

# Dale T. McKinley - Labour And Community In Transition: Alliances For Public Services In South Africa



This paper critically analyzes the context and practical experience of labour-community alliances to oppose privatization and promote public services, as they have evolved in South Africa since 1994.

While 1980s South Africa was rich in such broad and politically independent alliances against the oppressive apartheid system and the ravages of neoliberal capitalism, following the 1994 democratic transition the labour movement largely embraced the neoliberal corporatism promoted by the ANC-run state, which increased the social distance between employed workers and poor communities. Consistent attempts to repress community-led dissent in response to the political and socio-economic failures of the 'new' democracy, and the resulting delegitimization of community struggles related to the nature of public institutions and delivery of public services, undermined further the bases for unity.

This paper analyzes case briefs of the few labour-community alliances that exist today - the South Durban Environmental Community Alliance; the Cape Town Housing Assembly and South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU); and the Eastern Cape Health Crisis Action Coalition - as a means to surface their nature, challenges and successes. Collaboration is largely temporary and informal, involving small numbers of committed individuals from both 'sides'.

Twenty years after the first free and fair elections in South Africa, the harsh realities are that strong, organic labour-community alliances have virtually

disappeared and there is a growing disconnect between their respective politics and practical struggles. The positive past of labour-community mobilization in the country needs to be reclaimed both in thought and practice. If there is to be a coherent 'alternative' movement forward, labour and community have to find ways to talk with and learn from each other, to find a common language for and approach to, what kind of society, what kind of state and most crucially what kind of 'public' they desire.

*See more at:* <http://municipalservicesproject.org/labour-and-community-transition>

*See also:* <http://www.dalemckinley.org/>