

## Thoughts on the NDR Alliance pact

An Alliance pact must be rooted in the NDR, argues **David Masondo**, and requires the development of working class organisational and ideological capacity

The contemporary crisis of working class social reproduction expressed through high levels of poverty reflects one of the political setbacks suffered by the working class in the post-1994 political dispensation, notwithstanding progressive reforms. Of course, these reforms, are also under a constant capitalist offensive. The working class has been taking up concrete campaigns through organised and 'spontaneous' mass protests against this class offensive. While these mass struggles have had some uneven results, they have also been watered-down, deformed or completely rejected by the state with the backing of capital. White monopoly capital, and to a certain degree its junior partners (the compradorial black bourgeoisie), have significantly gained out of the 1994 breakthrough at the expense of the working class and other popular classes.

In the light of these avoidable setbacks which are not inscribed in the NDR as the ultra-left would argue, the SACP and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) have set the ball rolling on how the working class should concretely assert its leadership and dominant position in society and in the ANC-'led' revolutionary Alliance. So the burning question within the movement is how should the working class assert its power in society and within the NDR in order to deal with the legacy of the Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) and its class carrier – white monopoly capital.

To this effect, there have been calls for the SACP to contest elections on its own as part and parcel of a working class endeavour to assert its power in all sites of society, including the state. Our SACP 12th Congress called for a 'reconfigured' Alliance as an attempt to assert working class hegemony over the state. Cosatu called for a 'Pact'. These calls are made in the midst of an overwhelming consensus, at least in our liberation movement's official strategy and policy documents, that the working class is the leading and dominant social class in the National Democratic Revolution, notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the NDR itself. Indisputably, these calls suggest that there is a mismatch between concrete reality and official strategy and policy document. We should not mistake political policy statements for the concrete reality of class struggle. Proletariat hegemony has been significantly challenged, particularly in the exercise of post-1994 state power within the context of the NDR. Of course,

1. The ultra-left tends to see the national liberation organisations as inherently capitalist and in post-1994 South Africa the ANC as an inherent capitalist wolf shedding its sheep's veil,

2. See SACP MediumTerm Vision and Cosatu's 2015 programme

3. Working class power here refers to the ability of the working class to do what it wants to do, and its ability to impose, either by force or consent, its agenda on other classes such as peasants, the middle class or different fractions of the capitalist class within a common and contradictory class Alliance based on a minimum class programme and beyond.

this is being fiercely contested as pointed out earlier.

The post-2005 conjuncture has presented a relatively new political terrain which has also posed fresh strategic and tactical questions for our political practice in the struggle against the 1996 class project, which has significantly displaced, though not defeated, working class hegemony, particularly in the state. One of the post-2005 dominant conjunctural contradictions in the ANC has been a power conflict between the popular will and the will of the class project on many fronts. It is for this reason that our analytical focus has shifted since 2005 from explaining why the 1996 class project became dominant to how the proletariat and its NDR allies should defeat this class project in all respects.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the political foundations and principles of the emerging post-2005 'Pact' in the ANC-led Alliance since it also provides the necessary but not sufficient conditions for the defeat of the 1996 class project. This is also informed by the lived experience of the working class in its modes of engagement with post-1994 state power. We deal first with broad political foundations and then the political or institutional mechanisms which must give effect to the 'Pact' because we do not want to put the cart before the horse. The paper is not exhaustive on the political and institutional arrangements. Rather it provides a generic political framework and principles that should guide the mechanics of the 'Pact'. In doing so, not only do we ground the 'Pact' within the NDR framework and its tasks, but we also try to assess how working class organs, the SACP and Cosatu, have sought to assert working class leadership in the state within the NDR context.

#### **NDR as a basis for the 'pact'**

Class alliances and compromises and offensive and defensive struggles are usually structured by the balance of class power in different conjunctures. The 20th century class alliances in advanced capitalist countries, which resulted in class compromises codified in Pacts, were necessitated by both objective capital accumulation conditions and the subjective threat posed to capital by working class organisational capacity which threatened the continued existence of the capitalist system. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the existence of the socialist camp, particularly the USSR, also posed a global alternative to capitalism; hence capital had to make certain concessions to the working class. So class Pacts are not the products of capitalists' benevolence, but of the class struggle itself. There is a historical correlation between the strength of the working class organisational, political, and organisational capacity and the outcome of class struggles. For instance, we cannot analyse the capitalist neo-liberal offensive against the working class which rolled-back 20th century radical reforms without taking into account working class political and organisational power which enabled the working class to impose its agenda, albeit reformist, on capital. The setback suffered by the European working class movements enabled capital to restructure not only the capital accumulation regime based on neo-liberalism, but also the working class through neo-liberal labour flexibility regimes and macro-economic policies, thus weakening the power of the working class to exert its dominance over capital. The collapse of the USSR added impetus to the weakening of global working class power.

Class Pacts, in our context, are first and foremost between a bloc of NDR class

forces united against the CST and white monopoly capital. In fact, the NDR itself is a class Pact which has historically and organically evolved out of the struggles against internal colonialism and imperialism which has taken a new form, popularly known as globalisation. Our Alliance Pact is an anti-imperialist Pact based on the Freedom Charter.

Distinct from a bourgeoisie democratic 'pact' which subordinates the working class to the interests of the bourgeoisie, the NDR is a revolutionary programme which subordinates the interests of all classes arrayed against imperialism to the immediate and long-term interests of the working class. While the interests of the nationally oppressed classes are served in the process of the national democratic transformation, working class interests must be dominant. The interests of the working class must be placed at the core of this transformation, which must be linked to our socialist future. This is what will set us apart from the Pacts in the advanced capitalist societies or post-colonial elite Pacts which iron-caged the working class into reformism.

The fact that imperialism is the strategic enemy does not mean the NDR class Alliance must not engage imperialist capital. It should only do so on the class terms and conditions of the NDR. This means the working class must establish its hegemony within the NDR people's camp in order to impose a developmental agenda on capital (i.e. 'local' white monopoly capital, foreign capital and emerging black capital). The ultimate goal is to overthrow capital in general.

#### **The post-1994 experience, state power and working class power**

While we may quibble about how the Alliance ought to have been institutionalised

and organised in order to maximise the working class hegemony, there is no denial that the working class leadership and dominance has been asserted in different forms, informed by the class balance of power in the South African revolution. The 1994 breakthrough is a product of working class leadership organised under the ANC-led class Pact. In this section of the paper we mainly focus on how the working class has exercised its leadership and dominance in relation to post-1994 state power. We focus on state power because this is where power is concentrated.

I think Cosatu and SACP have been trying to exercise state power without state power – of course, with some uneven access to state office. In the last ten years, Cosatu and SACP cadres have not been able to act fundamentally outside of the dominant class project framework. While we have mobilised and organised for the ANC's successive electoral victories (which we must correctly claim), we have been politically left out in the exercise of state power, which matters most. We have not had a significant say on economic policy, deployments, mandates and accountability of deployees. This is not to disregard sterling parliamentary work being done by Cosatu and SACP cadres through our sophisticated mode of engaging the state and capital (e.g. mass campaigns, NEDLAC etc). Yes, we should appreciate the importance of these modes of engagement given the current balance of class power, but we also need to recognise the limitations of *indirect class rule* (i.e. exercise working class power through other class forces, particularly in the state). This is not to suggest that Cosatu and SACP constitute the totality of the working class.

At the risk of simplifying our experience in engaging state power, it seems plausible

to argue that we have mainly (not exclusively) exercised working class power through mass campaigns to influence state policy, notwithstanding the SACP and Cosatu cadres present in the state. In certain instances we have lost in the state what we won on the ground through mass struggles, including aspects of ANC policy and election manifestos. In the pre-2005 period, the class project refused to meaningfully engage us in policy discussions, implementation strategies and deployment of cadres to execute policy decisions. In the absence of an Alliance Political Centre, the state bureaucracy and leadership have twisted and watered-down the substance of the ANC policy decisions.. Not only are SACP and Cosatu, as proletarian organs of the NDR Alliance, being disregarded in the exercise of state power by the 1996 class project, the ANC itself is being disregarded in the manner in which cadres in the state exercise power. This has also been accentuated by state patronage, which is significantly eroding internal democracy. This partly explains the strategic and tactical convergence between the proletarian organisations in the Alliance and significant sections of the ANC.

One of the reasons for the inability of the working class to exercise state power through its organ, the SACP, has been due to the SACP's mode of entry into state power itself, which has also undermined the SACP's democratic centralism. As an independent political party, our mode of democratic operation is based on democratic centralism which includes, among other things, mandates, consultation, delegations, criticism and self-criticism. So we are democratic in the decision making process and centralist in implementation (i.e. all members of the party must implement democratic party decisions). How-

ever, the SACP's centralism in the implementation of decisions by members serving in the state apparatus has been complicated by the ANC's attempts to impose dominance in the Alliance. ANC policies are binding on communists serving in the ANC government. The democratic decisions of the SACP are undermined by the ANC's centralism and in particular the 1996 class project. Of course, the ANC's internal democracy is also under presidentialised, thus undermining NDR class power. The SACP and Cosatu's mode of entry into state power has encouraged opportunism, in which some of our cadres deployed by the ANC in the state tended to castigate Cosatu and SACP's policy positions as a basis for upward class mobility within the state. The hierarchical class structure of the state itself has also given rise to opportunism, bourgeoisification, and careerism and the weakening of working class leadership capacity. The 'reconfigured Alliance' should provide a political mechanisms for policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation which will include among other things, deployments, accountability and recall, to minimize capitalist dominance in the state. However, we should note that the organisational form and content of the reconfiguration of the class Alliance is contingent upon the type of ANC that will emerge in December 2007. What are the implications for the future of the Alliance if the ANC does not concede to the need for a reconfigured Alliance?

Beyond modes of entry, exit and accountability of proletarian cadres deployed in the state, we must seriously think about the class character and structure of the post-1994 South African state and how we intend not only to use it but also transform it in order to advance the interests of the working class in the immediate context of

the NDR. The fact that the post-1994 capitalist state is contested, like a contested capitalist factory, does not mean that we must not seek to grasp its capitalist class character. In fact, proper class characterisation of the post-1994 state will provide us with strategic insights to 'contest' state-capital relations in order to transform the state itself.

The NDR class Pact is not immediately aimed at establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, but National Democracy which is the dictatorship of the proletariat and its class allies, namely peasants, middle class and patriotic bourgeoisie (if it exists). We need to impose Freedom Charter egalitarian values on the class character of the NDR state we seek to build. These values must also find concrete expression in the kind of state we seek to build.

Against this background, we need also to pose key questions about which aspects of the state apparatus (ideological, repressive, economic etc) and their modes of operation require immediate change. We need to set immediate priorities for transformation of the state classism? For instance, what is the acceptable minimum remuneration for public sector workers and public representatives? Furthermore, is it acceptable for public representatives to be involved in business? What has been the impact of these phenomena in terms of class formation within the movement?

We need to think about the kind of state which we should be building in relation to its functions and tasks in respect of the transformation of CST. It is not enough to change the 1996 class project agents without changing the state class structure, orientation, character and values. Otherwise we run the risk of reproducing the 1996 class project through different individual actors trapped within the same class logic.

### **The NDR state and its economic tasks**

Neo-liberalism has provided the class project with the ideological scaffolding to restructure the economy to serve mainly white monopoly capital class interests and its allies. Our NDR Alliance should enable the working class to reverse this agenda and foist its agenda on other classes, which is about the deconstruction of the legacy of the CST. This will set us apart from the 1996 class project which has been reproducing a neo-CST. Our class pact needs to do so as a matter of necessity because our post-1994 South Africa is still marred by key features of the Colonialism of a Special Type. This finds concrete expression in 'dependent development', characterised by primary export dependency based on the Minerals-Energy-Complex and consumer-capital goods import-dependency, the colonial apartheid geography, and the reproduction of cheap labour through casualisation.

Judging by the outcomes of the ANC Policy Conference, Cosatu Conference and 12th SACP Congresses, it could be said that is agreement in the movement that the high levels of poverty and unemployment are out of sync with the NDR. We can safely argue that there is also emerging, even if it is contested, that these appalling human conditions are avoidable and alternatives have to be sought outside the existing erroneous accumulation trajectory.

There is emerging consensus on the need for a 'development state' based on an environmentally conscious industrial strategy. There is a need to diversify the CST production structure and forms ownership and control in order to supply industrial inputs for consumer goods and also inputs that produce the means of production, thus breaking dependent-accumulation. However, there are differences on how the

state should perform this function. The Cosatu and SACP resolutions suggest that the state should use its economic ownership and control of the means of production to break the CST dependent-accumulation. The ANC Policy Conference identified the centrality of the state, which includes, among other things, creating a state-owned-bank and pharmaceutical and mining companies. The Cosatu and SACP Congresses resolved on the need for expropriation of different forms of capital, particularly land, energy (SASOL) and steel (Mitall), and create new forms of collective ownership (state and co-operatives) and defend existing state-owned assets (e.g. ESKOM) in order to, among other things, boost our industrialisation. These should be used as leverage to persuade private capital to diversify South African production. Research agencies and public finance should also be used as both carrot and stick to impose an agenda on private capital to diversify. Furthermore, the state should also use its economic controls such as incentives, licenses and prices to influence capital's behavior in their investment decisions. This will also require the working class to exercise its power on the decisions of businesses on investment and the labour process.

Of primary importance is that the state assets should also be used to meet the reproductive needs (e.g. electricity) of the working class. Public enterprises cannot just be used as a means of lowering the cost of doing businesses. They must also be used to lower the cost of living. Public finance institutions should be used to build infrastructure in poor areas in order to de-commodify and/or reduce the cost of transportation.

The state should explore creating its own manufacturing industries (e.g. a car

industry) in which the state sets detailed production targets for its own industrial companies. Workers also need to have greater say in the management and control of these companies. The working class should also exert its control over its pension funds to determine the accumulation path.

These tasks have to be linked with the immediate and long-term class interests of the working class. Working class power can be exerted through state power to impose on capital to develop the means of production. While this will be in both the immediate interests of the working class in creating employment, it is also in the class interests of the capitalist class to generate surplus value, even if under the dominance of the proletariat. The development of the means of production in the long run will reduce the amount of labour-time required to produce the material needs of humans, thus freeing human beings from work. Of course, this depends on the ability of the proletariat to abolish wage-labour.

The aforementioned tasks will require policy elaboration including macro-economic policy, health, housing policies etc. This will provide us with a clear basis for an NDR Pact in the sphere of commodity exchange (labour power, money and consumer markets), production (what is to be produced, how and by whom, and under what forms of control and ownership, and under what working conditions) and politics (state policies). Here we need concrete NDR immediate demands which build links with our socialist future. In order to link these tasks coherently to our socialist future, we also need to elaborate on the content of our socialist 'economic' vision in the light of 20th century experiences and contemporary socialism (Cuba, China etc).

**Building working class ideological and political capacity**

Articulating our working class interests in the NDR context and beyond is one thing. Class capacity to realise our hegemony and class interests is another thing. To sustain our hegemony in the context of the NDR and beyond, we do not need to build the working class's organisational and ideological capacity. We are very few and yet the tasks are so huge and many. In the current period, we are few and better, but we are

also very, very few to an extent that our impact is not optimally felt in society. So we are few and better, but not the best. We need a clear strategy to build working class organisational and ideological capacity if we are to build on the sterling work we have already done with minimal human and financial resources at our disposal. ★

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