

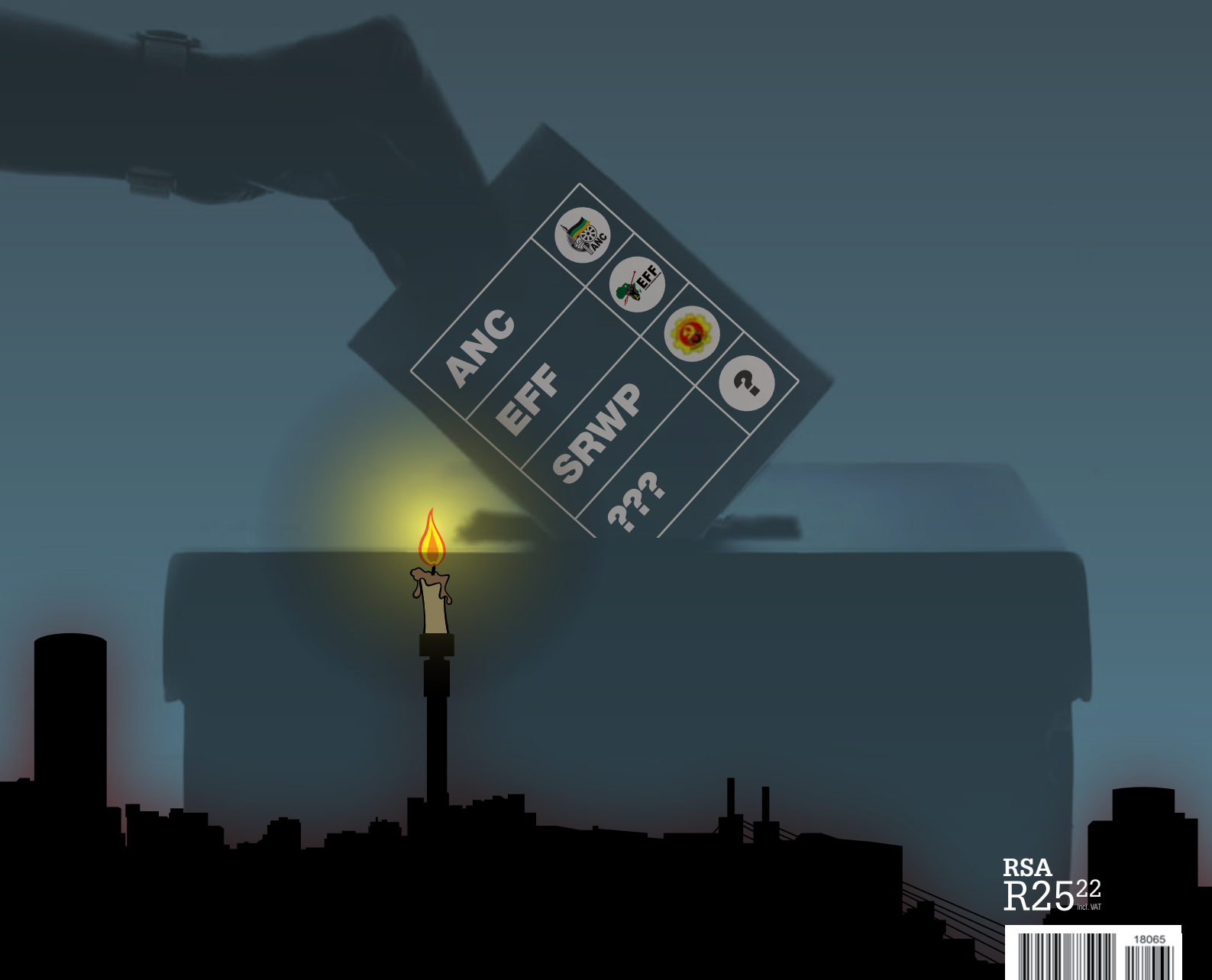
TAKING POWER SERIOUSLY

Amandla!

South Africa's new progressive magazine standing for social justice.

ISSUE NO. 63 APRIL 2019

WILL YOU BE VOTING IN THE DARK?



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The struggle is to socialise Eskom | Preventing civil war and US intervention in Venezuela

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FEMINISM FOR THE 99 PERCENT
CALLS ON ALL RADICAL
MOVEMENTS TO JOIN TOGETHER
IN A COMMON ANTICAPITALIST
INSURGENCY”

Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto

Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi
Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser

Unaffordable housing, poverty wages, healthcare, climate change, border policing; not the issues you ordinarily hear feminists talking about. But don't these issues impact the vast majority of women globally?

Taking as its inspiration the new wave of feminist militancy that has erupted globally, this Manifesto makes a simple but powerful case: Feminism shouldn't start—or stop—with seeing women represented at the top of society.

It must start with those at the bottom, and fight for the world they deserve.

And that means targeting capitalism. Feminism must be anti-capitalist, eco-socialist and anti-racist.

This is a manifesto for the 99%.

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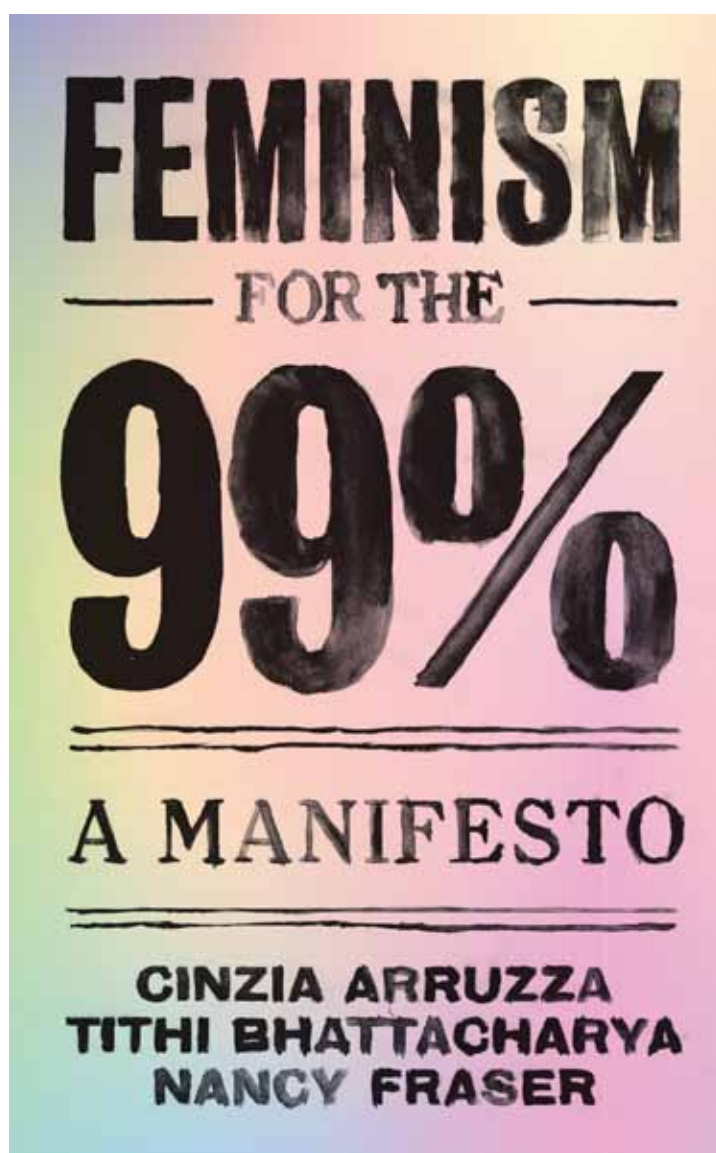
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Tropical Cyclone Idai. Thousands of people have been killed and tens of thousands are still on roofs and in trees, without food or water, desperately hoping that help will arrive in time. The city of Beira in Mozambique, where more than half a million lived, is destroyed.

Eskom, climate change and the just transition

WHAT TO DO ABOUT Eskom, is the 64 thousand dollar question? This should actually read the 640 billion rand question - that will be Eskom's debt in just three years, at current projections. Load shedding, Eskom's extreme financial crisis, total mismanagement, corruption, state capture and cronyism, as well as its addiction to coal, have led many to throw up their hands and give up on Eskom. The coal-dependent electricity sector is responsible for almost 60% of total greenhouse gas emissions. South Africa has become, per capita, one of the most carbon intensive polluters in the world.

Climate change and Cyclone Idai

IN SPITE OF THE RELATIVELY SMALL economy, SA's emission profile is at a similar level to Germany or Britain. So, when considering what to do with Eskom, we cannot ignore the problem of climate change. Only the extremely ignorant and callous could suggest this is not a key issue when our neighbours are suffering the worst climate change disaster ever to be inflicted on the Southern Hemisphere. Thousands of people have been killed and tens of thousands are still on roofs and in trees, without food or water, desperately

hoping that help will arrive in time. The city of Beira in Mozambique, where more than half a million lived, is destroyed.

Nelson Moda was in Beira when Tropical Cyclone Idai hit. He recounts what happened:

"It was my son's birthday on 14 March and we were all at home. In the morning this strong storm started and it was moving the city, the trees, and the houses. It was like a war. It was horrific. The children were crying and we were hiding in the bathroom. I could see people dying and the house where I live has been destroyed. There are children who now have no father, no mother, and no home. I saw the city where I grew up being destroyed with my naked eyes. In Beira, there are no basic services and people don't know what they're going to eat or where they're going to sleep. I haven't been able to sleep since that night."

IN EQUALLY EVOCATIVE WORDS, Fabrizio Graglia describes the impact of Idai:

"Idai massacred Sofala that Thursday night. Since that day we are without electric power, communication, fuel, food, drinking water, road connections, ATMs and banks. This cyclone has left

behind only death and destruction. The schools, our office, the hospitals that have remained standing have become the refuge of hundreds of families who have lost everything. The roof of the hospital in Beira has fallen and 5 newborns from the neonatal ward have died. Another 160 people have died in the facility...We have only eaten oranges and avocados for 3 days and we ration drinking water."

TROPICAL CYCLONE IDAI IS NOT AN isolated "natural disaster". Look at the second half of 2018:

- In August, in the Southern Indian State of Kerala, 483 people died and one million were displaced in devastating floods.
- In October, when Hurricane Michael made landfall on the North Florida coast, it was the third strongest hurricane in US history, edging out Hurricane Katrina which devastated New Orleans in 2005.
- In November, the ironically named town of "Paradise", home to 27,000 people, disappeared in the deadliest fire in California's history. 86 people died.
- In South Africa, some parts of the country are still suffering one of the longest and severest droughts experienced. The taps have even run dry in several Eastern Cape towns.

AND OF COURSE IT IS THE WORKING classes and the poor who are at climate change's coal-face. They live under the most vulnerable conditions and are least capable of adapting to its impact. People living in informal settlements and in low lying areas with poor housing are at extreme risk from floods and severe storms. And during periods of drought, access to water becomes even more precarious. Dependence on complimentary forms of livelihoods (food gardens, subsistence farming etc.) collapse.

Yet, we remain largely in denial. Media reports fail to link these disasters with climate change. But they are the outcome of global warming, of pumping millions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. And as the earth warms, the intensity and frequency of these weather events will get worse. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recent report, it is critical to do everything in our collective power to limit global warming to just 1.5 degrees centigrade, to avoid unprecedented disasters of nature. The report finds that limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require "rapid and far-reaching" transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities. Global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) would need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching "net zero" around 2050.

To do this will entail massive government investment and the planned reallocation of resources locally, nationally, and globally. Only the special circumstances of the First and Second World Wars have seen such a huge and rapid outpouring of public investment and planning. It is generally inconsistent with capitalism. It is certainly in direct contradiction with neoliberalism, especially if public investment is financed, as seems necessary, by taxing the profits of fossil fuel capital and the big banks.

It will also mean a severe loss of value of the billions of dollars of investment in oil, gas, coal and other minerals. Capitalists have shown no sign of willingly agreeing to forfeit trillions of dollars of future earnings by leaving the vast majority of proven fossil fuel reserves (coal, oil and gas) in the ground. The key message has become to look after your own country and exploit your fossil fuel resources more intensely than ever before.

How much more devastation must there be? How many more people must die?

South Africa

OUR GOVERNMENT PAYS LIP-SERVICE TO climate change. While recognising the carbon intensity of our economy, it is intent on rebuilding the Minerals Energy Complex. It is searching for foreign investment in mining and more coal-fired electricity plants. For the government, this equals economic growth and rising GDP, which in turn means greater foreign investor and business confidence, more state revenue, declining debt levels, less pressure from the credit rating agencies and more scope for empowerment deals. According to the government's commitment to combating climate change, it sees in the short term an increase in the carbon intensity of the



The coal-dependent electricity sector is responsible for almost 60% of total greenhouse gas emissions. South Africa has become, per capita, one of the most carbon intensive polluters in the world.

economy. Emissions are only scheduled to start reducing after 2035.

Labour movement paralysed

YET IT IS NOT JUST GOVERNMENT AND the media that are effectively in denial of climate change. The labour movement, which should be at the forefront of climate change, seems paralysed. It is proving unable to provide the lead in the militant struggle that must be waged against capitalism if we are to halt global warming.

Take the Eskom crisis. The labour movement has correctly opposed the unbundling of Eskom. They point out that this is probably the first step towards privatisation, massive job losses and increased electricity tariffs. However, they are silent on the urgent need to fight climate change and to take steps to decarbonise the electricity sector and transition to a low carbon economy.

This is unfortunate. It robs the labour movement of a powerful tool in building an anti-capitalist consciousness. Capital and the state are constrained by their need to defend profit, so they will not undertake the massive investments necessary. Without raising the issue of climate change, the few occasions when they talk of the need for socially owned renewable energy and for a just transition sound hollow. They look like a fig leaf for the defence of coal and coal-based industrialisation.

The labour movement is correct to critique and oppose the privatised independent power producer renewable energy programme. But it must also support unequivocally a just transition based on socially owned renewable energy. It is not enough to talk in abstract terms of an energy mix.

Such a just transition would entail the planned phase out of coal-fired power stations and the protection of the affected workers and communities. We currently have a good example of how not to do it. The failure to plan for the decline of gold mining has created ghost towns. It is mineworkers who have been made to bear the cost through their unemployment.

Clear demands must be refined around reskilling, no job losses, guarantees of state-supported income for displaced workers, economic support for communities affected by mine and power station closures etc. Equally, the unions must develop a strategic approach to demands

around ownership and control of the generation of renewable energy.

With social ownership, renewables could be developed as a public good. In contrast to the IPP approach, they could be deployed in a way that does not undermine the entire public service model of electricity provision. A cooperative relationship between different forms of energy is essential. It will allow South Africa to plan its transition, based on social and ecological need. Only a socially owned system can ensure a just energy transition. ■

Disclaimer

The views expressed in these articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Alternative Information & Development Centre, or the *Amanda!* Editorial Collective.

news briefs & social media



Some 1,600 people attended a mass meeting yesterday in Sigidi village, Xolobeni area, on the Wild Coast, to celebrate Human Rights Day. They came to protest against violence directed against rural communities who defend their land and to support the November Xolobeni "Right to Say NO" Judgment.

news briefs

Amadiba Crisis Committee: Human Rights Day in Sigidi, Mbizana

SOME 1,600 PEOPLE ATTENDED A MASS meeting yesterday in Sigidi village, Xolobeni area, on the Wild Coast, to celebrate Human Rights Day. They came to protest against violence directed against rural communities who defend their land and to support the November Xolobeni "Right to Say No" Judgment, that Minister Mantashe and DMR have appealed. The meeting was held at the premises of Sigidi Primary School.

The village built the school itself in the 1980s without support from the government. Today, 60-70 youth from Mdatya and Sigidi villages met up again to clean the premises, clean floors and scrub pots, putting all back to normal. As ACC, we salute the youth!

Headwoman Duduzile Baleni presided over the large event. In between speeches, a group of sangomas held a ceremony, asking the ancestors for help in defending our ancestral land and to get justice for our late chair, Bazooka Radebe, and his family. He was killed by hitmen three years ago today, on 22 March 2016. ACC holds that the investigation has been blocked.

28 organisations and community leaders with delegations from seven provinces signed a declaration of support for ACC and the right of directly affected land rights holders and the coastal Umgungundlovu community to "Free Prior and informed Consent". The Judgement says that DMR cannot grant a license for the "Xolobeni Mining Project" before the directly affected community gives consent in a customary law process.

Consequently, the Sigidi Declaration condemns Minister Mantashe's "survey" as a scam. ACC has reliable information that Mr Mantashe wants to "survey" Mbizana wards up to 60-70km away from the coast. As ACC, we regard him as being in contempt of court. Indeed, facing the community on 16 January in Xolobeni, he "lost it" and called the judgement "bullshit". He lies about the content of the Xolobeni judgement every time he speaks of it in the media.

The event was a demonstration of strength and resolve. To us as ACC, it marked the start of a Right to Say No information movement.

Workers are not going to vote

THANKS TO "THE NEW WORKER" newspaper for this interview with Siyabonga Mtshali, a disillusioned, card-carrying ANC member and a worker at Ekurhuleni's Disaster and Emergency Management Services. CWAU organiser, Khongelani Hlungwani, interviewed

him to get his thoughts on the upcoming elections.

Khongelani Hlungwani: Hi comrade, what are the workplaces issues you guys have as we are approaching 2019 election?

Siyabonga Mtshali: There are plenty of problems. The ANC failed us because our whole department is not permanent. We are under contracts even though we have worked for many years. This is a clear indication that the ruling party does not keep their promises that they made back in 2014.

KH: Do you think the upcoming elections can bring change to the problems you are facing?

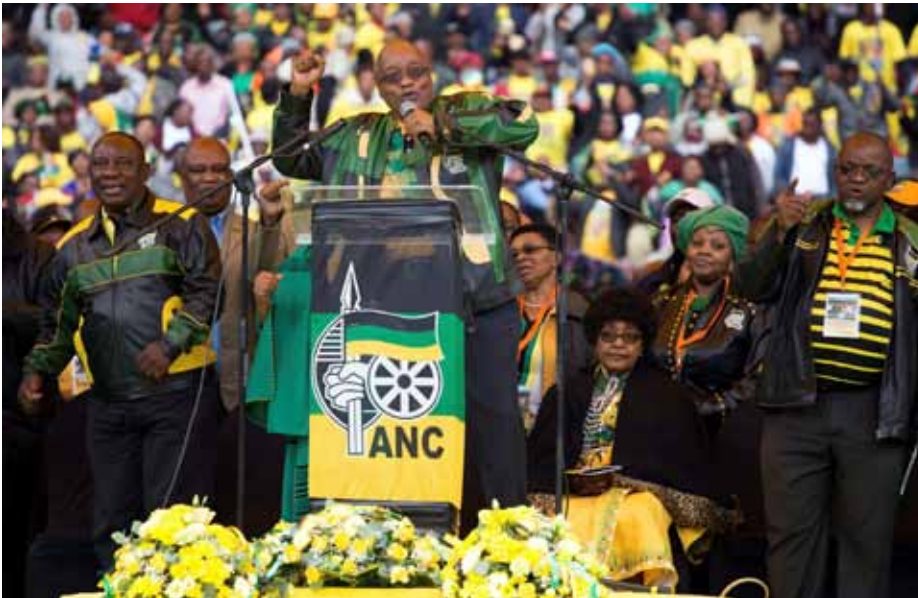
SM: I do not think so, because right now is just time for promises and making noise. I realise all political parties are full of lies and empty promises.

KH: Are there any parties doing things differently?

SM: I think EFF for now is doing much better. Since EFF got into parliament there are some changes. Look at the issue of land. I don't think the DA have the interests of us black people as they keep using vulgar language toward us. And my organisation, which is ANC, does not fulfil their promises. That is my concern.

KH: Where are you taking your vote to this time?

SM: Eish! I really don't know. We heard the president in his SONA address, and there are some changes since the time of Zuma. The SONA was peaceful. But still, I don't think I'm going to vote due to how



Right now is just time for promises and making noise. I realise all political parties are full of lies and empty promises... And my organisation, which is ANC, does not fulfil their promises. That is my concern.

bad they treat the workers especially in municipalities. I know most workers are not going to vote.

KH: Clarify me here. Why will workers not vote for an opposition party?

SM: Because people have love for ANC. So they feel like it is much better just not to vote.

What the bosses earn

JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WORRIED THAT they might be suffering as a result of the stagnant economy, this should put your mind at rest:

Investec: CEO Steven Koseff earned pounds. The basic salary came to £1.7m or R31.17m. Total remuneration was £3.5m or R64m.

FirstRand: CEO JP Burger's guaranteed package was R10.2m. His guaranteed and variable pay was R37.58m Add incentives and he got a cool R49.4m.

Woolworths: the company has not been doing too well since it bought the Australian chain, David Jones. But the CEO Ian Moir still pulled in a total of R30.6m. So much for payment by results.

Vodacom: CEO Shameel Joosub's remuneration came to R27.6m.

Sasol: one CEO is not enough for Sasol. It has two "joint CEOs". There's Stephen Cornell, paid in US dollars with a basic salary in rands. He got a total of R46.2m. And then Bongani Nqwababa's. He must be some kind of junior CEO, I suppose. I wonder why. Anyway he got a mere R25.9m. Looks like he was paid only in rands. So a total CEO bill of R72m.

Dishonesty no obstacle to office

IT SEEMS THAT SOUTH AFRICA IS NOT the only country in which judges find that government ministers have been dishonest and yet they continue

regardless. A judge has found that Brazil's new environment minister altered plans for an environmentally protected area in order to favour businesses. The judge found that Salles violated legal and regulatory norms, impeded the participation of other sectors of the environmental system and "attended the economic interests of a restricted group in detriment to the defence of the environment". All of this was found before he was actually appointed. But none if it impressed President Bolsonaro enough to stop the appointment.

Gig economy exploitation

THE AVERAGE UBER, LYFT OR POSTMATES delivery driver made 53% less in 2017 than in 2013. They are earning about \$783 a month on average (down from \$1,469). Those are the findings of a study by the JPMorgan Chase Institute. Why have those drivers suffered such a steep income decline? Fewer working hours, a flattening of demand, a decline in trip prices and an overall decrease in the amount these platforms are paying. Proof that what these platforms do is to woo workers with offers of more money, and then, once they have joined, take the money away again.

social media

Amandla! Forum: Helena Sheehan

HORST KLEINSCHMIDT
I ATTENDED THE HELENA SHEEHAN TALK and discussion at AIDC last night. Just wanted you to know of my appreciation that you arrange for such unique talks and cater for the discussion that followed. The diversity of opinion but also the frustrated

anger of young Black students expressed, demonstrates the need for such fora, the more so in the face of the failure of political parties at this time. Thank you. We need more such political, non-aligned education!

Xolobeni and the irony of history

GREY ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIORS
VOLUNTEERS WITH MID, MRLA, ZVT:

We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sistas in Xolobeni. Our attempt to oppose the Armed Forces Night shoot showed us in our middle class neighbourhood that the state does not listen to the citizen and will impose with violence using our taxpayers money to do so. R130million... Nothing has changed except the colour of the boot on the working man's neck.

The era of unbridled faith in the virtues of the markets is over

NAZEER AHMED SONDAY:

IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE OVER FOR CR. HE is on a path for more elite capture BEE style on land. We on the path to become a MacDonald republic. "

ABRI D:

WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN A STRONGHOLD OF persistence when it comes to repeatedly making the wrong choices.

Land reform: expropriation without compensation is not the central issue

PHILLIP NEWMARCH:

A VERY INTERESTING AND THOUGHTFUL article. But one thing it doesn't mention is our long "history" (?) of one lot of people chasing another lot away and grabbing their land. Many would say that's not just "history" – it's happening, right now, even on an individual scale, with "gentrification" and the like.

It seems to me we need something that confirms each person's right to live where they do. There have been advances in that regard, but not enough. They need to be "bulldozer-proofed".

Also, while there are "communal" tenure schemes of various kinds (which the article describes), these have certain disadvantages in that people are locked into them, and the useful value to each person is dependent on the fortunes of the whole. If an area suffers misfortune due to environmental degradation, or if someone finds better employment in a town, they can only escape by leaving everything behind, and moving to some other area with only their portable belongings. They cannot exchange their place in the "commune" (whatever it may be worth) for another place outside.

Election time again

By *Amandla!* correspondent



The legacy of the ANC government of the last 25 years is devastating.

SO WE COME TO ANOTHER election – the fourth including 1994. Increasingly, radio talk shows are populated by anguished would-be voters in despair at the choice before them. We can't promise to solve that conundrum, just to offer a perspective.

Any such discussion must start with a review of where South Africa stands now. What is the situation that will face a new government and what kind of strategies are required to address them? And it immediately becomes clear that the change that is required is fundamental. The legacy of the ANC government of the last 25 years is devastating:

- Economic stagnation, with an economy growing at a rate slower than the increase in population. In other words, shrinking for each inhabitant.
- Economic policy which continues to rest on austerity and an outdated and harmful vision of the Minerals Energy Complex – shipping raw minerals out of the country.
- Job devastation, with more than 10 million people unemployed (from 3 million in 1994) – 36% of people who need work can't get a job.
- Crumbling health care and education systems.

- Levels of violence, especially against women, that are devastatingly high.
- A polarised and divided society where racism is embedded in privilege, and non-racialism is a fading illusion.
- 3 million households without a proper house to live in.
- Unstable and intermittent supply of basic services such as electricity and water.
- Inadequate response to the devastations of climate change.
- Police violence against protestors and peaceful demonstrations.

The state is failing.

Need for fundamental change

IT IS IMMEDIATELY CLEAR THAT, IF THIS is the result of the existing policies, then they must change fundamentally if we want to achieve a different result. Black Economic Empowerment has failed. All it has done is to create a predatory elite, based on massive corruption and cronyism. The neoliberal, subcontracted model of capitalism has failed. It is failing even in advanced capitalist countries. In South Africa it has led to expensive and inefficient service provision, as well as

offering endless opportunities for super-exploitation of informalised workers and corrupt relationships between private suppliers and government procurement.

Secondly, the focus on extractive industries – digging rock and shipping it out – must be fundamentally changed. The President's "back to the future" dream of restoring the South African economy through more energetic, more efficient mining, is not only an illusion. It is also dangerous. We have seen by now that it is not mining that creates significant numbers of jobs, nor is it processing of the mineral that is extracted. It is downstream manufacturing. And the manufacturing share of the South African economy is now half what it was in 1994. It is no coincidence that manufacturing has declined as unemployment has risen.

And thirdly, there cannot be a viable strategy for the South African economy without addressing the fundamental issue of climate change. If nothing else, Cyclone Idai has brought home the threat posed by runaway climate change.

In short, any party which fails to offer fundamental change, including a strategy to achieve that change, will not be capable of delivering "a better life for all". The time for slogans is past.

Many parties, few solutions

ALTHOUGH A RECORD NUMBER OF parties will be standing in the national election one cannot say the voter is spoiled for choice. Very few get to the roots of the crisis facing South Africa. Most of the parties offer variations on the ANC's failed policies.

Many voters are being sold the idea that there is a new dawn. The ANC is in the process of being renewed, they are told. There is a narrative that goes roughly like this: Ramaphosa has had to bide his time, just as he did in order finally to win the Presidency. But the bidding will be over on 9th May. Then he will have a mandate to sweep away the rot and emerge with a nice, clean cabinet to lead a reformed ANC. So our duty as electors is clear – give the ANC the biggest mandate possible because to support ANC is to support Ramaphosa and the big broom.

Since the beginning of Ramaphoria, Amandla has been consistently saying that this is a dream. Ramaphosa is no great reformer. He expresses shock at the state of Eskom. Yet he was the head of Zuma's war room established in 2014 to deal with load shedding. While we tend to be a forgiving nation, we cannot forget nor ignore his role in the Marikana massacre. The police intervened at his behest. His company Shanduka held at least a 9% stake in Lonmin. Moreover, what was he doing while the Zuptas were looting the country? Was he not the Deputy President?

Ramaphosa sits on a knife edge. In the ANC, he presides but does not have power. The looting ANC reaches right down to every local area of South Africa. It would not be turned around even if Ramaphosa could establish hegemony over the national structures. And he manifestly cannot do that.

So the ANC offers us more of the same. And we can see where that has got us. (Incidentally, we can't afford to forget that this is not just the ANC. It is also the Tripartite Alliance – the ANC supported by the Communist Party and Cosatu.)

Since seeing the ANC list for the elections, there has been more support for our view that nothing is changing in the ANC, as known villains find their way high up the list. The Zuma faction is by no means vanquished. Nor will it be vanquished by what happens on 8th May.

On the right?

THE POLICIES OF THE DA ARE NOT significantly different from those of the ANC. They might speed up the privatisation of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) but the strategy is essentially the same. They might resist any change to the Constitution on the land question, but,



The focus on extractive industries – digging rock and shipping it out – must be fundamentally changed. The President's "back to the future" dream of restoring the South African economy through more energetic, more efficient mining, is not only an illusion. It is also dangerous.

as Ben Cousins explained in *Amandla!* 61, expropriation without compensation is not the key issue when it comes to a productive approach to the land question.

The DA's claim to difference has often lain in their approach to cronyism and corruption. However, the shenanigans in the metros where the DA has been in power have damaged that narrative. The DA has made clear that they are not above cadre deployment, as they showed with the Tshwane Mayor Solly Msimanga's unqualified Chief of Staff. Nor are they protected from vicious faction fights, as they have shown in the protracted and damaging battle with Patricia de Lille in Cape Town. The DA is very resolute in terms of being the party of real estate developers, intent on selling state property to capital and driving the poor further from the city. "Reclaim the city" has been battling such proposals in Cape Town.

On the left?

THIS ELECTION WILL SEE THE emergence of parties positioning themselves to the left of the ANC, in particular in the form of the EFF and Numsa's workers party, the SRWP. But the question that needs to be considered is to what extent either party offers a consistent anti-capitalist politics capable of providing a platform for worker and community struggles.

For a while, the EFF seemed to be riding the wave, with a constant profile from their parliamentary dramas with Zuma. But they have been damaged politically by their opportunistic support for DA municipalities as well as their equally opportunistic withdrawal of that

support. Their left orientation is being undermined by the extreme articulation of a narrow African nationalism and racialised discourse when it comes to other oppressed sections of the population, such as so-called coloureds and Indians.

And then there is the authoritarianism and intolerance of difference that suggest a major deficit when it comes to questions of democracy within the EFF. There is a strong sense that if you differ from the Commander in Chief, you will be marginalised.

Numsa's SRWP has very little profile outside of the union and socialist currents, and it is doubtful that in the short space of time before the elections they will be able to gain traction outside of their immediate circles. Its articulation of its politics as Marxist Leninism situates the party in the same ideological camp as the discredited SACP with its Stalinist past. Those looking for a new left politics want to see a party that deals with issues of the changing nature of the working class in the context of mass unemployment and precarious forms of labour, climate change, gender oppression, sexuality and the role of the state within a globalised and financialised economy. They may be disappointed by the SRWP's orthodoxy. Several comrades who have joined the SRWP express concern over the party's lack of structures and decision making processes.

So it may be that we will have to wait for the 2021 local government elections to see political formations that give greater expression to the struggles of working class communities. ■

Elections promise rural people; *the elected forget them*

By Lubabalo Ntsholo



On our way to the hospital, we drove on a dangerous gravel road that had potholes that have been turned to ponds. For over twenty years, the municipality has forgotten that roads need to be maintained.

IN DECEMBER 2015, I WENT TO MY rural home in Keiskammahoek, Eastern Cape, as I usually do during holidays. Then, one rainy night at about 2am, we were woken up by desperate knocks on the door. An eight year old girl had braved the rain and the dark to wake us up because her grandmother was seriously ill and needed to be taken to hospital, 12 kilometres away. Our first struggle was how we were going to get the granny to the car, because when it rains in rural Eastern Cape, most homes are inaccessible by car. We overcame this obstacle by loading her, a critically ill 72 year old, onto a wheelbarrow, then into the car.

On our way to the hospital, we drove on a dangerous gravel road that had potholes that have been turned to ponds. For over twenty years, the municipality

has forgotten that roads need to be maintained. On the journey we had to replace a burst tyre. When we got to the hospital, after much fighting to get attention, we were attended to by a young, hopelessly exhausted Indian doctor. He told me that he had been working since six o'clock the previous morning, alone. He later took me on a tour of the hospital and showed me broken windows, dysfunctional medical machines, lack of medicine, and so on and so forth.

I went back home again, a few months before the 2016 local government elections, and observed a hive of activity, with ANC and DA posters and activists all round. They were promising everyone who cared to listen about the manna that would fall on them if their parties were voted into power at the chronically dysfunctional Amahlathi Local

Municipality. Almost three years later, life has remained constant for the residents of that municipality, as much as it has remained constant for many rural dwellers across the country.

Rural areas abandoned

THE STORY ABOVE REPRESENTS THE SUM total of the struggles faced by rural people, which have been left unresolved, ignored and forgotten since 1994. The systematic, structural and functional problems encountered by rural people have remained constant for decades. Rural dwellers have become the surplus people of the land, remembered only when it is time for elections:

- Disintegrated family structures force the elderly to raise their grandkids, who are themselves eventually forced by circumstances to nurse their grandparents.
- Abandoned road infrastructure renders mobility almost impossible in rural areas.
- A dysfunctional schooling system, broken down public health provision, chronic unemployment, government ineptitude and blatant corruption make it difficult for committed public sector workers, such as the doctor I encountered at ss Gida Hospital, to stay and use their skills for the benefit of the public.
- Water taps installed just after 1994 are dry half the time. There is no sanitation, and potential farmland has been left to lie fallow because there is no coherent form of support for agricultural development.

Rural voting fodder

GRANTED, THE FORMER HOMELANDS were designed to be native labour reserves, with very little potential for sustained and vibrant economic activity. But successive ANC administrations have not developed any new vision for rural development for the past 25 years. Rural people are only good in as far as they are voting fodder for political parties. And they are very important voting fodder. According to Statistics South Africa, at least 65% of the population in South Africa lives in urban and peri-urban areas, with about 25% of the entire urban

population residing in Gauteng. Just over 30% of the population still lives in rural areas, locked in by the deficiencies highlighted above.

These population dynamics pose some strategic challenges for political parties, particularly for the ruling party. The ANC lost a significant majority of urban voters during the 2016 local government elections. They were completely decimated by the DA in Cape Town, lost the symbolically important Nelson Mandela Bay, lost control of the capital City of Tshwane, and lost the economic centre of the country, the City of Johannesburg. It is unlikely that they will ever manage to claw back support in these. A further significant drop in ANC support in Gauteng alone will have serious ramifications for its overall national support. Notable reductions in support in KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo would spell the end of ANC rule. So, reorienting their election machinery to revitalise their rural base is very important for their future electoral survival.

Traditional leaders don't represent rural interests

THEIR MANNER OF ATTRACTING THE rural voters betrays their lack of appreciation of the struggles faced by rural people. Quite honestly, very few political parties seem to have invested time to understand the depth of the problems faced by rural people.

At the centre of political strategy to attract voters is appeasement of traditional leaders. They have the misguided belief that traditional leaders are gateways to rural voters. This is not backed up by any empirical evidence. Quite to the contrary, when parliament was conducting public hearings for the *Traditional Leadership and Khoisan Bill*, there were in total over 500 people who made submissions. Most of them noted the hell-like conditions they were forced to live under by their so-called traditional leaders. Among other issues, they all raised the following:

- Rural people need to have the right to decide the use of their own land. They need to see accountability for revenues earned off their land. And they need to have a say over the boundaries that define their identities.
- Rural people want to be consulted when decisions that have a direct impact on their lives are taken. These decisions should be based on their own evolving customs, on the law, and on the Constitution.
- Chiefs are not private owners of the land. They are custodians of the land for the benefit of entire communities. But



Traditional Leaders at Bhisho Stadium in Eastern Cape. At the centre of political strategy to attract voters is appeasement of traditional leaders. They have the misguided belief that traditional leaders are gateways to rural voters.

successive laws since 1994 have given immense power to chiefs to control, make deals, and even sell the land for their own personal benefit.

SEEN AGAINST THESE SUBMISSIONS FROM a myriad of people, political parties have capitulated to the whims and manipulation of traditional leaders. This demonstrates a spectacular failure to respond to some of the most pressing issues raised by rural people. What they propose for traditional leadership is what can best be described as cosmetic. It is an attempt to reconfigure the institution of traditional leadership, without taking the power and giving it to the people. This leaves rural people locked into second class citizenship. They are condemned to be led by feudal lords who are used by politicians and unscrupulous mining companies for their own selfish ends.

This only perpetuates the continuing domination of rural people by a small feudal and mainly male rural oligarchy. It only cements the exclusion of women from decision-making processes. And it further entrenches the power of rogue traditional leaders to sell off pieces of land and make deals with multinational companies, as with the Xolobeni community in the Eastern Cape.

The strategy of appeasing traditional leaders will surely not do anything for democratisation and development of rural areas. It will only create distance between political parties and the rural electorate.

Gatekeeping by civil society movement

THERE ARE ALSO RURAL AREAS, SUCH AS the area I come from, with no history

of traditional leadership for at least the past 50 years. Governance in these areas has completely disintegrated too, with thoroughly inept municipal councils, completely detached from the people. In the absence of these structures of governance, civil society movements play a crucial role in plugging some of the gaps, and in facilitating alternative forms of economic participation, from the ground up. These civil society movements, such as Ntinga Ntaba ka Ndoda in Keiskammahoek, despite their noble ideals and supernatural determination, are also locked in another struggle, the struggle to merely survive. One day, perhaps we may write about the tragic hypocrisy of the civil society movement, the gatekeeping and the attempt to control the struggles of rural people by urban based people with access to huge donor funds, whose work in entrenching rural democracy is only superficial.

As things stand, rural people are caught. On the one hand politicians who are woefully out of their depth in terms of understanding what needs to be done. On the other, established civil society organisations who only see rural people as a means through which they can access money and prestige, while stunting authentic development of rural-based civil society organisations. Rural people remain alone, locked in grinding poverty and imposed underdevelopment. But they persist, as they have always done, to live their lives in dignity. Rural people are truly on their own. ■

Lubabalo Ntsholo is an EFF parliamentary researcher. He is writing in his personal capacity.

Searching for just one party for a just transition

By Janet Cherry



ANC manifesto recognises the reality that we have large coal reserves that can provide cheap energy that can also assist with affordable prices.

PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA'S SONA address on 7th February 2019 made the briefest possible mention of the just (and necessary) transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. He acknowledged that "The devastating effects of global warming on our climate are already being felt, with extreme weather conditions damaging livelihoods, communities and economies." But he did not speak the phrase "climate change" out loud.

He used the term "just transition" in the context of the restructuring of Eskom:

"Security of energy supply is an absolute imperative. Eskom is in crisis and the risks it poses to South Africa are great. It could severely damage our economic and social development ambitions...We will lead a process with labour, Eskom and other stakeholders to work out the details of a *just transition*, and proper, credible and sustainable plans that will address the needs of all those who may be affected."

WHICH TRANSITION WAS THE PRESIDENT referring to? The transition away from the current form of Eskom to an "unbundled" Eskom, of course, with the separation of generation, transmission and distribution

of energy. Far from an understanding of the need to transition away from fossil fuels, the President made a strong statement that the oil giant Total's finding of offshore gas could be a "game changer" for the economy.

So on the one hand the labour left is struggling to come to terms with the need for a transition away from fossil fuel, in particular coal and oil. Its overriding concerns are unemployment and fear of job losses. On the other hand, the concern of the ruling ANC is to expand the current Minerals Energy Complex domination of the economy. And they have the happy collusion and investment of the biggest fossil-fuel companies in the global capitalist world.

What does ANC offer on just transition?

ITS MANIFESTO EMPHASISES JOB creation through "inclusive growth". It does have some admirable emphasis on township and village economies, cooperatives, localisation and de-monopolisation. So it offers a commitment to:

- "Continue to support the use of renewable technologies in the country's energy mix to reduce the cost of energy, decrease greenhouse emissions, build the local industry through increased

localisation and create jobs, while recognising the reality that we have large coal reserves that can provide cheap energy that can also assist with affordable prices.

- Take forward Nedlac's Green Economy Accord on renewable energy. We will ensure that workers are treated fairly and reskilled and that the needs of people and the environment are at the centre of a just transition to a sustainable and low carbon energy future."

BUT WHILE IT DOES ACKNOWLEDGE THE need for a just transition, the danger is that its concept of just transition is limited to a tinkering with the existing Minerals Energy Complex.

Is DA any better?

THE DA, CURRENTLY THE LARGEST opposition party, offers remarkably similar rhetoric in its commitment to policies which respond to climate threats. It seems to understand climate threats as a rural problem rather than a challenge to the entire economic system based on resource and labour exploitation. If in government, the DA intends to:

"Improve the quality of vital infrastructure and ensure rural and farming communities can adapt to the challenges of climate change by compiling a detailed resilience plan to respond to the most urgent impacts of climate change with a view to minimise the shocks and stressors experienced by the agricultural sector and rural communities."

The emphasis on building resilience is not situated within an understanding of the structural link between climate change and global capitalism, nor of the need for a just transition. It does, however, have some innovative policies regarding IPPs and the building of local grids:

"A DA national government will:

- Support all viable renewable options including wind power, where applicable; and concentrated solar power and PV solar power projects in our deserts and built above the water surface of selected dams...
- ...[allow for] The expansion and updating of the grid, which will allow more Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to connect and begin contributing to generating capacity."

THIS DOES INDICATE THE POTENTIAL TO allow for Community Owned Renewable

Energy initiatives. However, the DA's economic policy is based on private enterprise and a free market, rather than worker, community or collective ownership of the means of (energy) production.

Who do we vote for?

SO IF WE CANNOT RELY ON THE ANC OR its mainstream opponent, the liberal DA, to further the agenda of a just transition, which party can we look to when we cast our vote on 8th May?

Among the mainstream contenders, the best bet is the EFF. Its comprehensive election manifesto takes up the "climate jobs" refrain abandoned by the labour movement:

"The EFF government will officially adopt the civil society-driven 'one million climate jobs' initiative as a government programme. Through this initiative, the EFF government will create one million jobs aimed at transitioning South Africa from coal-based energy sources to renewable energy."

IN ADDITION, THE MANIFESTO COMMITS an EFF government to:

- "reduce carbon emissions by 10% by 2024."
- "collaborate with African governments to drive the Green Revolution across the continent"
- "progressively introduce carbon taxes as one additional tool in the fight for sustainable development."

THE PROBLEM IS THAT THESE CLEAR AND admirable climate-related goals are situated within the EFF's dubious populist politics, with rhetoric on other issues clouding – and overriding, in the minds of voters – a straightforward focus on the just transition.

Can we look then to one of the smaller labour and/or green parties as a viable alternative? On the labour front, the main contender is the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party, led by Numsa. It can be expected to articulate the Numsa position on just transition. While no election manifesto was available at the time of writing, Numsa positions taken in 2018 regarding IPPs and coal-fired power stations were widely understood as a reversal of the "million climate jobs" position taken at COP17 (Durban, December 2011) where Cosatu launched this ambitious commitment to the transition to renewable energy.

What about the greens?

ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL FRONT, THERE is more than one active "green party" in



Far from an understanding of the need to transition away from fossil fuels, the President made a strong statement that the oil giant Total's finding of offshore gas could be a "game changer" for the economy.

South Africa. The Green Party of South Africa will contest the election with a view to promoting its agenda rather than winning a majority in parliament. Its manifesto takes the clearest position on the need for transition from fossil fuels: "An end to fossil fuel dependency – over a period of five years, with strong incentives for the development and adoption of alternative energy sources."

With an admirable emphasis on revitalising local industry, spokesperson Anisha Garieb also makes mention of workers' rights:

"If we revitalise and incentivise our local industry, we would have a better economy – and we would have control over how our workers are treated and control over how our products are made. It's a much better use of our resources"

A VERY SIMILAR AGENDA IS PUT forward by the confusing "Green South Africa" party. But all they say about energy and the need for a transition is that "Energy production needs to be reformed".

However, any green party that hopes to attract anything beyond a fringe of middle-class environmentalists would need to "speak" to concerns of the majority of poor and unemployed – to take a position which combines social justice with environmental priorities. In a phrase, a "just transition" party is needed.

Ecosocialism

THE ONE EXPLICITLY ECOSOCIALIST party that was registered in South Africa

was the Socialist Green Coalition, formed in 2009 under the leadership of seasoned left activist Trevor Ngwane. There is no indication to date that it will contest the 2019 election.

Lastly, Azapo, which has at times articulated a clear ecosocialist position (although it does not claim it as such), has not emphasised or referred to a just transition in its manifesto for 2019. Its limited focus on the environment notes that "An Azapo government will adopt clean production strategies, promote renewable energy and wean our economy off fossil fuels such as oil and coal"

Despite its explicit socialist orientation and some admirable policies such as a Basic Income Grant, Azapo is not likely to attract votes from more than a tiny section of the black working class.

Sadly, South Africans do not have a convincing alternative party to vote for on 8th May. The reasons for this lie in the class basis of the leadership of the dominant parties in South Africa, and their overriding economic interest. This combines with the structurally weak position of the working class and the failure of the left to clearly marry the solution to both the economic and environmental crises facing us. Those of us whose primary concern is a just transition will have to recognise that it is work and mobilisation on the ground, rather than elections, that will make the difference. ■

Janet Cherry is an ecosocialist activist and Professor of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth.

Québec Solidaire: a movement with a parliamentary wing?

By Andre Frappier



Students in Montreal mobilise for the climate change strike in March 2019. We must keep Québec Solidaire true to its aim of being “a party of the ballot box and the streets.”

QUÉBEC IS A PROVINCE OF Canada which has long contained a powerful movement for national liberation from Canada. It is a province which is culturally different from the rest of Canada: the dominant language is French.

Québec Solidaire (QS) describes itself as a “Popular Movement” rather than a political party. In 2018 it increased its vote in Québec from 7.6% to 16.1%. This gave it 10 seats in the Québec National Assembly, up from the three it won in 2014. It also

overtook the Parti Québécois as the biggest party supporting sovereignty for Québec.

Québec Solidaire campaigned on a clearly left platform centred on combating climate change, reinvigorating and expanding Québec’s public health care system, introducing the \$15 minimum wage and many other enlightened policy proposals. It supported the “Right to Say No” to mining – communities should be given a veto over mining permits. It also advocated an end to austerity, with free public education from pre-

school to university, a universal drug insurance plan and strengthened rights for workers. Other key parts of its programme included: standing for free public transport and nationalisation of inter-city transportation; a major increase in renewable energy production under public control; a ban on subsidies for fossil fuels and on exploration and exploitation of carbon-based energy sources.

As Richard Fidler reports in *Canadian Dimension* magazine: “In its 86-page Economic Transition Plan, entitled “Maintenant ou jamais” (now or never),

Québec Solidaire identifies the fight against climate change as the biggest challenge of our century. Accordingly, QS put this issue front and center in its campaign, pledging that a QS government will decrease Greenhouse Gas emissions to 48% of 1990 levels by 2030. “A colossal collective effort is needed”, it says. “Our plan is conceived within the perspective of a Québec that is marching towards its independence, to provide itself with the tools needed to carry out the transition. This is the real meaning of sovereignty, of a people who themselves direct their economy and their relationship to the territory.”

Origins of the success

THE SUCCESS OF QUÉBEC SOLIDAIRE IN more than doubling its seats from three to 10, including four seats outside Montréal, is a real victory that opens a new chapter for the Left.

The victory is not merely the by-product of a changing political climate. Partly, it reflects a generational shift; pre-election polling showed QS furthest ahead among voters under the age of 35. It is also the result of a protracted process of party building, especially over the last few years. QS members decided two years before the election to take the initiative of engaging social movements, unions, and local communities in a discussion. It was a discussion not only about what it will take to beat the Liberals, but also about how to fight neoliberal policies and their advocates. After all, the point is to change society, and not just usher in a changing of the guard.

There was also a conscious effort to make sure that the candidates were representative of the constituencies they represented. So over half of the candidates in Québec’s constituencies were women. They included a Muslim in a Montréal constituency and an Inuit in a far-north constituency (Inuits are the indigenous people of Northern Canada).

Challenges we face

THE TIRED AND CORRUPT LIBERAL PARTY was no longer able to maintain credibility, despite its election promises. The Parti Québécois, in power just before the Liberals, behaved in a similar way, for example subsidising oil exploration against the protests of local leaders, indigenous people and environmental groups.

The prevailing winds in the world, however, are not blowing from the Left. Look at the victory of Macron in France, Trump in the United States and Bolsonaro in Brazil. This adds to the challenges faced by the Left and particularly Québec Solidaire. We have to put forward a

Québec Election:

BREAKTHROUGH FOR QUÉBEC SOLIDAIRE



The success of Québec Solidaire in more than doubling its seats from three to 10, including four seats outside Montréal, is a real victory that opens a new chapter for the Left.

comprehensive and persuasive political response to the situation in order to convince voters of the need for far-reaching social change.

If we fail to provide this response, then protectionist and anti-immigration sentiment will maintain its hold on an electorate in search of solutions. The desire for social change also takes a right-wing form. So the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), a new right wing neoliberal party, was elected for the first time in the same election in which the QS vote increased. The CAQ is in government for the first time. To defeat the Right, we need to clearly show who is responsible for the current political and economic crises.

A key strategic choice

IN ITS MAY 2017 CONVENTION, THE YEAR before the election, QS members had to discuss whether or not we would agree to make electoral alliances with the Parti Québécois. That question was raised during the two previous elections and members voted to compete in all constituencies on our own.

But this time many of us figured it was time to go further than that. We adopted a position which said that we will not make alliances with parties that are associated with neoliberal practices or policies of exclusion, whether on ethnic or racial cultural bases.

That decision had a decisive impact on our future. In the following months, despite the fact that we were really under

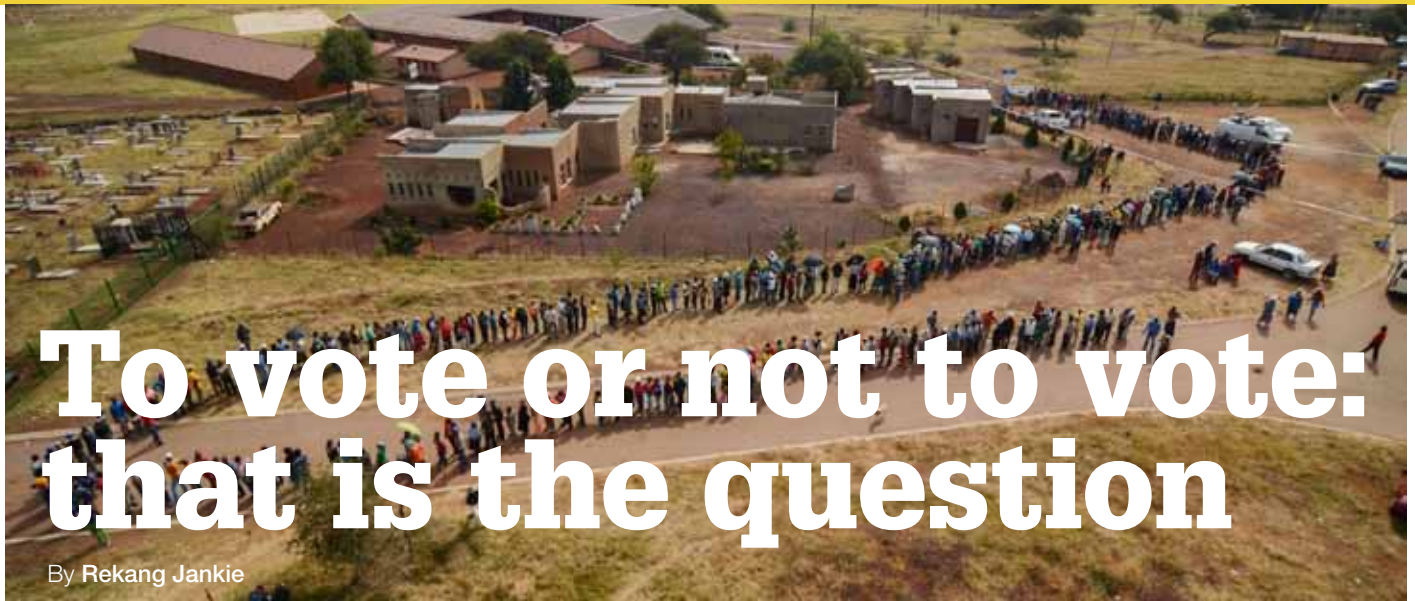
attack by PQ leadership and some of the media, our support continued to increase. Our decision made clear that we have nothing in common with neoliberal policies and right-wing nationalism. We are fighting for Québec national liberation, and this fight is directly linked to the struggle for social justice.

Challenges for the future

THE CHALLENGE FOR QS LIES NOT ONLY in waging a successful election campaign, in the traditional sense. It also lies in our ability to restore hope for change and rally the forces of social opposition to rekindle the struggle.

Now that we have been elected in much more significant numbers, we also face a different challenge. We have a much larger caucus of 10 MPs, and much greater resources. It will be a new challenge for the party organisation to limit the autonomy and power of the parliamentary wing. There are many historical precedents for left wing parties who, once they are elected to parliament, stop being a real movement and become dominated by their parliamentary representatives. We must keep QS true to its aim of being “a party of the ballot box and the streets.” ■

André Frappier is part of the leadership of Québec Solidaire, and a former union activist with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, where he was National director.



To vote or not to vote: that is the question

By Re kang Jankie

Voter turnout has consistently worsened since our first national elections in 1994.

WITH ELECTIONS ON THE horizon, South Africans are being encouraged to go to the polls. This extends beyond regular political party campaigning - it is a blanket call simply to vote. This is to be expected. Voter turnout has consistently worsened since our first national elections in 1994. What is worrying however is how the push to vote is being framed as both a political and moral imperative.

This perspective downplays crucial considerations. They include:

- the role of choice in a democracy
- the distrust which the failures of the past 24 years have created among voters, and
- the limitations of our electoral system.

IN ORDER FOR ELECTIONS TO BE meaningful, concerns with public participation, the closed-list member system and the responsiveness of parliament all need to be addressed. Failing to address these problems will render the calls to vote divorced from the reality of our country.

Voting and Democracy

THE ARGUMENT THAT WE MUST VOTE essentially rides on two assertions. The first one is that voting is a right that has been won through hard sacrifices. As a result, the decision to not vote is a betrayal of that sacrifice. In fact, voting in South Africa is a process described by Suntosh Pillay in the Daily Maverick as being “a tragic appreciation for the thousands who sacrificed their lives to give us the power and freedom that comes with electing our leaders”. Part of this critique of abstaining from voting is the notion that non-voters are an apathetic group.

But voting is not the beginning and the end of democracy. It is something that

has to happen in a democratic society, but it is not itself the sum total of democracy. The decision to vote is only one of the many ways people exercise their political freedoms. To see abstaining as a betrayal is to overlook the other dimensions of the freedom many fought for. This is especially true in a context where the electoral process has lost its meaning in effecting change.

Democracy is a far richer process than elections every few years. In focusing on the value of voting, the important victories currently being eroded are forgotten. Freedom of speech, association, assembly are but a few basic rights that many South Africans fought for that are currently under threat. The decision to abstain from voting can and should also be understood as the exercise of hard-won freedom. An essential element of the freedoms won by the anti-apartheid movement is the freedom to choose whether or not to participate.

And of course how to participate. Formations of the unemployed and homeless such as the Assembly of the Unemployed have advocated spoiling votes by stuffing cvs into the ballot box. This is very different from the current rhetoric that frames voting for a party as the only way in which individuals or groups can exercise their political freedoms. What the arguments that centre on voting do is to obscure the fact that democracy is, or perhaps should be, defined by *freedom* and by freedom I mean both freedom to do things (speak, assemble etc) and also freedom from harmful things (hunger, poverty etc). Under this expanded conception, voting is no more honourable an activity than not voting. Both fulfil the same function: exercising political freedoms.

In this context, the common refrain that non-voters are apathetic

flies in the face of vast evidence to the contrary. Service delivery protests, social movements, community-based organisations and NGOs are some but not all of the avenues for political engagement that show South Africans as a politically engaged populace. Voter turnout in elections is thus not the only mechanism by which South Africans engage in political activity. Nor should it be used as the primary metric upon which we measure political apathy.

In addition, an individual's decision to not vote should send a clear message to political formations that they have evaluated the electoral options available to them and have determined that these options do not satisfy their political needs and wants. The implications of this are that, rather than non-voters being the ones who have to effect some change in their practices, it is political parties that need to make the concerted effort to earn their votes.

Incapable parties

AT PRESENT THE POLITICAL PARTIES ON the table seem incapable of achieving that task. The ANC under Ramaphosa has begun a project of renewal: the renewal of a neoliberal project that is continuously being rejected across the world. The Democratic Alliance has decided to add xenophobia to its set of right-wing campaign tools. The EFF, on the other hand, has the dubious honour of being the political party most likely to be called “fascist” by political commentators, given their crude ethnic nationalism.

In response to this fertile ground for political opposition, a motley crew of poorly acronymed parties has emerged. GOOD, ATM, ACM, SRWP, and a whole host have presented themselves as alternatives to the status quo. Yet exactly what it is that differentiates them from existing

parties is quite hard to establish. GOOD's selling point is that they are not the DA, ATM and ACM have offered a home for the Zuma ANC outside of the ANC. SRWP has adopted a vision of socialism that can best described as "socialism from above". The extent to which even new entrants are no different from their peers is evident. And as such who to vote for matters, and currently South African voters have slim pickings.

Why Trust Elections?

THE SECOND KEY CLAIM OF THE PRO-voting contingent is that voting has instrumental value as it allows the citizenry to effectively decide who governs and how they will do so. Yet 55.6% of South Africans surveyed in the 2017 South African Reconciliation Barometer believe voting to be meaningless due to a lack of trust in politicians. In addition, 51% of South Africans surveyed do not believe that their vote makes any meaningful difference in society. In light of these sentiments, it is important to note that the past 25 years have engendered a real and legitimate scepticism about how effective electoral politics are.

For 25 years South African have had the opportunity to participate in free and fair elections. Despite this, South African life is typified by deep poverty affecting more than half the country, one of the highest rates of inequality in the world and high unemployment. These are real failures that voting has not been able to sufficiently resolve for much of the country's population. As a result, South Africans are right to wonder whether or not elections are a genuinely meaningful activity.

It begins and ends with elections

IN MANY WAYS THIS STEMS FROM HOW *limited* and *limiting* a political activity voting is. Every five years, citizens over the age of 18 are afforded the opportunity to go to the polls. They select their party of choice for the provincial and national governments. They return home and are subsequently afforded few meaningful avenues to interact with their "representative". In fact, representative is a largely misleading word to use. As former MP Ben Turok highlighted in his autobiography, he and his colleagues were assigned to constituencies with little regard to their historic and/or political links to those constituents. They were subsequently expected to overcome the barriers between themselves and these constituents while also carrying out their other parliamentary responsibilities.

The result of this is that studies have shown South Africans to have some of



Assembly of the Unemployed protesting in 2017. Formations of the unemployed and homeless such as the Assembly of the Unemployed have advocated spoiling votes by stuffing CVs into the ballot box.

the lowest rates of MP recognition on the continent. Exceptional parliamentarians may be able to rise above the limits of this process. However, the average MP is too alienated from their base to meaningfully represent their "constituents".

This distance between MPs and members of the public is compounded by the limitations in South Africa's public participation process. This is true whether it be in the case of individuals, interest groups, unions or other civil society organisations. Those organisations, usually community-based organisations, and individuals with limited resources can often not access these platforms. It effectively reduces them to voters without adequate representation or the opportunity to influence the law-making and policy making functions of government. In addition to this, research from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group indicated that out of 1,134 committee sessions held, only 39 (3%) featured comment from the public. What this means is that one of the most valuable processes for political engagement is effectively inaccessible to the general public.

Effectively the arguments in favour of elections possessing instrumental value do not stand. Representatives do not represent the people nor are processes for public participation genuinely participatory. Voting's potential to shape and direct the future of the country is effectively lost as soon as we leave the polling station.

Towards an imaginative approach to democracy

THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT elections cannot be valuable. Rather it is to argue that the flaws in our electoral system, the current nature of

party politics, the corrupting effects of participating in an electoral system embedded within a society marked by extreme levels of inequality, prevent the realisation of the ideals of democratic society. The narrow framing of elections traps our imagination in the way things are now. This can be harmful if, as I've shown above, the current situation needs deep transformation. Participation in elections becomes relevant when it is part of a genuine mass movement and struggle for fundamental socio-economic transformation and social justice at all levels, including gender, environment, etc.

Thus, while voting can and should be a meaningful part of political life, the fundamental flaws embedded in our electoral system strip the process of much of its real value. Political processes need to be responsive in clear ways. Public participation must be maximised and members of parliament should be transformed from party representatives to public representatives through shifts towards a constituency-based or a mixed-member proportional representation electoral system. Doing so might lead to greater accountability of elected representatives and erode party patronage machinery. This could go some way to ensuring that the legitimate needs of the masses are taken more seriously by elected representatives.

Beyond shifts in electoral systems, for elections and party politics to be ultimately meaningful they must be centred around alternatives to the status quo. They must be anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, anti-racist, pro-LGBTQ+ and at their core anti-oppression and exploitation. ■

Rekang Jankie is a media activist and founding editor of theprogressivecorner.com



The choice for the people in this election is between the incumbent president, an ex-general (who participated vigorously in previous military coups and dictatorships but is now a "converted democrat") and an oil tycoon. No wonder the voter turnout is likely to be only around 45%.

Nigeria's nightmare

By Michael Roberts

NIGERIA HAS JUST HAD A general election to elect a new president and Congress. Nigeria is often ignored in the global scheme of things. But it is the largest country in Africa, with around 200m in population and a larger national output than South Africa. It is rich in natural resources (especially fossil fuel energy) and its people. But it is appallingly poor.

Nigeria is the prime example of a country, fashioned by imperialism from

various original large tribes, originally for the slave trade, and later into a state for the extreme exploitation by multi-national companies. The Nigerian elite (based on the military and oil businesses) has taken its cut from this exploitation and rules through patronage, corruption, and in the recent past by outright military dictatorship.

For the last 20 years, however, there has been a semblance of democracy, with elections for governments. But this democracy is relative. In the mainly

Muslim inland north-east, there is a bitter battle going on with Islamic terrorist groups (Boko Haram) who seek to impose strict Islamic rule over swathes of part of Nigeria.

But at least, in 2015, the last president of Nigeria, Goodluck Johnson, conceded defeat to the current President without trying to stay in power using the military and chicanery – for the first time in Nigeria's chequered history. The general election this time pits the incumbent Muhammadu Buhari (76 years), of the

governing All Progressives Congress (APC), against the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) led by Atiku Abubakar (72 years). The APC purports to be a centre-left party opposed to austerity and in favour of better conditions for Nigerians, while the PDP advocates neo-liberal pro-market, pro-oil company policies.

Buhari's platform is "to be tough on insecurity and corruption" (which ironically was little changed under his presidency), and he wants to complete much-needed infrastructure projects. Abubakar is a pro-business free marketeer whose main pledges have been to privatise giant state-run companies and float the embattled naira currency. In practice, as in the US, there is little to choose between the two main candidates. Both men are from the mainly Muslim north of the country, which is where Buhari gets his support. Abubakar gets his from the south and south-east. The capital Lagos with its urbanised 20m swings between the two parties and will decide the result.

Both leading candidates are Muslims by religion and both intend to do nothing to change the nightmarish poverty and inequality in Nigeria, or even to establish equality before the law and protect human rights. As one middle-class urban voter put it: "They [Abubakar and Buhari] are both terrible people and not fit to be president ... I don't think Atiku will bring any real change if he wins. And all the 'experience and leadership' they've sold us at all levels, what has it brought us really?"

A young country

WHILE THEY ARE IN THEIR 70s, MORE than half of Nigeria's registered voters are under 35. Nigeria is a youthful country with a very fast growing population. Indeed, on current trends, Nigeria will double its population to 400m by 2050 and by any stretch become the most important state in Africa.

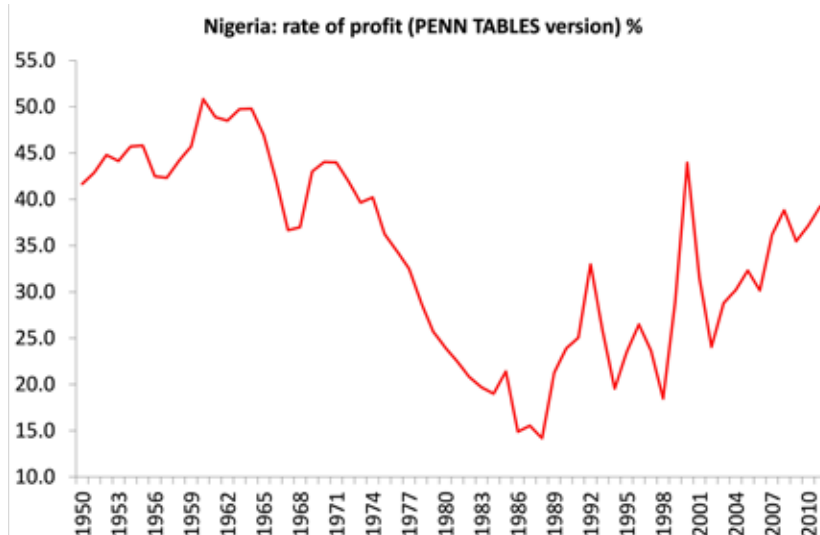
Young people (0 to 19 years of age) account for more than 54% of the population and their conditions are dire. Currently nearly a quarter of the working age population is unemployed, while the youth unemployment rate reached an all-time high of 38% in the second quarter of 2018.

An extractive economy

THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY IS A ONE-TRICK pony, as are many in Africa controlled by imperialism. Oil and gas production dominates; so all depends on the price of oil globally.

The Nigerian capitalist economy operates mostly for the foreign multinational oil companies. There is little investment outside of energy. Overall investment to GDP moves with the vagaries of the crude oil price and since the sharp fall after 2010, it has fallen to a 20 year low.

Investment in any capitalist economy, including Nigeria, depends primarily on its profitability. It is difficult to get decent data to measure the overall profitability of Nigerian capital. But using the Penn World Tables, I reckon it looks something like this.



This graph shows the wildly fluctuating rate of profit in the last 25 years, in response largely to the oil price.

Vulnerable to the oil price

THE PROFITABILITY OF CAPITAL SEEMS to follow closely the price of crude oil, demonstrating again that the Nigerian economy is imbalanced and structured to benefit only international oil, and not even domestic capital. In the boom period for the oil price in the 2000s, GDP growth took off and the rate of profit on capital (on my measure) rose 60%. But since 2010, the oil price has halved and Nigeria's real GDP growth has disappeared.

And the falling oil price and Nigeria's slide down has meant a rising budget and external trade deficit. That means the next government will be applying yet more austerity for the people while trying to restore profitability for the energy industries.

With the sharp drop in the oil price in 2016, the economy quickly slipped into recession and the slow recovery since 2017 has had little effect on providing jobs

for young people and others. No wonder the biggest national group of immigrants trying to get into Europe from North Africa are Nigerian.

A poor, unequal country

WHILE NIGERIA MAY HAVE THE LARGEST GDP in Africa, with 200 million people, its income per person is shockingly low at just 19% of the world's average. "Inequality in terms of income and opportunities has been growing rapidly and has adversely affected poverty reduction. The North-South divide has widened in recent years due to the Boko Haram insurgency and a lack of economic development in the northern part of the country. Large pockets of Nigeria's population still live in poverty, without adequate access to basic services, and could benefit from more inclusive development policies. The lack

of job opportunities is at the core of the high poverty levels, of regional inequality, and of social and political unrest in the country." (IMF report).

Inequality is huge, with the gini coefficient of inequality of income over 40. Nigeria has the highest proportion of people earning below the World Bank's definition of poverty in the world! Out of 180 countries, Transparency International places it the 144th least corrupt – in other words, it is near the top for corruption. Nigeria's annual inflation rate is

permanently in double digits, with interest rates for borrowing near 20%.

No real choice

THE CHOICE FOR THE PEOPLE IN THIS election is between the incumbent president, an ex-general (who participated vigorously in previous military coups and dictatorships but is now a "converted democrat") and an oil tycoon. No wonder the voter turnout is likely to be only around 45% of 73m eligible to vote; the unemployed youth and poor do not vote (except with their feet). So Nigeria's nightmare is likely to continue. ■

NOTE: AFTER THIS PIECE WAS WRITTEN, incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari won re-election, defeating Atiku Abubakar by over 3 million votes.

This article is taken from Michael Roberts Blog. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/02/24/nigerias-nightmare/>. The subtitle of the Blog is "Blogging from a Marxist economist".

Budget balancing close to panic

By *Amandla!* Correspondent



Mr Mbweni was quite clear in his speech: "Isn't it about time the country asks the question: do we still need these State-owned enterprises? If we do, can we manage them better? If we don't need them, what should we do?"

THE FIRST BUDGET OF THE NEW Finance Minister Tito Mbweni went further down the road of austerity. Service delivery spending was cut by R50.3 billion over three years compared to the previous three year plan. But the budget also marked a political shift. Using the outrage against the squandering of billions of rand at Eskom and other State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), the government is in for privatisation.

First in line is Eskom. But a lot of manoeuvring is needed before multinational corporations can start buying parts of the biggest public utility. This was indicated by the President's assurances that the "unbundling" of Eskom into three functional companies and a holding company is only about making Eskom easier to manage.

It is a fair guess that the plan is for the holding company to take over most of Eskom's loans of R420 billion (and growing). Last year Eskom paid over R30 billion in interest and R40 billion in capital payments (financed by taking on new loans). These debts must be made to go away. Otherwise the "unbundled" companies will be unattractive to private for-profit investors.

Mr Mbweni was quite clear in his speech: "Isn't it about time the country asks the question: do we still need these enterprises? If we do, can we manage

them better? If we don't need them, what should we do?" To the media, Mr Mbweni said that "the post-Soviet era" doesn't need big public companies. This gives ideological direction to the emergency bail-out of Eskom. The bail-out was a key feature in the budget: Eskom had announced it would go broke in April.

Privatised electricity to non-payers?

THERE CAN ONLY BE PRIVATISATION OF generation, transmission and distribution of electricity in South Africa if you don't care about the resulting major social upheaval. Soweto alone owes R18 billion in unpaid bills to Eskom. Another R17 billion is owed by a number of other municipalities. Eskom has made several attempts to cut off those municipalities from the grid, but it loses in the courts. The municipalities successfully argue that the reason they don't pay Eskom is that a large number of consumers don't pay them.

The political battle over Eskom is not over before it is over, but Eskom's debt crisis gave the 2019 Budget a character of panic.

Creative accounting...

THERE WAS R23 BILLION PER YEAR IN THE Budget to support Eskom's extreme debt service. It was labelled "Additions to

spending" or "provisional allocation for reconfiguring Eskom". The government "is not taking over Eskom's debt", argued Mbweni. The so called "additional spending" is planned to continue for 10 years, adding up to R230bn.

If we call a spade for a spade and stop trying to be so clever, the R23 billion per year is a debt service cost. And that raises the official debt service figure in the budget from 13.9 percent this year (rising to 14.5 and 15 percent in the next two budget years) up to 15.9 percent this year (rising to 16.2 and 16.6 percent in the following two years).

...and increasing government debt service

NOT COUNTING ESKOM'S DEBTS, THE government plans to pay about R210 billion in interest on loans to financial investors in the coming year (followed by R232 billion and R256 billion in the coming two years).

After this issue of *Amandla!* is out, we will see if these payments take a jump upwards. At the end of March, the credit rating agency Moody's may downgrade the government's credit rating. If it does, the interest rate on government loans will increase.

One of the investors in loans to the government (so called "bonds") is the large Government Employee Pension Fund (GEPF). GEPF held about 13% of the state debt in 2018. It will now earn R27-R33 billion per year from this investment, and rising.

But should it?

A progressive move against the debt crisis

THE POTENTIALLY PROGRESSIVE elephant in the room is precisely the GEPF. Besides its loans to the government, it also holds R86 billion of Eskom's debt in its investment portfolio.

At the moment, the GEPF acts like any other "maximise-your-profit" investor, although it has trade union representatives on the Board.

And the GEPF runs a R50 billion surplus per year. Lending to government and Eskom at reduced interest rates would not in the least threaten the pensions it is responsible for.

We wait for a suggestion from the unions that the GEPF should act outside the scandalised Public Investment

Corporation (PIC). At the moment, the corruption-riddled PIC manages the GEPE funds with over R1 trillion in company shares. These are risky investments which only give a return of 3% per year in dividends. These funds should be moved to government and SOE bonds to solve the debt crisis.

The alternative is continued reliance on the finance industry, which lends to the public sector at higher and higher interest rates.

If you have a key like GEPE, you must also have the political will, the insights into “how the system works” and finally the courage to put the key in the keyhole and turn it – always to the left.. The neoliberal slogan “Don’t waste a good crisis!” could be equally valid for the labour movement and its potential civil society and rural allies.

Shift the debt from private players and conduct a debt audit

A CRASH MUST BE AVOIDED. ROLLING load shedding must not become black outs. But instead of using the debt crisis for structural change towards privatisation, it should be used for structural change towards “collectivisation”.

The profit margins of the finance industry are part of the “Black Hole”. As much as possible, that industry should be cut off from the SOE debt feeding trough. That political clash must be preferred by progressives, rather than clashing with society at large.

The heritage of corrupt deals comprises a large part of the debt that SOEs today are servicing. We can continue to finance this dirty heritage at market rates, even long after culprits are in prison. Or we can shift the debt claims from parastatals to public funds, like the R1.7 trillion over-funded GEPE and the R200 billion Unemployment Insurance Fund. There are vast amounts of money there that are not being used. They are just sitting in market-driven investments. Unions have representatives on the Boards of both funds. They can insist on a debt audit. There are loans that funded “consultation” and “facilitation” in schemes where the lender is linked to the service provider. For example, Chinese state finance supporting a Chinese service provider using a so-called “facilitator” as an intermediary. These loans should perhaps be declared invalid.

Impact on services

AT PRESENT WE INSTEAD HAVE FAILURE to stop corporate tax evasion, rampant corruption, State Capture, illegal procurement in provinces and municipalities, and growing debt service under the tutelage of the finance industry. All of these had the following impact on



Public spending on health increased by 6.6 percent, but average inflation (price increases) are projected by Treasury at 5.2 percent this year. The population is growing by 1.6 percent per year. The two factors taken together mean real cuts in public health resources per person.

this year’s budgeting for public health and education, to give just two examples. We are in such trouble.

Public spending on health increased by 6.6 percent, but average inflation (price increases) are projected by Treasury at 5.2 percent this year. The population is growing by 1.6 percent per year. The two factors taken together mean real cuts in public health resources per person. This budget decision comes after the Health Ombudsman, in a 2018 report, described our Public Health system as “on the verge of collapse”.

There is another statistic which captures this collapse: in 2016/17, the legal claims from patients arguing they have been maltreated and hurt by public health care in Gauteng amounted to more than half of the Department’s health budget.

Meanwhile the Gauteng Department of Health is cash strapped and doesn’t pay wages in time: “Strikes for payments due have become a regular occurrence” leading to hospital shut downs, reports the Budget Justice Coalition (BJC).

Last year the Gauteng Health Department implemented an unofficial recruitment freeze. Medical staff of all kinds have been leaving to the private sector “in return for working conditions that did not pose an imminent health and safety damage to the health professionals themselves”.

The public education system is crippled. BJC used education as the example of budget choices violating the Constitution. Every child has the right to decent basic education, but with this budget real spending per learner will continue to fall. It has declined by 10 percent since 2010.

Similar to public health services, this is the result of population growth, increasing enrolment and the flattening out of spending. In April last year, the Department of Basic Education reported to Parliament that “provinces like Mpumalanga are collapsing because they

do not have funds for running costs and KZN is not far behind.”

107 students in the class room...

THE AVERAGE SIZE OF CLASSES IN GRADE 4 is increasing in public schools. It was an average of 40 learners per teacher in 2011 and 45 per teacher in 2016. But averages are averages. The size of classes is not only a mounting problem in Grade 4.

In February, a delegation from Equal Education (EE) visited schools in Mbizana in Eastern Cape. The EE delegation noted that in Mdatya High School right now, 107 students in Grade 12 sit in the same class room. Is this a national record?

The receiving end

PLACES LIKE MDATYA IN EASTERN CAPE comprise the local economy which receives resources from the national budgets, after economic predators of all kinds have taken their bites: the tax cheating corporations, the finance industry invested in the state debt, corrupt officials in provinces and municipalities, with all the *Bosasas* and corporations, consultants and tenderpreneurs that corrupted them.

And it is not likely to improve. The Treasury has announced a plan to encourage 30,000 out of the 127,000 public sector employees between the ages of 55 and 59 to take early retirement packages.

The question is what this potential loss of experience and know-how will mean for the performance of what the BJC called “the incapable state” in their submission to parliament.

It will no doubt get worse before it gets better. There is an increasing sense before the election that neither Ramaphosa’s social movement for personal enrichment, called ANC, nor the other parties which frequent the media have the solution. The problems are sitting right at the centre, and the top, of their party organisations. ■



Abahlali baseMjondolo's Mqapheli Bonono holds a paraffin stove after a shack fire. Only a company accountable only to its own narrow concerns would simultaneously complain about having surplus electricity capacity and be indifferent to the deaths and destructions caused by fires in homes without electricity.

The struggle is to socialise Eskom

By Jeff Rudin

WHEN RAMAPHOSA CONFIRMED THE break-up of Eskom, the Numsa General Secretary responded with a fighting tweet:

"Numsa shall meet Cyril Ramaphosa in the street. We reject this breaking up of Eskom as it is nothing but the first phase to privatise Eskom."

ADMIRABLE MILITANCY, BUT IS IT TOO late? Eskom has long since been privatised in almost every way, other than in name. Today's struggle is different. It is to socialise Eskom as an integrated public utility. Its mandate must be to provide universal and cheap electricity, for both domestic and economic purposes, while also being friendly to the health of both people and the environment.

Monopoly: a red herring

THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARGUE AGAINST this because it sustains a monopoly. But this argument is a red herring, despite

all the attention it attracts. This is so for two reasons:

1. As a result of free competition's profit maximising dynamic, bankruptcies, acquisitions and mergers are standard characteristics of competitive capitalism. Allow enough time for these everyday events to work themselves through the market and monopoly ends up being the natural state of capitalism. Permitting a competitor to Eskom would fill in a missing element to full privatisation. But the result will be the eventual demise/takeover of either Eskom or the competitor. Or the survival of both in what would then be a market rigged to promote their shared interests in maximising their profits. The axiom that competition reduces price serves only as ideological mystification in monopoly dominated markets. SA's banks are proof of this.
2. A single, state-owned monopoly, even in a capitalist economy, is sometimes

the most rational, cost effective and least wasteful way of meeting society's needs.

"Surplus" electricity

WHEN NOT PERIODICALLY blackmailing the country with electricity blackouts, Eskom claims to be burdened by surplus electricity. Surplus, in this instance, is not a measure of need but of ability to pay. Millions of people are still without electricity. Millions more can't afford the electricity to which they have "access". Faced with this reality, only a company operating within the norms of capitalism would dare to claim that it has a "surplus" problem. Moreover, only a company accountable only to its own narrow concerns would simultaneously complain about having surplus electricity capacity and be indifferent to the deaths and destructions caused by fires in homes without electricity. Only a company burdened by too much electricity but with no social responsibility would similarly be indifferent to the health hazards – the deaths, illnesses and lost productivity – suffered by households compelled to use non-electric energy sources for heating, cooking and lighting.

An alternative, socialised Eskom would not only use the bonus of surplus electricity to meet desperate social need. In the process of doing so, it would also create a large number of jobs in a country

notorious for its normalised level of mass unemployment.

Eskom's hostility to renewable energy

FUNCTIONING LIKE A PRIVATE COMPANY explains another Eskom anomaly: its hostility to renewable energy. The cheapest (new) electricity is now from renewable energy. Renewable energy is also the safest to produce and the easiest to supply to remote rural areas. Renewable energy, with a suitably protected local manufacturing base, has the added potential of creating jobs: some 250,000 jobs according to research by the One Million Climate Jobs Campaign. Like other electricity utilities in the world, Eskom should have embraced renewable energy as its primary energy source. As a properly socialised monopoly supplier of electricity, it would also have taken the lead in giving meaning to what is still the hollow concept of a Just Transition – it would have by now agreed alternatives for the workers who would unavoidably lose their jobs.

Another no brainer to save costs being incurred by a government so cash-strapped that it has had to increase VAT – cancel Kusile's Units 5 & 6, and close earlier than planned three of the existing coal-fired power stations. These measures would save between R15 and R17 billion, without affecting security of supply. But these steps are based on the greatly enhanced use of renewable energy. This alone makes them a no-no for Eskom.

And, so far absent from all these considerations, is – climate change: recognised by (virtually) all the countries of the world as the single greatest threat to the survival of humankind. Coal is South Africa's largest single contributor to climate change, by far. Eskom and coal are as joined together as fish and chips, with BEE now part of that mix. Like other shareholding companies fearful of stranded assets, coal remains king as far as Eskom is concerned. Like other (private) companies worldwide, Eskom sees its first duty as being to itself. That this contributes to humanity's long climate change suicide is ... unfortunate.

BEE

ONE OF THE REASONS FOR ESKOM'S hostility to renewable energy is BEE. Eskom's support for BEE (apart from its corruption tainted Gupta links) is perhaps best illustrated by its unilateral imposition of a 51% minimum threshold of black ownership by any company wishing to be an Eskom supplier. The extra costs of BEE business by an already heavily indebted company are not part of supply-chain calculations. Extra costs are just passed on to the public, thereby making electricity even less affordable to even more people.

There's another reason for mentioning BEE. There are those who dismiss as



When not periodically blackmailing the country with electricity blackouts, Eskom claims to be burdened by surplus electricity.

dreamers anyone who suggests that Eskom should ignore the market and use its surplus capacity to meet social need. Eskom's support for BEE is a reminder to those people that Eskom is already doing exactly that. Depending on the class interests involved, Eskom has shown it is quite ready to ignore the cardinal premise of "least cost" and to do so with the full support of the "shareholder".

A socialised Eskom would be ready to prioritise the interests of the working class (including the unemployed and the remaining poor) in the same way that Eskom continues to prioritise BEE, regardless of its dire financial straits.

Corruption – made easy by outsourcing

MENTION ESKOM TO MOST PEOPLE AND the standard response, after the obligatory eye-roll, is the cry of corruption. And the cry is well earned. But the events that gave rise to Eskom's corruption and the specific forms that it has taken are most unlikely to re-occur. They are the result of a highly unusual coming together of several disparate circumstances.

However, the reality of corruption remains, for corruption is integral to the political economy of capitalism. Neoliberalism, capitalism's current dominant form, adds steroids to capitalism's naturally occurring corruption. It does so by privatising everything that will attract profit-maximising business, while leaving behind only the shell of what is (misleadingly) called the "public sector". Being thus denuded of as much capacity – equipment, machinery, buildings, etc – as possible, the public sector has no alternative but to outsource everything. This leaves a voracious private sector ready to be fed by the public purse.

This is a global feature of neoliberalism – to which there is an added specifically South African dimension. This is the BEE dimension to the R800 billion public procurement up for private grabbing. Public officials have a huge incentive to

select BEE service providers, who enjoy preferential access to public outsourcing. Designed to promote black business, the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act perversely adds to the incentives to award and/or win tenders by corrupt means.

What all this means is that, regardless of Eskom's legal status of being either a public or private entity, it remains a prime target for corruption. If nothing else, this requires the policy of maximum outsourcing to be turned on its head. Anything less than urgent and comprehensive insourcing will guarantee the continuation of corruption, even though corruption's golden age in South Africa is hopefully cemetery bound.

For socialisation and against barbarism

SOME 7 BILLION PEOPLE – 91% OF THE world's total population – are experiencing one or other of the many forms of what is now called "austerity". Anxiety, fear, uncertainty, depression, despondency are all emotional forms of austerity. In the middle of the First World War, the soon to be assassinated German Marxist, Rosa Luxembourg, warned that the choice before the world was either socialism or barbarism. In 2019, barbarism – in the many forms of today's fascism – is everywhere on the march.

Global inequality and insecurity compound South African inequality and insecurity.

The struggle against barbarism is a call for the mobilisation of the broad left, including all progressive trade unions. The socialisation of Eskom is similarly a struggle that calls loudly and urgently. It is up to the same progressive trade unions, supported by the broad left, to hear. The two struggles are not separate.

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A much longer version of this article appears in the Daily Maverick.



The Reventazon River hydropower dam, which is the largest public infrastructure project in Central America after the Panama Canal. In 2017, hydropower, geothermal, wind, solar and biomass energy sources constituted 99.7 per cent of Costa Rica's national electricity mix.

Energy democracy and public ownership

By Daniel Chavez

ONCE AGAIN IN SOUTH AFRICA, “public ownership” in the energy sector has become a major issue. In the midst of a deep electricity crisis, the government has proposed the unbundling of Eskom, which will lead to greater liberalisation and privatisation of the energy sector. Against this, the two main unions at Eskom oppose unbundling and believe the entire energy sector should remain public. In the struggle to keep Eskom and the energy sector public there is much to learn from recent experience in Latin America.

In particular, two countries, Uruguay and Costa Rica, have gained international attention for their rapid shifts towards renewable energy, much to the credit of their state-run energy utilities.

Costa Rica's exemplary power sector

COSTA RICA IS AN OUTSTANDING example of efficient and egalitarian service delivery, rooted in public ownership. It has extensive electricity services – as well

as water, health and education services – and they achieve remarkable scores on indicators for equity, quality, affordability, public ethos and environmental sustainability. Since its foundation in 1949, the Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE), a state-owned company active in the fields of energy and telecommunications, has evolved as one of the pillar institutions of a Latin American welfare state that ranks today among the world's most advanced in terms of social development.

For almost seven decades, ICE has proved that it possesses high levels of technical, financial and managerial capability. Since its creation, the public utility has expanded access to electricity services from 14 per cent in 1949 to more than 99 per cent today. Along with its fellow public power providers, ICE has also greatly contributed to Costa Rica's current position as one of the world's most advanced countries in the transition to renewable energy.

In 2017, hydropower, geothermal, wind, solar and biomass energy sources

constituted 99.7 per cent of the national electricity mix, with fossil-fuel power representing a meagre 0.3 per cent. The vast majority of that energy was generated by state- and socially-owned power producers. ICE produced 66 per cent, and sub-national public utilities and rural energy cooperatives together generated another 7 per cent. The rest of the energy has been provided through Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) between the state and private, independent power producers.

There are four state-owned entities: one national (ICE), one regional (an ICE subsidiary active in the metropolitan region of San José), and two municipal companies. There are also four cooperatives. Between them they operate all of the country's distribution and commercial services, with no participation whatsoever by profit-driven private companies. In the words of ICE's Chief Engineer: “The Costa Rican population became used to good quality electricity, and therefore people are much

more demanding, because our services are perceived as a fundamental right.”

Previous researchers have argued that ICE’s “ability and willingness to plan in the long term and pursue renewable sources of energy is a product of its relationship with Costa Rican society... its embeddedness among civil society organisations, labour unions, intellectuals, and mass public opinion”.

In spite of its proven success as a highly efficient public enterprise, a series of neoliberal governments from the 1980s to the present day have promoted reforms to ICE’s publicly-based and solidarity model. ICE is also operating within an increasingly liberalised market. It has been subject to internal corporatisation, through a process that has changed the institutional and managerial frameworks of the company.

Costa Rica’s achievement, however, remains significant. Over the past seven decades, the evolution of electricity services in Costa Rica has to a large extent developed in opposition to private business interests.

Uruguay’s energy revolution

IN THE LAST DECADE, URUGUAY has accomplished an authentic energy revolution. Today, fossil fuels contribute a marginal proportion of its electricity mix. And 99.7 per cent of Uruguay’s population of 3.4 million have full access to electricity services. The national power utility is setting up distributed generation alternatives to meet the needs of the remaining 0.3 per cent who cannot be connected to the grid.

Uruguay had no oil or natural gas resources and until recently its “high energy prices were dragging down productivity”. However, the country now uses renewable sources “like no other place in the world”. In less than ten years the country has slashed its carbon footprint and lowered electricity costs, without government subsidies.

In March 2005, for the first time in the history of the country, a left coalition – the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) – was elected and drove the transition to renewable energy.

The National Administration of Power Plants and Electrical Transmissions (UTE) is a power company fully owned by the Uruguayan state. It has been the key player in the transition. More than a century after its founding, UTE remains a highly efficient company, in both the quality and reliability of its services and in its economic stability. International credit agencies have awarded UTE the category AAA (the highest investment grade), noting that “historically, the company has maintained an adequate

level of indebtedness,” which guarantees “easy access to the banking and financial market”.

UTE has been a dominant actor in the electricity sector. It owns approximately half of all generation assets in Uruguay and manages them directly. It is also the owner and sole operator of the transmission and distribution network, though it is obliged to provide open access to third parties in exchange for a transmission toll. Likewise, UTE is the only buyer in the national electricity market. The wholesale energy market is a vestige of the sector’s liberalisation in 1997, and is made up of independent power producers. The 2005-2030 energy strategy required UTE to enter into public-private partnerships (PPPs), particularly Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with 20 year contracts.

The expansion of wind power, alongside the requirement to buy

substantially to private investors’ ability to take home all-too-high profits:

- UTE’s commitment to buy all the wind power generated even when it is not needed;
- the long, twenty-year agreement periods of the PPAs, and
- the fixed energy price.

THE STATE HAS RELINQUISHED THE MOST profitable portion of the energy market – the wind sector – to private capital.

The least profitable component, the burning of fossil fuels that might be necessary to guarantee constant supply, was left in the hands of UTE. And there are no risks involved for the private investors, since the public power company guarantees them long-term profits. So all the risks are shifted to the public sector. In other words, UTE is nurturing the crows that will tear out its eyes.

The workers’ movement in

Uruguay is demanding the full renationalisation of electricity generation. This demand is not wholly unrealistic in a country that has successfully resisted and reversed other waves of privatisation in previous decades. In 1992, when the neoliberal government of the time tried to carry out a bulk sell-off of public assets, the enabling legislation was massively rejected by the citizenry in a referendum. Following this, in 2004, a coalition of diverse social movements won the support of 65 per cent of the electorate in a plebiscite for a constitutional reform that would ensure public ownership and management of

water resources for ever. This blocks any future privatisation attempts.

Learning from Latin America

THE MOST IMPORTANT AND OBVIOUS lesson emerging from any analysis of Latin American experiences is that there are alternatives to the current state of affairs. Costa Rica and Uruguay demonstrate that it is certainly possible to build a national and publicly-owned power system that provides high-quality, clean and affordable energy services to everyone.

The rapid and massive development of wind power in Uruguay would have been impossible without a powerful national and state-owned utility. These experiences also show that privatisation can be stopped and eventually reversed, and that state-owned enterprises (or a combination of national, municipal and socially-owned companies, as in Costa Rica) can enable a radical energy transition to renewable sources, acting in the public interest. ■

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from independent power producers, has radically modified the ownership structure of UTE’s generation section. Until recently it was entirely public, as the state owned the hydroelectric plants and other sources of electricity. By 2016, 65 per cent of installed capacity in the wind sector was already in private hands. UTE controlled the remaining 35 per cent, but this was mainly through indirect investment structures: public limited companies, trusts and operating leases. Only 7 per cent of the wind farms were built and managed directly by the state-owned utility through traditional forms of public investment.

Trade union activists, academic researchers, environmental activists and the press have criticised the profitability that the state assures to private investors. The twenty-year PPA contracts oblige it to pay even for the wind energy it does not need.

The trade unions have also criticised the expansion of private players in the renewable energy sector, pointing out that it constitutes a new and covert form of privatisation. They have identified a number of factors that contribute

Rebuilding the workers' movement for counter-power, justice and self-management: a contribution to the debate

By Lucien van der Walt



Saftu (claiming 800,000) has grown mainly by attracting existing unions. Some, like Givusa, were rooted in earlier Cosatu splits.

THE ROBUST EXCHANGE BETWEEN comrades Ronald Wesso and Mametlwe Sebei, in the pages of recent issues of *Amandla!*, over the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu) brings contrasting analyses of unions to the fore. Wesso favours a “new workers movement” based on the millions of precarious workers. He argues that unions represent a small elite enmeshed in a “neoliberal labour relations system,” and are undergoing “terminal decline” and “collapse.” For Sebei, by contrast, the organised workers and unions – Saftu especially – have waged bitter battles, including a “stubborn Stalingrad shop floor resistance,” to casualisation, and remain key to change. These positions have obvious political implications, with Wesso at the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAo), and Sebei in Saftu’s General Industries Workers Union (Giwusa) and *#OutsourcingMustFall*.

I offer my points in a constructive spirit; let us keep our energy for the real enemy. I suggest that Comrade Sebei’s position is more convincing, but that both of them skip some key issues. Specifically, I argue that we need a serious discussion on how to reform the unions – still the

largest, formal, class-based organisations – and what role they can play in a radical redistribution of wealth and power to the popular classes. These are profoundly political questions. I argue against reliance upon the state, and for re-building unions – and other workers’ movements – to maximise direct action, autonomy, and education, so laying the basis for direct workers’ control over production and the economy, rather than nationalisation.

This comes down, fundamentally, to the issue of consciousness. I argue against a tendency, common across the left, to continually substitute a search for new vanguard layers, moments and movements, for serious, patient work to construct a counter-hegemonic apparatus oriented to the big battalions of the working class.

The colonial wage

THERE ARE MANY AREAS ON WHICH comrades Wesso and Sebei agree: the ongoing centrality of cheap black labour power to South African capitalism, and the racist oppression this involves; the central role market-based, neoliberal measures like outsourcing play; the reality of a huge, growing pool of insecure, low-wage workers outside unions and

collective bargaining; and the necessity of working class rebellion. I concur. But the question is how to link immediate struggles to a profound transformation.

Unions resilient

OVERALL, I DO NOT FIND THE NOTION that unions are in a state of collapse or demise convincing. In terms of numbers, South African unions are astonishingly stable and resilient. This is all the more remarkable given rising mass unemployment, the worst of any semi-industrial country, and a neoliberal assault from the late 1970s.

In 1997, the state recorded 2,649,012 union members; in 2013, 3,261,900. Cosatu grew from 462,359 in 1985 to 1,258,853 in 1991. It had 1,768,000 members in 2003, and 2,191,016 in 2012. Over one in four workers (29.1 percent in 2012, Comrade Wesso argues) are unionists. Nearly a third of the workforce (31%, or 3.6 million in 2014) is covered by collective bargaining. If we exclude domestic service – almost impossible to unionise – and non-working class strata, like senior and managerial staff, the proportions would be even higher.

Cosatu reported 1,568,910 members at its 2018 congress, but its losses were to other unions. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) fell from 308,628 (2011) to 198,237 (2015), largely due to NUM splinter, Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu), which currently claims 200,000, including beyond mining. The 338,000-strong National Union of Metalworkers of SA (Numsa) and 120,000-strong Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu) left to form Saftu (2017) with unaffiliated unions. Some, like Giwusa, were rooted in earlier Cosatu splits. Like the Federation of Unions of South Africa (Fedusa), which claimed 700,000 in 2017), Saftu (claiming 800,000) has grown mainly by attracting existing unions. Then there is the National Council of Trade Unions (Nactu), and the Confederation of South African Workers’ Unions (Consawu), claiming 290,000, including Solidarity (140,000).

Union work

THESE ARE HUGE FIGURES, IF NOT WHAT any of us might wish. Comrade Wesso is right that union density (the percentage in unions) has fallen because the workforce

has grown. But it is still high, not least for the neoliberal era and African context.

Politically, the ongoing reality of three million-plus union members has to be addressed. This means, for me, an ongoing orientation towards unions, the largest formal organisations in civil society outside churches. The facts of serious corruption, the breakdown of workers' control, serious gender issues, as well as racial, ethnic and national conflicts, intolerance, gulfs between resolutions and reality etc. are undeniable. Precarious workers may be alienated by unions, but, not surprisingly, so are a significant number of other workers, including some union members.

Union challenges

BUT THIS DOES NOT indicate unions are hopelessly compromised or elitist. Rather, it indicates the need for a serious, non-sectarian reform project. That many unionised workers today are relatively well-paid, increasingly skilled, secure etc. is a victory, even if it should not be exaggerated: Bischoff and Tame's survey data shows that 50% of Cosatu members earn R11,800 monthly or less, with 40% earning R9,000 or below. The victory is threatened by cheap labour, deeply resented by private and state employers, and does not translate neatly into conservatism or defense of neoliberalism.

Even the most compromised unions and bureaucracies must address working class interests, or face internal revolt, splits, or collapse – NUM was forced into major reforms to survive Amcu. Comrade Sebei is spot-on when he characterises unions as progressive but warped movements, contested politically and between base and bureaucracy, the latter enmeshed in corruption and prone to betrayal. Capitalism cannot concede in any sustained way all workers' demands, so it's not possible to completely co-opt workers, whether or not they are union members.

Union struggles

UNIONS SHOULD HAVE DONE MORE TO fight the casualisation that threatens their survival, but Sebei is correct in noting that Cosatu and Saftu were not absent, organising general strikes and winning legal reforms.

I agree with Comrade Wesso that unions' resistance is profoundly compromised by entanglement with the state – especially Cosatu's ANC/SACP link. However, this does not delete the resistance.



New formations like the Simunye Workers' Forum and NGOs like Casual Workers Advice Office can be complementary. There is enough space for a thousand initiatives.

Certainly, unions' heavy reliance on labour law amendments and court cases, and on political parties (by Cosatu), should be criticised. But using the state's laws and courts is also central to CWAOW. If the laws can undermine some cheap labour mechanisms, then we have more than a neoliberal labour relations system. Rather, it is imprinted with powerful working class struggles – grave compromises but real concessions, forcing major neoliberal labour market restructuring to rely on legal loopholes, and excluding precarious workers. They are intended to contain unions, but can be used carefully, so long as they do not compromise workers' control and autonomy.

Many fronts

PERHAPS EIGHT MILLION WORKERS ARE outside the unions

So new formations like the Simunye Workers' Forum and NGOs like CWAOW can be complementary. There is enough space for a thousand initiatives.

Given union neglect (decades of grand resolutions aside) it is hardly surprising many precarious workers are alienated; the new forms of organising should be welcomed. Whether such formations herald a new workers movement that can displace unions remains to be seen, but it is unlikely. The new and the old are effectively operating amongst different sections of workers.

Union reforms

HOW THEN TO REFORM THE UNIONS – and for what purpose? These are profoundly political questions.

Comrade Wesso correctly highlights continuities between Cosatu and Saftu, and poor choices unions have made.

Both come down to workers' ideas. Being willing to fight is a start, but not enough: Amcu, for example, outflanked NUM with higher wage demands and more militancy, but has not shown more internal democracy, nor a serious programme beyond bread-and-butter issues.

I suggest that what is needed is a serious, organised, non-sectarian project of democratic reform and political discussion that spans the unions. This would include a rank-and-file movement, and would allow multiple views and foster critical thought. This needs to engage seriously with the treasure-chest of union and left history and theory, including debates over the state, corporatism, and alliances, insights from the 1980s Registration Debate and "workerism", and current debates, like disconnecting from the state as raised by, for example, Occupy and the Rojava Revolution. It means replacing reliance on the state and parties with struggle, and destructive inter-union rivalry with a serious project of working class counter-power.

There is no short-cut, no new movement or moment. No new social movements, strike committees, "Numsa moment", Cosatu renewal, EFF etc. can replace systematic, patient work and building from the bottom-up, including in big unions. This is a struggle for workers' control and popular power, not mediated by laws, state ownership, or patronage, and independent of all ruling class factions, state-based or private sector. ■

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What is fascism and how do we fight it today?

By Michael Nassen Smith



Fascism is commonly associated with a number of repulsive political features: authoritarianism, patriarchy and extreme nationalism based on ethnicity or race.

NOT SINCE THE 1930S HAS THE word “fascism” loomed so large over our political horizon. The term has been trotted out by liberals and socialists to refer to a range of modern political figures including Trump, Bolsonaro, Salvini, Orban and Modi. In South Africa, several political formations, including the EFF and BLF, have been called “fascist” or “pseudo-fascist” or “proto-fascist” by the liberal mainstream and socialist left alike. Fascism seems to be everywhere.

But what exactly is fascism and why is it such a threat to contemporary political life?

Fascism is commonly associated with a number of repulsive political features: authoritarianism, patriarchy and extreme nationalism based on ethnicity or race. These combine with nostalgia for a mythologised past. Fascism is suspicious of rationality and celebrates will, instinct, violence, spectacle and raw emotion.

But it is clear that not all patriarchs are fascists. Neither can we say that racial nationalism is inherently fascist. A dictatorship need not be fascist in character, as the left wing totalitarian governments of the 20th century illustrate.

So what, after all, makes fascism *fascism*?

Fascism then and now: mass politics in time of crisis

FASCISM IS A MODERN POLITICAL tendency that emerges in distinct social

conditions of economic and political crisis. European 20th century fascism emerged first in Italy after the devastation of World War 1, and again in Germany in the aftermath of the Great Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Fascism feeds off the material and psychological anxiety that ordinary people feel in times of social decay. It preys on a natural instinct to find both a cause and remedy for suffering. It exists where there is no principled left-wing movement with strong links to the working class and dispossessed. It proposes conspiratorial theories about an insidious “outsider” (racial, ethnic, religious or otherwise – even big business) that has infiltrated and corrupted local society. It calls for the expulsion of this element, mobilising all the regressive potentials of human psychology – unchecked emotion, hero-worship, fear, aggression – in order to acquire power.

One of the central features, therefore, of fascism is that it is a *mass movement*. While its politics in power serves the elite, its political energy during its rise to power comes from the petty bourgeoisie and not from the aristocracy, monarchy or big capital. This was the case in both Italian and German fascism.

Crucially, in its infancy, fascism has no qualms about using socialist rhetoric. It does so to get mass appeal and to swell its ranks with members of the working class. In Germany, the fascists attacked big business which, for them, was dominated by Jews. So it is possible to be a fascist and demand nationalisation, even socialism.

Indeed, we should never forget that the Nazis were officially *National Socialists*.

But after fascism comes to power it robs the working class of agency and annihilates its independence. Fascism, in keeping with its class roots in the petit bourgeoisie, moves from an energetic and mass movement to a bureaucratic machine. It is more than willing to accommodate big capital – as long as it is of the right national character – in a corporatist and authoritarian state.

Fascism today

TODAY, NEOLIBERALISM IS SUFFERING under the combined weight of the global financial crisis of 2008 and significant political upheavals that have taken place in recent years. Our contemporary era holds many disturbing parallels with the late 1920s and early 1930s. We are witnessing an alarming rise of right-wing nationalism, in response to growing inequality and unemployment across the globe. This rise has been accompanied by an ostensibly anti-establishment attack on “globalists” and veiled (and not so veiled) anti-Semitic conspiracy theories concerning rich Jewish capitalists (George Soros in particular). It cannot be said that Trump holds a coherent politics, but his backers and supporters have clear white supremacist and neo-fascist affiliations or sympathies. In the Global South, two of the globe’s larger democracies, India and Brazil, have recently succumbed to a militant right-wing politics.

What is more alarming is the global ambition of the resurgent right-wing. Matteo Salvini, Italian Deputy Prime Minister, has made it his goal to reform the EU in keeping with his narrow nationalist anti-immigration politics. He is supported by Marine le Pen in France and Viktor Orban in Hungary. Steve Bannon’s trips across Europe and Bolsonaro’s upcoming meetings with the Trump White House, must also be seen as part of a growing effort to unite the right in a new anti-liberal, anti-democratic (needless to say anti-socialist) and imperialist project.

The urgency to fight fascism

THE LEFT WAS NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO defeat fascism before it came into power in Italy and Germany in the last century. Much of this had to do with the Communist International’s (Comintern) theory of “social fascism”, which made no distinction between capitalist social democracy and the fascist movements



March in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1964. The first wave of anti-colonial resistance in the Third World was a continuation of the struggle against fascism in Europe in the 1940s.

of the time. Under the direction of the Comintern, the communists were told not to confront the fascists as a distinct and dangerous political force in their own right. This direction proved disastrous.

Theory, therefore, matters. And as we confront the global surge in right wing politics, we need to develop a program based on clear thinking that draws on past lessons.

Fighting the potential of a new fascism requires that we attend to the worst consequences of economic crisis. There are many projects worthy of our energies including an attack on austerity, the effort to secure ecological justice, redistribution to confront obscene inequality and the fight for decent well paid jobs.

Yet to win the economic and social victories needed to fight contemporary threats requires the building of local and global anti-fascist progressive movements. Those movements will need to pursue concrete economic reform whilst also combating the ideological and social features that fascism plays on, including authoritarianism and hero-worship, racialism and nativism, conspiracy, hyper-masculinity and patriarchy, and the celebration of force and aggression over reason, both within and outside left-wing politics.

Anti-fascist politics in the Global South

THE FIRST WAVE OF ANTI-COLONIAL resistance in the Third World was a continuation of the struggle against fascism in Europe in the 1940s. It expanded and extended the anti-racism and anti-imperialism that underpinned left-wing anti-fascist politics.

Fascism emerged as a consequence of a failed revolution in the West. In the same way, former colonial countries are potential victims of right-wing degeneration in the context of a failed or halted decolonisation project. No one was more insightful and prescient than Franz Fanon in advancing this point.

In South Africa today, the hopes of the liberation movement have been stunted in the post-transition, neoliberal turn. We are experiencing high levels of inequality and unemployment in a state plagued with corruption and incapacity. In this context, Fanon's warning remains decidedly relevant.

South Africa's political and social history makes us acutely vulnerable to the degeneration outlined by Fanon. We have failed to confront and contest racial categories inherited from our colonial and apartheid past. Indeed, in recent years we have seen the emergence of militant, narrow nationalism, whether Africanist or coloured, not to speak of the ever-present threat of white nationalism. This has risen at the same time as our continuous problems of xenophobia.

It is time to reformulate a militant and radical non-racialism. It must be willing to take on persistent racial injustice and inequality, but not succumb to racialism or narrow nationalism.

South Africans should also be alert to the mass character of fascist politics and the history that has gone before us. Socialist rhetoric is not to be taken at face value. Militancy should not be confused with progressive radicalism and neither should "nationalisation" and other radical slogans be immediately associated with left-wing politics

This vigilance should extend to our praxis – how we live our theory. In our organising and in our relationships we should be aware of authoritarianism, of creeping narrow nationalism and racialism, of patriarchy and celebration of force over democratic debate and solidarity.

A rallying call: for universalism and internationalism

LET ME END WITH A RALLYING CALL.

The current crisis in neoliberal capitalism presents a threat to us all. Contemporary forms of fascism are emerging as a distinct form of a potential future politics, both globally and nationally.

In order to confront fascism, we need to do more than attend to economic crisis. We also need to reaffirm a commitment to democracy, to left-wing internationalism, to humanism and a socialist cosmopolitanism. We need to fashion a universalist politics that centers the specific struggles of anti-racism, feminism, anti-homophobia, environmentalism and other forms of politics, fighting for those who are most directly impacted by the crisis in neoliberal capitalism and the rise of right-wing chauvinist nationalisms.

If fascism comes into power then it will be the left that shoulders the brunt of the blame, as it did in the 1920s and 1930s. Let us not allow it to happen again. ■

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Gilets Jaunes movement: the lasting French revolt

By Erwan Malary



"End of the world; end of the month. It's the same struggle". A slogan of the Gilets Jaunes which showed the convergence of struggles of daily life with struggles against climate change.

IN OCTOBER 2018, MACRON'S government announced a tax increase on petrol and diesel, allegedly to put France on a low carbon path. This tax was as unpopular as taxes usually are. But in the context of Macron's neoliberal agenda, it was far from being the most controversial of Macron's so-called reforms. However, on 18th October 2018, an unknown woman put a short video on social media. In it she denounced Macron's policies and called for people to protest. It went viral! In a matter of days, a petition that had so far gathered only 12,000 signatures, jumped over the million mark. In less than a week, countless Facebook groups had popped up nationally and Facebook events for marches and pickets were advertised widely on social media.

The movement first took the form of pickets at major traffic circles, including in rural and more conservative places not usually involved in protest movements. In many cases roadblocks were organised. However, facing increasing police repression, protesters moved away from the traffic circles and the protests took the form of weekly marches in major cities every Saturday. These marches are still taking place today. Act 16 of this drama took place on 3rd March, and it is likely to go on for a while longer.

An evolving movement

THIS "YELLOW VEST" MOVEMENT emerged organically, without any established organisation. This meant that it never got a unified and consistent set of demands. Some claimed it was a fascist movement, others believed it was the working class awakening. The truth is that it has never been very clear: from one traffic circle to the next, politics, demands and practices were different.

However, slowly the movement evolved from its initial narrow focus. At first, the core demand was the withdrawal of the new fuel levy, but very quickly a broader set of questions emerged: is this tax really going to pay for the ecological transition? Why isn't jet fuel taxed as well then? Is it fair to use it to repay the national debt and de facto to ask poor people to pay for it? Why then, if we have so much debt, has the wealth tax been removed?

In fact, it became pretty much a conversation around the tax system and how it should work concretely. But it didn't stop there. Just after the third or fourth week of protest, the question of police violence and state repression also became a recurring theme. What is the role of the police in a democratic society? Why is Macron's government so harsh on protestors, when he was elected because

people wanted to prevent the other candidate, fascist Marine Le Pen, from using fascist governing methods? How do we guarantee our constitutional rights to protest and strike?

Last but not least, the uprising slowly came closer to becoming a revolution. Why? Simply because people started to question more deeply the core of our political system: the election of "democratic" representatives. One concept is now on everybody's lips, the RIC (Référéndum d'Initiative Citoyenne – Citizen-led referendum). Inspired by the Swiss example of direct democracy, people are now asking for a simple but powerful change: if a sufficient number of citizens assemble and demand a legislative change, then the decision must be taken away from the MPs. People will decide directly through a referendum, and this must include the possibility of dismissing in this way our representatives, including the President.

The organised left?

A SURPRISING ASPECT OF THIS movement is that, for the most part, the organised left didn't play any direct role. Unionists weren't called to join the Gilets Jaunes until the beginning of February. The Greens and Eco-socialists had already planned to march in December, and therefore in many cities two marches were organised on the same day, sometimes with a common end point, sometimes not. There was mutual goodwill, but no real convergence. Of course, individuals from those organisations joined and some slogans showed the closeness of the movements ("End of the month, end of the world, same struggle!"). But calls on the left to support were either timid or fairly late.

The first reason was the suddenness of the movement that took everyone by surprise, including leftist organisations. The initial unclear perception of the movement also played a role: one of the first interpretations was that the movement was an anti-tax, anti-ecological, conservative gathering. The other main reason for such late support was the weakness of organisations: they pulled a lot of forces to oppose the public rail privatisation and lost. Why then mobilise your activists to join a movement without clear demands or a leader to discuss with?

There were some exceptions. SUD-Solidaire, a minority radical union, very



One concept is now on everybody's lips, the RIC (Référendum d'Initiative Citoyenne - Citizen-led referendum). People are now asking for a simple but powerful change: if a sufficient number of citizens assemble and demand a legislative change, then... People will decide directly through a referendum.

quickly took a position to support the movement. CGT, the major radical union also joined but later. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the France "Insoumise" party, also called on members to join, but all of this took time, probably too much. Right now, the movement is still on, but you don't see the crowd you saw in November and December.

The picture for the left is not completely blank. Many of its analyses were shared and debated on traffic circles and online. Its long-term work of popular education definitely helped shift the face of the movement from a potentially fascist and conservative anti-tax uprising towards more progressive sets of demands and a more radical understanding of Macron's class project. However, the slowness of the left to understand the ideological battle that was at play is saddening. Saddening too is the fact that the left, even if it might be ready to embark on a revolutionary moment, is not yet ready to surrender the lead to the unorganised organic working class.

A limited once-off victory or the emergence of a groundswell dynamic for change?

THE QUESTION NOW IS WHAT HAS THIS movement led us to, and does it have the potential to bring radical change in France and potentially in Europe?

So far, the movement has already registered a symbolic victory: for the first time, Macron is on the back foot. This is the first time Macron has had to withdraw a proposal. A call was also made by the

government to the biggest capitalist companies to give an exceptional extra end of the year bonus to their employees. Macron, in an attempt to take the initiative, also decided to organise a "national debate" all over France to gather demands from French people. However, these victories, as important as they are, are still limited. There was no proper wage increase – only a once-off bonus for some employees. More importantly, Macron is still in power, and his neoliberal agenda hasn't changed.

Now, the police repression and the media efforts to discredit the protesters are slowly bearing fruit, and it seems the movement is slowly losing steam.

However, and in spite of the feeling that this was a missed opportunity, three very positive outcomes of the Gilets Jaunes movement should not be underestimated. The first is that this movement has ripped apart Macron's narrative of a politician claiming to be neither leftist nor rightist, but simply pragmatic: his class position is now clear. His neoliberal agenda is now understood for what it is. Such ideological clarity means protests are not likely to stop but to grow, and this is a great achievement.

The second is that this realisation has spread to a large part of the French working class. The main success of the Gilets Jaunes movement is not really that it secured the withdrawal of the fuel levy. Its main success is that it has drawn onto the street hundreds of thousands of non-politicised people. The Gilets Jaunes are not the usual, educated, petit-bourgeois left. The movement has been able to

mobilise poor pensioners, struggling single mothers, people living outside the usual political hotspots. In other words, people you wouldn't usually see in protests and marches are getting back to politics. The apathy of the French working class is over.

A new democracy?

THE LAST VICTORY OF THIS MOVEMENT is its capacity to propose a new radical perspective for our liberal democracy: the dawn of direct democracy as an answer to our outdated representative democracies. The old system, where representatives would be held accountable only once every five years during elections, doesn't work anymore. People want to be able to reclaim control over decision-making when needed. Not only are they questioning election results as increasingly disconnected from people's will, but they are now claiming back their sovereign right: the right to govern on their own, through direct democratic practices. On this point, the similarities with the Italian 5-Star movement are striking.

There is currently a deeper groundswell in Europe to reform our political systems from a bottom-up perspective. The new world Gramsci was calling for might still be struggling to be born, but we are slowly getting there collectively, and this is critical to building a powerful answer to the coming fascist peril. ■

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Preventing civil war and US intervention in Venezuela



People queue up to buy food at a supermarket. There is a profound health crisis. Severe child malnutrition will have a long-term impact on the country's future.

We are publishing here an edited version of an interview conducted by the online magazine, Roar, with Edgardo Lander, Venezuelan activist and academic and participant in the "Citizen's Platform in Defense of the Constitution".

ROAR (R): Tell us a little bit about everyday life in Venezuela right now. What is the situation like on the streets, and how do people experience the current crisis?

Edgardo Lander (EL): THE situation is extremely tense. Everyday life is becoming more and more difficult. Inflation last year was over a million percent. Just this January it was estimated to be over 200 percent. People's salaries have absolutely dissolved. There is no way people can afford to buy basic necessities. Oil production, the source of 96 percent of the value of the country's exports, is just a third of what it was six years ago. Public services have severely deteriorated.

Venezuela's GDP is today just 50 percent of what it was five years ago. There is a profound health crisis. Severe child malnutrition will have a long-term impact on the country's future. According to the International Red Cross, the two

countries in the world that worry them most today in terms of their social crises are Yemen and Venezuela.

There is such a high level of discontent and desperation among the population, and the threats to their well-being are so severe, that all this could lead to an extremely negative outcome. We know from history that desperation is a breeding ground for fascism. People who are really desperate are willing to accept any alternative to the present state of things. A US military invasion and/or civil war are today real possibilities. Many people are just so fed up and so desperate that they are willing to accept basically anything, which makes for an extremely dangerous situation.

Venezuelan society today is not only extremely divided; people seem to live in two completely different realities. There is widespread distrust and fear of the "other." In this context, people are willing to believe anything said by "their side."

R: How did the situation get to this point?

EL: THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO HAVE decided to try to remain in power by any means necessary. And this has only

been possible — so far — because of the backing from the military, which up until this point has shown no signs of fragmentation, divisions or doubts about its support for the government. But this is something that could change as external pressure increases.

On the other hand, as US policy has demonstrated in the cases of Iraq, Libya and Syria, the number of people who suffer or are killed as a consequence of economic sanctions or military intervention is not a matter of much concern to the hawks who are today in charge of US foreign policy. The new level of economic sanctions is leading to an even more catastrophic situation.

In a policy characterised by extreme cynicism, the US government is simultaneously worsening an already dire situation for the population by strangling the Venezuelan economy, whilst offering a few million dollars in "humanitarian aid" to alleviate the socio-economic crisis to which it is actively contributing.

So we have two opposing forces — the Maduro government with the backing of the armed forces, and the National Assembly with the backing of the US, including the threat of armed intervention. These forces are slowly moving the country towards the brink of war.

On February 8, 2018, Guaidó declared that he would call for a US military intervention "if necessary." He also announced that he would organise "volunteers" to open up a "humanitarian corridor." This could easily have led to a confrontation with the Venezuelan military controlling the border between Venezuela and Colombia. After the failed attempt to bring US aid into the country on February 23, "no matter what," he has been actively asking the United States government to "use force" to oust the Maduro government.

Military backing makes Maduro believe that he has no need to negotiate. US backing makes the opposition think that it is just a matter of time before they can overthrow Maduro. The risk of more violence — by February some 40 people had been killed, according to the United Nations Human Rights Office — increases by the day. At this moment both sides are playing a zero-sum game in which they want to annihilate the other. Some form



President Nicolas Maduro with the military. Military backing makes Maduro believe that he has no need to negotiate. US backing makes the opposition think that it is just a matter of time before they can overthrow Maduro. The risk of more violence increases by the day.

of negotiation or agreement is urgently needed if this escalation of violence is to be stopped.

The Maduro government still has some popular support. It is not true that the support for the government among the popular sectors of Venezuelan society has completely disappeared. But it is smaller than it used to be even a year ago, and certainly much, much smaller than it used to be during the Chávez years. The humanitarian crisis, the difficulties in everyday life, as well as the government's authoritarian and repressive policies continue to erode popular support.

According to UN sources, 3.4 million people have fled the country over the last five years, representing more than 10 percent of the total population. A large proportion of Venezuelan families have close relatives — their sons, their brothers and sisters, as well as dear friends — that have left the country. This family fragmentation is a source of widespread pain.

R: How does Guaidó legitimate his claim to the presidency?

EL: IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO highlight that the rest of the opposition coalition was not really aware of Guaidó's plan to declare himself president at the January 23rd rally. But the us, in contrast, was absolutely aware of what was about to happen. Less than ten minutes after Guaidó declared himself president, there was an official public statement put out by the Trump administration recognising him as the legitimate president of Venezuela. So it is clear that this has all along been a highly coordinated script,

written in strict collaboration with the us government.

There are several constitutional and legal issues regarding whether Guaidó had or did not have the right to declare himself president. And that has to do with whether Maduro is a legitimate president or not, or whether there was a "power vacuum," the main justification used by this opposition.

On the one hand there has been no power vacuum. Whether you like him or not, Maduro heads the government and is in control of the armed forces. In May last year, we had presidential elections. They were supposed to take place seven months later, but the government decided that they should be held in May. Practically all the main opposition parties had been outlawed by the government. Maduro had the so-called Constitutional Assembly approve an arbitrary retroactive law, according to which political parties that had not participated in the previous (municipal) elections, held a few months before, were no longer recognised as legal political parties that could participate in elections.

It was clear that the main opposition parties would not have time to re-register in order to participate in those elections. So these were not, by any stretch of the imagination, free elections. The conditions were highly controlled to ensure that Maduro would be re-elected.

The whole process was a fraud. You cannot have free democratic elections if the government decides when they are convened, regardless of what the Constitution and the electoral law dictates, and which parties and which candidates can participate and which cannot.

Ever since the government lost the elections for the National Assembly in December 2015, the government has taken an increasingly anti-constitutional route. In those elections, the opposition parties won two thirds of the National Assembly, which gave them a tremendous amount of state power. According to the Constitution, they had enough votes to select the members of the Supreme Justice Tribunal as well as to decide the composition of the National Electoral Council. At that moment, Maduro and his government were confronted with a crucial dilemma. Should they recognise these election results, the will of the people, and respect the Constitution, or decide to remain in complete control of state power, no matter what? They clearly chose the second option.

Since early 2016, Maduro has been governing by means of successive decrees of State of Exception and Economic Emergency. This means that he attributed powers to himself to decide on practically anything he wants. According to the Constitution, the president can decide on a sixty-day state of economic emergency, which can be extended for a further sixty days if approved by the National Assembly. Currently, the state of emergency is in its third year.

R: How has this affected the country, and how have the people of Venezuela responded to this?

EL: THIS PERMANENT GOVERNMENT BY decree has had severe consequences. One particular negative consequence, with potentially disastrous long-term effects, was the decision to create the Orinoco

Mining Arc (*Arco Minero del Orinoco*), opening up more than 120,000 square kilometers — 12 percent of the national territory, approximately the size of Cuba — to transnational mining corporations. This is a very critical part of the country. It includes the territories of several indigenous people, is the most biodiverse part of the country, the most important source of water and hydroelectricity. It is part of the Amazon basin, with its absolutely critical global role in limiting climate change.

There are now tens of thousands of miners who are rapidly carrying out an accelerated process of large-scale socio-environmental devastation. This is probably the most serious socio-environmental crisis in all of Latin America today. All this is the result of a decree issued by Maduro, with no public debate, with no involvement from parliament, and in direct violation of the country's Constitution and its environmental, indigenous peoples and labour laws.

Since 2016 the government has become more and more authoritarian. It has completely closed the door to the possibility of free trustworthy elections where the population is able to decide on the present and future of the country. At the same time it has become more and more repressive.

In this increasingly desperate situation, it is not surprising that the population is open to solutions that would have previously been completely unthinkable. Even the presence of US troops is seen by many as an acceptable possibility because they see no other way out of the crisis. This is not only a middle-class phenomenon; it shows how deeply the country has changed.

R: What are the implications of this for the future of Chavismo and the Bolivarian revolution?

EL: AS LONG AS MADURO STAYS IN power, the destruction of the country's economy will continue, living conditions will continue to deteriorate and repression will increase.

For the extreme right wing of the opposition — and this obviously involves the US government — the “solution” is not only to get rid of Maduro, but to crush the Bolivarian experience. They want to completely destroy the Bolivarian experiment. The aim is to teach the *Chavista* popular movement a lesson: you cannot confront capitalism or try to

even imagine an alternative. The collective and personal costs are simply too high.

In this tense situation, in which neither side seems willing to yield, the space for talks and negotiations has been greatly reduced. As opposed to the interventionist policy of the US government, we welcome the offers by the Secretary General of the UN, as well as the presidents of Uruguay and Mexico, to mediate for a peaceful, constitutional, electoral alternative to violence, military intervention and civil war.

R: How likely is the possibility of an actual US invasion at this point?

EL: THE THREAT OF A US MILITARY intervention is more than just paranoia. The US government has stated again and again that every option is on the table, and President Donald Trump has explicitly stated — and repeated almost daily — that one of those is a military intervention. The recent experience of Iraq, Libya and Syria would indicate that this is not a far-fetched possibility.



Government by decree has had severe consequences. One particular negative consequence, with potentially disastrous long-term effects, was the decision to create the Orinoco Mining Arc (*Arco Minero del Orinoco*), opening up more than 120,000 square kilometers — 12 percent of the national territory, approximately the size of Cuba — to transnational mining corporations.

For the objectives of US policy (regime change), a direct military intervention might not even be necessary if — as a consequence of economic sanctions and blockades — there is a total collapse of the economy. Additionally, the presence of troops is not a necessary requirement for state-of-the-art military interventions. Missiles and drones could do the job, as they did in Libya.

The economic blockade that was recently intensified by the US government will no doubt have very serious implications, not only for the Maduro government, but also for the Venezuelan population who are already facing a severe humanitarian crisis. This is the reality we are facing today, and it could lead

to a complete collapse of the country. Besides a strict financial blockade, all oil-related trade has been prohibited. CITGO, the Venezuelan-owned subsidiary of the national oil company (PDVSA), has been practically taken over by the US government.

The decision to boycott the oil company will have a serious impact that will increase the already severe social crisis. In no more than a few weeks this could lead to a general scarcity of gasoline in the country. There will also be shortages of medicine and food at even higher levels than we have right now, because the government will lack the cash required to pay for these imports and most of its credit lines are closed.

The increasing tension on the border between Venezuela and Colombia over the so-called “humanitarian aid” could easily lead to an armed confrontation. It could even be the spark that starts a civil war.

R: What do you propose as a way out of the crisis?

EL: WE, AS THE CITIZEN'S Platform in Defense of the Constitution (*Plataforma Ciudadana en Defensa de la Constitución, PCDC*), and the newly created coalition, the Alliance for a Constitutional Consultative Referendum (*Alianza por el Referéndum Consultivo*), are pushing for an alternative to this path that is leading to an escalation of violence and the possibility of a civil war or a US military intervention.

The first step on this alternative peaceful path would be a basic agreement between the two sides to name a new transitional National Electoral Council. Its purpose would be to carry out a Consultative Referendum to ask the population whether general elections should be

convened for all levels of government, in order to achieve a peaceful, democratic, constitutional and electoral solution to the present crisis. Most importantly, it would put the decision in the hands of the people.

In practical terms this is a very simple process with one question: yes or no. The National Electoral Council has all the required infrastructure. It could be carried out in less than a month, as opposed to the organisation of national elections, which would take at least six months. This negotiated option is quite different from what Guaidó and the so-called “international community” have as their route: first to get rid of Maduro and then to convene elections. This would



A Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party protest in Johannesburg. A rejection of imperialist intervention can in no way justify unconditional support for the Maduro government. Support for the Maduro government from the international left will do profound harm to the future of popular struggles.

require the unconditional defeat of the Maduro government, something that is not likely to happen without a foreign military intervention.

As the PCDC, we had a meeting with Juan Guaidó as President of the National Assembly — not as president of Venezuela, since we do not recognise him as such. Basically, we told him that the route of a parallel government, increasing confrontation and the threat of us military intervention could lead to a civil war in Venezuela for which he and Maduro would be responsible. To avoid this scenario, a negotiated alternative is urgently required. We have been trying — so far unsuccessfully — to arrange a meeting with President Maduro for the same purpose.

We have been calling on international progressive activists, intellectuals and organisations, governments and multilateral organisations to recognise the threat represented by this escalation of violence, and step in to contribute to an end to this descent into death and destruction. We celebrated the initiative taken by the governments of Uruguay and Mexico to call for an international conference on Venezuela in Montevideo to contribute to a non-violent, electoral solution to the current crisis facing the country. We also value the statements by the Secretary General of the United Nations, who has repeatedly declared his

willingness to contribute to a peaceful negotiated solution.

A negotiated alternative based on a consultative referendum, where the Venezuelan population can decide on the way out of this crisis in free and trustworthy elections, with a new consensus-based Electoral Council, is absolutely critical at this moment to avoid a violent outcome.

R: What do you expect from the international left, in this respect?

EL: THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE HAS been that at least part of the left tends to analyse conflicts like the present one in Venezuela today in Cold War terms — imperialism vs. anti-imperialism. So they give backing to governments like the one in Nicaragua that have a radical, leftist, anti-imperialist rhetoric, even if at the same time they carry out policies and engage in practices that have nothing to do with the principles of the left: corruption, repression, blocking democratic expressions, a neoliberal opening up to transnational corporations, and so on.

We expect the left internationally to understand the complexity of the situation we are facing in Venezuela. It is a confrontation between a corrupt, increasingly repressive, undemocratic militaristic government on the one hand,

and active US intervention on the other. A rejection of imperialist intervention can in no way justify unconditional support for the Maduro government. Support for the Maduro government from the international left will do profound harm to the future of popular struggles. As was the case with the Soviet Union, people will identify this repressive regime as constituting “the left.” For this reason, unconditional solidarity with the Maduro government can do much harm, both to the Venezuelan population and to the future of popular anti-capitalist struggles.

What we need today is not solidarity with Maduro, nor support for an imperialist intervention, but solidarity with the Venezuelan people. At this moment this means basically two things. First, to do everything possible to prevent a civil war or a military invasion in Venezuela. This means actively rejecting economic sanctions and the threat of military intervention and pushing for a negotiated solution with multilateral participation, not unilateral intervention. And second, to recognise that there is an extremely severe social crisis in the country, and that a multilateral solidarity effort has to be made to help provide Venezuelans with food and medicines, as an alternative to the politically motivated, militarily backed “humanitarian” US aid that is today threatening the country. ■

Internationalism: a culture and a commitment

By Gustave Massiah



Marx addressing the International Workingmen's Association (First International). The First International, created in 1864, played an essential role in defining and structuring the workers movement and in asserting it as a strategic social movement of the period that was opening up.

INTERNATIONALISM IS A POLITICAL movement and a current of thought. It is also part of some conceptions of the “alter-globalist” (in French, “altermondialiste”) movement, also known as the “Global Justice Movement”.

Alter-globalisation / Global Justice

This is a movement based on the idea that an alternative way of organising the world is possible. It promotes global cooperation and engagement, but it is opposed to many aspects of the global economy, insofar as they don't respect social values of respect for people and the planet.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL, CREATED IN 1864, played an essential role in defining and structuring the workers movement and in asserting it as a strategic social movement of the period that was opening up. Since the initial workers' Internationals, internationalism has opposed nationalism's claim to subordinate all forms of identity to national identity. It poses the common interests of peoples as opposed to

confrontations between states, and it naturally extends to different forms of international solidarity.

Workers' or proletarian internationalism seeks primarily to build international solidarity among proletarians (workers, peasants, employees, waged and precarious workers, unemployed, etc). Today it is confronted by new issues that call for its reinvention. In the Global Justice Movement, the culture of this new internationalism rejects the ideology of neoliberal globalisation. It is an intersectional movement, searching for a transition that is at the same time social, ecological and democratic. It seeks to reinvent sovereignty based on the universal rights of the peoples.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an understanding of the world which sees a variety of systems of power working together to oppress. These systems of power include class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age and disability.

THE HISTORY OF INTERNATIONALISM IS marked by the merging of two major trends that developed in the late 18th century: the rise of nationalism and the development of the forms of organisation of the working class. Internationalism is defined in opposition to a conception of nationalism that exclusively links a national group, defined by its identity, with a nation-state. Since the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, the sovereign role of the state is the basis of the international system which is organised around relations between states. Working-class structures have undergone many transformations as a result of the industrial revolutions that have weighed upon the history of the workers' Internationals and the global justice movement.

The Internationals

VERY BRIEFLY, LET US RECALL THE history of the Internationals, although this does not exhaust the history of internationalism.

The First International was also known as the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). It was founded in 1864 in London and included followers of Karl Marx, Auguste Blanqui, Pierre-Joseph

Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Ferdinand Lassalle, and Giuseppe Mazzini. The anarchist currents still maintain today a small “International Workers Association.”

The Second International, founded by Engels in 1889, was dissolved in 1920 in the wake of its divisions over the war of 1914 and the Russian revolution of 1917. The division over the war was precisely a division between those who accepted the nation state as the fundamental identity (and therefore supported the war) and those who saw class as the fundamental identity (and therefore opposed the war). These sharp divisions over war and revolution marked the end of a period and opened a crisis in internationalism and the workers' movement. The Socialist International, which succeeded the Second International, contained some left currents but it was also identified with the management of capitalism rather than its downfall, and with colonialism.

The Third International, founded in 1919, developed an anti-imperialist and revolutionary orientation. Then it was reoriented by Stalin to the “construction of socialism in a single country.”

The Fourth International, founded by Trotsky in 1938, was never able to transform itself into a mass movement, although some of its members did play an important role in certain situations.

There are recurring debates on whether to found a fifth International. This has been discussed by some of the participants in the World Social Forums around two questions: what would be the relations with would-be progressive governments, and how does it differ from the forums between the social movements and the NGOs?

Internationalism and class

INTERNATIONALISM IS BASED ON AN analysis of social classes and aims to build the proletariat as a conscious and organised political actor. The class struggle is not reduced to the confrontation between the working class and the bourgeoisie. Proletarianisation and precariousness now affect all social layers that are not dominant. Internationalist class alliances put forward the idea that the proletariat, in the struggle for its emancipation, must seek the emancipation of all societies and of global society. Internationalism holds that the proletarian movement is the spontaneous movement of the

immense majority in the interests of the immense majority. All previous historical movements have been the work of minorities in the interests of minorities.

The Manifesto of the First International states: "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves." In the extended form of internationalism, the Global Justice Movement is built around several principles:

- diversity and the legitimacy of all struggles against oppression
- a strategic orientation toward universal access to equal rights
- a new political culture linking individual and collective commitment.

THE INTERNATIONALIST REFERENCE AND culture extend to such movements as those of the peasants, with Via Campesina, women's rights, climate justice, the indigenous peoples, etc.

Internationalism and globalisation

IT IS NECESSARY TO LOOK AGAIN AT THE relationship between internationalism and globalisation. The globalisation we know has been capitalist since its beginning, and capitalism has been global since its beginning.

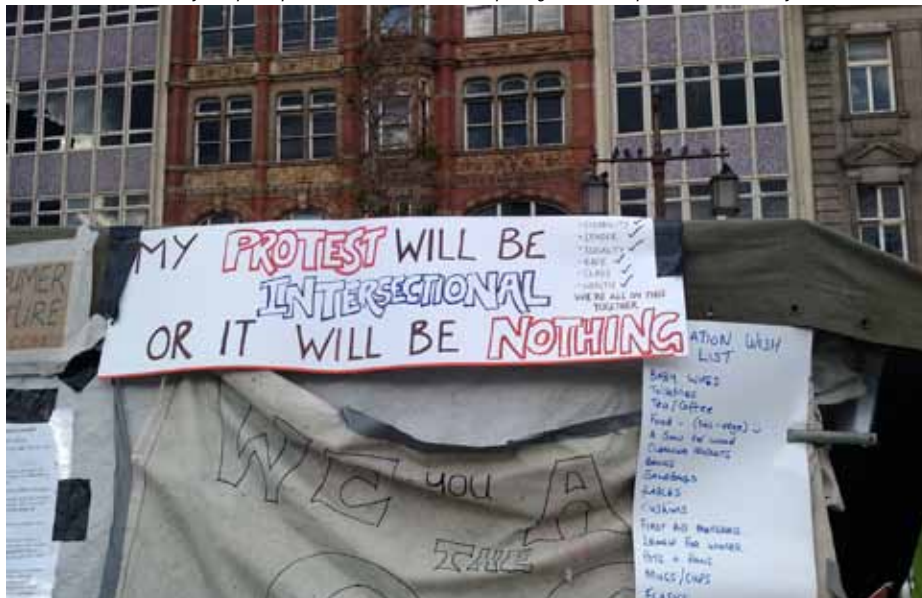
Consider, for example, the Venetian Republic, one of the great trading city-states of Europe until the 18th century. "The real mission of bourgeois society is to create the world market," Marx wrote to Engels in 1858. Even if some of those in the Internationals may have thought that capitalism was progressive, there was no idea in internationalism that capitalism would reduce tensions, inequality, or wars. That was why so much importance was given to world revolution.

Today, we find that neoliberalism, the new phase of capitalist globalisation, is faced with its social, ecological and geopolitical crisis. So it has turned to austerity combined with authoritarianism. This involves an enormous increase in violence and conflicts. Security-obsessed nationalist and xenophobic ideologies are mounting, with migrants as the scapegoats. Against this approach, Alter-globalisation is internationalist, offering a new stage in world history, a globalisation of solidarity that respects the universal rights of all citizens of all nations.

The internationalism that originated from the sudden emergence of the working class has been transformed by its encounter with the second major transformation, that of decolonisation. Internationalism played a decisive role in decolonisation by building the alliance between national liberation and workers' movements.

The class nature of the national liberation movements is complex and contradictory; there are significant differences among them. These differences

Credit: Photo and banner by K Gupta <http://mixosaurus.co.uk/2011/11/privilege-in-an-occupation/intersectionality/>



In the global justice movement, the culture of this new internationalism rejects the ideology of neoliberal globalisation. It is an intersectional movement, searching for a transition that is at the same time social, ecological and democratic.

cannot be reduced to the role of the respective national bourgeoisies. At the Baku Congress in 1920, the Third International implemented a strategic alliance between the national liberation and workers' movements. This alliance did not suppress the contradictions, but it created a new situation. It coincided with a period of advances from 1905 to 1970, notwithstanding wars and fascisms. It aided decolonisation and practically encircled the colonial powers. It imposed some social concessions and a welfare state in the countries of the capitalist centre.

Neoliberalism regained the initiative

BUT BEGINNING AROUND 1977, WITH THE debt crisis and the imposition of structural adjustment programs, neoliberalism began regaining the initiative. This has led to 40 years of defensive action by the social movement in the decolonised countries, in the post-revolutionary countries, and in the industrialised countries. This also included setbacks in the search for emancipation, the demise of the post-decolonisation regimes and of the soviet bloc.

Social, ecological and democratic transition

A NEW PERIOD HAS OPENED. THE SOCIAL movements are confronted by a conservative counter-revolution. They are opening up a new world through the major transformations under way, based on revolutions in women's rights and ecology, biotechnologies and digital communication in language and writing, a second wave of decolonisation after state independence, and a demographic revolution, in particular through migration and mass education. The social movements advocate an alternative,

the social, ecological and democratic transition.

With the reinvention of internationalism, we need to take into account many issues. Some of these have been raised from the beginning. They reflect new ruptures and open new horizons. The relationship between the concepts of people, nation and state are still topics of lively debate, as they were in the strategic debates throughout the decolonisation period. In the time of the First International, there was much debate over the Irish question and the relation between national and class struggles. At Bandung, in 1955, Chou En-lai summed it up: states want independence, nations want liberation, the people want revolution. The notion of people combines the social and the national. The political independence of states showed their limits. A second phase of decolonisation — the liberation of the peoples — begins.

Internationalism opposes nationalism's claim to subordinate all forms of identity to national identity. From the outset it has emphasised the importance, even the primacy, of social classes. The national interest, brandished by states, is aimed primarily at erasing class conflicts in the interest of the ruling classes, the national or international bourgeoisies. Internationalism promotes the importance of the class struggle and its international dimension.

Intersectionalism and identity

IT HAS ALSO BEEN NECESSARY TO acknowledge the importance of the issues raised by groups, communities, feelings of belonging, that cannot be reduced to the structuring of social classes, although class can be decisive. Substantial social changes alter the nature of the social classes and their relations.



Communist Party of Philadelphia May Day rally 1935. The Third International, founded in 1919, developed an anti-imperialist and revolutionary orientation. Then it was reoriented by Stalin to the “construction of socialism in a single country.”

Intersectionality highlights the relation between social distinctions, sexism and racism. The forms of engagement demonstrate new relationships between the individual and the collective.

At the individual level, the perception of identity is complex, and cannot be reduced to national identity. As Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau have emphasised, we must recognise and accept the richness of multiple identities. In the history of internationalism, the difference between nationalism and patriotism has frequently been debated. When the Communist Manifesto says the workers have no fatherland, it means the proletariat has been deprived of that. I am reminded of a quotation for which I can no longer find the source: “The bourgeoisie is cosmopolitan and nationalist, the working class is internationalist and patriotic.” The national question is not reducible to nationalism.

The global and the local

THINKING GLOBALLY AND ACTING locally is the complement of thinking locally and acting globally. Ecology has highlighted the change in perception of time and space and the importance of territories. The First International is inseparable from the Paris Commune of 1871, but also from the revolutionary

municipalism of Petrograd in 1917, Hamburg in 1923, Barcelona in 1937. Resistance movements to capitalist globalisation refer to national spaces. They emphasise the contradiction of states that are both subordinated to financial capitalism and a means to oppose it.

Globalisation and its contestation are reorganised through large geocultural regions.

Borders don't only fence off states. The very notion of border must be critically examined; it gains from being distanced from nationalism. Borders separate, but they are also places of exchange. Like the street in a neighborhood, a place of separation and encounter alike. The choice is political: wall the borders to make them impermeable, or knock down the walls in order to build bridges.

The culture of internationalism rejects the ideology of globalisation, particularly in its neoliberal version. That's why we call it “alter-globalisation”. This culture must reflect the new trends and build a social and democratic response to the surge of international religious ideologies such as evangelical Christianity, jihadist Islamisms, or Hinduism. It must also take into account the new geopolitical contradictions, and not retreat into a restrictive, campist vision of anti-imperialism in which all the enemies of our enemies become our friends.

Internationalism extends into international solidarity. International law may aspire to reinvent sovereignty on the basis of peoples' rights. International solidarity advances the notion of the people as defined by the history of their struggles, in the complex unity formed by classes, peoples, nations and states. International solidarity combines a number of approaches: solidarity between peoples oppressed by a situation imposed by the dominant powers; solidarity among all peoples in a project challenging the dominant system; solidarity in struggles and in the invention of a new internationalism in the era of globalisation.

Gustave Massiah is a French economist, urban-planner, and political analyst. He was a professor of social science and urban strategy at the French Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris La Villette. He is one of the founders of Attac, an anti-neoliberal movement started in France. He was its vice-president and remains a member of its scientific council.

Translated from the original French by Richard Fidler, a Canadian activist who blogs at <http://lifeonleft.blogspot.co.za/>

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A white body's relation to the system of whiteness

By Dshamilja Roshani

I've become complicit in your war
Before I knew we were fighting one.
My inner sense of innocence
Destroyed by inciting blasts of your gun.

A war I didn't choose
A war I wish to lose.

But you started to use your subtle skills
To slowly infuse your ruthless campaign
Into the twisted cells of my brain,
Into a distant space, far hidden behind
My clouded memory, obscurely designed
By your manipulation of my alienation,
The rotten mutation of collective frustration.
Heavy, thick, white fog. Sinking into
My increasingly unconscious mind.
As I continue to hide.
As I decide to ignore
The conveniently growing divide
Between myself
And the blasting gun shots outside.

So now I am changing my strategy,
Again.

I hope holding not a gun but a pen
Would help me not become complicit
Would write myself into consciousness,
Without cleansing my conscience. Instead,
I skip rope on your field of mines,
I tiptoe beside your guidelines
I gather ideas of redistribution
I listen to the whispers of revolution, and
Sculpt them into a rhyme.
So that maybe,
One day,
At the right time
My hollow sculptures can amplify
Billions of voices, rejoicing in
Trillions of choices, moving towards
A life beyond constant war cries,
Coming to defy
The domination
Of your and my lie.

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Oliver Mtukudzi

1952 to 2019

I don't feel like a foreigner if I am performing in South Africa, or any other African country, because I am an African. As long as I am anywhere in Africa, I am home.

Oliver Mtukudzi started performing with that other great of the rich Zimbabwean music tradition, Thomas Mapfumo, in 1977, in a band called Wagon Wheels. He died on the anniversary of the death of his friend and fellow musician, Hugh Masekela. In between, he recorded 65 albums. His voice, a unique blend of gravelly and husky, was instantly recognizable.

His music was not as overtly political as Mapfumo's. The closest he got was his song "Wasakara", "You're old". Given Mugabe's age at the time, the target was clear.

HIV/AIDS was a major focus. He lost a brother and several band members to the disease. He sang about it. As early as 1986 he produced a song called "Stay with one woman". In 2003 he was the face of the Southern African World Aids Day campaign "Men make a difference". He was interviewed about whether he would disclose his status if he was positive. He said he would, as his brother had, and when asked why, he replied: "Just to save the next life. Maybe one person would be aware."