

In the last seven years we have witnessed a mushrooming of 'supposedly independent' regulatory authorities. Whether one deals with the Independent Communication Authority (ICASA) or the electricity regulator (NER), what is common with these structures is their cushioning from mass pressure and to varying degrees their accountability to the executive. Despite provisions for public hearings and nominations, there exists no direct accountability of these structures to the general populace. Compare these levels of unaccountability to their powers to determine policies that affect lives of ordinary people!

There is no doubt that power in South Africa lies in the presidency and the departments of finance and trade and industry. Has parliament given a mandate to offers that government has made to the World Trade Organisation (WTO)? How many times have union negotiators found that government departments they are engaging with were negotiating under the dictates of the finance ministry? The delays in passing legislation, as required by the constitution, that will enable parliament to initiate and amend money bills is a sign of unwillingness by the executive to cede power to the legislature.

The politburo document should have reflected on these developments, as the briefing notes do not only pose a threat to debate but are a reflection of a move to take policy options out of popular and democratically elected structures.

## Conclusion

What does the politburo document say about what the working class and its militants are supposed to do? Except a call not to 'deepen divisions' within the Alliance as well as an appeal to prove the 'ultra-left argument' wrong, one does not find a clearer definition of tasks for the

working class and its activists. A call on militants to do nothing to exacerbate the tensions in the Alliance without a proper assessment of what the briefing notes represent and how they reflect class realignment, has the potential to do the very thing that the politburo document warns against - 'a dogmatic closing of ranks'. Even more bizarre is the assertion that the immediate task is to prove the incorrectness of the 'non and anti-ANC tendencies' within the mass movement. Having conceded that 'the principle strategic threat to the NDR' does not remotely come from these tendencies, it is baffling to read that the task in the coming months is to prove the ultra-left wrong.

The politburo argument is simple: the ANC's briefing notes have the potential to stifle debate but more serious is that they pose a 'very real danger to play straight into the hands of the ultra-left' who will say, 'we always told you so', so let us prove the ultra-left wrong. Ironically, therefore, the politburo concludes that the task is to deal with the 'ultra left', which the briefing notes say must be defeated. The only difference is that the ANC NEC thinks that such a tendency is influential as its views 'are often expressed as official policy of the federation'. But the politburo moves from the basis that such a tendency is a 'significant minority within Cosatu'.

Maybe there will be differences in dealing with the tendency! Maybe class militants and their organisations should not focus on the transformation of the ANC. They should not focus on class realignment that is taking place and reflected in the briefing notes. They should also not be concerned with the curtailing of popular democracy. They must disregard moves to divide their labour movement into private and public sectors. They must be unmindful of



Pic: Nigel Dennis

### *Where are they now?*

attempts to divide the Cosatu leadership from affiliates. They should also ignore what are clear attempts to cow both Cosatu and SACP. The focus should instead be on the 'insignificant ultra-left'.

This appears to be the advice-through-omission contained in the politburo discussion document. The document reflects on how in the past the ultra-left was dealt with. According to the politburo discussion document 'in the second half of the 1970s, the most significant non-ANC left emerged within the trade unions'. We are told that the SACP in 1985, noting 'the growing strength of the workerists', launched a campaign not 'to allow socialism to be monopolised by an anti-ANC tendency'.

This is a counter-distinction to the briefing notes which characterise the present 'left rebellion' as counter-revolutionary. The politburo discussion document points to how the campaign to defeat the ultra-left in the 1980s was fought on a principled basis. According to the document 'the ultra-left and workerists

were always treated as part of the broad people's camp. They were never treated as if they were the enemy or an imperialist conspiracy'. The battle was 'intense and comradely'. Those who were part of the fight that led to splits in Mawu, MWASA and Cawusa may be in a better position to say how 'intense and comradely' the battles were. Delegates at the 1987 Cosatu national congress who were scolded and threatened by Peter Mokaba to adopt the Freedom Charter if they wanted to escape being labeled 'political hobos', may be able to tell us about the 'comradely' struggle that made the SACP hegemonic within Cosatu. One has to also consult editions of the *African Communist* and *Sactu's Workers Unity* to see how comradely the battles were. They are there for all us to learn. For it to provide valuable lessons it should not be sanitised.

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