

Who's In, Who's Out?

Elite Democracy and the Disempowerment of the Working Class in South Africa

Devan Pillay
Department of Sociology
University of the Witwatersrand
South Africa

The Post-apartheid Elite Compromise

- ◆ Neo-liberal economic order (Gear)
- ◆ Maintain core economic elite interests
 - ◆ Mineral-energy-financial complex
- ◆ Black economic empowerment
- ◆ Employment equity
- ◆ Protective Labour legislation
 - ◆ Participatory forums e.g. National Economic, Development and Labour Council (Nedlac)
 - ◆ By-passed in first year on macro-economic policy

New Power Elite

- ◆ Economic Elite (monopolised, mainly white)
- ◆ Political elite (mainly black)
 - ◆ Supported by Cosatu and SACP
- ◆ Keep intact essential character of apartheid economy
- ◆ Fossil capitalism based on mining, energy and banking cartels
- ◆ Cheap labour power
- ◆ Jobless growth

Increased informalisation of labour ('precariat')

- ◆ Labour on key labour rights
 - ◆ But for formal sector workers
- ◆ Employers by-pass legislation – outsourcing and sub-contracting
- ◆ Create expanding sub-class of informalised labour (approx 30-40% of all employed)
- ◆ In addition to expanding informal sector and unemployed (approx 40%)
- ◆ Mainly black women

Organised labour – the new ‘insiders’?

- ◆ Unable/unwilling to organise informal workers
 - ◆ In the formal sector (semi-formal)
 - ◆ In the informal sector (informal)
- ◆ Suffocating embrace of Alliance politics
- ◆ Caught between expansive social movement unionism to narrower political unionism
- ◆ Although Cosatu remains independent and critical of policy

The Marikana uprising

- ◆ Possible turning point
- ◆ Epitomise tragedy of unmet expectations
- ◆ Increasing social distance between union leaders and members
- ◆ Collusion of state and capital against workers
- ◆ Neglect of workers' living conditions
- ◆ Disdain of black elite towards the working poor

Closing ranks against the outsiders

- ◆ Cosatu September congress: back Zuma for ANC president
- ◆ Highly contested
- ◆ Attempted Isolation of general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi
 - ◆ Highly popular amongst members
- ◆ SACP influence
 - ◆ Prevent emergence of counter-hegemonic politics
 - ◆ Intellectual henchmen of Zuma faction

The future of labour?

- ◆ Rise of splinter unions (and WASP)
- ◆ Divided Cosatu
 - ◆ NUM vs NUMSA
 - ◆ Mining versus manufacturing
 - ◆ Green economy (greenwashing) vs Green socialism
- ◆ Popularity of the ANC persists
 - ◆ Party of Mandela
 - ◆ Religious aura
- ◆ But the Emperor has no clothes

Combating exclusion: Building counter-hegemony

- ◆ Organised labour key, revive social movement unionism
 - ◆ Organise/help organise informal workers (precariat)
 - ◆ Build alliances with other social movements
 - ◆ Address broader issues of 'working class' and humanity
- ◆ Increasingly recognise ecological contradiction to limitless Growth
- ◆ Ecological Marxism – capitalism the central problem
- ◆ Nature and Labour the potential gravediggers
- ◆ Red-brown-green alliances key
- ◆ GNP counterposed to GNH (Gross National Happiness/Wellbeing)

A tribute to Chavez – who dared to challenge Empire

**Who dared to love the
poor and marginalised**

Love and Revolution – Che/Marx meets Buddha