

The "launch", by COSATU and some 'civil society organisation', of the 'new United Democratic Front' in the Western Cape on 22 August has already gone the way of many similar announcements in the past. As usual, there were the big headlines in one or more newspapers; followed by excitement among some sections of the left - within and outside the new social movements - that at last COSATU was going to take up the struggle against the neoliberal policies of the ANC. This was followed by the usual denials from COSATU that anything of the sort was going to happen, and by vows from COSATU that it remains forever committed to the Alliance and to the leadership of the ANC. If this was all that had happened, one could say that there was nothing new, and that we should just continue with the daily life of organising and movement building.

1. The need for a strategic debate on the new social movements and COSATU  
There is however something new in the announcement around the 'new UDF'. In the newspaper report announcing the launch the list of organisations mentioned included at least two unusual suspects: the Alternative Information and Development Centre, and the New Women's Movement. Up to now, COSATU has had a definition of "social movements" that excluded many or all of the movements and NGOs that have taken up struggles against the neoliberal policies of the ANC.. The 'new UDF' announcement, has thus raised a number of important questions for the new social movements:

?? are we seeing a change in the attitude of COSATU towards the new social movements?

?? are we seeing a change in COSATU's relationship with the ANC and towards its neoliberal policies?, and, as a result,

?? are we seeing a new period in which possibilities of a 'united front against neoliberalism' comprising of the new social movements and COSATU can be built?

Although I indicated above that COSATU has already denied any connection with the 'new UDF', the questions raised above remain important for the new social movements because there are strong currents within the social movements that are arguing for an orientation towards COSATU. By orientation we mean the overall political direction of an organisation. This direction determines its strategies and tactics, its organisational priorities, the way it deploys its resources and its cadre, and so on. For these activists, COSATU (or at least COSATU members) remains the most important force for a militant and socialist politics in South Africa today. For this reason, in almost every major campaign that the movements have to engage the question of how to relate to COSATU, and what weight we put on COSATU's role and position, always comes up for debate. These debates have become sharper since the WSSD, and have included, for example, differences over whether (in Johannesburg) the APF should have its own May Day rally or join the COSATU/Department of Labour rally, and what relationship should there be between the Stop the War Campaign (formed mainly by the Alliance

organisations) and the Anti-War Coalition (formed mainly by the new social movements) during the anti-Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - August 2005 2 war mobilisations. These differences are also surfacing in the debate about the South African social forum. Another issue around which the debate around how to relate to the Alliance has arisen has been the 'alliance' on the land issues, in particular the initiatives of the SACP and the LPM.

Up to now, however, these debates within the new movements have been discussed on an issues by issue basis, and the fundamental strategic orientations that are implied in each of these positions have not been openly or extensively debated. This simmering debate has been thrown into sharp relief by the announcement of the 'new UDF', and before that by the address given by Ashwin Desai, an activist in the new movements, to the conference of COSATU celebrating 10 years of the transition to democracy. In this contribution my aim is to engage directly with the strategic perspectives of those, within the social movements, who are arguing for an orientation towards COSATU as the way forward for the new social movements. These currents, of course, do not agree on everything, and in some cases their positions diverge on important questions. For example, as I will demonstrate later on, the position held by Brian Ashley & Co (floated in a paper titled (?) "Document of our political initiative") does not put any strategic weight on the social movements, and sees them only in relation to the more important strategic actor that is COSATU. On the other hand, comrades within the Socialist Group (like Trevor Ngwane and others) have focused their energies on the social movements, even though they also argue for an orientation towards COSATU. What however brings them together is the (growing) conviction among them that the way ahead for the working class in this period is to win COSATU over to a 'united front against neoliberalism'. As we shall see, this has a number of implications for their political practice in this period.

Let us first look at COSATU's attitude to the new social movements, and at whether this attitude has undergone changes in the light of the announcement of the formation of the new UDF.

## 2. COSATU and the new Social Movements

It is important to emphasise that the issue of COSATU's attitude to the social movement cannot, on its own, determine the attitudes of the new social movements to COSATU. On the other hand, the issue of COSATU's attitude to the new movements will certainly influence, and to an extent determine, how the social movements interact with COSATU.

Over the past few months, and certainly since the COSATU conference celebrating 10 years of democracy, there have been reports in the commercial press about a 'toenardering' or 'smooching' (passionate kissing) between COSATU and the new social movements. The Mail and Guardian (11 March 2005) reported that COSATU "is to forge links with social movements." and that COSATU adopted a resolution to this effect. These kinds of reports appeared to be confirmed with the report in the Independent on Sunday (7 August 2005)

that COSATU was working with social movements to launch a 'new UDF' to challenge the ANC.

Of course, in the case of the Mail and Guardian no such "resolution" was adopted,

Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005 3 and in the case of the Independent COSATU has moved swiftly to deny any launch of a UDF, let alone one that will challenge the ANC. In response to the Independent report, COSATU issued a statement in which it said, "COSATU is not creating an organisation called the United Democratic Front and it is not challenging the ANC". Notwithstanding this denial, the press has continued to feast on this 'formation of an opposition party to the ANC'.

This approach by the press gains credence in the context of the 10 Years of Democracy Conference when the commission report on social movement noted, "this COSATU conference has given some space to some of the left Social Movements and this should be seen as a positive step". Once again, no 'left Social Movement' was given any space at conference. What did happen was that comrade Ashwin Desai, an activist in the movements, did deliver a paper at the conference. This of course does not constitute space for the movements. So what is the COSATU position on the new Social Movements?

The position of COSATU on the social movements was spelt out in its resolution passed at the 8th National Congress in 2003. In this resolution, COSATU stated that the emergence of Social Movements 'hostile to the Alliance necessitates the immediate strengthening and consolidating of the political centre, with a view to lead the masses on the issues that have given rise to these single issue based movements". According to COSATU, its task is to "lead and mobilise mass campaigns to avoid opportunism and undermining of Alliance organisations". And so, on the one hand, COSATU recognises that there are (real) issues that give rise to these movements, and on the other argues that the movements are 'opportunistic'. COSATU goes further and argues for engaging the Social Movements. The key issue, however, is that the aim of this engagement is to lead these movements and "bring them into our fold" - which means to bring the movements into the Alliance.

COSATU, of course, does accept that there may be tactical differences between various organisations, and that this should not prevent alliances being formed. But COSATU is clear that "the agenda of these organisations (should) not aim to liquidate or undermine the Alliance partners". In plain language, any organisation or movement can be worked with as long as it does not oppose an ANC that has adopted neoliberalism as its political project. An interesting aspect of the resolution on the Social Movement is that the Democratic Party is mentioned in the same breath, in the same section of the resolution that deals with the movements. This is no simple drafting mistake: we now know that many communities that have taken up struggles against the neoliberal policies of the ANC get periodically tarnished with the same brush of being instigated by the Democratic Party.

Given this long-standing and tested position of COSATU on the Social

Movements, it is incorrect for comrade Eddie Cottle, (an activists in the Social Movements), to argue that COSATU's statement rejecting any association with the 'new UDF' initiative is "pathetic". The reason comrade Cottle is so indignant about the COSATU statement is because he harbours illusions about COSATU's political orientation in this period. COSATU is consistent with its Congress resolutions, and there is nothing "pathetic" about an organisation that sticks to its political positions - especially if it does this over a long period of time.

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While it is true that COSATU has always travelled one road when it comes to its attitude to Social Movements, we need to account for its recent rhetoric of 'kissing the movements'. Firstly, it's important not to confuse the writings of journalists with the positions of COSATU. Many of the journalists, like Vicki Robinson from the Mail and Guardian, do not even understand the structures of the federation and how the federation works, let alone its sometimes-convoluted policy positions. We know that the 10 Years of Democracy Conference was not a statutory congress of the federation. Besides it being a Zuma rally, it was just a forum to air discussions and ideas. Thus, no resolution could be adopted at such a meeting. To an extent, therefore, some of the rhetoric is just a case of misunderstanding from the journalists.

Secondly, and more importantly, the rhetoric from COSATU about the Social Movements is due to the events of 31 August 2002 - the WSSD. At the WSSD it became clear that COSATU and the Alliance in general could no longer ignore the Social Movements. The movements had shown that they were a public political force in South Africa, and more importantly that they were capable of mobilisation. Opposition to neoliberalism could no longer be said to be from a few NGOs "with a fax and a briefcase". The important issue in understanding the current rhetoric of COSATU is not, however, the strength of the movements, but on the contrary, their temporary weakness in the years following the WSSD. With a decline in the combativeness of the movements, COSATU can now afford to "give some space to some left Social Movements". This fact - the weakness of the movements at this moment and how this is influencing attitudes between COSATU and the movements - is important to understand. It is of particular importance in understanding the way Ashley & Co have defined their relationship to COSATU. I return to this issue later.

3. The attitude of the Social Movements to COSATU, and the basis of this attitude

We have seen what is the attitude of COSATU to the Social Movements, and how this attitude is consistent with the way COSATU has responded to the 'new UDF' initiative. How do the movements view COSATU, and how do they relate to COSATU?

There are two attitudes to COSATU in the Social Movements today. There is on the one hand the attitude of the mass of active militants in the movements.

By 'militants' I do not refer to all the members of the new Social Movements, but to those who are active on a daily basis, and have over the

last few years been responsible for leading the struggles against the ANC's neoliberal policies. They are also responsible for the day-to-day organising in the townships. Many of these activists are coming into contact with a socialist politics in the very recent past, and, equally importantly, they have no history of contact with either COSATU in its militant years, or with the Congress movement as a movement of struggle. On the other hand, there is the attitude adopted by what I will refer to as sections of the "old left" in the movement. The "old lefts" share a number of common features: here we have a small but influential number of activists who have been active socialists from (at least) the late 1980s and the early to mid-1990s; they tend to belong to active socialist groups within the Social Movements (though not all of them belong to groups); and in various ways they were involved as activists outside (and in opposition to) the Congress movement Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005 5 in the 80s and 90s. They thus share a common experience of socialist politics, an experience which, I will argue, is important in understanding the way they approach an analysis of COSATU today. The 'lefts' that concern me in this analysis are in most cases grouped around the Keep Left current in Jhb, the Socialist Group (also mainly in Jhb) and Ashley & Co (mainly from Cape Town). I will also argue that based on his intervention at the COSATU Conference in March, Ashwin Desai also articulates a perspectives that has a lot in common with these groups - although, as I indicated, there is no agreement on all questions.

#### Attitude of the mass of militants to COSATU

First then, let us deal with the attitude of the mass of militants in the movements. The attitude of this group to COSATU has been formed over the last 6 or so years since the emergence of the new Social Movements. This was a period of the first struggles against the neoliberal order, and were characterised by battles for the streets and some times literally for houses. These were the days of the struggles in Chatsworth, in Soweto, and on the Cape Flats. A major feature of this period was the silence of COSATU in some cases, and in some cases as part of the Alliance with SANCO and the ANC, COSATU was seen as supporting the evictions, the cuts in social services, and so on. As COSATU itself acknowledges at its 10 Years of Democracy Conference, it was "engaged in acrimonious relationships" with some of these new Social Movements. Given the development of the relationship between COSATU and the new movements, the attitude of the militants came to be summed up in one political statement: COSATU must break the alliance with the ANC if it is to achieve any credibility among this group. For the militants as long as the alliance persists, COSATU was part of the 'other side'.

COSATU's relationship with the new movements was to be tested, quite naturally, during the WSSD. By 2002 the new movements had achieve an initial level of political clarification, and the key issue for them was that the WSSD was an opportunity for the movements to mobilise, in the context of a convergence of national and international forces, against the neoliberal

policies of the ANC. The ANC was anxious to present itself to the world - especially its former supporters in the international anti-apartheid movement - as a party of liberation and one that represents the continuity of the progressive project of liberation from globalisation. From early on, there was a fierce contestation about the political position to be adopted by 'civil society' in the coming WSSD.

Within the Civil Society Indaba COSATU was the leader of the pro-ANC bloc, a defender of NEPAD politics (with of course the traditional bit of 'criticism' of this or that point). It was within the context of the political break with ANC politics within the Indaba that the militants completed the formation of their attitude to COSATU. In the Teach-In held at Wits University during the WSSD mobilisations, militants booed the General Secretary of COSATU. This schism was completed when COSATU joined the march largely inspired, if not organised, by the ANC. By then COSATU was deserted by even the SANGOCO leadership, and was left with the officials of the SACC. For the mass of militants, therefore, COSATU is associated with the ANC - the party that evicts them from their houses, that cuts their water, and that privatises their schooling. It is this process of lived experience that has formed the attitude of this group to COSATU. They have no historical reference points of the "mighty

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COSATU" of the 1980s, no nostalgia about an organisation known all over the world for its spirit of sacrifice and for its socialist politics. While one can argue about how "unsophisticated" this understanding is, and about how "narrow" it is, and indeed about how it will lead to a "dead-end", one thing is clear and has to be confronted: it is an attitude grounded in the real historical experience of those who subscribe to it. Further: it is an attitude whose validity is confirmed by the ongoing experience of political and social life today. We all know that when it came to taking the leadership of the mass struggles that have unfolded in various parts of the country this year alone (2005), COSATU has not displayed a fraction of the energy it has displayed in defending former Deputy-President Zuma. For the struggling masses in dusty townships no songs and praise, no sms campaigns, no trust funds to bailout those accused of public violence, no funeral funds for those killed in combat, no t-shirts in honour of the water that no longer runs, of energy cuts in the heart of winter.

The attitude of the mass of militants to COSATU, while it is politically and socially valid, does need to be engaged - it does need to be grounded within the worldwide body of experience of the socialist movement. For example, we need to engage with the militants about whether their correct assessment of COSATU means that there can be no tactical alliances with COSATU on specific issues, and under specific conditions? Later on I return to engage the kinds of strategic and tactical questions (or in modern language 'challenges') that the movements need to respond to.

The attitude of the 'old lefts' to COSATU

Although there are moves currently underway to consolidate sections of the

old lefts, at this stage there is no single programmatic statement of how the 'old lefts' view COSATU, and of how they theorise its place in the struggle for socialism today. The task of analysing the views of this group is also not made easy by the fact that positions are in many cases not written down and argued in a systematic way. One can of course understand this from the mass of militants, who still have to learn the art of framing argument in overall political and philosophical frameworks. That some of the 'old lefts' still fail to provide such systematic theorisation of their positions is itself an indication of how far we still have to go to win the struggle for the masses. Be that as it may, for the purposes of exposition or of clarifying my argument, I will use two texts that have given some systematic presentation of the attitude of the 'old lefts' to COSATU. The one is by Ashley & Co ("Document of our political initiative). This is a document that is doing the rounds and deals with the need for the regroupment of socialists. In its argument it deals with its strategic perspective of the "united front against neoliberalism" and in the context of this develops an approach to COSATU. The second text that will be the basis of my argument is by Ashwin Desai. The document is a speech he delivered at COSATU's 10 Years of Democracy Conference in March this year. After some general observations about a "new period of resistance to capitalist globalisation", the Ashley and Co paper turns to the central task of the left in this period, which is defined as the "renewal of the mass movement on a radical and militant basis". What is striking about the paper from then on is that in its discussion of strategy in this period the entire focus is on COSATU. There is no comparable discussion on the social movements in the entire document. COSATU, we are told, although it is the biggest and the most militant section of the trade union movement, Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005 7 has grown weak over the last few years. The weakness is ascribed to "lack of political independence and autonomy" from the ANC. COSATU, according to the argument, is isolated from the new struggles because of the failure of a 'class struggle current to emerge from within' it (COSATU). There follows a discussion of how COSATU's class independence is to be regained (through struggles within the federation). Intervention in COSATU, according to this argument, must be directed at getting COSATU to take up day to day struggles, and further, this will ensure that the "logic of the continuation of the Alliance will be posed". In other words, when COSATU takes up day-to-day struggles (like stay-aways and strikes, for example?) this will lead to 'posing' (does this mean 'breaking'?) the 'question' of the Alliance.

It is of course not entirely true that the paper deals only with COSATU. It also mentions the new Social Movements. Here is what the paper says about them: "The struggle to rebuild COSATU and to regain its political independence and militant tradition will not be the result of rank and file struggle alone. A number of shocks from 'without' will have to pave the way. The emergence of militant and radical social movements with a mass base that

take up the struggles against the failure of the new government to transform the lives of the majority and resist the impact of its conservative macro-economic policies will have a major impact in 'keeping COSATU honest'. Here lies the importance and potential of a whole range of new popular organisations such as the TAC, the LPM, the new women and youth formations that while taking up single issues are forced to link their local struggles to the broader struggle against neoliberalism. .As these formations develop a cadre of activists that see the necessity of engaging with the trade union movement to provide the necessary social weight to challenge capital and the state more fundamentally objectively and increasingly organically the formation of a united front against neoliberalism will be posed"

A number of positions are contained here, and they also form a chain with one action coming before the other, and leading to the next one. The chain looks some this like this:

- a. The key task of the moment is to build a militant and radical mass movement
- b. Although weak, COSATU is the key to this project
- c. The 'struggle for the soul of COSATU' cannot only be waged from within COSATU
- d. The role of the Social Movements in this project is to 'keep COSATU honest', in other words to act as a battering ram from 'without' and shift COSATU towards a militant and radical politics
- e. The movements must develop a cadre of activists that see the need to engage with the unions (meaning COSATU, of course)
- f. When this has happened, a united front with COSATU will be formed [like for instance the 'new-UDF'], and the "radical and militant mass movement" will be realised.

A 'hierarchy of orders' that ranks COSATU as the most important strategically, and the movements as secondary, has been constructed. The politics of Ashley and Co flow from this schema. Let us briefly look at how, in two key events over the last few years, this schema has shaped the politics of this group, and how COSATU has been

Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005 8 privileged and placed at the top of the 'food chain of the revolution'.

The first event was the WSSD. During the run-up to the WSSD mobilisation and the August 31march, when the split between COSATU and the new Social Movements became imminent, Ashley positioned himself as a 'middle-man' and as an 'honest broker'. He attempted to bring the two 'sides together' and to bridge the political divide (Some of his less sophisticated fellow-travellers even denounced the march of the movements in the media). The divide at the time, of course, was made of sterner stuff, and Ashley was forced to choose, as room for compromise evaporated in the heat of the mobilisation. Rather than come over to the side of the new Social Movements, Ashley chose not to attend any march at all: it was either COSATU or nothing. The second event is (or was?) the initiative around the 'new UDF'. The most striking thing about the 'new UDF' initiative, in which AIDC (where



Ashley and some of his comrades work) was quoted prominently, is that none of the 'militant and radical' Social Movements were engaged by Ashley and Company in the search for a united front with COSATU. Of course, it might be argued that the event was a Western Cape event, and many of the movements are outside this region. This will not hold. Firstly, none of the Social Movements in the Western Cape were consulted or engaged. Secondly we also know that the launch of the 'new-UDF' in the Western Cape is but a fore-runner to other provincial launches and of course a national launch later one [just like the old UDF]. The reason why the APF and others were not consulted is of course not difficult to see: it was politically impossible to do this because COSATU's political position does not allow it. And so during the WSSD it was COSATU or nothing, and in the 'new-UDF' initiative it is COSATU and nothing!

The important lessons of these two events, and of the way the orientation of Ashley and Co is defined, is that although they argue that the militancy of the Social Movements will "keep COSATU honest", and by linking with COSATU lead to the breaking of the Alliance (or at least "posing the question"), they know that this self-same militancy also pushes COSATU away. Thus, as in the WSSD, a time will come when the political divides cannot be bridged, and Ashley and Co have to choose. As in the WSSD, they chose COSATU, and so made clear their primary strategic orientation. For them the movements are a sideshow whose "importance and potential" lies in "keeping COSATU honest". If we leave aside the clear choice that is made by Ashley and Co for a primary orientation to COSATU, there are many issues that are vague and undeveloped in their position paper. In particular, the reason why COSATU is chosen as the privileged formation is not developed at all. We are told that COSATU is weak now, and we need to revive it. As to why, for example, they do not choose as primary what they themselves argue are "militant and radical social movements with a mass base" is not clear. After all - as modern day believers in the traditions of Congress (who are "trying to build on the rich history of the UDF.") - Ashley and Co should know that from its launch up to its demise the UDF had almost no representation from the major militant trade unions. In fact, even those unions like Food and Canning, which had historical roots in the Congress tradition, did not join the UDF. Another important intervention around how to understand the role of COSATU today

Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005 9 comes from Ashwin Desai, and is developed in his paper Shadow Boxing? COSATU, Social Movements and the ANC government. [Now, before discussing Desai's approach to the question of the attitude to COSATU and by implication to the movements, let me state that Desai's paper ranges over a number of important questions of strategy for the movements - many of which cannot be engaged in this paper. These include, for example, the question of struggle and legality in South Africa today, the question of the forms of struggle appropriate to the present phase of struggle in South Africa, and even an understanding of modern capitalist political economy and how it

informs our strategies today.]

Before taking up the reasons he advances for the importance of COSATU in this period, let us first establish what Desai presents as the role he sees for COSATU in the present historical period. For Desai, there are three key aspects that define the role of COSATU:

- i. COSATU would bring -to the new movements - a more "structural and macro-economic understanding of their oppression
- ii. The community movements would benefit from COSATU's national linkages, resources and legitimacy, and of course the movements should reach out to 'their class allies'
- iii. There is also the fact that, for COSATU, links with the movements such as the APF would present great strategic options for COSATU. In other words, it is in COSATU's self-interest to link up with the movement.

And what are the political implications of all this? What does this mean in terms of the present political positioning of COSATU? What does this proposed alliance with the movements mean for COSATU's position in the Tripartite Alliance? Here Desai develops the position:

"I can already hear some people arguing that this is an ultra-left plot to destroy the Alliance with the ruling party. Not so. I don't believe COSATU should leave the Alliance with the ANC. You're far too weak to go it alone at this stage. Frankly what is called for is not a symbolic act like breaking the alliance, but a practical act in support of the ideas that historically underpinned that Alliance. There is nothing incompatible with an Alliance with the ANC in challenging local or national government to remain, in its social spending, true to the Freedom Charter or RDP, if you like a more modern touchstone. Let them chuck you out if they don't want popular participation in setting the budget, but you don't have to go, in order to pursue this new orientation."

In order to appreciate the significance of Desai's position its useful to reflect on its evolution in the course of his presentation. Desai began with a lengthy discussion of the weakness and the failures of COSATU - much more extensive than Ashley and Co. He then went on to call on COSATU to extend a hand to the 'ultra-left' social movements, proceeding to reflect on how, unlike 'unionist too busy drinking tea with management' the new movements with all their weaknesses know their enemy. The argument develops and the need for linking struggles between communities and the workplace through a "coordinated huge annual income strike" is presented. From this we find, suddenly, that the struggle has to be waged within the Alliance, and later Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005

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within the ANC itself!

Of course, Desai does not believe that all these radical things he suggest - especially his strategy of 'breaking the law' - will happen without 'shaking (?)' the Alliance, or to borrow words from Ashley and Co, without 'posing the question of the Alliance'. Although he takes a different and sometime more entertaining route, Desai ends up in substantially the same position as

Ashley and Co:

?? Although the "powerful" social movements are recognised, COSATU is the primary point of reference. As Desai argues: "I suspect that you (COSATU) will not only provide leadership to your own members and to members of the fledgling community movements, but also to many who would consider themselves ANC stalwarts"

?? Desai knows that the movements are very critical of the Alliance (I seem to remember at one gathering Desai referring to COSATU's continued stay in the Alliance as a case of the battered wife syndrome), and so by asserting and arguing for the Alliance to continue, he is in fact arguing that the 'linking' up with the APF and other movements be done on the terms dictated by COSATU and the ANC.

?? Both Ashley & Co and Desai want to "build on the rich history of the UDF", of the Freedom Charter, and indeed "of the ideas that have historically underpinned the Alliance"

Earlier I argued that Ashley & Co failed to argue and develop the logic of this political choice. The task was - objectively - left to Desai. Let us now see how this logic unfolds.

According to Desai, there are about five reasons why this strategic orientation to COSATU is necessary today:

Firstly, Desai argues that within COSATU there is among "many ordinary officials and shopstewards .a genuine will to class struggle.

Secondly, there is ideological clarity within the rank and file about what is to be done; the issue standing in the way of this is "a sense of strategic exhaustion". What is needed, in other words, is to provide clarity or guidance on how to take up the struggle. In his contribution Desai takes up this challenge, and calls for linking struggles for wage increases with a "coordinated annual huge income strike"

Thirdly, the reason why struggles have not been taken up is because of the way COSATU has taken up struggles. Workers are "only too ready for class struggle, as long as it was not just another damp-squib strike and memorandum handover"

Fourthly, notwithstanding the strengths, Social Movements are still "parochial and insular, seemingly unable or unwilling to breach the boundaries of 'inherited' group areas." As indicated above, Desai goes on to say the movements would benefit from COSATU's national linkages and so on.

Fifthly, the movements are ideologically weak or at least undeveloped, and could benefit from COSATU's "more structural and macro-economic understanding of their oppression."

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#### 4. A critique of the political basis of the turn to COSATU

We can see that there are two sides to the arguments for a turn to COSATU.

On the one hand, the orientation rests on the argument that members of COSATU, officials and shopstewards, are ready to fight, and that the what is holding them back is the COSATU leadership itself, and a lack of clarity

about how the class struggle is to be taken forward. On the other hand, the orientation rests on the argument that highlights the weakness of the new Social Movements at a political and ideological level. Let us discuss the issues raised by this argument in turn.

Who does COSATU represent? Who is the COSATU member today?

The traditions of militancy for which COSATU is now world-renowned emerged in the 1970s. The working class that stood at the heart of this militancy, the blue-collar worker and semi-skilled worker, was a product of the process of industrialisation that began in the 1950s and was consolidated in the 1960s. Beginning with the Durban strikes in 1973, this section of the working class spearheaded a cycle of struggles that moved from the factories into the townships. This movement of the industrial proletariat supplied the leadership cadre that led the township revolts of the 1980s. Indeed, beginning with the launch of the Germiston Shopstewards Council around 1982, the shopstewards took their traditions of militancy into the large townships of the then Transvaal (Gauteng, Mpumalanga and surrounds). Desai and many who look to COSATU have images of this militant proletariat in their minds. The reality, however, has changed in a dramatic and fundamental way.

In an important study by Sakhela Buhlungu and Eddie Webster, both of the Sociology of Work Project (SWOP) based at Wits University, a survey of COSATU membership has revealed profound changes. Firstly, unlike the working class of the 1980s, whose forces were continually being replenished by the classes (student militants) of 1976 and 1980, the present COSATU membership is not being replenished by new waves of youth. This can be seen in the fact that the average COSATU member is growing older, and is his or her middle age. Secondly, the COSATU member of the militant 1980s was a blue-collar worker. According to Buhlungu and Webster in 1994 60% of COSATU members were unskilled and semi-skilled. Today the majority (60%) is made up of skilled, supervisory and clerical workers. These members are permanent and now have higher educational qualifications. The present day COSATU member, who is white collar, is also upwardly mobile. More importantly, however, many of the present crop of workers joined the unions after COSATU's formation, and thus the extent to which they are steeped in COSATU's militant tradition is itself questionable. Indeed, the growth of COSATU in the post-1994 period has also been due in large measure to the affiliation by historically conservative white collar unions: for example DENOSA, SASBO and in general the growth of public sector unions.

The upshot of all this is that without a major new wave of struggle and resistance, the COSATU member is drifting into the position of a labour aristocrat, even if the divide in terms of material wealth is as yet not a big one. For this reason, General Secretary Vavi's observation in his speech to the 10 Years of Democracy Conference becomes important: "We have produced countless working class leaders that are playing important roles in almost every sphere of transformation. Many of these take their place in government, and other leadership positions.." Of course, Vavi is too shy to name a key sector that has absorbed this leadership talent: the business

sector. And

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Vavi is proud of these leaders born of the labour movement, and argues that while COSATU cannot be held responsible for what they do in their new positions, "one thing for sure is that they are well trained and have not been a failure in their new areas of responsibilities"

Desai and Ashley & Co have created an idealised view of the COSATU member, and they cling to this image in much the same way that they cling to the 'traditions of the Freedom Charter'. As a result, while Desai recognises that the shopstewards are 'busy drinking tea with management'; while he notes the Numsa steward who is "not here to fight management", for some reason that one can only put down to a heavy bout of nostalgia, he refuses to draw the appropriate political conclusions. How are 'leaders that see both sides' supposed to deliver the 'left hook' to capital, and to have a "genuine will to class struggle"? And how is the member held down by middle age and a mortgage, career prospects in government and business, supposed to break the law as Desai suggest? Desai, and the many 'old lefts' who are seduced by the past, dare not ask these uncomfortable questions.

We have to come to terms with the fact that what we have in COSATU is not just an army dressed in battle gear and waiting for generals. The COSATU leadership's politics of compromise rest on a solid social base: the support for the Alliance within COSATU is not just a product of Vavi - it indeed reflects a deep sentiment within the new rank and file that all problems notwithstanding, the ANC in power is the best bet for the future. Vavi is right - and Desai, Ashley & Co wishful thinkers - when he says of the struggles and campaigns waged by COSATU in the post-1994 period: "While a number of these actions have on occasion brought us into conflict with the democratic government, they can all be characterised as attempting to defend and deepen our democracy, and to counter the agenda of big business"(Speech at the 10 years Conference.)

Is there ideological clarity within the COSATU rank and file?

To be fair, Desai does recognise the existence of ideological confusion among COSATU members, but for him this is not the key issue. For Desai, the reluctance to fight is "mainly because there is a sense of strategic exhaustion not ideological confusion". But now Desai puts us in an impossible situation. On the one hand we have a membership that is clear about what needs to be done, that has a genuine will to struggle and so on. We have a rank and file "only too ready for class struggle". On the other hand, this same membership and rank and file does not think they must oppose management (let alone the collective management: the state); they allow their unions to run investment companies (another approach to the 'class struggle?'); they allow their organisations to be deeply drawn into institutions of 'social dialogue'. Indeed, in many industries we know that the unions are complicit in deals with management that accelerate retrenchments. Confusion, according to the meaning normal people ascribe to

it, is when a person holds on to a number of contradictory positions at the same time. On the basis of prevailing evidence, supplied by Desai himself, we certainly have massive ideological confusion within the COSATU rank and file. This is certainly not a rank and file that is "clear about what is to be done"

There is, however, another possible interpretation of the facts. It is that the COSATU member (or at least that part of the membership - for example the shopsteward - that

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influences the direction of the organisation) is ideologically clear: but the clarity is to pursue integration in the present capitalist order, and not to pursue a path of class struggle. This conclusion is of course too horrendous to contemplate.

It is not easy to understand what Desai means by 'strategic exhaustion'. One can however infer what this means by looking at what Desai presents as a solution to this problem. According to Desai, the problem is "how" the challenge to the present policies is to be advanced. The issue of "how" a particular order is to be changed is always a difficult one. Indeed, this issue occupied the mass movement in South Africa for more than three decades, and even during the transition there was not always agreement. The important point here is that this kind of question [and as a leftist and Marxist Desai should know] is never resolved through discussions, through contemplation - but through action. Various communities, for example, have taken to the streets in defence of their interest - and in many cases have defied the law, as Desai calls on the unions to do. This approach by masses of people facing deteriorating living conditions is not new: there are no struggles that begin with a clear sense of how the struggle is to be taken forward, but this never stops people from struggling. The struggles that formed COSATU itself did not begin with an 'idea' of 'how' the apartheid regime was to be overthrown; they began with action, and through action developed an understanding of how the struggle was to be waged.

The question that needs to be asked is why communities in South Africa, who face the same problem of "how" to change the existing order, take up struggles, on the one hand, and on the other hand unions get exhausted even before they take up any struggles? Communities too have had many a march that ended in the delivery of a memorandum, but their position of impoverishment has led them to take up struggles.

Contrary to what Desai might want to believe, we have to accept that the difference between the union member and the community member lies in the fact that the community member, especially the new breed of activist that is being thrown up by the struggles in the township, is relatively free of the ideological baggage that holds the union member down. She or he is also free of the baggage that comes with upward mobility, or at least the possibility of upward mobility.

What kind of 'structural and macro-economic understanding' will COSATU bring

to the movements?

Everybody is agreed that the new Social Movements are still weak, and lack any developed or refined programme of analysis or demands. Does it follow, however, that COSATU will bring this clarity? A lot here depends on our assessment of what "structural and macro-economic understanding" COSATU presently has, and on whether it is the kind of understanding that will provide a solid base for the deepening of the class struggle.

For many of the 'old lefts' who want to orientate to COSATU is it difficult to face up to the fact that COSATU is not an innocent victim of "job insecurity, low wages, deaths from Aids all round, (the growth of a) small black elite." and many other government policies. Firstly, we know that the present industrial policy (even if COSATU for some reason continues to insist that there is no industrial strategy) of liberalisation was developed by COSATU economists - the Economic Trends Group Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005  
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which became the Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) and which now lives in the Department of Trade and Industry. Indeed, even in the face of massive job losses in the textile sector, the textile union SACTWU still continues to hold on to the neoliberal policies developed in the ISP. We also know that COSATU's Social Equity and Job Creation commits the federation to 'international competitiveness', tariff reduction, an export-led industrialisation, and recently through the 'buy South Africa campaign' to a phoney nationalism. I have dealt with COSATU's drift to the right over the last 15 years in numerous articles, and one can cite many other instances of the federation's adaptation to neoliberal pressure, its integration into the processes of capital accumulation, its sometimes shameful fight for black empowerment stakes, and in many instances the embarrassing purchase, by affiliates, of privatised companies.

Ashley & Co and Desai know that COSATU is deeply committed to the building of the institutions of "social dialogue", that is institutions of class collaboration. As to how this orientation by COSATU, defended by Vavi as late as at the 10 Years of Democracy Conference this year, will coexist with the "renewal of the mass movement on a radical and militant basis" (Ashley & Co), or how this will coexist with "a genuine will to class struggle" (Desai) is anybody's guess.

Now, is this the kind of "structural and macro-economic understanding" that COSATU will bring to the Social Movements? While one acknowledges that the movements are weak and have a lot to learn, this is certainly not the kind of 'lessons' the movements need to learn. The university of the streets, of the real, not imaginary class struggles in the townships and dorpias, schools, rural villages, and (yes!) even factories and mines, is a much better school of strategic studies than all the "230 written and well-researched inputs made by COSATU on issues of policy and legislation to 20 government departments and their corresponding committees in parliament" (Vavi at the 10 Years of Democracy Conference)!

Will the movements benefit from COSATU's national linkages, resources and legitimacy?

The movements, so the argument goes, are "parochial and insular, seemingly unable or unwilling to breach the boundaries of inherited group areas". What is needed, of course, is the federation's national linkages, resources and prestige. Let us for the moment not spend too much time on this rather astonishing argument that blames the working class for being working class - after all, in its normal existence as a class, the working class reflects the patterns of capital accumulation that form and shape it. South African capitalism is based on cheap labour, and the geography of cheap labour is a geography of group areas.

The first issue that needs to be taken up is the claim that the movements are "parochial". The movements are weak, but are they parochial? In the very short life-span of the new Social Movement (compared to the new South Africa, they certainly deserve the name 'new'), which is less than 6 years, we have seen the emergence of the LPM, Jubilee as an anti-globalisation movement, and the movements based in the three major metropolises - Jhb, Cape Town and Durban. Now, all these movements have identified GEAR and Globalisation in one way or another as being at the heart of the problems they face. Quite rightly, Desai observes that for many a community Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005  
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member the immediate enemy is the local councillor. But is this any different to the union member of 1973, who saw the immediate employer as the enemy, and only later - much later in some cases - saw the entire capitalist class as the enemy? In any event, and as Desai himself notes, wages are as much a "single issue" as is an eviction. I think Desai confuses the weakness of the movements with an entirely different matter, "parochialism"; he is buying into the COSATU myth that if you write many parliamentary submissions you automatically have a broad worldview. The irony of the last 10 to 15 years is how parochial COSATU has become. Once again, let us take Vavi at the 10 Years of Democracy Conference: "[COSATU] should be the voice of the working class, acting within and outside the Alliance to ensure better conditions in the workplace whilst it equally campaigns and lobbies for pro-poor policies from the state." This is a far cry from the COSATU that argued that its role was to "promote the working class as a dominant political and economic power". This is what being parochial means - a shift from class power to being a lobby group!

What kind of national linkages does COSATU provide? COSATU certainly has a head office, and more money than the movements. But national linkages, if they are to mean anything politically, their existence or otherwise are confirmed and tested in the context of a sustained campaign of struggle - and not in the course of office routine. Yes, there was a time when COSATU provided national linkages, and this was a time of its unparalleled authority in the mass movement. Every struggling factory, townships, school, village and mine echoed the same cry: "Sikhokhele COSATU! (COSATU lead us)!"



A national linkage is said to exist when the particular formation in question provides a magnet, a pole of attraction, a spinal column for most instances of the class struggle. At some distant past COSATU did provide a national linkage - but sadly it no longer does. As with so many aspects of their analysis of COSATU, Desai, Ashley & Co and many of the 'old lefts' are basing their analysis on nostalgia. It was Lenin who taught that the strength of Marxism as a tool of analysis is when it engages in a concrete analysis of concrete situations - it is certainly not a tool to bring ghosts from the pasts back to life!.

Unfortunately for all of us (both those who were involved in building it, and the new militants who have only seen its decline), what COSATU will bring to the movements is not any national linkage and resources for struggle, but rather the dead weight of its reformist bureaucracy. At this concrete conjuncture, COSATU will not link class struggles across the country, but will act as a Trojan horse facilitating the acceptance of the ANC by the movements.

Does the 'centrality of the point of production' necessarily translate into the leadership of COSATU in the present historical period?

There is an argument that always lurks in the shadows of the discussion on the role of the unions in the broader working class struggle. This is the issue of the centrality of the 'point of production' in understanding the role of the employed sections of the working class, and depending on one's political position, the role of the unions. For example, in their paper Ashley & Co argue that the new movements must engage with trade unions "to provide the necessary social weight to challenge capital and the state more fundamentally."

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Many socialists agree that the transformation of capitalism into a more egalitarian society cannot take place without changing the relationships of production. This is because of a range of reasons, one of which is that as a social system driven by profit the owners of capital enjoy enormous power throughout society as a whole. Therefore struggles over control of production - not for higher wages, although these are also important - are crucial in the struggle for transformation. The fact that it is important to transform production relations does not in itself tell us much about which organisations of the working class, or which sections of the working class would lead a "renewal of the mass movement" in any specific period. Let us take a few examples to explain what I mean here.

Different paths of the development of capitalism give rise to different types of working classes. In South Africa, capitalism gave rise to a racially divided working class, for example. In addition, at different times the structure of the working class might change. As we can see in South Africa today, the (political) dominance of blue-collar workers is now on the decline because of a range of factors, including the decline of the traditional industries of the blue-collar workers. The implications of this

is that at different points in time different sections of the working class are dominant within it, and at these points these sections determine the texture of the politics of the working class. The structure of capitalism, and the working class it brings into being, also determines the evolution of workers organisations. For example, in the history of capitalism we have had craft unions, general unions, industrial unions as well as hybrid forms of union organisations. All these different forms of organisations have played a militant role in their times.

The role of different sections of the working class in the struggles of the class cannot just be restricted to shifts within the industrial working class. There can also be shifts within the broader working class. The revival of a period of militancy might begin with other sections of the working class, for example the students. This was the case in South Africa at the end of the 1960s.

Because of the way they treat this issue, both Ashley & Co and Desai paint themselves into a corner. According to Ashley & Co, the emergence of social movements with a mass base and a militant politics will be important in shifting COSATU to the left. But surely this an admission that just because COSATU is at the point of production it does not follow that it is the starting point of the revival. Similarly, Desai writes at length about the combativity of the social movements - and about the vacillation of COSATU, but then turns around and confers the role of leadership in the present phase of the mass movement to COSATU.

The mechanical 'point of production' approach also needs to be engaged and challenged from a different angle. In South Africa today we all know that there have been many changes at the point of production. We all talk about casualisation, out-sourcing, sub-contracting, informalisation and so on. Large-scale retrenchments linked to these processes have evicted many workers from the traditional point of production, even if these workers are still subjected to the rule of capital in their lives. Therefore, the "point of production" cannot be understood in a mechanical and unchanging way. In the history of capitalism itself, the "point of production" has undergone many changes. For example, in early capitalism there was the so-called Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005  
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putting out system, where workers worked in their homes. The home was a point of production. At another time the dominant "point of production" was the small workshop and not the large factor. Today again, in some cases the home is becoming "point of production" as the capitalist are again using some kind of 'putting out system', like in the leather and shoe sectors. In his discussion Desai raised this important issue, but unfortunately he did not follow it up. According to Desai, the present "political marginalisation of labour reflects a social marginalisation of work as a source of stability, identity and emancipatory visions for an expanding section of the working class." In other words, the political leadership role of the blue-collar worker of the 1970s and 80s was a reflection of

industrialisation based on semi-skilled machine industry. In the 80s there were many discussions of how changes in the labour process in capitalist industry in South Africa had give this section of the labour force organisational and political leverage. Desai's observation (following Barchesi) challenges the assumption on which the organisational and political hegemony of COSATU in the class struggle was built in the 80s. While I do not have the space or the time to reflect on this crucial question, what I want to emphasise is that it challenges crude 'point of production' politics in a deep and fundamental way, and has profound strategic implications for our understanding of the class struggle in South Africa today.

Is there a revival of class struggle politics currently underway in the trade unions?

There have been a number of high-profile strikes that have taken place in South Africa over the last few months. After a long period of decline in strike activity, there appears to be a revival of industrial action on the part of some sections of the working class. For those who believe in a primary orientation to COSATU, and for those who argue (as I do) that the new Social Movement are the organisations that will lead the revival in this particular historical period, we both need to pay attention to any suggestions of a revival in the unions, and how this can link up with the struggles currently underway in the unions.

How should we understand the significance of strikes in general, and of strikes in this period in particular? Already in the 1860s Marx argued, "the periodical resistance on the part of working men [and women] against a reduction of wages, and their periodical attempts at getting a rise in wages, are inseparable from the wages system." The prevalence of strikes, therefore, is quite consistent with the reproduction of capitalism. On the other hand, strikes can be 'schools of the class struggle', and in the course of strike workers can develop their fighting temperament.

What is clear from the strikes that have taken place in the recent period is that

- i. they were a response to the deterioration that has taken place in living standard over the last few years,
- ii. in the majority of cases the workers did not win big increases, and in fact came close to where the bosses were holding out
- iii. none of the strikes attempted to mobilise the community - and this was true even of the SAMWU strikes
- iv. the leadership of the unions was rather anxious to ensure that these strikes are not seen as political
- v. none of the strikes had a 'wild-cat character', a sure indication of the general mood of combativity of the workers.

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While it is important for workers to engage in strike action, and while it is important for the movements to come out in support of such strikes, we

need to be sober in our assessment of the 'class struggle' potential of the strikes. What is clear from the recent strikes is that it would take a free imagination (free from reality) to interpret them as the beginning of a revival. What we have seen are procedural strikes, and they have not intersected with a combative mood within the unionised working class - a key condition for a revival.

In order to understand this point, let us compare these recent strikes with the strikes in the Transvaal in the early 1980s. Firstly, in many cases the strikes were spontaneous, and were organised autonomously at a local level. Secondly, while there was a procedure that workers had to follow before they could strike, in many cases workers ignored these procedures, and in important cases forced bosses to give in through sheer class power. Thirdly, in the strikes of the early 80s there was a spirit of no-compromise, even if this sometimes led to mass dismissals. Fourthly, the strikes in the 1980s linked up with struggles in communities, and this did not only happen through consumer boycotts. Fifthly, many of the workers and shopstewards who were involved in those strike were activists in the communities, and as a result the energy generated in the strikes spilled over into the communities. Sixthly, and conversely, the energy generated in community struggles spilled into the factories and gave the workers strength.

A more serious and much deeper analysis of the present strikes still needs to be made, but it is incorrect for us to raise them to a 'wave' simply because of the number of man-day lost as compared to last year. To speak of a strike wave we need a much more fundamental shift in the psychology of the masses, and in their preparedness, as Desai urges, to go beyond the confines of normal 'industrial relations'. Of course, it would be reckless (and I think Desai borders on recklessness) to just call on workers to break the law: a much deeper and spontaneous process that is sustained over time needs to happen before this psychological shift happen and we can seriously speak of a strike wave.

5. Should the Social Movements be afraid of "missing the boat", or, the real sources of the orientation to COSATU

Over the last 5 to 10 years- and some would say before that - COSATU has steadily drifted to the right. This can be seen in its economic policy, in its preparedness to provide voting fodder to the ANC even without any electoral conditions, and the way it has continued to provided this voting fodder even when after every elections the ANC has gone on its many union bashing exercises. COSATU has continued to weaken at the organisational level, and in important respects has continued to be integrated as a junior partner and as a "manager of discontent" in many apparatuses of the state. Today COSATU is more active in parliament - with hundreds of submissions - than it is within the working class as leader and political organiser. We now have a federation that is more concerned about a most disgraceful issue of supporting former deputy president Zuma. We have a federation that - notwithstanding Desai's observation that it has large resources to bring to the Social Movement - still does not have a national newspaper. And this is

in a period in which the only newspapers available to the working class is the capitalist press which dishes

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out doses of neoliberalism everyday. The catalogue of failures, of rightward drifting policies, of the conscious refusal to struggle, of capitulation in the face of ANC pressure, and more recently of embarrassing and outright shameful escapades is endless.

According to Claire Ceruti (and activist in the Social Movements and one of the old lefts) we should be optimistic about "the power of our politics and the potential of these hairline cracks (referring to the formation of the 'new UDF') forming in the ANC monolith." In other words, Ceruti and company would like us to believe that although for the last 5 to 10 years we have not managed to shift this drift to the right, if we are 'not pessimistic' then we will be fine, and we will all live happily ever after. In my discussion above I have shown that many of the assumptions the 'old lefts' make about COSATU have no basis in reality, that in many cases there is no analysis as much as there is a whole set of wishes, hopes and unfounded optimism. What accounts for this blind chasing after COSATU? What accounts for this lack of faith in the movements (and I am using this word here to encompass all the communities who are taking up struggles against neoliberalism) that are slowly but surely taking up their rightful place in national political life?

There are a number of reasons that account for this apparently irrational behaviour. The first is that the 'old lefts' are afraid of "missing the boat" as they did in the 1980s. The second is that this rising chorus among the lefts to embrace COSATU reflects a lull, a temporary retreat, in the development of the Social Movements since 2002. Thirdly, the hope that COSATU will be the saviour reflects, within the 'old lefts', a "strategic exhaustion", to borrow a phrase from Desai. Let us look at each of these in turn.

The fear of missing the boat

A significant number of leftists who are active in the Social Movements today were active in the 1980s, or at least they are members of political tendencies that were active in the 1980s. When the 1980s began, the hegemony of the Congress movements was not yet established, and indeed the 'workerists' were the dominant force in FOSATU (the union federation that came before COSATU). The address by Joe Foster to the FOSATU Central Committee in 1982 raised hopes that a workers party would be launched. Of course, this all came to nothing, and by 1987 the hegemony of Congress politics in COSATU, and in the mass movement as a whole was secured and consolidated. The leftists watched, sometimes in horror, sometimes with demoralised eyes, as the 'populists' won the day. These struggles were of course intensely fought, as could be seen by the splits in the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA), the National Union of Metal Workers' (NUMSA) attempts to win the struggle for the launch of a Workers

Party by the unions, and in many other sites of struggles like in the youth and student organisations. Even earlier, in the Western Cape, these struggles were fought out in the Disorderly Bill Action Committee (DBAC), and one of the outcomes of this particular struggle was the splits that led to the formation of the United Democratic Front in 1983. So intense was this struggle at times, and so fragile was the hegemony of Congress in the mass movement, that at the height of the uprisings in the Vaal Triangle and in the country at large, Jeremy Cronin, the leading ideological 'fixer' for the Communist Party, wrote that in the South African revolution there would be an

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'uninterrupted transition' from apartheid to socialism. This was a result of the intense pressure exercised on Congress by the uprising against capitalism and apartheid.

The victory of Congress forced many leftists to reposition themselves within the terrain of Congress politics, but by this time the Stalinism of the Communist Party was entrenched, and political intolerance for other non-Stalinist left currents was at its height. The lefts have not yet recovered from the political and psychological scars of the defeats of the 1980s, and these scars continue to be a powerful factor in the thinking of many 'old lefts' and their currents. Many of the 'old lefts' today are now terrified of a repeat experience, where a new wave of struggles erupts, and they (the lefts) are again left behind and a new mass movement or party is formed in which they have no influence. This fear is captured by Ceruti when she argues, against Eddie Cottle: "If the left keeps on refusing to get involved [in the new UDF] and fight these fights, we'll stay lily-white (sic!).[while] all the people .get involved in this kind of thing."

Moreover, Ceruti does not want to wait around until the capitalists bomb her, so, she would rather join the new UDF.

Fear and trauma sometimes leads to the suspension of many a person's faculties, and in this case of his or her ability to analyse a situation.

The most common factor in the arguments of the 'old lefts' for an orientation to COSATU is their lack of any concrete analysis of what has happened, and what is happening to COSATU. The dominant image in their heads is of Congress triumphant. But the 'old lefts' are wrong, not only about what is happening today (which I have already demonstrated), but also about what happened in the 1980s. It would take a much more extensive exposition than is possible here to review the 1980s, a task that is increasingly becoming necessary given the mythology that is building up around that period. I will however make one or two points about Congress, the lefts, and the struggles in the 1980s.

The first point is that when the UDF was launched in 1983, it was a weak political current, a minority political current among the large activist cadre of the time (across the sectors including the trade unions). In particular the organisational composition of the UDF revealed that it began

life as a shell of an organisation, certainly not as a mass movement.

According to Seekings, an official historian of the UDF, when the movement was launched, it had representation from a few smaller unions (SAAWU and GAWU), civic organisations mainly from three cities, Johannesburg area, Cape Town and Durban, and student and youth formation. Seekings notes that " the unions, whilst small in comparison with some of the absent independent unions, had by far the largest membership. A handful of organisations - mostly student organisations - had extensive membership. But most were little more than groups of activists. Most of the youth groups, for example had between 10 and a 100 members. Some of them, especially the civics, were able to mobilise large numbers of people around particular issues and enjoyed considerable popular support but had few regular formal members."

The significance of the weakness of youth is apparent when we remember that of the 565 organisations there were present at the launch, 317 were youth and students organisations. Moreover, the majority of organisations at the launch came from so-called 'coloured and Indian' areas, which meant that the 'heavy battalions' of the working class that were to define the intense class struggles of the 1980s were not in the UDF when it was launched. In addition, we can see that the UDF brought

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together, much like the Social Movements Indaba (SMI) today, many so-called single-issue organisations. Lastly, it's a great exaggeration to even talk of working class leadership in the UDF, as many of the organisations were middle class in character, as Seekings notes. The fear of Congress that clouds the analytical faculties of the 'old lefts' and their fear that 'the UDF is coming' is simply a product of a profound historical misunderstanding. This fear prevents the 'old lefts' from analysis of the dynamics and political shifts that led to the defeat of the left in the 1980s.

This leads me to a second important point that needs to be understood about the 1980s. It is this: The UDF become the political force that it become, and Congress tradition managed to win and consolidate its hegemony, because it responded and linked up with the spontaneous struggles in South African's townships. I cannot over-emphasise the strategic and political importance of this point for the future of the struggle for socialism today. The 1980s opened in the midst of a temporary lull in the class struggle - the defeats of the late 1970s, and the slow regroupment of forces that was taking place as the 70s came to a close. But a new activist cadre, or what Lenin referred to as a vanguard, had been constituted in the 70s, and together with the maturing of the contradictions of apartheid-capitalism [remember the (real) wave of strikes in the East Rand in the very beginning of the 1980s], the stage was set for a 'storm'. The stage for a deep crisis of South African capitalism had been set.

What made the UDF a UDF was that when that storm broke in the townships it was positioned in the eye of the storm. The UDF's growth had nothing to do

with the Freedom Charter (another new obsession of the 'old lefts'), it had little to do with the 'dynamics of the Congress movement' (another new phrase of the 'old lefts'): the UDF and the Congress traditions' political fortunes were changed irrevocable when they found themselves in the middle of an intense but spontaneous uprising. Today, therefore, when an activist cadre is being formed, when new contradictions of South Africa's post-apartheid and neoliberal capitalism are maturing, when (for now) a trickle of spontaneous struggles in South Africa's townships is slowly gathering speed, the 'old lefts' are trapped ..in the past. To paraphrase Marx, they are conjuring up the ghosts of the past to fight their present battles. In doing so, they miss the fact that the 'insular' and 'parochial' movements, the movements who still fail to breach group areas [like the UDF of old at its launch], the movements that have no national linkages; they miss the fact that this is the storm in the making. The movements will not become the force for socialism if the 'old lefts' tie them to the coat-tails of COSATU, and by extension the SACP and the ANC. It is to the spontaneous struggles in the townships that we should turn; every ounce of our resources must be dedicated to linking up with and supporting these struggles (no matter how 'chaotic' they are - and unlike Ashley & Co who have adopted a policy of either COSATU or nothing, we should adopt a policy of "either the spontaneous struggles or nothing"! As I indicate, this question will decide our future, and I return to it again below.

The Social Movements in retreat and the political demoralisation of the 'old lefts'

In her response to Eddie Cottle (A UDF for Co-option and Job Losses!) Claire Ceruti observed: "Sure, we pulled 20 000 to the WSSD, but that is not our real size and we've never repeated the feat." It is not clear what Ceruti means by our real size, and

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one might even contest her when she says the feat was never repeated. All these however, are secondary questions. What is beyond contest is that since the WSSD the new movements have been on the retreat. Indeed, one of the major problems of the leading groups of the new movements (which include the very 'old lefts' who are now quick to talk about the weaknesses of the movements) is that they have taken too long to come to terms with the fact that the movements are in a lull, and to take appropriate strategic and political steps. Eddie Cottle's attempt to conjure up the ghost of the WSSD in order to hide the real political and organisational difficulties the movements have to deal with will not advance us. No struggle is ever advanced by the ostrich method of politics.

The first mini-wave of struggle by the new movements began in 1999, passed through the anti-racism march (2001), and culminated in the WSSD march (2002). This period, 1999 to 2002, saw the emergence of the first community struggles against the effects of neoliberalism. Of course, 1999 was also the year of Seattle, and some of the 'old lefts' read the developments in South



Africa through the lenses of Seattle: suddenly, the working class in South Africa was part of an 'anti-globalisation' struggle! All manner of articles and books were written about this, and all manner of conferences were held and attended. But beneath this euphoria - and sometimes demagoguery - there was really no 'anti-globalisation movement', but just responses to isolated instances of injustice.

What makes a movement a movement? Why was it possible for the UDF period of the mid-80s to be a movement, and why do I say the '99 to '02 period had no movement? If we look at the mid-80s, they were preceded by a period in which an activist cadre had been constituted at a national level. It did not matter that this activist cadre did not have national linkages. What was important was that over the decade of the 1970s a layer of activists had emerged, had experienced both the charge of adrenalin that comes with storming the Bastille of apartheid as we did in 1976, and the demoralisation and exhaustion that comes in the aftermath of repressions and the retreat of upsurges of the masses. The formation of a cadre requires that the generation of activists is sifted both during upsurges and during downturns. History does not know of any generation of cadre that was able to lead fundamental social change, revolution that was only forged in a period of upturn. To be sure, this period of struggle and sacrifice is indispensable in the process of historical selection that is needed to form a cadre. But the masses are perceptive, and they ask: how will these heroes behave when the movements are on the retreat, when the enemy appears triumphant and invincible? Will they hold on to their pronouncements of the days of euphoria?

If we look at the period between '99 and '02, we immediately see that it did not inherit a cadre that had been formed in a previous wave of struggle. This period did not inherit organisations that had been formed in a previous period of struggle, and most importantly, this period did not inherit any political slogans, demands and programmatic (theoretical) perspectives from a previous period. All these crucial elements of what makes up a movement had to be created from scratch. When we consider the fact that all these crucial and difficult questions have to be resolved on an entirely new terrain of politics (for example, we have for the first time in the history of black working class life in this country, a government elected by that black

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working class), then we have to be sober and understand that the formation of the new movement that will challenge neoliberalism and a black capitalist class will occupy an entire historical period.

Now, the 'old lefts' had created, in their minds, a fiction called the anti-globalisation movement. They had stood on large podiums in Porto Alegre, been interviewed by national and international television stations, had their pictures in the newspapers every other day, and at every opportunity organised a march to this or that government official. The point

is that behind this grandstanding, many of the 'old lefts' failed to elaborate or advance any strategic concept of the nature of the struggle in this new historical period. Very little theoretical work was undertaken, and in some cases an anti-theory attitude was cultivated among the new layer of activists - as it became clear to some that answering hard questions of theory and strategy was less profitable than the quick-fix sound-bites of a television interview. How many times have we heard leading militants provide the same answer (for example, "the poor get poorer and the rich get richer") to every conceivable question from the press, no matter what the topic was? Of course, with this kind of politics - lack of any strategic concept, lack of any theoretical understanding of the social and class forces of this period of struggle, the tendency to grandstand - when the downturn came, it triggered a crisis. But crises takes many different forms. In this case, after WSSD the 'old lefts' were anchored by a host of other developments (for example the anti-war mobilisations in 2003), and thus they did not admit that the movement was going into a lull. These developments did not resolve these weaknesses; they provided temporary cover and postponed the day of reckoning. The next major landmark for the new movement was the 2004 elections. Much was expected from the movements about this event, but we have to admit that what we got was weak and embarrassing. We had sown the whirlwind and harvested fleas! There was the APF, which struggled to agree on a position, the LPM which called for some kind of boycott and fractured in the process. The failure of the new movements to create some kind of national approach or platform around the elections, and this after the unity achieved in the WSSD march, was as much an indication of lack of strategic and tactical capability as it was a reflection of the levels of political exhaustion among the leading groups in the movements. In general there was the absolute lack of direction to the mass of the working class - even if this direction would have to be understood as being mainly significant from the point of view of raising consciousness.

Fear and euphoria are in some way linked to the same hormone in the human body - adrenalin. It was a matter of time before the euphoria turned into fear. As it became clear that the movements were struggling - the 2004 elections were the critical turning point - exhaustion and demoralisation began to set in. There were two different responses to this new situation. On the one hand there were the militants who were formed by the '99 to 02 period. There is a group among these who have risen to the challenge and are shaping their temperament in the new difficult conditions. They are now undertaking the slow and painful task of preserving and building organisations, of educating themselves in the political traditions of socialism, and who maintain a healthy suspicion and even hostility to the new neoliberal order and those who mediate its acceptance among the masses - including the leading group

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in COSATU.

On the other hand there are the 'old lefts'. How do they respond to the new difficult period? Well, they go fishing. They go looking for a quick-fix to resolve the difficult problems of the current historical period. For the difficult task of forging new programmes and demands, they fish for the Freedom Charter. For the difficult task of building new organisations under new conditions they go fishing for COSATU, and hope that it will have ready-made solutions to their difficulties. Against the task of constructing new means of communicating to the masses and to the militants, they run after the Mail and Guardian, and lament when the new movements are no longer a fashionable item of commerce. They mistake the regime of the ANC in power with the regime of the National Party of the 1980s. They fail to see that having swallowed the NP, the ANC will be a much harder nut to crack - and that it will not be enough to find a new UDF as a counter-power to the ANC. The fixation with COSATU, and with the new UDF, is a product of the political demoralisation of the 'old-lefts'. And so, even as they run around and see a revival of the mass movement around every corner (like the recent strikes), their political demoralisation drives them into the arms of COSATU.

Can we organise a revolution according to a timetable? Or how the 'old lefts' have not changed their 1980s politics

The 'old lefts' misread the 1980s, and today they are politically demoralised by the lull in the mass movement. These two problems have combined to produce a third problem: the 'old lefts' have failed to develop any strategy of how to deal with the problems confronting the mass movement in the present period. They have failed to analyse the present period, and to draw conclusions about what is to be done. In his address to COSATU's 10 Years of Democracy Conference, Desai argued that COSATU members know what needs to be done, but they do not know how it is to be done. He referred to this dilemma as "strategic exhaustion". [I do not think the COSATU member knows what is to be done. This question remains open in the mind of the honest COSATU member as much as it is open in the activists of the new Social Movements. This is the simple explanation why the COSATU member does not know "how it is to be done".] But it is the solutions Desai puts forward in order to resolve this "strategic exhaustion" of the COSATU member that are revealing; they give us another idea of why the 'old lefts' are gravitating towards COSATU.

Desai's solutions tell us two things: The first is that it is Desai, and many other 'old lefts', who suffer from "strategic exhaustion". Secondly, it tells us how the 'old lefts' are trapped in their politics of the 1980s, and how it is these politics that will ensure that they will miss the boat, once again. What does Desai propose that COSATU do to go beyond this "strategic exhaustion"?

According to Desai, "instead of attempting exclusively to extract value directly from employers on, at best an industry by industry basis and at worst, site by site, in the form of annual, unco-ordinated wage strikes, it would make sense to link the struggle for wage increases with co-ordinated

huge annual income strike." After a discussion in which he argues that there is a difference between 'wages' and 'incomes' Desai calls for the need for an income strike. Unlike the normal wage strike, this strike would be directed against the government, and according to him "protest action to Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005  
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obtain a raise from government is, if done properly, far easier. One of the reasons is that the boss does not rely on the workers voting for him. .Not only are the people employed at a particular factory activated, but grandparents, schoolchildren, the unemployed and workers wherever they work, are thrown into action."

Desai continues: "These struggles would take place when public service struggles should take place, months before the annual budget is announced. In struggling in tandem with the rhythm of the annual budget, one will avoid .public sector strikes that are ultimately fought about the allocation of a fixed amount of money. In framing demands that include the broad working class, one will win the support for working class struggles of the majority of people in this country - the unemployed - millions of whom are former trade union members "

Let us look a bit more closely at what Desai wants. Firstly, he wants a struggle that is "co-ordinated". Secondly, the struggle must be a "huge" one, not these insular ones of the movements. Thirdly, it's a struggle which will be "far easier" than all the many unco-ordinated ones. Fourthly, and very importantly, talking to COSATU, Desai wants the federation to 'frame struggles that include the broad working class, one that will win the support for working class'.

The most striking thing about the 'solution' Desai advances is how similar it is to the politics of the left in the 1980s, and how it is a repeat of the politics that led the left to 'miss the boat' when the uprising in the 1980s grew and intensified. On the hand there was the FOSATU workerist bloc, who imagined that they would build 'strong shopfloor structures', and when these were 'strong enough', they would be able to take on the state, launch a struggle for socialism and so on. Somehow they imagined that they could control the tempo of the class struggle, and could run the struggle like they ran their trade union meetings: all co-ordinated, all organised, on time, with clear mandates and so on. They were horrified by the chaotic nature of the struggles in the townships, and in particular they felt all these struggles - the running battles with the police, the barricades in the townships - were all reckless and were bound to end in failure.

On the other hand there were the revolutionary socialists, the Leninists and Bolsheviks of all kinds of persuasions, who had a particular reading of Lenin's "What is to be done." According to this reading of Lenin, spontaneity was counter-posed to a planned execution of the class struggle. For these lefts too, the struggles in many townships were messy and chaotic, they were parochial and mostly insular, and most problematic, they were not informed by a 'socialist perspective'. Like the struggles today, those who

were participating in those struggles, so the lefts argued, lacked a "more structural and macro-economic understanding of their oppression", and so on. For the FOSATU workerists, the co-ordination was going to be provided by the unions, any maybe the 'Workers Party'. For the 'Leninists', only the "vanguard party" was going to do the job, and by vanguard they meant the party chiefs.

Today, as then, instead of turning to the spontaneous struggles that are erupting in some parts of the country; instead of finding ways of connecting up with new militants that are being thrown up in these struggles; instead of spending time and

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energy preserving and building the organisations that were thrown up by the last mini-wave of struggle, the 'old lefts' are looking for organisations that could fulfil the kind of role they dreamed of in the 1980s. Its is for this reason that we see, among some lefts a fixation with the 'party' completely out of proportion or synch with the present historical period.

The problem, of course, is that the Party seems as remote today as it was in the 1980s, and so, (again a form of dispair) COSATU now substitutes for the Party. You see, if it is 'captured,' COSATU provides the 'resources', the 'national links', the 'macro-economic understanding' that makes it possible to run the revolution according to a "plan", or according to a schedule. As things stand, Desai's plan cannot work without COSATU.

This attitude to the question of spontaneity vs planned struggle led the lefts to 'miss the boat' in the 1980s. Both the workerists (FOSATU), and the 'Leninist' left, failed to position themselves in the eye of the storm that was about to break. Ironically, what Desai is proposing is an action replay of the 1980s, and once again, his approach will lead to a position where the movements become an appendage to COSATU, and are positioned away from the spontaneous struggles in the townships, and are therefore unable to respond to a new upswing in the class struggles. Unfortunately for the 'old lefts', revolutions are not run according to a schedule, and they have to get used to a rather messy process of social change. There will be no "co-ordinated huge annual income strike" that is synchronised with "the rhythm of the annual budget", and that will be planned "months before the annual budget." This wish is a dream, and a bad dream at that. An attitude like this will land us on the right, with those who are opposed to working class militancy and independence, when the tempo of the class struggle picks up. This, indeed, was the destiny of Ashley & Company during the WSSD mobilisation.

6. Failed attempts to cheat history and steal the masses: from the WSSD to the new UDF

The underlying logic of the orientation to COSATU and recently to the new UDF is an attempt to cheat history and steal the masses from the Congress movement. Instead of building organisations patiently the 'old lefts' are hoping to find a ready-made organisations that would deliver a revolution, all pre-packaged and pre-paid. Instead of helping the new movements to

develop their own programme appropriate to their own times the 'old lefts' are getting themselves to sound like the Freedom Charter in the hope that the masses would think they are the real Charterist.

The significant issue about this kind of politics is that it encourages unprincipled combinations and poses the danger of an opportunist politics. Earlier on I discussed how the Ashley and Co's orientation during the WSSD landed them in an objective alliance with COSATU, and by extension with the ANC. In the discussion above I argued that Ashley and Co did not engage the movements around the UDF initiative because COSATU's political position does not allow it. And Ashley and Co got into a situation in which they have to abandon their own platform when faced with the pressure from COSATU. In their platform they argue that the emergence of militant and radical social movements is an important part of their strategy. On the other hand, however, they cannot really pursue a relationship with these movements because all their eyes are turned towards COSATU. And so now, as during WSSD, Ashley and Co end up not engaging the movements, and being in an alliance that is objectively

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counter-posed to the new movements and their politics of not compromising with neoliberalism.

The danger of unprincipled combinations and alliances can also be seen in Ceruti and Desai. For Ceruti and Desai, however, this danger has not played itself out as it has with Ashley and Co, but it is nevertheless a serious danger that needs to be averted. How does this tendency towards attempting to steal the masses, and so enter into unprincipled combinations express itself in Ceruti and Desai?

In her response to Cottle Ceruti says, "I don't know how this new UDF thing is going to unfold but should we not at least check it out . with a view to see what can be set moving on the ground and take a lead in doing that."

Now, here we have a situation where one of the leading militants in the Social Movements suggests that the movements should go into the 'new UDF' without:

- i. an analysis of the nature of the UDF, the social forces that make it up and its aims. In fact, what we have is an admission that she does not know this 'thing'.
- ii. an analysis of the state of the movements, and whether the movements would be able to conduct the kinds of ideological and political struggles that would have to be conducted in the context of the 'new UDF'
- iii. the development of some perspectives on how the movements would go about carrying out their tasks in 'this thing', and how this work in 'this thing' would help the movements strengthen themselves and overcome their existing weaknesses.

What we have here is a case of a politically irresponsible individual, who throws a few phrases around and then expects that a whole set of organisations built over the last few years should be risked in a half

thought out venture. This is a classic case of gambling with the organisations of the working class.

One of the key elements in the development of the new cadre will be the development of its own new politics. This includes the need to move beyond responses to isolated instances of injustice towards understanding the nature of the state, the nature of the ruling party, its use of its anti-apartheid dividend to prolong its hegemony among the masses. The problem is that this task is not advanced one bit when Desai suddenly undergoes a conversion to the Freedom Charter, when he suddenly argues that membership of the Alliance is just fine, when he suggest that the struggle against neoliberalism can be conducted within the framework of Congress politics.

So instead of clarifying the new generation of militants, and helping them develop an understanding of the character of the ANC, Desai is too caught up in trying to steal the masses from the ANC that he creates an entirely fictitious situation in which the Alliance will allow the space to realise the aspirations of the working class. In his rush to catch COSATU, Desai is performing all kinds of tricks. This attempt to cheat history lays the basis for unprincipled combination and an opportunist politics that we have seen in Ashley and Co.

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7. Summing Up: How should Social Movements approach initiatives like the 'new UDF'?

The launch of the 'new UDF' is important because it raises all kinds of important political, strategic and tactical questions for the new Social Movements. One of the issues raised by this launch is that of how should the new movements understand their orientation and tasks in the present phase of struggle. I have shown that the argument for an orientation to COSATU that is being advanced by some in the movement is based on a mistaken understanding of COSATU, and an equally mistaken understanding of the processes by which the mass movements of the 1980s were formed. I have argued that the orientation to COSATU, and the arguments that support this orientation, are in danger of promoting an unprincipled and opportunist politics. These politics threaten the political cohesion that is emerging within the Social Movements, and they threaten to disorientate many militants who are beginning to understand the tasks facing the movements today.

Earlier in this paper I raised a need for a debate and engagement of how the movements should related to COSATU. There are a number of issues that the movements need to take into account in deciding how to relate to the federation. Firstly, we need to analysis, concretely, the politics of the federation. This we have already done. Secondly, although COSATU is wedded to the ANC, from time to time there are clashes with the ANC. We need to understand the nature, the depth and the basis of these contradictions. Thirdly, the movements need to be clear about their own orientation, since

this will form the framework within which they relate to the federation. Lastly, the movement need to be clear about their tactics when conducting this relationship to COSATU. A number of key questions need to be posed and answered as part of charting out the tactical line of the movements.

#### Contradictions of the ruling class

While it would be foolish to argue that South African post-apartheid capitalism is now facing a crisis similar to the deep crisis of the 1980s, it is clear, however, that the patience of the mass in the townships towards the ANC is beginning to run out. The ANC will not relinquish its hegemony without a struggle. In the last instance we know that like all ruling classes the ANC will resort to repression to maintain the rule of the classes and the elites it represents. There is however limits to the use of repression by any ruling class. All ruling classes also need to rule by consent. A peaceful political context provides the best conditions for capital accumulation.

For the ANC and the Congress movement as a whole, the issue of 'ruling by consent' is more important than it was for the National Party. For the first time, South Africa's capitalist ruling classes are forced to have a political relationship with the mass of the people that cannot be just based on force or repression. This is because of the victories won by the mass of working people - the victory symbolised by the 1994 democratic elections. To this extent, the ANC in power is and remains vulnerable to pressure from below - from the masses. How does pressure from the masses reflect itself in the ANC and the Congress movement as a whole, and how does the Congress movement manage this pressure?

Firstly, this pressure can reflect itself by forced retreats by the ANC government on certain issues, and even for a certain time only. While the ANC in power is fond of

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making excuses about lack of 'resources', and with its journalistic chorus is fond of asking 'where will the money come from', the reality is that the resources are available in abundance. The point at issue is the political choice that is made about how to distribute them. So, if the pressure is high enough the ANC will find the resources to have some (limited) kind of delivery. Of course, it would be naïve to promote a view that "there is nothing incompatible with an Alliance with the ANC in challenging local and national government to remain, in its social spending, true to the Freedom Charter and the RDP." (Desai) The ANC is a party of the rich, and its entire policies since it came into power have been to consolidate the power of the rich. Alliance with the ANC is not compatible with the goals of social justice.

Secondly, another way in which pressure from the masses reflects itself in the ANC and the Congress movement as a whole is through contradictions within the Alliance. Contrary to what the Congress movement would want us to believe, the ANC is not a "broad church" (if it ever was one). The ANC today



is a party of monopoly capital, and like all parties, it reflects the needs of the ruling class to rule by consent. To this extent, it has to "manage" or "balance" the interests of various classes in society so that these interests are aligned with the overarching and dominant interests of the ruling class - monopoly capital. This is what the Italian Marxist Gramsci meant when he spoke about the idea of 'ruling class hegemony.' Clair Ceruti therefore misunderstands the entire nature of the ruling class when she argues (against Cottle), "you are .pessimistic . about .the potential of these hairline cracks forming in the ANC monolith." The "hairline cracks" that Ceruti is talking about are not a novel discovery. Their discovery by Ceruti does not constitute any strategic or tactical insight: the "hairline cracks" are a condition of the existence of the rule of the capitalist class. Without them the whole system would crack at the first sign of stress. In South Africa today, for example, there are a number of institutions whose sole purpose is to deal with "conflict management". The ruling class acknowledges that the system has contradictions, and sometimes they even acknowledge that the system cannot "deliver". The conflict that comes out of these contradictions is therefore 'institutionalised', it is 'managed' in such a way that the interests of the ruling class are not threatened.

And so, the contradictions within the Congress Alliance, the so-called "robust debate" in the Alliance, expresses the pressures of the mass on the ruling party, and they are at the same time a way of managing these pressures. It is in this context that we need to understand the 'need' for the SACP to involve itself in the land struggles, in the financial services issues and so on. This does not mean that the intervention of the SACP and COSATU cannot result in short-term gains for the working class. What it does mean, however, is that as long as these organisations are not prepared to take the route of class independence from monopoly capital and its party, the ANC; as long as they are not prepared to break the Alliance, their initiatives will not challenge the rule of the monopoly capitalist class in South Africa. The boundaries within which COSATU has to operate as a formation within an Alliance led by monopoly capital can be seen in its inconsistent struggle around GEAR. It can be seen in its statement that the Alliance is not an alliance on economic policy, and therefore the alliance cannot be broken because of GEAR.

The campaigns that are taken up by COSATU and the SACP, including the new Social Movements, Cosatu and the 'new UDF' by Oupa Lehulere - Augusts 2005  
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campaign against poverty and unemployment, to be launched as the 'new UDF' initiative constitutes a response to the pressure of the working class - as can be seen by many struggles in communities, but they also represent the way the Alliance is managing the discontent of the working class. This fact accounts for the reason that COSATU almost has a campaign for every season. While this campaign is being launched with much fanfare, we should ask where is the Big Income Grant campaign, where is the People's Budget campaign, and

where are the many campaigns that COSATU launches periodically? There is very little reason to believe that COSATU will take this campaign any more seriously than it has taken its many other (mainly press based) campaigns.

The overall orientation of the movements in this period

The overall orientation (or political direction) of the movements in this period is the framework within which any tactical alliances need to be conducted, including any possible tactical alliances with COSATU (or its affiliates). What should be the orientation of the social movements in this period? There are a number of elements that should form the basis of the Social Movements politics and struggles in the present period:

To begin with, the orientation of the social movements has to be based on the understanding that after the initial wave of mobilisation the social movements are in a period of temporary retreat. In this period the movements have to consolidate their organisations as well as preserve and consolidate the cadre that has been thrown up by the period of struggle from '99 to '02. There are many tasks that flow from this element of the movement's orientation, and I cannot discuss all of them. Among them is the need to conduct political education among the activist cadre in the movement. This education cannot be restricted to education about what is socialism, although this is also important. Activists also need to be educated in the tools of tactical and strategic analysis; they need to learn how to "read" a strike, for example, how to understand its dynamics; how to organise campaigns of resistance that are thought out and that show an understanding of the moods and psychology of the masses. This education in strategy and tactics should draw from more than a 100 years of the history of the working class movement in many parts of the world. We cannot just look back to the 1980s, as most lefts tend to do.

Another element on which the orientation of the social movements must be based is a deep and serious understanding of the character of the new ruling class. In many cases over the last few years comrades sometimes think it's enough to say the ANC is neoliberal in order to understand the character of the new power. For example, when Desai argues that nothing can be done if we do not break the law, he shows a lack of understanding of the nature of the state in South Africa today, and of the nature of the 'rule by consent'.

Probably the most important element of the orientation of the social movements in the present political situation is the need to connect up with the spontaneous struggles of masses of people in the township. As I indicated earlier on, the issues of the attitude to spontaneous mass struggle is the key to the development of the movements in the coming years. Let us look at this issue a bit more closely.

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Although the movements are in a lull, this does not mean that working class communities do not continue to take up struggles against instances of injustice. We have seen many communities take up struggles in the last few

months alone. These spontaneous struggle play a great and important role in the development of a movement:

Firstly, the spontaneous struggles of the working class are the clearest sign of the preparedness to struggle within the working class. Contrary to Desai, there is no way we can establish or assert the 'preparedness to class struggle' except through the outbreak of spontaneous struggles. Secondly, spontaneous struggles are the social soil on which organisations of the working class are born, the food that feeds their growth, and the air that sustains their lives. For example, the Brazilian Workers' Party, one of the largest in Latin America, was born out of a series of spontaneous struggles by workers in the so-called ABC region in the State of San Paolo in the late 1970s. In the South Africa, the present trade unions were born out of a series of spontaneous struggles in the early 1970s.

Thirdly, the spontaneous struggles of the working class are the cooking house in which an activist cadre is produced. These struggles are important in shaping the temperament of the cadre, its spirit of sacrifice and they develop the cadre's attitude to injustice. In the earlier discussion I made the point that for the movements the '99-'02 period was the first period in which a "post-apartheid cadre" was produced. The size of this cadre is still quite small, and it is not distributed among all our communities and across the country. Therefore, it's important for us to appreciate the importance of spontaneous struggle in the ongoing process of producing this new cadre. Fourthly, the spontaneous struggles of the working class provide the social energy and the human material (the activist cadre) that renews and revitalises organisations and they even renew the old activists themselves ('old lefts' take note!), who can fall into bureaucratic habits of work. The fact that COSATU is no longer being renewed by spontaneous struggles is one of the reasons why its members are sitting 'contemplating the world' instead of changing it. The chaotic energy of spontaneous struggles, its tendency to experiment with new forms of struggle, its tendency to test the limits of bourgeois power in ways that established movements are shy of doing, all these make spontaneous struggles an excellent fuel for the renewal and the further development of mass movements.

Lastly, (for this discussion anyway), the spontaneous struggles of the working class are a rich soil for the development of alternatives to the existing social order. A rather bookish view has emerged in our movements that alternatives to neoliberalism will come from the desktops of university professors and such like learned people. History teaches, however, that the greatest innovations in the struggles for social justice by oppressed classes emerged in the course of struggles that began spontaneously, and were not ordered by Central Committees, were not organised in 'tandem with any budget cycle', and indeed could not even be dreamed by the most insightful leaders of revolutions - including Marx and Engels. We know that the 'new form of state' discovered by the French Communards in 1871 was a discovery born of the chaotic energy of that fateful struggle. Marx and Engels watched in awe as, from the ruins of

Paris, France's proletariat resolved one of the most difficult riddles of history - what to do with the state?

All these and many other reasons that we could and should discuss make an orientation to the unfolding spontaneous struggles of the mass in South Africa's township probably the key element of our politics in this period. What this means in the context of the discussion around COSATU is that we should not put ourselves, and our movements, in a situation in which we abandon spontaneous mass struggle on the misguided reason of looking for either one big struggle, or a struggle with a so-called 'macro-economic' vision.

In our organisations, in our study groups, in our seminars and education events we should discuss how to make this orientation a reality. We should discuss how to link up with these spontaneous struggles breaking out all over the country. We should deploy our best cadre, our resources, and our energies to making these connections. We should closely watch and study the innovations in methods of struggles that are emerging out these struggles; we should listen carefully to the demands and slogans (and not rely on a generally ignorant and biased press for our reports) that emerge out of these struggles. Such should be the nature of our orientation and our tasks in this period.

What questions should inform our tactical attitude to COSATU?

We have seen that as long as COSATU is imprisoned in the Alliance, it will play the role of "conflict manager", of facilitating accommodation to the interests of the dominant class in South Africa today, monopoly capital. But does this mean that social movements shall never participate in any campaign that is initiated by COSATU? Of course not. Social Movements can and should participate in tactical alliances and fronts with COSATU, but this has to be done with a clear perspective on a number of issues. Some of these issues are:

?? Does the campaign constitute a step forward in the struggles against injustice, or is it just an attempt to provide political cover for the ANC and the ruling classes it represent?

?? What are the social forces that the campaign seeks to mobilise, and do these forces have an interest in short-term reforms or in long-term fundamental social change? This question will help us decide if the campaign will bring us into contact with potential long-term allies.

?? What has been the process of convening the campaign; has it been a democratic and transparent process; is there genuine space to shape the demands of the campaign and the methods of struggle?

?? Does the front that is set up by the campaign promote and preserve the political independence of the working class? In the 1980s, because of the nature of apartheid (which oppressed all black people irrespective of their class aspirations) it was not always easy to resolve this question of class independence in the mass movement. Today, any front that includes the ANC,

its leagues and other front organisations, compromises working class independence since the ANC is a party of monopoly capital.

?? Do we as the Social Movements have the organisational and political clarity to enter into fronts and alliances in such a way that our political programme and

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perspectives are not diluted, in a way that we do not lose our primary focus of organising militant working class struggle. We need to ensure that our independence, especially for organising militant struggles against neoliberalism and the ANC, is not restricted in any way by participation in any front.

Based on these questions and how we respond to them, the movement will have from time to time to decide how to respond to COSATU (and even SACP) campaigns. Our attitude to the new UDF should be responded to on the same basis. A last question that I would like to take up is whether we should demand that COSATU break the Alliance as a condition for participating in any front with COSATU?

Firstly, I cannot agree with Ashwin Desai that COSATU must stay in the Alliance. I think his statement that "I don't believe COSATU should leave the Alliance with the ANC" represents one of the biggest political regressions within the Social Movements since they emerged at the end of the 1990s. It represent a political regression for the thousands of metal workers and other unionists within COSATU who have been arguing for all these years for a breaking of the Alliance since the 1980s and in the 1990s. Desai's statement is an example of the kinds of unprincipled combinations and opportunist politics that come about as a result of this perspective of orientation to COSATU. Already, movements and organisations in the Western Cape have shown a consistently principled way of responding to the 'new UDF'. In all engagements with COSATU the movements should raise the issue of the Alliance, they should call for it to be broken and for COSATU to become politically independent. But it does not follow that no front can be entered into with COSATU before it leaves the Alliance. If we answer the questions I have suggested above in a way that indicates that a forward movement can be achieved, a working class politics can be advanced and (even short-term) gains for the working class will be made, then we should consider joining a front with COSATU. Within the context of such a front, we should maintain our right - and practice this right - to agitate for COSATU to break the Alliance. Indeed, we should use the unfolding of the campaigns, and the pressure these campaigns put on the ANC, to bring political clarity to those within and outside COSATU who might still think the Alliance might serve a progressive purpose.

COSATU's alliance with Zuma around the corruption charges is bringing shame, embarrassment and disrepute to a proud tradition of working class struggle. While it is not the purpose of this paper to analyse these disgraceful developments, as socialists and activists in the mass movements we need to

be extra careful and vigilant on how and whether we come into COSATU campaigns. The leading group in COSATU is using COSATU and its proud name in internal squabbles within the ruling class. Whatever the movements decide about how to relate to COSATU in the struggle for social justice, we need to make sure that we are not contaminated by the dirt that is oozing from every corner of COSATU's being at the moment.

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