



The Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF)

The Labour Bulletin spoke to APF leader Trevor Ngwane about how he views social movements in post-apartheid SA.

Today's social movements cannot be painted with the same brush. Many do not share the same political views while others are confused about certain issues. 'There are good movements and there are some bad,' Ngwane says in an attempt to illustrate the diversity of the so-called new social movements.

Government's initial response to social movements, he says, was to label

them all the same. This, he says, was as a result of the fact that the analysis of social movements has been reduced to focusing on organisations and individuals. Social movements, he adds, are the product of something. They are filling a political vacuum created by the failure and betrayal of the mass working class organisations. Hence, social movements must not only seek the support of the poor and

marginalised but also the broader working class and win over sections of the lower-middle class.

APF and the state

Since 1994 things have changed only in so far as a non-racial government is in place, he says. What has not changed are the issues confronting people on the ground. He says there is continuity in terms of the issues facing

the working class pre- and post-1994.

'There is now a new state under the ticket of working class aspirations but there has been a betrayal and that is where the clash occurs. There is a capitalist state ruling in the name of the very working class it is smashing.' Social movements, he says, have to fight the state, destroy it and replace it with a workers' state. Today's capitalism is neo-liberal so there is not much room for reform – the capitalist state does not have much to offer the working class.

He does not dispute however, that the ANC government has delivered in some areas. He says there is still a remnant of social democracy but that is being crowded out. The social democratic element finds common cause for the likes of Mbeki and big business who are concerned about stability.

Ngwane says the APF is prepared to engage the state on various issues but this does not presuppose other forms of action. Mass action, he says, is also part of that engagement process. The ANC was the chosen weapon of the working class against apartheid capitalism, 'that is why socialists like myself joined the ANC in the first place.'

Despite being a member of the ANC and being elected as an ANC councillor (and then being subsequently expelled in 2000), Ngwane has been a member of a small Trotskyite grouping – the Socialist Group – for the last ten years or so. It is important, he says, to maintain a working-class perspective which is not always easy to achieve.

Views on Sanco

Sanco, he says, got lost politically in the post-1994 period. He believes that it has lost the majority of its mass based support with very few branches still operating. The ANC, he says, is trying to use Sanco to mobilise for the

elections. This was clearly illustrated in the appointment of public enterprise minister Jeff Radebe onto Sanco's executive. 'Which Sanco branch elected Radebe?' he asks.

Elections

He says the APF has had extensive discussions and debates around its position in relation to the elections and what message should be projected around the elections. He does not believe voting will bring workers power – in fact, he believes elections could be used to undermine struggle.

However, the APF will not call for a boycott, instead, a call will be made for people to engage in a protest vote – meaning that they should vote but spoil their papers. Ngwane says he is going to spoil his ballot paper and write 'Viva socialism, panzi Gear'. The danger of calling for a boycott of the elections is that it will further encourage those who have lost hope not only in voting but in the collective power of mass action. 'People do not have hope in the vote but in their power to continue struggle. The vote was the power we got from collective action.'

The APF will use the election period to campaign and protest around worker needs and expose the class agenda of the ANC.

APF's structure

The APF is not a national organisation and the APF headed by Ngwane is mainly Gauteng-based. It has a number of community-based organisations affiliated to it such as the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. It has about 22 such affiliates in Gauteng and a few in the North West. The APF in the Western Cape (largely controlled by Samwu), for example, is autonomous. Ngwane says that the APF links up with numerous other social movement formations through the Social

Movement Indaba. The APF, he says is a very democratic organisation accommodating wide ranging views. To illustrate this he highlighted some of the debates which took place during a recent workshop on the elections. Debate, he says, even focused on a resolution to support the ANC in the upcoming elections. The organisation also has various structures in place to ensure some sort of mandating process.

The APF was formed in 2000 out of the municipal strike around Egoli 2000. The intention was that the unions would play an integral role in building up the APF. Samwu, he said, was intrinsically linked to the formation of the organisation with the APF, in the early days, attending Cosatu local meetings. He believes that the break with Cosatu was engineered by the alliance leadership. The relationship with organised labour, he says is now rather difficult. He would like to see a closer working relationship. This relationship would however, have to be based on a number of changes taking place in Cosatu. 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.'

Future of social movements

He believes social movements such as the APF will evolve and extend their scope of operation to take on other struggles such as health, labour and other issues. He says social movements should, in theory, have a closer working relationship with organised labour who together with other formations should seek to build a working-class party. The talk of a workers party has been going on for many years. Whilst acknowledging this, he believes the time is becoming increasingly ripe.

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