

# Where did the left go wrong?<sup>1</sup>

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**DRAFT: NOT TO BE QUOTED WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

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## 1. Introduction: some stories

There are so many ways of beginning a talk with a provocative title like this – and I suspect they all end in pitfalls, sandtraps, mud holes: nevertheless, if it is a time to do some unwrapping, to speak as we see, and to break with the boxes that trap us, then this conference provides an attractive venue and platform.

One could approach the issues analytically, restoring some of the grand narratives with a great sweep across capitalism, globalization, the unity of opposites, crisis and reform. The nature of the state, class formation, development, inequality are all up for theoretical analysis and conjunctural and strategic definition.

There is plenty of room for a textual approach, carefully examining documents, pulling out assumptions, looking at commonalities, identifying the strands of discord or unity paragraph by paragraph. Indeed, as we enter the era of the great tripartite strategic pronouncements, there are plenty of these floating around. A textual approach might look at changing emphases in documents and ways in which organizations present themselves and their syntheses to the world. How have the 'realities' of history shifted, and how has this impacted on 'perception' and 'ideological cohesion'?

One could be historical/sociological, again with choices of focus: a wider look, perhaps, at social processes in the new millennium, both global and local; or detailed examination of organizations, decisions and processes, the state of shop stewards, branches; ethnographies that spell out where the public actually are in terms of organization (in church?); and so on.

But perhaps the easiest beginning is just to tell a few stories. Simple tales that need explanation, understanding, that open up and summarise the moment with its concatenations and circles, and that present the differences and complexities that we need to start putting on the table.

Was that an emperor without clothes we saw walking in front, or would we rather not look, or did we make it up?

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this paper are not the views of the DBSA. The writer takes full responsibility for the arguments.

- **Story number 1:** Anyone who reads the papers would have seen interviews with the wives of murdered security guards: As members of SATAWU on strike went in a gang from train carriage to carriage, they rifled through bags for evidence of guards at work. Victims were taken into a particular carriage, stripped, beaten, hit with pipes, and then bleeding - unconscious if lucky - were hurled from trains. Many guards were found in the East Rand, hanging from trees, stripped, hands tied behind their backs, riddled with stab wounds after their abduction. A sign of the desperation of the guards, and what happens when badly paid, highly mobile people in a violent environment feel they have nothing to lose. But a sign too of the lack of organization of the unions in the industry. Little more than a whimper was heard from union leadership, mostly denials that their members were involved. Nothing about safety on trains. No threats to expel, no attempt to round up or stop, and poor marshalling at events with fertile ground for provocateurs! In the last days of the strike, guards disrupted the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of June 16 in Cape Town and Eastern Cape with front-page pictures of young people fleeing from flying stones. How could June 16 be seen as a target? How would violence encourage prospects of long-term unity amongst workers in the sector? It now seems the actions of the security guards are used as a benchmark, in this case by taxi drivers threatening chaos over the taxi recap scheme (see Cape Times, 28/08/2006). 57 people were reported dead in the security guards' strike. Almost as many people died in the massacre at Sharpeville.
- **Story no 2:** A letter in the Star on 3 July, in the context of strong COSATU objections to the Gautrain as being elitist and unlinked to any wider transport strategy. The letter from Themba Thwala referred to a TV debate where Gauteng MEC Ignatius Jacobs pointed out that COSATU's investment arm had lost the tender for this very project. "Publicly COSATU is opposed to capitalism and BEE, but behind the scenes they tender for business contracts. Mr Vavi indicates left, but turns right. Such politics of hypocrisy and double standards is practiced by the COSATU leadership...(will) Mr Vavi also call...for the NPA to stop the prosecution of 10 000 state officials who are mainly Cosatu members, accused of defrauding social grants." (In late July, SADTU Soweto did call for the dropping of charges against area managers suspended on alleged tender irregularities).
- **Story 3:** Another letter, from Mayihlome Tshwete (Business Day, 5 July):

"We place leaders in positions to represent our needs, yet all we get are tax scandals and conspiracy theories. As a youth member, I feel insulted and frustrated. If this is the mould we are supposed to fit into, I must be impaired.

We, as upcoming leaders, look at the ANC Youth League as a platform to instil a political idealism to fuel our hunger for broader transformation of this country. But by the time we reach positions of relevance, the credibility of our only tool of expression will be tarnished by dividers, con-men, profiteers and crooked politics.

I am tired of having to hold my tongue for the sake of political safety. I am tired of my political commitment being pinned beside the haunting image of a dying Hector Peterson. I am tired of being sidelined and undermined.

I am tired of being told I am "100% Zuma" without being asked if this is what I want."

COSATU are branded 'agents of imperialism' by the ANCYL for their critiques of Mugabe. Attacks on the NPA are issued by leadership themselves implicated in charges of fraud and tax evasion of millions associated with Kebble. Malusi Gigaba informs the public that the 'Youth League has never ceased being left' (Weekender, 17/06):

"What makes the youth league relevant is the support it enjoys among the youth who see it as their political home." Pointing out that the SACP also has investment arms, he argues that "many of the SACP members have also doubled up as empowerment partners for companies putting themselves in line for state contracts." Rhetorically, he asks: "does an investment arm suddenly replace the organization that formed it?" Did you know of the Youth Economic Participation Campaign that the League has been running since 2001, or their submission to the jobs summit? Yet it is unlikely the public can forget the role of the ANC and SACP youth leagues in raising the temperature and mobilizing the crowds outside Zuma's rape trial. This was transparently political support, not abstract commitment to a general ideal.

For the newly formed YCL, it seems a strange way to cut one's teeth and mobilize long-term support, in an early and hectic campaign around individual political choices. For COSAS, its charge against Tutu only limits its capacity to win respect and signals the awkward tone of the day.

- **Stories 4:** Innocent until proven guilty? Abuse of state resources and institutions? If Zuma really wanted his day in court, he only had to ask Shaik to call him as defence witness, a very easy and common process. He would have killed three birds: had his day in court, told of his innocence, and saved his innocent friend from jail. Yet Reuben Molahloga was summarily suspended from ANCYL for asking how the decision was taken to support Zuma. Ngcuka was publicly accused of being a spy, without real proof, apart from 'trump-card' Gideon Niewoudt, given tea and dug up from his death-bed before the 'case' collapsed. Walusz' lawyer (and activist on the right-wing of the Conservative Party) leads procedures to demand damages from satirists like Zapiro. Spymaster Masethla's alleged frauds are ignored; ex-Generals (ex-MK) write threatening articles in support of their favoured candidate Zuma without raising fear of dictatorship; Zuma himself threatens to 'reveal all' at (his) right time as if the public is only entitled to know in the context of his own campaigns. Perhaps as the Friends of Zuma Trust says, "they are just professionals and should be left to get on with the job in the way they best know how."
- **Stories 5:** Yet COSATU won widespread support for judging President Mugabe a human rights abuser, a man constitutionally elected and acting in terms of his law: A leadership call of integrity, for politics is not always about law and formal guilt alone but includes political judgment. This to- and fro-ing, this loss of memory and balance, creates a mishmash of principle that easily appears as hollow.
- **Etc:** But nobody needs really to explain. Where once there was a clear line and great effort to explain, now what was said yesterday wasn't actually said. "It's-not-a-virus-but-a-syndrome". Outside court, we get ethnic abuse, gender threats, violence and disrespect for the victim. Inside a picture emerges of a man who sleeps with the unstable child of an old comrade and then sets out to prove her a slut. Gender principles and commitments fly through the window; old-fashioned ideas on HIV surface. The usually articulate Nzimande is reduced to mumbling. Structures remain silent or waffle. Unity is invoked while throats are torn.

From a leadership previously articulate, generalized “pronouncements” are issued and a confusion of lame claims. Suddenly we discover we’re on the road to dictatorship. Suddenly “decentralization” is a solution – a well-known recipe to disarm the working class. Accusations are revealed in the context of personal political battles while the gullible public must simply believe, absorb and accept denials and assertions.

From the leaders, as one columnist put it, unprecedented levels of “mumbling, fumbling, and stumbling”. For the people, an assumption of blind loyalty or sectarian allegiance and carefully managed debate.

Now no-one is unaware of the numerous position papers that have transcended the personal politics. I am not uncritical of the Presidency; of the state of our social programmes; of the levels of inequality and displays of greed and corruption; of how the police react in crowd control situations. I am not unaware of the tendency of all political parties to centralize power, and the dangers as politics ‘normalises’ in South Africa. Nor am I naïve about presidential troubles with their deputies, whether in the UK or Malawi.

But can we unpack these things in a sober way, free of the fluff and froth described above; without the threats and dissembling that come with narrow and often personal political agendas?

I believe a strong left is essential. This includes the ANC as the premier national movement. We need progressive political voices that are organized and multi-faceted. These will never come from the fragmented and narrow ranks of the parliamentary oppositions. They are too limited in their interests, whether tribal/traditionalist or the right-wing/conservative politics of opposition for privilege. Large formations of civil society with strong links into the state and its structures, with membership and a principled progressive historical legacy, and deeply-rooted national social movements (such as TAC), are the base for sustaining a deep and wide democracy. They need critical space to discuss and organize. They are essential to sustain pro-poor social and political programmes in a democratic setting.

So how have we descended so quickly, how did we fall from a massive numerical voting ascendancy; a political and moral leadership; moral integrity and worldwide respect for the many battles fought; and a platform respected globally for its progressive political and social content in the teeth of a harsh and uncompromising world? How did the left descend so fast to the levels of disgrace, division and hypocrisy that the stories above begin to reveal? How can the recent populism, obfuscation, threats of chaos and anti-progressive mobilizing of instability, not be seen as morbid symptoms of the age, and signs of a left in crisis?

In summary, the left in the recent period stands exposed and isolated like never before. It is naked and guilty on a number of counts:

- Obfuscation
- Hypocrisy, or at best inconsistency that appears as a lack of integrity
- Personalized and self-serving politics
- An old style retreat onto the safe ground of position papers that break no new bounds and open no new spaces
- Refusal to self-critique or take responsibility for one’s woes and problems, blaming others whether enemies or conspirators

- Flirting and playing with the spectres of populism/tribalism/chauvinism/gender violence and intimidation
- Unity is asserted and loyalty assumed. Only the media and enemies conspire otherwise.

Not surprisingly, it appears to many that some things are falling apart.

Where DID the left go wrong?

## **2. How the world changed**

In the late 1980's, the world shifted. The end of perestroika and glasnost, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, signalled the emergence of a uni-polar world dominated by the United States. Capitalism was in the ascendance as socialist alternatives crumbled. New forms of production and trade emerged, as globalization took hold. With it went a fundamentalist market discourse, neo-liberalism. Marginalisation, inequality and poverty were the flip side of the globalization coin.

New forms of instant communication fuelled the globalization boom. At the click of a mouse, billions could be shifted across the globe. ICT, cellular communication, voice and data transmission, have fundamentally re-ordered the world we know.

The new post-modern world recognized difference and diversity. All viewpoints are equal as the grand narrative crumbles. Identities were multiple, never fixed, certainly not essentialised in snapshot concepts such as 'working-class' (that in any case showed all sorts of new characteristics and fractures). Complex interactions from local to global affected the new cultural politics. New pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and SARS re-defined social relations, sexuality politics, science and popular discourse. Yet, on the negative side, woven into the insecurities and marginalisations, new fundamentalisms grew. Ethnic division, racism, xenophobia and genocide rose to national and global phenomena.

New forms of political expression such as terrorism grew. New social movements were ostensibly unified in the anti-globalisation movement, that was blown out of the water - at its height - by 9/11 and 7/7. The temporary new ground of Blair's and Clinton's Third Way gave way to the crass paranoia of Bush accompanied by Britain's poodle politics, the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, a global assault on human rights and Israelification of the so-called war on terror with devastating results.

In the face of all this, it is clear that old categories would lose their power. How to deal with racism; identity politics; ideology; human rights discourse; and the unchallenged real dominance of capitalism. An adequate response to terror has been slow in coming from the left, whether on moral or political grounds, dazzled perhaps by the anti-American content of most terror groups and surprisingly unable to critique their right-wing and fundamentalist perspectives and implications.

On the one hand, yes, old realities of power, marginalization, inequality, hunger and disease. The impact of policies that cause distress to human beings is, if anything, more instantly visible. Yet the new forms of social relations required new responses and new forms of organization and politics.

These are not new ideas. In 1991 I argued a critique of the new SACP manifesto, in the stilted and proto-socialist language of the time (WIP 79, Thoughts on the SACP Manifesto):

“Communists should say: We have much work and rethinking to do to construct a vision of workable socialism. We need to debate, to examine old ideas, to try out new ones. How do we accommodate ideological, religious, ethnic, social and cultural differences? How do we build political tolerance? On what moral values can we negotiate/construct a community? What means or tactics are valid to achieve change? What are the limits a political party should set for itself?”(36)

And further: “We should not reify the notion of the working class. The ‘working people’ do not have mysterious essential interests in common on all issues at all times. They choose different churches or none, some are women or men, or gay. They go to discos or bars, play sports or watch TV, identify ethnically with some traditions, listen to the symphony or mbaqanga music. They may live in the towns or rural areas, or be part of this or that civic, or have a house or a shack, or suffer from AIDS or be healthy....Workers are workers as well as all sorts of other identities that they construct.” (37)...interests have to be justified and negotiated in different situations, times and places...questions of how you ensure social stability, of the limits to change, of how you construct alliances and so on are continuous and long-term issues in the building of socialism.”

I also criticized a tendency to tilt to a state-centred approach that downgraded civil society and its potential, thus missed a “wider and richer emphasis and direction that we should really be exploring and opening up”(37). There is no doubt that the real and multiple experiences of the UDF, and its description by some as the ultimate post-modern movement, provided many of the insights for such theoretical emphasis.

(Incidentally, the only part of this article that the SACP published - though it was submitted originally to the SACP - was a small hagiographic part where I called the party manifesto refreshing, with a clear thrust and a powerful critique of capitalism. Editors even left out the phrase that followed about “some unnecessary traces of old-style thinking.”)

In WIP 84 (1992: Insurrection in South Africa?), I had argued for a “dynamic, all-round and multi-layered conception”: (34):

For “...power is not centralized in the citadel. It is diffused in a range of practices, institutions and ideologies throughout society...eliminating the racial parliament will not ensure that sexist ideas no longer remain; a socialist economic policy will not transform undemocratic educational practices in the classroom. The challenge to undemocratic rule must of necessity be diffuse, and thus will also be uneven. Contradictions cannot be reduced to class contradictions, and relations to those of suppression and force. Marxism, to its discredit, has failed to produce adequate theorization of nationalism, ethnicity, religion, gender, culture.

“Rather than a conception of a two-class standoff, we need to see ideology as the cement that unifies a counter-hegemonic bloc. Social movements, often organized around non-class contradictions, enrich a confident and independent civil society.”

And lastly, I warned that in the Soviet Union “the best revolutionary cadres were removed to staff the administration of government. Bureaucracy and inefficiency reflected real shortages of skill and the means to run the society at a practical level. To manage a modern economy and other social institutions, to deliver the goods that

genuinely transform the quality of life of those who have sustained the revolution, is more than just a matter of wishful thinking.” (34)

Against this, was a conception of building alliances and political support in a Gramscian ‘war of position’ (see e.g. Simon, Roger: Gramsci’s Political Thought: Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1982):

“The struggle is not a short-term one that can simply wish away processes of social change that may take generations to accomplish. Nor can people be disciplined into line, but must be mobilized, convinced and won over. The goals and objectives in one’s head cannot be confused with what exists on the ground.” (35)

### **3. New approaches**

This paper is clearly not setting out to present a left programme, or even the basic elements of such a programme.

What is clear, though, is a need for fresh thinking and a dynamic approach to a dynamic and new era.

This approach certainly does require some of the following aspects:

- Nimble thought, that is creative, flexible, willing to face up to new realities and find ways to name and explain them;
- A willingness to examine old assumptions and the basis for frameworks;
- An openness that prevents the situation of group-think, where voices hear their echoes and are thus affirmed in continuous and closed circles;
- A complexity that can operate within a specific constituency as well as broadly, that can play at both local and global levels, that links the generic with the unique and specific in a country’s history;
- An approach that understands that unity and common platforms have to be built;
- Common action and platforms develop in the context of a principled, confident and outgoing hegemony;
- Unity operates in a world that is constantly changing, and thus unity and alliances have continuously to be built and re-formed and re-built;
- Understanding the profound post-modern lesson of decentred power, has major implications for where and how progressive platforms are built.

### **4. Weaknesses and lessons**

South Africa has undoubtedly provided one of the few potentially classic platforms for a positive and progressive programme in the world, certainly in the last decade.

Perhaps the left in this situation over-estimated the uniqueness of South Africa. There was an over-optimism about the existence of a clean slate, and the ability to wipe things clean with clear and bold new progressive policy. The complexity of change and the stickiness of social relations, has been a harsh and confusing lesson for all.

Perhaps it is this that makes the calls of betrayal so loud, though some may argue that they have always warned of the revolution stopping short of change.

Many of these groups have re-formed in the new era within the anti-globalisation camp. Groups such as the Electricity Petition Campaign, The Anti-Privatisation Campaign, the Durban shack-dwellers movement, and their tiny local government electoral attempts, have remained little more than small and localized with a narrow and limited scope. The leap from grassroots work to political perspective has been voluntarist and immediatist. Their longer-term perspective has dissipated in a romantic attachment to movements like the Zapatistas, or more recently populists such as Chavez. A short-term hype linked to the anti-globalisation circuit was reinforced by occupying the 'social movement' space at a public and media level. The disintegration of SANGOCO, fighting high-profile anti-globalisation politics while ignoring the need to service and progress its grassroots constituency, bears a sad testimony to the dangers of this voluntarist leap. Only the Treatment Action Campaign, the union movement and perhaps the churches, have had deep enough roots to operate on the ground of being significant social movements and thus to suggest a more sustained influence.

In reality, the left groups mentioned have little more influence than a long tradition of small and splintered Trotskyite and ultra-left groups in South African resistance history (and I use the word ultra-left cautiously, for obvious reasons). Many of their ideas around poverty, inequality and social change are no doubt relevant. Indeed, a range of such organized formations including from the Black Sash to local civic or issue-based groups, and so on, are part of the rich tapestry of thought and organized action to improve the lives of the poor in South Africa – it is important to adopt an inclusive approach, to be open to debate, and not to let rigid ideological positions preclude engagement and even common activity.

Academics, too, contribute to progressive thought and analysis, in research or academic institutions. Yet there has been a vacuum around understanding and theorizing of the big questions around state, society and class. Somehow, the new sociologies and histories have failed to grapple with the recent period of social change, have been broadly unable to get to grips with the formation and re-formation of society in the new millennium, or to engage the big social issues and suggest analysis. Even less can one grapple with what the implications might be. Fundamentalist intellectual positioning easily replaces open discussion in this disempowered situation.

The 'terrible' implications of the overwhelming dominance for the foreseeable future of capital, too, are hard for many left groups to face. The tendency might be to slide off to populism or to find external enemies to blame for complex changes. Small compromises such as the investment arms of COSATU and the SACP that implicitly accept the profitability and medium-term existence of capitalism, are made by all. Yet the overt implications such as the growth of a black capitalist class, are barely dealt with. The strategic questions are ignored, of how to engage with capital both locally and internationally, in order to ensure the addressing of social and economic development.

Grumbling and a refusal to self-reflect, replaces proper and rational debate and clarity. Does BEE cause poverty, or is it addressing a different set of issues? Who is poorer, who is richer, with what effect, why, could it be impacted by government policy, with what limitations or possibilities? Without debate, there is no complexity and no solutions are likely.

This is clearly seen, for example, in the formulaic 'debate' around GEAR. It has always been a yes-no either-or debate, thick with assertions and counterposed

positions, with a lot of self-referencing and a small number of usual suspects in the quoted footnotes. Nobody really had to prove anything about the actual mechanisms of control or power, the specifics of the era, the precise effects of policy. The loose term globalization and the swear-word neo-liberalism were enough to replace analysis. Other important debates such as the difficulties of trade unions in the new millennium, or the alleged 'apathy' of youth in the face of failure to mobilize or excite their political interest, or the pressures on higher education, have often been dealt with by lazy throwaway lines with the catch-all phrase "neo-liberalism" or by outdated and old dogmas

So the real complexities of policy choices were ignored. What would have been the impact on the economy of large-scale spending in the mid 1990s, especially given the global context? Was the civil service of the late 1990s, especially 'untransformed' and still white, the appropriate delivery vehicle for a new social programme? Was GEAR really a replacement for all elements of the RDP, or mainly a macro-economic policy? How is it that the ANC conference in 1997 endorsed GEAR if it was so destructive? Did it have any achievements? What have been the subtleties of poverty, inequality and marginalization, beyond rhetorical claims, who has been affected and how, what are the implications for state and society? What mistakes were made and serious possibilities for pushing back boundaries were missed? How does the new era of fiscal expansiveness and infrastructural expenditure change the rules of the game?

What were the reasons for the failure to develop an appropriate mobilisational and ideological/critical debate in this crucial period? Can these all be blamed on external forces such as neo-liberalism, or the dictatorial tendencies of the state/party or its seizure by capital? Why is there this ongoing tendency to blame external forces, and seldom to find problems in the nature of organizational response to social change and reality? Tied to this refusal to accept responsibility, is a tendency to re-assess without re-newing. This is most succinctly expressed in the long and repeated terms of office of all leaders in the left civil society opposition, leaders-for-life despite clearly having themselves been part of the preceding dead-ends. Where were the parties when they were needed, the institutions of civil society, how strong and organized were they, how extensive their reach? What were their problems and why? Why has parliament taken so much strain as an instrument of popular expression?

The fundamental questions, to repeat, are around facing the implications of the current victory of capitalism, and its dominant forms summarized in the term globalization. Is it possible to build 'development' under capitalism, can there still be a progressive prospectus? Is there scope to engage with capitalism in its dominant forms, and still find ways to harness a developmental path? If not, there has to be a wholesale return to revolution, with enormous dangers for social stability and economic collapse in the current global context. If so, the complexity of the ground requires the opening up of debate and the acknowledgement of failure and false starts.

The current anti-intellectual populism that blames commentators/ intellectuals/ unidentifiable conspirators and thus bays at independent views; the climate of conspiracy; the tendency to blame the media and to seriously insult the intelligence of the public and readerships' ability to read critically and sensibly make up their own minds; the combative and sectional responses of government and critics alike; none of these augur well for a climate of critical debate and ideological or intellectual renewal.

Yet there is a platform for progressive development and left influence in South Africa, which is still fascinatingly unique in the world. The emergence of left regimes in places like Chile or Brazil, even Venezuela and Bolivia, the formulation of a globalist and thirdworldist politico-economic and developmental discourse including India and China, merely reinforce that the ground for a left voice is not lost globally either.

## **5. The 'left' and some achievements**

Just as it is suggested that the current disputes and disgrace of the left have a history in far more fundamental and rooted errors and problems, so too the potentialities in the current situation, need to be rested on the trajectories of previous successes and realities.

The victory of the ANC saw the reinforcement of a progressive social agenda as official state policy, no more symbolized than in the RDP. Ending poverty and inequality, while affirming and liberating the poorest sections of society, were placed centrally in the social discourse and rhetoric. The institutions of the state were meant to align to develop policy and implementation plans to improve the quality of life of the poorest South Africans. From de-racialisation, to re-alignment of educational resources, to rolling out of an extensive social grants infrastructure, to the free basic services policies and pressures on local government, state apparatuses were meant to be of service to the broad population at large, rather than a small minority. Youth, women, the disabled, people in the rural areas, were targeted for special dispensations; unemployment was identified as a major social problem. Even GEAR has given way to a more expansive emphasis on state-driven infrastructural growth, to the collective relief of many not least for the new common ground it has defined.

None of this implies things happened as rhetoric demanded. Nor that there were not policies that overtly benefited specific groups, many previously privileged or with new privileged access. Nor that there were not terrible mistakes, misjudgements, naivety, important gaps and even bad faith and corruption. I would certainly agree with the critique that many solutions were too technicist and merely fed into the demobilization and social confusion of the post-liberation political period. But the effects and implications, and reasons and modalities, all need exploration in the context of an overwhelmingly progressive and popular discourse – even consensus – around the developmental state and its tasks.

While many of the constitutional imperatives involved compromise with the previous regime, there can be little doubt that a major progressive achievement was the consolidation of institutions of democracy. Undoubtedly, paper rights don't mean gender equality, an end to child abuse, police respect for rights, rehabilitation of prisoners, adequate water for all. Nonetheless, the freedoms entrenched in the constitution provide some of the most crucial defences and guarantees for the space to develop a left platform. The social stability that has ensued over the last decade, despite the multiple fractures and deep problems South Africa faces, is deeply linked to the structures of democracy. Democratic governance and the protection of a human rights discourse are to be valued and protected, as the negative lessons of Bush's war on terror have taught us and the examples of the collapse of fragile societies globally. Despite the strange freeze on critical discourse and public engagement by vast swathes of South African intellectuals, there has never been more freedom to say anything that anyone wants.

Lastly, there have been many successful interventions by the formations of the left, that implied concern, mobilization, strategic integrity. COSATU has continued to ply a

form of social unionism, to take up broad social and community issues, to comment on politics and the issues of human rights, in a way that went way beyond narrow unionism. COSATU and others such as NGOs, CBOs and the churches maintained a broad and visible public anti-poverty agenda in the face of the overt extent of poverty and inequality and the lack of clear government anti-poverty coordination or drive. Campaigns around redlining and financial services not only brought some concrete benefits to poor constituents (whether the Mzansi accounts, more cautious repossession, credit compliance), but also defined an attempt to focus on, confront, engage and pressurize the monopoly and powerful controlling elements of South African capitalism. Campaigns around Khutsong showed a rootedness in local concerns and an unwillingness to give in to distant and bureaucratic government decision making processes. Opposition to the repression in Zimbabwe was a high point in solidarity and the intolerance of dictatorial rule, as well as keeping focus on one of the bleeding sores in government policy and response. Unity around HIV/AIDS has pushed back some of government's weirder responses in this vital life-or-death arena.

## **6. Conclusion**

So the argument in this paper is not one-sided. If anything, the collapses described in earlier parts of the paper above, are even more curiously tragic given the many positive opportunities, the progressive space and platforms, the strong ideological hegemony, and the many successes of formations of the left.

What this paper has argued is that there are too many cracks to be plastered over. Many of the current morbid symptoms of the left reflect these more fundamental gaps.

The left will have to acknowledge its failures and open up to new voices and even ways of thinking. A long period of intellectual renewal is needed to develop a left platform, or a new progressive politics for the new era.

This will have to be a politics and social practice that acknowledges complexity and difference and the fragile delicacy of social consensus and unity. The response calls for the careful crafting of alliances, the adopting of strategies of compromise, engagement and hegemony, in the best Gramscian sense of the word. Within a principled framework, surely an inclusivist approach opens greater strategic possibilities for a progressive agenda?

A new progressive platform will have to start from an acknowledgment that there are few viable models, a hazy vision and few credible alternatives. Globalisation and the modern era call for new ways of interacting and new kinds of engagement.

Central to all of this, surely, must be a re-assertion of the values that define the left and are the simplest basis of its definition. Humanist values are required of integrity, of equity, solidarity, a belief in human potential and the possibility of social involvement to eliminate suffering. A consistent willingness to engage with people, to openly discuss, to listen to and to incorporate concerns on the ground, encourages transparency and accountability. Tolerance of difference and the celebration of diversity within an inclusivist but principled approach must be central.

The left must take responsibility for its own direction and fate, whether it shuffles on the current path to noisy irrelevance, or creates a perspective and vision that can

inspire and serve as a beacon to human beings in this very rocky, violent and fragile world.