

Social movements

Don't start the revolution without me

Celebration of the first decade of democracy has focused on how the government performed but it's a good chance to explore the state of organisation outside of government. In December last year the *Labour Bulletin* (Vol 27 (6)) began to look at the so-called new social movements. Since then, the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) and the School of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) have launched a study. The **Labour Bulletin** highlights some of the findings to understand how and why these organisations emerged, how they operate and how they seek to impact on policy and delivery.

Since 1994 discussion on the relationship between broader civil society and government invariably focused on the alliance between Cosatu and the ANC and what role organised labour would play in the post-apartheid SA. That remained the case well into the late 1990's and especially in the post-Gear years, as Cosatu continued to criticise governments' policy direction and its impact. As an initial concept document written to guide the project stated: 'Despite a few well-publicised complaints from the relatively better-off constituency of organised labour that finds a home within the governing ANC Alliance, the effects of these policy decisions have, for a long period after 1994, been pushed out of view.

'The same goes for those worst affected by these policies: the unemployed, those working in the informal economy, the aged, the indigent, and the rural poor. They have been afforded the occasional appearance at the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, state sponsored poverty hearings or cameo roles at racism indabas, but then, typically

are immediately exiled to the periphery of social policy and consciousness again'.

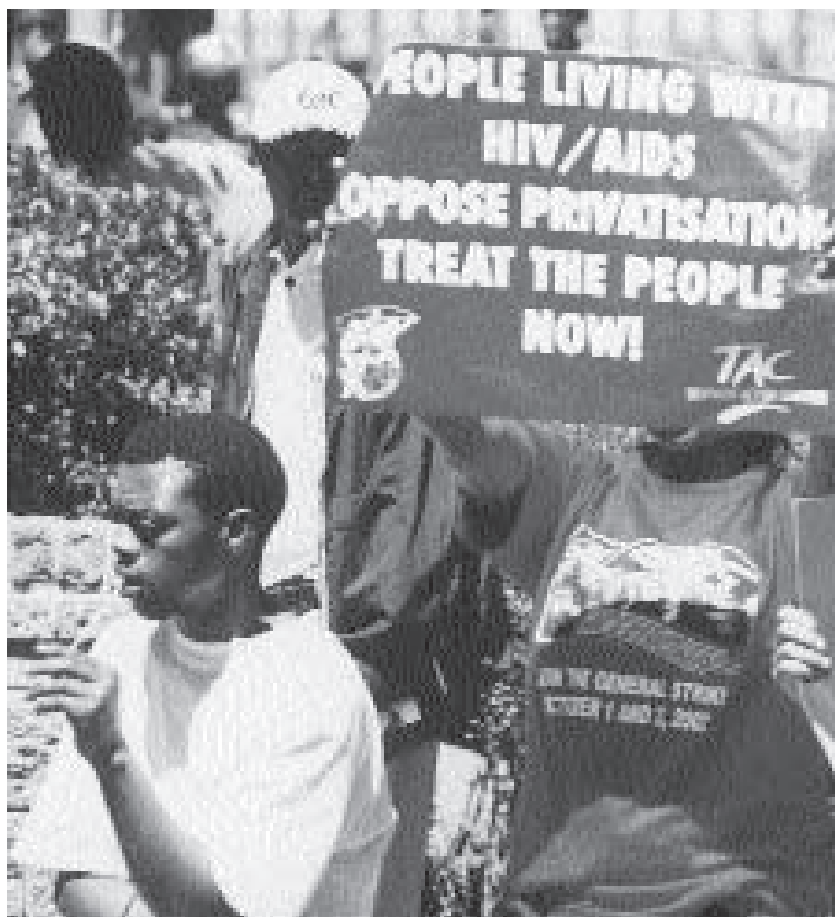
As Elke Zuern in her research on the South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) argues (see p10) what emerged in the post-1994 period was the view that 'civil society organisations were expected to shift their focus from a largely conflict, if not hostile, relationship with the state, to play a more supportive role, and broad-based social movements were expected to disband to make way for political parties and formal non-governmental organisations (NGOs), leading to a decline in popular mobilisation. Papers were published forecasting that many organisations and movements, which fought apartheid, would fold or dramatically transform themselves for an era of institutional, rather than extra-institutional, politics'.

As a result many of these issue-based structures formed as part of the anti-apartheid struggle found it difficult to define their relationship with the new ANC-led government. This was clearly evident in Zuern's case study which highlighted tactics

used by organisations pre-1994. If social and community organisations were against the old order, does that mean that they must permanently situate themselves against the state? Alternatively, is it wrong to define ones' role in strengthening the new order (as Sanco has attempted to do in more recent times)?

Cosatu's economist Neva Makgetla argues in a paper on the role of labour in the post-1994 period that the 'experiences of the labour movement in the first decade of independence present a contradictory and complex picture. On a day-to-day basis, the unions sometimes seemed to lurch from crisis to crisis, invariably accompanied by loud arguments, ideological contestation and the laments of academic observers. But examination of long-term trends provides a more optimistic picture. In fact, the labour movement was characterised by rapid growth, despite adverse economic conditions, growing political independence and a high degree of organisational cohesion. On the policy level, a critical shift occurred in how the unions saw their





Greenbergs' case study also raises some important questions around the impact and sustainability of some of the new social movements - which might have obtained high level of prominence in the media and through global networks - but have limited funds and a small number of active members.

engagement. Increasingly, Cosatu leaders aimed, not to take over political power themselves, but to provide a voice for workers and the poor from outside the state. This represented a clear break with the democratic movement's traditional expectation that it would directly use state power to reshape society. It means that organised labour had to expect a long-term process of engagement, with setbacks as well as gains over decades, rather than a once-off, millennialist victory.

But what about those movements which emerged in the post-1994 period? The CCS study sought to provide a political analysis of these movements, and an assessment of their impact on processes of social change - more specifically the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Hence, the study commissioned papers on 17 social and community movements in an attempt to answer a range of questions including the who, where, how and what of social movements but more importantly, have the social movements reinforced old social identities or are they constructing new ones? How coherent and sustainable are

these movements? Do they act to consolidate or undermine South African democracy? This special report will only focus on four of the case studies embarked upon.

The study reveals that one cannot generalise. The social and community movements do not all operate in the same way nor have they all positioned themselves to oppose the state, which is the general perception. The Treatment Action Campaign is not opposed to the state as a principle position. This does not however, discount the fact that it might oppose positions adopted by the government. Does this then make it anti-democratic? Steven Friedman and Shauna Mottiar explain (see p18) that the TAC 'seeks to engage with the state without taking it over and employs the methods of civil society engagement - lobbying and coalition-building, public protest and legal action'. It is clear that attempts have been made to put in place structures to ensure some level of democracy within the organisation. Organisations such as the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and the Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM)

do not operate in the same way. They are less structured and operate more as interlinking networks.

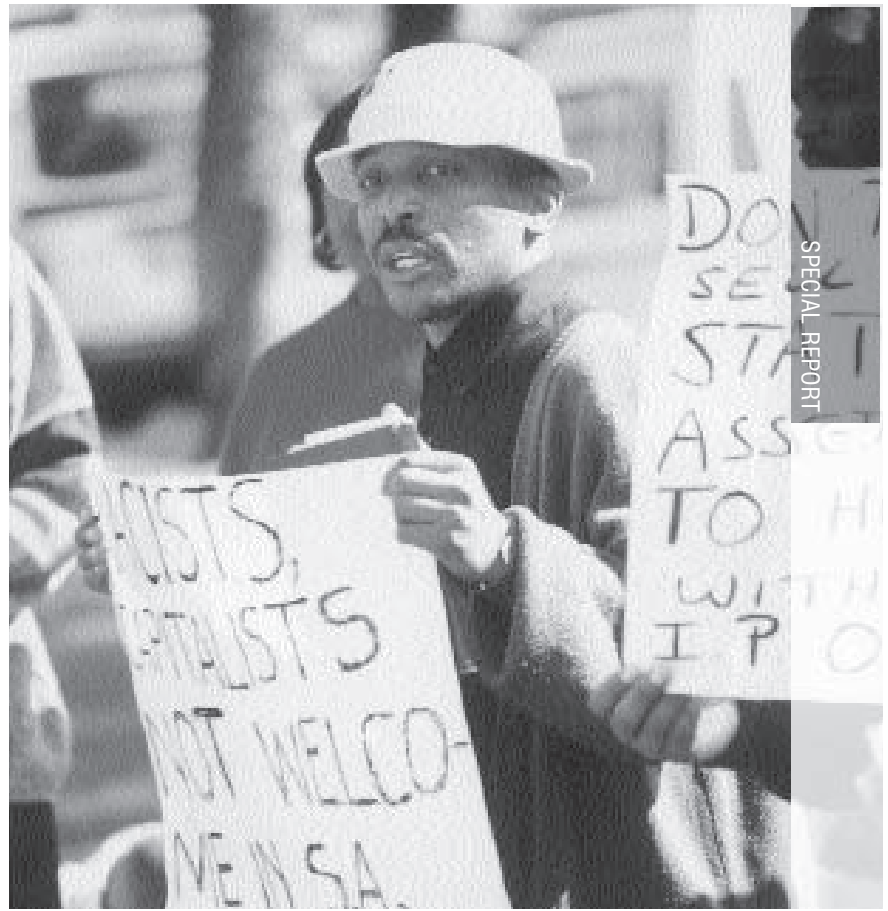
All the case studies attempt to define what social movements are and how they distinguish themselves from other civil society or community type organisations. In an attempt to analyse the SECC, Anthony Egan and Alex Wafer position it as 'a 'poor peoples' movement' (see p24) that includes a range of activists and supporters outside its natural recruitment area, while opposed by groups and individuals - trade unionists, socialists, and many 'poor people' of Soweto - who should logically be seen to be if not members of SECC then its 'natural' allies'. They add that the SECC and the rest of the movement frames its collective action around, at least in part, an ideology of resistance to neoliberal economic globalisation and commitment to a broadly defined socialism. The SECC's ideological position raises some interesting issues around whether the new social movements believe that a true democracy and proper service delivery can be realised outside a socialist democracy? Is a non-capitalist

system the only way to achieve a pro-poor agenda? And how truly democratic are socialist democracies? Is there evidence that they entrench democratic principles?

Egan and Wafer argue that the implications for social movements of the 'poors' are twofold. First, it suggests that one of their strategies can be the mobilisation of discontent among those who cannot benefit from the new economic order - but the question must be raised here whether, given the global situation, their solutions could be implemented. Second, their opportunities for action need to be linked to the global resistance movement - which further complicate the activities of those organisations (like SECC) that operate on a distinctly local level.

The LPM adopts similar strategies to the SECC and utilises global networks to build its profile. They both face similar dynamics amongst their membership who are not all supportive of opposing the state. Independent researcher Steven Greenberg highlights in his case study on the LPM (see p...) that divisions emerged around the relationship with government. 'The fundamental lines of division related to the question of the attitude the movement should adopt towards government. Some NGOs and a portion of the movement sought a continuation of a relationship of critical engagement... But a sizeable portion of the movement was convinced that a more antagonistic relationship to government was necessary. In their view government has the capacity to carry out the substantial and rapid transfer of land to the landless, but has opted for a different political and economic path. Pressure therefore needs to be applied to shift the government from its political and economic trajectories through mass collective action. Failing that - or parallel to it - redistribution from below through mass occupations would be necessary to ensure the transfer of land...'

Greenberg's case study also raises some important questions around the impact and sustainability of some of the new social movements - which might have obtained high level of prominence in the media and through global networks - but have limited funds and a small number of active



members. Greenberg concludes that the 'emergence of the LPM, in tandem with the unfolding land expropriation process in Zimbabwe, has had a notable impact on thinking around land in South Africa. The state has responded with a mixture of reform and repression, while other elements have become more vocal in their opinions on land redistribution.'

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the four case studies chosen that the new social movements have filled a vacuum left as a result of the transition period or what one analyst calls 'transition blues'. As mentioned in the previous *Labour Bulletin*, these movements cannot all be lumped together as being anti-democratic, insurrectionist and part of the so-called 'loony-left'. These movements are not all the same and even within their own structures differences exist (as is the case with political parties or unions). For example, it is questionable whether the 'grannies' of Soweto (involved in the SECC) have an agenda to overthrow the new government. But, if that were the case would this have a systemic effect of undermining or

strengthening democracy? Adam Habib, an executive director at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) argues that these movements can have the effect of strengthening democracy as they introduce a duality into the political system.

Therefore, it should not be a case of 'them or us' - the ANC-led government, social movements or for that matter organized labour (Cosatu). Ultimately organized labour remains the key vehicle for mass mobilization but now it and the tripartite alliance have some competition. As the capitalist system has taught us competition is healthy and forces companies/organizations and even governments to become more accountable and deliver better services. The new social movements have undoubtedly created some uncertainty in the market and have put some key service delivery issues on the national agenda. Is this so bad to ensure that our democracy is strengthened and survives in the next decade? - the editor.

LS

The full reports can be found on the CSS website: <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/> and click on 'social movements' under 'research'.