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# Labour and community in transition:

*Alliances for public services in South Africa*

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### ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Municipal Services Project (MSP) is a research project that explores alternatives to the privatization and commercialization of service provision in electricity, health, water and sanitation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is composed of academics, labour unions, non-governmental organizations, social movements and activists from around the globe who are committed to analyzing successful alternative service delivery models to understand the conditions required for their sustainability and reproducibility.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper seeks to record and critically analyze the context and practical experience of labour-community alliances to oppose privatization and 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 broad, politically independent and largely unified working class battle against the dying kicks of an oppressive apartheid system and the ravages of an increasingly hegemonic neoliberal capitalism. Such organic labour-community alliances were built, over time, through linked organizational and political work as well as conjoined practical struggle, including in advancing the provision of public services to all South Africans. Political independence was 'lost' however, when the majority of both labour and community movements, in the form of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), entered into formal alliances with the dominant political forces of the liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

The strategic locus of resistance and "people's power," now dominated by the ANC/SACP and its labour movement allies, shifted further onto a negotiations-centric and corporatist terrain in the early 1990s. The demands and struggles of the mass would, of necessity, have to be muted in order for the democratic 'deal' to be delivered. In the years following the first free elections of 1994, they embraced the political and institutional framework of neoliberal corporatism, which served to increase the social distance between (employed) workers and (unemployed/informalized) poor communities. 'Free market' forces and an individualist, work-defined citizenship became the change-agents of both social and political relations of the broad working class.

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 delegitimization of the struggles and ideas of community organizations related to the nature of public institutions and delivery of public services.

The cumulative result has been the weakening of labour and community organizations, alongside an increased disconnect between their respective politics and practical struggles. The subsequent rise to state power of President Jacob Zuma's faction in 2009 not only solidified these trends but made privatization and the provision of public services a policy tool for satisfying factional and party interests. What few labour-community alliances have been established since in defence of public services are largely temporary and informal, involving small numbers of committed individuals from both 'sides'.

This is exemplified by the fact that only three present day case studies of functioning labour-community alliances could be identified in the course of research. These are: the South Durban Environmental Community Alliance; the Cape Town Housing Assembly and South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU); and the Eastern Cape Health Crisis Action Coalition. The paper analyzes these case briefs of existing alliances as a means to surface their nature, challenges and successes.

Twenty years after the first free and fair elections in South Africa, the harsh realities are that strong, organic labour-community alliances have virtually disappeared in South Africa. Further, there is presently little in the way of a vision, much less practice, of alternatives to privatization among labour and community organizations that move beyond the state.

Nonetheless, there is a positive past of strong labour-community alliances in the country 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 ongoing fracturing of the ANC-Alliance,<sup>1</sup> and incipient initiatives such as the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) move toward political independence and the forging of an anti-capitalist united front of the broad working class. If there is to be a coherent 'alternative' 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.

## Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
APF	Anti-Privatisation Forum
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DENOSA	Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa
ECHCAC	Eastern Cape Health Crisis Action Coalition
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
NEDLAC	National Economic, Development and Labour Council
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
UDF	United Democratic Front

## Introduction

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 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.

For most analysts, the history of such alliances began with the 1979 formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). However, in order to fully understand the difficulty of forging such alliances in the country, there is a need to turn the clock back another 20 years to locate the genesis of the tendency for top-down, elite decision-making that has limited their possibilities to this day. 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 then-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 mass mobilization of the 1950s, 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 organization and minimal involvement of the oppressed sectors of the population. Crucially, where those sectors could have been involved (for example, within the organized labour movement) the ANC leadership's style of centralized direction 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 organizational direction. 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 possibilities for their future collaboration – more specifically, it would come to influence joint campaigns against the ravages of apartheid-capitalism and the privatization of public services from the 1980s onward.

One of the main reasons behind the formation of a new labour movement in the 1970s was a desire, by workers and their intellectual-activist allies, to forge a politically and organizationally independent labour movement run and controlled by workers themselves. The same can be said of the myriad civil society and particularly, community organizations that appeared on the scene at around the same time and into the early 1980s. Subsequent developments during the next decade however, saw the vast majority of the labour and community movements once again falling under the political, ideological and, in some cases, organizational 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 organizational 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 privatization and for public services, but also the labour unions and various forms of community organizations that have largely carried forward those struggles.

It is within such a historical context that this paper seeks to critically analyze the content, character, sustainability and impact of labour-community alliances that have worked to oppose privatization and promote public services, as they have evolved in South Africa since 1994. South Africans' struggles in the apartheid era gave rise not only to new ways of theorizing and practically engaging resistance to oppression but also to huge international and domestic expectations of the possibilities of a radical break with capitalist socio-economic convention and more specifically, its neoliberal pillars such as the privatization of public services.

The paper begins by focusing on labour and community in the neoliberal transition. First, it revisits 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 struggles for public services. The 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 analyzed as is the early 1990s period of negotiations with the liberation movements 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 affected workers and the broader working class as well as the way public services are delivered. The section concludes with a brief analysis of the rise of new community/social movements, the ensuing state and ANC-Alliance<sup>1</sup> response and consequences for the relationships between the labour and community movements.

What follows is an analytically framed and 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 new alliances are covered along with the key underpinnings of their subsequent decline due to differing understandings of and approaches to public services and alternatives to privatization. The implications of the coming to power of Jacob Zuma,

as set against the factional ruptures and policy shifts within the ANC-Alliance and state, are also critically engaged. Selected case briefs of three existing alliances are then offered, as a means to surface their nature, challenges and successes. 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 evident disconnect between labour and community movements and the corresponding weakness of alliances.

A final section exposes some harsh realities about the contemporary state of labour and community movements, alliances and associated struggles for public services and calls for a focused reclaiming of the rich and positive history of such alliances in South Africa and internationally. The labour movement and community organizations can occupy new ideological, political and organizational 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 organizations. The paper concludes by suggesting ways forward to build real people's alternatives to privatization.

## Methodology and limitations

Research for this paper was conducted over a five-month period from late 2013 to early 2014. Relevant leaders and activists from those unions and community organizations that either have been or are presently, engaged in political and/or organizational activity with each other were identified and contacted. Interviews were then requested and, where there was a positive response, conducted either in person or telephonically. South African-based researchers and academics who have undertaken linked work were also interviewed. Materials were also collected from interviewees.

During this process it became clear that there are very few formal and sustained labour-community alliances in South Africa. Rather, what alliances do exist are largely temporary, informal and dominated by educational and more ad hoc activities, involving small numbers of committed individuals from both 'sides'. Taking into consideration geographical spread as well as core focus area, 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 have emerged, the joint project between Cape Town's Housing Assembly and the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the work of South Durban Environmental Community Alliance with various unions. Further interviews as well as small focus groups of union and community members were then carried out. In the case of the third alliance, the Eastern Cape Health Crisis Action Coalition, several unsuccessful attempts were made over a period of four months to get participating organizations to facilitate a field trip and thus physical interviews and focus group discussions were not conducted in this case.

Desktop research of relevant historic and more contemporary theory and practice as directly related



to anti-privatization struggles, alternatives to privatization 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<sup>1</sup> under the guidance of the author.

The limited timeframe of the project made it extremely difficult to engage in extended follow-ups with all unions and individuals initially contacted. In addition, despite repeated attempts, NUMSA and the National Union of Mineworkers neither offered positive responses to requests for interviews nor provided materials. Requests for the same made to the Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union, COSATU Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal Provincial Secretaries as well as several provincial and regional secretaries of SAMWU also elicited no responses.

Notwithstanding, this paper represents arguably the most comprehensive effort yet to identify and contextualize 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 for all those struggling to put 'public' back into public services.

## Labour and community in neoliberal transition

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 protesting 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.

### Repression, resistance and contradiction

In the following years, the broad working class was hit with a double-blow. Neoliberal capitalism privileged the opening up of global markets, increasing capital mobility and re-organizing states to guarantee and catalyze 'free market principles' (Harvey 2005), while pushing for a flexible, insecure and informal labour regime (Chun 2009; Kalleberg 2009). As a result, unions lost some of their ability to service their existing members and recruit new ones at the same time as the objective basis for organizing 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 allied to the broader working class of communities, informal workers and students that 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 unionists and workers, largely associated with the ANC/SACP-aligned SACTU, who quickly dubbed the FOSATU crowd as 'workerist' and in turn, were labelled as 'populist'. 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 direction of, an alliance of political 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 organized 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 or 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 and 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 across the globe (e.g. South Korea, 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 the politics of the ANC/SACP loomed large over developments – as would also be the case in the post-apartheid period in South Africa. 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), ANC-aligned community and civic leaders launched their own 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) that 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).

Such struggles 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 realizing

specifically formulated political goals, but was the direct expression of grassroots politicization of local material and social grievances that involved both union members and unemployed community residents. Here was the seed of a genuine people's alliance that contained 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 state repression. Subsequent unity talks between various unions to strengthen the movement resulted in the formation of a new federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), in 1985 (Baskin 1991). COSATU brought together unions that had been in FOSATU, several independent unions and the huge National Union of Mineworkers. 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 organizations, 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 the federation's leaders travelled to Lusaka to meet with the externalized ANC/SACP leadership and endorsed the *Freedom Charter*, thus allying COSATU to these organizations at the same time as 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 realized 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 organized working class and its anti-capitalist struggle within a contradictory strategic and organizational framework. On the one hand, COSATU committed itself to prioritizing 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 organization, the ANC, seeking to govern the country.

These contradictions later came to the fore when in 1996 COSATU's Central Executive Committee used the term 'progressive alliance' to refer to organizations that supported the UDF and ANC. This implicitly announced that they would not ally with others, as was confirmed soon thereafter when COSATU refused to meet with the Azanian People's Organisation (Baskin 1991). Such a practical application of the unions' political alliance would be at the heart of the future relationship between COSATU, its affiliate unions and community organizations.

## Ending apartheid: 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 organizational muscle to the newly formed Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) as well as the legal umbrella necessary for continued mass mobilization, largely through strikes. Importantly, it was also the carrying out of consistent political education within the unions and in conjunction with community organizations 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 were 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. NUMSA did criticize the nature of the MDM – prefiguring a similar if historically and politically differentiated stance over 25 years later –, 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), but to no avail.

By 1989, behind-the-scenes negotiations between the ANC (mainly led by the still imprisoned Nelson Mandela) and the apartheid state were well-advanced. In fact, 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). 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 this elite-controlled ‘political reform’ process, the apartheid state had embarked on sweeping neoliberal ‘economic reforms’. The establishment of a government privatization unit in 1987 opened the doors to the commercialization of the Electricity Supply Commission (Eskom) as well as the Telecommunications Authority (Telkom). This was then followed by the wholesale privatization of the Iron and Steel Corporation in 1989 (van Driel 2003, 65). In response, SAMWU adopted the first-ever explicit anti-privatization campaign resolution of a South African union at its Second Congress in the same year (SAMWU 1989). The call was quickly integrated into a broader wave of strikes in late 1989 and early 1990, involving SAMWU and several other COSATU unions as well as community organizations. Although the unions demanded an end to privatization, 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 remained silent.

While the strikes did contribute to the apartheid state postponing the “full privatisation of core State-Owned Enterprises” (van Driel 2003, 72), the die was cast. The apartheid government had

already begun transforming the state into a body geared toward “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 ANC-Alliance, COSATU and the UDF/MDM whose 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 strategy as the ANC, COSATU had become involved in a parallel negotiating process with capital and the state. After signing accords with both (providing for the federation’s participation in the state’s National Manpower Commission), COSATU devoted much of its energies to institutionalizing bargaining agreements between unions, employers and the state (McKinley 1997, 121).

Similarly, a range of community organizations 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 organizations constituting 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 resulted in the effective 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. The perceived necessity of seeking common ground with capital and the apartheid state for some kind of social contract in the drive to restructure 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.

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 nationalization (particularly of monopoly capital), which most workers continued to demand as a means toward socialization of the means of production and the provision of public services (COSATU 1992), but which ANC leaders no longer saw as ‘an ideological attachment’ of the organization (*The Star* 1991).

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 tripartite National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) was formed, made up of 'civil society' as represented by SANCO and carefully chosen NGOs, of recognized union federations and of capital/big business. This was soon followed by legislation such as the Non-Profit Act of 1997 and the creation of institutions such as the Directorate of Non-Profit Organisations, which required those organizations to officially register, and the establishment of 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" (a watered down version of the *Freedom Charter's* explicit call for nationalization) contained in the ANC's main policy platform, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, 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 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) into three categories: those with a clear role in the provision of essential services; those with a lesser public role; and those with no public service mandate (NALEDI 1999). Less than five months later, the government announced the partial privatization of "South African Airways and Telkom and the complete sale of several other SOEs" (van Driel 2003, 67). Even though COSATU quickly responded with a day of action, their threat to hold a more damaging two-day national stay-away a month later evaporated after negotiations with the government.

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. Crucially, the NFA said nothing about reversing the privatization of SOEs or putting a halt to the more widespread privatization 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).

This political move was in direct contradiction to COSATU's clear opposition to privatization and support for the protection and expansion of SOEs to provide public services as captured in its 1992 Economic Policy Conference (Lehulere 2003), and it severely limited the ability of the labour movement to mobilize their members and the community against future privatizations. 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, by the time the ANC government went ahead with the Growth, Employment and



Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy in 1996, the labour movement (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, privatization. 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 political partners.

### Post-1994 division and realignment

SAMWU was the only union in South Africa that made consistent efforts during the mid-late 1990s to oppose privatization within the institutional and policy frameworks of the new democratic state as well as through a mass-based campaign involving communities and other civil society actors. As its former 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” (Roger Ronnie, personal interview). It was on this foundation that SAMWU engaged in a range of more focused campaigns, such as the struggle against the privatization of ambulance services (1995) as well as that of Johannesburg’s municipal services in the late 1990s (Metropolitan Council’s Igoli 2002). These were part of the union’s national anti-privatization campaign that was waged in those years, and which most always involved sustained efforts to forge alliances with community organizations. Indeed, SAMWU stood out in the labour movement for its attempts to link the struggle against privatization to mass mobilization and then again to build a new kind of public service (van Driel 2003, 75).

In the 1997 internal document *How to Deal with Contracting-Out in Local Government*, SAMWU set out what kind of alternative it was seeking: “[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*, SAMWU argued: “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 privatization 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-privatization campaign and the exigencies of the ANC-Alliance and its neoliberal corporatist framework undermined what could have been a strong kick-start 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 (Roger Ronnie, personal interview), the crucial missing ingredient according to the SAMWU leadership itself was a “very distinct lack of political will to vigorously take up the struggle against privatisation” linked to an ambivalence toward “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 rhetoric and practical local support, along with reluctance “to press consistently for the macro-economic and infrastructural priorities that would enable micro attempts at public restructuring to be generalised” (Hilary Wainwright, personal interview). At the level of the ANC-Alliance/state, the dominance of a top-down, bureaucratic politics privileged behind-the-scenes talks among leaders within prescribed, state-managed corporatist institutions.

The combined result was the gradual weakening and ultimate sidelining of SAMWU’s anti-privatization campaign and the further institutionalization of a neoliberal-inspired ‘restructuring’ of public assets and services as inked in 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,” catalyzing a growing insularity of union members, increasingly de-linked from community needs and struggles (Roger Ronnie, personal interview). 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 due to the devastating impacts of neoliberal ‘restructuring’ of both the economy and public service provision (Michael Blake, personal interview).

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 re-articulation of wage labour from “its exploitative and agency-lacking role under apartheid” to a post-apartheid “path to citizenship 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 came at the forefront of shaping both the social and political relations of the broad working class and their organizations. Although a COSATU-initiated *Future of the Unions* report in 1997 had already sounded a warning that a failure to organize casualized/informal workers would mean that COSATU membership would be “based in a shrinking section of the working class” (Paret 2013b, 15), there was now ample evidence to confirm that this was exactly what was happening. By

the early 2000s, the number of casualized/informal workers and unemployed made up between 30-40 per cent of the entire South African working age population (Altman 2006), while COSATU was becoming dominated by permanent workers who made up more than 90 per cent 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” (Ruiters 2005; Spronk 2007) and a widening socio-economic and organizational separation between (employed) organized workers and (casualized/unemployed) poor communities (Murray 2013; Qotole et al 2001).

Added to this stratification matrix were the rise of union investment companies (McKinley 1999) and the corresponding emergence of an “entrepreneurial culture” among 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” (Roger Ronnie, personal interview).

For the rest of the working class, the impacts of neoliberalism 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 public services into market commodities. The drastic decrease in national government grants/subsidies to municipalities and support for the development of financial instruments for privatized delivery forced local government to turn toward this latter option as a means of generating the revenue (McDonald 2000). It also laid the foundations for an enabling environment of patronage, corruption and factional politics as well as skyrocketing costs for 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 hardest. By the turn of the century, millions more poor South Africans had experienced cut-offs and evictions as a result of aggressive neoliberal policy (McDonald and Smith 2002).

It was within this multi-faceted context that a range of new community organizations 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 dictates of the ANC-Alliance (Mzwanele Mayekiso, personal interview). In almost all cases, they emerged in the very spaces opened up by the failure of the traditional political and civil society formations to respond to the changing conditions of 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 an inability to pay for commodified public services (Barchiesi 2006). This ‘perfect storm’ brought together those inhabiting an extended and flexible ‘community’ of work and life (as opposed to the formal workplace), which became the

epicentre of social solidarity. Since the vast majority of such new forces represented different strata within the broad working class falling outside of the capital-labour relational nexus, they were treated by most of the labour movement as secondary to the material, political and organizational position of formal, organized workers. Despite serious efforts from some workers to engage, 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 new boundaries of corporatism, made the possibilities of forging collective solidarities and struggles extremely difficult.

Not surprisingly, in most instances the new community organizations had little or no union involvement. This was the case of the Concerned Citizens' Forum, which united urban communities in direct response to evictions in Durban (Desai 2002), and the collection of rural organizations forming the Landless People's Movement (Greenberg 2006). However, social movements such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum in the Gauteng Province initially brought together a wide range of organizations, individual activists and political groupings that included the local branches of the South African Students Council, the SACP, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union, and the Independent Municipal and Amalgamated Trade Union. 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 organizational 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 morphing.

## Whither post-apartheid labour-community alliances?

By the turn of the millennium serious cracks were showing, despite the promise of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) as an emergent example of the potential of labour and community to come together in a formal alliance to both oppose privatization and forge collective public service alternatives. As the experiences of the 1990s had revealed, at the heart of the labour-community problematic were the macro-demands and impacts of COSATU's alliance with the ANC/SACP vis-à-vis incipient struggles taking place outside of its purview. No sooner had the APF, with many more community organizations on board from 2001, begun to offer public critiques of and engage in direct action against, the privatization agenda of the ANC government than the various union structures pulled out. By the end of the first year of its existence, SAMWU (Gauteng), SACP Johannesburg Central Branch, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Wits Branch) and the South African Students Council (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 movement was unpalatable to most of the leadership 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 privatization. Such pressure from below could not be ignored by COSATU leaders who responded with harsh public statements and plans for a full-scale 'anti-privatization' national strike (McKinley 2003, 58-59). The August 2001 strike was a 'success' in relation to the impressive numbers of workers who participated, with active support from the APF and other new social movements across the country; yet COSATU's leadership did not follow through with denouncing the ANC neoliberal policies and rather adopted a de-politicized and individualistic approach, attributing the privatization problem to technocrats within government (Lehulere 2003; van Driel 2003). As a result, the 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 the proposed follow-up strike action in early 2002 would not take place (van Driel 2003, 78). According to ex-SAMWU General Secretary Roger Ronnie, COSATU "interfered politically" in the union's attempts to forge a national anti-privatization alliance with communities (personal interview).

Reflecting the pattern that had begun to emerge in the 1990s, the leadership of COSATU and most of its affiliate unions had once again made opportunistic use of the mass. They did so for their own internal ANC-Alliance political purposes and as a means of managing and controlling the desires and expectations of their own membership and of the broad working class. 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 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 senior NUMSA official Dinga Sikwebu it is also a matter of "the leadership and conservative layers" in COSATU gaining "status and all the other perks" from the ANC, and "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 portraying the new community/social movements and the various initiatives to link labour and community struggles around opposition to privatization, such as the APF, as composed of 'criminals' and 'anarchists'. This campaign switched into high gear when the new movements staged a successful mobilization and march targeting the neoliberal-framed World Summit on Sustainable Development; the ANC leadership then accused all those who were actively critiquing and opposing its 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 Thabo 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 distinguished between 'bad' and 'good' civil society actors, an approach that was to become dominant in the ANC-Alliance and the government, and which henceforth would fundamentally shape any subsequent relationships between independent community organizations and COSATU. Thereby organizations such as the APF, the Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Landless People's Movement that linked the neoliberal agenda of the ANC/state to the privatization program and larger socio-economic assault on the broad working class were to 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 organizations such as the AIDS Consortium, the Treatment Action Campaign along with various NGOs grouped together in collectives such as the South African National NGO Coalition. 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 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 privatization. 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 de-legitimized due to their political and organizational origins. However, approaches that sanctified ANC-Alliance processes, privileging politically controlled government spaces for 'consultation' and involving only those formations that were not overtly critical of the macro-developmental trajectory of the ANC and the state, were embraced.

One of the immediate consequences was the translation of this conceptual-ideological attack into a physical assault, led by the coercive forces of the state, on identified community activists and organizations. Besides the arrest and imprisonment of hundreds of community activists across the country before, during and after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Bond 2002; Kimani 2003), the next several years saw a coordinated attempt by the state, often buttressed by state-hired private security personnel and local ANC politicians, to not only actively repress the organizations involved but to crush the spirit of community resistance. While neither of these attempts wholly succeeded, what they did do was divert community organizations' and social movements' limited human and material resources into a defensive-oriented political and organizational mode of operation (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 organizations that had actually managed to forge some kind of alliance with labour such as the APF and the Anti-Eviction Campaign, 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 vanguard politics and the tendency to place far too much time and energy on endless debates about desired organizational forms as well as critiquing COSATU and the ANC-Alliance, as opposed to grassroots organizing and occupation of available political spaces within an increasingly divided labour movement (Leonard Gentle, personal interview; McKinley 2012a; Lance Veotte, personal interview). 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 among many that community organizations were not only ‘anti-ANC’ but reactive and based on single issues without much ideological underpinning 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 organizing casualized/informal workers (Barchiesi and Kenny 2008; Desmond D’Sa, personal interview; Ngwane 2012). From the mid-2000s, the bases for unity necessary for meaningful and sustained labour-community alliances were already largely lying in tatters.

### Impacts of the ‘Zunami’<sup>3</sup>

Before 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 to internal battles within the ANC-Alliance. This was in direct relation to ongoing factional power struggles between the ‘camps’ of former South African president Thabo Mbeki, and of former deputy president Jacob Zuma (McKinley 2012a, 28).

Among other stated reasons, the leadership of COSATU and most of its affiliates became key supporters of Zuma on the basis that his faction would ‘reclaim’ the ANC and its Alliance as well as set a new ‘developmental’ path away from the privatization policy of neoliberal technocrats such as Mbeki (Gentle 2008; Pillay 2011; van der Walt 2009). However Zuma’s later presidency starting in 2009 would make clear that his ‘developmental state’ approach, which has itself led to numerous intra-factional splits since Polokwane, would be a great deal more about placing (and keeping) certain loyal individuals into positions of power within the ANC and the state than about any meaningful action toward reversing the neoliberal agenda (Botiveau 2013). Research by Paret (2013b) 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 privatization; in fact they have continued to be pursued with vigour. 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 privatize SOEs, the reality is that outsourcing, commercialization and corporatization of SOEs has proceeded apace (McKinley 2013).

As a result, 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 become dominated by politico-bureaucratic and economic elites with elected representatives only rubber stamping. 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’. 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 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, fuelling socio-political conflict. This ‘developmental’ policy game is having far reaching impacts because even state interventions on the technical/capacity front are now seen and experienced as top-down, imposed ‘solutions’ in and over which ordinary people have little say.

Implications for community organizations and more generally, residents of poor communities, were significant. In the APF for example, while there were numerous debates centred on the ideological content of the Zuma-led power block, at the community level its left-populist rhetoric created both confusion and a variegated ‘turn’ away from collectively organized and independent community struggle toward institutionalized party politics and a creeping social conservatism (McKinley 2012a). More specifically, the rapid and widespread crises of public service delivery and democratic accountability in the most politically marginalized 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-commoditized daily existence has led to 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. Scarce waged labour has become the main ‘prize’ in marginalized communities, the second prize being access to state-serviced and -controlled social grants that are subject to considerations of political patronage and party electoral support. All the while, a stretched civil society is being increasingly ‘asked’ to fill the massive gaps while the social consequences of a failing system continue to be individualized.

Simultaneously, there have been growing levels of tension that have manifested in various forms of local 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



2009-2012 when they averaged 309 per year (Runciman 2013). The combined waves of protest have also involved union members, mostly in mining strikes 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* 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 'Zunami'.

### Three cases of contemporary alliances

#### South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)

Formed in 1996, the SDCEA is an environmental justice non-governmental organization based in south Durban, comprising 16 formally affiliated local and community-based organizations. Its main activities are centred on lobbying, advocacy, reporting, research and mobilization/direct action as part of an overall struggle "against environmental racism and for environmental justice and health" (SDCEA 2013). While community organizations 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 and, as SDCEA coordinator Desmond D'Sa (personal interview) points out, these "inherently involve an anti-privatization 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, both private and state-owned.

Below is a select list of activities that SDCEA has undertaken over the last several years with unions, which can be said to involve public services (Desmond D'Sa, personal interview):

- 2008: A successful protest action with the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union prevented a Chinese shipment of arms to Zimbabwe from off-loading at (the partially privatized) Durban harbour, and another joint campaign to prevent illegal trucking companies from operating out of the harbour is ongoing.
- 2008: A series of educational workshops involving the Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union and other unions were held on enforcing regulations around 'industrial worker safety' as well as environment-related incidents in Durban and how these affect workers and communities.



- 2009: A successful campaign with SAMWU and StreetNet (a street and informal vendors NGO) prevented the city-owned Durban early morning market from shutting down.
- 2011: As part of an overall campaign for climate justice leading up to the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Durban, a series of workshops for the labour movement were held across the province. 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 involves several unions as well as other social movements in Durban, in opposition to the state's plans to expand and further privatize the Durban harbour. Besides research for advocacy purposes, a series of pickets, marches and media work has been undertaken.
- 2013: A current campaign involves the South African Democratic Teachers Union 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 were 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 (Desmond D'Sa, personal interview). It has also helped that in south Durban the communities are located in direct proximity to the majority state-owned Durban Port 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 workforce over the last decade in particular, a large number of the workers who belong to the SDCEA are now in casualized/informal employment. This has led to increasingly difficult relations with both the main COSATU unions as well as independent unions according to D'Sa: "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" (personal interview).

This is confirmed by interviews with casual workers who form part of SDCEA. They agree that unions "only come when there is an issue over wages" and they have very little to no local connection with unions. 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" (SDCEA focus group). 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'" (Frank Alexander, personal interview). As one focus group participant 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). The 'informal' nature of the alliances between SDCEA and the 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 reach out to casual workers as an integral part of union work.

Desmond D'Sa points out that another factor impacting on SDCEA's alliances with labour are corporate-initiated and state-supported 'stakeholder and community liaison forums'. He maintains that these have been initiated as a means to bring community organizations into a tightly controlled and politically manageable space. In his words, this "divides community residents and creates buffers between community organizations and unions ... anyone who threatens the bottomline of the companies becomes an enemy" (personal interview).

In this tense climate it is not surprising that 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). The fact that 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 and SAMWU**

In 2012 activist leaders from the Housing Assembly, a collection of community organizations in the Cape Town Metropolitan Area struggling for better housing, and shop-stewards from the SAMWU Cape Town City Branch came together. The International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) organized trainings with the stated objective 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 2013), mainly 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 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 2013).

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, they made a submission to the City of Cape Town containing a detailed critique of the IDP content and process, which explicitly located the plan 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 they delivered a memorandum “in respect of service delivery demands and the City’s Extended Public Works Programme [EPWP].” 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 lead to sustainable permanent quality jobs”; and for “decent housing, services, infrastructure and facilities” (Memorandum of Demands 2012).

In comparison to the fairly extensive, even if often troubled, alliances forged by SAMWU in the late 1990s and early 2000s with community organizations in Cape Town, the project remains a fairly modest and largely educational initiative. Other than the once-off march, there has been “little practical action of meaningful note” (Leonard Gentle, personal interview). In many ways, this represents the generalized state of labour-community relations in contemporary South Africa: they are dominated by educational and more ad hoc activities involving 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 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 left the project due to criticisms about it being too politically mainstream and anti-ANC. While focus group participants (which included only one SAMWU shop-steward) revealed a shared understanding of privatization, 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 (Housing Assembly-SAMWU focus group).

Notwithstanding these conceptual and ideological limitations, the project is a valiant attempt to build a critical consciousness and knowledge that links the theoretical to the practical. 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 into 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 healthcare services (Treatment Action Campaign/Section27 2013), a range of organizations began consultations and then formally came together in May 2013 to form the EHCAC (Stevenson 2013). The EHCAC consists of civil society groups such as the Treatment Action Campaign (a social movement focused on HIV-AIDS), the legal NGO Section27 and the People's Health Movement, as well as unions including the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA), the South African Medical Association, and the Health and Other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (EHCAC 2013). Although the EHCAC does not directly represent community organizations, many are active members of the Treatment Action Campaign and People's Health Movement.

In September 2013, an estimated 2,000 people took part in a march organized by EHCAC in the administrative capital of Bisho, where a memorandum was delivered to the Provincial Health Minister (Sasha Stevenson, personal interview). Among the problems identified as needing urgent attention were: poor health facilities with faulty and inadequate equipment; shortages of medication and supplies; a lack of human resources; the unavailability 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" (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 prioritize the demands in the mostly rural region of OR Tambo. However, there is no firm sign as yet as to whether these measures have been implemented (Sasha Stevenson, personal interview; Kholiswa Tota, personal interview).

One of the clear positives of the EHCAC is that DENOSA, a union not known for any sustained political or anti-privatization activism beyond a job retention focus, has for the first time formally allied itself to organizations that are outside of the ANC-Alliance. In doing so, DENOSA has made the link between the interests of providers and users of public services and the importance of their combined social force to change the face of public healthcare services. 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).

It is still early in the development of the EHCAC to judge of its sustainability as a labour-community alliance centred on public services. In order to move in this direction, though, the perennial divisions between labour and community movements over the prioritization of tactical approaches vis-à-vis the ANC and the state will need to be overcome in practice. At this stage, DENOSA has not had any real opposition to membership in the EHCAC within its own ranks, or its ANC-Alliance umbrella bodies, because “this is not seen as a political issue” (Tota 2013). However, if the EHCAC engages in further direct action and begins to more deeply discuss people’s alternatives to the status quo in the face of the state’s unresponsiveness, there is bound to be a large dose of ‘politics’ and thus increased contestation involved. Further, if independent community organizations start to become more directly involved in the EHCAC, this will no doubt surface historic political, organizational 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 organizations publically and energetically sympathized with the demands of lowly paid public sector workers, COSATU failed to open communication channels and to offer meaningful ways to engage in solidarity, thus forfeiting longer term campaign linkages with the workers (Ceruti 2011). While there have been a few attempts at national campaigns involving both ‘sides’, these have not really taken root within the respective rank-and-file memberships, having largely involved leadership.

There have also been examples of specific unions and community organizations coming together for brief periods around issue- and location-specific struggles which have sometimes involved joint research as well as direct action. For example, in the 2000s SAMWU and several community organizations and NGOs were involved in the Western Cape Water Caucus. The Caucus conducted research focused on the rollout 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 (Lance Veotte, personal interview; Jessica Wilson, personal interview). Even if the Caucus has effectively ceased to exist, one of its member NGOs, the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (involving several rural communities in the Western Cape) has in more recent years continued to struggle for subsidized water provision in rural areas for food gardens as well as for community participation in water management catchment agencies (Mercia Andrews, personal interview).

Elsewhere, provincial and local structures of SAMWU in the North West Province have, over the last 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 organizations have been held (Steve Faulkner, personal interview). Since 2010, local structures of the National Education, Health

and Allied Workers Union have also begun to informally engage with some community organizations and to set up community pilots around the planned National Health Insurance programme (Guy Slingsby, personal interview). On the environmental and energy fronts, Earthlife Africa (a Johannesburg-based NGO) mostly through its community-based Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Project 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 to bring down electricity tariffs (Tristen Taylor, personal interview). What follows is a list of other recent initiatives.

## 2010

On March 3, a community protest was held in Oukasie township (near the town of Brits in the North West Province), which was linked to, and largely in support of, an ongoing strike by SAMWU members in the Madibeng Municipality calling for the resignation of the mayor and finance officer for interfering in the municipality's administration (Rebellion of the Poor Database 2014).

For its part, COSATU convened a 'Civil Society Conference' on October 27-28 attended by over 50 community-based organizations, NGOs and by 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 sustained alliance with community organizations.

Finally, the Right2Know Campaign, a national access to information network of community organizations, NGOs and activists, and COSATU engaged in joint work around opposition to the Protection of State Information Bill that carried over into 2011. Several meetings were held to coordinate opposition, linked media-communications work and information-sharing (Right2Know Campaign 2011).

## 2011

In March, the Cape Town-based Alternative Information and Development Centre (an NGO that works closely with several community organizations) initiated a 'Million Climate Jobs Campaign' that brought together unionists, NGOs, community organizations and individual activists (Brian Ashley, personal interview), including COSATU. Earlier, COSATU had, through its research arm, the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), set up an associated reference group and developed 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, according to COSATU's affiliates coordinator, the campaign was too sectorally defined (Jane Barret, personal interview). As one of the participant organizations has argued, the initiative was never grounded and lacked a practical, campaigning character (Tristen Taylor, personal interview).

Starting in April, SAMWU took up a campaign to fight casualization of work in PICKITUP, the partially privatized waste collection agency in 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 organizations (Carmen Ludwig, personal interview), many 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).

## 2012-2013

In 2012, COSATU began a public campaign against the introduction of electronic tolling (e-tolls) on many of the highways in Gauteng Province after this internal ANC-Alliance issue went unresolved. The e-tolls falling under the auspices of the state-owned South African National Roads Agency Limited were then outsourced to a private consortium to carry out this cost-recovery program. 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 other civil society groups such as the Treatment Action Campaign, the South African Council of Churches, the National Taxi Forum and the South African Students Congress (COSATU 2013). This somewhat unique alliance 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. Opposition continues in the form of sizeable numbers of individual motorists simply not paying for the e-tolls, but the staying power of this coalition is yet to be seen.

Across many provinces, there were several additional examples of coalition activities between COSATU affiliates and community groups (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 North West Province.
- Building relations with the local communities of Phola and Klipsruit Mine in and around Ogies (Mpumalanga Province) to implement campaigns for youth employment as well as the delivery of basic public services.
- Work with local communities in Fetakgomo and Tubatse (Limpopo Province) to campaign around the "dispossession of communities by mines."
- Alliances with local community organizations in Newcastle (KwaZulu-Natal Province) to oppose, through marches, the privatization of public transport as well as for the implementation of occupational, health and safety regulations in local textile businesses.

Finally, immediately following the massacre of striking miners, 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, a newly formed women's community organization, 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 land ownership in the area, the dire lack of basic public services (water, health, electricity), inadequate housing and chronic unemployment in the area. While a closer relationship developed between community structures and the union according to a veteran community organizer in the Marikana area, it has largely been an alliance of activists and workers living in surrounding communities who have engaged in activities including rallies and marches, acting "on their own" without union involvement (Chris Malebatsi, personal interview).

### Sources of weakness and disconnection

At the heart of labour-community alliances in post-apartheid South Africa is the formal political relationship of the dominant trade union formation, COSATU, with the ANC and the SACP, political parties which control and manage the state. This political bias places the labour movement in a wholly contradictory position wherein its independence is subsumed under a macro-political, state-driven corporatism that ultimately requires subservience to interests that are neither of nor for the workers themselves. As this paper has shown, this situation has produced an unsustainable political uniformity across all levels of government and society, occasional criticisms and counter mobilizations by the labour movement notwithstanding. In turn, this constructed political alliance has come to replace the more 'natural' one that should exist among the different elements of the broad working class. As a result, the political divide is growing deeper with every response of the broad working class to the economic and social consequences of the enforced neoliberal capitalism 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 (Mzwanele Mayekiso, personal interview). The fact that many within COSATU still see the 'community' branch of the ANC-Alliance, SANCO, as representative of community concerns and struggles despite the fact that it is extremely weak or non-existent in most communities around the country (Carmen Ludwig, personal interview), is testament to the 'reach' of the associated political 'consciousness'. On the community side, a key problem has been a stubborn unwillingness to get beyond specific political and ideological differences with ANC-Alliance organizations and identify those issues and struggles that might help build practical linkages and mutual trust. Coupled to this has been the scourge of entrenched regional parochialism among community organizations in South Africa, which has greatly hampered the possibilities of unified action and meaningful solidarity (McKinley 2012b, 14). What this has produced is a situation where, on the one hand, unions simply do not know how to relate to independent community organization and struggle and, on the other hand, community organizations become largely self-contained and focused – either unable or unwilling to try and break through the enforced political and organizational 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 sees union issues" (Housing Assembly-SAMWU focus group). There is a great deal of rhetoric, mostly coming from unions and 'left' political formations, about the need for labour-community alliances but little practical effort and action to make them happen. Set against the reality of their poorly resourced and often highly marginalized community organizations, many activists then develop harsh criticisms of unions (and in particular, COSATU) since they do not see and get practical support. A good contemporary example are the struggles in the Western Cape that have largely been driven by seasonal farm workers (mostly shack-dwellers in the affected communities) alone, despite endless pronouncements of solidarity and claims of political support from COSATU unions such as the Food and Allied Workers Union (Leonard Gentle, personal interview).

Even though some unions have tried to break through the political fog, there has been a distinct lack of political will within COSATU to "build the infrastructure necessary for [anti-privatisation] campaigns at the national and regional levels" (Hilary Wainwright, personal interview) 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" (Jane Barret, personal interview).

This macro-politics has also fed intensified factionalism within the ANC-Alliance, which has in turn impacted on the character and content of linked struggles for public service provision (von Holdt et al 2011). Many community organizations have themselves experienced divisive splits, often revolving around competition for leadership and scarce financial resources in a context of generalized material and social deprivation, engendering a mode of individualism and entrepreneurial engagement within those organizations (McKinley 2012b, 14-18). This mindset has made it even more difficult for labour and community activists to develop trusting and sustained relationships (Lance Veotte, personal interview) as well as to forge genuine alliances in struggle.

More tragically, though, such a macro-politics has incubated and fed increasing patronage and corruption that have, over the last several years, seeped into the fabric of both the labour and community movements. For example, when a group of casualized street cleaners in Ekshurini (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 that of permanent municipal employees (Ighsaan Schroeder, personal interview).

As corruption and its parallel individualist approach have grown, the levels of trust and comradeship essential to positive personal relationships, internal democratic organization and any meaningful alliances of support, solidarity and shared struggle have declined (Desmond D'Sa, personal interview). In addition, the perennial problem of sexism, alongside often opportunistic and shallow 'gender politics' of both unions and community organizations, remains a huge barrier to a mutually shared progressive politics and democratic organization. This is particularly debilitating for community organizations in which women generally form the majority of membership (McKinley 2012b, 64-65). Within unions, the 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/unionized workers as against those who are unemployed/casualized workers. In respect of community leaders, they have regularly been co-opted into well-paid local government positions or become involved in networks of patronage and corrupt activity (Mercia Andrews, personal interview), leaving not only a huge organizational vacuum but also a divided community.

### **Institutional and organizational separation**

In the context of the divisive neoliberal, corporatist restructuring of the workforce and workplace in South Africa, unions now operate within a dominant institutional framework that serves to further separate labour and community. Membership in both unions and community organizations has now come to be defined largely by institutional position and structure, as opposed to class location and lived experience. 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. As expressed by a resident of Mpumalanga Township in KwaZulu-Natal who was deeply disappointed 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 Tshoaedi 2013, 28).

Mostly tucked away in their institutional silos, unions have failed to forge any kind of serious and longer term strategy to relate to, organize and support informal/casualized workers and the unemployed who dominate the membership of community organizations. When those communities 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 or improve their conditions of work, they largely fail to 'see' the mass of people who have no jobs or whose conditions are often much worse. The combined consequence is like two ships passing in the dark; while there are no research statistics to measure community organizations' involvement in strikes by unions, the 2012 *Workers Survey* does show that less than 25 per cent of COSATU workers participated in a community protest over a four-year period (COSATU 2012b), and the 2013 COSATU *Shop-Stewards Survey* reveals that only 12 per cent indicated their involvement in community organizations had anything to do with their work (Forum for Public Dialogue 2013).

The impact of this institutional separation has been profound. As against the generally flexible and campaigning culture of community organizations, unions have become highly structured with increasing levels of bureaucracy and the dominance of a culture of formalized negotiation (Roger Ronnie, personal interview; Xali 2005). For unions, this has meant the gradual but systematic loss of a bottom-up approach – something that has happened to a lesser extent in some community organizations as well. 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) to resolve both individual and collective worker struggles (Carmen Ludwig, personal interview), the organizational terrain for linked labour-community struggle is further eroded.

Even where some workers have broken away from the constraints of such organizational 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 strategy but this was not taken up seriously by the strike committee. As a result, the miners, most of whom had been members of the National Union of Mineworkers, and who had been part of the forum joined an independent union while the forum itself has since become largely moribund (Igshaan Schroeder, personal interview).

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 people-centred provision of public services and for 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 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**

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

While there certainly must be recognition of the generalized messiness that is part and parcel of

mass community politics and mobilization, 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. 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 this should come as no surprise, but that does not make it more acceptable given the high expectations of the many that South Africa's broad working class could and would lead a strong and unified post-apartheid struggle for radical systemic change.

Nonetheless, South Africa has a rich history of labour-community alliances that 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 mobilization and vibrant political and social education; the embracing of a political and organization culture of internal democracy, gender equality alongside vibrant dialogue and debate; and forging a principled, socially progressive, accountable and committed leadership. And finally, there is a need for moving beyond a rather stale anti-privatization posturing, to a broadened dialogue of what a pro-public service might look like and consist of.

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 privatization "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).

The good news is that there are spaces opening up that speak to both the realities and reclamation of change. The most crucial of these spaces has been engendered by the ongoing fracturing of the ANC-Alliance over the last few years, a process that has been greatly catalyzed 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 held state power is the parallel maintenance of both a politically malleable union leadership and expanding benefits for a meaningful threshold of unionized workers. On both counts, the 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 unionized 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 social reach and their potential to shake the capitalist-friendly ANC and the state it controls and manages, unionized 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 alternatives.

This is where the incipient moves by NUMSA, supported by many community organizations 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 (2013) 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].

In its first step along such a path NUMSA held a 'Resistance Expo' in February 2014 that saw a wide variety of community organizations 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 organize workers across value chains, including in the highly divided and volatile mining sector (NUMSA 2013), a move that could also herald the beginnings of organizational support for informal/casualized 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 organizations as well as in making common cause with informal/casualized 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 the state.

## What needs to be done?

Building labour-community alliances is an inherently difficult practical task everywhere, even in the best of circumstances. Even in instances, for example in Valle del Cauca, Colombia, where a single union and a small community organization located in one particular area have successfully formed an alliance to oppose water privatization and promote alternative means of delivery, it took a slow and often painful process to build the necessary trust and understanding (Bélanger Dumontier et al. forthcoming 2014). In more socially heterogeneous contexts such as South Africa, the task is that much more difficult. Nonetheless, the time is ripe.

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 independently from any political party. In order for that to begin there must first be recognition by unions and community organizations 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 among a small layer of seasoned unionists and activists. For this to happen, there needs to be a collectively planned program of consciousness-raising through a systematic education initiative that can catalyze positive and mutually beneficial, trusting and respectful relationships (Desmond D'Sa, personal interview; Adrian Murray, personal interview; also Housing Assembly-SAMWU focus group). 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 services they desire.

In doing so, a base can be constructed on which a parallel, joint program of basic grassroots activism can then be pursued. That program 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 organized workers and community residents. It should also propose ways forward for unions and community organizations to 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 (Roger Ronnie, personal interview; Hilary Wainwright, personal interview). Reclaiming public services calls for action at different levels: in the workplace, in the community, nationally and where possible and relevant, at the international level. Such a campaign must invoke both the progressive content of a human and constitutional rights template, and the more radical content of a democratically forged, anti-capitalist people's power that is not reducible to the state. 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 privatization 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 organizational work 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 organizational identities. What must act as a constant reminder is the immediate goal to engage in a struggle to "democratise, open up and improve the way services and indeed the state itself is organised" as a means toward "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.

## Endnotes

1 The 'ANC-Alliance' refers to the formal political alliance between the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

2 Mbuso Nkosi is a researcher in sociology and politics at the University of Witwatersrand.

3 A term deriving from the combination of the (abbreviated) surname of the incumbent president of 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.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dale T. McKinley** is an independent writer, researcher and lecturer based in Johannesburg, South Africa. He is a long-time political activist and has been intricately involved in social movement, community and political organizations and struggles since the late 1980s. Dale has a PhD in Politics-African Studies. He is the author of three books and has written numerous book chapters, research reports, journal/magazine and press articles on various aspects of South African and international political, social and economic issues and popular struggles.

## Interviews

Frank Alexander, General Secretary, Metal, Engineering, Plant Hire and Allied Workers' Union (MEPAWU), personal interview, Feb. 26, 2014.

Mercia Andrews, Director, Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), personal interview, Nov. 26, 2013.

Brian Ashley, Director, Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), personal interview, Dec. 10, 2013.

Jane Barret, Affiliates Coordinator, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), personal interview, Oct. 14, 2013.

Michael Blake, Researcher, International Labour, Research and Information Group (ILRIG), personal interview, Nov. 29, 2013.

Desmond D'Sa, Coordinator, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), personal interview, Feb. 26, 2014.

Stephen Faulkner, International Relations Officer, South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), personal interview, Sept. 17, 2013.

Leonard Gentle, Director, ILRIG, personal interview, Oct. 4, 2013.

Housing Assembly-SAMWU focus group, conducted in person with several members of the Cape Town Housing Assembly and SAMWU, Nov. 30, 2013.

Carmen Ludwig, Researcher, National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) and past researcher with SAMWU, personal interview, Oct. 11, 2013.

Chris Malebatsi, community liaison for the Marikana Support Campaign, personal interview, Feb. 11, 2014.

Adrian Murray, PhD candidate at the University of Ottawa, Canada, Skype interview, Feb. 3, 2014.

Roger Ronnie, unionist and political activist and former General Secretary of SAMWU, personal interview, Nov. 29, 2013.

Ighsaan Schroeder, Coordinator, Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO) and past union organizer and educator, personal interview, Sept. 18, 2013.

Guy Slingsby, Organising and Collective Bargaining Researcher, National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), personal interview, Oct. 15, 2013.

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), personal focus group discussion with seven casualized workers who are part of SDCEA, Feb. 26, 2014.

Sasha Stevenson, Attorney at Section27, personal interview, Oct. 10, 2013.

Tristen Taylor, Coordinator, Earthlife Africa (Johannesburg), personal interview, Sept. 23, 2013.

Kholiswa Tota, Eastern Cape Provincial Secretary, Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA), telephonic interview, Feb. 21, 2014.

Lance Veotte, Western Cape Provincial Chairperson, SAMWU, personal interview, Nov. 29, 2013.

Hilary Wainwright, Editor, Red Pepper magazine and Fellow, Transnational Institute, Skype interview, Oct. 25, 2014.

Jessica Wilson, Project Officer, Environmental Management Group (EMG), personal interview, Oct. 14, 2013.



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