9% of all economically active people (including the 40% who are unemployed) (COSATU, 2006a).

The profile of COSATU members has changed over the past decade. While the unions of the 1980s organized mainly unskilled and semi-skilled workers, the majority are now classified as skilled, supervisory and clerical. This can be attributed to the organisation of public sector workers in the 1990s, such that public sector unions (including teachers, civil servants and health workers) are among the largest affiliates of COSATU. In addition, COSATU has succeeded in getting white collar unions, such as that of bank officials, to affiliate. Education levels are consequently much higher than before, and the age profile has also lowered. Most workers only joined their union after 1991 and were not part of the militant years of mass class struggle during the 1980s, when the socialist ethos and culture of the workers' movement was being formed (Buhlungu, 2005).

Attempts in the past to organize the unemployed have failed, and formal declarations to reach out to the informal sector

have not resulted in any meaningful action (COSATU, 2003a, b + c). In 2005 COSATU made recruitment of new members, including semi-formal workers, a priority (see COSATU 2005b), but most affiliates did not take this seriously enough, resulting in only a marginal increase in membership by the time of its ninth congress in September 2006 (COSATU, 2005c and 2006a).

This failure to organize the more vulnerable sections of the working class seems to be a consequence of a new generation of union members who are more interested in the short-term protection and extension of their gains under ANC rule, rather than a more long-term vision of an organized working class that cuts through the formal/informal/unemployed divisions, and constitutes a viable counter-hegemonic force. Are COSATU and SACP leaders tailing behind the relatively conservative consciousness of organized workers, or are workers merely following the lead of a new generation of COSATU leaders who, despite their militant rhetoric, are even greater beneficiaries of the new order?

This brings us to the second thread: the upward mobility of leaders. The failure to organize vulnerable workers and the unemployed can be explained by the character of the union leadership at the various levels<sup>23</sup>. Most organizers are male, and seem less interested in organising the mainly female vulnerable workers. In addition, there is a rise of what Buhlungu (2003) calls the 'entrepreneurial unionist' who are mainly interested in using the union as a stepping stone to upward mobility. This occurs at all levels of leadership, from shop stewards vying for promotion in their companies (see Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2006), to leaders at various levels becoming enmeshed in relationships of patronage with the new political and economic elite, seeking black empowerment deals, civil service appointments or political promotion to parliament or the Cabinet.

Buhlungu (2003) identifies two other ideal types, namely the 'ideological unionist' that remains true to the original socialist goals of the union movement, based on worker control, and the technocratic 'career unionist' that pragmatically treads a careful path between the two. Nevertheless, increased 'professionalization' of unions, which has meant increased salaries and benefits, has contributed to the upward mobility of union leaders, such that many have become middle class, increasingly removed from the rank-and-file (see Buhlungu, 1999). As worker control recedes, COSATU itself acknowledges that oligarchy is

increasingly taking hold of the union movement (COSATU 2006a).

In addition, instead of increasing working class influence in policy determination, many argue that corporatist arrangements such as the National Economic, Development, Labour Advisory Council (NEDLAC), particularly under conditions of low unionisation and stretched capacity, deepen oligarchic tendencies within the union movement. This arguably diverts it from the strategic priority of building a much more influential counter-hegemonic force across all strata of the working class. Others, however, point to the benefits labour has derived from such arrangements, where labour's voice in policy determination has proven to be a vital check against rampant market forces (Cherry, 2006).

In contrast to those in the new social movements who continue to believe that COSATU is critical to any Left renewal (see Desai, 2005), Lehulere (2005) believes that COSATU may have militant rhetoric, and occasionally engage in strike action, but its members are mainly concerned about narrow production politics (wage increases and conditions of employment) and not broader state-power politics.

In other words, for Lehulere COSATU members are no longer interested in forging a broader social movement unionism that combines struggles at the point of production with struggles in the community. The *latter* is where the militant working class battles will be fought. While tactical alliances could be formed with COSATU, any hopes of forging a working class politics with them are futile, he argues, especially if they continue to remain within an alliance with the ruling party.

This may be too stark a picture of upwardly mobile beneficiaries of the new order, dislocated from the broader working class mired in poverty and destitution. In addition, the decline of social movements since their heyday in 2002, when they seemed poised to challenge the dominance of the ANC in the townships (Bond, 2002), casts great doubt on the sphere of consumption as the centre of future working class mobilisation and organisation. A new Left project has to include *both* spheres of contestation – production politics as well as consumption politics, trade unions as well as new social movements (see Bieler et al, 2008).

COSATU insists that most of its members are still primarily the 'working poor', in intimate contact with (and often supporting) their unemployed family members and neighbours,

both in the urban and rural areas. Indeed, the militant security guard strike in May 2006 (*Mail and Guardian* 19-25 May, 2006), and the massive public sector strike in 2007 (*Amandla* No. 2, June 2007) were reminiscent of the 1980s, and suggested that the 'working poor' were still prominent within COSATU. Rebutting the 'labour aristocracy' thesis, COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi asserts that "most formal workers and even union members do not earn much above the poverty line. Some 40% of union members earn under R2500 per month. " (Vavi, 2005:7)

This is supported by independent observations of union shop stewards in low wage sectors of the economy. Not all shop stewards fit the profile of upward mobility found in sectors such as mining or manufacturing. The retail sector, for example, has a very different profile. The South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) national shop steward coordinators earn a very low wage, and have a number of unemployed dependents. They, and all the shop stewards they coordinate, fit the profile of the working poor that Vavi describes, and serve the interests of members at the workplace level in the best traditions of COSATU unionism. SACCAWU is one of the few unions to have recruited vulnerable workers, and has won many rights for them (see Masondo, 2008).

Vavi (2005:8) argues that it would be "suicidal" for the union movement to focus narrowly on formal workers only. It also stands to lose much if unemployment rises. In addition, an influx of vulnerable workers, as well as the unemployed, into union ranks could undermine trends towards oligarchy and the domination of many unions by upwardly mobile, better paid and better educated 'beneficiaries' of ANC rule. But is COSATU serious about organising non-core workers, and reaching out to the broader working class?

### **A Left Turn in the Alliance?**

On the one hand, if the discourse of COSATU leaders is to be believed, then COSATU is still steeped in the traditions of social movement unionism that combines strong shop-floor organisation with a willingness to engage in both workplace struggles as well as broader struggles for social transformation. The deepening social crisis has exposed the '1996 class project' for what it is - the enrichment of a few, while the majority, including

most COSATU members, struggle to live a decent life. This has opened the ruling party up for capture by the working class. In COSATU and the SACP's calculation, the figure of Jacob Zuma is necessary to forge together a 'counter-hegemonic bloc' within the ANC, and pave the way for working class dominance of the 'national democratic struggle'.

Recent ANC policy conferences have passed a number of resolutions in favour of the working class, and have rejected those deemed unfavourable. The 2005 conference, for example, rejected proposals for a two-tier labour market, (ANC, 2005) and the Polokwane conference passed resolutions in favour of free education, greater state involvement in the economy, and an expanded social security system, amongst other things (ANC, 2007). When the Alliance met in March 2008, with the new ANC leadership in place, they resolved to firm up the Alliance structures, which did not function well during Mbeki's reign.

COSATU and the SACP believe that the working class membership of the ANC will increasingly respond positively to the progressive policy positions put forward by the Left. The problem, then, was not the ANC as such, but the Mbeki leadership in government that ignored these policies. This, they hope, will change with the new ANC leadership at the helm.

In other words, the COSATU and SACP leadership believe that the strategic imperative of not leaving the Alliance, but on the contrary strengthening the proletarian presence within the Alliance and the ANC, is proving to be correct. This is particularly so if the following happens: firstly, as envisaged in COSATU's 2015 programme (2003b), the federation grows its membership to four million by 2015 and, with the help of the SACP, it effectively engages in extensive political education such that trained working class cadres continue to swell the ranks of the ANC, taking over its leadership at all levels of the organisation. Secondly, COSATU and the SACP ensure that the Alliance arrives at a binding agreement that will govern its operations, and ensure that the Alliance acts as *the* political centre that guides government policy (see COSATU 2006b, SACP 2008). The election of COSATU and SACP leaders into the top positions of the ANC is the first step in this process.

On the other hand, while the 2015 programme looks like a realistic strategy to propel working class interests to the fore, COSATU affiliates have thus far made little progress in expand-

ing their membership, let alone recruiting informalized workers. It has shown no interest in organising the unemployed, and, apart from a 2005 conference with social movements (Pillay, 2006), has done little to work with social movements fighting working class issues. Instead, COSATU and the SACP, along with the Young Communist League and the ANC Youth League, have alienated the independent Left within their own organisations, as well as potential Left allies outside, by brooking no criticism of Zuma.

Indeed, since his election as ANC Secretary-General Gwede Mantashe has followed Zuma in going out of his way to appease the markets<sup>24</sup>. He, along with president Motlanthe, have re-affirmed the ANC's orthodox economic trajectory, and there are clear signs that the steward of the GEAR policy, Trevor Manuel, will keep his position as Minister of Finance after the 2009 elections. Market forces, globally and nationally, are so powerful that they seem more likely, as before, to change the new men occupying the leadership positions in the ANC, than these men changing the ANC.

Nevertheless, the ANC's election Manifesto (ANC, 2009), released in January 2009, has re-affirmed the drift towards a more redistributive policy agenda, with promises of a national health insurance, free education, more aggressive rural development and action against labour brokers who encourage the informalisation of labour. The influence of COSATU is clearly evident here. However, Trevor Manuel has warned that the global financial crisis will slow down economic growth in South Africa, and postpone the implementation of new programmes that require massive new public expenditure (*Sunday Times*, 25/1/09). And Zuma's stamp on rural development proposals envisages increased power for traditional leaders, which undermines the position of rural women seeking greater gender equality (*The Times*, 26/1/09).

Mantashe has also made it clear that, contrary to earlier indications, the Alliance will *not* be the political centre - the ANC will continue to call the shots. This was demonstrated by the manner in which the ANC dismissed the premiers of the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces in 2008, without consulting their alliance partners, much to their dismay. COSATU and the SACP in the Western Cape threatened to withdraw their support for the alliance in the next elections (*Weekender*, 9/8/08). How-



ever, as before, this was an empty threat. The ANC is adept at smoothing over wrinkles when elections approach, only to revert to business as usual afterwards.

While there are signs that the ANC under Zuma and Motlanthe has indeed shifted to the 'Left', in that it seems more determined than the Mbeki government to implement redistributive policies and build a developmental state, it should be noted that these shifts were already occurring under Mbeki's rule. Indeed, the newly formed COPE has a very similar election manifesto to that of the ANC. The key question is: what is 'Left'? If by 'Left' is meant greater redistribution of wealth, such that poverty and inequality is reduced, then the discourse, at least, looks promising.<sup>25</sup> The ANC's election manifesto also includes greater environmental awareness. However, if being 'Left' *also* means building a participatory democracy, a culture of tolerance, and a constitutional state that respects the rule of law, then the Zuma coalition seems to be going in the opposite direction.

### **Zuma, Polokwane and the Rise of Neo-Stalinism**

A third explanation, no less pessimistic, accepts that the SACP, under the leadership of Blade Nzimande, has indeed masterfully succeeded in asserting its hegemony over the ANC and the Alliance, through the figure of Jacob Zuma. While aware of other class forces within the Zuma camp, the SACP and COSATU, far from 'hoping and praying' that a Zuma leadership will deliver their agenda, have in fact ensured that the mass power they command through COSATU will keep Zuma on track. In fact Zuma may be so indebted to COSATU, the SACP, the YCL and the ANCYL that he will have little option but to follow their agenda once in power. But that agenda has little to do with building the participatory-democratic, socialist politics that resonated within the working class movement since the 1970s.

Instead, recent rhetoric and practice within these organisations suggest that a more reckless, intolerant, neo-Stalinist politics is emerging, under the guise of a democratic working class politics. As mentioned earlier, independent, critical voices within the SACP and COSATU have been silenced or purged, often quite ruthlessly. The reckless manner in which COSATU and SACP leaders have attacked the judiciary when it suits them, and the manner in which they have sought to undermine the National Prosecutions Authority (NPA) and its investigating arm, the Scor-

pions, bodes ill for the future independence of these and other constitutionally independent bodies<sup>26</sup> (see Hamilton, 2008 and Mapaila, 2008). Nzimande is steeped in a vanguardist tradition of politics (having learnt his politics at the feet of the professed Stalinist, the late Harry Gwala) and is likely to pursue a well-trodden 'revolutionary' approach where 'independence' only has meaning if these bodies bow to the will of the party. Under his leadership, the SACP has gradually snuffed out the promise of a participatory-democratic socialist trajectory, which began to emerge since the early 1990s (see Williams, 2008). While the Zuma phenomenon opened up space for the contestation of ideas within the ANC (which, with the formation of COPE, is now closing), such space in the SACP and COSATU simultaneously narrowed substantially, such that any questioning of the Zuma strategy is likely to invite disciplinary measures, if not expulsion.

### **Conclusion**

The 'left turn' in Alliance discourse may suggest that a working class presence is indeed asserting itself. However, this may only suggest a populist tilt towards short-term redistribution, whilst keeping the fundamental system of crony capitalism intact (with new players under Zuma jostling with the 'BEElionaires' from the Mbeki era). At worst it heralds the rise of an ominous form of neo-Stalinism, where the invocation of the state as a key actor in development becomes a battering ram for statist practices that narrows the democratic space, and opens up a new terrain of state patronage, looting and mal-administration (even if the intentions of many in the new leadership are to pursue a redistributive agenda). Even more ominously, Zuma's social conservatism could see increased power for traditional leaders in rural areas, the re-introduction of the death penalty, and attempts to undermine gender equality and freedom of sexual preference as embedded in the Constitution (see Butler, 2008).

The arrival of COPE, even though it is another version of ANC 'bourgeois nationalism', has opened up the political terrain in South Africa, and for the first time since 1994 there may be a real contest for power in the 2009 elections. While the ANC is expected to win the national elections, it may lose a few provinces, most notably the Western Cape and possibly even the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and the Free State. This opening of the political space in the country, however, has simultaneously narrowed

space within the Alliance. Inner-party democracy still exists within the various formations - but only if Zuma's leadership is unquestioned. Given Zuma's conservative, patriarchal outlook and the corruption charges that refuse to disappear, it remains a mystery as to why the Alliance Left stubbornly cling to his leadership (as opposed to backing Motlanthe as president, for example).

A substantively-democratic, Left path must resurrect the promise of the 1980s, where a 'popular-democratic' approach combines the best of 'workerism' - namely its emphasis on class politics and participatory democracy (in the form of deep-rooted, accountable democratic structures that empower working class people in a real sense) - as well as the best of 'populism', which hegemonizes a progressive politics throughout society. Such a path was pursued through the Alliance, and failed. Attempts to continue to do so with an intolerant, neo-Stalinist form of politics contradicts the essence of being 'Left' in the full sense.

It remains to be seen whether COSATU members continue to offer the ANC and the Alliance the same level of support as in the past. Given their claim to have returned the ANC to its working class bias, the COSATU and SACP may have convinced its followers that at last poverty and inequality will be meaningfully addressed. However, given the array of predatory class forces lined up against a Left project within the Zuma coalition, as well as the intolerant style of politics of the new leadership, which can destabilize the country, this does not seem likely.

If life under a Zuma-led ANC means another term of neglect and disappointment, COSATU and SACP members may finally see that they need to break from the Alliance, and forge a more self-conscious working class politics in alliance with other movements and strata in society. This is especially so if COSATU succeeds in recruiting precarious workers into its fold. Given the opening up of the political landscape, the prospects of the re-emergence of a democratic Left (and hopefully eco-socialist) alternative to the sterility of patronage politics are, in the medium to long term, looking brighter.

### **Endnotes**

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2. This refers to the SACP's description of the neo-liberal project which began with the 1996 adoption of the orthodox Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy framework (see SACP 2006).
3. This includes not only core workers in the formal sector, but all informalized workers, the unemployed and all their dependents. These 'class fractions' may also be referred to as 'subordinate classes' (see Bieler, Lindberg and Pillay, 2008)
4. Key figures here include prominent Kwa-Zulu Natal businessman Don Mkhwanazi, of the Friends of Zuma campaign. As the SACP itself admits (SACP 2008b) there are now more business-people in the ANC executive than before, the most prominent being ANC Treasurer Mathews Phosa who, like many others in the Zuma coalition, were marginalized by Mbeki, and did not have the same access to sources of patronage as those business-people (or aspirant business-people) within the Mbeki camp.
5. This refers to key former champions of working class socialist politics, most notably former COSATU leaders Jay Naidoo and Sam Shilowa, former National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) leaders Cyril Ramaphosa, Marcelle Golding and James Motlatsi, former textile workers leader John Copelyn, and a range of others who have become exceptionally wealthy businessmen since 1994.
6. It must be emphasised that those accused of 'workerism', and its variations, did not always accept these labels (although many were happy to call themselves workerists, or independent socialists), whilst those accused of 'populism' never accepted that tag. The term 'popular-democratic' appears in academic literature, but not in the discourses of activists (where 'national-democratic' was preferred). However, it is possible to construct ideal types of each discourse and practice, in the knowledge that in the real world of political praxis these appear as *dominant*, but not exclusive, characteristics of particular groups at particular moments in history.
7. Led by the ANC, this alliance included the Transvaal and Natal Indian congresses, the Coloured People's Congress, the (white) Congress of Democrats and the SA Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). All these organisations went underground, or became defunct, when the ANC was banned in 1961. Although the Communist Party of SA was banned in 1950, it re-emerged underground as the SACP, and its members played prominent roles in all the congress formations, and in drawing up the Freedom Charter.
8. A third stream, somewhat marginal to this debate, was that of Black Consciousness (BC), which reached its highest point during the mid-1970s. In its original form BC had a populist character, in that it placed emphasis on race. However, some within BC began to embrace class politics, but tended to view all blacks as workers, and all

whites as capitalist. Adherents of BC were mainly to be found in what became the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), which was formed in opposition to COSATU in 1986. However, BC was popular in some COSATU affiliates such as the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA).

9. Those with a more social democratic orientation looked no further than the Labour Party of Britain, which during the 1970s and 1980s was beginning to take a more strident left turn in Opposition.
10. This label was used by some members of this grouping - a loose alignment of mainly black unionists and union intellectuals, some of whom were not necessarily unsympathetic to the idea of an independent working class party, but who had a less sectarian approach and a greater appreciation of the complexities of race and class, than perhaps the more 'pure class' approach of the 'syndicalists' and 'partyists'. Some adhered to a more radical version of Black Consciousness thinking, while others adopted a more 'pure class' approach. A key intellectual figure for many in this alignment was Neville Alexander, a Marxist who built strong links with black consciousness groups in the early 1980s, through the Cape Action League and the National Forum - formations that by the mid-1980s were swept aside by the dominance of the ANC-aligned UDF (discussions with a member, September 2008; see also Seekings, 2000).
11. Laclau also labelled this 'populist' - however, it is necessary to make a firm distinction between a *populist* politics that is led by the middle class, and a *popular-democratic* politics led by the working class in the struggle for socialism.
12. Although it was watered down by the ANC (see ANC, 1994), it nevertheless retained a strong redistributive emphasis (see Marais, 2001).
13. The new black elite have been called BEElionaires, with reference to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), which was meant to empower the black majority, but which has mainly served to enrich a few individuals, including former trade unionists. BEE is often referred to as Black Economic Enrichment. However, pressure has been exerted to broaden the base of BEE (now called BBEEE, namely broad-based BEE), but this has resulted in many trade union officials at local, provincial and national level being included in tender deals to give them legitimacy - thus enmeshing COSATU (as well as SACP) officials and leaders in relations of patronage - a key factor that explains their continued adherence to the Alliance.
14. This entailed public disagreements including mass action, and ensured that the post-apartheid government did adopt some progressive legislation, particularly around labour rights.

15. The SACP initially welcomed GEAR when it emerged in mid-1996 - a reflection perhaps of the powerful presence of cabinet ministers in the party at that time. However, the party soon followed the cue of COSATU in criticizing its emphasis on the fiscal deficit, to the neglect of the massive social deficit in the country.
16. Mbeki was, ironically, supported by the SACP for ANC president, contrary to the calls by some within the party to put forward the independent socialist, Pallo Jordan, as a candidate for president (discussion with SACP member Langa Zita, 15 September 2008).
17. Previously, the SACP expelled Dale McKinley for criticizing the ANC.
18. For example, a R500 000 donation to the party went missing. Madi-sha claims he gave it to Nzimadna, while Nzimande claims not to have received it. The case is still unresolved, although the SACP formally absolved Nzimande of any wrong-doing.
19. The author's observations at both congresses, which he attended as an observer (see Pillay, 2006).
20. Personal observation of the author, in discussion with colleagues whilst working for the NUM from 1997 until 1999.
21. Discussion with a COSATU official, 26 September 2008.
22. See resolutions from their last congress
23. Administrative deficiencies, including financial mismanagement, have also played a part (see Webster and Buhlungu, 2004)
24. See for example an interview with Mantashe in the *Sunday Independent* (28/09/08), where he suggests that the ANC's macro-economic policies will not change, because they are in fact 'left'. There is however a bit of equivocation - on the one hand Mantashe is content to declare himself a Marxist (as did Alec Erwin, Mbeki's former Minister of Trade and Industry, who oversaw much of the liberalization of trade in South Africa), but is careful not to scare the markets with robust talk about dramatic changes in economic policy.
25. SACP deputy general secretary's address to the Chris Hani Institute seminar on 28 January 2009, titled 'The Current Financial Crisis and Possibilities for the Left', was hailed by Left critic Patrick Bond, a respondent, as "one of the most coherent and visionary of texts I've read about the contemporary situation, showing full cognizance of the processes of capital accumulation, world system formation and ecological crisis, as well as mapping out some of the implications for South African Left praxis". Cronin, of course is one of the more 'enlightened' SACP leaders who was brave enough to question the party's support of Zuma in the past. It remains to be seen whether his thinking becomes mainstream within the Alliance, given the contested character of the Zuma coalition as discussed earlier.
26. Such as the public broadcaster - the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which is currently embroiled in in the factional

dispute between Mbeki and Zuma supporters. The SACP and COSATU have put pressure on Motlanthe to sign into law a controversial bill that will allow members of parliament, effectively dominated by the Zuma faction, to replace the current board of the SABC, deemed to be in favour of the Mbeki faction (*Sunday Times* 18/7/09).

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