

# The people's camp in disarray

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*A discussion of this kind is necessary in light of the country celebrating 20 years of democracy. I think it is perfectly timed to force us to look at the state of the left forces at this moment in South Africa. Are they providing leadership? What kind of leadership are they providing? You cannot have this discussion and fail to look at the policy space in the past 20 years. What has happened to policy? Who is driving policy 20 years on, to whose benefit? What is the impact on all classes, especially the poor and working class? What are the material conditions of the working class and the poor, at this point of celebrating 20 years of the democratic breakthrough?*

## ORGANISATIONAL WEAKNESSES

In this discussion, we have to look at everything from the organisational point of view. What is the state of COSATU and the rest of the trade union movement? This is the first question.

I am told that there are 179 registered trade unions in South Africa and the great majority do not belong to any of the existing four federations – and four federations, in a country with 53 million people and a labour force of 16–17 million people, represents the fragmentation of the working class. It also represents organisational weakness: even if there were possibilities opening up at a policy level, an incoherent, fragmented trade union movement would not be able to seize an opportunity to advance its narrow interests or the national interests of the working class and the poor.

It would be useful to study several issues, including how the AMCU (Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union) phenomenon emerged. Is it because of this weakness, or is the leadership losing direction? This is not a small matter in the South African context.

The second question we need to look at is the state of the SACP (South African Communist Party). What role is it playing: is it advancing class interests? We don't need to look at how many people wear a communist hat in different parts of society but rather at who is driving the transformation project from a left perspective. What is the role of the Party? Is it a force that the left



can confidently rely upon to ensure that the advances of the left are defended and further advances are made?

The third question is that of the material conditions of the working class and the poor, 20 years down the line. When COSATU and SACP celebrated the first 10 years of the breakthrough, we came to a conclusion that, in economic terms, the main benefits of transformation in society have accrued more to capital than to workers and the poor. We are now sitting at the end of the second decade. The question that needs to be answered from a left perspective is: what happened? The declaration at the time was that the next decade must be a decade of the workers and the poor. Has this become the decade of the workers and the poor, from their point of view? This should be a great area of debate.

The ANC defines itself as a 'disciplined force of the left'. It can claim that because, since the 1940s, it has analysed our society from a class point of view. It has understood that there is an on-going class battle and there are two main forces in society that are at each other's throats to impose a hegemony based on their own interests. I think that analysis is necessary now. How far have we gone? You can do that by looking at the friends you keep, who define your character. If you are always seen among the dagga-smokers, there has to be a reason why they are next to you.



This analysis of the ANC itself from the historic point of view, as has been outlined by Pallo Jordan: from the Freedom Charter to the Morogoro Conference and to countless other conferences, up to the 'Ready to Govern' programme, the RDP, and all of that. Where are we now in relation to all of this? Are we making advances to consolidate the great Morogoro slogan that our struggle is not just about replacing (whites) in the exploitation and oppression of the working class, not just changing the chairs in terms of race, but about ensuring that we transform societal relationships, such that the working class will feel that it is not just not the motive force of that past but also the motive force of the present?

This is another of the organisational challenges that are facing us. Are the working class and the trade union movement in such a state that they can provide strategic leadership from a left perspective to the revolution as a whole? Or are we losing the plot altogether, in every respect? That type of analysis and discussion is something that I would say we must embark upon.

## THE ROLE OF CAPITAL

Then there is a question of the role of capital. Do capitalist relations of production still have the positive function of expanding the economic base and the productive forces generally? In my view, this question has to be broadened to look at what has happened to the working class. I believe very strongly that the working class has already been restructured and segmented by the forces of production. There is a working class (segment) of the 18% who have medical aid, provident funds, better salaries. Sometimes we debate whether this is the working class or a middle stratum. A lot of those people are members of COSATU and work in the public, heavy chemicals, and automotive sectors, where the salaries are quite substantial.

There is another (segment of the) working class that is just coping. Those who are earning about R3000 to R6000 have their own battles, where they must fight for access to housing subsidies, medical aid, battling about taking their kids to township schools or moving them out. Then there is the phenomenon of the working poor, those who earn too little to live on, maybe below R3000, many of whom are employed by labour brokers. Finally, we have the 7.4 million who are unemployed.

I think we have to look at what that segmentation of the working class means to their political outlook and to how they relate to the progress, or lack of progress, that has been registered over the past 20 years. Sometimes you can see even in COSATU the divisions within the working class politically. The working poor tend to be much more radical. They tend to be more militant and they tend to belong to the group that says, 'Ag, we have seen nothing of real material change accruing to us'. And the public sector workers would not be able to say

that without being contradicted by facts. Those things then do play a role politically in the divisions between the proletariat core and non-proletariat core, even within the trade unions. That is another organisational issue, together with the organisational paralysis that is creating the havoc we are seeing in the platinum belt now.

## IT'S NOT JUST THE ECONOMY

What is actually in crisis for the left is not just divisions in COSATU. Those are symptoms of a larger-scale problem. The people's camp is in disarray, along with the project that they were supposed to be delivering to the masses. 'The people's camp' are those who are led by the ANC from the apartheid and colonial era into the phenomenon of a better life for all. That camp is in disarray because in the main we didn't push the morality questions at the beginning, and now I fear the train may have left us at the station.

The paper prepared by David Makhura in preparation for (the 2012 ANC national conference in) Mangaung brilliantly identified all these crises of corruption, greed and factionalism. At Mangaung, it was obviously a paper that was standing on the toes of everybody, including the leadership itself. If you compare the analysis – which was a perfect analysis of what is happening in the ANC and the congress movement as a whole – with the remedies adopted, you will see that all the serious things we should be doing were edited out. They were just systematically put on the side. Some things have come from there, such as the (integrity) committee in parliament, but nothing comes close to addressing the totality of the crisis that was properly analysed in that discussion paper.

You know why? Because, like the second phase of radical economic transformation, it got lost in the factional battles. And the factional battles that sidelined even that discussion were created deliberately to maintain the status quo in the economy: the status quo of 'the macro-economic policies we are employing is fine; let's proceed without any real change, without confronting the need for a real change'. It is something that we hear only in the speeches from the minister and the president.

Those things just disappeared at Mangaung because they were too truthful about the behaviour we are not prepared to let go. Now what do you have post-Mangaung? You have a quasi-thing that is not going to deliver this comprehensive radical economic transformation or force the movement to squarely challenge the rot. Morally, organisationally, factions, all of that.

We are now one year after Mangaung. You tell me whether you are seeing a change, seeing what you were calling for. There is no paradigm shift to say, 'It has been 20 years, what is happening with us, where do



we go? What do we change, where?’ That is what I fear. Waiting for another conference in 2017 and then going into the next elections with all the inhibiting nature that imposes. The fact that we must defend ourselves against the opposition doesn’t give us an opportunity to look strongly internally at what is happening with our movement, with ourselves. The discussion about what is happening to the left movement is the most important one, because it will answer the question, ‘What is this left that we are talking about?’ Left of what?

The ANC is a liberation movement and it remains a liberation movement because it seeks to fight against colonialism of a special type and do away with the divisions created by apartheid. So this is a national struggle against the national oppression. We normally define it as ‘black people in general and African people in particular’ dealing with the three forms of oppression – all of that theory. But at the centre of any liberation struggle is the property question, and you cannot talk about the totality of the struggle without addressing that.

We have got to ask the question about the black middle class and black bourgeoisie and the building of the industrial working class among the former oppressed: how they should behave – in comparison to how the white oligarchies behaved over time? This is an area that we must address. If the struggle against colonialism was a struggle against land dispossessions, and against looting of natural resources by the colonisers for the benefit of the headquarters, and against the establishment of the big six monopolies that control everything that happens in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, then the critical question from the left is: what does that mean today? Are we addressing that and closing the chapter of a colonial era? How are we doing it?

It is a difficult question to answer. I don’t think we are anywhere close. Look at land redistribution and how we are able to build new farmers and how they lose the land. The last statistics I saw showed that we have only hit 9% of the target of 30%, and that 70% of what we have redistributed is lying idle, not being used. This doesn’t require changing the property clause (of the Constitution).

We need to look at the extent to which the South African economy remains externally owned. The reality we face is that the big six companies and every mining company are foreign-owned. This is where one finds people saying they can go to Australia or go to Canada, because those are equally their homes. It talks to the extent that capitalism has restructured over this period, to the possibility of having no home base. You can’t say they are based in South Africa; they are based everywhere.

We do have the resources here that they need. That is our leverage, but we are not using it. Even in the platinum sector, the growth point of the economy, there

is no leverage. The minister just mentions the issue of tax and you hear the pandemonium in the pages of Business Day, every article for two or three weeks!

## VISION, CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE

To move forward we have to look at the vision. For example, if you say South Africa can only develop through building an industrial manufacturing base for South Africa like all other countries have to do, how do we achieve that? What will be the role of capital, the role of the state, the role of society, including labour?

Our biggest problem is that, even though we speak about the need for an active developmental state, I can see no reason for the state to drive anything. It is not just about the existence of IPAP (the Industrial Policy Action Plan): all of us agree that is the way to go. But I don’t see capital being given carrots and sticks to ensure that we achieve [the goals] in any of those five ‘job-driver’ sectors. We have a Mining Indaba to address the current crisis, but we can’t even move from the starting blocks to arrest people who are killing others. Leave the issue of building houses and infrastructures – we can’t arrest the criminals. And therefore you undermine things.

I have a chance to meet with capital all the time, those who are coming into South Africa. The consistent message is, ‘We want clarity on where the country is going. We want predictable policies so that we can adapt.’ The real reason behind the investment strike is not that our policies are left-wing and radical. It is because there is a policy paralysis in the state. There are too many voices speaking in public and in contradiction to one another. For example, in my view, there is a serious contradiction between the programme of the ANC, which was adopted in Polokwane and endorsed in Mangaung, and big elements of the NDP (National Development Plan). Particularly the macroeconomic policy. It is just a contradiction; every investor can see that these are two different things. The ANC, because it will not take a strong leadership position, uses the policies to speak to different constituencies. It is this paralysis that is going to frighten any investor and, in this paralysis, the minimum programme doesn’t emerge. The minimal action that must develop is just not there.

The state is central in all of this discussion: a state that has some capacity but also some leadership that can inspire confidence that these things are possible. This is one of the most critical discussions for us to have. In South Africa, we don’t have that discussion because, every time you go there, it appears that you are taking on the leadership and they take exception to that. And then you have factions and demobilisation, and we are in disarray – but we are not addressing the fundamental issue. We need leadership which can inspire confidence that this minimum programme is available. ☺

