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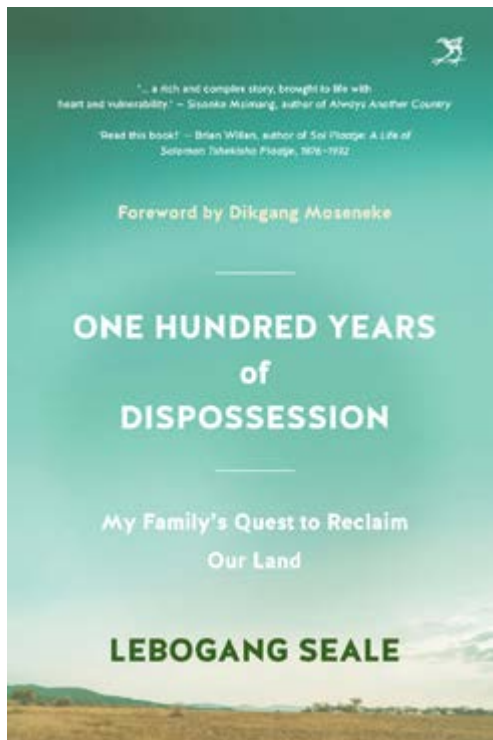
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ELECTIONS 2024

ITS TIME FOR THE LEFT TO TALK

**OUR TIME
IS COMING...**





One Hundred Years of Dispossession: My family's quest to reclaim our land

Lebogang Seale

'The high ideals of our revolution towards the pervasive restoration of birthrights to land and reconnection of native people to their confiscated land, and the goodness that must follow, have for now faltered. And yet, works like One Hundred Years of Dispossession, which must be read by all, especially the young, will hopefully rekindle the flame of the genuine quest for that primal goal of land restoration and justice side by side with all other important fundamental entitlements due to all people of our country.'

– DIKGANG MOSENEKE

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Lebogang Seale has written a personal and poignant account of the impact of South Africa's failing and flailing land reform policy on ordinary people whose quest for restorative justice remains denied. *One Hundred Years of Dispossession* shows not only that land reform in South Africa is a criminal failure and monumental disappointment but that, more than that, it is a betrayal that punishes the affected communities whose quest for justice remains denied.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lebogang Seale is a multi-award-winning journalist and media and communications practitioner. He holds a master's degree in Journalism and Media Studies from Wits University and has a wealth of experience in the mainstream media spanning over a decade. He has served as editor of the Sunday Independent and currently manages the University of Johannesburg's Strategic Communications division. He is a co-author of *The A-Z of South African Politics*, Jacana Media.

contents

30 | *Gen Z will lead the people's revolution in Kenya*

Editorial

- 02** Elections 2024: it's time for the Left to talk

News briefs

- 04** News briefs

Feature: The election and the GNU

- 06** Election year: the global context
William Shoki
- 09** Following a crushing defeat: is ANC-DA coalition stabilising or aggravating?
Mazibuko Kanyiso Jara & Gunnett Kaaf
- 12** The private sector continues to stifle democracy
Andile Zulu
- 14** Beyond the GNU and its deceptions: the poverty of analysis
Enver Motala
- 16** Build a broad united front on the ground
Amandla! interviews Sidney Kgara

A moment of history

- 19** The 1984 Vaal uprising: a turning point in the struggle
Noor Nieftagodien

Health

- 22** Repairing a Rolls Royce: unpacking the NHI discourse
James van Duuren



- 16** Build a broad united front on the ground: *Amandla!* talks to Sidney Kgara of Nehawu



- 25** Political protection of economic interests condemns humanity



- 28** West African coups: just changing masters

Climate

- 25** Political protection of economic interests condemns humanity
Jeff Rudin

International

- 28** West African coups: just changing masters
Paul Martial
- 30** Gen Z will lead the people's revolution in Kenya
Rasna Warah
- 32** The children of Gaza: starvation as a weapon of war
Louis Reynolds
- 34** Indian coalition government a defeat for Hindu nationalism
Sushovan Dhar
- 36** Can we vote away fascism in the US?
Lewis Barnes
- 38** Zarina Patel and the story of Kenya's labour and Left movements
Lucien van der Walt
- 41** Comic strip: The Reluctant President
Roger Etkind & Themba Stokwe



Front cover cartoon by Themba Siwela



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ELECTIONS 2024:

ITS TIME FOR THE LEFT TO TALK

THE 2024 NATIONAL AND provincial elections represent a critical turning point in South African politics. The results are a massive setback for the ANC, which is now forced into a humiliating coalition with the Democratic Alliance. For Cosatu and the SACP, they represent a huge disaster. In effect, they signal the last rites for the Tripartite Alliance, which may continue in name but will have no effect in the political shaping of things.

We have to ask: will the dramatic reversal in fortunes of the once dynamic and powerful workers movement be sufficient to bring about a shake-up sufficient for a new path for the Left to be realised?

In 2007, Amandla published an editorial on the outcome of the 2007 ANC Polokwane Conference, entitled “Zuma victory: a call for the left to vuka”. Once again we make the call for the Left to recalibrate. Failure to do so will usher in a long period where we will be marginal and largely irrelevant to politics. In the face of the real possibility of the extreme right-wing coming to power in France, this is precisely what the Left was able to do. Communists, Greens, Social Democrats and Trotskyists successfully united and defeated the threat of the extreme right—at least for the moment.

The situation in South Africa is different, but something similar is required.

What happened in the elections?

The ruling ANC has been implementing harsh austerity and introducing the privatisation of key industries. In those circumstances, the Left might have been celebrating its paltry 40% vote. However, a closer analysis of the elections should put a stop to any false triumphalism.

For a start, the ANC did not lose support to the Left. There was no genuine Left party standing in the elections. The Economic Freedom Fighters is the closest we get to something resembling a Left party, if one is willing to ignore its anti-democratic commandism, history of involvement in corruption, dubious financiers, and parliamentarism. And it also lost support; it received over 350,000 fewer votes than in 2019 and will now have five fewer MPs.

The big winner was Jacob Zuma’s uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP), only formed a mere six months before the election. It won almost 15% of the vote and will have 58 seats in Parliament. It is now the third largest party in Parliament, after the ANC and the DA. The MKP is a party led by a disgraced former president of the ANC and the country, who is facing corruption charges for his involvement in the arms deal, who is a misogynist and rape accused, centrally involved in facilitating state capture and corruption amounting to hundreds of billions of rands. The fact

that such a party is able to garner almost 2.5 million votes (2 344 000) tells us a lot about the state of politics, especially class politics in South Africa.

Rise of a populist politics

It is not possible to characterise MKP’s economic policies as reactionary. After all, its manifesto advocates a series of redistribution programmes, nationalisation of key sectors of the economy, greater regulation of big business, and an end to austerity and neoliberalism. But its social policies are regressive and right-wing. Of equal concern is that it is a thuggish party which will not hesitate in mobilising storm troopers against those who stand in its way. It will continue to attack and deligitimise institutions necessary for defending the democratic gains achieved in ending Apartheid.

This thuggish, ultra-nationalist politics is complemented by the rise of the Patriotic Alliance, which wants to drive foreign migrants out of South Africa. No one should be fooled by its jovial, charismatic leadership. It focuses on the resentment of the so-called ‘coloured’ population, especially those in the rural areas. And it has grown from nothing (6,660 votes in 2019) to now having 330,425 votes, nine members of Parliament and a ministerial position in the new government!



The elections, and the coming into existence of the GNU, must do for the Left in South Africa what the first round of the French elections did for Communists, Social Democrats, Greens and Trotskyists—they woke up, came together, and forged a minimum programme based on labour and the social movements. Here too, the Left must Vuka!

The PA is the closest political formation to fascism in South Africa. It has weaponised the issue of foreign nationals, especially illegal immigrants, to win electoral support. Together with MKP, it signals the potential for the growth of an extreme right-wing type of politics, with particular South African features.

Aiding the growth of these parties is the great disillusionment of South Africans, who have had their hopes of a better life killed off by the destruction of jobs, collapse of services, and failures of local government. The deep alienation in society can be seen in the millions who stayed away from the elections. Part of the ANC's poor performance is that, of the 41 million eligible voters, only 27 million registered, and just 16 million went to vote. Even though this was characterised as the most important election since 1994, the percentage poll dropped from 66 to 58 percent.

It is MKP, and parties like the PA, with their populist and demagogic message, which are better placed to capture the attention of these disgruntled layers. There is nothing progressive that can be read into the millions who have become disillusioned with one person one vote! It is in this sense that we say, once again, the Left must Vuka.

Government of National Unity

The ANC was always going to disguise getting into bed with the Democratic Alliance through the formula of a government of national unity. And in many ways the alliance with the DA, IFP and the rest makes it easier for Ramaphosa to push through the structural reforms demanded by the IMF, and make big business the drivers of South Africa's stalled development. Opposition in the ANC itself will now be neutralised by Ramaphosa's new partners. Therefore, there should be no doubt that the Government of

National Unity will, at the very least, be a continuation of Ramaphosa's 'neoliberalism light'.

The more likely outcome will be neoliberalism on steroids: greater budget cuts, more rapid privatisation, retrenchment of public sector workers, subsidies to incentivise capital

referring to progressive faith leaders who have made calls for a new movement to fill the vacuum left by the United Democratic Front.

We are mindful of the danger of Left sectarianism, and those groups who reduce the problems facing the workers movement to the question of leadership.

It will take much more than denouncing the bureaucrats of mass organisations as sell outs to rebuild working class and popular power.

In particular, the dangers of the current situation need to be soberly assessed. We need to come to terms with just how bad the current balance of forces is. We need to hold up a mirror to ourselves, not to beat ourselves up, but to be realistic about what basic action programme we can unite on. Adventurism of sustained general strikes or

occupations of cities has to be replaced with a programme capable of closing the gap between the few hundred activists that we are as the Left and the millions labouring in impoverishment.

Although we need to look ahead to the 2026 local government elections, our immediate attention must be on struggling together around the most immediate needs of poor and working class people. Hand-in-hand with struggling for a basic income grant, in defence of jobs, resisting budget cuts, privatisation, etc, spaces need to be created to discuss politics, where new and common reference points can be developed. At all costs, polarising ideological polemics, which shed more heat than light, should be avoided.

The elections, and the coming into existence of the GNU, must do for the Left in South Africa what the first round of the French elections did for Communists, Social Democrats, Greens and Trotskyists—they woke up, came together, and forged a minimum programme based on labour and the social movements. Here too, the Left must Vuka!



investment, and even greater use of precarious forms of labour. Given the weakness of the labour movement on the one hand, and the depth of the economic crisis on the other, tough times lie ahead.

A Left dialogue

This makes it even more urgent for different components of the Left to come together to take stock of these elections, and forge a common approach to the GNU and Ramaphosa's plan to build a consensus amongst all sectors of society for neoliberal reform—his long-desired social contract.

The Left we are referring to are those activists in popular organisations who believe organisation and struggle are the most important means to confront the current situation, and who oppose subordinating these struggles to nationalist agendas. We are referring to Left formations who are expressing the need to build unity and solidarity, such as those in Cosatu and the SACP calling for a left popular front, those in Saftu involved in building the Working Class Summit, and those in Amcu who are building a Labour Party. We are also

news briefs

The struggle continues for Abahlali baseMjondolo

In early April AbM [reported](#) that:

On 7 April the notorious private security firm IPSS, with support from the SAPS, launched an attack on the Sihlalangenkani Occupation in Umhlali, on the North Coast. The occupation is affiliated to our movement. The attack was unlawful and violent.

People's doors were kicked in and people were assaulted, insulted, and threatened by men wielding automatic weapons. Many people were kicked, including women. The police fired rubber bullets at the residents. Money was also stolen. People who tried to film the attack were threatened. The police boasted that they have been instructed by police minister Bheki Cele to shoot and kill. The residents were dehumanised and the whole community criminalised...

The real 'crime' of the Sihlalangenkani residents is that they have occupied and held 'prime land', land where very rich people, most of them white, live in gated communities...

Our comrades spent three days in police cells for the 'crime' of being elected leaders of the residents of a land occupation. The 'crime' of the residents of the occupation is being poor and black

and residing on land near to where very rich people live.

There is much talk of the constitution. Respect for the constitution was the litmus test set up for the GNU, to try to keep MKP out. Where is the respect for the constitution here? We can expect that this kind of fundamental clash of class interests, and vigorous defence of 'property rights', will be even more common under the GNU. Which is why we must unite to oppose it.

South Africa a winner

There is one contest South Africa is winning over the rest of Africa. Though it's one record we could well do without. South Africa has [far more dollar millionaires](#) than any other African country. 37,400 South Africans own more than \$1 million. Next in line is Egypt, with 15,600, less than half our total. It's part of being the most unequal country in the world. And that's another of our undesirable records.

Nedbank bosses score R400 million

And we can see how some of those dollar millionaires makes their money. [The outgoing Nedbank CEO](#) leaves with a tidy R92.5 million for his last year. That's a 176.4% increase on the previous year. A worker on minimum wage would have to work for 1,612 years to earn what this man put in his pocket in one year. Added together, the top seven executives of Nedbank received R396.8 million in 2023. On average, that's 146% more than in 2022.

And these increases of more than 100% are taking place while public sector workers struggle to get a CPI increase, and the government's austerity strategy devastates health and education services for those who can't afford private services. It's clear. Austerity only applies to some. Others are exempted.

Billionaires taxed less than workers

Billionaires in the US are being extraordinarily well looked after. A [recent analysis](#) shows that "in 2018, US billionaires paid a lower effective tax rate than working-class Americans for the first time in the nation's history." Part of the way this

works is that increases in share prices, which increase the wealth of share owners, aren't taxed until they are sold. So the value can keep going up without the owner having to pay any tax. They can then, as Elon Musk did when he bought Twitter, use these shares as collateral—in Musk's case \$13 billion in tax-free loans.

And then, after finding ways to avoid paying tax, the billionaires claim to be acting virtuously by 'giving away' some of their wealth—setting up charitable foundations. The truth of the matter is that they should be paying taxes on that vast wealth. That would allow democratically elected governments to decide how to spend the money, instead of billionaire autocrats.

Blood minerals in DRC

[Techcabal reports](#) that:

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) claims it has new evidence linking Apple's supply chain to illegally exported minerals from the troubled east. DRC is rich in "3T"—tin, tungsten, and tantalum—critical components to manufacture electronic devices like smartphones and computers.

US-based Amsterdam & Partners LLP said on Wednesday in a statement seen by TechCabal that new evidence from whistleblowers shows that the iPhone maker benefits from blood minerals—a term used to refer to minerals from war-torn countries.

And so the destruction of the DRC continues, in the service of technology for the wealthy of the world.



A miner digs out soil which will be filtered for cassiterite, the major ore of tin, at Nyabibwe mine, in eastern Congo. New evidence from whistleblowers shows that Apple benefits from blood minerals.

Zionist Germany strikes again

Yanis Varoufakis, former Greek Finance Minister in the first Syriza government, who resigned rather than accept the



Samsung is facing its first ever strike. A union representing about 30,000 staff said members were extending industrial action that was originally meant to last only three days, after management failed to give any indication that it would hold talks with them.

bailout terms imposed on Greece, has been a vocal supporter of Palestine. He was due to attend a Palestinian congress in Germany. [Then:](#)

I was banned from entering Germany. When I asked the German authorities who decided this, when, and under what rationale, I received a formal reply that, for reasons of national security, my questions would receive no formal reply.

This followed the arrest of a member of an organisation called 'Jewish Voice for a Just Peace', in Germany, for staging a one-woman protest. She held a placard which said: "As an Israeli and as a Jew, stop the genocide in Gaza." She was arrested for anti-semitism.

And so the deliberate and unprincipled conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-semitism continues in Europe, and especially in Germany. It is done in the name of protecting Jewish lives and Israel's security. But the terrible irony is that this conflation increases the probability of anti-semitic actions, as people recoil at the savagery and brutality of the Israeli state. Far from protecting Jews from anti-semitism, it makes them more vulnerable.

Demise of the CCMA

The Simunye Workers Forum of casual workers, based in Ekurhuleni, has [embarked on a campaign](#) to be allowed to represent workers at the CCMA. You would think the CCMA would welcome

such support. After all, it's much easier to conduct fair proceedings if both parties are able to articulate their positions clearly. And the original mandate of the CCMA was to provide an accessible justice system for workers.

But the CCMA today seems to have other priorities. As Simunye puts it:

The CCMA also incentivises its commissioners to 'settle' as many disputes as possible, especially at conciliation. We have found that commissioners sometimes bully workers into signing settlements at conciliation, instead of taking their cases further to arbitration. This can mean that a worker who has been unfairly dismissed after working for one company for 15 years and who has a good chance of winning their case, will instead be bullied by CCMA commissioners or even translators into accepting a three-month payout instead of reinstatement.

There are three trade union representatives on the CCMA Governing Body—from Cosatu, Nactu and Fedusa. What are they doing while this kind of practice is widespread in the organisation they are supposed to be governing? How can they allow the CCMA to incentivise settlement of cases, to the prejudice of workers? Of course, part of the answer is that they don't care about these workers. They aren't union members—often they can't be union members because unions don't recruit casual workers.

Just another example of the decline in the trade union movement. There was a time when trade unions' key interest was in defending workers. Now, they only care about their members. Informal and casual workers, who form a growing proportion of the workforce, are left to fend for themselves.

Green shoots for labour globally

In the US and Europe, there are small signs of a regeneration of interest in trade unions. Starbucks, Amazon—these bastions of union bashing—are finally being forced to accept trade unions and start bargaining with them. It's a long hard road of organising workers, and these companies use every trick in the book to avoid having to deal with unions, but there are signs. In Starbucks in the US, for example, there are now 464 stores that are unionised, employing 10,949 workers.

Now it's Samsung's turn. The company in South Korea is facing its first ever strike. [As the Guardian newspaper in the UK reported:](#) "A union representing about 30,000 staff—about a quarter of its employees in South Korea—said members were extending industrial action that was originally meant to last only three days, after management failed to give any indication that it would hold talks with them."

And their demand? A 3.5% wage increase and a day off to mark the union's founding. Hardly revolutionary. But maybe the tide is turning for the big tech companies in their relations with organised labour.

ELECTION YEAR:

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

By **William Shoki**

2024 has been the ultimate election year. By the end of this year, more voters than ever in recorded history will head to the polls in at least 64 countries. Over half of the world's population will be involved. In just the last three months alone, pivotal elections have taken place in India, South Africa, Mexico, the United Kingdom, France, and the European Parliament.

Ever since the 2008 financial crisis, which put liberal democracy on trial and precipitated a wave of right-wing populism worldwide, it has been easy to treat the rise of authoritarian politics as inevitable. Meanwhile mass politics on the Left has declined. However, the surprising backslide of the right in some places complicates that thesis.

India

In India, Narendra Modi secured a third term as India's prime minister [in a closely contested election](#) which took place between 19 April and 1 June. His National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won 293 seats in the Lok Sabha, despite a reduced majority for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The opposition Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance

(India) gained 234 seats, indicating a strengthened position. Modi's personal victory margin also decreased significantly, reflecting a decline in his electoral dominance.

The election took place amidst a severe socioeconomic crisis, with high unemployment and inflation rates. The government's focus on a high GDP growth rate, and the goal of achieving a \$5 trillion economy by 2028, did not address the lack of employment generation, particularly in labour-intensive industries. This has led to stagnant employment growth and increased inequality, with India having a large number of billionaires alongside a substantial population reliant on [free food grains](#) for survival.

Politically, the election result reflects a weakening of Modi's position, with the BJP needing support from regional parties to form the government. The opposition has been emboldened, challenging the BJP's policies and the erosion of democratic institutions, including the imprisonment of activists and the suppression of dissent. The BJP's election strategy, which relied on nationalist fervour and Modi's personal appeal, was less effective this time. The

opposition successfully challenged Modi's image and campaign spending.

The election outcome suggests a shift in public sentiment against the BJP, possibly due to anti-incumbency, economic hardships, and opposition to the government's unpopular measures. The BJP's losses in states like Uttar Pradesh, and the impact of mass movements against government policies, such as the farmers' protests, indicate a growing discontent.

Despite the BJP's reduced majority, the party remains a potent force, with the potential to recover from setbacks. The Indian Left, though, has not emerged as a significant player in the current political landscape. The election result, while not a resounding victory for the opposition, [offers a glimmer of hope for India's left and social movements](#), as a weakened government may present new opportunities for progressive change.

Mexico

The most hopeful of all three cases is no doubt Mexico. [Claudia Sheinbaum's resounding victory](#) in the country's June 2 presidential election marks a



In her victory speech, newly elected President of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum, paid homage to the social movements that have shaped Mexico's history, from labour activists to student leaders, teachers, and farmers, and the pivotal roles played by women.

historic moment for the nation and a significant milestone for the National Regeneration party, or Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, (Morena for short). She emerged triumphant, with a decisive 30 point lead over her conservative challenger, Xóchitl Gálvez, garnering 58.3 percent of the popular vote. This victory not only solidifies Morena's position as a dominant force in Mexican politics. It also sets the stage for a potential shift in the legislative landscape, with the party and its allies on track to secure a substantial majority in both houses of Congress.

Sheinbaum's campaign was a testament to her scientific background, characterised by a disciplined and methodical approach. She conducted an extensive series of rallies, nearly three times as many as her opponent, and unveiled a comprehensive policy platform that included the expansion of social programmes, education initiatives, healthcare reforms, affordable housing, infrastructure development, and a public sector-led energy transition. Her steadfast focus on policy, and her refusal to be swayed by personal attacks or negative campaigning tactics, underscored her commitment to the issues that mattered most to the electorate.

She faced a coordinated international media campaign that sought to tarnish the reputation of Amlo and Morena with baseless accusations of cartel collusion. But despite this, Sheinbaum's victory stands as a testament to the resilience of the party and the support it enjoys among the Mexican populace. Her win reflects a broader realignment of party dynamics, with working-class voters increasingly gravitating towards Morena, reinforcing the party's cross-class coalition.

In her victory speech, Sheinbaum paid homage to the social movements that have shaped Mexico's history, from labour activists to student leaders, teachers, and farmers, and the pivotal roles played by women. She positioned herself as a continuation of Mexico's

Fourth Transformation, a movement that she vowed to carry forward as the country's first female president. Her electoral mandate is formidable, and she is set to assume the presidency on October 1, ushering in a new era of leadership for Mexico.

A lesson for the Left

In India, right-wing populism is in retreat ([in South Africa, it might be getting its wings](#)). There is a lesson to learn from Mexico, a country similarly riven by cross-cutting social cleavages, and where the hegemonic revolutionary nationalist party—in this case, Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI—lost power. In South Africa and India, the independent Left has been paralysed by the question of whether starting a new left-wing party is feasible in countries marked by political fragmentation.



Leaders of left-wing La France Insoumise celebrate the historic victory of the Nouveau Front Populaire (New Popular Front), an alliance hastily formed less than a month before the elections, which prevented a victory for the right-wing Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen.

Morena—which registered as a political party in 2014 and won its first election in 2018—is proof that it's [worth taking our chances](#).

France

In the West, France also offers reason to be cautiously optimistic. The New Popular Front (NFP), a left-wing alliance, secured a historic victory in the snap parliamentary elections, becoming the largest bloc in the National Assembly, with 182 seats. This outcome was a significant upset, as it was widely expected that Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National (RN) would win. The NFP's victory was a result of a hastily formed

alliance less than a month before the elections, which included various left-wing parties such as France Insoumise, the Parti Socialiste, Les Ecologistes, and the Parti Communiste Français.

The NFP's platform focuses on social change, including the repeal of President Emmanuel Macron's retirement reform, wealth redistribution, investment in public services, and recognition of Palestinian statehood. The alliance's success has led to a hung parliament, with the NFP, Macron's centrist bloc, and the RN-dominated right-wing pole each holding a significant number of seats. This situation could lead to a period of intense parliamentary instability.

The NFP's victory was celebrated by left-wing voters and progressives across France, with many expressing relief and jubilation at the outcome. In contrast, the RN and its supporters were disappointed,

with Le Pen predicting a year of parliamentary chaos that she believes will strengthen the far right.

[The balance of power in the new parliament is complex](#), with the NFP needing to navigate a right-leaning chamber and a centre-right dominated Senate. The alliance will have to propose a prime ministerial candidate who can defend their programme, while facing the risk of no-confidence votes from the opposition. The

leading forces within the NFP, France Insoumise and the Parti Socialiste, have slightly shifted the balance in favour of the latter.

Macron, who dissolved the National Assembly in June, now faces the possibility of a 'cohabitation' government, with an opposition cabinet. He has shown a willingness to bide his time and seek opportunities to divide the left-wing alliance. The process of forming a new government could take several weeks, with negotiations and manoeuvres expected to be challenging.

United Kingdom

Across the channel in the United Kingdom, there is also reason to celebrate

the defeat of 14 years of Conservative Party (Tories) governance. The Tories' tenure was characterised by austerity measures that damaged public services, increased poverty, and exacerbated social divisions, fanned by promoting 'culture war' talking points.

The election results indicate a strong desire for change among voters, with the top concerns being the cost of living, health, and the economy. Despite the Tories' defeat, their legacy persists, including the rise of the far right, as evidenced by the far-right Reform Party's electoral success. The Labour Party won a landslide with only 34% of the vote and faces challenges from the Reform Party, the [Greens, and Independent candidates](#), reflecting a fragmented political landscape.

Under Keir Starmer's fence-sitting "pro-business and pro-worker" platform, the Labour Party is a shadow of its former self. Having [purged](#) principled socialist leaders—most prominently Jeremy Corbyn, who is back in the House of Commons as an independent—it has entered 10 Downing Street pledging fiscal conservatism to appease capital, while committing to being a [lieutenant to the United States and its hawkish foreign policy](#). In the face of overwhelming decline in public services, its fiscal conservatism pledge is in effect a commitment to continued austerity, with the usual consequences for the working class and the poor.

United States

Naturally, perhaps the most important election for the world this year takes

place in November. All eyes will be on who wins the keys to Washington. Following a disastrous performance in the first presidential debate, Democratic Party insiders are scrambling to persuade Joe Biden to step down in favour of someone more cognitively competent. Almost every poll projects Donald Trump beating Biden in a head to head. Whether another candidate—like Vice President Kamala Harris, or California Governor Gavin Newsom—would fare any better, remains unclear.

Whatever the outcome, the US political establishment remains in lockstep on foreign policy: committed to being strong allies of apartheid and genocidal Israel, while ramping up confrontation with China. Even so, there is a world of difference between Republicans who, for example, are spearheading a [punitive review of bilateral relations with South Africa](#) (after our efforts to hold Israel accountable at the ICJ and ICC), and Democrats, who tolerate some pluralism in international relations.

A Trump White House will embolden right-wing forces globally, not least in its backyard, in places like Javier Milei's Argentina or Nayib Bukele's El Salvador. That Trump's [presidential agenda](#) simultaneously pledges to "PREVENT WORLD WAR THREE, RESTORE PEACE IN EUROPE AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST [sic]" and "DEPORT PRO-HAMAS RADICALS AND MAKE OUR COLLEGE CAMPUSES SAFE AND PATRIOTIC AGAIN [sic]" is every indication needed that Trump will replace the 'peace' of the hypocritical liberal international order with an illiberal one,

where force and might supersede basic international law and human rights.

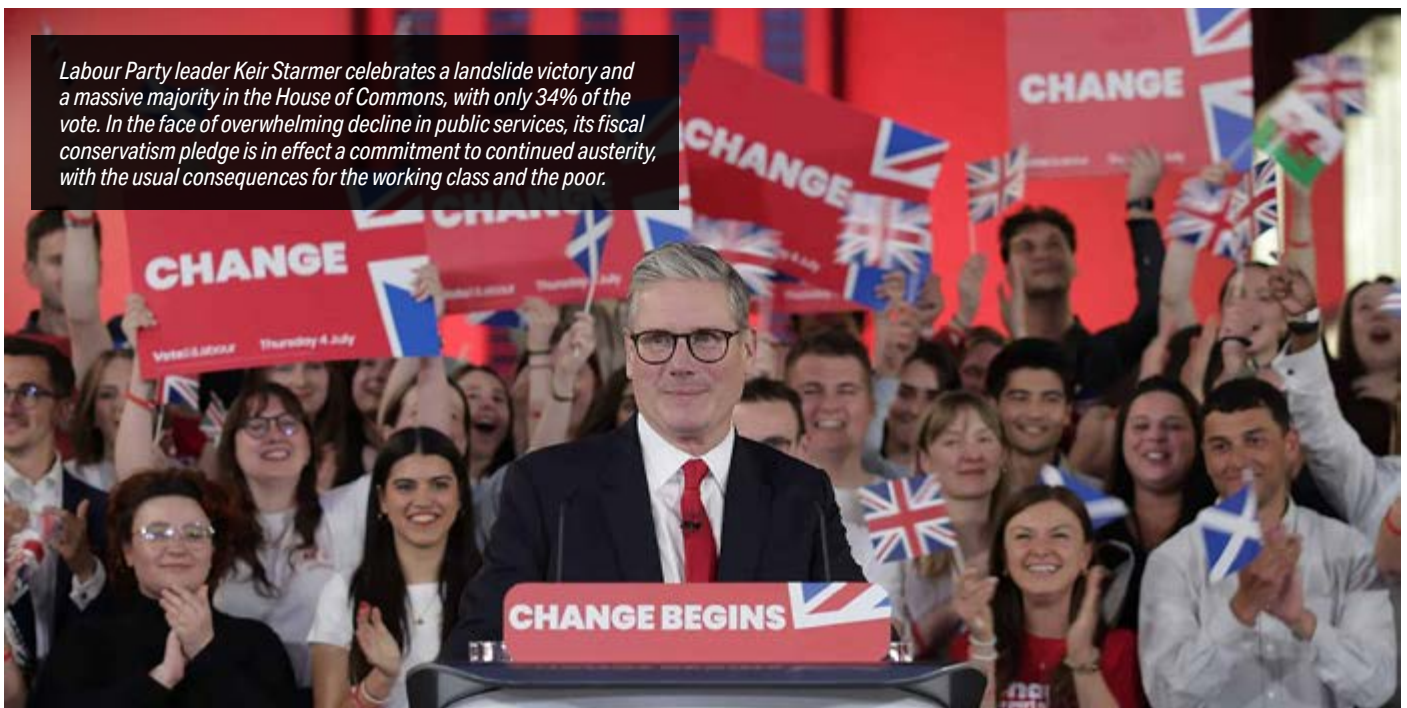
Beyond identity to class

The stakes could not be higher. Rather than view right-wing politics as something that rises and falls, we should treat it as a permanent current in the political field. The liberal order continues to crumble and capitalism continues to stagnate. So it is not surprising that those committed to some version of the status quo will mobilise support by offering fortification of a shrinking pie (against the 'wrong kind' of people, however defined). At the core of the ongoing rise of far-right populists sits their claim to be on the side of the people, against the corrupt elites. Yet, most of the time, they are an 'anti-elite elite', representing lumpen factions of capital, like domestic capitalists or small businesses, against international finance capital. The gambit can only work for so long.

The lesson for the Left is that we can offer something better. We can move beyond identitarian questions of who belongs, to asking what kind of society we want to live in. We can move beyond doling out ever-shrinking pieces of the pie, and focus attention on who controls it. As right-wing and centrist forces move to further obscure class from political conflict, the task of the Left is to keep it in view. No war but class war.

Will Shoki is editor of [Africa is a Country](#), and a member of the [Amandla! Collective](#).

Labour Party leader Keir Starmer celebrates a landslide victory and a massive majority in the House of Commons, with only 34% of the vote. In the face of overwhelming decline in public services, its fiscal conservatism pledge is in effect a commitment to continued austerity, with the usual consequences for the working class and the poor.



FOLLOWING A CRUSHING DEFEAT: IS ANC-DA COALITION STABILISING OR AGGRAVATING?



In this article we look at the implications of the ANC/DA-led coalition government for the ANC-SACP-Cosatu Alliance, and for the broader polity.

By **Mazibuko Kanyiso Jara** and **Gunnnett Kaaf**

THE ANC'S PRECIPITOUS electoral decline by a whopping 17 percentage points, from 57% to 40% in the general elections, has sent shockwaves throughout the political system in South Africa. It has reduced ANC's seats in the National Assembly from 230 to 159 and ended its 30 year domination of electoral politics. This crushing defeat has shocked ANC comrades to the core. It caught them off guard; their dreams had convinced them of ANC's eternal, dominant might; "the glorious movement" as they are fond of calling it.

The ANC has chosen to go with the DA as their main coalition partner, in their multiparty coalition they mischaracterise as the Government of National Unity. This is not a GNU, but a neoliberal pact trying to stabilise a political and social system in deep crisis. We elaborated this thesis in [our previous article](#) published by Elitsha and Amandla. In this article we look at the implications of the ANC/DA-led coalition government for the ANC-SACP-Cosatu Alliance, and for the broader polity.

But to get there, let us first develop an understanding of why the DA in particular emerged as the most advantaged beneficiary in this election.

DA's 30 years of unbroken fight back

The DA is the only parliamentary party that has consistently waged a political fight against the ANC for 30 years, uninterrupted since 1994. And during the process they have grown significantly. Challenges from the NP, UDM, and Cope amounted to short-term waves that died down over time. Although the EFF's wave has not died down yet, it is stagnating around 10% of the vote.

The DA's predecessor, the Democratic Party, led by the veteran liberal Zach de Beer, got 1.73% of the vote in 1994, and had only 7 seats. But they were the most vocal opposition party, representing the interests of the white community. The National Party had joined the transitional Mandela-led Government of National Unity, because they had 20.3 % of the vote and a guaranteed Deputy President and eight ministerial positions.

The NP pulled out of the GNU in 1996, but by then the DP had firmly entrenched itself as the main opposition party, defending and advancing white interests in post-apartheid South Africa. So the NP and DA made a deal to form a 'Democratic Alliance' of white parties.

Then, towards the 1999 elections, the deal fell through, and the NP withdrew.

In the 1999 elections, the DP, led by the liberal firebrand Tony Leon, under the slogan, "Fight Back", clearly promising to fight back against democratic changes on behalf of the white community, won 9.5% of the vote, and moved from 7 to 38 seats. They became the official opposition and retained the DA name, even though they did not use it officially until the 2004 elections. Meanwhile the National Party (despite having undergone a Damascene moment to become the New National Party) declined to 6.8% of the vote, with only 28 seats.

In the next election, in 2004, the DA increased its vote to 12.3%, with 50 seats. Helen Zille took over the leadership in 2007, and promised that she was the last white leader of the DA. At this stage they had come to the realisation that only a multi-racial character would make them gain Black votes in a substantial way to challenge the ANC. So Zille spearheaded the DA's turn towards Blacks to be substantively included in the leadership, so as to expand its support base.

In the 2009 elections the DA got 16.6 % of the vote nationally and won Western Cape province with 51%. In 2014, the DA won 22% of the vote, with Zille

at the helm, surrounded Black leaders. Mmusi Maimane was elected the first (and probably the last) Black leader of the DA in 2015. They received 20.7% in 2019, a slight decline. This made the DA's white establishment impatient with Maimane and the strategy of attracting Black voters through placement of Black leaders in the upper echelons of the party. So Maimane and other Black leaders, including Herman Mashaba, the DA's mayor in the Joburg Metro, were pushed out. The DA was frustrated because the ANC had again declined in 2019, from 62% to 57% of the vote, while Vryheidsfront Plus (VF Plus) increased its vote from 0.9% to 2.3%. The DA lost white votes, their main base, to VF Plus, and yet they still did not gain Black votes, even with a Black party leader.

As they approached the 2024 elections, the DA had gone back to being a white party with John Steenhuisen as party leader. Even though they still have some Black leaders in their upper echelons, they now reach out to the Black community from the vantage point of their white base. Zille, now occupying the powerful position of Federal Council Chairperson, recently openly said that she regrets ever championing Black leadership within the DA. Steenhuisen made it very clear after the 2024 elections results that he was elated that they won 21.8% of the vote, having retained their white base and regained Black votes.

In a country where the white community only makes up 7.3% of the population, the DA has sustainably grown over the last 30 years. It has retained its majority as a governing party in the

Western Cape since 2009, and its official opposition status nationally, with above 20% of the vote, since 2014. They have done this amidst a sea of Black poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. Meanwhile, whites, their core base, remain the most economically and socially privileged and powerful racial group, 30 years after the official fall of apartheid. And now they occupy six powerful ministries and have six deputy ministers in Ramaphosa's GNU.

Clearly the DA has, through modern strategies, mastered the art and science of winning the hearts and minds of Black people, in the midst of the neoliberal crisis, in which democracy is not associated with development for the Black majority.

They have also exploited the racial inferiority complex that still prevails among Blacks, as a hangover of colonial and apartheid ideology that was not completely obliterated, since the apartheid social structural legacies remain. This combines with the post-apartheid neoliberal crisis, through the failures of a Black government and Black parties such as EFF and COPE, that remain trapped in exhausted national liberation politics. The DA has now succeeded in achieving their declared goal of breaking the ANC's majority. Take note, their goal is not to win an election with an outright majority of 50% plus 1, because they know that's impossible for as long as they remain a white liberal party.

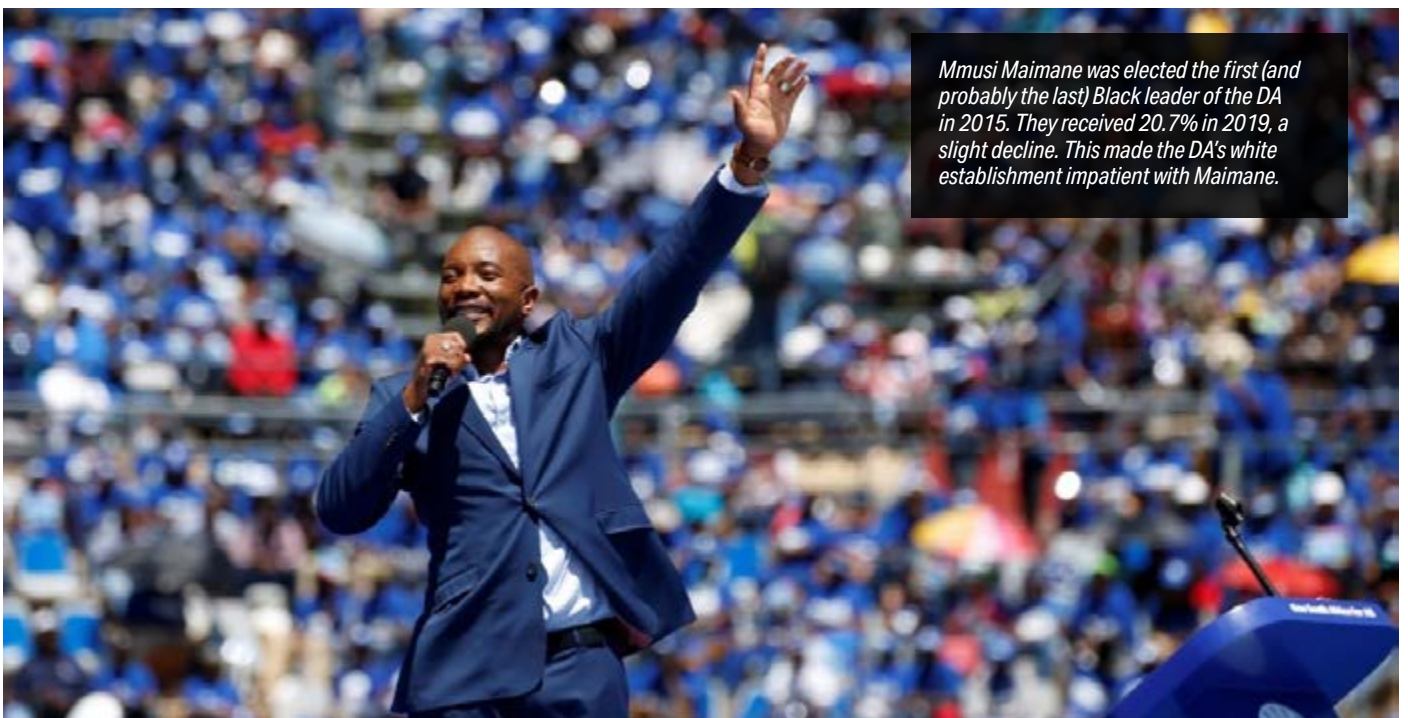
This all demonstrates why, and how, the biggest beneficiary of this ANC loss is not the MK party, but the DA.

The ANC-DA coalition imposed by the ANC leadership, from above

After the elections results were announced, it was pretty much clear that the mass base of the ANC and its Left flank, the SACP and Cosatu, would not support a coalition with the DA. Initially, the SACP said that, if the ANC formed a coalition with the DA, they would convene a special congress to review their membership of the Alliance with the ANC. Cosatu also expressed disapproval of a coalition with the DA. And there was resistance inside the ANC itself.

So the ANC NEC that met in the immediate aftermath of the crushing electoral defeat announced a GNU as a preferred option, instead of a coalition. However, they did not explain how this GNU differs from an ordinary coalition. The composition of the 1994 GNU was clearly defined in the 1993 Interim Constitution: parties with 20 seats in the National Assembly (5% of the vote) would be allocated ministerial positions proportionally, and parties getting 80 seats (20% of the vote) would be eligible to get a Deputy President position. The purpose was also clearly defined: it was to manage the transition from apartheid to democratic rule.

This contrasts sharply with the current, so called GNU. Its Statement of Intent is vague on both the composition and the mandate. And negotiations for the GNU were conducted under a veil of secrecy. Political deals were made to advance narrow party interests, instead of the professed national unity. A good



Mmusi Maimane was elected the first (and probably the last) Black leader of the DA in 2015. They received 20.7% in 2019, a slight decline. This made the DA's white establishment impatient with Maimane.

example of this is when Zille announced that they will defend Cyril Ramaphosa if Phala Phala comes back to parliament as a result of the current EFF court action.

Under the guise of a GNU, the ANC leadership succeeded in imposing the DA- / ANC-led multiparty coalition. The reason they went this route is because they are aware that they are discredited as result of their neoliberal policies. These have wrought dire development outcomes (huge unemployment, massive poverty, inequality and underdevelopment) plus widespread corruption within the state. They promote the discourse of a GNU, accompanied by a 'National Dialogue' and a 'Social Compact', to regain legitimacy and credibility. But to the extent that they are not prepared to genuinely address the development problems of the neoliberal social crisis, their GNU, National Dialogue and Social Compact gimmicks are only going to fall flat.

Better coalition options that exclude the DA were possible

The ANC leadership preferred the DA coalition option because it was highly preferred by the markets and big business. Their neoliberal inclinations, resulting from their neoliberal policy practice over the last 30 years, made it difficult for them to ignore the DA option. But there were better options. They could have gone with EFF and a few small parties. Or just small parties without the DA and EFF. The Gauteng provincial government coalition that has excluded the DA demonstrates that it was also possible to form a coalition government, without the DA, even at a national level.

But the DA was such a highly preferred choice of big business and finance capital; they thought that ignoring it would be suicidal.

The option of working with small parties, without the DA, remained unattractive to them, not because it can't work. It could work if they changed their economic policy and thinking. But they have no courage or inclination to ditch neoliberalism and move towards a sovereign development project that delinks from neoliberal global capitalism;

a project that would advance development and genuinely revive democracy in a manner that includes ordinary citizens and that reshapes global economic architecture.



That's why the political and social crisis is going to get worse. It is not possible to resolve it within the neoliberal policy framework.

SACP is allowing itself to perish alongside the ANC

Now that the ANC has clearly embraced the DA as their main coalition partner, the South African Communist Party has somersaulted on its initial position, and come out in full defence of the ANC. They explain the ANC's big electoral decline by blaming the media for highlighting ANC failures and corruption. They say the media acted as an agent of imperialist forces who are hell-bent on toppling the ANC for its BRICS affiliation and its stance on Palestine. The SACP's propagandist defense of the ANC ignores their own initial criticism of the ANC's neoliberal policy framework over the past 30 years.

The SACP lacks the courage of a Left force, and its schizophrenic posture is going to lead to it perishing alongside the ANC, if they are not careful. The SACP doesn't realise that people are fed up with the ANC's neoliberal project and corruption over the last 30 years, but don't have alternatives.

They seem not to be recognising the deepening political crisis of the discredited political ruling class that is losing legitimacy. That's why rogue right wing elements, such as MK party led by Zuma, won substantial votes. It's on the back of decay of the political system.

The SACP doesn't sufficiently recognise the political significance of the deepening social crisis. It's a crisis that results from the dire development outcomes of neoliberalism. And this GNU, with its

neoliberal consensus premised on the NDP, is going to make that social crisis worse.

Even the SACP's socialist strategy, that puts the National Democratic Revolution at its centre, is not reviewed to assess its impact over the last 30 years. It is simply constantly restated as an ideologically correct strategy. That is problematic. The strategy has not worked over the last 30 years. A discussion on its serious weaknesses would be very useful.

Exit the neoliberal crisis

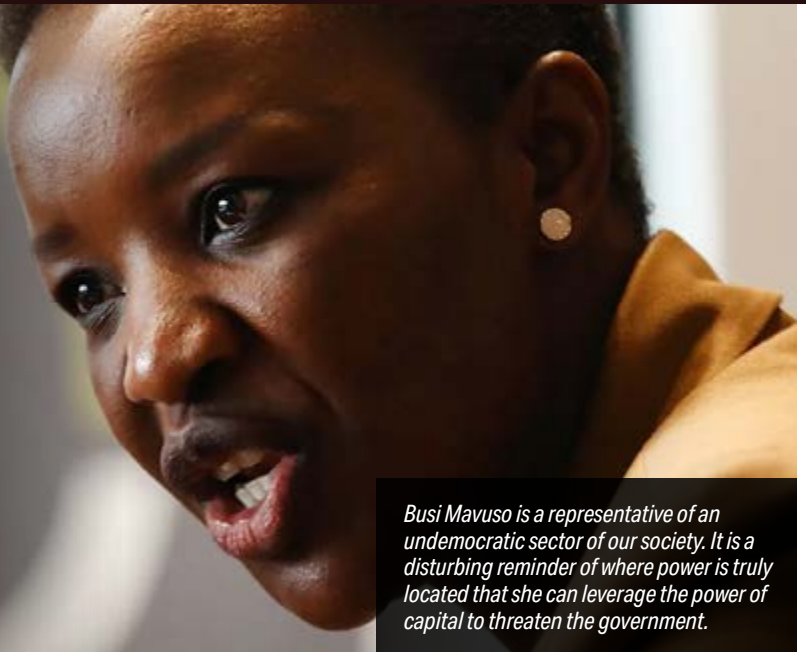
What is needed to exit the neoliberal social crisis is audacious measures that include:

- state-led, active industrialisation that delinks from neoliberal global capitalism, that will create jobs, and build robust manufacturing industries that produce consumer and capital goods;
- expansionary fiscal and monetary policies that break with neoliberal austerity;
- a decent basic income grant;
- sustainable public sector jobs;
- improved public services (water, sanitation, electricity, education, health, transport, roads, housing, etc.); and
- increasingly ecologically responsive energy, infrastructure and institutions.

All these will not be possible under the minimum programme of the GNU, announced in the Statement of Intent. The minimum programme amounts to business as usual, premised on the neoliberal agenda of the NDP. Without revolutionary measures, the social and political crisis is going to get worse and more ruinous.

Mazibuko Kanyiso Jara and Gunnett Kaaf are Marxists with the [Zabalaza Pathways Institute](#).

The private sector continues to stifle democracy



Busi Mavuso is a representative of an undemocratic sector of our society. It is a disturbing reminder of where power is truly located that she can leverage the power of capital to threaten the government.

By **Andile Zulu**

DEMOCRACY, THROUGH ITS institutions and processes, can be understood as an expression of the will of the people. So what are the political structures that seek to smother and stifle the voices of the people, which our government is mandated to represent? Fingers of accusation and blame are often pointed at corrupt politicians, self-serving bureaucrats, or the resurgent and reactionary right wing. But seated at the peak of economic power within South Africa's political landscape is a sector of society that is intrinsically opposed to the will and power of people: the private sector.

In a [News24 interview published just a day before the 2024 general elections](#), Busisiwe Mavuso, CEO of Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA), sent a stern warning to the ANC: if it were to enter into a coalition which “touted policies of mass economic destruction”, the business sector would withdraw from its recently established partnership with government. According to Mavuso, these policies of economic destruction would include attempts to nationalise industry, or to introduce a new tax regime. This would be a departure from a ‘reform agenda’ which seeks to boost business confidence and attract investment to grow the economy.

These comments by the BLSA leader reflected the private sector's fear of an ANC-EFF coalition being born following the elections.

The partnership she was referring to was [established in 2023, with more than 130 of South Africa's CEOs](#) pledging their support in a business-led effort. Business would collaborate with government to implement reforms

to fix the country's crises in energy, logistics, security, organised crime and corruption. Key reforms supported and advanced by this business partnership include: the ‘liberalisation’ of the energy sector, through Eskom's unbundling, towards creating a ‘competitive’ electricity market; designing a roadmap to save freight and logistics through inviting private sector participation; and bolstering National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) capacity to enforce the law and combat corruption.

Busisiwe Mavuso's comments are valuable to those of us who are trying to imagine and realise a new South Africa, in which its people are freed from the terror and brutality of poverty, unemployment and record-breaking inequality. Her explicit privatisation agenda reveals the long-term material interests of capital.

A question of democracy

South Africa is a democratic state, in which the government's legitimacy and authority is derived from the will of the people. This takes place through numerous institutions and processes. Our democracy is flawed and at times far from ideal, but the right of citizens to be involved in political decision-making is indispensable. The well-being and best interests of the country's majority should be the guiding star of government policy and legislation.

Who do CEOs and big business represent besides the interests of shareholders and profit-chasing investors? By definition, the capitalist enterprise is undemocratic. It derives its authority through private ownership of economic production. And it uses

this leverage over society to enforce its legitimacy, by locking people into exploitative dependence in the hopes of receiving a wage.

Mavuso is a representative of an undemocratic sector of our society. It is a disturbing reminder of where power is truly located that she can leverage the power of capital to threaten the government. And her purpose is to persuade government to circumvent its constitutional obligation to first serve the South African people.

The power of ideology

She also shows us a potent ideological tactic wielded by capitalists; it's a tactic of mystification designed to make the interests of the powerful few appear harmonious with the interests of the destitute many.

It is a tactic long-beloved by South Africa's post-apartheid ruling class. It is advanced by corporate-backed media, conservative economists, mainstream political ‘thought leaders’, policy consultants within government, and politicians committed to neoliberal policy-making.

Marxist scholar Louis Althusser said that ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”. It shapes the way people perceive their lives. Years of private sector propaganda have swept many South Africans into believing that what is best for domestic big business and foreign investors is what is best for the working class, poor and unemployed majority.

Responding to the criticism that business was propping up an ANC-led

government, Mavuso claims, “It’s got absolutely nothing to do with the ANC. It’s bigger than the ANC. This is about 62 million South Africans”. Here is the mystification at work. She would have us believe that the benevolence of the private sector will be the country’s salvation. Such mystification is not conducted out of malice or in an attempt to deceive the public. Since the dawn of capitalism, capitalists have believed that their ownership, industry and enterprise entitle them to rule societies through influencing or directly shaping political decision-making within government.

Real class interests

Although the needs and interests of the working class, unemployed and poor at times converge with those of the private sector, most often they are at odds. Right now, millions are unable to access quality healthcare, education or social services. Yet the National Treasury has for several years implemented a series of austerity measures in an effort to appease creditors, reduce the size of the public sector and gradually create a pathway towards privatising vital functions of the state.

As millions suffer unemployment, the government has been historically discouraged from direct intervention in the economy—whether in the form of expanding financial social support or using public investment to stimulate economic activity and localised industrialisation. The government and the private sector correctly highlight the issue of the country’s shrinking streams of tax revenue. But the private sector describes a meaningful increase in the Corporate Income Tax rate, or the introduction of a wealth tax, as impossibilities. Instead, the wealth of the rich is left largely untouched and the effective tax rate on high-income individuals has decreased since 1994. Meanwhile increases to Value Added Tax suffocate the poor and jobless.

Public vs private: the Just Energy Transition

The most recent evidence of the divergence between the public good and private sector interests is the [Just Energy Transition Partnership \(JETP\)](#). Following COP26, South Africa entered into a high-level political agreement with France, Germany, the EU and the USA (known as the International Partners Group). These states agreed to provide South Africa with \$8.5 billion towards financing the country’s transition away from fossil fuels (primarily

coal) and initiating a comprehensive decarbonisation process. The majority of this financing consists of loans. It is provided on the basis that South Africa produces a plan to decarbonise that will make confronting climate change and transitioning to renewable forms of energy profitable enterprises. In practice, the state must introduce structural reforms to create a regulatory and policy framework that will be friendly to profit-making from renewable energy technologies and infrastructure.

Numerous civil society organisations, social movements, energy sector trade unions and radical climate activists have questioned if the JETP is truly in the best interests of citizens. It [pushes the state further into debt](#) and will encourage the implementation of harsher cuts to public expenditure on basic services and public goods. Energy sector trade unions have expressed profound worries about what the deal will mean for workers, and they are correct to do so. Both the [International Monetary Fund and the World Bank](#) advocate for weakening labour protections in the energy sector. [In 2022 they said](#) that “bold reforms of labour market institutions in the areas of collective bargaining, employment protection legislation, and minimum wage-setting would give firms greater workforce management ability and boost employment opportunities for the inexperienced and the young”.

Most tellingly, in 2023 the World Bank provided a \$1 billion ‘Development Policy Loan’ towards restructuring Eskom. This ‘restructuring’ means the

unbundling of the utility, turning its now separate entities into capitalist enterprises, and opening power generation to independent power producers. This extensive reform entails the loss of South Africa’s energy sovereignty at a time when comprehensive and strategic planning is needed to implement a truly just energy transition. Moreover, as [numerous](#) progressive energy scholars have noted, liberalisation of the electricity sector will entail passing production costs onto consumers, to ensure returns on investment. And this will likely deepen the crisis of energy poverty in the country.

There is a central issue with the private sector playing such a massive role in setting the agenda for policy making and legislative reform, beyond the corruption of democracy. Capitalists operate on a logic of staying competitive, reducing investment risk, minimising costs and maximising profits. What is best for the working class, poor and unemployed is not always profitable. The private sector would have us believe that capitalism is not just our only option, but that it is a mutually beneficial arrangement. All evidence points to the opposite. So long as there is an inequality of power—between the propertied few and the exploited, precarious many—the radical potential of democratic governance will be stifled.

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



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BEYOND THE GNU AND ITS DECEITS: THE POVERTY OF ANALYSIS

By **Enver Motala**

Deceptive analyses of the electoral outcomes have avoided the reality of the structural and multi-dimensional crisis facing this and other societies. We are mired in inequality and unemployment...we have extraordinary levels of food insecurity, hunger and poverty, landlessness and corruption, violence and neglect.

MORE THAN 60% OF THOSE who have the right to vote in South Africa responded with deafening indifference or calculated rejection to the recent parliamentary electoral process. They simply did not think that the 'democratic' election had any meaning in their lives. And who can blame them for their distrust of the destructive cynicism of the system against working class, unemployed, urban and rural lives—structured to ensure a permanent state of desperation and hopelessness for the majority of the population? The post-apartheid capitalist state has failed to resolve the fundamental contradictions of racist capitalism, given its commitment to an ideological and political orientation which has deepened the grip of neoliberal policies, against the hopes that imbued the democratic struggles against apartheid. The post-apartheid state has only increased the grip of global corporate regimes and imperialist states, which have declared war on the global poor.

This grip has also been fostered by the countless commentaries in the media about the promises of the GNU. They refer to 'liberalism's last stand,' a 'new dawn' based on 'cooperation', presenting 'unique challenges', promising 'stability' and an 'opportunity to 'reinvent' South Africa. And nearly every such commentary is filled with phrases about 'constitutionalism' and the 'rule of law' even though, in the hands of the comprador elite, these institutions are daily shredded into meaninglessness.

Rule of law...for some

These capricious media voices are intent on focusing the mind on interpretations of the possibilities of this

or that combination of parliamentary government, constitutionalism, and the rule of law. They ignore the scorn of such rule by powerful states like Zionist Israel and the USA, as we have seen in the ICJ case against Israel. No amount of harking on the virtues of the rule of law will eradicate the hypocrisy of those who use it as justification for unequal power, against the demands of democratic accountability. Fairness and 'equality before the law' have been turned into their opposite—rule by the power of might; the privilege to subjugate, oppress and exploit, abandoning the world to the hegemony of corporate power. This permits corporate power to rule (through law) the systems of food production, access to medicines, water, electricity, clean air, health, education and every necessary public good and service to which human beings are entitled by right, and by virtue of their labours in the workplaces and institutions of this world.

Deceptive analyses of the electoral outcomes have avoided the reality of the structural and multi-dimensional crisis facing this and other societies. We are mired in inequality and unemployment (close to the worst, if not actually the worst, in the world in South Africa). We have extraordinary levels of food insecurity, hunger and poverty, landlessness and corruption, violence and neglect, both gendered and more generally, dysfunctional health and education systems and environmental destruction.

Unless these fundamental issues affecting the lives of workers and the unemployed in urban and rural communities are addressed, no rearrangement of the seats in parliament is likely to resolve anything. Nor will the populist orientations of political parties

which rely on the ideas of a chauvinistic and increasingly right-wing nationalism provide answers to the dominant forms of power. Nationalism's demagogic appeals cannot ever be a substitute for democratic and humane rulership, or resolve the deepest contradictions faced by this society and others like it. We can see how the global polycrisis, and the grip of corporate ideas on public consciousness, have given rise to chauvinistic and neo-fascist regimes, in the war on the global poor and the planetary environment. We see this not only in Gaza, Sudan, Haiti, the Sahel, Myanmar and elsewhere, but also in the destructive ecocide that we witness daily. These regimes have, moreover, decimated the strong and independent institutions of workers, and won over their leaderships to the agenda of capital accumulation. They have subverted the possibilities of democratic accountability, through their extraordinary power over the systems of communication and the dissemination of knowledge.

Fundamental change is on the agenda

It should be obvious to us all that society must be changed fundamentally, raising the question of how to confront the power of the existing regimes of control. There are no easy answers. But what is obvious is that those who are committed to genuine social change must develop a fuller appreciation of the relationship between mobilisation, consciousness, and organisation. Space does not permit such a fuller exploration here. It requires a much deeper examination of historical and contemporary political, social, and organisational forms developed in the struggles against oppressive

and exploitative regimes. Historically, these have taken a variety of forms, especially as they arose in the struggles against feudalism, capitalism and colonialism. There is a huge body of literature, experience and thinking about this history which must be studied continuously.

Seeding an alternative

That historical experience is augmented today by forms of struggle that are emerging daily, against corporate globalisation and the varieties of capitalism it has spawned everywhere. Communities of the working class—including the unemployed, and the urban and rural poor—are developing forms of political consciousness. We need to examine more closely their principles, forms of action, strategies, tactics and theorisation.

We need a more detailed and careful examination of the useful experiences of such communities, and the many experiments for drawing theoretical and practical lessons. They point to important ways to challenge both the structural and systemic attributes of the prevailing global and national systems of power, through the unceasing process of developing socially useful knowledge, and by the active practices seeding the possibilities for an alternative social system.

These practices, despite some fragilities, represent the hope for, and possibility of, freedom from the rigours of exploited and oppressed lives. They signify livelihood initiatives not dependent on exploitative wage labour, systems of food sovereignty, care, and environmental action. They are taking back the commons through solidaristic and collective action, not only in South Africa, but throughout the world. They arise from the principles of solidarity and collective action for genuine and accountable democratic development, for struggling ultimately for the best forms of organisation, towards a democratic socialist vision.

Most importantly, they are also about developing networks of collaboration in social

movements and organisations, locally and beyond. They are an expression of new forms of leadership and cooperation that arise in the lives of working-class communities, committed to a new and redemptive vision for a humane and caring society—banishing the growing spectre of barbarism that confronts the world now. Only those who cannot see, hear, feel, or understand will fail to notice the emergence of these cumulative processes of developing alternatives against the destructive force of capitalist control.

I think that the alternative forms of resistance now emerging have not been studied or practiced sufficiently amongst radicals to understand their potential for wider application in the struggles against oppressive regimes. This is especially because of the extraordinary growth, diffusion, and hegemony of the dominant forms of power, and the pervasive influence of historically developed forms of opposition to it.

New and emergent ways of contesting power and hegemony must be a critical element for the rise and development of genuinely democratic and eco-conscious socialist societies. Such consciousness also implies wider forms of social mobilisation, around the multiplicity of issues faced by working class communities. It must bring together socio-economic, political, cultural, eco-socialist and other modes of resistance to the hegemony of corporatisation. It entails a reliance not only on the development of radical consciousness amongst organised workers (acting

as a class for itself), but also on the communities and social movements outside the workplace. These are key to understanding conceptions of social reproduction—the unpaid labour of work and care done at home—and the critical value of social mobilisation and organisation around what is called 'service delivery,' i.e., the democratic responsibility of the local state, coming from its democratic mandate.

For radicals committed to an alternative society, these initiatives provide, by implication, a perspective on both historical and contemporary forms of mobilisation and organisation, in the struggle against the power of corporate global systems, and the support of militarised states. Such mobilisation, and the educational and other strategies for the development of wider consciousness, are now even more urgent. We face a tide of reactionary policies and mechanisms used to support the global drift towards neo-fascist, religio-nationalist, authoritarian, militaristic and dictatorial regimes, and their power over forms of communication, education, research and learning.

The continued assault against human beings and the environment can only be halted by all those committed to an alternative to this society, and for a democratic eco-socialist future.

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New and emergent ways of contesting power and hegemony must be a critical element for the rise and development of genuinely democratic and eco-conscious socialist societies. Such consciousness also implies wider forms of social mobilisation, around the multiplicity of issues faced by working class communities.

BUILD A BROAD UNITED FRONT ON THE GROUND

Amandla! talks to **Sidney Kgara** of Nehawu



Some people will actually say MKP, Cope, EFF, they are factions of the ANC. So if you take it at a superficial level, you could say the vote is still to the Left.

However, in practice, EFF was idealistic. Its demands for joining the government didn't reflect the actual, real balance of class and political forces. They were impossible. And MKP was completely driven by a personalised hatred by Zuma towards Cyril, so they didn't want to cooperate. ANC said it made many attempts to engage them. So there can be a justification within the ANC about this current government.

And there was internal division within the ANC. The dominant component of the leadership obviously favoured a line of engaging the DA, and for naive, but often well intended, reasons. The assumption is that capital is white in South Africa and actually has confidence in the DA, not in the ANC. This is despite what the ANC is doing to deliver their policies. So maybe it will enhance that confidence. And also we can address racial tension in that process.

But the ANC couldn't be seen solely seeking a coalition with the DA—it would be suicide—everybody knows that. So you bring in as many parties as possible, so that you create a semblance of national unity. And as long as there's no reversal of the gains so far, and if there can be at least a start to the implementation of the NHI and the basic income grant, then I think the picture can look different in 2029.

Amandla!: A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since we last talked. Then you were talking of the SACP standing for elections. Now we have a Government of National Unity. Some people say it's actually a coalition with the DA, masquerading as a government of national unity. A fig leaf to cover the nakedness of that coalition. How do you view what has happened and where we are?

Sidney Kgara: Our analysis is, firstly, that the overwhelming majority of South African voters voted on the Left. Meaning from the centre-left on which the ANC stands, up to the MKP and EFF. Forget about the politics of the MKP leadership. Many people who voted for MKP are probably least likely to vote for the DA. Some amongst them would have thought

that they're voting for continuity with Zuma, being sympathetic to him in the context of the ANC. I don't even think that they necessarily agree with the semi-feudal political perspective MKP has now. Some people will actually say MKP, Cope, EFF, they are factions of the ANC. So if you take it at a superficial level, you could say the vote is still to the Left.

But the concept of national unity is narrowly focused in relation to the DA. In essence, it doesn't meet the criteria of a GNU, properly so-called. You can bring smaller parties, but you must also, at that superficial bourgeois level (because in that context of government, we don't consider class), look to the EFF, look to the MKP. A key facet of the NDR was to forge a nationalist consciousness amongst the oppressed in the first place, but alongside non-racialism. Clearly, beyond the racial divide, there are ethnic fissures that are yet to be overcome.

A!: But there is no macroeconomic policy in the ANC or in the DA that, in the next five years, will make any significant impression on employment rates or the broad standard of living of the working class. And if that is the case, then you arrive at 2029 with the ANC, jointly with the DA, responsible for an even worse situation. How does the Left position itself in order to be ready to take advantage, rather than these populist organisations which purport to stand for the working class?

SK: From our side as Nehawu, there's no debate. You can't still want to convince the ANC about

reconfiguration. It's no longer a theoretical debate. It's a practical question.

The class has no leadership on the ground in the townships, in the informal sector, to some extent in the small towns. Assert leadership there on the ground. Take leadership. Lead struggles on the ground. Defend the NHI, fight for the BIG. Fight against any neoliberal macroeconomic policy.

Focus on the next elections in local government; take issues on water, electricity, indigency policy in the townships. From now on, take up those issues that are municipal, because those are the sites of service delivery campaigns, where we have fragmented organisations that are also sometimes captured by opportunists. Although there are also well meaning grassroots organisations, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo. Respect their independence, but take up the kind of issues they are struggling around, and work with them where it's possible.

The point here is, in our analysis, we say it's a scandal that in this election, there was no anti-capitalist voice. There is a rich tradition in our country.

AI: There was no real anti-neoliberal voice, actually.

SK: Yes. And we've got to also try to understand the alienation from the election. It's not voter apathy, it's alienation, but also, arguably, conscious boycott, withdrawal from the formal political process. And there's a paradox. On the one hand, people talk about voter apathy, but actually grassroots working class communities are actively mobilising in their service delivery protests. There's no apathy. They are just alienated from the formal, bureaucratic processes.

It's about building what the SACP calls a powerful movement of the workers and the poor, and in that context, you reduce the excessive focus on ideological sectarianism and build a broad front with other organisations.

AI: A broad front has to take a political form. We cannot go into another election without, as you say, any political formation standing against capitalism, or at least neoliberalism. I listened to the SACP general secretary recently, and he said, 'We're not joining in with the neoliberal DA'. Well, what about the neoliberal ANC?



The ANC couldn't be seen solely seeking a coalition with the DA—it would be suicide—everybody knows that. So you bring in as many parties as possible, so that you create a semblance of national unity.

SK: It's complicated. On the one hand, when you read the ANC manifesto, you can conclude that on macroeconomic policy it's actually anti-neoliberal. They don't say anything on infrastructure, for opportunist reasons. They know that they are continuing on the neoliberal project of privatisation. The ANC always produces reasonably good manifestos, but what it implements in government is different. We know manifestos don't matter, but this can be confusing.

But I think at this time now, the post election, the good thing is it will be difficult to argue like they were arguing in the Congress. Comrades who opposed the idea of the SACP contesting elections have no leg to stand on. Even within the party, you are likely to see a shift away from the way they were shepherding us in the direction of the ANC. It is difficult to sustain the organisation in that way. But now I think the opportunities are unleashed.

AI: I have two linked questions. One is, where are we now in relation to the National Democratic Revolution? And then the related question is, will the Alliance hold? I was joking with you earlier on when I said you were in an alliance with the DA. But in a sense, it's true. Cosatu is now in an alliance with the DA. Can this alliance be sustained, or will it rupture, or will parts of it peel off because they can't sustain it any longer? How do you see all of that unfolding?

SK: Our analysis is that we are no longer concerned about the ANC. We are more concerned about the

leadership of the NDR as a socialist strategy. Over the past 30 years, the NDR has taken a neoliberal trajectory. There's been dilution, pragmatism, opportunism in revising what it actually is. Instead, the NDR must take the form of class struggle on the terrain of building a sense of national non-racialism, deepening democracy, while advancing the elements of class struggle.

Our argument is that the NDR has not been defeated just because the ANC lost a decisive majority. What we are arguing is that what is defeated is the neoliberal trajectory. Politically it is unsustainable. Socially, economically it is unsustainable. Only 6.4 million people voted for the ANC, out of 27.7 million registered voters, while a massive 42.2 million were eligible to vote. That's just over 15% of all eligible voters. You can't lead the NDR on that basis.

So for us, this is a period of rebuilding. It's not a period of just proceeding as if nothing has happened. The decline of the popular organisations, of the trade union movement has been happening since 1994. The rebuilding is not with the view of elections, but a broader view of class struggle. Local government elections in 2026 provide an opportunity to project that anti-capitalist voice in the political discourse, but also in 2029.

AI: So how does that get organised politically? Under whose banner are they going to stand? Is it going to be a Popular Left Front banner? Is it going to be an SACP banner? How will it express itself politically?

SK: Our view is that the SACP currently is the main coherent, large, Left, Marxist organisation. It's one that can have the capacity to attempt a broad front, knowing that there can be pitfalls of ideological difference. That shouldn't matter, but it can affect strategic and tactical questions.

It would have to be a different type of front. As much as possible, we can put aside whatever label you come with, but also appreciate that the context doesn't allow for the luxury you had in the 80s and 90s, where we could take the differences we had over the character of the Soviet union and label ourselves in those terms.

There's a broad, reasonable consensus between us on the analysis of the situation with unions such as Numsa. Some things required time to take everybody together to see things in the same way.

You have to reconnect differently, but more genuinely, not instrumentally, just using people for election. It must be a genuine attempt to resolve people's issues in the areas where they live. It's a practical question. Build the structures of the working class, and you can organise the ANC differently yourself from outside. You can force it to make choices. But your main core is not them. You build new alliances.

I think reaching consensus on this, at a theoretical level, won't be that tough in the party, or in Cosatu. What's going to be tough is practicalising it. Not every affiliate takes the issue of grassroots work, workplace organisation, seriously.



Our politics in this election particularly is largely drifting towards identity politics. From MKP, with a strong flavour of Zulu nationalism, or tribalism, to the PA; the DA with the racism and politics of liberalism, and the EFF with elements of pseudo-militarism. You have the sort of context that gave rise to Hitler, gave rise to Mussolini, gave rise to Trump, gave rise to Modi.

And not every region of the party or province of the party would take implementation of that type of strategy in the same way. If you are oriented in a rightwing direction, organisation is not important. What's important is leadership, hierarchy.

But if you broaden your coalition, inject new energy, people can start reconciling themselves when they can see the difference they can make in the broader balance of forces.

What is the Left?

During the discussion, Comrade Kgara said the majority in the election voted for the Left. Amandla! challenged Comrade Kgara on what he meant by that.

AI: What do you mean by the Left? Where is the dividing line between the Left and everybody else?

SK: There is an emerging centrist consensus: on the one hand there is a neoliberal version on the Left (a neoliberal, centre-left ANC), and on the other hand a neoliberal version on the right (the DA). In this context the Left is defined in terms of the broader political spectrum or

parliamentary landscape. This does not narrowly pertain to Marxism, as such. To the right of Marxism, there is a form of Left politics hoping to attain 'social justice' within the bounds of capitalism. With the ANC, you can point to things like national health insurance in the manifesto. Or Basic Income Grant. That type of orientation.

But at the same time, there are contradictions internally: there are the structural reforms of partial privatisation—of

electricity, the ports, freight rail, telecommunications—through private-public-partnerships and through so-called blended financing. So the ANC is caught up in the same thing that is happening to the Labour Party in Britain and the Democratic Party in the US.

AI: Although, in MKP there's the whole element of social conservatism, certainly in the

leadership and probably the membership.

SK: Even more reactionary than conservative. You can't drive any revolution or transformation if you want to subject popular sovereignty, democratic sovereignty, to the traditional leaders. Basically you are mimicking what is happening in Swaziland—the *tinkhundla* system. This even contradicts their fake agenda of radical economic transformation. Many of those who voted for MKP, and for Zuma in particular, would have done so in terms of what they may have seen as continuity with what he purported to stand for during his twilight years in the ANC—the radical economic transformation agenda.

When I'm saying to the Left, I mean from the ANC centre-left up to the EFF, but including MKP. Their votes largely come from the ANC and EFF, as admitted by both these parties. There are people who would

not have been voting for the ANC and EFF previously, but for the IFP, if they were narrowly driven by the reactionary ethnic or identity politics. There are variations of that sentiment, but it represents the overwhelming majority of the vote share.

AI: In class terms, the leadership of the MKP represents that element of the African bourgeoisie which had no other means of accumulation than to take from the public sector. As opposed to Cyril's generation, which took the first slices of the cake, direct from capital. So in that sense, they're not Left at all.

SK: Except I would say, in my opinion, those are aspirant petty bourgeoisie, in the sense that they were excluded. These are disgruntled people, backed by thugs, in terms of funding, apart from the international component.

There has been socio economic stagnation for almost 20 years in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, made even worse by Covid. We have only now recovered the size of the economy and the labour force pre-Covid. In that environment, sections of the working class and the poor tend to look to the populist and demagogic big-men, like Zuma and to some extent the EFF, as their saviours or messiahs.

Our politics in this election particularly, although it was already boiling under the surface, is largely drifting towards identity politics. From MKP, with a strong flavour of Zulu nationalism, or tribalism, to the PA; the DA with the racism and politics of liberalism, and the EFF with elements of pseudo-militarism.

You have the sort of context that gave rise to Hitler, gave rise to Mussolini, gave rise to Trump, gave rise to Modi.

Sidney Kgara is head of Nehawu's Policy Development Unit.

A MOMENT OF HISTORY

Amandla!

THE 1984 VAAL UPRISING: A TURNING POINT IN THE STRUGGLE

By **Noor Nieftagodien**

This is an edited version of a presentation given on 13th April 2024, as part of a panel discussion, on the 40th anniversary of the Vaal uprising.

VERY OFTEN, WHEN WE TALK about the history of the liberation movement, metropolitan places like Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town are given primary importance. Secondary places don't receive the same kind of attention, even though they were very significant in the development of resistance movements.

This is especially the case for the Vaal and its townships (including Evaton, Sharpeville and Sebokeng), which operate in the shadow of Johannesburg and Soweto. It's very important to give significance to areas like the Vaal Triangle in our understanding of the development of the liberation movement.

This is especially crucial on the 40th anniversary of the Vaal uprising this year. We should use these moments to reflect on the importance of history and what we can learn from it today.

A history of struggle

The Vaal area has a long history of radical struggle that goes back to the late 1920s, into the 1940s and 50s, the 1970s and then, of course, the road to the Vaal uprising in September 1984. The Vaal was an important industrial area that developed from the late 19th century through coal mining, and then from the 1930s as an important site of heavy industrial growth, mainly because of the government's import substitution policy. In the aftermath of the establishment in the early 1940s of Iscor in Vanderbijlpark, the region became a hub of the steel sector, which had a ripple effect on the rest of the region. By the 1940s and 1950s it had become an important site, not only

of the industrial economy, but also of the development of the Black working class.

The locations and townships of the Vaal were, at different times, key centres of Black resistance. For example, Evaton was established in the early 20th century and was a freehold location with very large plots, owned by its Black residents. In the 1930s, the property owners of Evaton organised themselves into independent local committees through which they tried to establish autonomous local governing structures. A few years before that, in the old location of Vereeniging, known as Top location, the Communist Party had a stronghold and organised demonstrations against what were called the pickup vans.

So the Vaal region has a long tradition of radical and independent struggles, in which questions of the land and working class autonomy, as well as the creation of different organisations, have featured. Following the [Sofasonke movement](#) in Orlando, there were significant squatter

VAAL UPRISING



When we think of the Vaal uprising, we must understand it not only in terms of its achievements in Sebokeng and the surrounding townships, but also that it triggered the most significant joint mass action by workers and students/youth.

movements in Evaton. This developed, as elsewhere in the PWV (now known as Gauteng), when the Black working class grew numerically because of industrialisation, and there was not enough land or housing for Black people. In the 1940s and 1950s, Evaton became an important site of radical politics.

The massacre of anti-pass protesters in Sharpeville in 1960 entrenched that township's position in the history of Black resistance. In fact, Evaton was better organised and had larger numbers of protesters on the same day. This was due to its longer history of resistance, and the recent bus boycott, which was led by a new generation of young radical Black activists. Many of them were educated, including at universities, and became part of the ideological debates within the ANC. Some of them left the ANC to join the PAC. It was these young people, in their late teens and early 20s, who organised and led the marches in Sharpeville, Evaton, Boipatong and Bophelong.

We must see the Vaal uprising as part of a longer tradition of radical politics. So, when we think about the emergence of radical politics today, when we despair about the absence of movements and the difficulties, we must remember that there were previous moments like this, but the working class, poor people, drew on their histories to reimagine and develop new politics.

New organisations of students, communities and labour

From the late 1960s, with the emergence of black consciousness and led by the South African Student Organisation, new student and youth organisations developed in various parts of the country. Some of these were not part of national organisations but became spaces of political conscientisation. One such organisation in the early 1970s was the Sharpeville youth club. From about 1972 / 1973, it organised youth in the township on a social basis, but over time became more political. Importantly, throughout the 1970s, young people were attracted to black consciousness.

State repression in 1976 and 1977 struck heavy blows against black consciousness organisations. But in the Vaal, as was the case elsewhere in the country, from 1979 there emerged new locally-based organisations, as well as significant national organisations: Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo), Azanian Student Organisation, and the Congress of South African Students (Cosas).

Unlike in the early 1960s, state repression failed in the late 1970s to crush the mood of resistance. The Vaal Civic Association was one of the first of a new generation of civic organisations to be established.

This reconstitution of civic and student organisations, and other political movements, laid the foundation upon which the very successful liberation struggle inside the country was built. The post-1976 period was also important because the uprisings posed a serious challenge to the apartheid state, which responded with a combination of reform and repression.

Material conditions were deteriorating

What was significant in relation to the Vaal Triangle and other African townships was that in 1977 the state created a succession of different local government structures: first, the Community Councils which replaced Urban Bantu Councils in 1977.

Then, in 1983 the government introduced the Black Local Authorities (BLAs) that, like their predecessors, had limited power but were burdened with the responsibility to raise funds, to build housing and develop the townships. Unlike the white towns, which had significant secondary and tertiary economic sectors, African townships were seriously under-developed and had limited sources of income generation.

As a result, the BLA in the Vaal, and in Sebokeng in particular, turned to rents in order to generate revenue. In fact, the Sebokeng Council made the serious error of imposing a sharp increase in rents for this purpose.

The uprising

In September 1984 the Vaal Civic Association, with support of other movements, mobilised against the rent increases. They marched through the township on 3 September 1984. The police intervened violently to stop the march, leading to deaths and injuries, and many arrests. As was the case in Soweto in 1976, young people confronted the state in many ways. They organised student and youth movements, but also early on, some in Sebokeng organised themselves into informal military structures. The presence of ANC underground operatives in the Vaal Civic Association facilitated connections with the ANC underground, particularly linked to Botswana.

So the Vaal uprising in September 1984 was an immediate response to the rent increases. But the work of the Vaal Civic Association pointed to a long-term deterioration of livelihoods and living conditions in the township: overcrowding and the decline of infrastructure and services had become the norm. Furthermore, residents were hit hard by the economic recession in the early 1980s, which led to widespread retrenchments. Industrial regions such as the Vaal and the East Rand were particularly badly affected.

What is significant about the September uprising as well is that, within the short space of two months (between early September and November), political resistance experienced rapid transformation. The country would never be the same. Notwithstanding the repression of the uprising in September, Fosatu, Cosas, and civic organisations organised solidarity with the people in Sebokeng. In October, there were attempts in Soweto to organise a stay-away.

The Vaal uprising triggered solidarity action in Soweto and other parts of the PWV. At the time, students, mainly but not exclusively under the leadership of Cosas, had organised a sustained boycott, demanding SRCs, an end to corporal punishment and to sexual harassment.



The reconstitution of civic and student organisations, and other political movements, laid the foundation upon which the very successful liberation struggle inside the country was built.

The worker-student-youth alliance

This is significant, because the Vaal in particular, and then the East Rand (known today as Ekurhuleni), were important sites of trade unionism, especially unions affiliated to Fosatu, such as the Metal and Allied Workers Union (Mawu) and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU).

The focal point of the uprising then moved to Ekurhuleni, where the unions, Cosas and civic organisations (such as the East Rand People's Organisation led by Sam Ntuli) had a significant presence. Alexandra was also important, because there was a strong Mawu tradition. Moses Mayekiso, who lived in Alex was a key organiser for Mawu in Wynberg and in the East Rand, where he worked closely with Chris Dlamini, who later became the president of Cosatu.

Cosas also spread like wildfire across the country. From mid-October 1984 the students, under the leadership of Cosas, started to reach out to the leadership of Fosatu, particularly Chris Dlamini, whose daughter was a student activist. Nyami Booi and Cosas leaders in the region approached Chris Dlamini and Moses

Mayekiso to win union support for the students' demands. A committee was established, consisting of Fosatu and Cosas leaders, which called for a regional stay away on November 5 and 6. Close to a million workers and students came out on strike and brought the industrial heartland of the country to a complete standstill.

What this regional general strike demonstrated absolutely clearly was that power rested with workers, students and youth.

This was arguably the high point of worker and youth alliance in the history of South Africa. In my view, the regional general strike of November 5 and 6 was the turning point in South African history. Once the Black working class demonstrated its power and capacity to strike serious blows against the economy, sections of the capitalist class quickly drew the conclusion that their continued support would threaten capitalism itself. They could see the writing was on the wall. The Black working class was well organised and able to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people, not only in the PWV but also nationally.

So when we think of the Vaal uprising, we must understand it not only in terms of its achievements in Sebokeng and the surrounding townships, but also that it triggered the most significant joint mass action by workers and students/youth. The foundations for such joint action were laid by students and workers in 1976 in Soweto and in subsequent years in the Cape, with the Fattis and Monis strike and the Wilson Rowntree and Red Meat boycotts.

These are the histories of resistance that should become part of the process of rebuilding our contemporary movements.

Noor Nieftagodien is the Head of the History Workshop at Wits University.



The post-1976 period was also important because the uprisings posed a serious challenge to the apartheid state, which responded with a combination of reform and repression.

REPAIRING A ROLLS ROYCE: unpacking the NHI discourse

By James van Duuren

SOCIAL AND PRINT MEDIA ALIKE were awash with deeply polarising headlines on the rationale behind the decision by President Ramaphosa to sign the NHI Bill, two weeks before national elections. While the constitutionality of certain segments of the Bill is to be challenged in court, barring some impressive legal jiu-jitsu, the NHI (in its current or adjusted form) is here to stay. And it will become a major influence on the structure of the South African healthcare system for decades to come.

It is easy to be caught up in partisan politicking, where the NHI is framed either as salvation for all of the country's ailments or the death knell to the South African health system and economy. Yet, these narratives both serve as a clear distraction from the deeply necessary constructive analysis and critique of the Bill itself. We must ensure that the NHI framework is made fit for our purpose and is best positioned to tackle the many challenges it must face.

Failings of the government

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the deeply valid source of the anger with, and mistrust of, the government and healthcare administration. It exists in those of us who have worked in the public sector, as all healthcare workers have at some point. It affects all of us who have had to resuscitate newborn children by torchlight because of a lack of electricity; all of us who have had to wait too long for an ambulance in an emergency; who have not had the essential medications that we needed for our patients; or who have dealt with faulty, poorly-maintained machinery and overcrowded waiting rooms. Administrative failing, loadshedding, stockouts, and a history of tender corruption make it difficult to trust at face value any systems reform.

All this, in the context of South Africa's significant quadruple burden of disease, makes day-to-day survival a strenuous enough task for patients and healthcare providers alike. This is not to mention the cost in exhaustion, burnout and inevitable brain drain of skilled workers. These failings fall squarely at the feet of the government.



Social and print media alike were awash with deeply polarising headlines on the rationale behind the decision by President Ramaphosa to sign the NHI Bill, two weeks before national elections.

There is much fear. There are also very real risks and obstacles to overcome. These are subverted however by some of the invalid criticisms driven by protectionist, free-market agendas which paint the Bill with a single brush of ANC incompetence. They deliberately ignore many opportunities for structural health system change embedded in the process. We do not want the NHI to become another shipwreck on the route to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the goal of Health For All—as defined in the [Declaration of Alma-Ata](#) in 1978.

Health quality and structure inseparable

Financial and quality improvement reforms are often seen as two entirely separate processes: “why do we need to change the financial structure? Can’t we show that we can improve the quality of services in the current system first?” This is a mistaken approach that we must dispel. Improvements in the other building blocks of the health system are inextricably intertwined with changes in structure and funding.

South Africa is a two-tiered health system. Approximately 49% of national health expenditure services 86% of the population in the public sector; 51% of expenditure services the 14% of the population in the smaller private sector. Altogether, this is around 8.5% of GDP, more than covering recommendations by

the WHO World Health Report to spend approximately 6% of GDP to achieve UHC goals.

Per capita spend in the private sector is nearly 5 times that in the public sector and growing! No country in the world has a higher proportion of health expenditure in its private sector. We are more than six times the OECD average!

Furthermore, these private hospital prices continue to increase year-on-year at rates above the Consumer Price Index (CPI), passing on a greater and greater financial burden to the middle class. This leads to medical aid benefit packages being depleted earlier each year and to out-of-pocket expenses. And it leaves an overburdened public health system to pick up the pieces. This is to say nothing of the inequity in staffing, with nearly two-thirds of specialists working in the private sector.

The President’s statement about wanting the NHI to build a “Rolls Royce system of healthcare” for the country was certainly crude electioneering rhetoric. But we are currently in the situation of overpaying for a second-hand model, usable by only a small proportion of the population. It runs for only part of the year before it breaks down, and then it is overcharged for the very parts needed to repair it. Only then are we dropped off at the taxi rank.

It can be clearly argued, with an overwhelming evidence base globally,

that a tax-funded, primarily single-payer model of healthcare provision is not only a more efficient form of health financing. It also safeguards the other key provisions of UHC—equity, effectiveness of care and affordability.

Yet there are many public sector interventions that do need to occur to capacitate any rolling out of NHI funds. What are some of these valid areas of contention, where groups such as Section 27, the Health Justice Initiative, TAC, Rural Health Advocacy Project and the People's Health Movement have been vocal?

- **Major investment required:** accreditation of facilities and providers by the Office of Health Standards Compliance will require major investment in public facilities to ensure that they meet newly set standards, in order to access NHI funds. Without this, the Bill risks further disenfranchising public facilities and only strengthening funding streams to private facilities. Austerity budgeting only serves to further weaken these necessary systems in health.
- **Rural areas left out:** there is no clear focus on ensuring equity in resource distribution to rural areas. The availability of an NHI Fund may motivate some private practitioners, GPs and even hospital groups to move into areas where they previously did not have a sustainable customer base. However, without a focus on equity, many rural communities may be left by the wayside, waiting without any mechanism to benefit from funding changes.
- **Centred on hospitals:** social determinants of health and the role of community health workers (CHWs) remain on the backburner in the hospital-centred debate around the NHI. Many cost-effective interventions could be rolled out to tackle some of the major disease burdens in areas of HIV/Tuberculosis, non-communicable disease and maternal and child health. This would require formalisation of CHW cadres, standardised scopes of practice and training, and local management systems within a Community Oriented Primary Care model.
- **No provision for asylum seekers:** registration for services by asylum seekers and undocumented individuals will need to be addressed. The Bill makes provision for SA citizens, residents, inmates and refugees. However, coverage for asylum seekers and illegal immigrants is limited to notifiable conditions,



child health and emergencies. There is no rational constitutional, economic or public health provision that can allow for such a limitation. The health status of one person of necessity affects those around them.

- **Emergency care only:** a focus on emergency care alone is short-sighted. For example, a Type 1 Diabetic under this system would only be able to access insulin during an emergency, such as a hospital admission for a diabetic coma. They would then be discharged without chronic medication support, to inevitably return again to an ICU. Even from an economic perspective, let alone a human rights one, the logic is flawed.
- **Reform of private sector needed:** the interventions outlined in the Health Market Inquiry are long overdue. They are almost uniformly accepted and provide a basis for reform of the overserved private sector that can and should operate in parallel to the developing NHI.
- **Unanswered questions:** Contracting Units for Primary Care (CUPS) will function at the sub-district level and serve as the basic unit through which NHI payments are transferred to public and private providers. They will need to be capacitated. How will these CUPS be managed? What administrative and accounting capacity will they have? And will there be space for community input? These are all questions that remain to be answered in practice.
- **Corruption must be designed out:** corruption in the healthcare sector can no longer be viewed as an intractable and uniquely South African moral failing. It needs to be designed out of the system, with extensive budgetary checks and balances, enhancement of District Level Management capacity, highly transparent procurement and provider payment mechanisms and a data-led approach to priority setting.
- **Minister too powerful:** the role of the Minister remains inordinately powerful under the Bill, with responsibility for the appointment of the NHI Fund CEO, board members and the membership of benefits, stakeholder and pricing advisory committees. An effective fund requires a transparent and accountable oversight mechanism to protect from gross state capture.
- **Civil society oversight required:** the role of civil society oversight within the Bill is relegated to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. Limiting critical civil society monitoring to one advisory committee will not engender trust in system reform. Accountability at all levels of the model will allow for greater protection against potential misuse of resources.
- **Standardisation needed:** definition of the Health Benefits Package provided by the NHI is essential to allow for the calculation of patient costs, and assessment of whether services will be comprehensive and universally available, and to ensure that they include all areas of preventative, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care. Standardisation could uncomplicate a lot of healthcare costs in this country that are deliberately obscure.

Any one of these and a number of other issues could threaten to derail the NHI project if clarity is not sought. Many submissions on these issues to parliament

and during the NHI public roadshow have simply been ignored. Yet each also represents an opportunity for significant positive reform in the current system.

What does the road forward look like?

Professor Nicholas Crisp, the Deputy Director General in charge of the National Health Insurance, has stated that the NHI Fund is to be fully phased in gradually over time, taking decades, with a number of election cycles likely to pass before it is ubiquitous.

Previous Minister of Health Joe Phaahla has stated that the NHI will undergo a first transitional phase until mid-2026. In this phase, human resources will be allocated, further NHI relevant legislation will be developed, amendments made (such as to the Medical Schemes and National Health Acts), a schedule 3a Public Entity established, and potentially some early purchasing of services for vulnerable groups carried out. From then until 2028, NHI services will be rolled out more extensively.

Both the Discovery group and Momentum Health have released statements to their members supporting the aim of UHC and seeking to calm fears that the NHI signing means any imminent change to medical aids functioning. They have been reassuring members that the private sector will continue to exist well into the future.

Section 33 of the Bill is a key area of contention that will be challenged by these groups, as it currently states that, once “fully implemented”, medical schemes will be limited to only offering cover for services not provided by the NHI fund. It is argued that removing this provision will allow for flexibility in care for those who can afford and are willing to pay additional voluntary costs for private services, thus decanting them from burdening the public sector. A change to this section of the Bill would have to be balanced with a reduction in the potential monopoly power of a single purchaser in negotiating and setting lower prices with pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies.

Building the Fund will require funneling of existing funds—from government medical schemes, significant medical aid tax credits (private subsidies), general tax revenue, shifting of provincial equitable share funds and shifting of conditional grants into the fund. Thereafter, a potential payroll tax and a surcharge on personal income tax may be introduced through a money bill by the Minister of Finance. Gradually, medical aid spending will reduce as the population moves away from a reliance on private schemes which are no longer subsidised.

Major health information systems and ICT reforms will need to be rolled out. An extensive national electronic patient records system, as well as a separate provider registration and payment

system, will need to be designed and implemented—some of these processes are long underway.

Separate technical and political issues

There is a clear responsibility for engaged civil society and the state. Technical problems must have technical solutions! There must be incremental improvements, step-by-step, to the quality and operation of the NHI model. This is the only way the quality of health outcomes in our country will improve.

If we can separate the political from the administrative aspects of governance, then critique of the NHI need not be relegated to the realm of private sector or economic elitist interests. It is all too easy to reduce problems to intractable ideological difference, and not actually put in the work to address their solvable components.

At every step along the path there are technical questions to be asked and answered.

We cannot hope to counteract any of these challenges without a public and civil society discourse that moves beyond the vitriolic and towards the details.

Dr James van Duuren is the Deputy Secretary of the People's Health Movement South Africa. He writes in his personal capacity.

Community health workers march to the offices of Western Cape Premier, Alan Winde. The role of community health workers (CHWs) remains on the backburner in the hospital-centred debate around the NHI.





Oil companies knew since the 1950s that their product was causing catastrophic climate damage. Companies like BP and Shell understood the dangers of methane emissions from 'natural' gas, but nonetheless marketed it as a clean energy.

POLITICAL PROTECTION OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS CONDEMNS HUMANITY

By **Jeff Rudin**

“HOW DARE YOU,” Greta Thunberg [lambasted world leaders](#) in 2019, “you have stolen my dreams and my childhood”. By 2024, one could say that world leaders have stolen much more than her dreams and childhood. They’ve included the whole of humanity in the suicide they’ve chosen for themselves. A suicide, moreover, that is no longer in the far distance. Climate change science is proving to be wrong in one important respect: the change is happening [much faster than predicted](#).

The then 16-year-old Greta Thunberg also challenged the US Senate in a personal address in Washington. [Her demand, she told them](#), is that:

governments, political parties and corporations grasp the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis and come together despite their differences—as you would in an emergency—and take the measures required to safeguard the conditions for a dignified life for everybody on earth.

Rather than taking measures to ensure the very survival of our species, the governments, political parties and corporations have been complicit in the cover up. This was exposed in April 2024 by the Democratic Party’s own Congressional Joint Staff Report, entitled [Denial, Disinformation, and Doublespeak: big oil’s evolving efforts to avoid accountability for climate change](#).

We learn from [Jamie Henn’s article](#) on the report that oil companies knew since the 1950s that their product was causing catastrophic climate damage. Companies like BP and Shell understood the dangers of methane emissions from ‘natural’ gas, but nonetheless marketed it as a clean energy. During the previous decade, the industry spent over \$700 million on university research to ensure a future for fossil fuels.

The report is the culmination of a three-year investigation, which the industry was most energetic in trying to obstruct. Amongst its manoeuvres, it tried withholding information, resisting subpoenas, and then swamping the committee with over 100,000 pages of meaningless documents.

Despite the industry’s efforts, Henn concludes, the report is a damning account:

Over the course of thousands of emails, top executives, lobbyists, and PR advisors debate how to lobby against important regulations, greenwash the industry’s reputation, shape university research agendas, and mislead the public about the threat of fossil fuels.

No less remarkable than the report itself, was the [Senate Budget committee’s conclusion to its special hearing on the report](#). It recognised that the report “highlights the urgency of addressing climate change and

holding corporations accountable”. But its programme of action is no more than this:

It is crucial that we prioritize transparency, scientific integrity, and the well-being of our planet. Only through collective action and responsible decision-making can we hope to create a sustainable and resilient future.

Notwithstanding this pathetic political response, Jamie Henn’s focus—like the general public one—is exclusively on the fossil fuel industry. Noting that this industry isn’t willingly going to give up its profitable primacy, he calls for “sharper teeth” with which to hold Big Oil accountable.

“Our planet is dying. The time for fairytales is over”

[Greta Thunberg](#)

The overarching fairytale at the centre of this article is the belief that the political leaders of profit-maximising economies will do anything fundamental to adopt and enforce what climate science says is needed to stop human extinction.

Within this there are three particular fairytales:

1. Polluter Pays

The principle that those who produce the pollution should pay the price of preventing damaging human health and the environment goes back to the 19th century and is embedded in legislation worldwide.

A 2023 study, by a team of economists and finance professors, calculates the cost to corporations if they were to pay for their pollution. The study of nearly 15,000 public companies in the US found that costs would amount to at least 44% of their profits. However, as Seth Borenstein points out in his report on the study, these 15,000 companies represent only a fraction of the corporate carbon damages worldwide. The true cost is trillions of dollars globally, and hundreds of billions for US corporations. Nearly 90% of the calculated damage comes from only four sectors: energy, utilities, transport, and the manufacture of materials such as steel.

The focus of the study was what it would mean for both profitability and the world's ecological health if governments were to introduce and enforce legislation compelling corporations to report on their direct greenhouse gas pollution. Omitting indirect pollutions means, for instance, that emissions by road-based transport were excluded from oil companies' emissions.

The US Environmental Protection Agency's \$190 'social cost of greenhouse gases' (SC-GHG) per ton was used in the research's calculations. At this price, the average damages caused by the utility industry was more than twice its profits. Materials manufacturing, energy and transportation industries all had average damages that exceeded their profits.

This corporate damage report and its devastating impact on profit maximisation was published by the prestigious journal Science. Yet its main recommendation is captured by its title: Mandatory

disclosure would reveal corporate carbon damages—accurate reporting is critical for markets and climate policies. This speaks to its limited focus only on accountability and transparency, and its blindness to the political side of economics.

Nobel prize winning economist Paul Romer had different, though equally revealing, reasons for being unhappy with the report. He accepted that the report's damage estimates were useful, but wasn't happy with "the moralistic framing and induced urge to punish."

Most importantly, neither the report nor any of its commentators saw the need to ask why, after some 150 years of being recognised as a need, polluters are (mainly) still not paying, and are instead being allowed to 'externalise' their costs to the public.

Of the top 20 of the world's industrial sectors, ranked by environmental impacts, none would be profitable if environmental costs were fully integrated. That amounts to a global industrial system built on sleight of hand. As Paul Hawken, the then Californian civil rights activist, environmentalist, businessman and author, puts it:

We are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it GDP

The polluter pays principle remains a fairytale.

2. Progressive taxation

The same theme of governments not taking political action to restrain economic profit maximisation repeats itself.

In fact, far from taking action to restrain, it provides incentives to encourage. The main government incentive to US industry came in 2022 in what Helferty and Nacheman call

the "carrot" of the so-called Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The White House described the IRA's incentives to private industry as:

the most significant action Congress has taken on clean energy and climate change in the nation's history.

The size of the carrot? More than \$800 billion over 10 years, according to the US Treasury:

US industry is mainly happy with taxpayers paying for industrial pollution. Their only complaint, write Helferty and Nacheman, is that the incentives are not large enough. It is time for the IRA's carrots to be followed by a regulatory stick.

There are two obvious questions that are rarely asked:

- Why do they think it necessary to ask the politicians for the 'regulatory stick'? Do they think our political leaders are so stupid that they don't know about the polluter pays principle, or that they need reminding?
- Why don't they dare ask why the political leaders avoid directly taxing the polluting corporations?

Indeed, why don't they ask why the opposite happens? Corporate taxation everywhere has been reduced during the last almost half century. Tax dodges and profit shifting have even got a name that is recognised worldwide: Illicit financial flows (IFFs). Small steps have begun to be taken, but why is it taking so long to implement even these small steps?

In short, why does progressive taxation remain a fairytale?



Neither the report nor any of its commentators saw the need to ask why, after some 150 years of being recognised as a need, polluters are (mainly) still not paying, and are instead being allowed to 'externalise' their costs to the public. The polluter pays principle remains a fairytale.

3. Global fossil-fuel advertising ban

While delivering dire new scientific warnings of global heating, [António Guterres, UN secretary general](#), recently accused the fossil-fuel industry of being “godfathers of climate chaos”. Noting that: “Many governments restrict or prohibit advertising for products that harm human health, like tobacco,” he said:

I urge every country to ban advertising from fossil-fuel companies. And I urge news media and tech companies to stop taking fossil-fuel advertising.

Calling for such a ban shows that even this unique teller of undiplomatic truths sometimes believes in fairytales. It’s his conclusion, however, that is most revealing for present purposes:

“It’s ‘we, the people’ versus the polluters and the profiteers. Together, we can win. But it’s time for leaders to decide whose side they’re on.”

Incest of the politically and economically powerful

The politically powerful have always known which side they’re on. It’s us, ‘the people’, for whom this reality is seemingly lost in fairytales. The necessary marriage between economics and politics is both old and global.

Making sense of the three fairytales is the (often implicit) idea that governments somehow don’t know what is needed to stop—let alone reverse—climate change. We hang on to this idea, despite successive generations of the world’s political leaders saying they accept the reality of climate change and the science that explains the complexities of what is happening.

For practical reasons, I’ve focused exclusively on the fossil-fuel industry. But that industry is only one sector of an integrated economic system premised on profit maximisation. It is the whole society, in line with its economic imperative of profit maximisation, that the political leadership protects as its ultimate responsibility.

This does not exclude exceptions when public pressure can no longer be ignored, like with the tobacco ban. But the South African Canegrowers provide the most recent example. Having lost the battle against the public health-inspired tax on sugar, they haven’t given up on the war. They are currently—and falsely—claiming that [the tax has already cost 16,000 jobs](#). People’s health, including

large scale deaths, are, like with climate change, of no consequence in such amoral matters.

A large transition away from fossil fuels—even if it were to happen—would still leave that political-economy intact. Fossil fuels are a symptom, not a cause, of why we are fast losing the battle against climate change.

A sobering though not hopeless conclusion

If humanity is to have a future, it is system change that must happen. Fast. Not seeing the political side allows for the power of the fairytales. Faced with the choice between system change and death, our economic and political leaders have (implicitly) chosen death. Unfortunately for humanity, that unilateral choice also means death for everyone else.

And there’s no succour to be found in the immediate future. Even before any of the urgent—not to say drastic—steps that need taking, there’s a growing backlash against the pathetically inadequate climate change measures being taken in some countries.

Is there anything that can still be done? Yes. Lots. Beginning with abandoning the idea of politicians being ignorant or bought by the fossil fuel lobby. Followed by recognising that the leaderships of Europe, North America and Japan consider countering climate change to be, at best, a nice to have optional extra. This was even before the emergence of the right-wing parties now sweeping Europe that are committed to Trump-like measures to dismantle the already inadequate measures for countering climate change.

Climate change considerations—being low on the agenda—were unceremoniously dispatched by the immediate sanctions on Russian oil and gas, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Suddenly, coal came back onto

the agenda, with banks again openly proving the funding, and oil and gas exploration became respectable again. Similarly, without thought of climate change, the US, Britain, and the EU are ready to fight the Russians to the last Ukrainian. Their enormous military and financial support to that unfortunate country is, via vastly increased demand for killing machines, good for the military-industrial complexes [President Eisenhower warned against](#). But it is a disaster for curtailing greenhouse gas emissions. This additionally applies to the endless supply of military equipment being given to Israel, albeit on a smaller scale.

Democracy allows for the possibility of political parties opposed to the status quo being in the parliaments around the world. However, in the absence of such parties, it is necessary to see elected political leaders as central to the problem, not the solution. By extension, this applies, even more so, to those institutions of the UN supposedly committed to tackling climate change, starting with the annual meetings of world leaders at the mystery-evoking events called COPs.

Where does all this leave climate activists?

The biggest of the immediate challenges, in my view, is to reach the largest possible worldwide consensus that system change is the only viable response to climate change. Where that consensus leads and the form it takes are challenges for the future.

The most urgent challenge for now is to ensure that humanity will have a future. Probably not for most of those reading this article. But for our children and grandchildren and their children.

Jeff Rudin is a member of the [Amandla! Collective](#).



The biggest of the immediate challenges, in my view, is to reach the largest possible worldwide consensus that system change is the only viable response to climate change.

West African coups:

JUST CHANGING MASTERS



By **Paul Martial**

The last French soldiers leave Niger.

The crisis is so profound that French soldiers have been expelled, diplomatic missions closed, and French nationals are considered persona non grata.

Mali, then Burkina Faso, and finally Niger have experienced coups d'état and subsequently formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). These military juntas are pursuing a unified policy of international rapprochement, a shared strategy in the fight against jihadists, and a common rhetoric around the defence of national sovereignty. What should we make of this new reality for West Africa? Some see these coup leaders as new heralds of Africa's liberation. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different.

The common thread among these three coups is that they are directed against French policy. This is not the same, for example, as the coup in Gabon, a Central African country also part of France's sphere of influence.

The crisis is so profound that French soldiers have been expelled, diplomatic missions closed, and French nationals are considered persona non grata.

France's unacknowledged African history

There are multiple causes of this understandable popular rejection, particularly by the youth. There is, of course, the history of France's relations with African countries, marked by slavery and colonialism, aspects of which many French politicians still view positively.

France's neocolonial policy post-independence, was known as 'Françafrique'. The former colonial power maintained its economic and financial dominance with the continued use of the [CFA franc](#), a currency guaranteed by the

French Treasury. Military domination has also persisted, with French troops stationed in Gabon, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, and Djibouti. And this is without mentioning the more than 60 military interventions on the continent since independence. The intervention in Libya met with strong opposition and destabilised the Sahel region. France's complicity in the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda remains a painful memory.

Confrontation with French policy

A French journalist published a book entitled [Arrogant as a Frenchman in Africa](#), a phrase aptly describing how French authorities have cut themselves off from African youth. We remember the statements of a former president who declared in Dakar that "[the African man has not entered history](#)" and President Macron's [disdainful joke](#) about his counterpart in Burkina Faso, insinuating that he was leaving the room to fix the air conditioning. The unfair and humiliating visa policy also contributes to this perception.

France is seen as an Islamophobic and racist country, due to its treatment of migrants and discriminatory policies toward members of the African diaspora.

The failure of French military operations in the Sahel

France's inability to eradicate the jihadist threat in this region is a major cause of

the rift. The French army intervened first in Mali with [Operation Serval](#). This operation, mistakenly considered a success, merely dispersed Islamist groups, who quickly reorganised and launched increasingly bold attacks. The French authorities then embarked on a broader operation, [Barkhane](#), covering all Sahel countries. Despite eight years of intervention, Islamists have advanced in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, leading to widespread misunderstanding and even conspiracy theories about a supposed alliance between France and the Islamists.

The truth is, of course, quite different. French authorities failed to see that the insurgencies were grafted onto recurring problems which varied according to the territory. These included land and water competition between herders (mainly Fulani) and farmers, challenges to the rigidity of social structures by young people, or revolts by descendants of slave and other marginalised families. Additionally, Islamist activities offer many young people remuneration, through various trafficking activities.

France's response was purely security-oriented. Worse, in Mali in 2017, people at the National Reconciliation Conference urged authorities to start negotiations with the belligerents. France firmly opposed this, while at the same time negotiating and paying ransoms for the release of French hostages.

Coups as responses to popular mobilisation

The coups occurred amid significant popular mobilisations denouncing both corrupt regimes and their inability to resolve the security crisis.

In Mali, large demonstrations preceded the coup. These were led by a coalition, the June 5 Movement—Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP), composed of parties and Islamic associations. A minority faction of the M5-RFP, led by Choguel Maïga, supported the junta.

In Burkina Faso, a revolution in 2014 toppled Blaise Compaoré's dictatorship, and the French military facilitated Compaoré's escape from the country. This was followed by the election of President Roch Kaboré, whose poor security record facilitated the military coup.

Niger's case is slightly different. The coup by General Tiani, head of the presidential guard, resulted from an internal struggle within the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism, which ruled the country.

However, in all three cases, the juntas appeared as saviours and enjoyed some popular support.

The role of Ecowas and French criticism

The popularity of the juntas was bolstered by the policy of the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas). Under the pretext of restoring constitutional order, Ecowas imposed a harsh economic embargo that primarily affected populations already hard-hit by the Covid crisis. Ecowas even threatened military intervention against Niger, while endorsing all electoral frauds.

At the same time, French authorities continuously criticised the juntas publicly. Macron even refused to comply with Niger's demand for French troops to leave, deeming the government illegitimate.

The juntas took advantage of this to withdraw from the regional structure and form the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), an economic and military alliance.

Are the juntas progressive?

The coup leaders have adopted a sovereigntist, anti-French, and anti-Western discourse that aligns perfectly with Putin's ideology. Democracy is criticised as an externally imposed and unsuitable system for African traditions, or as ineffective.

Is the promised success evident? Clearly not. The security situation is deteriorating significantly, with jihadists controlling vast territories. The recent [attack on the Mansila barracks](#) in Burkina Faso, where over a hundred soldiers perished, demonstrates the juntas' incapacity to resist.

Ironically, the detractors of France have pursued the same security-focused policy, and reject any political solution to the conflict. The use of costly Wagner mercenaries has resulted in numerous massacres, such as in [Moura](#), where over 500 civilians were killed by mercenaries and Malian soldiers. Niger has enlisted the services of a Turkish mercenary company, [SADAT](#). In Burkina Faso, the junta has created poorly armed and trained militias, the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), who are easy targets for Islamist groups and often target the Fulani community.

Suppression of democracy and repression

As the crisis deepens, the juntas weaken and respond by shrinking democratic space. Political activities are banned, and leaders are either arrested or exiled, as with Oumar Mariko, leader of a radical left-wing Malian organisation. The press is censored, opponents are imprisoned or sent to the front lines with the VDP, as happened in Burkina Faso to lawyer Guy-Hervé Kam, co-founder of the militant civil society organisation 'Balai Citoyen,' and the former foreign minister, even at the age of 70. Union leaders, such as Moussa Diallo of Burkina Faso's General Confederation of Labour, are persecuted.

Some may be deceived by the juntas' sovereigntist or even anti-imperialist rhetoric, which merely mimics other African dictators. Accused of corruption or electoral fraud, they defend themselves by adopting anti-colonialist rhetoric to vilify their opponents.

In practice, the juntas are indistinguishable from other dictatorships: same censorship, same repression, same electoral fraud, same corruption. The only difference is their allegiance to Putin. Those tempted by the policy of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' disregard the interests of the people of those countries, and fail to see that the juntas have not freed them from neocolonialism; they have merely changed masters.

Paul Martial is editor of the site [Afriques en lute](#).



The coup leaders have adopted a sovereigntist, anti-French, and anti-Western discourse that aligns perfectly with Putin's ideology. Democracy is criticised as an externally imposed and unsuitable system for African traditions, or as ineffective.

Gen Z will lead the people's revolution in Kenya

By **Rasna Warah**

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared on [The Elephant](#) website. A week after these protests took place, and after this article was written, the Finance Bill was withdrawn.

SOMETHING TRULY REMARKABLE happened in Nairobi on 18 June. For the first time since Kenya's independence, a people-driven movement took to the streets in droves. It was ignited largely by Gen Z—those born after 1997. They are also known as the fully “digitally native” generation, because they were born during the internet age.

They were protesting against the Finance Bill that was to introduce punitive taxes that would, among other negative impacts, significantly raise the cost of living and the cost of doing business in Kenya. If passed, it would also allow the state to raid the personal data of citizens, including bank details and mobile money accounts.

The people gathered on the streets of Nairobi were not those who usually attend rallies; they were young people, including professionals, from all classes.

This spontaneous, organic movement was significant in three important ways. One, it was leaderless; there were no politicians or political leaders leading

the pack, nor was it associated with any political party. Two, it was driven largely by social media; the call to protest was communicated mainly via social media platforms like X and TikTok. Three, civil society organisations that, in the last couple of decades, have been the traditional torchbearers of matters related to good governance and accountability were largely absent or invisible.

In this way, the movement is very much akin to a number of movements globally: the Occupy Wall Street movement; the ‘Arab Spring’ in North Africa; protests that resulted in the ouster of Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in 2019; and the rapidly growing climate change movement currently being championed by young activists like Greta Thunberg.

The June 18 protests demonstrated that it is possible for Kenyans to rally around a cause without being chaperoned or persuaded by any political leader or politician. This is in sharp contrast to the early and mid-1990s when political leaders, such as Martin Shikuku, Kenneth Matiba and James Orendo, could mobilise thousands of people to large pro-democracy rallies, demanding the end to Daniel arap Moi's dictatorial regime. For their efforts, some of these leaders were incarcerated, and it took another decade for Moi to be ousted. The resounding

victory of Mwai Kibaki in the 2002 general election saw many of these leaders join government or become elected leaders.

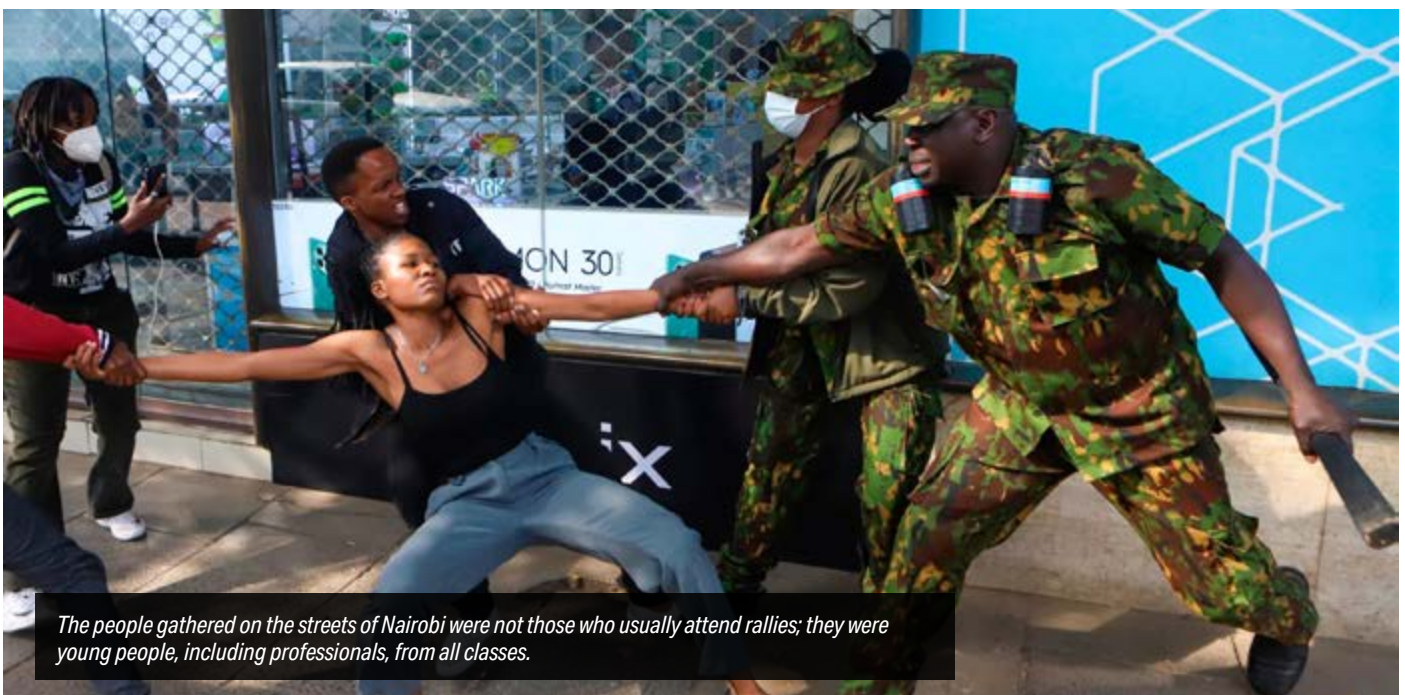
Then there was no one left to speak for ‘the people’, except civil society and non-governmental organisations (CSOs and NGOs). During the Kibaki era, they also took on the role of educating the public about their rights and responsibilities, when it was no longer dangerous to do so.

A crisis of confidence

However, the 2007/8 post-election violence led to the death of hundreds of people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of others. This made it clear that the relationship between the state and its citizens had altered irreversibly, and that the concept of ‘nationhood’ was still a mirage in Kenya.

This disputed election was a turning point in Kenya. Ordinary Kenyans became sceptical of the ability of the state to protect them and to uphold their rights. This resulted in louder demands, spearheaded by Raila Odinga, among others, for changing the constitution to give citizens more rights.

On their part, NGOs and CSOs experienced a severe crisis of confidence. Many viewed the post-election violence as a symptom of their failure to reduce ethnic tensions and polarisation.



The people gathered on the streets of Nairobi were not those who usually attend rallies; they were young people, including professionals, from all classes.

The violence and mass displacement brought to the fore issues that had not been dealt with adequately either by the state or NGOs. They included grievances related to land, inequality and the rule of law.

The Kenyan public was also beginning to question whether CSOs and NGOs were, in fact, part of the problem afflicting Kenya's politics; some civil society and non-governmental organisations were viewed as being partisan or aligned to political parties or donor countries. Many NGOs and CSOs became 'professionalised', carrying out projects that appealed to donor organisations and were quite often oblivious to the needs of what Kenyans refer to as people "kwa ground". The 'real' civil society—members of trade unions, cooperatives, farmers' associations and the like—were ignored.

It was expected that the promulgation of a new constitution in 2010 would lessen the burden on NGOs and CSOs to ensure that people's rights are respected. It was thought that the establishment of independent, state-funded commissions and oversight bodies would protect citizens from the vagaries and excesses of the state. But the powers of these commissions were significantly eroded by both Presidents Kenyatta and Ruto. Anti-corruption and police oversight bodies, for instance, have largely failed to bring people to book or to make leaders and the police more accountable. Extrajudicial killings by the police continue unabated. More significantly, these presidents' [disrespect for court orders](#) has signified that an independent judiciary is also under serious threat.

The 'defanging' of state institutions not only poses a threat to citizens but also to the many NGOs and CSOs. There is a palpable fear among them that their operations might come to a halt if they are too vocal.

The power of social media

Recent governments have underestimated the power of social media to bring about social, economic and political transformation. Former President Uhuru believed that an army of propagandists and bloggers he recruited in State House

could shield him from the people's wrath, but this clearly did not happen. Similarly, President Ruto believes that his communication with people will help ensure his neoliberal, regressive agenda is not questioned, whether citizens like it or not. This has clearly not happened.

Ruto has also been cosying up to Western leaders (whom he vilified during his campaign to become deputy president in 2013 election because he perceived them as supporting his indictment at the International Criminal Court). He believes this will protect him from scrutiny or criticism from Western nations and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF),

democracies are not delivering public goods at anything near the pace that our very young population expect. There is a profound scepticism of power and suspicion of the West, in particular, among this African demographic." And the appetite for debt among these politicians has not abated since the presidency of Uhuru. Under Ruto, Kenya's debt burden is set to rise even further, to 80 per cent of GDP.

Kenyan youth are also very aware of the fact that the decisions made by the current crop of old-school politicians, many of whom have been accused of corruption and other crimes, will deeply affect their future. And they are determined not to let that happen. Remember, this is also the generation whose parents suffered under the IMF/World Bank-induced Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) of the '80s and '90s (reincarnated in the Finance Bill 2024). SAPs created a stressed and deeply impoverished generation, with reduced access to basic services. Poverty and inequality levels rose as people struggled to meet their basic needs.

Now, President Ruto is planning to dismantle the existing national health insurance system and replace it with a more

expensive and complicated system that will make it harder for families and young people, including children, to access healthcare. Public university education fees are also set to rise.

Enter Gen Z. This tech-savvy generation has shown us that Kenyans do not need mediators in the form of politicians or civil society organisations to speak on their behalf. They have demonstrated their ability to organise on a massive scale. After Nairobi, protests were planned in Mombasa, Eldoret, Kilifi, Laikipia, Nakuru, Kisumu, Meru, and Kericho. The movement has gone viral! They are the true patriots who will lead a people's revolution that will bring about the change Kenyans desperately need.

Rasna Warah is a Kenyan [writer](#) and [journalist](#). In a previous incarnation, she was an editor at the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).



Ruto had to account for the millions of shillings he wasted in travelling in a luxurious private jet to the United States for a recent state visit, even as he implored Kenyans to "tighten their belts" and prepare for tough austerity measures in the face of rising national debt.

which most Kenyans believe is the main architect of the draconian Finance Bill.

But even Ruto had to account for the millions of shillings he wasted in travelling in a luxurious private jet to the United States for a recent state visit, even as he implored Kenyans to "tighten their belts" and prepare for tough austerity measures in the face of rising national debt. His belated explanation that the jet was a 'gift' from friends also raised a lot of questions about Kenya's foreign policy. What 'quid pro quo' arrangements were made with this foreign 'friend' and did this put Kenya's national interests at risk? Such questions may not have arisen if Kenyans on social and mainstream media had not demanded answers. It is likely that closer scrutiny will continue under a 'woke' generation that has little patience with politicians who speak from both sides of their mouths.

As anti-corruption crusader and founder of The Elephant, John Githongo, [explained to me](#), "Current

The children of Gaza:

STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR

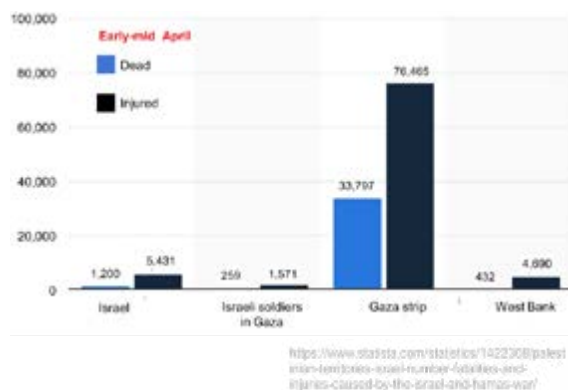
By **Louis Reynolds**

This article looks at why children are dying of hunger in Gaza, and almost half a million people face catastrophic levels of food insecurity.

On October 7, 2023, about 1,200 Israeli soldiers and civilians, including 33 children, were killed in war crimes committed by both the military wing of Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, acting under the “[Hannibal Directive](#)”. The atrocities left 5,431 people injured. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups also captured 251 soldiers and civilians, including children and women, and took them into the Gaza strip.

The Israeli government responded with an immediate declaration of war. By mid to late April, the resulting conflict had killed 35,688 people in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt), [including more than 13,800 children](#). Around 88,175 were wounded.

The dead and injured



Of the children killed in Gaza, most were killed by the IDF with weapons supplied by the USA. Today, while the [direct military killing continues](#) and the death toll among children [approaches 16,000](#), children in Gaza are also dying of acute malnutrition, diarrhoea and dehydration, and are vulnerable to a host of mainly communicable diseases.

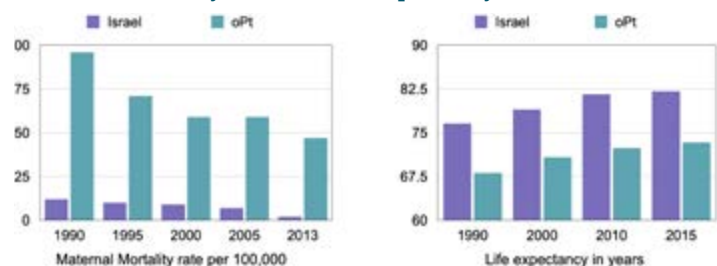
To understand why this is happening, we look at three key health indicators in the region **before** the Hamas attack, as a baseline, and compare the general health of the people in the oPts—Gaza and the West Bank—with that of Israel. The indicators are:

- **Maternal mortality rate (MMR):** the number of women in a given time period who die as the result of being pregnant compared with those who give birth to live babies.
- **Life expectancy:** how long, on average, a baby born in a particular time period is expected to live. Life expectancy is very sensitive to the number of small children who die; if many people die very young, life expectancy drops badly.
- **Under-5 mortality rate (U-5MR):** the number of children out of every thousand born alive who die before their 5th birthday.

All three indicators reflect not only the quality and availability of health care, but also the social, economic and environmental conditions in which people live.

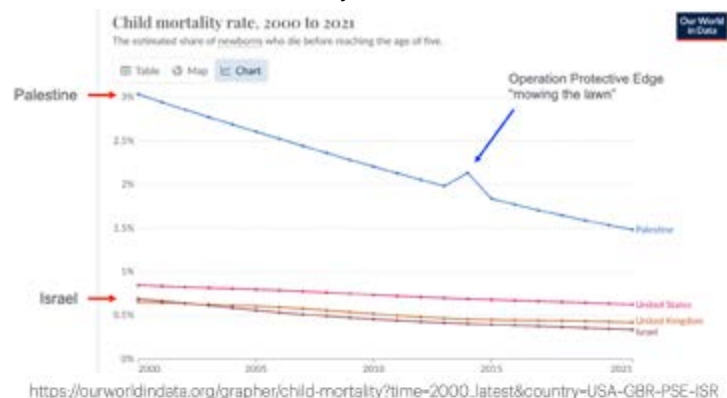
Health outcomes—the baseline was never normal

Maternal mortality rates and life expectancy for Israel and the oPt



These differences in maternal mortality rates and life expectancy between Israel and the Occupied Territories are a dramatic indicator of the longstanding conditions of life of the Palestinian people.

Trends in the under 5 mortality rate



Again, though there was a welcome improvement all round, it is clear that, throughout that period, far more Palestinian than Israeli children did not enjoy their 5th birthdays. The blip in the line for Palestine reflects ‘Operation Protective Edge’, the devastating 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza that, according to a [report from Physicians for Human Rights Israel](#) (PHRI) killed over 2,100 people, of whom at least 70% were civilians, including over 500 children. The U-5MR for Israel is excellent; it outstrips both the US and the UK.

And nothing has changed. [Another report from PHRI](#) shows how Israel still evades responsibility for Palestinians’ health and that enormous differences in health care persisted into the Covid-19 pandemic with devastating results.

Hunger and famine in the Gaza Strip

Hunger in the Gaza Strip is not something new. Hunger has long been an instrument of ethnic cleansing and a weapon of war for Israel.

After the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada in December 1987, Israel adopted a deliberate strategy of limiting nutritional value and creating food insecurity among Palestinians, as a counterinsurgency strategy. It started small, progressively restricting movement of people and goods.

In late 2000, the military destroyed farms, razed more than 10 percent of Gaza's agricultural land, and uprooted more than 226,000 trees. Later it limited fishing, one of the pillars of Gaza's food system, to a very small bit of sea along the coastline.

Around 2008, Israel devised a range of mathematical formulas to determine the quantity and types of food that it would allow into Gaza. In 2012 Gisha, an Israeli human rights organisation, won the release of a Ministry of Defence document, based on a model produced by staff in the Ministry of Health, called [Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip—Red Lines](#). It includes tables and charts breaking down daily food consumption by sex and age and calculating the minimum caloric intake that would allow "nutrition that is sufficient for subsistence without the development of malnutrition."

According to a [2006 report in The Observer](#), Dov Weisglass, adviser to Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, described the red line like this:

The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger.

He clarified that the hunger pangs are supposed to encourage the Palestinians to force Hamas to change its attitude towards Israel, or force Hamas out of government.

By October 7 the red line had disappeared. Mass starvation was now a key weapon of war. The deterioration in a few months is a mark of the worsening situation—an estimated 350,000 more people, making 1.1 million, are described as 'People in catastrophe', according to the scale of the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\)](#).

The Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, made the strategy very clear on 9 October 2023:

THE GAZA STRIP

FAMINE IS IMMINENT AS 1.1 MILLION PEOPLE, HALF OF GAZA, EXPERIENCE CATASTROPHIC FOOD INSECURITY



IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis; 15 Feb–15 July 2024; Published on 18 March 2024

There will be no food, there will be no fuel... we are fighting human animals.

Destroying the healthcare system

Not content with destroying the health of the population, Israel has also been systematically destroying the infrastructure of the healthcare system. There remain 11 barely functioning hospitals, out of the 36 functioning ones before the latest invasion.

The destruction of Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City would be the equivalent of destroying Groote Schuur Hospital at least.



Al Shifa hospital before and after the recent attack.



Global collusion

While the recent destruction of a children's hospital in Ukraine rightfully received widespread condemnation, the same people are eerily quiet when it comes to the much greater destruction in Gaza. And it's not just an immediate silence. The silence extends back decades, as Europe and the US have supported a regime which, deliberately, and systematically, attacks the lives and health of the people, and the children, of the Occupied Territories.

Louis Reynolds is a retired paediatric intensive care specialist, and a member of the People's Health Movement of South Africa.

INDIAN COALITION GOVERNMENT

A DEFEAT FOR HINDU NATIONALISM

By **Sushovan Dhar**

In the city of Ayodhya, Narendra Modi inaugurated the Ram temple in January 2024, built on the ruins of the Babri mosque. A symbol of the overwhelming might of Hindutva, led by an ultra-nationalist whose ambition is to transform secular India into a Hindu nation.

ON JUNE 4, 2024, THE PRIME Minister of India, Narendra Modi, was re-elected for the third time, but with fewer seats. His Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was unable to secure an absolute majority. The results make it amply clear that this Hindu-nationalist supremo is paying the price for his refusal to address the socio-economic crisis that has gripped the country, and gotten worse over the last 10 years under his administration. Rahul Gandhi, his main rival, rose to prominence as the leader of the opposition coalition, Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (India), in an election much closer than anticipated.

Fictions and truths

Many people were surprised by the outcome. Most had predicted a landslide victory for Modi. After six weeks of voting, the BJP, which has been in power for ten years, gained only 240 seats (272 are needed for a majority), down from 303 in 2019. This places Modi in a tight situation leading the Nationalist Democratic Alliance, a coalition of fifteen parties that includes smaller regional parties. His opponents call it a “moral defeat”. After all, the 73-year-old Modi sought 400 seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) so that he could amend the constitution.

Despite this unexpected setback, the autocratic leader celebrated his win, calling it a historic achievement, as people put their trust in (his) alliance for the third time. Yet his party lost even in Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous and impoverished state, in the north of the country. Uttar Pradesh has also emerged

as the latest laboratory of Indian fascism in the last decade. There, in the city of Ayodhya, Narendra Modi inaugurated the Ram temple in January 2024, built on the ruins of the Babri mosque. A symbol of the overwhelming might of Hindutva, led by an ultra-nationalist whose ambition is to transform secular India into a Hindu nation. The BJP lost in Ayodhya too.

Modi will now be forced to rely on his alliance partners, shocking for someone accustomed to enjoying unrestricted power and authority for more than 20 years. Not only has the political landscape changed and Modi been substantially weakened, but he is now facing a freshly rejuvenated opposition, out to challenge his omnipresence in Indian politics and society. These were amply evident in the first few sessions of the newly convened parliament. In the days to come, the BJP will also have to fight several state legislative elections, where the opposition alliance, bolstered by the results, will challenge them strongly.

Modi-magic under challenge

The Modi-magic has generally ceased to work. The personality cult built around the supreme leader has proved inadequate during the elections. But what changed so suddenly?

The poor results are attributed to unemployment, a profound socio-economic crisis, and all-pervasive inequality that has reached new heights. Also, Modi’s mismanagement of the Covid crisis, during which at least five million Indians died, has been one of the prime factors, slowly brewing discontentment with his regime.

Economic results are good on paper (6.8% growth in 2024, according to the IMF), to the extent that India is now the world’s fifth-largest economy, ahead of the UK. But other indicators are poor. According to data from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, at 45.4%. The general unemployment rate is 8%, which may not account for numerous types of underemployment and disguised unemployment. India is a country where 92.4% of the workforce is estimated to be employed in the informal sector. While infrastructure is now more developed, as evident with the near doubling of airports (from 74 to 140), public debt has increased (82% of GDP), and employment-generating industries are lacking. The IMF has also warned that general government debt might surpass 100 percent of GDP shortly.

One of the biggest crises faced by the country is profound rural distress, with rural incomes declining consistently since the beginning of 2022. A never-ending inflationary spiral puts basic goods more and more out of reach for rural households, exacerbating this loss of purchasing power. Over and above that, the Modi government did nothing about the agrarian crisis that has been underway since the 1990s, when India adopted neoliberal measures that hit the agrarian sector hard. Even though agriculture contributes approximately 18 percent of the country’s GDP, it employs nearly 45 percent of the workforce—close to 594 million people, according to latest estimates.

The agrarian crisis and agrarian distress in India have resulted in rural indebtedness. Numerous reports submitted to the government on farmers' suicides have pointed out clearly that indebtedness among rural households has been a major cause. The National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) *Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holding, 2019*, released in 2021, revealed that around 50% of Indian agricultural households are indebted.

Failure of religious polarisation

The masses emerged as the most powerful agency in the current elections. Results show that the BJP lost 38 seats in the constituencies that saw active participation in the farmers' struggle. From farmers to doctors and the movements against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which threatened the citizenship of large numbers of Muslims, each one of them has a polarised opinion against the BJP government. While a large section of society actively marched on the streets, ignoring serious reprisals, an even greater section silently endorsed the mood, and acted in the polling booths.

While the Modi regime couldn't be unseated, the election results do not fully capture the mood of the masses in the streets. Let's not forget that everything was stacked against the opposition in this, the least free and fair national election in India's history of independence. The ruling party had a huge advantage over the opposition when it came to administrative machinery, media, and finances.

Can we interpret the mandate as one for a secular and democratic India? Yes, in a certain way but only partially.

Modi sought unquestioned public endorsement for his ten years of authoritarian rule, and support for the next five years of dissolving the country's bourgeois-democratic fabric. The voters declined to approve his plans. Even amongst the voters that supported his Hindu majoritarian politics, the communal appeal did not prevail over all other considerations, despite his ferocious anti-Muslim remarks. This result punctures his image of invincibility

and is also a personal defeat for him. It is certain that the country's democratic backsliding to an outright autocratic state has been halted, if only for the time being. This will possibly open up democratic spaces, both within and outside the parliament. The agenda of the BJP, together with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—a right-wing Hindu nationalist, paramilitary organisation—was to amend the constitution, with the help of an overwhelming (more than two-thirds) majority, to create a Hindu state. This is now postponed for the time being. The BJP-RSS' Hindu majoritarian project has suffered a critical electoral blow, but is not entirely defeated.

The action taken by the BJP to target author Arundhati Roy, in a prosecution for 'hate speech', indicates that they want to pursue repression more vigorously.

So it is too early to be conclusive. The BJP has lost an absolute majority but has not been vanquished. Any exaggeration of the opposition's achievements can take us down the wrong political path. However, the election results have not only raised questions about Modi's invincibility, but have also returned the country to a coalition government after a decade of one-party control. A strong government with total control of the parliament wouldn't have augured well for the working class.



From farmers to doctors and the movements against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which threatened the citizenship of large numbers of Muslims, each one of them has a polarised opinion against the BJP government. While a large section of society actively marched on the streets, ignoring serious reprisals, an even greater section silently endorsed the mood, and acted in the polling booths.

The future uncertain

The rejuvenation of the opposition space will surely open up spaces for dissent and defiance. As economic conditions worsen for an overwhelming majority of the country, we will witness more and more protests and revolts in the days to come. But will spontaneous and episodic uprisings be sufficient to defeat the fascists? Let's not ignore the fact that we are up against a formidable power that can retaliate strongly. The global right-wing wave also has negative consequences for Indian politics. The BJP has demonstrated an ability to bounce back from electoral defeats owing to the strong grass-roots network of the RSS across the country. The repressive machinery shows no signs of relenting.

A weak government would certainly open up options for the Left and social movements. In order to exploit that, we need a clearly articulated strategy that is able to create a counter-hegemonic narrative, based on a strong anti-capitalist transformative vision, with a strong democratic component. However, the Left is hardly a force to reckon with in the current Indian political landscape, even though they have been able to increase their parliamentary presence from 6 to 9. It is high time that we need a New Left that can fight against Hindu hegemony and is not separated from the transformative counter-project of building democratic socialism either.

Sushovan Dhar is a political activist and commentator.

CAN WE VOTE AWAY FASCISM IN THE US?

By **Lewis Barnes**

WE ARE IN A DANGEROUSLY precarious situation in the United States at the moment. With the Presidential election five months away, the Democratic Party is struggling internally over Biden's candidacy, and Trump has restated his desire to contest any election he deems "fraudulent". We face a choice between a fascist and a man too frail to even debate him. It is tempting in this desperate situation to try to close ranks around the least bad option—a bumbling and genocidal Joe Biden.

The liberal media will incessantly push the narrative that it is our duty to vote out fascism, but leftists must resist these simplistic and emotive appeals. Their narratives obscure the political and social dynamics that have given rise to a fascist movement in the United States. They also deflect from their own role in strengthening Trump's candidacy.

There are many reasons for the development of fascism in the United States, structural, historical and circumstantial. The inherent conservatism of the constitution, and the 'checks and balances' of the branches of government, enable rapid shifts to the right, whilst slowing advances by the Left. So, for decades we see a lack of meaningful progress on issues that have very high public support, like gun control, student debt or healthcare costs. Meanwhile, in the less than four years since Trump established the conservative majority in the Supreme Court, there have been

significant roll backs of rights to abortion and affirmative action. The recent Supreme Court decision granting Trump broad immunity from prosecution as president continues this legalised path toward fascism.

These rapid shifts to the right are very demoralising for the liberal establishment, because it undermines their ideas about the virtues of liberal democracy and the 'sanctity' of its institutions. In the liberal imagination, the right to abortion, or even the right to vote, were conferred by a benevolent government. The reality that mass Left social movements won these rights, as concessions to their greater demands, is ignored.

Popular struggle, not legal cases

This history of struggle is very relevant for us today, because it offers a path toward genuine resistance to the Trump project. When Trump was elected in 2016, there was a significant surge of grassroots resistance. Demonstrations that had typically attracted 100 people swelled to thousands, and historic marches to Washington became the norm.

Instead of encouraging these protest movements, the liberal media and the Democratic Party establishment tried to divert this energy into the Trump-Russia collusion case. Within a year, mobilisation

had faded and everyone was watching the constant coverage, trying to find a smoking gun of Russian interference.

This diversion of popular energy into the dead end of legal cases against Trump (Russia collusion, impeachment twice, and hush money payments) has been an important shield for him. The cases play right into his 'outsider' narrative and claims of victimisation, while they distract from the need to militantly resist the Republican political agenda.

Challenge to build a Left

Since Trump first emerged as a candidate, the liberal media has inadvertently enabled and strengthened his campaign. Eight years ago, his candidacy was initially treated as a joke, and his unedited speeches and press conferences were gleefully broadcast almost 24/7. There was little or no fact-checking or serious investigation of the campaign's claims. This amounted to almost \$2 billion in free media coverage.

In their minds, he could never win, and he would destroy the Republican party. They failed to see the appeal of an 'outsider candidate', who had effectively tapped into the well-organised former Tea Party and evangelical movements. The liberal media has occasionally reflected on their inadvertent support for the Trump campaign, but they ultimately continue to pursue the higher ratings that constant and unethical coverage of Trump provides.

To effectively challenge the Trump campaign means not only fact-checking. It also means supporting an alternative political project that will mobilise the millions of people who believe in a more just and equitable world. The political structure of the United States makes building Left projects difficult; it is much more common for Democrats to use Left imagery and rhetoric than fight for Left policies. The most salient example is the Obama's 'Hope and Change' campaign's faux Left turn, which famously bailed

The Democratic Party establishment undermined the Sanders campaign's Left agenda at every turn, although Sanders was always projected to do very well against Trump.





*Joe Biden's support for the Gaza genocide may be **the** issue that costs him this election. There was a campaign in Michigan, among mostly Arab-Americans, to write "undecided" on their ballots instead of voting for Biden in the Democratic primary.*

out the banks instead of those facing foreclosure.

The Obama years were followed by a shift to the right, with Hilary Clinton and then Biden both acting in opposition to strong challenges from Bernie Sanders. The Democratic Party establishment undermined the Sanders campaign's Left agenda at every turn, although Sanders was always projected to do very well against Trump. He was able to mobilise among disaffected voters, mainly young people. The geriatric Biden presidency highlights the generational divide in US politics, where young people are very consistently to the Left of both parties on every issue.

The subsequent emergence of 'the squad' of young Congressional representatives has expanded this internal struggle in the Democratic party. The Democratic congressional leadership has tried to contain this energy and divert it toward further support for Biden, despite the clear evidence that mobilisation of young and disaffected voters is key to defeating Trump.

The senile empire

Although US citizens are famously ignorant of geopolitical issues, people have certainly taken note of the embarrassing exits in Iraq and Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, and Palestinian genocide in Gaza. Joe Biden's support for the Gaza genocide may be the issue that costs him this election. There was a campaign in Michigan, among mostly Arab-Americans, to write "undecided" on their ballots instead of voting for Biden in the Democratic primary. This could be crucial, and there has been a sharp shift in his rhetoric since the primary elections there in April. His failure to deny arms to Israel may have already doomed his campaign.

Biden's stance on Gaza is consistent with the imperialist project of the Democrats that seeks to manage global conflicts in the interests of global capitalism. But as the situation in Gaza has shown, Biden is a huge liability, and the move to supplant him may be related to his inability to manage the crisis in Gaza.

The trend of waning US influence globally will continue in the future, as China, Russia and other states are becoming increasingly defiant. The prospect of another Trump presidency has only accelerated this trend, as his 'America First' rhetoric becomes more mainstream. The upheavals and destruction from this shift in economic and political power are very difficult to predict, and the "senile empire", to use Samir Amin's phrase, will be very dangerous.

Voting system undemocratic

The Electoral College in the United States also plays an important role in the demobilisation of voters and social movements. This is an electoral system in which each state has a fixed number of electors who sit with the electors from the other states in an assembly, called the Electoral College. This assembly chooses the president. Most states give all their elector positions to the party which has the most votes in the state. Most states are either Republican or Democrat by big majorities.

This creates a dynamic where six 'swing states' will decide the election. While there is obsessive coverage of the presidential election by the media, and it is one of the few popular political conversation topics, the vast majority of votes are not decisive.

The Electoral College was devised partly to give slave-holding states more

political power, and it remains largely intact since 1787. It functions today as a way to limit the democratic power of the electorate and give power to more conservative areas of the country. If the more democratic popular vote was used to determine Presidential elections, the 2000 and 2016 votes would have been won by Al Gore and Hillary Clinton respectively. Trump lost the popular vote in 2020 by 7 million votes (almost 5%).

To popular resistance

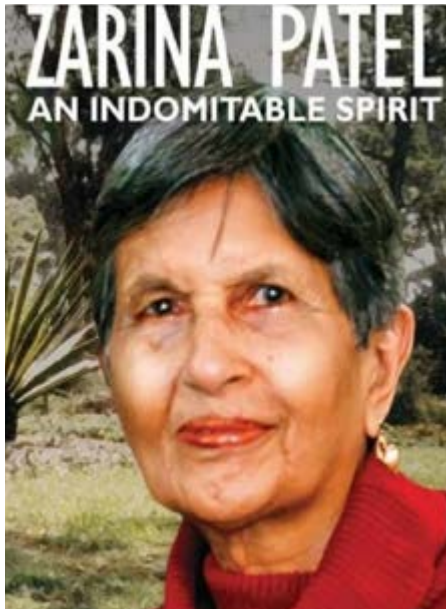
The deep structural issues and powerful forces acting together to push the United States farther and farther to the right cannot be challenged except by popular resistance from every sector of society. The last Trump campaign gave us a sense of what this might look like, but also how alliance with the Democratic and media establishment will only strengthen him. The chaotic and confusing in-fighting in the Democratic party right now is a result of their inability to understand or challenge Trump's fascist project.

The narrative that a vote for Biden is an anti-fascist vote masks these failures and limits genuine anti-fascist action. For those in swing states, it may feel better to vote Democrat, but the reality is that the roots of this current crisis run deep and it cannot be voted away in a single election. There are millions of people who are effectively sitting on the sidelines. Leftists must organise among them for a better future, independent of the two parties responsible for the current crisis.

Lewis Barnes is a husband, father and community organiser based in Boston, Massachusetts.

Zarina Patel and the story of Kenya's labour and Left movements

By Lucien van der Walt



Zarina found in the December 12 Movement a prefiguration of a new Kenya: rebels against the suffocating party-state, the wretched economy, the colonial legacy, and communalism; Black, Asian, Kikuyu, Kalenjin and more, standing together for a better tomorrow.

ZARINA PATEL, CHAMPION OF THE workers and women, passed away on 25 April 2024 after a long illness, aged 88. Author, artist, editor, and stalwart of popular movements, she is widely mourned. Her political life, and her research, provide a unique window into the often-forgotten story of labour and left-wing movements in Kenya. She not only wrote histories—she made history.

Born in 1936, Zarina was from Kenya's South Asian community. As in southern Africa, there was an Asian presence for millennia, but most arrived as cheap, often indentured, labour under Britain. Many worked in harsh conditions on the Uganda Railway connecting the coast and East African interior.

She grew up in the final years of British colonialism and witnessed the independent Kenyan African National Union (Kanu) government of Jomo Kenyatta, established in 1964, become a repressive, corrupt, patronage-based machine. She saw the creation of a mythmaking, official patriotic history that reduced the liberation struggle to Kanu, and built a personality cult for Kenyatta.

KANU's party-state suppressed opposition and tried to close or capture every independent space or movement. In 1965, unions were forced into a single, government-run Central Organisation of Trade Unions (Cotu). Rival parties and dissenters were repressed. This accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s under Daniel arap Moi, who ruled until 2002.

African repression of the Left

Many in today's labour and Left movements look back fondly, often uncritically, at early African nationalist states. But Kanu's trajectory was not unusual. Workers backed Kwame Nkrumah's rise in Ghana, but the independent government, launched in 1957, banned rivals and introduced detention without trial—and made strikes illegal. In 1961, workers, backed by street traders and the unemployed, organised a 17-day general strike. This was met with a state of emergency. Controls over workers followed, including a state-backed Trades Union Congress in 1965.

Julius Nyerere of Tanzania argued, in his 1962 essay *Ujamaa*, that workers who wanted too much were actually "potential capitalists" who needed to be "coerced by the government." He, too, built a one-party state that tried to swallow unions. In 1971, Nyerere's *Mwongozo* guidelines promised workers' control, but when workers occupied factories, he sent in the riot police.

The same scenario played out elsewhere: for example, in Kenneth Kaunda's Zambia. Ideology made no difference. Actually, these governments—Kenya's included—all declared themselves 'socialist' while oppressing the popular classes.

It is hardly surprising that the Left is weak in many African countries. Outside of South Africa and Namibia, 'socialism' is commonly identified with repressive, corrupt states, and the Left is seen as separate to workers' movements.

Kanu was one of the worst. Its corruption was on an industrial scale. Whereas Nkrumah and Nyerere tried to smother ethnic politics and tackle the chieftaincy, Kenyatta relied on Kikuyu ethnic chauvinism, and fostered hostility to other groups, including Indians. Moi continued this divide-and-rule, although he switched to a Kalenjin base.

Zarina—feminist and socialist

Zarina was influenced by feminist, left-wing, socialist, and Marxist ideas from the 1960s onwards. This was very risky. Kanu assassinated opponents, both within and outside the party. Victims ranged from moderate former trade unionist Tom Mboya to Kanu leftist Pio Pinto. Its communalist politics led to violent youth militias, and also the scapegoating of minorities: rioters targeted Indians in 1982, and there were orchestrated attacks in 1993.

Zarina involved herself in struggles in the 1970s. She joined the underground December 12 Movement (DTM) in the early 1980s; this was a cell-based, non-racial, and socialist movement. She was active in Mombasa and Nairobi. DTM members would engage *wananchi* (the people, 'citizens') in public spaces, through theatre, and (illegal) publications. In the DTM, Zarina met Zahid Rajan, later her life partner. They worked together on their cell's underground newsletters, *Pambana* and *HDK*.

Zarina found in the DTM a prefiguration of a new Kenya: rebels against the suffocating party-state, the wretched economy, the colonial legacy, and communalism; Black, Asian, Kikuyu, Kalenjin and more, standing together for a better tomorrow.

Marxism gaining ground

Marxism, and class analysis, were gaining ground in the universities in Kenya and neighbouring Tanzania. It was no alien 'Western' plant, as nationalists then and now—Moi among them—loved to claim. It was a global movement, co-made by Africans. Notable East African Marxist scholars included Kenya's Peter Anyang Nyong'o and Tanzania's Issa Shivji. Materials like South Africa's (banned) *African Communist* journal were also important influences in the region.

The DTM drew heavily on the radical university milieu. Zarina thrived in the DTM's political work, while [she was always sceptical](#) of dogmatic assertions, favouring debate, scepticism, and openness. She was critical of a decadent modern culture that embraced consumerism, drugs, easy money, sugar daddies, Hollywood values and extreme individualism—but in retrospect, too, of

the DTM's conformist left-wing culture.

What Zarina would never compromise was the need to fight injustice and exploitation. She was an ardent opponent of class systems, and of communal, racial, and religious strife and hatred. She was tireless in her fight to restore Kenya's democratic constitution, and to open space for the popular classes to remake Kenya, non-racialism, and a common nationhood.

Disappointments of the 'second liberation'

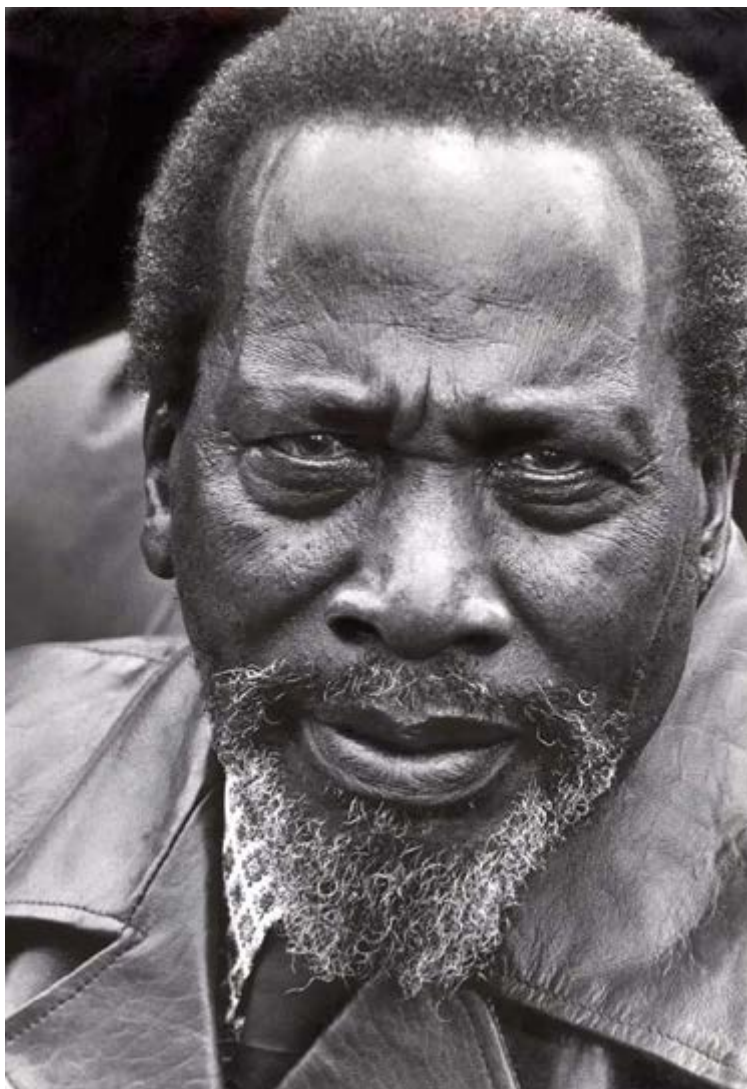
From the late 1980s, the 'second liberation' swept sub-Saharan Africa: decades-old authoritarian governments were forced by popular pressures to hold open elections; many toppled. Unions often played a major role, including in Ghana and Zambia. But much depended on whether incumbents were willing to risk elections. To their eternal credit, Nyerere and Kaunda allowed peaceful transitions, and Kaunda gracefully conceded defeat to the union-backed Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) in 1991.

Moi's Kanu government took a different road. It held supposedly open elections in 1992, but opponents were intimidated, and votes rigged; state-sponsored ethnic violence killed hundreds.

Patronage, Big Man politics, and the ruthless struggle to win state positions—a sure road to power and wealth—were also deeply entrenched in the political culture.

Kanu lost in 2002. Wracked by factionalism in the aftermath, it played a limited role in the 2007 elections. But its legacy remained: the election results were disputed, leading to massive, party-linked, ethnic conflicts. 1,400 died, 600,000 were displaced.

The disappointments of the 'second liberation' were playing out elsewhere too—notably, the MMD's rapid evolution into a corrupt establishment party. A full discussion of why parties usually betray voters and serve the powerful and wealthy falls outside the scope of this article. But some of the reasons are the



The Kenyan African National Union (Kanu) government of Jomo Kenyatta, established in 1964, became a repressive, corrupt, patronage-based machine.

cross-class character of parties, which reward identity politics and Big Men; parties' integration into state power, which is after all their main purpose; leaders' enrichment through office; and the top-down, centralised nature of states, which can only be wielded by self-interested small elites.

Many *wananchi* sense these truths, but they are rarely translated into an alternative politics. A major reason is that anti-imperialist nationalists, and the Left generally, also aim at winning state power through parties. Instead of rejecting the party system, they tend to blame parties' failures on contingent factors: ideology, leaders, and members.

Nationalists see betrayal, crooks, or cowards. For Frantz Fanon, the problem was the "absence of ideology," "intellectual laziness" and a greedy "psychology." Obviously, politics and skills matter. But these factors cannot explain why the problems repeat—and regardless of ideology and ability. Consider the parallel developments in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zambia.

Postcolonial leaders pursue their own interests

Marxists instead blamed party leaders' class position: many in DTM (says Gona) thought the problem was that Kanu was supposedly "completely mortgaged to the USA." This was underpinned by the idea, held by most Marxists, that postcolonial elites were not really ruling classes. Classes were based on means of production, and they were in government. So, they were characterised as fragile (if odious) 'petty bourgeoisies' without real power, and reliant on support from 'imperialism'.

But this misreads postcolonial state elites' resources and character. Marx's rival, the anarchist and syndicalist Mikhail Bakunin, had a broader class analysis. He called such groups a "new bureaucratic aristocracy", based on control of the instruments of state. He drew attention to the fact that they wielded armies and bureaucracies, state industries and budgets. They were usually the biggest employers.

Control of the main means of administration and coercion made them *ruling classes*, and enabled enrichment, corruption, and patronage.

Since high office was essential to their class position, political battles were ruthless; patronage and repression were valuable tools. When these local ruling classes worked with powerful imperial states, they did so in their *own* interests. And their resources provided real autonomy: Moi was able to ignore demands from the 'international community' for fair elections.

This background perhaps helps explain why the Left declined in Kenya's 'second liberation'. It struggled to understand the terrain, and the terrain was shaped by the battles of the 'bureaucratic aristocracy.' Meanwhile, hollowed out by Kanu, Cotu could not form the basis for an alternative, popular counter-power. Civil society, beyond the parties instead centred on the educated middle class, donor dollars, and NGOs.

Focus on history

Zarina started to focus on ‘people-centred movements’ and suggested that “the capture of the state by vanguard parties” was not “an adequate form.” She doubted Cotu could be salvaged. In 1991, she was central to struggles to save Nairobi’s Jeevanjee Gardens, donated to the city by local Indian businessman A.M. Jeevanjee, in 1906, from a Kanu-backed land grab.

Her attention turned increasingly to research on the history of labour, the Left, and local Indians. With Zahid, she founded and ran *AwaaZ* (“Voice”) magazine from 2000.

By then, she had published her first book, *Challenge to Colonialism*, about Jeevanjee. He co-founded the Indian Association in 1900, and the East Africa Indian National Congress (EAINC) in 1914; these inspired Harry Thuku’s East Africa Association in 1918, the first Black nationalist group.

Like many early critics of colonialism, Jeevanjee was from an elite, frustrated by racial barriers within the British Empire—in his case, raised by local whites. He sought reforms within the British Empire framework, not independence, and stressed lobbying and pressure.

While imperial racism was real, it existed alongside an imperial class project of incorporating local elites—educated, capitalist, and aristocratic—through education, qualified voting, indirect rule, and trade. Class divides were common in African and Asian societies, and nationalists like Jeevanjee accepted them: they wanted unfair racial barriers removed, not classes. The 1950s–1960s nationalists, like Kanu and the rest, had given up on reforming the Empire. But they shared, with their predecessors, a leadership core based on frustrated local elites, and an acceptance of class society, exemplified by their leaders’ development into ‘new bureaucratic aristocracies’.

Zarina’s work not only challenged Kanu’s self-serving patriotic history by restoring the memory of groups like EAINC, but also started unveiling a more radical tradition of local struggle.

Makhan Singh and the memorial lectures

Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh, a towering labour history of the British and early independence periods, recovered a radical tradition of trade unionism, very different to Cotu. This centred on the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, founded in 1935, later merged into the East African Trade Union Congress. It organised both black and Indian workers, was critical of capitalism and colonialism, transnational in outlook, and also organised in Tanzania and built links in Uganda.

The leading figure was Makhan Singh, son of Sudh Singh, who was fired for forming the Railway Artisans Union in the 1920s. Makhan came from a Ghadar Party background. A global movement influenced by Bakunin, anarchism, and syndicalism, Ghadar (“revolt”) insisted that anti-colonial struggle be waged by and for the popular classes. Rather than replacing imperial overlords with local exploiters, it aimed at an egalitarian, bottom-up society. Ghadarites were

active in East Africa, and three were shot, two hanged, eight jailed and twenty deported in a crackdown in the 1910s; but it survived underground.

In the 1920s, Ghadarism moved closer to the Soviet Union, as did Singh, and he developed links with communists abroad, including South Africa. In the late 1940s, Singh, an Irishman called T.P. O’Brien and *Daily Chronicle* journalists were running a Marxist Study Group in Nairobi.

In 1950—and speaking for East African TUC—Singh was the first to publicly demand “complete independence” for East Africa. This was well before EAINC, or what became Kanu. Britain’s repression intensified in the 1950s. Singh was sent into internal exile, like Kenyatta. The unions survived but, like the national liberation movement, were captured by moderates. The stage was now set for the state to be handed to Kanu.

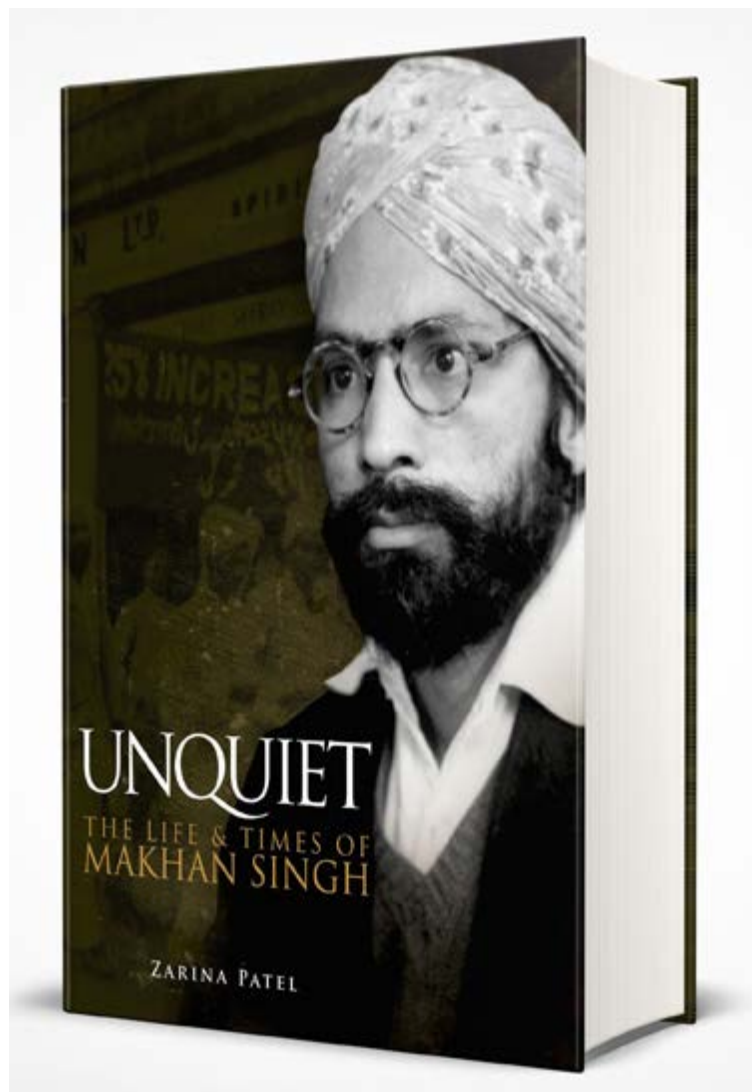
The Left retained a presence. Pinto and a white Marxist, Douglas Rogers, ran the main Kanu paper for years; Singh was admitted to Kanu. But he

was marginalised, as were leftists like Oginga Odinga; others, like Pinto, were killed.

Zarina tried to revive the memory of these stalwarts through the [Makhan Singh Memorial Lectures](#) series started in 2006, and other means: over 5,000 visited the touring Pinto Exhibition she and Zahid organised in 2023.

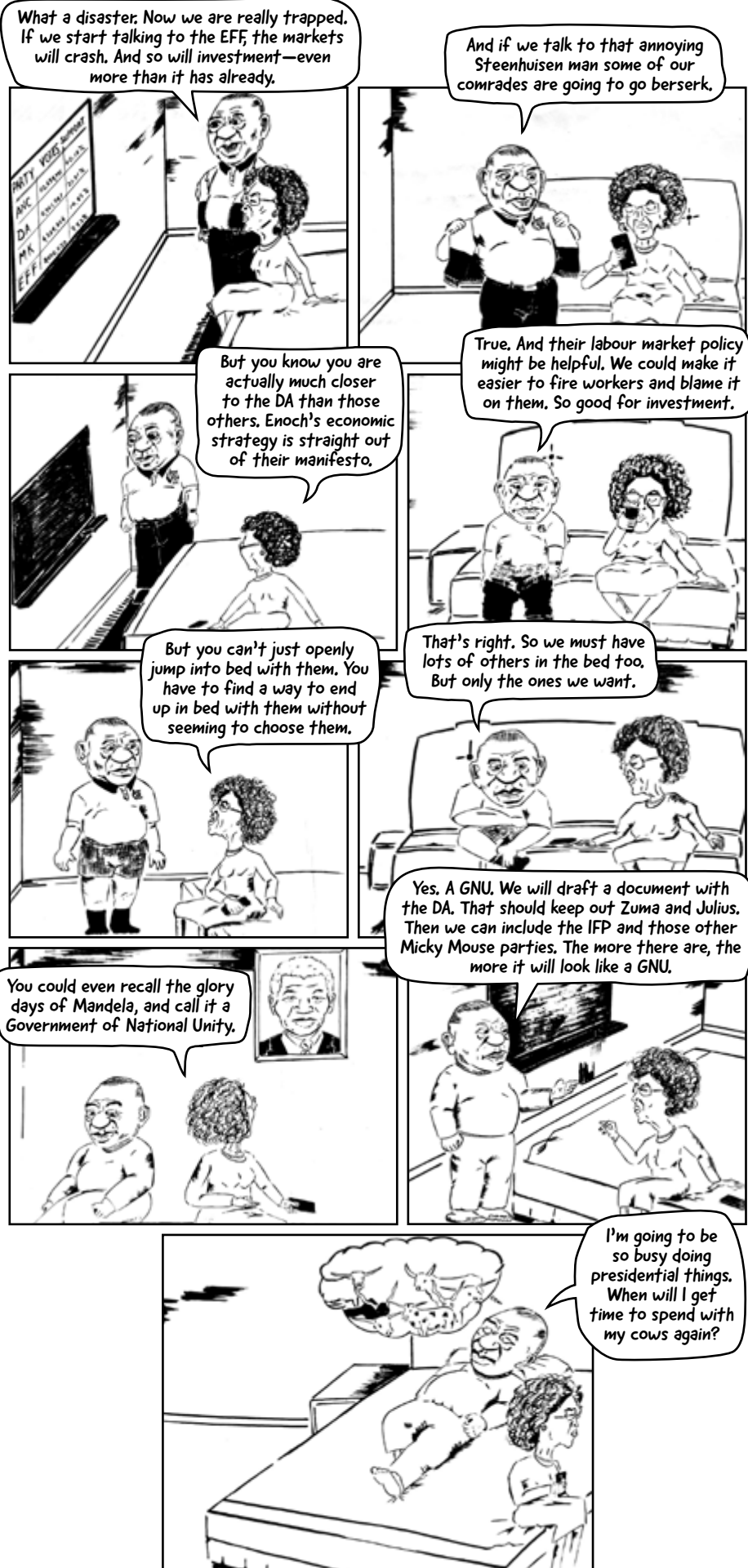
And so, we come full circle: Zarina and the DTM were part of an ongoing radical tradition that Britain and Kanu had tried to destroy, dating to the 1910s, sometimes surviving underground. Zarina, Gona argues, must be remembered alongside Kibachia, Odinga, Pinto and Singh, as “among the Kenyan patriots, revolutionaries ... who fought for ... the political changes that Kenyans are enjoying.”

Professor Lucien van der Walt is Director of the Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit (NALSU), at Rhodes University, worker educator and author.



Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh, a towering labour history of the British and early independence periods, recovered a radical tradition of trade unionism.

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Solidarity with Arundhati Roy

We add our name to the more than 200 Indian academics, activists and journalists who in June published an open letter to the Indian government. In it they called for it to withdraw its decision to prosecute celebrated author, Arundhati Roy, under anti-terrorism legislation. 14 years ago Roy is reported to have said that the disputed Indian region of Kashmir had never been “an integral part of India”. This statement is being dredged up 14 years later and used by the Hindu nationalist BJP regime as a pretext to silence someone who has been a constant critic. And using anti-terrorism legislation is particularly severe as it allows prolonged periods of incarceration without bail, pending the actual trial.

Democracy is under threat under the BJP regime of Narendra Modi.

We stand in solidarity with Arundhati Roy.