

The impact of tripartite politics on the leadership function in public administration

Dialogue between the ANC, COSATU and the SACP in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Since 1994 the South African state has been governed through an Alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Whilst each of these organisations claims autonomy and independence, it shares a common history and core ideological persuasions which has been articulated as the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Whilst ANC members may not necessarily be members of the SACP or COSATU, any member of the SACP or COSATU who desires to enter politics is required to be a member of the ANC. The SACP and COSATU do not contest elections. As part of the agreement, only the ANC contests elections and as such leads the Alliance. This has led to a number of challenges, specifically related to public administration. This article describes the nature of the tripartite alliance by considering the historical roots of the alliance itself and its performance in government; and by concluding that there is an understanding of the leadership role of the ANC within the Alliance. The ANC itself is a reflection of the broad church nature of such an Alliance.

Irrespective of this convergence of ideology, there is periodic divergence on the leadership role of the ANC viz a viz that of the Alliance as the strategic centre for policy and governance issues. However, the ANC has, over the years, successfully challenged this assertion and, through practice, has led the Alliance in a politically driven manner that is predicated on consultation, due diligence and functional purpose. However, any member of the SACP or COSATU who desires to be part of Parliament or the executive is required to be a member of the ANC. While COSATU and the SACP provide advice, through Alliance structures, on the deployment of cadres in the public service, the deployment committee is an ANC structure and the final decisions with regard to deployment, resides with the ANC.

INTRODUCTION

With the benefit of a sense of the histories of the ANC, SACP and COSATU as well as the respective organisational constitutional imperatives, their structural arrangements and policy preferences, the locus and focus of public administration, the interface between administration and politics, it is necessary to examine how tripartite politics have impacted on state administration in terms of policy formulation and implementation, public leadership, human resource capacity and governance.

This article focuses on the shared and divergent interests among the main Alliance partners – ANC, COSATU and SACP and how these have shaped and continue to shape state capacity through leadership, governance, policy delivery and human resources provision or staffing. These themes cannot be considered in isolation as they are integrated and integral to a holistic understanding of how the state functions. Leadership is a prerequisite for good governance and both, in turn, are prerequisites for policy development and implementation. The aforementioned are at-risk when the state is not adequately staffed by a critical mass of employees who not only understand their role as state employees, but who are also passionately committed to the programme of action of government and therefore, committed to ensuring that the citizens of the country are indeed the beneficiaries of good government services.

COMMON INTERESTS

Within the Alliance, there seems to be broad consensus on welfare or social security policy and a general recognition and acceptance that the lives of the majority must be improved. This consensus is a necessary condition; both on moral grounds and as a means to ensure political stability and identification with the relatively new state. As a common interest issue, it is a quick win and is largely supported by all the Alliance partners. However, the crucial political challenge for the ruling party (ANC) has to do with successfully reaching this aim – political stability and patriotism – without disrupting the economy whilst retaining the support of key groups including business and labour. The black middle class has experienced explosive growth over the last eighteen years. This category of citizen has become known as the *black diamonds* and has, with increased mobility, introduced new interests to the Alliance. For example, the ANC and the tripartite Alliance must now wrestle with ideas as to whether it (primarily the broad-based ANC), through its policy preferences and policy planks, only represent the interests of those who are well organised and articulate, with a limited interest in expanding the welfare system. How does the ANC balance the needs of this growing middle and upwardly mobile class against the increasing inequity gap in the country? This group may perceive the expansion of the welfare system as creating an onerous tax burden on them as they become more dissociated from the poor and working class. So while some policies like social security may initially start out as common interest positions, the risk of it degenerating into divergent interest becomes stronger as more citizens move from the working class to the middle class.



DIVERGENT INTERESTS

Divergent policy interests are most prevalent in the area of economic policy than in social policy. The history of the Alliance over the last eighteen years reflects this visibly. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was essentially developed as a COSATU-SACP document after a wide consultative process and adopted by the ANC in the first democratic elections in 1994. The RDP, was replaced by the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) framework in 1996. GEAR was perceived as having been drafted by a few bankers and academics from Washington without any popular local support. Various mutations of GEAR followed such as Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) and the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsGISA) and currently the New Growth Path (NGP) is mooted and pursued as being the policy solution to the country's economic woes.

The RDP, which was perceived as a strong socialist policy, took a backseat in favour of GEAR which, according to COSATU, was a policy that clearly favoured a capitalist system and ideology. COSATU was instrumental in drafting and implementing the RDP with COSATU's founding General-Secretary, Jay Naidoo, who was appointed as the minister responsible for implementing the RDP in the Mandela cabinet. In developing GEAR, COSATU was not consulted. It is arguable that this was a deliberate strategy of the ANC at the time in an attempt to diminish the influence of COSATU within the political domain.

The perception of GEAR was fuelled as the South African government's response to the pressures of international capital instead of focusing on the developmental needs of the country as purported through the RDP. To many within COSATU, the choice was clear: Is it about the interests of those who possess economic power and control the market? Do they—and those who enter the market—have to be helped merely because South Africa must be able to compete internationally? Can and should the state be regarded as a neutral mediator between labour and capital? Should the state instead not opt for a radical socialist vision? These issues simultaneously transcended and augmented the ideological differences between the ANC and the COSATU-SACP axis in the Alliance. Raising these questions also poignantly pointed to the role the state ought to play in the South African society and economy and, therefore, the transformation direction and trajectory of South Africa – the notion of a developmental state.

The NGP and the National Development Plan (NDP) are still in the infancy stage. However, there are multiple points of divergence within and amongst Alliance partners as to the value of these policy directions. The difference though between GEAR and the NGP is that, unlike with GEAR, the ANC is carefully attending to the views of its Alliance partners; or at least, it is creating such a perception. There are indications that the NGP is seen as an evolving policy document which can be amended in accordance with the dictating material and contextual conditions of the country at any given point in time. It is not absolute and is strengthened through the continued dialogue that is taking place through the alliance structures. The two ministers directly involved in spearheading the NGP come from COSATU and the SACP respectively (Ebrahim Patel, former Secretary-General of Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) and Minister of Economic Development and Rob Davies, a Central Committee member of the SACP and Minister of Trade and Industry) whilst Trevor Manuel, finance minister in Mbeki's administration, heads the

National Planning Commission (NPC). In some instances, it is to be expected that divergent policy interests have the potential to converge and become common interest positions.

“IN-BETWEEN” OR “TWILIGHT” INTERESTS

Somewhere between common interest and divergent interest positions reside what can be termed *twilight* interests. One member may have a strong view of certain policies whilst, in the interest of the Alliance, the leading member would usually consent, but not necessarily share the same conviction as the partner advocating certain positions. An example of this is evident in employment-related policies. COSATU, as a workers’ movement, has strong views on the notion of *decent work*. Whilst the ANC may share this value (which was confirmed through the Polokwane resolutions), its position as a broad-based organisation, is informed by responding to a myriad of constituents that span across the class formations, including the unemployed, the poor as well as organised business. In this instance, it will contend with the COSATU position, whilst seeking to find a solution that will not compromise the national economy as it pertains to the labour market.

ALLIANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy development and implementation include five basic steps:

- identify a problem
- formulate a policy
- adopt the policy
- implement the policy and
- evaluate the policy

Three distinct areas of public policy can be identified. Just about any policy can be classified as social, economic, or foreign. Many citizens would only be aware of issues such as welfare, crime, abortion, education, and health care within the realm of public policy. What they may possibly be unaware of is that all of these fall under the heading of social policy, and only represent a part of the whole. The artificial dissonance between different policy orientations is a recipe for policy failure.

The eventual character of the policy is shaped by the ideological persuasions of the ruling or governing party of the day. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the cohesive force or ideology that has and continues to shape the policy positions of the South African government since 1994 through the lens of the ANC and the Alliance and how this has been seminal in the way that the policy objectives are delivered.

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR)

The constant and consistent theme throughout the Alliance partners documents, including their constitutions, policy frameworks and strategy documents centres on the concept of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR).



The Constitution of the ANC states that

The ANC is committed to end apartheid in all its forms and transform South Africa as rapidly as possible into a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic country based on the principles of the Freedom Charter and in pursuit of the national democratic revolution (researcher's emphasis).

Highlights from the SACP Constitution commit the party to:

strive to be the leading political force of the South African working class whose interests it promotes in the struggle to advance, deepen and defend the national democratic revolution (researcher's emphasis) and to achieve socialism;

educating, organising and mobilising the working class and its allies in support of the SACP and its objectives of completing the national democratic revolution (researcher's emphasis) and achieving socialism;

Furthermore, the SACP Constitution articulates the main aim of the unfolding national democratic revolution as completing

the national liberation of the African people in particular and black people in general, to ensure the destruction of the legacy of white supremacy, and the strengthening of democracy in every sphere of life.

COSATU, at its 10th National Congress called for a

programme for transformation, setting out the short-term, medium-term and long-term objectives to deepen the NDR (researcher's emphasis) and the attainment of socialism. The programme will reflect the multitude of challenges facing the working class at the point of production and reproduction; and in all sites of power, the state, judiciary and the media.

Blade Nzimande, the Secretary-General of the SACP wrote (Nzimande 2006) that, "The character, content and direction of the NDR are of fundamental importance to our alliance, since the deepening and consolidating of the national democratic revolution is the glue that holds our Alliance together." If the NDR is the cohesive force behind the tripartite Alliance, then it is imperative to understand what the NDR is. It is through a better understanding of the NDR that one may possibly be in the position to better comprehend the impact of the alliance on public administration.

Genesis of the NDR

Marxist-Leninism introduced the concept of national democracy in an attempt to justify growing international links between the Soviet Union and the ex-colonial world. In 1960, 81 Communist and Workers' parties met in Moscow and in the final declaration formally introduced the term *national democracy* into the theoretical repertoire of the international communist movement (Statement 1960). This was done to designate a

category of ex-colonial (and dependent) countries which could be identified as engaged on a non-capitalist path of development in opposition to imperialism and towards national autonomy.

The NDR has historically been understood to be a revolution led by progressive motive forces (mainly oppressed and exploited), to defeat repressive and colonial regimes and build people's democracies. While the objective was regime change in favour of socialism, it was recognised that there were also circumstances where, due to domestic or global balance of forces, such a revolution is unable to immediately proceed to socialism. This could be because the motive forces are either not strong or conscious enough to drive the revolution towards socialism or other objective factors pose a limitation to a transition to socialism.

A national democracy was defined in the Moscow statement as being committed to the strengthening of national independence, land reforms in the interests of the peasantry, abolition of the remnants of feudalism, expiration of the economic roots of imperialist rule, the limitation and ousting of foreign monopolies from the economy, the foundation and development of a national industry, the raising of the standard of living of the population, democratisation of public life, an independent, peace-loving foreign policy (Lowenthal 1963:56). It was envisaged that in such countries, local communist parties would not aim in the first instance at the socialist transformation of society because of the very low level of development of the production forces and social production which characterise these countries and renders immediate socialist revolution impossible. The revolution was to be interpreted as being conducted in two stages, the NDR followed by socialism.

The conditions for immediately carrying out revolutionary socialist transformations and for embarking on the socialist path have not matured in all countries, as is evident in the nations' historical archives. Not all countries have a sufficiently organised working class, a peasantry ready to accept the leadership of the working class, and a Marxist-Leninist Party. This does not mean that in these countries' social development must slow down or even come to an end. Revolutionary Marxists, having studied the special features and tendencies in the life of the young state, have established that they can have progressive development along a non-capitalist path that will eventually lead to socialism.

However, the underlying theory of NDR surmises that such states can, at the same time, establish cultural and political conditions under which communist parties can be formed (if not already in existence) and acquire a hegemonic role amongst the proletariat (and its allies). The interests of the national bourgeoisie and the working class are thus conceived as converging in underdeveloped social formations. Common interests are taking shape creating the conditions for alliance formation. The forms of state intervention which are part of this *non-capitalist* path of development are not seen as being in conflict with the interests of the national bourgeoisie or with capitalist property ownership. On the contrary, a large and energetic state sector in the economy is conceived in the theory of national democracy as the best defence available to the national bourgeoisie against the international monopolies (Brookfield 1981).

Apartheid in South Africa gave rise to a new political term: *colonialism of a special type* (CST). In terms of the CST analysis, South Africa advanced the following thesis: given the specific structure of South African society, the struggle to establish socialism must first



assume the form of struggle to establish a national-democracy and that this struggle must be successful before there can be any transition to socialism in South Africa.

CST identifies three interrelated antagonistic contradictions: class, race and patriarchal relations of power. These antagonisms found expression in national oppression based on race; class super-exploitation directed against Black workers on the basis of race; and triple oppression of the mass of women based on their race, their class and their gender.

It has been argued elsewhere that the concepts of national democracy and CST are essentially apologetic. They merit no scrutiny because their unique function is to provide a justification, *ex post facto*, for an opportunistic political policy, on the part of the Soviet Union and national communist parties of alliance with non-socialist nationalist regimes (Dallin 1963; Lowenthal 1963; Steele 1985:165).

Given that the NDR has been conceived from within communism, key questions that arise, particularly for the SACP, within the context of the Alliance relative to the NDR are:

- Could it be that within the Alliance, and in broader society, there is in essence a contest over whether the NDR has a capitalist or socialist orientation?
- Are contemporary struggles not a reflection of a struggle between pursuance of a socialist oriented NDR and a struggle to co-opt and transform the NDR into a full-blown bourgeois (capitalist) democracy with the bourgeoisie (black and white) at the helm of such a project? Is it possible to even create a sustainable bourgeois democracy in South Africa in the light of the inequalities reproduced daily by the capitalist system?
- Is it still possible to pursue a socialist oriented NDR in the post-Soviet era? Was such an NDR perhaps only possible during the existence of the Soviet socialist union of countries which acted as a counter to the designs of the imperialist world? Could this be the reason why some in the Alliance are talking about the aim of the NDR being to manage the capitalist system in line with main elements of its own logic?
- What should be the strategy and tactics of pursuing a socialist oriented NDR in a unipolar, imperialist world dominated by the US?
- Has an NDR ever progressed to socialism under bourgeois-type multi party democracies? Has it not been the case in 20th century national democratic revolutions that such revolutions have only proceeded to socialism only immediately after the victory over repressive regimes, and not under conditions of open electoral contests in bourgeois democratic type dispensations?
- Is it inevitable that in today's unipolar world national democratic revolutions can only be co-opted and transformed into bourgeois democratic dispensations after a democratic breakthrough like in South Africa?
- What can South Africa learn from Chavez' Venezuela of the 2000s?

The ANC, COSATU and SACP share the perspective that the national democratic revolution means the achievement of a non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society. While there are nuance differences to how each partner interprets the NDR, there seems to be a shared understanding amongst them about these nuanced perspectives.

While the NDR may have been conceived from within the *belly of communism*, there appears to be a degree of consensus in the Alliance that the NDR has evolved to the point where it is not a socialist revolution or a struggle for capitalism. It can be argued that this

shared perspective was deepened through the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955. Whilst not a socialist document, it (the Freedom Charter) envisaged a radical transformation of society, based on democratic rights, including the major restructuring of the capitalist system itself in favour of the overwhelming majority of the South African people. This shared perspective was also strengthened by the ANC's commitment to a working class bias as captured in the Morogoro Conference (1969). This *middle way* in interpreting the NDR as neither socialist, nor capitalist, may well have been to the advantage of the ANC in assuming the leading role of the Alliance. The *middle way* resonates with the character of the ANC as a "broad church", a *hegemonic organisation* that does not seek to define itself in exclusivist, or narrow ideological terms. Rather, the ANC remains home to a variety of progressive ideological currents—nationalist, Africanist, socialist and of a variety of different classes and strata, all united behind a common commitment to national democratic transformation.

In broad terms, the NDR wants to ensure that every South African, especially the poor, experiences an improved quality of life. It aims to build a developmental state shaped by the history and socio-economic dynamics of South African society. Such a state will guide national economic development and mobilise domestic and foreign capital and other social partners to achieve this goal. It will have attributes that include:

- capacity to intervene in the economy in the interest of higher rates of growth and sustainable development;
- effecting sustainable programmes that address challenges of unemployment, poverty and underdevelopment with requisite emphasis on vulnerable groups; and
- mobilising the people as a whole, especially the poor, to act as their own liberators through participatory and representative democracy.

The ANC's vision for society, informed by its interpretation of the NDR, is both comprehensive and broad. It recognises the transitional state of society and the transformation imperatives that are needed to ensure that democracy is indeed entrenched. It acknowledges the co-existence of different class formations and does not commit to doing away with this. In relation to public administration; the vision sets the scene for the policies that ought to be developed and pursued by government. These policies must address the inequities and poverty that has been the result of the history of South Africa. Not only that, the ANC's understanding of the NDR with regard to the state, is that the state must be interventionist in both society and the economy in the context of a mixed economy. Democratic centralism is a key feature in the state's role in society and the economy. Effective and successful intervention will require the deployment of the required technical capacity, which must be synchronised to the deployment of cadres in key state institutions. However, where this capacity, specifically in the bureaucracy, is minimal, then an aggressive skills development programme is required.

The ANC represents the NDR as an ideology that is socially inclusive and not socialist in its intent whereas both the SACP and COSATU strategic adoption of the NDR is that it (the NDR) is a means to an end, that end being socialism. This ideological orientation of the ANC is the over-riding consideration in how government policy is ultimately formulated and implemented, sometimes with conservative caution and at other times with revolutionary passion, itself an outcome of the middle path.



POLICY INFLUENCE

Social movements have characterised the ANC-led government as neo-liberal. This characterisation seems to have overlooked and thus missed the opportunity to engage the ANC's many identities. The ANC is a liberation movement; democratic government; and one of the oldest social movements in Africa. Each of these identities has specific appeal and possibly is one of the reasons why the party continues to win elections. Therefore, mass mobilisation is not enough, there needs to be clear and specific policy alternatives and most importantly, buy-in from stakeholders in government. It is crucial that the ANC be engaged at all levels of its many identities.

COSATU has managed to have a significant impact on policy – particularly economic (labour) and social policy—through a variety of formal mechanisms such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), a parliamentary office to monitor legislation and facilitate consultations with parliamentary committees, and engagement with departments and ministries. It is regularly consulted with, often in advance of other civil society organisations, and frequently provides inputs into government policy documents. Because of its proximity to government, COSATU is often seen as a greater source of opposition when it does oppose government as has been evident in the recent e-tolling saga in Gauteng. Several parliamentarians and cabinet ministers hail from the ranks of the labour federation, therefore, also provides a source of influence within the inner sanctums of government. COSATU has combined strike action, mass mobilisation and over the past eighteen years, strategic participation in policy-making. It also promotes the improvement of the working conditions of members and for non-racial, multi-party democracy. The *Labour Relations Act*, 1995 in particular, is considered to be a major victory for the union federation, providing as it does, for one of the most progressive labour regimes in the world.

Not everything has been without a struggle for COSATU. There were some fundamental policy differences with the ANC, including the differences in policy on matters dealing with socio-economic issues. The bigger question, then, is why COSATU has chosen to bond with the Alliance despite obvious policy disagreements with the ANC? A simple response might be that there is no mandate to do otherwise. Under the COSATU Constitution, a policy decision of the magnitude of breaking the Alliance would have to be passed by the majority of delegates at a major policy conference like a Congress. The proposal would need to come from one of the affiliated trade unions in the form of a resolution and be supported by a second affiliate. COSATU has to date failed to secure such a resolution, not for a lack of trying from some of its affiliates. If they break with the Alliance, COSATU is at risk of losing its privileged access to the state (and with it the ability to influence policy meaningfully), something that at least the senior leaders in the organisation seem unwilling to risk.

In the end, government policy is determined through the ANC processes. However, the ANC processes are influenced by COSATU and the SACP given their Alliance status as well as the matter of multiple memberships among these organisations. COSATU and the SACP may have a very clear policy position, but unless they are in a position to influence the ANC policy platform, these policies mean nothing as both organisations have opted to be in an Alliance with the ANC rather than contest the elections and thus the viability of their policies with the electorate.

ANC'S LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE ALLIANCE

The form of leadership that is prevalent in the Alliance is that of democratic centralism. This form of leadership requires all members to participate in discussions of issues and policies and all the members are eligible to vote for the leaders. However, once leaders have been put in place, very little opposition to their ideas is permitted (De Vries 2001:239). The danger to this type of leadership is that it may be misrepresented to such an extent that it results in extremely autocratic practices. The period from 1996 to 2007 came dangerously close to rupturing the Alliance as the SACP and COSATU faced accusations from factions within the ANC of being ultra-leftist.

The ANC is permanently faced with the question: What does it mean for government to lead an Alliance consisting of both organised labour and communists? Although there has been growing criticism of COSATU and affiliates by ANC leaders, there has been little desire for a messy public split.

The organisational capacity of COSATU is invaluable to the ANC, especially during election campaigns. The ANC simply does not have the machinery in place to sustain an effective election campaign, with some key observers even arguing, that the ANC has been having considerable difficulty with any kind of mobilising activity at the grass-roots. Making use of COSATU's infrastructure considerably simplifies matters for the ANC. As a result, whenever there is an election, ANC officials actively court shop-stewards and regional organisers to support the ANC's electoral campaign by arranging visits by ANC political candidates to factories, pension pick-up points, and other places where large numbers of the ANC's expected constituency would be present.

The SACP and COSATU are classified as leftist whilst the ANC is representative of a broad church balancing the interests of various class formations. It must be noted that the ANC plays the central role within the Alliance. Southall (2008:61) postulated that although the Alliance is formally a partnership, the ANC is the leading phenomenon. The communist wing, the SACP, remains a separate political party with no autonomous representation in Parliament or the provincial legislatures. Its members who sit in Parliament do so as ANC members of Parliament (MPs). In addition, a significant number of COSATU federation members and union officials have been elected to Parliament under the auspices of the ANC. These SACP and COSATU deployed members serve in the public service as representatives of the ANC and as such are subject to the disciplinary code and constitutional imperatives of the ANC.

Southall (2008:55) proposes that liberation movements inhabit an environment which is uncongenial for democracy, while also stressing unity, rejecting partisan divisions and promoting the illusion that they represent the entire nation. This is particularly the case for the Alliance whereby the ANC leaders seem to act as if everything is working well thereby creating an illusion. It is explicit that the Alliance partners would use whatever available mechanisms at their disposal to pursue their agenda as was seen at the 52nd National Conference of the ANC in Polokwane in 2007.

Five interventions by COSATU between 1990 and 1994 helped shape the democratic transition and contributed significantly to the nature of the Alliance:

- the combination of mass action with negotiation helped break the deadlocks at important moments;



- its involvement in economic policy-making generated new institutions, such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) and research into new industrial policies;
- it contributed to the new constitution, including the right to strike;
- it was a central political actor, mobilising support for the ANC during the 1994 election and elections ever since; and
- it initiated and advocated the RDP as was an accord which was viewed by labour as committing a newly elected ANC government to a labour-driven development programme.

Notwithstanding the COSATU influence, the South African state was, since 1990, squarely integrated in the global political, economic and military establishment. Together with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (a crisis for communists), the ANC leaders started to adopt positions increasingly consistent with a neo-liberal orthodoxy. By late 1993, the ANC had made a number of concessions on macroeconomic policy which were to culminate in the Growth, Economic and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. GEAR aimed to achieve growth through fiscal deficit reduction, gradual relaxation of exchange controls, reduction in tariffs, tax reductions to encourage the private sector (and especially foreign direct) investment, and privatisation. When GEAR was announced, the Alliance partners were angered both by the content (which they saw for the first time) because the government asserted that it was *non-negotiable*. With painful irony, what began as an accord to bind an ANC-led Alliance ended up ensnaring both COSATU and the SACP in a neo-liberal-inspired macro-economic policy. GEAR forthrightly committed the ANC government (and all the SACP and COSATU politicians and bureaucrats within the alliance) to a strict monetarist regime, market-led growth strategies and a South African version of trickle-down economics.

The strength of any governing party is most evident in the support it enjoys at the ballot box. In the case of the ANC, it won an overwhelming majority in 1994 and increased its returns in 1999 and again in 2004. It had a slight decrease in 2009, but still remains in power with an overwhelming majority. The ballot support for the ANC has never dropped below 63%. Union leaders are, therefore, likely to continue to want to co-operate with the government in the hope of influencing it, rather than opting for the political wilderness. They, together with the leaders in the SACP would be aware that according to an Ipsos Markinor survey conducted in April 2007, only 8% of South Africans (and 5% of ANC supporters) would vote for a breakaway SACP/COSATU party if it were to stand independently in a national election.

The degree of labour autonomy from both the party and the state has an impact on the influence of labour on the state. Here COSATU is in a relatively strong position because it developed its own political culture during the 1980s and early 1990s. At the core of this were the shop stewards, elected by shop floor workers, usually through secret ballot and directly accountable to their constituents. They operated on the basis of strict mandates from the membership and were subject to recall. Their independence from employers and the state was a central part of this culture, underpinned by financial independence through stop order deductions. Furthermore, elected worker representatives dominated the regional and central executives of these unions, including the president and national office bearers

who were constitutionally required to be full-time shop floor workers. This autonomy was asserted inside the Alliance where COSATU saw itself as an independent and equal partner. Indeed during the late 1980s it emerged as *de facto* leader of the anti-apartheid movement inside South Africa. However, the transition to democracy has weakened this political culture. *Firstly*, COSATU has lost significant layers of leadership to government, political office and the corporate sector. Often labelled the *brain drain*, this has seriously diminished the pool of skilled and experienced leaders developed over years of struggle. *Secondly*, and relatedly, there has been a marked decline in the quality of service provided to members and an erosion of the role of mandates and report-backs. *Thirdly*, a growing gap has developed between leadership and the base. *Fourthly*, the unbanning of the ANC has enabled the ANC to assert its hegemony over the Alliance. Instead of COSATU and the SACP drawing the ANC into a left project, through the transition, the ANC has increasingly been drawn into a neo-liberal project, thus marginalising both COSATU and the SACP's redistributive programmes. This hegemony has increased massively with the ANC's assumption of state power where it now has access to vast resources and capabilities provided by a modern state bureaucracy.

The strategy and tactics adopted by COSATU and the SACP, as well as those within the ANC who do not approve of a neo-liberal political and economic path, continue to revolve around wanting to win concessions from the leaders of the ANC within a framework that consistently waters-down the demands being made (for example, the bases for job creation, youth wage subsidy, resource redistribution, socialisation of basic services and democratic debate). This approach is ostensibly designed to ensure an acceptable degree of ideological and organisational continuity with the ANC leaders running the country, so as to maintain a *National Democratic Alliance* that is seen as the only viable political/organisational vehicle to meet the needs of the majority (the workers and the poor). The reality, however, is that while bringing moderate relief to that majority, the most tangible result has been to preserve and advance the personal careers and political futures of leaders across the Alliance spectrum. While making radical sounding statements on worker-related and political economy issues, combined with limited mass action designed to extract concessions and remind capital of mass power, the leadership of COSATU and the SACP have been unwilling to make the connection between the neoliberal democracy pursued by the ANC elites and the parallel organisational and class lessons in relation to the Alliance.

The binding message that has held this entire edifice together since 1994 has been the constant rhetoric of the need for *unity* within the ANC and Alliance. This is counter-posed to the dangers of an independent workers' movement and/or political organisation that will break such *unity* and thus weaken the *liberation movement*. The reality is remotely different. The kind of unity that ANC elites have fashioned is one that revolves around a mass of radical-sounding rhetoric about transformation, a progressive National Democratic Revolution, deepening democracy, a developmental state, workers' interests and the national interest. All the while, however, the political and organisational space created has been used to progressively narrow the boundaries of debate and opposition to the chosen *line*. In the process, the cornerstones of any real democracy has been, and continues to be, actively eroded within the ANC and Alliance – the critical questioning of the substance behind such



rhetoric/policy and mobilisation to challenge and change the political and economic *status quo*. It is no cliché to say that the struggle will continue.

Would a more plausible alternative to the Alliance be for COSATU and the SACP to team up to offer a left alternative to the ANC? There appears to have been some movement in this direction with the pledge at various COSATU Congresses to build the SACP and to provide the party with some financial resources. However, the SACP itself is unwilling to break with the Alliance, while many of the middle-rank unionists who would support leaving the ANC did not see the SACP as a natural ally. Another alternative, and one supported by some unionists, has been the idea of forming a new workers party. There has, however, been little sign yet of discussions that might initiate such an alternative.

Establishing a workers' party would take workers a number of years to establish themselves and against odds with few financial resources, mass media hostility, and divisions among COSATU members and leaders on the merits of the proposal.

Signs are prevalent of widespread disillusionment with the ANC that may manifest itself in other ways. There is evidence suggesting that despite the considerable financial and personnel resources, COSATU and its affiliates have put behind the ANC electoral campaigns, trade union activists have not invested much of energy into it.

Governance is about implementation of policy. This requires the requisite state capacity. The policy that gets implemented is not Alliance policy, it is the ANC policy. The principals (Ministers) may originate from COSATU or the SACP, but when appointed Minister, they are appointed on an ANC slate. This has the potential to paralyse delivery or state effectiveness as ministers appointed as such are put in positions where they are responsible for implementing ANC policy, but accountable to either the SACP or COSATU from whence they derive their political mandate and legitimacy. Furthermore, governance requires the appointment of technically competent officials. Whilst the ANC manages the deployment of cadres in key state institutions, it is necessary that political intelligence be balanced against technical competence in order to ensure effectiveness.

Policy contestation between the Alliance partners has a direct impact on the state departments. Member bias from the different Alliance partners has an impact on the success or failures of policy implementation. Kuye (2009:604) correctly asserts that policy proposals can be subverted, even amongst Alliance partners by political forces or administrative sabotage under the guise of political incompatibility with some vague reference to political reality. Organisational culture influences the ability of the state to deliver. A lack of trust between Alliance partners will debilitate service delivery. This is evident in public sector trade union disputes with the government. Furthermore, the ANC's character as a home for all (broad church) movement has attracted some whom have been labelled as *tenderpreneurs* by the SACP whilst COSATU has raised concerns around *hyenas* and a *predator state*. These are signals of the low levels of trust that has taken root within the Alliance because those deployed, started to abuse the state machinery for private gains and wealth accumulation rather than serving the public good.

When it comes to the Alliance and the developmental state, Kuye (2011:177) cautions that while there must be greater intensive state driven economic and social policy direction, in adopting the character of a developmental state, some of the *prescripts of good governance*, which includes good human rights records and an effective civil society, should not be sacrificed.

CONCLUSION

The NDR, as an ideology, has been the penetrative force that has kept the Alliance intact. While the NDR has been conceived from within a communist context, it has been expropriated and reinterpreted by the ANC. The NDR continues to influence the way in which government policy is developed, how governance is conducted and the way in which the state is ultimately led.

While COSATU and the SACP have in the past called for the Alliance to be the strategic political centre, both organisations explicitly accept and implicitly understand the leadership role of the ANC in the Alliance. It is the ANC that contests elections on an ANC policy platform, forms the government, deploys cadres to senior state positions and finally decide on and implement policy. COSATU and the SACP may influence these processes, but the decision and the outcome remains that of the ANC.

The nature of the Alliance is complex. Processes are complicated through practices such as dual or multiple membership, specifically in relation to SACP, which is a political organisation just like the ANC, including members who are also members of the ANC. When the ideas of the SACP enjoys hegemony within ANC structures, it is not always clear that the outcomes (specifically with regard to policy), are the ANC's outcomes.

Notwithstanding the challenges, this article illustrates that the ANC leads the Alliance in all respects. This leadership is, however, not a *pure* ANC leadership, but rather a leadership that has been informed and shaped by the penetrative influence of the SACP, through the practice of dual membership where one can be a paid up member of both the ANC and SACP. Notwithstanding this, the ANC has claimed the NDR as its own; decides on which policies to pursue and determines the nature of state governance. The most potent political instrument – the deployment committee – is not under the scope of the Alliance, but rather the sole responsibility of the ANC. It is this committee that decides which cadres get deployed to which senior government and business entities.

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