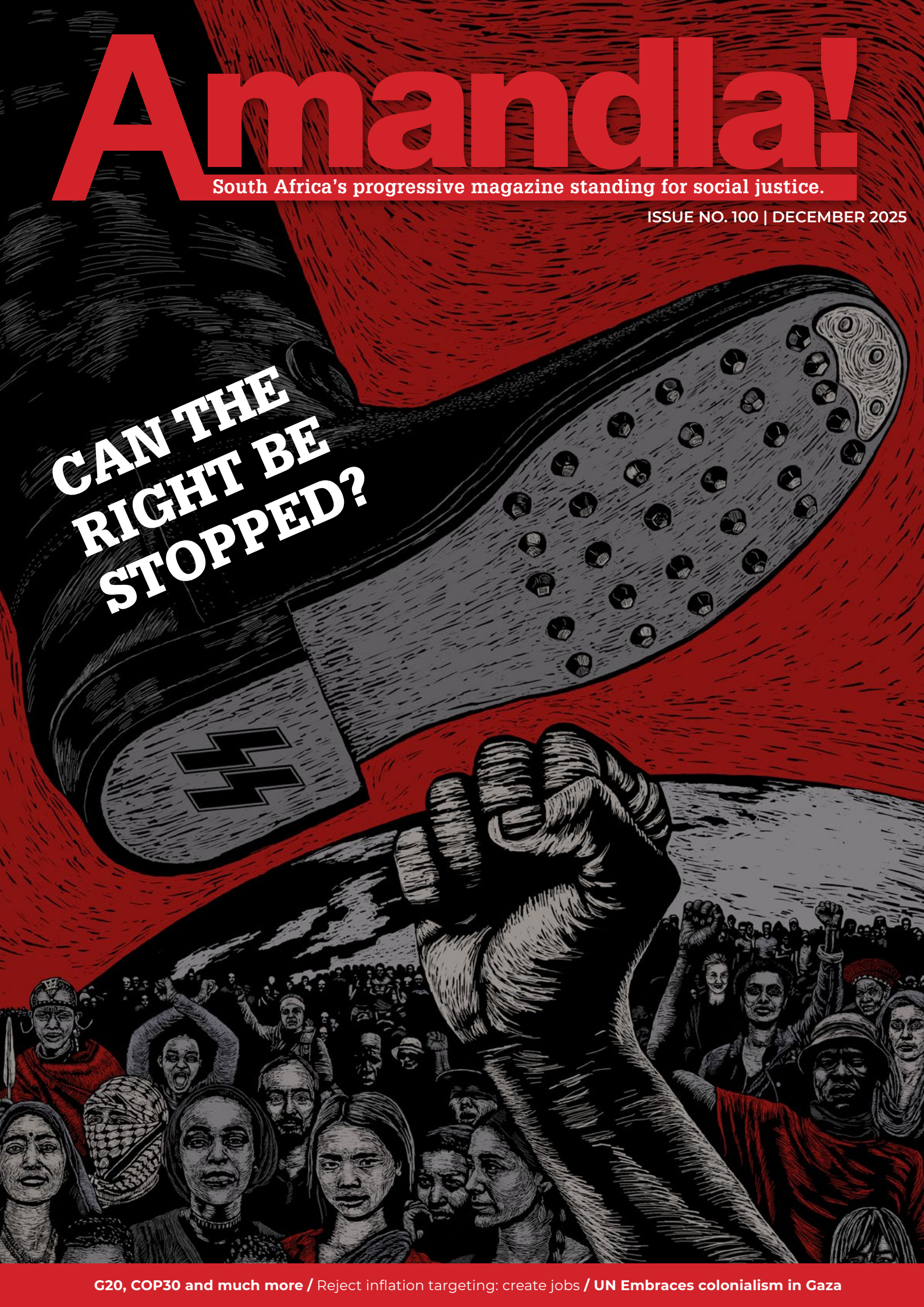


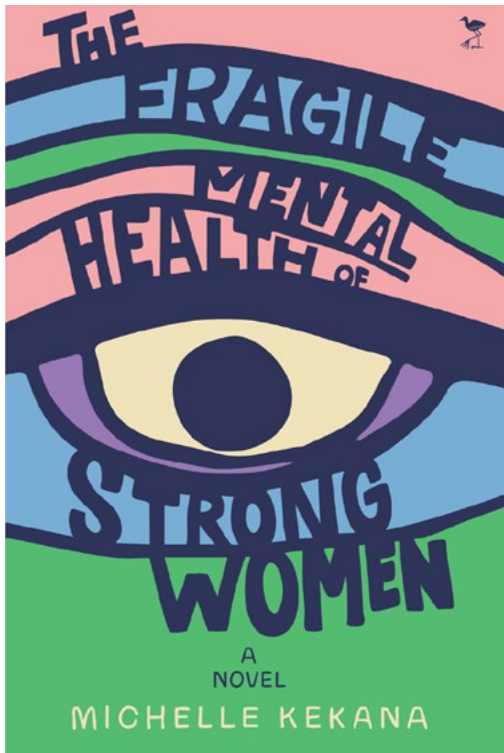
# Amandla!

South Africa's progressive magazine standing for social justice.

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CAN THE  
RIGHT BE  
STOPPED?





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# The Fragile Mental Health of Strong Women

Michelle Myeko Kekana

In Michelle Myeko Kekana's exquisitely moving breakout novel, three modern South African women find themselves brought to breaking point as they navigate the complexities of life, love and mental health.

On a moonless night, Hope, feeling desperate and trapped in her mother's house after years of failed job searching, steps onto the highway, contemplating ending her life. Her failed attempt leads her to Bonga, a kindred spirit who helps her to rediscover her strength amidst the darkness of self-loathing. Meanwhile, Ayanga struggles with the harsh realities of motherhood, battling sleep deprivation and isolation while feeling disconnected from her newborn. As Ayanga's husband Sizwe neglects his responsibilities, the weight of expectation drives her to a desperate act.

Zethu enters university with dreams and vaulting ambitions but when her roommate dies by suicide, her world spirals into chaos. Amidst the disarray a new relationship transforms her into a version of herself she no longer recognizes. Bound together by a psychiatrist, Hope, Ayanga and Zethu confront their demons in a deeply relatable book that touches on queer politics, childhood trauma, the stigma of depression and the burden of social media.

With compelling prose and an unforgettable cast of streetwise characters, *The Fragile Mental Health of Strong Women* is a poignant gift to those journeying toward self-acceptance. Black women have been labelled strong; their tears seen as indulgent, their suffering expected to have an imminent expiration date. Don't believe that label.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Michelle Myeko Kekana** was a 2021 JIAS writing fellow. She has been published in an anthology of essays about post-apartheid South Africa. Michelle is a former teacher but an eternal student who is passionate about creating the things she wishes existed. She is an adoring mother of 4 children, ranging from ages 10 to 25.

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# Amandla! at 100

## CONFRONTING THE THREAT OF A RESURGENT RIGHT

**R**EACHING A 100TH ISSUE IS no small feat in today's fractured and financially ravaged media landscape. For a magazine rooted in critical analysis, movement-building, and the difficult work of imagining alternatives, it is even more remarkable.

*Amandla!* was founded in 2007, in a moment of deep turbulence both within South Africa and globally. At home, the centralisation of power around Thabo Mbeki's presidency had produced a technocratic, insulated ruling elite presiding over widening inequality and the entrenchment of neoliberalism. The ANC Alliance was convulsing under the weight of the arms deal scandal, while Jacob Zuma opportunistically positioned himself as a champion of the Left. This positioning masked deeper currents of factionalism and political opportunism, rather than any meaningful ideological break with the neoliberal core of the state.

It was in this context that *Amandla!* first appeared. Its task was ambitious: to draw together a diverse range of voices from across the South African Left—both inside and outside the Alliance—to re-open a strategic dialogue that had largely stalled. This was reflected in the composition of the Editorial Collective and Advisory Board, which brought together significant members of the different forces of the Left, including the independent and Alliance Left. The hope was that such a dialogue might give birth to something broader: a united front capable of resisting the tightening hold of neoliberal policy, as well as the narrowing of democratic space that came with the consolidation of power in Mbeki's centralised presidency.

Globally, these were also years when the contradictions of globalised capitalism were coming to the fore; its stability was cracking. The 2007–2008 financial crisis exposed the deep structural contradictions of neoliberal capitalism. Across the world, people were



*The front cover of the first pilot issue of Amandla, from 2007. Amandla is rooted in critical analysis, movement-building, and the difficult work of imagining alternatives. To celebrate 100 issues is to honour that legacy. It is also to recognise the continued need for independent spaces of Left thought.*

beginning to question the legitimacy of the economic order that had dominated since the fall of the Soviet Union. *Amandla!* was able, in those early days, to offer important commentary on this crisis and its implications, not only for the global economy, but also for struggles at home. In South Africa, the effects were quickly felt in rising unemployment, service delivery failures, and the intensification of inequality.

To celebrate 100 issues is to honour that legacy of critical analysis, dialogue, and rootedness in struggle. It is also to recognise the continued need for independent spaces of Left thought and debate in South Africa today, at a moment when the crisis risks tearing the country apart, and when the political and ideological terrain is shifting in dangerous ways.

### The right is on the rise

The global feature in this milestone issue reflects a stark reality: the right is on the march across continents. From the Americas to Europe to South Asia, we see the rise of reactionary forces—some traditional, some newly configured—that blend authoritarianism, xenophobia, militarism, and neoliberal economics.

South Africa is far from insulated from these global winds. Here, too, the right is surging. And though the forms it takes are varied, the cumulative threat is serious.

The old white right has never disappeared and remains a persistent danger, resurfacing in moments of crisis and drawing strength from wealth, property and global networks of capital. At its forefront today is AfriForum, with the trade union Solidarity in support. AfriForum has built strong links with the extreme right in the United States and Europe. It uses these alliances to amplify the false narrative of a “white genocide” and to pressure the South African state, while undermining transformative policies such as land reform.

Yet the influence of this white right is not confined to its overt formations. Its agenda increasingly influences the liberal bourgeois centre-right, particularly the Democratic Alliance. Although clothed in the language of constitutionalism and good governance, the DA's economic and foreign policy positions remain not just neoliberal but outright reactionary.

Its agenda aligns with a section of South African business that sees the current crisis not as a warning about inequality and exclusion, but as an opportunity to accelerate market reforms, deregulation, and austerity. This is a right that speaks the language of efficiency, while ignoring the structural violence of hunger, unemployment, and collapsing public services.

## The new right

Alongside it, however, another, potentially more explosive, right-wing formation is rapidly maturing. It is one that thrives on the social despair, anger, and alienation generated by South Africa's deepening crises.

In a society battered by unemployment approaching 50%, decaying infrastructure, the collapse of local government, rising costs of living, and, for many years, persistent load shedding, the ground is fertile for dangerous political currents. Populist, ethno-nationalist, and openly xenophobic groups and parties now draw significant support by exploiting precisely these conditions.

These forces scapegoat migrants for the structural failures of the state and capital. They fuse anti-immigrant rhetoric with racial and tribal narratives that fracture working-class unity and redirect anger towards the most vulnerable. And they do so with growing organisational sophistication, buoyed, in part, by flows of money and ideological support from sections of the global right, who see South Africa as another frontline in a worldwide culture war.

This right-wing populism presents the most immediate political threat in South Africa today. It is volatile, demagogic, and able to mobilise real despair into reactionary energy. It speaks directly to the lived misery of impoverished communities, but channels that suffering away from the actual sources of crisis—neoliberal austerity, corporate power, elite corruption, and the ANC's historic failure to transform

the economy—and towards migrants, minorities, and invented enemies.

In doing so, it has driven a wedge between the Left and the very communities whose interests it seeks to champion.

## Weakness of the Left

The tragedy is that the South African Left is entering this dangerous period weakened and fragmented. Years of organisational erosion, ideological drift, and strategic confusion have taken a toll. Trade unions remain crucial but are divided. Social movements that once led powerful local struggles have, in many places, lost organisational capacity, or dissolved under pressure. Emerging formations have struggled to gain traction or build durable structures.

Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis, unemployment, and the collapse of basic services have created a vacuum. And it is one that the right has been far quicker and more adept at filling than the Left.

This makes the challenge before us both urgent and immense: how to rebuild the confidence of the people in Left politics; how to re-establish rootedness in working-class communities; and how to articulate a programme that speaks directly to people's immediate needs, while pointing towards a transformative horizon.

## Organise or starve

The starting point must be to go back to the basics of political organising. The Left must campaign on the issues that matter most to people:

- the soaring cost of food, transport, and electricity;

- unemployment, especially among youth;
- access to water, sanitation, housing, and healthcare;
- safety, dignity, and the right to live free from fear;
- a functioning state capable of delivering basic services.

These struggles cannot remain rhetorical or confined to intellectual spaces. They must be anchored in daily life, in street committees, in neighbourhood assemblies, in community organisations, in democratic trade unions, and in campaigns that are tangible and winnable.

Rebuilding the Left means rebuilding local organisation—block by block, ward by ward, municipality by municipality. It also means rekindling a culture of unity. While ideological differences are inevitable and sometimes productive, fragmentation has become a luxury the Left can no longer afford. We need local united fronts capable of coordinating struggles, sharing resources, and amplifying the demands of the poor and working class. And at the national level, we need renewed efforts to build broad coalitions that can counter both the liberal centre-right and the dangerous ethno-nationalist right.

## The next 100 issues

If the first 100 issues of *Amandla!* played a role in creating spaces of critical dialogue, strategic debate, and solidarity across the Left, the next 100 will be even more essential. As the right grows stronger and more organised, the Left will need platforms that can analyse conditions honestly, expose reactionary forces, elevate grassroots struggles, and help clarify political strategy.

*Amandla!* has always been more than a magazine. It is part of an ecosystem of movements, thinkers, activists, workers, feminists, youth organisers, and internationalists committed to building a just, democratic, and egalitarian society. That ecosystem must now become more vibrant, more rooted, and more capable of challenging the right on every front: ideological, organisational, and material.

Reaching a hundred issues is an achievement worth celebrating. But it is also a reminder of how much work lies ahead. In a time of despair, the task of the Left is to rebuild hope—not the shallow hope of empty promises, but the grounded hope born of collective action, solidarity, and struggle.



*Right-wing populism presents the most immediate political threat in South Africa today. It is volatile, demagogic, and able to mobilise real despair into reactionary energy. It speaks directly to the lived misery of impoverished communities.*

# key events

## Looking back: The first 100 issues

Instead of News Briefs, we thought we would indulge in a little reminiscence and look back over some of the key events we have covered over the last 18 years, and some of the comments we have published which resonate today. Here are the results.

## First, our favourite Amandla! predictions

**The honeymoon won't last. Editorial. Amandla! 57. April 2018**

"The structural crisis of the South African economy will not fundamentally change with the Ramaphosa presidency. Ramaphosa has made it clear that he is firmly committed to the same old, same old—Minerals Energy Finance complex. Earn dollars from digging minerals from the ground and getting them out of the country.

This strategy has failed over the last 25 years... For 25 years it has failed to lay the basis for oft-promised beneficiation—processing the minerals into materials and products in South Africa. This would create jobs. It hasn't happened and it won't happen. This is not a strategy to create millions of jobs. And we need millions of jobs."

*History has absolved us.*

**NHI. Interview with Mark Heywood. Amandla! 14. May 2010.**

"On paper and as a matter of policy the ANC and the government remain fully committed to implementing an NHI policy. However, deadlines have not been

met. And if you look at statements coming from the Treasury and the Department of Health, this is not going to be a rapid process."

*That seems like a bit of an understatement now, more than 15 years later.*

## Then some of the key South African events we have covered

**ANC Polokwane Conference. Hein Marais. Amandla! Pilot 3. December 2007**

"What puzzles me is where the left got the idea that Zuma has left credentials. I think he approached the left offering his services. But he also might have approached a bunch of other class interests in society, such as capital, assuring them that nothing is going to change. So the left is going to stake claims, which it will struggle to push through."

*How prescient he was.*

**Marikana. Ronnie Kasrils. Amandla! 26. September 2012**

"On 16 August an order was given to deploy almost 500 police armed with automatic weapons, reinforced by armoured vehicles, horsemen and helicopters; they advanced towards the hill where 3,000 striking miners were encamped... These strikers were hardly occupying some strategic point, some vital highway, a key city square. They were not holding hostages. They were not even occupying mining property.

Why risk such a manoeuvre other than to drive the strikers back to work at all costs on behalf of the bosses who were anxious to resume profit-making operations?

This was a deployment of state forces that could only end in the dreadful manner witnessed: 34 dead, 76 wounded, their families devastated."

*And now, more than 13 years later, not a single conviction for their murder.*

**Farmworkers strike. Mercia Andrews. Amandla! 28/29. December 2012**

"Like Marikana in the mining sector, 'De Doorns' has ignited the imagination of farmworkers and the rural poor. As with the mineworkers' demand for R12,500 a month, the farmworkers' demand of R150 per day has become the rallying call of this struggle.

In fact, mining and agriculture, the historical backbone of South African capitalism, have been severely shaken".

*Again, 13 years later, farmworkers struggle on for anything even approaching a living wage, and are routinely evicted from their homes.*

**Launch of EFF. Benjamin Fogel. Amandla! 32. October 2013**

"The EFF marks a break with the established consensus because they explicitly reject the line that we need a social compact based on wage suppression to ward off a forthcoming apocalypse and the panacea of Foreign Direct Investment as the solution to our economic woes."

*13 years later, as the EFF seems to be in decline, what is the assessment now?*

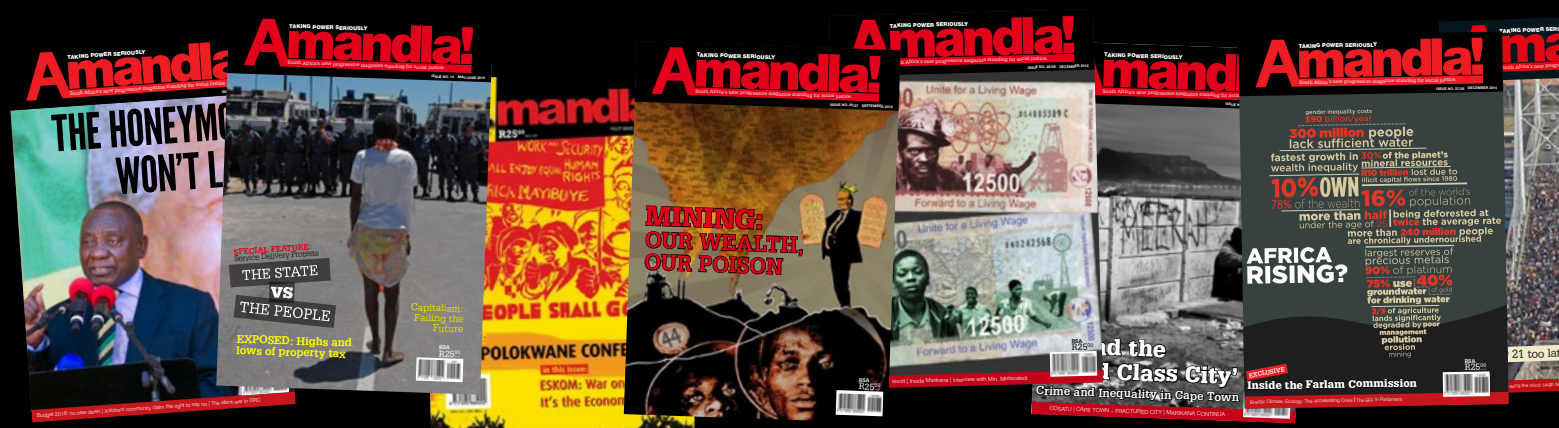
**NUMSA's expulsion from COSATU. Claude Gabriel. Amandla! 37/38. December 2014**

"This is a significant event—first, because NUMSA is one of the most important unions in the federation, and second, because it was one of the essential elements in COSATU's creation in 1985."

*Looking back, its significance has been the substantial weakening of the trade union movement. And politically, the 'NUMSA moment' was wasted and has evaporated.*

**Fees must Fall. Editorial Amandla! 43. December 2015**

"FMF has prioritised the public, democratic decision-making of an



independent, non-sectarian movement. It has worked vigorously to encourage open debate and to express independence from any political organisation. In fact, it has gone out of its way to make sure that political organisations know their place, as supporters of a movement owned and controlled by students.”

*The issue of independence of popular movements hasn't gone away.*

**Launch of SAFTU. Interview with Zwelinzima Vavi. Amandla! 51. March 2017**

“We have closed the chapter on Cosatu. Cosatu was part of the alliance - that was its mainstay, even during its best days of battles against e-tolls, battles against labour brokers, even when it fought privatisation and fought against job loss blood baths from as early as 1999 / 2000. But Cosatu was always open to an attack that you are campaigning and fighting and all of this things, but then we had to go and vote for the ANC in the next elections.

Now that will not be. That card will not be played against us. We are completely independent from any political party.”

*And then NUMSA came with its SRWP and tried to overturn that gain. With disastrous results for the federation.*

**Covid-19. Editorial. Amandla! 69. April 2020**

“The lockdown may be necessary to slow the spread of the virus. But it is not tenable without substantially dealing with the squalor that neoliberal policies have imposed on the poor. At the very least, government must:

- Guarantee the payment of the wages of all workers.
- Provide a basic income grant, free electricity and water, and food parcels for the needy, especially children.

- Impose a moratorium on evictions and retrenchments.
- In the medium term, roll out a state-driven housing and transport programme.”

*And indeed it wasn't tenable, and exacerbated the already terrible levels of poverty.*

## And a few of the key international issues

**Gaza burns again. News Briefs. Amandla! 1. March 2008**

“Israeli killings in Gaza are indiscriminate, brutal and totally out of scale with the claim of retaliation... Even Israel's staunchest ally, the USA, has called for restraint, but only after peace talks were called off in protest over Israel's invasion of Gaza.”

*Again, change is only for the worse. The only thing that shows you that this wasn't 2025 is the US call for restraint.*

**Arab Spring, Egypt. Interview with Nawal El Saadawi. Amandla! 19. April 2011**

“Women of all ages, especially young women, and even girls, participated in the revolution every day and night. They were in the streets in their thousands. Tahrir Square was our ground.”

*Looking at Egypt now, this feels very far away.*

**Sudan. Muzan Alneel and Walaa Salah. Amandla! 67. December 2018**

To avoid the tragedy of a total collapse, the transitional government and its regional and international partners must understand the commitment of the protestors to justice. They must learn the lessons of October 21st: the country will not see stability if the people do not see justice. Prioritising the compromise with the military over the demands of the people might seem like the easy way out.

But first of all, it is unethical... it is also a strategic mistake. It can lead the people, as they lose hope in the transitional government, to take the matter to the streets again to correct the path of the revolution.”

*We see the results of a failed revolution in the barbarism that is Sudan today.*

**Ukraine. Interview with Oksana Dutchak. Amandla! 81. March 2022**

“I had discussions with leftist people from other countries and I am sometimes surprised at how they are afraid of putting too little blame on Nato... For sure, Nato can be blamed at some point, but when the bombs start falling from the sky, only Russia can be blamed for the bombing. From here on the ground the situation looks different because we see how the Russian government behaves. They are not willing to give up their plans. We can hardly say let's keep Russia and Nato away from here, because it is only Russia who invaded Ukraine. It is not Nato who is bombing the cities. It is very obvious here.”

*Ukrainian leftists argue against the campist interpretations of the war. That debate continues.*

## And a political postscript

**SACP. Interview with Jeremy Cronin. Amandla! Pilot 1. July 2007**

“The Party has every right, should it so choose, to fight elections in its own right and this is something that needs to be assessed in an ongoing and flexible way”.

*18 years later, with the recent contribution of the Chairperson of the party, the issue rumbles on. The vanguard of the working class moves at the speed of a snail.*



# Another Left is possible

March 20, 2003. US Marines prepare to cross the Iraqi border from northern Kuwait. US imperial hubris reached its peak with the presidency of George W. Bush and the wars that his administration launched in Afghanistan and Iraq.

By **Gilbert Achcar**

*This is an edited version of a presentation that was made to the launching conference of ZASO in December 2023.*

**C**LIMATE CHANGE, WARS, genocides, economic turbulence: the world in which we presently live is worrying and the future looks quite bleak. This sorry state is in large part the result of decisions made in the last decade of the past century, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During those years, Washington opted for the perpetuation of its global dominance at the cost of world peace. This was to be achieved by stoking again past tensions with Russia and China. Washington treated these two countries as potential enemies, although neither of them represented any longer a systemic challenge to global capitalism, which they had both integrated into. This fundamental policy led to what I have described since then as the New Cold War. Unbridled neoliberalism

The economic corollary of this policy was unbridled neoliberalism. This included the toughening of the neoliberal diktats of international financial institutions, the culmination of the imperialism of free trade with the foundation of the World Trade Organisation, and the 'shock therapy' fostered by Washington and its allies in post-Soviet Russia. This went along with a benign neglect of the dangers of climate change. US imperial hubris reached its

peak with the presidency of George W. Bush and the wars that his administration launched in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Unbridled neoliberalism produced the most important crisis of global capitalism since the Great Depression of the interwar years of the twentieth century. The Great Recession of the late 2000s led to massive state intervention, using public funds to bail out the banking system. Unlike what many believed then, this crisis did not usher in the end of neoliberalism; on the contrary, it led to a renewed neoliberal onslaught. The same is true of the next gigantic economic crisis, the 2020 Great Lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic. Major changes in applied economics do not arise from neutral, intellectual debate. They reflect, primarily, changes in the balance of social forces.

This balance has remained until now largely in favour of global capitalism, at the expense of global labour. It was worsened by the two successive economic crises, along with the rise of unemployment and the expansion of working poverty. Both of these further weakened working class resistance and unionisation. France recently illustrated this. Pensions reform has been a key objective pursued by French capitalism for several decades. It was defeated in 1995 by the most important surge in class struggle that France has seen since 1968. The reform was finally enforced in 2023, in spite of stubborn resistance by the French labour movement.

## Radicalisation of Left and right

The social consequences of the economic crisis of the late 2000s fed a political radicalisation in two opposite directions.

On the one hand, a rise of progressive resistance struggles in the following decade, spectacularly inaugurated by the Arab Spring in 2011. It was followed by mobilisations in countries such as Spain, Greece and even the US itself. A second global wave of revolts in 2019 included a Second Arab Spring and struggle upsurges from East Asia to Latin America, before it was eventually choked off by Covid-19. This progressive radicalisation took a political form in the rise of mass-based anti-neoliberal currents in various countries, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. The successes of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Bernie Sanders in the US were more unexpected. And there was Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France. And a new wave of progressive governmental changes in Latin America—in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil.

On the other hand, this progressive wave was counterbalanced by a reactionary radicalisation, rising since the onset of the neoliberal onslaught. While the political 'centre' has kept shifting rightward ever since, the far right surged globally with the onset of neofascistic governments in several countries. These included major powers such as India under Narendra Modi, Russia under Vladimir Putin, Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro, and the US itself under

Donald Trump. The reversal included the increasingly authoritarian course on which China set under Xi Jinping.

## Failure of the Left

The overall global balance has clearly tilted in favour of the reactionary radicalisation. This is not a product of objective conditions alone, but also of the Left's own shortcomings and failure. It has reproduced many of the problems that marred the twentieth century's Left, including electoralism and self-limitation when in government or when it comes within reach. They also include bureaucratism, 'strongman' politics, and 'neo-campism'—knee-jerk support for, or lack of critique of, whoever is antagonised by Washington and its Western allies—"the enemy of my enemy is my friend".

Fundamentally, the Left has not managed to reinvent itself. There have been a few exceptions: Black Lives Matter in the US, for example, and the Resistance Committees in Sudan.

## Success of the right

Most of the far right, on the other hand, has reinvented itself as neofascism: it learned the lessons of the failure of twentieth-century fascism, and adapted to what was acceptable to the present-day capitalist order and big business. So, it has ardently espoused neoliberalism and proclaimed its adherence to procedural democracy. But it has gradually emptied it of content once in power, with authoritarian curtailment of political freedoms and suppression of basic conditions of political competition.

This reinvented far right has been rising globally at the expense of both the neoliberal mainstream and the Left, building up on the social resentment created by neoliberalism and channelling it, above all, into scapegoating migrants.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, launched by a Putin regime that has been ever more drifting to the far right, provided a major boost to the Western imperialist alliance under US hegemony. It renewed the original rationale for this alliance—'democracies' against authoritarianism—with customary hypocrisy and double standards. It also allowed a major expansion of NATO to Finland and Sweden, and it triggered a massive increase of military expenditure globally, to the great benefit of arms producers.

Biden basically continued his predecessor's foreign policy in two major respects:

1. He continued Trump's provocative stance on China. The difference was



*The progressive wave was counterbalanced by a reactionary radicalisation, rising since the onset of the neoliberal onslaught. The far right surged globally with the onset of neofascistic governments in several countries, such as India under Narendra Modi.*

that he tried to disguise the predatory economic drive of US imperialism against the rise of China's economic power by pretending, again, to uphold 'democracy' against China's autocratic drift under Xi.

2. He carried forward Trump's blatantly pro-Israel stance. So he focused on expanding the 'normalisation' of relations between Gulf oil monarchies and Israel. And he did not reverse any of Trump's pro-Israel moves, nor try to hold back the Israeli far right from further expanding its settler-colonial encroachment on the Palestinian West Bank.

## Dual role of the genocide

This policy laid the ground for the Biden administration's uninhibited endorsement of the genocidal war waged by Israel in Gaza since 7 October 2023. The Biden administration and most of its Western allies have de facto greenlighted the ongoing crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Israeli armed forces.

This first open condonation by Western governments of an openly genocidal war waged by a far-right government since the Second World War has hugely discredited Western liberalism and exposed its racist worldview. It has allowed for the normalisation of the European far right, not least through a joint condemnation of a purported 'new antisemitism'. This has become a thin veil for the shared Islamophobia that unites traditional antisemites and neocolonial white supremacists.

The Western governments' reaction to the Israeli onslaught on Gaza has given a major impetus to the global rightward drift.

At the same time, there is growing worldwide indignation towards the genocidal massacre of Palestinians, including growing protest within the United States itself. This is a further indication of the persistence of a significant potential, especially among the youth, in support of progressive causes. These include opposition to imperialist and colonial wars, to racism in all its forms, to gender oppression, to the continuous neoliberal dismantlement of all social gains achieved in the previous century, to capitalism itself, and to the ever more criminal neglect of governments in the face of climate change and its dreadful consequences.

## Reinvent the Left

This potential needs to be captured and channelled into organised forms that could tremendously enhance its effectiveness and confer a new credibility and hopefulness on the fight to change the world. That requires a reinvention of socialist anticapitalism, fully absorbing the lessons of the defeats of the twentieth century's Left and finally settling the unsettled accounts of its huge historical bankruptcy.

In sum, in order to be able to convince at large that "another world is possible"—the central slogan of the global justice movement since the turn of the century—it is imperative to first show in deeds, and not only in words, that another Left is possible. It is therefore extremely urgent for the Left to reinvent itself.

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# Resistance to Trump grows: mass marches, local rebellions, electoral victories

By **Dan La Botz**

**R**ESISTANCE TO PRESIDENT Donald Trump is growing, taking the form of massive, peaceful protest marches, small local rebellions, Democratic Party election victories, and a gradually changing public opinion. One could even talk about a growing class consciousness. The growth of the Resistance comes in reaction to Trump's attacks on public services, higher education, freedom of speech, and public employees and their unions, and the cruelty of the violent attacks on immigrants. The Resistance grows in response to the ferocity, depravity, and cruelty of Trump's polices that are affecting millions. So, we have to describe those policies before turning to the Resistance. We have to know what we're fighting, to fight more effectively.

## The authoritarian counter-revolution

We are in the midst of something like a counter-revolution—Trump is creating an authoritarian state that exists to further enrich the billionaire oligarchy by eliminating government regulation and taking away social programmes from working people and the poor. And at the same time he is attempting to replace the global, neoliberal, capitalist order, that began in the 1980s and went into crisis in the 2000s, with a nationalist, protectionist system.

Donald Trump is at the peak of his powers. He controls the presidency, both houses of Congress, and the servile Supreme Court. He is a billionaire himself and has the support of at least a [dozen billionaire backers](#) who donate hundreds of thousands of dollars each to his political campaigns, and other corporations and wealthy individuals who donate tens of thousands of dollars. This money powers both him and his MAGA movement. Many of the billionaires now also hold positions in the Trump administration.

Yet one cannot say that Trump and the Republicans represent the capitalist class, or at least not alone. Big tech corporations, Hollywood and the entertainment industry [contribute most to the Democrats](#). Silicon Valley



*Trump and his cabinet have increasingly become advocates of white, Christian nationalism. White people were the founders of the country, and they should remain the dominant group. So much for Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and native Americans who make up 40% of the population.*

corporations give about 80% of their political money to the Democrats. The resistance to Trump, if it is to be truly successful, must also resist the powers of these corporations and the parties they finance.

## The ideology of MAGA

Trump and his cabinet have increasingly become advocates of white, Christian nationalism. White people were the founders of the country, and they should remain the dominant group. So much for Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and native Americans who make up 40% of the population.

Christianity demands patriarchy—a man heads every family, and each family is made up of a man and a woman and their children. So women must be subordinate to men, and LBGQTQ folk are anathema.

And nationalism also means the idealisation of the United States, a country that was founded by conquest, and colonisers who exterminated and expropriated the indigenous people.

Trump and legal advisors have developed a series of legal doctrines on which they base their actions and which they are using to construct an authoritarian state:

1. The doctrine of “originalism”: the Constitution should be interpreted as it was originally intended when it was published in 1786.
2. The idea of “the unitary executive”: the President has absolute control over the entire executive branch—every department, agency, and office.
3. The “impoundment theory”: the President can impound and withhold funds voted by Congress, which is supposed to control the nation's budget.
4. The “major questions doctrine”: government agencies may not engage in activities that are not explicitly spelled out in the laws that created them.

These legal theories, together with the Supreme Court ruling on presidential immunity for acts committed as president, give Trump enormous, dictatorial power. We now live in a dictatorial regime. That is what the Resistance is fighting.

## Economic and social policy

In his two presidential terms, Trump has cut taxes on corporations and the rich by \$4.5 trillion (projected from 2017–2030), which has led him to also cut social programmes. For example, he cut the

budget for health, housing, education, science and the environment. Trump and the Republican Congress have proposed removing subsidies to the Affordable Care Act, the government health insurance policy that covers 44 million Americans. And he has fired 300,000 federal employees, torn up their collective bargaining agreements, and effectively destroyed their labour unions.

In an attack on academic freedom, Trump has attempted to take control of higher education, including at private universities such as Columbia and Harvard, by withholding billions of dollars in research funds, and reducing the 1.1 million foreign students who study at U.S. universities (and who usually pay full tuition.) The goal is to transform universities, whose faculty in the humanities are often liberal, progressive, or leftist, into more conservative institutions.

Trump has also attacked the media and the constitutional right to “freedom of speech and of the press”. He has banned several news organisations from events and briefings, filed lawsuits against major media, and cut federal funding for public radio and TV. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press in America still exist, but they are under fierce attack.

Since taking office he has issued several Executive Orders ending all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programmes, intended to protect racial minorities, women, and LGBTQ people, to create fairness in hiring, promotion, and treatment of federal workers.

## Migration

The US under former President Joe Biden accepted 125,000 refugees per year. Under Trump, the limit is 7,500, with priority given to his infamous white Afrikaner programme.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids have been among the most controversial and emotional issues of his administration. The ICE raids are conducted by armed, masked men and look like kidnappings. They are often violent and include arrests not only of undocumented immigrants, but sometimes of US citizens. They have removed over two million undocumented immigrants or approximately 8,000 per day (including self-deportations).

False claims have been used to justify federalising and mobilising the National Guard, and in some cases the Marines, dispatching troops to a number of cities.

## War-mongering foreign policy

Trump has also transformed American foreign policies. While he claims to be “the president of peace,” many of his statements and actions portend war. Renaming the Department of Defense the Department of War is more than symbolic. Trump, like former US presidents, continues to provide billions of dollars in military assistance to Israel as it carries out its genocidal war against Gaza.

He and his Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, have been ordering the destruction of small boats, mostly in the Caribbean, that they alleged, without evidence, are transporting drugs. So far, they have blown up 18 boats taking 70 lives.

At the same time, in Europe Trump has failed to provide the weapons needed for Ukrainians to defend their sovereignty, hoping instead to reach an economic deal with Russian dictator Vladimir Putin.

## The protest marches against Trump

Millions of Americans have risen up in protest. There have been large peaceful marches, local militant actions that verge on rebellion, and voters turning to the left, voting for Democrats, and in some cases for progressive Democrats.

The Resistance might be said to have begun on January 21, 2017 with between 3 and 5 million people gathering in Washington DC for the Women’s March, the day after the inauguration of Trump in his first term. Since then, the protests have been coming every couple of months, with protestors demonstrating in hundreds

of cities, towns, and hamlets across the country, each protest larger than the last. In the latest “No Kings” protests, 7 million people participated in 2,600 cities in all 50 states. It was the largest protest in US history. Like the first No Kings, this was organised by a coalition of 200 groups, the most important being Democratic Party groups like Indivisible and MoveOn, and NGOs like Public Citizen and the American Civil Liberties Union, and activist network 50501.

The demonstrations have taken on the character of a social movement, and it is not clear that groups like Indivisible will be able to determine its course. It is a movement of people who, while they’re Democrats, are sick of the Democratic Party leadership.

In ten months, the demands have become clearer. They want to take their country back from Trump; they want no dictators, no billionaires. And they know that they are fighting fascism, which, if it isn’t here now, could be just around the corner.

## Local protests verging on rebellion

In some areas people have turned to more militant action that at times has verged on rebellion. In June in Los Angeles, and in September in Chicago, both cities with large Latino immigrant communities, protestors began to confront ICE officers engaged in raids on immigrant communities, and to take action to try to stop the raids. Protestors warned when ICE were coming, and at times blocked streets with their bodies or their cars.

In response, ICE has become more violent, with ICE officers using flash-



*In the latest “No Kings” protests, 7 million people participated in 2,600 cities in all 50 states. It was the largest protest in US history.*

bang grenades, tear gas and pepper spray, beating people in their custody, and firing guns.

The protests have been peaceful, if sometimes militant and disruptive. There is no sign at this point that armed attacks will become a trend.

There is also the resistance of university presidents who have refused to accede to Trump's demands, and of progressive law firms and lawyers who have not only brought law suits against Trump's administration but have also refused to be silenced by him.

## On the electoral front

Most Americans who oppose Trump put their hope in ending his regime through elections. In the November 4 national elections, the Democrats won several important races, and also some minor ones. The results suggest a turning away from Trump that will be tested in the November 2026 mid-term elections, where there is the potential to flip the Congress to a Democratic majority.

## The most notable victory was that of Zohran Mamdani in New York

Mamdani ran on a platform calling for freezing rents, making public transportation free, and providing free childcare. And he also made clear that he supported Palestine, could not support Israel as a religious state, and promised to arrest Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes if he came to New York. He won wide support from younger voters, renters, labour union members, and Black and Latino voters, and he won one-third of the Jewish vote.

Mamdani's victory was a defeat for President Donald Trump, but it was also

a victory for the progressive wing of the Democratic Party and for the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the country's largest socialist organisation, with about 80,000 members. However, in Virginia and New Jersey, mainstream or moderate Democrats were elected; they are definitely not progressives.

When he becomes mayor on January 1, 2026, Mamdani will face enormous challenges. New York City is the centre of American capitalism and Mamdani will face stiff opposition from the city's financial and real estate elite. To pay for his multibillion-dollar programme of a rent freeze, free buses, and universal free childcare, Mamdani will have to persuade the state governor to support his goals, and convince the legislature to provide the budget—a serious challenge.

And Trump has suggested he will stop Mamdani and punish New Yorkers for electing a socialist. And he has the power to withhold funds from the city and to send ICE and the National Guard to the city.

Mamdani will have to move DSA's members and many others to build a movement to fight for his programme. He can only be as good as the movement that supports him.

## The future of the Democratic Party

Mamdani's astonishing victory has created enormous excitement, and there will be attempts to change the Democratic Party's direction. But it appears hopelessly out of touch with the American people, and it is not clear that it can change. Its main function is to represent the interests of certain sections of the capitalist class, not to speak for the people. Bernie Sanders' 2016 campaign for president, which had a programme that spoke to the issues of the working

class, was crushed by the Democratic Party leadership.

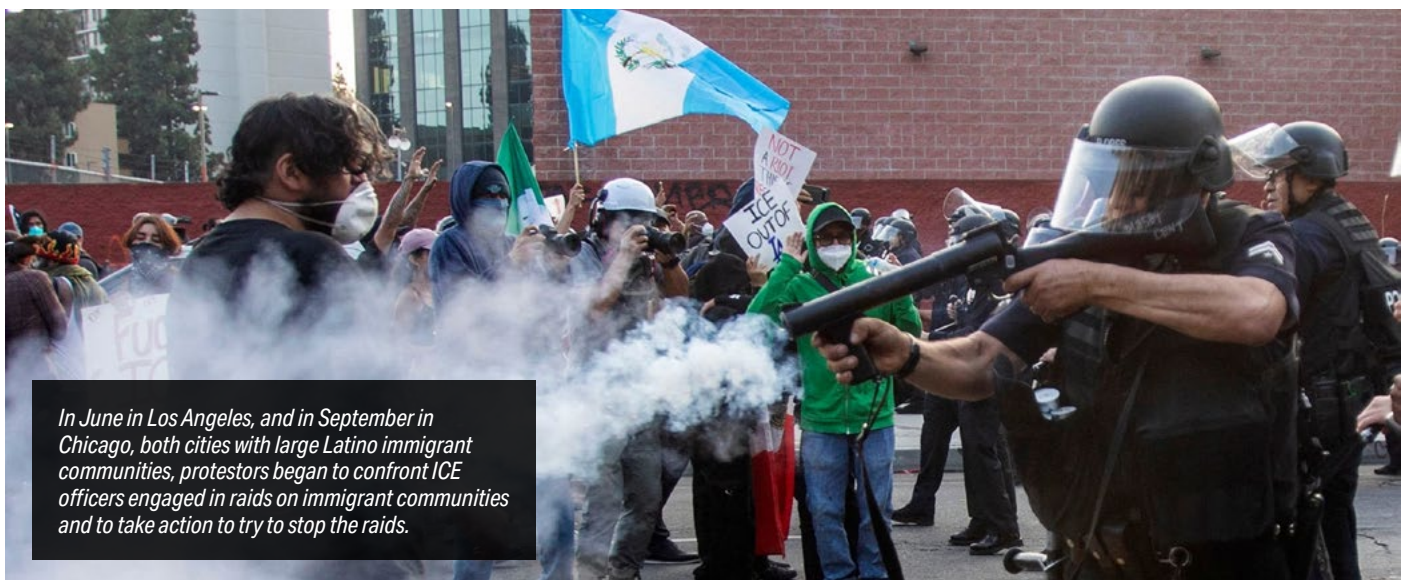
The Democratic Party is not a democratic organisation with an active membership. It has no members and virtually no organisation at the popular level. It is led and controlled by the elected professional politicians, and by donors who finance them, and is administered by political apparatchiks. It raises billions of dollars which go to lawyers, political strategists, and principally to TV, radio, and social media advertising. Ordinary people play no role in setting the party agenda, hiring personnel, establishing goals, or anything else.

Election to national political office now costs several million dollars. The reform groups, progressives and leftists must either drop out or adopt the approaches of the Democrats.

## The way forward

The Resistance must continue to do what it has been doing: mass demonstrations, small local rebellions, and fighting to win elections. In these mass marches, in small local rebellions, and in elections, the American people are standing up against Trump. We will need more militant disruptive actions, civil disobedience, and strikes on a large scale to defeat him, and there is a chance we can do it. Still, we face the threat of Trump's authoritarianism developing into actual fascism, and if that happens the Resistance will have to change as well.

Dan La Botz was a founding member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). He is the author of [Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union](#) (1991). He is also a co-editor of [New Politics](#) and editor of [Mexican Labor News and Analysis](#).



*In June in Los Angeles, and in September in Chicago, both cities with large Latino immigrant communities, protestors began to confront ICE officers engaged in raids on immigrant communities and to take action to try to stop the raids.*

# What the night teaches:

## TOWARD A NEW LEFT IN AN AGE OF UNFREEDOM

*The anxieties of a neoliberal age have merged with a century-old ideological machine, resulting in a political formation that is both achingly familiar and terrifyingly new. When the BJP finally ascended to power, it did so not as an electoral accident but as an ideological culmination.*

By **Sushovan Dhar**

SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL HAS shifted in India. We can sense it not only in the obvious places—parliament, television studios, election rallies—but in the slower, quieter zones of life: in schools, where fear becomes a language; around village wells, where caste still decides the order of thirst; in the silence that descends when the name of a minority religious community is uttered in anger; and in a thousand unspoken hesitations that now punctuate ordinary speech. The anxieties of a neoliberal age have merged with a century-old ideological machine, resulting in a political formation that is both achingly familiar and terrifyingly new.

### A century in the making

This phenomenon is not the simple rise of a right-wing party. It is the triumph of a project that has waited patiently for generations, gathering strength in neighbourhood shakhas, religious festivals, charity networks, and school textbooks. As [Christophe Jaffrelot has shown](#), the Sangh Parivar is less a political organisation than a sprawling social organism: it breathes through institutions, circulates through habits, and settles in the smallest crevices

### Structure of Hindu nationalism

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, lies at the heart of the fascist umbrella. Founded in 1925, this is a Hindu nationalist organisation that has emerged as one of the most influential forces in contemporary India. Rather than functioning as a political party, it operates as a nationwide network of volunteer cadres who convene regularly for ideological training, physical drills, and community activities. Over the course of a century, it has established schools, charities, cultural organisations, and outreach initiatives that significantly shape our everyday social lives.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) serves as the political arm of the RSS, with many of India's leading figures, including the prime minister, having undergone training within its ranks. To grasp India's current authoritarian and majoritarian shifts, one must understand the RSS—its worldview, its organisational discipline, and its long-term ambition to transform India into an explicitly Hindu nation.

The *shakha* is the RSS's basic unit: a small, routine gathering where drills, chants, and informal instruction cultivate discipline and ideological belonging. Modest in form but powerful in effect, it embeds the organisation's worldview into daily habit. Through thousands of such neighbourhood assemblies, the RSS has built a cadre network unmatched in scale or durability.

of cultural life. When the BJP finally ascended to power, it did so not as an electoral accident but as an ideological culmination.

The novelty lies in the way this old machinery has blended with the wreckage left behind by neoliberalism. The Indian countryside is haunted by the ghosts of abandoned promises—of minimum support prices, of stable wages, of irrigation canals that dried up before

they could reach the field. Workers, living under flyovers and carrying smartphones and debts in their pockets, overflow the cities. A generation has grown up believing that modernity means precarity, that mobility means insecurity, and that survival means fighting for scraps. [Kalyan Sanyal's insight](#)—India's vast “zones of exclusion”—no longer feels like scholarly terminology; it describes the texture of daily life.

## Neoliberal ruins, authoritarian dreams

In these ruins, Hindu nationalism has found its language. Wherever economic certainty collapsed, cultural resentment spread; wherever jobs vanished, myths of historical grievance grew; wherever the welfare state receded, the politics of humiliation stepped in. “You may not be secure,” the majoritarian narrative whispers, “but at least you are superior to somebody”. It is a toxic morality, but in an era of displaced hopes, it has been effective. [Dave Renton’s reflections on fascism](#)—its capacity to turn despair into a desire for purification—fit the present moment with uncomfortable precision, though India’s authoritarianism wears the mask of electoral democracy.

The result is a peculiar hybrid: an authoritarian majoritarian order with fascistic aspirations, operating through the familiar procedures of the Republic, while hollowing it out from within. Elections continue, but their spirit fades; institutions stand, but their autonomy erodes; courts pronounce judgements, but justice grows timid. [Perry Anderson once wrote](#) that India never fully resolved the contradictions of its nationalist origin; today those contradictions have returned with a vengeance, now sharpened by the ambitions of a movement that seeks to replace the Republic with a civilisation-state.

## The limits of liberal opposition

In the face of this transformation, the mainstream opposition moves like a sleepwalker. Its imagination is still stuck in the terminology of the 1990s: efficiency, growth, development, secularism as a token ritual, welfare as patronage, and coalitions as the ultimate goal of politics. It fails to see that the BJP doesn’t merely contest elections; it rewrites the very language in which politics is conducted. How can a party whose worldview is exhausted, whose secularism is timid, whose economic programme is indistinguishable from the ruling order, and whose social imagination is limited by market ‘common sense’, how can such a party confront a movement that seeks a total remaking of society?

Yet the crisis of the Left is more painful still, because it is a crisis of possibility. The Left once anchored mass movements across the country, organised workers and peasants, and taught generations to read not only words but the whole world. Today, it



*Foot soldiers of Hindu nationalism drilling in the shakha. The shakha is the base unit of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, which lies at the heart of the fascist umbrella. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) serves as the political arm of the RSS.*

stands diminished: present but hesitant, principled but tired, organisationally widespread but politically timid. Parliament has become the gravitational centre, drawing the Left ever deeper into alliances that dilute its clarity and muffle its voice. It behaves as if the threat can be outmanoeuvred with tactical arithmetic, as if the [Sangh Parivar](#) is merely another adversary in a long parliamentary play.

But the far right is not a parliamentary adversary. It is a civilisational project, and only a counter-civilisational politics can meet it. The Left must recover its sense of historical mission, its capacity to imagine beyond the horizons of the present, to mobilise those who live and work in the shadows of the economy, and to speak a language that makes dignity central to political life.

For this, the Left must confront a reality it has long recognised but has not always treated with the urgency required: caste is not an adjunct to class; it is the very grammar of labour in India. The Dalit question is not a question of representation alone; it is about the organisation of work, the allocation of degradation, and the distribution of fear. The caste order fractures the working class before it can even assemble itself. Any Left politics that does not place caste abolition at its core will find its social base narrow, its alliances fragile, and its imagination incomplete. The very people who suffer most from capitalism’s violence—landless labourers, sanitation workers, informal workers, migrants, Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, and Muslims—are the ones whom the far right seeks either to co-opt, or to expel from the national fold. Therefore, the Left must construct a

countervailing force from the bottom up, targeting the areas where caste and class intersect most violently.

## The global implications

But the terrain of struggle is not only national. India’s authoritarian turn radiates outward, leaving a permanent mark on the global order. A country that houses one of the world’s largest workforces—and perhaps its most precarious—cannot embrace authoritarianism without consequences for global working class struggles. When worker protections are gutted in India, global capital applauds; when unions are weakened, supply chains tighten; when dissent is criminalised, the world’s factories grow quieter. Global capital not only tolerates the authoritarian turn; it actively embraces it.

India’s growing position as a huge consumer market exacerbates this complicity. Tech giants and financial conglomerates treat India as the next frontier of expansion. A regime that offers deregulation, cheaper labour, subdued unions, and political stability is a gift for investors. And so the global silence grows louder. Democracies that preach human rights fall mute when confronted with India’s size, its market, and its geopolitical utility.

Then there is the matter of climate. India stands at the frontline of the climate crisis; its heatwaves, cyclones, droughts, and floods are harbingers of a planetary future. The developmental vision of the present government, marked by extractive mining, coal expansion, and dispossession disguised as progress,

threatens not just India's ecological survival but the world's. An authoritarian state that suppresses environmental movements and criminalises indigenous resistance accelerates catastrophe.

And geopolitically, India has become a pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy. It is courted as a counterweight to China, granting the ruling regime a kind of moral immunity. Western powers tolerate what they would denounce elsewhere because India is too large, too strategic, and too central to the choreography of global rivalry. The erosion of Indian democracy thus becomes intertwined with the interests of imperial power; the global fight against authoritarianism must pass through India.

The crisis lies in the fact that India, a vast country that is central to global capitalism, crucial to climate survival, and essential to geopolitical balance, is sliding towards an authoritarian future, while its traditional opposition remains paralysed. The importance of resisting this trajectory reaches well beyond the confines of the national frontiers. To combat Hindu authoritarianism, it is essential to advocate for the future of democracy, worker's rights, ecology and global demilitarisation.

## Toward a New Left formation

From this perspective, the Left's renewal is not merely desirable; it is necessary. Its task is not to return to old formulas or cling to exhausted organisational habits, but to re-imagine itself as a force capable of speaking to a century defined by precarity, ecological collapse, and identity-driven authoritarianism. It must build new solidarities among the precarious and the excluded; it must craft new idioms that resonate across caste, class, religion, and region; it must treat political education as a living practice rather than an archival memory; it must embrace internationalism, not as a slogan but as a strategic orientation.

Above all, the Left must recover the art it once mastered: the art of naming the world—its structures of violence, its possibilities of transformation, its concealed fractures, its suppressed dreams. For the far right thrives when the world is misnamed, when exploitation is called destiny, when suffering is called sacrifice, when oppression is called tradition, when dissent is called treason. To resist this tide is to restore the belief that another social order is possible and that the collective power of the

dispossessed can break the horizon of inevitability. India's authoritarian turn is not yet complete; the future remains open, though dangerously so. The question is whether the Left can rise to meet it, not as a relic of past struggles, but as the architect of new ones.

If such a Left can be built, it will not only confront the far right on its home terrain; it will speak to the world as well. For the struggle unfolding in India is not a regional drama; it is one of the great political battles of our time. Its outcome will shape not only the fate of a nation, but also the trajectory of democracy itself.

## The slow work of renewal

In the end, the most honest path forward may be the one [Achin Vanaik gestures toward with quiet clarity](#): the slow, almost subterranean work of building a New Left from the ground up. Not a revival of the old parties, nor a miracle born of electoral arithmetic, but a long season of molecular accumulation—patient organising in cramped rooms and on broken fields, in union meetings, in women's collectives, in [Dalit bastis](#) and migrant dormitories, in those half-forgotten corners where the republic's promises never truly arrived. Out of such places come the only cadres who can withstand the long winters of authoritarianism—people tempered by struggle, educated in the ethics of solidarity, guided by a vision larger than the exhaustion of liberal democracy. If history teaches anything, it is that moments of sudden rupture are prepared in years of invisibility.

A New Left, if it is to be born, will come quietly at first, gathering fragments of resistance. until one day, when conditions ripen and fear falters, it emerges with a force that seems to have appeared overnight but has, in truth, been a century in the making. Against a movement that dreams of remaking the nation in the image of a wounded past, only a Left committed to a deeper, more generous democracy—one that transcends capitalism rather than pleading with it—can offer a horizon worth walking toward.

**Sushovan Dhar** is a political activist and commentator.



*Queuing to vote in the national elections in 2024. Nearly a billion people voting over several months. An authoritarian majoritarian order with fascistic aspirations operates through the familiar procedures of the Republic, while hollowing it out from within. Elections continue, but their spirit fades.*

# What is left of the Chinese Left?

By **Au Loong-yu**

**W**ITH TRUMP IN power, many parts of the world are swinging to the far right. This is the most pressing challenge we currently face. But what is the situation of the Left in China? And where is the Chinese far right?

## The Left since 1989

About 25 years ago, at the turn of the century, the shock from the June 4th Massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989 began fading away, and political life became slightly active again, especially among academia. Debates revived, with positions divided between the ‘Liberals’ and the ‘New Left’. But the most vocal were neither liberals nor leftists. The former were more like neoliberals, interested in pushing for greater ‘marketisation’, rather than demanding liberal democracy. This was partly (and understandably) out of concern for their safety, and partly out of genuine belief in the (capitalist) market. The latter were mostly nationalists who defended the party state (after the massacre!) and saw it as the protector of the ‘national interest’ or the ‘people’s’ economic interest—but never their political rights.

On top of this, the age of the internet also brought forward voices from minjian, or ‘common folk’, from ‘Maoist’ to ‘Trotskyist’ or ‘Social-Democrat’. This was also the time of NGOs, which worked on and campaigned for different issues. Hong Kong’s academia and civil society organisations played a significant role in this process. Although these NGOs did not work on political campaigning, they were still closely monitored by the state (especially those working on labour issues), fearing they might radicalise.

The flourishing of political debates and of NGOs prompted many to believe that the age of liberalisation was coming. But the opposite was the case. In 2015, Xi Jinping rounded up and banned most of the labour NGOs in mainland China, and arrested human rights lawyers. In



*A railway project in Nairobi, Kenya, a signature project of China's Belt and Road Initiative. China's overseas investment has ranked in the top five of the world total for many years, and it has sought commercial success and geopolitical power—this is not worse than other capitalist countries, but neither is it better.*

2018 some [Maoist students launched a solidarity campaign with workers at the Jasic factory](#), who wanted to found a workplace trade union. Soon they were arrested (or simply kidnapped), and this was followed by a ban on student-led ‘Marxism Societies’ at various universities. In fact, targeting Maoists had begun more than 20 years ago, when some attacked the late president Jiang Zemin for giving party membership to capitalists. This in turn radicalised some Maoists, who founded the ‘Maoist Communist Party’. But before long, in 2009, their leader Ma Houzhi (馬厚芝) was sentenced to ten years in prison.

With the full-scale crackdown in Hong Kong in 2020, Beijing took revenge on its people for daring to resist Beijing’s extradition bill a year earlier. It exterminated all political opposition and social movements there, including trade unions and the small Left circles. Of the last players, the small Trotskyist group there was symbolic—it had been the CCP’s longest and most consistent Left opposition, dating back nearly a hundred years. Before the crackdown, the former colony had given a second chance of survival to a wide range of China’s political dissidents.

In the Mainland there has not been any organised opposition since 1949. From 1979, there was a strong liberal current, but it was not allowed to organise. From

2017, when Liu Xiaobo, the leading liberal advocate, died in prison, the liberals’ influence has dwindled under Xi’s repression, although it has managed to make noises occasionally. Only the nationalists have grown stronger and stronger, because they have the support of the regime. Nowadays, no visible Left current remains. Even more chilling: despite being persecuted for years, the [Falun Gong](#) remains the most vocal and organised current overseas (probably with an underground presence in China). As a religious cult which demands personal loyalty to its top leader, their political orientation is not helpful to

working people.

## What is this regime?

So how do we characterise a regime which suppresses all dissidents, from liberals to all shades of Left currents and independent civic associations? Before we give it a name, let’s briefly discuss its basic features:

1. State power is unlimited. Not only can all public affairs ultimately be controlled by the state, but also private lives as well, from women’s fertility, to holding a passport, to arresting young people enjoying Halloween.
2. The state is in turn under the absolute control of the party, which never bothers to hold free and open elections. And the party, in turn, is led by a top leader who can change the country’s constitution at will to make himself a lifelong autocrat.
3. There is thought control and indoctrination with the party’s ideology, whose essence is simple—tingdanghua, gendangzou (聽黨話·跟黨走), or “listen to the party and follow the party”.
4. Its Chinese nationalism is ethno-centric. It sees the nation as a homogenous whole and the party as its natural agent. Its [Big Han chauvinism](#) has now resulted in

racism, including cultural genocide and mass incarceration of Tibetans and Uighurs.

5. The party also sees Chinese society as a homogeneous whole, so dissidents are a threat to the nation that need to be put down. Not only is organised opposition not allowed, but even individual opposition, once it becomes influential, is silenced.
6. To achieve the goal of zero political opposition, the party-state resorts to full-scale surveillance and the infamous [social credit system](#). State-crafted digitalised money further enhances the Orwellian society.
7. Its economic strategy, since the mid-1950s, has always been to prioritise investment in infrastructure and heavy/advanced industries over people's basic consumption and wellbeing, as the Great Leap Forward / the Great Famine have shown. Since 1979, the party has reintroduced capitalism to China, and along with it a massive influx of foreign capital. This has enabled the party to achieve the goals of both rapid industrialisation and feeding the people. Relative poverty (labour's share of national income) has in fact risen, however, because the party bureaucracy has used its absolute power to grab and commercialise vital resources to enrich themselves. It is a bourgeoisified bureaucracy.
8. Its overseas investment has ranked in the top five of the world for many years, and it has sought commercial success and geopolitical power —this is not worse than other capitalist countries, but neither is it better. This has necessarily driven Beijing along the road of global economic expansionism. This has been followed by political expansionism, as it sees itself as the legitimate successor of imperial / Kuomintang (KMT) China, along with the "territory" it perceives to have belonged to it. This is why it has copied the KMT's "nine-dash line" false claim over a big chunk of the South China Sea.

### A far-right, imperialist regime

Only a far-right regime contains all of these features. While Trump is still in the first stage of autocratic engineering, Xi Jinping's Orwellian autocracy has already advanced into its digitalised

version, precisely because his party already has complete control. To see Beijing as something fundamentally more progressive than Trump's administration is one of the greatest delusions.

In the midst of the trade war between the US and China, quite a few among the international Left feel happy about Beijing "standing up to Trump's bullying". While we are temporarily entertained by Trump's failure, we must not forget that any Xi victory in his counter-offensive always requires the people to pay the price. And, in the face of both the trade war (an external pressure) and China's internal crisis of over-capacity / unemployment, Xi has resorted to accelerating China's exports. This just shifts the problem elsewhere; it doesn't solve it. In fact, it will magnify the global crisis.

Fundamentally speaking, Xi is not fighting imperialism. Rather, he is content with his personal agenda of haodaxigong (好大喜功)—a craving for greatness and glory—while serving the collective interest of the bourgeoisified bureaucracy. Whether Beijing has reached parity with US power is an important but secondary issue. The primary issue is that

Beijing's global expansionism has gone down the road of imperialism. Honest socialists do not wait until Beijing has fully achieved its goal before warning the world of this danger.

As a long-standing far right regime, with no checks on the state from within or from any opposition or social movement outside, Beijing poses grave dangers for the Chinese people and for the world. Yes, US imperialism is much stronger militarily and economically, and is now more harmful to the world. But China could potentially do immense harm as well. No one could stop Xi from starting an unjust war (just as Deng Xiaoping invaded Vietnam in 1979) or from prioritising his fight for hegemony over his people, just as Mao did. I have no answer to this mega challenge, but the least we can do is to call a Leviathan monster by its correct name.

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](#).



The red dashes are the "nine-dash line" — first published around 1947 by the KMT-led Chinese government with 11 dashes, reduced to nine dashes in 1952. Inside the line lie China's claims to "historic rights" over islands, waters and resources. It sees itself as the legitimate successor of imperial / (KMT) China.

# VENEZUELA AND THE GLOBAL LEFT

## no to both authoritarianism and imperialist aggression

By Daniel Chavez

AS THE GLOBAL RIGHT ADVANCES and socialists worldwide grapple with how to build Left alternatives, Venezuela's crisis raises fundamental strategic questions that extend beyond regional borders. The current political, economic and social situation under Nicolás Maduro's government represents one of Latin America's most complex contemporary authoritarian cases. It requires clarity from the international Left on how to navigate between opposing authoritarianism and resisting imperialism.

Following the fraudulent presidential elections of July 2024, the government has intensified its authoritarian trajectory, while facing a multidimensional collapse. At the same time, Donald Trump's return to the US presidency has heightened interventionist threats. Naval operations in the Caribbean have caused numerous civilian casualties, and mass deportations have targeted Venezuelan migrants. Meanwhile, the anti-government camp has fractured, with key sectors aligning with international far-right forces.

Venezuela's crisis raises fundamental strategic questions for socialists worldwide. How should the Left engage with Maduro's authoritarian regime? Do we need to defend Venezuela against imperialist threats? What about the rising popular opposition? These questions require answers that go beyond sectarian stances and acknowledge the complexity of the Venezuelan situation.

### Maduro's authoritarian consolidation

Maduro's government has drifted into becoming a fully autocratic regime. The process of authoritarian consolidation has been gradual, with social and political repression intensifying after the July 2024 presidential elections, effectively reducing popular mobilisation. In those elections, people voted for radical change, but the official electoral results were never released. The National Electoral Council (CNE) has not published detailed results by state, party, or municipality.



*Venezuela's crisis raises fundamental strategic questions for socialists worldwide. How should the Left engage with Maduro's authoritarian regime? Do we need to defend Venezuela against imperialist threats? What about the rising popular opposition?*

The state is strong on coercion but weak or non-existent on protecting social rights. As of May 2025, public sector workers' minimum income (combining basic salary and bonuses) stood at approximately US\$160 per month, with the basic minimum wage alone being much lower, at around US\$3-3.50. Meanwhile, the basic food basket costs between US\$500 and US\$700 a month. To survive, families must resort to informal work, remittances from migrants abroad, and bonuses distributed through local participatory mechanisms—what Venezuelans call *matar tigrillos* ("killing little tigers"), meaning quick and informal work that uses whatever skills people have to earn money to cover basic needs. The economic and social crisis has generated an exodus of nearly eight million Venezuelans—almost a third of the population.

Yet Maduro and his business partners are absolutely convinced they must never give up power, no matter what they have to do to keep it. Political prisoners remain incarcerated in harsh conditions. Many are held incommunicado, without private lawyers, unable to see family members, and with seriously worsening health conditions.

### Far-right alliances

On 8 February 2025, the European Parliament's far-right group, Patriots for Europe, met in Madrid under the slogan "Make Europe Great Again". Leaders including Spain's Marine Le Pen, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Italy's Matteo Salvini, and Spain's Santiago Abascal, attended. During this meeting, the main leader of the Venezuelan opposition, and this year's Nobel Prize winner, María Corina Machado, intervened via streaming to thank "the work of the Patriots for Europe group within the European Parliament, which has always been at the vanguard of the struggle for the Venezuelan people's freedom".

Her participation confirmed historical alliances between the right-wing opposition leader and global reactionary forces. Machado enthusiastically supported the Trump government's expulsion and imprisonment of alleged *Tren de Aragua* members in the Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT) in El Salvador, arguing a link between the criminal gang and Maduro's government. This is precisely the argument the White House has used to declare the Venezuelan gang a terrorist organisation, accusing people of membership for reasons as banal as having a crown-shaped tattoo.

## Trump's return and the escalating imperialist aggression

The relationship between the Maduro government and the White House has fluctuated in recent years. In January 2025, Trump's special envoy Richard Grenell arrived in Caracas. A transactional, mutually functional relationship between the governments seemed possible at that time. Maduro's government actively participated in Trump's deportation policy, including sending planes belonging to Conviasa, the Venezuelan national airline, to collect deported migrants. Good will towards the Trump administration was evidently motivated by questions around sanctions and oil policy.

In the second half of this year, the US government significantly shifted its policy. Chavismo's most vocal opponents reached the White House and secured positions in the Senate and House of Representatives. From Florida, Republican politicians like Marco Rubio have built careers on direct opposition to the global Left, promising to vigorously attack the Cuba-Nicaragua-Venezuela triad. For many Venezuelans, the 'American dream' has suddenly and catastrophically vanished, yet they still hope Trump's government will strongly oppose Chavismo. The harshest measures against the Venezuelan government are only just beginning, and military escalation cannot be ruled out.

## Reject military actions

Socialists worldwide must categorically reject US naval operations in the Caribbean, carried out under the pretence of fighting drug trafficking. These operations have included bombings of Venezuelan vessels, resulting in dozens of deaths since the beginning of September, impacting coastal communities and increasing the risks of conflict. Such actions, violating international law, do not solve issues like drug trafficking, which is used as an excuse for interventions that prioritise geopolitical interests over regional peace.

The country is extremely weak in the face of foreign aggression. Internationally, it is practically isolated. Internally, the social fabric is torn apart. Instead of recognising this and taking steps towards national reconstruction — for example, releasing all political prisoners — the government relies on a single

and ineffectual response: the mobilisation of millions of militia members. This has worsened the atmosphere of conflict and deepened the militarisation of civil society. And it disregards the 1999 Constitution (CRBV), which emphasises peace and dialogue.

Venezuelan progressive political and civil society organisations, such as the *Plataforma Ciudadana en Defensa de la Constitución* (Citizen's Platform in Defence of the Constitution), have issued urgent and compelling calls. They appeal to all democratic and popular forces, and the broadest spectrum of the Venezuelan opposition, to set aside political or ideological affiliation and overcome all forms of sectarianism and arrogance. They call for Left forces to radically distance themselves from any belligerent adventure and from all forms of foreign interference. This means openly rejecting all forms of interference and promotion of violence by foreign powers on Venezuelan territory, as well as the repressive actions of Nicolás Maduro's own regime.

## Questions for the international Left

The international Left cannot defend an authoritarian government that systematically violates human rights, keeps 900 political prisoners in deplorable conditions, and has presided over the exodus of millions fleeing intolerable living conditions. The regime's consolidation of power through electoral fraud, systematic repression, and the suspension of fundamental rights places it squarely within patterns of authoritarian rule that socialists have historically opposed. Nonetheless, this necessary critique must not lead to alignment with right-wing opposition forces, whose alliances with international far-right movements show how segments of the opposition have embraced

reactionary politics incompatible with genuine democratic transformation.

True anti-imperialism involves strengthening popular sovereignty, democratic institutions, and social movements. Maduro's regime has systematically sought to destroy all of these. The Left must therefore support the country's sovereignty, while demanding that the government take measures to genuinely strengthen it: releasing political prisoners, restoring democratic freedoms, and engaging in peaceful dialogue to achieve a constitutional resolution.

The challenge lies in building international solidarity that strengthens autonomous popular organisation within Venezuela, rather than bolstering either the regime or the right-wing opposition. This involves recognising that Venezuelan workers, students, community organisers, and ordinary citizens seeking dignity, democracy, and social justice are the true popular opposition, whose struggles align with Left principles.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro, represents Latin America's democratic Left. In a recent message on social media, Petro said:

*I don't defend Maduro, I didn't recognise his election, but even less do I defend an invasion of Bolívar's homeland. That would be the ultimate betrayal of the history and future of all of Latin America and the Caribbean. Venezuelans' problems are resolved by Venezuelans. That is the principle of people's self-determination.*

Petro's formulation provides a framework for the international Left. Only through principled internationalism can the Left meaningfully contribute to overcoming Venezuela's authoritarian maze, while defending Latin American self-determination against resurgent imperialism under the Trump administration. Venezuela's future depends not on external saviours — whether imperial or otherwise — but on the Venezuelan people's ability to build democratic alternatives that transcend both authoritarianism and reaction.

**Daniel Chavez** is a Uruguayan-Dutch political economist. He is a Senior Project Officer at the Transnational Institute (TNI) and a Senior Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg.



*Socialists worldwide must categorically reject US naval operations in the Caribbean, carried out under the pretence of fighting drug trafficking. They are used as an excuse for interventions that prioritise geopolitical interests over regional peace.*

# BRAZIL IN THE MIRROR OF LATIN AMERICA

By **Israel Dutra**

**T**O UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT political situation in Brazil, we need to situate it within Trump's renewed offensive across Latin America.

Trump's election has opened a new stage in the relationship between US imperialism and Latin American countries. Now led by the Trumpist far right and its circle of billionaires, US imperialism wants to impose a new form of colonisation, targeting the Global South.

On the one hand, the neocolonial agenda has a far-right laboratory with the genocide in Gaza. On the other, Trump is positioning himself to confront the expansion of China, which, through the BRICS, is increasingly vying for more space in the world market.

And Trump is acting on several fronts to harass the Latin American continent: the tariff war; threats against Panama; the persecution of immigrants within the US (the vast majority of whom have Latin American origins); and now the recent siege of Venezuela and Colombia.

How Brazil responds to these contradictions—and to the need for resistance to Trump's neocolonial project—is the central theme of discussion.

## The main political battle in Brazil

Brazil today is shaped by a contest that pits different sectors and social classes against each other, reflecting the broader international conflict. Two major strategic challenges, exposed during the Bolsonaro government, remain decisive:

- Confronting the far right, which has a clear coup project. This became clear with the revelation of its plans, and in the attempt to stage a 'Brazilian Capitol' on 8 January 2023.
- Halting environmental devastation, which threatens catastrophe for the entire planet. Deforestation, the predominance of agribusiness, and extractivism continue to destroy the country.

Faced with these two fundamental tasks, how do the main political actors behave?



*The demonstrations of September 21st, in which more than half a million people mobilised in hundreds of cities across Brazil, expressed widespread indignation at the proposed constitutional amendment to protect members of Congress and to pave the way for amnesty for coup plotters.*

The far right continues to flatter Trump in an attempt to return to power in 2026, even with the successful impeachment of Bolsonaro. It wants to use the rhetoric of 'narco-terrorism' to support an even harsher security policy, as seen in the recent [massacre in Rio de Janeiro](#).

The government is an important bulwark against the return of the coup plotters. It is attempting to balance confronting the attacks of imperialism, a greater need to deepen social agendas such as reducing the working day, and relying on its (very limited) strategy of class conciliation. This shows its limits. It doesn't go to the end in the fight against the far right, and fails to present itself as an alternative at COP30, where the environmental issue is on the agenda.

Social movements and critical sectors of the Left, including within PSOL (the Socialism and Freedom Party, an independent, anti-capitalist party) face a dual challenge: fighting in the streets against the far right, while maintaining political independence and defining their differences with the government, and

embracing the agenda of the working class and all the people.

This scenario is not unique to Brazil. Mamdani's victory in New York is part of this general process, marked by polarisation. The far right continues to exploit the crisis of liberal democracies. This is reflected in the lead that Trumpist parties have in the polls of the four largest countries on the European continent. On the other hand, Italy's general strikes were the high point of solidarity with Palestine, marking for millions an internationalist example, seen in the actions of European workers. This was also seen in the Flotilla, in Greta Thunberg, and in Colombian President [Gustavo Petro's denunciation of imperialism](#) at the UN General Assembly, among other expressions, such as the rebellions of Gen Z.

## Three contradictions of the national situation in Brazil

Right now, the national situation is marked by preparations for the 2026 election. There, the presidency will be elected, and the national and regional

chambers and parliaments will be renewed, as well as the governments of the country's 27 states. However, this prelude to the electoral process combines different crises and tensions that reflect Brazil's structural contradictions. There are three major tensions in the immediate situation:

### 1. The political fight against Bolsonaroism, the imprisonment of coup plotters, and relations with Trump

[The demonstrations of September 21st](#), in which more than half a million people mobilised in hundreds of cities across Brazil, expressed widespread indignation at the Proposed Constitutional Amendment on Protection of Persons (the PEC da Blindagem). This was a proposed constitutional amendment to protect members of Congress from facing criminal charges or being investigated, charged or arrested, and to pave the way for amnesty for coup plotters. These mobilisations signalled that the mass movement still retains significant strength. It has resumed the offensive in the streets, which until then had been inclined only towards Bolsonaroism. It was a breath of fresh air and a hopeful sign. The mobilisation reshaped the parliamentary agenda, provided a social base for the STF's (Supreme Court's) positions, and buried the amendment.

In this context, with Bolsonaro no longer a viable electoral factor, Lula opened negotiations with Trump. The government also recovered popularity as it defended causes such as a wealth tax and the campaign to end the 6x1 working-week regime: workers in many industries work six consecutive days and receive only one day off.

The far right, on the defensive, has attempted to reposition itself with the public security agenda, as it already does in many countries, such as Ecuador and El Salvador, where President Bukele is held up as a model for intensifying internal repression and competing for the most backward sectors of the population.

### 2. The 'public security' narrative and the genocide of Black youth

A police operation ordered by Governor Cláudio Castro on 28 October produced the deadliest police operation in Brazil's history: a massacre, a slaughter, was carried out, with 128 fatalities (probably still underreported).

This is a crime committed by the state, a barbaric act of violence that reinforces the spiral of the so-called war on drugs policy, which surrounds the hills and favelas of Rio, placing the working population in the line of fire between state forces and factions (whether militias or drug traffickers). The death toll surpassed even the [Carandiru massacre](#) of the 1990s in São Paulo.

The UN condemned the operation as a barbaric crime. Claudio Castro, the right-wing Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro, ordered it directly, seeking media attention and prestige. The use of the justification of 'narco-terrorism' marks a dangerous escalation which is aligned with far-right strategy in the Trump mould — provoking Venezuela and Colombia militarily and politically, seeking to destabilise their governments, and exert direct influence over the two countries.

A broad mobilisation led by the Black movement, and by grassroots organisations rooted in the favelas and working-class urban peripheries, showed the urgent need for a strong street response—protests and actions demanding a different path that will end the massacres and state violence against the population.

### 3. COP30, social mobilisation and the limits of green capitalism

COP30 opened shortly after the federal government authorised oil exploration in the Amazon River estuary. It marks an abandonment of the emissions-reduction goals established by the 2015 Paris Agreement. According to COP president André Corrêa do Lago, the focus will now be on climate-change adaptation. This implicitly admits the inability to act in the face of the interests of the fossil fuel

industry, and accepts the very serious points of no return already reached, or on the way to becoming so.

Support for the Tropical Forests Forever Fund (TFFF), which seeks to combat deforestation through the financialisation of preserved forests, is another example of the severe limitations of the government's environmental stance. It is a Brazilian government proposal to create a global, market-based fund that would pay countries to keep their tropical forests standing.

COP30 therefore mirrors Brazil itself: both the government's contradictions in the face of so-called 'green capitalism' and the urgent need to confront climate denialism and far-right violence.

We oppose oil exploration. We oppose the TFFF, which integrates itself into the logic of green capitalism by financialising the preservation of tropical forests, treating them as a cog in the capitalist accumulation process. We oppose the government's decision to add more than 3,000 kilometres of the navigable stretches of the Tocantins and Madeira rivers to the National Privatisation Programme (PND), which sparked protests from Indigenous and traditional peoples. These decisions directly contradict the government's stated environmental commitments.

## Debates on strategy and the role of the socialist Left

In this complex scenario, the role of socialists within the PSOL is to occupy the front line in confronting the far right, without renouncing an independent and combative stance towards the government.

To build a social majority, the Left must defend programmatic issues, such as reducing working hours, taxing billionaires, rejecting oil extraction in the Amazon estuary, ending the so-called "war on drugs". This must be part of transitional measures towards another solution that involves advancing the fight against financial capital and defending ecosocialism.

Israel Dutra is a sociologist, Social Movement Secretary of PSOL, a member of the party's National Directorate and of the Socialist Left Movement (MES/PSOL).



*Bodies lined up in the street after the police operation ordered by Governor Cláudio Castro on 28 October produced the deadliest police operation in Brazil's history: a massacre, a slaughter, was carried out, with 128 fatalities (probably still underreported).*

# STOP THE MARCH OF THE RIGHT-WING



*Operation Dudula attempted to storm the offices of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute a legal NGO that represents poor and marginalised groups. They were thwarted by a much larger group of people from poor communities, led by Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Inner-City Federation and other organisations.*

By **Noor Nieftagodien**

**I**N JULY 2025, JOHANNESBURG WAS the scene of a tense stand-off between two diametrically opposed political forces. A small group of Operation Dudula members, several of whom were clad in pseudo-military uniforms, had marched to the offices of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI), with the aim of disrupting its operations. SERI is a legal NGO that represents poor and marginalised groups. Masquerading as an organisation that cares about the poor, Operation Dudula espouses a local brand of Donald Trump's xenophobic and anti-immigrant politics, which it propagates through threats, intimidation and violence.

Their attempt to storm the building was thwarted by a much larger group of people from poor communities, led by Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Inner-City Federation, and various anti-xenophobia and anti-racism organisations. In contrast to Operation Dudula, these movements have for many years organised and mobilised poor communities in struggles for housing, jobs and decent public services.

Preventing Operation Dudula from meeting its objectives represented an important victory for progressive forces. It has been buttressed by the recent High Court ruling that the organisation's intimidation and violence against immigrants at public hospitals were unlawful.

Abahlali baseMjondolo has labelled Operation Dudula "a militarised, fascist

organisation". Indeed, it should be viewed as the shock troops of a larger, more dangerous movement of conservative and reactionary politics, which has taken root in South Africa's political landscape, echoing experiences across the world.

## Global turn to the right

Internationally, right-wing parties and authoritarian governments appear to be ascendant and consolidating their grip on power. Donald Trump heads the rogues gallery of the leaders of these formations, which includes Netanyahu, Modi, Farage, bin Salman, Le Pen, Milei, Kagame and so forth. Several of them are conservative populists who have mobilised mass support by portraying themselves as anti-establishment. They have opportunistically tapped into widespread discontent about declining living standards, widening inequality and the general precarity of life.

Central to their politics is the scapegoating of immigrants as the supposed cause of the problems faced by poor people in their countries. Aided by fascist groups, these leaders have whipped up anti-immigrant rhetoric and have implemented policies to limit immigration, especially from the Global South. In the United States, the Republican administration has unleashed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hound immigrants and deport them, while in Europe draconian anti-immigrant laws are being enacted, not

least now by the social democrats of the British Labour Party.

Populist right-wing movements are defined by a toxic cocktail of anti-democratic and anti-poor politics. Where they have achieved power, conservative parties have launched serious attacks on basic rights won by trade unions and women's movements (such as minimum wages and abortion). Their authoritarianism is evident in the criminalising of dissent and protests, and the curtailing of freedom of speech. Climate crisis denialism, anti-vaccine and conspiracy theories, and anti-woke hysteria are among the staples of their right-wing ideologies. They relish the propagation of various forms of hate: racism, misogyny, Islamophobia, anti-LGBTQI and anti-semitism. For them, the future is the past, where women were subordinate, Black oppression was celebrated, and democratic rights were enjoyed only by a minority.

On the global stage, they are ardent supporters of Israel's genocide, while they turn a blind eye to the industrial-scale murders and famine in Sudan and DR Congo. In fact, western governments and corporations are often complicit in these heinous crimes against humanity: Black and Brown lives are dispensable in their pursuit of power and profits.

These right-wing organisations refuse to acknowledge that the real cause of the protracted global crisis is the dominant neoliberal economic framework. This has been pursued for

decades by most governments, often under the whip of the IMF and World Bank, representing the economic and political interests of global powers. Deindustrialisation, slashing of public services, high levels of unemployment (especially among young people), casualisation of labour, the privatisation of education, health and housing, and the degradation of the environment, these are all outcomes of austerity, privatisation and the deliberate hollowing out of the public sector.

All establishment parties, from the conservatives to liberals and social democrats, have contributed to these interconnected crises. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Tories spearheaded the attack on the public sector, with the aim of selling off critical public services to the private sector, with devastating consequences for health and transport. Under Tony Blair, the Labour Party since the 1990s has embraced key facets of Thatcherite policies. The current Starmer government is now indistinguishable from the Conservatives. In a generation it has transformed from the electoral representative of the working class to a party of the rich. Disenchantment with the dominant parties has led to the far-right Reform Party of Nigel Farage gaining significant support and threatening to eclipse both the Tories and Labour in the next elections. Similar processes have been unfolding across the globe, as is evident in parts of Latin America and Africa.

## Rising tide of conservatism in South Africa

Since the advent of democracy, South Africa has been celebrated as a beacon of democratic values, undergirded by what is deemed the most progressive constitution in the world. Yet, in the recent past we have witnessed a sharp rise in conservative populism, echoing developments elsewhere in the world. Arguably, the conditions are ripe here for the growth of Trumpist politics, with no shortage of aspirant authoritarians desperate to mimic the success of their racist, sexual predator hero.

South Africa's democracy is under serious threat. Failed economic policies have resulted in large scale de-industrialisation, devastatingly high levels of unemployment and persistent inequality. Hunger, poverty and illness are endemic. Austerity and corruption have disabled the state, which can barely provide the most basic services to the majority of people. The constitution insists on socio-economic rights for all, but across the country a growing number of people don't have access to

decent work, housing, health, water and education. Poor Black people remain locked into apartheid's racial enclaves, where the social fabric of communities is systematically being ripped apart by grinding poverty, drug abuse, GBV and gangsterism. For the majority, there seems to be no escape from this vortex of precarious survival.

Without the politics or policies to address the underlying causes of these problems, right-wing organisations are beating the anti-immigrant drum, in order to deflect attention from their own complicity in the crisis. The Patriotic Alliance, ACDP, Democratic Alliance, Afriforum, Action SA, IFP and MK Party are among the most prominent parties promoting right-wing politics of xenophobia, racism and ethno-nationalism. Like their global counterparts, many of these organisations also support Israel's genocide and authoritarian leaders.

The national elections of 2024 revealed a tendency among politicians, including from the ANC and EFF, to resort to anti-immigrant politics. Today, even trade union members blame 'illegal immigrants' for unemployment, lack of service delivery and high levels of crime. Xenophobia has become normalised across our society, with few political parties prepared to challenge the blatant lie that immigrants are the cause of our problems.

With the local government elections on the horizon, we are likely to witness an intensification of xenophobic rhetoric, as parties compete to be the most visible and

radical anti-immigrant group. They will care little about the potential eruption of intra-community violence, which previously led to widespread destruction and deaths. In fact, an important objective of anti-immigrant politics is to sow divisions among poor people, to weaken their movements, and to undermine mobilisation against the system that produces poverty and unemployment.

## The power of solidarity

The effective challenge to Operation Dudula in Johannesburg has inspired similar actions in communities, where movements have chased them away from hospitals and schools. It is the unity and power of these movements that stand in the way of anti-democratic authoritarianism. If the right-wing forces in South Africa and globally continue to grow, we face a dark future.

But there is hope. Across the world and even under the most difficult conditions, progressive movements and people are challenging the destructive conservative forces, from Alexandria to Palestine, Sudan and New York. An important and urgent task ahead is to build united fronts in South Africa, our continent and beyond, in order to advance an emancipatory agenda.

Noor Nieftagodien is the Head of the History Workshop at Wits University, a member of the *Amandla!* Collective and a founding member of Zabalaza for Socialism (ZASO).



*Sewage running down a street in Dunoos, Cape Town. Austerity and corruption have disabled the state, which can barely provide the most basic services to the majority of people. A growing number of people don't have access to decent work, housing, health, water and education.*



## The right threatens

## we must fight back



*One of the many marches in London. In the Middle East, Gaza is not only a humanitarian tragedy, it is a test case of 21st century imperial transition—centralised control, corporate contracts and political tutelage—unless people's power blocks it. Meanwhile, millions keep marching across the world.*

By **Zwelinzima Vavi**

*This is an edited version of an input to a recent workshop.*

**I**MPERIALISM HAS REGROUPED behind an openly oligarchic project: billionaires, monopoly tech and finance now sit in the driver's seat of the American state under Trump. Abroad, that power seeks to discipline whole regions, and at home it sells austerity and privatisation as 'reform'. Our task is to read the world clearly, and organise accordingly.

### The international situation

In the US, the wealth of the ruling oligarchs is surging. By September 2025, US billionaire wealth [hit a record ±\\$7.6 trillion](#), underscoring who benefits from the new order. Meanwhile Project 2025, the [agenda of the Heritage-Foundation](#), targets organised labour: curbing union recognition, rolling back wage protections, weakening unemployment insurance and even flirting with bans on public-sector unions. This is a frontal assault on working people.

In the Middle East, Gaza is not only a humanitarian tragedy; it is a test case of 21st century imperial transition—centralised control, corporate contracts and political tutelage—unless people's power blocks it. Meanwhile, millions

keep marching across the world, naming the genocide and forcing recognition of Palestinian statehood. By late September 2025, over 150 countries had recognised Palestine.

In the Sahel, popular anger expelled French troops' influence. States are reasserting sovereignty after decades of security partnerships that delivered insecurity and extraction. We support the dethroning of the Paris neocolonial architecture and call for an end to foreign military tutelage. Our warning, however, is that purely military rule can sideline workers, muzzle unions and stall social transformation, unless popular, civilian, worker-led institutions anchor the transition.

### South Africa

Which brings us to what's happening at home. After 31 years, we are facing mass unemployment. Hunger grips 20 million people who skip a meal a day. This is a transition without liberation. A minority advanced, the majority got stuck with collapsing services, clinics without medicines, overcrowded schools, and police stations without vehicles.

We've written in Saftu about something we call a 'disappearing bridge'. Let me explain. The number one citizen of South Africa used to stay in Chiawelo, in Soweto. But he has moved, not alone,

but with thousands of other activists of the 1980s, trade unionists, and leaders, who once lived the daily realities of the poor. And the movement has widened to include professionals. While there is benefit in this, conservatism is beginning to rise amongst those who do not experience the hardships.

In the past, union membership used to be restricted to blue collar workers. Most of the leaders of the unions were drawn from the blue collar, and therefore proletarian, working class. Now, with the welcome unionisation of the public sector, we have seen that professionals and junior and senior managers are leading the trade union movement, and they face different pressures in life. Blue collar workers, the rock drillers of the platinum belt, could go six months on a strike; they felt they had nothing to lose. Their IDs were already confiscated by the Mashonisa. The middle strata have bonds to pay, car instalments to look after, kids in private schools which require payment. Naturally, that brings an element of conservatism, even amongst leading trade unionists, across the board.

So militancy plunges, wage demands narrow, strike endurance shortens. Rank and file anger goes unheard; the leadership is no longer experiencing the frustration of early morning: lack of taxi or train availability; standing in a long queue in the township; waking up at four

o'clock to face criminal elements on the way to the transport. They are celebrating that load shedding has ended. But the black working class is experiencing "load reduction" week in, week out.

This rising conservatism must preoccupy any left-leaning activist in South Africa and the rest of the world. There is a reality of collapsing cities with potholes, water cuts, load reduction and corruption. This has become a breeding ground for right-wing clean-up politics.

### Class bias of the media

And the media have also moved into the former whites-only suburbs. You get to know what's the general feeling of the people who have a louder voice, because they speak better English on radio, they write more coherent articles in the newspapers. Workers have no capacity to phone the radio station. They don't have money for data. And so there is a particular monopoly of ideas that is beginning to concentrate in those that are the biggest influencers of society, and that's why, increasingly, the voices of the working class are being sidelined.

Last week, the 20th anniversary celebrations of Abahlali baseMjondolo, attended by thousands of so-called shack dwellers, from many provinces, was blocked out of the media. Only Groundup and one other daily newspaper covered the event or bothered to send a reporter. South Africa is known as the protest capital of the world, with five major protests happening every day. But you will never get to know what the women and the youth of those protests are protesting about. You are lucky to hear about the protest in the traffic report, if it goes onto the highway so the elites get disturbed. Meanwhile, trade unions are blamed for the crisis that South Africa finds itself in.

Fascism rarely starts with jackboots. It starts with a quiet erasure, and it talks to an order without the poor.

### Rise of the 'strong' man

And so there's the rise of the 'strong man' as saviour. There is a danger in that. I'm not saying this to try and pour cold water on the euphoria in South Africa in praise of General Mkhwanazi. He has done a wonderful thing for our country. But

when you listen to some of his solutions, you have to get worried. The numbers of his police have dropped from 25,000 to 19,000. But he doesn't blame austerity and capitalism, or the hapless ANC state that is engulfed in corruption. He says the problem is that the unions are asking too high wages for their members. And the middle class say yes, our general is speaking the truth. It is the unions that are a problem in the country.

And then the general says that, during things like the 21st July uprising period, we must cut social media so that nobody can communicate, because he felt that that crisis was fueled by Twitter, Facebook, Tiktok, you name them. So he wants to turn the clock back to the dark days of the bannings. Follow the dictators elsewhere in Africa who blame social media instead of addressing the crisis.

link between those struggles and the local struggles. We've got to expose the oligarchs and show the masses of our people that this is a project of the billionaires.

### Our tasks

We've got to rebuild the bridges here at home; reroute the leadership back to the working-class communities; kill the phenomenon of the big man. We've got to magnify the voices of the people who are suffering from hunger and collapse of services, not the voices of the leadership all the time. We've got to anchor our battles to the informal settlements and make them visible, even to the media. We've got to take on monopoly prices; take up the battle for food, for the transport crisis in South Africa, for finance, for data, for rolling actions, for use of Section 77 notices, where that is strategic.

Yesterday, in a radio station debate, a worker said we need a special convention of the trade union movement, of the working class, to analyse and develop a programme of action against what is happening, to put the working class at the forefront of that fight-back battle. We've got to tackle the media and write more ourselves. We've got to expose them when they block out important voices of the working class. We've got to relink our struggles back to the youth and to the women, and defend the right to strike, to bargain, to build strike funds. And we've got to prepare for anti-union legal offensives.

The Sahel region shows that neocolonial chains can be broken. South Africa shows why we must rebuild working-class power now, centred around people before profits. Yes, we want order, but with justice, not without the poor; not the order of the Western Cape, which excludes the ordinary people. We've got to anchor to internationalism. And above all, we must fight for worker democracy from below, not worker democracy imposed by

the leadership. Zabalaza must not be a slogan; it must be a plan.

Zwelinzima Vavi is General Secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Saftu).



*Ramaphosa's houses in Chiawelo and Fresnaye. He moved, not alone, but with thousands of other activists of the 1980s, trade unionists, and leaders, who once lived the daily realities of the poor. Conservatism is beginning to rise amongst those that do not experience the hardships.*

So this is where we are. And this is not just in South Africa; it's everywhere. We've got to re awaken the fire in our belly; anchor our fight-back strategy to internationalism; pick up the Palestine battle; fight alongside the masses of Swaziland, the DRC, Western Sahara, the Sudan. We've got to show the

# THE FAR RIGHT AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON: the ecosocialist alternative

By Michael Löwy



*One common element in most of these neo-fascist governments or movements is negationism—the refusal to acknowledge the ecological crisis and climate change. In spite of the overwhelming scientific evidence, they persist in denying, or simply ignoring, the reality of global warming.*

**I**N RECENT YEARS, WE HAVE SEEN A spectacular rise in reactionary, authoritarian and/or fascist far-right movements across the globe. They already govern half of the world's countries, including: Trump (USA), Modi (India), Orbán (Hungary), Erdogan (Turkey), Meloni (Italy), Netanyahu (Israel), and recently Milei (Argentina). Elsewhere, they have recently governed Brazil (Bolsonaro), and are a serious candidate for power with the National Rally (France), the AFD (Germany), the Republican Party's Kast (Chile) etc. And Putin's regime in Russia is not very far from this model.

In each country, the far right has its own characteristics: in many cases (Europe, the United States, India), the 'enemy'—i.e. the scapegoat—are the Muslims and/or the immigrants; in some Muslim countries, it is some religious minority (Christians, Jews, Yezidis). In some cases, xenophobic nationalism and racism predominate; in others, religious fundamentalism, or hatred of the Left, feminism, and homosexuals.

Despite this diversity, there are some common traits shared by the majority, if not all: authoritarianism, [integral](#)

[nationalism](#)—'Deutschland über alles' and its local variants 'America First', 'O Brasil acima de tudo', etc; religious or ethnic (racist) intolerance; and police/military violence as the only response to social problems and crime. The characterisation as fascist or semi-fascist may apply to some, but not to all. Enzo Traverso uses the term '[post-fascism](#)', but I believe that *neo-fascism* is the best term to describe both the continuity and the novelty of the 21st century far right.

## Neo-fascist not 'populist'

The concept of 'populism' is used by some political scientists, the media and even part of the Left. But it only serves to sow confusion. While in Latin America from the 1930s to the 1960s the term corresponded to something relatively precise—[Vargasism](#), [Peronism](#), etc.—its use in Europe since the 1990s has become increasingly vague and imprecise.

Populism is defined as "a political position that sides with the people against the elites". But this applies to almost any political movement or party! This pseudo-concept, applied to far-right parties, leads—intentionally or

unintentionally—to legitimising them. It makes them more acceptable, if not sympathetic—who is not for the people against the elites?—while carefully avoiding terms that cause offence: racism, xenophobia, fascism, far right. 'Populism' is also used in a deliberately misleading way, by neoliberal ideologues, to conflate the far right and the radical Left. They are characterised as 'right-wing populism' and 'left-wing populism', since they are opposed to liberal policies, 'Europe', etc.

## Climate change rejected

One common element in most of these neo-fascist governments or movements is *negationism*—the refusal to acknowledge the ecological crisis and climate change. In spite of the overwhelming scientific evidence, they persist in denying, or simply ignoring, the reality of global warming. Donald Trump is only the most vociferous and vulgar proponent of this trope, which is not only an ideology, but an *ecoidal praxis*.

This is illustrated again by Trump, who is totally devoted to the unlimited development of fossil fuels. These suicidal politics represent the interests of the fossil oligarchy—the capitalist sectors linked to the production of oil, coal, gas, chemicals, plastics, cars and airplanes, etc. Their short-sighted perspective is exclusively focused on immediate opportunities for profit and accumulation.

## Back to the 1930s?

History does not repeat itself; we can find similarities or analogies, but current phenomena are quite different from past models. Above all, we do not—yet—have totalitarian states comparable to those of the pre-war period. The classic Marxist analysis of fascism defined it as a reaction by big capital, with the support of the petty bourgeoisie, to the revolutionary threat posed by the labour movement. One may wonder whether this interpretation truly accounts for the rise of fascism in Italy, Germany and Spain in the 1920s and 1930s. In any case, it is not relevant in today's world, where there is no 'revolutionary threat' anywhere.

There are other significant differences with the fascism of the past: neo-fascist regimes are devoted to neoliberalism, not to corporate-national economies. And they are involved in ecocidal activities on a much larger scale than in the 1930s.

## What is the explanation?

It is difficult to offer a general explanation for such diverse phenomena, which are the expression of contradictions specific to each country or region of the world.

One ‘explanation’ that should be rejected is that it is linked to waves of migration, particularly in the US and Europe. Migrants are a convenient pretext, a useful tool for xenophobic and racist forces, but they are by no means the ‘cause’ of their success. Moreover, the far right is thriving in many countries—Brazil, India, etc.—where immigration is not an issue.

The most obvious and undoubtedly relevant explanation is that capitalist globalisation—which is also a process of brutal cultural homogenisation—produces and reproduces, on a global scale, forms of ‘identity panic’ (a term coined by [Daniel Bensaid](#)). This leads to nationalist and/or religious intolerance, and fosters ethnic or religious conflicts. The more nations lose their economic power, the more they proclaim the immense glory of the ‘Nation Above All Else’.

Some of these explanations are useful, but they are insufficient. We do not yet have a comprehensive analysis for a phenomenon that is global and is taking place at a specific moment in history.

## How can we fight back?

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula. Bernie Sanders’ call for a Global Anti-Fascist Front is an excellent proposal. At the same time, we must build broad coalitions in defence of democratic freedoms in every country affected. This is also an ecological imperative: prevent the rise of negationist and ecocidal governments; or, when they are in power, resist their destructive politics.

But we must also take into account that the capitalist system, especially in times of crisis, constantly produces and reproduces phenomena such as fascism, coups d’état and authoritarian regimes.



*Ecosocialism has the potential to bring together social and ecological movements, peasant, indigenous, youth, women and workers, in the resistance against neo-fascist negationism and environmental destruction.*

The root of these tendencies is systemic, and the alternative must be radical; it must be anti-systemic. In 1938, Max Horkheimer, one of the leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, wrote, “If you don’t want to talk about capitalism, you have nothing to say about fascism.” In other words, a consistent anti-fascist is an anti-capitalist.

This is more than ever relevant today, when the active destruction of the environment, and global warming, are the inevitable consequence of the expansive logic of the capitalist system. If we want to avoid ecological catastrophe, the only way is to look for anti-systemic proposals, such as ecosocialism.

## Ecosocialism the way forward

Ecosocialism is an attempt to provide a radical, civilisational alternative, based on the basic arguments of the ecological movement, and of the Marxist critique of political economy. It counters capitalism’s destructive idea of ‘progress’ with an economic approach guided not by money or economics, but by social needs and ecological balance. This dialectical synthesis is attempted by a broad spectrum of authors (including [Joel Kovel](#) and [John Bellamy Foster](#)). It is at the same time a critique of ‘market ecology’, which does not challenge the capitalist system, and of ‘productivist socialism’, which ignores the issue of natural limits.

Ecosocialism has the potential to bring together social and ecological

movements, peasant, indigenous, youth, women and workers, in the resistance against neo-fascist negationism and environmental destruction.

An ecosocialist transformation is impossible without public control over the means of production and planning; that means public decisions on investment and technological change. These must be taken away from the banks and capitalist enterprises, to serve society’s common good. Socialist planning is grounded in democratic and pluralist debate, on all levels where decisions are taken: different propositions submitted to the people, in the form of parties, platforms, or other political movements, and delegates elected accordingly. However, representative democracy must be completed—and where necessary corrected—by

forms of direct democracy, where people directly choose between options on major issues, at the local, national and, later, global level.

The passage from capitalist ‘destructive progress’ to socialism is an historical process, a permanent revolutionary transformation of society, culture and ways of thinking. This transition would lead not only to a new mode of production and an egalitarian and democratic society, but also to an alternative way of life—a new ecosocialist civilisation, beyond the reign of money, beyond consumption habits artificially produced by advertising, and beyond the unlimited production of commodities that are useless and/or harmful to the environment.

Such a process cannot begin without a revolutionary transformation of social and political structures, and the active support of the vast majority of the population for an ecosocialist programme. The development of socialist consciousness and ecological awareness is a process, in which the decisive factor is people’s own collective experience of struggle—from local and partial confrontations, to the radical change of society.

[Michael Löwy](#) is a Franco-Brazilian sociologist. Emeritus Research Director at the CNRS (National Center of Scientific Research), Paris, and author of, amongst others, *Ecosocialism: A radical alternative to capitalist catastrophe*.

# COP 30:

## entrenching the crisis of climate politics

By **Brian Ashley**

*The Aramco oil refinery in Dahrhan, Saudi Arabia. COP30 offered no fossil-fuel phase-out; oil-producing nations blocked binding language, and the final deal focused on voluntary road-maps instead.*

**A**S THE DUST SETTLES AFTER COP30 in Belém, the scale of the failure becomes impossible to ignore. The world is on a path toward catastrophic warming, ecological systems are collapsing, and millions across the Global South face annihilation, not in the distant future, but today. The world's political and economic elites arrived in the Amazon to negotiate when the 1.5°C target has already slipped out of reach; and they left with little more than symbolic gestures. No binding emissions cuts. No serious plan to phase out fossil fuels. No meaningful climate finance for adaptation. No accountability for the destruction already unleashed.

The gap between official international climate policy and the lived reality of a warming world has never been wider. In Belém, that gap became a chasm.

The world is heading towards roughly 2.8°C of warming by the end of the century. This is not a scenario compatible with human dignity—or even, for many, with life itself. Rising seas, extreme heat, drought, and flooding are eroding food security, displacing communities, and driving inequality to historic heights. The economic costs of climate disasters are skyrocketing, but the social and human costs are immeasurable: lives lost, livelihoods shattered, ecosystems irreversibly damaged.

These worsening crises play out in a world shaped by neoliberal austerity and debt dependency. Countries battling climate shocks are forced to cut social spending, privatise public goods, and surrender sovereignty to creditors. Governments continue pouring billions into militaries, fossil fuel subsidies, and the enrichment of corporate elites. The current political economy accelerates both warming and war.

### The growing irrelevance of the COP

COP30 offered no mechanisms for enforcement, no firm deadlines, and no clear pathways to keep warming below 1.5°C. Nor did it include a fossil-fuel phase-out; oil-producing nations blocked binding language, and the final deal focused on voluntary road-maps instead. What it did offer was an expanded space for corporate actors, carbon traders, and mining interests seeking to greenwash extractivist projects.

What is staring society in the face—and what too few scientists are willing to acknowledge—is that the climate-crisis regime cannot be separated from the logic of capitalism. So-called “green transitions” simply open new arenas for profit, while remaining embedded in the same global system of accumulation. Renewable energy may be expanding, but it does not replace fossil fuels; it merely adds to an energy expansion rather than driving a real transition.

Climate summits have become a “safety valve” for capital. They offer the illusion of action, while allowing the core exploitative relations to continue. For workers and communities already suffering climate breakdown, it is undisputable that the COP has failed them.

### The Just Transition heist

COP 30 adopted the Belém Action Mechanism for a Global Just Transition (BAM)—a proposed new institutional arrangement under the UNFCCC, designed to address the current fragmentation and inadequacy of global just transition efforts. Trade unionists and workers should have no illusion in this mechanism. It has no finances or concrete plans to protect workers and communities affected by energy and other

decarbonising initiatives. There are no resources for a re-industrialisation in harmony with the protection of nature. So workers and other vulnerable sectors will simply be left behind. Words and policies in COP statements are a dime a dozen. Reality is more harsh.

### Why mass movements matter—and why institutions don't

If COP30 cannot deliver the mechanisms for decarbonisation or social protection, then the hope must lie in movements of people: workers, peasants, indigenous people, women, youth, the urban poor. Outside of a global mass movement rooted in national realities, the necessary steps to confront the climate crisis will not occur. Yet such a movement cannot be built if it fails to address the immediate needs of the working classes and the poor. The fight for climate protection and ecological justice must therefore begin with the fight for life itself—for clean water, decent housing, jobs, food, and security against the elements.

Right-wing climate denialists exploit the desperation of the poor to drive a wedge between ordinary people and climate action. They present environmentalism as a threat to livelihoods rather than the path to survival. To win the majority, our movement must link ecological transformation with social justice. We must demand the redistribution of wealth and power away from the billionaire class, big tech, and ruling elites who plunder the planet for profit.

**Brian Ashley** is a member of Zabalaza for Socialism and serves on the *Amanda!* editorial collective.

## COP30

ISOLATED ADVANCES  
AMID MAJOR OMISSIONS

By Renata Belzunces

**T**HE 30TH CONFERENCE OF THE Parties (COP30) has just ended on a melancholy note. It failed to decisively confront the climate emergency on key points such as climate finance and the reduction of fossil fuel use. It showed, once again, that saving capitalism seems more important than saving humanity and the planet as we know it.

When we talk about saving humanity, we are referring to the portion that already suffers the effects of climate change. They will continue to shoulder the burden of the dominant classes, who remain safe from forced migration, loss of land, worsening health and premature deaths, job losses, and rising food prices.

At the previous conference, in Baku, the ‘magic number’ of \$1.3 trillion per year until 2035 for adequate climate financing was announced. On that occasion, only \$300 billion (23% of what is required) was put on the table. The Belém Final Declaration reaffirms the required amount of \$1.3 trillion and emphasises that at least \$300 billion should go to the Global South. But no new money appeared. Meanwhile, military spending has hit historic records—[\\$2.7 trillion in 2024](#)—putting pressure on public coffers and competing with other areas, such as addressing the environmental emergency.

The Paris Agreement set the challenge to keep the global average temperature increase well below 2.0°C, a target reaffirmed at COP30 and strictly

dependent on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. By the end of the summit, 122 countries had submitted their new targets, the so-called NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions). The maths must therefore be redone, but it is now extremely unlikely that, even if these countries meet their stated objectives, the ceiling can still be achieved.

The largest global source of GHG emissions is the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas), and there is huge resistance to reducing this from countries whose economies are heavily dependent on oil, from private and state-owned oil companies, and from other related sectors such as the automotive industry.

### Belém Mechanism for Action

The international trade union movement called for the creation of the Belém Mechanism for Action (BAM) to implement a Just Transition. Trade unions recognise that the issue has been gaining ground on governmental and corporate agendas; even so, the prevailing approach is far from ensuring decent work as a driver of decarbonisation. On this point, COP30 moved forward by creating the mechanism and recognising that workers, communities, and Indigenous peoples—in their intersections of gender and race—cannot be made to foot the bill. The decision is the result of social struggle and should be

celebrated, even amid the contradictions of inadequate funding and the absence of a global decarbonisation pathway.

### The People’s Summit

Civil society had a prominent presence at the People’s Summit, where more than 7,000 people gathered between 12 and 16 November. The aim was to unify struggles, organise demonstrations and, of course, pressure countries to prioritise people over business interests. The People’s Summit march brought together more than 30,000 participants. It featured a funeral for fossil fuels, statues criticising Donald Trump, masks honouring Chico Mendes (a Brazilian trade union leader, and environmentalist assassinated in 1988), and a rich cultural programme led by Arrastão da Pavulagem, a local cultural group known for its music, dance, and costumes.

The standout feature of the march was the massive presence of Brazilian Indigenous peoples, who made themselves heard there and throughout the Conference. The occupation of the Blue Zone, where negotiations take place, on 13 November, caught the attention of the global press because it was a security violation in a UN-controlled area. In fact, Brazilian Indigenous peoples led daily demonstrations in various spaces throughout the conference and remained mobilised even after the People’s Summit concluded. Their main demands are the right to their ancestral lands, in addition to criticism of the carbon market and large projects that violate their territories.

COP30 laid bare the gap between the severity of the climate crisis and the political will of countries to confront it concretely. Although there were advances in the creation of the BAM, the absence of new funding, the resistance to abandoning fossil fuels, and the persistence of economic interests over collective well-being prevailed. Even so, the mobilisation of Indigenous peoples, social movements, and workers showed that civil society remains the main driving force pushing for real change.



*The People’s Summit march brought together more than 30,000 participants. The standout feature was the massive presence of Brazilian Indigenous peoples, who made themselves heard there and throughout the Conference.*

Renata Belzunces is an economist working at DIEESE, a union research and policy institute, doing research in Work and Environmental Studies.

# CONSULTANTS AND THE CLIMATE CON

## MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS ARE GOBBLING UP SCARCE CLIMATE FINANCE

By **Michael Marchant** and **Zen Mathe**

**S**OUTH AFRICA'S JUST ENERGY Transition (JET) is about much more than changing how the country produces energy. It is about doing so in a manner that contributes to decent work, social inclusion, and the eradication of poverty. This requires radical shifts to South Africa's economy. These should be chiefly guided by public interest, and the needs of those communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and the nature of the transition.

In June 2025, Open Secrets launched its latest report, *The Climate Consultants: How Management Consultants Cash in on the Climate Crisis*. The investigative report reveals how management consultants are cashing in on the climate crisis and South Africa's Just Energy Transition (JET), potentially undermining the pursuit of a just transition.

Grant funds are committed to South Africa's JET by the international donors of the International Partners Group (IPG), which is providing loans and grants to support South Africa's transition from coal to cleaner energy sources. The report revealed that around 65% of these funds have been paid to private companies and organisations, including management consultants.

Globally, not nearly enough money is being provided by wealthy countries to poor and developing countries to assist their energy transitions. Wealthy countries, and companies based in them, have long benefited from the pollution and carbon emissions that have caused the climate crisis, and they owe people in the Global South a [climate debt](#). Instead, most of the inadequate funds they provide come in the form of loans that must be repaid. When grants are paid, they are often pocketed by powerful private corporations linked to the donor countries.

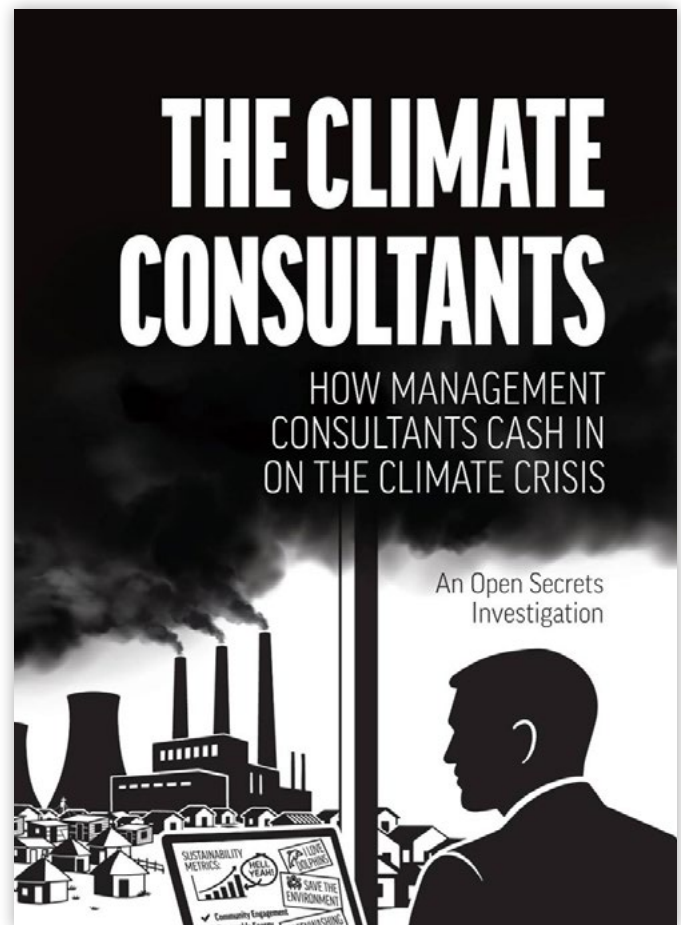
South Africa is a good example of this problem. South Africa's [JET Implementation Plan](#) (JET IP) estimates that we need at least \$100 billion (just under R2 trillion) for a just transition. But the current IPG pledge is just \$12.8 billion—a little over 10% of what the country needs. Of this, less than 25% had been committed by the end of 2024, and only 6% is envisioned as grant funding, with most of the money coming as loans.

It is outrageous that scarce grant funding, meant for South Africa's energy transition, is lining the pockets of already very wealthy private consultants. Yet this is a global experience. Despite growing scrutiny of the damaging impact large consultancies have, they have continued to grow in size and influence. In fact, the poly-crisis facing the world today has proved a boon for consulting businesses: the global market for management consulting passed \$1 trillion in 2023. Consultancies are rushing to position themselves to benefit from new demand from corporations and governments seeking advice on a broad range of issues related to the climate crisis. South Africa is no exception.

The country has recent experience of the devastating complicity of major consulting firms like McKinsey and Bain in state capture — and their refusal to take genuine responsibility for the harm done. This is an ever-present reminder of why we must scrutinise the role of consultants, especially when they have an influence on issues of fundamental public interest and importance.

### The circular flow of funds

Currently, much of South Africa's just transition grant funds are caught in a circular loop: they are paid to private consultants based in, or with links to, the donor countries. For example, *The Climate Consultants* report revealed that global audit and consulting firms, PwC and Deloitte, have been major recipients of United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) grant funds, respectively.



*Open Secrets' investigative report reveals how management consultants are cashing in on the climate crisis and South Africa's Just Energy Transition (JET), potentially undermining the pursuit of a just transition.*

PwC was an implementing agent on JET projects worth around R130 million, all funded by the UK government. This included two large projects working with another UK-based consultancy, Adam Smith International. These projects—on issues related to water, energy, and the local economy in Mpumalanga—go to the very heart of South Africa's just transition. Yet, [PwC South Africa told Daily Maverick](#) that it had no knowledge of this work; it was likely conducted by its UK office. This means that scarce grant funding, meant to benefit people in Mpumalanga, is paying for the swanky London offices of consulting firms instead.

In much the same way, Deloitte was the implementing entity for around R145 million in JET projects funded by the US, prior to the US withdrawing from the IPG following the election of Donald

Trump. Deloitte South Africa similarly confirmed that it had no knowledge of the projects, suggesting that US grant funds meant for South Africa were paid directly to consultants based elsewhere.

Often, the grant funding for South Africa's JET does not even touch our shores.

## Conflicts of interest

And most of these consulting firms are fundamentally conflicted. They have made their fortunes by advising fossil fuel firms. Most still do lucrative work for these firms and other corporations that contribute to the climate crisis, and have acted to deliberately slow down any transition. This is a global phenomenon; infamously, McKinsey & Company has aggressively pursued and promoted [new oil and gas deals on the fringes of global climate negotiations](#) where it plays an advisory role.

In South Africa, a powerful example of this is another US consulting firm, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). *The Climate Consultants* report showed that BCG's South African office was the most prominent private consultant in South Africa's JET space. It has worked closely with corporations and big business lobby groups, all while receiving grant funding to work on JET projects in Mpumalanga, and to assist some of South Africa's biggest emitters plan their energy futures.

BCG faces significant conflicts of interest from its global and local work for fossil fuel companies and petrostates. It has done lucrative work for Saudi Arabia, and, in 2023, it named major fossil fuel firms—Saudi Aramco, Shell and ExxonMobil—amongst the top 50 innovative companies in the world. This, despite them being amongst the largest carbon emitters and contributors to the climate crisis. In South Africa, BCG holds a lucrative contract with [Sasol](#), whose Secunda facility is the single largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world, as well as Standard Bank, a prominent funder of new oil and gas projects in Africa.

Remarkably, BCG has received JET grant funds for work that will benefit these corporations. It received funds to develop an 'Energy Transition Roadmap' (ETR) for the Energy Council of South Africa in 2024. The Energy Council says its mission is to "address energy security and the just energy transition", but it is made up of some of the world's largest polluters, including Sasol, TotalEnergies and Exxaro. It is chaired by Sasol's CEO, Simon Baloyi.

## Lack of transparency and oversight

These consultants' contracts with donor countries are usually not publicly available. Further, the models and information they use to inform crucial climate policies are kept secret, due to their financial interests. So there is no opportunity for the public to exercise any proper oversight over the work that they are doing. This opacity is built into the models of private consulting firms.

A related risk is that this kind of work is usually done in terms of contracts between donor countries and the consultants. So, the grant funding does not flow into South Africa's fiscus, and the appointment of consultants and other contractors takes place outside South Africa's public procurement laws and constitutional provisions. This not only introduces corruption risks, but crucially casts doubt on the ability of the South African state to determine the nature and scope of work being undertaken on a just transition, purportedly in terms of South Africa's state policy. The risks to South Africa's sovereignty are obvious.

The struggle for a just transition  
It is now obvious that private consulting firms see energy and climate consulting as the new frontier for profit making. Their growing role in advising on South Africa's JET raises serious concerns due to their conflicts of interest, secrecy, and influential role outside of the oversight of public bodies. Like all consultants, there

is also a risk that they will contribute to the long-term decline of the state's capacity to undertake this vital work itself, inducing dependency on these profit-driven, private actors.

But there is still time to change this. The state must ensure greater transparency for how JET monies are spent. It must maintain a publicly accessible database of the full expenditure of JETP monies—both loans and grants—including the funding partnership agreements, in all their forms. There must also be a concerted effort to ensure that JET funds are routed through the South African state, wherever possible.

It is also urgent that the state introduces proper regulations for consulting firms, which currently operate with no regulatory body and little effective oversight. Strengthening legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks in the consulting sector will be crucial in ensuring that the current problems do not persist within South Africa's JET space.

Michael Marchant and Zen Mathe are investigators for [Open Secrets](#).



*Currently, much of South Africa's just transition grant funds are caught in a circular loop: they are paid to private consultants based in, or with links to, the donor countries.*



Over 91% of transport emissions are from the road subsector. Over half of road emissions come from private cars. The rest come from freight: light, medium and heavy trucks. The South African emission profile clearly shows the relative absence of reliable public transport and a high level of freight travelling by road.

## PUBLIC FUNDING OF COLLECTIVE TRANSPORT IS THE ONLY SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

By **Maxine Bezuidenhout**

**T**HE THREAT OF CLIMATE CHANGE is no longer in the distance; it is here. The consequences of ever-increasing average temperatures are extreme weather conditions that create long-term and short-term economic damage, disrupt communities, worsen health and life expectancy, and make workers' jobs more dangerous. One way to mitigate climate change is to decarbonise the economy.

The transport sector produces about 12% of the country's total emissions. Decarbonising it can make a significant contribution in reducing South Africa's carbon footprint. There are two key measures that are key to reducing transport sector emissions:

1. Shift at least a million passengers away from private cars and onto public transport, such as buses and rail; and
2. Shift a meaningful amount of commercial freight from road transport to rail.

This possible future, however, is rapidly slipping away under the weight of government policies—historical and current.

The reason for this lies in the country's transportation mix. The South African transport sector can be split into four subsectors: road, rail, air (aviation) and maritime (shipping). Rail and maritime emit the least CO<sub>2</sub>. Over 91% of transport emissions are from the road subsector. Over half of road emissions come from private cars. The rest come from freight: light, medium and heavy trucks. The South African emission profile clearly shows the relative absence of reliable public transport and a high level of freight travelling by road. The relatively low volume of rail emissions

clearly indicates that rail is underutilised. Looking at South African transport-related legislation, the main issue is that current policies (and their financing) are not designed to achieve transport decarbonisation goals, or ensure a safe, reliable and affordable transport system for all South Africans.

### The legacy of apartheid

Ever since the 1980s, the predominant approach to solving any transport-related challenges has been to rely on market liberalisation, create artificial competition, and generally operate on the principle that "the market knows best". As a result, the apartheid government ramped up financial assistance to a diverse range of bus companies, each responsible for their narrow route from a township to a CBD; deregulated the commercial rail sector, cancelling the long-standing regulation that obligated companies to transport freight by rail; vertically separated the railway companies (into infrastructure and train operating companies); and promulgated similarly dysfunctional policies in other transport subsectors.

In 1994, the new democratic government inherited the inhumane, apartheid spatial development system, in addition to a disintegrated public transport sector. In it were numerous bus subcontractors, deregulated taxi services, and a railway with a significant maintenance backlog.

### Failures of the last 30 years

The transport policies since democracy, however, have barely improved. [The government's stated goal](#) is to create:

*safe, reliable, effective, efficient, environmentally benign and fully integrated transport operations and infrastructure that will best meet the needs of freight and passenger customers, improving levels of service and cost in a fashion that supports government strategies for economic and social development whilst being environmentally and economically sustainable.*

But in reality, it followed a similar free-market path.

Instead of creating a coherent and organised public transport system, the government continued to 'purchase' routes from independent bus companies. Instead of supporting the railway and investing enough money in the rail infrastructure, the government went further with vertical separation, based on the belief that freight railway should be a profit-making company. Instead of addressing the challenges in the taxi sector, the government relied on the creation of the main mother body—the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO)—and limited financial incentives to scrap old vehicles. And on it continued.

Instead of genuinely regulating the transport sector, the government has long relied on trying to solve every problem with financial incentives or through public-private partnerships. The way the public-private partnerships have been organised means that the government was bankrolling the majority of the original investment. In addition to that, the government entered numerous patronage guarantees, where it was willing to subsidise the full extent of private companies' losses. In a way, what the government was not willing to do for

some state-owned enterprises, which were forced to take on a crushing amount of debt, it was happily providing to a range of private companies.

Similar decisions were taken in the area of the transport budget. The government was severely underfinancing the public transport sector: it only increased the budget allocation to the sector by the inflation rate or slightly below. At the same time it was overspending on public-private partnerships that benefited a narrow segment of the population. For instance, the 2024 budget allocated R6.2 billion for bus rapid transit (a network used in fewer than ten cities). This compared with R7.6 billion towards more than 94 bus contracts, jointly responsible for owning over 6,300 buses, which carry the majority of bus passengers throughout the country.

The result of government policies, which have been largely devoid of new ideas over the last decade, is the deepening of the transport sector crisis that we see today. Over the last decade, approximately 1.5 million more people have started using taxis at the expense of public transportation. The number of private cars is surging, particularly with the widespread adoption of e-hailing services. By the end of 2024, Uber reported having over 40,000 drivers and more than 1.4 million regular customers in South Africa. If this trend continues, decarbonisation targets will not be achieved, which would mean a less secure and more unhealthy future for all of us.

## Green capitalism vs just transition

Plans from the business sector propose R2 trillion worth of government interventions to decarbonise the sector. They include tax incentives for electric vehicles, expanded public-private partnerships, government investment in green fuel, and more

concessions to third parties in rail. These are accompanied by government purchase of green vehicles for its fleet, and offer of financial incentives for recapitalising taxis into electric vehicles. The trajectory of these plans is similar to those currently being rolled out – it reflects the green capitalism mindset, which believes that a decarbonised future can be achieved with the help of financial incentives. However, these policies, in some form or another, have been tried for more than fifty years and have essentially led us to the crisis we are currently in.

An alternative to green capitalism is the just transition. That means reforming the transport sector from within, with the goal of protecting workers, communities, and the environment simultaneously. This is not just about reducing emissions; it is about transforming transport into a public good that uplifts all South Africans.

## What must be done

South Africa is currently at a crossroads. It can continue the current path and pursue additional tax cuts, public-private partnerships, and other strategies that form the bulk of green capitalism. Or it can choose to move towards a more caring and just society that would benefit all. If it chooses the latter, it needs to:

1. **Prioritise public transport.** That means massive reinvestment in rail and buses, with an end to the piecemeal contracting of private routes and a review of transport provision. The transport sector needs to centre the interests of the final user, and should be responsive to consumers' needs.
2. **Reject blind faith in markets.** Move away from any initiatives that privatise and guarantee profits for the private sector but socialise the risks.

3. **Combine financial incentives with regulation.** The government must use the full force of its powers, including the authority to correct and regulate the private sector.
4. **Assess rigorously.** Rank projects based on their social and environmental value.
5. **Be honest about emissions.** Electric vehicles are not a silver bullet. Electric vehicles charged from fossil-fuel-derived electricity are merely shifting the origin of emissions from the cars to the power plant. So, decarbonisation must go hand in hand with green energy.
6. **Balance the environment and jobs.** Decarbonisation will lead to job losses in trucking, auto manufacturing, and the fossil fuel sector. The International Labour Organisation estimates that up to a third of workers will need reskilling, while up to 20% may not be absorbed at all. Planning for this cannot be an afterthought.
7. **Align policies across different departments.** There are currently several governmental departments and numerous policies within these departments that have different decarbonisation goals and methods. The government should be united in its approach.

The only way to provide efficient, reliable, safe and affordable, passenger-friendly transport to the mass of South Africans, without incurring huge carbon emissions, is to invest in publicly-funded, collective solutions. Anything else is doomed to failure.

**Maxine Bezuidenhout** is the head of the Alternatives to Extractivism and Climate Change Programme at the Alternative Information and Development Centre.

*Instead of addressing the challenges in the taxi sector, the government relied on the creation of the main mother body—the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO)—and limited financial incentives to scrap old vehicles.*



# Reject inflation targeting: create jobs



*The current exclusive prioritisation of a low inflation target is incompatible with addressing South Africa's deep socio-economic challenges. Instead, the SARB's mandate should be reoriented toward promoting employment and structural transformation.*

By **Dominic Brown**

**I**N THE MEDIUM-TERM BUDGET Policy Statement, Enoch Godongwana announced a downward shift in target inflation from the 3–6 percent range to a specific target of 3% (plus or minus 1 percentage point). This marks a further tightening of South Africa's inflation targeting framework, following the SARB's 2017 declaration that it preferred a 4.5 percent inflation midpoint.

This article argues that the current exclusive prioritisation of low inflation is incompatible with addressing South Africa's deep socio-economic challenges. Instead, the SARB's mandate should be reoriented towards promoting employment and structural transformation.

## The problems of inflation targeting

South Africa officially adopted inflation targeting in 2000, although this approach had been informally applied since at least 1994. Under this regime, the Finance Minister sets the inflation target, while the SARB retains independence over the instruments used to achieve it. The main instrument used by the SARB to reduce inflation is a higher interest rate.

It is true that inflation harms the poor by eroding real incomes, but South Africa's inflation rate in the democratic era has been relatively low and stable. When prices have risen, they have not been a consequence of too much money chasing too few goods—domestic inflation. Rather, price increases have

been driven by external factors, such as increases in the price of fuel, energy and food. So some scholars suggest that whether the domestic inflation rate increases or decreases has less to do with domestic monetary policy and more with changes in the level of global inflation. The implication of this is that, as I wrote about in *Amandla!* 83, increasing the interest rate is not the answer to curbing inflation. And, as a former National Treasury official, Owen Willcox, has [warned](#), “reducing the inflation target would lead to more austerity, and lower economic growth and employment”.

In addition, the concern that inflation negatively impacts on prospects for economic growth can be exaggerated, as historical evidence suggests. Some even say that it is only when inflation exceeds 40% that it begins to reduce growth rates. A [World Bank economist](#) [has indicated](#) that economic growth continued at inflation rates of 15 to 20%.

Despite this, the SARB has consistently maintained high real interest rates in its effort to keep inflation within target. As left economist Ashgar Adelzadeh (2022) observes, South Africa has recorded some of the highest interest rates globally over the past two and a half decades.

## Consequences of high interest rates

High interest rates result in higher domestic borrowing and debt repayment costs. These mean less disposable income

and therefore a reduction in the buying power of the majority of people in the country. High costs of borrowing, coupled with declining domestic demand, lead to the stagnation or contraction of the economy. This, in turn, leads to job losses and declining levels of government revenue from income taxes. Higher interest rates also mean higher debt service costs on loans denominated in foreign currency, and an interest rate higher than GDP growth will normally increase the debt-to-GDP ratio. In response to this, the South African government has drastically cut spending, in the form of harsh austerity budgets.

Austerity, along with high interest rates, discourages fixed investment, particularly in sectors like manufacturing. Here the requirement for borrowing is greater, because of higher capital requirements than in other sectors. Between 1994 and 2015, gross fixed capital formation in South Africa averaged only 18% of GDP—around 10 percentage points below the average for upper-middle-income countries.

In stark contrast, South Africa's financial sector has expanded dramatically. The country now has one of the highest market capitalisation-to-GDP ratios globally, with capital markets reaching more than five times the average for its income group. This reflects a broader process of financialisation, in which finance sectors dominate the economy, while productive sectors like manufacturing decline.

This is a serious concern for a country with an unemployment rate exceeding 40%, as the finance sector is less employment- and labour-intensive than manufacturing. By narrowly focusing on price stability via high interest rates, the SARB undermines employment creation and reinforces an economic model driven by short-term financial returns, rather than long-term productive investment. So the current inflation-targeting framework limits the ability of monetary policy to support structural transformation.

## An alternative approach

For monetary policy to support employment, the real interest rate must be significantly reduced to stimulate investment. However, South Africa's ability to lower interest rates is constrained by global financial conditions. As the CEO of Nedbank noted, "I can't see the US Federal Reserve cutting rates, and on that basis, it will be difficult to see SA cut much further." This reflects South Africa's vulnerability to global capital movements, rooted in the liberalisation of financial markets of the mid to late 1980s. After 1994, the post-apartheid government continued to deregulate its capital markets, opening its economy to short-term international capital flows. As a result, the SARB relies on high interest rates to attract foreign portfolio investment and maintain balance of payments stability. Without capital controls, lowering interest rates risks capital flight and a weakening rand.

Yet there are viable alternatives, including reintroducing capital management measures, such as capital and exchange controls. Exchange controls regulate local currency in relation to international currency markets

by preventing convertibility (direct exchange) of the rand to other currencies. Capital controls restrict the flow of capital out of the country. They limit repatriation of investment income by both foreign and local investors, and regulate the ownership of foreign assets by residents, and of domestic assets by non-residents. Some examples of exchange controls include taxes on cross-border financial transactions, and the establishment of a dual exchange rate system. The latter was used effectively in South Africa from 1979 until 1995, through the creation of the financial rand (finrand). The goal of the dual exchange rate system was to protect everyday trade in goods and services from the instability of financial markets.

In terms of capital controls, one measure could be imposing minimum stay requirements - these restrict capital outflows by placing a holding period during which foreign investors cannot withdraw capital and/or dividends from South Africa. This prevents short-term capital movement, and discourages speculative investments. Other regulatory tools include limiting how much domestic debt non-residents can buy, and restricting foreign currency borrowing by domestic institutions.

Strengthening the regulation of capital markets through imposing capital and exchange controls reduces speculative inflows and breaks the direct link between domestic and foreign interest rates.

## The case for capital account regulation

Capital and exchange controls aim to regulate money flowing in and out of the country. This allows governments greater space to adopt countercyclical policies. These are economic policies that

move in the opposite direction to current economic trends—i.e expansionary fiscal and monetary policies when the economy slows. Constraining capital flight and limiting exchange rate volatility reduce the inflation caused by a weaker currency, and therefore the pressure to raise interest rates.

Capital controls also enhance policy sovereignty. When financial outflows are controlled, the central bank does not need to maintain high interest rates to attract inflows. This gives the state greater autonomy over both monetary and fiscal policy. Furthermore, Fine and Mohamed (2022) argue, regulating financial flows helps shift the composition of capital toward less volatile and more productive investments. And exchange rate stability improves when capital controls limit the volatility of demand for domestic currency.

As John Maynard Keynes famously argued, the management of the domestic economy depends on having the freedom to set appropriate interest rates independently of international conditions. Capital controls are a necessary condition for that independence.

## The need for radical change

South Africa's current inflation targeting regime, rooted in a liberalised financial framework, has failed to address the country's core development challenges. High interest rates have suppressed productive investment and contributed to deindustrialisation and mass unemployment. To break this cycle, the SARB's mandate must be reoriented towards employment creation and structural transformation.

Achieving this requires both a shift in the objectives of monetary policy and a reassertion of capital and exchange controls. By strengthening these controls, the SARB can significantly reduce interest rates and engage in greater levels of direct lending for preferred purposes, to enable employment creation. This will also increase macroeconomic (fiscal and monetary) policy space, enhance financial stability and reduce the foreign debt component of total public debt. Strengthening capital account regulation is not a radical proposal. It is a necessary step towards realising an inclusive, developmental macroeconomic agenda.

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*High interest rates have suppressed productive investment and contributed to deindustrialisation and mass unemployment. To break this cycle, the SARB's mandate must be reoriented towards employment creation and structural transformation.*



The claim by Capitec CEO Gerrie Fourie that our 32% unemployment rate would be 10% if Stats SA counted informal traders is simply wrong. The real question is why joblessness is so high and informal work so limited, and what that means for our historical reckoning and policy.

## UNEMPLOYMENT IS EXCEPTIONALLY HIGH

### EVEN IF ELITES ARE TRYING TO PRETEND OTHERWISE

By Ihsaan Bassier

South Africa doesn't have a 'statistical-error' unemployment crisis; it has a jobs crisis. Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) counts people as employed even if they worked for an hour. This includes self-employment. So [the claim by Capitec CEO Gerrie Fourie](#) that our 32% unemployment rate would be 10% if Stats SA counted informal traders is simply wrong. The real question is why joblessness is so high and informal work so limited, and what that means for our historical reckoning and policy.

ONE DAY, THE CEO OF THE largest bank in South Africa announced that the country's most pressing economic issue, unemployment, was simply a long-running statistical error:

*What is interesting is when you look at the unemployment rate, we talk about 32%. But Stats SA doesn't count self-employed people. I really think that is an area we must correct. The unemployment rate is probably actually 10%. Just go look at the number of people in the township informal market, who are selling all sorts of stuff, who have a turnover of R1,000 a day.*

The media went nuts. Is it possible that all the doom and gloom about this most intractable issue of unemployment is mere government polemic, and actually things aren't so bad? The CEO of Capitec can see over half the adult population's bank accounts after all. Never mind that he didn't bother to check whether Stats SA does ask questions about self-employment—why check with incompetent bureaucrats, when, as one of the most powerful people in the country, one can just proclaim?

The Stats SA head gave a diplomatic but firm reply:

*"Stats SA methods remain robust... We do not fix statistics to feel better about our reality. We reflect that reality, so the country can make evidence-based decisions to change it."*

Jonny Steinberg was more direct, saying that the Capitec boss "degraded public discourse":

*Being very successful can, paradoxically, lead to intellectual laziness, born from overconfidence. He assumes that his own intuition about the employment rate is right, forgetting that on statistical matters, everyone's intuition is almost always wrong, no matter how knowledgeable they are.*

### Is there anything to the 10% claim?

Of course, there are serious conversations among academics and statisticians

regarding measurement issues for the official unemployment rate. This means that there is a range in which the true unemployment rate probably lies. However, unemployment in South Africa is undoubtedly exceptionally high. In addition to the official Labour Force Surveys, several other surveys run by different organisations have asked about employment in different ways for the last 30 years. And all confirm an exceptionally high and persistent rate.

#### How the QLFS defines work and unemployment

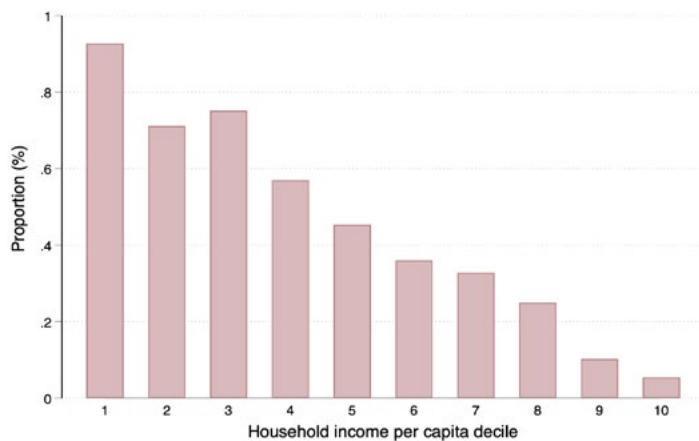
Is Stats SA excluding the informally employed? Stats SA counts you as employed if you did any work for pay, profit, or family gain in the last week—"even if just for an hour"—including self-employment and unpaid work in a family business. Explicit examples given include work in exchange for food or housing, brewing beer, looking after children, or even unpaid work helping someone else in the household sell things. If you had no work and looked / were available for work, you're unemployed.

A number of articles have already laid out the manifold problems with the CEO's claims. For example, Haroon Borat explains the classic issue of selective sampling—those with the bank accounts and informal transactions the CEO sees, which he attributes to unemployed people, are more likely to be employed. This leads him to miss seeing the unemployed.

If anything, as is well known, the official unemployment rate is an underestimate of a reasonable definition of unemployment. If you failed to look for work for any reason during the seven days immediately preceding the interview, then you are classified as a discouraged work seeker and are not included in the “official” unemployment rate, only in the “expanded” rate of 45%.

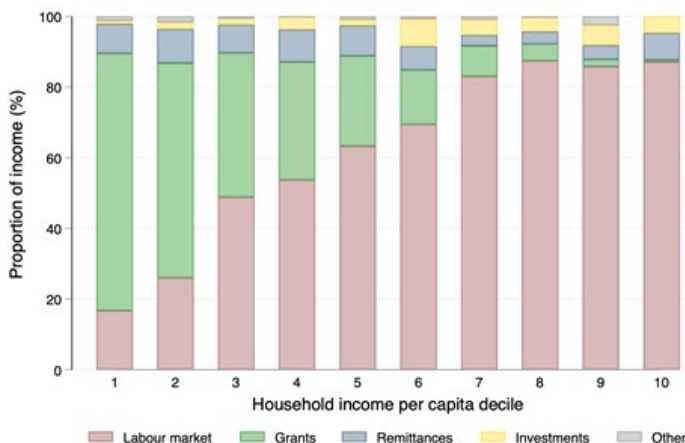
But a question arises: how do people survive if unemployment is so high? This graph shows, unsurprisingly, that the unemployed come disproportionately from the poorest households in the country, with much higher poverty rates, funded mostly by wages and grants.

Unemployed households as a proportion of each income decile.



But the next graph shows that unemployed people live in households with other sources of income—usually with someone else who is employed. Most household income for the unemployed still comes from employed people (nearly 60%); most of the rest comes from social grants (about 30%). These households are larger on average, partly precisely to support such unemployed members.

Income sources for unemployed households in each income decile.



## Why is unemployment so high, and informality so low, in South Africa?

Most of the “evidence” in the media discussion has been at the level of anecdotes about informality. But it has never been claimed that there is no informality; in fact, official statistics suggest that around 1 in 3 employed people are employed informally. It’s just that this is low compared to other countries with similar levels of per-person income: in Sri Lanka the informality rate is around 67%, Indonesia 81%, and Egypt 68% (Brazil is a bit lower at 37%).

Why aren’t more of the unemployed working informally? There has been a lot of research on this for decades. It is an active research question, and one of the most important in the country. Borhat and others’ recent research explains such missing informality in terms of Apartheid urban legacies “designed to stymie the flourishing of the informal sector.” My forthcoming

research with Joshua Budlender and Surbhi Kesar investigates the links to historical land dispossession.

Vimal Ranchhod points out the underappreciated fact that high unemployment is more broadly a Southern African phenomenon: “For example, in Southern African countries in 2022, the national unemployment rates ranged from 18 percent in Lesotho to 29.8 percent in South Africa”. This included Eswatini (25%), Namibia (21%), and Botswana

(21%), all much higher than the world average of about 6%. This suggests that the long and shared history in the region, of colonisation and mining labour recruitment, likely contributes to the long-lasting labour crises.

In any case, the consequences of such high

unemployment are clear. Poverty rates in South Africa (19% according to one measure from the World Bank) are far beyond any countries at similar levels of economic development, such as Sri Lanka (under 2%), Indonesia (7%), Egypt (5%) or Brazil (4%). Similarly for inequality. These are persistent structural features of South Africa that it doesn’t help to wish away.

## Worse than ignorance; the CEO’s narrative serves elite interests

The more grating part of the CEO’s proclamations was the narrative he pushed. Firstly, the idea that there is no crisis—“if we really had a 32% unemployment rate, we would have had unrest”. This comes less than four years after the July riots brought the country to a standstill, likely helping force the government to reverse its decision to halt grants to the unemployed.

Secondly, the CEO’s call to “go out and encourage these entrepreneurs”, as the way to address the country’s issues, individualises the problem as a behavioural deficiency on the part of those unemployed. This avoids facing the overwhelming structural causes, including the extreme historical economic coercion and dispossession. Ultimately, it feeds into a favourite gripe of the white upper classes, as revealed by another writer supporting the CEO’s claims. He asks about the South African narrative of inequality, poverty and unemployment: “Is it a government agenda, aimed at justifying BBBEE, Equity legislation, grants and a welfare state—all in the pursuit of justifying the National Democratic Revolution?”

Such narratives should be called out and shamed for what they are: unhelpful and often malicious falsehoods, rooted in denial and an inability to face an impending economic reckoning. However, there is one part I agree with: after 30 years of little redistribution or growth, the clock is ticking on a revolution towards an economy that serves everyone.

Ihsaan Bassier is an Assistant Professor in Economics at the University of Surrey, and a research affiliate of SALDRU at the University of Cape Town. Most of his research uses South African survey and administrative data to help understand workplace, household and structural aspects of inequality.

# GRANTS FOR THE RICH

## THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL WITH TAX

By **Chloé van Biljon**

Did you know there is a government “grant” given to some of the most privileged in the country? Those that have the resources to be able to afford private medical aid get R364 deducted from their tax every month. While it might be disguised under the name of a “tax credit”, the effect is the same—the state is giving them money. This costs the state **R30 billion every year**.

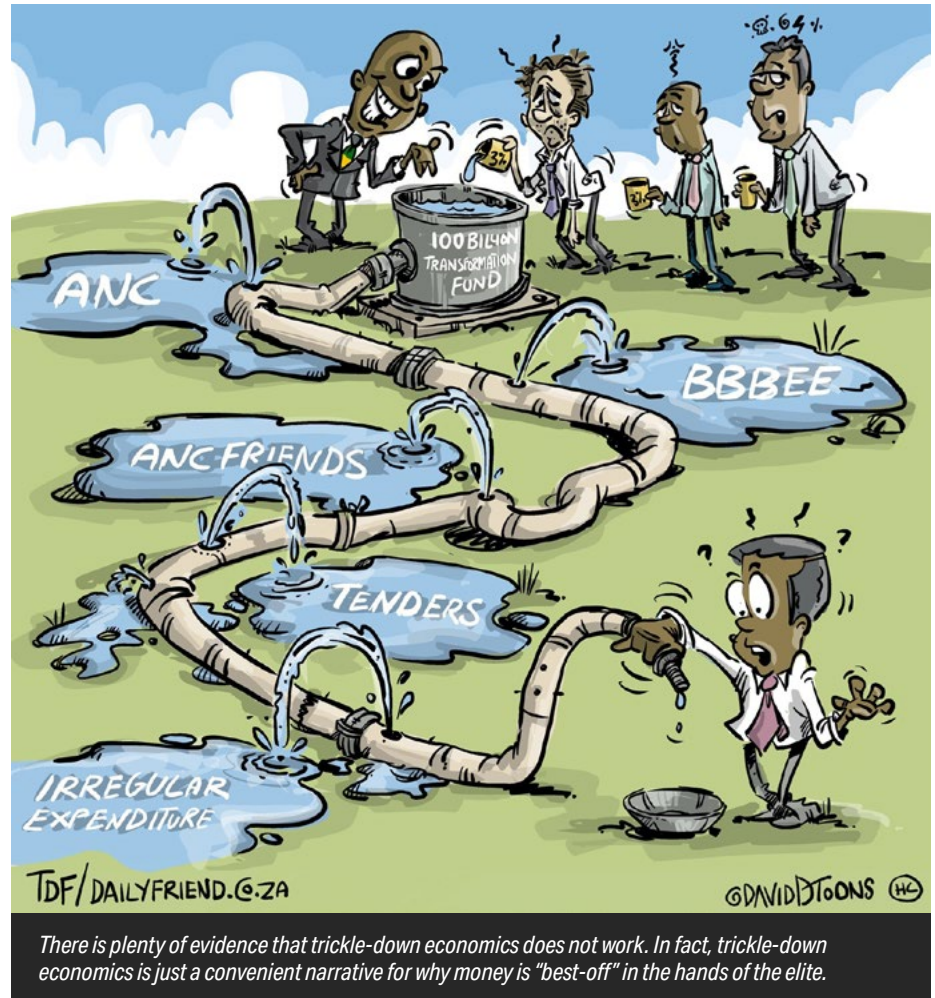
Contrast this with another grant, the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant. This is a grant of R370 per month that’s only available to some of the poorest South Africans. The grant has only increased once since it was introduced, and its future still remains uncertain. Treasury claims that funding the grant is not sustainable. The grant costs the state R35 billion every year.

Medical Aid Credit Rebate	SRD Grant
R364	R370
Privileged 16%	Poor 9%
Costs R30 billion	Costs R35 billion

Looking at these two grants side by side, the kind of economic theory and politics of the Treasury become clear. They are happy to put money into the pockets of wealthier people, as they will “do productive things” with this money that will create growth. That growth will somehow trickle down to the rest. In addition, they say that they believe that incentivising people to use private services “to lessen the burden on the state” is worth paying for.

It should be noted that all the people who make these decisions have medical aid and therefore benefit from this gift. None of them receive the SRD grant.

Now there is no universal truth here; economic theory is inherently political. As with anything political we must ask, who does this politics serve? There is plenty of evidence that trickle-down economics does not work. In this particular case, rather than spending this money, individuals with medical aid are much more likely to save, or invest in financial assets that do little for growth. SRD



*There is plenty of evidence that trickle-down economics does not work. In fact, trickle-down economics is just a convenient narrative for why money is “best-off” in the hands of the elite.*

recipients, on the other hand, are likely to spend, creating demand for goods and services, which in turn leads to growth. In fact, trickle-down economics is just a convenient narrative for why money is “best-off” in the hands of the elite.

Incentivising people to use private health care “to lessen the burden on the state” creates a two-tiered system: those in luck can access higher quality care. It also drains essential resources from the state. Far from taking a burden off the state, as some argue, its services are rendered using staff that the public sector needs and the state trained. And it distances wealthier citizens, who hold significant political power, from public institutions, causing them to become detached from public health considerations. If those with money and power were still invested in the state of our public health, it would not have been allowed to deteriorate to the sorry state it is in today.

Some of the privileged 16% medical aid members are not ‘wealthy’—they are middle class. While such a change will worsen their cost of living problems, this alone cannot justify providing what is essentially a form of government grant on the basis of medical aid membership. While the cost of living problems experienced by the middle and working class must be taken seriously, the medical aid credit rebate is a poorly targeted measure. It eases the cost of living for the middle class alone.

For more information on this and a host of other possible progressive tax reforms, see AIDC’s new publication [Tax in the World’s Most Unequal Country: The South African Fair Tax Monitor on opportunities for resource mobilisation](#).

Chloé van Biljon is a Tax Justice Officer at AIDC.

# CAN THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY'S HISTORY BE AN UNWITTING SOURCE OF HOPE?

By **Jeff Rudin**

**T**HE UNTHINKABLE occurred in December 2024. The South African Communist Party (SACP) announced it would no longer remain subservient to the African National Congress (ANC). It would, for the first time, contest local elections—due in 2026—against the ANC.

So unexpected was the event that it continues to attract a wide range of media coverage. This article seeks to extend the analysis provided by the editorial in *Amanda!* 99 and further developed by Brian Ashley on the website of [Zabalaza for Socialism](#).

To better understand the enormity of the announcement, as well as its simultaneous limitations, along with the hope lying buried in both, requires a rush through the SACP's history. This requires recognising, in the SACP's own words, that, for most of its history, it has grappled with the "ever present question" of its relationship with the ANC.

## A bald history

The baldest outline of the party's history begins in 1921, with its formation as the first communist party in Africa. It also has the admirable distinction of being South Africa's first non-racial political party; an honour all the more memorable in a society structured on statutory racism. The SACP's Zulu name, Abantu abadla ndawonye, translates poetically in capturing the uniqueness of its infancy: "The people who eat together". It is important to acknowledge this foresight, along with the bravery of what it meant to be a communist in a police state in which communists were the devil incarnate.

The new party's first 25 years saw a series of policy shifts and zig-zags, usually dictated by the Comintern (the Third International). One of the first acts



*The unthinkable occurred in December 2024. The South African Communist Party (SACP) announced it would no longer remain subservient to the African National Congress (ANC). It would, for the first time, contest local elections against the ANC.*

of the post-World War II National Party was to ban the SACP, in 1950, which, controversially, led the party to dissolve itself.

In 1953 the SACP was secretly reformed and opted to work with and through the ANC. The party broke cover only in 1961, a year after the ANC itself had been declared illegal. But, from 1953 to recently, it submerged itself into the ANC. During the particularly harsh period of the mid-1960s, it was the de facto ANC.

In 1962 it retrospectively provided itself with a theoretical basis for its relationship with the ANC—the theory of Colonialism of a Special Type. For the ANC this meant a joint commitment between it and the SACP for a National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Formally adopted by the ANC in 1969, the NDR was then seen as a seamless transition from national liberation to socialist liberation.

In the meantime, party leaders and members worked with the ANC and its allies, championing the civil rights and democratic values that were inscribed in the Freedom Charter of 1955. In 1961, an armed struggle was launched, led by communists, and senior ANC members.

By the mid-1960s, militant resistance within the country had been defeated; the leaders of the SACP and the ANC were either imprisoned or in exile. During the party's 30-year exile, it followed the logic of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) by allying itself *unconditionally* to African nationalism, in the form of the ANC. It's the unconditional aspect that needs emphasising,

## The Tripartite Alliance

In 1990, the party and the ANC were unbanned. Their leaders returned from exile to join leaders of the domestic resistance movement which had sprung up in the 1980s, including the leading non-

racial trade union federation, Cosatu. The party and Cosatu formally joined the ANC in the Tripartite Alliance shortly before Nelson Mandela's election as president of a democratic South Africa in 1994.

For the next 30 years the party remained chained to its position of subservience to African nationalism. It continued after the ANC's embrace of neoliberalism in the early 1990s; it continued even though President Thabo Mbeki—Mandela's successor—made no secret of his antipathy to the party in the early 2000s; it continued while President Zuma—elected with the party's full backing for his supposed progressiveness!—dragged the ANC deeper into corruption, economic decay and electoral decline.

It continued even while it formulated a swingeing critique of the ANC's

subservience to capital. [It spelled out](#) that the NDR:

*does not mean that the oppressed 'people' can be regarded as a single or homogeneous entity. The main revolutionary camp in the immediate struggle is made up of different classes and strata.*

It further described the sweeping measures taken by the ANC government to develop a particular “stratum” of the “revolutionary camp”—the African bourgeoisie. [It described](#) “emerging black capital” as “excessively compradorist and parasitic” on big capital. That the current President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, is a billionaire is entirely consistent with the Party’s 2006 analysis. The African bourgeoisie have achieved their NDR. Their only current concern is to become even richer and larger. But, for the SACP, the fixed idea of an NDR moving seamlessly to socialism remains unchanged.

## Failure to flex its muscles

This delusion substantially determined its approach to the negotiated settlement to democracy during 1990–93. Rather than the peaceful transition being the usually understood miracle, it has become fashionable in some circles to see it as a sellout. This is a lazy judgement, even when not being an opportunistic one. The balance of forces both in South Africa and internationally—especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union—along with MK’s own weakness left little option, objectively.

But the SACP was still in a sufficiently powerful position for it to

have had a significant influence on the transition. Consider, as a beginning, its at best timid response to:

- the ANC’s 1992 traveling to the US to learn from the World Bank, IMF and major private banks the imperative of adopting neoliberalism;
- [being silenced by the ANC’s outrageous 1994 accusation of racism](#) against some of the SACP’s leading white members, who were also ANC MPs. The reason? They questioned the ANC-dominated Parliament’s decision to increase the already obscene pay and perks paid by the previous apartheid Parliament to its MPs. Astonishingly, this resulted in them dropping the matter.
- the 1996 “non-negotiable”, neoliberal macro-economic policy, GEAR, that Mandela imposed and that prevails to this day, which the SACP refers to as the heavily coded “1996 class project”

The SACP and its leaders’ public stature at the time enabled a much more robust response to each of these three events (amongst others) had they so chosen. This stature can be seen from these examples:

- The people had unbanned the SACP long before its formal return to legality, with SACP banners and flags displayed at demonstrations prior to 1990.
- The popular response to the 1993 murder of its General Secretary, Chris Hani, was the closest South Africa came to open civil war.
- Joe Slovo enjoyed enormous prestige after succeeding Chris Hani.

- The magic of the Mandela factor internationally, as well as the international hope embedded in the ‘new’ South Africa, all combined to make possible a more principled opposition to some of the harsh realities of the Washington Consensus to which the Mandela government kowtowed.

How is one to understand this misplaced weakness that characterises so much of the SACP’s history? Space permits only the beginning of a complex answer:

- It lost a constituency when what was seen as the established (white) working class defended South Africa’s racial capitalism rather than being the class that would overthrow it. This was a racial capitalism, which, mediated by their unprecedented access to the social surplus, turned them into junior members of the white ruling class. This precipitated their (effective) replacing of the class struggle with the national one.
- The second world war finalised the birth of the hitherto nascent African proletariat, but by then the SACP had already seen its future in the national struggle not the primacy of the class struggle.
- The subsequent delusion of the NDR reinforced the focus on the national struggle and its consequent subservience to the ANC.
- The embourgeoisement of most of the SACP’s leadership—including Cosatu—strengthened the status quo.

To sum up: for just over 70 years—from 1953 to 2024—the Party defined its central task as supporting the ANC in its drive towards political power. After 1994, crucially, the SACP retained its by then customary role as an essentially ignored partner in the Tripartite Alliance. Its own identity and programme were submerged beneath those of the ANC. The party continued to believe that the ANC was still bound by the objectives of the original NDR, cherishing the fantasy that the now capitalist-committed ANC would somehow be an essential part of the transition to socialism.

## Why the break now?

This brings us back to where I began: the SACP’s announcement in December 2024 that it was going to contest the next national election. The announcement astonished everyone, not least the SACP itself.



*A protest in support of the South African Communist Party after it had been banned. One of the first acts of the post-World War II National Party was to ban the SACP, in 1950, which, controversially, led the party to dissolve itself.*

It was, for the SACP, a case of the single straw breaking the camel's back. The long-suffering battered wife had eventually said: "Enough".

So, what was the proverbial straw in this case? The ANC, having lost its majority in the 2024 election, chose to form a coalition government with the second largest parliamentary party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), as its main partner. I have argued elsewhere that the DA's unapologetic endorsement of neoliberalism is the fundamental reason for the ANC's choice. It is this choice that the SACP considers to be a step too far for its tolerance. Yet, this is the same neoliberalism the ANC has remained steadfastly committed to.

Holding together the current coalition government is the commitment to address poverty, unemployment and inequality, which they recognise as plagues. They also agree that economic growth is the only vaccine available—and the key ingredient is neoliberalism.

In practice, this means an increasing dependence on the private sector, which in turn requires being even more business friendly than ever.

To mix metaphors, for the coalition government, the knight on a white horse is the investor.

But it was an ambivalent break. The party insists that it is not a divorce but 'a reconfiguration of the Alliance'. This is why, almost a year later, it still hasn't said anything about any major policy differences with the ANC or given reasons why all left-leaning electors should vote for it. The point is that it can't. To do so would put paid to any rapprochement with the ANC. And now the SACP National Chairperson, Blade Nzimande, has proposed in a 'Discussion Paper' that the decision of the Special Congress should be reconsidered and changed in another Special Conference. Alas, space precludes further elaboration.

Paradoxically, the SACP's inability to insist on the ANC unsaddling neoliberalism is a source of the long-promised hope.



*After 1994, the party continued to believe that the ANC was still bound by the objectives of the original NDR, cherishing the fantasy that the now capitalist-committed ANC would somehow be an essential part of the transition to socialism.*

## Towards a new Left

I predict that the SACP's inability to break with the neoliberal ANC means that, when the ravages of investor-friendly neoliberalism reach a critical point, enough members of the poor and unemployed will abandon waiting for the arrival of the horse. Joining them, if my forecast holds, will be SACP members, in sizeable numbers—including some leading members—no longer willing to accept their party's history of mistakes. Instead of the resignation that, for years, has been their daily bread, they will leave the SACP and join the new rider on a different horse.

The fragmented forces of the broad French Left set an example by forming a victorious united front against the anticipated victory of the neo-fascists in last year's French election. South Africa's innumerable Left organisations—all small and mutually hostile—might, likewise, form a united front capable of attracting the long excluded, though often spoken about, unemployed 50% of the working-age population, along with the long-disaffected members of the SACP, trade unions and rank and file workers.

Such a united front—which might include some rank and file members of both the EFF and MK but not their far-from-Left leaderships—depends, crucially, on the Left's ability to make as many people as possible aware that another world is possible. More important, still, is for them to know that they are the midwives in waiting for this better world.

Way back in 1927, the then ANC President, Josiah Gumede, voiced the passive despair of the African people with these moving words:

*We have nothing and can only tell each other sad stories of our slavery. We have waited long for a liberator, but we don't know where to find him.*

The best way to commemorate this plea for a liberator would be for the mass of South Africans to answer that they don't need a Spartacus, an individual saviour. They are all Spartacus; they are all self-liberators acting collectively in an explicitly anti-neoliberal united front.

Yes, I might be dreaming. But who would have thought that Zohran Mamdani would be the elected Mayor of New York—the capital of capitalism—despite a united ruling class campaign to portray him as a Jew-hating communist!

Jeff Rudin is a member of the *Amandla!* Collective.



At a media conference on 6 July 2025, Lieutenant-General Nhlhla Mkhwanazi named Mchunu and deputy SAPS national commissioner responsible for detectives, Shadrack Sibiyi, among those who enjoy inappropriate relationships with organised crime syndicates.

## Madlanga evidence shows urgent need to protect whistle-blowers and investigators

By **Moepeng Talane**

**T**HERE ARE TWO PARALLEL PROBES into police corruption currently underway on separate constitutionally-mandated platforms. They reveal deep-seated weaknesses in governance, possible political intrusion in police operations, and a need to overhaul arguably the most critical operation in the criminal justice system.

But more than that, the evidence revealed so far tells us what we already know: corruption begets violence and an unfair advantage for the corrupt, particularly when they enjoy protection from the most powerful offices. Thus, no whistle-blower will be safe until the laws that govern protection and its enforcement are enhanced to protect them.

### Police criminality

On 10 July 2024, just a week after the official announcement of the Government of National Unity, Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Police met for the first time in this administration. In a media [statement](#) released the next day, the committee raised concerns about the "attrition" of the South African Police Service's (SAPS) crime intelligence and detective services divisions, and pledged its support. Highlighting these units' under-capacitation in a constrained environment, the committee declared its "immense responsibility to ensure that the SAPS management put in place strategies to remedy capacity challenges within the detective services and crime intelligence divisions".

A year later—almost to the day—came President Cyril Ramaphosa's [announcement](#) of the establishment of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Criminality, Political Interference, and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System, known as the '[Madlanga Commission](#)', after former Constitutional Court Justice Mbuyiseli Madlanga who chairs it. Its mandate is to probe serious allegations regarding top police structures, and his decision to place Police Minister Senzo Mchunu on special leave pending the investigation.

The probe followed public backlash after the 6 July media [conference](#) by KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Provincial Police Commissioner Lieutenant-General Nhlhla Mkhwanazi. At that conference he named Mchunu and deputy SAPS national commissioner responsible for detectives, Shadrack Sibiyi, among those who enjoy inappropriate relationships with organised crime syndicates. Both immediately denied the allegations. What has since surfaced before the Madlanga commission are details of this alleged impropriety and abuse of power across several ranks.

### The evidence so far

We've heard that, at the root of the issues leading up to Mkhwanazi's statements, is Mchunu's intention, expressed in a 31 December 2024 letter to SAPS leadership, to dissolve the Political Killings Task Team (PKTT). This task team was [initiated](#) in 2018 to curb the spate of murders of local politicians in

KZN. In their defence, Mchunu and Sibiyi have characterised the project as an operationally unsustainable entity that the SAPS should consider reconfiguring for wider reach.

Mkhwanazi, National Police Commissioner Major-General Fannie Masemola, and crime intelligence head Lieutenant-General Dumisani Khumalo have conceded that reviewing the task team's mandate and make-up may be prudent. But they also maintain that this may not be the real reason for the call for dissolution. The PKTT, they have argued, started off as a SAPS project, but over time morphed into an inter-departmental affair, whose strategic planning happened through a security cluster inter-ministerial committee. On the ground, they say, it was run as an efficient instrument accounting for how it met its targets.

Mkhwanazi and Khumalo have further lamented what they say is Mchunu's bad faith. They say that he claimed to act in the best interest of the SAPS, but failed to consider all stakeholders needed for a phase-out process. Importantly, the commission is yet to hear from Mchunu. However, both he and Sibiyi have appeared before the parliamentary ad hoc committee also probing the corruption allegations. The committee has not heard the level of operational details brought before Madlanga, but has so far heard from key policy players in policing matters.

## The case for the PKTT

The PKTT, according to Khumalo, who is also its project manager, has been instrumental in its core work of political killings investigations. But it provoked the wrong people when its members began to link crime incidents in Gauteng to the infiltration of SAPS leadership by organised crime players, specifically the Big Five cartel, who allegedly enjoy protection from the top brass.

The mistaken-identity murder of engineer Armand Swart in Vereeniging in April 2024 became the moment of discovery for the Gauteng counter-intelligence operations team working on the case. Khumalo had deployed some of the PKTT's investigative specialists to support the team. They inadvertently uncovered links to businessmen and alleged cartel members Katiso Molefe and Vusumuzi Cat Matlala, who are alleged to have ties to both Mchunu and Sibiya, among others in SAPS leadership.

Varying evidence before the commission alleges that Matlala relied on these ties in securing a R360 million tender in 2024 to provide wellness services to the SAPS, despite being **implicated** in fraud and corruption relating to other procurement processes. While the contract has since been terminated, it was allegedly irregularly entered into with Sibiya's assistance, as Matlala's highest-ranking connection at SAPS operational level. It is important to note that this has so far been hearsay evidence. Some of it was reportedly recounted by detectives who participated in the investigation and subsequent arrest of Matlala in May this year on a separate charge.

The detectives have testified to Madlanga on Molefe, linking him to Swart's murder as the **mastermind** who ordered the hit, albeit on the wrong individual. The hit order, the detectives have surmised, was to eliminate a whistle-blower in a fraud investigation involving state company Transnet. Molefe's nephew Lucky Molefe, a Transnet employee at the time of the murder, was an implicated party. Lucky remains at large.

Matlala and Katiso Molefe meet in their **Big Five** involvement, which Khumalo has characterised as a network known for overseeing planned ATM bombings, contract killings, and kidnappings, among other crimes.

## Who protects the protectors?

Extremely concerning, too, is the fact that the detectives who effected the arrests of these seemingly powerful individuals are themselves **victims** of alleged bullying, security threats, and smearing.

Three of them have had to appear in camera before the commission, as they are in witness protection and fear for their safety. They concluded their testimonies with chilling accounts of how their investigative work in pursuing the two and their associates has impacted their lives. But they were clear in their views that witness protection does not guarantee their safety indefinitely.

Witnesses A, B, and C, as they are known to the commission, all spoke of being uprooted from their families when most South Africans enjoy quality family time in the festive December holidays, and of now living a shadow of their former lives.

Recalling their intimidation at the first bail appearance of Molefe's co-accused in the Swart murder at a Vereeniging court in 2024, Witness B told the commission that it was not unusual for investigating officers to be the targets of threats. But starkly unnerving for her was the realisation that this time they were unsafe even from their own. The detectives' testimonies revealed incidents of interference across different

SAPS levels as they proceeded with their investigations.

Their full-time protection arose from a threat analysis assessment by their supervisor. But the long-standing brazen disregard for the letter of the law by other senior officials begs the question: we know that even those who fight organised crime in its many facets are vulnerable to the same threats as ordinary members of society—so what will happen after the Madlanga and parliamentary processes? Will there be an appetite to overhaul the country's whistle-blower protection and support mechanisms to make them truly effective in the fight against persistent corruption and lawlessness?

## Urgent intervention needed

Corruption Watch was one of many civil society organisations that contributed to the Department of Justice's (DoJ) discussion **paper** on whistle-blowing in 2023, fresh on the heels of Ramaphosa's implementation plan for the Zondo recommendations. The DoJ team deserves kudos for significant research into the best possible mechanisms for legislative restructuring of whistle-blower protection, with numerous examples from other countries. But we have not seen the next phase of this process.

Even when we do see it, civil society should mobilise and encourage the public to partake in this critical process; and we must do so with a clear understanding of the urgency of the situation. Police officers like the Madlanga witnesses risked all to bring prosecution-ready cases of well-connected accused before our courts. There must be unwavering and intentional protection and support for them, regardless of factors such as cost. It remains one of the only ways to win the war against corruption: protecting whistle-blowers and those to whom they report.

The police committee must work to rebuild the capacity it refers to in its statement, while also ensuring permanent policy changes for police best practice standards. As a society under siege from lawlessness, we should all insist on the protection of corruption investigators and whistle-blowers, regardless of the sector in which they operate.

Moepeng Talane is a senior journalist and editor with civil society organisation Corruption Watch.



**Babita Deokoran. Murdered 23 August 2021. Corruption begets violence and an unfair advantage for the corrupt, particularly when they enjoy protection from the most powerful offices. No whistle-blower will be safe until the laws that govern protection and its enforcement are enhanced to protect them.**

# FREE ELECTRICITY FOR THE POOR

## AND COST RECOVERY FOR THE REST

By **Tracy Ledger**

**U**NIVERSAL ACCESS TO electricity is essential for equitable development: electricity enables a higher standard of living, and access to better and cheaper food (through home cooking and refrigerated storage), and it is essential for almost every home-based or small enterprise. One of South Africa's priority policy goals since 1994 has been to ensure that everyone—no matter how poor they are—can use basic services like electricity to improve their lives. The 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) emphasised the critical role of universal access to services in meeting the country's development goals (Section 1.4.2.):

*The first priority is to begin to meet the basic needs of people—jobs, land, housing, water, electricity, telecommunications, transport, a clean and healthy environment, nutrition, health care and social welfare.*

As a result, hundreds of billions of rands have been invested in extending infrastructure to previously unserved areas.

But physical access alone doesn't deliver comprehensive development benefits. A connection to the electricity grid is of limited value when the user cannot afford to access the amount of electricity they require to improve their lives.

Access to services only fulfils an equitable development mandate (rather than a basic survival mandate) when everyone can access a certain *minimum amount* of services. A *survival level of access* only supports the lowest standard of living and offers no opportunities to engage in socioeconomic activity that will lift people out of poverty. By contrast, a *developmental level of access* will allow households to cook regularly (which usually results in more nutritious and cheaper food consumption) and to engage in small-scale economic activities.

**Research indicates** that households that can access sufficient electricity are more likely to start their own micro enterprise than those that cannot.



*The high level of poverty in South Africa is the greatest obstacle to households and small enterprises being able to use sufficient electricity to improve their lives and generate incomes.*

*Genuinely pro-poor, pro-equity policies for the provision of basic services must aim to progressively deliver a developmental level of access for everyone. They must not stop at a survival level.*

**Research** from the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) suggests that a developmental level of electricity for a household where it is the sole source of energy is 350kWh per month. This allows for cooking every day, use of basic electrical appliances, lighting and access to information services. The long-term policy priority for access to electricity should be to ensure that every household can access this amount of electricity. A realistic, medium-term goal could be set at 200kWh/household per month, given current budgetary constraints.

### Affordability is the greatest barrier

The high level of poverty in South Africa is the greatest obstacle to households and small enterprises being able to use sufficient electricity to improve their lives and generate incomes. In recognition of this, most of South Africa's electricity

policies are clear that tariffs must be "affordable".

The current approach to affordable service delivery for low-income households is a combination of (i) free services and (ii) payment on a sliding (cross-subsidised) scale for consumption above the amount of free services. In theory, this is a model that could deliver universal developmental access, but whether it actually does depends on two critical factors:

- The quantum of the free services compared with the developmental level of access; and
- The cost of the balance of services that households must pay for, over and above the free amount, to reach developmental level.

Currently, the national free services programme allocates just 50kWh per household of free electricity each month. So the free allocation makes up only a small part of what households require (14% of the developmental level) and they must pay for the balance. But can low-income households actually afford that additional electricity?

## What are 'affordable' tariffs?

Most of South Africa's policies that deal with delivery of basic services contain the objective of ensuring that these are *affordable*. But there is generally very little (or nothing) in the way of concrete affordability standards against which this objective can be assessed. What is an affordable monthly tariff for electricity? R300? R500? Policymakers do not currently have an answer to this question. Without a clear understanding of what level of tariff is *affordable* (in a pro-development context) for each category of user, we cannot assess whether a tariff meets the affordability objective.

The issue of affordability is not addressed to any meaningful degree during annual electricity tariff setting processes, either by municipalities or by NERSA. Blanket statements about whether proposed tariffs are 'affordable' or 'unaffordable' are never backed up by detailed empirical analyses that compare the cost of services to household income and poverty.

## How to measure affordability

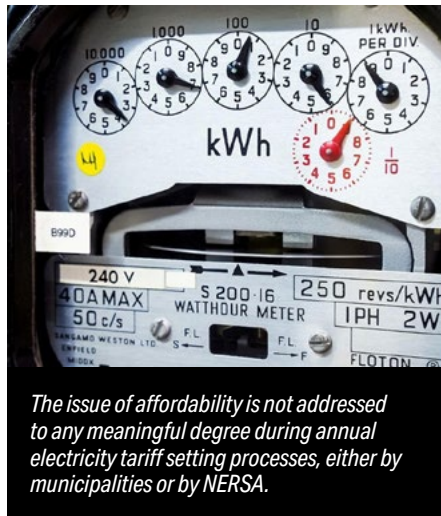
Globally, the most used way of measuring affordability is to calculate the percentage of income that is actually spent on a service. The most common measures indicate that households should spend no more than 10% of their total household income on electricity.

However, there are several problems with using this approach in a high-poverty environment such as South Africa:

- The 'percentage of income' approach measures how much a household is *actually* spending on services. The poorer the household, the less money they will spend, by self-limiting usage to levels well below what would be considered developmental. The fact that expenditure on a survival level of services is below an upper limit does not automatically mean that the cost of that service should be considered affordable. We want to know how affordable the developmental level of usage is, not the current (survival) level.
- It is problematic to use a percentage-of-income approach in a high-poverty environment where many households have very small incomes and food insecurity is high.

The human-rights-based approach to affordability, proposed in the water sector by the UN Special Rapporteur, takes a *relative* approach towards affordability.

It stipulates that a service can never be considered affordable if it requires the household to sacrifice other basic needs, such as food. This relative approach gives a much clearer picture of the poverty (development) implications of a certain level of tariffs. Black Sash research indicates that food is the main item poor households sacrifice to pay for electricity. If payment for household services requires reducing the household food budget to a below-adequate nutrition level, then the net developmental impact is negative, and the cost of services should automatically be deemed unaffordable.



## So how affordable are current tariffs?

PARI has undertaken [detailed research](#) to determine the affordability of electricity and water tariffs for poor households. We combined water and electricity costs in our assessment because households have to pay for both services, so they impact the affordability of each other. The assessment was made based on these calculations (for the cost of electricity and water, we used the average of tariffs across metros and, for electricity, Eskom):

- **Total household income** minus basic food expenditure requirements equals post-food income
- **Post-food income** minus cost of electricity and water equals residual income.

So the residual household income is the income that is left to pay for all other household expenses, such as accommodation and transport. For the purposes of this study, we assumed that, if it is less than R900 (i.e. R30 per day) then the cost of those services should be deemed unaffordable. This is a very conservative approach, since most

households require more money than this to pay for all those other items.

Our results showed the following:

1. About 25% of the population live below the food poverty line. For those households, there are no scenarios where the household can afford to purchase *any* level of services, even if food consumption is restricted to below an adequate nutrition level. The reality for these households is that they generally consume even less than the calorie-sufficient amount of food, in order to pay for other basic essentials. This contributes directly to South Africa's high levels of child malnutrition and significant burden of non-communicable disease related to poor diet. 28% of South African children under the age of 5 are classified as malnourished. Diabetes caused by poor nutrition is now the leading cause of death among Black women in South Africa.
2. Another 15% of the population live above the food poverty line, but below the lower bound poverty line. For these households, there is also no scenario where any level of services payment could be considered affordable. Even if the household limits its food consumption to below what is necessary for basic nutrition and receives all the free services, the residual income remaining is below the threshold R900 per month level.

So for households living below the lower-bound poverty line (40% of the population), there is no scenario in which the current cost of services can be considered affordable within the context of South Africa's national development objectives around food security and using services to improve standards of living.

*These households cannot afford to pay anything for services.*

The result of this situation is that households either resort to illegal connections or limit consumption to the free services allowances (in those households where they do actually receive this) or get into debt to pay for services. None of these outcomes support a developmental agenda.

*The only way in which these households can access services in a sustainable manner to support socioeconomic development is if those services are free.*

The current unaffordability of services is critically undermining the impact of the remainder of the social wage package: the reality is that social grant recipients are often not using their grants received from the state to improve their nutritional status. They are using them to pay another part of the state for survival levels of water and electricity.

In 2017, [research concluded](#) that there are two main reasons why the introduction and expansion of the social grant system has not translated into the expected improvement in general nutritional status: 1) food prices have increased faster than grants, and 2) there are multiple other claims on that income. Notable among these is the rapidly increasing electricity price. Black Sash found that the main reason why childcare grant recipients borrowed money was to pay for electricity. The same report found that grant recipients regularly trade food expenditure for electricity purchases.

## What does this mean for electricity tariff-setting policy?

The current approach to electricity tariff-setting is that service providers (municipalities and Eskom) calculate the cost of providing the service, and then apply to NERSA for a tariff that covers that cost. Most services providers use a sliding scale of tariffs, where those who consume more partly subsidise the tariffs of those who consume less. However, the over-arching approach is to have tariffs that reflect cost.

The inability of households to afford electricity is often used as the basis for a proposal that we need tariffs that are lower than the cost recovery level, and that the state should compensate service providers for the difference.

We do not believe that this is the best approach to addressing affordability; it may in fact cause more problems than it solves. Instead, we believe that we need to have a process of accurate cost reflective tariffs (i.e. service providers must accurately calculate what it costs them to provide a service and tariffs must reflect that). We think the best way to support low-income households is through direct support (free services to qualifying households).

The main reasons why we support this approach are:

1. It is imperative that we have an accurate calculation of what it costs to provide a service like electricity. Our long-term goal should be to make that cost as low as possible, but we cannot do that without an accurate cost determination. If tariffs are no longer based on costs incurred, then the incentive for service providers to manage costs is partly removed. The fact is that, under the current system, there is little incentive for Eskom to manage costs, with serious negative implications for economic development.
2. More free services for lower-income households will result in more equitable outcomes and better targeting than subsidising tariffs, within the current fiscal constraints.

So, the 40% of households which cannot afford to pay for services should receive a minimum developmental level of 200kWh of consumption for free. If we attempt to make the first 200kWh of consumption free for *all* consumers (through subsidised tariffs), this will represent a significant fiscal burden, and most likely can only be funded from cuts to other essential state expenditure. The equity impact is much greater if we focus funding on the poorest households, while other users pay a cost-reflective tariff.

3. For much the same reasons, if we use lower tariffs to support poor households, we will only be providing them with part of the support that they need, since these households cannot afford to pay anything for the developmental level of services.

In summary, we recommend that the process of setting tariffs is separated from the process of supporting access for low-income households. The former should focus on cost reflective tariffs, within a clear target of cost optimisation. The latter is best achieved by ensuring significantly higher levels of free services to qualifying households.

Tracy Ledger leads the Just Transition Programme at the [Public Affairs Research Institute](#).

*Households either resort to illegal connections or limit consumption to the free services allowances, or get into debt to pay for services. None of these outcomes support a developmental agenda.*



# A SECOND CRISIS COMMITTEE BORN IN RURAL EASTERN CAPE

By **Dick Forslund**

**F**OR THOSE WHO HAVEN'T KEPT UP with this saga, SANRAL is building the N2 Wild Coast Toll Highway in the Eastern Cape. The local community, through the Amadiba Crisis Committee, has been fighting to change the planned route, from the coast to the centre of Amadiba.

As part of the project, Sanral is building the highest bridge in Africa over the Mtentu river. The community of Khanyayo, on the other side, the south side, of the river, has also been battling with SANRAL since 2018, when the highway started to be built. However, forced relocations and exhuming of graves did not affect everyone. And many that suffered the pain trusted it would be balanced by jobs to family members in the N2 project, and other promises made to the community by Sanral and its consultants. So the community was not united in its opposition.

Sanral is however notorious for not being able to keep its promises. They are typically supported—captured—by local traditional leaders and businesspeople with links to the ANC.

So, Khanyayo community came together. In August, following the example of their close neighbour Amadiba, residents of Khanyayo met and decided to form a Khanyayo Crisis Committee. The headman of Khanyayo, Chief Jama, has locked the community hall to stop the community from holding meetings and continuing to write petitions to Sanral. The meeting took place in a church.

## Construction causing havoc

The building of the N2 through community land in Khanyayo is causing havoc.

Firstly, Sanral decided to use a lodge designed for some fifty tourists to accommodate hundreds of workers on the project. As a result, a conservation tank 20 meters away from the Khanyayo Clinic started to spill sewage into its yard.

The staff has been working in the stench for a year. The sewage is also suspected to contaminate the water in a nearby river used for drinking water. The whole area is a wetland and dirt travels far.



*In August, following the example of their close neighbour Amadiba, residents of Khanyayo met and decided to form a Khanyayo Crisis Committee. Amadiba Crisis Committee managed to get funding for their first T-shirts.*

Secondly, and even more serious because it risks of damage for the indefinite future in the community, the natural fresh water supply in Khanyayo has been strangled. Surplus stones and debris have been being dumped in the wetlands beside the road build since construction began. As a result, the rivers and springs in Khanyayo are drying up. On top of that they are covered with dust from the blasting.

Wetlands make decent life and subsistence agriculture possible in Pondoland. So Sanral's inability or unwillingness to control its contractors, to intervene and stop what is going on, is therefore bad news in Amadiba. Whatever the final route of the N2, such violations and destructive behaviour by contractors who take shortcuts to increase profits cannot be accepted. In June, ACC opened a case with the Green Scorpions and the SA Human Rights Commission about this destructive behaviour. It was not only an act of solidarity, but also of self-defence. The slogan 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All' applies.

## Release Andile Valela from prison in Flagstaff!

The Khanyayo community is right now also fighting the criminal justice system in Flagstaff.

On 14 April, a community member, Andile Valela, was assaulted by police officers when he came early to a picket

outside the gates of the offices of Sanral's contractor, WBHO Construction. Two hours later he went to the Mtontsasa SAPS to report them. There he got handcuffed, arrested and assaulted again.

The trumped-up charges are "damaging a police car with a stone" and "insulting SAPS officers". Bail has been denied twice, the main argument being that he did not give the name on his ID when he was arrested; he gave his cultural name used by the whole community. The judge decided it made him a flight risk. He completely disregarded the fact that it was Andile who went to the police. Different cultural and ID names are common in the whole of the Eastern Cape. It is even a legacy of apartheid.

Comrade Andile Valela has been in prison for seven months. The trial is of course postponed again and again. In a petition delivered to the Flagstaff court in November, the community slams the practice in Eastern Cape of using refusal of bail as a punishment before any trial. The denial of bail has been appealed in the Mthatha High Court.

*The struggle continues*

Dick Forslund is an economist at AIDC and a son-in-law (umkhwenyana) of the Amadiba Crisis Committee.

# Mismanagement

## of a union medical aid

By **Suraya Jawoodeen**

**S**OME TRADE UNION INVESTMENT companies own and manage, amongst their portfolio of investments, financial benefit schemes that are marketed to their membership and those of other trade unions. These financial benefits include funeral policies and medical aid schemes. This article reflects on one such example, as part of a series of articles on the difficulties and contradictions of these investment companies.

### The Sizwe Hosmed Medical Scheme

The National Union of Metalworkers' Numsa Investment Company (NIC) owns the 3Sixty Global Solutions Group. The 3Sixty Global Solutions Group owns 3Sixty Health. 3Sixty Health administers the Sizwe Hosmed Medical Scheme. 3Sixty Health (formerly Sechaba Medical Solutions) was founded in 1978 by mainly Black doctors who wanted to start up a medical aid for disenfranchised Black South Africans.

Sizwe Hosmed is an open medical scheme, unlike many others that are restricted, usually according to employer. It was formed through the merger of Sizwe Medical Fund and Hosmed Medical Scheme in 2021.

The merger process itself was beset with many problems between the Sizwe Medical Scheme and the Council of Medical Schemes (CMS). After the merger, the joint scheme continued to struggle on many fronts.

By 2022 the scheme was recording the fourth-highest operating deficit according to the December 2022 Industry Report of the CMS. The scheme experienced higher claims than anticipated in its pricing for the 2022 benefits.

There were at least two forensic investigations into the payment systems of the scheme and some of the CEOs were removed.

### Problems with the merger process

The proposed merger process between Sizwe and Hosmed medical schemes was opposed by the CMS in 2020, who made an application to place Sizwe under curatorship instead. The CMS argued that a due diligence study demonstrated several problems:

- There were inadequate processes for members to vote for the merger;
- Accreditation to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) would lapse due to the merger, and the merged scheme would need to reapply for accreditation. This would result in municipal employees not being able to access their medical aid in this period – hence the objections by the trade unions operating in the local government sector;
- The due diligence was only undertaken when the merger process was already underway;
- A report by Sizwe's auditors highlighted deficiencies in internal controls on the part of the scheme's Principal Officer, trustees and administrator;

- The proposed merger was not reflected in the 2019 annual financial statements;
- Trustees' remuneration for training, travel, accommodation, telephone and other costs were not reconciled;
- The scheme's solvency levels in the annual financial statements were incorrectly calculated; and
- The annual financial statements for year end 31 December 2019 were rejected by the CMS.

The Sizwe Medical Scheme was previously placed under curatorship in 2012.

### Statutory management

On 11th July 2024, CMS placed the scheme under statutory management. The statutory manager's role was to ensure legal compliance, financial soundness and proper administration. He provided reports to the CMS on progress. Whilst there was a slight improvement in the June 2025 report, it was noted that the scheme was in a poor financial state and that further action was required.

A joint statement by the Board of Trustees and the CMS stated that the decline in solvency levels was due to the underpricing of the benefits, and historically unreliable budgetary and forecasting processes.

The statutory manager's report of 15 August 2025 stated that the scheme was facing severe financial and operational problems, critical solvency issues, non-compliance with regulatory requirements, membership losses and unsustainable claims.

The CMS argued that the drop in solvency levels would not allow the scheme to be technically solvent. This resulted in the application by the CMS to place the scheme under provisional curatorship.

### Provisional curatorship

As a result of this application, the Scheme was placed under provisional curatorship by the Gauteng High Court, effective 4 September 2025.



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*Sizwe Hosmed, owned by Numsa Investment Company and supplier of medical aid to many trade union members, was placed under statutory management. The company was in a bad financial position and there were material irregularities and gaps in its administration.*

The Registrar used reports of KPMG and the statutory manager to demonstrate that Sizwe Hosmed was in a bad financial position and that there were material irregularities and gaps in its administration. The court appointed a provisional curator to address ongoing solvency concerns, non-regulatory and non-compliance issues. This process dissolves the board.

The CMS expects the provisional curator to investigate Sizwe Hosmed's financial position and recommend solutions for the future of the scheme. These may include a merger with another scheme, liquidation, or the continuation of the scheme.

## Loss of membership and marketing space

Sizwe Hosmed announced that it would raise subscriptions by 19% in 2026. The South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC) said that, according to the conditions of accreditation, this required consultation with SALGBC. No such consultation took place. So the SALGBC has indicated that it will encourage municipal workers to move to other medical aids. Workers had also complained that they had difficulties accessing healthcare services.

The Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU), also in local government, says that its members found that healthcare practitioners required upfront cash payment, as it was alleged that Sizwe Hosmed had stopped honouring claims.

As a result, the scheme has not been granted accreditation to market the scheme and benefit options to local government employees for the 2026 year.

## Solvency levels

The Medical Schemes Act (MSA) 131 of 1998 defines financial soundness to mean that a medical scheme has sufficient assets to generally conduct its business, provide for its liabilities at all times and meet the prescribed solvency requirements. The Regulations specify that it must, at all times, hold a minimum of 25% of its members' gross annual contributions.

The solvency level of Sizwe Hosmed at the time of the merger in November 2021, was at 36.5% but it dropped to 25.4% by November 2022, and fell below 25% in early 2023. This then required a detailed business plan under Regulation 29 of the MSA.

The first three business plans, submitted between February and October 2023, were rejected by the CMS, due to inadequate information and

*Members of Numsa and other trade unions are members of this scheme and have already been adversely affected by its financial problems. They have been faced with demands for upfront cash payments by health care providers and non-payment by the scheme to those providers.*



inaccurate forecasts compared to actual performance. A fourth plan submitted in September 2024, after a change in actuaries, was approved by the CMS in December.

Solvency levels stood at 5.6% in June 2025 and 6.2% in July. There is a view that the reserves fell so low due to underpricing of benefits, challenges in financial forecasting, and a R162 million claims shortfall.

## Non-health care expenditure of the scheme

The CMS 2022 Industry Report stated that the non-health care expenditure of the scheme was higher than the average in the industry in a number of different areas. Some examples in the report include:

- The marketing and advertising expenditure of the scheme was four times the industry average;
- The 18 trustees were paid R11.8 million in 2022, an average fee of R658 000 per trustee. That is way above the industry average of R389 000, putting it at number 3 in fees paid. In other medical Schemes, like Discovery and GEMS, trustees are paid for attending meetings. Sizwe Hosmed trustees were also paid simply for being trustees.
- The Principal Officer at the scheme received a 20.23% pay rise in 2022; and
- Sizwe Hosmed was among five medical schemes with the highest expenditure on their AGM.

## Is this an appropriate model?

The problems at the scheme span over a decade, with repeated interventions by the CMS and internal forensic

investigations to attempt to address them. However, none of these interventions has achieved the turnaround required to stabilise the scheme.

Members of Numsa and other trade unions are members of this scheme and have already been adversely affected by its financial problems. They have been faced with demands for upfront cash payments by health care providers and non-payment by the scheme to those providers.

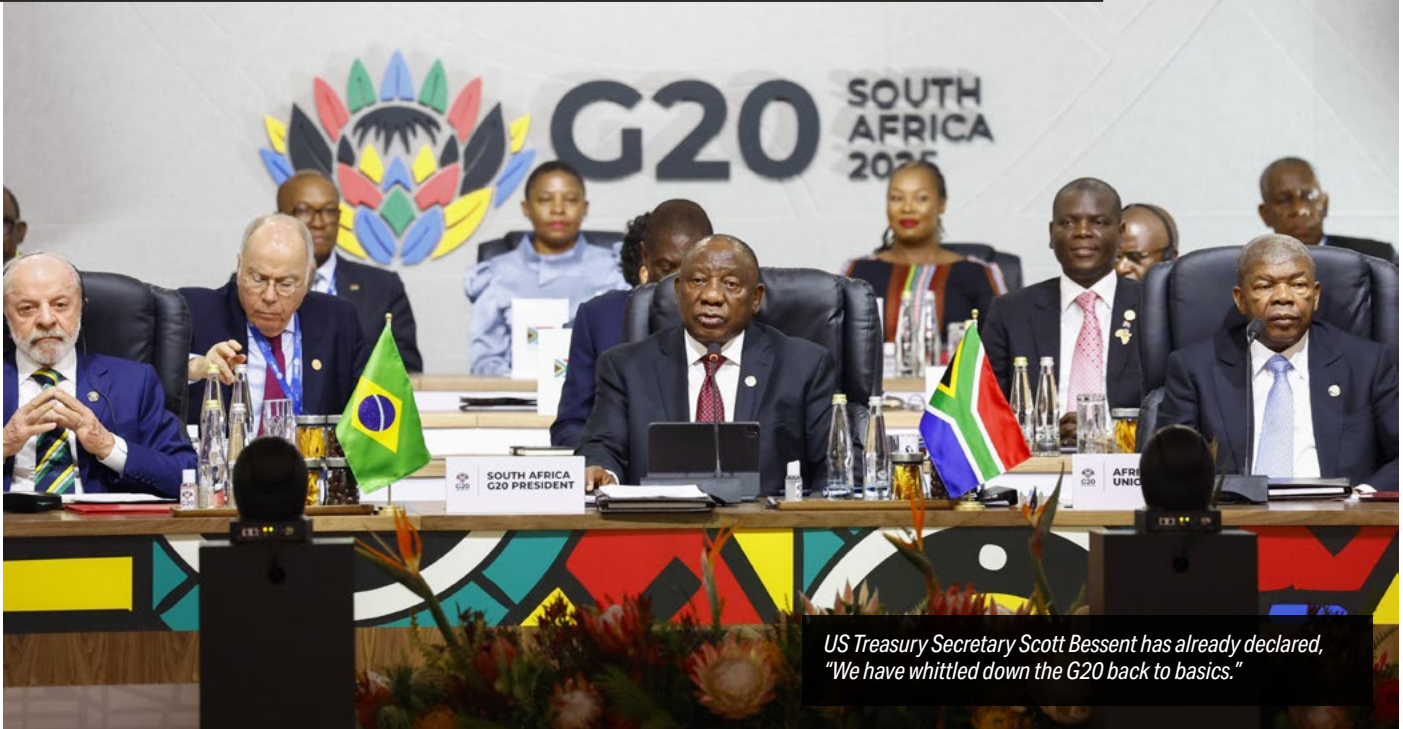
The Board of Trustees of the scheme includes trade union leaders and officials who rely on the business leadership and judgement of the company directors and executive. Very often the company leadership are rewarded through large financial packages and are not held accountable when the business fails. There are repeated patterns and examples of how little control and direction the trade union representatives have as trustees on these boards.

The original intention by the trade unions was to provide affordable financial services and associated products for their members. For a number of reasons these services and products have been badly managed over a prolonged period of time. The unions will have to urgently confront and address if this is the most appropriate model to provide services and benefits to their members.

Further articles will explore the appropriateness of trade unions attempting to address issues of redress through the capitalist market.

**Suraya Jawoodeen** is the former Deputy General Secretary of Nehawu, former Head of Secretariat at Numsa, and currently works on a short-term contract at the Alternative Information Development Centre (AIDC) and Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED).

## G20, COP30 AND MUCH MORE MICKEY-MOUSE MULTILATERALISM TO COME



By **Patrick Bond**

**T**HE G20 COMPRISES 19 OF THE world's major economies plus the European Union; in 2023, the African Union was added (tokenistically).

The body was formed in 1999 as a finance ministers' club at a Berlin meeting, at a time of nervousness about economic crises in several middle-income countries, including South Africa. But it was in 2008 that the G20 graduated to a heads-of-state annual meeting, due to the global financial crisis.

As the G20's first major act, South Africa's then-Finance Minister Trevor Manuel led a committee that granted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) nearly \$1 trillion worth of new funding, approved by the G20 in an April 2009 London emergency meeting. That session also coordinated central banks' low interest rates and money printing, termed Quantitative Easing (QE), to avoid a repeat of the 1930s Great Depression.

And again in 2020 during the Covid-19 crisis, G20 leaders agreed that their capitalist self-interest was threatened sufficiently by widespread pandemic-prevention lockdowns and economic seizures, that further QE and much lower interest rates were needed. In addition, a brief pause on the poorest countries' foreign debt repayments was offered. But that didn't prevent three

African economies that were among the 2010s' fastest-growing in the world—Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia—from defaulting on foreign debt repayments between 2020 and 2023, or terrible fiscal pressure from mounting across the continent.

These two financial bailouts were G20 interventions that suggest, in a time of peril, fusion between imperialist and subimperial countries can be achieved. On the other hand, divisions amongst capitalists over handling Covid-19 vaccines and treatment were *not* solved within the G20 from 2020-22: British and German leaders vetoed efforts by South Africa and India wanting an Intellectual Property waiver (the way AIDS drugs were made generic in 2001, saving millions of lives).

Since then, the world's crises—climate and biodiversity catastrophes, brutal wars, economic volatility, the threat of rampant Artificial Intelligence, extreme inequality and others—have multiplied, and their causes now extend well beyond the greed and irresponsibility of the traditional Western imperial powers.

The advent of far-right Western rulers (the two Trump presidencies, and Giorgia Meloni in Italy since 2022), and three more neo-fascist parties currently leading in European polls, brings with it the threat and reality of fast-spreading

'paleo-conservative', economically-isolationist, xenophobic and socially-reactionary politics.

In this ominous period, the African continent's first hosting of the G20 was meant to build upon Lula Ignacio da Silva's November 2024, Rio de Janeiro summit, by taking the baton on a variety of issues: coordinated international taxation of the ultra-rich, food security, adding 'disaster resilience and response,' African debt relief, climate financing for a 'just energy transition' and 'harnessing critical minerals for inclusive growth and sustainable development.' The likes of Joseph Stiglitz and other progressives were even drawn into a major inequality commission—albeit one which did not have the grace to recognise any initiatives from social activists.

From the beginning of 2025, more than [130 official meetings were held](#) in various glamorous South African sites. Not only did G20 civil servants labour over phraseology, but so did a myriad of allied groups Ramaphosa's team had gathered: B20 for business ([guided by McKinsey and Bain](#) in spite of being [told by Ramaphosa to fire those particular consultants](#)), L20 for workers, W20 for women, C20 for civil society, Ch20 for children, M20 for media, etc. But as the dust settles, *it all appears for naught*.

## 'Non-binding' progressive policies and revealing omissions

What's wrong with the documentation so laboriously prepared? Put simply: it's another case of talk left, walk right.

Pretoria's choice of three progressive theme words—solidarity, equality, sustainability—was uplifting, and quickly recognised as the precise opposite of the new Trump regime's agenda. As Rubio [blurted out](#) on X.com back in February:

"I will NOT attend the G20 Summit in Johannesburg. South Africa is doing very bad things. Expropriating private property. Using G20 to promote 'solidarity, equality, & sustainability. In other words: DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] and climate change'."

But in reality, derailment of all progressive G20-legitimizing work is inevitable. One reason is the Declaration's continual resort to two weasel words—'voluntary' and 'non-binding'—in vital areas where capitalism desperately needs major doses of nationalisation, or at least tough regulation. Instead, the Critical Minerals Framework, the High-Level Principles on Sustainable Industrial Policy for Inclusive Economic Growth, Industrialisation, Jobs and Equality, the Common Carbon Credit Data Model, the South African Presidency initiative on a G20 Africa Cooperation Agenda on Trade and Investment, the implementation of Voluntary and Non-Binding High-Level Principles on Combating Illicit Financial Flows—all of these are "voluntary and non-binding".

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has already [declared](#), "We have whittled down the G20 back to basics."

## G20 starves us of peace and food sovereignty

There was much hollow, hypocritical rhetoric in the Johannesburg Leaders' Declaration, for example:

*We will work for a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ukraine, as well as ending other conflicts and wars around the globe.*

Those crafting the Declaration's vapid phrasing were too fearful to name the aggressors and profiteers—much less arrange punishment.

Other high-minded hypocritical fibs pothole the Leaders' Declaration:

*We affirm our unwavering commitment to act in accordance with international law including international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations and its principle of peaceful settlement of disputes and in this regard, we condemn all attacks against civilians and infrastructure.*

And on and on.

When it comes to hunger crises, other important words are unmentionable in either the Declaration or the G20 Food Task Force statement: multinational agribusiness, intellectual property, genetic engineering, profiteering and speculation. These terms are not to be found, because they are assumed to be a natural part of corporate agriculture, although all of them undermine food sovereignty and climate sanity. Reforms like "land redistribution" and "agro-ecology" and genuine peasant

empowerment are not mentioned; they would violate the G20 Food Task Force's commitment to "pursuing actions that are in compliance with WTO rules and obligations."

So the G20 declaration pushes 'food security' phraseology without any concession whatsoever to the objectives of grassroots [food sovereignty movements](#).

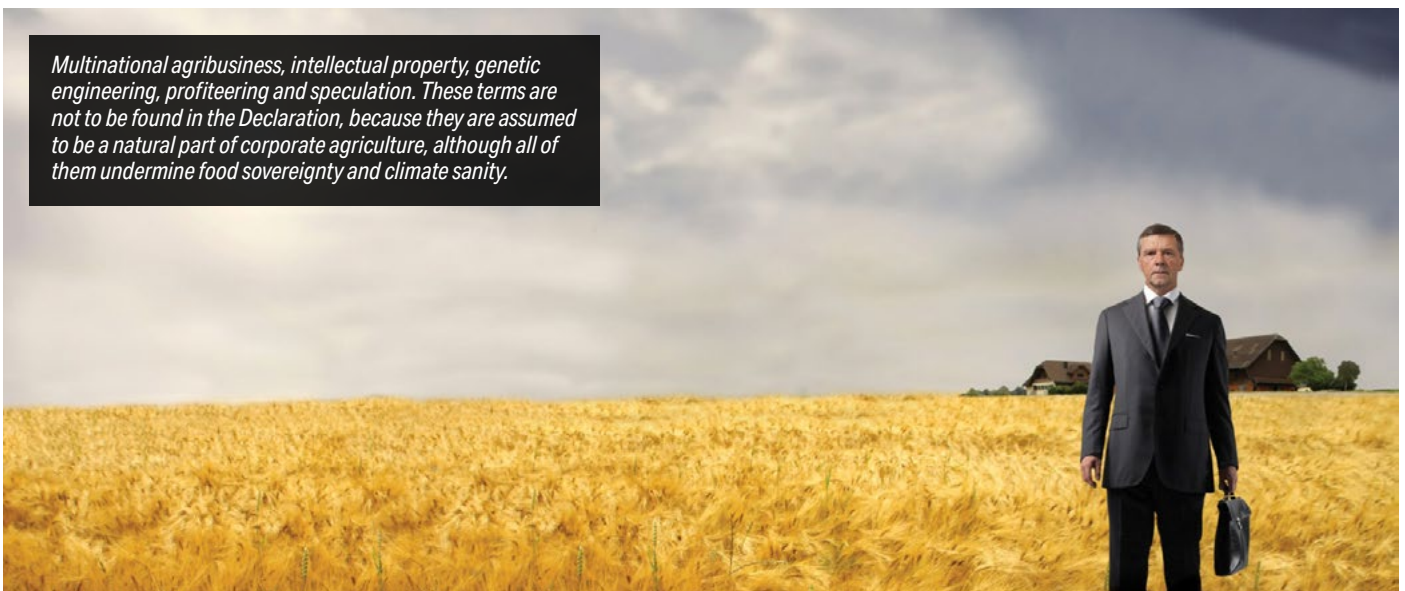
In addition to ignoring the content demanded by progressive anti-hunger and food-system activists, the most obvious aspect of any G20 official statement is silence about—and thus disrespect for—processes of civil society mobilisation. The G20 Food Task Force statement ignores courageous movements around the world—for example the Via Campesina network, whose members have struggled valiantly for land redistribution and pro-peasant policies.

But civil society should have had no expectation of being taken seriously by the G20 in Johannesburg, in a country where more than 12 million of the 62 million population is considered to be food insecure, led by a hedonistic ruling class that exudes subimperial obeisance to agricultural imperialism.

## Financial imperialism

The same upward-gazing obsession could be observed in the G20's highest-profile task force—led by the same Trevor Manuel who bailed out the IMF in 2009—on '[Growth, Debt and Development](#)'. This was aimed mainly at alleviating the home continent's worsening fiscal crises, for example through [IMF gold sales](#). The mass protests and demands from so many African movements where unrest has been intense in recent months—from Madagascar and Mozambique, to Morocco and Tunisia—are not referenced, much less acknowledged and respected.

*Multinational agribusiness, intellectual property, genetic engineering, profiteering and speculation. These terms are not to be found in the Declaration, because they are assumed to be a natural part of corporate agriculture, although all of them undermine food sovereignty and climate sanity.*



Specifically unmentionable for G20 financial-reform bureaucrats are the clear strategies coming from [Kenya's Gen Z since mid-2024](#)—for example, demanding 'debt audits' to determine whether corrupt lending for corrupt projects should be considered 'Odious Debt'. Then there are the two biggest South African parastatal debtors—Eskom electricity (for the Medupi and Kusile coal-fired power plants) and Transnet (for Chinese locomotives). They are obvious cases in which the fiscal burden of corruption soared over the past two decades, due to Pretoria taking on foreign loan repayment obligations.

Many other [civil society forces across Africa](#) argue for 'reparations' based on standard 'polluter pays' principles, to be paid as 'climate debt' by the big Western and BRICS greenhouse gas emitters—including China, which is owed a substantial share of Africa's foreign debt. Such ideas dare not be mentioned by Manuel's small-minded team. Perhaps his declaration's sentence of greatest merit is this:

*Over recent presidencies, the G20 has debated Multilateral Development Bank reform, debt sustainability, and climate finance, yet progress has been slow and credibility is waning.*

One feature of waning credibility is the failure to acknowledge conflicts of interest. For many months, debt activists have worried. Manuel is the most [effective neoliberal politician](#) in the country's history. He [also runs institutions](#) that have African sovereign financial instruments among their assets (e.g. Africa's largest insurance company, and the local branch of the notorious Rothschilds). What hope then for South Africa's G20 presidency?

Back to the Leaders' Declaration:

*We continue to urge the international community to support vulnerable countries with a strong reform agenda whose debt is sustainable but are facing liquidity challenges and encourage the IMF and the World Bank to continue their work on feasible options to support these countries, which should be country-specific and voluntary.*

Translated into straightforward English, this means that Africa's toughest neoliberal finance ministers—aiming to privatise and cut social spending (that 'strong reform agenda')—need to load on yet more debt, to swamp current and future generations with permanent structural adjustment obligations.

## Climate chaos confirmed

On the climate crisis, the Leaders' Declaration was consistent when it bragged about COP30: "We highlight the successful outcomes of the 2025 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference COP30 in Belém." After all, ruling classes from the G1 (the US), the other G7s and the BRICS have—since the 2009 Copenhagen Accord—resolutely lined up against everyone else, on three foundational positions:

1. Do not agree to cut emissions or leave fossil fuels underground to the extent necessary to save us all from planetary catastrophe;
2. Do not admit you emitted by acknowledging the 'polluter pays' principle because you'll face liability claims, and have to pay 'climate debt' and reparations (as even the ICJ in July 2025 ruled is logical);

3. Instead, do limit climate finance to loans, and 'privatise the air' through carbon markets, dubious offsets and other emissions-trading gimmickry.

## Johannesburg's decorative but ineffective bottom-up counter power

South African society had not been particularly well mobilised to deal with the contradictions, compared, say, to the most intense G20 [counter-summit and protest](#), which was in [Hamburg in 2017](#). On Friday, just before the leaders' summit began, a national [Women's Shut Down](#) was held in at least 15 cities, protesting gender based violence. In the centre of town, from November 20–22, there was a 'We the 99%' festival. Several thousand participants demanded global economic justice, drawing on '[Fight Inequality Alliance](#)' advocacy and the local New Economy Hub. And Johannesburg's United Front movement mobilised 350 community activists to [march](#) nearly an hour from Soweto to the conference site on the final day.

Two other forces of dissent made more news: several dozen [rightwing populist xenophobes](#) (Operation Dudula) along with the MK Party, [attracted tear gas and arrests](#) near the conference site on November 22; and the South African Municipal Workers Union, which traded off a \$235 million back-pay settlement with the city of Johannesburg for a [promise not to disrupt the event](#) (an earlier [threat](#), later [denied](#)). This deal may have solved a problem for Johannesburg authorities in the short term, but it has also generated awareness of the flimsy nature of municipal deal-making, especially in a wet period that, just days before the G20 summit began, witnessed [severe flooding and inadequate stormwater drainage](#)—again revealing the country's notorious [lack of climate adaptation and resilience](#).

These were merely indications of the way such deprived 'North-South' [partnerships are being generated](#) through G20 cooptation of South African elites. And it's the same with the COP process as well, Lula's recent role confirmed. It's all too [reminiscent](#) of what a white-supremacist Rhodesian leader, Godfrey Huggins, described as the preferred neo-colonial arrangements he foresaw in managing racist rule (from 1933–53) in what later became Zimbabwe: a "partnership between a rider and a horse."

Patrick Bond teaches sociology at the University of Johannesburg.



Women lie down for 15 minutes in silence in solidarity with victims of GBV. On Friday, just before the leaders' summit began, a national [Women's Shut Down](#) was held in at least 15 cities, protesting gender based violence.

# RAMAPHOSA, THE G20

## AND THE EMPTY PROMISE OF A JUST TRANSITION

By **Charlize Tomaselli**

This article is co-published with Business Live

**C**AN A MAN WHO ONCE URGED police repression against striking mineworkers now claim to lead Africa toward a people-centred, justice-driven future for its minerals?

In November, the world's most powerful economies will gather in Johannesburg, with President Cyril Ramaphosa as host. South Africa has billed the summit as a chance to reshape global debates on energy, minerals and development. The themes are noble: solidarity, equality, sustainability. Ramaphosa himself has spoken about breaking Africa free from resource colonialism, building industries that add value locally, and creating green jobs for the future.

On the surface, it sounds transformative. Yet scratch the veneer and the contradictions quickly emerge. South Africa remains locked into the same extractive model that defined the apartheid era: a minerals-energy complex built on exporting raw materials, while communities are left with poisoned rivers and broken land. The Just Energy Transition Investment Plan, celebrated internationally, is already unravelling. The Komati coal-to-renewables project has collapsed, and coal is still being championed as a "critical mineral" by Ramaphosa's own energy minister, Gwede Mantashe.

This is not simply incoherence. It reflects a political economy in which elites benefit from extraction, while ordinary people pay the costs. Ramaphosa himself embodies this. He is not only a president but a businessman whose fortune was built on mining. His brother-in-law, Patrice Motsepe, is a mining billionaire, now moving aggressively into green hydrogen and renewables. Ramaphosa sat on Lonmin's board during the 2012 Marikana massacre. His own emails described their protest as "dastardly criminal" and called for "concomitant action." For many South Africans, those words will forever mark him as complicit in the bloodshed.

Now, as G20 president, Ramaphosa positions himself as the voice of Africa's mineral sovereignty. But his message of justice contradicts his legacy



*The Just Energy Transition Investment Plan, celebrated internationally, is already unravelling. The Komati coal-to-renewables project has collapsed, and coal is still being championed as a "critical mineral" by Ramaphosa's own energy minister, Gwede Mantashe.*

of repeatedly siding with capital against workers and communities.

Across the continent, the reality of the so-called green transition tells its own story. In Buhera, Zimbabwe, villagers face eviction to make way for lithium mines that will supply European electric cars. "Land is everything to us," one community member told researchers. In Ulanga, Tanzania, farmers are displaced by graphite mining. In the DRC's Ruashi district, cobalt extraction has left water contaminated and children sick, even as the mineral powers the world's batteries. These are the communities who should be centred in G20 debates. Yet they remain invisible, while leaders and corporations negotiate supply chains and "investment opportunities" in their name.

Ramaphosa speaks often of beneficiation, of Africa building its own processing industries. But there is no evidence that his government is serious about this. The Just Energy Transition has already been captured by elites, structured around loans that deepen debt, and contracts that enrich politically connected firms. Motsepe's African Rainbow Energy & Power is positioning itself as a key player in the renewable sector and is deeply invested in manganese mining in the Northern Cape. Once again, the people are asked to sacrifice land and livelihoods so that elites can profit and foreign capitals can secure their "clean" energy future.

The G20 could be an opportunity to confront these patterns, to insist on

free, prior and informed consent for communities, to demand reparations for ecological destruction, to build regional industrial capacity that serves African needs. But that would require a break with the logic of neoliberalism and elite accumulation. It would require leadership willing to put people before profit, even if it meant confronting global capital and curbing domestic oligarchs. Ramaphosa has shown no sign of being that leader.

What he offers instead is symbolism without structural change. He talks of justice while reinforcing the very system that made him rich. He speaks of solidarity while workers are shot or starved of options. He frames Africa as rising while communities are pushed off their land for minerals they will never benefit from.

A just transition for Africa cannot be led by mining billionaires and presidents who answer to capital. It must be led by the people in Buhera, Ulanga, Ruashi and in the townships and villages of South Africa itself; those who know too well that the promise of minerals has always come at their expense.

Unless Ramaphosa is willing to break with the system that produced him, the G20 will not be a platform for justice. It will be a stage for green colonialism in a designer suit.

**Charlize Tomaselli** is Research and Learning Facilitator at the [Coalition for Human Rights in Development](#).



## THE UN EMBRACES COLONIALISM IN GAZA:

### Unpacking the Security Council's mandate for the U.S. colonial administration of Gaza



*The site of an Israeli strike in Gaza City 22 November 2025, six weeks after the 'ceasefire'. This ceasefire has allowed continuous Israeli attacks on Gaza every day since it was declared (killing hundreds and causing massive destruction to civilian infrastructure) but tolerates no retaliation by the Palestinian resistance.*

By **Craig Mokhiber**

*This is an edited version of an article first published on the website [Mondoweiss](https://mondoweiss.net).*

**M**ORE THAN TWO YEARS INTO the genocide in Palestine, the UN Security Council has finally acted. But rather than acting to enforce international law, protect the victims, and hold the perpetrators accountable, it adopted a resolution that openly flouts key provisions of international law, disempowers and further punishes the victims, and rewards and empowers the perpetrators.

Not since the UN partitioned Palestine in 1947 against the will of the indigenous people, setting the stage for 80 years of Nakba, has the UN acted in such a baldly colonial (and legally ultra vires) way, and trampled so recklessly on the rights of a people.

### A resolution from Hell

The resolution implicitly rejects a series of recent findings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), openly denies the Palestinian right to self-determination, and reinforces Israeli regime impunity, even as the genocide continues.

Despite the ICJ's finding that the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination on their land, the resolution strips that right away, empowering hostile foreign forces to govern them.

Despite the Court's finding that Gaza (as well as the West Bank and East Jerusalem) is illegally occupied and that the occupation must end quickly and completely, the resolution extends the

Israeli occupation, endorses the indefinite presence of Israeli regime troops, and superimposes a second, US-led occupation on top of it.

And despite the Court's finding that no agreement or political process can trump their rights, the resolution nullifies those rights and assigns them to the discretion of the US and its Israeli and other partners.

Even in the midst of an ongoing genocide perpetrated by an apartheid regime, nowhere in the resolution is there a single mention of the crimes of genocide, apartheid, or colonisation, of the thousands of Palestinians still held in Israeli torture and death camps, or of the principles of accountability for perpetrators, or redress for victims.

Nor is Israel required to meet its legal obligations of compensation and reparations, with that responsibility handed instead to international donors and international financial institutions, in what amounts to a multibillion-dollar bailout of the Israeli regime.

In sum, the resolution guarantees the full impunity of the Israeli regime, in addition to advancing its normalisation.

### A colonial administration

The resolution even welcomes, endorses, and annexes the widely discredited Trump plan, and, while not citing all of its problematic provisions, calls on all parties to implement it in its entirety. It empowers the Trump-headed Board of Peace to serve as the transitional administration governing all of Gaza, to control all services and aid, to control the movement of people in and out of Gaza, and to control the framework,

funding, and reconstruction of Gaza, and it includes the dangerously broadly formulated authorisation of "any other tasks that may be required." And it grants up-front authority to the Trump board to establish undefined "operational entities" and "transactional authorities", at its own discretion.

In clear breach of international law, it rejects Palestinian control of their own territory in Gaza until Trump and his collaborators decide that the Palestinian Authority has satisfied the reform requirements set by Trump. And it contains no promise whatsoever of Palestinian independence or sovereignty.

Instead, in direct contradiction to the findings of the ICJ, it sets back the cause of Palestinian freedom and self-determination with a vague, hyperqualified, and non-committal line that says that AFTER the Trump-led bodies decide that the Palestinians have met UNDEFINED "reform and development" criteria, "the conditions MAY finally be in place for a credible PATHWAY to Palestinian self-determination and statehood."

### A proxy occupation force

The resolution also mandates an armed proxy occupation force, labelled the "International Stabilisation Force", to operate under the Trump-headed Board of Peace. This force is to have a command approved by the Trump Board, and will explicitly operate in collaboration with Israel, the perpetrator of the genocide (as well as with Egypt). Its members are to be identified "in cooperation with" the Israeli regime, and it is to work with the regime to control the Palestinian survivors in Gaza.

It will be mandated to secure the borders (i.e., to cage the Palestinians), to stabilise the security environment of Gaza (i.e., to suppress any resistance to occupation, apartheid, or genocide), to demilitarise Gaza (but not the Israeli regime), to destroy Gaza's military defence capacities (but not those of Israel), to decommission the weapons of the Palestinian resistance (but not those of the Israeli regime), to train the Palestinian police (in order to control the Palestinian people inside Gaza), and to work for the (nefarious) objectives of the "Comprehensive (Trump) Plan."

The force is also mandated to "protect civilians" and assist humanitarian aid, to the extent that it is allowed by the U.S. (or inclined) to do so. But that such a force, which is to collaborate with Israel, would do nothing to stand up to Israeli aggression and attacks on civilians should by now be self-evident.

And it is to "monitor the ceasefire," a U.S.-guaranteed ceasefire that has allowed continuous Israeli attacks on Gaza every day since it was declared (killing hundreds and causing massive destruction to civilian infrastructure) but which tolerates no retaliation by the Palestinian resistance. It is safe to assume that any ceasefire monitoring by such a force will be focused principally on the Palestinian side—not on the Israeli regime as the occupying power.

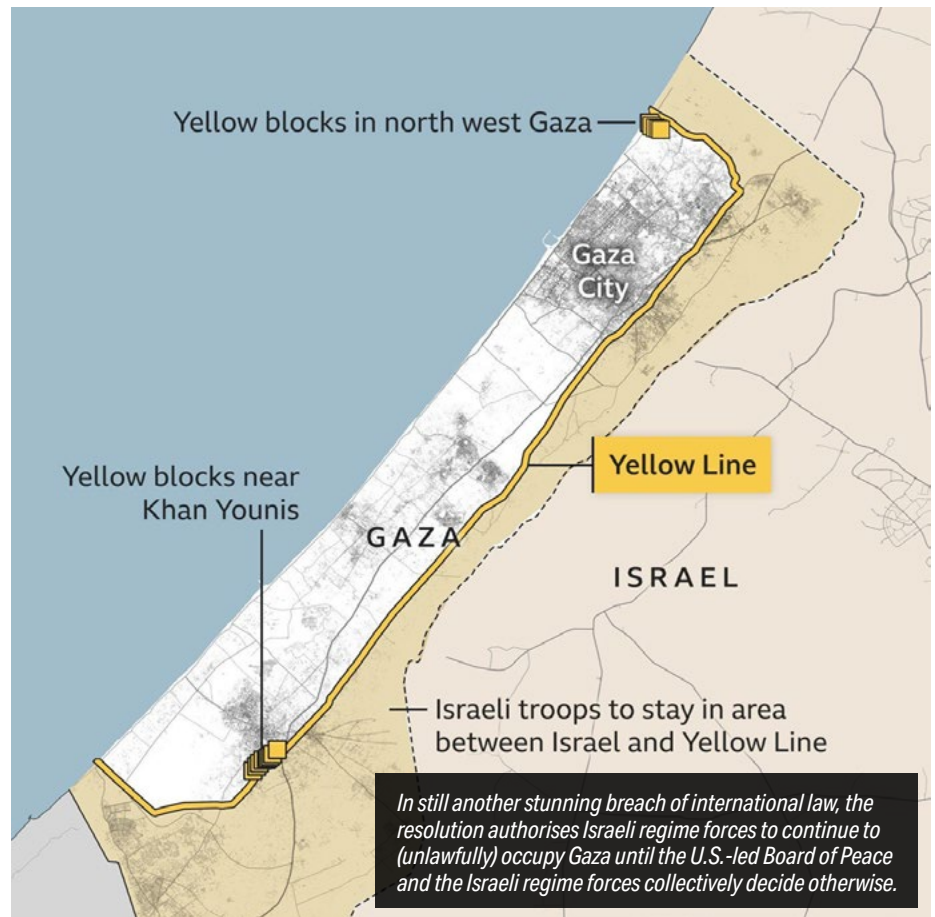
In other words, the mission of this proxy occupation force is to control, contain, and disarm the population victimised by the genocide, not the regime perpetrating it, and to ensure security, not for the victims of the genocide but for its perpetrators.

In still another stunning breach of international law, the resolution authorises Israeli regime forces to continue to (unlawfully) occupy Gaza until the U.S.-led Board of Peace and the Israeli regime forces collectively decide otherwise. And, in any event, the resolution provides that the Israeli Occupation Forces can remain in Gaza to occupy a "security perimeter" indefinitely.

Finally, both the colonial Board of Peace and its proxy occupation "stabilisation force" are given a two-year mandate and the possibility of an extension in consultation with Israel (and Egypt) but not with Palestine.

## The madness of colonisers

Needless to say, this resolution has been rejected by Palestinian civil society, almost all Palestinian political and resistance factions, and human rights defenders and international law experts from around the globe.



The Council is bound by the rules of international law, including and especially the highest, so-called jus cogens and erga omnes rules, like self-determination and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.

Its blatant disregard for the findings of the ICJ on these matters reveals the degree to which many of the terms of this resolution are in fact unlawful and ultra vires (beyond the authority of the Council). As such, the ramifications of this rogue action by the UN Security Council will have implications far beyond Palestine.

The UN Security Council, if unconstrained by international law, becomes a dangerous instrument of repression and injustice. This is precisely what we have witnessed in this case, as the Council ignored international law and effectively turned the survivors of Gaza over to the co-perpetrators of the genocide.

## A path forward

The U.S. attempt to impose a 19th Century form of colonialism on the long-suffering Palestinian people of Gaza, like the French-Saudi colonial scheme that came before it, is destined to failure. Such schemes are fundamentally flawed from the outset, as they seek to impose outcomes without legality (under international law,) without legitimacy (in their exclusion of Palestinian agency), and without any practical hope of success

(given their near universal rejection both in Palestine and across the world).

The U.S. may be able to threaten and bribe enough states to support it in a UN vote, but securing sufficient troops and other personnel to implement the resolution on the ground, against the will of the indigenous people, may well be another matter. And sustaining support as the plan (inevitably) begins to unravel will be even more difficult.

In the meantime, for those committed to justice, human rights, and the rule of law, the task is clear. This plan must be opposed in every capital, and at every juncture. Governments must be pressed to end their complicity in Israeli abuses, U.S. excesses, and in this atrocious colonial scheme.

The Israeli regime must be isolated. Efforts toward boycott, divestment, and sanctions must be redoubled. A military, fuel, and technology embargo must be imposed. Israeli perpetrators must face judicial prosecutions in every available tribunal. And the streets must echo with the righteous roar for Palestinian freedom of millions through demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience, and direct action.

**Craig Mokhiber** is an international human rights lawyer and former senior UN Official. He left the UN in October 2023, penning a widely read letter warning of genocide in Gaza.

# Ndixolele, Nomeva

By Yomelela Fadana

*I plead for your forgiveness, Nomeva, ndixolele. For the longest time, I blamed our people for not understanding why we are poor, why we are oppressed. I blamed us for not being able to see what is oppressing us.*

**I** PLEAD FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS, Nomeva, ndixolele. For the longest time, I blamed our people for not understanding why we are poor, why we are oppressed. I blamed us for not being able to see what is oppressing us.

Nomeva, uxolo. They villainised you, and I always thought you were docile, until I truly understood what oppression is. I mistook your resilience as meekness. Forgive me. They told me the poor don't always understand the deeper cause of their struggle, but they didn't mention that oppression limits the ability to reflect, that it limits the ability to dream, that it limits confidence and hope for the future.

Yhini, Nomeva, ndixolele. It is hard to analyse the water when you are drowning. I mistook your being passive for docility. All this time, I didn't understand that the true nature of oppression is a powerful, relentless machine, long hours working just to be stuck in a never-ending cycle, hands raw, back aching from double shifts. All this time, you were not passive; you were fighting for survival.

And how I hate you, capitalism, for leading me astray! For making a fool of me; for making me believe that it wasn't the system, but rather the person; allowing me to blame Unomeva. Separating us into classes, making me

believe one is better than the other. I once thought education alone could save us, but now I see, I see as clear as daylight, that the schools, the policies, and the cities themselves were made to keep us struggling, giving us just enough to keep coming back, as if we are incapable children.

## They want us hungry

Back-breaking work in exchange for wages that allowed us neither to eat enough to stay satisfied nor quench our thirst, nor clothe ourselves, nor house ourselves decently. They led me to believe that capitalism is a counterattack to poverty, pitting me against Unomeva. I plead forgiveness. Divide and conquer they did. All along, this so-called remedy to hunger—capitalism—is literally the byproduct of poverty. In order for capitalism to thrive, it feeds off poverty. That's why they don't feed us enough to satisfy our hunger, nor give us enough water to quench our thirst. They want us hungry. They want us thirsty.

Losing our culture and traditions, capitalism did not only enslave my mind. It taught me to measure worth in money, not humanity. It made me envy and distrust you, Nomeva. I've completely forgotten that my survival depends on us working together. How I hate you, capitalism, for stripping me

of my humanity, Ubuntu bam, and my African identity. Selling me dreams of meritocracy. Promising that if I work hard enough, just a bit harder, I too can make it. But they failed to mention that structural barriers still exist, encouraging me to blame myself for my shortcomings. If I fail, it is because I didn't work hard enough, not because the game was rigged from the day I was born, as if underfunded schooling doesn't exist and limited access to opportunities isn't a thing.

## They sell us the lie that everyone can rise

Capitalism not only oppresses our bodies, it enslaves our minds. It pits us against one another, turning neighbours into competitors, and friends into rivals. It thrives on our division, on the internalisation of guilt and self-blame. Meritocracy is its most seductive lie: the promise that anyone can rise if they try hard enough. But the ladders to success are broken before we even step on them. The schools are underfunded. Opportunities are scarce. Networks are inaccessible. Yet we are sold the story that failure is personal, that poverty is the result of laziness, and that struggle is a reflection of character rather than circumstance.

And I see it now: capitalism does not merely extract labour; it extracts hope. It teaches us to measure life in dollars and cents, to see joy as weakness, rest as laziness, and care as expendable. It teaches us that humanity itself is secondary to productivity. It feeds on our hunger, our thirst, our exhaustion, and then convinces us that our suffering is our fault. The education systems, the job markets, the cities, even the laws—they were never designed to lift us. They were designed to filter us, to test our compliance, to give just enough so we keep returning, hopeful, hungry, and obedient.

And yet, in all of this, Nomeva, you survived. You endured. You resisted quietly, fighting in ways I failed to see. And it is not just survival; it is a quiet rebellion, a refusal to surrender completely to the machine that seeks to erase you. All this time, I thought your compliance was weakness. But now I see it for what it is: strategy, resilience, and survival under conditions designed to break you.

I plead for your forgiveness, Africa. Forgive me for internalising the lies, for blaming our people for what is not theirs to bear alone. Forgive me for believing that education alone could free us, when the system itself was built to ensure that only a few escape while the rest remain trapped. Forgive me for forgetting that

our strength is in unity, in community, in Ubuntu. We are not merely individuals competing for scraps; we are a collective, a people, a culture; and capitalism cannot erase that without our consent.

I see it now: capitalism is more than an economic system. It is a psychological tool, a cultural eraser, a machine that steals dignity, patience, and hope. It promises freedom while chaining us to the wheel, selling dreams while ensuring we can never fully grasp them. It masks structural oppression as personal failure and calls it meritocracy, teaching us to blame ourselves rather than the system designed to oppress us. It steals our culture, our traditions, and our sense of self, replacing them with a counterfeit identity measured only in productivity and wealth.

## We will resist

Yet in the face of this, I see you, Nomeva. I see us, Africa. I see the resilience, the creativity, the courage that persists despite centuries of being fed just enough to survive but never to thrive. I see the way we have adapted, survived, and preserved humanity where the system sought to destroy it. And in that, there is hope. There is resistance. There is power.

So I plead, Nomeva, and I plead, Africa: forgive me. Forgive me for misunderstanding, for judging, for internalising the machine's lies. But let

this forgiveness also be a commitment: a commitment to see clearly, to recognise the machinery of oppression, and to stand in solidarity. To see capitalism not as an inevitability but as a system we can challenge together. To remember that survival is not compliance, and endurance is not weakness. That our humanity, our Ubuntu, and our collective strength are the weapons it fears most.

I plead forgiveness, Nomeva, ndixolele. I plead forgiveness, Africa. And I promise: we will see, we will resist, and we will reclaim what was never theirs

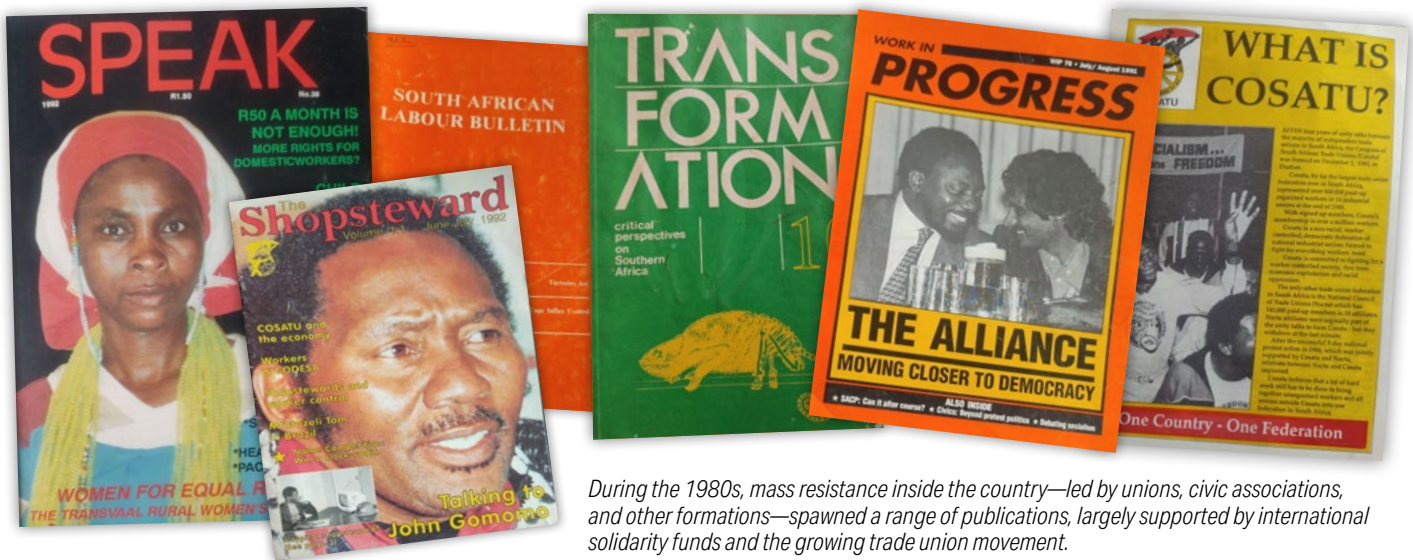
**Yomelela Fadana** is a writer and emerging social critic from the small township of Zwelethemba in the Western Cape. His work explores class struggle, community pain, and the hidden mechanics of everyday oppression. Rooted in the lived experiences of ordinary people, he writes with an honesty shaped by the realities around him. Beyond the page, he is a young man committed to challenging injustice, one protest at a time. Through his words and actions, he hopes to help reshape the Western Cape's political and social landscape.

*If I fail, it is because I didn't work hard enough, not because the game was rigged from the day I was born, as if underfunded schooling doesn't exist and limited access to opportunities isn't a thing.*



# South African Left media: a contemporary review

By **Hassen Lorgat** with contributions from **Jenny Grice** and **Martin Jansen**



During the 1980s, mass resistance inside the country—led by unions, civic associations, and other formations—spawned a range of publications, largely supported by international solidarity funds and the growing trade union movement.

## The historical foundation: anti-apartheid mass media

It is difficult to speak of a 'Left Media' today in the same sense as during the historical struggle against apartheid and its corollary for many, socialism. At that time, publications like *The Guardian* and *New Age* and others were publicly linked to banned parties like the SACP, ANC, PAC and Black Consciousness Movement. During the 1980s, mass resistance inside the country—led by unions, civic associations, and other formations—spawned a range of publications, largely supported by international solidarity funds and the growing trade union movement. These are some of the key media from this era, which advocated for democratic transformation under working-class leadership:

The [South African Labour Bulletin](#) provided crucial analysis on labour and worker rights for the trade union movement and debates within that movement. One of the crucial and most politically contested debates, for example, was on whether the new independent trade unions should register with the state, and join the established industrial relations system, after the reforms of the 1979 Wiehahn Commission. It is still publishing today.

[Work in Progress](#) was a radical journal offering theoretical and socialist analysis of the struggle. [Learn and Teach Magazine](#) was a "people's magazine" that

made complex political issues accessible to a mass audience. [Speak](#) was another 'people's magazine', which told stories from women's perspective. And [UPbeat](#) focused on youth culture and politics from an anti-apartheid perspective.

Then there was [Vrye Weekblad](#), the first Afrikaans anti-apartheid newspaper, that challenged the National Party from within its own language community and famously exposed the [Vlakplaas police death squad](#).

South was a popular Cape Town-based weekly with an accessible style and a strong anti-apartheid stance, aimed at a wide Black readership. And in the communities, many publications turned to addressing many of the needs of working class and poor communities, focusing on specific struggles and audiences. Examples were: [Grassroots](#), a Cape Town-based community newspaper that focused on issues affecting 'coloured' and Black communities to build political awareness and organisation; [Muslim News](#), a vocal anti-apartheid voice for the Muslim community, succeeded by *Muslim Views*, showing the resilience of the alternative press; and [The Indicator](#) in Lenasia and its environs

During the 1980s, Cosatu and its unions encouraged the emergence of workers' culture that served to amplify working class ideas through choirs, poetry, theatre and other forms, often participating alongside mass rallies and even funerals of fallen combatants.

Numerous poetry books were published celebrating these poets: Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi Hlatshwayo, Nise Malange.

## The post-apartheid transition: shifting terrain (1994 to the early 2000s)

The early 2000s saw South Africa's Left and progressive media include a mix of alternative print publications, activist-driven online platforms, and critical social movements. This period was defined by two key shifts:

- **Critique of mainstream media:** the mainstream media was often viewed as aligned with corporate and state interests, with the ANC itself critiquing its ownership structure for excluding challenges to the prevailing distribution of wealth and power. The public broadcaster shed some of its radio stations to private hands with Black shareholding.
- **Shifting funding and focus:** after 1994, donor funding moved away from grassroots mobilisation towards state-directed development. This funding crisis led to the decline of many anti-capitalist organisations and independent media, coinciding with the relative decline of mass unions' political leadership and the rise of NGOs (both international and national).

## Trade union newsletters in the Cosatu unions and Numsa during the 1990s and 2000s

From the late 1990s until about 2010, regular newsletters were produced by Cosatu and numerous affiliates, for example, Nehawu, Num, Numsa, Sadtu, Samwu, TGWU (Satawu).

But there were challenges—they were expensive to print and distribute and it was a common sight to see old newsletters lying around in trade union offices, propping up an old desk, or in a heap gathering dirt.

In Numsa, there was a major drive to try and make the newsletter a membership education tool and to encourage members to read it and contribute to it, rather than it end up littering offices. A survey of readers was done, and various changes were made to the content as a result: short translation boxes of every long story were provided in seSotho, isiZulu and Afrikaans; a ‘BUA’ (‘Speak out’) page was added to encourage members to submit their views on issues; there was a ‘Kids page’ that included a competition with prizes like an Oxford English dictionary; an Advice column — the ‘Dear Judy’ page — was introduced with Numsa education official, Judy Madumo, ably answering workers’ complaints and giving advice; and there was a ‘Letters to the editor’ page and ‘Numsa Lite’, a light-hearted page of music, poetry and sport written by Numsa member. Numsa cartoonists were paid for their contributions as if they had submitted a photograph.

Budding writers were identified through their ‘Winning letters’ or ‘Winning BUA’ in Numsa News and they were invited to join special Numsa writers’ training courses, where professional journalists shared tools with them on how to captivate readers in a story. Initially, there was a little bit of a tussle with the leadership over whether writers should be chosen only from those who supported the leadership. Fortunately they were finally persuaded that it was important to get a cross-section of writers, even those critical of the official line. This helped Numsa News to move from being a mouthpiece of its leaders to covering diverse views and factory struggles from right across the country. In this way, it built a dynamic picture of the workers who made it the force that it was.

Encouraging our drive was Workers’ World Media Productions (WWMP). It ran an Annual Labour Media Awards programme that included various categories: best newsletter, best story, best poster best artwork etc. Numsa’s publications and writers were often chosen and this helped to elevate the standing of Numsa’s publications in the eyes of its members and to honour the chosen writers.

Another useful project of WWMP was its involvement with community radio stations through its flagship Labour Community Radio Project. This involved training trade union co-hosts to work with these stations in producing weekly labour shows. Several Numsa members and officials took up this challenge and became competent radio producers and presenters, enabling them to bring workers’ views to their community and raise the profile of trade unions.

Conditions are very different today, but one major challenge remains: how to ensure that members own their union, control it and expand it. Yes, there are new internet-driven social media like Facebook, You Tube, TikTok, Instagram, webinars etc., but can these on their own build the organisation that we need to continue to grow and build the movement?

## The contemporary landscape: a fragmented ecosystem

The contemporary Left media landscape is diverse but fragmented, comprising several key strands. It is clear, from the above history, that all efforts struggle to become hegemonic for long. And this has been exacerbated by a decline of mass working class movements.

The “traditional Left” and trade union media: despite criticisms of co-option, the media of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) remain central to any review. SACP Media continues to publish African Communist, Umsebenzi, and Umsebenzi Online, and runs SACP TV. Cosatu Media still produces The Shopsteward (now online) and has a TV show on YouTube (Cosatu TV). Saftu has a [space on their website](#) for videos and is active on X. And Numsa is active on social media (X/Twitter) and its website, publishing video statements and critiques (e.g., “Numsa slams Cosatu leadership”). It also produces publications like *Motsotso wa Numsa*, though access issues highlight the problem of the digital divide.



*In Numsa, there was a major drive to try and make the newsletter a membership education tool and to encourage members to read it and contribute to it, rather than it end up littering offices.*

NGO-linked platforms, publications, and training hubs: a range of organisations function as platforms for left discourse, political education, and media production. *Amanda!* is a project of the Alternative Information & Development Centre (AIDC), but with an independent Editorial Collective. These days, it publishes a quarterly magazine and has an active website. It also has a presence on social media. *Amanda!* provides left-wing perspectives on South African and global social movements, labour issues, and politics. It analyses current events and features debates, proposals for social change, and reviews. Its goal is to be a non-sectarian platform that unites activists and intellectuals to encourage collaboration and broaden left-wing discourse.

Khanya College provides education for historically oppressed communities and strengthens CBOs and unions. Its publication, *Karibu* (online and hard copy), defines itself as a working-class paper. Workers’ World Media Productions is dedicated to building democratic

media for the working class. Its projects include Elitsha, a grassroots online news website, Harambee, a social justice current affairs TV show and a weekly social justice news bulletin, Uhuru News.

**Community Radio and TV:** as a victory of our struggle for democracy, many community radio and TV stations exist within working-class areas and are intended to serve them. However, most are not necessarily pro-working class or anti-capitalist and either simply mimic their commercial counterparts or serve the commercial interests of religious groups or political parties. Their current role and function, and the neglect of this sector, has resulted in these resources of our struggle being captured by old and new elites with business interests, and aspirant new entrepreneurs. There are exceptions of course which need to be mentioned. Groups like Bush Radio, one of the first to obtain a license in 1996, and Cape Town TV have done a sterling job to maintain a strong democratic community orientation. So too, groups like Voice of the Cape, and Radio 786.

In this regard, many Muslim organisations have also coalesced around Palestine's liberation struggle, utilising outlets like Muslim Views and Media Review Network that have appealed to the working class and the poor.

## Challenges, gaps, and the role of Left media

Progressive or left-wing media in South Africa is not part of a cohesive political mass movement. Their actions are often atomised and disparate, speaking for narrow constituencies rather than aggregating a unified working-class voice. As highlighted, we have been weakened by the failure of a mass centre that the mass-based unions represented during the previous era, with no mass workers' or socialist party in our context. This is partly a reflection of the global decline of the Left: a distinct Left politics has been in decline globally for two decades, with sectarianism and atomised activism weakening its agenda.

In our context, the digital divide adds to our problems as it undermines the potential for amplifying working-class politics, a problem that begins with the need for mass organisations to renew themselves. The problem is not only access to data but also that we have lost contact with members. Access becomes a material demand for the poor and the working class.

Left media attempts to fill critical gaps, but its fragmented nature limits its impact. The core agenda for a progressive Left media should include:

- Championing participatory democracy and public services: providing a Left response, for example, to the National Health Insurance (NHI) or the neoliberal argument for privatisation.
- Providing a cohesive alternative Left political voice: the decline of mass working-class organisations and the absence of a national Left party create a vacuum. Atomised media produces critique but fails to unify messaging into a powerful campaign.
- Fulfilling the watchdog role: while transparency is a priority, more political campaigning is needed against corporate power (banks, large corporations) and traditional authority structures.
- Advocating for a progressive communications policy: protests at bodies like ICASA in 2024 highlight ongoing demands for universal service obligations, zero-rating for non-profits, and data roll-over—essential policies for bridging the digital divide.

## The path to renewal

South Africa lacks a radical opposition mass movement that seeks to fundamentally change the status-quo in favour of the poor and working class. This underpins the weaknesses and gaps in Left media. Yet, we live in a period where Marx's adage of capitalism being its own gravedigger is more relevant in the media sphere than anywhere else in society.

New media present huge possibilities for conscientising, organising and mobilising. Digital media technology—the internet, smartphones and social media—have made it possible to overcome Left and working-class fragmentation and weakness, towards forging a unified, non-sectarian vision. But reliance on internet-based organising is a critical flaw, creating a social and linguistic barrier—often through complex English—that alienates the very communities it seeks to represent. This shows a lack of ambition to challenge the dominance of the mainstream media, despite the cost-effective new media tools available, in a context where practically every working-class person has access to a smartphone or communications device.

The [People's Media Consortium](#), formed in 2021 by 17 left NGOs and trade unions, is a significant attempt to address the current weakness of the lack of alternative, independent mass media that appeals to the working class, using new media technology.

The path to renewal demands a national conversation to redefine the Left's role and to build alternative, independent mass media that can truly serve, politically enlighten and expand the revolutionary mass democratic movement.

Hassen Lorgat has worked in unions and NGOs and now works in extractivism and mine waste. He is also a media justice activist.

Jenny Grice was for many years responsible for editing Numsa's publications.

Martin Jansen is the director of Workers' World Media Productions, a left NGO that specialises in developing alternative, independent and democratic working class mass media. He is a former trade unionist and lifelong political activist.



*Amandla! provides left-wing perspectives on South African and global social movements, labour issues, and politics. It analyses current events and features debates, proposals for social change, and reviews. Its goal is to be a non-sectarian platform that unites activists and intellectuals to encourage collaboration and broaden left-wing discourse.*

# Crystal Joy Dicks

## *some episodes of a life remembered*

By **Stephen Faulkner**

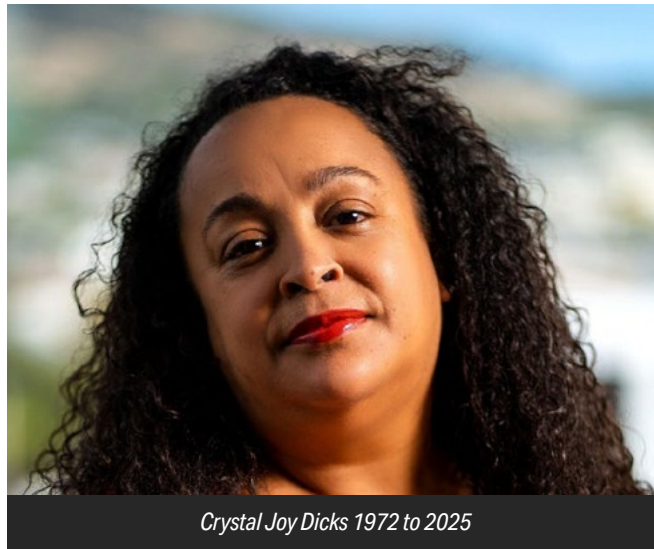
**W**HEN THE NEWS broke that Comrade Crystal Dicks was no more, a palpable shudder went through significant sections of the local and international labour movement, through Left and feminist circles, and through all of the organisations she came into contact with.

It wasn't just that she was still in her prime at 53 years old, or that she had left behind a cherished 15 year old daughter, or that she had finally put down roots in a friendly neighbourhood and had almost completed making a lovely home for herself and her daughter. It was much more.

It was almost as though a person had been lost to us who was in the process of quietly making the tangible difference, without fanfare, without a great deal of recognition, that we all agreed was completely necessary, regardless of our own political traditions. She was someone who was decidedly helping to bring about the conditions for deeper societal change, and especially through worker and community activist education, and more recently through a focus on supporting younger woman activists.

Despite the prevailing circumstances, when the Left is having to scramble to maintain even its sometimes marginal existence, she was opening minds, building cadre, raising and tackling the necessary difficult questions, and crucially, for those who had lost faith in much that is paraded as leadership, she led by example. She meant what she said. In short, we had lost someone who was doing the sort of consistent critical education and organising work that was needed to unshackle rigid mind-sets, tackle low self-esteem and collective confidence, and above all else, was encouraging a socialist feminist perspective, and crucially, attempting to put it into practice.

In her youth, Crystal was one of those student activists during the later years of apartheid that threw herself into liberation politics with gusto. A



*Crystal Joy Dicks 1972 to 2025*

generation, that included her older brother, was not intimidated by the bloody and brutal power of the apartheid state and its apologists. And later remained wary and critical of a post liberation politics that attempted to sideline mass democratic aspirations and demobilise power emanating from below.

### Workers education

After student politics it seems almost natural that, like her brother, she would secure work in the trade union movement, initially in the parliamentary office of the new trade union giant, Cosatu. This was at a time when socialist policies were being developed by the workers movement for a radical transfer of power. Class confidence and consciousness were still growing. Expectations from within the workers movement were crystallising into alternative plans for the economy, social development and the inclusion of the previously marginalised majority. It was an exciting time to be close to what was regarded as a key hub of power.

As the dead weight of caution and conservatism began to surface in Parliament, Crystal moved into the new workers education centre, Ditsela, as a Programme Officer. She soon established herself as a potent worker educator, understanding the political significance of a pedagogical approach that borrowed heavily from Freire and worker-centred education, and took

it further. She pioneered new programmes for women leaders, for the marginalised within the trade union movement such as unrecognised and mostly women administrators, who often held organisation together while mainly male leaderships pontificated about the revolution! She worked with others to liberate organisational development theory to apply to mass democratic organisation. She began to see the crucial power relationships that exist in all organisations, and especially those claiming to represent the working class.

She noted how leadership tended to default into forms of

bureaucratisation when 'invisible' power relationships were disturbed, and how many of the actual practices that make up the culture of an organisation contradicted their stated aims. This sharpened her socialist feminist outlook still further, and after six intense years in Ditsela, she looked for work where she could untangle these contradictions further.

She returned to Cosatu as Head of the Education Department when workers education was already slipping down the agenda and the budget, despite the rhetoric. A reliance on the state for funding and for 'recognition' was already undermining workers education as an independent, worker- (union-) controlled entity. At that time, there was a raging discussion in worker education circles about so-called 'accreditation' of formalising prior learning, and a push for certification of worker education programmes. She was amongst the first to realise that the vultures of commodification and opportunistic private provision were circling, and she was ready to bat them away, even when many of the private providers were ex-trade unionists. And bat away she did!

From Cosatu she went to work for Numsa. She found kindred spirits there who recognised and were busy building union education that addressed not just the needs of the working class, but also served to ensure that the union's internal life was healthily democratic. At that time,

with Crystal's enthusiastic involvement, Numsa's education was possibly amongst the most effective in the country, if not the continent. It was properly resourced; it was seen as critical to building leadership cadre; it armed negotiators with strategic thinking about industrial policy; it built the confidence of organisers, shop stewards and local activists.

Sadly, the all too familiar responses of a new and insecure leadership began to manifest themselves. Education was increasingly seen as a threat, not an essential part of a thriving unionism. Key people in the education department were seen as potential (and real) rivals to the leadership, and in the time-dishonoured tradition of negative bureaucratic control, were side-lined and even suspended on wholly spurious grounds. This slide into unaccountability was recognised early by Crystal, and reluctantly she decided to move on.

## Patriarchy bites

After Numsa, Crystal became the first Gender Officer at Wits University. In a very short period of time, she helped frame its expanding terms of reference, its point of entry into the academy, introduced equality policy development and its adoption, and guidelines for grievance handling, and detailed the support that was needed to make sure that it was effective for those who had suffered from discrimination.

It wasn't long, however, before the ugly head of institutional and personal patriarchy, embedded in much of the so-called liberal education tradition reacted

and pushed back. The Gender Office was creating a disturbance. It was challenging established norms. It was giving voice to the powerless.

The top echelons of the university, who claimed a progressive outlook, colluded with openly reactionary forces to marginalise the Gender Office, and attempts were made to restrict its growing influence. Meanwhile its popularity with the student body was on the ascendency, especially during the period of rising student militancy culminating in the Fees Must Fall movement.

Crystal's departure from the university, after two years of what can only be described as trench warfare, left her exhausted, angry and feeling betrayed. She explained some of this in a courageous article in the Mail and Guardian some time later, when a central character in the Wits fiasco attempted to assert his divine rights in another, overseas university, and was finally exposed as being shallow and self-centred.

## Always a socialist feminist

Up until her untimely death she worked for a range of organisations, some focused on younger people, some on trade unions, others in wider civil society, and mostly on developing educational and policy strategies for significant change. She became known for her tenacity, her super-sharp mind, her creative and engaging work style, her irrepressible and often irreverent good humour, and, once again, the way that she tried to live her life in tune with the principles she held dear.

She was not a dogmatist. She would seek advice, change her views, be prepared to read and listen if it meant that political, paid and unpaid work for the common good could be enhanced. But she never wavered, even in the face of sometimes appalling pressure and the reactionary behaviour of others, (they know who they are!) or lost sight of the need for a socialist feminist solution to the chaotic world we live in. Never.

The one thing almost all those who have spoken of her passing have noted, is that Crystal was above all else, intensely human. She was strong, fragile, knowledgeable, naive, worldly, tough, tender and everything in between. She loved the proletariat, but had a taste for fine cuisine, and even sometimes a little bourgeois pampering. She loved all manner of music and voraciously read books and journals of every hue. She loved poetry and could be moved to tears by a single stanza. She was brilliant company around a table laden with good food she had cooked and where the latest political argument and revolutionary gossip were aired. It's no wonder she was so deeply loved by so many.

### Farewell Crystal.

*A shining light in a world that needed you more than ever. Hamba Kahle.*

Stephen Faulkner worked with Crystal for many years from 1998 and they remained close friends and comrades. Stephen is a retired trade unionist and still an activist.



*In her youth, Crystal was one of those student activists during the later years of apartheid that threw herself into liberation politics with gusto.*

# The Reluctant President



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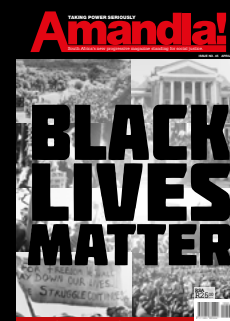
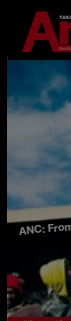
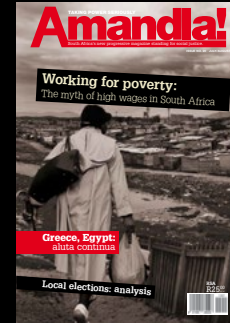
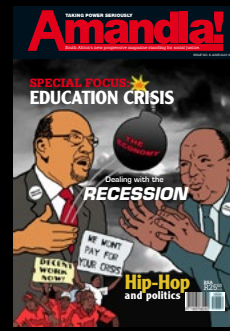
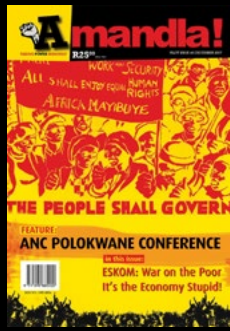
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