

South African labour-community alliances to promote public services

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Executive Summary

This paper seeks to record and critically analyse the historic as well as contemporary context and practical experience of labour-community alliances that have worked to oppose privatisation and/or promote public services, as they have evolved in South Africa since 1994. In doing so, it poses and attempts to answer three key questions: What are the key factors behind the rise and then decline of labour-community alliances from the early 1980s to the present? What kinds of alliances presently exist? What can be done to reclaim and rebuild alliances?

The dynamic and varied struggles of allied labour and community movements in the early 1980s were grounded in a politically independent and largely unified, broad working class battle against the dying kicks of an oppressive apartheid system and the ravages of an increasingly hegemonic neoliberal capitalism. Such political independence was 'lost' however, when the majority of both movements, in the form of COSATU and the UDF, entered into formal alliances with the dominant political forces of the liberation movement, in the form of the ANC/SACP. Simultaneously, a creeping neoliberal capitalism catalysed social and economic fragmentation amongst the broad working class, creating the conditions for both objective and subjective divisions. The combined impact was decidedly negative for any complementary and/or parallel alliance between labour and community and more specifically, for the struggle against privatisation and for public sector and service alternatives.

Things became more problematic as the strategic locus of resistance and 'people's power', now dominated by the ANC/SACP and its labour movement allies, shifted even further onto a negotiations-centric and corporatist terrain from the early 1990s onwards. In fairly quick time, the overall results were a curtailment of mass struggle, the increased political marginalisation of independent broad working class forces and the embracing of a neoliberal agenda. In turn, this severely undermined any politically principled, democratic and collectively-enjoined labour-community struggle both against, and for public alternatives to, privatisation at the very time that they were most needed.

Consequently, the now dominant political and institutional framework of neoliberal corporatism increased the social distance between (employed) workers and (unemployed/informalised) poor communities. 'Free market' forces and an individualistic, work-defined citizenship became the change-agents of both social and political relations of the broad working class and their organisations. The ensuing politics and practices of most of the labour movement in response to such developments only served to make the possibilities of forging collective solidarities and struggles with communities all the more difficult as exemplified in the experience of the APF in the early 2000s.

The ANC-run state's consistent attempts to repress community-led dissent in response to the political and socio-economic failures of the 'new' democracy, largely accepted by its alliance partners, undermined further the bases for unity between labour and community. It also created the conditions for the delegitimisation of the

struggles and ideas of community organisations related to the content and character of public institutions and delivery of public services. The subsequent rise to party and state power of the Zuma faction not only solidified these trends but then ensured that the entire terrain of privatisation and the provision of public services has become more of a policy tool for satisfying factional and party political interests than anything else.

The cumulative result of these transitional realities has seen the weakening of both labour and community organisation, alongside increased disconnection. What few contemporary labour-community alliances do exist are largely informal and dominated by educational and more ad-hoc activities, involving small numbers of committed individuals from both 'sides'. This has catalysed a situation where, on the one hand unions simply do not know how to relate to independent community organisation and struggle and, on the other hand community organisations have become largely self-contained and focused.

Twenty years after 1994, the harsh realities are that organic labour-community alliances are non-existent in South Africa. Further, there is presently little in the way of a vision, much less practice, of alternatives to privatisation that move beyond the state. Nonetheless, there is a positive past of labour-community alliances that needs to be reclaimed both in thought and practice. The key challenge now for both labour and community movements, is to occupy the new spaces that have opened up as a result of the on-going fracturing of the ANC-Alliance and incipient initiatives such as NUMSA's move towards political independence and the forging of an anti-capitalist united front of the broad working class. If there is to be movement forward, labour and community have to find ways to talk with and learn from each other, to find a common language for and approach to, what kind of society, what kind of state and most crucially what kind of public they desire?

Introduction

Core context

In the South African context, one of the more studied and celebrated aspects of the anti-apartheid struggle especially during the late 1970s and 1980s was the active presence and significant political and economic impact of labour-community alliances (Ballard et al., 2005; Barchiesi, 2006; Baskin, 1991; Buhlungu, 2010; Friedman, 1987; Naidoo, 2010; Neocosmos, 1998; Pillay, 1996; Seekings, 2000; von Holdt, 2003; Webster, 1988). A key struggle component of those alliances was advancing the provision of public services to all South Africans.

When it comes to the history and analysis of such alliances though, the starting point most often begins from the 1979 formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). However, in order to fully understand and locate the genesis of such alliances, and thus also to ground any subsequent history and analysis, there is a need to turn the clock back almost 20 years earlier.

In the year following the declaration by some of the underground leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in December 1961 that the main strategic direction of the anti-apartheid struggle was to be armed struggle (ANC, 1991, 5), the now-exiled ANC held a conference in Lobatse, Botswana. Despite the Lobatse conference reaffirming the emphasis on mass action (Meli, 1988, 153), this did not take place precisely because the dominant strategic push was now one of a select group of movement leaders and activists trying to stimulate mass struggle by its own (armed) example. Different to the 1950s period of mass mobilisation, which had centrally involved sections of the labour and community movements, was that limited acts of armed sabotage would now replace mass, non-violent action.

The fact is that an armed sabotage campaign (there yet being no liberation movement strategy or capacity to wage serious armed struggle), by its very character, relied on highly secretive organisation and minimal involvement of the oppressed sectors of the population. Crucially, where those sectors could have been involved (for example, within the organised labour movement) the ANC leadership's style of centralised direction of campaigns seriously impeded potential action. Confirmation came from the Lobatse conference report on trade unions which, while appealing for more coordination between the main union federation, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the ANC, stressed that SACTU should be regarded as a "department of our movement rather than a separate movement" (Meli, 1988, 153).

What this shows, is that from the very beginning of the ANC/SACP- led armed phase of the liberation struggle in South Africa, the core strategic orientation to those social forces representing workers (and as will be shown later, also those representing the broader working class in communities) was one of top-down, leadership-centric political and organisational direction and control. This orientation greatly contributed to the virtual stasis of labour and community mass struggle from the early 1960s until the mid-1970s. More crucial for this paper though, it also fundamentally shaped the ensuing forms and practices of the labour and community movements as well as the terrain for the possibilities and subsequent character of associated alliances; and

more specifically, those focused on responding to both the ravages of apartheid-capitalism and the parallel, neoliberal-inspired drive by the apartheid state to reign in both labour and community militancy alongside the privatisation of public services from the 1980s onwards.

One of the main reasons behind the formation of a new labour movement was a desire, by workers and their intellectual-activist allies, to forge a politically and organisationally independent labour movement run and controlled by workers themselves. The same can be said of the myriad civil society and particularly, community organisations that appeared on the scene at around the same time and into the early 1980s. Subsequent developments during the 1980s and early 1990s however, saw the vast majority of the labour and community movements once again falling under the political, ideological and, in some cases, organisational umbrella of the exiled ANC/SACP alliance (McKinley, 1997).

With the transition to democracy and the ANC's capturing of state power after 1994, a range of new political, socio-economic and organisational relations of power among these various forces of liberation came to the fore. This occurred alongside the rapid adoption by the new ANC government of a neoliberal macro-economic policy framework. In turn, such transitional realities have, over the last 20 years, fundamentally re-shaped not only the political economy of South Africa as well as the more specific struggles against privatisation and for public services, but also the labour unions and various forms of community organisations which have largely carried forward those struggles.

Paper purpose and structure

It is within such a historical and liberation movement context that this paper seeks to critically analyse the content, character, sustainability and impact of labour-community alliances that have worked to oppose privatisation and/or promote public services, as they have evolved in South Africa since 1994. What makes such a paper timely, appropriate and important is the fact that the focus is on South Africa, a country whose people's struggles in the apartheid era gave rise not only to new ways of theorising and practically engaging resistance to oppression but also to huge international and domestic expectations of the possibilities of a radical break with capitalist social and economic convention and more specifically, its neo-liberal pillars such as privatisation of public services.

The paper begins by focusing on labour and community in the neoliberal transition. First, by revisiting the theory and practice of 'social movement unionism' in the 1970s and 1980s alongside that of 'civil society, as applied and experienced in South Africa, with specific reference to alliances and struggles for public services and against privatisation. The character and impact of the political alliance of both the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) with the ANC/SACP is then analysed as is the early 1990s period after the unbanning of the liberation movements and of negotiations leading up to the democratic breakthrough of 1994. This is followed by a critical look at the dominant neoliberal and corporatist 'developmental' policy framework formally instituted soon after 1994 and how this impacted on and shaped workers and the broader working class as well as approaches to privatisation and the provision of public services. To

conclude, there is a brief analysis of the rise of new community/social movements, the ensuing state and ANC-Alliance response and the consequent effects on the relationships between the labour and community movements.

What follows is an analytically-framed but empirically grounded, scoping exercise of labour-community alliances covering the period from the turn of the century to the present. This section asks, and seeks answers to the question - Whither post-apartheid labour-community alliances? Some examples of the few attempts to build alliances between labour and social movements are covered along with the key underpinnings of their subsequent decline and how these shaped differing understandings of and approaches to, public services and alternatives to privatisation. The character and consequences of the coming to power of Jacob Zuma, as set against the factional ruptures and policy shifts within the ANC-Alliance and state, is also critically engaged. Selected case briefs of three contemporary alliances that exist are then offered, as a means to surface the nature, challenges, problems and successes of such alliances. A listing of other activities that represent some kind of joint labour-community initiative is also included. The section is rounded-off by looking at the main reasons for the clearly evident disconnect between labour and community movements and the corresponding weakness of alliances.

A final section casts a gaze towards the future, through the prism of the past. Here, it is argued that there must first be a combined engagement with some harsh realities about the contemporary state of labour and community movements, alliances and associated struggles for public services as well as a focused reclamation of the rich and positive history of such alliances in South Africa and more contemporarily, internationally. This then provides a foundation upon which the labour movement and community organisations can occupy new ideological, political and organisational spaces that are opening up as a result of the declining hegemony of neoliberalism, the fracturing of the ANC-Alliance and incipient moves by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) to forge an independent, anti-capitalist united front of labour, community and other civil society organisations. The paper is rounded off by suggesting what needs to be done to not only begin to occupy those spaces but to fill them with meaningful alliances and parallel struggles that can build real people's alternatives to privatisation and thus also to the devastations of neoliberal capitalism.

Methodology and limitations

Research for this paper was conducted over a five month period from late 2013 to early 2014. An initial search was undertaken to identify and then contact those unions and community organisations (and/or federations and collections thereof) that either have been or are presently, engaged in any kind of political and/or organisational activity or alliance with each other. Subsequently, relevant leaders and activists from these unions and community organisations were identified and contacted as well as South African-based researchers and academics who have undertaken linked work. Interviews were then requested and, where there was a positive response, conducted either in person or telephonically. Materials were also requested and collected from interviewees.

During this process, three functioning alliances were identified and chosen as case studies. Field trips were then made to Cape Town and Durban, where two of these alliances are located, and further interviews as well as small focus groups of union and community members carried out. Due to lack of response from key persons involved it was not practically feasible to carry out a third field trip in the case of the other identified alliance situated in the Eastern Cape Province.

Desktop research, of relevant historic and more contemporary theory and practice as directly related to anti-privatisation struggles, alternatives to privatisation and more specific labour-community alliances both in South Africa and internationally was undertaken throughout the project period. This research was inclusive of a comprehensive literature review carried out by a contracted junior researcher Mbuso Nkosi, under the guidance of the author.

The limited timeframe of the project along with the extended holiday period in South Africa during December-January, made it extremely difficult to engage in extended follow-ups with several unions and individuals initially contacted. This objective limitation was exacerbated by a more subjective factor. Despite repeated attempts, which in some cases included formal correspondence as a follow-up to numerous telephonic and email communications, I was unable to get positive responses to my requests for interviews and materials from both NUMSA and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Further, requests for the same made to the Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPWAWU), COSATU Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal Provincial Secretaries as well as several provincial and regional secretaries of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) also elicited no positive responses.

Regardless, a substantial amount of work was completed that represents arguably the most comprehensive effort yet to identify and contextualise as well as gather information, analyses and participant experiences and perspectives on, contemporary labour-community alliances in South Africa. Hopefully then, this paper will stimulate much-needed debate and provide a solid platform for further research on a topic of crucial importance not only to South Africa's labour and community movements but to all those struggling to put the public back into public services.

Labour and community in neoliberal transition

Repression, resistance and contradiction

At the same time in the early-mid 1970s that unions in South Africa were beginning to show clear signs of emerging from the effects of the political repression and strategic quiescence of the previous decade, the neoliberal variant of capitalist ideology was coming to the fore across the globe. The 1973 Durban strikes, which involved over 100 000 black workers embarking on a series of strikes against deteriorating conditions of work (Webster, 1998), marked the start of what was to become a long and continuous class war, straddling the pre and post-1994 eras, between the broad working class and capitalists, alongside their political and bureaucratic allies within the state.

That broad working class was hit with a double-blow. Neoliberal capitalism privileged the opening up of global markets, increasing capital mobility and re-organising states to guarantee and catalyse 'free market principles' (Harvey, 2005), alongside pushing for a flexible, insecure and informal labour regime (Chun, 2009, Kalleberg, 2009). As a result, not only were unions weakened in terms of their ability to service their existing members and recruit new ones, the objective basis for organising outside of their immediate terrain was severely undermined (Paret, 2013b). Additionally, large numbers of workers simply lost their jobs and were forced into the informal labour market to compete for work in an ever-increasing pool of poverty.

In the context of an apartheid South Africa where the neoliberal push was mixed-in with white political, social and economic domination through a repressive state, this 'war' played itself out from the late 1970s in very particular ways within the labour movement. A large number of unions had become increasingly opposed to what they saw as the subordination of worker interests and struggles to the macro national liberation politics of the ANC/SACP which, as the ANC's Lobatse conference had confirmed, saw the labour movement as more of a transmission belt for the 'vanguard' political party (Pillay, 1996, 31).

Along with radical white intellectuals who embraced a 'new' Marxist approach that was critical of what they argued was the ANC/SACP's "Soviet Model" of trade unionism, they wanted to forge politically independent unions which were allied to the broader working class of communities, informal workers and students and which practiced workers control and participatory democracy (Baskin, 1991; Friedman, 1987). This eventually resulted in the formation of FOSATU in 1979 which foundationally believed that "unless labour's political organizations were fully independent from the liberation movement they would merely abolish the legal structure of apartheid while subordinating workers to the new majority-based nationalist regime" (Barchiesi 2011, 53)

On the 'other side' were those unions and workers, largely associated with the ANC/SACP-aligned SACTU, who quickly dubbed the FOSATU crowd as 'workerists' and in turn, were labelled as the 'populists'. At the heart of this apparent split in South Africa's labour movement was whether or not unions should be formally aligned to, and thus under the political guidance and direction of, a political party (or in this case, an alliance of such parties). Linked to this was a deeper ideological and strategic debate centred on differing interpretations of the ANC/SACP's theory of 'national democratic revolution', specifically in respect of the political role of the organised working class, the struggle for state power, the relationship between race and class and the strategic primacies of socialism or 'national liberation' (McKinley, 1997).

Regardless of these debates, which also included questions of union priorities such as collective bargaining versus campaigning as well as forms such as workplace versus residential forums (Xali, 2005), it was FOSATU that took the lead in forging a rejuvenated labour movement. Linking the strengthening of internal union (especially shop-floor) structures and democracy to the struggles against state repression on a more general societal level FOSATU reached out to communities and their unemployed/casual worker constituencies. This saw FOSATU for example, forging practical ties with communities as part of the 1979 strike at Fatti's and Moni's pasta

factory which resulted in a national consumer boycott of the corporation's products (Baskin, 1991, 23). Another example of this conscious effort to forge labour-community alliances was the involvement of FOSATU unions "in struggles over community demands such as resistance to the eviction of 'illegal' squatters in [the East Rand townships of] Kathelhong and Daveyton" (Barchiesi, 2006, 9). As Buhlungu (2010) shows, many FOSATU unions also drew heavily on the "lived experiences" of workers (for example, cultural and religious) to forge stronger workplace and community relations.

FOSATU's new approach of forging institutional, campaigning and social ties with communities was consistent with other similar initiatives in places such as South Korea and Brazil. Key to this approach, which has been termed 'social movement unionism', is moving beyond the productive realm and encompassing struggles for social reproduction (Munck, 1998, Seidman, 1994; Waterman, 1999; Webster, 1998). Contrary to the criticisms of the ANC/SACP that FOSATU did not represent a 'political unionism' that took the struggle for power seriously, this approach consisted of a "highly mobilised form of unionism which emerges in opposition to authoritarian regimes and repressive workplaces ... is embedded in a network of community and political alliances, and demonstrates a commitment to ... the broader democratic and socialist transformation of authoritarian societies" (von Holdt, 2002, 285).

On the community front things were moving forward as well. But as has always been the case with both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods in South Africa, the politics of the ANC/SACP loomed large over developments. No doubt spurred on by the intensification of community struggles, regularly linked to the new unions in the (non-ANC) FOSATU fold, as well as the earlier launch of the National Forum (NF - initiated by the decidedly anti-ANC Azanian People's Organisation - AZAPO), ANC-aligned community and civic leaders launched the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 (Seekings, 2000). While the UDF (and NF) were ostensibly formed in direct response to the apartheid state's introduction of the Tricameral Parliament, which attempted to co-opt the minority Coloured and Indian population groups into the apartheid framework, it was the worsening material conditions of the black majority and their increasingly radical resistance to the devastating socio-economic impact of the apartheid-capitalist system, that was the key factor.

As Barchiesi (2006:9) argues, the apartheid state's "neglect of housing demands ... had led to constant overcrowding and ... a burgeoning 'squatter' population of 'undesirables', unemployable workers". Not only did this make for extremely miserable living conditions in the urban areas but also in the rural Bantustans where those who were superfluous to the immediate requirements of the apartheid-capitalist labour system, but essential for its social reproduction, were dumped. It was in the macro-context of this combined neoliberal and apartheid assault on the broader working class that the UDF launched a national campaign called *Asinamali* (We Have No Money) which called for communities to boycott the paying of rents and services (Barchiesi, 2006; Naidoo, 2010). The central importance of the *Asinamali* campaign was the refusal to "accept the lower standard and quality of services" as part of larger political struggles that demanded "equality and justice" (Naidoo, 2010, 128). As Naidoo (2010) points out, this necessarily involved the emergence of opposition to the privatisation of public services and thus represented

a desire on the part of poor, black communities to do away with the commodification of such services.

Such desires were on full display in late 1984 when the townships in the Vaal Triangle near Johannesburg erupted. No longer willing to put up with local apartheid controls and feeling the full brunt of the economic crisis residents took to the streets, burning businesses and government buildings, setting up roadblocks and battling with police and attacking municipal councillors. What made the Vaal uprising, which soon spread to most parts of the country, so significant was the linkage that communities made between local grievances and national political and economic change. This uprising did not emanate from the confines of (UDF) national leadership intent on realising specifically formulated political goals, but was the direct expression of grassroots politicisation of local material and social grievances that involved both (employed) union members and (unemployed) community residents. Here was the seed of a genuine people's alliance that contained within it, an equally genuine alternative to apartheid-capitalist oppression.

Now that several bridges had been built between unions and communities, the scale and intensity of resistance to the political and socio-economic exigencies of the apartheid-capitalist system increased, as did repression from the apartheid state. Subsequent unity talks between various unions resulted in the formation of a new union federation, COSATU, in 1985 (Baskin, 1991). COSATU brought together unions that had been in FOSATU, several independent unions and the huge National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). By doing so, much of the division that had been part of the populist-workerist debate was temporarily buried. Linking up with community and student groups and bringing with it the militancy of hundreds of thousands of workers, COSATU provided a much needed cohesion and direction to the ongoing resistance.

However, it is instructive that during his speech at COSATU's launch, the newly elected General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa stated that: "If workers are to lead the struggle for liberation we have to win the confidence of other sectors of society. But if we are to get into alliances with other progressive organisations, it must be on terms that are favourable to us as workers" (as cited in Baskin, 1991, 54). Such ambiguity no doubt had those outside of COSATU scratching their heads but this was soon laid to rest when COSATU leaders travelled to Lusaka to meet with the externalised ANC/SACP leadership and endorsed the Freedom Charter; thus, allying COSATU to both organisations, and thus also to the UDF. The compromise was in the form of an 'understanding' that COSATU would be an independent union federation (Seekings, 2000), although it was never explained how such independence would be realised through a formal alliance with specific political parties.

Indeed, by tendering itself to the ANC/SACP camp, COSATU had placed a large part of the organised working class and its anti-capitalist struggle within a contradictory strategic and organisational framework. On the one hand, COSATU committed itself to prioritising a multi-class approach to national liberation in which the 'people' would now be constitutive of all social classes divided along racial lines; on the other, COSATU had to subsume a particular ideological party line, with the Freedom Charter representing the specific programmatic reflection of a political organisation, the ANC, seeking to govern the country.

These contradictions quickly came to the fore when in 1996 COSATU's Central Executive Committee used the term 'progressive alliance' to refer to organisations that supported the UDF and ANC. What this clearly meant was that COSATU would not ally with those community organisations, unions and political formations that did not do so. This was confirmed soon thereafter when COSATU refused to meet with AZAPO (Baskin, 1991). What this represented was the practical application of unions being in a formalised alliance with a political party. It was a decision that would be at the heart of animating much of the future relationship between COSATU, its affiliate unions and community organisations.

What kind of alliances, what kind of power?

Despite such contradictions, COSATU and its expanding union membership became arguably, the leading force in the intensified struggle for political, social and economic liberation that was waged during the late 1980s. Both the federation and individual unions were deeply involved in community struggles around issues such as transportation, housing and rent, and basic public services (Barchiesi and Kenny 2008; Paret, 2013a). When the UDF was banned by the apartheid state in 1988, it was COSATU that provided the necessary organisational muscle to the newly formed Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) as well as the legal umbrella necessary for continued mass mobilisation, largely through strikes. Importantly, it was also the carrying out of consistent political education both within the unions and in conjunction with community organisations that allowed for the necessary ideological and political linkages between labour and community struggles to be made (Ronnie, 2013).

However, tensions around the issue of political as well as strategic and ideological allegiance to the ANC/SACP was never far below the surface despite what might have appeared as a largely unified internal, anti-apartheid mass struggle under the ANC-Alliance's banner. Pre-figuring a similar, if historically and politically differentiated, stance over 25 years later, it was NUMSA which criticised the nature of the MDM, arguing "that the new alliance should comprise anti-capitalist rather than merely anti-apartheid organisations, should include non-Charterist as well as Charterist groupings, and should have permanent structures" (Seekings, 2000, 231). In any case, NUMSA's critique was already behind the curve.

By 1989, behind-the-scenes negotiations between the ANC (mainly led by the still imprisoned Nelson Mandela) and the apartheid state were well-advanced; similarly, the exiled ANC had long been talking with both international and domestic capital to find common ground concerning a post-apartheid South Africa (McKinley, 1997). The new terrain of negotiations politics was fast displacing whatever ground the labour and community struggles were attempting to occupy and in the process, creating increasingly fertile conditions for "centralised power and decision-making in the hands of a negotiating elite" (Pillay, 1996, 338).

Parallel to the creeping dominance of an elite-controlled 'political reform' process through negotiations, the apartheid state had embarked on an 'economic reform' process that heralded the long gestating adoption of neoliberalism. The establishment of a government privatisation unit in 1987 opened the doors to the

commercialisation of the Electricity Supply Commission (Eskom) as well as the Telecommunications Authority (Telkom). This was then followed by the wholesale privatisation of the Iron and Steel Corporation (ISCOR) in 1989 (van Driel, 2003, 65). In response, SAMWU adopted the first-ever explicit anti-privatisation campaign resolution of a South African union at its Second Congress in the same year. It called on COSATU and the entire democratic movement to initiate an anti-privatisation campaign (SAMWU, 1989). The call was quickly integrated into a broader wave of strikes in late 1989 and early 1990 that involved SAMWU and several other COSATU affiliate unions as well as some community organisations. Although the unions called for an end to privatisation, the main thrust of the strikes was centred on issues of racial discrimination, wages and working conditions (van Driel, 2003, 71). For their part, the ANC and SACP were silent.

While the strikes did contribute to the apartheid state postponing the “full privatisation of core State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs)” (van Driel, 2003, 72), the die was cast. Much like formal apartheid, the neoliberal horse had already bolted from the stable. The very state that had based its existence on the systemic oppression of the majority of people (i.e., the public) who lived under it, was now facilitating its transformation into a body geared towards “regulating and promoting the private sector as opposed to serving public provision” (Fine and Hall, 2012, 56). On the terrain of public services, people’s power had seemingly been trumped by the political party and elite variety.

After the release of liberation movement leaders from apartheid’s prisons and the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and other political parties in February 1990, the strategic locus of resistance and ‘people’s power’ shifted even further onto a negotiations terrain. This was not only in respect of the ANC and SACP but also of the two other ‘arms’ of the Charterist Alliance, COSATU and the UDF/MDM whose mobilisational energies were now being largely directed at responding to state-supported violence and to push the fledgling political negotiations between the apartheid state and the ANC/SACP along (McKinley, 1997, 104-107). Following the same general negotiation strategy as the ANC, COSATU had become involved in a parallel negotiating process with capital and the state. After signing accords with the apartheid state and domestic capital, providing for participation in the state’s National Manpower Commission, COSATU devoted much of its energies to institutionalising bargaining agreements between unions, employers and the state (McKinley, 1997, 121).

Similarly, a range of community organisations had entered into negotiations with local white councils about the provision of public services. This involved issues such as; “highly-subsidised services, a single metropolitan tax base ... [and] the development of formulas for democratic local government” (Bond, 2005, 57). With the core leadership and organisation of what had constituted the UDF/MDM now absorbed into the ANC itself, the remaining community ‘civics’, after holding talks with the ANC, formed a new umbrella body called the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), which unofficially became the fourth member of the ANC/SACP/COSATU Alliance (Zuern, 2004, 6)

Combined, these shifts by the labour and community movements resulted in the curtailment of mass struggle by the broad working class. Although both COSATU

and SANCO leaders continued to stress (just like ANC leaders) that their own negotiations process was in the interests of their constituency and needed to be mass-led, the reality was that ordinary workers and community members often had little say in decisions made in the negotiated spaces and forums. The perceived necessity of seeking common ground with capital and the apartheid state for some kind of social contract in the drive to restructure (albeit on a more progressive bent) an ailing South African local government and macro-economy, meant that mass struggle by the broad working class would need to be contained within the parameters of that very negotiating process. Within the broader strategic framework of ongoing political negotiations involving their political representatives, the ANC and SACP, the demands and struggles of the mass would, of necessity have to be muted in order for the democratic 'deal' to be delivered.

A classic example of this involved the issue of nationalisation. While most workers continued to demand nationalisation (particularly of monopoly capital) as a means towards socialisation of the means of production and the provision of public services (COSATU, 1992), ANC leaders were busy trying to convince their broad alliance that nationalisation was no longer 'an ideological attachment' of the organisation (The Star, 17 September 1991). Another example was the COSATU-led, two day strike in 1991 against the state's unilateral implementation of a Value-Added Tax (VAT). Although the strike was impressive, with huge numbers of workers involved and community residents coming out in support, VAT was not rescinded and soon high-level political talks between the ANC and the state resumed centre stage.

No sooner had the ANC overwhelmingly won the democratic election of April 1994, than the new government began to give institutional form to the corporatism that had now come to dominate ANC-Alliance politics. The National Economic, Development & Labour Council (NEDLAC) was formed, made up of 'civil society' (consisting mostly of SANCO and carefully chosen NGOs), labour (consisting of recognised/organised union federations) and the private sector (consisting of representatives from capital/big business). This was soon followed by legislation such as the Non-Profit Act of 1997 and the creation of institutions like the Directorate of Non-Profit Organisations (which required NGOs/CBOs to officially register with the state), and the National Development Agency ("to direct financial resources to the sector") (Ballard et al, 2006b, 397). All of this fit comfortably within the push "for a more formalised civil society constituency as part of a developmental model where formally organised groups participate in official structures to claim public resources" and where "the role of such organised groups is constructed along the lines of official government programmes, without space to contest the fundamentals of those programmes" (Greenberg and Ndlovu, 2004, 32-33).

Simultaneously, previous commitments to a state-led "public sector restructuring" (even if watered down from the *Freedom Charter's* explicit call for nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy) contained in the ANC's main policy platform, the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP), were quickly back-pedalled (Habib and Padayachee, 2000). Instead, the ANC government came out with a 1995 paper entitled 'The Restructuring of State Assets' which grouped SOEs into three categories: those with a clear role in the provision of basic needs; those that have a public role but are not essential; and, those with no role in meeting basic needs (NALEDI, 1999). Less than five months later, the government

announced the partial privatisation of “South African Airways and Telkom and the complete sale of several other SOEs”. Even though COSATU almost immediately responded with a day of action (albeit on a national holiday and with little to no involvement of communities), their threat to hold a two-day national stay-away a month later evaporated after negotiations with the government (van Driel, 2003, 67).

The end result was the signing of a ‘National Framework Agreement on the Restructuring of State Assets’ (NFA) in February 1996 between the government and all the main trade union federations (which included the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA) and the National Council of Trade Unions - NACTU). Crucially, the NFA said nothing about reversing the privatisation of SOEs or putting a halt to the more widespread privatisation process that was also underway at the local government level. Rather, it simply stated that the government’s aim was to restructure certain state assets and in doing so, it would “consult” with trade unions through the auspices of NEDLAC on a “case-by-case basis” (Department of Public Enterprises, 1996). Not only was this in direct contradiction to COSATU’s clear ideological opposition to privatisation and support for the practical expansion and protection of SOEs to provide public services as captured in its 1992 Economic Policy Conference (Lehulere, 2003), it severely limited the ability of the labour movement to mobilise union and community members against future privatisations. Above all, it placed the labour movement in a position of “co-determining the ‘restructuring of state assets’ with government on a neoliberal basis” (van Driel, 2003, 73), notwithstanding SAMWU’s lone voice of disagreement.

Thus, even by the time that the ANC government went full neoliberal steam ahead with the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy in 1996, the labour movement, and more specifically COSATU, had placed itself and millions of workers within a corporatist strategic framework that effectively undermined any politically principled, democratic and collectively-enjoined struggle both against, and for public alternatives to, privatisation. As Panitch (1981, 24) importantly states, while corporatism requires “institutional arrangements ... the essence of corporatism is not institutional but political”. Placed within the context of a globally dominant neoliberal capitalism which the ANC government had already chosen to embrace, what was really being instituted was a politics of social and class control (Catchpole and Cooper, 2003, 14); a neoliberal corporatism in which participating labour and community movements would now be expected to be reliable institutional partners through their being reliable political partners.

Resistance, division and realignment

The only union in South Africa that made consistent efforts during the mid-late 1990s to not only oppose privatisation within the institutional and policy frameworks of the new democratic state but also to forge a mass-based anti-privatisation campaign involving communities and other civil society actors, was SAMWU. As the former SAMWU General Secretary Roger Ronnie has averred, “SAMWU’s realisation of the need for real public services owned and managed by the public sector/state drove the desire to ally with community organisations” (Ronnie, 2013). It was on this foundation that SAMWU engaged in a range of more focused campaigns, such as the struggle against the privatisation of ambulance services (1995) as well as in opposition to the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council’s *Igoli 2002* blueprint to

privatise the city's municipal services in the late 1990s. These were part of the union's broader national anti-privatisation campaign that was waged throughout the late 1990s and which most always involved a serious and sustained effort to forge alliances with community organisations. Indeed, SAMWU stood out as the one part of the labour movement which attempted to link the struggle against privatisation to mass mobilisation (of its own membership, communities and the larger public) and then again to building a new kind of public servant and service (van Driel, 2003, 75).

In a 1997 internal document on 'How to Deal with Contracting-Out in Local Government', SAMWU set out what kind of alternative (to privatisation) it was trying to struggle for: "The alternative is not some major formula that can be pulled out of the pocket and put on the table ... [it] is to keep the service in the public sector ... which says that the public sector can be 'turned around' so that it is efficient, responsive, effective, equitable and affordable" (SAMWU, 1997). In its 1998 'National Anti-Privatisation Campaign Plan' document, SAMWU argued that, "we need to turn to our communities ... we must show communities that privatisation is not in their interests ... we need to win community support to reform the public sector ... and take up issues of community representation and participation in public sector reform" (SAMWU, 1998). SAMWU tried to put these perspectives into practical action in its campaigns; for example, in water campaigns targeting the Hillstar community in Cape Town (Wainwright, 2013, 14) and the privatisation of Nelspruit's water services (van Driel, 2003, 76).

Yet, a combination of internal union weaknesses, the unwillingness of COSATU to fully back an anti-privatisation campaign and the exigencies of the ANC-Alliance and state's neoliberal corporatist framework undermined what could have been a complete game-changer for both the public sector and labour-community alliances to defend and transform public services. As with corporatism, the 'essence' of the challenge was a political one.

At the union level, besides weak linkages between rank-and-file workers and the campaign (Ronnie, 2013), the crucial missing ingredients, as made clear by the SAMWU leadership itself, was a "very distinct lack of political will to vigorously take up the struggle against privatisation" linked to an ambivalence towards "working with organisations and persons who do not all fit into what constitutes the Alliance" (SAMWU, 2002). Within COSATU it was a case of a huge gap between (supporting) rhetoric and practical support, along with its "willingness in practice to press consistently for the macro-economic and infrastructural priorities that would enable micro attempts at public restructuring to be generalised" (Wainwright, 2014). At the level of the ANC-Alliance/state, it was the dominance of a top down, bureaucratic-heavy politics that privileged behind-the-scenes talks amongst the respective leaderships and also within prescribed, state-managed corporatist institutions.

The combined result was the gradual weakening and ultimate side-lining of SAMWU's anti-privatisation campaign and the further institutionalisation of a neoliberal-inspired 'restructuring' of public assets and services as evinced through the signing of the 'Framework for Restructuring Municipal Service Provision' in 1998. Additionally, the two main institutional and legislative frameworks governing labour-state-capital relations, NEDLAC and the *Labour Relations Act* rapidly became vehicles for "specific intra-union and worker issues removed from the local level"

which catalysed a growing insularity of union members, increasingly de-linked from community needs and struggles (Ronnie, 2013). In turn, the material gains for many public sector workers that were derived from the corporatist framework increased the “social distance” between those workers and poor communities whose material realities were moving in the opposite direction thanks to the neoliberal ‘restructuring’ of both the economy as well as the public provision of services (Blake, 2013a).

As the neoliberal agenda proceeded apace, so too did its social and economic impacts. At the core of the new ANC state’s pursuit of ‘nation building’ and the construction of what has been termed the “moral economy” (Hemson, 1998) was a shifting notion and form of citizenship. Naidoo (2010, 175) captures the effects of this shift succinctly: “...’the citizen’ would come to be treated and made as ‘the customer’...a logic of payment and individual responsibility would come to determine the delivery of basic services.” This shifting of citizenship also involved the rearticulation of wage labour from “its exploitative and agency lacking role under apartheid” to a post-apartheid “path to citizenships rights, socioeconomic emancipation and redistribution” (Murray, 2013, 57). As Barchiesi (2011, 74) argues, this meant that post-apartheid citizens were now “required to shed ‘dependency’ habits, moderate their claims, defer social expectations, suppress resentment over class inequalities, and place work at the centre of responsible conduct.”

The macro-social import of this neoliberal social engineering ensured that ‘free market’ forces and individualism were now at the forefront of shaping both the social and political relations of the broad working class and their organisations. Although a COSATU-initiated ‘Future of the Unions’ report in 1997 had already sounded a warning that a failure to organise casualised/informal workers would mean that COSATU membership would be “based in a shrinking section of the working class” (Paret, 2013b, 15), there was ample evidence to confirm that this is exactly what was happening. By the early 2000s, the number of casualised/informal workers and unemployed, made up between 30-40 percent of the entire South African working age population (Altman, 2006), while COSATU membership was becoming dominated by permanent workers who made up “more than 90 percent of members” by the mid-2000s (Buhlungu, 2010, 107). What this translated into was both an increasingly fragmented broad working class with “multiple relational identities” (Spronk, 2007, Ruiters, 2005) and a widening socio-economic and organisational separation between (employed) organised workers and (casualised/unemployed) poor communities (Qotole et al, 2001, Murray, 2013).

Added to this stratification matrix were the rise of union investment companies (McKinley, 1999) and the corresponding emergence of an “entrepreneurial culture” amongst union leaders and officials (Buhlungu, 2010; von Holdt, 2002). The corresponding change in personal lifestyles and approaches to mass struggle, especially involving struggles emanating from poor communities outside of the formal boundaries of the capitalist economy, increasingly led to an acceptance of “the normalisation of bourgeois social and political relations” and a separation between “anti-capitalist and anti-privatisation struggles” (Ronnie, 2013).

On the ‘other side’ of the working class coin, the impacts of the neoliberal onslaught were devastating in the opposite extreme. Besides massive job losses, accompanied by all the attendant social and economic damage to already poor families and

communities, the ANC-managed state also implemented basic needs policies that turned many basic services into market commodities. This was facilitated by a drastic decrease in national government grants/subsidies to municipalities and support for the development of financial instruments for privatised delivery. In turn, this forced local government to turn towards commercialisation and privatisation of basic services as a means of generating the revenue no longer provided by the national state (Macdonald, 2000). It also laid the foundations for an enabling environment of patronage, corruption and factional politics as well as a huge escalation in the costs of basic services and a concomitant increase in the use of cost-recovery mechanisms such as water and electricity cut-offs that necessarily hit poor people the most. By the turn of the century, millions more poor South Africans had also experienced cut-offs and evictions as the result of the neo-liberal orgy (Macdonald and Smith, 2002).

It was within this overall, multi-faceted political, ideological, economic, social and organisational context that a range of new community organisations and social movements surfaced (Ballard et al, 2006; McKinley and Naidoo, 2004; Naidoo and Veriava, 2003). For these new forces, SANCO had long ceased to be an effective community voice, having time and again shown its subservience to the political and organisational dictates of the ANC-Alliance (Mayekiso, 2013). In almost all cases, they emerged in the very spaces opened up as a result of the failure of the tactical approaches and strategic visions of the traditional political and civil society formations to offer any meaningful responses to changing conditions affecting their equally traditional constituencies (McKinley and Naidoo, 2004, 14-15).

Also, the combined effects of labour market and public service 'restructuring' meant that in most communities the loss of formal employment translated into the loss of an ability to pay for commodified public services (Barchiesi, 2006). This 'perfect storm' of neoliberalism thus brought together those inhabiting an extended and flexible 'community' of work and life whose organisational form replaced the formal workplace as the epicentre of social solidarity. Since the vast majority of those in the kind of 'community' that constituted these new forces represented different strata within the broad working class, strata whose labour/work cannot be formally 'measured' and thus organised on a more explicit capital-labour relational nexus, they were almost immediately seen and treated by most of the labour movement as secondary to the material and political and organisational positionality of formal, organised workers. Despite serious efforts from sections within the labour movement, mostly within SAMWU, the dominant politics and practices of the labour movement in response to the changing composition of the broad working class and the enforced boundaries of corporatism under neoliberalism, made the possibilities of forging collective solidarities and struggles extremely difficult.

Not surprisingly, in most instances the new organisations had little or no union involvement. This was the case of the Concerned Citizens' Forum (CCF) which brought together urban communities in direct response to evictions in Durban (Desai, 2002), and the collection of rural organisations from across the country who came together to form the Landless People's Movement (Greenberg, 2006). However, social movements such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) in the Gauteng Province initially brought together a wide range of organisations, individual activists and political groupings which included the local branches of the South African

Students Council (SASCO), the SACP, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and the Independent Municipal & Amalgamated Trade Union (IMATU). Also on board were the provincial structures of both SANCO and SAMWU (McKinley, 2012, 11)

Here then was a potential example of the kind of labour-community alliance centred on public services and crossing traditional political and organisational boundaries that many had desired since the heady days of the anti-apartheid struggles in the 1980s. As the 'new' South Africa headed into the 21st century there were at least some signs that the long class war was starting to take a different shape.

Whither post-apartheid labour-community alliances?

Undermining the bases for unity

Despite the promise of the APF as an emergent example of the potential of labour and community to come together in a formal alliance to both oppose privatisation and begin to forge collective public service alternatives, it did not take long before serious cracks started to show. As the experiences of the 1990s had already begun to reveal, at the heart of the labour-community problematic were the macro-demands and impacts of COSATU's political and organisational alliance with the ANC/SACP vis-à-vis incipient initiatives and struggles taking place outside of its purview. No sooner had the APF, now with many more community organisations on board, begun to offer public critiques of and engage in direct action against, the privatisation agenda of the ANC government than the various union structures which were part of the APF pulled out. By the end of the first year of its existence, SAMWU (Gauteng), SACP Johannesburg Central Branch, NEHAWU (Wits Branch) and SASCO (Wits Branch) had all left, charging that the APF had become too anti-ANC and anti-government. What this unfortunately confirmed once again was that an independent, politically radical community-based movement was unpalatable to most of the leadership of those forces allied to the ANC (McKinley, 2012b, 11).

Regardless, the rank-and-file of many COSATU unions continued to press for further action against the increasingly devastating personal and material consequences of privatisation, wrapped up as it was within the blanket of neoliberalism. Such pressure from below could not be ignored by the COSATU leadership who responded with harsh public statements about the government's continued pursuit of privatisation and announced plans for a full-scale 'anti-privatisation' national strike (McKinley, 2003, 58-59). While the August 2001 strike was a 'success' in relation to the impressive numbers of workers who participated, along with active support from the APF and other new community and social movements across the country, the COSATU leadership consciously failed to link the criticisms of privatisation to the ANC's clear embracing of neoliberal policies but rather adopted a de-politicised and individualist approach, attributing the privatisation problem to technocrats within government (van Driel, 2003, Lehulere, 2003). As a result, any political and organisational momentum for further union action as well as labour-community alliances was effectively buried. This was confirmed when the COSATU leadership held 'talks' with the ANC soon after the strike and later announced that a proposed

follow-up strike action in early 2002 would now not take place (van Driel, 2003, 78). As ex-SAMWU General Secretary Roger Ronnie confirms in respect of the union's attempts to forge a national anti-privatisation alliance with communities, COSATU "interfered politically" (Ronnie, 2013).

Reflecting the pattern that had begun to emerge in the 1990s, the leadership of COSATU and that from most of its affiliate unions, had once again made opportunistic use of the mass. They did so for their own intra-ANC Alliance political purposes and as a means of managing and controlling the desires and expectations of not only their own membership but of the broad working class as a whole. As van Driel (2003, 75) states, "the general pattern has been for COSATU to announce protest action as a method to force the Government to the negotiating table and then, once achieved, to call off the planned action, sometimes without consultation with the members or communities involved." In the words of former Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union (CEPPAWU) leader and APF Chairperson John Appolis, what COSATU leaders really mean when they talk about working with community/social movements is "giving social movements' direction. In other words, social movements must get subordinated to the positions that they [COSATU] hold" (as quoted in Buhlungu, 2006, 78). For another long-time, senior NUMSA official Dinga Sikwebu it is also a matter of the "the leadership and conservative layers" [in COSATU] gaining "status and all the other perks" from the ANC. According to Sikwebu, "this relationship between the ANC and the union movements will always be there because they feed into each other" (as quoted in Bramble and Barchiesi, 2003, 224).

Such a relationship also imbibed the ANC's political propaganda campaign that began soon after the emergence of many of the new community/social movements and the various efforts, like the APF, to link labour and community struggles around opposition to privatisation, and which sought to portray these movements and their activists as 'criminals' and 'anarchists'. The campaign kicked into high gear after the new movements had staged a successful mobilisation and march targeting the neoliberal-framed World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD - soon followed by the national strike) when the ANC leadership accused all those who were actively critiquing and opposing its neo-liberal policies of being an "ultra- left ... waging a counter-revolutionary struggle against the ANC and our democratic government", and of siding with the "bourgeoisie and its supporters" (ANC, 2002). Then-President Mbeki waded in by claiming publicly that, "this ultra-left works to implant itself within our ranks ... it hopes to capture control of our movement and transform it into an instrument for the realisation of its objectives" (Mbeki, 2002).

These attacks laid the groundwork for an approach that distinguished between 'bad' and 'good' civil society actors, something that was to become dominant throughout the ANC-Alliance and the government and which henceforth would fundamentally shape any subsequent relationships between independent community organisations and COSATU. Organisations such as the APF, the AEC and the LPM that linked the neoliberal agenda of the ANC and the state to the privatisation programme and larger economic and social assault on the broader working class were to henceforth be considered as unacceptable partners and indeed, as virtual enemies to the 'national liberation movement'. On the other hand, COSATU would develop broader and more structured relationships with organisations such as HIV-Aids consortium,

the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) along with various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) grouped together in official collectives such as the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO). It should have come as little surprise then that during the following year the ANC's Deputy Secretary General, Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele publicly distinguished "positive social formations" and those with whom "we have a bit of a problem". She added: "We are a young democracy ... we need a consensus. So we cannot behave in a manner like societies (that have been) independent for many years" (as quoted in Merten, 2003).

Crucially, this self-serving division of civil society according to the political, ideological and organisational dictates and needs of the various leaderships of the ANC-Alliance codified a parallel binary. In this case it was applied to the substantive approach to what constituted acceptable ways and means to oppose and forge alternatives to privatisation. So, proposals such as those of the APF (2006) for "independent and democratic mass working class organisations" in which ordinary workers and residents of poor communities would be "active in the formulation of alternatives" through, for example, the convening of "people's assemblies ... where social, political and economic issues of direct concern" would be "openly discussed and acted upon", were rejected and de-legitimised due to their political and organisational origins. However, approaches that sanctified intra-ANC Alliance processes, privileged politically controlled government spaces for 'consultation' and involved only those formations which were not overtly and publicly critical of the macro-developmental trajectory of the ANC and the state, were embraced and legitimised.

One of the immediate consequences was the translation of this double-barrelled conceptual-ideological attack into a physical assault, led by the coercive forces of the state, on identified community activists and organisations. Besides the arrest and imprisonment of, hundreds of community activists across the country before, during and after the WSSD (Bond, 2002, Kimani, 2003), the next several years saw a coordinated attempt by the ANC-run state, often buttressed by state-hired private security personnel and local ANC politicians, to not only actively repress the organisations involved but to crush the spirit of community resistance. While neither of these attempts wholly succeeded, what they did do was to divert huge amounts of the limited human and material resources possessed by community organisations and social movements that might otherwise have been spent on actually building organisation and catalysing alliances, into a defensive oriented political and organisational mode of operation and practice (McKinley and Veriava, 2005). In the process, they also contributed to substantially undermining the varied bases for unity between labour and community, helped along by the deafening silence of most of the labour movement.

Within those social movements and community organisations that had actually managed to forge some kind of alliance with labour such as the APF and the AEC, there were also many internal weaknesses and divisions (McKinley, 2012b; Runciman, 2012). At one level these had to do with internal issues of personalities, pre-figured vanguardist politics and the tendency to place far too much time and energy on endless debates about desired organisational forms as well as critiquing COSATU and the ANC-Alliance, as opposed to grassroots organising and occupation of available political spaces within an increasingly divided labour

movement (Gentle, 2013; McKinley, 2012a; Veotte, 2013). On another level, there were often too “few instances of the [respective] membership working together ... little knowledge of the daily struggles and campaigns of the other” and a yawning gap between the “negotiations culture” of the unions versus the “campaigning ‘culture’ of the community organisations (Xali, 2005).

Combined, these varied weaknesses and divisions served to feed mutually-reinforcing and largely negative perceptions about the ‘other’, from both the labour and community ‘sides’. From the union ‘side’ there was a clear perception amongst many that community organisations were not only ‘anti-ANC’ but reactive and based on single issues without much ideological under-pinning and longer-term strategies for democratic transformation (Ludwig, 2013). From the community ‘side’, many started to view unions as elitist given what they saw and experienced as union absence from their own struggles as well as disinterest in organising causal/informal workers within communities (Barchiesi and Kenny, 2008; D’Sa, 2014; Ngwane, 2012). By the time the seismic events leading up to the ANC’s Polokwane Conference and subsequent rise to power of Jacob Zuma from the mid-2000s onwards were underway, the bases for unity necessary for meaningful and sustained labour-community alliances were already largely lying in tatters.

Impacts of the ‘Zunami’¹

In the years immediately before and after the ANC’s 52nd National Conference in the provincial city of Polokwane in late 2007, much of the politics and practical work of COSATU (in conjunction with the SACP) was tied directly to internal battles within the ANC-led Alliance. This was in direct proportionate relation to ongoing personal, positional and factional power struggles between the ‘camps’ of former South African and ANC President Thabo Mbeki, and former Deputy President (and at the time ANC Deputy President) Jacob Zuma (McKinley, 2012a, 28).

Amongst other stated reasons, the leadership of COSATU and that of most of its affiliates became key supporters of the Zuma faction on the basis that he represented forces that would ‘reclaim’ the ANC and its Alliance as well as set a new ‘developmental’ path for the country that would move away from the previous policy emphases on privatisation that had been the work of the neoliberal technocrats such as Mbeki (Gentle, 2008; Pillay, 2011; van der Walt, 2009). However what has since become clear in practice, is that the ‘developmental state’ path of the Zuma faction, which has itself undergone numerous intra-factional splits since Polokwane, has been a great deal more about placing (and keeping) certain loyal individuals into positions of power within the ANC and the state than it has had to do with any meaningful action towards reversing the neoliberal agenda (Botiveau, 2013). Paret’s (2013b) research also shows that in the post-Polokwane period, the Zuma faction’s declared focus on state intervention has not, in any fundamental way, even begun to address the various forms of privatisation that have continued to be pursued with vigour. In this way, the entire terrain of privatisation and the provision of public services has become, under the Zuma-led government, more of a policy tool for satisfying factional and party political interests than anything else. Thus, even while current Zuma acolytes such as Minister of Public Enterprises Malusi Gigaba have publicly stated that it is not the policy of the ANC and the state to privatise SOEs, the

reality is that outsourcing, commercialisation and corporatisation of SOEs has proceeded apace (McKinley, 2013).

As a result for example, the approach to local government administration and its public service delivery mandate under the Zuma government has remained firmly within the neoliberal frame (Pillay, 2011). All macro-development decisions affecting poor communities have now become dominated by politico-bureaucratic and economic elites with democratic representatives having largely become rubber stamps. Networks of patronage - which incubate and sustain growing corruption - increasingly drive what formal participation there is and determine who does and does not benefit from 'delivery'. On this front, even the ANC as well as the COSATU leaderships have admitted as much in the recent past (Boyle, 2010; Majavu, 2011). Formal, institutional channels for citizen participation have become even more politically manipulated than before and an atmosphere has been created in which there is fear of dissent/freedom of expression and an almost complete lack of access to information related to municipal budgets, services and associated mismanagement. This has led to the closing down of a sizeable portion of popular space for contestation and accountability and to increased socio-political conflict. Linked to the playing of the 'developmental' policy game as above, such realities at the community level undermine any parallel actions and interventions of the state on the technical/capacity front since these will continue to be seen and experienced as top-down, imposed 'solutions' in and over which ordinary people have little say and control.

The various impacts on community organisations and more generally, on residents of poor communities was, and continues to be, significant. In the APF for example, while there were numerous and organised discussions and debates centred on the ideological content and political character of the Zuma-led power-block, there was little doubt that at the community level the left-populist rhetoric of Zuma created both short-term confusion and a variegated 'turn' away from collectively organised and independent movement-community politics and struggle towards institutionalised party politics and a creeping (Zuma-inspired) social conservatism (McKinley, 2012a). More specifically, the rapid and widespread crises of public service delivery and democratic accountability in the most politically marginalised and poverty-stricken communities have, over the last few years, evinced a double 'movement'.

On one hand, the contemporary social front now directly mirrors this overall politics. An escalating hyper-commoditised daily existence has produced a situation in which the vast majority of those residing in poor communities are engaged in a desperate struggle for social relevancy and location. The result has been an intensification of social division, stratification and dysfunction, now more than ever driven-on by increased competition for limited social benefits, services and productive opportunities. As alluded to earlier, in a Manichean twist, scarce waged labour has become the hoped-for light at the end of the tunnel, the main 'prize' for social inclusion and stability as against the dark and desolate recesses of utter social marginalisation. Access to state-serviced and controlled social grants, and even then most often subject to considerations of political patronage and party electoral support, now represent a barely inclusivist second 'prize'. A stretched civil society is being increasingly 'asked' to fill the massive gaps in between but the larger reality is one in which the social consequences of a failing system are being individualised.

Simultaneously, there have been growing levels of tension/conflict that have manifested in various forms of local, community protests and violence most often involving the state's police forces as well as local politicians and elites (Alexander, 2010; von Holdt, 2013). According to one, multi-year academic study the number of community protests have increased by almost 150% from the period 2005-2008 to the period from 2009-2012 when they averaged 309 per year (Runciman, 2013). The combined waves of protest/violence have also involved union members, mostly those occupying the lowest paying jobs in the mining sector striking over wages and working conditions. This was the case at the Marikana mine in August 2012 when 10 miners were killed in intra-union violence, followed by the massacre of 35 striking miners by police, with another 70 injured (Alexander et al., 2012). There have also been scores of community protesters shot dead by police forces over the last several years (*The Sowetan*, 24 January 2014).

Cumulatively, this cocktail of constructed dysfunction, division and conflict has made the possibilities of labour-community alliances centred on public services even more difficult and tenuous than had been the case prior to the rise of the 'Zunami'.

Three cases of contemporary alliances

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)

Formed in 1996, the SDCEA is an environmental justice non-governmental organisation based in south Durban comprising 16 formally affiliated organisations, all of which are local and community based. Its main activities are centred on lobbying, advocacy, reporting, researching and mobilisation/direct action as part of an overall struggle "against environmental racism and for environmental justice and health" (SDCEA, 2013). While community organisations constitute its formal base, SDCEA has, since the early years of its formation, worked with a variety of unions that cut across different federations and also include independent unions.

The main vehicle for these 'informal' alliances with the labour movement has been specific campaigns, educational activities and protests/mobilisations and, as SDCEA coordinator Des D'Sa (2014) points out, these "inherently involve an anti-privatisation politics" since, they "seek to enforce government regulation on the safety, health and environmental fronts ... in other words, to force government to do its job". However, there have also been a significant number of activities with unions focused on the defence of jobs in local industries/facilities, both private and state-owned.

Below is a select list of chronologically ordered activities that SDCEA has undertaken over the last several years with unions which can be said to involve, in one form or another, public services (D'Sa, 2014):

- 2008 - A successful protest action with the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATTAWU) that prevented a Chinese shipment of arms to Zimbabwe from off-loading at (the partially privatised) Durban harbour, along with an ongoing campaign with the same union to prevent illegal trucking companies from operating out of the harbour.
- 2008 - A series of educational workshops involving CEPPAWU and other unions on enforcing regulations around 'industrial worker safety' as well as

environment-related accidents and incidents in Durban and how these affect workers and communities

- 2009 - A successful campaign with SAMWU and also involving the NGO, StreetNet (which assists informal traders and the homeless) to prevent the shutting down of the city-owned Durban early morning Market
- 2011 - As part of an overall campaign for climate justice leading up to the international Conference of the Parties¹⁷ (COP - the governing body of the Convention on Biological Diversity) event held in Durban, a series of workshops/forums for the labour movement were held across the province on struggles and activities planned around the COP17 meeting. These focused specifically on climate change and associated impacts on poverty, health, human rights and the environment. The campaign culminated in various educational activities and a mass march during the meeting
- 2012 - An ongoing campaign involving several unions as well as other social movements in Durban, in opposition to the state's plans to expand the Durban port/harbour (which involves further privatisation). Besides research for advocacy purposes, a series of pickets, marches and media work have been undertaken
- 2013 - An ongoing campaign involving the South African Democratic teachers Union (SADTU) on environmental education in local schools

What has made these informal, largely issue and campaign-based alliances with the labour movement an integral and consistent part of SDCEA's activities is that the relationships are often "facilitated by union members who are part of the communities" that make up the SDCEA and that the coordinator himself was a worker and union member employed by one of the refineries in the area for many years (D'Sa, 2014). It has also helped that in south Durban the communities are located in direct proximity to the majority state-owned Durban Port/harbour as well as various private refineries and other industries that form the backbone of employment opportunities in the area. Nonetheless, because of mass retrenchments that have taken place within the local work force over the last decade in particular, a large number of the workers who belong to the SDCEA are now in casualised/informal employment. This has led to increasingly difficult relations with both the main COSATU unions as well as independent unions since SDCEA has found that "it is most often only when the interests of the union's permanent workforce are involved that they get involved [with the SDCEA] ... and when they do they often want to dominate/lead but not match this with practical actions and solidarity" (D'Sa, 2014).

This is confirmed by those casual workers themselves who are also members of the community organisations belonging to SDCEA. They all agree that unions "only come when there is an issue over wages" and that there is very little to no local connection between unions and [casualised] workers in the community. As a result, they have been forced to work through labour brokers who, they argue, "are simply interested in making money and favouring those they know". A local labour broker operating as an 'independent union' somewhat ironically agreed, saying that "there is often a negative relationship with them such as when we cooperate with corporates [and are] seen as 'sell outs'" (Alexander, 2014). As one of the casual workers stated; "as casual workers we are in the dark...we are only told to come to meetings and pay our [union] subscriptions" (SDCEA Focus Group, 2014). The 'informal' nature of

the alliances between the SDCEA and unions can therefore be seen as one of the outcomes of the neoliberal-inspired stratification of the broad working class and the clear failure of established unions to respond to these shifts and thus to reach out and organise casual workers as an integral part of union work and organising.

Another factor that impacts on the SDCEA's alliances with labour, are the prevalence of confidential contracts between workers and employers that explicitly state that workers should not have membership in community organisations, as a way of preventing worker activism against the employer outside of the institutional boundaries of union-employer relations. What makes this harder to fight against is that the dominant chemical and petro-chemical industries in the area rationalise this 'prohibition' on community activism by reference to security concerns and are often supported by the state. This is then extended by corporate-initiated and state supported, 'stakeholder and community liaison forums' which "divides community residents and creates buffer between community organisations and unions" (D'Sa, 2014). In D'Sa words, "anyone who threatens the bottom line of the companies becomes an enemy".

No wonder then that in such a climate where both the corporate and public sectors are seemingly in bed with each other, both casual and permanent workers are afraid to lose their jobs and thus generally toe the line. Further confirming the critical analysis around the impact of neoliberal restructuring on social relations, the casual workers argue that they have been forced into an "individualist" mode where "each worker looks after himself". As a result, they feel 'completely disempowered ... you either play the game and give up your principles or you get co-opted and keep silent" (SDCEA Focus Group, 2014). The fact that the SDCEA has, despite these disabling realities, been able to continue to pro-actively work with the labour movement in various ways is testimony to their recognition that some kind of broad working class alliance remains essential in the face of such seemingly overwhelming adversaries and barriers.

Cape Town Housing Assembly/SAMWU

What its participants refer to as 'the Project' started back in 2012 when activist leaders from the Housing Assembly, a collection of community organisations in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area struggling around housing issues, and shop-stewards from the SAMWU Cape Town City branch came together. With the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) providing a training role and the Municipal Services Project (MSP) providing finance, the stated objective of 'the Project' is to "build relations of trust between two distinct constituents of the working class through a process of joint capacitation and engagement of the City of Cape Town's Integrated Development Plan (IDP)" (Blake, 2013b), with the focus of such engagement revolving around the public service provisions of the IDP. According to ILRIG's Michael Blake who has been the main trainer for 'the Project', "there is a powerful objective basis to collaboration [since] both [the Housing Assembly and SAMWU] are constituencies of the working class [and] many occupy the same place in the lower section of the class pyramid [and] share the same typical problems of poor housing, health conditions, poor services, infrastructure and facilities" (Blake, 2013b).

Over the last two years, a number of workshops have been held, “out of which numerous structures, campaigns and documents have been developed pertaining to service delivery policy, municipal governance, employment and the further development of the Housing Assembly as a forum in which numerous organizations can converge to critique and develop alternatives” (Murray, 2013, 3). In April 2012 ‘the Project’ made a submission to the City of Cape Town containing a detailed critique of the IDP content and process, which explicitly located the IDP within a “neoliberal understanding” and stated that, “the quality of services to poor communities has deteriorated due to privatization and outsourcing of municipal services” (Joint Submission, 2012). This was followed, in July 2012, by a march to the City’s offices where ‘the Project’ delivered a memorandum “in respect of service delivery demands and the City’s Extended Public Works Programme”. The two main demands were for: the City “to negotiate with SAMWU on the period of individual EPWP contracts of employment ... and the extent to which these contracts leads to sustainable permanent quality jobs”; and, for “decent housing, services, infrastructure and facilities” (Memorandum of Demands, 2012).

Given the fairly extensive, even if often troubled, alliances forged by SAMWU in the late 1990s and early 2000s with community organisations in Cape Town, ‘the Project’ is a fairly modest and largely educational initiative. In many ways, this represents the generalised state of labour-community relations in contemporary South Africa that are dominated by educational and more ad-hoc activities and which largely involve small numbers of committed individuals from both ‘sides’. Nonetheless, as Murray (2013, 89) points out, a “learning process” has allowed members to “understand the development of counter knowledge, solidarities and class-consciousness and counter hegemonic movements to be the outcome of learning processes” and “a lack of knowledge, education and mutual understanding as a root cause of fragmentation of struggles”. Seen in this way, ‘the Project’ is a small, first step to (re)lay the foundations for a more solid and lasting alliance.

Doing so against the more generalised backdrop of a highly fragmented and politically contested broad working class as well as within the Cape Town-specific milieu of racial and ANC-Alliance division, is no easy task. Some of the initial SAMWU participants have stopped being part of ‘the Project’ due to criticisms about it being too politically mainstream and anti-ANC. While focus groups participants (which included only one SAMWU shop-steward) revealed a shared understanding of privatisation, its various impacts on both the broad working class and the delivery of public services as well as the ‘public’ not being reducible to the state, all participants continue to frame their expectations of change in terms of reclaiming the ANC’s (broken) promises through contesting state-led developmental plans and frameworks. As such, participants admitted that they have not really thought about alternative public forms but do look to places such as Venezuela and Bolivia as “inspirations and examples of what collective power”, that brings together “communities, political leaders and unions”, can achieve (Project Focus Group, 2013).

Regardless of these conceptual and ideological limitations, alongside the fact that other than the once-off march there has been “little practical action of meaningful note” (Gentle, 2013), ‘the Project’ has made a valiant attempt to build a critical consciousness and knowledge that links the theoretical to the practical. In turn, this

has positively impacted on the gradual development of activist knowledge and more informed understanding and engagement between some unionists and community activists. What remains to be seen is the extent to which this can be scaled-up and translated not only into a commonly held, anti-systemic, bottom-up approach to the provision of public services but to joint practical actions that can provide the means to forge a more lasting and effective alliance.

Eastern Cape Health Crisis Action Coalition (EHCAC)

For many years there has been a serious crisis of public services in the largely rural Eastern Cape Province (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2011; Ensor, 2012). In direct response to one aspect of that crisis, public health care services (Treatment Action Campaign/Section27, 2013), a range of organisations began consultations and then formally came together in May 2013 to form the EHCAC (Stevenson, 2013). Amongst others, the EHCAC consists of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC - a social movement focused on accessing treatment for people with HIV-AIDS), Section27 (a rights-based legal NGO), the People's Health Movement (PHM - a NGO), the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA - a COSATU-affiliated union) and the South African Medical Association (SAMA - a COSATU affiliated union for doctors) (EHCAC, 2013). Later in 2013, the FEDUSA-affiliated Health and Other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERSA) which organises mostly higher skilled and professional public service workers, joined. Although the EHCAC does not have any community organisations as specific members, there are many that are active in the TAC and who work with the PHM.

In September 2013 the EHCAC organised a march of around 2000 people to the Provincial Department of Health in the administrative 'capital' of Bisho, where a memorandum was delivered to the Provincial Health Minister (Stevenson, 2013). Among the problems identified as needing urgent attention were: poor health facilities with faulty and inadequate equipment, the availability of medication and supplies, a lack of human resources, poor or in some cases non-existent management, a lack of patient transport and emergency medical services, poor quality and insufficient staff accommodation, inadequate rehabilitation, home-based care and preventative services and financial mismanagement. Framing their approach as one centred on the denial of constitutional and legislatively-derived rights, the EHCAC called on the Minister "to develop a plan with clear timeframes that includes components that address the items listed urgently to remedy the crisis". A response was "demanded by 11 October 2013" (EHCAC, 2013).

On the same day as the march, DENOSA issued its own public statement indicating that its participation was "in line with our commitment to quality health service and under the spirit of a positive practice environment for health workers to render quality service, which is currently not the case in the Eastern Cape" (DENOSA, 2013). The delayed response of the Provincial Minister of Health was to come up with a restructuring plan for one hospital and a promise to prioritise addressing the demands in the O. R Tambo region which is mostly rural. However, there is no firm sign as yet, as to whether these promised plans have been practically implemented (Stevenson, 2013; Tota, 2014).

It is too early in the development of the ECHCAC to say whether it will be another example of a well-intentioned but short-lived attempt to forge a labour-community alliance centred on public services. Certainly however, one of the clear positives of the ECHCAC is that DENOSA, a union not known for any sustained political and/or anti-privatisation activism beyond a job retention focus, has for the first time formally allied itself to organisations that are outside of the ANC-Alliance frame. In doing so, DENOSA has made the important link between the interests of providers and users of public services and then as a potential combined social force to change the face of the provision of public health care services in conditions of crisis. DENOSA's Eastern Cape Provincial Secretary Kholiswa Tota, confirms such an approach when she speaks of the need to develop "a partnership [of] all "players ... management, workers and community" and sets this against the failure of the union's long-time "partnership with government" (Tota, 2013).

In order to move in this direction though, the perennial divisions between the labour and community movements over the prioritisation of tactical approaches to both the ANC and the state will need to be overcome in practice. At this stage, DENOSA has not had any real opposition to its membership in the ECHCAC from within its own ranks, or from its ANC-Alliance umbrella bodies, because "this is not seen as a political issue" (Tota, 2013). However, if the ECHCAC engages in further direct action and begins to more deeply discuss people's alternatives to the status quo (neither of which it has yet done), as a result of a continued lack of response, engagement and practical action from the state, there is bound to be a large dose of 'politics' and thus increased contestation involved. Further, if independent community organisations start to become more directly active in the ECHCAC, this will no doubt surface historic political, organisational and ideological tensions within its membership.

Other labour-community initiatives

The last several years have been relatively barren when it comes to labour-community alliances for public services, especially at the national level and involving COSATU. A good example of one lost opportunity in this regard is the 2009 public sector strike. While most community organisations publically and energetically sympathised with the demands of the lowly paid public sector workers, COSATU failed to open communication channels or to try and forge any kind of meaningful ways in which such communities could build solidarity and thus longer-term organisational and campaign linkages with the workers (Ceruti, 2011)

While there have been a few attempts at national-level campaigns involving both 'sides', these have not really taken root within the respective rank-and-file memberships, have largely involved leadership and have failed to sustain themselves. Then, there have also been varied examples of specific unions and community organisations coming together for brief periods around issue and location-specific struggles which have sometimes involved joint research as well as direct action.

For example, for a few years from the early-late 2000s SAMWU along with several community organisations and NGOs were involved in the Western Cape Water

Caucus. The Caucus conducted research focused on the roll-out of pre-paid water meters and flow management devices which included recording people's experiences in affected communities as well as dialogue with the City of Cape Town and National Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in 2006-2007 (Veotte, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Even though the Caucus has effectively ceased to exist, one of its member NGOs, the Western Cape-based Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE - involving several community organisations in rural area) has in more recent years continued to struggle for subsidised water provision in rural areas for food gardens as well as for community participation in water management catchment agencies (Andrews, 2013).

Elsewhere, provincial and local structures of SAMWU in the NorthWest Province have, over the last three-four years engaged in anti-corruption work targeting specific municipalities and local politicians fingered for the theft and fraudulent use of funds designated for the delivery of public services and infrastructure. Several meetings and marches involving community organisations have been held (Faulkner, 2013). Since 2010, local structures of NEHAWU have begun to informally engage with some community organisations and to set up community pilots around the yet-to-be implemented National Health Insurance programme (Slingsby, 2013). On the environmental and energy fronts, Earthlife Africa (a Johannesburg-based NGO) mostly through its community-based Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Project (SECCP) has worked with NUMSA on anti-nuclear as well as socially-owned renewable energy initiatives. Additionally, it engaged in a 'free basic electricity campaign' that involved both NUMSA and SAMWU and, over the last three years, has worked with NUMSA to target the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) to bring down electricity tariffs (Taylor, 2013).

What follows below is a list, by year, of other relevant and specific actions/initiatives that have taken place since 2010.

2010

- On 3 March a community protest was held in Oukasie township (near the town of Brits in the NorthWest Province) which was linked to and largely in support of, an ongoing strike by SAMWU members in the Madibeng Municipality calling for resignation of the Mayor and Finance Officer for interfering in the administration of municipality (Rebellion of the Poor Database, 2014).
- COSATU convened a 'Civil Society Conference' on 27-28 October attended by over 50 community based organisations, NGOs and SANCO. The Conference focused on social justice, economic development and the government's 'New Growth Path' as well as advancing rights to health and education (COSATU, 2012a, 79). While the conference solidified some of COSATU's ongoing campaigns, mostly with NGOs, around HIV-AIDS, education and international solidarity it did not lead to any substantive or sustained alliance with community organisations.
- The Right2Know Campaign (a national access to information network of community organisations, NGOs and activists) and COSATU engaged in joint work around opposition to the Protection of State Information Bill which carried over into 2011. Several meetings were held to coordinate opposition

as well as linked media-communications work and the sharing of information (Right2Know Campaign, 2011)

2011

- From April, SAMWU took up a campaign to fight casualisation in PICKITUP (the partially privatised waste collection agency in the City of Johannesburg). SAMWU engaged with casual workers, many of whom then joined the ensuing strike with permanent workers. While there was no direct involvement of community organisations (Ludwig, 2013), most poor communities in Johannesburg responded positively to the strike, which ended in a stated but yet to be fully implemented agreement that all employees from sub-contractors and labour brokers would eventually be employed directly by PICKITUP on a permanent basis (SAMWU, 2013).
- In March, the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC - a Cape Town-based NGO that works closely with several community organisations) initiated a 'Million Climate Jobs Campaign' that brought together unionists, NGOs, community organisations and individual activists (Ashley, 2013), including COSATU. COSATU had through its research arm, the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), earlier set up an associated reference group and developed a policy to develop strategies for every sector that was formally adopted by COSATU's Central Executive Committee (CEC). However, the initiative lost steam. COSATU lacked capacity to follow through and the campaign was too sectorally defined (Barret, 2013). As one of the participant organisations has argued, the initiative was never grounded and lacked a practical, campaigning character (Taylor, 2013).

2012-2013

- Having begun as an internal ANC-Alliance issue which went unresolved, COSATU began a public campaign against the introduction of electronic tolling (e-tolls) of many of the highways in Gauteng Province. The e-tolls, which fall under the auspices of the state-owned South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL), were then outsourced to a private consortium to carry out this privatised transport cost recovery. COSATU was soon joined by the 'Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance' (OUTA, 2013), a collection of largely middle class road users and business associations as well as by a range of other civil society organisations. This somewhat unique alliance of labour and elements of community then proceeded to engage in a series of direct actions, including highway go-slows and a large march in Johannesburg. Legal challenges were also initiated. Despite "building solidarity with sections of society that have not previously identified with COSATU" (COSATU, 2012a, 76) the government went ahead with the e-tolls at the end of 2013.
- At the COSATU local level across many provinces there were several examples of activities (COSATU, 2012a). These included:
 - Pickets targeting the local municipality and involving affected communities in Victoria West (Northern Cape) around the non-delivery of electricity in informal settlements as well as a march opposing the non-delivery of medicine at a local clinic

- Pickets and marches against the tolling of public roads as well as corruption in local municipalities in the NorthWest Province that involved local community organisations
- Building relations with the local communities of Phola and Klipsruit Mine in/around Ogies (Mpumalanga Province) to implement campaigns for youth employment as well as the delivery of basic public services.
- Working with local communities in Fetakgomo and Tubatse (Limpopo Province) to campaign around the “dispossession of communities by mines”
- Forming alliances with local community organisations in Newcastle (KwaZulu-Natal Province) to oppose, through marches, the privatisation of public transport as well as for the implementation of Occupational, Health and Safety (OHS) regulations in local textile businesses
- A public transport campaign, involving the Commercial Stevedoring Agriculture and Allied Workers Union (CCSAWU - a small, independent union based in the Western Cape Province) and the Mayibuye Rural Women’s Forums, in rural/small towns across the province (Andrews, 2013)
- Immediately following the Marikana massacre, the Marikana Support Campaign (MSC) was formed. It involved families of the murdered miners, independent worker committees, the NACTU-affiliated Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), a newly formed women’s community organisation, Sikhala Sonke as well as several small political groups and individual activists. The campaign has since focused on support for those families of miners killed or arrested but has also engaged issues of mine land ownership in the area, the dire lack of basic public services (water, health, electricity), inadequate housing and chronic unemployment in the area. As a result, a closer relationship developed between community structures and AMCU but it has largely been an alliance of community and workers (as community members) that have, “on their own” engaged in activities which have included rallies and marches (Malebatsi, 2014)

The sources of weakness and disconnection

The political and the social

At the heart of everything to do with labour-community alliances in post-apartheid South Africa is the formal political alliance of the dominant trade union formation, COSATU, with the ANC and the SACP. This alliance places the labour movement in a wholly contradictory position wherein the independence of the labour movement is subsumed under a macro-political corporatism, driven by the state which those political parties control and manage, that ultimately requires subservience to interests that are not of, and for, the workers themselves. As this paper has shown, this has produced an enforced political uniformity across all levels of government and society, occasional criticisms and counter mobilisations by the labour movement notwithstanding. In turn, this constructed political alliance has come to replace the more ‘natural’ one which should exist between the different elements of the broad working class itself. As a result, an almost permanent political divide has arisen in the context of the responses of that broad working class to the economic and social

consequences of the enforced neoliberal capitalism that practically frames the instrumentalised political alliance of the ANC/SACP/COSATU.

More specifically, this has translated into a majority of unions and their members being “scared” to ally with, practically support or even regularly communicate with, non ANC-Alliance community structures (Mayekiso, 2013). The fact that many COSATU unions still see the ‘community’ branch of the ANC-Alliance, SANCO, as representative of community concerns and struggles, despite the parallel fact that SANCO is extremely weak or non-existent in most communities around the country (Ludwig, 2013), is testament to the ‘reach’ of the associated political ‘consciousness’. What this has produced is a situation where, on the one hand unions simply do not know how to relate to independent community organisation and struggle and, on the other hand community organisations become largely self-contained and focused; either unable or unwilling to try and break through the enforced political separation.

This has generated a mutual ‘ignorance’ between labour and community, wherein neither ‘side’ seeks, as a key enabling part of their political practice, knowledge and information about the other. As one SAMWU unionist stated aptly, “the community sees community issues and the union see union issues” (Project Focus Group, 2014). What there is, is a great deal of rhetoric mostly coming from unions and ‘left’ political formations, about the political necessities of labour-community alliances but little practical effort and action. Set against the reality of poorly resourced and often highly marginalised community organisations, many activists within those communities then develop harsh criticisms of unions (and in particular, those that are in COSATU) since they do not see and experience practical support. A good contemporary example are the struggles of farmworkers in the Western Cape which, despite endless pronouncements of solidarity and claims of political support from COSATU unions such as the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), have largely been driven by seasonal (casualised) farm workers who are also mostly shack-dwellers in the affected communities (Gentle, 2013).

Even though some unions have tried to break through the political fog, there has been a distinct lack of political will at the level of COSATU itself to “build the infrastructure necessary for [anti-privatisation] campaigns at the national and regional levels” (Wainwright, 2013) that could have provided the equally necessary means for labour-community alliances to sink deeper roots. In the words of a seasoned unionist, “there is just not much effort to push labour-community alliances within COSATU ... driven by a neglect at the national level to support and link up with suggestions and proposed activities of COSATU locals in a way that recognises the link between communities and workers” and that would then surface associated “discussion about and attention to, the nature of the state and public services (Barret, 2013). This macro-politics has also fed intensified factionalism within the ANC-Alliance which has, in turn, also been reflected within community organisations as well as impacted on the character and content of linked struggles for public service provision (von Holdt et al., 2011). This has made it even more difficult for labour and community activists to develop trusting and sustained relationships (Veotte, 2013) as well as for unions and community organisations to forge genuine alliances in struggle.

More tragically though, it has incubated and fed a politics of patronage and corruption that has, over the last several years, seeped into the fabric of both the labour and community movements. So for example, when a group of casualised street-cleaner workers in Ekhuerleni (east of Johannesburg) joined SAMWU and went on strike with the union's backing to demand permanent employment status they would have had every reason to believe that their struggle would come to fruition given the alliance with SAMWU. Instead, a local SAMWU shop-steward who was involved in a labour-broking business on the side intervened and undermined their struggle by ensuring that the street-cleaners were only offered a temporary contract with his firm at wages less than one-third of a permanent municipal employee (Schroeder, 2013).

As corruption and the individualist-centred approach that parallels it have grown, so too have the levels of trust and comradeship essential to positive personal relationships, internal democratic organisation and any meaningful alliances of support, solidarity and shared struggle, declined (D'Sa, 2014). Within unions, the social (and thus political) gap between well paid leaders and officials and ordinary worker members has widened, while the same has happened when it comes to the lifestyles and daily experiences of many employed/unionised workers as against those who are unemployed/ casualised workers. In respect of community organisations community leaders have regularly been co-opted into well paid local government positions or become involved in local-level networks of patronage and corrupt activity (Andrews, 2013). In many cases, this has left not only a huge organisational vacuum but also a divided community.

The institutional and organisational

In the context of the divisive neoliberal, corporatist restructuring of the workforce and workplace, the dominant institutional framework within which unions now operate serves to further separate labour and community. Membership in both unions and community organisations has now come to be defined largely by institutional position and structure as opposed to class location and lived experience/struggle. Much like the same in the political/social realm, there is an institutionally constructed division between employed and unemployed/informal workers. As a result, non-union members of the broad working class are effectively locked out of the labour movement 'house', left to fend for themselves. Like Thulisile Zondi, a resident of Mpumalanga Township in KwaZulu-Natal who understandably expressed a deep disappointment at how he was treated by his union after losing his job: "I was only useful to the trade union when I was employed and could pay my subscription [fees]. However, once I was unemployed because of factory closure the union did not want anything to do with me" (as quoted in Mosoetsa and Tshoedi, 2013, 28).

Mostly tucked away in their institutional silos, unions have failed miserably to forge any kind of serious and longer-term strategy to relate to, organise and support informal/ casualised workers and the unemployed who dominate the membership of community organisations. When those community organisations protest over a lack of basic public services, for the most part they do not 'see' the public sector workers who deliver those services; and when union members go on strike to defend their jobs and/or improve their conditions of work, they largely do not 'see' the mass of people who have no jobs or whose conditions of work are most often much worse.

The combined consequence is like two ships passing in the dark. So for example, while there are no research statistics to measure the degree to which members of community organisations have involved themselves in strikes by unions, the 2012 Workers Survey does show that less than 25 percent of COSATU workers had participated in a community protest over a four-year period (COSATU, 2012b), while the 2013 COSATU Shop-Stewards Survey reveals that only 12 percent indicated their involvement in community organisations had anything to do with their work (Forum for Public Dialogue, 2013).

The impact of this institutional framework on the character and content of union organisation has been profound and has served to further widen the gap between the labour and social movements. As against the generally flexible and campaigning organisational 'culture' of community organisations, unions have become highly structured organisations with increasing levels of bureaucracy and the dominance of a 'culture' of formalised negotiation (Xali, 2005; Ronnie, 2013). For unions, and to a lesser extent for some community organisations as well, this has meant the gradual but systematic loss of a bottom-up approach to organising where local structures controlled by rank-and-file members become the drivers of a larger organisational 'engine' in which union leaders and officials are the enablers and facilitators as opposed to being the managers and controllers. When combined with the increasing use, by unions, of institutionally bound legalistic avenues (such as through NEDLAC and the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration - CCMA) to resolve both individual and collective worker struggles (Ludwig, 2013), the organisational terrain for linked labour-community struggle is further eroded.

Even where some workers have broken away from the constraints of such organisational methods in order to more directly confront employers this has for the most part, not translated into linking with community needs and concerns as a means of strengthening and expanding an overall struggle. A recent example of this was in Bokoni (Limpopo Province) where a community-labour forum was established and had representation on a national strike committee (of miners) that was formed after the Marikana massacre. The forum argued for combining labour and community structures as part of a larger organisational strategy but this was not taken up seriously by the strike committee. As a result, the miners, most of whom had been members of NUM, and who had been part of the forum joined an independent union while the forum itself has since become largely moribund (Schroeder, 2013).

It is the cumulative undermining of the possibilities for the organic development of labour-community alliances that has hit both 'sides' the hardest. In other words, no union member or community activist who is interested in struggling for the public (i.e., the people and not simply the state) to be brought back into the provision of public services and thus also into the democratic ownership, control and management of public resources, can legitimately oppose the deepening and expanding of such alliances on their own terms. The challenge then, is to throw off both the subjective and objective 'baggage' that has either been willingly or forcibly brought on board so that the respective ships can be turned around, converge side-by-side and then join together to embark on a new journey. Twenty years into the new South Africa there are signs that such possibilities are beginning to emerge from the long shadows of the past.

Reclaiming (some of) the past, inventing the future

Realities and reclamation

There can be no running away from the fact that contemporary labour-community alliances, and more specifically those that are centred on public services, in South Africa are extremely weak and that there are widespread disconnections between the organised (union-based) and 'other' (community-based) working class at many levels. The harsh realities are that organic labour-community alliances are non-existent in South Africa and what alliances that do exist are concentrated at the local, tactical and circumstantial level. Further, there is presently little in the way of a vision, much less practice, of alternatives to privatisation that move beyond the state.

While there certainly must be recognition of the generalised messiness that is part and parcel of mass community politics and mobilisation as well as the limitations of the 'subjective factor', there must also be recognition of the fact that the labour movement as a whole is tailing contemporary popular struggles on the ground and has largely adopted a reactive and defensive strategy of engagement with communities. Consequently, there are virtually no present-day examples, and more especially at the national level, of unions practically and in a sustained manner, proactively linking with and assisting community organisations and informal/casualised workers.

Even though there are some minor exceptions to this overall reality, the present-day picture is a far cry from the celebrated days of the 1980s and the early promise of the post-apartheid period. In many ways, as this paper has attempted to show, this should not come as a surprise. However, that does not make it any easier to accept given the high expectations that so many had, and continue to have even if less pronounced, that South Africa's broad working class could and would lead a strong and unified post-apartheid struggle for radical systemic change.

Nonetheless as has been shown, South Africa has a rich history of labour-community alliances which needs to be reclaimed both in thought and practice, the most crucial aspects of which are: unions seeing the community and thus also the 'other' working class, as part of who they are and possessing a strategy to pursue and activate alliances; a unity of class struggle that is grounded in mutual respect and learning; a tactical focus on grassroots mobilisation and vibrant political and social education; embracing a political and organisation culture of internal democracy alongside vibrant dialogue and debate; and, forging a principled, socially progressive, accountable and committed leadership.

Similarly, the labour and community movements in South Africa must reclaim an internationalism that has, for the most part, disappeared into the shadows of proclamation and propaganda. There are numerous present-day examples across the globe of unions doing the very things that their South African counterparts used to do such as: engaging privatisation "as service users as well as providers, as workers, and as citizens"; using their "distinctive organizing capacities and the detailed knowledge of their members to improve the quality of the service they deliver to their fellow citizens, as a necessary part of defending its public character"; and, in the process working "alongside civic organizations, farmers and rural

movements” (Wainwright, 2012, 71). Possibly more than anything else, South African unions need to commit themselves “to serving the wider public, rather than simply seeking instrumental alliances to save their own jobs” (Wainwright, 2009, 93).

New spaces, new possibilities

The good news is that there are spaces opening up which are beginning to ‘speak’ to both the realities and reclamation as above. The most crucial of these spaces has been engendered by the on-going fracturing of the ANC-Alliance over the last few years, a process that has been greatly catalysed by the horrific events at Marikana in August 2012. Along with this, there has been a slow but sure loosening of the ANC’s political and ideological hegemony. Whether in South Africa or elsewhere, the very basis, historically, for the maintenance of a sustainable political alliance between unions and (ostensibly progressive) political parties that have hold of state power is the parallel maintenance of both a politically malleable union leadership and expanding benefits for a meaningful threshold of unionised workers. On both counts, such an alliance ‘ship’ in the South African context is taking on copious amounts of water and there is absolutely no reason to believe that this will be turned around simply because of a shifting of the leadership deck chairs.

What is also happening is that the wage and working condition gains of all but the most highly paid unionised workers are being seriously eroded by the combined effects of the state’s neoliberal policies and the displacement of the current crisis of capitalism onto workers. In respect of the ‘other’ part of the broad working class (i.e., the community movement), the impacts are being felt even more acutely. In this context, as long as the dominant trope of popular struggles that are presently being driven by that ‘other’ remain in the political shadows, in terms of their political militancy, their social reach and their potential to cause serious breaches in support for a capitalist-friendly ANC and the state it controls and manages, unionised workers will feel little pressure to translate their own obvious dissatisfaction with the political ‘delivery’ of the ANC-led alliance into serious consideration of unified, broad working class political and organisational alternatives.

This is where the incipient moves by NUMSA, supported by many community organisations and other civil society formations across the country, to forge an independent and anti-capitalist united front of the broad working class comes into the picture. For the first time in the history of a democratic South Africa, a COSATU-aligned union, and its largest one at that, has openly declared that it no longer wants to be in a political alliance with the ANC. In place of that long-standing alliance, NUMSA has stated that it will now seek to:

...lead in the establishment of a new United Front that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities, in a way similar to the UDF of the 1980s. The task of this front will be to fight for the implementation of the Freedom Charter and be an organisational weapon against neoliberal policies such as the NDP [National Development Plan] (NUMSA, 2013).

In its first step along such a path NUMSA held a ‘Resistance Expo’ in February 2014 which saw a wide variety of community organisations and social movements sharing

perspectives on their struggles and engaging in discussion with NUMSA shop-stewards who were attending the union's political education school. Again, this was a first in the post-apartheid era. Such initiatives could indicate that "the nearly 10-year revolt of the poor may be complemented by an industrial partner" (Gentle, 2014) and see a rejuvenation of labour-community alliances centred on basic public services (Ashman and Pons-Vignon, 2014). Additionally, NUMSA has said that it will embark on a process to organise workers across value chains, including in the highly divided and volatile mining sector (NUMSA, 2013), a move that could also herald the beginnings of organisational support for informal/casualised workers.

NUMSA's moves remain embryonic at this stage and it must still translate stated intent into practical action when it comes to active involvement in community struggles and organisations as well as in making common cause with informal/casualised workers. Nonetheless, what NUMSA has done is to open wide the door of new possibilities not just for labour-community alliances for public services but for a broad working class-led movement to mount a serious political challenge to the ANC and state.

What needs to be done?

The key challenge now for both the labour and community movements in South Africa is to occupy the new spaces that have opened and to do so as organisations independent from any political party. In order for that to begin to happen though, there must first be recognition by unions and community organisations that they are part of the same struggle; in other words, to lay a foundation for the unity of the broad working class in opposition to neoliberal capitalism. As simple as it may sound, this initial conceptually strategic step has yet to permeate through the respective movements, at present having only taken root amongst a smaller layer of leaders and seasoned unionists and activists in select unions and organisations. For this to happen, there needs to be a collectively planned programme of consciousness-raising through a systematic education initiative that can catalyse positive and mutually beneficial, trusting and respectful relationships (D'Sa, 2013; Murray, 2014; Project Focus Group, 2013). Labour and community have to first talk with and learn from each other, to find a common language for and approach to, what kind of society, what kind of state and most crucially in the immediate term, what kind of public they desire?

In doing so, a base can be constructed on which a parallel, joint programme of basic grassroots organising and activism can then be pursued. That programme of action should itself be grounded in a basic set of demands that speaks directly to the real living conditions and daily struggles of both organised workers and community residents. It should also be linked to how unions and community organisations can come together to change the face of the public sector as a means not only to deliver public services but to do so in a way that deepens and expands their democratic character and content (Ronnie, 2013; Wainwright, 2013). The most viable and useful form for these endeavours is a campaign for reclaiming the public sector and public services for the public and which is rolled out at different levels; in the workplace, in the community, nationally and where possible and relevant, at the international level as well. This campaign must invoke both the progressive content of a human and constitutional rights template as well as the more radical content of a democratically

forged, anti-capitalist people's power that is not reducible to state ownership and power. In this way, the idea of a meaningful United Front that encompasses social forces beyond its broad working class core can begin to be translated into practice.

It is crucial for such a learning process and campaign to take on board contemporary international examples of positive experiences in not only resisting privatisation but in building alternative, democratic ways and means to both structure the public sector and deliver public services. Wainwright (2013, 35) reminds us of why this is so important:

A common feature ... is the role of the union and community alliance in organising and sharing the knowledge and skills of public service workers and users. This knowledge has been the basis of developing alternative ways of organising the service guided to varying degrees by principles of equity, the creativity of labour, responsiveness to the community, and full accountability and transparency.

What is required is patient political and organisational work and activism informed by a democratic spirit of humility and openness. There is no space here for vanguardist, paramount leadership, no room for the presumption of collective 'working class' consciousness and no place for the defensive and divisive promotion of narrow organisational identities and terrain. What must act as a constant reminder is that the immediate goal is to engage in a struggle to "democratise, open up and improve the way services and indeed the state itself is organised" as a means towards "accountability, ending corruption, introducing participatory methods of government [and] creating means by which the knowledge of all is used for the benefit of all" (Wainwright, 2013, 46). While a longer-term goal of broad working class struggle might well be to replace capitalism with an alternative system, it is only by engaging in the kind of practical, here-and-now struggle for real changes in the lives of the public, both human and institutional, that the possibilities for more radical change can be brought into being.

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¹ A term deriving from the combination of the (abbreviated) surname of the incumbent president of the ANC and South Africa (Jacob Zuma) and the term 'tsunami' used by then COSATU General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi, to describe the various forces within the ANC-Alliance that backed Zuma in his multi-pronged battle against various legal challenges as well as charges of rape and corruption leading up to the ANC Polokwane Conference in 2007.