

## Discussant's comments on papers by Jeremy Seekings and Franco Barchiesi

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I'm not qualified for any serious engagement with Marxist political economy. I got this job because I have a passing statistical literacy, and have been a distant member of the Basic Income Grant Coalition over the last few years.

The two papers we have just heard are different from the more general and theoretical inputs we've had to date. They have something in common. They are both case studies – through which theories about class, class interest and political strategy can be thought.

**Franco Barchiesi's** paper raises the centrality of unemployment and looks at the case of the introduction of a Basic Income Grant. His thesis is that history of the BIG campaign shows up a limitation of "working class politics", in not being able to argue an alternative to a wage-centred paradigm of social inclusion.

I think he is right in so far as COSATU - by its own admission - has not been able to recruit or organize informal and unemployed workers. And if yesterday's debates about the role of new social movements is taken into account, COSATU has had little success in articulating and representing these (class) interests too.

Barchiesi invokes the "radical" possibility of thinking of unemployment not as a social problem – but as an "opportunity to think alternative forms of social citizenship" which can liberate individuals from waged work. Something which could certainly not be done on R100 per month.

So the argument is a little circular – the labour movement failed to succeed in mobilizing for a BIG because it is a labour movement and failed to imagine something other than labour as the basis for a contract between state and citizen. I would be interested to hear more about what the *something other* might look like in the South African context.

The case study also opens some other questions. I quote David Ruccio on Wolpe's take on political battles: He said that "they could not simply be deduced from economic conditions, but needed to take into account the real, material specificity of political institutions, levels of organization and political discourse."

The Basic Income Grant Coalition post 2002 was weakened, not only by failures of ideology, but by the loss of capacity and commitment by the South African Council of Churches and SANGOCO as well as COSATU, and by a costly attempt to set up an independent national office which drained its resources, failed in its mandate for grassroots mobilization and was subject to fraud. Explanations for the current state of

the coalition and the campaign cannot, I believe, be read so easily off class interests, or be reduced to the failure to take a single notion into consideration.

I have been wondering where Constitutionalism is to be located in these questions of the nation, national identity and political strategy. It would be interesting to explore the rhetorical uses of socio-economic rights in campaigns such as the BIG. We have certainly seen TAC making good use of the justiciability of socio-economic rights in the Constitution. To what degree is this a strategy we should take more seriously here in our discussions?

Let me turn now to **Seekings and Matisonn's paper**. The only one so far to dare to report "*research by means of questionnaires and interviews.*"

I think it is possible to test empirically the relationships and associations between class and attitudes to social movements and representative democracy. I'm not sure this is quite achieved in this work, something Jeremy concedes right from the start.

There are two methodological questions here. First, how do you establish the relationships and associations? And this paper goes some way towards this, with all the necessary caveats about the sample and the proxy for class, which is really the most problematic thing. This data doesn't support the analysis very well.

The second is how to interpret the associations once established. There are a number of arguments made at this conference that might help to think about the concrete situation in Cape Town, and that might influence the findings. In other words - to add variables.

The data collection was done just before the March 2006 local government elections – potentially distorting the responses towards formal local democracy.

The 2001 decision to place a moratorium on cut-offs and evictions in the City of Cape Town might be a better explanation for the engagement with - rather than opposition to – state bodies in Cape Town. Did the frequent change of leadership in the Western Cape lead toward this moratorium? Is this a Kerala type example?

Why is there relatively little resistance / insurgency to be found in Cape Town. Is it because Cape Town has relatively less poverty? What is the influence of greater inequality?

The theoretical issues of the relationship between class and political action are at stake here – both in the campaign for a Basic Income Grant and in seeking to investigate the relationships between class and attitudes towards representative democracy and protest action.

Both these cases can be used to explore causes somewhere between the materiality of class and the contingencies and strategies of political processes. In this way they help us think about the move from Voice to Leverage.