

Cosatu and the ANC national conference

Can Limpopo be another Morogoro?

Cosatu emerged from the June ANC policy conference optimistic that the ANC remained a party with a bias towards the working class. **Dinga Sikwebu** questions this assumption and argues that Cosatu needs to deepen its understanding in order to better comprehend what drives ANC policy.

When 1 500 African National Congress (ANC) delegates filled a hall at Kempton Park's Gallagher Estate for a policy conference in June 2007, large parts of Johannesburg were under snow. If everything goes according to the Congress of South African of Trade Unions' (Cosatu) plans, when the ANC holds its national conference in December, the snow will have melted and political temperatures will be at boiling point. This is not about Limpopo's summer temperatures but concerns the fierce contest which Cosatu hopes to mount. If the song popular in Cosatu meetings, *Sodiban'eLimpopo* is anything to go by, the die is cast for Polokwane.

Since its national congress in September 2006, the country's biggest union federation has been active in a campaign to influence the outcome of the ANC December conference. After noting the ANC's shift "from earlier working-class bias as adopted in its Morogoro Congress in 1969", Cosatu's Congress resolved that "the forthcoming ANC national

conference presents another opportunity for the working class to assert its leadership of the NDR (National Democratic Revolution)." What are the prospects for this succeeding? Can Cosatu influence and shift the ANC leftwards? How probable is an ANC return to its Morogoro stance?

COSATU UPS THE STAKES

Having identified the importance of the ANC conference, Cosatu's Congress adopted two tasks. First, Cosatu had to develop a programme aimed at uniting the liberation movement. Second, it must identify ANC leadership which could best pursue a programme in the interests of the working class. The call to identify leaders to drive "the liberation movement programme" marked a departure from earlier Cosatu approaches where the question of who leads the ANC was regarded as the latter's business.

After the Congress, Cosatu developed a framework and criteria for election of ANC leaders. The federation was also active around

the ANC policy conference. It produced detailed responses to ANC draft policy documents and dispatched these to membership with the hope that this would assist members active in ANC branches. The paper on ANC leadership summarises Cosatu's bottomline. This includes a commitment by the ANC to:

- Undergo transformation and implementation of the Freedom Charter including its call for nationalisation, redistribution of wealth, land reform and free and compulsory education. This commitment to the Charter, an end to commodified service delivery, and abolition of anti-worker legislation will measure whether the ANC is shifting leftwards.
- Turn the second decade of democracy into a decade of the working class and poor through implementation of programmes aimed at ending unemployment and poverty.
- View the ANC-Cosatu-South African Communist Party (SACP) Alliance as the driver of transformation in society and the state. A political centre made up of the three organisations should be established with the task to determine policy and deployment to government and the state.

The August 2007 Cosatu Central Committee had on its agenda the finalisation of the federation's position on the ANC leadership race as well as formulation of a framework for a pact that will reconfigure the ANC-Cosatu-SACP alliance.

Kally Forrest



Johannesburg froze during the ANC's policy conference, but December will see political temperatures at boiling point

WILL THE STRATEGY DELIVER?

According to the federation's leadership, the strategy to influence the ANC is yielding results. A Cosatu press statement issued after the ANC policy conference optimistically declared that "the ANC remains first and foremost a liberation movement with a bias towards the working class". This assessment resulted from Cosatu's reading of conference outcomes. There is a similar tone in the political report tabled at Cosatu's September Central Committee. The report calls "for an active state-led industrial strategy; developmental fiscal and monetary policy; free and compulsory education; a comprehensive social security system etc", as confirmation that the ANC remains a working class-biased movement.

But another reading of the ANC conference can lead to a less-optimistic assessment. Firstly, nowhere in ANC resolutions is there enthusiasm for reconfiguring the tripartite alliance. The resolution on organisational renewal notes the call from Cosatu for a pact and the debate within the SACP on electoral options for the party, but dismissively states that the "ANC

respects the right of individual Alliance partners to discuss and arrive at their own decisions on how they seek to pursue their strategic objectives. Consistent with this principle, the ANC will continue to determine, in its own structures and processes, on how best to advance its own strategic objectives". Issues such as the establishment of a state-owned bank, mining, steel, energy, information and communication parastatals, which Cosatu lists as indicators of a shift, have been sent back to branches – as were issues such as a rural development strategy, land reform and the debate on the appropriateness of running a surplus as an element of fiscal policy.

The second notable thing about the ANC conference is how bland some of the resolutions are. What does a call on the state to "ensure proper management and exploitation of strategic mineral and energy resources" mean? Cosatu celebrates this as an "interventionist approach to the use of mineral resources". Does a reference to a "new and more equitable growth path" warrant a celebration when there are no details on what that

path entails? It's clear that Cosatu is now using a different measuring stick from the one at its Congress last year. The federation's congress identified implementation of Freedom Charter provisions, abolition of legislation that leads to casualisation and an end to privatisation and commodified service delivery, as criteria to assess whether the ANC is moving leftwards. None of these is in the conference's outcome.

Thirdly, a different reading of ANC resolutions will reveal that notions like the developmental state and industrial strategy are not new ANC and government policies. A survey of ANC documents from the 1990s shows how the two concepts have been part of the organisation's policy arsenal. The resolution for a national health insurance also goes back to the 1997 ANC national conference in Mafikeng. The Stellenbosch ANC conference in 2002 called on the government "to continue with plans towards a comprehensive social security system". So was its identification of the use of monetary policy "in a flexible manner, consistent with broad aims of the ANC economic policy, including job creation, investment and poverty eradication". Instead of heralding these policies as shifts, the question Cosatu should ask is: what is it that makes the ANC unable to translate these into government policies?

It appears that the political strategy to contest the ANC's direction predisposes Cosatu to seeing shifts where none exist or where their qualitative impact on the working class and the poor is uncertain. As ANC economic transformation coordinator Michael Sachs says: "It is becoming predictable that whenever the ANC meets, Cosatu will declare a shift leftwards. This is what the federation said when the ANC had its National General Council (NGC)



Delegates at the ANC policy conference in June this year.

in Port Elizabeth in 2000. Cosatu also referred to a shift after the Stellenbosch national conference in 2002. Similar pronouncements were made when we had another NGC in 2005". For Sachs, developments in the ANC since 2000 is a "process of policy development in which as the ANC gains experience, it fine tunes and adapts its policies".

MYTHOLOGY AROUND MOROGORO

One reason why Cosatu is predisposed to seeing shifts where there are none is the mythology around the 1969 ANC consultative conference held in Tanzania's Morogoro. According to the federation, it was at this conference that the ANC affirmed its working class bias. It refers to clauses in the *Strategy and Tactics* document adopted at the conference that asserted that victory against apartheid "must embrace more than formal democracy" and accorded a special role to the working class in the struggle for emancipation. At the core of Cosatu's current political strategy is a Morogoro Number Two.

While it is correct that positions affirming the leading role of the working class were adopted, what is missing is the context in which the

Morogoro conference took place.

The conference sat during the Cold War when the struggle for influence between the US and the Soviet Union was at its height. Also, the international situation in 1969 saw the intensification of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. So it is not an accident that the Morogoro document opens with the statement that the struggle in South Africa takes "place within an international context of transition to the socialist system, of the breakdown of the colonial system..." Ascendant anti-imperialist forces played no small role in pushing the ANC leftwards.

Another factor absent in accounts of Morogoro is how it took place when the ANC was at its lowest in terms of morale and organisation. Luli Callinicos' book on Oliver Tambo and Ben Turok's autobiography reveal how the conference was more occupied with questions such as the functioning of the NEC, accountability of leaders and pursuance of armed struggle than matters of class leadership and strategy.

The third point around Morogoro is how some problems that the conference meant to address

persisted long after the gathering. Referring to struggles around decisions reached, Callinicos describes how resolutions "resulted in considerable disquiet: the answers they provided generated new problems, exposing fault lines along the way forward".

Comparison between the 1960s and now show how different the periods are and how improbable it would be for the ANC to return to Morogoro positions. In 1969 the ANC was an illegal movement while today it manages the state.

Also important for the debate on whether the ANC can be pushed back to previous policy stances is to distinguish between formal adoption and actual implementation. Despite references to a "special role of the working class" in *Strategy and Tactics*, when the Durban strikes erupted in 1973 and the new black unions appeared, the ANC's reaction was according to Roger Southall in his *Imperialism or Solidarity* "characterised by confusion, inconsistency and ambivalence". Having characterised apartheid as fascist, the ANC-South African Congress of Trade Unions-SACP alliance had little confidence in the development of new worker organisations.

An unsanitised version of Morogoro, shows how it is possible for the ANC to adopt left-leaning resolutions at its December conference without these becoming government policies and programmes. A chasm between resolutions and implementation is always possible.

NO THEORY OF PARTIES

It is not only the mythology of Morogoro that motivates Cosatu's improbable mission of winning back the ANC. There exists no systematic analyses of such change or a theory of the role of political parties.

Cosatu has not developed an understanding of parties' role in

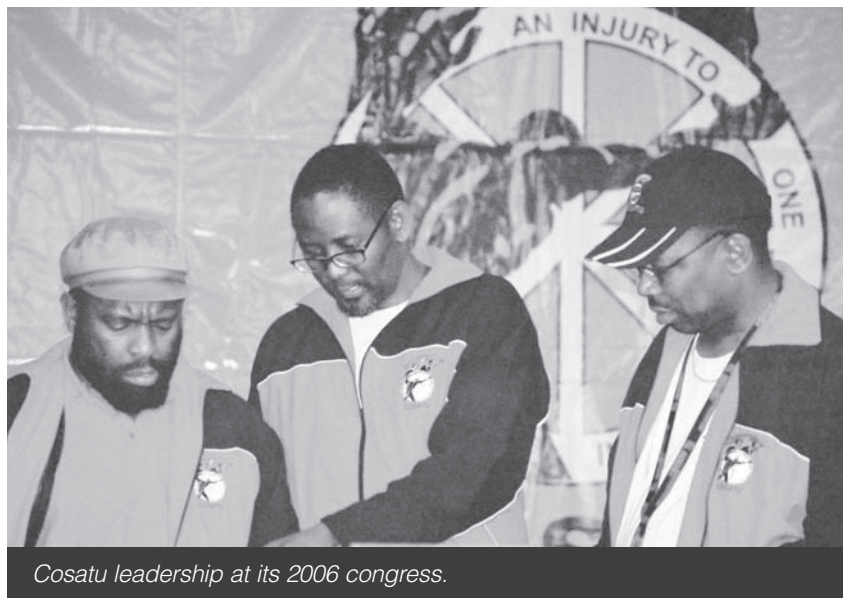
William Matlala

post-independence situations. A discussion document in the run-up to Congress spoke about how the ANC “operates as an adjunct to, rather than the driver of the state”. It talks about how to some the ANC is a “ladder to power and resources” and how the social composition of the organisation is changing. Congress resolutions adopted the same issues and spoke about the class contradictions within the ANC. They spoke of leadership being increasingly drawn from middle and capitalist classes and the dominance of the organisation by capital.

These are important observations, but do not constitute a theory on the role of parties. Although the document said the ANC was an adjunct of the state, it did not explain how this came about and was maintained. The document did not discuss how public funding of political parties, the list system and floor crossing produces a certain kind of ANC.

The Cosatu document is also silent on how ANC decisions such as the move to branch boundaries coinciding with ward demarcation, have contributed to the fusion of the ANC and the state. Although points are made about class contradictions within the ANC, there is little explanation of how these tensions express themselves.

There is also no attempt to understand how the dominance of capital comes about. Besides an assertion that the black working class remains the historical constituency of the ANC, Cosatu does not unpack this by identifying the sections that form this constituency or tease out whether there is a distinction between those who are members of branches and those who vote for the ANC. These are important questions if one considers the results of a National Labour and Economic Development Institute (Naledi) survey conducted for Cosatu in 2005. The survey states that only 35%



Cosatu leadership at its 2006 congress.

of Cosatu members in the study are active in ANC branches. Only 20% of other unions and only 17% of non-union members, belong to the ANC.

In an article on political parties, Blyth and Kazt identify four organisational types of parties that have appeared in Western democracies. These are elite parties, mass parties, catch-all parties and cartel parties.

Cartel parties arise when parties buy into neo-liberal policies such as export-led industrialisation, liberalisation of domestic markets and a dependence on foreign rather than domestic investment. In this context, space for policy competition becomes less, members and constituencies become irrelevant except in times of elections and public relations (PR) replaces campaigns. Dependence on PR leads to a reliance on public and corporate funding. Cartel parties have a twofold role – management of voter expectations and externalisation of policy commitments by passing policy-making to regulatory bodies insulated from the electorate.

The description of cartel parties resembles the ANC. Interestingly, the July conference did little to reverse these tendencies. Although the conference recommended that powers to appoint mayors and provincial premiers should revert to ANC constitutional structures instead of being vested in the president, little is said in resolutions about

empowering voters. The conference resolved that the system of proportional representation “should be maintained and strengthened” despite proposals from Cosatu and SACP for an electoral system that mixes list and constituency representation. Delegates were also divided on floor-crossing. A significant section trumpeted the value of laws that allow elected representatives to move to other parties without losing their seats.

Conference also supported state funding of political parties without any word on regulation of private donations. Resolutions were mum on the opening of policy spaces. The resolution on legislatures and governance contains no proposal on how to strengthen legislative arms of government in their oversight roles, something that Cosatu has raised in numerous submissions. There was also no discussion on how institutions such as the Reserve Bank should be subjected to mass pressure.

How Cosatu hopes to win back the ANC is a mystery. The integration of the ANC into state structures as well as the articulation between the party and capitalist networks seems to have gone unchallenged at the policy conference. LE

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