

TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGIES

A COMPARISON OF SOUTH AFRICA AND BRAZIL – COSATU AND THE ANC; CUT AND THE PT

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The reconfiguration of work in contemporary capitalism with the advent of neoliberalism from the early 1980s has seen the loss of traditional manufacturing jobs and the concomitant benefits that trade unions have achieved. The trend towards job insecurity undermined trade unions' bargaining power and the power to advance workers' interests.

In this context trade unions have sought various means to overcome the downward pressure on wages and working conditions. In South Africa and Brazil the dominant trade union federations adopted similar strategies in attempting to overcome this development. The development of the political situation in both instances provided an opportunity to align themselves with political parties professing they had the interest of the workers at heart. In South Africa it was the African National Congress (ANC) who championed opposition to Apartheid, the legal system that denied citizens not classified 'white' the vote. Here the dominant trade union formation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) joined with the South African Communist Party and the ANC into an alliance which became known as the Tripartite Alliance. At the time of the ANC's accession to power in 1994, the programme through which this improvement in the standard of living was to be carried out was called the Reconstruction and Development Programme.

In Brazil the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT) was instrumental in the establishment of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT), which was launched in 1980. It provided considerable support to the PT throughout its time in office. The PT governed at the federal level in a [coalition government](#) with several other parties from 1 January 2003, until August 2016. After the [2002 parliamentary election](#), PT became the largest party in the [Chamber of Deputies](#) and the largest in the [Federal Senate](#) for the first time ever. [Lula](#) da Silva became the president and was succeeded by [Dilma Rousseff](#) in 2011.

This paper will consider whether the electoral support for the ANC and PT in South Africa and Brazil respectively by Cosatu and CUT provided any real benefits to their respective membership and of the broader working class. Furthermore, we will examine what the effect of this alliance had on the articulation are being built between trade unions, social movements and political power.

We will examine the economic effects of the alliance through key indicators, primarily that of the labour share of national income. Although this is a crude measurement, it does provide some description of the relative power of labour and capital in the period under review. The study of factor shares will help the understanding of income inequality and evaluate whether the stated aims of Cosatu and CUT were, in fact, realised and whether the supported political parties managed to promote social justice.

Furthermore, the paper will examine whether the kind of alliances undertaken ought to be continued in the form that it has taken thus far and what other possibilities may exist for pursuing the social welfare agenda of Cosatu and CUT.