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HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE END OF A DREAM?
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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This paper will consider, in the context of the new global order, the extent to which the radical democratic dreams of the 1970s and 1980s can be converted to reality in the New SA. In doing so, it traces the origins of the democratic dream in the recent history of progressive social movements, NGOs and CBOs[1] in South Africa, in particular the ideological discourses that underpinned the practices of different organisations. It then reflects on the changes that have occurrred since the unbanning of political organisations in 1990, and the debate on the relationship between a democratic state and civil society. Finally, it presents a series of strategic options facing social movements in the New SA, in its struggle to build the democratic order of its dreams.

Introduction

South Africa after the April 1994 elections is a country of hope and expectations. With Nelson Mandela installed as president, presiding over a government of national unity, a significant advance has been main towards democratic rule. However, while great effort has been made to ensure inclusivity at the level of political elites, it remains to be seen to what extent the New SA's vision of a transparent, participatory democracy, as painted in the interim constitution and the ANC-alliance's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), has any meaning. A key indicator will be the extent to which organs of civil society, in particular the social movements and NGOs that were central to the liberation process, play a role in shaping the new order.

The transition to democracy in South Africa is characterised by the simultaneity of two democratic traditions, namely that of traditional parliamentary or representative democracy, and that of grassroots participatory democracy. The former has until now been the domain of the white political elite (with limited participation by black elites in the tricamaral system, and in the bantustans), while the latter space has been occupied by a vast range of black and non-racial social movements that re-emerged onto the South African scene since the early 1970s.

For those on the Right of the political spectrum, stable, orderly parliamentary democracy needs to be protected from the hordes below. Mass mobilisation and organisation for them means 'mob rule', 'intimidation' and the caving in to 'unrealistic expectations' that will frighten away foreign investment (read any daily newspaper editorial in SA). The 'masses' have to be contained, and the best way to do this would be to institutionalise political conflict to the point where the New SA resembles the old in all its fundamental aspects, except that now it would be 'deracialised'. This is what Barber (1984) calls 'thin' democracy, and it is based on 'elite pacting' (see Van Zyl Slabbert, 1992).

For those on the Left end of the spectrum, mass participatory democracy, where working people have had a real opportunity to participate in shaping their future, is under threat from the elites above. For the 'insurrectionist' current within the Left, representative democracy and parliaments mean elite rule, the stifling of mass protest, and the caving in to pragmatism, and the dictates of the national and international bourgeosie. The 'elites' have to be held in check, and the best way to do this would be to maintain a high level of mobilisation and conflict, and to keep alive hopes of insurrection and the complete overthrow of the old order (e.g. see Molaba, 1993).

For the 'radical reform' current within the left (see Adler & Webster, 1994 and Cronin, 1994) there is a recognition that both traditions have shaped the nature of the transition, and are likely to have an impact on the future democratic order. In other words, SA is well-poised to be very different to other African countries where democracy was attempted in the absence of a vibrant civil society that contained strong, progressive social movements and NGOs.

There is also the recognition that elite pacting and a narrow corporatism that excludes the majority of the population from the benefits of socio-economic 'development', can severely polarise society. The possibility of a dramatic upsurge in levels of violence in

the country is real, to the extent that it eventually ushers in a new, muti-coloured authoritarian form of government that brushes aside the constitution in order to stabilise the country.

For 'radical reformists', then, the way out is to seize the opportunity of forging a unique democracy that combines the best of both formal, representative democracy and the less formal, participatory democracy as practiced, in greater or lesser degree, by the progressive social movements.

The extent to which this will be possible depends to a large degree on the manner in which radical democrats are able to contend with a global order that may predetermine the outcome of national struggles.

The Global context

The world in the 1990s looks very different to that of previous decades. There have been profound changes at the political level, and these have been shaped primarily by a fundamental transformation of the forces and relations of production. The once-workable statist economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc could no longer compete with the more flexible capitalist economies of the west and far east, which proved to have greater innovative capabilities, and, especially the Japanese economy, was able develop and utilise high technology to its maximum potential.

Brecher et al (1993) make a useful distinction between globalisation-from-above and globalisation-from-below. We will briefly sketched some of the main trends in globalisation-from-above here, and return, in the concluding section, to a consideration of globalisation-from-below.

Globalisation-from-above increasingly concentrates power in the hands of a few powerful multinational companies at the expense of the majority of the world's population in the South or 'developing world', as well as an increasing number of people in the North or 'developed' world. Indeed, there has been a decline in earnings among the lower third of the population in many countries of the North, and the rise of "permanent unemployment" (Brecher et al: xii).

While some countries of the South have succesfully integrated into the new global order (e.g. the newly industrialising countries of South East Asia), most have become mere providers of labour and raw materials, captive markets, tourist playgrounds and dipositories for the toxic waste of the North. Xabier Gorostaga (in Brecher et al:xii) feels that "never before in history, not even in colonial times, has such an extreme bipolarisation of the world existed".

The ideology of 'democratisation' , championed by the North and its agencies like the IMF and World Bank, does not include social and economic justice. The structural adjustment policies of the latter have, instead, exacerbated social inequality, and this in turn has increased social instability in many countries. The repression and poverty that has resulted from globalisation from above has provoked "religious and nationalist fundamentalisms" of immense proportions in many parts of the world (ibid:xii).

The powerful countries of the world, led by the military might of the USA, have attempted to police a global situation they created, but with significant lack of success. Despite its domination of the United Nations, the US has been unable to stamp its authority in major parts of the world left uncontested by the decline of the Soviet Union as a rival superpower. The globe is rapidly being divided up into new spheres of influence – with *uncertainty* as the dominant feature.

The power of national states has been severely eroded by the increased mobility of capital, and new patterns of international investment. As Gay Seidman observes, "even in historically industrialised areas, social services and corporate taxes have been cut in an effort to retain investments". (in Brecher et al:xiii).

While the rich get richer and the poor poorer on a global scale, Alvin Toffler warns that "an even greater chasm separates the armed from the unarmed and the ignorant from the educated" (1991:20). The great technological revolution sweeping the world has opened up a new terrain of struggle – access to and control over information. Says Toffler: "The control of knowledge is the crux of tomorrow's world-wide struggle for power in every human institution" (ibid).

The rise of new social movements in SA

It is as a response to these global trends, and the failure of national states in the South to intervene on behalf of its people, that new social movements have emerged around the world. Social movements are those movements or organisations that are mass based and oriented towards social change, but which are not formal political parties. These movements can be 'progressive' (such as a trade union movement working towards an egalitarian social order) or 'reactionary' (such as the fascist movement which sought to reintroduce traditional inequalities under new conditions) or a combination of both (such as religious movements that seek to fight colonialism or imperialism on the one hand, but preserve traditional patriarchal or feudal relations on the other).

In the South there have traditionally been two kinds of social movements – the trade union movement that arose with industrial capitalism (via colonialism), and anti-colonial peasant movements of various kinds (see Wignaraja, 1993). In South Africa the ICU of the 1920s was perhaps a combination of the two, although it formally took on the character of a trade union.

In recent decades the term New Social Movements has gained currency, and in the South has been used to describe that vast array of movements that went beyond the narrow concerns of Capital and Labour, or of struggles in the countryside. Predominantly urban in character, these movements, following their counterparts in the North,have taken up environmental (green) issues, women's (feminist) issues, race (black) issues, civic (housing) issues etc. Some of these groups have assumed an explicitly anti-capitalist character, and most are at least implicitly anti-capitalist in that they seek to empower the poor and marginalised against the local, national and global elites.

In South Africa the democratic trade union movement has been the leading social movement since the late 1970s. Its orientation towards production politics as well as state-power politics (see Burawoy, 1985), in particular its willingness to engage in alliances with non-workplace organisations for the democratisation of all levels of social life, gave it a different character to that of traditional trade unions, what Peter Waterman (1993) has term 'social movement unionism'.

The new unions brought the dream and promise of a new, radical democratic order that went beyond "bourgeois democracy" and avoided the pitfalls of bureaucratic state socialism. This vision and dream, first articulated in a coherent form by the radical intellectual Rick Turner in *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy in SA* (1972, Johannesburg:Ravan Press) was embedded in the organising style and the discourses of the unions, and in many of the social movements that followed.

Prior to the re-emergence of the unions with the 1973 Durban strike wave, the student movement, organised through the black consciousness (BC) South African Students Organisation (Saso) and the predominantly white left-liberal National Union of SA Students (Nusas), occupied the centre stage in the anti-apartheid struggle. The churches also played a vital role in keeping alive opposition to apartheid, and in providing resources to organisations. The black student movement captured the imagination of wide layers of oppressed people, and this culminated in the massive 1976 student uprising (see Hirson, 1979).

Although the uprising was crushed, and the BC organisations banned a year later, it ushered in a new era of reform apartheid under the leadership of PW Botha, and his total strategy programme. In an effort to control and co-opt the new social movements, legal space was widened for industrial organisation, and an attempt was made to incorporate urban african, coloured and indian people into the total strategy project. This attempt to legitimise the reform process, and contain resistance to apartheid, at the same time also widened the space for anti-apartheid mobilisation. Civic movements began to emerge in the late 1970s, the student movement began to regroup with the formation of the Azanian Students Organisation (Azaso) in 1980; and industrial protests and union-community activity re-emerged on the scene with dramatic success (see Saul & Gelb, 1986).

'Working class' leadership

The social movements in the early 1980s were by and large influenced by two currents of thought:

The first emanated from within the independent trade union movement itself, where a non-Soviet New Left Marxism combined with the practical necessity of organising a resilient, democratic and accountable organisational structure that was capable of withstanding state and management repression. In this conception 'working class leadership' meant workers themselves needed to rise to leadership positions. Great emphasis, therefore, was placed on building a worker leadership, and unions such as the Federation of SA Trade Unions (Fosatu) instituted comprehensive worker education programmes (see Friedman, 1985).

The second current came from the exile movement dominated by the ANC and SACP, where Soviet affinities were still strong, and the imperative of instituting vertical forms of organisation under the conditions of illegality deepened the practice of vanguardism. In this conception 'working class leadership' was exercised by the vanguard working class party (i.e. the SACP) on behalf of the working class (see Toussaint, 1982), according to the Leninist model of a party of "professional revolutionaries" who were able to instill, from outside, a 'working class consciousness' amongst workers. The SACP led the 'working class struggle' and, by extension, the ANC and its allies led the struggle against apartheid.

These different conceptions had a direct bearing on the relationship between the union movement and the emerging community organisations. The first instance of union-community cooperation emerged in 1979, when a strike at Fattis and Monis in Cape Town resulted in a massive consumer boycott that involved a wide range of community organisations in the Western Cape and nationally (see Pillay 1989). This largely succesful display of union-community cooperation encouraged meatworkers to elicit community support for its strike the following year, which resulted in a national boycott of red meat. Both these watershed boycotts raised issues of vital concern to the emerging social movements: Who leads the anti-apartheid struggle – workers or intellectuals/ community activists/ students?

In the 1970s the BC movement, which had a very tenuous relationship with the trade union movement, had a clear line: the students led the anti-apartheid struggle (see Hirson 1979). By the late 1970s students had revised their understanding of struggle, and had begun to absorb Marxist, class-based insights into their understanding of how society operated. This was inspired in part by the apparent success of the Angolan and Mozambican socialist revolutions, and the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution, as well as the re-emergence of the SACP as a more visible underground force.

By the late 1970s the strength and vitality of the workers movement made an impression on new layers of student activists, and this time round they renounced their leadership role in the anti-apartheid struggle, and bowed before "the working class" as the leaders of that struggle, which now had a more explicit anti-capitalist character. In fact, the struggle had become less a struggle against simple white domination and more against "racial capitalism"(see Saul and Gelb, 1986) or a Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) (see SACP, 1962) i.e. white rule *and* capitalist exploitation .

The importance of the student movement lay not only in the support it gave at the time to the workers' struggle, but also in the creation of activists that would go outside the ranks of the student movement to set up and run a range of community organisations. Many also joined the 1970s wave of ex-students who filled positions as office bearers or (formal and informal) support staff of the trade union movement – in particular the new community unions that swept like wildfire across the country in the early 1980s.

Early 1980s: 'Workersim' versus 'populism'

The different conceptions of 'working class leadership' gave rise to the workerism-populism debate that gripped the resistance movement during the early 1980s. It arose in the context of two powerful, and distinct, terrains of organisation, namely the terrain of

state-power politics, which was dominated by the UDF acting primarily as the legal expression of the exiled ANC, and the terrain of production politics, which in the early 1980s was dominated by Fosatu and the Cape-based GWU and A/FCWU.

The UDF, which was formed in 1983 out of the emerging student, civic, women's and youth organisations around the country, was in effect run by students and ex-students in many parts of the country. For a period before the launch of the UDF, Azaso, Nusas and Cosas took the lead in promoting the ANC, and were at the forefront of the Free Mandela Campaign and the 1981 Anti-Republic Day campaign. Students also took the initiative in ensuring the success of the Fattis and Monis, Red Meat and Wilson Rowntree consumer boycotts during 1979-81.

Another leading force in the formation of the UDF was the Natal Indial Congress (which relied heavily on students for its activist base) and the re-constituted Transvaal Indian Congress. With its Congress history, these organisations were able to use Congress symbolism with great effect to project the ANC into the public arena. However, its 'vanguardist' style of operating was closer to that of the exile leadership than that of the union movement or the UDF in other parts of the country.

Underlying the workerism-populism debate was a common belief in the necessity or inevitability of socialism, given the 'intertwined' nature of apartheid and capitalism. The elimination of white domination, it was felt, meant the death of capitalism as well. The key strategic question, however, was whether the anti-apartheid struggle should take on an overtly anti-capitalist character (and led by the trade union movement and/or a workers party), or whether the focus should be on white domination as a unifying element (as long as "the working class" led the struggle).

Those who emphasised the anti-capitalist nature of the struggle were labelled "workerists", while those who emphasised the anti-apartheid nature of the struggle were labelled "populists". However, there were various shades of nuance between and beyond these two positions.

Among the **"workerists"** were those who had a social-democratic understanding of socialism, and believed in a gradualist advance towards social change. They tended to believe that worker struggles should be confined to the factory floor. Others, however, recognised the need to engage on the terrain of state-power politics, but sought to do so through the trade union movement exclusively (*a la* Solidarity in Poland), eschewing alliances with political organisations outside the workplace. They were labelled "syndicalists" (see Foster, 1982).

Those who did believe in the necessity of a workers' party either felt that it should be based on the trade union movement, as in the UK or Brazil, or that it should be a Leninist/Trotskyist "vanguard" party that avoided broad alliances which included "the sons and daughters" of the white bourgeoisie. In other words, the latter looked towards building an alternative to the 'Stalinist' SACP, either through the "primitive accumulation of cadres" in direct opposition to the SACP and ANC (Callinicos, 1986) or through transforming of the ANC into a mass workers' party (Marxist Workers Tendency, 1982).

At the **"populist"** end of the debate stood the SACP, from whose quarters the strongest charge of "workerist" was levelled at those unionists which refused to embrace the Congress movement in general, and the SACP in particular (see Toussaint, 1983). They accused the "workerists" of having a narrow conception of class, and of misunderstanding the imperatives of the struggle for state power, namely the necessity to build the broadest alliance of forces against a common enemy. For the SACP and its allies in the union movement and the UDF the rider "under the leadership of the working class" was added, but this in effect meant "the leadership of the SACP" as the "vanguard" of the working class *a la* the Soviet Communist Party.

But others within the Congress camp did not add the rider. They were populists in the true sense, in that they did believe, as with early BC, in a non-class, undifferentiated struggle against apartheid. They either did not recognise class and other divisions within the oppressed camp, or they downplayed its significance to the point of extinction.

There were those on both sides, however, who recognised vast areas of common ground. They converged at the level of ideological discourse, namely that of a ***popular-democratic*** conception of struggle, which at the same time acknowledged class and gender differences, as well as the necessity of forging a broad alliance of anti-apartheid forces. Working class leadership went beyond the crude substitutionism of the SACP at the time, and grappled with the complexities of building a worker leadership from the ranks of the working class, which would strive to reflect the gender and ethnic composition of the mass movement. Such a leadership could only be built, according to this perspective, if there was maximum democracy and accountability within organisations, as well as a clear working class consciousness, ie an understanding of the capitalist nature of apartheid, and the need to build a socialist alternative (see Pillay, 1989).

Amongst some adherents of the popular-democratic perspective, there was also a critique of the view which held that there was a *necessary* relationship between capitalism and apartheid, and not a *contingent* one. In other words, this perspective held open the possibility of a non-racial capitalism developing in South Africa, which meant a separation of race and class. To fight apartheid, therefore, did not automatically mean that capitalist exploitation was under attack as well, and neither did the demise of capitalism automatically imply that racism would be abolished with it. While the two were historically intertwined in South Africa, there needed to be a separate focus on each sphere of struggle. These views, while not dominant, were most evident within the Western Cape region of the UDF, and within the GWU and A/FCWU (see Pillay, 1989).

However, in terms of organisational practices, the imperatives of workplace organisation propelled unions towards a preoccupation with narrow economistic concerns. They saw these as necessary for their mere survival as trade unions, and were thus often unable to support community campaigns (eg see Pillay, 1985). The imperatives of state-power politics, on the other hand, compelled community and political groups to match the pace of the state, which often meant being more centrally organised. They therefore often became impatient with the unions' slower consultative method of decision-making, and tried to bully the unions into making quick decisions in support of their campaigns.

Late 1980s: The strategic compromise

The massive 1984 Vaal stayaway, which saw unprecedented unity between Fosatu unions and the UDF, and the formation of Cosatu in 1985, as a combination of both "workerist" and "populist" unions, paved the way for a more constructive relationship between the union movement and other social movements. Although the first two years of Cosatu's existence was characterised by bitter divisions between "workerists" and "populists", by 1987 most of the heat had been taken out of the debate, as a "strategic compromise" was forged (Lewis,1988).

A popular-democratic conception of struggle seemed to have become dominant within Cosatu, and all its affiliates, including the strongest "workerist" critics like Numsa and CWIU, adopted the Freedom Charter "as a stepping stone to socialism". Numsa had resolved to compromise on its alternative demand for a Workers Charter, and instead put the latter forward as a complementary set of demands to that of the Freedom Charter.

The UDF, in the meantime, was under severe attack by the state, and by 1988 it was effectively banned from operating. The Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), a looser coalition of anti-apartheid forces, including the union movement,was formed to take its place. This time, however, Cosatu played a leading role in the anti-apartheid struggle, as many community activists were driven underground, and the civic, youth and other community-based social movements were unable to operate effectively (Seekings, 1992). Cosatu, despite itself being under concerted state pressure, led the campaign against violence, the civic disobedience campaign, the Free Mandela campaign etc. Leading unionists such as Cyril Ramaphosa, Jay Naidoo, Jayendra Naidoo, Chris Dlamini, John Gomomo, Sydney Mufamadi and others took on a high political profile.

Unions were able to weather the storm of state repression precisely because of their location within the production process, and their particular relationship with the owners of capital. It was much easier to effectively ban community and political organisations, which have a more tenuous link to their supporters, than a trade union, which performs a daily function for its members. Unions, despite the tremendous gains they have made in rolling back the frontiers of management control, are also seen as essential sources of stability in the workplace, given the experiences of 1973 and beyond. Managers and owners of the bigger corporations had learnt the hard way that it is far better to negotiate with a legitimate representative of the workforce than a faceless mass engaged in continual disruption in a highly volatile political situation. Even though business leaders had often been at odds with the apartheid government, the force of this realisation was not lost on a state that had come to represent, in the final instance, the interests of monopoly capital.

It is often forgotten that the PW Botha era was an era of 'reform'. The repression that gained the ascendancy during the latter half of the 1980s was in response to the wave of resistance to (albeit short-sighted) reform measures, which despite their limited nature, were of such a magnitude that they caused a split in the National Party. The repression of the second half of the 1980s was not designed to wipe out the opposition, but to stabilise the situation in order for the reform process to continue. But PW Botha could not quite cross the rubicon, ie he could not offer reforms that were substantial enough to in themselves stabilise the situation. Instead, his reforms merely widened the space for

increased resistance to his government. The old order refused to die, and the new struggled to be born. Out of this impasse Botha had to exit the scene.

When FW De Klerk took over in 1989, the MDM was rapidly moving into gear for another wave of resistance, this time in the form of the civil disobedience campaign. Student, civic and other community organisations were still slowly recovering from the repression of the previous years. In 1989 they were able to breathe slightly easier, but it was still clear that without the unions, resistance in most parts of the country would have been tepid . The civil disobedience campaign took on various forms, and some of the biggest marches were seen around the country. FW De Klerk was reminded that, without swift and decisive action, his regime would face the same pressures as his predeccessors. There would be no stability without the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, and the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations.

1990s: The centralisation of struggle

But what did the prison releases and unbanningings bring to the internal resistance movement? On the one hand, it once again opened up space for organisation and mobilisation. The civic movement rapidly revived its strength throughout the country, and this led to the formation of Sanco in 1992. Sanco, as an umbrella body striving to represent all civic organisations, was in many ways meant to replace the UDF, which formally disbanded in 1990. As Jacobs (1992) argues, however, the highly centralised nature of Sanco has weakened the civic movement at grassroots level. The separation of civic leaders from their base has been further exacerbated by the obligation of leaders to participate in increasingly numerous and complex policy-making forums at national, regional and local level .

The student movement, through the merger of Nusas and Sansco in 1991, was meant to develop into a unified, national organisation that made an impact on national issues, in the way it did during the 1970s and early 1980s. The campaign for transformation at historically white universities towards the end of 1993 was an indication of a new resolve by students to find a campaign that would put it on the national agenda. However, there is little sign of the more deeply grounded student organisation of the past, where emphasis was placed on developing and nurturing, through rigorous internal education programmes, new layers of activists and leaders who were equipped to comprehend the complexities of race, class and gender in SA. The PAC-aligned Pan African Students Organisation has grown in strength on many campuses, but is still much weaker than Sasco, and has as yet shown little sign of becoming an organised, national movement with a coherent strategy .

The UDF formally disbanded in 1990, in deference to the ANC, which was expected to replace it as the internal leader of mass resistance to apartheid (alongside national formations such as the civic movement, the student movement and the trade union movement). However, it soon became clear that the vitality of the UDF as an umbrella of a vast range of grassroots social movements was to be replaced by the centralised form of ANC politics, partly shaped by the imperatives of negotiations politics, but perhaps more importantly by the culture of exile politics, where a vanguardist mode of

operation was exceptionally pronounced, given both the conditions of illegality, and the Soviet legacy.

The ANC rapidly overshadowed all that existed prior to its legalisation – except the trade union movement, in particular Cosatu. While the civic movement, but more deeply the womens, students, youth and other movements, allowed themselves to be subordinated to the ANCs dominating presence, the unions continued to bolster their distinct role in the national liberation struggle.

The SACP tried to cast itself as the political expression of the working class, but it became evident that, far from becoming the "earned" vanguard of the working class (see Pillay,1990 and Pillay & Webster, 1991)), the SACP was tailing behind the energy and vitality of the union movement. Leading SACP members occupied strategic positions within Cosatu, as they did within the ANC, but there is no evidence that *as SACP members*, they are providing specific guidance and direction. In fact, it seems more likely that the converse applies. The main function of the SACP, according to some critics, is that it serves as a "trade union for activists seeking positions of influence".

The 1990s, then , has so far represented the centralisation of struggle, and with the election of the ANC as the leading party in government, this trend has already deepended.

However, there are counter-vailing trends. The civic movement has been growing in stature and vitality, despite its own centralisation under Sanco, and its growing funding crisis (see *Reconstruct* No.14 in WIP 93, 1993). The youth league has been determined to carve an independent profile for itself, although it may be said that the youth lost its social movement status when the SA Youth Congress dissolved to form the ANC Youth League in 1990. The National Women's Coalition, while not yet a mass movement in that it exists primarily as a combination of relatively small women's sections of a wide range of political parties as well as small independent women's groups, has been carving a distinct role for itself as a pressure group to advance gender rights, with some success. The student movement , divided along party political lines (with the ANC-aligned Sasco dominant) remains in disarray, although there the potential for mass mobilisation is clearly evident.

The centralisation has also been offset by the emergence of negotiations forums which, despite their obvious shortcomings, has the potential to revitalise civil society, and the social movements that provide it with its essential vitality. Before looking at the options facing social movements in the New SA, let us briefly review the recent debate over the relationship between a democratic state and civil society.

The battle over civil society

Since 1990 a lively debate has ensued in the pages of *Urban Forum*, *Work In Progress* and *African Communist* over the nature and function of 'civil society' (see Glaser (1990); Swilling (1991); Narsoo (1991); Nzimande and Sikhosana (1992a,b & c); Mayekiso (1992 a & b); Horn (1992); Louw (1992) and Stadler (1992)). Without delving into the full complexities of this debate, what follows is a consideration of some of the main points of difference.

Gramsci

During the 1980s the ideas of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci became popular amongst activists within the country. Gramsci, unlike Marx, did not make a radical separation between the state and civil society, and did not see the latter as necessarily the preserve of the bourgoisie where, says Sassoon , Marx believed that "the individual became all important" in a "partial, depraved state of individual egotistical desires, of economic necessity" and therefore needed to be abolished (1983:73). In fact, Gramsci saw the separation primarily as a 'methodological' one, as in reality it is difficult to see the boundary lines between the two spheres. It is only when a restricted, everyday usage of the 'state' is employed, where the state refers only to government, that a clearer distinction can be made.

For Gramsci civil society included elements of the economy base and non-political aspects of the superstructure. However, while he saw that the state plays a vital role in developing civil society, he argued against the conflation of the two spheres, as advocated by Italian fascists and French Jacobins. (Sassoon, 1983: 74).

Civil society is a contested terrain, and as such it is incumbent upon organisations of the working class to engage in a battle of hegemony within civil society, in a 'war of position' towards socialism. Hegemony in civil society meant that once the working class captured state power, that power would be bolstered by "a sturdy structure of civil society" (Gramsci, 1971: 238-239). Gramsci, unlike Soviet Marxists, explicitly warned against what he called the perpetuation of "statolatory" – the tendency to worship the state (1971:268). According to Sassoon, Gramsci believed that the 'withering away of the state' meant "a full development of the self-regulating attributes of civil society" (1983: 74).

Although there are a range of views on what actually constitutes 'civil society', a working Gramsci-inspired definition is that it constitutes that space between the state apparatuses and individuals or families. It includes elements of the economy, although the economic base of society constitutes a seperate realm. It also excludes 'political society', the sphere of political parties inside parliament and, to some extent in limited democracies, those outside as well. In other words, it constitutes that vast array of voluntary associations that make up everyday life, from business associations to trade unions, stokvels, religious groups etc, in dialectical unity with all the other spheres.

Sleeping with the enemy?

Many on the Left now advocate the nurturing of an 'independent, vibrant' civil society, a space that has since the advent of capitalism been under the hegemony of the ruling capitalist class? This championing of an 'independent civil society' arises out of a recognition that statist experiments in socialism have failed, and that mass organisations representing working people ought to preserve a relative autonomy from the political organisations they support, especially after the latter come into power.

The SACP's Nzimande and Sikhosana, however, dissent from this view, and believe that "strong and democratic mass organisations can maintain their autonomy even if they

operate within the state structures" (1992a:27). They refer to Nicaragua under Sandinista rule to support this claim, in direct contradiction to the Sandinista's own self-criticism after it lost the 1990 elections, where it was concluded that the mass movement was, in the words of former Sandinista Secretary for Foreign Affairs Alejandro Bendana, "not sufficiently autonomous and democratic", and that the FSLN "now believes that there is a great need for mass organisation to be independent of the party" (Pillay ,1991:58-9)).

The main concern of Nzimande and Sikhosana is that civil society is the terrain of the bourgeoisie, and the aim of struggle is that "the distinction between the state and 'civil society' must progressively disappear, since such a distinction is the embodiment of the alienation, exploitation and oppression of the working class under capitalism". Thus for them the contested nature of the civil society terrain, where the battle for hegemony is waged, culminates not in the creation of an independent civil society under the hegemony of mass organisations representing the working class, but in the overthrow of the state and the *obliteration* of civil society as such. This accords with Marx's anarchistic notion of the 'withering away of the state' to be replaced by 'an administration of things', that is a society that regulates itself without a state or a civil society (since the latter is defined by the former).

In fact, Nzimande and Sikhosana's view accords, in abstract, with that of radical free marketeers such as Leon Louw (1992) and the late Don Caldwell (1992), who, following the ideas of the neo-conservative Ayn Rand, also posit as an ultimate goal an ideal social order where no state exists (except perhaps to give parking tickets).

So, from different starting points, and following different routes, Louw and Nzimande arrive at the same destination in abstract . However, they diverge dramatically when they hit the concrete, as this anarchic state of being, of course, exists only on paper. In practice, Nzimande and Sikhosana's route is the well-trodden path towards a Soviet style society where an authoritarian state is all-powerful, while Louw argues for the continued, but unfettered, rule of the bourgeoisie, in that "civil and economic ... society ... should be none of the state's business" (p31).

Leninists, however, are not the only one's who are suspicious of an 'independent' civil society. Friedman, from a left-liberal perspective, also warns against the notion of a 'vibrant civil society' that will limit a liberal state's ability to provide "representivity, accountability and public contest to the vital areas of social life.(1991). Narsoo, building on Friedman's perspective, warns: "In our haste to distance ourselves from the Stalinist bureaucracy we may find ourselves in bed with the rabid free-marketeers" (1991:26). Stadler, in a response to Louw, recognises the "symbiotic and mutually interdependent relationship between the contemporary state and civil society", and argues that "a strong, authoritative and autonomous state contributes to a vigorous and creative civil society. Weak states are tyrannical and undermine civil society" (1992:34).

Mayekiso (1992a) tries to avoid falling into bed with liberal free marketeers by putting forward the notion of two civil societies, the one bourgeois, which is currently dominant, and the other working class, and composed of mass organisations and voluntary associations of that class. Mayekiso therefore seems to imply that the struggle for a 'vibrant civil society' is confined to the latter, in the struggle for a democratic social order where the working class is hegemonic in both the state and civil society.

Swilling goes a step further, and defines the bourgeoisie completely out of 'civil society', which for him is constituted only by "everyday citizens, who do not control the levers of political and economic power" (1991:21-2). It is within this apparently class-free sphere of liberty that an 'associational socialism' can be built, as a countervailing sphere of power to that of the state. By strengthening voluntary associations or CBOs, and asserting "the absolute *centrality of the local* as opposed to the national in the definition of planning units (p23, emphasis in original), Swilling suggests that "civil society should be the guardian of the public good and not the state" (p22).

Swilling, by defining the bourgeoisie out of 'civil society', does not resolve the blatant *reality* of western capitalist domination of the modern market-oriented global state. It is no wonder that, in the context of the current hegemony of New Right free market ideas, agents of western economic interests such as the IMF and World Bank vigorously promote the shift from the nation-state to the local as a planning unit. Swilling does not consider the possibility that, without a democratic state to act on behalf of (or to assist the organisation of) the unorganised and socially weak sectors, the market will allow existing and emerging elites to dominate the local, at the expense of the poor and marginalised.

The struggle, surely, should be to ensure that the state at local, regional and national level is an *accountable, transparent and democratic* state (not a weak state), that acts primarily in the interests of the historically oppressed majority.

Progressive civil society

Mayekiso's argument for a 'working class' civil society recognises the contested nature of civil society as a whole. Within that sphere of contestation, he seeks to enhance the role of those CBOs and social movements that represent the interests of the poor and marginalised. However, by talking of a 'working class' civil society, Mayekiso is in danger of (unintentionally) privileging urban working class communities at the expense of rural communities, on the one hand, and foreclosing the possibility of forging alliances with other sectors of society that also stand to lose out against the continued domination of the 'international bourgeoisie' (including 'middle-class' environmental groups, NGOs etc) .

A concern is emerging that the new democratic order will attend to the needs of the organised urban sector, and ignore that of the unorganised rural poor and unemployed. This is what has been called the 50% solution (see Morris, 1993). It seems that, at least in the short to medium term, South Africa will need a strong democratic state to engage in massive social reconstruction and development. A strong, transparent and democratic state is also needed to protect the interests of, and empower (through capacity-building) the unorganised and weaker sectors of society, who are in danger of being swamped by more powerful sectors, including business and working class sectors, which have greater resources and lobbying power.

It is in this context that a happier distinction might be made between 'progressive' organisations of civil society – those that have the broad aim of democratising society – and 'conservative' or 'backward' organisations of civil society, which respectively seek to

entrench or recast existing power relations, or to promote narrow religious or ethnic chauvinism.

Unlike the latter, it would be in the interests of progressive organisations of civil society to forge a (tension-ridden) alliance with the democratic state, if only to ensure that its democratic potential is fulfilled. At the same time, if a slide towards a new authoritarianism is to be avoided, the independence and vitality of progressive civil society cannot be compromised. This delicate balance is predicated on the existence of a critical (but diverse and accessible) mass media, and an education system that instills a democratic ethos amongst all future citizens, and enhances the capacity of the the poor and marginalised to access and utilise information for their own empowerment.

Let us consider this balance more closely in the following section.

Social movements and the New SA

Participation and its limits

The ANC's RDP accords a major role for civil society in the developmental process. It specifies the necessity of "mass participation" in the elaboration and implementation of the RDP, and specifically mentions the important roles that CBOs and NGOs can play, alongside a democratic state, in the developmental process. This 'bottom-up' view of development is further elaborated in a recent study commissioned by Sanco, which played a key role in the drafting of the RDP (see Hanlon, 1994).

The mass organisations have since February 1990 occupied a central role in the developmental process. This has been primarily because the apartheid state came to realise that it had no legitimacy to implement developmental initiatives. Unions and civics, alongside a wide range of service groups, have thus played key roles in the formation of the National Housing Forum, Electrification Forum, Education and Training Forum, National Economic Forum etc at national level, and a host of development forums at regional and local level.

However, while the principle of 'community' consultation has been established, at least in the transitional period, frustrated experts and others anxious to get on with the job of delivering development have raised the question of the limits to bottom-up participation (see Narsoo, 1993). This frustration arises partly out of the recognition that development cannot proceed effectively if there are 'interminable' 'consultations' with community representatives, who act as gatekeepers of the developmental process, and who often prevent any decisions being taken without their approval. This problem is compounded when civics represent only a narrow set of interests in a community containing a wide range of interests.

Many civic leaders now accept that civics do not necessarily represent whole communities, but point to successful instances where civics have played a mediating role between a vast range of competing interests within a community (see Botha, 1982). Mayekiso (1993), in a sharp response to those in the Urban Foundation and elsewhere who he feels wish to undermine the role of civics in development, argues that the main

issue at stake is the need for powerful representative CBOs which can bargain with the state and private developers.

Nevertheless, as argued previously, consideration has to be given to the role of a democratic state in a situation where CBOs are either absent or represent partial interests. In the absence of democratic state involvement the ideology of 'community control' could mean an enhanced role for existing elites who, through developers and consultants, will use traditional and emerging community elites to further their own narrow economic interests, at the expense of less organised sections of the community. This tendency is further exacerbated by the role of international agencies who's policies tend to undermine the role of the state in an effort to privatise society and the developmental process.

It is in this context that the limits and possibilities of community participation in the developmental process needs to be considered. To what extent should NGOs and CBOs be the focus of developmental activity? In other words, to what extent should the local be privileged above the national? Does increased attention to localised developmental initiatives, in an effort to move away from statism, enhance the danger of societal fragmentation, where universal values are replaced by the narrow concerns of religion and ethnicity?

Inside or out?

All these perspectives have implications for the degree to which social movements and CBOs are independent of a future democratic state. It is clear that, particularly in a developing country like South Africa, where a democratic institutional order and culture is still being built, there are no easy answers. Social movements representing black people have, to a large extent, acted outside the formal institutions of power, and have maintained an independence from the apartheid state. The trade union movement is in fact the only social movement that participated to a limited extent in formal institutions such as industrial councils and the National Manpower Commission.

Unions are now poised to play a central role in an emerging 'social contract' with the state and capital, particularly through a restructured National Economic Forum. The major challenge is the extent to which such a social contract is widened to include wider layers of civil society, to prevent the emergence of a 'narrow corporatism" (see later).

But even if a social contract is narrowly constituted, social movements like the civics still face crucial choices. Should they participate in local government structures? If they do, they risk losing their social movement status, to become part of 'political society'. If they remain outside and continue to function as pressure groups and 'watchdog', they exclude themselves from crucial arenas of policy-making. Social movements, it seems, are searching for a formula that will allow them to participate fully in the developmental decision-making process, while at the same time maintain and develop their grassroots social movement character. Their decisions in this regard may determine whether they are in fact seeds of a new democratic order, or mere bubbles that have emerged during a period of crisis, which will burst once the crisis subsides (see Amin, 1983).

'rogressive NGOs too face crucial decisions. Should they become QUANGOs, and erve a democratic state, or should they jealously preserve their NGO status. If the atter, will they then always be at the mercy of foreign funders, who may have an interest n undermining a democratic state?

Opting out

f social movements decide to opt out of the policy-making arena they will, with the possible exception of the trade union movement, either become a spent, marginalised orce in the forseeable future (while a new bureaucracy assumes total control of the eigns of power), or they will become alternative sources of power, challenging a new order from within the bosom of the marginalised and dispossessed.

One route towards opting out could be the absorption of the forums into government ministries, where leaders of social movements become functionaries at national, regional and local level. This would cut these leaders off from their base, and increase the centralisation of power at these various levels, thus stifling completely the potential to build a more participatory democracy. In this scenario, a narrow social contract may emerge, with the danger of a 50% (or 30%) solution to the problem of development. Here a section of the union movement, representing higher paid workers, may be absorbed into a national consensus on development, leaving out less organised and lower paid workers, the unemployed and the rural poor. Part of the civic movement could participate in local councils, which could mean their demise as autonomous champions of the interests of their constituencies.

In this scenario social movement s activists will join the new elite that is rapidly forming, and whose interests will eventually coincide with those they fought against during the struggle for liberation. The vast majority of people will remain powerless and at the margins of the new order.

The most likely ideological discourse that would dominate in this scenario would revolve around 'development' in the 'national interest', with strong support from international agencies, in particular the IMF and World Bank. Money and foreign NGOs will flood into the country, and in the process will severely undermine the role of exisiing progressive NGOs. There would be an anxiousness about achieving 'social stability', in a desire to attract foreign investment, and prevent capital flight etc. Other bye-words include 'affirmative action' and 'black advancement' as synonyms for the empowerment of the historically deprived, but in reality they would mean creating and sustaining a new black elite.

In response to this scenario, excluded sections of society, possibly rallying behind political groups that have chosen to remain outside the parliamentary process, may strive to continue the mass struggle. This might include sections of the civic, union, youth and students' movements. The resultant instability, coupled with continued resistance to the new order from the far right, could lead to greater repression, and a contraction of democratic space within society.

A second route open to social movements is to avoid becoming absorbed into the decision-making process, and to place emphasis on building their power within their

various constituencies, from where they would offer conditional support to a democratic government that is constrained by a 'power-sharing' constitution. Such an option might be supported and coordinated by the SACP (possibly in alliance with other groups on the left) which would seek to steer such a government in a socialist direction, and rely on mass struggle to ensure that the voices of the historically deprived and marginalised are heard. The SACP's Jeremy Cronin (1994) hints at such a possibility. Others see the need to build an entirely new workers party to play a similar role (see Desai and Habib, 1994).

There is a distinct possibility that a combination of these two options may emerge in the longer term. If the new government proves to be severely constrained in its efforts to fundamentally transform the country socially, politically and economically, leftwing forces within the government and outside may then opt to concentrate on rebuilding the power and organisation they once enjoyed within the deprived communities, in an effort to counter-balance the overwhelming power of new and existing elites, particularly within the economy.

Dynamic incorporation

If social movements decide to push for increased participation in institutions of power, they have the opportunity to deepen the democratic potential that exists in the current negotiations forum initiative. They can do this by institutionalising the energy inherent in the negotiations forums that have proliferated during 1992 and 1993, through a wider social contract that goes beyond capital, labour and the state. This could take the form of a socio-economic or social and labour council, which could both harness the energy currently existing within social movements throughout the country, as well as provide the basis for building the capacity of organisation within civil society, including rural areas (see Pillay & Richer, 1993 and Schreiner, 1994).

But will a wider social contract enhance or stifle the vitality of civil society? This question cannot be answered in the abstract. It is only through a cautious engagement with the state, while at the same time maintaining a close link to their base, that social movements can determine the best course to follow, under specific conditions.

This option does not exclude elements of the previous scenario, in that a political movement or coordinating platform outside parliament may prove to be necessary to provide strategic direction for progressive social movements and intellectuals, in an effort to ensure the full democratisation of the state and society. Such a political force may well be the extra-parliamentary ANC/SACP alliance, given recent displays of independence by the ANC *vis a vis* the new government.

However, there are severe limits to the extent to which a party can act against its own leaders in power. In addition, as the preceding historical analysis indicates, the over-centralising and hegemonistic tendencies of a liberation movement as succesful as the ANC/SACP alliance may prove too overwhelming for relatively fragile organisations seeking to enhance power from below.

Globalisation from below

The struggle for democracy in SA cannot be seen in isolation from global processes, as sketched in a preceding section. The challenge facing progressive civil society turns around its precise relationship to the national state, in the context of a globalisation process that enhances localisation, or what has been term 'global localisation' (see Lash & Urry, 1994:312)

The failure of democratisation processes in Africa and elsewhere, including the empty democracies of Zambia and Zimbabwe, has instilled a sense of disillusionment amongst some progressive social movements and NGOs in the South about the possibilities of forging alliances with national states in the struggle against globalisation from above. They advocate a retreat into civil society. Nicaragua's Alejandro Bendana, while critical of the manner in which the Sandinista government in his country stifled the independence of civil society, disagrees:

> "We cannot fall into localist, depoliticized, NGOist conceptions and turn our backs on the need to attain hegemony at the state level, because, at this stage at least, the democratics movement cannot afford to dispense with the state" (1994:22)

While progressive civil society needs to forge an alliance with the democratic government, it also needs to independently forge alliances with progressive movements globally. A further consideration for South African NGOs is the implications of an imminent flood of wealthy foreign NGOs into the country, particularly from the USA. Many of these NGOs or QUANGOs have agendas that may be more in tune with their own countries' foreign policy objectives, than with the need to organise 'globalisation-from-below'. Indeed, some, in the interests of providing a more 'efficient' and 'effective' service to communities, may seeking to displace South African NGOs as service organisations.

As part of a slowly emerging 'globalisation-from-below', social movements and NGOs here, as in other countries of the South, are considering ways to counter this threat. The partial attempts at regional networking may be expanded to include all progressive social movements and NGOs in the region, with a view towards forging a global NGO network that is able to service a global social movement network. In other words, as the global state takes hold with improved informational technology (see Toffler, 1991), this is beginning to be counteracted by the emergence of a regional and global civil society, where progressive organisations around the world share experiences and develop tactics and strategies to undermine the power of existing international elites (see Brecher et al, 1993).

Further possibilities are embedded in the analysis provided by Gordon (1994), who makes a distinction between **Internationalisation** (where *laissez faire* finance capital, dictated by the logic of *exchange*, rules supreme,), **multinationalisation** (where powerful companies, dictated by the logic of *production*, remain anchored in national economic systems and the exploitation of the South) and **globalisation** (where the logic of *innovation* has led to the socialisation specific networks of capital, and 'global'

companies find it in their interests to build the capacities of local labour and regions in the South).

In terms of Gordon's analysis, the national/regional/local states in SA have much greater bargaining power when dealing with foreign companies seeking to invest in South Africa, than what they seem to realise. Global companies (e.g Apple-MacIntosh), unlike multi-nationals (e.g. IBM), do not necessarily seek the cheapest cost of production, and may invest in this country on terms that are highly favourable to specific regions, and to workers.

If this is true, the pressure from the Right to limit the role of social movements, in particular trade unions, in the policy-making process, may be considerably weakened, in the interests of a thorough democratisation of society. Globalisation-from-below, in all its variations, and with all its limitations and possibilities, does at least offer an alternative to the New World Order. The dream may, after all, still be realised.

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FOOTNOTE

[1] Following donor-inspired lexicon, civics, coupled with a vast array of community groups like stokvels, burial societies etc, have been called community-based organisations (CBOs). Those organisations that service them, such as Planact, BESG etc, are now called Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). A further distinction has been made between CBOs and CBDOs, ie community-based development organisations, which are development agencies that are staffed by community members, and which engage in development work on a non-profit basis. They are distinguished from profit-making, private developers. Borrowing from Jesse Jackson, the CBOs are seen as the tree-shakers, while the CBDOs are the jam-makers.

Soon we will also be making a distinction between NGOs and quasi-NGOs or QUANGOs, namely organisations that are state funded, but which seek to present themselves as non-governmental organisations representing the interests of civil society.

For our purposes here, we will be using community organisations and CBOs interchangeably, to refer to those organisations outside the workplace that are membership based. CBOs include social movements, which are mass based, but excludes the trade union movement, which is a social movement located in the workplace. All of these and other voluntary associations constitute civil society.