



Zuma, the Scorpions and the developmental state

There are increasing signs that this government is embracing the concept of a developmental state. But what does this mean in practice? **Devan Pillay** seeks to explore what form of developmental state could emerge in view of current contestations around power.

Sociologist Peter Evans, in his seminal 1995 study *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*, argues that a 'development state' needs to be both autonomous from society, as well as deeply embedded with key social classes in society that have a developmental agenda. He calls this 'embedded autonomy'.

Evans' study counterposes the German sociologist Max Weber's notion of a de-personalised, impartial and rules-driven bureaucracy – a key feature of a modern developmental state – to that of a patrimonial, predatory or clientelistic state. In the latter case personalised, informal relations are dominant, and the state is 'captured' by particular elites and used to advance their narrow, selfish interests – a key feature of the state in post-colonial societies, including much of Africa.

A developmental state is by definition interventionist, and goes against the idea of a neo-liberal minimalist state that leaves 'development' in the hands of market forces. While the RDP promoted the concept of a developmental state, Gear reversed direction, leaving the country in schizophrenic limbo between two conceptions of the state. The failure of neo-liberalism throughout the world to address poverty and growing social inequality, as well as pressures from within the country – including within the ANC-alliance itself – has seen the ANC increasingly embracing the idea of a 'developmental state'.

A 'developmental state', however, can be authoritarian and narrowly focussed on economic growth, and easily degenerate into a patrimonial state – or it can be democratic and accountable to the needs of the poor and marginalised. Which path is South Africa likely to follow?

Recent debate around the developmental state, as well as the turmoil within the ANC over the dismissal of Jacob Zuma as the country's deputy president, is revealing. On the one hand, there is the strong view that the Scorpions – the independent prosecuting authority that has brought corruption charges against the former deputy president – represents the highest ideals of the modern Weberian state.

The Scorpions, many argue, have lived up to their mandate of targeting organised crime and corruption wherever it has found it, without fear or favour. If it means going after the deputy president of the country on suspicion of corruption, then so be it. This is unprecedented in most countries, let alone developing countries, and the dismissal and charging of the deputy president has been hailed across Africa, and throughout the world.

The counter-charge, by Zuma supporters,

that the Scorpions are mere pawns in the hands of Mbeki or other elites vying for power, rings hollow. Apart from the indiscretions of former Scorpions head Bulelani Ngcuka, no evidence has been brought forward to convincingly counter the image of the Scorpions as an impartial body fulfilling its mandate. In the absence of such evidence, we have to conclude that the attack on the Scorpions (and indeed the entire judiciary) reveals a clash between a Weberian state struggling to be born, and patrimonial, clientelistic relations that refuse to die.

This view is strengthened by the demand by some that Zuma be reinstated as deputy president of the country, without it being established by a court of law whether or not he is indeed guilty of corruption. This is perhaps to be expected from quarters such as the ANC Youth League who, despite their occasional resort to Marxist rhetoric, exemplify the aspirant post-colonial elites who seek to capture the state and use it for their own narrow purposes. They mask their aspirations by claiming to fight the 'capitalist agenda' of Mbeki and others associated with him, although a cursory inspection reveals that they merely belong to one aspirant bourgeois faction pitted against another within the ANC.

Their relationship with the slain, tainted mining magnate Brett Kebble, their support for the pseudo-Marxist Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and his disregard for the rule of law, and their various black empowerment deals, amongst other things, bear testimony to their aspirations.

What is more difficult to understand is why the champions of democratic accountability and the developmental state, Cosatu and the SACP, find themselves associated with one set of aspirant bourgeois elites against another.

It is one thing to uphold the rule of law

and the justice system – a key pillar of a democratic developmental state – and demand a fair trial for Zuma. However, it is quite another to seek to undermine the justice system through careless and unproven accusations, in the belief that Zuma represents the best hope for the Left within the alliance.

No one in Cosatu or the SACP has revealed what Zuma's left credentials actually are – beyond the fact that he is a warm and approachable leader (so was Ronald Reagan), that he comes from the working class (so did Lyndon B. Johnson), and that he played a major role in the revival of trade unionism (so did Fredrick Chiluba).

Indeed, Cosatu and the SACP, by tying their project for left renewal within the ANC to Zuma's fortunes, are in danger of reducing the demand for a democratic developmental state to that of a typical patrimonial state that acts in the interests of a few elites. Such a 'captured' state will use revolutionary or even socialist rhetoric to legitimise its rent-seeking behaviour, as in Mugabe's Zimbabwe – thus delaying the prospects of true democratic left renewal even further.

The danger of what the SACP's Jeremy Cronin has called 'zanufication' is perhaps enhanced by the narrow manner in which the 'developmental state' is being discussed by both the ANC and its critics. The ANC has confined the discussion to the East Asian experience, which, apart from Japan and to some extent Hong Kong, were extremely authoritarian states. In their pursuit of rapid industrialisation, the state was embedded with a rising industrial capitalist class. 'Development' was focused on economic growth, where improving physical infrastructure and the accumulation of capital were the primary objectives, and redistribution secondary.

Such rapid growth rested on encouraging rampant consumerism, a squeeze on labour and other human rights, and environmental degradation. Democratisation came to countries like South Korea only after massive labour unrest and the growth of democracy movements during the 1980s.

While much can be learnt about how the East Asian developmental states intervened to promote economic development, including an industrial policy oriented towards nurturing infant industries, directing

investment flows and subsidising labour costs in various ways (including subsidised transport, food and housing), we seem mesmerised by high Asian growth rates as the main measure of 'development'.

What happened to the critique of GDP per capita as a measure of development? All this does is tell us about capital accumulation, and says nothing about how wealth is distributed in a country. Some people are certainly getting rich in India and China today – but are the poor benefiting, or remaining poor? Indeed, are the poor being moved off their land in the name of 'development', forcing them to eke out a living in urban slums? Evidence is emerging that, contrary to World Bank figures, at least some of the poor are in fact getting poorer in India and China.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has for a long time promoted the Human Development Index as a measure of development. In other words, the physical and emotional well-being of human beings in harmony with the natural environment, and not the growth of capital and physical infrastructure, should be the focus of development.

Besides the European social democracies that achieved high levels of redistribution along with economic growth, are there examples of redistributive, democratic developmental states in the post-colonial world?

The state of Kerala, in south-west India, is one of the best examples of the widespread distribution of resources within a context of low economic growth. Patrick Heller, drawing on the work of Peter Evans, shows in his book *The Labor of Development: Workers and the Transformation of Capitalism in Kerala, India* how a different form of 'embedded autonomy' can be achieved, where the state develops strong links with subordinated classes in society, in particular the working class and peasantry. Kerala has been widely praised for its high human development indices, particularly in health, education and nutrition.

Another democratic 'developmental state' that places emphasis on building links with the poor and marginalised is Venezuela. After Hugo Chavez won the presidential election in 1998, the country adopted one of the most democratic constitutions in the world.

His 'Bolivarian revolution' proceeded to redistribute the country's vast nationalised oil wealth to the poor, and earned the wrath of the US-backed elite who ruled the country for centuries. An attempted coup after his re-election in 2002 saw the people rushing to the defence of Chavez, and restored him to power. In 2004 he won an internationally monitored referendum on his rule, with almost 60% of the vote.

Unlike Brazil's ruling Workers' Party, which has avoided confrontation with local elites, the US and the international finance institutions – and in the process making little impact on that country's massive poverty and social inequality – Chavez has used the state to actively promote the interests of the poor.

Why are we mesmerised by the Far East, and not other, more democratic examples of redistributive development? Is it because Kerala's low growth, sustainable development path is too radical for a relatively urbanised South African society oriented towards mimicking individualist, western consumption patterns? Is Venezuela's example of taking on vested interests, and inviting the wrath of US imperialism, too risky for our delicate, post-conflict democratic transition?

If our timid and schizophrenic efforts at 'development' continue to be primarily oriented towards empowering a thin layer of black elites, the vast majority mired in poverty and destitution will demand more radical interventions.

The question is: who will they look towards to provide leadership? A radical-sounding elite only interested in using the poor as a stepping stone towards self-advancement; or a clearly focussed progressive movement of the working class and poor?

In other words, are we headed towards a predatory state that is captured by a rapacious black elite whose main interest is to replace the white elite?

Or can we indeed move towards a democratic developmental state that is characterised by an autonomous, efficient bureaucracy that is also deeply attuned to the needs of the subordinated classes?

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Pillay is an associate professor of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand.