

Revisiting Radical Reform? Strategic Dilemma's Facing the South African Labor Movement

Niall Reddy*

July 2024[†]

Abstract

Once a lodestar of the international Left, the South African labor movement has been in a long downward spiral. For well over a decade membership rolls have been shrinking, organization has been fracturing and corruption festering. This article traces the decline to labor's failure to transform the post-Apartheid social structure. Propelled by the momentum of the victorious liberation struggle, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) began putting forward a program of 'radical reform' in the early 1990s. Using power resource theory this article reconstructs the internal logic of this strategy and argues that its promise lay in its proffering of a solution to labor's 'developmental dilemma'. That dilemma, confronted by labor across the peripheries, arises from the fact that organizing at scale depends on structural changes in the economy that are inhibited by the absence of adequate coordinating institutions. RR envisaged the use of state power and strategic compromise to overcome market failures and enshrine a growth model that would be conducive to class formation. But the strategy collapsed as the ANC abandoned it and COSATU failed to rally to its defense. Radical reform became neoliberal reform. As its structural power wilted away the labor federation took a conservative turn, adopting a strategy focused on safeguarding partial victories. Using PRT again, this article offers a critique of this strategy, uncovering its short-termist orientation. But it also shows how several decades of neoliberalism have made it far harder to achieve the positive class compromises upon which RR relies. The essence of the dilemma facing labor is that RR has become more urgent as the conditions for it have become far more complicated. The concluding section of this article offers tentative thoughts on a way forward, focused on a party political strategy.

Keywords: Labor strategy; power resource theory; neoliberalism; development; COSATU.

*Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa. Correspondence: niall.reddy@wits.ac.za

[†]The author would like to thank Bruce Baigrie, Eric Blanc, Ryan Brunette, Ruth Castel-Branco, Vivek Chibber and Eddie Webster for generous feedback. All errors remain his own.

1 Introduction

Once a lodestar of the international Left, the South African labor movement has been in a long downward spiral. For well over a decade membership rolls have been shrinking, organization has been fracturing and corruption festering (Kenny 2020). In this article I trace the decline to labor's failure to transform the post-Apartheid social structure. Propelled by the momentum of the victorious liberation struggle, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) began putting forward a program of 'radical reform' in the early 1990s (Saul 1991, Von Holdt and Webster 1992, Webster and Adler 1995, Barchiesi 1996). This entailed an ambitious state-led effort to revive industry and foster a high-road, wage-led economy that would undergird further organizing. But the ANC, initially supportive, abandoned the project almost as soon as it was in power. Too entangled within the ruling party and backfooted by early losses, the federation failed to mount an effective defense of its program. Radical reform was replaced by neoliberal reform. COSATU's soaring ambitions of egalitarian reconstruction gave way to skyrocketing unemployment, waning growth and the hollowing out of manufacturing. Strategic paralysis took hold in this environment. Determined to safeguard the limited gains won in the transition, the federation shelved ambitions for economic reform and thereby left itself unable to address the root causes of its own decline. This essay argues that the way out of this morass requires a return to certain fundamental strategic principles set forth during the moment of radical reform (RR).

RR held promise because it offered a means of responding to labor's developmental dilemma. The basis for this dilemma is what we could call the "structural determination thesis" (SDT). Roughly what this states is that the structure of the economy is more important than any other variable for class formation. Based on the way their production processes and markets are configured, industries and enterprises vary according to how easy they are to organize and to the costs workers are able to impose once organizing succeeds. Labor benefits when output and employment are concentrated in workplaces that are high in these two indexes. The SDT states that this matters more than any other factor - like the presence of favorable institutions or cultural frameworks - in predicting whether unions succeed at scale. As an immediate consequence, this suggests that there is a hierarchy to the different democratic power resources that academics study, and that structural power sits atop it.

The most important evidence of this comes from Usmani's (2017) quasi-experimental study which shows that both the generalized decline in unionization rates across the world and the large disparities that continue to hold between advanced and developing countries, are explained overwhelmingly by changes and differences in employment concentration in 'high capacity' industries. The SDT can also be inferred from Silver's (2003) magisterial study of the way loci of labor unrest track patterns of industrial migration around the world, and in Rojas' (2018) more recent dissection of the 'shifting tides' in the Latin American Left. But its acceptance is much broader than this. Something like the SDT seems to be behind the extremely widespread perception that post-industrialism heralds the end of organized labor as a hegemonic actor.

The developmental dilemma (DD) arises because emerging markets lack endogenous dynamism and consequently face political barriers to unlocking the structural economic changes that the SDT shows are necessary for mass based unionization. Unlike in early capitalist developers, the implantation of capitalist social property relations in latecomers doesn't by itself propel long-lasting accumulation in structurally capacitated sectors. Late developers face entrenched coordination problems that stymie productivity boosting forms of investment. These require a specific set of state institutions to untangle (Gerschenkron 1962). But nothing endogenous to the capitalist political structure guarantees that elite incentives will align with support for those institutions (Doner and Schneider 2016).

Indeed the macro historical record suggests the reverse. Where such institutions have been erected, historical contingencies have normally played a significant role. The successful "joint project" for Korean development, for example, was the product of geopolitical pressure and overseas competition pressing state and business elites into agreement on developmental institution building

(Chibber 2003). In most places, such pressures don't exist and hence neither do developmentally-minded elites. Where this is the case, the smart move is for labor itself to take some responsibility for the structural transformation of the economy. In service of its long-term future, not to say its transformative aspirations, labor must adopt a political strategy focussed on assembling the coalitions that can generate investment into 'upgrading institutions'. The SDT, coupled with the political nature of development, means that economism is a dead end for unions in the Global South.

There are only two possible ways out of this dilemma. First, unions can try to disprove - or revise - the structural determination thesis. They can channel their energies into innovative organizing strategies to bring in traditionally neglected sectors of the workforce. They can hope that gradual changes in systems of production unlock new sources of structural power and make concerted efforts to 'discover' such opportunities. To the extent that such strategies aren't zero-sum in resource terms every union movement should be trying them. The SDT, afterall, is bad news. It's not clear that it will actually be possible for the South to widely replicate organizing-conducive economic structures (or for the North to re-create them). We should therefore hope that some movement comes along to reveal its fallacies. But as of now that seems unlikely. There is simply no precedent to suggest organizing force of will or ingenuity can overcome structural barriers at a societal level. The successes we've so far seen with new organizing models are all highly localized.

The other option is for labor to try and subvert the SDT by subverting the structure itself. The SDT says that the industrial structure constrains labor's power *under capitalism*. Rather than fight the constraint - labor could fight the system directly through revolutionary action. But by design of the dilemma we're posing, we have to assume it would be doing so from a position of relative weakness. The revolutionary strategy would therefore have to be one that accords a central role to peasants, or middle strata or some other class fraction. It's doubtful that there is any country in the global South (or North) where such strategies have any chance of success. In entrenched democracies like South Africa's they are simply off the table (Stephens and Stephens 1986, Chibber 2017, Blanc 2021).

So labor remains saddled with the SDT. And where history hasn't endowed it with an enterprising elite, it remains saddled with the developmental dilemma. South Africa today is one such country. A certain promethean spirit did once exist among the state elite in the early Apartheid period. It built effective public agencies and a wide suite of state enterprises that worked to engineer a manufacturing miracle in the post-War decades. But this was racially proscribed development - it benefited the white population and above all white business elites, both emergent Afrikaner and established English fractions. By the 1980s, many of those businesses had outgrown the carapace of the state stewardship. They looked abroad for their expansion, and eventually also for a means of minimizing political exposure to the country. They thus came to deeply espouse modernization along the terms of the Washington Consensus.

Labor quickly grasped the threat posed by capital's attempts to disembed markets as democracy was foisted on it. Hence a contest loomed between two very different visions of post-Apartheid reconstruction: radical reform and neoliberalization. In the balance, labor lost that fight, and a market logic came to define the path of reform in macro-economic policy and business institutions. But the defeat was far from total. COSATU won significant concessions, particularly in the realms of welfare policy and labor regulation - imparting a discordant character to the institutional structure of the post-Apartheid economy. As poor as it has been for growth, this turned out to be a reasonably effective formula for hegemony. Labor was incorporated into the new order through a relatively friendly industrial relations regime, and through the integration of COSATU leaders into the top layers of the party-state (and its patronage circuits). It ceased mobilizing around economic policy. RR was smothered in the cot.

A new strategy replaced it, centered on safeguarding these early gains. Labor agreed to direct its disagreements through internal ANC channels, forswearing militant action or threats to exit the coalition. In exchange the ANC agreed to underwrite the existing labor regime, deflecting

the relentless opposition to it from business actors. Calling this a "strategy" might be misleading however. It was more an "implicit bargain" (Friedman and Groenmeyer 2016), which rested in considerable part on the co-optation of COSATU's leaders and the short-circuiting of its democratic processes. Which is not to say that it was wholly irrational. The ANC was powerful and deeply popular at a rank and file level. The rewards it offered for loyalty were far from insignificant: protective labor laws helped COSATU avoid the far worse fate of unions in other liberalizing economies.

And yet COSATU's new strategy failed to reckon with the SDT and the dilemmas it poses. Post-Apartheid labor history has become one more piece of confirming evidence for that thesis. Despite a broadly friendly government, supportive regulations and deep traditions of democratic organizing, labor has been unable to arrest a steady trajectory of decline. I argue that this is centrally related to the erosion of unions' structural power under a neoliberal growth path. By binding its political feet and leaving it unable to mobilize assertively in favor of an alternate economic vision, the current form of the Tripartite Alliance (between the ANC, the South African Communist Party and COSATU) is now compromising the future of the union movement.

As the name suggests, RR was a self consciously radical and socialist programme - its conceived end goal was deep societal transformation. But because it grasped and responded to the developmental dilemma it was also a pragmatic strategy. In the next section of this essay I trace its history and unpack its internal logic. I then examine the causes of its untimely death as the ANC turned against it and COSATU failed to rally to its defense. The following section traces the consequences of this failure: a neoliberal ratchet effect that took hold during the early phases of post-Apartheid rebuilding which institutionalized a new conservative social bloc. Drawing on Wright's (2000) theory of positive compromise I then look at the ways this history of marketization has created new challenges for securing the class settlements on which RR relies. The purpose of this article is to sketch out the core strategic dilemmas facing the labor movement in South Africa - dilemmas which will no doubt be experienced much more widely than this. I don't offer comprehensive solutions but in the final section I do briefly discuss one issue - the building of a political vehicle - that should be central in efforts to divine a way forward.

2 From Resistance to Reconstruction

In a series of meetings at the start of the 1990s COSATU began thinking through economic scenarios for Apartheid's aftermath (COSATU 1990, Joffe 1991, Munck 1994). Beset by political instability and facing the exhaustion of its inward oriented growth model, the South African economy at the time was in the doldrums. COSATU sought to take charge of its reinvigoration. The cornerstone of its emerging vision, encapsulated in the slogan "growth through redistribution", was an attempt to marry the objectives of popular empowerment and economic reconstruction. This would be achieved through a far-reaching and synergistic transformation of both productive systems and governance institutions that would unlock a high-road developmental trajectory of wage-driven accumulation. The first pillar of this strategy was the dismantling of the Apartheid workplace and the consolidation of bargaining and firm-level governance rights for workers. The wage pressure resultant from these reforms would squeeze less productive firms out of the market. The state would then step in to coax the reallocation of capital up the value chain using a wide range of policy instruments. Historic conglomerates would be broken up and strategic firms nationalized. Capital markets would be heavily regulated and the state would establish its own financial institutions. The "[transformation] South Africa's international economic linkages" would create the resource base and policy space for generous social spending.

This broad vision was soon flanked by more technically detailed economic plans drawn up by labor affiliated experts. The Industrial Strategy Project (ISP) produced a nearly 300-page report in 1995 laying out a strategy for industrial renewal, driven by social compacting, co-determination, support for innovation networks and the restructuring of ownership (Joffe et al. 1995). An equally

detailed set of findings had emerged just prior from the Macro-Economic Research Group, officially an ANC initiative but one in which COSATU was heavily involved (Macroeconomic Research Group 1993). It envisaged a two-phase plan for economic revival. The first would entail a heavy push from the state in the form of investment into social and basic infrastructure: services, health care, housing, transport and energy. Its aim would be to “crowd in” private accumulation, which would take the lead in the subsequent phase, building on the efficiency gains unlocked by prior public investment. But public authorities would keep a heavy hand on the tiller of accumulation: guiding the macroeconomic allocation of capital by intervening heavily in financial markets, setting prices, rationing lending and proscribing assets.

Certainly the labor movement’s most consequential intervention in the policy realm was the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), which eventually became the ANC’s first election manifesto. The RDP originated in COSATU deliberations about the need for a ‘reconstruction accord’ which would set the terms of federation’s electoral support for the ANC. Successive rounds of negotiation with the ANC led to a watering down of some of the federation’s more radical stances (Lodge 1999). But the 6th version of the document, which became the official program of the Tripartite Alliance, preserved the strategic essence of the original. “Growth through redistribution” was abandoned but the plan retained a commitment to synergizing growth with social development and poverty alleviation. The state was to steward ‘structural transformation’ of the economy to dislodge Apartheid era distortions and revive industry. Most promisingly and most radically, the RDP placed a great deal of emphasis on democratic governance and on the need for popular movements to become arbiters of development. It envisaged a more “socially inclusive” form of corporatism with social and civic movements accommodated in statutory negotiating bodies alongside the triumvirate of labor, state and capital (Eidelberg 1997).

There was neither perfect congruence across these different plans nor total consensus on any one of them among COSATU leaders. But collectively they reflected an underlying orientation that had come to dominate the labor movement’s strategic thinking as the democratic era dawned. That orientation - radical reform - can be traced back to different phases of the labor movement’s history. It bore many markings of the ‘social movement unionism’ that defined labor in its most militant phase as it sought to ratchet up mobilization against Apartheid in coordination with a wide range of community and civic organizations. From these experiences, the union movement was deeply imprinted with a macro-political sense of perspective and a determination to drive social change far beyond the bounds of the shopfloor. But the strategic forms through which it sought to enact that change were also heavily influenced by an earlier history, during which unions had deliberately eschewed political action in favor of a more cautious approach focused on amassing shopfloor power (Webster and Adler 1995). Labor organizers in this period developed an astute tactical flexibility, defeating the co-optive strategies of the state by using legal openings to build collective power beyond its immediate reach. At a more general level, they came to appreciate the utility of reforms, not as ends in themselves, but as “dynamic phases in a progressive struggle to achieve longer-term goals” (Webster and Adler 1995, p. 80).

Underlying RR is a strategy of power accumulation that can be recapitulated in the terms of power resource theory (PRT) - a common tool for analyzing different forms of influence available to labor in a democratic polity. In its canonical version, PRT distinguishes between two power resources: structural and associational. Structural power “results . . . from the location of workers in the economic system” (Wright 2000, p. 962). Two different ‘faces’ of structural power are commonly distinguished. ‘Workplace power’ stems from the costs workers are able to impose by halting production. It’s generally greater in industries that involve higher value functions, have integrated production processes, are central in input networks, have readily collectivized workplaces, or have macroeconomic significance (Schmalz et al. 2018). ‘Marketplace power’ is a function of the supply and demand for labor power. It is heightened in tight labor markets or, ipso facto, where workers possess scarce skills. Economic conditions and industrial structures thus jointly determine structural power. Crucial in particular are: (1) the extent to which economic activity and employment are concentrated in industries that bear the above characteristics; (2) the spatial and legal organization of workplaces and (3) the tightness of labor markets.

Associational power is grounded in resources of collective action. Differently to structural power it requires "organizational process to take place and collective actors to emerge who are capable of producing and executing strategies". These processes occur at different levels (Schmalz et al. 2018, p. 118). Within workplaces, wage earners combine to form shop steward groups and works councils; within market places they combine to form trade unions; and at the political level they form parties. Associational power is the lynchpin of class politics because it is typically collective action that effectuates the potential sources of leverage embodied in social structures. Its scope is a function of the size and quality of member organizations - their internal cohesiveness, democratic vitality, leadership capacity, bureaucratic excellence etc.

Modern invocations of PRT add other power resources to the mix. Important for our purposes is institutional power: advantages gained from legally codified rights and guarantees, again operating at different societal levels. This includes political guarantees like freedom of association, firm-level rights like codetermination, sector level frameworks like centralized bargaining systems and social entitlements like conditional cash transfers. Institutional power is, as Schmalz et al. (2018, p. 121) argue, a "double edged sword". It congeals past victories into lasting settlements. But it also restricts and canalizes political action in ways that might undermine contentious strategies. Yet no long-range political project can survive without legally consolidating its advances. The rhythms of mobilization are simply too unstable.

There are quasi-automatic mechanisms through which structural power and institutional power each reinforce associational power. Higher structural power increases the costliness of disruption and thus makes it easier to overcome free rider and other collective action problems. Institutional power endows both individuals and organizations with rights that increase the benefits of association and reduce the costs of membership. Both thus facilitate the expansion of associational bodies. The essential logic of RR is to deploy associational power - through the state - to drive reforms that expand each of these other power resources, and thus set up virtuous feedback mechanisms, depicted in the figure below. At a very general level we can think of this reform effort as encompassing two planks. Firstly a strategy of structural change (reindustrialization) pursued through industrial policies supported by an accommodating macro environment. Two broad objectives are aimed here. First, the direct bolstering of structural power through the expansion of capacity industries. Secondly the leveling up of the economy and the undergirding of long-term growth through the promotion of industries with learning externalities. The second element of RR involves an institutionalization strategy centered on welfare and corporatist policies. Once again there is a both political and an economic moment to these reforms. They entrench social income and industrial citizenship rights and thus reinforce institutional power; and they provide a policy infrastructure for managing demand, incomes and inflation.

Jointly these two planks of RR work to achieve "growth through redistribution", the orienting objective of the strategy. RR aims to enshrine a wage- and welfare-led growth model where equitable redistribution fuels demand and attracts investment. Growing incomes secure popular legitimacy for the plan while expanding profit opportunities sustain productive compromises with business. Like at the power level, the different elements of the economic strategy reinforce each other. Industrialization supports social citizenship by expanding the surplus available for redistribution and relaxing external constraints on the policy space. Corporatization policies aim to support manufacturing growth by fostering cross-class productivity coalitions. Here the state would need to take additional action to steer firms towards competitive strategies premised on the cooperative problem solving that codetermination allows for. Skills and innovation policies would be important tools in this effort, helping to generate 'institutional complementarity' between welfare and productive regimes. If successful these strategies can provide a basis for "positive class compromise" - founded on mutual benefit rather than simply political stalemate. As Wright (2000) argues, the long-term stability of any RR strategy relies on compromises of this kind.

The above could be seen as an elaboration of a basic axiom common to all versions of democratic socialism: 'use power to build power'. Radical reformers didn't employ the concepts and terminology of modern social science used here, but they fully understood the real world mechanisms

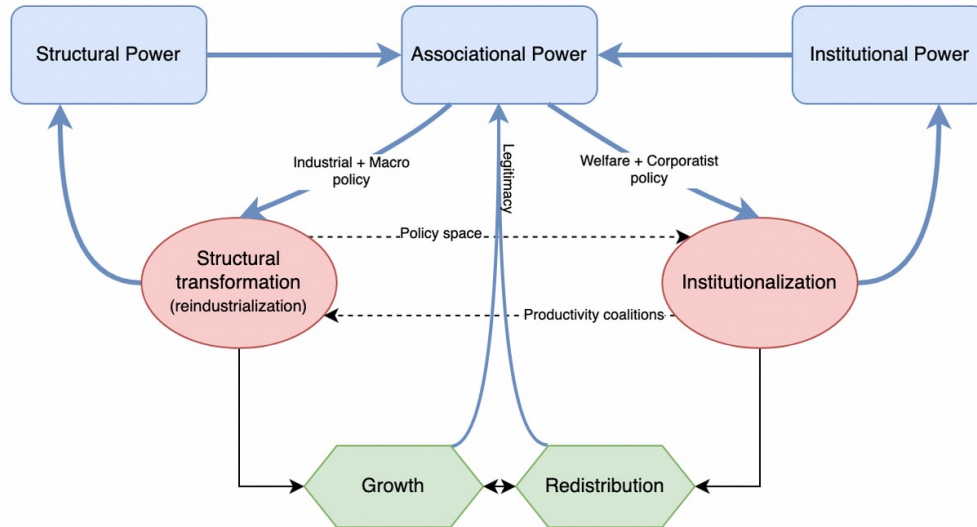


Figure 1: The power logic of radical reform.

and interconnections that these help to illustrate. But conceiving a power strategy in abstract terms was ultimately the easy part. The real test for radical reformers would be in cashing out this abstract schema into concrete plans for economic governance. The heart of the dilemma lay in constructing policies that would cohere and grow the progressive coalition while simultaneously keeping alive the compromise with sectors of capital. To realize its higher ambitions the movement must periodically re-assert its accumulating power to alter the contract with capital and push forward the boundaries of socialization. This requires that its autonomy not be compromised by the pressures of managing capitalism.

The importance of RR is that it represented at least the outline of a viable strategy for advancing the class struggle on the terrain of democracy. Unlike the revolutionist wing of the movement, it took seriously the sea change that universal suffrage represented, and the comprehensive overhaul of tactics that it demanded. But it also avoided the complacency implicit in many theories of ‘National Democratic Revolution’, which assumed that the ANC’s ascent to power would negate the need for independent class mobilization. RR tied social transformation to the recurring deployment of the full gamut of collective power resources - electoral, institutional and mobilizational - that democracy allows for (Korpi 1983). In the best tradition of Swedish democratic socialism, it refused to trade solely in abstract slogans, putting forward a “galvanizing alternative” that showed how progressive statecraft joined with organized class power could impose collective social purpose over the economy and answer the ‘developmental dilemma’ posed above (Saul 1991, Higgins 1993). This alternative was accumulationist and not simply redistributionist. Radical reformers well understood that socialism wouldn’t be built on a dwindling surplus. Hence they set themselves up to confront liberalism head on - demonstrating, through practical alternatives, the falsity of the dichotomy between efficiency and equality on which the latter stakes its legitimacy.

At the level of detail, much could still be faulted with the ambitious plans COSATU was conjuring up. In general the federation’s outlook was laudably internationalist and forward looking. It sought a pathway for constructive integration into the global economy, drawing heavily from the experiences of the East Asian Tigers rather than harking back to a pre-globalization era. Yet lessons from abroad were insufficiently assimilated in some cases and too mechanically applied in others. The careful attention paid to the policy successes of the Tiger economies, for example, was not extended to their institutional underpinnings (Nattrass 1994). The federation evinced little appreciation for the centrality of effective bureaucracies and nodal planning agencies in

authoring modern developmental miracles and hence took no active stance on state (re-)building. On the other hand, the productivism that East Asia helped to inspire was taken up somewhat over zealously. The ISP advocated a kind of Rehn-Meidner-type strategy of using upwards wage compression to crowd out lower productivity industries and force value chain upgrading. The economic efficacy and political viability of such a policy in a context of massive relative labor surpluses - soon to become the largest in the world - was not properly interrogated however (Nattrass 2001).

This gives a flavor to the kinds of challenges the labor movement confronted. What it was grappling towards was a kind of high-road developmentalism-from-below. It aimed to transpose the growth mechanisms of Northern social democracy into a context of peripherality, using wage pressure not simply to drive accumulation but structural change. There were few historical precedents for this strategy. Certain parallels could be drawn to mid-century Scandinavia, where welfare states took root in - and helped to transform - conditions of relative backwardness. But the context that COSATU faced had been radically altered in the course of more than half a century of capitalist development. The technical, institutional and political challenges entailed in the late-late development stage are far greater than those of late development (Whittaker et al. 2020). In South Africa these were magnified by the extremes of inequality and unevenness that Apartheid had engendered. Viable solutions to these challenges would never have been conceived in abstract but only through real world trial and error pursued from the cockpit of power. The plans constructed in the transition period provided at least a promising starting point from which to begin this process of discovery.

3 Radical Reform’s Soggy Ending

Why then, despite this promise, did the moment of RR peter out in such a “soggy ending”¹? The proximate answer to that question is straightforward: radical reform failed because the ANC hastily abandoned it. Several factors: ideological weakness (Padayachee and Niekerk 2019), the increasing weight of middle class elements within the party (Eidelberg 1999), and the intense pressure exerted by business and foreign governments (Khan and Mohamed 2023), conspired in this outcome. But this immediately prompts the more compelling question: why is it that COSATU failed to resist this sudden turn towards neoliberalism? At first brush it would seem that the labor movement had ample means to have at least put up a serious fight. It had been vanguard of the disruptive mobilization that brought Apartheid’s to its knees. Throughout the negotiated transition it had demonstrated its ability to effectively apply pressure both from within and without the halls of power. Its ideological sway over the wider movement was evident in the tendency for its plans to become Alliance doctrine. So how was it so decisively steam rolled by the neoliberal backlash?

The standard answers from the side of labor revolve around a story of co-optation (McKinley 2003, Pillay 2008, Buhlungu 2010). COSATU was defeated, in this narrative, because by the time of the ANC’s neoliberal pivot it had relinquished meaningful political autonomy. Key union leaders had taken up lucrative positions in the top echelons of the Government of National Unity formed by the ANC after 1994. Many others had joined the highest decision-making bodies of the party. Lower down the chain, COSATU shop stewards were co-opted into the middle levels of the civil service, into regional bodies of the party and even into the human resources divisions of big corporations. This was partly the result of a conscious decision to “deploy” COSATU activists into the state to oversee the implementation of policy and to shore up the Alliance by blurring organizational boundaries.

Critics on COSATU’s Left have frequently argued that labor’s demobilization was a direct product of the corporatist logic of RR (Desai and Habib 1994, Bramble and Ollett 2007, Runciman 2019). But in doing so they tend to conflate two different things: institutionalized negotiation with state

¹The phrase is Karl von Holdt’s, personal correspondence

and business actors, a necessary part of any democratic socialist strategy, and the corporatist form that came to define the federation's relationship with the ANC. Corporatism of the first kind never became a significant feature of the institutional landscape in South Africa precisely because of the premature demise of RR. Most of the things that would've provided the substance for tripartite economic negotiations - industrial policy, credit allocation, capital controls - had been largely left by the wayside in the ANC's neoliberal turn. Policy making in most other domains reverted to the usual "quiet politics" of backroom dealmaking. Thus NEDLAC, the NEF's successor, only ever dealt with a small handful of actually consequential policies, chiefly related to labor regulation - and only then in consultative fashion. Precisely because labor lacked the wherewithal to advance an independent economic agenda, none of its agreements ever required COSATU to transmit heavy discipline downwards, and so they had limited effects on the internal life of unions.

The corporatisation of the Alliance, on the other hand, did contribute to snuffing out radicalism (McKinley 2016). But this wasn't an entailment of RR. It's perfectly easy to imagine a counterfactual scenario in which COSATU might have espoused broadly the same democratic socialist strategy but with a different tactical approach, one that foregrounded organizational autonomy. The roots of the labor movement, after all, lay in a political tradition that defined itself on a particularly radical form of class independence (Byrne et al. 2017). "Workerism" remained a very live current within COSATU well into the democratic era, particularly among manufacturing workers, who attempted in 1994 to convince the federation to sever links with the ANC entirely. Hence the modalities of COSATU's relationship with the ANC were debated intensely over the entire transition period and before that. Every participant in this debate took it as given that the ANC was a multiclass formation, and that the realization of COSATU's program would require some form of internal struggle.

The class autonomists lost the debate and this impinged on the possibilities for radical reform. That loss was not foreordained but neither was it entirely unforeseen. Those agitating for autonomy had to contend with enormous popular support for the ANC among rank-and-file union members. Perhaps more pertinently they had to contend with the increasing appeal that closeness to the ANC held for unionists seeking personal advancement in the democratic era. Every labor movement faces co-optive pressures but in South Africa those pressures were especially strong owing to a variety of factors: the scale of patronage transfers allowed for by state transformation, the extent of the ANC's monopolization of the political arena, and the relative deprivation of the communities in which patronage systems took root.

Thus co-optation did play some - probably significant - part in why RR was cut short. But standard accounts tend to overstate the extent to which COSATU simply capitulated to the ANC's neoliberal turn. They fail to consider the fact that that capitulation might have been partly endogenous to the defeats that the reform agenda suffered in its early stages. As the scope for alternatives narrowed, more and more unionists will have sought incorporation into the emergent regime. More importantly, standard accounts ignore the resistance that was managed. That resistance might not have been overly militant - which is why it gets overlooked. Yet it is pretty clear that, even if far less effective, COSATU's opposition went beyond simply "muted grumbling" (McKinley 2003). It waged an internal battle against neoliberalism which we observe in its many public denunciations of the '1996 class project'. More importantly we see this in the belated emergence of an organized opposition to that project in the context of Jacob Zuma's 2007 campaign for the ANC presidency, which succeeded in unseating the key architect of the neoliberal turn (Thabo Mbeki).

This means that a full accounting of RR's defeat - yet to be written - will have to advert to questions of power and not simply organizational form. Almost all accounts of the transition from Apartheid note that the structural context of the mid-1990s - defined by ascendent hyperglobalization - was hostile to state-driven models of development of the kind to which COSATU aspired. Yet none has adequately mapped out the precise channels through which this context shaped the capacities and orientations of the actors involved in defining the emergent dispensation. I would conjecture that any such attempt will have to pay close attention to the path dependent effects

through which the outcomes of early institutional battles shaped the subsequent terrain on which further contestation evolved. Much as RR hoped to unlock momentum effects, neoliberalization appears to have been driven forward by a pattern of ‘policy feedback’ in which the marketization of one domain encouraged complementary reforms in the next. Capital market liberalization, for example, opened the domestic equity market to massive inward investment by foreign institutional investors who then promoted governance reform aligned with shareholder value principles. This led to dramatic changes in the corporate sphere as historic conglomerates were unbundled and internationalized (Reddy 2023). The deregulation of trade and financial markets created new challenges for macroeconomic stabilization, which spurred an archetypally neoliberal pattern of state formation in which bureaucratic capacity and intergovernmental authority concentrated in a conservative National Treasury (Pons-Vignon and Segatti 2013). RR was swept aside by a cascade of neoliberal reforms as early setbacks ramified into entrenched disadvantages.

4 From Radical Reform to Neoliberal Reform

Yet COSATU’s defeat was far from total. The federation was still able to extract key concessions amidst the ANC’s sudden lurch to the right. The most important of these were in the industrial relations sphere. The 1995 Labour Relations Act became the centerpiece of a new labor regime, buttressed soon by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) and the Employment Equity Act (1995). Collectively, these inscribed an industrial relations system with a strong progressive bent, providing for a high degree of centralized bargaining coverage (relative to peer countries), strong protections for workers (particularly in relation to dismissal), and a permissive legal environment for unions, with relatively little state interference in their internal affairs. Welfare was the second domain which saw progressive breakthroughs. Labor joined other civil society actors in pushing for a Basic Income Grant in the late 1990s. The government responded with an expansion of the existing system of cash transfers, in particular an extension of the child support grant to include all children under the age of 18 (Seekings 2004).

In respect to both welfare and industrial relations, the path of reform consisted largely of the deracialization of previously exclusionary policies. Institutional transformation over the transition was thus characterized by a sort of path dependency ‘from below’ and more punctuated change ‘from above’. Social and industrial protections were universalized while ownership, governance and financial institutions were re-modelled along Anglo-Saxon lines to serve the internationalizing imperatives of large-scale capital. The result, as Nattrass (2014) points out, is a mixed institutional structure blending traditional aspects of a ‘coordinated market economy’ with the business structure of a ‘liberal market economy’. Institutional incongruence seems to be the outcome of this. Firms are subject to strong capital market pressures and face serious disadvantages in innovation stemming from their position in the world economy. This wedds them to labor strategies premised on maximizing flexibility and minimizing cost. But they are impeded in this by heavy regulation. Labor, however, lacks the associational power to guarantee the forms of cooperation that could support different strategies. Industrial relations thus remain highly conflictual, even violent (von Holdt 2013). Rather than mutual benefit, institutional reproduction derives from the inability of either side to decisively alter the status quo.

But as important as institutional discordance is in prompting class contention, it would be a mistake to assume, as Nattrass and Seekings (2015) do, that fuller liberalization would bring about any substantially higher employment equilibrium. Outside of a few select industries, the evidence that wage setting institutions have been responsible for extensive job losses is lacking (Bassier 2021). The real problem of the South Africa economy is its lack of success in the export-oriented manufacturing industries that are associated with productivity cascades - which Rodrik (2008) shows is not generally explained by wage pressure. Further liberalization would not have made a difference here because the challenges of export-led diversification are ultimately rooted in pervasive market and coordination failures which private actors have no means of addressing on their own - the basis for the developmental dilemma outlined at the start of this essay.

Thus liberalism’s legacy has been one of poor growth, industrial downgrading and the erosion of policy sovereignty. Manufacturing has withered as the gale winds of foreign competition have blown through the economy, with the state providing only sporadic forms of support. The stripping away of capital controls leashed the economy to the ‘global financial cycle’ leading to repeated episodes of boom and bust. Upswings bred distortion by pushing capital into nontradable sectors while downswings left deep scars: the destruction of existing capabilities and foregoing of learning externalities set the country even further back on the value-added slope and reinforced regressive specialization in commodity linked sectors, deepening exposure to global trade and financial cycles (Cimoli et al. 2017, p.14). In a cruel inversion of the vision of democratic control in RR, the South African economy today is one utterly dominated by the vagaries of the global market.

Worse still were the political ramifications of this. The slowing economy choked off avenues of advancement for aspirant black capitalists. They turned their attention instead to the state, exacerbating the rent-seeking pressures which led ultimately to “state capture” (Reddy 2017, Von Holdt 2019). Rather than straightforward neoliberal hegemony a toxic form of dual power emerged. The Treasury remained relatively autonomous acting as the guarantor of neoliberal fundamentals in economic policy. At the same time the patronage faction of the ANC took over most other state institutions and SOEs, subjecting them to rampant predation. More than anything, it’s the chronic failure of public institutions, particularly related to energy provision and logistics, that have produced the past “lost decade” of negative per capita income growth (Hausmann et al. 2022).

5 Power Resources in the Neoliberal Economy

The result is a growth path which, far from supporting the virtuous cycles that RR aspired to, has steadily eroded labor’s structural power. Figure 2 shows employment reallocation away from sectors traditionally associated (Silver 2003, Usmani 2017) with structural power (Panel B); and (2-digit) industries (C) and occupations (D) historically associated with it (see the caption for full details). In view of such figures it is in some ways surprising that labor has managed to stave off total collapse as long as it has. This is partly testament to the vitality of the organizing cultures carried over from the liberation struggle, which have atrophied but not been erased. But more accurately it’s testament to the importance of the limited concessions that labor did wrest from the ANC: the latter’s acceptance of unionization in the public sector and its defense of regulated labor markets in the face of entrenched business opposition. This hints at a source of resilience in the Alliance. Paradoxically, the environment created by the party’s betrayal of labor’s higher order objectives has made unions more dependent on it for their lower order objectives. It created a setting that has helped to rationalize COSATU’s pursuit of ‘influence at the expense of power’ (Buhlungu 2010).

The influence gained has been tightly circumscribed however. The “implicit bargain” which has come to govern the Alliance grants COSATU a “veto over labor law changes” and other issues in its direct purview while depriving it of any say over economic policy (Friedman and Groenmeyer 2016, p. 64). In effect, labor has fallen into a strategy of safeguarding resources of institutional power by giving up on the pursuit of structural power - which was the implicit aim of RR. The problem with this is that power resources are not all equal. Reams of comparative evidence certainly leave no doubt as to the importance of favorable bargaining and welfare regimes in allowing unions to grow and persist. But where institutional power has been decisive, allowing labor to weather large adverse shifts in its structural environment, it’s been of a degree and kind which COSATU has not come close to achieving (Schmitt and Mitukiewicz 2012). The wall-to-wall centralization of bargaining, extensive unemployment protections and administrative rights in social policy, which have allowed unions in strong social democracies to buck the global trend of fragmentation, do not exist in South Africa. Those institutions entrenched labor’s influence in part by reshaping the entire regime of accumulation around the fact of worker empowerment and participation - very much unlike the situation in South Africa, where strong labor rights are grafted on to the hostile

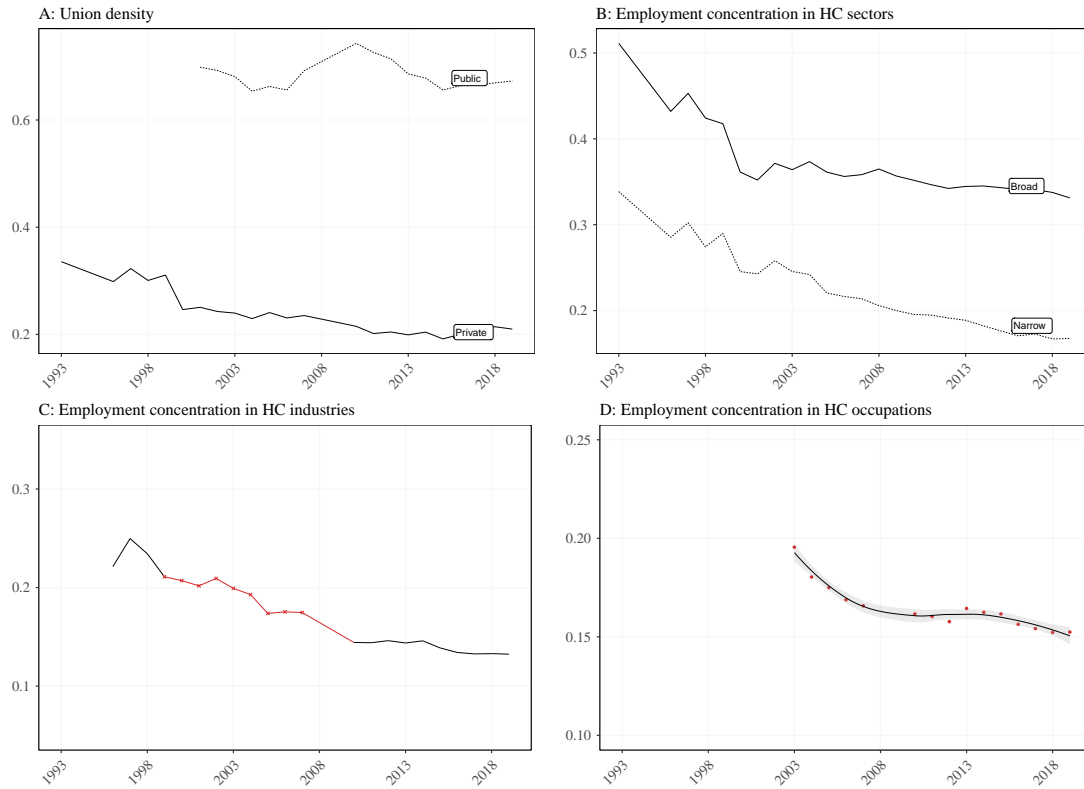


Figure 2: Labor’s diminishing structural power. Author’s calculations based on Post-Apartheid Labour Market Surveys (PALMS). Panel A reports economy-wide union density in the public and private non-agricultural sectors. Panels B to D report employment concentration in high capacity sectors, industries and occupations respectively. The denominator in all cases is total private non-agricultural employment. HC sectors in Panel A are defined as those conventionally thought to possess structural power - mining and manufacturing the narrow measure plus transport and construction in the broad measure. Panel B defines HC industries at the 2-digit level as those with historically high unionization rates. This is calculated as industries with union densities in the top tercile of the distribution for the first two years of the series. Industry classifications in the labor market surveys changed in 1999 before reverting in 2008 so the figure is comprised of two separate series (black and red parts). Panel C employs a similar procedure: HC occupations are those with historically high union densities. Occupational data in PALMS is only available from 2003. All estimates use the cross-entropy weights provided in the data.

body of a liberalized economy.

Thus on a power resources calculus COSATU has struck a losing bargain. The benefits of shoring up institutional gains have been far outweighed by what labor has lost by acceding to a liberal growth path. Structural and hence associational power resources have withered. This ultimately compromises the institutional victories in whose name they have been sacrificed. Those gains are subject to persistent hostility because of the functional incongruence of existing arrangements - their failure to accommodate elite interests - which means that they will survive only as long as labor is able to adequately defend them. Eventually its declining power will lead the ANC and its business backers to seek to revise the terms of their “implicit bargain” to reflect the changing balance of forces, as we are already seeing in the vicious confrontations playing out over public sector wages.

After years of accumulating strain on the shopfloor, growing organizational fractures and a persisting failure to grapple with corruption - a problem made far worse by the labor’s connections to the party-state - many now believe that unions are on the brink of disaster (Reddy and Shoki 2024). The recent collapse in wage premiums for union members, discovered by Wittenberg and Kerr (2019), may be a statistical harbinger of this crisis. If it’s to stave off collapse, the labor movement will have to rediscover some of the militancy and ingenuity that defined it in an earlier age. It will have to embrace a plurality of new tactics: finding inventive ways of reaching the most

precarious rungs of the workforce (Paret 2013); leveraging new forms of structural power opened up by a digitizing and globalizing economy (Castel-Brando and Dawson 2023); while tapping into less orthodox power resources made possible by alliances beyond the workplace. But the historical and international record provides little assurance that these things will be enough. Unless organized labor can provide some answer to the ‘development dilemma’ its long term future hangs in the balance.

6 Neoliberalism, Class Compromise and the Problem of the Traverse

Yet those advocating a return to RR must face up to the brute fact that almost three decades of liberal underdevelopment have seriously diminished its prospects. We can illustrate this by returning to Wright’s (2000) notion of ‘positive compromise’. This term refers to cross-class agreements that provide for collaborative problem-solving to generate positive-sum gains. Such agreements therefore elicit a measure of consent from elites - rather than relying simply on the latter’s resignation to political circumstances they cannot change. ‘Negative’ compromises of the latter kind are unstable. If prevailing arrangements don’t satisfy elite preferences in any form, they will generate persisting hostility leading to either a new compromise or investor exit precipitating economic breakdown. Positive compromises underwrite the stability and growth required for the gradual accretion of working class associational power upon which RR relies.

Positive compromises are possible because of the potential for working class organization to help resolve the collective action and coordination problems that capitalists routinely encounter. These and many other examples mean that the relationship between capitalists’ welfare and workers’ power is not monotonically inverse as some Marxist theories hold. The gains from cooperation may be strong enough, in certain settings, to more than offset the losses capitalists suffer as worker power encroaches on their sphere of control.

This is the basis for Wright’s (2000) famous inverse-J curve (Figure 3). The curve depicts an aggregated relationship between worker power and the realization of capitalist’s interests. Wright posits that at lower levels of worker organization, the control-reducing effects of an increase in power dominate. Workers at this stage are too sparsely organized to effectuate the discipline needed for cooperative gains to be fully realized. However at a certain point of increasing associational power a threshold is crossed. Worker organization achieves a scale that allows for convincing solutions to coordination problems. Now the cooperative effects dominate and the Wright curve slopes upwards. This is the sweet spot for RR strategies. Within this region, the ongoing accumulation of associational power is less likely to trigger capitalist reprisals. The zone of positive compromise incubates associational power, allowing it to reach a point at which labor can project democratic control over investment and other traditional prerogatives of property - sparking a new phase of conflict (“democratic socialism”).

The Wright curve at the national level is constituted partly from interest-power dynamics in the national political sphere and partly from the ‘aggregation’ of curves at lower units of analysis - the region, sector or firm. These curves assume different shapes depending on local characteristics that structure preferences and opportunities. Wright curves, therefore, vary across time and place. One way to think about what’s happened in South Africa is that neoliberalism has reshaped the Wright curve, steepening and elongating its downward sloping region. This is the effect, firstly, of changes in the structure of markets, production systems and governance institutions, which have altered the preference structure of capital, making positive compromises harder to achieve (Barchiesi 1996, p. 91). Internationalization, for example, has diluted incentives for demand-expanding income policies. Shareholder influence and capital market pressure have driven an emphasis on flexibility over cooperative labor regimes. Research suggests that the South African economy today is profit-led - pro-labor distribution is growth dampening which implies intensified, zero-sum distributional conflict (Ntshwanti 2022).

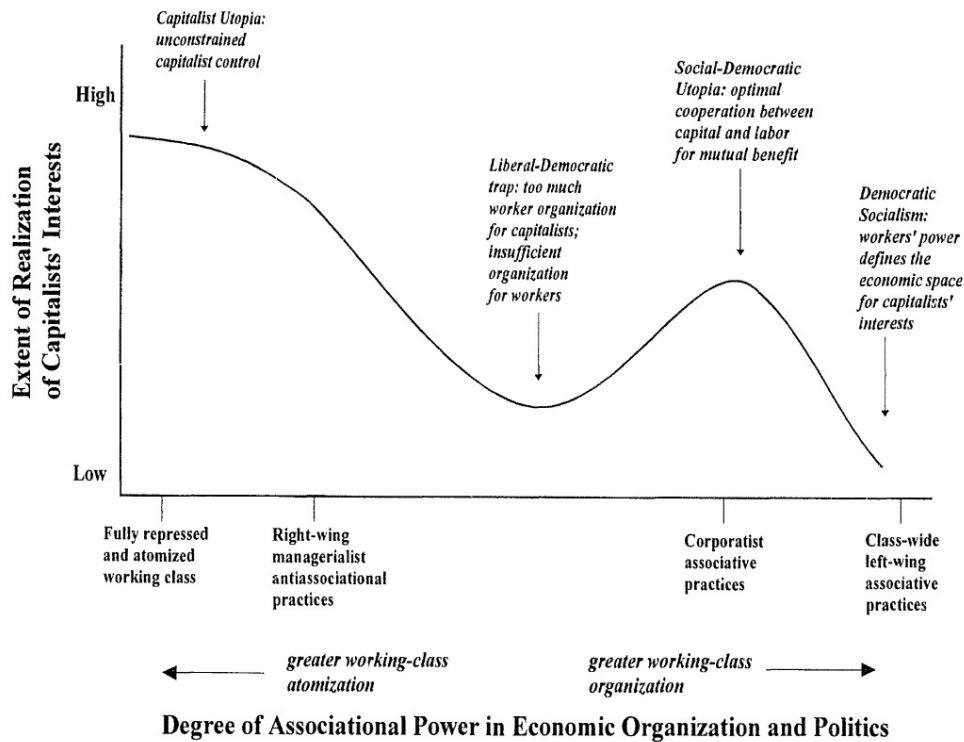


Figure 3: Wright's (2000) J-Curve.

Moreover, the catastrophic erosion of state capacity due to rampant corruption has undermined the conditions for positive compromise in the political sphere. At this level, class accords hinge on labor's capacity to mobilize associational resources in the electorate and in the workplace in support of corporatist arrangements that foster growth. In a late-late developmental context such arrangements will have to encompass complex industrial policies alongside those relating to incomes and skills, which makes bureaucratic efficacy even more crucial to their success. Capital's willingness to participate in them will depend directly on the credibility it vests in the public institutions charged with their enactment. The result of 'state capture', however, is that business has come to react to any aggrandizement of state authority in the economy with outright hostility. Labor, for its part, will have a far harder time amassing popular support for state led development given similar attitudes within the general public.

The transformation of work also affects possibilities for compromise – this time from the side of labor. Workplace fissuring and globalization have widened the gaps between workers in different firms, sectors and occupations (Webster and Francis 2019, Bassier 2021). This undermines solidaristic bonds and makes interest aggregation more complicated for unions. Workers with very different expectations, facing different employment conditions, find it harder to agree on collective goals. For a given level of associational power, narrowly conceived as a function of membership size, unions are therefore less capable of 'delivering' cooperation. This suggests a further shift downwards in the Wright curve, even as declining rates of unionization have meant a move backwards along the curve. Incentives for compromises around class-wide issues are also weakened by the increasing skew in union membership, which is concentrated among better off, formalized workers, particularly in the public sector. Economic competitiveness has less bearing on public sector workers, which makes them less likely to act as agents of compromise (Garrett and Way 1999).

One of the reasons this should worry advocates of RR, is that the Wright curve depicts a core dilemma that the strategy faces - the problem of the traverse. RR depends on labor crossing the crucial power threshold beyond which positive compromises become much more likely. But to get there it has to travel through a zone of conflict, in which every increment to its power amplifies the threat to capital. The dilemma emerges because associational power is partly endogenous to capitalists' interest realization given the sensitivity of labor market conditions to investment. Disinvestment triggered by labor advances slackens job markets which undercuts organizing. European social democratic movements overcame this partly through internal resilience - their ability to weather periodic economic downturns. But more importantly, the dilemma for them was mitigated by the dynamism of their economies. Workers' augmenting power did not always trigger major cutbacks to accumulation because enough outlets for profitable investment remained after the costs and uncertainty of labor action were defrayed. As labor's demands became more onerous with its growing influence, social democrats often succeeded in exploiting divisions within capital - forging compromises with sectors more capable of absorbing cost increases.

The South African economy suffers from low baseline dynamism due to its unresolved structural problems. Because of mounting social and governance crises on top of this, it suffers from a structural deficiency of business confidence. The breakdown in service provision and ongoing political instability provide ample reason for investors to doubt the surety of long-term returns. Since the average margin of confidence under which new investment projects are undertaken is diminished, the effects of exogenous shocks - like those related to labor upsurges - are more pronounced. Neoliberalism, therefore, has compounded the problem of the traverse doubly. It has meant that every increment to worker power more adversely affects capitalists' welfare. And it magnifies the negative feedback of this onto the labor movement by making the investment function more sensitive to labor relations.

This in turn makes it harder for labor to manage the problem of 'optimal militancy' (Webster and Adler 1995). To elicit cooperation from capital, unions must strike an appropriate balance between assertion and discipline. But this is challenging in part because that balance bears heavily on the internal life of the movement. Militancy stimulates rank and file activity. A labor movement that yokes it back too forcefully and too frequently will stifle worker control and expose itself to co-option. One that lets it run wild cannot aspire to compromise. The South African labor movement presently needs a large infusion of grassroots militancy to shake off the oligarchism that beleaguers it. But adding unbridled labor unrest to the mixture of South Africa's already acute crises threatens to precipitate crippling disinvestment which would stymie organizing. Onesidedly militantist strategies are unworkable in an economy characterized by chronic investor hesitancy. On the other hand, quashing militancy too early threatens to cut short the movement towards union renewal. The target range of 'optimality' is much narrower as a result.

7 Conclusion: Reviving the Party Question

The reason to favor a RR strategy today is not because anything has changed in the last 30 years to give it any higher chance of success. Quite the opposite. Two and a half decades of neoliberalism have made it far harder to contemplate the steady democratization of economic life. But neither have they shown us any surer means of resolving the class question. We might be slightly closer to the kinds of deep societal crises that revolutionists wager on - but we're further than ever from being able to ensure that socialism rather than barbarism will be their outcome. Labor's best hope remains within the constitutional order - with the exercise of democratic power resources to gradually widen the progressive coalition. As long as that's the case, it will still be bound by the developmental dilemma. So if not RR ad verbum, labor's strategy will still have to be one that replicates certain of its core features. At a minimum it will have to involve a political struggle to shape a growth path favorable to the expansion of structural power.

In lieu of easy answers to the above challenges, which don't exist, I'll conclude this article by

reflecting on one very general strategic insight that they imply. The point is perhaps an obvious one: that RR and analogous strategies are inconceivable in the absence of an effective political vehicle. It was the lack of a programmatically committed, class centered party that doomed the project in the 1990s. Only the emergence of such a party can offer any hope of success today. This is true for a lot of reasons but I wish to focus on two suggested by the challenges just outlined.

For starters, a party stands a greater chance of managing the problem of optimal militancy. Party intervention might indeed be what's needed to jumpstart the initial militancy required for union revitalization. Labor, buckling under its manifold crises, lacks the internal strength for this task. A party might bolster that strength from without by inspiring and recruiting the 'militant minorities' that sustain vibrant organization, and by forging effective allegiances outside the workplace (Uetrict and Eidlin 2019). Parties are also better placed to control militancy once summoned. With private sector density currently below 25 percent unions stand almost no chance, in this economy, of achieving the scale that would compel them to cater to class-wide concerns in negotiations with business. They are likely to remain parochial in a sense - focused on the immediate needs of their membership. Party formation is more fluid and less constrained by economic structure. Recent history is replete with examples of mass parties emerging extremely rapidly - particularly in more open electoral systems like South Africa's. The encompassing nature of modern parties and their sensitivity to median voter dynamics, inclines them towards social pacting (Teitelbaum 2010). This all too often means that they end up 'mobilizing restraint' for conservative ends, safeguarding their own hold on power by reigning in transformative struggles. But they are not fated to do so - this is where radical politics as an artform becomes decisive.

The second reason the party question looms large is because there is no straight road to RR in the political-economic environment just described. Labor's best chance is to secure short-term policy shifts that might be distant from radical objectives but nonetheless foster conditions somewhat more conducive to class formation and class compromise. It has to slowly reshape the Wright curve as it seeks to traverse along it. Public service reform and the re-regulation of state tendering, for example, could help stem the decline of state institutions and revive public trust in corporatist solutions (Klaaren et al. 2022). Stronger industrial policies, long a stated ambition of the ANC, could shore up parts of the manufacturing sector and foster pro-developmental constituencies within business. Given the right coalescence of political forces these are both things that can conceivably be enacted in the medium-run, well before labor reaches the point at which it can aspire to RR on its own terms. That demands a political vehicle capable of amassing electoral support, patching together issue-based coalitions and acting to shape the national political agenda.

This permits us to conclude on a note of cautious optimism. The structural economic constraints on union renewal right now appear binding, but the political space in the country is becoming far more open as a result of regime transitions occurring at both the global and local scale. In neither instance can we be assured that these transitions will evolve in progressive directions but they do at least appear to be providing openings which a strategically attuned movement might be able to exploit. Globally, polycrisis and the multipolarization of power are drawing the state back into the driver's seat of development and providing space for peripheral countries to renegotiate the terms of their integration into world markets (Sahay 2022). Locally, the ANC's retreat is upending the political map. South Africa's highly proportional, low barrier electoral system favors new entrants which has given early momentum to various populist formations. But the complex social cleavages of the country stymie their advance (Reddy 2022). A path forward for a new left party - whether emerging *ex nihilo* or through the recombination of existing organizations - will remain open for at least some time.

8 References

Barchiesi, F., 1996. South Africa in Transition: Scenarios Facing Organized Labor. *Critical Sociology*, 22 (3), 79–112.

- Bassier, I., 2021. The impact of centralized bargaining on spillovers and the wage structure in monopsonistic labour markets. *UNU-WIDER*, WIDER Working Paper No. 2021.
- Blanc, E., 2021. Socialists Should Take the Right Lessons From the Russian Revolution. *Jacobin*, Online.
- Bramble, T. and Ollett, N., 2007. Corporatism as a Process of Working-class Containment and Roll-back: The Recent Experiences of South Africa and South Korea. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 49 (4), 569–589.
- Buhlungu, S., 2010. *A Paradox of Victory: COSATU and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Byrne, S., Ulrich, N., and van der Walt, L., 2017. RED, BLACK AND GOLD:: FOSATU, SOUTH AFRICAN ‘WORKERISM’, ‘SYNDICALISM’ AND THE NATION. In: E. Webster and K. Pampallis, eds. *The Unresolved National Question in South Africa*. Wits University Press, 254–273.
- Castel-Branco, R. and Dawson, H.J., 2023. The remaking of working classes: digital labour platforms and workers’ struggles in the Global South. *Work in the Global Economy*, 3 (2), 109–115.
- Chibber, V., 2003. *Locked in Place: State-building and Late Industrialization in India*. Princeton University Press.
- Chibber, V., 2017. Our Road to Power. *Jacobin*, Online.
- COSATU, 1990. Recommendations on post-apartheid economic policy: Workshop on Economic Policy for a post-apartheid South Africa, Harare, 28th April to 1st May 1990. *Transformations*, 12 (2).
- Desai, A. and Habib, A., 1994. Social Movements in Transitional Societies: A Case Study of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, 22.
- Doner, R.F. and Schneider, B.R., 2016. The Middle-Income Trap: More Politics than Economics. *World Politics*, 68 (4), 608–644.
- Eidelberg, P., 1999. Guerrilla warfare and the decline of urban apartheid: The shaping of a new African middle class and the transformation of the African National Congress (1975–1985). *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 19 (1), 53–65.
- Eidelberg, P.G., 1997. The tripartite alliance on the eve of a new millennium: The Congress of South African Trade Unions, the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party.
- Friedman, S. and Groenmeyer, S., 2016. A nightmare on the brain of the living?: The endurance and limits of the collective bargaining regime. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 91 (1), 63–83.
- Garrett, G. and Way, C., 1999. Public Sector Unions, Corporatism, and Macroeconomic Performance. *Comparative Political Studies*, 32 (4), 411–434.
- Gerschenkron, 1962. *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*.
- Hausmann, R., Sturzenegger, F., Goldstein, P., Muci, F., Barrios, D., and UNU-WIDER, 2022. Macroeconomic risks after a decade of microeconomic turbulence: South Africa (2007–2020). *UNU-WIDER*, WIDER Working Paper No. 2022.

- Higgins, W., 1993. Social democracy or democratic socialism. *South African Labour Bulletin*, 17 (6).
- von Holdt, K., 2013. South Africa: the transition to violent democracy. *Review of African Political Economy*, 40 (138), 589–604.
- Joffe, A., 1991. COSATU Economic Policy Conference. *South African Labour Bulletin*, 15 (8).
- Joffe, A., Industrial Strategy Project, and International Development Research Centre (Canada), eds., 1995. *Improving manufacturing performance in South Africa: the report of the Industrial Strategy Project*. Rondebosch, South Africa: Ottawa, Canada: UCT Press; International Development Research Centre.
- Kenny, B., 2020. The South African labour movement: A fragmented and shifting terrain. *Tempo Social*, 32 (1), 119–136.
- Khan, F. and Mohamed, S., 2023. Elites and economic policy in South Africa’s transition and beyond. *International Review of Applied Economics*, 37 (6), 1–23.
- Klaaren, J., Brunette, R., and Belvedere, F., 2022. *Reforming the Public Administration in South Africa: A Path to Professionalisation*. Siber Ink.
- Korpi, W., 1983. *The democratic class struggle*. Routledge.
- Lodge, T., 1999. Policy processes within the African national congress and the tripartite alliance. *Politikon*, 26 (1), 5–32.
- Macroeconomic Research Group, 1993. *Making democracy work: A framework for macroeconomic policy in South Africa: A report to members of the democratic movement of South Africa*. University of Western Cape, Centre for Development Studies.
- McKinley, D., 2003. The Congress of South African Trade Unions and the Tripartite Alliance since 1994. In: *Rethinking the Labour Movement in the ‘New’ South Africa*. Ashgate Pub.
- McKinley, D.T., 2016. *SA’s Corporatised Liberation*. Houghton: Jacana Media.
- Munk, R., 1994. South Africa: ‘The Great Economic Debate’. *Third World Quarterly*, 15 (2), 205–217.
- Nattrass, N., 1994. Economic Restructuring in South Africa: The Debate Continues. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20 (4), 517–531.
- Nattrass, N., 2001. High Productivity Now: a critical review of South Africa’s growth strategy, 24.
- Ntshwanti, M., 2022. Is growth in the South African economy profit-led or wage-led? *Journal of Economic and Financial Sciences*, 15 (1), 12.
- Padayachee, V. and Niekerk, R.V., 2019. *Shadow of Liberation: Contestation and Compromise in the Economic and Social Policy of the African National Congress, 1943-1996*. NYU Press.
- Paret, M., 2013. Precarious Labor Politics: Unions and the Struggles of the Insecure Working Class in the USA and South Africa. *Critical Sociology*.
- Pillay, D., 2008. COSATU, the SACP and the ANC post-Polokwane: Looking Left but does it feel Right? *TRAVAIL, capital et société*, 41 (2).
- Pons-Vignon, N. and Segatti, A., 2013. ‘The art of neoliberalism’: accumulation, institutional change and social order since the end of apartheid. *Review of African Political Economy*,

- Reddy, N., 2017. The crisis of the party-state in South Africa. *Africa is a Country*.
- Reddy, N., 2022. South Africa Has Not Been Immune to Right-Wing Populism. *Jacobin*.
- Reddy, N., 2023. Liberalization, democratization and the remaking of the South African corporate network 1993–2020. *Socio-Economic Review*, 21 (1), 213–242.
- Reddy, N. and Shoki, W., 2024. The metal that bent. *New Internationalist*, (548), 30–35.
- Rodrik, D., 2008. Understanding South Africa’s economic puzzles. *Economics of Transition*, 16 (4), 769–797.
- Rojas, R., 2018. The Latin American Left’s Shifting Tides. *Catalyst*, 2 (2), 147–206.
- Runciman, C., 2019. The ‘Double-edged Sword’ of Institutional Power: COSATU, Neo-liberalisation and the Right to Strike. *Global Labour Journal*, 10 (2).
- Sahay, T., 2022. A New Non-Alignment. *Phenomenal World*.
- Saul, J., 1991. South Africa: Between ‘Barbarism’ and ‘Structural Reform’. *New Left Review*, (I/188), 3–44.
- Schmalz, S., Ludwig, C., and Webster, E., 2018. The Power Resources Approach: Developments and Challenges. *Global Labour Journal*, 9 (2).
- Schmitt, J. and Mitukiewicz, A., 2012. Politics matter: changes in unionisation rates in rich countries, 1960–2010. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 43 (3), 260–280.
- Seekings, J., 2004. Trade unions, social policy & class compromise in post-apartheid South Africa. *Review of African Political Economy*, 31 (100), 299–312.
- Seekings, J. and Nattrass, N., 2015. *Policy, Politics and Poverty in South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Silver, B.J., 2003. *Forces of labor: workers’ movements and globalization since 1870*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stephens, E.H. and Stephens, J.D., 1986. *Democratic Socialism in Jamaica*. London: Macmillan Education UK.
- Teitelbaum, E., 2010. Mobilizing Restraint: Economic Reform and the Politics of Industrial Protest in South Asia. *World Politics*, 62 (4), 676–713.
- Uetricht, M. and Eidlin, B., 2019. U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing “Militant Minority”. *Labor Studies Journal*, 44 (1), 36–59.
- Usmani, A., 2017. The Rise and Fall of Labor. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 3025799.
- Von Holdt, K., 2019. The political economy of corruption: elite-formation, factions and violence. *SWOP Working Papers*, 10, 32.
- Von Holdt, K. and Webster, E., 1992. Towards a Socialist Theory of Radical Reform.
- Webster, E. and Adler, G., 1995. Challenging transition theory: The labor movement, radical reform, and transition to democracy in South Africa.

- Webster, E. and Francis, D., 2019. The paradox of inequality in South Africa: a challenge from the workplace. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 101 (1), 11–35.
- Whittaker, D.H., Sturgeon, T.J., Okita, T., and Zhu, T., 2020. *Compressed development: time and timing in economic and social development*. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Wittenberg, M. and Kerr, A., 2019. The union wage premium in SA.
- Wright, E.O., 2000. Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105 (4), 957–1002.