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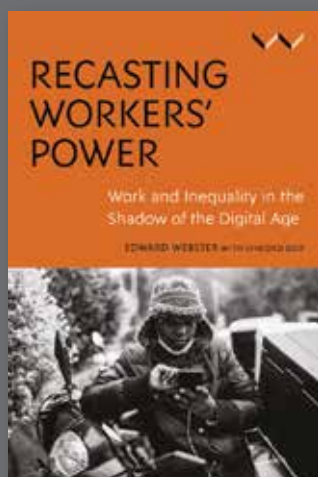
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STOP

THE GENOCIDE

PALESTINE SPECIAL FEATURE



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Recasting Workers' Power

Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age

Edward Webster with Lynford Dor

Webster and his colleagues have done it again! Their careful ethnographic studies offer a much-needed perspective from Africa on the central challenges facing labour worldwide: the disruptive impact of digital technologies and how workers can mobilise in response.

— Ruth Milkman, City University of New York

Refuting pessimistic accounts of the decline of worker power, Webster has written a masterful account of new worker struggles in the Global South, with valuable lessons for the Global North.

— Chris Tilly, University of California, Los Angeles

Knowledge production must show how worker resistance can be harnessed into a global movement to confront exploitation. This collection explores how real problems and processes should be the focus of research and its findings.

— Akua O Britwum, University of Cape Coast

Workers as helpless victims of new technology? Not so, argues Eddie Webster in this powerful book on labour's innovative forms of organisation and new power resources in the Global South. A must read!

— Andreas Bieler, University of Nottingham

Much of the debate on the future of work has focused on responses to technological trends in the Global North, with little evidence on how these trends are impacting work and workers in the Global South.

Drawing on a rich selection of ethnographic studies of precarious work in Africa, this innovative book discusses how globalisation and digitalisation are drivers for structural change and examines their implications for labour. Bringing together global labour studies and inequality studies, it explores the role of digital technology in new business models and how it can be harnessed for counter mobilisation by the new worker.

About the Authors

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HOUSE THE PEOPLE AND BUILD THE ECONOMY

NOBODY WHO LOOKS AROUND South Africa's cities and towns can deny that we have the most acute housing crisis. Shack settlements constantly increase in number. New land is occupied. Shacks burn down and are rebuilt. Even entire apartment blocks burn down. The endless cycle of impoverishment and degradation continues.

The ANC government claims to have provided approximately 5 million "housing opportunities" between 1994 and February 2022, according to a [May 2022 Department of Human Settlements \(DHS\)](#) report. But note, these are "housing opportunities", not houses. Just as job opportunities are not actually proper jobs, so housing opportunities are not actually houses. As they put it: "A housing opportunity can be an actual house or only a plot of land with access to piped water and electricity." So site and service counts, in their book, as a housing opportunity.

Destruction of the public sector

As we look at the housing situation, we see the problems of all of our social provision. And most importantly we see the problem of the hollowing out of the state and the reliance on external contractors to provide. It is most striking that, when the apartheid government decided, for its own purposes, to build houses for the black workforce in the late 50s and 60s, it delivered them in numbers, for example, in Soweto. And the vehicle of this delivery? Public sector employees. Workers directly employed by government to carry out work needed by society.

Those public works departments were effective, even if they were not always as efficient as would be desirable. Since 1994

they have been destroyed. There is no other word for the wanton eradication of public capacity.

In their place are the tenderpreneurs. And with the tenderpreneurs, public funds leak away. They leak away on companies who win tenders despite the fact they have zero capacity to do the work. They leak away on partially completed housing. They leak away on all the corruption that

build shacks there. What more evidence is needed of the dire state in which people have been and are living?

And in this situation, not everybody is affected equally. The housing crisis, makes women even more vulnerable to violence and abuse. They cannot leave abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to live. Shacks without services force them to place themselves in



Site and service in Nkqubela, W.Cape. For the Department of Human Settlements, site and service counts as a 'housing opportunity'.

inevitably surrounds the relationship between the incapable state and capitalist business.

People don't have houses

Meanwhile we are left with an ever-increasing housing deficit. Such a dry technical term – housing deficit. The reality of the housing deficit is what we hear about in more detail in the articles in the feature of this issue. Three and four generations living in one house. Massively overcrowded backyards. And people living in shacks as far as the eye can see.

It is overcrowding, more than anything else, that drives people to occupy land in order to erect shacks. People voluntarily move onto land which initially has no services – no water, no sewage system, of course no electricity – and

insecure situations when they must relieve themselves, and without decent housing the burden of care increases tremendously. They fetch water and firewood to cook, and they look after children who become sick because of the dire conditions under which they live.

The government says it's failing

Meanwhile, what is this government doing? Failing even by its own dismal standards. It's worth quoting at length from the Human Settlement Department's 2022 Annual Report about the service delivery environment:

- An increase of households living in informal settlements,
- The lack of and inadequate capacity in bulk infrastructure,
- Delays in the procurement processes.

- *Regulatory and governance incapacity in the land planning process,*
- *The constraints associated with availability of funding,*
- *Impact of rapid urbanization,*
- *Increasing inequality,*
- *high level of indebtedness of households.*

It's all there. The dysfunction of government laid bare. More people are living in shacks. No capacity to provide services. They can't manage their own processes with any degree of efficiency. There's not enough money. And so on. These are the excuses for the failure to build houses for South African people to live in.

And fail they have. In their own mealy-mouthed fashion they say, "The impact of the above has been an exponential decrease in the delivery of key programmes." But the failure is not simply in the delivery. Consider this: "As of 31 December 2022, the government had completed 17,647 serviced sites, or 58% of the total target for 2022/23. Progress against the number of houses/units completed was slightly worse: 25,115 houses/units were completed at the end of 2022. This is 47% of the annual target."

It's not just that they are failing to meet the targets. It's that the targets are so miserably small and inadequate. It is generally acknowledged that the 2022 census represented a substantial undercount – especially of poor households. But even this poor census acknowledges that more than R1.4 million households live in "informal dwellings". If we take the national average of 3.4 people per household (and in poor households it will be substantially higher) we still get 5 million people living in shacks and tents. In reality it is millions more. And the Department writes in its report of a target of building 50,000 houses a year – 1.4 million people in shacks and they can't even reach their feeble target of 50,000 houses.

And they do this when their own goal, as expressed in the *Breaking New Ground* programme, was to eradicate informal housing by 2014. Here we are, ten years later, and the shack settlements are continuing to expand.

Housing could drive growth and jobs

As soon as we scratch the surface of the housing crisis, we find the crisis of jobs. With 13 million people unemployed, most people cannot afford to rent a house, let alone buy one, or to maintain their dwelling or pay for services. Local government provides services on a cost recovery basis because of under-funding from the national budget. Since most people cannot afford to pay for those services, local government tends to outsource their responsibilities including provision of housing in the case of the big municipalities – the metros.

And yet the relationship between housing and jobs has the potential to be such a positive one. As the original Reconstruction and Development Programme envisaged, housing could be a source of decent employment. If five percent of the value of our economy – R230 billion (using the June 2023 GDP figures) – was allocated to providing housing, hundreds of thousands of workers could be employed in housing brigades to meet the housing backlog. These workers would build the houses, lay the pipes and other infrastructure required. There is precedent for this in the Microbrigada movement in Cuba, although they used mainly employed workers. Engineers would not leave the country because they can't find work. There would be a huge demand for plumbers, electricians, bricklayers, etc.

Instead of creating slums, government could build mixed housing in the inner-cities for the new artisanal class created by a mass housing programme.

Housing must cease to be a commodity and become a social service. We should be looking at the example of Vienna, Austria, where, as we reported in *Amandla!* 87, more than 50% of houses are publicly owned.

In turn, shops, restaurants, creches, schools, clinics and community centres would be needed. That would require more workers. Downstream industries would employ more workers to meet the demand for the inputs and the white goods (stoves, fridges etc) that would grow. State revenue would be enhanced by the stimulus the economy would receive from the many hundreds of thousands now employed at a decent wage.

If such a programme were combined with a mass public transport programme, aimed at uniting the townships built at the periphery of our cities and towns, in a safe, climate-friendly way, it suddenly becomes possible to imagine an end to the cycle of collapse.

To achieve all of this, we would need more state, not less. A different kind of state, which directly delivers social goods and services to the people, instead of trying (and failing) to be project managers of predatory tenderpreneurs. And we need less monopoly ownership over cement, steel and other industries essential for such development. We cannot afford to enrich the few in this process.

In short, we need a fundamental change in the direction of the economy and society, so that simultaneously we can build housing on a mass scale, create large numbers of jobs, build safer spaces for women from GBV, and allow working class people to live their lives in dignity.



Half-finished houses in Msunduzi municipality in KZN. With the tenderpreneurs, public funds leak away. They leak away on companies who win tenders despite the fact they have zero capacity to do the work. They leak away on partially completed housing.

news briefs

Cynical Cyril

Two days after the springboks won the world cup, Cyril Ramaphosa was on the airwaves, telling us how we must follow their example. As if there was the remotest connection between the springbok rugby team and South Africa as a country.

Let's not even think of comparing the intelligent, clear-minded leadership of the boks, with the leadership of the ANC. Rassie and Jacques with Cyril and Paul.

The fundamental difference is that the rugby team all have the same material interest. They all want to win the World Cup. They all want to win each game. That is what drives them. But South Africans don't all have the same interests. Some of us have an interest in having basic services delivered to us on a reliable and quality basis. Others have an interest in profiting from service delivery contracts and from private services, for when the public ones collapse. Some of us have an interest in us all sharing in the profits of companies, and at the least being fairly paid a living wage as workers. Others have an interest in keeping the profit to themselves and paying workers as little as they can get away with. The list can go on.

And then, of course, the springboks generally fight to overcome problems created by their opposition. The ANC spends most of its time trying to overcome problems created by itself, load-shedding being the most glaring example, with Transnet not far behind.

So this speech to the nation by Cyril Ramaphosa must be seen for what it is – a

cynical, dishonest attempt to hitch his wagon to the successful springboks. And we should feel contempt for a failed political leader who has stooped so low.

How capitalism celebrates the bad news and mourns the good

At the end of October there were some striking pieces of financial news. Firstly, US GDP was higher than expected. The US economy is growing. Must be good news. But then we hear that global stock markets have gone down. They anticipate that this good news about the state of the US economy will induce the Fed (the US Reserve Bank) to try and stop the economy from growing by increasing interest rates. The reason? They have to create unemployment in order to stop workers from negotiating higher wage increases.

And then, Sibanye-Stillwater announces the retrenchment of 4,500 workers. And what happens? Its share price goes up. Those retrenchments will increase the profitability of the company.

It's hard to avoid the conclusion from this that Marx was right – capitalism does indeed thrive on the back of the suffering of workers.

More trade union corruption

Once again, sadly, [amaBhungane unearth](#)s the details of corruption amongst the leadership of the trade union movement. This time it is the turn of the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (Popcru), a major affiliate of Cosatu with a claimed membership of more than 150,000. Villain number one in this sorry saga is former prisons commissioner, Khulekani Sithole. He is a major supplier of Popcru, invoicing the union in May this year for R10.85 million for year planners and notebooks. They obviously do a lot of planning and writing in Popcru. Villain number 2 is Thulani Nsele, Popcru Treasurer. According to Nsele's own story, in his court papers, Sithole paid R1.15 million for a house for him, and R112,000 for a BMW motorbike. He says he was going through a divorce and needed some help.

Anyway, Nsele seems to have done better than Numsa's Irvin Jim, who is only recorded as getting

R40,000 for a birthday party and R15,000 for a laptop for his daughter.

Oh how the mighty South African trade union movement has fallen. Time to rebuild it from the ground up.

A new union

And rebuilding from the ground up is exactly what some of those expelled by Numsa's purge are trying to do. As they have said:

Expelled, suspended and dismissed trade union activists who belonged to NUMSA did everything in their power to challenge the unconstitutional and unlawful purging of democratically elected leaders and union officials.

They fought against the corruption and business unionism in Numsa until they were dismissed or expelled. In the end they said, "Enough is enough", and November saw the launch of the Metal Mining and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (MMAWUSA).

We have come together to defend workers against employers whose interest is profit at the expense of better conditions of employment and an uncaring state who uses budget cuts and austerity measures to deepen the crisis of poverty, unemployment, inequality and corruption in South Africa.

They have resolved:

- To build a democratic and worker controlled trade union based on active membership, participation in policy and decision making.
- To build a trade union free of discrimination or unequal treatment with respect to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or any other arbitrary grounds.
- To develop solidarity with other trade unions, nationally.

As Amandla, we wish them well. We hope that this will see a rebirth of a trade union



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movement that is genuinely controlled by its members and which avoids the pitfalls of the bureaucratisation and business unionism that has brought Numsa down.

A victory in Ecuador and a pending disaster in South Africa

In August this year, the people of Ecuador voted in a historic referendum – the Yasuní referendum. They approved a 1 million hectare protected land in which oil drilling is banned. It's an area that is a Unesco-designated biosphere reserve, and it is also home to two Indigenous groups who have never had contact with modern civilisation. Against the wealth of the oil industry, that was a tough vote to win. It was the result of years of grassroots organising. The result is that Petroecuador, the state oil company, which has been producing about 60,000 barrels a day in the Yasuní, will now have to shut down that entire operation.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in South Africa, a mining company has revived a plan to mine coal on the southern boundary of the Kruger National Park. 18,000 hectares on the edge of the park, with open cast and underground activity. While an earlier such proposal was rejected by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, who knows what the Minister of Coal, Gwede Mantashe, will do next?

More dysfunctional government

The Home Affairs Department recorded 36,000 hours of system downtime in the first half of this year. That's 36,000 hours during which people have spent money and time to go to Home Affairs offices to deal with essential issues of personal documentation, and been turned away. There will have been thousands of poor people amongst them, people who can't afford taxi fare to go up and down, until by chance the office opens. As Minister Motsoaledi said in the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), "Home Affairs is the anchor of economic activity, social activity, and the legal system of the country."

The dysfunction of government results in South African lives being disrupted and South Africans being treated with contempt.

Climate tech investment down as COP28 nears

According to a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, global investment in climate technology has plummeted by more than 40% in the last year. That is scarcely an optimistic environment. Cause for optimism had already been dealt a devastating blow when it became clear that Dr Sultan al-Jaber, head of the United Arab Emirates' state oil company, would be president of the climate summit. Now, in the last

few days, it has emerged that this state oil company has so little shame that they are planning to conduct negotiations for oil deals with no less than 15 different countries during the conference itself. As the conference claims to be seeking ways to end oil production, its president will be doing deals to sell more. Very much like the trade unionists in South Africa who are socialists by day, but capitalists by night.

\$62 billion lost a year

South Africa is losing \$62 billion a year from illicit financial flows, according to a pilot study by the United Nations Convention on Trade and Development (Unctad). That's more than a billion rand. And of course it may well be much more. And for once it's not us on the Left who are saying it. It was part of an address by the Tyre Import Association of South Africa (Tiasa) chairperson and MD of Treadzone, Charl deVilliers, to a conference on illegal trading in auto parts. Misdeclarations, undervaluing of invoices and tax evasion are some of the causes.

The bottom line is it's fraud – theft from the South African people of tax money that should be going into schools and hospitals. And this is the private sector that this government wants to run Eskom, the ports, the railways and just about everything else. So they can continue to steal from us.



In August this year, the people of Ecuador voted in a historic referendum – the Yasuní referendum. They approved a 1 million hectare protected land in which oil drilling is banned.

HOUSING: THE FAILURE OF THE NEOLIBERAL PATH

By **Patrick Bond**

HOW SEVERE ARE SOUTH Africa's housing and consumer-debt crises, and what can be done to address them, at the root, finally; not just with existing tokenistic subsidy measures? By considering the class character of housing, fused with race, gender and environmental analysis, we can distinguish between the neoliberal agenda of the state, banks and property developers on the one hand, and the needs of society on the other.

Census failure

First, regarding the scale of the crisis, it's *even worse than in 1994*, given the country's population increase from 35 to 62 million. We can't truly say, with confidence, how bad things are, due to Statistics South Africa's 2016–21 defunding, self-described "brain drain" and professional collapse. (Recall Stats SA's zany declaration in mid-2020 that the "narrow" unemployment rate had fallen during Covid's lockdown period from 30% to 23%. In reality, from April–June 2020 there was actually a decline of five million employed and informally-employed workers.)

Official homelessness figures, drawing on the 2022 Census, are unbelievably rosy: for example, only 55,719 people without shelter in 2022, led by Gauteng with 25,384, the Western Cape with 9,743 and KwaZulu–Natal with 7,768. More realistically, the Johannesburg Homelessness Network reckons there are "about 20,000 people sleeping rough in Johannesburg alone, with fewer than 1,000 beds available in shelters," and the Western Cape Government recently estimated 14,000 people experiencing homelessness in Cape Town alone, a figure endorsed by urban public-interest NGO Ndifuna Ukwazi.

Such extreme undercounts reflect an exceptionally sloppy Census, with an official surveying deficit above 30% – more than 30% of people were not actually counted. Stats SA's board chair conceded that may rate as "a new international record." Blamed on residual Covid-19 hesitations, xenophobia and "very low trust in the government," it implies that a redo is probably in order.

The bias in who was counted and who was not is glaringly obvious in surreal General

Household Survey figures released in August 2023, such as the share of "households living in informal dwellings" in the three poorest provinces: only 3.1% in Limpopo, and just over 5% in KwaZulu–

encouraged municipalities to end what, under white rule, had been extensive public (municipally-owned) housing construction and management. Instead, they outsourced these contracts to for-

Official StatsSA informal dwelling undercounts (2022 General Household Survey), by province

Indicators	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
% of households who live in an RDP or state-subsidised house	22.3	22.8	24.5	32.5	22.6	19.7	14.4	20.1	16.9	19.8
% of households receiving a housing subsidy from the state	14.8	10.1	5.4	17.0	9.6	14.1	14.4	10.3	9.0	10.3
% of households living in informal dwellings / tents / caravans	16.7	5.3	15.3	13.4	5.2	20.5	20.5	7.0	3.1	12.3

Natal and the Eastern Cape.

No progress with backlog

What we do know, though, is that several million houses have been built with state subsidies since 1994. But that rate has fallen dramatically as construction prices rose and subsidies stayed flat. As then Human Settlements Minister Lindiwe Sisulu claimed in a 2019 strategic plan, "the government has delivered almost 4.9 million houses and housing opportunities since the dawn of democracy" – which if true, would have meant nearly 200,000 RDP houses were built annually (two thirds of the 1994 RDP annual mandate).

Not true. In an August 2021 cabinet reshuffle, Tourism Minister Mmamoloko Kubayi switched jobs with Sisulu, and two years later in a *MoneyWeb* interview, admitted the scope of the problems she inherited: "You would have projects that have been done, and no one could tell where they were in the process, and incomplete projects. So we've now quantified them to almost 1.9 million units that were unfinished." (Those were Sisulu's "housing opportunities", perhaps.)

Why such sloth? Under Sisulu, she remarked, "We had a tendency of non-accountability, where you would find contractors will come, do the work, not finish, and they will not be held accountable." But actually, this PPP (Public-Private Plundering) model dates to 1994 – when national policy

profit developers and banks.

The result, Kubayi confirmed, is no progress in reducing the absolute number of houses in the national backlog: "We have built more than three million houses. For the ones that are falling under *Breaking New Ground*, which is your normal RDP [house], the current backlog we are told is at three million."

That's a shocking admission, for as the RDP document had reported, "The urban housing backlog in 1990 was conservatively estimated at 1.3 million units. Including hostels and rural areas, the backlog rises to approximately three million units."

Hence it's terribly important to contest the ruling party's back-slapping service-delivery claims, especially in an election year. After all, when combined with municipal services – typically including electricity, water, sanitation, stormwater drainage, lighting and refuse removal – the dissatisfaction expressed about housing (in a poll by the Human Sciences Research Council) in 2019 rose to 38% of the population, up from 25% in 2003.

The 2020–22 Covid-19 shocks caused even more damage to housing and service delivery, especially when the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and BRICS Bank provided nearly \$10 billion in expensive loans but with 'fiscal-consolidation' – austerity – conditionalities which have radically

reduced funds available to municipalities.

Yet to be fair, on the one hand, the current national housing subsidy budget amazingly escaped Enoch Godongwana's recent fiscal hatchet. He approved an increase in spending from R26.1 billion this year to R32.6 billion in 2026–27, slightly higher than the anticipated inflation rate.

On the other hand, as a share of the total budget (which rises from R2.262 trillion this year up to R2.588 trillion in 2026–27), the increase from 1.11% to 1.26% is still far below the immediate post-apartheid period, in which Housing Minister Joe Slovo successfully lobbied for a 1.5% housing share of the budget. And it's extremely low compared to the 5% that both the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) and Slovo's 1994

Budgetary trends in the 'social wage' (Treasury's 2023 Medium-Term Budget Framework)

R billion	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	Outcome			Revised	Medium-term estimates		
Community development	162.2	165.1	180.0	198.3	215.7	226.5	233.1
Housing development	23.7	27.0	25.7	26.1	29.3	31.0	32.6
Transport	25.9	29.4	33.7	40.2	42.1	45.1	47.2
Basic services and local government ¹	112.5	108.7	120.5	131.9	144.3	150.3	153.3
Employment programmes	16.9	18.1	20.3	20.3	21.3	22.2	23.3
Health	222.7	228.5	235.3	241.2	247.1	255.5	267.2
Basic education	247.6	262.5	276.2	293.6	296.1	308.5	322.6
Fee-free higher education and training	44.3	54.7	61.0	64.0	62.7	65.5	69.3
Social protection	247.0	252.2	261.0	280.1	294.4	312.7	326.9
of which: Social grants	218.9	222.7	233.0	252.1	266.5	248.4	259.8
Social security funds	106.9	75.9	72.6	71.4	73.9	53.3	52.1
Social wage	1 047.7	1 057.0	1 106.3	1 168.8	1 211.3	1 244.1	1 294.6
Percentage of non-interest spending	60.5%	59.6%	60.2%	61.3%	61.6%	60.8%	60.7%

The debt crisis

The problems are obvious: underspending on state-subsidised houses compared to what is needed (and what was promised); the placement of new residences in the peri-urban periphery, far from employment and commercial opportunities; inadequate municipal services; Slovo's decision to allow the structures to be sold on the open market instead of contributing to state fixed-

capital formation; and society's over-reliance on extremely expensive bank credit for home mortgage bonds, at a time when 37% of South African borrowers are not in good standing, according to the National Credit Regulator.

On that latter point, in mid-2023 R1.21 trillion was invested in home mortgage bonds, just over half of all consumer credit. Interest rates had been reduced by the Reserve Bank by more

than 3% in April–May 2020, thanks to the universally-recognised need for an urgent recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. In turn, monetary policy relaxation generated a surge in housing prices and new bonds.

But when in late 2021 the interest rates were raised ten successive times to levels higher than at any time since 2008, housing prices crashed. Consumer defaults rose to 37% of all formal debt accounts.

Credit standing of formal consumer debtors, June 2023



Consumer debt accounts in arrears (3 months +), year-on-year change



These are aspects of the neoliberal capitalist housing crisis.

Racist housing location

But the debt crisis doesn't begin to capture the extent of degradation. Most low-income households' residents are unable to access the formal bond market, so they rely on informal mashonisa creditors, for which no formal records are kept. And these poorly-housed South Africans suffer a racist component of housing policy, which was to put poor people far away from urban areas simply because land is cheaper there.

This was acknowledged 20 years ago when current Deputy President Paul Mashatile was Gauteng's leading housing official: "If we are to integrate

communities both economically and racially, then there is a real need to depart from the present concept of housing delivery". His spokesperson Dumisani Zulu explained, "The view has always been that when we build low-cost houses, they should be built away from existing areas because it impacts on the price of property."

In the developer-driven, bank-centred model that Slovo (then dying of cancer) had agreed to in the 1994 housing policy, with World Bank officials and his Director-General Billy Cobbett pulling him far to the right against the social-democratic RDP mandate, neo-apartheid

housing was inevitable.

This also became a gender-oppressive housing policy, insofar as capitalist patriarchy compels women to accomplish more "social reproduction" tasks than men, including child-rearing, elder-care, cooking, community organising, etc. These tasks are much more difficult in the new peri-urban ghettos, because social amenities and state services (creches, clinics, police) are often absent. And environmentally, the new faraway ghettos are examples of how not to plan for a carbon-constrained future, where petrol prices will soar once climate policies take effect.

Change must come – but how?

There is inevitably a debate on whether the radical change necessary can be achieved through advocating the “right to housing” found in the South African Constitution (albeit working within a relatively ungenerous welfare state) or through a much more radical approach to urban transformation.

The leading Marxist urban scholar, David Harvey, has insisted on the latter, yet with a nod to the former (in a 2008 New Left Review article), by virtue of using:

the right to the city as both working slogan and political ideal, precisely because it focuses on the question of who commands the necessary connection between urbanisation and surplus production and use. The democratisation of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will, are imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanisation.

However, the problem of rights-based sloganeering became clear in South Africa’s Constitution, which in 1996 was launched by its main commission organiser, Cyril Ramaphosa, just as he was transitioning from trade unionist and liberation movement general secretary to business tycoon. To trump the pleasing constitutional clause, “Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing,” two weasel-word phrases were inserted, along with a devotion to property rights: “The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.”

That phrasing neutered the Constitution. The failure to anticipate austerity and the slow pace of delivery – or to really compel the state to ditch Slovo’s fetish that “housing must be provided within a normalised market” (the main operational objective of his 1994

Housing White Paper) – left the judiciary hamstrung.

The 2000 lawsuit against housing policy led by Irene Grootboom showed, especially when she died homeless in 2008, that a court simply declaring Slovo’s policy unconstitutional because it ignored poor people, was not enough. In that case, the Constitutional Court felt it was not empowered to direct a brand new policy, due to the division of labour between executive and judiciary. The capitalist status quo remained intact.

Ironically, when Mashatile spoke in London at Chatham House in May 2020, he admitted past failure:

Our point of departure is that the new economy we are building must be more inclusive, resilient and sustainable. We have taken the view that in building a post Covid-19 economy, we need to go back to the fundamental insights contained in the RDP of the early 1990s... Guided by the RDP, we are of the view that through urban expansion and renewal as well as provision of infrastructure and services, particularly to the historically-excluded communities in rural and urban areas, conditions would be created to repair the broken structure of the South African economy.

There are many unrealised RDP objectives. The promised land redistribution target of 30% within five years was scaled down dramatically (less

than 1% of land was redistributed), and substantial funding for land reform was not forthcoming. The promised minimum standards for housing were replaced by an “incremental” process and inadequate “basic services”, and a strong state role in housing was negated in favour of the market-driven approach.

As a result, the RDP houses were often less than 30 square meters in size, compared with the old apartheid “matchbox” 40 square meters. Politically-connected contractors with dubious ethics did the construction, often installing lower-grade state services, including rare rubbish collection, inhumane sanitation, dirt roads, no street lights, no sidewalks, and inadequate storm-water drainage. And they were generally located even further from jobs and amenities than under apartheid.

Resistance has often emerged, although like most of the “popcorn protests” that appear briefly, the various urban and peri-urban community movements have not advanced a genuine policy solution. The need to break away from the capitalist-based strategy may eventually arise, but only when the movements declare a genuine right to South Africa’s cities and towns far more ambitious than that offered in the Constitution or in state policy.

Patrick Bond teaches sociology at the University of Johannesburg.





Intlungu protests in Cape Town in May 2021. We ended up marching to Cape Town where we beat the shutdown there in the Civic Centre. And then they listened to us, during that shut down, when we closed off all the entries to the city.

INTLUNGU LAND OCCUPATION CAPE TOWN

Interview with **Zama Timbela** and **Mabhelandile Twani**, leading activists in Intlungu.

AMANDLA!!

Tell us about the housing situation in Khayelitsha.

MABHELANDILE TWANI:

Here in Khayelitsha we have backyarders and people who have been in family houses for more than 20 years now. You will find three generations in one house. Waiting in the database has been the order of the day since the late 1980s. And unemployment - that's one of the biggest crises that we are having here in Khayelitsha.

ZAMA TIMBELA:

It was around Covid-19 that led us to this issue of occupation. People were fired or retrenched from work. Some of them couldn't afford to pay for the rent because there were no jobs anymore. So, they decided to come and occupy this vacant land all over Khayelitsha.

There's also overcrowding in houses and among backyarders. No more houses have been built since 2017 / 2018. Hence people decided to take over the land and build shacks. If they're going to wait for government, they will wait for another 20, 30 or 50 years. That includes corruption that is happening inside the government. People are stealing money, the money that's supposed to be for building houses for the people.

AMANDLA!!

So when was Intlungu established?

ZT: When the occupations started during Covid, we said let's form a movement that will focus on occupation and defence of the occupation, because the City will come and want to demolish our shacks. We have to respond and defend those shacks.

AMANDLA!!

You have organised the occupations. They started off spontaneously, but then you organised. How did that occur?

ZT: The 24 different areas where there are occupations are all part and parcel of the movement. We started in the area called Covid-19. Most of these occupations were named after the pandemic because that was when the occupation took place, because of the worse economic hardships. So we have occupations called Lockdown, Mask, Social Distance, Pandemic, Level 2, Covid-19, and New Dawn. Covid-19 is the biggest area. We liaised with all the occupations to meet at Covid-19. We wanted to set up an organisation that would defend and strengthen our occupations. And also our politics as comrades.

MT: We have different committees because these occupations are different sizes. We are about 18,000 households here in Level Two. We have six sections and every section has its own committee, which deals with the problems of the section. For example, when people are having cases or disputes in the community, they must go and report to section committees. And then there are times where all the sections will meet and discuss the way forward of the area and also the challenges in their sections. In Covid-19, they have about 13 areas with committees.

An important aspect of the occupations is that the majority are women. Many are single parents, people who are coming out of marriages and so on.

AMANDLA!!

And do you have rules on how people must behave in the occupation?

ZT: We do have rules. For instance, we have a rule that at 11 o'clock shebeens must be closed. There must be creches. And we've started a patrol system. People patrol the areas to make sure there is no crime, no gender violence, people are safe where they are staying. If there's an issue, the committee of the area will call a meeting, and the issue will be addressed. Sometimes we call the police for something that needs police or social workers, But there are rules, comrade, there are rules.

AMANDLA! :

These different committees from the different occupations, they constitute the leadership of Intlungu?

ZT: Yes. This week we have a meeting in Level Two. And next week, we'll have a meeting in Social Distance. Our meetings rotate, and everyone is aware about Intlungu. Two or three people from the committees in different occupations represent them in the bigger community of Intlungu.

AMANDLA! :

Do you have any kind of statement of your beliefs as Intlungu?

MT: We believe in democracy. Each and everything, whether it comes from the City or from the state, we discuss it openly. No one discusses with the City without allowing Intlungu to discuss further. We have noticed that the City and the government departments, when they want to do something, they don't want to consult the entire collective. At times we have to push hard for them to listen.

And also we have values. We are sympathetic with the women's struggle. We understand that the vast majority of people in the occupation are women, and at times every man must be able to assist if there is a necessity. For example, on the question of GBV, if another man is beating a woman, men must call

the man into a meeting and discuss with that particular man up to a point of disciplining the person.

ZT: Another thing that we are fighting is the issue of political parties. People are trying all sorts of things to place their political parties in the occupations. But we are suppressing those. Yes, people have the right to join their political parties. But the people in the occupations have had enough of these political parties, all of them. They say, "No. Enough of your promises. We are fine with Intlungu. We occupied the land because of Intlungu. We have shacks now because of Intlungu, instead of waiting for your empty promises". They have tried to establish Sanco in these areas but they couldn't succeed because people have heard enough about Sanco and ANC. The EFF are trying to penetrate, but they are unlikely to succeed.

AMANDLA! :

What are the demands you're making to local government and national government? And how do you put forward those demands?

ZT: When we first started to make demands, it was around the issue of water, proper sanitation, electricity and flush toilets. We engaged the City. And then we saw that the City is not interested to hear us. So we ended up marching to Cape Town where we beat the shutdown there in the Civic Centre. And then they listened to us, during that shut

down, when we closed off all the entries to the city. Even the mayor couldn't go inside for six hours on that day. Then they called us for engagement, together with the Department of Human Settlement.

MT: Another demand that we were putting forward, it was recognition as people who have occupied the land, as people who are demanding basic services, and also as people who are demanding dignity where we stay.

ZT: And the other demand is housing. We don't want to end up in shacks. And we have already tabled that demand. But we said let's start with this one of basic services such as water, electricity, and full flush toilets and jobs. And then when we get those, then we'll start demanding houses.

AMANDLA! :

What have you been able to achieve in relation to those demands?

MT: We have won the question of recognition. The state has recognised us as people who have occupied the land, as people who are supposed to get basic services. The minister committed herself to create a budget that will accommodate the occupations. And she did that. She gazetted a budget of R111 million. Before the recognition, we said we are going to send all the databases of how many people are in the occupations from each area. We did that. And then she recognised us after that. That was the first victory.

And then the second victory was the question of giving us the services.

ZT: Yes, there are services. But it's a challenge. Some of the areas had to fight and we are assisting in other occupations. I think there are three or four occupations that don't have services at this moment. The rest have services. So we are still engaging the City to put those services in those areas.

MT: And also the City of Cape Town, and some counselors in the City are still having a push back kind of mentality. For example, we have an area that is next to Khayelitsha Mall. The counselors want to remove that area so that they can build a private hospital. They say you need to squeeze yourself, or try to join other people in their yards. They were told last week, if they don't do that, they will never receive basic services. So we have such situations as well.



Level Two residents clearing waste from the settlement. There are municipal services. But it's a challenge. Some of the areas had to fight and we are assisting in other occupations. I think there are three or four occupations that don't have services at this moment. So we are still engaging the City to put those services in those areas.

ZT: People are being employed in different projects here. And that was our demand as well. Although it's the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), but at least they're getting something. Now the issue is for us to fight to be employed permanently on cleaning the street, cleaning everything that they're cleaning, because EPWP is six months, one year, three months project.

AMANDLA! :

And in the occupation, I presume there are people from other parts of Africa, refugees and migrants. Are they well accepted in the occupation or do you have problems of xenophobia as well?

ZT: As we are socialists, we are accepting everyone. We have people from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique in these occupations, and they participate on the meetings, doing well with other people from here in South Africa. We've got people from as far as Stellenbosch and Paarl in this occupation. We accept everyone.

AMANDLA! :

In terms in terms of the actual struggle for houses, what are your next steps?

MT: At the moment we're still consolidating the victory. Our plan for now is to fight for better services. We are not happy with the toilets, for example, because we fought for full flush toilets, and they gave us the bucket system. And also the question of jobs. We want to challenge the City and the national government to take into account that this tender system must end. People must get employed directly by the state.

ZT: In terms of campaigning for houses, our initial plan was that the government must look for land. There is a lot of land in Cape Town. So when we have done these services, our next stage will be fighting for houses. And there must be infrastructure in those areas. There must be access to transport, access to shops and facilities. Because we don't say people must

relocate and then put them in a place where there is no transport, no facilities, no jobs, nothing.

AMANDLA! :

Some people say that it's unlikely that government can give people houses. Therefore we should be demanding site and service schemes, where government puts down certain infrastructure and allows people to build their own houses. How does Intlungu see it?

MT: We have a problem. It's not the first time that the state goes to site and service. If you remember during the period of ANC in Western Cape, they have tried site and service around 2004 / 2006. Here in Khayelitsha, in the section called Site B, next to

Makhaza. That thing fell and many people had problems with that site and service. For example, there is the question of people's dignity. The state doesn't want to take responsibility for building houses. So they are shifting the responsibility to the working class.

So our position is clear. We don't support site and service. The state must take the responsibility, because they have a budget for houses, and they can't take that budget for houses for something else. It has to do houses.

AMANDLA! :

I suppose that in this housing struggle for people and services and jobs, you need to make alliances with other sectors of society in Khayelitsha. Are you able to make alliances with the backyarders to talk about the division in Mandela Park, where surely the interests of the backyarders are actually the same as those in the occupation? Can you build such an alliance?

ZT: Yes, we have alliances with **Housing Assembly**. There's a meeting that was set up by Loyiso, one of the chairpersons of backyarders. He wants to meet

with us and to have a joint program on demanding houses. And also we have comrades in Du Noon that occupy the land and they want to work with us as well and in Kraaifontein as well. There's a movement in Pietermaritzburg that is doing good work, challenging services as well. They want to work with us. And Abahlali as well.

MT: And we've managed to link up with **Ndifuna Ukwazi**. If we have



Protest outside the ward councillor's office. The counselors want to remove that area so that they can build a private hospital. They say you need to squeeze yourself, or try to join other people in their yards. They were told last week, if they don't do that, they will never receive basic services.

a problem with the occupation, we call them with their own legal services. But sometimes we have limitations with them. For example, when people are reconnecting electricity and they get arrested, they will say they are not taking such cases. They regard those cases as criminal cases. Others will just want a soft struggle, not the real radical struggle. And we have to treat alliances differently.

AMANDLA! :

And your perspectives for a national housing movement? Do you see that it is possible to bring some of these other forces like Abahlali together?

MT: We are interested to maybe start a big movement. But we are starting with a network of these movements that are fighting for housing. And then we start to have a talk with different movements, so that we get a sense of what kind of a movement we want and what would be guiding the movement. We are interested to see a national movement that will be based on resisting not only for housing, but capitalism itself.

WHAT DOES THE ALBERT STREET FIRE TRAGEDY TELL US ABOUT HOUSING?

By **Lauren Royston** and **Nolwazi Mahlangu**

ON AUGUST 31ST 2023, THE country woke up to the news that [a fire](#) had claimed the lives of over 60 people in the Usindiso building in the inner city of Johannesburg. As the death toll rose to 77, so did a national discourse about “hijacking” and blaming of foreign migrants. This was fuelled by politicians and the media.

If you looked hard enough, you might also have noticed articles in the mainstream media about the systemic nature of the housing crisis, which makes the occupation of abandoned buildings an option of last resort. No-one would make a “choice” to live in circumstances of insecurity and unsafety if other options existed.

Occupation is a symptom of the housing crisis. It is the lack of affordable and available formal options – whether provided by the state or delivered by the private sector – that makes this crisis systemic.

Solutions do not lie in condemning occupiers as “foreigners”, noting that both migrants from the region and South Africans lived in the building on Albert

Street. Nor do they lie in masking the reason for occupation as being a problem of “hijackers”.

How did we go so wrong? What has happened to the ideals of the Freedom Charter and the Reconstruction and Development Programme?

One million houses

Before apartheid ended formally, the White Paper on Housing was being drafted. Published in 1995, it was the outcome of a negotiated process at the National Housing Forum. Private sector interests in property and construction, the recently unbanned ANC, Cosatu and civics were present. Shortly thereafter, in 1997, the Housing Act was promulgated. Its aims were to address historical housing inequalities, promote housing access for the poor and institute a national housing subsidy scheme. Promoting economic growth through private sector involvement in the subsidy projects was a central tenet.

It was at this time that the delivery target of one million low-cost houses within five years was born. Housing was seen as a catalyst for economic

growth, emphasising the importance of state, private sector, and community participation. **By 2001**, government had housed five million people in 1.1 million houses, and between 4.5 and 5 million households had been provided with registered title, widely perceived as constituting secure tenure.

Even though housing delivery was impressive in the early years, the backlog continued to grow due to urbanisation, which had been accelerating since the mid-eighties.

Challenges soon emerged concerning both the quantity and quality of the subsidised houses, and peripheral location was key amongst the critiques. Land in a “good” location was seen to be too expensive to work within the subsidy limits. At that stage, market-related land prices went unchallenged; it was only later that spatial justice and spatial equity emerged more fully in the policy discourse, driven more by the planning sector than by human settlements.

Breaking New Ground

Before this, in 2004, the national Department of Human Settlements released the Breaking New Ground (BNG) housing strategy. This was more formally known as the Comprehensive Plan for Sustainable Human Settlements.

BNG brought with it a shift, at least on paper, from housing quantity to quality, location, informal settlements and the notion of the housing asset. In practice, the language of informal settlement “eradication”, used in BNG and borrowed from the Millennium Development Goals, took on a life of its own. Evictions and the prevention of “slums” became the order of the day. New “slum eradication” bills were put out for comment, and it was only through the agency of informal settlement residents and their use of the courts, that the bills never reached enactment. [Abahlali baseMjondolo’s challenge](#) to the Kwa Zulu Natal Slums Act was pivotal in this regard.

National Housing Code

The [National Housing Code](#) was published in 2004, and revised in 2009, standardising housing development,



Solutions do not lie in condemning occupiers as “foreigners”, noting that both migrants from the region and South Africans lived in the building on Albert Street. Nor do they lie in masking the reason for occupation as being a problem of “hijackers”.

financing, and implementation, including a chapter on informal settlement upgrading (the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme – UISP). Informal settlements continued to grow and the National Upgrading Support Program (NUSP) was established to provide technical and financial assistance to municipalities to upgrade informal settlements. The programme has since been absorbed into the department, with the establishment of the Informal Settlement directorate.

Many city-wide upgrading plans were produced in the NUSP era. The progressive tenets of the programme included relocation as a last resort and the centrality of participation. However, implementation has been **slow and difficult**.

In this context, occupations sit alongside private sector accommodation provision and subsidised housing delivery as the mechanisms by which people access housing. If you are unemployed, income insecure and working class, your options are limited: private rental and ownership accommodation is out of reach, and subsidy projects are on the decline. Rather than waiting patiently in a housing queue – and people are sceptical due to maladministration and corruption – self-provision has become an increasingly effective, but desperate, option. In Latin America this is called the “social production of habitat”, giving recognition to self-provision and assigning to the state an entry point of support rather than condemnation.

Informal settlements and occupations increasing

Within this period however, informal settlements were increasing, as was the occupation of inner-city buildings in Johannesburg. While the building occupations are absent from official data systems, we know that between 1994 and 2015, the number of informal settlements **increased from 300 to 2,225**. Although the 2022 census indicates that the number of households living in informal housing has decreased significantly since 1994, this data has a **31% undercount** – 31% of people and 30% of households were not counted. This means the quality of the data could be **poor and unreliable**. Regarding the rest of the housing programme, the Department of Human Settlements **announced in 2022** the provision since 1994 of 5 million housing opportunities (actual houses or plots with piped water and electricity), and the delivery of over 3.4 million housing units, comprising stand-alone houses and units in multi storey buildings.

The Johannesburg story

Johannesburg is the largest municipality in South Africa, with an **estimated population** of 6,198,000 people. 80.17% are Black Africans, who live in the worst conditions of poverty in the city. Most earn below R3,200 per month. In Johannesburg inner city, decent and affordable housing, at sufficient scale, does not currently exist in practice. While there is insufficient space in this article to discuss the city level policies, the **Inner-City Housing Implementation Plan** (ICHIP) was intended to tackle the housing challenges and create safe and clean communities with access to economic opportunities.

Our recent snapshot check on the

Occupiers have constitutional rights to housing and legal protections against arbitrary eviction. Seen from an historical perspective, these legal and constitutional provisions were a response to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid land deprivation and dispossession. In practice, the case law that has developed from litigating against illegal evictions has led to a better balance between the rights to housing and property. Housing rights litigation has also led to the development of new policies, such as the Emergency Housing Programme (EHP), which came out of the famous **Grootboom case**. However, much remains to be done, as the tragic Marshalltown fire, and reactions to it, show.

The state needs to use, and where



We know that between 1994 and 2015, the number of informal settlements increased from 300 to 2,225.

availability of affordable housing options shows that low income options under the Social Housing Programme, such as the units provided by the Johannesburg Social Housing Company, require an income of above R3,500. They exclude people without identity documentation, payslips, or bank accounts, shutting out the majority of the urban poor.

Commission of enquiry

This is the context in which the **Khampepe Commission of Inquiry** begins its work. The Commission must clarify the cause of the fire, where responsibility lies and the identity of extractive interests (the “hijackers”, if they existed in the building). But organisations of civil society and the working class must ensure that the systemic nature of the housing crisis also comes to the commission’s attention. What the commission finds should influence responses to occupations in the inner city.

necessary adapt, the policy mechanisms that it already has at its disposal – the EHP and the UISP. The origins and intentions of post-apartheid legislation, like the PIE Act, must be reinforced and the case law that has developed around evictions must be entrenched: procedural requirements like a court order, with consideration of the relevant circumstances, and alternative accommodation where people would become homeless.

Only then will we be getting closer to the vision in the Freedom Charter and the transformative potential of the Constitution. Only then can we imagine a Johannesburg where a fire that took the lives of 77 people, and ruined the lives of many others, never happens again.

Lauren Royston is Director of Research and Advocacy and **Nolwazi Mahlangu** is an intern at the **Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI)**.

SOCIAL HOUSING IN A COLLAPSED STATE

Amandla! spoke with **Malcolm Campbell**, an architect, urban designer and development planner, based in Cape Town, who has a long history of involvement in the delivery of affordable housing and supporting struggles around housing,

MALCOLM CAMPBELL:

I have become despondent with the policy approach of the ANC government. I didn't see it adequately addressing housing need. It exacerbates the problem rather than attempting to solve it. It started with the abandonment of the RDP. In the early 90s, I had studied development planning at University College, London and my specialisation was housing and development in developing economies. And as a Marxist and socialist, I have an attitude that the state must provide formal housing for all. From my studies at that time, it appeared very few states, except for the "Socialist Bloc" countries, had succeeded in that. If you look at the quality of the housing provided in those countries, with few exceptions, it was actually very poor, with environments which were not really conducive to building communities.

At the time, while I was studying, the most successful housing initiative was something that had been pursued by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, shortly before he was assassinated, in the late 80s. He had seen Sri Lanka's limitations in terms of its finances, and the extent of the housing need. A number of people were housing themselves in very rudimentary kinds of ways, using whatever recycled material they could find. And he took the approach that, rather than the state providing housing products targeting a limited number of beneficiaries, it was necessary to look at how to use subsidies to maximise the impact on a significantly wider range of beneficiaries.

So, instead of building houses, they allowed people to access funds to improve their shacks: new corrugated iron, or replacement of the corrugated iron with brick. It was called the ***One Million House Programme***. It was a very successful initiative because a wide range of people were able to benefit from assistance in terms of improving housing and living conditions.

AMANDLA!:

Was this approach tried in South Africa?

MC: In the early 90s, when Joe Slovo was Housing Minister, this was presented to him as an approach, in addition to building complete houses on greenfield sites on the outskirts of the cities. Why don't we acknowledge that a lot of people have already housed themselves in informal settlements and backyard shacks? Subsidies could be used, in addition to providing new housing, to give these people a leg up. This approach did not find favour. Of course, politically there are points to be scored if you can demonstrate that you've provided so many new houses in areas which are critical to your political patronage.

So they then proceeded with the housing, which came to be called the ***Breaking New Ground*** housing policy. They provided 40 square metre housing units for people who earned below R3,500 a month. And generally these houses

were built on greenfield sites - sites developed from scratch. Community and social infrastructure had to be put in, like clinics and schools; roads had to be put in. A lot of money actually went particularly into what they call the civil works - roads and sanitation and the water and electricity supply.

At the end of the day, there was very little money left for what is called top structures, which are the actual housing units.

So obviously, with that kind of approach, there were constraints and limits to the amount of housing they could produce. If you look at the figures, with the housing need growing every year, the ability to keep pace with that housing need dwindled quite considerably. If you look at every 10 year interval, you can see it becomes more and more a kind of hopeless situation.

Then, obviously in this country, the other big problem with getting developers to do housing is that a lot of the money doesn't land up in the development, given corruption and declining skills levels.



The ***Breaking New Ground*** housing policy provided 40 square metre housing units for people who earned below R3,500 a month. And generally these houses were built on greenfield sites.

AMANDLA! :

Was it always like this?

MC: The irony is that, under apartheid, in the late 50s and 60s, the state via its public works programme was able to pursue a policy which was obviously meant to bolster apartheid, but it was a very successful programme of mass house building. This resulted in the kind of housing you see in Soweto and all the former locations all over the country. They set up teams dedicated to building these units, and they were able to get them out quite rapidly and efficiently and quite inexpensively, because there were no private contractors who had to make a profit. It was financed directly by the state.

So South Africa did experience a period in which there was quite a successful delivery mechanism for delivering mass housing.

When I visited Cuba, I saw their housing brigades. There's a division of labour with skilled people at various levels, some with experience

in design, others in costing, others in managing construction projects, and then, obviously, large teams who actually execute these projects. So they were able to have quite an aggressive rehousing programme, particularly relating to the conversion of existing buildings to accommodate more people.

AMANDLA! :

So does the incapable state we now live with make a difference to our approach to social housing?

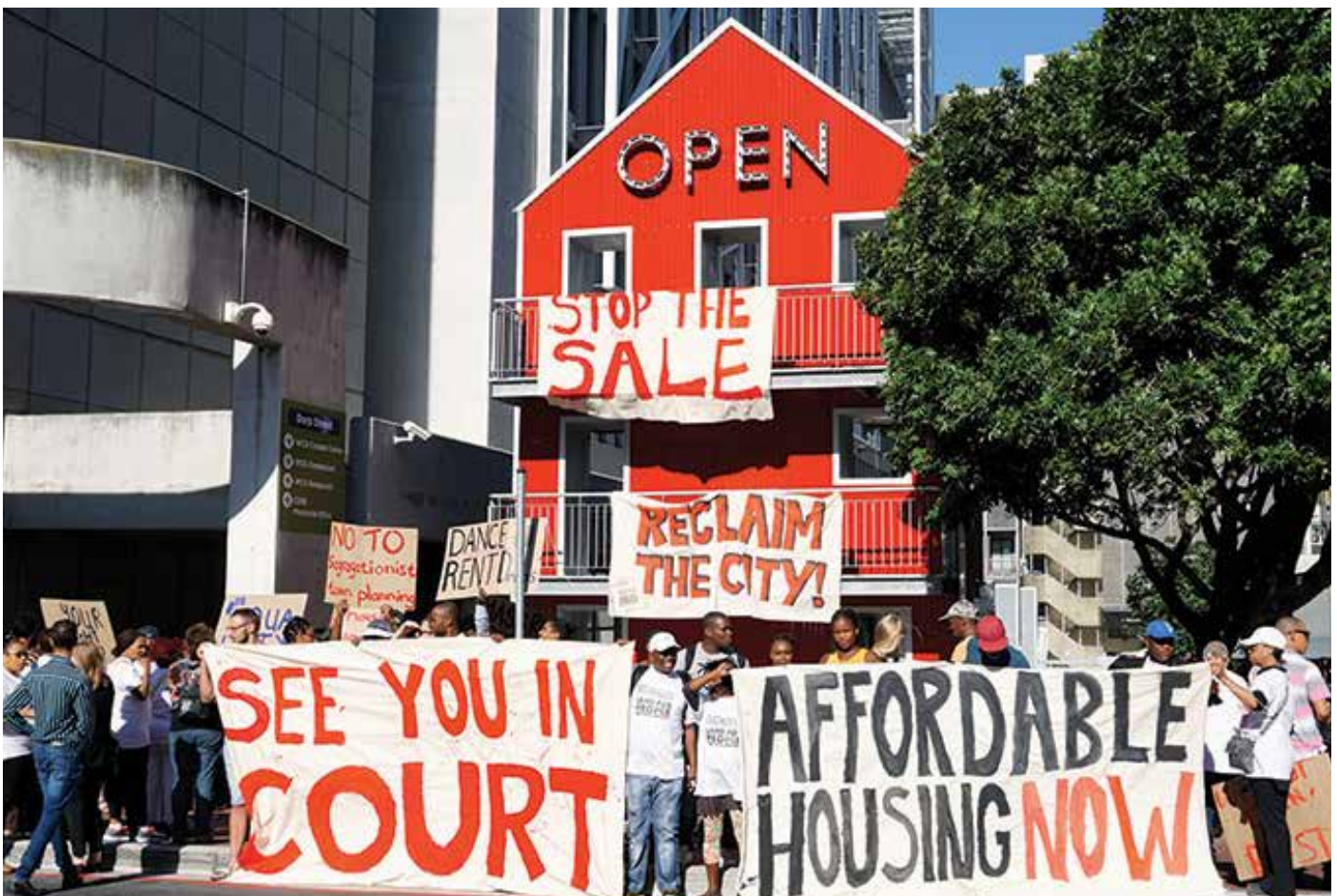
MC: This is where we currently are with housing. The state is not able to respond to the demand. Where they are able to respond, there's no guarantee that the funding will reach the beneficiary communities, given the levels of corruption. But despite this, people are housing themselves. They're occupying land illegally, setting up structures, and occupying vacant buildings.

And it's very important that we

are able to assist in organising communities in these initiatives. In that way, we put pressure on the state to come to their assistance.

What it means is that the emphasis is no longer so much on the house as a unit, as a product. The emphasis is increasingly on providing infrastructure that supports positive housing environments. The provision of physical infrastructure: trafficable access ways (I won't call them roads), a system for removing sewerage and refuse, a water supply that everybody can access. And then there's the kind of social and community infrastructure ensuring that there's access to health care, to schools, to educare centres. And importantly, the economic infrastructure ensuring that people have access to jobs or opportunities where they can earn an income.

So I think that is very much where the emphasis should be placed at this juncture, unless we are able to achieve the kind of political change where the state is able to take greater responsibility for the provision of housing. That will still remain a political demand which we have to raise quite strongly.



The battle over Tafelberg School property in Cape Town. Lessons can be learnt from Occupation Movements such as *Reclaim the City*.

The irony is that, under apartheid, in the late 50s and 60s, the state via its public works programme was able to pursue a very successful programme of mass house building. This resulted in the kind of housing you see in Soweto.



AMANDLA ! !

What you're describing sounds remarkably like what was called site and service. And if I recall, the debates of the early 90s, site and service was rejected by progressive forces, because it was inferior to what we wanted. So are we now settling for what we wouldn't have settled for before, because things are just in a worse state? Or were we wrong, or what?

MC: When we were opposing site and service schemes, it was in a period where the state had capacity and the means to provide formal housing. So we rejected site and service out of hand. The situation has now changed. Not only are the resources not there, they've been squandered, and housing need, in the interim, has grown exponentially.

And the capacity to deliver housing at scale is no longer there either. I mean, it's very interesting, the state is now starting to award major, multi billion rand infrastructure projects to Chinese contractors. We see this trend all over Africa, where all major infrastructure projects are being done by the Chinese and local capacity is actually being lost.

The current thrust of progressive struggles around housing has been to pressurise the state to move away from these RDP houses on greenfield sites on the outskirts of the city, with the emphasis being placed on creating higher density, well located housing opportunities within the city – in inner city areas where there's already a social and community and economic infrastructure that they can tap into.

And the state has been slow in responding to this, attempting to deflect it to the private sector to buy into the institutional – and social – housing policies. The private sector has largely turned its back on it because it's not profitable enough for them. In some instances, the state has set up what they called special purpose vehicles. These are entities created by the provincial government or the local government, which act relatively independently of these governments. But even that has not worked very well. Fortunately, there have been initiatives, although limited, by NGOs who have pioneered some ground-breaking inner city affordable housing initiatives, from which important lessons can be learnt, as well as lessons to be learnt from Occupation Movements such as Reclaim the City.

AMANDLA ! !

So effectively, what you're saying is we are in a different and worse situation than we were 30 years ago, which is an interesting and depressing reflection. It comes from a place where, as you say, both the capacity and the political will of the state to aggressively address housing need has dwindled.

MC: Correct, and it is further compounded when projects are procured. Here one has to contend with rent seeking. The development of the black bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie in this country has been on a parasitic basis. They don't create value. They extract value from those who create value.

AMANDLA ! !

It occurs to me that, just as we tend to think of land as a rural issue, we think of housing as an urban issue. But housing presumably is also a rural issue.

MC: Interestingly, I've been involved in a rural housing pilot scheme in the Eastern Cape, with the Development Bank of South Africa. At the time, it had been established that, if people are given a housing subsidy, many people would rather invest in the rural area of their family origin. So rather than build a house in the city, in one of the locations, they would rather spend that money and build a decent home in the Eastern Cape or wherever.

An advantage is that in the rural areas, in order to provide housing, you don't have to spend money on roads, and sewage systems and waste removal. And so all that money can go into the unit. And not only that, you can supply solar panels and you can supply a 5,000 litre water tank, so they can store water. So suddenly, they get much more out of the subsidy than they would get if they were living in the city.

In addition, it was contended, that the city is quite a hostile place for kids, and for old people. So a lot of workers would prefer having the elderly and the kids schooling in the rural areas, where it's safer and less likely to be subjected to negative influences. It would be interesting to test whether this argument still holds today.

ISRAELI STRATEGY IN PALESTINE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Interview with **Gilber Achcar**

AMANDLA! :

The scale of Israel's attack on Gaza is unprecedented. Do you see this largely as an act of vengeance or does it have a strategic purpose?

GILBERT ACHCAR :

Of course, one dimension of it resembles an act of vengeance. But it is also an opportunity that has been seized by the Israeli far right, represented by Netanyahu and his government, to implement an old dream, an old project of theirs, called the Greater Israel project. They were deeply unhappy at the fact that the Israeli state in 1948 left out from the Palestine of the British mandate some 22%, represented by the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. As we know, those were occupied by Israel in 1967. However, Israel could not swallow them in the sense of annexation, because, unlike what happened in 1948, the population did not flee. The vast majority of them stuck to their land and homes. They saw what happened in 1948, when 80% of the Palestinian population of the territory that the new Israeli state occupied fled the war, believing they would come back once the fighting was over. And they were never allowed to go back. The population of the West Bank did not want to become in its turn a population of refugees in tents, so they stuck to their places.

It's the same for Gaza, with the addition that beyond Gaza you have the Sinai Desert. That's not exactly a place where you would think of fleeing to immediately, unless you are under very, very tough circumstances, as is presently the case. And that's the point.

So for Gaza, they think they found a way to fulfil that dream. And some of the far right in Israel believe that it's even the time to do it in the West Bank. They are starting, and this is less reported, of course, than the massacre in Gaza. But you have already a large number of people killed on



In 1967, unlike what happened in 1948, the population did not flee. They saw what happened in 1948, when 80% of the Palestinian population of the territory that the new Israeli state occupied fled the war. The population of the West Bank did not want to become in its turn a population of refugees in tents, so they stuck to their places.

the West Bank, and permanent harassment by the settlers of the Palestinians there, in parts of the West Bank, openly inciting them to leave and go to Jordan.

And the parallel with 9/11 is quite clear. What the George W. Bush administration did after 9/11, especially the invasion of Iraq, was of course very obviously the exploitation of an opportunity to fulfil a goal that actually was even less related to the event than what is happening in Gaza now.

AMANDLA! :

What they're doing right now in Gaza is trying to squeeze everybody down Gaza from the north to the south. It's almost like a phased approach, where you first squeeze them into the south. But there seems no suggestion that the Egyptians are planning to let them in, because they don't want to house that problem. So where does this strategic objective go?

GA: The term you use is exactly appropriate. It's a phased operation. From north to south Gaza, and the intention is then from south Gaza into Egypt. And we know that the Israeli government has deployed a lot of efforts to try to get Western countries to convince the Egyptian government to open the border gate, and to let the Palestinians into the Sinai. But Egypt has been very strict on this. The Egyptian government does not want to see the expulsion of what would be close to 2 million Palestinians into its territory, turning them into permanent refugees. There was a document from the Ministry of Intelligence in Israel, which was revealed at the end of October. It detailed three scenarios for Gaza. The one deemed to be the best in the document was exactly the evacuation of the Palestinians from Gaza into the Sinai, and their permanent settlement there, with the building of a city for them.

All this will depend on the ability of the Israeli army to achieve what they regard as the consensual and minimal goal of this operation,



There was a document from the Ministry of Intelligence in Israel, which detailed three scenarios for Gaza. The one deemed to be the best was exactly the evacuation of the Palestinians from Gaza into the Sinai, and their permanent settlement there, with the building of a city for them.

which is the eradication of Hamas. And that can't be taken for granted, even with the level of terror and destruction and death. At the time of speaking now, you have close to 10,000 people killed, maybe 40% of them children, out of a population of 2.3 million. Take the same proportion in South Africa and you will get even more frightening figures. That's why the term genocide that's now starting to be used, at least as a warning by UN agencies, is absolutely appropriate. What is going on is definitely a genocidal massacre.

AMANDLA ! !

That would be the equivalent of more than a quarter of a million people in South Africa dying. Meanwhile, Anthony Blinken is ferrying himself around, doing a kind of Henry Kissinger in the Middle East, trying to talk to everybody. How serious are the risks that this is going to turn into broader military activity in the Middle East, involving other countries?

GA: The countries that might get involved are those allied with Hamas, and that would have been Iran primarily, represented by the Lebanese Hezbollah. There have been a few gestures, which are token gestures, like firing missiles from Yemen, or a few rockets at the border from Lebanon. But Iran and Hezbollah remain cautious. It seems that the Iranian regime does not have the will to get involved

in that war and pay a very heavy price for it, given what the United States has been sending to the area, intended as a deterrent for Tehran.

There were reports that the Iranian rulers, and their auxiliaries in Lebanon and Iraq, have told Hamas that it should have consulted them before launching its operation. That's a way of saying: "Since we haven't been consulted, we bear no responsibility."

AMANDLA ! !

We have been seeing over the last couple of years Middle Eastern powers defying the BDS call and building diplomatic and economic ties with Israel. Is that process now put on hold? Is it reversed? Is it dead?

GA: It has been dealt a very severe blow at the very least, if it hasn't been radically reversed. Until now we have, again, token gestures, like recall of ambassadors. Even Jordan did that. These are ways for these governments to show that they are doing something, because they are under heavy pressure. Egypt and Jordan, as two countries neighbouring Israel, are very wary of what's happening because their populations feel deep solidarity with the Palestinians. Like the rest of the Arab population and way beyond actually - people speak of the Muslim world but even in Latin America, which has nothing to do with Islam, you can see that solidarity.

This conflict in Gaza really epitomises the global cleavage between the Global South and the Global North. Thus, the Arab regimes that had engaged in so-called normalisation, that is establishment of diplomatic and other relations with Israel, find themselves in a very embarrassing situation.

Iran is outbidding all Arab regimes on the issue of Israel; it has used the Palestinian cause as a scourge to beat the Arab regimes with, of course without doing very much itself. Eventually, the future of Arab relations with Israel will depend on what happens at the end of this ongoing tragedy. But the scale of the massacre is already such that it would be very difficult to resume the "normalisation" process, I believe.

AMANDLA ! !

If we look at the politics of Israel, what effect is this whole process going to have? In the short term, it seems to have hardened, almost inevitably, a kind of vengeful attitude. But that coexists with the sense that this was a massive failure on the part of government, and therefore the government must pay. Does it convince anybody who wasn't already convinced that there is no military solution to this issue? Where does Israeli politics go?

GA: Only a tiny minority is drawing the right conclusion - the one that you just spelled out, that there is no military solution to such a conflict. You have to come to terms on the basis of political settlement, which means inevitably taking into account the Palestinians' rights. This Israel has completely refused until now. But the vast majority of Israelis are, for now, unfortunately, in a very different mood, although whether they apply that to the Palestinians in general, or to Hamas in particular, is difficult to tell. A big section of the Israeli society has drifted towards the far right, to the point of producing this far right government that includes neo-Nazi ministers. Such people certainly don't make much distinction between Hamas and the Palestinians. For them, the Palestinians are evil. They are very openly racist.

Now, there is another segment of the Israelis who still believe that they can get some kind of arrangement with the Palestinians. But I would say the majority of

those believe in some kind of Oslo-like deal, which is a total sham. It's the creation of a bantustan under Israeli control. The bottom line of this stance is no less racist, ultimately, than the other. Only a tiny minority may believe that Israel should get into a real peace with the Palestinians. And that would mean granting full equality to the Palestinians, as well as the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees that are today in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and other countries. And that is a very, very radical stance for the present Israeli society.

AMANDLA ! !

Some people say that South Africa resolved its problems. So, nothing is impossible. But the South African ruling class didn't give up anything economically. There is no conceivable solution in Palestine without a major surrender of actual material resources. So, what is the way forward for the Palestinian struggle? It is very difficult to be optimistic, sometimes, when we look at this situation.

GA: You're absolutely right about the end of apartheid in South Africa. But there is a further dimension, which is even more crucial, in the case of Palestine. The difference between the Israeli case of settler colonialism and the South African or Algerian cases is that, in the latter two cases, you didn't have an expulsion of the original population as an essential part of the project. And that's a very major difference. Zionism as a settler colonial project had in its programme the mass expulsion of the population of the country in order to build a Jewish state, or at least a Jewish-majority state. That was achieved by not letting the Palestinians go back to their houses, villages, and lands after they fled the war in 1948. The Israelis have razed hundreds of villages. They were completely wiped off the map after the war as a way of

appropriating the land. This creates, of course, relations that are even more bitter than in other cases.

Secondly, the coexistence in one state of the Palestinians and the Israelis is not possible unless this project of a Jewish state is relinquished. You would need the end of the Zionist state as a Jewish state, based on ethnic, racial definition, and that is much more difficult to achieve than the transition from apartheid. In Algeria, the Europeans fled massively to France, because the Algerian liberation movement was more radical in its reconquest of the land. Thus, the smooth transition you had in South Africa is rather the exception than the rule.

AMANDLA ! !

So, what is the way forward for the Palestinian struggle?

GA: As you said, there is no ground for optimism today in this conflict. The future looks extremely bleak. And it has been looking bleaker and bleaker over many years now. Right now, it's as if in South Africa you had the white Afrikaners in power. That's what you have in Israel.

It would take, I would say, major political changes to occur in all components of the situation. Firstly, in the Israeli society itself. Secondly,

in Palestinian society and the Arab environment. It would require the emergence of new forces able to win over large numbers to a radical and internationalist perspective. And last but not least, in the United States and the West, you would need a radically different approach to the problem.

Now, of those three, the only place where you have had some real positive development is the United States. It's paradoxical to say it, but it's in the United States that we have seen a progression of the understanding of the Palestinian cause, even among American Jews. And that's very encouraging. You even have amazing polls showing that a majority of the Democrats are against increasing military aid to Israel, for instance. You wouldn't have had this only a few years ago. So, there is a real shift there. And maybe, ultimately, this will have repercussions on the Israeli society, which is very, very sensitive, of course, to what happens in the United States. The connection of American Jews in particular with Israel is such that they have a lot of influence on Israeli society. So, if we wanted to identify a ray of hope in this huge darkness, that would be it for the moment.

Gilbert Achcar is Professor of Development Studies and International Relations at SOAS, University of London.



Members of *Jewish Voice for Peace* and the *IfNotNow* movement demonstrating in Washington DC. It's paradoxical to say it, but it's in the United States that we have seen a progression of the understanding of the Palestinian cause, even among American Jews. And that's very encouraging.

WHAT IS HAMAS?

By **Joseph Daher**

HAMAS HAS BEEN DEMONISED since its attacks on October 7th 2023, leading to the death of 1,200 Israelis. Where did this party come from and how did it develop?

Origins and development

Hamas, the Arabic acronym for “Islamic Resistance Movement”, was officially established in December 1987, at the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifada. Its roots however go back to two organisations: Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which had been active in the Gaza Strip since the 1940s, and the *al-Mujamma al-Islami* association, founded by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin in 1973 in Gaza, and legalised by the Israeli occupied military administration in 1979. *Al-Mujamma al-Islami* was established and acted as a front organisation for MB’s activities in Gaza.

The Israeli occupation authorities initially encouraged the development of *al-Mujamma al-Islami* structures throughout the Gaza Strip, particularly social institutions and political activities. The aim was naturally to weaken the nationalist and left-wing camp, by encouraging the Islamic alternative. This is because the MB had decided to adopt a stance of non-confrontation towards the Israeli occupying forces and to focus on the

islamisation of society first. This choice of non-armed confrontation with the Israeli occupier was contested within Hamas in the early 1980s and a new political entity, Islamic Jihad, led in Gaza by Fathi Shikaki, was created from this division.

Hamas’ development was also stimulated by two major regional events. The oil boom after 1973 enabled the Gulf monarchies to increase investment in Islamic fundamentalist movements, including *al-Mujamma Islami*. And the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 promoted the Islamic fundamentalist political orientation.

Islamic fundamentalist movements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) also benefited from the Palestinian Liberation Organisation’s (PLO’s) major setbacks. These started in Jordan in 1970 with Black September and the Jordanian regime’s violent repression of Palestinian forces, which led to their transfer to Lebanon. Following the expulsion of PLO forces from Beirut to Tunis in 1982, the Palestinian national movement was further weakened. Its leadership, strategy and political programme were increasingly called into question. This was in addition to the growing focus of the Fatah-led PLO on seeking a political and diplomatic solution rather than armed resistance.

By contrast, Hamas leadership

supported armed resistance. Hamas played a role in the first and second intifadas (1987-1993 and 2000-2005), while maintaining a strong rhetorical stance against the Oslo Peace Agreement between the PLO and Israel. This was increasingly and widely seen as a complete capitulation of the PLO to Israel’s demands.

Within this framework, Hamas increasingly gained popularity in the Palestinian streets in the OPT. At the same time, the PA was increasingly criticised because of its failure to achieve any Palestinian national objectives in the face of continuous Israeli occupation and colonisation, while Ramallah was accused of corruption and clientelist practices. And the PA’s security collaboration with Israel was also widely denounced within the Palestinian population and society.

Meanwhile, Hamas slowly transformed, from being a party which, in the 1990s, refused any participation in the institutions inherited from the Oslo Agreement, to political accommodation with those institutions. In the Palestinian legislative election of January 2006, running as the “List of Change and Reform”, Hamas won a majority of seats, obtaining 42.9 percent of the vote and 74 of the 132 seats.

The international community and Israel responded by boycotting and embargoing the Hamas-led government and suspending all foreign aid to the OPT. Tensions between Hamas and Fatah escalated after the Hamas coup that ousted Fatah from Gaza in June 2007. The West Bank and Gaza Strip remain under the authority of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas respectively.

Political programmes

Hamas adopted its first Charter on August 18, 1988. It acknowledged its affiliation with the MB. It stated that it “considers the land of Palestine an Islamic waqf for all generations of Muslims until the day of resurrection”. On the PLO, it said that: “Our homeland is one, our misfortune is one, our destiny is one and our enemy is common”. Hamas’ opposition to the PLO has always been essentially political, not religious. The text of the first Charter had however anti-Semitic overtones, with a reference to the Protocol of the Elders of Zion (a forgery created by the



Hamas played a role in the first and second intifadas (1987-1993 and 2000-2005), while maintaining a strong rhetorical stance against the Oslo Peace Agreement between the PLO and Israel.

Tsarist police at the beginning of the 20th century), as well as a denunciation of the “conspiracies” of the Masonic lodges, the Rotary and Lyons clubs.

The latest Hamas charter, published in 2017, has witnessed some major modifications, towards more moderation. It now, for instance, proposes a political programme implicitly in line with a two-state solution, while antisemitic content has been removed, and instead the struggle of the party is against Zionism. In addition to this, the new document does not mention any connection to the MB.

Military branch

Hamas has grown considerably stronger militarily since Israel’s first ground incursion in the 2008–2009 war, thanks in part to its growing links with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah, particularly through the transfer of military expertise.

Today, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, is estimated to have between 15,000 and 40,000 combat-ready fighters. According to various studies, al-Qassam Brigades has an arsenal of drones and around 30,000 rockets at its disposal. It has fired 8,500 of these since October 7, reducing the effectiveness of Israel’s “Iron Dome”. Hamas also uses numerous armed booby-traps and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as well as shells and mines. It is now manufacturing a large proportion of its own weapons, developing drones and unmanned underwater vehicles, and engaging in cyberwarfare.

Strategy and regional alliances

Hamas leaders have cultivated alliances with Qatar and Turkey in recent years, as well as with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is its main political and military supporter.

Hamas has been witnessing with growing concern the conclusion of the US-brokered Abraham Accords in the summer of 2020, and further normalisation of relations between Israel and Arab states, not to mention the rapprochement between Turkey and Israel. This context has only strengthened Hamas’ crucial alliance with Iran – and therefore Hezbollah. Its relations with Teheran have continued to provide military assistance, including weapons and training, in addition to important financial support.

The leadership changes within Hamas’ political movement have also had an

impact. The relationship has certainly been maintained on a political and military level over the last decade – despite disagreements on the Syrian uprising. But the replacement of Khaled Meshaal with Ismael Haniya as Hamas’ leader in 2017, and other leadership changes in the military wing, have facilitated closer relations between Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran.

Hamas officials multiplied their visits

the region and rehabilitate relations with two allies. That said, any evolution in the relations between Syria and the Palestinian movement will not mean a return to the pre-2011 setup, in which Hamas leaders enjoyed major support from the Syrian regime. Officials in Syria will most likely lessen their public criticism of Hamas, but not restore any form of strategic military and political support, at least in the short



Palestinians at a Hamas rally in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, in 2005. In the Palestinian legislative election of January 2006, running as the “List of Change and Reform”, Hamas won a majority of seats, obtaining 42.9 percent of the vote and 74 of the 132 seats.

to Teheran to meet with the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Qasem Soleimani, while repeatedly praising Iran’s assistance in the media. They have declared on several occasions that they have succeeded in significantly developing their military capabilities, because Iran had provided them with a lot of money, equipment and expertise.

The renewed and deepened relations with Iran have not come without criticism in the Gaza Strip and even among Hamas’ popular bases, however. The assassination of General Soleimani by a US strike in Baghdad in 2020 was heavily condemned by Hamas. But a picture of him, posted on a billboard in Gaza City, was torn down just days before the first anniversary of his death. The instigator of the action, Majdi al-Maghribi, accused him of being a criminal. Several other Soleimani banners were also taken down and vandalised, with one video showing an individual describing him as the “killer of Syrians and Iraqis”.

Similarly, the restoration of ties between the Syrian regime and Hamas in mid 2022 should be seen as Teheran’s attempt to consolidate its influence in

term. Future connections between the Syrian regime and Hamas are therefore very much governed by interests connected to Iran and Hezbollah.

The wrong alliances

Hamas, just like the rest of Palestinian political parties, from Fatah to the Palestinian Left, look not to the Palestinian masses and the regional working classes and oppressed peoples as the forces to win liberation. Instead, they seek political alliances with the region’s ruling classes and their regimes to support their political and military battles against Israel.

So Hamas leaderships have cultivated alliances with monarchies in Gulf states, especially Qatar more recently, and Turkey, as well as with the Iranian regime. Rather than advance the struggle, these regimes restrict their support for the cause to areas where it advances their regional interests and betray it when it doesn’t.

Joseph Daher is a Syrian-Swiss marxist and academic and author of *Hezbollah: The Political Economy of Lebanon’s Party of God*.



THE COLONIAL PROJECT OF ZIONISM

By **Roland Rance**

From the beginning of the 20th century, Palestinians were being removed from the lands which they and their families had farmed and lived on for centuries.

Conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, Britain has witnessed a concerted witchhunt based on largely spurious allegations of antisemitism. Students have been disciplined, academics dismissed, meetings banned and protesters arrested on flimsy charges. Most notably, the opposition Labour Party has expelled hundreds of members for alleged antisemitism; an analysis conducted by [Jewish Voice for Labour](#) shows that Jewish members are almost ten times more likely than non-Jews to be expelled for antisemitism.

It is conceivable that some of those expelled were indeed guilty as charged. But it is stretching the bounds of credibility to assume that so many Jewish members were guilty of racist behaviour towards other Jews. Their offence, rather, was stronger opposition to the state of Israel and to the Zionist movement than is permitted within the constrained limits imposed by the Labour Party, and policed by supporters of the Israeli state.

This phenomenon illustrates a remarkable success of Israel's propaganda drive – the deliberate conflation of opposition to Israel and support for Palestinian rights with racist discrimination against

Jews. This is summed up in the claim that “Anti-Zionism equals antisemitism”. This claim has an unfounded – and arguably antisemitic – corollary, that support for Zionism is an integral element of Jewish identity. It is based on a profound misrepresentation of both Zionism and antisemitism.

The reality of Zionism

The term “Zionism” is widely and inaccurately used by both its supporters and its opponents. In our solidarity with the Palestine struggle for liberation, we must be careful neither to dismiss Zionism as an irrelevance, nor to overestimate its power.

Supporters present Zionism as variously a response to anti-Jewish racism (misleadingly called “anti-semitism”), as a movement of national liberation, or as the realisation of a Biblical and historical aspiration.

Many opponents, on the other hand, use the term “Zionism” interchangeably with “racism”, even “fascism”. In doing so, they fail to look at the reality and specificity of the Zionist ideology and movement.

Although Zionism plays a key role in Israel's propaganda apparatus, it is mistaken to see it as a reason for Western support for Israel. This support is based on Israel's central role in upholding

Western dominance in the Middle East. For as long as Israel exists in conflict with the Palestinian people and the Arab world as a whole, it has no strategic alternative to an alliance with the West. But presenting this support as a result of Zionist influence acts to disguise Western motives and interests, and to shift any blame or responsibility to “the Jews”.

Zionism is in essence a European settler colonial movement. It developed in late 19th century Europe, as a response to the officially sanctioned antisemitic pogroms of the Tsarist empire. It was never a mass movement. While millions of Jews joined revolutionary organisations to fight racism, and millions more simply fled to Western Europe, the USA and elsewhere, some thousands gravitated to a movement which argued that antisemitism could not be combatted or escaped.

The fault, Zionists argued, was not with individual antisemites or with the economic and social conditions which produced them. It was with Jews themselves. They internalised the antisemitic argument that Jewish existence in a non-Jewish environment was unnatural. The solution, argued the early Zionists, was for Jews to withdraw themselves entirely from non-Jewish society to a space where they could remould themselves as fully human.

This was very much a minority view. In the three decades preceding the First World War, some two million Jews fled Tsarist persecution. Of these, no more than 50,000 moved to Palestine, and half of these left within two years. Zionist accommodation to – even adoption of – European antisemitic attitudes was from the start opposed by socialist, religious, conservative and liberal Jews alike.

The dispute between Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews would have remained an internal Jewish affair, with Zionism constituting a minor sect, were it not for two external factors: the rise of European antisemitism leading eventually to the Nazi holocaust, and the Zionist decision to focus its resettlement plans on the already-inhabited Palestine.

The Jewish state

Unlike the small Jewish communities who had always lived in, or travelled to, Palestine, the Zionist immigrants had a specific political project – the establishment of a Jewish state. They proposed to achieve this through the twin projects of “conquest of the land” and “conquest of labour”. This meant, in effect, the removal of Palestinians from the land, and their exclusion from the economy. Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, recorded in his diary:

We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our country. The property owners will come over to our side. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly.

This project, against the wishes of the indigenous inhabitants of the country, could only be carried out with the support of a major sponsor. Herzl believed that the Zionist movement could reach an agreement with European antisemites; in his book *The Jewish State*, he wrote that “the antisemites will become our most dependable friends”, while promising that his proposed state would form “a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarism”.

In search of such a sponsor, Herzl met the Turkish Sultan, the German Kaiser and advisers to the Russian Tsar, none of whom agreed to his proposals. But, with the British occupation of Palestine in 1917, the Zionist project gained official favour. While British forces battled the Turkish and German armies for control of Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Balfour (who

had some years earlier introduced the racist Aliens Act designed to prevent Jewish refugees from entering Britain) issued his famous Declaration “view(ing) with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”. The purpose of this support was made clear shortly after by Ronald Storrs, the British military governor in Jerusalem, who wrote of “forming for England ‘a little loyal Jewish Ulster’ in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism”.

Under British colonial rule over Palestine during the next thirty years, the Zionist project flourished, creating a virtual state-within-a-state. The watchwords of this project were the slogans “conquest of the land” and “conquest of labour”. The Zionists proceeded to acquire land from absentee landlords. Ignoring all custom and precedent, they evicted tenant farmers rather than tithe them (allow them to stay and pay a portion of what they produced).

From the beginning of the 20th century, Palestinians were being removed from the lands which they and their families had farmed and lived on for centuries. At the same time, they conducted a systematic campaign of boycott and self-sufficiency. When Palestinian opposition to British colonialism and Zionist dispossession erupted in the **1936 uprising** and a six-month general strike, this enabled the Zionists to replace the numerically much larger Palestinian community as the dominant economic force in the country.

Since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, the World Zionist Organization has entered into a contractual agreement with the state. This in effect places control of all state land (including vast areas expropriated from Palestinians in 1948 and since) under the control of its subsidiary, the Jewish National Fund/Keren Kayemet. This body – which is registered as a charity in both Britain and South Africa – is bound by its articles of

association to provide to Jews only. By this means, without enacting any explicitly discriminatory legislation, the state of Israel has effectively excluded Palestinians (and other non-Jews) from over 90% of the land in the state. This includes increasing parts of the 1967-occupied areas. These have all been handed over to a body not even nominally answerable to the citizens of Israel, but rather to the fictive entity “the Jewish people”.

Zionism a racist ideology

Opposition to Zionism is thus a legitimate – indeed necessary – element of the struggle for peace and justice in the Middle East. Anti-Zionists oppose Zionism ideologically, because rather than fight antisemitism it in effect justifies and exploits this form of racism. And also politically, because it forms a central element of the dispossession and oppression of the Palestinian people. The attempts to delegitimise – even criminalise – anti-Zionism as equivalent to antisemitism are in effect an intervention into an intra-Jewish dispute dating back at least 130 years.

We should not be deterred by these desperate attacks. Zionism is indeed a racist ideology (towards Jews as well as towards Palestinians). Its official institutions are a central pillar of Israel’s apartheid regime in the area “from the river to the sea”. The dismantlement of the Zionist structure of the state of Israel, along with an immediate and complete end to the 1967 occupation, and the return of Palestinian refugees, must remain our central demands.

Roland Rance is a supporter of *Anti-Capitalist Resistance* in England. He has been active in Palestine solidarity campaigning in England, Israel and Palestine for nearly fifty years.

Palestinians voting to support the 1936 general strike. This enabled the Zionists to replace the numerically much larger Palestinian community as the dominant economic force in the country.



EUROPE SCARED OF HUGE SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE

By Leah Levane

The Interior Minister in France, Darmanin, announced an **outright ban** on pro-Palestine protests throughout France, citing a potential disruption to "public order". In Paris, activists were met with water cannons and tear gas.

ON AN ALMOST DAILY BASIS, criticism of Israel and support for Palestine are being shut down; for example, the [Wei Wei exhibition](#) in London has been closed, and exhibitions in Paris, Berlin and New York have been called off.

The world has seen a huge groundswell in support of Palestinians, who are being pulverised in Gaza, and this has caused great consternation amongst our political leaders and the Jewish establishment.

The UK

In the UK, the (now former) Home Secretary (Minister of Home Affairs) labelled the enormous protests in support of a free Palestine "hate marches" and tried to get them banned. Even though she has now been sacked, the government is still considering changing the law to enable such bans. Inevitably huge media publicity is reserved for the very few people who did, for example, wear a Hamas headband at the protests - tiny numbers out of a crowd which, on 11th November 2023, numbered up to a million people. It included a large Jewish Bloc, who were greeted with warmth and applause.

The UK's opposition Labour Party has banned its members from discussing the issue. They use a similar argument to the one used against the marches - Jewish people would feel uncomfortable. Never mind how uncomfortable Palestinians and their supporters might feel. The Labour party has failed to provide meaningful opposition to the government

and so instructed its MPs to vote against a ceasefire motion in parliament. Only a quarter of Labour MPs disobeyed this edict, ten of whom held official positions, from which they have consequently been sacked or had to resign. Local elected representatives have been told not to call for a ceasefire or attend pro-Palestinian marches.

Labour suspended MP Andy McDonald for saying at a large demonstration, "We won't rest until we have justice, until all people, Israelis and Palestinians, between the river and the sea can live in peaceful liberty". His "crime" - using the expression "between the river and the sea" to express support for peaceful coexistence. They claim that saying "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is antisemitic and this was too close to that phrase.

European suppression of protest

As to demonstrating, Germany has seen the largest amount of repression, followed by France and the UK. In [Austria](#), police have cancelled vigils and demonstrations, also often citing the use of the slogan "from the river to the sea". At one cancelled event, hundreds turned up anyway and were "kettled" (kept in a designated area by police). They were released one by one, but only after giving their personal information. Similar bans on protests for Palestinian rights have also been imposed in [Hungary](#).

The Interior Minister in France, Darmanin, announced an **outright ban**

on pro-Palestine protests throughout France, citing a potential disruption to "public order". But across France, including in [Paris](#), [Strasbourg](#), and [Lyon](#), demonstrations took place anyway, with a strong police presence. In Paris, activists were **met with water cannons** and tear gas. President Macron has now become the only European Leader backing a ceasefire. Will this position weaken the clamour to criminalise anti-zionism with **up to five years in jail**?

In Germany, Wieland Hoban, the chair of Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East, described the police's letter relaying the cancellation of a demonstration they had organised as "a copy-and-paste of what they've used for the last two years, since they've regularly started banning demos." He noted that the letter included familiar language speculating about "the emotional Palestinian community" and "the likelihood of acts of violence". He pointed out that this was "racist terminology, used exclusively against Arab communities." Protests have also been outlawed in Berlin, [Mannheim](#), [Munich](#), and [Frankfurt](#).

Being Jewish is no protection

These "sensitive times" are used to prevent people from speaking out, and being Jewish is no protection. Indeed, as Jews speaking up for Palestinian rights, we can evoke greater anger and hate. We are called all sorts of offensive things - "traitors", "sham Jews", "self-hating

Jews” and even “kapos”.

Sole protestors can also be arrested, and being Jewish, Israeli, or descended from Holocaust survivors is no protection. In London, Yael Khan, an elderly Jewish woman was arrested because her placard “could give offence” – it had some very hard-hitting language, including “Nazi Israel” on one side. On the other, it said:

Stop using anti-Semitism to enable Israel to genocide Gaza. Stop using the Holocaust [which exterminated my family] to enable Israel to exterminate 2.4 million Palestinians in Gaza ... We Israelis live on the land stolen from the Palestinians by Zionist terrorism.

In Berlin another Jewish woman, Iris Hefets ([interviewed by Yanis Varoufakis](#)) was arrested after walking, alone, holding a placard saying, “As an Israeli and a Jew: Stop the genocide in Gaza”.

Liverpool Hope University [postponed a talk](#) by Israeli-British historian, Avi Shlaim. His recent book *Three Worlds: Memoirs of an Arab-Jew*, like most of his work, challenges Israel’s official historical narrative. The university said it had made its decision taking into consideration the wellbeing and safety of students and staff.

Deliberately confusing anti-Zionism with anti-semitism

The widespread adoption of the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance: of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) Working Definition of antisemitism](#), despite objections by leading jurists and academics with expertise in antisemitism, has provided the framework for much of the clampdown on free speech. Seven of the eleven examples in this working definition relate to Israel. As a result, Palestinians are prevented from using language such as “ethnic cleansing” and “apartheid”. Comparison with the Nazis is beyond the pale.

So, what words should Palestinians use to talk about their experience of the past 75 years of being, at best, second class citizens, or living under siege, under a brutal military occupation? Every family has at least one member who has been jailed, with their land stolen and attacked by settlers, for which there is almost never any punishment.

The IHRA’s widespread adoption, often under great pressure, has led to job losses. Some students have been prevented from applying for Masters degrees or threatened that pro-Palestinian activism could jeopardise future job prospects. When these things

happen, others inevitably self-censor, further narrowing the space for free speech.

But some Palestinians have refused to accept the IHRA working definition. In Britain Dr Shahd Abusalama, born in Gaza’s Jabalia Refugee Camp, [was accused](#) of antisemitism three times based on that “definition”, while employed by Sheffield Hallam University. Each time she was exonerated, but, because of her suspension and the time and energy spent fighting the allegations, she felt obliged to resign.

Twenty three [members of Dr Abusalama’s family](#) were killed in the current bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

The context for Hamas attacks and reactions

The French Interior Minister pushed several institutions to [cancel](#) events with exiled Palestinian lawyer Salah Hamouri. And in Germany, the Frankfurt Book Fair [postponed a long planned ceremony](#) honouring Palestinian

why there is always a deplorable rise in antisemitic incidents when Israel attacks Gaza. They don’t recognise that, encouraged by the Israeli State, they are the cause. It is they who conflate Jews with Israel. It is they who legislate to conflate criticism of Israel, and certainly of the ideology of Zionism, with antisemitism.

European guilt for the Holocaust, especially in Germany and Austria, is understandable. But total support for Israel, acquiescing to its narrative of permanent victimhood, is dangerous. It creates double standards. The Financial Times [reported](#) that many officials and diplomats worry that the West’s support for Israel’s assault on Gaza “has undone months of work (with the Global South) to paint Moscow as a global pariah for breaching international law, ... exposing the US, EU and their allies to charges of hypocrisy...What we said about Ukraine has to apply to Gaza.”

Ongoing guilt for centuries of Jewish oppression, ghettoisation, pogroms,



Up to one million people in London on 11th November. The world has seen a huge groundswell in support of Palestinians, who are being pulverised in Gaza, and this has caused great consternation amongst our political leaders and the Jewish establishment.

author Adania Shibli, Germany’s 2023 LiBeraturpreis winner for her novel *Minor Detail*, telling the true story of an Israeli soldier’s rape and murder of a Palestinian girl in 1949. The reason: “due to the war started by Hamas, under which millions of people in Israel and Palestine are suffering”.

The “reason” given for cancellation speaks volumes; as though there was no context for Hamas’s attack. It is obviously possible, as the UN General Secretary did, to oppose what Hamas did, to emphasise that killing and kidnapping civilians went beyond their internationally recognised rights to resist occupation, and still to acknowledge the background, and that the reaction from Israel is excessive.

The Establishment never asks

expulsions and Holocaust cannot mean impunity for Israel. As a state, like all others, it does what it thinks best for its own interests. So it works with whoever supports it, including known antisemites like Hungary’s Victor Orban. This does not make Jewish people safe, and it brings terrible harm to Palestinians, as the world has known for decades.

There is a way to peace and coexistence. The first step is a ceasefire – now!

Leah Levane is Co Chair, Jewish Voice for Labour (UK)

OPERATION AJAX: 70 YEARS SINCE THE CIA AND MI6 JOINT VENTURE

By Houshang Sepehr

70 YEARS AGO, IN 1953, THE American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its British counterpart, MI6, organised a coup d'état to oust Iran's first and last democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq.

Details about the coup emerged after the CIA released a trove of documents about the mission, named "[Operation Ajax](#)". The release of the new documents provides the first official confirmation of the extent of the CIA's involvement in Iran's history.

Once upon a time it was oil in Iran

In the 1950s, after World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, there were two major factors for American imperialism when it came to "managing" Iran. First, that Iran remained a politically reliable geographic buffer, which blocked Soviet Union access to the warm water of the Persian Gulf. Second, that Iran's profitable oil reserves remained in the hands of Western companies. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, owned by the British government, had been in the country ever since the discovery of large reserves in 1908.

Both of these priorities seemed threatened by the appointment of Mossadeq to the post of Prime Minister.

The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had held a monopoly on the extraction, refining, and sale of Iranian oil. Anglo-Iranian's grossly unequal contract, negotiated with a corrupt monarch, required it to pay Iran just 16 percent of the money it earned from selling the country's oil. The company made more profit in 1950 alone than it had paid Iran in royalties over the previous half century.

Oil nationalisation

Now the champion of the fight against the all-powerful British Oil Company, Mossadeq brought together behind his personality a coalition of politicians hostile to the Shah, the merchants of the Bazaar, and the modern, Western-educated petty bourgeoisie. It took the name "National



In July 1952, a crisis broke out with the Shah when Mossadeq claimed control of the army. He received the massive support of the population of Tehran, who rose up, confronted the army and its tanks for five days, and ended up becoming almost masters of the city.

Front", found an echo among the poor urban masses, and at first had the support of the clergy.

In March 1951, the Iranian parliament, on the initiative of Mossadeq, adopted a recommendation calling for the nationalisation of the oil industry. In April, oil workers staged a general strike; solidarity strikes and street demonstrations took place in the capital, Tehran, and several major cities. Mossadeq's power and popularity had grown so great that the king, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, was virtually forced to appoint him as Prime Minister on April 29, and the crisis focused on the oil question. Mossadeq was determined to expel the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, nationalise the oil industry, and use the money it generated to develop Iran.

On April 30, nationalisation was voted unanimously by parliament, and the Iranian National Oil Company was created. For the masses, this represented an unprecedented victory, revenge for decades of national humiliation. The population proclaimed "Oil is our blood". Mossadeq

was considered a national hero: he dared to challenge this state-within-a-state that was the Anglo-Iranian Company, with its gardens, its swimming pools, its housing, its restaurants, reserved for the exclusive use of the English. Some buildings even apparently displayed a sign saying: *No dogs and Iranians allowed*.

The company responded with a categorical refusal of any compromise, the closure of the Abadan refinery, the biggest in the world at that time, the departure of engineers and technicians, and above all by its veto against any attempt by Iran to commercialise its oil production. After a delay, the American oil companies declared solidarity with the Anglo-Iranian Company, and no other country dared to confront them.

The blockade and the coup

In July 1952, a crisis broke out with the Shah when Mossadeq claimed control of the army. He received the massive support of the population of Tehran, who rose up, confronted the army and its tanks for five days, and ended up becoming almost

masters of the city, although there were hundreds of deaths. Mossadeq would later be named by Time magazine's "Man of the Year of 1951."

British officials turned to the CIA for help. Presenting Mossadeq as a threat to America's global fight against communism, British intelligence services conspired with the CIA to undermine his regime. President Truman refused the CIA permission to initiate a coup d'état to help the British oil company. But as soon as Eisenhower became president in November 1952 the CIA renewed its request for a coup, arguing that Mossadeq was a "communist", and Eisenhower gave the go-ahead.

Under the CIA plan, the Americans would spend \$150,000 to bribe journalists, editors, Islamic preachers, and other opinion leaders to "create, extend and enhance public hostility and distrust and fear of Mossadeq and his government." Then they would hire thugs to carry out "staged attacks" on religious figures and other respected Iranians, making it seem that Mossadeq had ordered them. Meanwhile, General Zahédi (future Prime Minister and father of the Shah's son-in-law) would be given money to "win additional friends" and "influence key people." The plan budgeted another \$11,000 per week, a great sum at that time, to bribe members of the Iranian parliament. On "coup day," thousands of paid demonstrators would converge on parliament to demand that it dismiss Mossadeq. Parliament would respond with a "quasi-legal" vote to do so. If Mossadeq resisted, military units loyal to General Zahédi would arrest him.

Mossadeq was finally overthrown on August 19, 1953 by a coup d'état nominally instigated by General Zahédi, but in fact organised and financed by a CIA general collaborating with MI6, the American

ambassador and the Shah's entourage. Thugs from the underbelly of Tehran were widely called upon to give the appearance of popular support to the Shah. He had already fled to Italy, but returned to Iran and was restored to his throne by American imperialism.

"Return to normal in Iran", headlined the English newspapers the day after. The National Front was banned, Mossadeq tried and imprisoned, and one of his ministers executed.

The repression was particularly merciless towards the communists. There were thousands of arrests and convictions, and hundreds of executions.

The Shah's dictatorship in the service of imperialism

Within a short period after the coup d'état, the Shah had tightened his grip on the country's security services and imposed a dictatorial police regime, which ruled through brutality and fear.

And American imperialism was well served. His first priority had been to get his hands on the oil. In 1954, a consortium of oil companies was set up, of which American and Britain companies each secured a 40 percent interest. This was a sign of the new order, with the US muscling in on a formerly British preserve. Rockefeller, Special Assistant to the President for Foreign Affairs, was able to tell Eisenhower in 1962: "We have been able to ensure total control of Iranian oil... At present, the Shah cannot undertake the slightest change in the composition of his government without consulting our ambassador".

From the outset, the military monarchy set up an instrument of

repression, with the help of the CIA: the political police, SAVAK, the backbone of the Iranian State. This name inspired terror; after a few years, they began to systematically practice torture. Trained and supported by the CIA, SAVAK subjected the Iranian people to one of the most brutal and oppressive totalitarian regimes in the world. The US government reinforced the oppression with money, armaments, and training. All opposition political parties were banned, and many of the

activists who participated in the movement for nationalisation of oil were arrested or fled the country.

For 25 years, the Iranian people suffered under the brutal dictatorship of the US-installed and US-supported Shah. In 1977, there were, according to Amnesty International, between 25,000 and 100,000 political prisoners in Iran.

That came to a screeching halt in 1979, when the Iranian people finally had had enough and decided to violently revolt.

The impact of the coup

Each year on August 19, the anniversary of the coup, millions of Iranians ask themselves what would have happened if the US and UK had not conspired all those years ago to overthrow Iran's democratically elected leader. Certainly, the barbaric Islamic regime, which was much worse than the previous dictator, might not have existed.

Apart from rewriting the destiny of Iran and its neighbours, the coup d'état paved the way for a series of imperialist interventions and the toppling of democratically elected governments across the world. Perhaps Washington might have thought twice before plotting coups in Guatemala in 1954, Congo in 1961 or Chile in 1973 ..., if they'd been unable to overthrow Iran's Prime Minister, Mossadeq, so easily and profitably.

In this way, the American coup d'état in Iran turned out to be one of the pivotal events of modern world history. It also laid the foundations for the anti-American and anti-dictator backlash of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, 26 years later.

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Shah and President Eisenhower all smiles in 1954, following the coup. Eisenhower gave the go-ahead for the coup.

Austerity budgeting is doomed to continual failure and suffering

By Thokozile Madonko and Owen Willcox

By phasing in our fiscal consolidation over the medium term, we avoid the social and economic dislocation associated with more rapid adjustments while still stabilising the fiscal position without burdening the economy and future generations with excessive debt. Minister of Finance Pravin Gordhan 22 February 2012.

Our challenge is that rising debt services costs are crowding out important social spending, and our economy has not grown fast enough to support increasing expenditure or our current debt levels. Minister of Finance Enoch Godongwana 1 November 2023.



The living standards of average South Africans have been declining in a country with the highest levels of inequality in the world. This has been accompanied by record levels of unemployment, poverty and gender-based violence.

FISCAL CONSOLIDATION HARMS the vulnerable during rough times, stifles investment, and does not deliver debt sustainability. After 12 years of austerity budgets, South Africa has still been unable to achieve fiscal consolidation and stop the debt-to-GDP ratio increase, despite the vast social costs of austerity. It is time to try different approaches.

Austerity a vicious circle

South Africa's 2023 medium-term budget policy statement continues the current policy trajectory by setting unrealistic spending targets. Attempts at fiscal consolidation have mainly focused on containing spending with a sharp real contraction, frontloaded in the first year of the medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF). But slower economic growth and rising interest rates mean that debt service costs increasingly crowd out social spending. In response, austerity measures contribute towards lower aggregate demand, lower growth, rising inequality and a weakened state.

Meanwhile, the intense fiscal pressure on basic education, healthcare, social protection, the criminal justice system, and other critical public goods undermines the longer-term growth and

development prospects.

Minister Gordhan argued in 2012 that, by pursuing fiscal consolidation, the South African fiscal position would stabilise and that it would do so without burdening the economy and future generations. This has proven to be completely false. According to the South African Parliamentary Budget Office, the strategy has not been successful.

Since 2012, spending growth has been brought to a halt in order to accommodate a dramatic rise in debt service costs. In real per capita terms, core expenditure (non-interest spending, excluding SOE bailouts) has grown at essentially zero. In fact, austerity measures have been ineffective in stabilising debt and are crowding out crucial social spending, as noted by the current Minister of Finance, Enoch Godongwana.

However, the level of private sector investment in South Africa is around 20 per cent lower than before the global financial crisis in 2008, and Foreign Direct Investment has never reached much more than **two per cent of GDP**. South African businesses are unlikely to invest in the capacity to produce goods and services that average South Africans do not have the money to buy.

Duma Gqubula argues that South Africa's economy has performed poorly:

From 1994 to 2022, GDP per capita, an imperfect measure of average living standards, increased by 22%. By comparison, over the same period, GDP per capita growth in local currencies was 783% in China, 337% in Vietnam, 315% in Ethiopia, 285% in India and 216% in Poland.

In South Africa, GDP per capita in 2022 was lower than it was in 2007. In other words, the living standards of average South Africans have been declining in a country with the highest levels of inequality in the world. This has been accompanied by record levels of unemployment, poverty and gender-based violence. Inequality generates significant costs for society in multiple ways (health, crime, social cohesion), while vast concentrations of wealth in a few hands undermine democracy.

Reducing capital expenditure makes debt problem worse

As a result, South Africa's continuing economic crisis is manifesting as a fiscal crisis. A group of **prominent international economists** argued that austerity policies implemented in Europe post the 2008

financial crisis “did not limit or shorten the [economic] downturn; they made it deeper and longer than it otherwise would have been.” They further noted that “the research department of the IMF now largely supports this conclusion”.

Every austerity drive hits one area of fiscal expenditure first and hard: public investment. Compared to other relatively inelastic government outlays, like grants and public sector salaries, this is the softest target of fiscal consolidation, on the expenditure side of the fiscus. The logic is that this will restore sustainability, ignite growth and allow consolidation to come to an end.

This approach is contradictory: if the government cuts spending, it reduces GDP growth, which results in a higher debt ratio. Just take the decline of South African public-sector infrastructure investment. Capital or infrastructure expenditure has an impact on communication, travel, logistics and the provision of services. According to Stats SA’s latest *Capital expenditure by the public sector* report, public-sector capital expenditure has steadily waned since 2016, declining by R82 billion. That represents a decrease of 29 per cent.

Furthermore, local government expenditure declined, with 148 of South Africa’s 257 municipalities cutting back on capital expenditure in 2020. A similar story can be told for public corporations, with capital expenditure declining by 42 per cent since 2016. Public capital expenditure has long been argued to be the engine house of employment creation, not to mention contributing an essential part of South Africa’s ecological transformation.

By reducing public expenditure at a time when private expenditure is falling, the South African Government hastened the rate at which total income has diminished. South Africa must stand for sustainable growth, quality jobs, fairly shared prosperity, and an equal opportunity for all children regardless of gender, race, class or nationality. The government’s current fiscal path stands for none of these.

Profound change is required. A more considered and growth-orientated approach to fiscal consolidation is needed to support increased social and infrastructure investment and social support. That’s because the economic outlook has continued to darken, while questions are being asked about the National Treasury’s ability to credibly assess the government’s fiscal and economic position in the short term. It’s worth taking a moment to think about why

the National Treasury’s forecasts are important.

Inaccurate Treasury forecasts a problem

Policymakers are credible when economic agents believe they will try and fulfil their policy commitments (as much as possible). Therefore, we expect that what the National Treasury announces will happen, with a reasonable margin of error and a certain likelihood. In other words, credibility contributes to anchoring expectations. Fiscal policy announcements play an essential role in catalysing expectations and ensuring policy certainty.

Of late, the government has been unable to produce a credible assessment of the country’s finances. The Southern Centre for Inequality’s Public Expenditure Project has noted with concern the growing divergence between budget plans and their execution and the declining accuracy of tax revenue forecasts. The budget included a salary freeze; but this was never going to happen. Yet, pay increases for government employees have been held below inflation on the basis of the expectation of a budgetary freeze. There are attempts to roll back pandemic-related expenditures, such as the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress grant and the Presidential Employment Stimulus. These attempts are supported by an approach that denies that funding is available for these interventions in future budgets. But again, this approach is undermined when the budget is exceeded. Spending targets are set at unreasonably low levels in the annual budget. This makes them impossible to achieve without causing harm to service delivery. This further undermines the budget’s credibility.

Over time, a weakening of budget credibility can impact on a broader set of fiscal institutions, including fiscal authority, effective public administration and clear oversight and control of budgets. After 12 years of austerity

budgets, South Africa has still been unable to achieve fiscal consolidation and stop the debt-to-GDP ratio increase, despite the vast social costs of austerity. Not to mention dismantling the social provisioning of goods and services central to the care economy. Thus, while government discourse suggests an eventual end to austerity, there is consensus that austerity “has become an enduring feature of living under neoliberalism: instead of being a means to facilitate a robust recovery, austerity is for [South Africa] the ‘new normal’”.

Alternatives to austerity

However, there are alternatives to austerity, even for South Africa. If the main argument for austerity is that there is no money for critical social investments, then the best response is to raise it. This could be done through progressive taxation, such as taxes on corporate profits, financial activities, personal wealth, property, imports/exports, natural resources, and digital services. Another avenue is eliminating illicit financial flows, using government reserves, and adopting a more accommodating macroeconomic framework. Alternatives have been presented, and there are financing options that the South African government could exploit to increase critical socio-economic investment and catalyse sustainable and equitable growth and development.

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FOLLOW THE MONEY - corporate mining profits in South Africa

By Andy Higginbottom

This article summarises the report, The Corporate Make-up of the Mining Industry in South Africa: Profit Survey 2023. It is jointly published with the [Review of African Political Economy \(ROAPE\)](#)

W“FOLLOW THE money” – the profits of mining corporations operating in South Africa, gleaned from the corporations’ own published accounts. We are following their declared profits. Transfer pricing and the illicit flow of profits from legal operations have both rightly been [flagged as major concerns](#), but here we seek to map only the licit flow of profits. These are of concern enough.

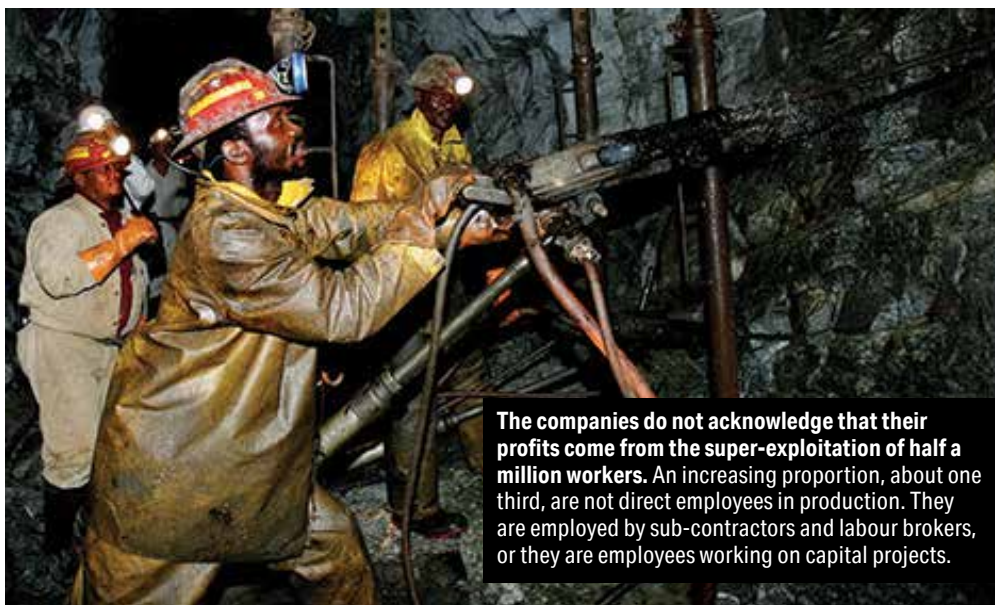
The companies do not acknowledge that their profits come from the super-exploitation of half a million workers, who work in platinum group metals (39%), coal (21%), gold (20%) and the other sectors (20%). An increasing proportion, about one third, are not direct employees in production. They are employed by sub-contractors and labour brokers, or they are employees working on capital projects.

How much are they making?

South Africa’s mining revenues peaked in the previous commodity cycle in 2013, followed by a trough. The beginnings of a new uptick in demand were affected by Covid in 2020, then made a strong recovery to record levels in 2021 and 2022.

Mining corporations plan for cyclical changes, and typically they will set profit targets as a cycle average of 15% rate of profit (Return on Capital Employed – ROCE). ROCE is a measure of the degree of profitability.

Profits are revenue minus costs. For exports, this relation is strongly affected by exchange rate movements. When the rand depreciates against the dollar, it is to the advantage of producers, because most of their costs are in rand, whereas their sales are in dollars. From 2021 to 2022 the year-on-year increase in profits in dollar terms was 10.4%, whereas in rands it was



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more than double that at 21.9%.

The sector generated at least \$15.7 billion net operating profits in 2022. Coal, platinum group metals, and diamonds achieved especially high prices and were particularly profitable for their producers.

Who are the main corporate players?

Foreign-based multinationals received around 55% of all South Africa mining profits in 2022.

Until 2018, three mining super-majors dominated: Glencore Xstrata, BHP Billiton and Anglo American. There has been a significant shift in the last five years, with Glencore and BHP Billiton reducing their positions. Both companies however retained assets outside South Africa that they had obtained from their acquisitions of Xstrata and Billiton respectively.

Swiss company Glencore has benefited hugely from unusually high coal prices. Glencore’s combined greenhouse gas emissions, mostly from its coal production, were 370 [mtCO₂ equivalent](#) in 2022. This is nearly as much as the entire UK emissions of 417 mtCO₂ equivalent.

Four South African based mining companies each made over \$1 billion profits in 2022. Impala Platinum, Sibanye Stillwater and African Rainbow Minerals made most of their profits in the platinum group metals sector, while Exxaro and other coal companies also gained. Impala and Sibanye have attracted the interest of the giant US based asset managers, such as Blackrock and Vanguard.

Who profits?

Anglo American stands out as the overall major player, taking 41% of all sector profits. It leads in platinum and through its subsidiary Kumba in iron ore.

Anglo’s roots go back to the notorious imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, who founded the DeBeers diamond conglomerate in 1887, and the Oppenheimer family’s Witwatersrand gold interests, which came together in 1925. For over a century, Anglo has been the single greatest beneficiary of the super-exploitation of African workers, in the migrant labour system first constructed by British colonialism, and then further segregated under apartheid.

Within five years of majority rule, Anglo moved its headquarters to London in 1999, close by Buckingham Palace, and in 2021 the company returned to the original DeBeers London office in Charterhouse.

Anglo made huge global profits of \$14.5 billion in 2022, 58% of which came from Southern Africa. Anglo’s own data shows that employees in the producing areas of Africa, Latin America and Australia generate about four times more profit per head than their remuneration.

There is significant black leadership in the sector due to the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme. This is “legalised corruption” embedded within corporate governance. Increased ownership for a select few has bought their loyalty to big business. This is epitomised by the 9% stake in Lonmin of Cyril Ramaphosa, whose urging of police action led to the Marikana Massacre on 16th August 2012.

Marikana is one instance of a global pattern of contracted out state violence for profit. Lonmin's major shareholder is Xstrata (later Glencore). Emails surrendered to the Farlam Commission reveal that Lonmin's hard line was endorsed by Xstrata's hands-on chief executive Mick Davis. Xstrata had just three months earlier sponsored similar shootings in Peru. Davis went on to become Treasurer of the UK Conservative Party.

Sibanye Stillwater is a 'rising star'. It was originally set up as Sibanye Gold by Gold Fields in 2013. Since then it has expanded aggressively into platinum metals, with its takeover of US producer Stillwater in 2017, and then Sibanye Stillwater bought out Lonmin in 2019. It has become clear that at a price of \$290 million, Lonmin's mining operations were severely undervalued.

Lonmin's assets were worth much more than the executives of either company let on at the time. Lonmin's managers wanted to close down the company as the entity responsible for the Marikana Massacre. Working with Amcu, Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) economist Dick Forslund argued against the takeover and the threatened job cuts. He pointed out that once the minerals extracted with platinum are taken into account, the company would have increasing revenues. Despite these warnings, the Competition Commission approved the takeover.

Sibanye has indeed expanded

production in the Lonmin mine, especially the K4 shaft, expected to be profitable for the next 50 years. Within just three years, Sibanye has drawn R34.7bn profit from Lonmin production. That's eight times its purchase price.

In contrast to coal producers' recent great good fortune, the gold mining companies have been struggling to make a profit from the ever-deeper mines in South Africa, in which nearly 100,000 mine workers still toil. In 2020, Harmony Gold bought the last remaining gold mine assets of Anglo Gold Ashanti in South Africa for R4.4 billion. Harmony is now the biggest gold producer in South Africa, where it has nine underground mines, one open pit and "several tailings retreatment operations". It has a mine in Papua New Guinea and a project in Australia.

What is the London connection?

Half of all the profits generated by mining in South Africa in 2022 passed through to London corporations and capital markets. The longstanding relationship of racialised exploitation that began with Cecil Rhodes has entered a new chapter, as companies relocate their HQs to London. Following Xstrata and Anglo, several former South African based companies have extensive overseas operations, especially in the gold sector. Randgold Resources was founded in 1995, with headquarters in Jersey (UK) and

listed on the London Stock Exchange. By 2017 it achieved operating profits of \$335 million from mines in Mali, Cote D'Ivoire, Senegal and Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2018 it merged with the Canadian Barrick Gold for \$6.5 billion to become the world's largest gold producer.

Anglogold Ashanti no longer has any production in South Africa, but fifteen gold mine assets overseas that generated a net operating profit of around \$1.8 billion in 2022. On 18th August 2023, Anglogold decided to move its corporate headquarters to London and have its primary share listing in New York.

The migrant labour system set up by Cecil Rhodes and his cohort of Randlords, the openly imperialist mining magnates that so determinedly stomped themselves to riches, remains in place, albeit these days in neo-colonial forms. Our study shows that Rhodes' legacy runs much deeper than his prominent statue at Oxford University, insulting as that is. Behind the symbol there is a continuing structural economic legacy. Neither have fallen, yet.

As Kwame Nkrumah said, we need positive international action to fight this latest chapter in imperialist neocolonialism "with resolution and in unity". Rhodes' structural legacy must fall.

Dr Andy Higginbottom is a retired Associate Professor, Kingston University, London and member of the Marikana Solidarity Collective.



Anglo made huge global profits of \$14.5bn in 2022, 58% of which came from Southern Africa. Anglo's own data shows that employees in the producing areas of Africa, Latin America and Australia generate about four times more profit per head than their remuneration.



The Double Objective of Democratic Ecosocialism

By **Jason Hickel**

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in [Monthly Review](#).

WE FACE A DOUBLE CRISIS AS THE twenty-first century unfolds. On the one hand, it is an ecological crisis: climate change and several other Earth System pressures are exceeding planetary boundaries to a dangerous extent. On the other hand, it is also a social crisis: several billion people are deprived of access to basic goods and services. More than 40 percent of the human population cannot afford nutritious food; 50 percent do not have safely managed sanitation facilities; 70 percent do not have necessary health care.

Deprivation is most extreme in the periphery, where imperialist dynamics of structural adjustment and unequal exchange continue to perpetuate poverty and underdevelopment. But it is evident also in the core: in the United States, nearly half the population cannot afford health care; in the United Kingdom, 4.3 million children live in poverty; in the European Union, 90 million people face economic insecurity. These patterns of deprivation are shot through with brutal inequalities of race and gender.

No political programme that promises to analyse and resolve the ecological crisis can hope to succeed if

it does not also simultaneously analyse and resolve the social crisis. Attempting to address one without the other leaves fundamental contradictions entrenched and will ultimately give rise to monsters. Indeed, monsters are already emerging.

Capitalism is the driver

It is critically important to understand that the dual social-ecological crisis is being driven, ultimately, by the capitalist system of production. By capitalism here, I do not mean simply markets, trade, and businesses, as people often so easily assume. These things existed for thousands of years before capitalism and are innocent enough on their own. The key defining feature of capitalism is that it is, as a condition for its very existence, fundamentally antidemocratic.

Yes, many of us live in electoral political systems—as corrupt and captured as they may be—where we select political leaders from time to time. But when it comes to the system of *production*, not even the shallowest illusion of democracy enters. Production is controlled overwhelmingly by capital: large corporations, major financial firms, and the 1 percent who own the lion's share of investable assets. Capital wields the power to mobilise our collective labour and our planet's resources for whatever it wants. It determines what we produce, under what conditions, and how the surplus we

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generate shall be used and distributed.

And let us be clear: for capital, the primary purpose of production is not to meet specific human needs or to achieve social progress, much less to achieve any concrete ecological goals. The overriding objective is to maximise and accumulate profit.

Production for profit, not need

The result is that the capitalist world-system is characterised by perverse forms of production. Capital directs finance to highly profitable output, like sport utility vehicles, industrial meat, fast fashion, weapons, fossil fuels, and property speculation. At the same time, it reproduces chronic shortages of necessary goods and services, like public transport, public health care, nutritious food, renewable energy, and affordable housing.

This dynamic occurs within national economies but also has clear imperialist dimensions. Land, labour, and productive capacities across the Global South are roped into supplying global commodity chains dominated by Northern firms—bananas for Chiquita, cotton for Zara, coffee for Starbucks, smartphones for Apple, and coltan for Tesla. These are

all for the benefit of the core, all at artificially depressed prices. They do this instead of producing food, housing, health care, education, and industrial goods to meet national needs.

Capital accumulation in the core depends on draining labour and resources from the periphery.

It should therefore come as no surprise that, despite extremely high levels of aggregate production and energy and material use, deprivation remains widespread within the capitalist world economy. And these levels of energy and material use are driving ecological pressures well beyond safe and sustainable boundaries. Capitalism produces too much, yes, but also not enough of the right stuff. Access to essential goods and services is limited by commodification; and because capital seeks to cheapen labour at every opportunity, particularly in the periphery, the consumption of the working classes is constrained.

The double challenge

It would not take much, as a share of total global productive capacity, to ensure decent lives for everyone on the planet. But with the reality of the ecological crisis, we must also face a second challenge. It is the challenge to achieve well-being for all *while at the same time* reducing aggregate use of energy and materials (specifically

to this. But high-income countries also need to scale down less-necessary forms of production in order to reduce excess energy and material use directly.

If capitalism has always been unable to achieve the former goal (well-being for all), it most certainly cannot achieve the latter. It is a structural impossibility. It runs against the core logic of the capitalist economy, which is to increase aggregate production indefinitely, to maintain the conditions for perpetual accumulation.

It is clear what needs to be done: we must achieve democratic control over finance and production. We must now organise it around the *double* goal of well-being and ecology. This requires that we distinguish between two things. On the one hand, the *socially necessary* production that clearly needs to increase for social progress. On the other hand, the destructive and less-necessary forms of production that urgently need to be scaled down. This is the revolutionary world-historical objective that faces our generation.

What would such an economy look like?

To secure the social foundation, first we must expand and decommodify universal public services. By this I mean health care and education, yes, but also housing, public transport, energy, water,

Second, we must establish ambitious public works programmes, to build renewable energy capacity, insulate homes, produce and install efficient appliances, restore ecosystems, and innovate socially necessary and ecologically efficient technologies. These are essential interventions that must be done as quickly as possible; we cannot wait around for capital to decide they are worth doing.

Third, we must introduce a public job guarantee, empowering people to participate in these vital collective projects, doing meaningful, socially necessary work with workplace democracy and living wages. The job guarantee must be financed by the currency issuer but should be democratically governed at the appropriate level of locality.

Consider the power of this approach. It allows us to achieve ecologically necessary objectives. But it also abolishes unemployment. It abolishes economic insecurity. It ensures good lives for all, regardless of fluctuations in aggregate output, thus de-linking well-being from growth. As for the rest of the economy, private firms should be democratised and brought under worker and community control as appropriate, and production should be reorganised around the objectives of well-being and ecology.

Next, as we secure and improve the socially and ecologically necessary sectors, we also need to scale down socially less-necessary forms of production. Fossil fuels are obvious here: we need binding targets to wind this industry down, in a fair and just way. But—as degrowth scholarship points out—we also need to reduce aggregate production in other destructive industries (automobiles, airlines, mansions, industrial meat, fast fashion, advertising, weapons, and so on). At the same time, we must extend product lifespans and ban planned obsolescence. This process should be democratically determined, but also grounded in the material reality of ecology and the imperatives of decolonial justice.

Finally, we urgently need to cut the excess purchasing power of the rich, using wealth taxes and maximum income ratios.

Right now millionaires alone are on track to burn 72 percent of the remaining carbon budget to keep the planet under 1.5°C of warming. This is an egregious assault on humanity and the living world, and none of us should accept it. It is



We urgently need to cut the excess purchasing power of the rich using wealth taxes and maximum income ratios. Right now millionaires alone are on track to burn 72 percent of the remaining carbon budget to keep the planet under 1.5°C of warming.

in the core). This must enable sufficiently rapid decarbonisation and bring the world economy back within planetary boundaries. Technological innovation and efficiency improvements are crucial

internet, child care, recreation facilities, and nutritious food for all. Let us mobilise our productive forces to ensure everyone has access to the goods and services necessary for well-being.

irrational and unjust to continue diverting our energy and resources to supporting an overconsuming elite in the middle of an ecological emergency.

If, after taking these steps, we find that our society requires less labour to produce what we need, we can shorten the working week, give people more free time, and share necessary labour more evenly. This would permanently prevent any unemployment.

The internationalist dimension

The internationalist dimension of this transition must be front and centre. Excess energy and material use must decline in the core to achieve ecological objectives. In the periphery, productive capacities must be reclaimed, reorganised, and, in many cases, increased to meet human needs and achieve development. Throughput must converge globally to levels that are sufficient for universal well-being and compatible with ecological stability.

For the Global South, this requires ending structural adjustment programmes, cancelling external debts, ensuring universal availability of necessary technologies, and enabling governments to use progressive industrial and fiscal policy to improve economic sovereignty. In the absence of effective multilateral action, Southern governments can and should take unilateral or collective steps toward sovereign development and should be supported toward this end.

Degrowth is the framework that has cracked open the imagination of scientists and activists over the past decade. As all of this should make clear, degrowth is

best understood as an element within a broader struggle for ecosocialism and anti-imperialism.

Is the program outlined above affordable? Yes. By definition, yes. As even the influential capitalist economist John Maynard Keynes acknowledged, anything we can actually do, in terms of productive capacity, we can pay for. And when it comes to productive capacity, we have far more than enough. By establishing democratic control over finance and production, we can simply shift the use of this capacity away from wasteful production and elite accumulation to

It is clear, however, that the environmentalist movement that has mobilised over the past several years cannot serve as the sole agent of this change. It has succeeded in bringing ecological problems to the forefront of public discourse. But it lacks the structural analysis and political leverage to achieve the necessary transition. The bourgeois green parties are particularly egregious, with their dangerous inattention to the question of working-class livelihoods, social policy, and imperialist dynamics.

achieve social and ecological objectives.

Some will say this sounds utopian. But these policies happen to be extremely popular. Polls and surveys show strong majority support for these ideas, and official citizens' assemblies in several countries have called for precisely this kind of transition. This has the potential to become a popular and feasible political agenda.

The agent of change

But none of this will happen on its own. It will require a major political struggle against those who benefit so prodigiously from the status quo. This is not a time for mild reformism, tweaking around the edges of a failing system. This is a time for revolutionary change.

It is clear, however, that the environmentalist movement that has mobilised over the past several years cannot serve as the sole agent of this change. It has succeeded in bringing ecological problems to the forefront of public discourse. But it lacks the structural analysis and political leverage to achieve the necessary transition. The bourgeois green parties are particularly egregious, with their dangerous inattention to the question of working-class livelihoods, social policy, and

imperialist dynamics.

To overcome these limitations, it is urgently important for environmentalists to build alliances with the unions, the labour movements, and other working-class political formations that have much more political leverage, including the power of the strike.

To do this, environmentalists must foreground the social policies I have listed above. We must organise to abolish the economic insecurity that leads working-class communities and many unions to fear the negative ramifications that radical ecological action may otherwise have on

their livelihoods. But the unions also need to move. I say this not as a critic from the outside, but as a lifelong union member. How did we ever let the political horizons of the labour movement shrink down to industry-specific battles over wages and conditions, while leaving the general structure of the capitalist economy intact? We must revive our original ambitions and unite across

sectors—as well as with the unemployed—to secure the social foundation for all and achieve economic democracy.

Finally, progressive movements in the core must unite with, support and defend radical and anticolonial social movements in the Global South. The workers and peasants of the periphery contribute 90 percent of the labour that fuels the capitalist world economy. The South holds the majority of the world's arable land and critical resources, which places substantial leverage in their hands. Any political philosophy that does not foreground Southern workers and political movements as leading agents of revolutionary change is simply missing the point.

This requires the hard work of organising, establishing solidarities, and uniting around common political demands. It requires strategy, and it requires courage. Is there hope? Yes. We know it is empirically possible to achieve a just and sustainable world economy. But our hope can only ever be as strong as our struggle. If we want hope—if we want to win such a world—we must build the struggle.

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"OUR LAND AND JOBS, NOW!"

Are we to now entertain another so-called messiah because he spouts crude anti-capitalist rhetoric, and in his guise as commander-in-chief (of the nation?) spits out populist, Africanist rhetoric?

BUT CAN THE EFF EVER BE MORE THAN JUJU'S PRIVATE ARMY?

By Allan Kolski Horwitz

AMANDLA! HAS RECENTLY RUN articles about the crisis of Left politics in South Africa, with commentators weighing up the chances of existing political parties opening up real options for working-class power. And in doing so, a spotlight was put on the possibility, nay inevitability, of working with the EFF.

One such view was expressed by Mercia Andrews (*Amandla!* 88). Mercia, a veteran of social movements and trade union work, argued that:

For those seeking to fill the vacuum of the Left, it is necessary to come to terms with the EFF . . . even though . . . Its radical nationalism and strident race politics have led some of the Left to mistakenly characterise the EFF as a proto-fascist movement.

Now Mercia is wise in raising the question of the necessity of "filling the vacuum",

because the Left's ongoing paralysis and domination by "bosses" (of the capitalist and the bureaucratic varieties) has made it desperate for signs of life. This leads many who still consider themselves to be socialists, and want to taste the joy of being close to the centres of power, to fill their lonely hours with intuitions of dramatic change: for example, that after the next national elections, the ANC/EFF coalition will see Malema installed as Vice-President, fulfilling his long-standing ambition of advancing to the highest office, and opening the door to radical reform of a friendly working-class nature.

But mistaken identity can be very dangerous. Did we not see this when so-called progressive elements in the ANC Alliance and beyond, ignoring his history of deep corruption, endorsed Zuma as a preferred candidate to neoliberal Mbeki. Are we to now entertain another so-called messiah because he spouts crude anti-capitalist rhetoric, and in his guise as

commander-in-chief (of the nation?) spits out populist, Africanist rhetoric? In the name of what charade will such isolated leftists excuse the EFF's opportunistic alliances and support for anti-working-class policies and tenderpreneurial corruption in government? And this is notwithstanding its "pay back the money" campaign, which was an expression of Malema's vengeance, after his expulsion from the ANC, for challenging Zuma.

A fascist movement?

For what characterises a fascist movement, whether in Europe, Africa or South America? Is it not any localised version of a highly centralised, militarised, racist purveyor of ethnic/national purity, promoted by purportedly pro-working-class state machinery, and led by an all-powerful, lifetime leader?

This charismatic demagogue (Duce, Fuhrer, Caudillo, Emperor. . .) habitually promises full employment through

state-controlled labour schemes, inward industrialisation, and driving out unfair competition, both from outside and from a fifth column made up of “foreign” forces. The Leader and his Party spout a million National Development Plans, while using

capacity or vision to manage state resources. As glaringly, Malema also ignores the totally inadequate state education system that is condemning his primary constituency – millions of young blacks – to semi-skilled, marginalised

positions and tenders and makes minimum contributions to actual delivery. For if the party had managed to really transform the running of even a small number of wards/towns/cities, such positive action would have resulted in massive election swings away from the ANC, whose performance has been so dismal.

Bearing this in mind, it comes as no surprise that Mercia then defines the EFF as “In reality... a cross between a radical ANC and an anti-neoliberal activist SACP.” Absolutely, and that is why it is no real alternative for socialists!

Or am I being uncharitable and incorrect in viewing the ‘radical’ ANC as merely the Zuma/Manyi/Niehaus RET trio, exemplars of corruption and idiocy? And what is the anti-neoliberal activist SACP, if not a dried out, sell-out entity of opportunists who pretend to influence the ANC, while accepting and advancing anti-working-class policies, in exchange for retaining cabinet positions?

However, Mercia still gives the green light for engaging: “Given the popular base of the EFF, it will not be possible to wish them away. A new left politics will have to engage and seek alliances with the

EFF, even as it guards its independence and focuses on building itself.” And so, blinding herself to the EFF’s track record, an important activist is now reduced to hanging on to such slippery coat-tails. Can one really believe that the EFF will open its arms to genuine socialists/feminists? The recent parachuting of our ex-Public Protector into the ranks of EFF parliamentarians is just so perfect. What better way to show the finger.

Is programme the issue?

Another view was presented by Trevor Shaku (one of the young socialists in the crisis of politics roundtable discussion in *Amandla!* 88) who provided an analysis of the EFF’s social base – unemployed township youth and disaffected Black intellectuals/ professionals – and came to different conclusions:

The crisis for me is a crisis of organisation, and it’s a crisis of leadership. And, of course, these



Members of the EFF protesting inside the Steakhouse Grill in Braamfontein. The truth is that Malema retains his image as a leader of youth only by utilising high-profile guerrilla theatre.

inflammatory, volatile propaganda that, in the African environment, focuses on false targets like minorities, especially migrants, and/or White/Indian economic blocs. But before we test how much of this definition applies to the EFF (ha, ha) let us go back to its origins. Julius and Floyd are an unchallengeable duo because of Juju’s well-developed personality cult. His image as a radical is built on non-compensation and redistribution of white-owned land as the means to end inequality. This is combined with targeting any instance of white hypocrisy and the continuing power of white capitalists like Anton Rupert.

But while these issues endure because of stubborn racism, they are also very much symptoms of the ANC’s failed elitist policies and dysfunctional government, not to speak of the mafias milking Eskom and other SOEs.

And yet these forces are not EFF targets. Nor is the creeping privatisation that is taking place, because the ANC state simply does not have the managerial

economic status. Or the incredible lack of a mass transport system that is safe, comprehensive, and affordable.

If I am wrong, then where are the EFF campaigns that target these critical areas in a systematic and thoughtful way? Where are the interventions at local level that will bring effective service delivery and jobs?

The truth is that Malema retains his image as a leader of youth only by utilising high-profile guerrilla theatre. And so, when Mercia’s states, “This is the only left formation which has managed, not only to develop a mass working class base but also to successfully win representation in Parliament and local government,” we must ask, so what?

Winning seats in government doesn’t mean the party is or has been progressive in terms of working-class interests. The EFF was born out of personality clashes over positions. Its politics has stayed at that level and resulted in opportunistic coalition/alliance jockeying which rewards the incompetent and venal with high

two crises are underpinned by the objective factors, the historical, practical, and even economic changes which have occurred since 1994. In this context, when we say that there is disorganisation, I think we are making a mistaken assumption. The right-wing populism, the rise of various groupings in our communities, represent organisation. It's a question of what type of organisation. What is missing here is an organisation that is armed with a proper programme. And as a result, those types of organisations are taking the space.

Ah, so the problem is superficial consciousness, lack of understanding of the true nature of the plagues that continue to afflict us; and, as a result, lack of a proper programme.

But is this true? Is lack of a proper programme the key obstacle holding back working-class reorganisation and renewal? Have there not been programmes aplenty since the late 60s – from the PAC's call for land distribution without compensation, to the ANC's Freedom Charter with its nationalisation of the "heights of the economy", to the Workers Charter's call for worker ownership and control, to the RDP's social contract?

But at the moment of truth in 1990, when free political activity was ushered in, radical change was diverted by the rising bourgeois class within the liberation movements, under the banner of neoliberalism.

Then, crucially, when the post-1994 demobilisation of community organisations and trade unions was insisted on, so-called left forces melted away in the form of silent Cosatu MPs, cadre acceptance of

lucrative corporate directorships and professional appointments (whether to state departments or civil society), and the ideological climate swung towards individualism and worship of bling.

out the ruling elites. And despite sniping at Boers and white billionaires, Malema has been fully part of this process, as proven by his history of suspect Limpopo deals and cutting down of potential internal rivals.

And yet, from time to time, despite all

And here it may be worthwhile to remind ourselves of the buffet of ideological ingredients that the EFF founders claim they are dining on: Marxism–Leninism/ Fanonism/ Sankarism/ Anti-capitalism/ Anti-imperialism/ Pan-Africanism/ Black nationalism/ Anti-Zionism/ Anti-white racism/ Anti-Indian racism . . .

How rich if not extravagant!

Malema's practice

As leader of the ANCYL in that period, Malema could have led a revolt against Gear and BEE, as get-rich schemes. He could have supported the Khulumani demand for retributive justice from the corporations that buttressed and grossly benefited from apartheid. He could have marshalled forces to stop the extraordinary relaxation of controls on the export of capital. He could have done all this and more together with those in civil society who did not wish to surrender their working-class politics to US-led triumphalism about a mythical 'free market'.

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However, compare the list to the extravagant lifestyles, links to scams like the milking of VBS, on/off support for harassment of migrants, and persistent use of slogans like "Kill the Boer!" that only direct workers away from their most dangerous enemy: their own corrupt leaders. But then, the lack of ethical and consistent leadership in (purportedly) mass working class organisations is the key stumbling block to sweeping

this double-dealing and the "commander-in-chief" culture that Malema insists upon, there are those who applaud the EFF. For example, its recent call (on account of the Gaza massacres) for severing all ties with Israel while apartheid rules Palestine is a very worthwhile motion to support. In such circumstances a broad front is needed.

Malema a Zuma clone

But this should not confuse us: overall, the EFF tiger will not change its stripes, nor be ridden, for this beast is headed by a Zuma clone whose rule is likely to prove as catastrophic. Indeed, like Msholozzi, Malema is a charismatic orator, an African(ist) who claims to brook no dishonour. Mara, if you can't be a Captain of Industry like Cyril, why not be a Field Marshall and fill the ranks of your brigades with disaffected youth who have nothing to lose, because no other left formation is worthy of the name?

The EFF was formed solely for one purpose: after having challenged and lost to the old Bull, Cde Jujuzi needed a political vehicle. From heading the infamously corrupt ANCYL of the Brett Kebble 90s, he was out in the cold, and the cold is bitterly unpleasant for one who loves the warm imbawla of the Movement and its networks of tenderpreneurship. From all accounts, while ensconced in his Limpopo lair, the leopard Malema scored many a kill. Was his rumbling belly to be denied this sweet-smelling carrion?

Allan Kolski Horwitz is an activist for the rebuilding of a liberation movement in South Africa/Azania.



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BRICS TRADE UNION FORUM: LABOUR SHOULD NOT BE SPOKESPERSONS OF THEIR GOVERNMENTS

By Trevor Shaku

IN LATE SEPTEMBER, THE MAIN trade union federations from BRICS countries converged in Durban for their annual trade union forum (BRICS TUF). The theme was “Cooperation for Fair and Inclusive Development for all Peoples of the World...”

Their gathering was immediately followed by the BRICS Labour and Employment Minister’s Meeting (LEMM), which is meant to merge government and business inputs with those of organised labour.

As expected, the trade union movement was meant merely to rubberstamp and legitimise the decisions taken by government ministers. Organised labour’s participation in LEMM was reduced to a ten-minute input from Cosatu, handpicked by the Department of Employment and Labour, without consultation with South Africa’s broader labour constituency.

Dangers of bourgeois nationalism

This did not shock us, however. The shocking development is the attitude of the representatives of the trade union federations, who cloaked themselves in bourgeois nationalism and turned themselves into unappointed spokespersons of their governments. They did not focus on forging alliances between our federations for common struggle against exploitation, privatisation, and fiscal onslaught. Instead, it was a classic example of “cus-tomarily jumping at the opportunity to join government delegations to trade deal talks”, echoing narrow bourgeois nationalism, guided by the logic of competition and trade.

This attitude is caused by the degeneration in the labour movement,

which itself is caused by trade unions being drawn closer to government through alliances.

To avoid these dangers, trade union federations in the BRICS bloc will have to come together on a common programme of struggle against exploitation, privatisation, and fiscal austerity.

Against the neoliberal agenda

So, the BRICS governments declaration in 2013 committed to debt sustainability. This is a repetition of the neoliberal mantra established under the Bretton Woods regime, to whip countries towards “fiscal

the process of the clean energy transition. This motion was elbowed aside on the grounds that it was submitted late. But as the unfolding energy transition is being privatised, our opposition towards it must grow louder.

Our struggle with our national bourgeoisies for the share of the surplus continues.

BRICS and the need for an alternative

BRICS was meant to offer a multipolar alternative, in the context of the unfair multilateral system that favours the US and Europe. The west has used its



Trade union federations in the BRICS bloc will have to come together on a common programme of struggle against exploitation, privatisation, and fiscal austerity.

consolidation”. In recent years, the governments of India, Brazil and South Africa have implemented fiscal austerity. Trade union federations ought to be establishing a common platform to fight the imposition of such austerity measures.

Saftu brought a motion for insertion in the declaration, to commit the federations to fight against privatisation in

post-war hegemony, through the Bretton Woods financial institutions (the World Bank and IMF) and the World Trade Organisation, to allow its corporations to dominate global trade. This became even more acute in the 1970s, when the global economy stagnated as a result of the overaccumulation crisis that built up in the Western economy, as multinationals

competed for the world market.

The multinationals that could win and dominate global capitalist trade were those that could lower their input costs and undercut their competitors. Multinationals from the advanced world migrated production to East Asia, where unit costs of labour were low, independent unions were not allowed, and environmental, safety and health regulations were non-existent. In addition to offshoring, these multinationals benefitted from the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programmes that turned the neo-colonial world into a destination for Foreign Direct Investment, to extract minerals and profits cheaply.

And soon BRICS companies also took advantage of the poorest countries' misery.

An alternative multilateral regime is necessary. The question however is, will a BRICS that is still premised on a capitalist framework provide the alternative so desperately needed?

Imperial-capitalism and disappointments

One area where the Bretton Woods institutions have had a continuing stranglehold is in controlling finance and dictating policy recommendations that serve the interests of imperialist corporations from the advanced neo-colonial countries. Disappointingly, instead of forging a new developmental path away from these institutions, the BRICS governments still follow the recommendations of the IMF and World Bank. They have increased their ownership in both institutions. These institutions have been declaring since 2009 the desire to change leadership and "shift the voting power ... in favour of the Emerging Market Economies and Developing countries". But the Bank president is still inevitably a US citizen, while the IMF's leader is always European.

And their neoliberal agenda has not changed. In its 2022-26 *Country Partnership with South Africa*, the World Bank asserted that a "sustained pace of reform and level of fiscal consolidation will mean that difficult policy choices will be required". These included cuts in public services, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and shrinkage of the civil service wage bill.

The BRICS' failure to establish a new, independent financial institution makes this all the more discouraging. As Zwelinzima Vavi said in his input to the BRICS Trade Union Forum, if South Africa taps the \$100 billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement, that still gives power to the IMF: after taking 30% of our quota as a loan, access to the next 70% requires having an IMF structural adjustment programme in place!

That is why it was no surprise that the BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration

(the first having been in 2018) showed the leaders' ongoing obedience to Western neoliberal institutions, as articulated in a half-dozen resolutions supporting:

a rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at its core... a market-oriented agricultural trading system... a robust Global Financial Safety Net with a quota-based and adequately resourced International Monetary Fund (IMF) at its centre... [with] increases in the quota shares of emerging markets and developing economies (EMDCs)... including in leadership positions in the Bretton Woods institutions.

De-dollarisation

The other area where Sandton demonstrated dismal political will is the need to urgently reform the global currency regime. The domination of the US dollar as the base currency has been a problem; it enables US imperialism to bully and influence economic policy globally.

In December 2022, the Bank of International Settlements reported that half of the world's trade is conducted/invoiced in US dollars. Although there has been a gradual decline over the past 19 years, the dollar still accounts for over 60% of Foreign Exchange Reserves. In addition to this, about half of the cross-border loans and international debt securities are issued in US dollars. The dollar is the base currency of the world. Even the BRICS New Development Bank only lends 22% of its current portfolio in local currencies.

The position held by the dollar unfairly advantages it against other currencies and affects trade relations generally. By holding the dollar as the base currency, the US can lay a claim over values produced by the working class across the world. They don't have to match the toil; they simply print the currency. And when there is financial turmoil — even if it emanates from the US — the dollar strengthens, because it is a hedge and "store of value" globally. The devaluation of the dollar in such a position is unthinkable.

Moreover, the US Federal Reserve — which decides on printing dollars — determines the pace of monetary policy and interest rates across the world. Fearing devaluation against the dollar, central banks of many countries have tailed the

Fed's hiking of interest rates since early 2022, so that the sellers and buyers of currency will hold onto their currency, rather than dumping it in the forex market. Our central bank, the SARB, is doing this even at the risk of recession, more unemployment and rising cost of living.

There is a lack of serious engagement by trade unions and others in civil society. There is a tendency to hype the BRICS as anti-imperialist when in reality it is sub-imperialist. We have not yet provided an alternative monetary regime of exchange.

There has been regular rhetoric about striving to "reform the financial architecture" since the 2008-09 global financial meltdown. Yet in the BRICS 2023 declaration, the only mandate along these lines was to "task our Finance Ministers and/or Central Bank Governors... to



The other area where Sandton demonstrated dismal political will is the need to urgently reform the global currency regime. The domination of the US dollar as the base currency has been a problem; it enables US imperialism to bully and influence economic policy globally.

consider the issue of local currencies, payment instruments and platforms and report back to us by the next Summit."

Kicking the can down the road in this manner leaves doubt about whether the BRICS are serious about reforming, or whether their conservative leaders enjoy the *status quo*.

Their capitalist orientation makes a mockery of providing an alternative. In a capitalist framework, competition, not collaboration, is the determining feature of trade relations. Individual countries have to be ruthless, including exporting capital at the lowest costs by suppressing labour costs. So the new order will not replace imperialism with a more humane order, but with another form of imperialism. Even though this imperialism might not resemble the murderous US imperialism, it will nonetheless be geared towards profit extraction and the plunder of resources.

Trevor Shaku is the National Spokesperson of Saftu and a former FMF and OMF activist.

AI machines aren't 'hallucinating'. BUT THEIR MAKERS ARE

By [Naomi Klein](#)

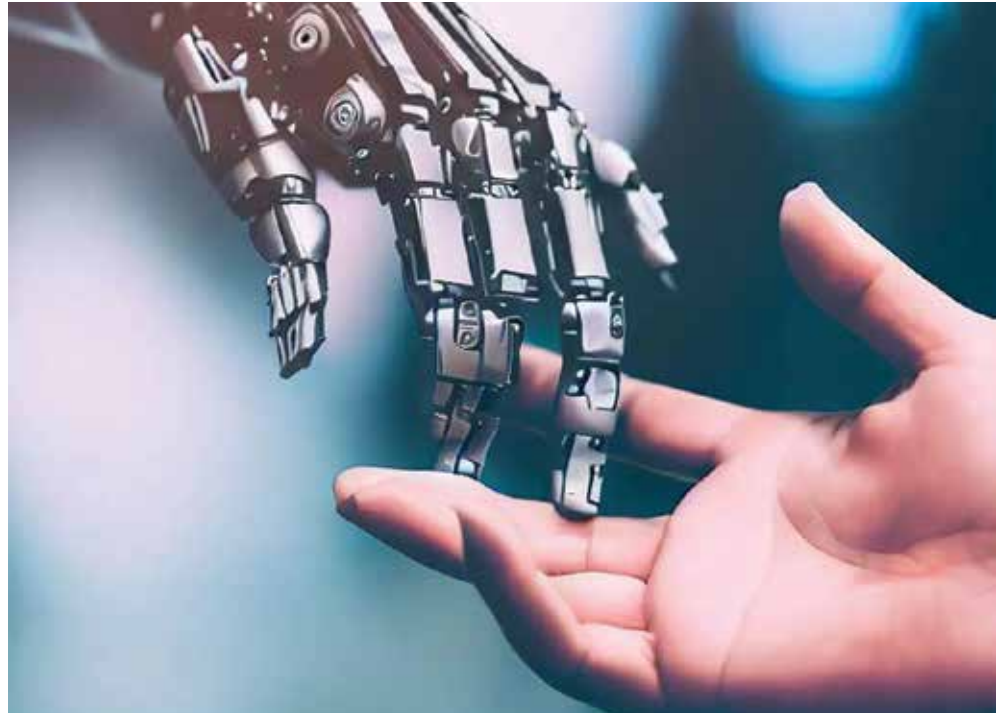
THIS IS AN EDITED VERSION OF an article that first appeared in the UK Guardian newspaper.

“Hallucinate” is the term that architects and boosters of generative AI have settled on to characterise responses served up by chatbots that are wholly manufactured, or flat-out wrong. The word refers to the mysterious capacity of the human brain to perceive phenomena that are not present, at least not in conventional, materialist terms. They are appropriating a word commonly used in psychology, psychedelics and various forms of mysticism. By doing that, they are simultaneously feeding the sector’s most cherished mythology: that by building these large language models, and training them on everything that we humans have written, said and represented visually, they are in the process of birthing an animate intelligence on the cusp of sparking an evolutionary leap for our species.

Generative AI will end poverty, they tell us. It will cure all disease. It will solve climate change. It will make our jobs more meaningful and exciting. It will unleash lives of leisure and contemplation, helping us reclaim the humanity we have lost to late capitalist mechanisation. It will end loneliness. It will make our governments rational and responsive.

There is a world in which generative AI, as a powerful predictive research tool and a performer of tedious tasks, could indeed be marshalled to benefit humanity, other species and our shared home. But for that to happen, these technologies would need to be deployed inside a vastly different economic and social order than our own, one that had as its purpose the meeting of human needs and the protection of the planetary systems that support all life.

And our current system is nothing like that. Rather, it is built to maximise the extraction of wealth and profit – from both humans and the natural world. In that reality of hyper-concentrated power and wealth, AI is much more likely to become a fearsome tool of further dispossession and despoliation.



What we are witnessing is the wealthiest companies in history unilaterally seizing the sum total of human knowledge that exists in digital, scrapable form. They are walling it off inside proprietary products, many of which will take direct aim at the humans whose lifetime of labour trained the machines without giving permission or consent.

Mass theft

I’ll dig into why that is so. But first, it’s helpful to think about the work these benevolent stories are doing in the culture as we encounter these strange new tools. Here is one hypothesis: they are the powerful and enticing cover stories for what may turn out to be the largest and most consequential theft in human history. Because what we are witnessing is the wealthiest companies in history (Microsoft, Apple, Google, Meta, Amazon ...) unilaterally seizing the sum total of human knowledge that exists in digital, scrapable form. They are walling it off inside proprietary products, many of which will take direct aim at the humans whose lifetime of labour trained the machines without giving permission or consent.

This should not be legal. In the case of copyrighted material that we now know trained the models, various lawsuits have been filed that will argue this was clearly illegal. Why, for instance, should a for-profit company be permitted to generate doppelganger

versions of artists’ work, with the benefits flowing to everyone but the artists themselves?

The trick, of course, is that Silicon Valley routinely calls theft “disruption” – and too often gets away with it. We know this move: charge ahead into lawless territory; claim the old rules don’t apply to your new tech; scream that regulation will only help China – all while you get your facts solidly on the ground. By the time we all get over the novelty of these new toys and start taking stock of the social, political and economic wreckage, the tech is already so ubiquitous that the courts and policymakers throw up their hands.

We saw it with Google’s book and art scanning. With Musk’s space colonisation. With Uber’s assault on the taxi industry. With Airbnb’s attack on the rental market. With Facebook’s promiscuity with our data. Don’t ask for permission, the disruptors like to say, ask for forgiveness. (And lubricate the asks with generous campaign contributions.)

By now, most of us have heard about the survey that asked AI researchers and

developers to estimate the probability that advanced AI systems will cause “human extinction or similarly permanent and severe disempowerment of the human species”. Chillingly, the median response was that there was a 10% chance.

How does one rationalise going to work and pushing out tools that carry such existential risks? Often, the reason given is that these systems also carry huge potential upsides – except that these upsides are, for the most part, hallucinatory. Let’s dig into a few of the wilder ones.

Hallucination #1: AI will solve the climate crisis

Almost invariably topping the lists of AI upsides is the claim that these systems will somehow solve the climate crisis. The former Google CEO Eric Schmidt summed up the case when he [told](#) The Atlantic that AI’s risks were worth taking, because “If you think about the biggest problems in the world, they are all really hard – climate change, human organisations, and so forth. And so, I always want people to be smarter.”

According to this logic, the failure to “solve” big problems like climate change is due to a deficit of smarts. Never mind that smart people, heavy with PhDs and Nobel prizes, have been telling our governments for decades what needs to happen to get out of this mess: slash our emissions, leave carbon in the ground, tackle the overconsumption of the rich and the underconsumption of the poor because no energy source is free of ecological costs.

The reason this very smart counsel has been ignored is not due to a reading comprehension problem, or because we somehow need machines to do our thinking for us. It’s because doing what the climate crisis demands of us would strand [trillions of dollars](#) of fossil fuel assets, while challenging the consumption-based growth model at the heart of our interconnected economies.

Clear away the hallucinations and it looks far more likely that AI will be brought to market in ways that actively deepen the climate crisis. First, the giant servers that make instant essays and artworks from chatbots possible are an enormous and growing [source](#) of carbon emissions. Second, as companies like Coca-Cola start making [huge](#)

[investments](#) to use generative AI to sell more products, it’s becoming all too clear that this new tech will be used in the same ways as the last generation of digital tools: that what begins with lofty promises about spreading freedom and democracy ends up micro targeting ads at us so that we buy more useless, carbon-spewing stuff.

And there is a third factor, this one a little harder to pin down. The more our media channels are flooded with deep fakes and clones of various kinds, the more we have the feeling of sinking into informational quicksand. Geoffrey Hinton is often referred to as “the godfather of AI”. He just quit a senior role at Google so that he could speak freely about the risks of the technology he helped create, including, as he [told](#) the New York Times, the risk that people will “not be able to know what is true anymore”.

Hallucination #2: AI will deliver wise governance

This hallucination summons a near future in which politicians and bureaucrats, drawing on the vast aggregated intelligence of AI systems, are able “[to see patterns of need](#) and develop evidence-based programs” that have greater benefits to their constituents.

As with the climate claims, it is necessary to ask: is the reason politicians impose cruel and ineffective policies that they suffer from a lack of evidence? An inability to “see patterns”? Do they not understand the human costs of [starving](#) public healthcare amid pandemics, or of failing to invest in non-market housing when tents fill our urban parks, or of approving new fossil fuel

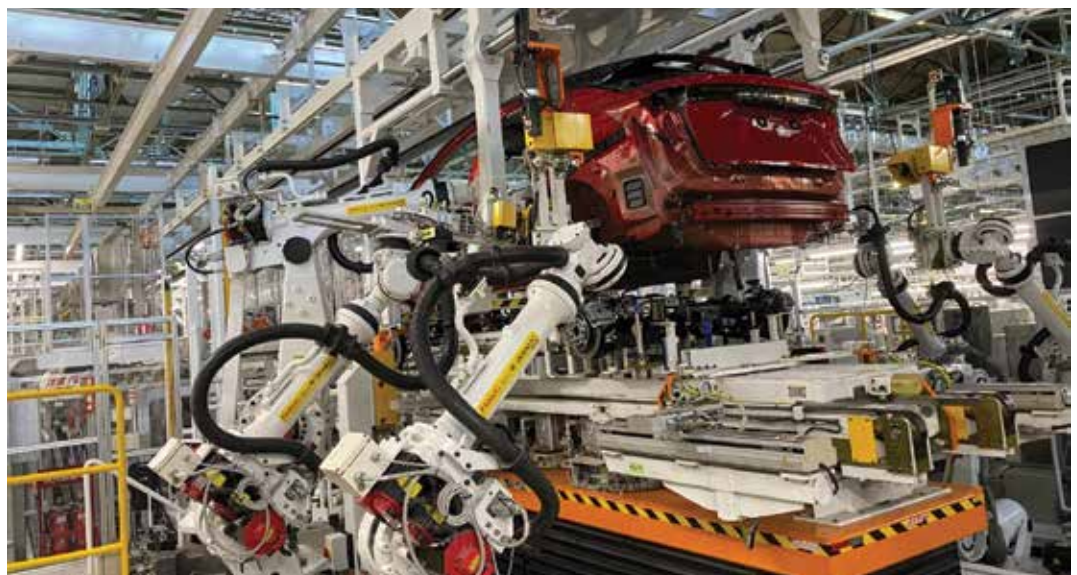
infrastructure while temperatures soar? Do they need AI to make them “smarter”, or are they precisely smart enough to know who is going to underwrite their next campaign, or, if they stray, bankroll their rivals?

It would be awfully nice if AI really could sever the link between corporate money and reckless policy making. But that link has everything to do with why companies like Google and Microsoft have been allowed to release their chatbots to the public despite the avalanche of warnings and known risks. Schmidt and others have been on a years-long lobbying campaign [telling](#) both parties in Washington that if they aren’t free to barrel ahead with generative AI, unburdened by serious regulation, then western powers will be left in the dust by China. Last year, the top tech companies [spent](#) a record \$70m to lobby Washington – more than the oil and gas sector.

They have intimate knowledge of precisely how money shapes policy in our national capitals. But when you listen to Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI – maker of ChatGPT – talk about the best-case scenarios for his products, all of this seems to be forgotten. Instead, he seems to be hallucinating a world entirely unlike our own, one in which politicians and industry make decisions based on the best data and would never put countless lives at risk for profit and geopolitical advantage. Which brings us to another hallucination.

Hallucination #3: tech giants can be trusted not to break the world

[Asked](#) if he is worried about the frantic



We live under capitalism, and under that system, the effects of flooding the market with technologies that can plausibly perform the economic tasks of countless working people is not that those people are suddenly free to become philosophers and artists. It means that those people will find themselves staring into the abyss.

gold rush ChatGPT has already unleashed, Altman said he is, but added sanguinely: “Hopefully it will all work out.” Of his fellow tech CEOs – the ones competing to rush out their rival chatbots – he said: “I think the better angels are going to win out.”

Better angels? At Google? Contrary to the hallucinations of the people profiting most from AI, Google does not make decisions based on what’s best for the world – it makes decisions based on what’s best for Alphabet’s shareholders, who do not want to miss the latest bubble, not when Microsoft, Meta and Apple are already all in.

Hallucination #4: AI will liberate us from drudgery

Generative AI won’t be the end of employment, we are told, only “**boring work**” – with chatbots helpfully doing all the soul-destroying, repetitive tasks and humans merely supervising them. Altman, for his part, sees a future where work “can be a broader concept, not something you have to do to be able to eat, but something you do as a creative expression and a way to find fulfilment and happiness”.

That’s an exciting vision of a more beautiful, leisurely life, one many leftists share (including Karl Marx’s son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, who wrote a manifesto titled *The Right To Be Lazy*). But we leftists also know that if earning money is no longer to be life’s driving

imperative, then there must be other ways to meet our creaturely needs for shelter and sustenance. A world without crappy jobs means that rent has to be free, and healthcare has to be free, and every person has to have inalienable economic rights. And then suddenly we aren’t talking about AI at all – we’re talking about socialism.

Because we do not live in the Star Trek-inspired rational, humanist world that Altman seems to be hallucinating. We live under capitalism, and under that system, the effects of flooding the market with technologies that can plausibly perform the economic tasks of countless working people is not that those people are suddenly free to become philosophers and artists. It means that those people will find themselves staring into the abyss – with actual artists among the first to fall.

Tech companies would like us to believe that it is already too late to roll back this human-replacing, mass-mimicry product. But there are highly relevant legal and regulatory precedents that can be enforced. For instance, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) **forced** Cambridge Analytica, as well as Everalbum, the owner of a photo app, to destroy entire algorithms found to have been trained on illegitimately appropriated data and scraped photos. In its early days, the Biden administration made many bold claims about regulating big tech, including cracking down on the theft of personal data to build proprietary algorithms. With a presidential election fast approaching,

now would be a good time to make good on those promises – and avert the next set of mass layoffs before they happen.

A world of deep fakes, mimicry loops and worsening inequality is not an inevitability. It’s a set of policy choices. We can regulate the current form of vampiric chatbots out of existence – and begin to build the world in which AI’s most exciting promises would be more than Silicon Valley hallucinations.

Because we trained the machines. All of us. But we never gave our consent. They fed on humanity’s collective ingenuity, inspiration and revelations (along with our more venal traits). These models are enclosure and appropriation machines, devouring and privatising our individual lives as well as our collective intellectual and artistic inheritances. And their goal never was to solve climate change or make our governments more responsible or our daily lives more leisurely. It was always to profit off mass immiseration, which, under capitalism, is the glaring and logical consequence of replacing human functions with bots.

Naomi Klein is a Guardian US columnist and contributing writer. She is the bestselling author of *No Logo* and *The Shock Doctrine* and Professor of Climate Justice and Co-director of the Centre for Climate Justice at the University of British Columbia



Clear away the hallucinations and it looks far more likely that AI will be brought to market in ways that actively deepen the climate crisis. First, the giant servers that make instant essays and artworks from chatbots possible are an enormous and growing source of carbon emissions.

The bubble, the state, and the crooked-mouthed monk:

THE CHINESE PROPERTY CRISIS AND ITS CULPRITS



By Au Loong-yu

A housing complex in Wuhan that was being built by China Evergrande. The company was back in court again in Hong Kong at the end of October, after its creditors filed a winding-up petition due to its failure to pay back loans.

IN ITS RECENT [PRESS RELEASE](#), THE IMF slightly upgraded its gloomy forecast for China's growth next year from 4.2% to 4.6%, but warned about the continuing "weakness in the property sector." According to [Bloomberg](#), between 2013 and 2022, the price of new homes sold in 300 Mainland Chinese cities trebled. The long boom in the property market has eventually promoted a big bubble that began to burst in 2021. Prices since then have been falling drastically, and developers are facing big difficulties paying back their loans.

We have already seen Evergrande, the biggest developer, back in court again in Hong Kong at the end of October, after its creditors filed a winding-up petition due to its failure to pay back loans. The property giant began its slow-motion collapse in 2021 when it could not pay its 2.43 trillion RMB (US\$340 billion) liabilities. This has been followed by another giant, Country Garden, also now struggling to pay its debts and to get new loans just to finish its projects. And many households have already made down payments and mortgage payments on these projects.

Listed developers now owe the people US\$960 billion in unbuilt homes, according to the [Economist](#), comprising roughly 40% of all purchased but uncompleted homes. Since 2021, many developers no longer have the money to keep their construction projects going, because their sales have been plummeting.

According to the [South China Morning Post](#), the 100 largest developers in Mainland China saw their sales down by 41.3% in 2022 (nationally they dropped 26%). In July 2023 they fell a further 33.1% year-on-year.

If one of the table's four legs breaks

[Bloomberg](#) gave us a glimpse of the potential knock-on effect of the crisis when it reported that, "an analysis of China's 186 listed developers shows that about 48% of total borrowing is held by companies that either already defaulted on public bonds... or are at 'significant' risk of missing repayment". This amounts to 13.6 trillion yuan of debt being at risk of default, or 12% of China's GDP.

The stakes are very high. According to a [Project Syndicate](#) report, "the value of China's housing market is [four times](#) the country's GDP, compared to 1.6 in the US and 2.1 in Japan. It accounts for more than one-quarter of all economic activity and two-thirds of household wealth". It would be catastrophic if the crisis is not contained in time, not just for China but also for the world economy.

It is true that the government has been vigilant in not raising a lot of foreign loans, and official statistics show a low level of foreign debt. But the problem is that there are a lot of hidden foreign debts – local government and corporations have borrowed a lot from foreign banks or by

issuing bonds. The [Financial Times](#) tells us that Evergrande alone was estimated to have \$19 billion in overseas liabilities. No one knows the actual figure of China's foreign debt, but Evergrande's default is enough to deal another blow to the already weak confidence of foreign investors in China's market.

There are multiple factors behind the fall in prices and sales, but the fundamental driving force is the excessive supply and over expansion of the market. The housing vacancy rate is 25%. Since 2009, so many new flats have been built that they are enough to house 250 million residents, in a country where 600 million live on a monthly income of 1,000RMB (US\$140). No wonder that, "[70% of homes sold since 2018 were bought by people who already owned one](#)". Xi Jinping certainly had a point when he said "houses are for living in, not for speculation". He has again proved that he is good at promoting slogans, but only slogans.

Who are the culprits?

Who is responsible for the property crisis? Michael Roberts, a leftist economist, rebutted the Western mainstream's narrative (for instance, the [Financial Times](#)). This has blamed the government for its heavy-handed or inappropriate regulations and for its failure to raise the level of consumption which is too low. His [article](#) argued that it is the fault of the capitalist market and the private sector,

and that more Chinese state ownership and state intervention would be a remedy to market chaos.

I have no sympathy for the Financial Times' recipes, but I think Roberts' thesis is misinformed, to say the least. The fact that in general it is capitalist forces which created this crisis should not blind us to the other side of the coin – it has always been the state which has pushed for more capitalism, with Chinese characteristics – a crony, state-led capitalism. The top tier predator of this ponzi scheme is none other than the central government, followed by the collusion between local government and the developers (known as the “white gloves” of local officials). The three formed an unholy ponzi scheme alliance which has eventually led to the downfall of the property market.

The central government laid the groundwork for this ponzi property scheme from the very beginning of the economic programme “reform and open”. The 1982 constitution stipulated that urban land belongs to the state and explicitly prohibited its sale. This was soon revised in 1988 to allow the sale of the right to land use for a certain period of time (50–70 years). This openly followed the example of colonial Hong Kong's practice of land tender, in the midst of the party's call to

“learn from Hong Kong!” (to get rich).

Municipal governments and even small towns would soon massively *quandi* (圈地, enclose land) for *kaifaqu* (開發區, development areas), from theme parks to real estate. Many of these eventually went bust. This would further extend to rural land as well – with a stroke of the pen local officials could always change “agricultural land” to “non-agricultural land”.

In response, the central government tightened control again – for a while. But its fundamental policy of allowing the commercialisation and speculation of state-owned land has never changed at all, paving the way for more rounds of enclosures and building booms in later periods. The 1994 tax reform gave local government a second opportunity to promote another round of property boom.

This was followed by the 2008–9 global financial crisis, which created conditions for a third wave building boom: central government handed out matching funds of 30% to local municipalities to build more infrastructure, so as to boost domestic demand and save the economy. The municipalities raised the rest of the money from their LGFVs (Local Government Financial Vehicles), borrowing from the banks or issuing bonds to fund these projects. These huge

infrastructure investments usually came with development plans for residential areas or industrial parks/commercial hubs etc. By then, local municipalities had made themselves increasingly dependent on land sales and the property market – ultimately accounting for one third of their revenue.

The fourth wave was again provided by the central government when it rolled out its 2013 “new model of urbanisation” policy. This further pushed up house prices, with no regard to the bubble which was already forming. Some of them would eventually become “ghost towns” or *lanweilou* (爛尾樓, unfinished buildings).

The other side of the story was that a lot of people lost their homes in the midst of massive land grabbing all over the country and across both rural and urban land. There was also strong resistance, the most famous of which was the [Wukan struggle](#).

Mainland and Hong Kong – a comparison

This leads us to the issue of corruption with Chinese characteristics. Why were ghost towns possible? Didn't the municipal governments and developers study the projects' feasibility before launching them? Why would developers be allowed



Listed developers now owe the people US\$960 billion in unbuilt homes, according to the Economist, comprising roughly 40% of all purchased but uncompleted homes.

to sell off-plan properties (properties that had not yet been built) when China was still far from being a rich country, and when even Xi Jinping recognised the seriousness of China's corruption? While the government is such a control freak concerning the people, why couldn't it assert equally effective control over the developers and the mad financialisation of the property market? Especially when urban land is state-owned (which implies that the government can always unilaterally set the terms).

In colonial Hong Kong, all undeveloped land was also under state ownership, or "crown land". While the colonial government did allow the developers to unjustly enrich themselves immensely, since the 1970s it was also able to provide affordable public housing to half of the population there. By contrast, the mainland's mega property bubble was only possible after the party finally officially discarded the physical distribution of houses to workers in state-owned or collectively owned enterprises (of which most small and medium ones were privatised) in the late 1990s.

Looking back over the whole period of "reform and open", it is clear that the CCP was tilted from the very beginning towards enriching local officials, developers and the upper middle class, at the expense of the lower middle class and the poor.

There are of course all kinds of housing projects to help the poor, but how they are implemented is the biggest problem and also a carefully guarded secret, not to mention that their scale is small. In a state where the officials are entirely free from any kind of scrutiny from the people, they can always make the policies work for their own enrichment. No wonder the reports about public housing or accessible housing for the poor often ending up in the hands of local officials. The National Audit Office found that 30% of 290,000 rented public flats were "violating the rules" and were "abused". In the "old" Hong Kong period, when it still enjoyed autonomy, its media often ran reports like [this](#) – a township Vice Party Secretary alone would own 192 units of housing. It's not clear how many were public or private houses, but the number is staggering.



Looking back over the whole period of "reform and open", it is clear that the CCP was tilted from the very beginning towards enriching local officials, developers and the upper middle class, at the expense of the lower middle class and the poor.

The state as a part of the problem

It does not matter at all to the bureaucrats if the newly built towns are not eventually completed – local municipalities got their revenue from land sales, corrupt officials got their commission or a share of the booty, the developers got revenue from selling the flats, and with the help of local officials also their loans from state banks.

This leads us to another facet of the bureaucracy – its dysfunction caused by the constant conflict between official rules and the terrible corruption within the hierarchy of the bureaucracy. [The case of the Qinling](#) illegal villas allows us a glimpse of the tug of war between local bureaucrats and the central government and with... Xi Jinping. The local bureaucrats broke the law to build their villas in an environmentally protected area. When this was reported to Xi he ordered their demolition in 2014. But the local officials resisted stubbornly for four years, through lies and tricks, before they finally did their jobs when hard pressed. But Xi had to issue six instructions before it was done.

On top of the complete degeneration of party bureaucrats into a bourgeoisified bureaucracy, there is also the factor of a particular political culture – or the lack of it – in the party. The practice of *diyibashou* (第一把手, the top party leader or the bosses of their respective departments) making irresponsible decisions over "economic development", often in defiance of professional advice or dissident party leaders, has been innate to the CCP since 1949. The most horrible example is the Great Leap Forward.

When these two factors coincide, the

scale of corruption becomes unimaginable. The toxic environment within the party state also prompts corrupt officials to make big money as soon as possible (and many will move their money abroad afterwards), lest the party leadership suddenly changes course again and closes down their window for graft. This is reflected in the jingle "the communist party is similar to the moon, whose shape is constantly changing". Fundamentally speaking, the culprit of this man-made crisis is nothing else but the party state.

When Roberts sees a remedy in the party state, he forgets that it is never neutral; instead the bureaucrats have long hijacked the state for their own material interests, and consciously pursued more, through larger and larger dose of privatisation and commercialisation of land use. Far from being a part of the remedy, the party state is a big part of the problem. Another Chinese jingle (quite popular during Mao's rule) gives us a more accurate picture of the party bureaucrats than Roberts' narrative – *waizui heshang nian waijing* (歪嘴和尚念歪经, crooked-mouthed monk chants scriptures crookedly. Buddhism may be the Truth, but you cannot rely on a crooked-mouthed monk to chant its scripture. State intervention could be useful, but you can't rely on a corrupted party to implement a good policy. You may get the opposite of what you wish for.

Au Loong-Yu is a long-time activist based in Hong Kong and author of *China Rise: Strength and Fragility*, and *Hong Kong in revolt: the protest movement and the future of China*.

Andre De Ruyter's *Truth To Power* only reveals half of the story

By Andile Zulu

THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF 2023, South Africans have endured over 300 days of rolling electrical blackouts. What once seemed like a temporary failure in the operations of Eskom, the country's public electricity utility, has evolved to become a crisis that has continued for 16 years. The persistent insecurity in electricity supply converges with the country's numerous socio-economic issues, whether it be mass unemployment, economic stagnation, pervasive poverty or violent crime, and compounds them.

Load-shedding not only makes all of our problems worse, it limits the state's capacity to confront and solve our problems. A country lacking a sustainable supply of energy cannot pursue socio-economic development, effectively supply basic services or stimulate economic growth. In the midst of almost daily load shedding-induced frustration, millions of South Africans must wonder: what is wrong with Eskom and how can it be fixed?

In his book titled *Truth to Power: My Three Years Inside Eskom*, former Eskom CEO Andre de Ruyter sought to provide answers to the first question. Based on his experiences, De Ruyter's book reveals that the primary cause of load-shedding, and Eskom's general dysfunction, is political. Specifically, the book details how systemic corruption and organised criminality drastically drained Eskom's resources, disorientated its mandate and severely weakened its operational capacity. Aggravating these issues are the lack of experienced engineers at the utility, ruling-party interference through the policy of cadre deployment, continual sabotage of Eskom's maintenance, dishonesty from politicians and extensive corruption within the coal economy.

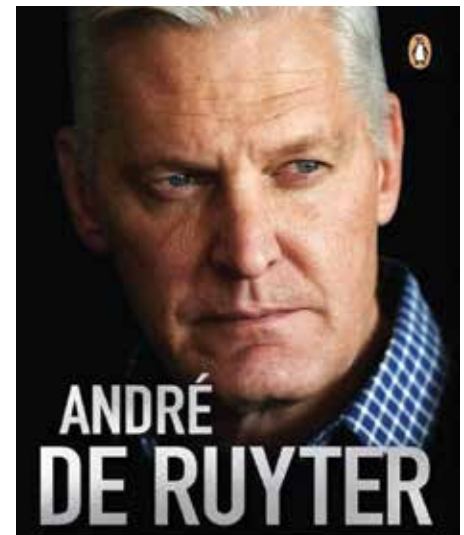
Andre De Ruyter's book sits within the ever-growing field of post-apartheid

literature which reveals and reflects on the failures of ANC governance (think of it as a new genre on state failure). Although the revelations provided by books like *Truth to Power* are undoubtedly valuable and often shocking, their utility is hindered by a lack of political, economic and historical context.

Where is the context?

If we seek to solve the many crises which plague the country, such as load-shedding or energy poverty, then we need to inquire into the conditions in which those crises unfold. Through such inquiry, the motivations, interests and incentives which sustain corruption and misgovernance become clear. And it is this clarity which demystifies the roots of the crisis, allowing for the kind of perception which can formulate effective political responses and transformative policy.

Without an examination of political context and history, the actions of Eskom's board members, coal criminals or politicians whose policies govern the utility appear as a result of simple greed or incompetence. Some would characterise that as inherent to government-run utilities. Moreover, the absence of historical and political context in *Truth to Power* will undoubtedly lead many readers to a series of ideological conclusions and policy propositions, which De Ruyter himself advances in the concluding chapter of his book. The conclusion many readers will likely reach is that, in order to end loadshedding and ensure a sustainable supply of energy, the state must surrender its monopoly in the energy sector and allow private sector generation onto the scene, through the creation of a competitive energy market. De Ruyter himself argues that "historically, there is no better allocation of resources than the market. Wherever governments



The detailed experiences of Eskom's former CEO raise a serious political dilemma: how can we pursue transformative change in a state crippled by systemic corruption?

have allocated resources, it has been an abysmal failure". To some this may seem to be a strange assertion to make in a country with a capitalist economy and the highest levels of wealth inequality in the world. Others may agree with De Ruyter's assertion, pointing to the decay of public infrastructure or the government's failure to sustainably provide basic services of a decent and dignified quality.

For those of us sincerely concerned and committed to South Africa's transformation through progressive politics, the detailed experiences of Eskom's former CEO raise a serious political dilemma: how can we pursue transformative change in a state crippled by systemic corruption? And for those of us who believe a democratic state must play a central role in implementing socio-economic development, how can we convince citizens to put trust in such a reformative programme, if their experience of the state has been tainted by years of neglect and misgovernance? Even if one is not shocked or surprised by the revelations unveiled in *Truth to Power*, the book still provides a useful illustration of how corruption and criminality unfold at SOEs such as Eskom.

Truths Andre De Ruyter neglects

De Ruyter, like numerous energy experts, scholars and activists, argues that the government's decision - reflected in the 1998 White Paper on Energy Policy - to place a moratorium on public investment into Eskom's generative capacity was profoundly short-sighted. It is this lack of investment in capacity and maintenance, as demand within the population and economy grew, which led to the first

episode of load-shedding in 2007. Furthermore, De Ruyter is correct to claim that this decision was politically motivated.

But what De Ruyter neglects to include in his analysis is that this choice from government was motivated by an adherence to neoliberal ideology. Powerful nations and institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) concluded that not-for-profit, publicly owned utilities were structures of the past.

The choice to neglect investment into Eskom's generative capacity was made in the hopes that it would create space for private sector penetration into the energy sector. The ideological and political interests of such policy decisions are further reflected in the gradual commercialisation and corporatisation of Eskom, which began in the mid-1980s under the apartheid regime and were further pursued by the ANC in the late 1990s and early 2000s. One sees this pursuit of neoliberal policy through legislation such as the 1998 Eskom Amendment Act. This saw the utility become a limited liability company, with the government as its sole shareholder. Eskom's tax-exempt status was removed.

By 2001 Eskom had become fully corporatised, with the adoption of the full-cost recovery model and the 'user pays' principle. This meant Eskom had to rely on raising revenue for conducting maintenance and boosting its generative capacity through the sale of electricity to end-users (citizens such as you and me). As numerous progressive scholars and activists have already argued, this drastic shift in Eskom's financing meant a public

good became a commodity and citizens became consumers.

In a country where millions live in poverty and suffer from low wages and unemployment, the attempt to gather massive sums of revenue through the sale of electricity is unsustainable. Unsurprisingly, the past decade has seen Eskom's operational capacity significantly weaken, due to decreasing sales volumes, as more citizens cannot keep up with rising tariffs and jump off the grid, seeking alternative means of getting electricity.

The contradiction between Eskom's mandate to provide a public good, and its corporate objective to ensure profitability and streams of revenue, is a fundamental cause of the current energy crisis. Unfortunately, this policy analysis is largely absent from De Ruyter's account of what ails the utility.

There is another 'truth' which De Ruyter's book neglects and one cannot blame or necessarily fault the former CEO for not highlighting it (the man has never claimed to be a political scientist or analyst). Considering its pervasive existence, corruption may appear to be inherent to government-run structures. But in fact it is a result of the ruling government's failure to sustainably and equitably grow the post-apartheid economy, as a result of adopting neoliberal economic practices. This led to an early de-industrialisation in South Africa and the gradual loss of well-paying, labour-intensive work.

Emergent and ambitious post-apartheid capitalists could not penetrate the cemented networks and sectors of the economy (due to a lack of capital,

resources and connections). So they turned towards the state as a site of accumulation, through the state tender and procurement process. The predatory elite which preys upon utilities such as Eskom does so not simply because they are incompetent or inherently greedy. They do it because the post-apartheid economy has little room to accommodate their class interests.

What is to be done?

For those seeking to understand the prevalence of corruption and the political relations which sustain it, De Ruyter's book provides some valuable insights into how state owned enterprises are undermined by narrow political interests. But ultimately the book does not provide a holistic picture that directs us to the fundamental roots of the energy crisis. What it does remind all South Africans concerned with progressive or radical politics about is that the pursuit of change will face a mighty obstacle: political elites (collaborating with some actors and institutions in the private sector) committed to accumulation at the expense of the public good. Perhaps the greatest truth that De Ruyter's book provides is that any attempt to solve load-shedding, mass unemployment and weakening state capacity, will require us to challenge the neoliberal paradigm which governs entities such as Eskom, and this necessitates a monumental shift in the economic relations which underpin our political order.

Andile Zulu is a political writer and Energy Democracy Officer at the AIDC.

Unit 1 Kusile. The choice to neglect investment into Eskom's generative capacity was made in the hopes that it would create space for private sector penetration into the energy sector.



JOHN SAUL,

socialist internationalist

1938 to 2023

By Patrick Bond

JOHN SAUL WAS A SOCIALIST internationalist profoundly grounded in Southern African liberation struggles. He served as an exemplary scholar-activist from the late 1960s until his death, helping to develop radical political sophistication in cadres from his native Canada, to Central and East Africa, to the Western Cape. His passing in September, at age 85 in Toronto, followed a period of suffering from cancer, and his wife Pat's death a year earlier, and led to outpourings of admiration.

For good reason. The region's independent Left found him enormously supportive, especially in nurturing the ideals of permanent struggles for social justice, long after the region's false-decolonisation was 'won.' Academics pored over his 20 books about liberatory politics.

John's last South African appearance was in April 2016, when he received an honorary doctorate at the University of Johannesburg. His acceptance speech included these lines:

I first came to Africa from Canada, my home and native land, via the US more than 50 years ago – to Tanzania – to do research for my doctoral thesis for Princeton on the country's burgeoning rural marketing co-operatives. It was a period in Tanzania full of promise, the years when Julius Nyerere was president and socialist possibilities were in the air. It was too exciting a place and time for my wife and for me to think about leaving quickly. So I signed on as a lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam and we were there for the next seven years, and both our children were born there as well... I did return to North America and I did write my doctoral dissertation for Princeton on the prospects for socialism in Tanzania. But this was not the kind of topic that was popular in the world of American political science ... and I had been in Tanzania too long and lived with its dream too intensely

to conform to the models of modernisation theory and other fetishes of American political science to write the kind of dissertation my professors wanted from me. And, of course, they flunked me.

Thank goodness his subsequent appointment at York University allowed both a professorship without a doctorate, and freedom to run the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa. Like many, I met John in his solidarity treks, for example to Rocky Street, where in the early 1990s the urban civic movement would gather to strategise at Planact. John and his fellow-generational Canadian socialists Judith Marshall, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, regularly helped us link to organised labour, not just logistically but by opening up socialist concepts to community-labour alliance theory, to the era's globalisation debates, to concerns over ossified party politics, and to the broader gendered challenges of social reproduction.

John's first surreptitious trip to South Africa came after he was officially banned from entering due to having co-authored *Crisis in South Africa*, a Monthly Review Press book that was photocopied and

circulated underground, samizdat-style. (In 1984, Pravin Gordhan – then a Durban chemist – waved it at me when I asked him what was the single best text to read about South Africa.) John snuck over the border anyhow, and hid out at the Melville house of Eddie Webster and Luli Callinicos, his permanent Joburg hosts.

John also lectured at Wits Sociology during the 1990s, and in the early 2000s, and was sufficiently confident about his critique of the African National Congress turn to neoliberalism to enter ferocious academic debates with Communist Party intellectuals Jeremy Cronin and Ray Suttner in the pages of *Monthly Review*.

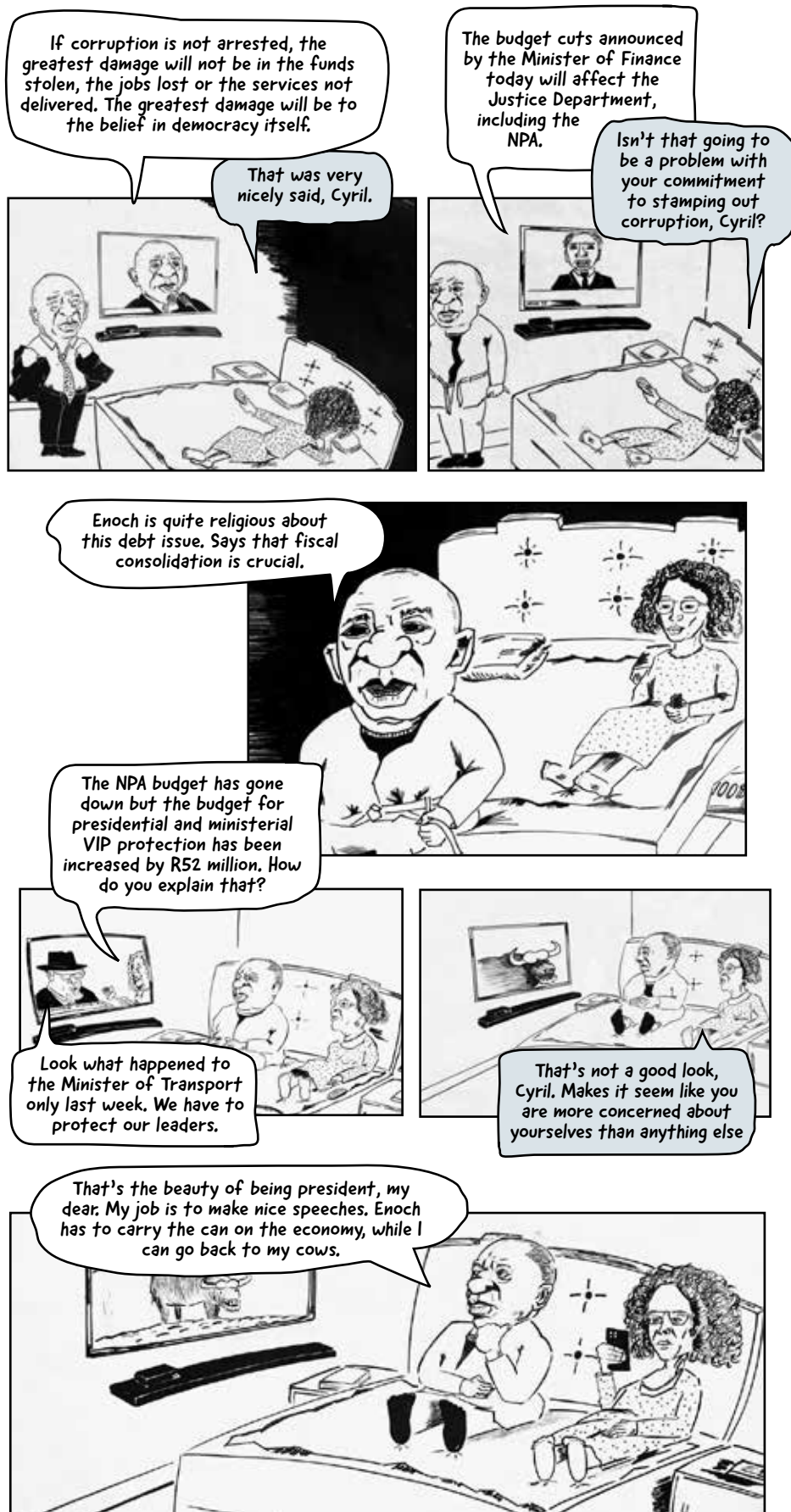
His excellent research, engaged writing, enormous wisdom and sustained commitment to Marxism can be found in scores of Southern African Report quarterly editorials – thankfully all [online at https://africanactivist.msu.edu/record/210-849-24386/](https://africanactivist.msu.edu/record/210-849-24386/). John's two main prized sites for scholarly publication were the annual *Socialist Register* (dating to 1969) and the *Review of African Political Economy*. And the many days he spent in Dar es Salaam, Maputo, Windhoek, Harare and other regional hotspots over the past several decades also generated enormously rich analysis and numerous books.

John continued working this year, still, on a '30 year war' manuscript for Cambridge University Press. And UJ Press will soon publish his *Revolutionary Hope vs Free-Market Fantasies*. As a broader legacy, we have in John's writings some of the most visionary, challenging, self-critical and ultimately uplifting ways of expressing independent-left politics. And his love of community, family, jazz, sports and nature remind us that the struggle can always be waged for both bread and roses.

Patrick Bond teaches sociology at the University of Johannesburg.



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57 Journalists were killed in 2022 – in the world. Since October 7, 2023, **66 journalists have been killed** – in Gaza alone. This is the scale of the slaughter that is being perpetrated on the population of Gaza by the Israeli state. Thousands of children massacred. All actively supported by the US and Europe. We bow our heads for the dead, and we stand in solidarity with the living.