

Can it survive?

The Alliance in a new era

This new era has been made complex by what Karl Marx predicted in *The Communist Manifesto*: 'The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.' This is what we are experiencing today: globalisation.

The Alliance is facing difficulties primarily because it was created to meet the needs of the black working class – the National Question. Now it seems unable to adjust to this new era. To understand these difficulties, it is necessary to analyse the Alliance's history.

The Alliance's history

Before the unbanning of the SACP and ANC, COSATU was in a relatively strong position within the Alliance. It was the only part of the Alliance operating legally inside South Africa. Political strategies may have been determined collectively but their implementation was channelled through COSATU.

The balance of forces within the Alliance changed after the SACP and the ANC were unbanned. As it became clear that the ANC had the overwhelming support of the black population and was unquestionably leading the liberation movement, it assumed leadership of the Alliance. When the ANC went into

Frans Baleni looks at the Tripartite Alliance in the era of globalisation and discusses how can it serve the working class in the struggle for economic and social freedom.

government, its position was consolidated. As such, the Alliance partners' influence on the Alliance itself and its activities has never been equal. The only real cracks in the Alliance's unity came over the question of privatisation in 1995 and the macroeconomic policy, Gear.

The Alliance was and is a voluntary arrangement. Hence, it can only operate based on mutual understanding. Such an understanding existed in the struggle for political liberation.

Liberation phases

Liberation involves different phases. The first is the establishment of a political democratic framework with universal voting rights. On this issue, unity of purpose existed, which brought together the workers, the black middle class and black and white employers.

The second phase of the liberation struggle is liberation from poverty, economic deprivation and exploitation. The unity that existed in the first phase

cannot survive the second phase, because there will be disagreement on how to address these issues. Because the class struggle will dominate this phase, there can be no agreement between the working class and the capitalist class, irrespective of colour or ethnicity.

Our country is now entering the second phase. In other countries, liberation movements broke into pieces soon after political independence. In India, the trade unions and political parties split into communist and anti-communist factions. In many African countries, a fictitious unity was created through the establishment of a one-party state and the introduction of controls over trade unions. Evidence shows that such unity is short-lived and has negative consequences for an economy.

The question confronting the working class in our country is how to extend the unity of the Tripartite Alliance, which served us so well in the struggle for political liberation, to serve us in the struggle for economic and social freedom. We need to examine the future of the Alliance in this context.

The Tripartite Alliance will serve the interests of the working class if it is committed to achieving economic liberation. The commitment of COSATU and the SACP is clear. COSATU has a single, unambiguous constituency – the workers, which it must serve or face disintegration. The SACP, based on Marxist-Leninism, has an equally clear ideological commitment to serve the working class. The only question mark hangs over the ANC. If this question mark is removed, there will be an unstoppable coalition of forces serving the working class.

The ANC's history

The ANC has a varied history. From 1912 until after World War II, it was largely a

black middle class organisation committed to orderly constitutional change. Except for the land campaign, it did not have any particular social programme until it endorsed the Freedom Charter. Then, because of visionary leaders, the ANC became committed to working class freedom. This commitment allowed it to extend its base to include the majority of blacks and receive their support in the 1994 elections.

The third phase of the ANC's history began when it entered into government. Until then, it, like the SACP and COSATU, represented the working class because the vast majority of blacks were workers. Once in government, it was subjected to pressures from employers, international finance institutions and western governments. It cannot set its own agenda because it has to weave a course in and around conflicting interests. As a result, it has taken a direction opposite to the Freedom Charter, with, for instance, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises.

The ANC in government

No doubt, the ANC will be in government for the near future. The question is how, under enormous capitalist pressures, can it recommit itself to the working class. If it does, it will ensure the survival of the Tripartite Alliance.

It is important to recognise the distinction between the ANC as a political organisation with its own members and democratic structures and the ANC in government. ANC MPs are drawn from the ranks of the ANC and are committed to pursue ANC policies. Yet, they are subjected to such diverse and contradictory pressures that they are in many and important ways separate from the ANC outside government.

The ANC outside government, on the other hand, is accountable only to its



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members who are mostly working class people. It can ignore the free market conditions stipulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for receiving aid

Recommitting the ANC

I am not suggesting that we find ways to compel the government to immediately implement a full-blown social policy. South Africa is in an exposed position in the capitalist world and is open to retaliation by international finance if it takes such steps. The issue is how to commit the government to a process of socialist action so that the goal is clear without insisting on a time limit.

Firstly, we need to institute the right to recall. When some comrades get into leadership positions, they think they are above the rules and discipline of the organisation that put them there. Leaders must always be reminded that they are representatives. They must report to their constituents and justify their actions or be removed from office. This must be re-

enforced by progressive members who, during re-elections, must remove leaders who have not followed conference decisions.

Another problem facing the ANC in government is that it is dependent on advice from the old civil service – where Afrikaners worked for white supremacy within a capitalist society. Ministers do not know the details of all the problems they face so they rely on civil servants to advise them. Therefore, an ANC minister may find it difficult to pursue collectively agreed policies. The civil service must be changed for there to be real progress in implementing progressive ANC policies.

Lastly, no ideological unity binds ANC MPs and ministers. Some of them are active supporters of the capitalist system who consult the Chamber of Mines and the big financial conglomerates before any other groups. In some instances, they do not consult the trade unions at all. We must ensure that our government prioritises consultations with COSATU and the SACP.



How can the ANC recommit itself to the working class?

The role of the SACP

In this article, I have examined how to make the ANC, as both a political organisation and government, firmly committed to the application of progressive policies so that socialism is not just an unthinkable dream. COSATU or the SACP would then never have to support government policies through the Alliance to which they are ideologically opposed.

Even if the ANC were committed to progressive policies, difficulties might still exist within the Alliance, for instance, if the SACP had to compete with the ANC as a political party fighting elections. Inevitably, the question of whether one party should assimilate the other would arise. This question will be irrelevant as long as the SACP is communist and rejects a social democracy. The ANC, on the other hand, is not a communist party and chances are very small that it can be one.

It is important that the SACP remains true to its communist faith because

COSATU alone would not be able to make the necessary impact. The SACP needs to think clearly about its identity. It should assert its independence, challenge, criticise and pose alternatives to the ANC without actually undermining or threatening it. Without provoking condemnation or using personal abuse, COSATU and the SACP must retain the right to criticise the implementation of unacceptable policies.

This, of course, will test the Alliance. Its future would depend on the degree of tolerance within it. On occasion, the parties will agree to disagree and this should be accepted. But if principles have to be sacrificed to maintain the Alliance's life then it ceases to be of any significance and can be safely dumped at the salvage yard. ★

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