COVER

Social movements

A fancy name or rebels with a cause?

Social movements are in fashion. Who are they, who do they represent and how do they interact with unions and political parties? The Labour Bulletin explores the emergence of these movements and evaluates whether they are opportunities for the revitalisation of the labour movement or sites of struggle.

There is a lot of smoke and mirrors around social movements. It is not as if they are new (or many of the issues they are pursuing) – if organisations such as the UDF (and other community-based organisations) were still around they too would be classified as social movements. What is new is the name; the way in which they are positioning themselves in relation to the state and their international focus and global connectedness.

The term social movements began to emerge in international literature in the 1980s. In South Africa the name leapt to prominence in the build-up to the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in 2001. By the time the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) came around a number of the emerging social movements appeared to position themselves against the ANC-led government and its alliance partners such as Cosatu. The fact that social movements gained prominence in the build-up to two high-profile international conferences raises questions about how much international developments have influenced the way social movements have emerged in SA.

What are social movements?

Adam Habib of the Centre for Civil Society analyses how civil society has defined itself in the face of democratisation and globalisation (see p14) He claims that in response to rising poverty, civil society in SA has been reconstituted in various ways. One has been the response to the effects of neoliberalism. This category of organisations has been described by some studies as social movements. (Desai, 2000) 'This category is a made up of a diverse set of organisations, not all of whom actually meet the criteria of social movements. Some, like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) are nationally-based associations, and in this case focus on challenging the state's AIDS policy and enabling the provision of anti-retroviral drugs to AIDS sufferers. Others like the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and the Concerned Citizens Group (CCG), are at the local level, and in these cases organise against electricity cut-offs in Soweto and rates evictions and water terminations in Chatsworth and surrounding townships in Durban respectively.

Both of the latter are more formal community-based structures, which have a distinct leadership and membership, often supported by a middle class activist base. Moreover, their mode of operations is fundamentally different. They are not survivalist agencies, but are more political animals. They have been largely established with the explicit political aim of organising and mobilising the poor and marginalised, and contesting and/or engaging the state and other social actors around the implementation of neoliberal social policies. As a result, they implicitly launch a fundamental challenge to the hegemonic political and socio-economic discourse that defines the prevailing status quo.'

Habib, Valodia and others argue in a research proposal on social movements that what distinguishes these community movements from political parties, pressure groups and NGOs is that mass mobilisation is their prime source of social sanction. 'Alongside the developments of community movements, has been the rise of social movements operating at a local level and also making direct global connections. Emblematic of these movements is the TAC and Jubilee South. The former has linked up with US-based organisations like ACT-UP, sourced drugs from Brazil and Thailand and challenged the government on the streets and in the courts for the provision of anti-retrovirals. Jubilee

South mobilises on the issue of the 'apartheid debt' locally and links internationally with organisations mobilising against the "third world debt". These two organisations are vital to understanding how social movements are making global connections while impacting on policy and delivery locally. A growing social movement that is more loosely

organised than TAC and Jubilee South is the Landless People's Movement (LPM). Initially supported by the National Land Committee (NLC), it has made an impact beyond the headline-making Bredell land invasion'.

Michael Sachs of the ANC says that the diversity of these movements defies an easy definition. 'Matters are complicated further because the boundaries between a "social movement" and a football club, an independent religion, vigilante group, political party, trade union, choir group or NGO remain fuzzy; all have characteristics usually associated with social movements; all overlap with modes of organisation, solidarity and mobilisation at the community level.'

Sociology professor at Wits University Jacklyn Cock in her article (see p19) attempts to analyse what these social movements are about. Do they represent a new form of social activism? Are they 'militant particularisms', ephemeral eruptions of the urban poor, the rural landless and other marginalised groups, or components of an emerging global civil society? What is their relationship to the anti-corporate globalisation movement? Are these embryonic social movements? Are they social movements in the sense of 'purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory, as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society.' (Castells, 1997:3)

Cock refers to Wits Sociology lecturer Devan Pillay's research on social movements where he warns against adopting too narrow a definition. He says: 'Social scientists have attached different meanings to the term "social movement", ranging from small local protest groups to "anti-systemic" national liberation movements. Much of the literature is rooted in the experiences of the developed North. For our purposes, social movements are those relatively autonomous movements or organisations that are mass-based and oriented towards social change.' (Pillay, 1996:329) It follows that a crucial question is whether these initiatives seek to empower the poor and the marginalised against local, national and global elites. Or is it the case that these movements are embracing the politics which addresses the interests of the poor, but are showing the development of a movement which can act as a genuine vehicle for social transformation in the hands of the poor?

What is clear is that social movements are not homogenous; in many instances they are young and therefore, tend to lack hierarchical structure and conventional organisational form; tactics differ and they are issue-based. The impact of their actions goes beyond the issues they are trying to address. For example, the demand for land (as espoused by the LPM) does not just simply begin and end with access to land. What unites them is their broad opposition to corporate-driven globalisation while some movements have adopted European tendencies, as described by Sachs, of opposing the 'new politics of representative democracy.'

Why social movements

It is a mere ten years since the new democratic and non-racial government came to power, why social movements? This is an issue which ANC researcher Michael Sachs explores (see p23). He argues that democracy means that these social movements will exist – however, it does not mean that the poor have no alternative avenues to achieve their objectives. Voting, he says, is not the last act of popular democracy. Sachs says however, that a number of social movements have consciously positioned themselves as the 'adversaries of representative democracy.' There might well be a case for such a stand in Europe, he argues, where mature democracies were experiencing a crisis of representation – but could the same be said for SA?

Habib et al argue however, that international studies of social movements have shown that the opening up of political spaces during transitions to democracy and worsening social conditions is usually the spark for activism and collective organisation.

So what then are the conditions giving rise to social movements? Is it merely about the government's failure to speed up delivery or a shift in policy focus? Is it as Habib, Cock and others argue that the conditions of the poor have worsened since 1994 as a result of rising poverty and unemployment? Or is it a case not only of rising poverty but heightened expectations on the government to deliver more? The generally held view is that the adoption of Gear led to a shift in the way basic services were provided. Habib et al claim: 'These developments have seen the costs of basic services escalate and increasing disconnections of water and electricity as the local state emphasises cost recovery. Between 1999 and 2000 for example some 75 400 water-cut-offs occurred in the Greater Cape Town area. (Smith in McDonald and Smith, 2002: 41) In Soweto after the 1999 general election some 20 000 houses had their electricity supplies disconnected every month.

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 Commission, 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.

The result of this, Habib et al argue, has not been a passive acceptance by the poor and marginalised but rather an attempt to mobilise to address their concerns. Social movements have been formed because they are articulating the interests of the poor, they are speaking the politics of the poor. Does the rise of social movements represent a contestation between these structures, unions and political parties for the hearts and minds of the marginalised and poor? Who or which political party is talking on behalf of the poor? Organised labour claims that it does, but does it? The ANC government claims to do this, but does it? And now social movements claim they do – or do they too not have dubious agendas? If social movements are beginning to speak on behalf of the poor, which poor are we talking about as the more well known movements are more of an urban phenomenon. To what extent are there similar movements in rural communities?

Sachs claims that the ANC, as a political party, is now constrained in its ability to ensure mass-based mobilisation. The central leaders of the social movements of the 1980s have moved into institutional politics and the gap has now been filled by a group of individuals who have successfully raised issues around delivery. However, a political analyst says the ANC, through its own deliberate actions created the space for the rise of the new social movements. He says the ANC not only demobilised social movements but also its own organs such as branches, the youth league, student movements and all those organisations which were part of the of bedrock of the social movements symbolised by the UDF of the 1980s. The ANC, he believes, doctored the activities of such organs to fit in with the new political and economic agenda of the post-apartheid state.

Relationship between local and global movements

The likes of Cock and Peter Waterman have referred to the relationship between local and international social movements and how they are linked by the common approach of opposing anti-corporate globalisation. Waterman (see p28) in his article explores the development of the World Social Forum (WSF) and the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement (GJ&SM). In Waterman's analysis there is definitely an argument to support the view that social movements in SA were able to gain sufficient ground, resources and support through the international networks which emerged through the establishment of the WSF in 2001 and during the mobilisation ahead of WCAR and the WSSD.

Cock also explores the links established between the local social movements and the anti-corporate globalisation movement. She implies that these links were forged during the WSSD and could be witnessed in the support for the alternative march which attracted about 25 000 people as opposed to the alliance march. It is clear that the global forums have provided some direction and support base for the local social movements. As mentioned previously, Sachs does question the type of influence the GJ&SM has had on the local social movements and whether some views can apply to a legitimate government which is still in the process of setting up democratic institutions. He says in line with the general view of the global social movements, the SA government 'is regarded as a slave to corporations and democratic institutions as dangerous mechanisms for the co-option of the poor. Some go further: not only does the state seek to co-opt any form of autonomous mobilisation, but that democratic movement which now occupies the institutional centre is inherently hostile to the poor in general and the "social movements" in particular.'

Response to social movements

Habib and Cock refer to some of the initial knee-jerk reaction by some government ministers in 2001 to the actions of the SECC as being a 'gang of criminals' while some journalists reporting at the time questioned whether these new social movements did not represent a new revolution in SA. Habib et al say: 'Some have argued that these movements are characterised by a reactive and spontaneous character and that they are, therefore, patchy, uncoordinated, unsustainable "sparks" which quickly die down without really being able to develop into a sustained force that has a long-term influence in society. Others have argued that the reconstruction and development of post-apartheid South Africa requires stability and these movements undo the stability achieved with the 1994 settlement… But despite these concerns it is very clear that these social, or rather, 'community' movements have challenged the very boundaries of what for a short while after the demise of the apartheid state was seen as 'politics'. They have also

added to the cast many new actors associated with the play of politics in South Africa.

During a recent workshop organised by the Centre for Policy Studies some additional responses to the new social movements were given by Sangoco executive director Abie Ditlhake whose own agenda is also questionable. He claims that 'social movements no doubt represent a testing ground for future political struggles and organisational formations.' However, he questions whether they have emerged organically from community-based interests or from the 'urban privileged intelligentsia, more often a conglomeration of ideological personalities at the leadership and theoretical level.'

Ditlhake believes social movements in SA have been compromised in two ways. 'Firstly, their dependency on intellectuals whose grounding is unstable and thus poses a danger to their political and organisational stability; and secondly, their dependence on foreign funding, largely sourced through the intervention of either NGOs and/or connected political and intellectual engineers, undermine one of their fundamental essence and social uniqueness.'

Those involved and supportive of social movements claim they have emerged out of the 'objective realities' such as cut offs – a result of ANC policy. Research underway will hopefully determine whether the new social movements emerged out of a group of intellectuals who oppose the ANC or as an organic response to ANC policy.

While there has been general disquiet within government towards the emergence of the so-called new social movements, there does seem to be some subtle differences in attitudes. For example, the TAC is seen to be 'more acceptable' than other movements such as the APF or the LPM while there are lesser known social movements who are playing a critical role in delivery at a local level.

Labour and social movements

Former SACP official Dale McKinley said during the CPS workshop that the alliance put pressure on Cosatu to severe its relationship with the APF. He illustrated this by claiming that Cosatu was asked by the leadership of the alliance: 'why are you keeping the enemy in your house?' Two months later Cosatu evicted the APF from Cosatu House. McKinley implies that tensions in the relationship between the two organisations emanated from the alliance leadership. But is this true?

Cosatu and its affiliates were very involved in setting up the APF but now relations are rather strained to say the least. It would appear that it has not all been a one-way street. Cosatu officials claim that the likes of Ngwane have for some time badmouthed the federation both in international forums and locally, by claiming that they are sell-outs. The *Labour Bulletin* interviewed APF leader Trevor Ngwane (see p31) on his views of Cosatu, government and the future of social movements. He says a future relationship with Cosatu could only occur if it asserted its independence from the ANC. 'You cannot fight against privatisation and then support its chief engineer.'

Cosatu's alliance with the TAC has been rather different. The parties have worked closely together while tensions have arisen where differences have emerged around the use of various tactics. Despite these differences, Cosatu is prepared to work with the TAC because it does not view the state as something which must be smashed.

Engagement with social movements was one of the few resolutions actually debated at the recent Cosatu national congress. Numsa tabled an initial proposal which called for the need to work with social movements so as to build a stronger social base to take forward transformation. The draft resolution did not exclude those social movements which are outside the congress movement.

The NUM challenged this resolution on the basis that it would constitute a change in Cosatu's political position that it would cooperate only with those organisations which had been part of the mass democratic movement. The NUM argued that Cosatu's current position was that it would only work with organisations which are not hostile to the ANC. The adoption of Numsa's resolution would constitute a change – which of itself was not a problem but had to be acknowledged as such and therefore, had to be properly debated. As a result of the approach adopted by the NUM, a revised position was eventually endorsed which limited engagement to those social movements which were not hostile to the alliance. This view is elaborated on in an input made by NUM general secretary Gwede Mantashe during a recent debate with Ngwane at RAU (see p33). Mantashe is clear on his position – the post-apartheid state is a site of contestation and therefore there can be engagement with the state. Ngwane however, is clear that the state should be smashed and replaced with a socialist state. (This view is not shared by all in the APF.) The failure to agree on their understanding around the status of the new government does not bode well for future co-operation.

What do social movements mean for organised labour?

Waterman says: 'In many ways, the new movement echoes the labour movement in its emancipatory moments or moods. But, where the labour movement was, and sometimes still is, considered by its

activists and analysts to be either the centre or the vanguard of social protest and internationalism, the GJ&SM reveals that this task is a multi-faceted one, with no central point or privileged force. Where, moreover, the labour movement has become trapped in modernity, losing both its original emancipatory and its early internationalist vocation, the GJ&SM sees a globalised modernity, at least implicitly, less as a solution, more as a problem.' Waterman's assessment mirrors views by some local social movements that organisations such as Cosatu are reformist (which they are) and sell-outs to the ANC. Unions by their nature are reformist. Can they survive by always defining themselves in opposition to either the state or capital? Does their reformist nature imply that they have sold-out or is it the nature of unions to negotiate and engage within a particular system?

Habib et al say 'some analysts in South Africa, make the mistake of seeing the main impetus of the movements as being fuelled by the trade union movement. But recent social movement activity has been motivated by social actors spawned by the new conditions that lie outside of the ambit of the trade union movement and its style of organising. [The latter's attempts to advance its interests is so highly ritualised and domesticated within the ANC alliance, and otherwise institutionalised, that the major trade unions in South Africa grouped mainly under the banner of Cosatu show little inclination to act outside and against the major policy decisions of the ANC]. In this regard Joe Foweraker in his analysis of the Latin American social movements makes the following points: Whereas the labour movement developed a formal organisation, sought political integration and political rights, and operated within the political system, new social movements are supposed to employ direct action, promote changes in dominant values, and move mainly within civil society.' While labour unions 'are seen to have a centralised hierarchical and often clientist structure, the organisation of the new movements is variously described as decentralised, non-hierarchical, anti-oligarchial, open, fluid, spontaneous and participatory.' (Foweraker, 1995: 41-43) These comments are apposite for the way many social movements are organised in South Africa at the moment and for the way that trade unions have come to operate.'

It is unclear to what extent unions in SA are concerned about the emergence of social movements. There was some hint of sensitivity within Cosatu around the ability of the social movements to mobilise around the two international events (WCAR and WSSD). Aside from this, is the concern within Cosatu around the potential political fall-out around the rising levels of poverty. Will the ANC be able to arrest the situation (rising poverty) especially if the emerging social movements are able to evolve into a powerful vehicle for articulating the interests of the poor. Where will this leave the congress movement and who will labour's new allies be?

The emergence of social movements in the post-1994 period will pose some serious challenges for trade union federations such as Cosatu if it is unable to take up the challenge posed by the *Labour Bulletin* at the beginning of the report. Will social movement be sites of struggle or act as an impetus to revitalise the labour movement? In view of the current state of organised labour, if serious measures are not taken to revitalise unions, then it is likely that social movements will prove to be sites of struggle. An important issue is whether unions remain the most appropriate form of organisation to represent atypical workers? Ngwane made it clear during his interview that social movements will expand its focus of interest to include areas such as labour.

Conclusion

Numerous contradictions emerge when attempting to explore the notion of social movements. It is not a given that they are all progressive (whatever that currently means) if one considers that organisations such Pagad and Mapoga could also be considered as social movements or even for that matter the LPM. It is also not a given that all social movements are opposed to the state despite the fact that some of the high profile leaders have positioned themselves as such. At the same time some social movement leaders might be anti-ANC but many of their supporters are members of both the ANC and Cosatu.

Amidst these contradictions one cannot ignore the issues giving rise to these movements as we celebrate ten years of democracy. Nor for that matter can we ignore the moves to delegitimise the role played by both Cosatu and the ANC or the possible backlash of the latter trying to subsume all struggles under their umbrella. Nor can these movements be wished away by demonising them.

As we begin to grapple with the potential significance of these movements, we must not ignore the debate around whether the ANC is a liberation movement or a political party. In the build-up to the WSSD the ANC attempted to position itself as being part of civil society is that still the case? Or did the December national conference clearly define its new role as that of a political party? - *the editor*

LB