

Transition's Child: The Anti-Privatisation Forum (South Africa)

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Some theoretical considerations

In broad theoretical terms, the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) can be classified under the rubric of 'social movement'. The immediate 'problem' here though, is that there are such an incredible variation of definitions/understandings on offer (for example: Benford and Snow 2000, Cohen, 1985, Della Porta and Diana, 1999, Escobar and Alvarez 1992, Gibson 2006, Tilley 1985) that the term risks becoming simply a catch-all phrase, much like 'civil society', denuded of any consistently and coherently applied meaning. Additionally, some of these theoretical constructs tend to derive their predominate locationality from the history and movement experience in the Western world, thus possessing an inherent bias and limited applicability on a more universal level.

It is thus important, specifically in relation to the South African context and the APF as a post-apartheid creation, to adopt some kind of foundational, 'social movement', theoretical understanding. In this respect, Ballard et al (2004: 2) provide the most applicable definition: "Social movements are ... politically and/or socially directed collectives, often involving multiple organisations and networks, focused on changing one or more elements of the social, political and economic system within which they are located." Such a definition incorporates associated analyses focusing on the triad of political opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes (for example: Clark 2003, Keck and Sikkink 1998, McAdam et al 1997, Melucci 1989, Tarrow 1994) that constitute the key analytical framework of contemporary social movement scholarship. It can thus be applied universally as well as in the more specific realm of investigation into social movements at the community, national and regional levels.

The APF, like most of South Africa's post-apartheid social movements, is an organisation that cuts across all three dominant models/categories used to classify social movements; namely,

“‘old’ movements which directly challenged the state seeking reform or revolution, the notion of ‘new’ movements based on identity-oriented concerns whose target was less the state itself but rather society, and social change, more broadly, or the ‘new-new’ global movements which together challenge a single understanding of and pathway for globalisation (Ballard et al 2004: 19). Indeed, the APF does not fit neatly into any one of either the dominant analytical schema or assigned categories that constitute the main components of social movement theory.

Similarly, the APF is a movement whose creation, subsequent development and ongoing practical engagements and struggles do not conform to any particularistic (social movement) theorisations of formation, mobilisation and/or activity. While sharing many of the macro stimuli and characteristics (for example, neo-liberal globalisation and societal shifts from the realm of production to consumption) of more recent social movements all over the globe the APF has also been fundamentally shaped by the uniquely South African. This includes apartheid-inspired constructions of race and class, the post-apartheid political dominance of a multi-faceted liberation movement which includes ‘old’ social movements and the exigencies of specifically crafted neo-liberal social and economic policies in the context of extreme socio-economic inequality and the energetic pursuit of a deracialised capitalism.

As such, the APF’s social movement character and ‘status’ has been, and continues to be, driven by a mix of structural, distributional, consumptive and identity pressures/characteristics. In this sense, the APF is neither theoretically exceptional nor common in respect of the sources and corresponding explanations of its origins, development and activities. In the words of Ashwin Desai (2006), South Africa’s “movements of the poor must be celebrated for being what they are: relatively small groupings of awakening antagonism in a sea of political apathy, nationalist ignorance and informal repression.”

The context

When South Africa’s first ever one-person, one-vote elections in 1994 resulted in an overwhelming victory for the African National Congress (ANC), it was the South African working class that was at the forefront of celebrating the arrival of a new democracy. After all,

the ANC and its liberation movement allies were now in political control of the state thanks to the votes of those – mostly to be found in the ranks of the working class - who had, throughout South Africa's modern history, been denied the right of institutionalised democratic participation simply because of their racial categorisation.

Accompanying this however, there still remained a broad based (but ultimately mistaken) expectation amongst the working class that the new ANC state would immediately begin to pursue a more socialist - or at the least, radically redistributive - political economy. The basis upon which such expectation had been built derived from the militant, mass-based political and socio-economic struggles of that working class (predominately in the form of unions and civic/community organisations) since the mid-1980s, alongside the continued 'socialist' rhetoric of the ANC itself.

Throughout the late 1980s and first two years of the 1990s, the ANC had consistently kept to it's 'line' that, once in power, it would nationalise key sectors of the economy, would set about a radical redistribution of land and wealth and would ensure that the black working class became the main 'driver'/ controller of a 'people's' state dedicated to popular/participatory democracy; further, the ANC's adoption, in 1994, of the fairly radical, social-democratic *Reconstruction & Development Programme* (as its electoral platform) served to fuel such expectations. This was despite the fact that the South African working class was itself already weakened, differentiated and divided as a result of the combined effects of a long-running capitalist crisis/recession and the apartheid state's divide-and-rule approach to the demands/struggles of unions as well as to those of the less easily controlled community/civic organisations (Murray, 1994: 156-158).

Even if it had been long apparent to some that the ANC was never going to follow even a proto-socialist developmental path once in power (McKinley, 1997), the bubble was clearly and publicly burst with the ANC state's 1996 unveiling of the neoliberal GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) macro-economic policy. GEAR codified the new government's commitment to macro-fiscal discipline, export-oriented growth, privatisation/ corporatisation of state assets, a flexible labour market, decreased levels of corporate taxation and full-scale integration into the logic of a globalised capitalist system of production and accumulation (Habib

and Padayachee 2000). Just as crucially though, GEAR served to further catalyse a fundamental change in the ANC's (and thus the newly democratic state's) relationship with 'civil society' – from one that had historically been defined by a recognition/embracing of the leading political and ideological role and place of the forces of the broad working class, to one that now prioritised institutionalised corporatist relationships involving all social forces in the project of 'nation building' through political/ideological 'consensus'.

The organisational groundwork for this rightward ideological shift of the ANC had been laid soon after the ANC's return from exile in early 1990. Instead of supporting and strengthening the plethora of community/civic organisations (along with progressive unions) that had formed the backbone of the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s – and which had come together in the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its successor, the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) – the ANC called on all civics/community structures to fold-up and become part of ANC branches or to join the newly launched South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) which, it was announced, would become the 'fourth' member of the Tripartite Alliance. Simultaneously, the ANC further formalised its political/organisational alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the traditional 'party of the working class', the South African Communist Party (SACP), by setting up numerous (consultative) Alliance structures and drafting key leadership figures into its electoral list for all levels of government.

Consistent with the socio-political thrust of GEAR, the ANC government also set about forming national structures and adopting legislation to give institutional and legal form to its corporatist commitments (Ballard et al 2006: 397). All of this fit comfortably within the ANC government's push "for a more formalised civil society constituency as part of a developmental model where formally organised groups participate in official structures to claim public resources" and where "the role of such organised groups is constructed along the lines of official government programmes, without space to contest the fundamentals of those programmes" (Greenberg and Ndlovu, 2004: 32-33).

Cumulatively, these developments meant that by the mid-late 1990s the vast majority of what had constituted a South African civil society rooted in broad working class politics and struggles, and

which had sustained the hope of millions for an anti-capitalist transformation of South African society, had largely 'disappeared'. Whether swallowed by the ANC, absorbed into other Tripartite Alliance structures, hobbled by the co-option of key leaders into the state and associated corporatist institutions or starved of financial resources, the bottom line was that the political and organisational terrain for active and militant resistance to the ANC's creeping neo-liberalism, elite deal making and wholesale acceptance of the institutionalised framework of bourgeois democracy had been (temporarily) contained.

It might well be argued (and indeed it has been), that the presence of COSATU and the SACP, as part of both a formal alliance with the ruling ANC party as well as the 'traditional left' in South Africa, necessarily translates into a vibrant 'working class civil society' capable of, and willing to, contest fundamentally the politics, policies and overall developmental agenda of the state¹. However, the reality is that the acceptance of an unequal and essentially subservient political/organisational relationship within an ANC-dominated alliance (McKinley 2001: 183-206) - which is supposed to act as the political master of the state - as well as participation in corporatist institutionalism, has served to tie organised workers and large numbers of community activists with historic ties to the Alliance, into a false sense of ideological and strategic unity with the ANC/state and, even if to a much lesser extent, with corporate capital.

The logical result of these developments was a precipitous decline in the overall living standards of the working class simultaneous to a further material and social stratification within it.² Those who lost their formal jobs (alongside their families/networks) and/or whose labour became even more precarious were hit hardest by the huge escalations in the costs of basic services and a concomitant increase in the use of cost-recovery mechanisms such as water and electricity cut-offs. By the turn of the century, millions had experienced cut-offs and evictions as the result of the ANC's neo-liberal orgy (McDonald and Smith 2002, Cottle 2003) and were also being devastated by an HIV-AIDs epidemic, catalysed by official denialism and the state's refusal to provide decommodified access to anti-retrovirals. As if all of this was not enough, the ANC state's capitalist-friendly land policies, which ensured that apartheid land ownership patterns remained virtually intact, meant that South Africa's long-suffering rural population continued to taste the ever more bitter fruits of labour exploitation and landlessness.

It was the cumulative result of such political/strategic choices and socio-economic realities, combined with the failure of the main traditional, organised working class forces to lead and sustain counter mobilisations and active class resistance, that eventually saw the rise of new social movements/community organisations³, at first in the main urban centres and then also in some rural areas. One of these movements was the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF).

A new 'home of struggle'

The initial/immediate impetus for the formation of the APF in July 2000, derived from increasing opposition by students, workers and the unemployed poor to a combination of neoliberal measures implemented by the City of Johannesburg (COJ) and the University of Witwatersrand (Wits). Out-sourcing of work at Wits and COJ was resulting in large-scale job losses. Tens of thousands of poor community residents were being cut-off from their electricity and water supply as a result of COJ's cost-recovery model⁴, and thousands of others were being evicted from council and bond houses because they could no longer pay the rent/bond. Many of the activists that led the push towards the formal establishment of the APF had been active within various structures of the Alliance and had tried to fight the implementation of neo-liberal policies from within those structures. The shutting down of such opposition and dissent (in many cases, through expulsion) provided further impetus for the establishment of the APF, with the overall organisational thrust being to unite the various grievances/struggles and mobilise support from broader community and other 'civil society' organisations. Thus was the APF born, embedded in historic and ongoing political and ideological struggles, yet not formally aligned to any political organisation or organised ideological tendency.

At its formation, the APF consisted of various individual activists (most with substantial histories of involvement in socialist political and union struggles), alongside the Wits branch of the South African Students Council, the Johannesburg Central Branch of the SACP, the South African Municipal Workers Union (Gauteng Province), the Wits Branch of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union, the Independent Municipal & Amalgamated Trade Union, Youth for Work; the South African National Civics Organisation (Gauteng Province), the

Kathorus Concerned Residents, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, the Evaton Reconstruction Forum, Jubilee South Africa and five small socialist political groupings.

In its founding statement, the APF set out the key reason for its existence. Namely, “to bring together the collective struggles of poor/working class communities against the devastating effects of capitalist neo-liberalism in South Africa ... (so as) to effect fundamental shifts in the basic service/needs policies of the state so that the majority of South Africans can enjoy the full realisation of their basic human needs and rights”. The longer-term vision of the APF is, “to bring about radical changes in the character and content of democracy in South Africa so that ordinary poor and working people can have popular and effective control over their lives.”

The APF’s first year of existence threw up many practical challenges and revealed, at an early stage in its development, that an independent, politically radical social movement was unpalatable to most of the leadership of those ‘left’ forces allied to the ANC. Without any meaningful financial resources, the movement was reliant on donations from individual activists, a small number of sympathisers and in-kind support from unions like SAMWU and a few progressive NGOs. The practical impact of this was the predominance of individual activists, dedicated unionists and members of political groupings in the initial ‘activist forum’ structure, resulting in limited involvement of the rank-and-file members of affiliated community organisations. Coupled to this, several of the organisations that had initially helped form the APF but which were all allied to the ANC-Alliance in one way or another⁵, pulled out of the APF during its first year of existence – the main stated reason for this being that the APF had become too ‘anti-ANC’ and ‘anti-government’.

Nonetheless, the APF did manage to mobilise community opposition - in Soweto, the East Rand and to a lesser extent in the Vaal region - to continuing service cut-offs and evictions and to support boycotts of payments for basic services. Importantly, the tactical approach to these early struggles was to first approach local and provincial government officials and relevant government-initiated community structures to try and raise community grievances and engage in a serious dialogue to find solutions. Unfortunately, but predictably, these efforts were rebuffed, resulting in the adoption of a second phase of struggle which saw the APF bringing the various

community organisations together to come up with a set of common demands and a Programme of Action (POA) leading to intensified direct action campaigns in the communities themselves. This resulted in several marches targeting local government/political officials, the development of more concrete demands around service delivery and a greater public profile for the APF, under its own banner.

It was to the APF's longer-term credit (and indicative of the accumulated, pre and post-1994 organisation-building and struggle experience of core activists) that, early on, it developed a core set of objectives, demands and a recurrent programme of action (POA) by which to both guide its own activities and against which to measure failure/progress. Some of the key objectives included: a halt to all privatisation of public sector entities and return of public control and ownership; the co-ordination and intensification of anti-privatisation struggles in communities in Gauteng under the overall umbrella of the APF; the development of a programme of political education beyond local-level issues; the development/building of a broader layer of movement cadres; overcoming the conceptual and practical division between community and workplace; and, the development of domestic and international links/solidarities with like-minded movements and NGOs.

Key demands formulated included: the ending of all service cut-offs and evictions; implementation by government of free basic services for all (water, electricity, health, education and housing) alongside a progressive block tariff system; the scrapping of all service-related arrears in poor communities; increased national subsidisation of local government for basic service delivery; an end to mass retrenchments of workers; and, the implementation of meaningful negotiation/ consultation between government and poor communities over policy decisions affecting those communities.

Confirming the APF's historical foundations in the myriad struggle tactics of earlier, mass-based civics, the basic POA developed consisted of: various forms of mass, direct action at local, provincial and national levels; regular mass community meetings; alliance-building and solidarity activities with community organisations outside of Gauteng as well as with organised labour; door-to-door campaigning in communities; submission of memoranda of demands and

policy alternatives to all levels of government; and, regular, community-based report-back meetings.

By mid 2001, the APF had almost tripled its community affiliate membership to eight community organisations (all in Gauteng Province). The spirit of resistance to and negative impact of, government's service delivery policies had intensified within poor communities, with youth and pensioners making-up a large portion of the new membership in community organisations moving toward the APF. With this growth came the dire need for meaningful financial resources and in late 2001 the APF succeeded in securing core funding from the U.K.-based progressive funder, War on Want, for an initial period of three years. This allowed the APF to open-up its own offices (in COSATU House) and to hire two full-time employees (an organiser and administrator).

There was much debate within the APF over receiving donor funding issue, mostly centred around the potentially negative consequences on the political and organisational character of the movement. The eventual decision to move in this direction, supported by the vast majority of the APF's membership, was informed by a commitment to remain politically and organisationally independent (it was communicated to the funder that the APF would pull out of the funding agreement if there was any move to overtly influence/dictate) and by the fact that the APF was unable to source meaningful financial resources from its own poor constituency/membership as well as the reality of a complete unwillingness on the part of South African-based funding/donor agencies to seriously consider financial support to a movement such as the APF.

Paralleling these developments were changes in the structural character of the APF from its earlier reliance on an activist forum. Formal office bearers were elected (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) and an APF Council was formed which would act as the highest decision-making body and have representation from all community affiliates, political groupings and in which individual activists could also participate. In addition, a smaller Executive Committee was formed to deal with ongoing practical work and a range of sub-committees - e.g., education, organising and media - were setup to carry out specific tasks of the movement. The practical

result was that the APF became much more capable of identifying and implementing a range of activities (both within APF and in communities) on a larger and more intensive scale.

The intent was to place community organisations at the organisational centre of the APF where organisational autonomy and difference would be respected in combination with more formal structures to ensure collective decision-making, a leadership core, accountability mechanisms and the primacy of a democratic process. In this respect, the APF was making a concerted attempt to break from past experiences in the liberation movement and some of the 'old' social movements, of a lack of internal democracy and the resultant bureaucratisation.

However, during this early period of the APF's existence and struggle, there was insufficient attention given over to the problem of relations of power in respect of gender. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a male-dominated leadership and a lack of focused integration and discussion of such power relations and how this impacted on the political and organisational character of the APF, to the detriment of the movement. The dominant tendency within the APF, following a well-worn 'tradition' amongst most left movements/parties, was (and to a lesser degree continues) to see 'gender issues' as a *ad-hoc* matter, not as central and necessary to forging an equality of participation and capacitation. Resistance to openly confront male chauvinism, both at a personal and structural level, has been one of the ongoing results.

Despite the often-times unwieldy character of the APF's ideological and socio-historical heterogeneity (which can also be viewed as a strength, an inherent barrier against enforced conformity) the movement held itself together chiefly because the dominant strategic approach to struggle was informed by a willingness to engage in concrete action, on the ground. While there was an acknowledgment of the danger of bureaucratisation, the introduction of formal structures provided the necessary space for an open contestation of a diverse set of views crucial to any internal organisational democracy, without which there would have been no sustained or stable basis upon which to move further into communities and orient the APF towards struggles taking place. The new slogan of the APF – 'Working Class Struggle in Action' – captured the spirit of a strategy that sought to ensure that the character of this struggle would not be predetermined by a set political/ideological programme (as had been the experience of many APF activists in the

liberation movement) but rather defined/shaped by the APF's broad, working class constituency, in struggle, where, and as, they live.

Also crucial to the APF's early (and continued) survival was the fact that the movement stood on its own – i.e., the APF was not formed through an NGO, academic and/or political organisation and not cocooned within/umbilically tied to, the institutional and personal relationships that play themselves out in such organisations. This has allowed for ideological and tactical contestation as well as practical changes in the structure of the movement to be approached and engaged on an APF-specific terrain, not through organisational/individual proxies.

However, this did not mean that the perennial problems of ego, opportunism, sectarian political vanguardism and organisational unaccountability were not experienced within the APF. It is just that when these problems arose, as they did from early on in the APF's existence, the APF was largely able to deal with/approach them, with varying degrees of success, independently of whatever else was going on in other organisations and personal relationships on the South African 'left' – through its organic, democratic structures involving all affiliates/members. This character strand, a clear break from the dominant organisational forms of South Africa's past liberation movement and more contemporary political parties, served the APF well.

Growth, challenges and contradictions

By the end of 2001, the APF had established itself as one of the leading post-apartheid social movements in South Africa. Besides the formation of an allied organisation in Cape Town (under the same name), the presence of other social movements like the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF) in Durban, the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) in Cape Town and the Landless People's Movement (LPM) at national level lent a more collective and solidaristic feel to the struggles of the APF. Along with these movements, the APF participated in the activities around the World Conference against Racism (WCAR in Durban) in late August 2001, where all the weaknesses as well as potential strengths of the new social movements were on display. Similarly, while the APF-hosted National Exploratory Workshop in December 2001, which brought together a wide range of anti-privatisation forces, was an exciting event it's potential

was largely undermined by an unwillingness to get beyond political/ideological differences and the scourge of entrenched regional/organisational parochialism (a constant affliction of many of the post-1994 social movements that has greatly hampered the possibilities of unified action and meaningful solidarity).

Throughout the year 2002, the APF continued to grow and so too did the various service-related struggles in communities increase. Scores of mass marches and direct actions were initiated and/or supported, numerous educational initiatives started and sustained and legal support provided (both inside and outside the APF) as state repression against community protest intensified. However, it was events during and after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in August-September 2002 that represented a watershed (both positive and negative) in the development of the APF (and other social movements) on a number of fronts:

- The range of activities engaged, especially the ‘big march’ on 31st August to the WSSD, gave a sense of common purpose and spirit of resistance to APF community affiliates and brought in a range of new community organisations and individuals into the APF;
- The splits with other ANC-aligned ‘civil society’ formations catalysed a clearer political and ideological ‘identity’ but also marked the end of any serious potential for alliances with such forces;
- New links were made with a few progressive NGOs and international organisations as well as potential funders;
- The problem of the ‘big event’ psychosis amongst the movements was highlighted, and thus the need to orient even further towards organisation building and grassroots activities;
- The opening up of opportunities to forge greater solidarity with other movements through the newly formed Social Movements Indaba (SMI); and,
- The development of unrealistic expectations of the APF, by its own leaders/members, fuelled by a misplaced sense of triumphalism and illusions in what could be achieved in relation to changes in state/government policies.

One of the most immediate ‘results’ of the WSSD events for the APF, was an even more intensified crackdown on dissent and protest by the state’s repressive apparatus, combined with open hostility/public attacks by the ANC and its Alliance partners, COSATU and the SACP. In June 2003, and at the behest of the ANC, the APF was evicted from its offices in COSATU House, with the trade union federation leadership unapologetically attempting to circumvent the legal rules binding tenancy. It was this, combined with the consistent lack of any support/

solidarity from the leadership of COSATU unions for community-led anti-privatisation struggles – with the occasional exception of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) -, that directly impacted on the APF membership’s longer-term, negative view of COSATU (and by extension, the SACP).

Internally, the ‘inheritance’ of the events around the WSSD, proved to be a mixed bag for the APF. Early in 2003, an interim APF Constitution was adopted (as a “Memorandum of Understanding’). This was important because it gave the APF a foundational structure and purpose that was collectively decided-upon (a constant reference point) and which, over time, would prove to be invaluable in dealing with threats to collective democracy, ideological and organisational divisions, general sectarianism and lack of accountability. Further, in an attempt to adapt to the changing character of South African ‘left’ politics and the affiliate growth of the APF (by mid-2003 there were around 12-14 functioning affiliate members), regional structures were formed with the purpose of decentralising organisation and mobilisation and providing a more local-level focus which could better relate to ongoing struggles and needs. While this move saw the beginnings of more focused activities and struggles on the ground, in communities, it simultaneously revealed many weaknesses in respect of levels of community organisation and the uneven state of development of APF cadres.

By late 2003, the more specific struggles around water were given a boost with the APF-led formation of the Coalition Against Water Privatisation (CAWP), which was an attempt to bring together community organisations, progressive NGOs/academics and unions to forge a broad united front in the struggle against water privatisation (with a specific focus on pre-paid water meters). For the next two years, it was CAWP, alongside the APF, that was at the forefront of fighting the ‘water wars’ that erupted in the communities of Orange Farm and Phiri through ‘Operation Vulamanzi’ (‘Water for All’) – a campaign which re-appropriated the 1980s struggle tactic of physically bypassing certain water ‘control’ measures, in order to freely access water and, in the process, strike a grassroots blow for the immediate ‘decommodification’ of water and simultaneous self-empowerment of the community.

Not surprisingly, these struggles were vigorously and violently suppressed and resulted in numerous legal cases having to be fought. Besides the more immediate financial pressures that these developments placed on the APF/CAWP as a result of endless legal battles, the sustained repression and saturation propaganda by government/ Johannesburg Water, took its toll on APF/CAWP community activists/members. As a result, direct physical resistance waned and tactics shifted to a more educational/legal approach which included support for a constitutional rights legal challenge to pre-paid water meters and the limited provision— by the state - of free basic water to poor communities.

The APF held its first Annual General Meeting (AGM) in early 2004 - with a total of 19 community affiliates in attendance - where proceedings were dominated by intense discussion and debate around the approach to electoral politics (in the context of upcoming national elections) as well as whether or not the movement should formally adopt socialism as its goal. A majority decided that the APF should not enter into the electoral arena, noting that this was a tactical decision. While not, in principle, against participation in bourgeois elections, the majority felt that the time was not now and the APF's resources and energies should be dedicated to rebuilding fighting organisations on the ground and further exposing communities to the failures of ANC government policies, the nature of the ANC's politics and the sources of socio-economic problems for the poor.

While socialism was adopted as the long-term vision and goal of the APF this was not accompanied by any serious interrogation of what this might concretely mean for the APF or whether or not there was a common understanding amongst members/ affiliates as to the nature/character of socialism. One of the more useful 'products' of the APF's decision on electoral politics was the development of a local government platform, the result of a lengthy series of participatory meetings and workshops involving most of its active membership. The platform was a key component of the APF's mobilisation activities leading up to the 2005 local government elections. Since that time, it has acted as the APF's Manifesto on key problems and alternatives at local government level.

Despite the growth of the APF and the range of community struggles that had taken place since the WSSD, there were, by mid-2005, clear signs of a developing political and organisational crisis in the APF. The more general crisis stemmed from the APF getting caught up in the 'moment', with too much focus and energy placed on political/ideological debate (and thus the organisational form of APF), that did not involve the majority of membership but rather mostly those from the political groupings as well as individual activists-intellectuals. Coupled to this was a widespread tendency amongst some influential APF activists, to believe that large-scale mobilisations, media coverage and attendance at international conferences/meetings were the main indicators of the APF's 'success' and growing stature/ influence in broader society and amongst the South African and international 'left'.

More specifically though, the crisis centred around growing concerns of many community affiliates related to a lack of accountability and undemocratic behaviour of political groupings in the APF, with two leading members of one of these groups also being the only two full-time employees of the movement (thus having privileged access to membership and resources). The enduring political/strategic approach of these groupings – i.e., to act as the 'political vanguard' of the APF so as to transform it into a leading component of a desired new political entity – usually conceived as a Mass Workers Party – was practically translated into making use of APF resources and employed positions to push such an agenda and to elevate 'leadership' into supra-organisational positions. The unfortunate 'methodology' that accompanied this political agenda was to attack (both personally and politically) anyone who stood against such a 'line' and to attempt to organisationally and politically impose their own nascent independent political party formation to contest local government elections – the Operation Khanyisa Movement⁶ - onto the APF as a whole.

The combined results of this situation were first, a split within the APF's oldest and largest affiliate, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee⁷, and subsequently an internal battle within the APF involving the political groupings and a small number of affiliates on the one 'side' and the rest of the affiliates and individual activists on the other 'side'. While this battle was fundamentally about respect for democracy and accountability within the APF, it unfortunately produced extremely negative personalisation of issues and problems as well as unnecessary

labelling and divisive behaviour. All of this revealed a number of weaknesses within the APF: the 'pop star' tendencies of some of the leadership and a growing intolerance of criticism from within the movement; a all-too-readily employed tendency to use the collective resources and organisational processes of the movement for more narrow political/ideological agendas; and, the general political and ideological under-development of a second layer of activists/cadres despite the fact that the APF arguably possessed the most developed organisational structure, internal democracy and mobilisational programme of all of the post-apartheid social movements in South Africa.

The broader context of what was happening in other social movements added fuel to the fire. By the beginning of 2006 intense, internecine personal, political and organisational battles had resulted in the effective collapse of the CCF, the partial disintegration of the LPM and the AEC and the splitting of Jubilee South Africa. These developments resulted in a dominant tendency amongst leading social movement activists/intellectuals (and many sympathisers/supporters) – with the APF being no exception – to see the period as one of a 'down-turn' in struggle. While such a perspective was understandable, the fact is that the 'down-turn' was much more associated with the movements themselves, not actual struggles on the ground, which continued to take place across the country in hundreds of poor communities (with little accompanying media coverage and/or more direct involvement of the movements themselves). One of the most crucial, cumulative outcomes of this was a 'turning-inwards' of the social movement 'left', with many experienced activists simply leaving movements in frustration and/or disgust (and again, the APF was no exception).

Nonetheless, it was the existence and conscious nurturing of democratic structures and space within the APF, combined with the general willingness of the majority of membership to engage in open/honest debate and polemics that prevented the APF from disintegrating/splitting. In addition to the employment of a new organiser, an entirely new set of leaders were elected democratically and transparently (with a third of that leadership now comprising women activists) after much heated debate around the character and context of the crisis and open contestation for all office bearer positions at the 2006 AGM. The movement had stood firm and was able to emerge intact, if a bit battered and bruised.

Advances, setbacks and eventual implosion

For the remainder of 2006 and during 2007-2008, the APF experienced a period of political and organisational consolidation (and repair). The main practical examples of this were:

- New policies governing individual and affiliate behaviour;
- Greater accountability of APF leadership through expansion of the office bearer collective (to include regional and sub-committee coordinators);
- Completion of an affiliate audit to identify political and organisational weaknesses and strengths - and thus locate areas in need of intervention and support - as well as expose 'paper' affiliates (i.e., those without any meaningful democratic leadership, structure and process);
- Greater accountability and transparency in relation to movement expenditure and use of resources;
- A shift away from the 'big event' approach to a greater focus on systematic organising for struggle at the community level.

Time was also given over for membership to:

- Re-look at objective realities and the success/failure of adopted tactics;
- Assess the underlying reasons for the 'down-turn' in practical struggles within APF organised communities;
- Discuss the 'lessons' emanating from the disintegration/divisions within other movements;
- Debate and discuss the changed balance of forces within the state, the ANC-led Alliance and broader society.

Even though such internal reflection and consolidation took substantial time and energy, there were positive outcomes on the practical front of struggle. One of the most important shifts was to 'marry' direct action and organising/mobilisation to the main struggle in a particular community. This allowed for a more focused approach to initiating/sustaining struggles in the context of the APF's human and resource constraints and produced a broadening out of some affiliates to encompass surrounding informal/shack settlements. As a result, the APF was able to reach out to other communities such as Queenstown (Eastern Cape), Rammolutsi (Free State) and Khutsong (North West) where there was an identified desire for linkages and practical support as well as develop and deploy organising teams (through a resuscitated Organiser's Forum) in order to focus collective energies/resources and build a social base for future direct action.

New areas of APF work-activism undertaken included;

- HIV-Aids research in targeted communities, linked to issues of service delivery and living conditions;
- Research on pre-paid water meters with links to the previously instituted legal action to test constitutional rights to water;
- Beginning to address and mobilise around, environmental degradation in communities and workplaces;
- Furthering practical solidarities with retrenched workers.

Additionally, women activists within the APF formed a 'Women's Forum' (Remmoho – 'All of us together'), with the goal being to act as a force for change in the APF and social movements more generally by developing an analysis of how violence against/attitudes towards women is the result of the use of power dynamics between men and women and then taking this analysis and the parallel struggle against violence against women into the APF/social movements. Although this was an extremely positive development in general terms, the formation of Remmoho sparked some intense debate within the APF, the dominant character of which revealed the specific extent to which many APF members-activists remained rooted in a socially conservative gender mind-set and practice.

On the more external-solidarity front, the APF continued to be the leading driver behind the SMI throughout 2007-2008. Despite its own internal challenges alongside the general weaknesses within/amongst social movements across the country, the APF actively participated in the various Social Forum meetings and processes, forming the largest contingent from South Africa to the 2007 World Social Forum held in Nairobi, Kenya and providing human and material support to the Southern African Social Forum. Various APF community activists also continued to conduct international solidarity and fund-raising trips, especially as part of the Coalition against Water Privatisation and its ongoing constitutional rights legal case, while the APF hosted several international solidarity groups and activists-researchers.

In 2008 and in response to the widespread xenophobic attacks in Gauteng (and other parts of the country), the APF - through the SMI - became the leading organisation in the Coalition against Xenophobia (CAX). Even though CAX was able to successfully organise a large march in Johannesburg and undertake a series of educational and other mobilisational events in

conjunction with an impressive range of NGOs and immigrant organisations, the xenophobic attacks - and subsequent responses - exposed contradictions between the APF's macro anti-xenophobic politics and the actual attitudes and practice of some of its community members and constituent affiliate organisations. In turn this raised important but ultimately limited discussions within the APF (and left social movements more broadly) about the links between the inherently nationalist framing of much of the APF's tactical 'engagements' with, and demands of, the state around basic services/needs and the incubation of xenophobic attitudes/practices.

Additionally, the APF also had to confront the cumulative impact of the factionalist politics within the ruling ANC which saw the demise of former ANC and South African President Mbeki and the subsequent rise to power of Jacob Zuma (with the backing of COSATU and the SACP) after the ANC's Polokwane Congress in late 2007. While the APF consciously engaged in an ongoing debate throughout 2008-2009 within its ranks centred on the ideological content and political character of the Zuma-led power-block, there was little doubt that at the community level the left-populist rhetoric of Zuma – combined with the previously intense opposition to the Mbeki regime – created both short-term confusion and a variegated 'turn' away from independent movement-community politics and struggle towards institutionalised party politics and a creeping (Zuma-inspired) social conservatism. Coupled to this was the ever-intensifying, systemic socio-economic crisis that has been at the heart of South Africa's ongoing maldevelopment since 1994, combined with parallel failures of the ANC-run state under the new Zuma regime to deliver on its renewed promises of basic service provision and work opportunities to the poor. Even more so than before, this forced much of the APF's constituency/membership into a narrower survivalist mode.

Here it is crucial to note that the social base of movements such as the APF was always dominated by the 'other' working class – i.e., casualised workers, those in the 'informal sector', the unemployed and more particularly, unemployed women. In classical 'left' parlance, for movements such as the APF, an extended and flexible 'community' of work and life came to replace the formal 'workplace' as the epicentre of organising collective resistance to capitalist (neoliberal) political, productive and social relations. However, since the vast majority of those in the kind of 'communities' that constituted the APF represented different strata within the

working class, strata whose labour/work cannot be formally ‘measured’ and thus organised on a more explicit ‘capital-labour’ relational nexus, they were often seen/treated (by the left in general) as secondary to the material and political/organisational positionality of formal, organised workers. This not only made the possibilities of enjoining practical and political working class solidarities and struggles extremely difficult for the APF at a time of intensified material deprivation and political-ideological confusion, but also engendered a politics that easily gravitated towards a mode of individualism and entrepreneurial engagement.

While these crises and failures spawned a general upsurge in community struggles around ‘service delivery’ failures and frustrations (most notably involving housing issues in informal/shack settlements) throughout the 2007-2010 period, the APF was mostly unable to link up with and help organise/support such struggles, although there were notable exceptions as noted earlier. Largely taken up with trying to support and sustain existing struggles and community affiliates, the APF faced a situation where increasing numbers of its members came to see and treat its limited financial resources (largely the result of dwindling financial support derived from funders) and its organisational spaces/processes as a means for their personal survival or aggrandisement. This was further catalysed by the loss of experienced activists - due predominately to personal circumstances, job offers and life choices⁸ - combined with the renewed impact of continued attempts by coercive forces of the state to crush and/or co-opt community dissent.

The APF suffered a huge setback in 2009, when its full-time organiser, the organiser for CAWP as well as the APF Johannesburg regional organiser (all male) were involved in an almost year-long internal APF disciplinary process for sexual misconduct that caused massive disruption to - and division within - the APF and its affiliates. Besides the eventual expulsion of all three men (which translated into the loss of the APF’s core organising capacity) the personal, political and organisational fall-out was a massive body blow to the movement, effectively paralysing its practical struggles and organisational coherence. At its last AGM in early 2010 which was dominated by personal attacks, bickering and bitterly contested leadership elections, two co-founders and long-standing leaders of the APF stepped down. Although a new set of Office Bearers was elected at the AGM, within a few months the APF was effectively bankrupt – with

its fairly sizeable financial reserves and donor funds having been squandered and/or misused - and its democratic structures and processes lay in tatters. A little more than ten years after its formation, the APF had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist as a functioning social movement

A personal reflection

If there was a consistent ‘Achilles’ Heel’ of social movements like the APF, it was the accumulation of unrealistic and misplaced expectations of singular (or dominant) leadership of socio-political struggles within poor communities and a consistent lack of appreciation of the practical means (both in relation to human and financial resources) to create and sustain such a leadership role. It was a serious weakness and one which, unfortunately, remains impregnated in the general psyche of many leading (left) movement activists and general memberships and which can only and always lead to disillusionment/disappointment and rationalisations for turning social movements into pre-figured vanguardist political entities and/or ready-made ‘ATM’s’⁹ to access financial resources.

However, it is no good to simply pronounce on these problems without also considering what is required in the future to adequately respond to, engage with, and potentially ‘solve’, them. In other words, it is wrong to assume that movements like the APF moved in some sort of linear, constantly growing, more resourced and perennially progressive direction. A movement can be ‘in touch’ with the mood of the ‘mass’ and can be able to define the political and socio-economic conditions and subsequent impact on poor communities, but if it does not have serious and committed activists to mobilise/manage resources, to enjoin open debate and discussion, to support/sustain organisation within communities and who respect democratic structures and collective decisions, then the ability to do so is not much more than an intellectual exercise. Is this not the fundamental lesson to be learnt from the brief history of South Africa’s post-apartheid social movements, including the APF?

Without a sustainable core of dedicated, principled and disciplined activists there is little chance any social movement can hope to overcome either the internal or external contextual problems/challenges faced. Meeting this challenge is not solely a matter of strategic or tactical

vision in relation to the 'objective conditions', having the 'correct' political programme, successful recruitment or being able to better mobilise and propagate ideas. It is the (subjective) quality and (objective) quantity of 'human resources' thrown up by the ongoing struggles that take place, and will continue to take place, with or without the presence of a movement like the APF was, that is central to the effective future of left social movements and accompanying community struggles. Tied to this, the base character, identity and vision of any meaningful social movement must be determined and shaped by the primacy of what its constituency/members confront and thus desire to change. Similarly, in which its theoretical and/or strategic vision remains true to those realities but also is able to move beyond them if conditions and contexts shift accordingly. Further, movements must find new and creative ways to create collective solidarities – human, organisational and political/ ideological – in both their own constituencies and in respect of the broader 'community of the oppressed. Without this, they are doomed to, at best, remain an occasionally effective 'nuisance'; at worst, to become irrelevant to all but those who simply are seeking a means to further their own political and/or personal agendas.

In spite of the above, the impact of the APF during its existence, given the limited timeframe, the accumulated challenges of 'liberation movement' loyalties and the serious lack of human and material resources - was multi-faceted and substantial:

- It was at the forefront of: creating a new organisational 'voice' for those that had been socially, economically and politically marginalised;
- It instilled a new sense of collective activism and demand for social/political redress amongst poor communities;
- It helped shift the terrain of political and social engagement and debate in South African society as a whole and in the process, expand the boundaries of democratic politics and representation beyond the status quo framework;
- It managed to effect shifts of some specific socio-economic policies in favour of the poor.

The APF's relevance stemmed from the reality of the ANC state's betrayal of the broad working class (i.e., inclusive of the underemployed and unemployed), both organisationally and politically. Indeed, its very existence was a direct result of this and the accompanying capitalist neo-liberalism that was subsequently pursued. Its role was to (partially) fill the organisational and political/ideological vacuum that had been created, so as to offer a new avenue for the voices

and struggles of the poor and a means to impact on the most basic needs of the poor majority through mass mobilisation/action, organisational coherence, political engagement, educational initiatives and the creation of a new consciousness of the possibilities of radical change.

Notes

¹ Such arguments have been vigorously proffered by successive leaders of both COSATU and the SACP ever since the early 1990s. While references are far too numerous to list here, most of the key documents/ speeches that have been made public over the last ten years or so can be found on the respective websites of the two organisations: <http://www.cosatu.org.za> and <http://www.sacp.org.za> .

² There are numerous studies and reports conducted over the last several years that confirm this state of affairs. For example, see: United Nations Development Programme (2009), *Human Development Report 2009, Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) ; South African Cities Network (2006), 'State of the Cities Report 2006' - <http://www.sacities.net/knowledge/research/publications/395-socr2006> ; University of South Africa (2004), 'Projection of Future Economic and Sociopolitical Trends in South Africa up to 2025', Research Report No. 351 (Pretoria: Bureau of Market Research); United Nations Development Programme (2003), *South Africa Human Development Report, The Challenge of Sustainable Development in South Africa: Unlocking People's Creativity* (London: Oxford University Press); Department of Social Development (2002), 'Transforming the Present, Protecting the Future: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security for South Africa' (Pretoria)

³ Some of the main/key movements and organisations borne out of this period include: The Concerned Citizens Forum in Durban (which no longer exists but which spawned numerous community organisations that remain alive and active); the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg (which continues to expand and now has nearly 30 affiliate community organizations); the Landless People's Movement (a national movement which went through a divisive 'split' with its original NGO partner – the National Land Committee – and has since weakened but remains active in some rural and peri-urban areas); Jubilee South Africa (a national movement centred around debt, reparations and social justice struggles/issues but which also experienced a split in its ranks in 2005/2006 which has since resulted in the existence of both Jubilee South Africa and a new formation – Umzabalazo we Jubilee); the Anti-Eviction Campaign based in Cape Town; and Abalahli base Mjondolo (a movement of shack dwellers mainly in/around Durban but which has begun to link up to other shack dweller organisations in other parts of the country)

⁴ The City of Johannesburg had, in early 1998, publicly unveiled a strategic framework for the 'reconstruction' of the city, entitled 'IGOLI2002'. This framework, much like GEAR, resided comfortably within the parameters of classic neoliberal policy design and importantly, represented the first, local-level application of the ANC state's broader neoliberal-inspired developmental agenda in the post-1994 period.

⁵ These included: SAMWU (Gauteng), SACP Johannesburg Central Branch; NEHAWU (Wits Branch); and, SASCO (Wits Branch). IMATU, even though not allied to the ANC/Alliance, also pulled out, ostensibly because the APF had become too 'militant'.

⁶ The choice of the name 'Operation Khanyisa Movement' came from the campaign of the same name (literally meaning, 'To Turn On') originally implemented by one of the APF's first community affiliates – the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) – to reconnect the electricity supplies of community residents which had either been cut-off (as a result of non-payment) or drastically reduced due to the installation of pre-paid meters.

⁷ The split resulted in the formation of a second community organisation in Soweto – the Soweto Concerned Residents Committee (SCR). The SCR almost immediately applied for formal affiliation to the APF, but it took over a year for this to happen due to consistent, and at times virulent, opposition from the SECC as well as organisational confusion with the SCR. The SCR did finally gain affiliate status in early 2006 and since that time, both the SCR and SECC have remained within the APF fold.

⁸ It is instructive to note that over the ten full years of its existence the APF produced a sizeable number of well trained and skilled cadres through its consistent programmes and workshops on political education, organising, writing, media-communication and computer skills. One 'unfortunate' result of this was that many of these cadres

became prime targets of various NGOs, local government institutions and academic-research outfits. Not surprisingly, the APF lost most of these cadres when they got formal jobs.

⁹ 'ATM' stands for 'Automated Teller Machines'

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