

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

In the post-1994 analysis it is clear that many challenges face civil society to continue the struggle to end poverty, inequality and continue national development. Although the inclusion of labour and community organizations in the governing ANC Alliance and in the national bargaining structure, NEDLAC, was lauded for its transformative potential, the government has increasingly marginalized civil society and has formed a strong allegiance to the interests of international and domestic capital. Since the introduction of GEAR, the government's neo-liberal inspired macroeconomic framework, the necessity of redistribution has taken a back seat to economic growth. Many CSOs frustrated with the slow pace of change are now questioning how to mobilize South Africans once again for further democratic reform.

One of the greatest barriers to mobilization is the absence of a common cause. Under apartheid, civil society rallied around the cause of liberty from state oppression. In the new South Africa, the Government of National Unity enjoys the overwhelming support of civil society. Satisfied with the achievement of civil rights and a democratic parliament, many South Africans are in no mood to struggle. The diminishing influence of NGOs and trade unions in the post-apartheid era makes the challenge of mobilization all the more difficult. After 1994, both trade unions and NGOs experienced an exodus of staff to government and both were weakened by a significant decline in international support. Many trade unions have experienced declining memberships due to increasing levels of unemployment and the growing informalization of work. NGOs, often forced to commercialize their operations, have been focusing more on project-specific operations than on raising social consciousness. Moreover, as poverty levels in South Africa remain extreme, as violence rips apart families and communities, and as the AIDS epidemic ravages the poorest segments of society, the organizational capacity of CSOs is crippled.

With a less militant, declining membership, shrinking leverage at the national level, and no common cause to rally around, the labour movement will be unable to play a significant role in mobilizing civil society for further transformation. Similarly, NGOs dependent on external support are often forced to be more accountable to donors than to the communities that they serve. Clearly, it is the national government and its private sector partners that hold the bulk of power in South African society and it is this alliance that must commit itself to thoroughgoing democratization. If democratic transformation is more than just rhetoric, then government must commit to an active redistribution of power and resources. For CSOs, the struggle to improve livelihoods with meager resources must continue and the goal of a more equitable society must be their guiding principle. In the words of Nelson Mandela:

"History will judge us extremely harshly if we fail to turn the opportunity, which it now presents us with, into common good. The risk of further pain and affliction arising from violence,