

Amandla!

South Africa's progressive magazine standing for social justice.

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UNEMPLOYMENT IS KILLING SA

NEOLIBERALISM

IS GUILTY

Education cuts provincial choice within national programme / Load-reduction: capitalism's electric shock therapy
/ Minerals over life: plight of Congolese people



Atef Abu Saif

Don't Look Left

A Diary of Genocide

With a Foreword by Chris Hedges

'In the morning I read the news. The news is about us. But it's designed for people reading it far, far away, who couldn't possibly imagine they could ever know anyone involved. It's for people who read the news to comfort themselves, to tell themselves: it's still far, far away. I read the news for different reasons: I read it to know I'm not dead.'

A harrowing and indispensable first-hand account of the experience of the first 85 days of the Israeli invasion of Gaza, from a prominent Palestinian writer.

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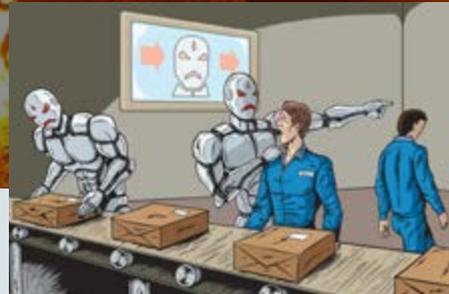
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Cosatu may, every now and then, complain about the ANC. But it's like a toxic relationship. The next night there they are, in the same bed again. Bickering but still together.

THE POPULIST THREAT AND THE RESPONSE OF THE LEFT

THE NEED IS GREATER THAN EVER for a consolidated voice of the working class and the poor. On the one hand, daily community protests seem to indicate a population that is not by any means apathetic. But when it comes to elections, the majority don't participate. No political party has been able to capture the imagination of the mass of people who experience unemployment, sewage in the street, erratic water supply, unaffordable electricity and intolerable levels of gender based violence. Yet enough of those people are desperate and sufficiently concerned to protest.

There are a number of candidates vying to capture this imagination. The field is becoming crowded. But they are by no means genuine supporters of the interests of the working class and the poor.

The Left is absent

The brutal truth is that, with very few exceptions, the right is capturing the mood of dissatisfaction much more effectively than the Left. All over the world there has been a dramatic shift to the right. What was once centre-left social democracy is now so far to the right that it is almost indistinguishable from the conservatives—equally wedded to neoliberalism, militarism, islamophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

In South Africa, we have two major problems. Firstly, the key social force, organised labour, is largely absent from the scene. It should be pioneering an alternative politics to the ruling coalition, but unfortunately, it is either in bed with the majority party in government, or too weak and disorganised to play this role. In the case of Cosatu, they may, every now and then, complain about the ANC. But it's like a toxic relationship. The next night there they are, in the same bed again. Bickering but still together.

The alliance with the ANC in government has also created a huge divide between its leadership and members. Today Cosatu, by virtue of its alliance with the ANC, is in effect in an alliance with the DA, through the 'Government of National Unity'.

Sure, now that the austerity policy of its alliance partner is biting hard in health and education, there will be a token protest. It seems that 7 October is the day on which workers will be asked to sacrifice their salaries and stay at home. Everybody knows that this, on its own, will make no difference. But Cosatu is simply incapable of mounting a serious, sustained campaign against its alliance partner.

The other components of organised labour—Saftu, Nactu and Fedusa—are too weak, fragmented and politically incoherent to represent a viable alternative.

To defeat the strategy of austerity would require the kind of intelligent, rolling and continuous mass action that, from time to time, the French trade unions show us. The political will is simply lacking.

As for the SACP, it has lost all capacity to act as a party. It has been reduced to being nothing more than the political commission of Cosatu, ensuring Cosatu remains loyal to the ANC, regardless of its neoliberal agenda.

Populist and pseudo Left

The second problem is that the space vacated by labour has been occupied by a motley collection of political forces which we often try to capture with the label 'populist'. Into this bag we can put MKP, the EFF and other off-shoots of the Radical Economic Transformation (RET) faction of the ANC. Of course, the PA, Action SA and National Coloured Congress, to name a few, represent the right-wing component of the populist fringe.

Their occupation of the space is based on putting forward simplistic, opportunistic and contradictory political platforms. They believe these will appeal to those suffering from the economic and social disintegration presided over by the ANC/SACP/Cosatu alliance.

The challenge to the Left is to popularise our message, that it is not immigration (with or without documents)

which is taking jobs. There is plenty of evidence that immigrants contribute to the growth of the economy—they create jobs. In fact, it is foreign and domestic capital that is taking jobs by taking their money out of the country. It is the government that is taking jobs by signing trade agreements that allow in masses of foreign goods. In fact, they have destroyed whole industries. But ‘Abahambe’ remains the intuitive response for many people.

MKP and EFF have policies in favour of nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. But nationalisation can be in the service of capitalism, as well as a challenge to it. And, as we know, it can also be a smokescreen for ‘state capture’—in the control, and for the benefit, of a parasitic layer of the Black middle class.

MKP reinforces this impression with its opposition to ‘white monopoly capital’. Not, you notice, capital itself. To paraphrase a recent document from Saftu *What is left? What is not left?*, the Left don’t fight against capitalism so that we can replace the white capitalist class with a black capitalist class.

The EFF is, on paper, also anti-neoliberal, advocating a central role for the state in directly delivering services. They advocate the return to the public sector of outsourced service provision. Yet its leaders are happy picking the fruits available only to the privileged. And again, they are not explicitly anti-capitalist.

What is Left?

To be Left and anti-capitalist requires a deep commitment to democracy, to fighting patriarchy and to struggling for a feminist perspective, not just in words but in practice. It also requires confrontation with capitalism’s assault on nature, and a rejection of productivism and extractivism.

And the same is true in the struggle against imperialism. It is easy to be against western imperialism; in South Africa, we are not short of reasons. But what about similar practices from newly emerging powers like China and Russia? The politics of ‘our enemy’s enemy is our friend’ are opportunistic. They turn us against the efforts of dominated classes and nations to free themselves from national oppression and foreign domination.

Matched against these criteria, both MKP and EFF fail dismally. A party which pledges itself to prioritise traditional law cannot be regarded as feminist, let

alone one which has committed itself to shipping off pregnant teenagers to Robben Island. That’s MKP.

Nor can a party that humiliated and then demoted one of its representatives (Naledi Chirwa) for missing a parliamentary session, because she was looking after her sick four-month-old daughter. Or a party with a military structure in its constitution. That’s the EFF.

The danger we face and the task ahead

Our current situation is filled with danger. We have a coalition government which represents the last gasp of the non-populist, neoliberal right wing. We have said many times that neoliberalism is simply incapable of solving the most fundamental of our problems—mass unemployment, effective delivery of services etc. And the ANC–DA Alliance is more deeply committed to neoliberalism even than its predecessors.

So by the next election in 2029, if the coalition lasts until then, the GNU will have been a failure. It is possible that capital will have disciplined it sufficiently to get the ports and trains running again. After all, they need them for their profit, hence the Vulindlela project. But there is no way that the other fundamental problems will shift significantly. We can say with confidence, if also with desperation, that there will be no significant impact on real unemployment. So unless some form of credible Left movement is able to emerge from the wreckage of our popular organisations, the most attractive options are likely to be MKP, EFF and PA.

That is how vital and how urgent is the task of building an alternative.

At the last local elections, a few popular, community-based organisations set up their own political organisations so that they could obey the electoral rules and stand for election. Unlike many other organisations, the day after the election they didn’t disappear, only to reappear five years later. They were there, to try to hold their councillors to account and to continue to be the voice of the community.

It hasn’t been an easy ride. But the rooting of elected representatives in really existing popular organisations is vital. The task now is to build united, community-based organisations which take up, in a militant and focused way, the issues that concern the community. The small number of green shoots that have appeared are a hopeful sign.

Also, a possible hopeful sign is the emergence of a Left in the SACP, talking about building popular organisations, based on local issues. They say that this is no time for sectarianism—the popular movement must be built, and we must work together. Political differences are secondary to the urgency of such a task.

History is not sanguine about this possibility. But the message is the right one. The Left must come together around such a project, and, from those hundreds of organisations all around the country, build a movement for socialism from the ground up. All who are willing to participate honestly in such a process must be welcomed. The alternative doesn’t bear thinking about.



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news briefs

Samwu shows the depths of 2024 trade unions

On 22 September, the Sunday Times reported that Johannesburg City workers were experiencing huge deductions from their pay packets. Some even got nothing—the entire amount was deducted. And all because of an agreement their ‘leaders’ signed with a service provider. Under the agreement, Samwu leaders became “sales representatives for Shosholozza Finance”. Samwu agrees to “endorse and promote Shosholozza as its preferred financial services provider and provide Shosholozza with an irrevocable and unconditional mandate to assist the members, as well as allow Shosholozza to frequently present presentations to promote and market their services”.

It would be nice to think that this is an exception. Then we could all moan about corrupt people and move on. But unfortunately, it’s not. It’s the norm. It describes exactly the relationship between Numsa leadership and the Numsa Investment Company. In that case, Numsa Regional Secretaries are expected to promote the sale of NIC financial products to Numsa members. And NIC gave the General Secretary R40,000 for his 50th birthday party, and his daughter got a laptop. What the Samwu ‘leaders’ received has not been revealed.

Union member ares being marketed to financial service providers by the people who are supposed to be representing their interests. And this is

now regarded as normal practice. As the Samwu Regional Chairperson is reported to have said: “To our knowledge all Samwu prescripts were complied with and followed.” So that’s OK then.

Austerity at Stats SA

Not only is austerity attacking our already sinking health and education systems. Now it is preventing us from even knowing its full harmful effects. Stats SA has a 21% vacancy rate. It hasn’t collected statistics on poverty for the last nine years. The Statistician-General says that budget cuts are crippling the organisation. And the 2022 census is so widely discredited that the only people who seem willing to use its results are the Treasury. They will use it to cut the budgets of Nelson Mandela Bay, Mangaung, eThekweni and Ekurhuleni. Maybe they hope that poverty will vanish because there will no longer be statistics to calculate it.

Not so sweet for workers at Mr Sweet

Workers at Mr Sweet have been on strike since 19 August. They have not had a pay rise since 2022. Now the company is offering them a 4% increase—in effect a pay cut. And this is all while Mr Sweet’s owners, Premier Food, last year declared a 23% increase in revenue to R17.9 billion. Employers are always so quick to argue unaffordability of wage increases when they claim a company is suffering. It seems they are less interested in sharing the fruits of success.

People not equal even when they drown

In August, two boats sank in the Mediterranean. One sank off the coast of Sicily, the other off the coast of Corsica. In one there were three deaths, in the other seven. One was all over the front pages of newspapers and websites for at least a week. The other sank almost without trace, just a few lines on a [Reuters feed](#). One, the Bayesian, was filled with holidaying millionaires. The other has no name. It was filled with more than 30 African migrants, who also

have no name. For one, specialist Italian navy divers were brought in to help. For migrants, boats trying to help in rescues are harassed by that same Italian government. The *Geo Barents*, a ship used by Médecins Sans Frontières, has recently been [detained for 60 days](#) so it can’t continue with its rescue missions.

‘Double standards’, ‘hypocrisy’... there just aren’t the words.

Suspended government officials

Thank goodness for the GNU. It gives South Africa access to a bigger pool of brains than those of the ANC. And what a result. The IFP’s Mzamo Buthelezi, the new Minister of Public Service and Administration, has come up with [the brilliant idea](#) of allocating suspended officials, who are waiting for their disciplinary cases, to other departments. An equivalent might be to take people who have Covid (or any other infectious disease) and move them from their home to other homes to protect their families—in the process, of course, infecting ever more people.

Meanwhile, the obvious answer to the problem—process cases rapidly—seems to be beyond the capacity (or maybe the desire) of government. A Department of Correctional Services official has spent 883 days on paid suspension. That’s two and a half years. But no problem. Just put him in the Department of Water Affairs, or maybe the Treasury, and see what havoc he can wreak there for two and a half years. The GNU keeps on giving.



Luxury yacht Bayesian and a boat full of refugees. Both sank. Their sinkings got very different responses.

By the middle of September, 1,500 Samsung workers in India had been on strike for 11 days. They are demanding that the company recognise their new union, the Samsung India Labour Welfare Union (SILWU), and agree to bargain with it.



No free speech for supporters of Palestine

The new university year has just started in the US, and they are picking up where they left off. Protesting students at Columbia University in Harlem have been arrested and attacked by police. The University of California is enforcing a 'zero tolerance' policy on new pro-Palestinian encampments, and has [banned "overnight loitering"](#). Rutgers University and George Washington University have suspended Students for Justice in Palestine. New guidelines around hate speech and harassment were issued by New York University. [They say](#), "Using code words, like 'Zionist,' does not eliminate the possibility that your speech violates the NDAH (Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment) Policy". So naming someone a Zionist is now [hate speech](#). The list could go on.

And this comes on top of a [bill passed by the US House of Representatives](#) in June. If passed by the Senate, it would prevent the government from quoting the numbers of people dying in Gaza.

The US constitution claims to protect free speech. It seems that's only for some.

Unionising Samsung and striking against abuse

By the middle of September, [1,500 Samsung workers in India](#) had been on strike for 11 days. They are demanding that the company recognise their new

union, the Samsung India Labour Welfare Union (SILWU), and agree to bargain with it. They are protesting about unreasonable work pressures, and are demanding a significant wage increase.

Meanwhile, [a report in Hankyoreh](#), a 'left-leaning' newspaper in South Korea, has been reporting on a strike of Samsung workers there. The newspaper reports on the physical toll on workers when they work on the production line. A worker posted a picture of her thumb on a group chat: "'My thumb is becoming deformed,' the worker wrote. 'My thumb is a badge of honour from the 8-inch production line.' Workers on this production line are known not only for their deformed fingers but for a laundry list of physical ailments such as varicose veins, plantar fasciitis, and slipped discs."

On its website, Samsung parades its [mission and values](#): "Our promise to perform responsibly as a leading, global company". It seems that promise does not extend to the workers who make the products that create the company's wealth.

Really valuing your workers

There were some significant disruptions to many services across the world in July, as a faulty update by a company called CrowdStrike crashed global systems. [It has been called](#) "the largest outage in the history of information technology". Of course, it meant a huge amount of extra work for the technicians and partners of CrowdStrike, so the company felt it

should recognise that. [It sent each of them a small gift](#)...a very small gift. A \$10 gift card, with the message "To express our gratitude, your next cup of coffee or late night snack is on us!"

How to make your employees love you!

Ugandans inspired by Kenyan neighbours

In July, young Ugandans were inspired by their Kenyan neighbours to attempt to protest in Kampala against corruption and human rights abuses. Unfortunately, the protestors weren't the only ones to learn from their neighbours. The demonstration was banned by the Ugandan government, on the spurious basis that they had received intelligence that "criminally-minded youths might hijack it in order to loot and vandalise." ["Soldiers and police were deployed](#) around the parliament building and in the centre of the Ugandan capital with the aim of deterring any protesters. All roads to the parliament were blocked off, with only lawmakers and other parliamentary staff having access, and NTV Uganda images showed military armoured personnel carriers patrolling the area... 'It's like a war zone'". Dozens of young people were detained for ignoring the ban.

Demonstrations also took place throughout Nigeria (as we report in an article in this magazine), again apparently inspired by the example of the youth of Kenya. Encouraging signs of continental connection.

Voice of the unemployed

Amandla! spoke to Siziphiwe Dunjana, now living in Khayelitsha, about what it has been like for her to be unemployed.

Siziphiwe Dunjana: Originally, I came from Eastern Cape in 2016. I finished my matric in 2015, then I came here because I wanted to look for a job. I thought that in Cape Town there are more jobs. But then I came here and find out that it's the same. In fact, I saw that it's better in Eastern Cape than Cape Town. There are more jobs there. I have had some jobs, maybe four months contract, three month contract. Those kinds of jobs. Nothing else.

Amandla!: If somebody in your family has a job, do they have to help to feed and look after the other members of the family who don't have a job?

SD: Absolutely. There are two people who are working in my home, so they have to look for our aunt and for us and for our children, because we are all unemployed. So if I can get employment, I can also do that.



I'm part of Cry of the Xcluded. It's an organisation, a campaign, that is fighting against austerity and budget cuts, fighting for the livelihood of the communities, fighting against unemployment.

A!: How do you survive without a job, without an income?

SD: It's not easy to survive without a job. You have to call people, and people are tired of being called by someone who's unemployed. The government just gave us that so-called social relief grant. And with that grant you have to buy food for yourself, and the food that you are buying from that money is not enough. I'm too much stressing right now, because now, in December time, I have to buy clothes for my kid, and I have to buy 'back to school' clothes for my kid. But I don't have money. It's not an easy life.

A!: Do you always have enough to eat?

SD: No, I don't always have enough to eat. I have to maybe go to my home, where my aunt is staying, to ask for food there. I have to look around for food, from friends or from other people. My friends are all facing the same problem because we're all unemployed.

A!: People who write about these things say that there is starvation, that there are people who seriously become sick from not having enough food, especially children. Do you see that?

SD: Yes, young people who are unemployed are ending up using alcohol and drugs. So they're ending up going to hospitals. And children whose parents are unemployed, are ending up going to dumping sites, eating dirty food, and then being admitted to hospitals. I've seen those things many times.

A!: Do you look for work?

SD: Yes. I've been looking for work because there are these online things that they have given us to look for work, and from Facebook and even from local councillors. I'm going to my local councillor to ask. But there's no job. EPWP does not work for all people. It works for ANC members. And it works for the councillor's, friends and the councillor's children. If you are not affiliated to the ANC, then you won't get EPWP work.

And for me, EPWP work is not good. It will be a job for three months, then after three months, boom, I don't work. I can say EPWP is slavery work. My friend told me that if you have an appointment to the doctor, you don't get paid, even if you were at the clinic.

I would rather they take EPWP from the tenderpreneurs to the government, so that EPWP can be permanent jobs, with medical aid and other benefits. The government is supposed to give the money to the local municipalities, but it decided to give it to rich people, rich businesses, and sell the jobs to tenderpreneurs. The government must own the EPWP; it must be state owned, not by the tenderpreneurs. They don't work. Even if they say a tenderpreneur is working here, but our streets are still dirty. We have potholes. We don't have toilets. They take the money but they don't do the work. They just take the money and go around buying our people.

You see others selling their bodies to old papas, others selling their bodies to Nigerians, because there are no jobs. The government doesn't create jobs for us. I think amongst youth, out of 100% I can say 15% are working. And when there is a job, they say they want experience. How can you have experience? Because you are from school, then you didn't even go to work, you just passed your matric, then you want a job, but they want experience. Where will you find the experience? Because the experience that we have is from the books of the school, not from work.



EPWP work is not good. It will be a job for three months, then after three months, boom, I don't work. I can say EPWP is slavery work.

AI: Why do you think there aren't jobs in South Africa? What's the reason?

SD: I think it's because of budget cuts, austerity. If the government didn't cut the budget for the local municipalities, there will be more jobs for our communities.

AI: Are you part of any organisation that's trying to fight against all of this?

SD: Yes, I'm part of [Cry of the Xcluded](#). It's an organisation, a campaign, that is fighting against austerity and budget cuts, fighting for the livelihood of the communities, fighting against unemployment. We want the government to create jobs for our people, so that we can live the same lives that the rich people are living. We also want the government

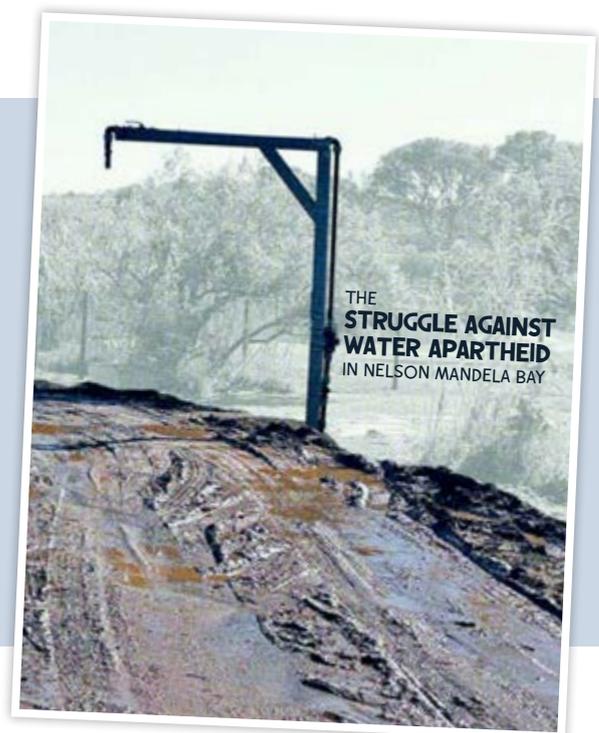
to stop taxing the poor people. They must tax the rich people, because they have all the money that the government needs.

We're managing to mobilise people. We have managed to challenge the government about the Basic Income Grant. We don't want the R370 grant. R370 is not enough. Even the child of Ramaphosa can't take lunch with R370. We want R1,750 for unemployed people to survive. They must tax the rich so that the money will come to us.

The Struggle Against Water Apartheid in Nelson Mandela Bay

This publication forms part of the Nelson Mandela Bay Water Crisis Committee series, documenting its organising and mobilising work. It tells the story of the inept bungling by the municipality of Nelson Mandela Bay and how the wealthy and white, including big business, are prioritised, and black and poor working class communities are neglected.

The Book will be available from 1st October on the websites of the [Environmental Justice Fund](#), [Blue Planet Project](#) and [Africa Water Justice Network](#), and at the *Amandla!* PE offices, Masakhasizwe Resource Centre, Daku Road, Kwazakhele, Gqeberha 6205.



Life without wages

THE SCALE, THE REASONS AND THE ALTERNATIVES

By **Brian Ashley**

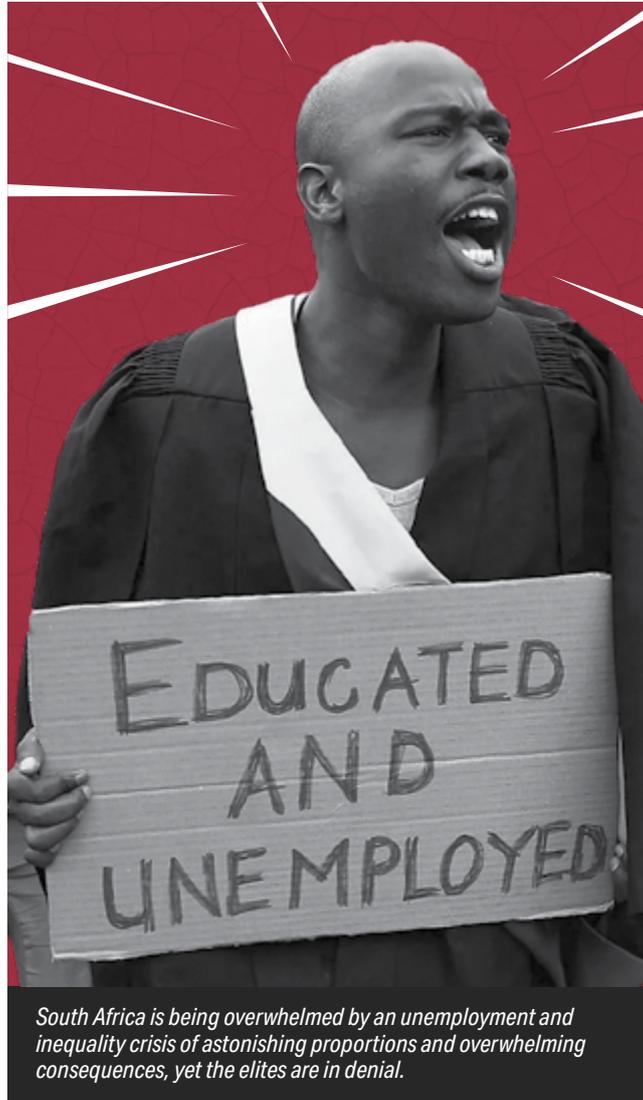
THREE DECADES AFTER the end of apartheid, South Africa is experiencing a sort of structural decomposition. The economy is in steady decline, state institutions are eroding, and visions of national renewal are hard to find. Unemployment is both a manifestation of this decomposition and its cause. South Africa is being overwhelmed by an unemployment and inequality crisis of astonishing proportions and overwhelming consequences, yet the elites are in denial.

There can be no avoiding personal accountability for the terrible levels of violence, especially against women. But the elites run away from seeing that this violence is related to the mass unemployment of the more than six million men, who are robbed of their 'breadwinning role'. So long as their 'solutions' to endemic crime and violence are disconnected from fighting mass unemployment, the majority of our townships will remain terrifying no-go areas, overrun by crime and gangsterism.

The biggest cause of poverty and income inequality is unemployment. Numerous studies show that earnings from work are the most important source of household income, and, in the absence of a comprehensive welfare programme, unemployment has a dramatic impact on household poverty.

The scale

While official figures record South Africa's rate of unemployment at about 32%, the truth of the matter is that the official statistics grossly underestimate the number. They do this by excluding the 3.2 million unemployed people who have given up looking for work, because there is none to be found. When they are included, the rate of unemployment is 42%—what is referred to as the expanded rate. We call it the more real rate.



South Africa is being overwhelmed by an unemployment and inequality crisis of astonishing proportions and overwhelming consequences, yet the elites are in denial.

However, there are another 2.3 million people (mainly women) who are also excluded from the figures, because they are designated as 'homemakers'. In reality most of them are unemployed and would welcome a job. And by mistakenly including anyone who has earned any income of any sort, including begging, the 'active unemployed' are treated as employed in Stats SA's misguided rates of unemployment.

This suggests that the true number of unemployed is much closer to 50% than 32%. Nevertheless, whether 32% or 42% or 50%, such levels of unemployment represent a massive social disaster. It is worth recalling that, when

unemployment reached 25% in the USA, it was the period they called the 'great depression'. It caused the government to introduce the New Deal, an extraordinary set of measures to give relief to the unemployed, stimulate the recovery of the economy and reform the financial system to prevent it happening again.

Recognising the scale of unemployment is one thing. There is much less agreement about its causes and solutions.

The structure of the economy is the problem

The post-apartheid mass unemployment crisis is rooted in the structure of the South African economy. It is a semi-industrialised economy, dependent mainly on the export of raw materials and the import of high value goods. It is based on intensifying the extraction of minerals, and fully integrating South Africa into the global economy, together with black economic empowerment. And it is underpinned by a neoliberal macro-economic policy. It is crystal clear that this strategy has run its course. It has failed in its own terms.

South Africa's economy labours under stagnant growth. It remains untransformed, dominated by global and domestic monopolies. The rapid removal of protective trade tariffs made much of South African industry uncompetitive. Not only have cheap imports wiped out several labour intensive industries, like textiles, but South African corporations globalised and disinvested from South Africa. In addition, to compensate for the removal of apartheid's laws which guaranteed cheap labour, capital switched to more capital-intensive forms of production (mainly through mechanisation). This has led to many workers being thrown out of production.

This can be seen from the following table which shows that economic growth did not bring job creation in the years immediately after 1994 .

Growth in production compared with growth in jobs 1995-2001

	Average annual growth in value of production	Average annual growth in demand for labour
Business Services	10.7%	0.4%
Manufacturing	7.4%	- 2.4%
Trade	6.3%	1.5%
Agriculture	6.2%	- 1.8%
Transport	5.9%	- 5.2%
Community services	3.9%	- 0.3%
Electricity	0.3%	- 0.3%
Mining	-3.1%	- 6.87%
Construction	-9.3%	- 8.4%

South African industry has always had a strong tendency toward capital-intensive, rather than job-creating, labour-intensive, production. Government’s export-led growth strategy made this worse, not only through its trade policies but as a result of its export incentive schemes. It also created demand for highly skilled workers rather than semi-skilled and low-skilled workers, who make up the vast majority of the unemployed.

Shifting to an export oriented economy exposed South African goods to intense competition on the global market. This forced capital to introduce a number of cost-saving mechanisms, which focused on ways of cheapening the costs of labour. The entire labour market was restructured and various forms of labour-saving mechanisms became generalised. These included outsourcing and the use of labour brokers, and informal and part-time contracts. Privatisation, austerity and high interest rate policies further contributed to mass retrenchments and a situation of job-less growth.

And it is not as if government has served as employer of last resort (guaranteeing work for those who can’t get private sector jobs). Between 2000 and 2022, just 2.5% of the population over 15 years old were employed in the education sector. The proportion of the population employed in education is now lower than in 2010, despite overcrowded classrooms. This is set to get worse as the implementation of even harsher austerity policies leads to retrenchments of public sector workers and the further freezing of posts in the public sector.

The vulnerability of the South African economy to shocks from the

global economy was harshly exposed during the 2007/8 global financial crisis, and again during the Covid-19 pandemic. Between October 2008 and March 2010

more than 1.2 million workers lost their jobs, as the crisis took its toll. And the toll was worse in the mining and manufacturing sections of the economy. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy collapsed and almost three million jobs were lost. Not all of them have since been recovered.

Once again, the winds of the global economy are pushing the South African economy to the point of recession. This time it’s the slowdown in growth in China and the decline in demand for mineral commodities. Rising debt and a new wave of retrenchments are destroying thousands of livelihoods. We have an economic growth strategy based on intensified exploitation of the country’s natural resource wealth, combined with debt-driven consumption. This offers virtually no hope of dealing with South Africa’s unemployment crisis. A new sustainable development path and industrial strategy is needed.

There is another way

30 years of neoliberalism has given us liberalisation, privatisation, austerity,

and high interest rates. The government has bent over backwards to attract foreign investment. All of this has caused South Africa’s unemployment rate to double, until it is one of the highest in the world.

Another way requires a break with neoliberal policies. It requires a public pathway which drives a reindustrialisation programme based on meeting the needs of the millions of impoverished people in this country. Such a programme needs to be based on employment multipliers (creating indirect jobs as well as direct ones) such as in driving a mass housing programme, expansion of public transport, agrarian reform and rural industrialisation. These interventions will stimulate downstream industries and create millions of decent jobs when they are underpinned by the mobilisation of domestic public finances.

However, the unemployment rate of 50% gives us the opportunity to think beyond the issue of wage labour and job creation. We have an important opportunity; in fact it is imperative to rethink work beyond the formal labour market. We must go beyond thinking just of job creation. We must focus on socially useful labour. This was the conception behind the notion of climate jobs—work directed to combating climate change. It is also embedded in growing the care economy (health, social welfare and education), expanding public investment in education, health and expanding public infrastructure to enhance the quality of life.

A follow-up article for the next issue of *Amandla* will expand on this alternative, public pathway.

Brian Ashley is a member of the Amandla Collective.



Shifting to an export oriented economy exposed South African produced goods to intense competition on the global market. This forced capital to introduce a number of cost-saving mechanisms, which focused on ways of cheapening the costs of labour.

ORGANISING THE UNEMPLOYED:

The Botshabelo Unemployed Movement



When we started, we were working under a tree, and then we got an office. I think it's an achievement. And then we started building the branches around Botshabelo.

Amandla! interviews **Khokhoma Motsi**

Amandla! interviewed Khokhoma Motsi, a leader of the Botshabelo Unemployed Movement (BUM), to understand how they have gone about the challenging task of organising unemployed people. This is what he had to say:

Khokhoma Motsi: We started in 1999.

We were about four comrades who saw a need to organise the unemployed people around our area, because we have seen the numbers of unemployed people going up. And then we asked ourselves: we are organising them for what? That was when there was a suggestion that we link them with different Setas to get different skills.

Secondly, we organised them for political education, so that they could understand the situation they found themselves in. The Christians say it is by the grace of God, but we understand that it is a manmade disaster or crisis. By then we saw that crisis, and we see even now that we were right. The stats are going up rather than going down. By then, we thought it will be a temporary thing, for the unemployed to fight for the right to work, because it is not in the constitution. Those were the things that prompted comrades to build Botshabelo Unemployed Movement.

Thirdly, when we were on that road, we met with other organisations during CoP17, because we were part of CoP 17 in Durban. We talked about

how we can unite this struggle of the unemployed people, because now we need to put politics in that struggle. Our comrades must understand local, national and international politics. And then we got support from the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) in Cape Town. So that's how we started.

Amandla! What have been your most valued achievement—the highlights of this long process?

KM: Some things are small things, but really they are achievements. When we started, we were working under a tree, and then we got an office. I think it's an achievement. And then we started building the branches around Botshabelo. Even now we are continuing to move to other areas in the province as well. I think that is also an achievement. Thirdly, we started political workshops with our allies like progressive NGOs and others. We started political workshops with our comrades to 'tune up their skop' so that they can stand up for their issues. Our constitution clearly states that they must be politically aware so that they can reject those laws that don't favour them and fight for themselves. They must not wait for Motsi and the executive committee to take their hands.

And then we also managed, as an organisation, to be part of the Assembly of the Unemployed (AoU) and the Cry of the Xcluded, and build them, and they have grown till today. We also implemented campaigns like climate change, the one million climate jobs signature campaign. Fighting inequality, fighting austerity. We are part of marches at the national level, as an organisation not as an individual. Because when one represents the AoU, he has been seconded to that structure by BUM. And then we have an ecology garden at our office.

But the most important achievement is to have a core group of comrades who understand our situation, and who will never go and look for work because they understand that there is no work in this country. Their work is to be at the office and implement the programmes of the organisation. We must try by all means to fight back. And we can see that we have energetic comrades who are really doing exactly that.

AI: You must have faced challenges along the way. Tell us about some of them and how you have overcome them.

KM: You lose comrades, because most of them are youth. The biggest problem is when you are losing the best comrades either to ANC or to EFF. When they started building EFF in our province, particularly in Botshabelo, we felt it at BUM. That included those comrades whom we put a lot of resources in terms of educating them about the situation and the current political situation in the country.

When you organise unemployed people, they think that you organise them to get money. When you call a meeting, it is very difficult for people to attend your meeting. We had to teach our people that they are unemployed and they must attend the meetings, so that we plan together with them. That was a big challenge. Because when ANC calls a meeting, they know that's where there are food parcels. It was a challenge. Especially the issue of funds. Now, we are fighting the current regime. And it's difficult to get funds to build. When we get funds, as little as they are, they are really assisting a lot. By then it was really a challenge; we could not even have tea in the office. But now it's better.

And then the other thing is when Covid came there was a big challenge of how do we meet using these computers. That was a big challenge for us to meet as an organisation.

AI: It sounds like your main strategies are really organising and educating.

KM: Exactly. When you organise on the ground, that is exactly what you should do. You should mobilise people, two or three people, talk to them, talk about their situation, hear from them, and then come in with assistance, not as Motsi, but as an organisation. And you listen to them as well, so that you can work. And so that they can trust exactly what you are saying. That is the way we are doing it.

AI: Which leads me to ask you what lessons you have earned over the years, from your experience.

KM: I think that I learned a lesson particularly in terms of elections. You should have both funds and human

resources. People on the ground really need to know you. And that is the work we are doing currently. Secondly, we have learned that in capitalism, or where capitalism is being implemented, those who are on the Left are struggling in terms of funds. And then also it taught me how important is political education.

AI: Explain a bit more about your experience of elections

KM: You should properly know your story when you're dealing with the IEC in terms of registration. If there is any mistake, and you submit late, you won't even participate. Currently, IEC doesn't do its work in terms of educating communities about elections. Then, the media covers the bigger organisations. We don't see the smaller ones, only your ANC, your DA, your EFF. They won't cover these smallanyana organisations, unless someone has got a connection at SABC. That is what happened in Makanda, where at least Makana Citizens Front (MCF) have been given that platform through some of our comrades.

And then also, we have seen that people are not voting, particularly youth. So there's a lot of work that

needs to be done among the youth going into election and how they participate in the daily politics of their country. They can't just sit somewhere smoking nyaope and not participating in their situation.

AI: Why did you decide to stand in the local government elections in 2021?

KM: It was coming through our programmes that we are doing. For the last election, people who were the beneficiaries of our soup kitchen, they were pushing for that. It was community members who pushed us to take part in elections. But also it was a strategic move. Because if we have a seat or two in the council, we could influence some of the people in terms of how we present our issues in that council. Even if we know that we could not influence the decision, because in a council decisions come through voting. And it is important also for information, to have someone in that council. It is a strategic position. In the local government elections unfortunately we didn't manage enough votes to make a PR councillor.



And then we also managed, as an organisation, to be part of the Assembly of the Unemployed (AoU) and the Cry of the Excluded, and build them, and they have grown until today.

Existing industries have become increasingly capital-intensive (using more machinery than labour in production). As neoliberalism unfolded around the world, unemployment began to rise in most countries that adopted these policies.

Government policies to blame for SAs chronic mass unemployment

By **Dominic Brown**

THE LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN South Africa is second to no other country in the world. Everyone recognises that it's a problem, with various polls suggesting that it's the main concern for people in the country. The problem is so bad that it is described by some as a virus. The symptoms are the widespread desperation of the majority of people in the country, and deepening social tensions.

Like any illness, an incorrect diagnosis can lead to prescribing the wrong medicine (solution), resulting in worsening outcomes. Therefore, an understanding of what lies behind unemployment in South Africa is important in order to start to think about what potential solutions may be available. There are many factors that contribute to high levels of unemployment in the country. The legacy of apartheid is certainly one of them. But the unemployment rate has more than doubled since 1994, from 20% to 43%. So, what went wrong since?

Mainstream narratives commonly argue that the reason for increased joblessness in post-apartheid South Africa primarily lies with supply side factors in the labour market—for instance, skill shortages, resulting in a mismatch between job seekers and the jobs on offer. I will offer an alternative explanation that argues that chronic mass unemployment is less to do with the lack of skills and fundamentally to do with the

political economic trajectory that South Africa embarked on post-1994.

Unemployment is not a uniquely South African problem. Unemployment occurs everywhere and during all times under a capitalist mode of production. Nevertheless, the level of unemployment varies depending on how the economy is organised. During the post-World War 2 period up until the early 1970s, many developed countries had virtually full employment. Large levels of state investment, financed through taxation and disciplining private capital, were channelled into developing public infrastructure in the post-war rebuild. This, together with the roll-out of mass public works programmes, was essential to employment and job creation.

In short, the state was a fundamental player in creating employment, through investing in production and public services. This changed dramatically following the rise of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism in general

Neoliberalism is a set of economic and political policies that views state intervention in the economy as an impediment to achieving economic and social development. It includes trade liberalisation and deregulation of finance, reducing taxes, privatisation of public institutions, fiscal prudence, and a general reduction of public spending and government debt levels. These are

all ways of minimising the state's role in the economy.

Increased emphasis was placed on investments in finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) rather than investment in the real economy (tangible goods and services). These FIRE sectors are less employment-intensive than bricks-and-mortar industries like manufacturing.

As a result of these policies, many countries' economies, particularly developed economies, were deindustrialising—manufacturing as a share of employment, and of the economy as a whole, began to shrink. Existing industries have become increasingly capital-intensive (using more machinery than labour in production). As neoliberalism unfolded around the world, unemployment began to rise in most countries that adopted these policies.

South African neoliberalism

Even though unemployment is a global phenomenon, South Africa is certainly an extreme case. The post-apartheid government inherited high levels of unemployment. Large-scale public investment was necessary to re-industrialise the South African economy, to shift from dependence on the capital-intensive mining sector and diversify the economy. Expanding social spending and investing in public infrastructure and production should have been the

objective. Unfortunately, the opposite unfolded during the transition from apartheid and beyond. The very macroeconomic policies that have resulted in worsening unemployment globally, were implemented. They drove the premature deindustrialisation of the South African economy, and undermined prospects for creating a sufficient number of decent jobs.

During the transition period, South Africa integrated into the global economy when it joined the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1993, and then the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995. This led to the reduction of trade protection policies. Tariffs and subsidies were cut. Overall average manufacturing tariffs were cut from 23% in 1994 to 8% in 2004. This was even more than was required by the global bodies, despite there being a clear opportunity, in the immediate post-1994 period, to seek more protection, rather than less, given what apartheid had done to our economy.

The cheaper imports, from China for example, came at the cost of many job losses. Manufacturing industries, important for labour-intensive employment, were negatively impacted. Over the past three decades, the contribution of manufacturing industry to the economy has been on a downward spiral, dropping from 23% in 1994 to 12% in 2024. A major contribution to this decline came from the clothing and textile sectors—the most labour-intensive manufacturing sectors. These sectors suffered severe job losses, with a [reduction of 37% of the jobs between 1996 and 2005](#). Between 2005 and 2021, of the more than 300,000 jobs lost in manufacturing industry as a whole, 120,000 were from the clothing and textile sectors.

Similar trends unfolded in mining and agriculture, with the number of jobs in both declining by [more than 20% between 1994 and 2019](#). The decline of these industries also contributed to the collapse of South Africa's steel industry, leading to many job losses as well.

Not only were many jobs lost, but the government's economic policies undermined the possibility of creating enough jobs to absorb job losses as well as new entrants into the labour market. Central features of the government's economic policy over the past 30 years have been to prioritise reducing the budget deficit and to avoid increasing the level of taxes. The outcome has been inadequate social spending, a shrinking public sector and a lack of fixed investment in public infrastructure.



Lesotho garment workers. The South African clothing and textile sectors suffered severe job losses, with a reduction of 37% of the jobs between 1996 and 2005. Between 2005 and 2021, of the more than 300,000 jobs lost in manufacturing industry as a whole, 120,000 were from the clothing and textile sectors.

The role of the Reserve Bank

There are also low levels of private sector investment in the real economy. This relates, in part, to the government giving the Reserve Bank (SARB) the mandate of price stability (i.e. inflation targeting) as its primary objective. This drives up interest rates, which reduces the domestic borrowing that could enable investment in productive sectors, which would spur job creation. One useful measure of investment is the percentage of what is produced in the country (GDP) that is spent on investment in long-term things like infrastructure, machinery and buildings (fixed investment). This percentage has been declining since 2010 as a consequence of these dynamics. It then dropped dramatically in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. While there has been some recovery, the current [level of fixed investment](#) is still below pre-pandemic levels and even below the 2007/08 level. Worse, investment in manufacturing industry is particularly low—averaging 8% between 1994 and 2019.

The SARB's mandate has further implications for employment. The rationale for hiking interest rates is to curb inflation, in a context where there is too much money chasing too few goods. However, the majority of people in South Africa are unable to make ends meet, due to structural mass unemployment and extremely low wages paid to most of those who are working. The high interest rates push up debt repayment costs for households and businesses. This means that people have less money to spend. The result is a contraction of

the economy, which culminates in job losses. This reality is made stark by major economic shocks and recessions, like the global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, which triggered massive job losses.

There is another way

The unemployment crisis in South Africa is unsustainable. It underpins many of the social ills we are facing in our country, and makes them worse. When high interest rates come together with government's harsh austerity economic policies, the chances for creating a large number of jobs are non-existent. This approach simply cannot create a significant number of jobs. We need a different path.

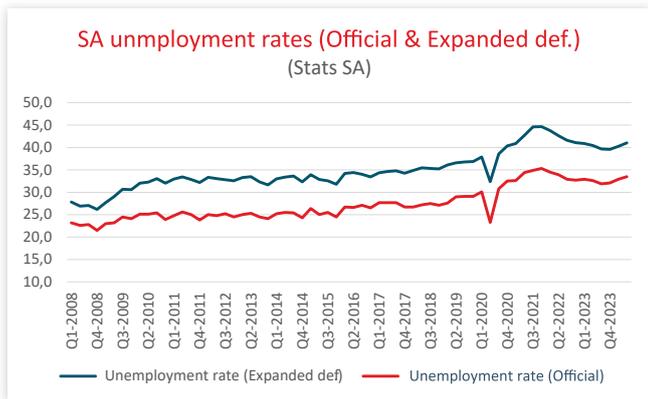
To create millions of decent jobs and livelihoods, the state has to play a leading role. Investing in the development of mass public housing and the roll-out of public transport could be important initiatives that contribute to improving people's lives and job creation. It would also stimulate employment in other sectors in the value chain. This should come with protection for local productive industries, to help grow South Africa's manufacturing industry, which has played a significant role in generating labour-intensive employment in the past.

Dominic Brown is head of the Economic Justice Programme at the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC).

Breaking out from South Africa's growing mass unemployment

By Dick Forslund

"It cannot continue like this", they say. But it does. It is clear that a whole collection of things must change for South Africa to break free from its steadily growing, mass unemployment.



- Insisting that the bloated R2.3 trillion Government Employee Pension Fund (GEPF) must act as a profit-maximising financial investor, lending to the indebted government and parastatals like Eskom at market rates. It is also the largest buyer of shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE).

half of the value they create every year. This strangles economic demand for ordinary goods and services in the domestic economy. Weaker trade unions, and the pressure from the growing army of the unemployed, add to the old legacy.

- The world-beating inequality. This contributes to suppressing any normal domestic economic demand. A recent report on the retail sector found that the highest paid earned between 155 and 1,308 times more than the lowest, in companies [like Woolworths and Pick n' Pay](#).

Policies that come from the colonial, apartheid legacy include:

Some of those changes are in the so called 'macro-economic framework', established with the GEAR programme in 1996. Others must address the colonial and apartheid legacy. And some lie between the two.

Policies that stem from the macro-economic framework include:

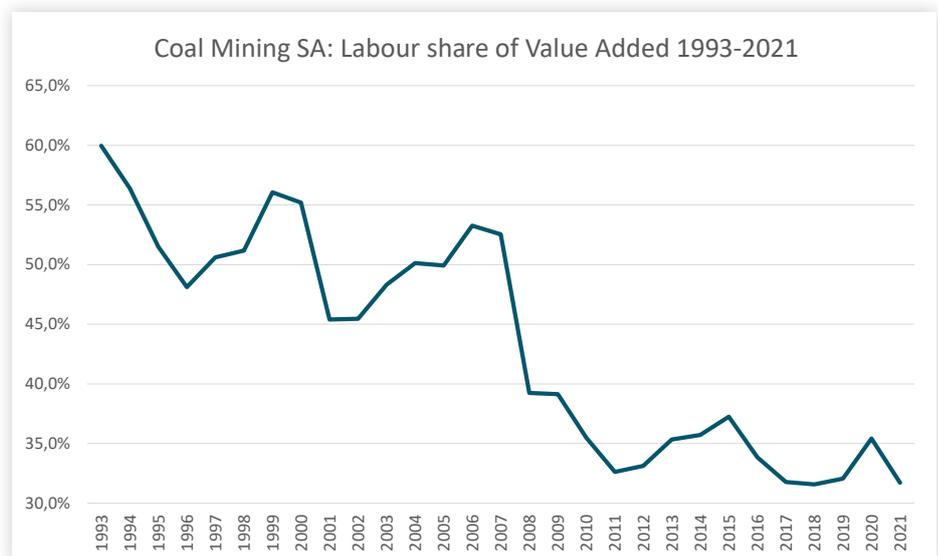
- Gradual deregulation of financial markets. This has left South Africa with one of the highest interest rates globally, whether on government bonds or any type of credit to individuals, or for local business investment loans.
- Signing the WTO 'free trade' agreement. This eliminated protections for domestic industries, which severely impacted sectors like textiles and leather.
- Stifling public service sector growth for ten years with tax cuts. This was followed by austerity and now harsher and harsher budget cuts. This has shrunk the public service (including employment of frontline staff) and created more space for private capital, procurement and privilege. This has been done supposedly in the belief that the gains of the minority who benefit will eventually trickle down to the impoverished majority.

- The failed dogma of an "export-led growth path". This prioritises the extraction of minerals to sell abroad, with infrastructure projects that serve extractivism. In South Africa, this has the status of ideology, dominating government and ruling class thinking. The result is an undiversified and monopolised economy, which is steadily deindustrialising.
- The persistence since 1994, of the racist low wage regime. One half of the labour force that does have employment takes home less than

Increase demand with better wages

The retail example illustrates how weak the unions are in that sector, but the same can be said about the South African coal mining industry. In 2005, the sector employed a little more than 50,000 workers. [Today it employs over 90,000](#). Coal mining is one of the few industries thriving in South Africa. It thrives from selling the best coal to China and India, making Eskom's economic life difficult, in the name of free trade. This is the export-led growth path.

Yet, in this coal industry, the share of value produced that is paid in wages has gone down. This combines the legacy from colonialism and apartheid with the



The fall of the wage share of the national income, from about 50% in 2015–2016 to 45% in 2021, meant a total accumulated loss of R390 billion in domestic economic demand over five years.

dominant economic policy. The share of value added that doesn't go to wages, goes to profit—it goes to capital, the owners of the mines. In short, workers have been getting less and shareholders have been getting more.

This fall in the labour share of value added (or Gross Domestic Product) is an international fact. Since 1995, the labour share in the industrialised OECD countries has fallen by four percentage points, on average. Weaker unions are pointed to [as the reason](#): “For firms to stay globally competitive, they need to suppress production costs, and reducing costs through wages is a commonly used solution”.

But this reduction in the wage share puts a big hole in domestic demand. The result is growing unemployment, even in the Global North.

So one key component of a strategy to reduce mass unemployment in South Africa is higher domestic demand. Wages must become higher, at the expense of profits, in mining, on farms, and at the big retailers. This means that the trade union movement has to be rebuilt, not only to oppose immediate threats of retrenchments, but also to revive the buying power of workers.

Public works programme

However, no government on earth can break out from a situation of mass unemployment without starting up equally massive programmes for public employment. This historical truth is even more compelling in South Africa.

South Africa has suffered two unemployment shocks since 1994: a loss of one million jobs during the global financial crisis in 2008. Then we had the Covid lock-down in 2020. But ours is not only about recovery from shocks. And mass unemployment is not about an office in Sandton entering the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’. We have chronic growth in mass unemployment, which we must break out of.

It is obvious where large public projects for repair, maintenance and new building could start: a lot would be about employing people in long term unemployment and youth. We have a country-wide water and sewage infrastructure crisis, in cities, towns, townships and informal settlements. We have millions of people living in shacks.

Victims of the climate crisis floods in KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere are still displaced. Rural schools are falling apart. Local, regional and even provincial roads are either in a terrible state or need repairs. There is no shortage of need. Instead of beginning to satisfy these needs, however, the infrastructure agenda is dominated by the building out of the Durban harbour, the R20 billion N2 Wild Coast project and the R25 billion highway expansions in KZN, managed by a bankrupt Sanral. These are private-public partnerships funded by the Treasury, which borrows the funds on the markets. In short, this is a mineral export infrastructure programme, designed to create profit, not employment.

At the same time, the DA-ANC coalition in KZN is scaling down infrastructure support programmes for water and electricity infrastructure and small-town repairs by close to 50%, [citing “budget cuts”](#).

To finance such public programmes, a progressive government would first look at the funds that are under its control. It would get rid of the neoliberal paradox in the national budget, where the biggest creditor to the budget is the state pension fund GEPPF, lending at commercial rates. This fund should act as a public resource for cheap and long-term borrowing—the proper role of a public pension fund.

This could provide funds for SARS to stop endemic tax evasion. In 2019 the [Davis Tax Committee noted](#) that Global Financial Integrity estimated tax losses of more than \$122 billion between 2003 and the end of 2012. And it certainly hasn't stopped since then.

Focus on the unemployed, not on business

In May, before the elections, [President Ramaphosa promised](#) that an ANC

government would create “one million new jobs per year for five years”. At the beginning of September, he announced that the first of three “strategic priorities” of the ANC-DA coalition and its hanger-on parties is “[inclusive growth and job creation](#)”.

But there is one caveat—it must happen via the private sector: “We all know that the government doesn't create jobs. Business creates jobs”, said President Ramaphosa in his 2022 State of the Nation Address (SONA), mindlessly re-iterating the neoliberal mantra. DA leader John Steenhuisen commented that it was “[directly from the DA playbook](#)”.

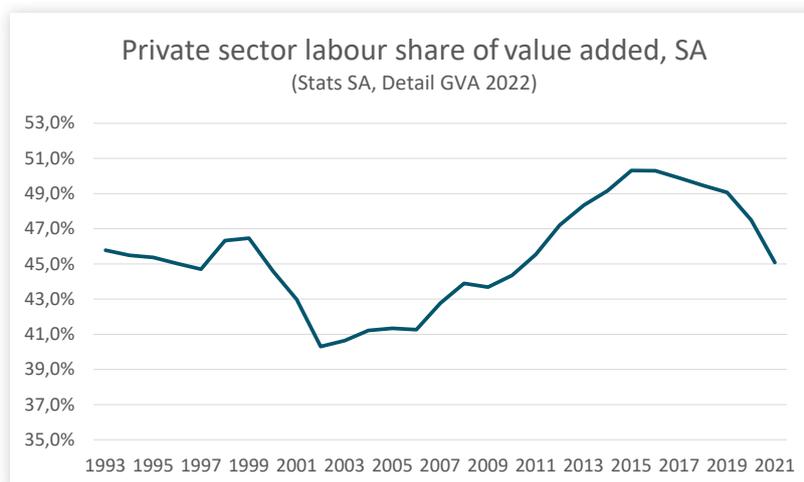
In this playbook, the focus is not on unemployment and the unemployed. The focus is on business—creating a “conducive environment” for business owners and corporations. To the political right wing, employment and “inclusive growth” are side-effects of this. Unfortunately, the data shows it hasn't worked.

For progressives and the Left, the focus is on unemployment and the unemployed: on employing people to get things done that have to be done—build houses on a mass scale, fix the infrastructure that Ramaphosa's approach has left to rot, staff the health service properly, the list is endless. We have a debilitating crisis in public health and education, but the provincial governments are cutting staff. We have students by their tens of thousands who have completed education as doctors, nurses and other professions, but they sit at home.

Everything else follows from this approach, including stopping society from falling apart as a result of criminality, violence and drugs.

The economic policies of the DA and the ANC have had a love affair for over two decades. Sometimes they were close. Sometimes they were a bit more distant. Now they are finally married and in bed together, where they belong. The rest of us must build the alternative that will bring jobs. Their approach is doomed to failure.

Dick Forslund is an economist with the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC).



The wage share of value added in coal mining since 2010 has mimicked the situation in South African agriculture. According to Stats SA, coal miners and farm workers are equally exploited.

Can we blame migrants for unemployment?

By Sharon Ekambaram



The late Eddie Webster, a prominent thinker on [labour](#) and [globalisation](#), situates chronic unemployment and inequality within the broader context of a shifting global economy and the changing nature of capitalism. In his writings, Webster explores the nature of work in the current era and the global economic crisis that is resulting in systemic unemployment.

Political parties scapegoat

Yet during the 2024 elections, most political parties resorted to scapegoating migrants to win votes, tapping into frustrations over unemployment, crime, and service delivery failures. Politicians like [Gayton McKenzie](#) and Herman Mashaba blamed foreign nationals, calling for mass deportations and targeting migrant-owned businesses. Despite these tactics, most parties performed even worse than in the 2019 elections. This demonstrates that this approach does not resonate with the majority, in the absence of substantive policy proposals.

But this scapegoating does pose a serious threat to democracy and the rule of law. Political vigilantism has evolved into violent xenophobia. Groups like [Operation Dudula](#) embrace right-wing extremism, rejecting democratic values and institutions, and opposing our progressive constitution.

Politicians and vigilante groups capitalise on socio-economic divides, blaming a marginalised and maligned community. This mirrors the divisive populist extremism of global figures like Trump, whose personality-driven politics prioritise division over substantive governance.

South Africa is no different to the US, Europe and Australia in criminalisation of movement of people, the majority of whom have black or brown skins. Politicians spread misinformation to ensure their party stays in power—a lucrative enterprise. [An ordinary MP earns](#) around R1.1 million per year, including basic salary, allowances, and pension contributions. The stakes are high to remain in power.

The real culprits

Thirty years into democracy, South Africa's socio-economic crisis cannot be blamed on migrants. The real culprits are neoliberal economic policies such as Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (Gear), privatisation, and outsourcing. Privatisation and market-driven policies have exacerbated poverty, benefiting only a wealthy minority. And these neoliberal 'solutions' are supported by McKenzie, Mashaba, and of course the ANC.

Precarious work

So called "precarious work", which includes outsourced, part-time, or temporary jobs, as well as self-employed and unemployed individuals, now defines the wage-less segments of [globalised capitalism](#). These workers, who often lack benefits or a stable income, share a common experience of vulnerability, rather than traditional work-related solidarity. The workers on motorbikes, delivering online shopping orders for supermarkets like Checkers, are a prime example. And their employers are the wealthiest corporations.

In addition, women suffer from the neoliberal failure to fund social care,

bearing the brunt of unpaid labour in households, caring for children, the ill, and the elderly.

Meanwhile, there are attempts to fight back. Organisations like [Street Net](#) seek to unite marginalised and unorganised workers, such as street vendors, in the fight for socio-economic justice. Delivery workers have organised themselves into WhatsApp groups to support each other when accidents occur, as they rush to meet the 60-minute delivery deadlines.

A way forward

Research from the [International Labour Organisation](#) (ILO) and local studies finds that immigration has no significant effect on the overall unemployment rate. In fact, international migrants are more likely than South Africans to [provide employment to others](#). And even if we expelled 3 to 5 million foreign nationals, we would still have [over 13 million unemployed young people](#)—prime candidates for substance abuse, which is destroying the fabric of society.

Instead, we must unite in the struggle for a universal basic income grant (UBIG), financed by a wealth tax. We also need to build international solidarity to fight for better working conditions for all.

Systemic unemployment weakens the trade union movement and workers are scared to strike for better working conditions, faced with the very real threat of losing what has become a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have a job. Faced with excessive worker exploitation, a UBIG can act as a buffer. With a guaranteed flow of money into the home, workers will challenge abusive or exploitative working environments if they know that the risk of doing so does not mean starvation at home, or that their children have to stop schooling. Instead, workers will deal with "precarious work" as a UBIG means that workers do not have to accept slave wages, thus driving up wages in exploitative sectors.

All this scapegoating of migrants does is distract us from calling out the real issues—mismanagement, corruption, and the failure to implement policies that create decent work for all.

[Sharon Ekambaram](#) is a human rights activist. She works at Lawyers for Human Rights and is part of Kopanang Africa against Xenophobia.

TECHNOLOGICAL UNEMPLOYMENT IS HERE TO STAY

By **Fazila Farouk**

THE DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER OR not robots are stealing human jobs is a perennial one.

One side of the debate argues that the automation heralded by 21st century technologies is leading to higher levels of unemployment—what the economist John Maynard Keynes referred to as “technological unemployment”. He described it as jobs being lost to automation at a rate outpacing the invention of new jobs.

The opposing view is that the threat of technological unemployment is mitigated by new jobs. These have repeatedly replaced those made redundant by successive industrial revolutions. Contemporary [proponents of this view](#) argue that the overall effect of the current artificial intelligence (AI) revolution is that some jobs are being lost, while others are undergoing modification; but quite significantly, new jobs are also being invented.

It’s hard to disagree with the latter view, given the emergence of previously unimagined jobs. For example, when YouTube was invented 20 years ago, it’s unlikely that its makers imagined that their video-sharing platform would one day be raking in millions in revenue for social media content creators, an unheard-of profession in those days.

Nevertheless, we still find ourselves caught up in an ongoing debate about technological unemployment. Despite the opportunities heralded by the cutting-edge technologies of our time, sustaining livelihoods somehow seems to be getting harder. This intuition is in fact backed by a report [from the ILO](#). At the beginning of this year, it projected a worsening global unemployment rate, whilst reporting that disposable

incomes are in decline alongside a general drop in the standard of living.

So, what’s going on? Why haven’t the technologies of our era yielded better socio-economic outcomes for society?

The answer lies in understanding the fundamental nature of innovation. Within the realm of industrial development and economic growth, most innovations broadly focus on increasing efficiencies. This is because the technocratic capitalist society we live in both praises and promotes efficiency as a norm. This highlights the dominance of an “instrumental rationality” (which the sociologist Max Weber described as a [means-end rationality](#)). It pursues efficiency as a goal, whilst neglecting an evaluation of its outcomes. So the concept of efficiency is imbued with a [deferential quality](#); it is perceived as rational and unassailably objective, no matter the cost.

In technocratic societies such as in our digital era, it is technical efficiency that has become the ideological force shaping the economy and society. As a result, despite widespread anxiety about technological unemployment, the labour-saving technologies of the current era are not just accepted as normal, but also as rational and desirable.



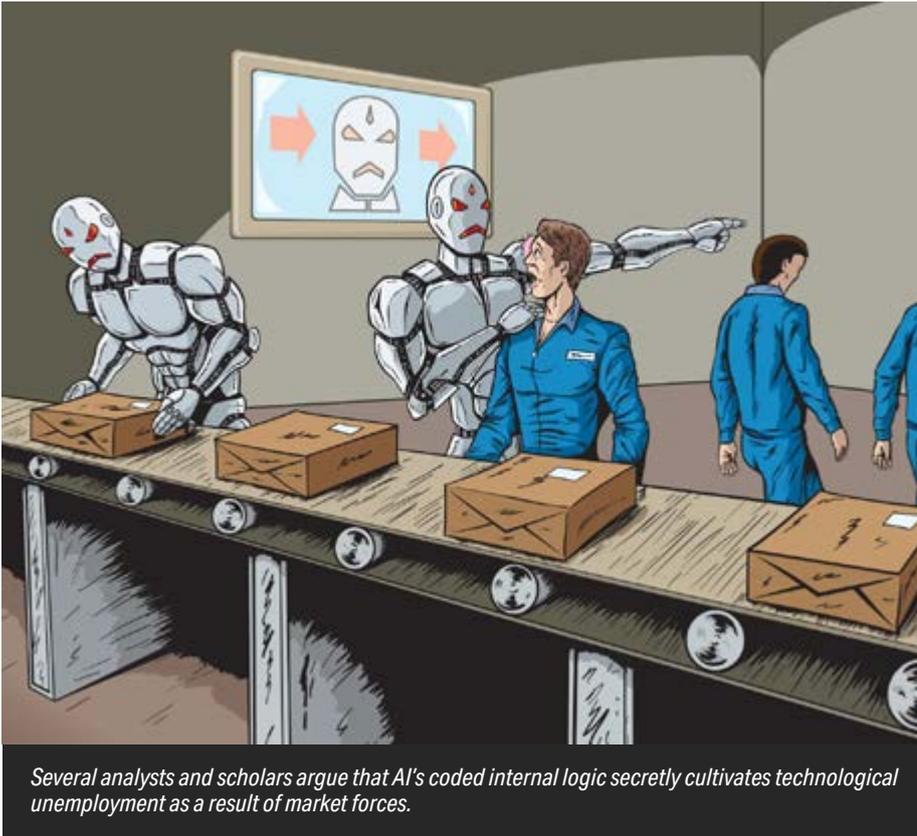
In technocratic societies such as in our digital era, it is technical efficiency that has become the ideological force shaping the economy and society.

An excessive focus on automation technologies

What this leaves us with is an excessive focus on automation technologies, particularly in relation to the dominant technology of our era—AI. The fact that AI is software also means that a fair amount of change is taking place in the background, both literally and figuratively behind the screen—not just computations out of sight, but also an AI black box. Several analysts and scholars argue that its coded internal logic secretly cultivates technological unemployment as a result of market forces. For example, Silicon Valley analyst and technology writer, Tim O’Reilly, cautions that [“the economy is running on the wrong algorithm”](#), with the pervasive “master objective” to expand corporate profits at all costs, even at the expense of jobs.

At the same time, the economic historian, Carl Frey, has linked the growth of monopolies in the digital economy to an increase in automation technologies. He cites the profit-incentivised expansion plans of companies as the source of labour-saving innovations. [He connects the pursuit of monopoly status to the increased adoption of automation technologies](#). This follows from the fact that wider profit margins increase prospects for market domination.

Relatedly, two different teams of MIT economists highlight jobless economic growth as a significant problem that has emerged as a result of 21st century automation technologies. Eric Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee note a [“great decoupling”](#) between economic growth and job creation. Meanwhile, Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo [argue](#) that current innovations result in insufficient productivity gains. Due to a preoccupation with inventing technologies that prioritise



automation, this has a “displacement effect” on jobs. Acemoglu and Restrepo specifically attribute the emergence of this “[wrong kind of AI](#)” to market failure.

The impact of technological unemployment

When the AI winter ended just over a decade ago, the digitalisation of economies became a trending issue. Suddenly, the middle class came into view, as AI started encroaching on what were once considered stable jobs that supported decent livelihoods. Not only did this lead to a wave of automation anxiety amongst the general public, but it also spurred a number of studies with a specific focus on labour market dynamics. These studies predicted the nature and scope of job losses, including the kinds of jobs that would be lost to automation and the people that would be affected.

At the time, the widely cited [Frey and Osborne study on the impact of computerisation in the US labour market](#) predicted that nearly half of American jobs (47%) were at risk of automation. Based on the statistical model deployed by the US study, a [local study](#), by Stellenbosch University’s Daniel B. le Roux, argued that the jobs performed by 35% of South Africans were susceptible to automation. It argued further that the jobs most at risk were “low and medium-skilled white-collar occupations” in

the private sector, and that there was a prevalence of “previously disadvantaged” South Africans in these occupations.

As part of a PhD study that examined the intersection of innovation and inequality, I went in search of the evidence to corroborate the claims made by these studies. This led me to the banking sector, which took the lead five years ago as the most rapidly digitalising sector in the South African economy. The surge of digitalisation that swept through the banks in 2019 resulted in the automation of internal operating procedures, as well as the migration of customer interaction to mobile and online platforms. While this led to efficiencies for both the banks and their customers, a significant after-effect was the prospect of technological unemployment for large numbers of bank staff.

Concerns about job losses in the banking sector came to a head in September 2019 when SASBO, the finance trade union, [threatened a national strike](#), which was ultimately halted by a court interdict. At the time, the media reported that the digital re-alignment strategies of South Africa’s top four banks resulted in a number of clerical support and client services jobs becoming obsolete. This resulted in the loss of approximately 6,000 jobs. Meanwhile, in the ensuing years, banks have been quietly reducing their headcount.

What was curious about the interviews that I conducted with banking

sector representatives is that they spoke about technological unemployment in abstract terms. They referred to ‘functions’ that were becoming automated. They refused to respond to questions about the demographics of those whose jobs were most at risk and/or to confirm the figures quoted by the media. Industry reports, on the other hand, revealed that large numbers of Black women, who were corralled into clerical support jobs, [were the majority in banks](#). At the same time, [nearly two-thirds](#) of bank staff lacked post-matric qualifications. This highlighted a correlation between Black women with low educational attainment in low-skilled jobs and those who were at the battlefield of job losses during this peak digitalisation period.

Intriguingly, the higher up the ladder I went, the vaguer the responses were to questions about the demographics of technological unemployment. In fact, the leading executives counteracted my questions with oblique references to their banks’ transformation and BEE targets.

Despite these claims, the distribution of labour in these institutions reveals that banks have been slow to embrace transformation in any meaningful manner. Employment equity targets have historically been addressed by hiring Black women in proletarianised white-collar jobs. These are now becoming redundant. Meanwhile, their reluctance to respond to questions about the demographics of technological unemployment exposed the banks as employers embedded in the logic of technological rationality. They have absolved themselves of any responsibility to deal with the human cost of automation.

The banking sector can be used as a pace setter for the white-collar economy, especially in relation to its significance for the expansion of the Black middle class. This makes it clear that technological unemployment represents a new threat to South Africa’s transformation. Job losses as a consequence of the adoption of automation technologies have definitely taken place. However, sensitivities around who is affected create an intentional silence about higher attrition rates amongst certain demographic groups. These challenge the dominant narrative on transformation.

The platform economy to the rescue?

Based on the idea that the AI revolution not only eliminates jobs, but also produces new ones, there is incessant promotion of the platform economy as

a new frontier for job creation. This is in line with an ongoing emphasis on skills development. In this respect, there are some outlandish claims made about the platform economy. These include the argument that it has [the potential to lift South Africans out of poverty](#) and that it [“is the pathway that will drive growth and jobs across Africa”](#).

Proponents of this view promote the platform economy as a vehicle to develop South Africans as a nation of micro-entrepreneurs. While this may invoke romantic notions of flexible working hours and self-directed work that is personally satisfying, several studies challenge this perception. They expose the emergence of a precariat in the platform economy. In fact, the exploitation of workers in the platform economy is so extreme that it’s given rise to an explosion of precarity scholarship. This characterises gig economy jobs as work that is evidently only accepted under economic duress.

In general, platform work is grouped into location-specific gig work (like app-driven deliveries) and online crowdsourcing work (outsourcing tasks

or projects to people via the internet). My study of the tech start-up sector reveals that the most common labour platforms to have emerged in South Africa’s digital economy are those that offer location-specific gig work. This also happens to be the [most exploitable form of work in the platform economy](#). As might be expected, “the uberisation of work” has entered labour market discourse as a pejorative term to describe the race to the bottom.

To put it crudely, what is being presented as the solution to South Africa’s unemployment crisis is the digital economy’s version of kitchen girl and garden boy jobs. This is an insult to South Africans who have struggled so hard for freedom from oppression.

Online crowdsourcing work, which is not location-specific, tends to require higher skill levels. However, notwithstanding the skills requirements, there is growing evidence of an emerging hierarchy in the global labour market, indicating greater exploitation of workers in the Global South. Evidence has surfaced of [non-Western workers being channelled into less skilled and poorly remunerated crowd work](#) referred

to as microtasks. For example, a [Time Magazine investigation](#) found that OpenAI paid Kenyan crowd workers less than US\$2 per hour to label problematic content that was used to train ChatGPT to avoid offensive language.

We need better solutions for a better future

It’s absurd to continuously preach educational attainment and skills development for a better future, in digitalising economies that predominantly produce precarious work. Prioritising education and skills within populations are important goals for societies to strive towards. However, this should be done for self-actualisation. It is ironic to link it to employment, given that the future will undoubtedly be one where there are fewer jobs available, as a structural outcome.

One solution that delinks livelihoods from employment is the introduction of a universal basic income (UBI). It’s a remedy that is popular amongst tech entrepreneurs, who understand that technological unemployment is becoming a permanent feature of society. Everyone from Elon Musk to Sam Altman supports the idea of a UBI.

Moreover, as the efficiencies created by technology create the opportunity for better work-life balance, another idea that has re-emerged is that of the four-day working week, without a reduction in pay. Similarly, we might consider the revaluation of pay for low paying jobs that are difficult to automate, such as in the pink economy (care work), which happens to be where some of the most vulnerable workers in our society are located.

Ultimately, we need to embrace the idea that technological unemployment is here to stay, as well as the fact that we can do better by those left behind. South Africans are already living in a society where half the working age population is unemployed. Our response has been to endure the discomfort of living in the most unequal society in the world. It’s time to move forward differently. Not only is it time to experiment with new ideas, but it is also time to move away from the prejudices of the past, as we reflect on what kind of future society we want to build.

Fazila Farouk is a digital economy specialist based in Cape Town. She writes about [the intersection of innovation and inequality](#).



A local study argued that the jobs performed by 35% of South Africans were susceptible to automation. It argued further that the jobs most at risk were “low and medium-skilled white-collar occupations” in the private sector and that there was a prevalence of “previously disadvantaged” South Africans in these occupations.

Protests outside a school in Steenberg. There have been widespread protests since the Western Cape government announced that 2,407 teaching posts will not be renewed in 2025.



Education cuts are provincial choice within national programme

By **Aliya Chikte** and **Jaco Oelofsen**

THERE HAVE BEEN WIDESPREAD protests since the Western Cape government announced that 2,407 teaching posts will not be renewed in 2025. Thousands of teachers will lose their jobs, and individual schools may lose up to 10 teachers each, especially at lower-income schools without the funding to absorb these posts.

The root cause of these cuts is the national government's austerity programme that has worsened since 2020. This is aimed at curbing state spending—particularly on the wage bill—with the ultimate goal of reducing public debt. However, the province has been accused of passing the buck and failing to protect teachers from the impact of these cuts. And the province has in turn blamed public sector unions for forcing the National Treasury's hand.

Here, we disentangle this crisis and the narratives surrounding it, while looking towards alternatives.

Why do these cuts matter?

The announcement of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) takes place in the context of a public sector that is buckling across the country. It is weighed down by the socio-economic crisis which has placed greater demands on it, and weakened by years of systematic budget cuts and underfunding. The crisis in the health sector is well known ([see Amanda! 88](#)), but education is facing similar challenges.

A [2023 Equal Education study of public schools](#) found that all the schools surveyed had some level of overcrowding in at least some classes. 74% of the 751 classes inspected had over 40 learners, and 82% of classrooms had too few chairs and desks. 65% of teachers were found to be overworked—unsurprising given that the national average learner-to-educator ratio has increased from 27 in 2012 to 32 in 2023. School feeding schemes are grossly insufficient, with some Eastern Cape schools reporting that they received even less than the meagre allocation of R3.05 per meal per learner in 2023. In the Western Cape, thousands of learners were reportedly still unplaced by the end of January.

In education, as in healthcare, the crisis is therefore complex. It is not just a problem of insufficient teachers, or insufficient schools, or insufficient goods and services for those schools. It is all of them combined. The results of this have been catastrophic, with up to 81% of Grade 4 learners unable to read for meaning in any language.

Austerity is also a feminist issue. When cuts to the budget are made in areas where women are predominantly employed, austerity results in a deepening of the feminisation of unemployment. And the 2,407 teachers will be forced to join the 8.2 million people in the unemployment queue.

The reaction by teachers, students and activists to the WCED announcement has to be understood in this context.

Why is it happening?

National Treasury has been chasing a 'primary budget surplus' to stabilise the rising levels of public debt. That means that, excluding debt and interest payments, government's income should be more than its expenditure. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, then-finance minister Tito Mboweni outlined years of public budget cuts in order to "close the mouth of the hippopotamus". The mouth was the shortfall between what government spends and what it earns in revenue.

Austerity has been squeezing state and public resources, but there has ultimately been a failure to reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio (the amount of debt compared to the economy's total production). Instead, austerity has undermined economic growth, which in turn reduces tax revenue. As revenue collection falls, government implements more budget cuts across all key sectors. The underlying issue is that South Africa has a stagnating economy, and this is only made worse by austerity measures. So austerity is self-defeating. But the Treasury continues to pursue it. Between 2023 and 2024, non-interest spending has shrunk by R21 billion in real terms.

For basic education particularly, there has been a R3.9 billion real cut in the budget over the last year. Equal Education has reported that spending per learner has been decreasing in real terms since 2018. Even National Treasury themselves

admitted in the Budget Review that provincial departments are going to be constrained in hiring additional teachers. This will result in larger class sizes and higher teacher-learner ratios.

The public sector wage bill

Nationally, the public sector wage bill has been a key point of contestation in the budget process. National Treasury made a conscious decision not to budget for public sector wage increases last year, despite the looming agreement. This decision was roundly criticised as being irresponsible and potentially politically motivated. Some accused Treasury of manufacturing a crisis to influence future wage negotiations.

The WCED is now blaming their shortfall of R3.5bn on this “underfunded” public sector wage agreement. To a large extent, the province is correct in blaming the Treasury. We at AIDC have made countless interventions criticising the austerity budgets of the past years. However, it also seems that the Western Cape would like to remove the question of their own accountability from the negotiating table. They want to pin it all on the decisions of their GNU partners.

The problem is that spending allocations amongst provincial departments are a provincial decision - National Treasury does not directly fund provincial education departments. Instead, National Treasury provides funding to each province through the Provincial Equitable Share, and the provinces themselves decide on the appropriate allocation. Each province therefore has the ability to decide how it will respond to financial pressures. The Western Cape can choose to reallocate money to protect teaching posts in low and middle-income areas. Instead, they choose to divert funding to infrastructure and ineffective safety programmes.

How have other provinces responded?

Of course, the Western Cape is not the only province facing austerity. KwaZulu-

Natal is in serious financial trouble and is yet to decide how to respond. Eastern Cape has indicated that it will cut its budget on goods and services. Similarly, Gauteng has stated that it will be slashing funding for scholar transport and free school meals (the National School Nutrition Programme), to protect teacher jobs.

While these provinces have not put teaching jobs on the chopping block, the approach of Gauteng and the Eastern Cape does not safeguard schooling either. Food and transport to get to school are as important as the teaching itself.



A 2023 Equal Education study of public schools found that all the schools surveyed had some level of overcrowding in at least some classes. 74% of the 751 classes inspected had over 40 learners, and 82% of classrooms had too few chairs and desks.

So what can the Western Cape do better?

There are many ways in which the Provincial Treasury can reprioritise spending to secure teaching jobs. Opposition and union leaders have argued that the Western Cape has been spending unnecessarily on the Law Enforcement Advancement Plan (LEAP), systemic tests and the #BackonTrack programme, which have supposedly been shown to be ineffective. While there are ways to internally reallocate funding, fighting over how the pie is divided instead of how big the pie is, pits departments and needs against one another.

There are also questions around the degree to which the wage agreement was truly underfunded by National Treasury, and the degree to which its underfunding was a decision by the province. MEC for Education, David Maynier, misleadingly refers to the November 2023 Medium

Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) to show that their crisis is a result of the underfunded wage agreement. However, in the February 2024 Budget Review, substantial allocations were provided to each province by the National Treasury for the Public Sector Wage Agreement, by using the Gold and Foreign Exchange Contingency Reserve Account (GFECRA). These allocations were intended specifically for the costs of the wage agreement and to protect frontline workers in health and education.

Compared to all other provinces, the Western Cape is equal last for spending

on education, together with the Northern Cape. If the province were to increase education expenditure from 37% to the national average of 41%, there would be more than enough funding to protect teaching posts. It is therefore not acceptable for the Western Cape government to act in a condescending manner to its critics—as it did in the parliamentary special debate on 12 September—and fail to address these crucial questions of prioritisation.

There are alternatives

Beyond the province, the national government must recognise that, while South Africa has considerable debt costs, blanket budget cuts aimed at the public service are not the answer. Alternatives include cuts aimed instead at the high salary levels of senior managers and department or commission leaderships. They could use the tax system to tax the wealthy more, introduce a wealth tax, and prevent corporations from avoiding tax with illicit financial flows. They hesitate to tax or target the lifestyles of elites, but they don't hesitate when it comes to imposing austerity measures that cut public services to the poor and the unemployed.

Austerity is ultimately a political choice. It is one we must reject.

Aliya Chikte and Jaco Oelofsen are researchers for the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC).

THE AMADIBA CRISIS COMMITTEE:

Fighting for sustainable development

By **Nonhle Mbuthuma** and **Cromwel Sonjica**, with assistance from ACC's Technical Team

THE AMADIBA CRISIS COMMITTEE (ACC) has been struggling since 2007 to preserve the way of life and livelihoods on the Amadiba coast. Initially, that struggle was directed against an Australian mining company's plan to mine titanium on our land. Today, while ACC is still fighting the mining company and vested mining interests inside the state, our land is also under another threat.

ACC is campaigning to convince the South African National Roads Agency Limited (Sanral) and the government not to route the new N2 Wild Coast Toll Highway on the Amadiba coast, but to put it inland. This has led us to [propose an alternative inland route](#). ACC is assisted by friendly road engineers and other experts to bring the N2 issue into the public eye once again.

The Amadiba coast: a vibrant local economy in a precious ecosystem

The Amadiba coast, in the Eastern Cape (EC), is renowned for its stunning natural beauty and rich biodiversity. This region is not only home to unique flora and fauna. It also holds big cultural, economic and historical value for the local communities. Economically, the fertile land on the coast provides food security to over 800 households, who sell surpluses to the market in Durban and elsewhere. The local economy is also [boosted by successful ecotourism](#). The community-run [Mtentu lodge](#) has over 2,000 visitors per year.

As Amadiba Crisis Committee, we argue that all of that—the local economy, the social fabric and our still functional system of traditional land governance—is undermined by the coastal route for the new N2 highway. That route is planned to run as close as 2.5km to 3km from the coastline, right through Bekela, Mdatya and Sigidi villages.

In addition, and not least, the coastal alignment of the N2 highway would disrupt the ecosystem, leading to irreversible environmental damage and loss of heritage,

in a region known internationally as the [Pondoland Centre of Endemism](#). The region contains high numbers of endemic species—species that occur nowhere else in the world.

This is why there has been a conflict about the authorised coastal alignment of the new N2 for over two decades. This conflict has also raged inside the Eastern Cape government, as shown by a [2004 letter to the Eastern Cape Director of Biodiversity & Coastal Management](#). The author, Dr Div de Villiers at the Eastern Cape Department of Environmental Affairs, warned the Biodiversity Management Director in Bisho of a coming “internal outcry” if the route wasn't changed. He suggested that the N2 should enter the Amadiba area some 18km from the coast—in fact at the same place where the Alternative Inland Route (AIR) today is suggested to enter into its ‘green fields section’ by ACC.

In 2021, ACC put together a simple terms of reference—“Put the N2 in the Centre of Amadiba and Fix our Local Roads”. We then engaged a technical team of friendly road engineers, spatial and social planners, geographers and economists to work out the concrete alternative route for the road.

The origins of the conflict

The first documented sign of conflict between the coastal Amadiba communities and Sanral is a [June 2010 speech](#) at Xolobeni Komkhulu (traditional court) by ACC's late chair, Bazooka Radebe (who was

assassinated on 22 March 2016). Bazooka said they had put the N2 on the coast, only to support the ‘Xolobeni Mining Project’. He demanded that the highway be moved inland.

Fast forward to 6 April 2017: Sanral's then CEO, Skhumbuzo Macozoma, visited Komkhulu, because the villagers were preventing N2 contractors from working on the coast—the encounter, in a packed Komkhulu hall is captured, in the documentary “[Ihlazo](#)” ([Disgrace](#)).

The role of the Amadiba Crisis Committee

Starting as a Komkhulu elected committee in 2007, ACC is today a social movement in Amadiba. We campaign to protect our land. We inform the community. We engage in legal battles. We organise protests and rallies. We work to raise awareness locally, nationally and internationally. To the broader public we say: ACC's efforts highlight the importance of community-led advocacy in environmental, local economy and social justice issues.

From 2010, it slowly started to become clear in Amadiba that the N2 was planned to run on the coast. ACC then became a vocal and organised force against the proposed route, in addition to campaigning against the ‘Xolobeni Mining Project’.

Proposing an alternative inland route

After three meetings with ACC's technical team, in March 2023 Sanral disappeared, despite agreement that the next meeting should discuss the proposed alignment through Lurholweni. The ACC then went public with the [proposal for an Alternative Inland Route \(AIR\) for the N2 highway](#). The AIR aims to balance the need for infrastructure development with protection of the Amadiba coast and its local economy. By suggesting an inland route, ACC hopes to achieve several key objectives:



The grey route is the coastal route that ACC is fighting against. The red route is the alternative route ACC is proposing.



The community of Jama, by the Mtentu bridge, chased away Sanral's contractors, Aveng-Strabag, at the end of October 2018. Hitherto unknown videos from this historic event (that concerned broken promises of local employment) [here](#).

1. **Environmental preservation:** it would minimise the highway's ecological footprint, preserving the coastal environment and its biodiversity. Sanral's coastal route would make a footprint much bigger than the 80m-wide road reserve. Ribbon development along it would start, like everywhere where a new main road is built in Eastern Cape. Land administration has collapsed in the province.
2. **Community Protection:** it would protect local communities from displacement, loss of their cultural heritage, losses to their agricultural economy and disruption of ecotourism on the coast. It would prevent the Amadiba coast from developing into a township.
3. **Sustainable Development:** it would present an opportunity for sustainable development that aligns with the long-term interests of both the local population in Amadiba and the broader region of Mbizana, in better communications. Putting the new N2 in the centre of Amadiba allows for many more connections with local roads.
4. **Jobs and the economy:** it would provide more jobs in Amadiba, including in the Lurholweni township, in the short- and the long-term. The AIR includes Lurholweni in the N2 project, by upgrading the R61 that runs through the township, and fixing its internal road network.
5. **The budget:** according to ACC's technical team, it would be significantly cheaper to build than the coastal N2 alignment, approved in 2011. The AIR requires much lower

bridges in rural Amadiba. Two-thirds of it would be built on already existing roads.

ACC held positive meetings about this in 2022 and at the end of 2023 with the Department of Environment, the National Treasury and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.

Public support and awareness

The ACC proposal today also has widespread support in inland Amadiba. Over 1,100 residents have discussed the proposal at community meetings and imbizos in 2023 and 2024. A [popular presentation](#) in isiMpondo and English has been widely distributed. An imbizo, in inland Dangenani Komkhulu on 4 April 2024, once again discussed the demands of villagers affected by the building of the Mtentu mega bridge. The imbizo also declared its support for the alternative inland route.

The proposal has been presented by ACC and its technical team to the national Department of Environmental Affairs (July 2022), to the National Treasury (November 2023) and to the officials of the Infrastructure SA programme at the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (December 2023), where flaws in the 2009 Environmental Impact Assessment for the original route, and two old studies from [2002](#) and [2008](#), were pointed out.

The proposal should now get attention and support from environmental organisations, human rights groups, and concerned citizens. The campaign emphasises the need for responsible development that

respects both the rights of indigenous communities and the environment. Public awareness and pressure are crucial in convincing Sanral and government authorities to consider the inland route seriously.

The Amadiba Crisis Committee's dedication to protecting our land, and promoting development for the economically marginalised majority, should serve as a powerful example of community resilience and environmental stewardship. We argue strongly that our proposal for the N2 highway is a call for a balanced approach to development in the Eastern Cape—one that values social justice, economic and communication progress and protection of South Africa's crucial biodiversity areas, and that leaves nobody behind.

Call to action

Supporting the ACC's campaign can take many forms, from raising awareness on social media to participating in advocacy events and engaging with policymakers. By standing with the Amadiba Crisis Committee, you can help ensure that development projects respect and protect the invaluable natural and cultural heritage in traditional regions like Amadiba.

As the ACC continues to advocate for its cause, it is imperative for the broader public to support our efforts and recognise the importance of sustainable and economically inclusive infrastructure planning.

Nonhle Mbuthuma and Cromwel Sonjica are members of the Amadiba Crisis Committee's Executive Committee.

LOAD-REDUCTION

CAPITALISM'S ELECTRIC SHOCK THERAPY

On the horizon is a protracted campaign against the South African working-class to penalise those connecting illegally, through load reduction and disconnection blitzkriegs.

By **Tony Martel**

SOUTH AFRICA'S LOADSHEDDING crisis has seemingly moved from Eskom's coal fired power stations to municipal distribution networks, principally in townships. Chronically under-resourced municipalities, whose funding model was originally outlined in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, are unable to cope with the increasing demand for infrastructure upgrades necessary to end loadshedding in municipalities.

So now we have what is called 'load reduction'.

[According to Eskom](#), load reduction is a long-established process that Eskom uses in specific areas when there is sufficient electricity available, but a transformer's integrity is at risk due to overloading. Loadshedding, on the other hand, is used when the national grid is constrained and there is not sufficient capacity to generate electricity to meet demand.

Today, suburban South Africans experience uninterrupted electricity provision, while life for people in townships and rural villages largely remains the same: electricity shutoffs are a constant.

The full cost recovery model

According to Eskom's spokesperson, Daphne Mokwena, the utility is no longer simply replacing damaged transformers in distribution networks

when they are overloaded. Following investigations, they have concluded that illegal connections are the culprit for this damage. They say they must therefore conduct audits to determine where illegal connections are being made and the extent of them. Subsequently, these audits will result in removing households with illegal connections from the grid. Underneath it all, this strategy at play is informed by the need for Eskom and municipalities to recover costs from households and private enterprise. The alternative, of course, would be to recover it from taxation.

Municipalities have based their funding model on recovering their costs from customer payments, while at the same time providing free services for those who are unable to pay. In South Africa's socioeconomic context, with the highest unemployment rate in the world, these contradictory mandates have proved disastrous. Municipalities are unable to provide basic services. Funding [for municipalities](#) was based on the understanding that electricity was to account for the largest share of the operating expenses recovered from service payments. In order to try to cope with these competing directives, municipalities must then double down on cost recovery, by consistently increasing service rates for residents.

Burdened by the unemployment crisis, and with austerity measures increasing the cost of living, working-

class people are now forced to pay electricity rates reaching R3 per kWh in some cases.

Load reduction for the poor

Then the loadshedding crisis came and induced wealthy and suburban households to move increasingly off-grid by installing rooftop solar. This reduced the paying customer base, requiring municipalities to further increase their rates. This has become an unrelenting strain on working-class households. This is what drives the working-class in townships to pay to install illegal connections (zinyoka), so that they can afford other basic necessities. Municipalities are now experiencing their cash cow, electricity payments, as a candle burning at both ends.

Falling under Operation Vulindlela, the Presidency's National Energy Crisis Committee (NECOM) has a work stream on demand-side management. It has resolved to manage the current phase of this crisis by implementing control measures to eliminate illegal connections and ensure residents (customers) pay for their electricity. [According to the Minister of Electricity, Kgosisentso Ramokgopa](#), "Necom will run an aggressive demand-side management campaign aimed at reducing demand on the grid. It is possible to reduce demand by 1,000MW and reduce load shedding by one stage through simple measures".

On the horizon is a protracted campaign against the South African working-class, to penalise those connecting illegally, through load reduction and disconnection blitzkriegs.

According to the report, [Energy Racism](#), conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research and Practice (CSRP) based at the University of Johannesburg, load reduction is a practice for use predominantly in townships. The report also asserts that power shutoffs in townships during load reduction can last for days or months at a time, in some cases. Disinvestment in infrastructure, which is aging and poorly maintained in townships, is forcing working-class South Africans to suffer the consequences of neoliberal governance, amidst the legacies of apartheid. It is a means of recovering a diminishing source of income for Eskom and municipalities. And more importantly it is a mechanism of control to further establish the ethos and 'discipline' of a market economy amongst the predominantly black working class of South Africa.

[In 1999, post-soviet Georgia](#) was in the middle of a transition from a bureaucratically planned economy to one of a capitalist market, with the introduction of neoliberal reforms. In this process, the Georgian government sold its electric utility, Telasi, to a company based in the United States, called AES Corporation—the largest electric power company in the world at the time. Under the auspices of AES, the utility began a mass electricity shutoff campaign, obliging Georgians to pay for electricity to reconnect. This resulted in widespread protests and riots by citizens to reject the disconnections, which disproportionately affected lower income households. The transition to a capitalist market economy required citizens by force to pay for electricity. Previously, when Georgia was a part of the Soviet Union, they could either access electricity for free or it was heavily subsidised.

Load reduction is not an altogether new phenomenon historically, and it is also not a purely technical issue. It is a political economic tool, a violent one, to change people's attitudes and behaviours toward electricity, which is a key requirement for social reproduction, and to view it as a commodity that must be bought and sold. It is a means of oppression which undermines the basis of social welfare policies, like free basic electricity, that are intended to enable working class people to transcend their condition. It pushes those without means to pay, which puts them in a situation where they are now even less capable of meeting their everyday needs.

It is also true that confronting energy poverty has become a key lever to address meaningful socioeconomic development for the working-class in South Africa. Tracy Ledger and Mahlatse Rampedi, in their report [Hungry for Electricity](#), argue for a minimum threshold level of consumption of at least 350 kWh per month, preferably at no cost, for the poor and unemployed, to provide a sufficient amount of food for their households, and to engage in other activities that would enable other economic activities that would increase people's standard of living. Shifting the costs of services and infrastructural development from households to public funding through taxation would not only enable Eskom and municipalities to end load reduction. It would also be a monumental improvement in living conditions for South Africa's working class. And it would put electricity supply where it belongs—as a public good rather than as a commodity like any other.

A historical precedent

When we experience load reduction we are also at the mercy of capitalism's conditioning of the South African working-class, which extends back to the early days of European colonial expansion. Today we must pay for these services or face load reduction. Long ago, South Africans were similarly forced into work by taxation and 'land reduction'. This is [evidenced](#) in the 1897 testimony at a commission of inquiry from George Albu:

*"Commission: Suppose the k***** [black Africans] retire back to their kraal [cattle pen (sic)]? Would you be in favour of asking the Government to enforce labour?"*

*Albu: Certainly ... I would make it compulsory ... Why should a n***** be allowed to do nothing? I think a k***** should be compelled to work in order to earn his living.*

Commission: If a man can live without work, how can you force him to work?

Albu: Tax him, then ..."

[It brought Africans](#) into the cash economy, where they began to supply their labour to farms and mines or sell cash crops to pay taxes. In settler economies in Southern Africa, people were dispossessed of their land and moved to semi-arid and unproductive lands. In these labour reserves, Africans had few ways to earn a living but to work for wages.

Today they are being given little choice—pay for electricity or go without. Over time, racial capitalism squeezes its grip tighter and tighter on the South African working class, first expropriating land and enforcing work, then separating Black people in townships and homelands, before fully integrating them into a capitalist market economy. In this way, capitalist social organisation in the arc of history becomes more 'natural' and self-evident, the enemy becomes less visible, and a liberatory pathway becomes all the more challenging to organise.

Tony Martel is a PhD Candidate in Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University and works on the Transition Township Project in KwaZakhele, Gqeberha.



Then the loadshedding crisis came and induced wealthy and suburban households to move increasingly off-grid by installing rooftop solar. This reduced the paying customer base, requiring municipalities to further increase their rates.

WHAT AMERICA'S LABOUR RESURGENCE CAN TEACH UNIONS ABROAD

By **Eric Blanc**

While the union system in the US differs from ours in South Africa, many of the principles outlined in this article can be helpful, especially in building new and smaller unions (ed).

FROM THE UNITED STATES TO SOUTH Africa, labour's decline over the past half century has [devastated working-class communities](#), undermined [democracy](#), and deepened the grip of big business over our work lives, our political system, and our planet. To turn this around, we need tens of millions more people forming, joining, and transforming unions.

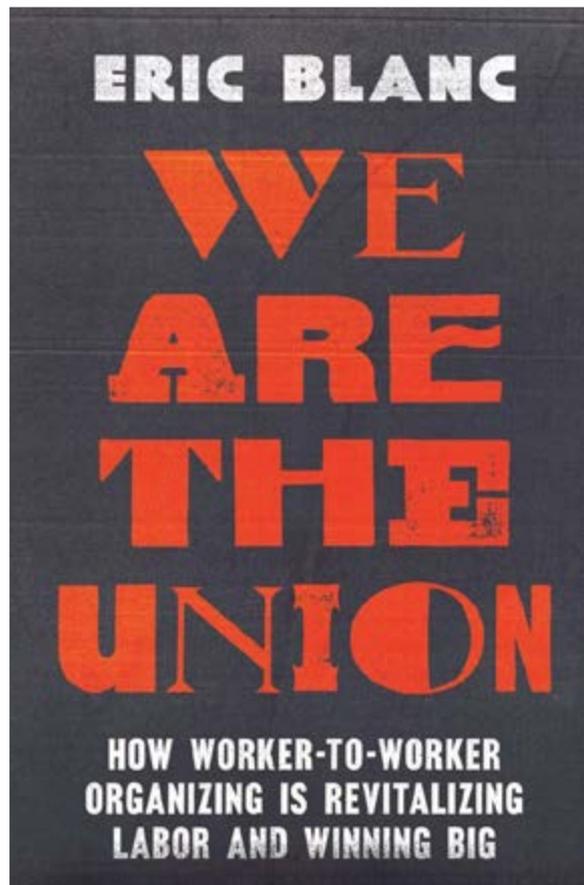
By analysing the recent US unionisation surge and telling the stories of worker organisers, my forthcoming book, *We Are the Union: How Worker-to-Worker Organizing is Revitalizing Labor and Winning Big*, makes a case for how to overcome business-as-usual in both corporate America and organised labour. My argument is simple: a new unionisation model is necessary because the only way to build power at scale is by relying less on paid, full-time organisers and more on workers. Staff-intensive organising is often very effective, training people to lead their co-workers in struggle. But it costs too much to grow widely. The good news is that [recent struggles](#) in the US have built off rank-and-file-oriented traditions, to develop a scalable approach to worker power, capable of driving exponential union growth, and changing the world.

Bottom-up spirit

Though economic and political contexts diverge across countries, many of the core dilemmas of building widespread working-class power remain similar internationally. As United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain [explained](#), “[w]e don’t win by telling workers what to do, what to say, or how to say it. We

win by giving working-class people the tools, the inspiration, and the courage to stand up for themselves.”

Reviving the bottom-up spirit that enabled US unions to make their big breakthrough in the 1930s, [worker-to-worker initiatives](#) from 2021 onwards have shown how this can be done in our sprawled out, suburbanised society. And they have done it in cafes, auto plants, newspapers, universities, and beyond. Labour’s most astute opponents have clearly identified the threat posed by this growth in worker-to-worker organising.



We Are the Union: How Worker-to-Worker Organizing is Revitalizing Labor and Winning Big makes a case for how to overcome business-as-usual in both corporate America and organised labour.

Little Mendelson, the country’s most notorious union-busting firm, sounded the alarm in a [2022 report](#):

There has been a shift in how people are organising together to petition for representation. What

was once a top-down approach, whereby the union would seek out a group of individuals, has flipped entirely. Now, individuals are banding together to form grassroots organising movements where individual employees are the ones to invite the labour organisation to assist them in their pursuit to be represented.

Easy, cheap and scalable

Lamenting that “the ability to encourage activism has never been easier,” the report stressed that this “is especially true with the younger workforce ... [that is] more progressive thinking.” Because digital tools have dramatically lowered communication costs, it’s now easier for rank-and-filers to initiate organising drives and to get trained by other workers nationally. Social media enables employees to “begin organising on their own in a grass-roots fashion ... [and] allows local organisers to use the collective knowledge of the best organisers around the country.”

One of worker-to-worker unionism’s key merits is that it’s relatively cheap and, therefore, scalable—that is, there’s no inherent limit to its scope. Scalability is a somewhat cold and technocratic term, normally used more by corporations than their challengers. But here it refers to something simple, visceral, and righteous: building an organised mass movement of ordinary people taking back control over their lives and their workplaces.

Workplaces have changed

Epochal economic changes have made scalability particularly challenging. At the time of US labour’s meteoric rise in the late 1930s, workers [lived in dense, work-adjacent communities](#). The economy revolved around large, centrally located establishments, like steel and auto factories. Employers were no less viciously anti-union back then, but organisers could focus their limited resources on a relative handful of big,

geographically concentrated targets. That is no longer the case.

America's top private employer, Walmart, [has 4,600 stores](#), averaging a few hundred employees each, that are scattered across the country. Other top private employers—Home Depot, Starbucks, Kroger, FedEx, Target, UPS, Amazon—also have huge numbers of dispersed workplaces. Workers usually live many miles away from work and from each other. The same is true within the much-expanded 'care economy', which by its nature must have schools, hospitals, and nonprofits dotted across the nation to provide services to local populations.

It's no longer possible to write, as one author [did](#) in 1939, that "today in the United States people and industry are highly centralised within a relatively small fraction of the nation's total area."

Because of decades of decentralisation, building worker power at scale, and widely enough to win, is significantly more difficult.

Organisers effective but expensive

The problem with staff-intensive organising isn't that it is ineffective. As countless workers can attest from personal experience, at its best, heavily-staffed organising can empower its participants and it can win major concessions. Indeed, worker-to-worker unionism is largely a development and expansion of its most rank-and-file-oriented traditions. But in all its different forms, a staff-heavy approach suffers from one basic limitation: it's incredibly expensive.

Up against intense employer opposition and weak labour laws, current best practice in the US is to hire at least one staffer for every one hundred workers to be organised. And it [routinely costs over \\$3,000 today](#) to unionise one worker, a dramatic increase from the roughly \$88 dollars (inflation adjusted) that it took to unionise each steel worker in the 1930s.

Worker-to-worker organising

Fortunately, a new model exists—one that builds off, but also qualitatively transforms, the best practices of rank-and-file-oriented labour organising.

The idea that workers should organise other workers is hardly a new one. Though many union drives fail to put this axiom into practice, since the late 1980s it's been a basic principle of labour strategy. It is reflected in tactics like building strong organising committees tasked with holding one-on-one conversations with co-workers. To quote [UNITE HERE's](#) unofficial [motto](#), "the



Reviving the bottom-up spirit that enabled US unions to make their big breakthrough in the 1930s, worker-to-worker initiatives from 2021 onwards have done it in cafes, auto plants, newspapers, universities, and beyond.

organiser organises the committee, and the committee organises the workers."

Building off this foundation, worker-to-worker unionism gives rank and filers responsibility for key tasks usually reserved for paid, full-time organisers. Increased reliance on workers can take numerous forms, ranging from low-level responsibilities like creating a drive's visual logo, to ambitious duties like running its social media efforts or researching the company. My book—based on over 200 interviews and a survey of 500 worker leaders—shows that three things in particular define the new model:

1. Workers have a decisive say on strategy;
2. Workers begin organising before receiving guidance from a parent union; and/or
3. Workers train and guide other workers in organising methods.

In other words, workers initiate an organising drive or train other workers (or both), and they play a central role in determining the campaign's major decisions.

The upshot is that worker-to-worker efforts are generally cheaper and easier to spread widely. Worker organisers can more consistently become strategy-making generals, not only foot soldiers, as is the case in many (though not all) heavily staffed efforts. Because the gaps in power, experience, and authority between workers tend to be narrower than between workers and full-time organisers, worker-to-worker organising also tends to be more democratic.

And its reach can extend beyond a local level. With the rise of digital tools, it's now possible for workers to reach out to, coordinate with, and train other workers anywhere in the country.

This is not a minor development, since companies and working-class communities have sprawled out so much over the past century.

It's worth underscoring that the new model does not consist of passively waiting around for workers to spontaneously rise up. Worker-to-worker unionism leans heavily on proactive tactics like seeding drives through mass online trainings and digital tools, and workers using personal networks, or cold calling. It also proactively spreads unionisation via 'salting'—encouraging organisers to take jobs at strategic workplaces with the goal of unionising them.

Unlike many previous cases for grassroots unionism, my core criticism of staff-heavy approaches—that they're too costly to scale—does not suggest that full-time organisers and union resources are relatively unimportant. Unions should be investing far more in organising.

Capacity and accumulated experience are crucial. Staff are generally an essential vehicle to transmit both. But most unions use this correct general argument to justify their specific (staff heavy) division of labour, without seriously probing the potential to scale up by deploying experienced full-timers and union resources in a new way. The case studies in *We Are the Union* suggest that workers can, and should, do more than they're normally asked—or allowed—to do.

Eric Blanc is Assistant Professor of Labor Studies at Rutgers University, the director of the Worker to Worker Collaborative and the author of *We Are the Union: How Worker-to-Worker Organizing is Revitalizing Labor and Winning Big*, which will be published by the University of California Press in 2025 and can be pre-ordered [here](#).

MINERALS OVER LIFE:

THE PLIGHT OF THE CONGOLESE PEOPLE

By **Ruth Mudingayi**



March to SA parliament. Although seeking refuge in South Africa and other nations presents its own set of challenges, many Congolese nationals would rather face these hardships than endure the horrors of starvation, sexual violence, genocide, or modern-day slavery that plague their homeland. (Photo: Vincent Lali)

FOR MANY, THE SAYING “THERE’S no place like home” resonates deeply, symbolising a profound desire for security, comfort, and belonging in one’s native land. However, for a significant portion of the global population, this sentiment remains tragically unfulfilled.

Countries like South Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been ravaged by war, often due to their geopolitical positioning and the abundance of natural resources beneath their soil. The DRC alone holds approximately 80% of the world’s coltan reserves and an estimated 150 million carats in diamond reserves, as of 2023. These invaluable natural resources, with an estimated worth of \$24 trillion, have drawn the greed and exploitation of both Western and neighbouring nations, creating a cycle of conflict and suffering.

Mass displacement of people

By the end of 2023, over 117.3 million people worldwide had been displaced due to human rights abuses and instability in their home countries. This staggering figure includes 7.1 million internally

displaced persons within the DRC as of March 2024. Furthermore, the plight of the Congolese is underscored by the 1,128,014 refugees and asylum seekers who fled the DRC in 2023.

As of May 31, 2024, there were 42,132 registered Congolese refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa, a figure that does not account for those who undertake perilous journeys through neighbouring countries seeking safety. Although seeking refuge in South Africa and other nations presents its own set of challenges, many Congolese nationals would rather face these hardships than endure the horrors of starvation, sexual violence, genocide, or modern-day slavery that plague their homeland.

Armed conflict prevails

The DRC is engaged in a multifaceted struggle, facing two distinct but interconnected battles. In North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, and much of eastern Congo, a nearly three-decade-long conflict has claimed over six million Congolese lives. And in Haut Katanga and Lualaba there is a crisis of artisanal mining, including child mining.

In eastern Congo, the turmoil began with the Rwandan genocide in 1994, which led to a mass influx of Rwandan

refugees into Congo. The ensuing chaos prompted Rwandan President Paul Kagame to allege that Hutu perpetrators of the genocide were being sheltered in Congo (then Zaire), leading to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invading the DRC. This invasion initiated the First Congo War, which saw the RPF align with Laurent Kabila’s rebel group, the Alliance des Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Congo Zaïre (AFDL), in their fight against Mobutu’s authoritarian regime.

In 1997, after the defeat of Mobutu, Kabila ascended to the presidency. However, his subsequent decision to revoke permission for Rwandan and Ugandan forces to operate freely in the DRC led to the outbreak of the Second Congo War, often referred to as Africa’s World War. This conflict was marked by a breakdown in relations between Kabila and the neighbouring nations that had helped him rise to power. Following Kabila’s assassination in 2001, his son, Joseph Kabila, assumed the presidency, yet violence and instability persisted. The ongoing conflict facilitated the smuggling of valuable minerals into Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi, with various militia groups, including the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), profiting from the theft of Congolese resources.

Conflict always tied to minerals

As the conflict continued, it became increasingly apparent that the motivations behind these invasions had less to do with humanitarian concerns and more to do with resource acquisition. Rwanda emerged as a top exporter of coltan, amassing approximately \$516 million in mineral exports in 2021. This represents only a fraction of the billions of dollars’ worth of minerals that Rwanda has extracted from the DRC, ultimately attracting foreign investors eager to capitalise on these resources. The situation is compounded by the fact that many multinational corporations operate with little regard for the human cost of their profit margins.

To maintain their influence and operations in the region, Kagame’s government has been implicated in

funding the Mouvement de Mars 23 (M23), a militia that emerged in April 2012 after members of the Congolese army defected. The M23 wreaked havoc in North Kivu, causing the displacement of 200,000 people in just three months. Despite military interventions by the DRC armed forces (FARDC) and assistance from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the group remained a formidable force until its defeat in 2013. However, the momentary defeat of the M23 did not bring peace; violence and instability continued, perpetuating a cycle of suffering for the Congolese people.

The UN mapping report, which documented over 617 violent acts in the DRC from 1993 to 2003, highlighted egregious human rights violations linked to mineral exploitation. In addition to armed violence, sexual violence has been utilised as warfare designed to inflict deep suffering on Congolese people. [Anneke van Woudenberg](#) notes, “Rape is being used as a weapon of war in eastern Congo. We have documented that when armed groups enter a town, they rape women and girls—sometimes publicly, sometimes privately—in order to punish the local population. It’s the easiest way to terrorise a community.”

In 2011, Congo was labeled the “rape capital of the world”, after reports revealed that at least 48 women and girls were raped every hour. The consequences of these violent acts are not merely physical; they also lead to the social ostracisation of their victims. After nearly a decade of remaining covert, the M23 rebel group launched a new offensive in October 2021, attacking Bunagana and perpetuating a relentless

cycle of violence, death, and displacement in eastern Congo. On August 15, 16 civilians were killed in the Rutshuru territory of North Kivu by the M23. All this continues to prove that where capitalism persists, greed continues to drive the loss of innocent lives in the pursuit of minerals.

Driven by capitalism

Natural resources, including minerals like gold and tantalum found in the DRC, have exacerbated the worst traits of human behaviour. The ongoing conflict in the east is ignited by capitalist interests. Simultaneously, the DRC struggles to put an end to the child mining crisis facing the south of the country. In the provinces of Haut-Katanga and Lualaba, multinational mining companies benefit from the instability and poor governance by exploiting the country’s artisanal mining laws. This exploitation forces entire families to work under deplorable conditions.

The price paid for green energy

As the world races to lead in renewable energy and produce electric cars to ‘save the planet’, individuals in the DRC work in hazardous mines without protective gear, exposed to toxic materials. The lack of enforced mining regulations has led to a child mining crisis and left artisanal miners vulnerable. Corruption, ongoing warfare, and poor governance create an environment where multinational companies exploit a struggling economy. Brands like Tesla, Apple, and Dell indirectly benefit from this child labour

crisis by sourcing cobalt for their lithium-ion batteries from companies involved in artisanal mining, such as Congo DongFang Mining CDM, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Chinese company, Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt Ltd.

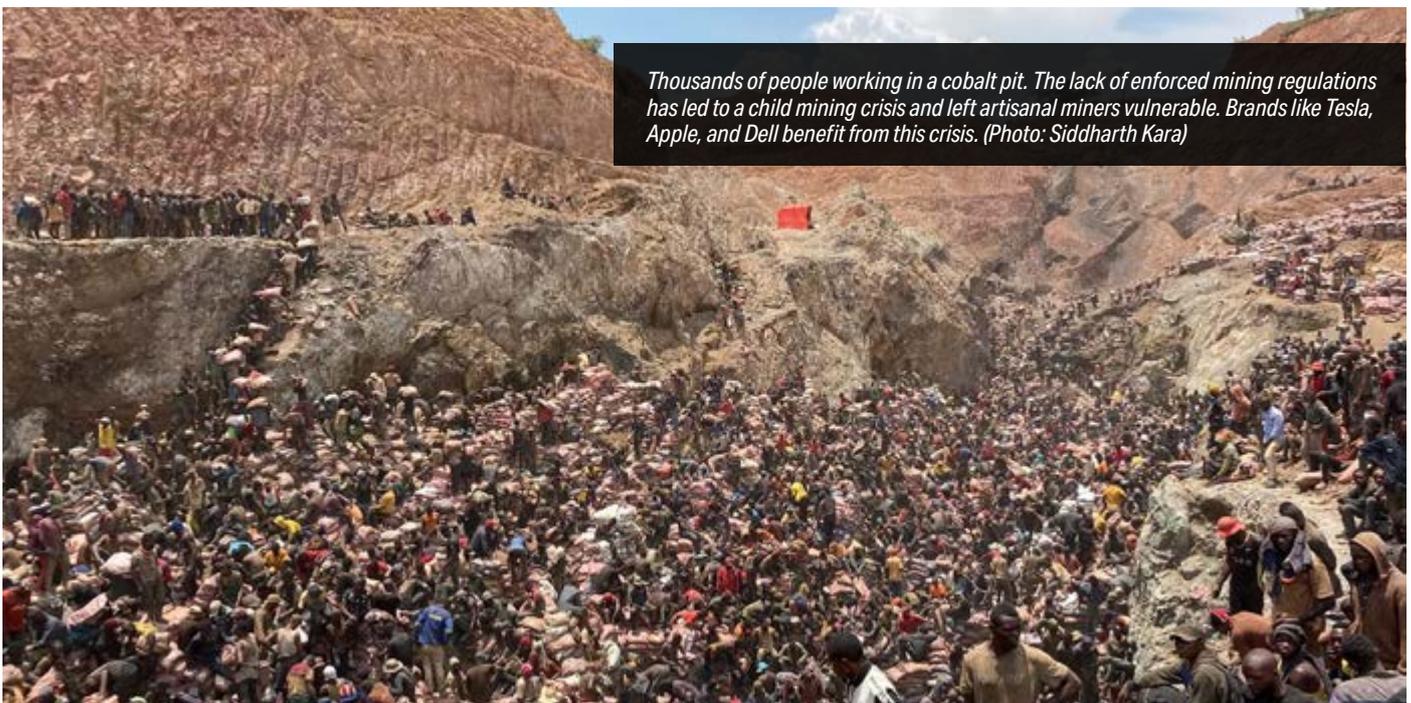
It is almost paradoxical that, to ensure the planet remains intact for future generations, current generations must endure exploitation and death. Many people do not realise that the conflict in Congo is a global issue. Whether knowingly or not, our actions implicate us in Congolese suffering through our governments, technological advancements, and the push for green energy to combat climate change.

The Congolese lose their homes so that we can enjoy comforts they are denied. How can we claim to be creating a safer planet with our technological advancements when it requires exploiting others? Who are we to decide who deserves safety and a place to call home? As Jean Bahati from Mushaki in North Kivu said to [Hi.org](#):

We have not offended God. We are Congolese. We just want to live in safety, peace, and freedom.

As long as profit-based exploitation of minerals in the country continues, safety, peace and freedom are just a dream. Right now, to be Congolese is to fear waking up, because real life is a living nightmare.

[Ruth Mudingayi](#) is a South-African born Congolese. She is the co-founder of *What is Happening in Congo?*, an organisation dedicated to denouncing the atrocities occurring in the DRC.



Thousands of people working in a cobalt pit. The lack of enforced mining regulations has led to a child mining crisis and left artisanal miners vulnerable. Brands like Tesla, Apple, and Dell benefit from this crisis. (Photo: Siddharth Kara)



VENEZUELA:

A 'CIVIC-MILITARY-POLICE' REGIME

Interview with **Emiliano Terán Mantovani**

This interview was conducted by Raúl Zibechi, originally published in Spanish, in Brecha Magazine of Uruguay, and translated by Steven Johnson. We publish it as part of a new reciprocal relationship between Amanda! and the [New Politics](#) website in the US.

One of the most powerful and independent critical voices in Venezuela today, Emiliano Terán Mantovani is a sociologist, and political and environmental activist committed to the resistance against extractivism.

This interview was not easy to put together, as Emiliano has to move with extreme caution in the face of the overwhelming militarisation that the country is experiencing.

How would you characterise the Maduro government?

Since July 28, an electoral fraud has been carried out in Venezuela that will be much talked about when the biggest frauds in the contemporary history of Latin America are remembered. Today, we are facing a reconfiguration of Maduro's political regime so that it can govern under conditions of complete social,

political and international illegitimacy. It is a dangerous reconfiguration, because it intends to take repression and social control to unheard of levels. But allow me first to explore where we are coming from, in order to see where we could be going.

Maduro's government has drifted more and more, over these 11 years, towards decadence in every sense. It has been pulverising the framework of social rights, seeking to suffocate all political and social dissidence, with a brutal repression of the entire popular sector, even if one is a critical chavista. Venezuela has been governed under a permanent state of exception: a legal one, by decree, which lasted more than five years, from 2016 to 2021, something totally unconstitutional, but which paradoxically was normalised.

On the other hand, the architecture of power in the Maduro regime was shaped by a gradual restructuring of the state. The precursor is the corporate and militarist state established during the Chávez administration, its authoritarian and vertical ways of doing politics, with its fundamental principle of maximum loyalty to the leader above all else. The structures and networks of state corruption are also an important precursor. These elements saw continuity in Maduro's government, but now without Chávez's charisma and political legitimacy, without the enormous oil income that it once had, and in the context of a systemic collapse. And so everything began to be imposed,

fundamentally, by force and violence. The National Assembly, won handily by the opposition in 2015, was disregarded, and a parallel National Assembly of the regime was created in 2017. Military companies were created for the direct and private appropriation and management of wealth. The enormous poverty that the crisis produced was used politically, creating institutional channels for the selective allocation of wealth to state officials and supporters of the ruling party, the PSUV. Access to information was eliminated.

Numerous state and para-state security forces were deployed—a structure of corruption and unchallengeable power, in an environment of maximum impunity and militarisation, a 'mafiasation' of the state. All of this was justified in the name of "defending the revolution and socialism" and "fighting against the right wing". So we had a regime change from within and a new type of dictatorship was consolidated, a clientelist and oligarchic regime, which also allows direct appropriation of regional wealth to maintain provincial loyalties.

Venezuela is governed like a hacienda—a plantation estate.

However, some consider it to be leftist

There is no basis whatsoever to say that this is a progressive government, much less a leftist one. There is a strong liberalisation of the economy, with

promotion and protection of transnational capital, large tax exemptions, low-profile privatisations, promotion of special economic zones, and the creation of a VIP Venezuela (tourism, restaurants, bars, trips, luxury vehicles) only for foreigners, business people, and high-level government officials. There is the systematic destruction of the salary, keeping it in bolivars while the economy is completely dollarised (today it is equivalent to 4 dollars a month). There is the abandonment of the public sector.

Fedecámaras, the country's main business association, which was always seen as the great enemy of Chávez, is now a friend of the Maduro regime. We are facing one of the most aggressive neoliberal restructurings in the region, although it is certainly not a conventional neoliberalism. The development of an authoritarian system and the neoliberalisation of the economy are two parts of the same process of regime change in Venezuela. One is a function of the other.

In addition to business people, the Maduro regime has made a new alliance with the evangelical churches, as Bolsonaro did. In these days of popular protest, forced labour prisons for "terrorists" and "coup perpetrators" are being promoted. The two governments that have most promoted the destruction of rights in Latin America today have been precisely those of Milei and Maduro.

I believe that some groups on the Left that continue to support this have not even managed to understand the level of decadence, conservatism and mafiasation of this regime. And they get bogged down supporting this disaster and undermining their own credibility. This is a symptom of an historical loss of direction that must lead us back to the question, what is the left in this crisis, which is a global crisis? Who does it represent? How does it understand the relationship between ethics and politics? How does it respond to this changing and violent world?

But as far as Venezuela is concerned, we reach a point where there is no nuance whatsoever.

The second conclusion is that this regime of corruption, abuses, making life precarious, and repressive violence, is understood and felt by the vast

majority of Venezuelans as a nightmare. A nightmare they wish to see come to an end. It is a level of disgust never seen in the 25 years of the Bolivarian process. And this created the critical mass of irrefutable generalised discontent that was overwhelmingly reflected in the elections.

Every sector of Venezuelans voted massively against Maduro, be it rural, urban, young people, adults, the most precarious, the middle classes, in Caracas, in the Andes, in the Llanos, in the Amazon, various sectors of the Left, centre, right, religious, atheists, all of them, with a forcefulness never seen before in Venezuelan electoral history.

This does not seem to be understood by some parts of the Left, who sadly have criminalised the popular protests in the most impoverished neighborhoods of the country, calling them "ultra-right". This reinforces the mechanisms of repression and persecution that are underway. At other times they treat the population like children and underestimate people's

Where is the regime going?

What we are probably witnessing is a new, more radical, more extremist political reorganisation of the regime to control the population. Constitutional guarantees are de facto suspended. Government spokespersons have reported more than 2,200 arrests in a few days, without any legal procedure, affecting the entire social and political spectrum of the country. Security forces stop passers-by to check their phones to see if they have any content against the government, in order to arrest them. Mechanisms of informing or social denunciation have been established to report opponents. An app has even been created to enter their names, addresses and photos. Houses of those who protest or oppose the government have been marked.

Also, from official speeches and security agencies, content is circulated to frighten the population, announcing that "they are coming for you". And uniformed prisoners are exposed, Bukele



A shop with goods priced in dollars. There is the systematic destruction of the salary, keeping it in bolivars while the economy is completely dollarised (today it is equivalent to 4 dollars a month).

capacities, alleging that they are confused, manipulated, lacking sound judgment, and handing the country over to the United States. They have no self-criticism or the least understanding of the magnitude of failure that this chavista political project has had to reach for people to flee across the borders. For these leftists, the people do not have the right to rebel and should remain silent, supporting the government until the end of time.

style, shouting slogans in favour of the government. There is strict surveillance of social networks, with a "National Council of Cybersecurity" created to formalise it. A law was passed to control NGOs.

As you can imagine, the Venezuelan population today is terrified and in shock. This is what the Maduro government has called a new "civic-military-police" alliance. We live in a totally policed, quasi-Orwellian society. The regime seeks to control every sphere and expression of Venezuelan society.

What characterisation do you offer of the opposition led by María Corina Machado?

Machado has an orthodox neoliberal, political-economic programme of massive privatisations and alliances with international capitals, and a geopolitical closeness with the United States and what these sectors call the “free world”. She is a woman who comes from the powerful economic classes, from a family of important business people. Her position towards the Bolivarian process has always been classist and confrontational, though, in order to make herself more palatable and broaden the scope of alliances, she has been moving towards more moderate positions recently.

This shows us the kind of dilemma in which the Venezuelan people have been and will continue to be for the time being, and the great need to gradually build a political alternative to this. There is a need of a path of popular, sovereign struggle that also seeks to change the model of society, and that seriously begins to think beyond oil and extractivism.

But there are nuances about the opposition that must be mentioned, to have an up-to-date understanding. This is not 2017. Although the huge majority of the population rejects the government, we are not facing two strong, equal political blocs. Maduro’s government controls everything: the armed and security forces, the judiciary, the electoral authority, the national assembly, the vast majority of regional and municipal governments, the national media, the oil industry, everything.

The opposition that Machado leads today is not homogeneous. She does not have total control and has had many political adversaries within that sector. For the elections, she managed to build unity with the other actors of the coalition, but it is difficult to know if such unity can be maintained, given their history of conflicts. To date there has been no consensus on her orthodox economic programme; for example, not all agree on privatising PDVSA, the state-owned oil and gas company. If it were to assume power, chavismo would still control the Supreme Court of Justice, the National Assembly, the electoral body, and the other powers I mentioned. Even in power, it might have chavismo as the opposition.

The Venezuelan population has not been historically inclined to neoliberal ideas, but rather to an anti-oligarchic political culture. There is also the question of what the level of military support for Machado would be, as there

have been mutual antipathies for a long time. The Venezuelan context is very unstable and fragmented. This is probably what part of the Left and several social movements calculated when they decided that they preferred to face a government of Machado to Maduro.

Finally, how do you see the future? Do you think a civil war is possible?

One scenario is that Maduro’s government remains in power, through three mechanisms: first, a regime of brutal repression that prevents the emergence of a significant dissident force or a strong political alternative. Second, a regime that already knows how to govern in a context of collapse and chaos, and does not care much about international criticisms and isolation. And third, a regime that manages to consolidate some international trade channels for its natural resources, through the support of China, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, among others. It could also sell other commodities, and wait for the waters to calm down so that it can again more openly invite new international investors. It’s not the first time that the cruelty of extractivism has sustained and legitimised dictatorships.

It would be difficult for a scenario of rupture not to break out sooner or later, though we do not know when it will happen or what form it would take. Another possibility is the unraveling of the governmental bloc, which has also been happening gradually. There have recently been manifestations of public discontent, such as that of Francisco Arias Cárdenas, or the Minister of Culture Ernesto Villegas. Clearly, at the core of the questions that have arisen are questions about internal ruptures even amongst

the military, which would indeed play a defining role in the crisis.

It will be the ability to mobilise that will give these possibilities shape and dynamism. It remains to be seen how social resistance will develop, how the discontent, fear and terror that people are experiencing will be channeled. Social creativity and persistence will be crucial for popular recomposition in times of iron dictatorship. The international response will be important, although it will vary, and probably depend on how the alternatives for change move internally.

Finally, the domestic economic situation will be very decisive. The so-called economic recovery is based on very weak foundations. The distribution of wealth continues to be extremely unequal. And we cannot forget that we are coming from a long economic crisis, brought about by the exhaustion of the oil rentier model.

Could there be more violent confrontations?

It is a possible scenario, if all channels for a peaceful solution are finally closed. Although a civil war requires two armed sides, and in Venezuela that monopoly is essentially held by the national government.

Amanda! has published two other articles recently on Venezuela on its website, from the [Tempest Collective](#) and from the Brazilian group [Resistencia](#). The question of Venezuela remains contested.



Maduro praying with evangelical pastors on national TV. In addition to business people, the Maduro regime has made a new alliance with the evangelical churches, as Bolsonaro did.

Bangladesh:

FROM DESPOT TO NEOLIBERAL LEADER

By **Sushovan Dhar**

ON AUGUST 5, SHEIKH HASINA WAJED, the prime minister of Bangladesh for the last 15 years, had to resign and run from the country after being driven out by student protesters. The student movement began with demands to end the quota (the allocation of many government jobs to the descendants of freedom fighters). But it gave way to a broader rebellion against the Awami League (AL), led by Sheikh Hasina, and her despotic government. The students achieved this victory after a fierce struggle, which saw more than 400 people killed and numerous others injured or reported missing. The turn of events in the South Asian country brings back memories of Sri Lanka in 2022, or even the popular uprising that chased from office Ferdinand Marcos, the President of the Philippines, following 20 years of autocratic rule.

No bullets or batons could deter the students who simply marched on, ready to take on any challenge. When Sheikh Hasina called the army to defend her, it

dared not stand against the people. And her house of cards came tumbling down.

Two turning points

The first significant turning point in the history of independent Bangladesh was the movement for democracy in 1990, against the military dictatorship. Between 1982 and 1990, military gangsters took control, a government characterised by killings, random imprisonments, bribery, and looting, along with the destruction of democracy and democratic principles. This led to millions of people taking to the streets to demand the return of civilian rule, removing them from power and allowing for the establishment of parliamentary democracy. The movement delegitimised military rule and the army's control of politics. Political parties agreed on the nation's democratic direction, although this was ultimately disregarded as events progressed. Both AL and BNP were prominent in these conflicts and greatly profited from them.

The 2013 movement, also called the Shahbag movement, is the second significant turning point. It called for the execution of war criminals. At first, AL backed the movement because it aligned with its goals. However, it later encountered challenges when the movement called for greater societal democratisation and an end to socioeconomic inequality. It attempted to control the movement but was unsuccessful. It then withdrew party members, intimidated the leaders, encouraged discord among them, and generally debilitated the struggle.

Shahbag protests by the Left persisted, but their small scale and minimal influence in national politics caused the movement to lose momentum by 2014. This resulted in a missed opportunity for democratisation and addressing socioeconomic injustices through grassroots efforts. In the end, the movement was crushed.

AL then moved forward to dismantle its political rival, the BNP. For AL,



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although Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamic organisations were factors as well, the BNP was its primary electoral opponent. And AL leaders were starting to see that discontent and disagreement with their misrule could help the BNP at the polls.

The crackdown on the opposition

Random arrests of BNP leaders led to charges being filed against them. As a result, the BNP withdrew from the 2014 elections, citing unfair conditions. It demanded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation to make way for a "non-party" and "impartial" chief executive to oversee the polls. This handed power to AL on a platter, with 153 candidates out of 300 elected uncontested. This election and its aftermath marked the beginning of a profound democratic deficit, setting the path for the current degeneration.

Since then, a conscious and consistent dismantling of the BNP has taken place, blocking its political activities across the country. Thousands of court cases were filed against the leaders and active members of the party, ranging from corruption to murder charges. It has never been able to recover. In addition, after 2014 they resorted to violence, giving AL a golden chance to target them. Khaleda Zia, the two-time Prime Minister, was sent to jail in February 2018 on charges of corruption. BNP's fortunes sank further.

Meanwhile, the Left, which was engaged with popular movements, was also harassed and repressed. The leadership of the movement to stop the development of the Rampal power station was charged with false cases and physically intimidated. Workers' movements met a similar fate.

By the end of 2018, the AL was in perfect control of the bureaucracy and the judiciary. Even the army, traditionally seen as a big backer of BNP, was bought over.

The results of the 2018 elections surpassed even the most optimistic AL expectations. It won 288 of the 299 seats in the country's parliament. The period between 2018 and 2023 established AL as the ultimate arbiter of Bangladesh's politics and society. The January 2024 elections were a sham, with the entire opposition absent from the electoral arena. This pushed the resistance into the extra-parliamentary arena. With Hasina's exit, her party will find it almost impossible to maintain its hegemony in the nation's politics.



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Awami League's rightward march

With the BNP's decline, Islamic forces openly participated in the electoral arena as active organisations. And AL compromised with its historic secular credentials and built a tacit alliance with Hefazat-e-Islam, a radical Islamic outfit that was responsible for attacks on, and murder of, secular bloggers. The AL regime also granted concessions to Islamic forces.

Bangladesh's struggle with democracy has been tragic since the birth of the nation. Popular movements have time and again contested autocratic structures, only to find the fruits of their labour devoured by a new autocrat. Sheikh Hasina and her entourage are the latest incarnation. Are they going to be the last?

The interim government

Three days passed with no government after Hasina left Bangladesh. Then, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning economist Muhammad Yunus was sworn in as the head of Bangladesh's interim government. Officially called the Chief Advisor, Yunus will lead a 17-member team consisting of retired bureaucrats and military officers, NGO personalities, advocates, academics, and others. It also includes a couple of student leaders who led the rebellion. The diversity, including multi-religious and multi-ethnic, looks impressive, even though it doesn't include any representatives of the workers and masses. Can it break the current impasse and pave the way for a democratisation of the country? Can it fulfill popular aspirations? Only time will tell!

For Yunus, this is his first success in politics, after earlier unsuccessful attempts. While there's huge expectation around him, his role as the apex financial predator should be kept in mind. Far from being a panacea for fighting rural poverty, his ill-fated [micro-credit scheme](#) imposed additional burdens on the rural

poor, including severe indebtedness. Meanwhile, his advocacy of extreme forms of neoliberalism made him a darling of western governments and the World Bank.

The composition of the interim government is evidence of how a steady erosion of democratic institutions in Bangladesh has created a deep hatred for existing political parties. The same goes for the army. Hence the support for Yunus, a personality apparently perceived as someone rising above partisan politics, and able to lead the nation towards development. The fact that he was harassed by Hasina attracted sympathy for him.

Economic decline

Bangladesh, a poster-boy of neoliberal reforms, has recently experienced economic difficulties. The country was severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, as were Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Its GDP growth is now forecast to fall below 6% this year and next. Previously, the country had enjoyed steady growth of 6-8%. The value of the currency, the *taka*, has plummeted against the US dollar, foreign debt repayment is rising due to loans for Bangladesh's many iconic megaprojects, and some sectors of the banking sector look unstable.

How will Mr. Yunus resolve this crisis? A fervent supporter of market fundamentalism and neoliberal capitalism, he will resort to the IMF for a bailout, with the full knowledge that severe austerity measures will be the price. Commentaries on the current political unrest have focused on the tyranny of Sheikh Hasina's government. But they have either completely ignored, or largely downplayed, the deterioration of the key economic indicators leading to the crisis.

If it was the quota system that triggered the rebellion, the underlying causes are linked to deeper political and

economic problems. Bangladesh faces chronic unemployment, with 40% of people aged between 15 and 24 out of work and out of school.

Can the country's economy continue to grow if it maintains its strong focus on garment manufacturing, exploiting an abundant workforce, and low wages? Especially given that the impending IMF austerity measures will recreate harsher conditions once again, forcing people out into the streets after this immediate euphoria.

The two principal political forces in the arena, BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, are anxiously looking at early elections to lay their hands on power. The latter appears to be very strongly organised, with active networks across the country, and will certainly not let this chance pass.

The way forward

The July uprising was successful, with the participation of a myriad social forces. Just like any other struggle against autocratic regimes, the popular aspirations were for liberty and freedom, but were largely expressed in vague and abstract terms. It was not a movement guided by sharp ideological positions. The students protested for reforms, but state repression ignited a mass uprising, involving wide swathes of the Bangladeshi working and middle classes. The students have won the trust of the people and will have to chart a way forward.

The fate of the July events will lead to a positive outcome if workers are able to assume a leading role. Overcoming communal, ethnic and other divisions, the working class, other working people, oppressed groups and their allies must fight to gain a seat at the table, and also to win real gains in wages, working conditions and social protection. They have to win the fight for climate justice, as Bangladesh is immensely vulnerable to the impact of climate change. One thing is for sure: even with the best possible parliamentary transition, neither the caretaker government nor any future governments will be able to resolve any of the challenges without a massive push-back against capitalism itself.

Gaining ground on democratic rights, socioeconomic justice, and climate justice will require the full weight of the organised working class, because the forces of capital will pull in the opposite direction. Students began the revolution; working people will have to make sure it succeeds. Herein lies the biggest challenge for the Left in Bangladesh.

Whither the Left?

The organised Left is extremely weak. Two major parties, the Bangladesh Workers' Party and a faction of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JASAD), were part of the Hasina government and are complicit in its crimes. It's true that other left-wing organisations, including the Communist Party of Bangladesh, were on the streets, resulting in a few of their members being killed and many others injured. But their weight in Bangladeshi politics is extremely small. Once a powerful force, the Left is now a shadow of its former self.



The Nobel Peace Prize-winning economist Muhammad Yunus was sworn in as the head of Bangladesh's interim government. A fervent supporter of market fundamentalism and neoliberal capitalism, he will resort to the IMF for a bailout, with the full knowledge that severe austerity measures will be the price.

It's hard to imagine that in fact the Left played a key role in the language movement of 1952 and the mass uprising of 1969. At the time, it also had an unrivaled influence on peasant and worker mobilisations. However, its influence waned after the 1960s, partly as a result of the Sino-Soviet conflict, which led to divisions between supporters of Moscow and Peking. While Chinese influence forced part of the population to actively oppose the war of liberation, Soviet influence led others to blindly follow Bangladesh's first president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his authoritarian policies. Groups opposing the authoritarian regime were constantly

persecuted. Thousands of left-wing workers were killed, and organisational spaces such as trade unions and student associations became sites of violent attacks, a trend that continued under military rule.

Historically, the Bangladeshi Left has depended on external support from Moscow or Beijing. Instead of creating independent organisations and unifying with other sections of the Left in the 1980s, they put their strength and efforts at the service of the Awami League (led by Sheikh Hasina) or the BNP (led by Khaleda Zia), prioritising their agendas over those of the Left itself.

In fact, throughout Bangladesh's history, leaders – from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Ziaur Rahman, H. M. Ershad, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina – have been able to secure the unconditional support of one left-wing party or another. At present, the former Left is probably larger than the active Left. The largest part is trapped in parliamentary

cretinism, while other smaller organisations are more NGOs than political organisations.

In this process, questions of capitalist exploitation, or issues such as gender or ethnic discrimination, are conveniently forgotten. The only positive thing to be said about the Left is that it has remained steadfastly opposed to any form of religious fundamentalism or sectarian violence. Today, Bangladesh needs a strong new anti-capitalist Left, whose vision of socialism goes beyond the bureaucratic 'actually existing socialisms' of the

20th century. A new Left that has the capacity to take on issues like the current democratic crisis, the emergence of reactionary forces, the rise in state violence, the expanding inequality, and the climate crisis and capitalism. The Left must reinvent itself, reorganise and unify against all forms of bourgeois domination. An essential condition for this would be to build an independent identity and a clear, determined vision, combined with creative politics. The new Left is more necessary today than ever.

Sushovan Dhar is a political activist and commentator.

CRISES IN FRANCE

By Pierre Rousset

Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right Rassemblement Nationale. Now, the choice of a prime minister depends on the goodwill of the far right!

ON 9 JUNE, EMMANUELLE MACRON unexpectedly decided to dissolve the National Assembly, just as the Rassemblement Nationale (far-right National Rally party of Marine Le Pen) was gaining momentum. Three weeks later, the results of the first round of voting were unequivocal: the parties of the presidential bloc were crushed, and in the second round the National Rally could hope to win an absolute majority of seats in Parliament, or at least be the largest party. (The French electoral system uses two rounds of voting. If no candidate gets an absolute majority in the first round, the names of the top candidates go to a second round. The one with the most votes in the second round wins).

These hopes were dashed. After the second round, the far right ended up in third place, behind the Nouveau Front populaire (the New People's Front formed by parties of the broad Left) and the presidential party.

The electorate wanted neither Macronism nor the National Rally in the corridors of power. Today, thanks to Macron, it has both. It took him eight weeks to choose a prime minister: Michel Barnier, a member of Les Républicains party, which won only 5% of the vote. He had previously negotiated this appointment with Marine Le Pen, to ensure that she would not immediately table a vote of no confidence against him. Madame agreed... conditionally.

Now, the choice of a prime minister depends on the goodwill of the far right!

Government and parliamentary crisis

The new parliament (577 MPs) is even more fragmented than the previous one:

- **The New People's Front (NFP)** came first, by a slim margin, with approximately 193 seats. It includes four main parties: the Greens, La France Insoumise (LFI), the Communist Party (PCF), and the Socialist Party (PS), and allies. But it was also supported by a vast mobilisation of trade unions and associations. By convention, the president first asks the largest group to present a candidate for Prime Minister. Macron could easily have respected this, betting that an NFP government would be brought down by a vote of no confidence. But he preferred instead to send a political message: the NFP's questioning of Macron's neoliberal measures was out of the question.
- **The 'presidential camp'** got 168 seats, down from its previous 250. This "presidential majority" suffered an electoral disaster. With the next presidential election on the horizon, disunity and rival ambitions are becoming the norm (Macron cannot stand for a third term).

- **Les Républicains**, the former governing party of the traditional right, is now only the fifth largest party (43 seats). Some members left to the National Rally. Now that the prime minister, chosen by Macron (and tolerated by the National Rally), belongs to their party, they are demanding full implementation of their programme! But Michel Barnier, as prime minister, will have to work with Macron's party and assert some independence from Les Républicains.
- **The National Rally**, with 143 seats, had a mixed result. Although far from what it had hoped, it almost doubled its number of MPs. This doubles its financial resources, as well as various parliamentary privileges.

No stable majority is in sight; new legislative elections cannot be held before June 2025.

Democratic crisis: marching towards a new authoritarianism

The constitution of the Fifth Republic is one of the most undemocratic in Western Europe. But this is not enough for Macron and the proponents of neoliberalism. The previous (minority) government had already distorted and abused an article of the Constitution (49.3) which allows a law to be passed without a vote, to legislate

pension reform. This was rejected by 90% of active workers, by all unions, and by parliament. Millions of people took to the streets to oppose it. But the government remained inflexible, hoping to crush the will to resist.

This denial of democracy has become natural, a given, for a whole 'social elite' that has taken it upon itself to ensure the direct domination of capital over society. It is dismantling the social gains achieved in the aftermath of World War II and after May 1968. It is transferring all profitable activities to the private sector, while leaving the unprofitable ones to the public sector. And it is marginalising "intermediary bodies" (trade unions...), sites of counter-power—and more. France's surveillance society is one of the most developed in Western Europe. The powers of the security services have been reinforced. The police are militarised. The army is playing an increasing role inside the country. A shadowy centre of governance has been established. The environmental movement has been criminalised. The influence of dominant ideology is growing. Civil, social, and environmental rights are being curtailed. A preventive civil war apparatus is being put in place.

The regime crisis

The constitution was designed to protect those in power from any social or political disruption. It provides the framework for the hyper-presidential system driven by Emmanuel Macron. In the process, he is breaking the balance that has allowed this regime to endure: between the presidency and parliament, between the state and capital, between repression and reform... Convention dictated that, if millions of people protested, parliament, even a Gaullist one, would give something in return. That understanding is now over.

We are changing regimes. Macron has embarked on what many analysts call a "conservative revolution", but in a chaotic manner. The National Rally fits into the same dynamic: the "confrontation-cooperation" combination we are witnessing is not accidental.

A new opportunity for the Left?

The formation of the NFP, and the unexpected success of its electoral campaign, have rekindled hope. But we know that this is only a reprieve. The rise of the National Rally continues, and the dynamic of popular mobilisation remains fragile, but the time gained can be put to good use. After the summer holidays and the Olympic Games, the autumn began with demonstrations in France, on 7 September, against Barnier's appointment (around 30,000 in Paris, mostly young militants). More are expected.

The unity in the NFP has been maintained, though not without crises and disputes that demoralised grassroots activists in June and again in September, with a violent polemic between François Ruffin, who left the LFI, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's staff. Such posturing is unwelcome. Unity is a struggle, but how it is pursued matters.

The initial success of the NFP was due, in part, to four factors: the state of emergency caused by the National Rally threat; the Left's history of unity; decisive pressure from mobilisation of trade unions and popular organisations in favour of political unity; and the fact that the dissolution of parliament meant that there was little contestation over constituencies.

The political spectrum in the NFP was broad. All non-sectarian components of the far Left were able to join and

campaign. On the right flank, former President François Hollande invited himself into the elections, and was elected under the NFP banner.

The Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Greens had all suffered resounding electoral defeats, although they have regained some momentum by displaying a 'left' profile. Conversely, LFI's image was tarnished when its leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, excluded several outgoing MPs who had shown too much independence. Despite this, five of them were re-elected under the NFP banner, against Mélenchonist candidates. The purge was deeply resented in left-wing activist circles, and the defeat sounded a warning for Mélenchon.

Several well-known LFI MPs have denounced the lack of democracy in LFI, which continues to face internal criticism on this issue. The movement has managed to build an electoral base in popular neighbourhoods and suburbs by bringing abstentionists (often Muslims) to the polls. It has consistently advocated a programme of breaking with the neoliberal order (while prioritising state geopolitics internationally). It has been built as an electoral machine, with the presidential election as its permanent horizon. It is a 'fluid' movement, without formal membership lists or internal rules.

A limit may have been reached. Can LFI expand its territorial base without enriching its political discourse and organisational framework? Can it advocate democracy in society while failing to implement it within itself? Can it oppose violence against women, but too easily cover it up internally? What happens to LFI is of concern to all components of the Left.

The current conditions favour the unity of the NFP. This will be determined in the coming weeks. Will the proliferation of local committees allow it to integrate all the available grassroots forces?

A new generation of young people is stepping onto the scene, bringing with them commitments to solidarity (with Palestinians, migrants, and people facing racism). Social precariousness and the impact of the climate-ecological crisis provide fertile ground for multiple forms of resistance. Everything must be done to encourage their convergence. But to achieve this, the Left must break with its presidential obsession. A real cultural revolution is needed.

Pierre Rousset is a member of the leadership of the Fourth International and a member of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (New Anticapitalist Party) in France.



The formation of the NFP, and the unexpected success of its electoral campaign, have rekindled hope. But we know that this is only a reprieve. The rise of the National Rally continues, and the dynamic of popular mobilisation remains fragile.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS SPARKS NATIONWIDE PROTEST IN NIGERIA

By **Baba Aye**

FOR THE FIRST TEN DAYS OF August, tens of thousands of people trooped out onto the streets across Nigeria in nationwide #EndBadGovernance protests against hardship and hunger. Demonstrations were held in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, as well as in 29 of the 36 states of the federation. In all the seven states where there were no protests on the streets, residents joined the nationwide protest by sitting at home, as was the case in Enugu.

According to the organised private sector, the Nigerian economy lost N500bn (\$305m) to the massquake on the first day alone.

At least 13 people were killed that day by security forces, who confronted protesters in some states with live bullets, according to Amnesty International. And by 3 August, the death toll, according to the Nigeria Labour Congress, might have risen to over 40. More than 1,200 people have been arrested.

But all of these failed to douse the mass anger which drove the protests. There were calls for the president to speak to the people, although the

organisers stressed that they were more concerned with their demands being met. Eventually, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu addressed the nation on Sunday 4th. Not surprisingly, his speech was high on self-praise, but low on any serious content about how the hardship of people would be ameliorated, beyond empty promises that these hard times would lead to greater prosperity in an undefined future. In the course of his speech, he pointed to “a few with a clear political agenda to tear this nation apart”, with a barely veiled threat to “ensure public order”. At the same time, he urged those protesters “who desired a better and more progressive country” to call off the protests and embrace dialogue.

Some reformists in the ranks of protesters, as well as some that are clearly fifth columnists, echoed this call. Indeed some, including a few ex-leftists, had asked the protesters to leave the streets after the first two days, saying their point had been made, and, with violence in a number of states, there was no need to continue at the barricades.

But in Lagos, Abuja and across the country, the spirit of resistances

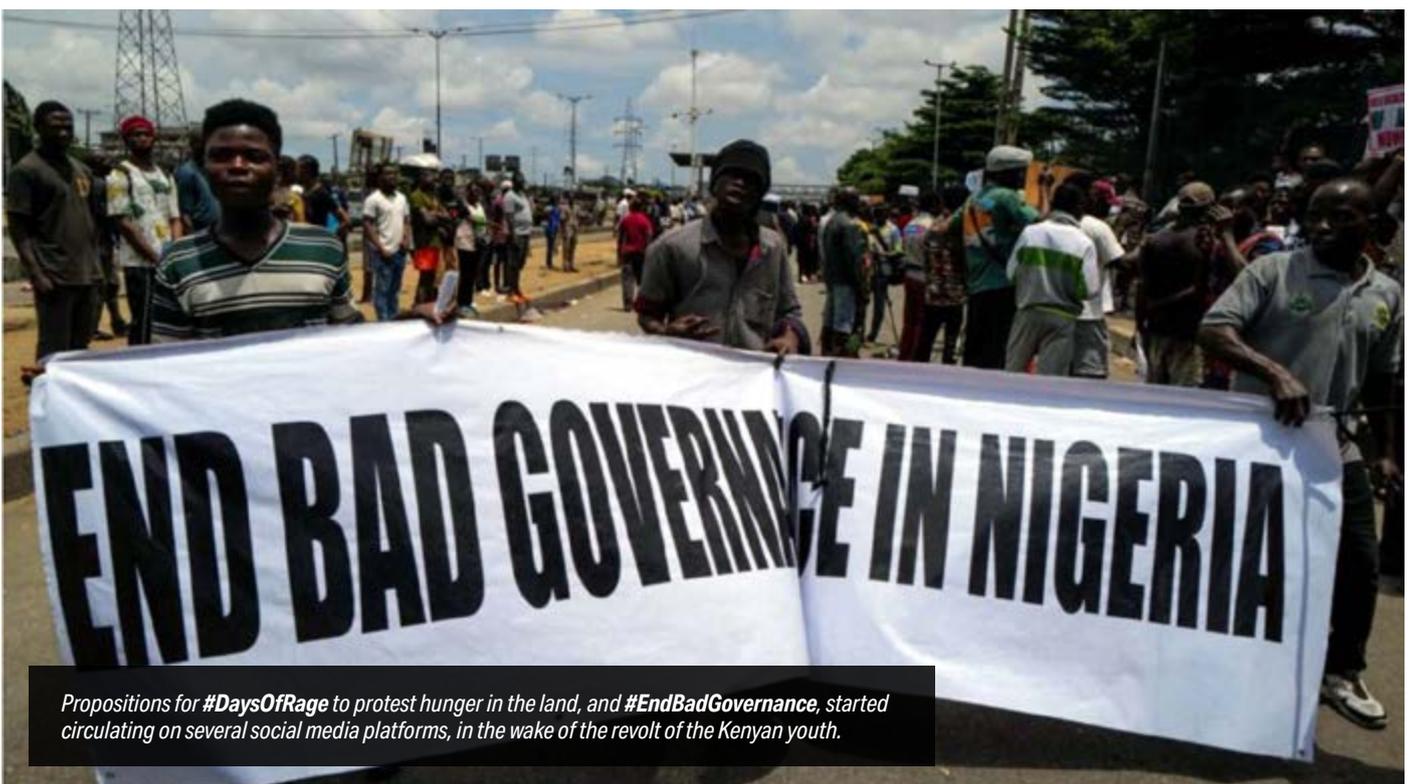
remained unbowed, despite increased attacks by the police and thugs aligned with the ruling party.

The road to #DaysOfRage

The main drivers of this national protest were excruciating hardship and pangs of hunger, as a result of the economic policies of the current government. It has been the most thorough-going in implementing neoliberal policies. President Tinubu even declared that he deserved Guinness World Records recognition for economic reforms.

During his inauguration on 29 May 2023, he simply announced that the “petrol subsidy is gone”. This resulted in an immediate 240% increase in the fuel pump price. The currency also lost 70% of its value against the dollar. An electricity tariff hike of upwards of 300% has devastated homes, businesses, schools and hospitals.

Consumer price inflation, which had averaged 13% between 2002 and 2022, now stands at 34%. Millions can barely feed themselves, pay their rents, or afford healthcare, in a country where over 76%



Propositions for #DaysOfRage to protest hunger in the land, and #EndBadGovernance, started circulating on several social media platforms, in the wake of the revolt of the Kenyan youth.

of health expenditure is out-of-pocket. People now die from easily treatable ailments.

Meanwhile, the working class demand for a living wage as the new national minimum wage was treated with contempt. After much ado about nothing, organised labour settled for an increase from N30,000 to N70,000. When N30,000 was agreed upon in 2019, its value was \$83.50. But the new minimum wage of N70,000 is worth just \$46.35. Working people in the informal economy are in an even more terrible state. There is hardly anywhere to turn to for credit. And other working people can hardly find money to buy from them.

The generalised state of hardship and hunger of working people in the country was a recipe for rebellion.

The first wave burst out spontaneously at the beginning of February, in the North Central state of Niger, and Kano in the North West. Within two weeks it had spread, including to other geopolitical zones, in both the Northern and Southern parts of the country. The Nigeria Labour Congress's declaration of 27-28 February as nationwide workers protest days further generalised the momentum, even though the unions mellowed after only the first day. The wave continued into March, in an atmosphere of an impending general strike, which the trade unions had created but failed to live up to. This first wave petered out. The August #DaysOfRage is the second Act of this unfolding moment.

Propositions for #DaysOfRage to protest hunger in the land, and #EndBadGovernance, started circulating on several social media platforms, in the wake of the revolt of the Kenyan youth. It was initially inchoate. The Take It Back movement, which was part of this discursive emergence online, stepped in, with Omoyele Sowore, its National Convener, conducting an online poll to distil out a shared set of demands. As calls for the action became sharpened, and the set date of 1-10 August drew closer, liberal reformists, as well as the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress, made it clear that they were not going to be part of the protests. However, they urged the government to respect

the protesters' freedom of association and expression. Meanwhile, groups on the Left, with little if any traction in the emergent movement, laid claim to being its 'leaders'.

For its part, the Nigerian state brought out its whole bag of tricks to prevent the mass action from taking place. Several state officials issued threats that the government would smash any attempted protests. Pastors, bishops, imams, traditional rulers, academics and a host of such 'well-respected' people were brought in to echo the ruling class positions: the protests would lead to chaos, protests have never achieved anything, fifth columnists would hijack the protests even if they started as peaceful demonstrations, etc.

The nefarious ethnic card was also



"We rather die of bullets than to die of hunger; we cannot stay at home and die of hunger".

shamelessly played, particularly in Lagos state, the metropolitan heart of Nigeria, a few days before the kickoff date of the #DaysOfRage, Lagospedia, an X account with over 41,000 followers which claims to proclaim the virtues of Lagos, launched a #IgboMustGo campaign.

All these did not work. The mood of a huge movement on the horizon was palpable. The state and its minions changed tactics. They started trending fake news that the protest had been postponed to 1 October, the Flag Independence Day. There were swift rebuttals.

The final card of reaction was an attempt to tame it. A series of court orders on the eve of the protest limited demonstrations to designated venues, where the state envisaged it would curtail disruption of public activities. There were shows of strength from the security forces in several major cities. And by the

dawn of 1 August, they were strategically positioned in every state capital, to nip the protests in the bud, or at least kettle them into insignificance.

Dynamics, trajectories and prospects

There were peculiar dynamics to the demonstrations in different regions, as well as different states in the same regions. These partly reflect the nature of the social forces and the elements of difference in the histories of their repertoires of resistance. A lot has been said about the protests degenerating into violence, including by President Tinubu. Even Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa, who had stepped in as solicitor (attorney) for the organisers of the protest a

few days earlier, issued an appeal to the protesters on 2 August to "withdraw themselves from the protest grounds" and "suspend the protests immediately and indefinitely", because "the protests were said to have been hijacked with sponsored agents".

What these sorts of appeals failed to appreciate is not only the diverse nature of violence, but that the only consistent form, across virtually all states, was that unleashed by the state and its sponsored agents. In some instances, the police

worked hand in hand with thugs to attack rallies. In most cases, where the thugs acted alone, in the first few days they were repulsed by the large numbers of demonstrators. Where the police acted alone, they were bolder, firing tear gas, and even live bullets, resulting in fatal casualties. Violence was also unleashed by protesters in several Northern states, especially in response to police violence. A tragicomic case was that of a policeman who was killed by his colleague while firing at protesters in the North Western state of Katsina.

Once the genie of violence was let out of the bottle, burning and looting ensued. The state governments stepped in to protect property and reinstate order. Katsina state government declared a 24-hour curfew in Dutsinma local municipality, and a 12-hour curfew in all other areas in the state. Five other states, spread across the three geopolitical zones

Causes of protests not going away

The ongoing nationwide protest is the third massive protest movement in 21st century Nigeria, after the 2012 #OccupyNigeria uprising and the 2020 #EndSARS rebellion. But, while 2012 and 2020 started as largely spontaneous, popular responses with no set time, these #DaysOfRage started with clearly defined commencement and end dates. Within the “structurelessness” and “leaderful” “leaderlessness” that defined #EndSARS and most of the unfolding autonomist-inspired social movements since #OccupyWallStreet, a sense of organisation is emerging. This is largely possible because of the role of a nationwide radical, non-sectarian Left platform, the Take It Back movement, which was equally central in cohering the demands and mobilisation of the #EndSARS movement.

Organised labour might also be losing its relevance as the social force representative of the working class. What happened on Day 1 and Day 2 was effectively a general strike. But it would be crucial for the emergent movement to be able to go beyond passive involvement of rank-and-file workers to active engagement, in building working people’s power.

It is also significant that this protest’s demands started where the #EndSARS demands ended, before it was drowned in blood; #EndBadGovernance. Fostering understanding of the need for system change and revolutionary democracy from below, rooted in working people’s power, to “end bad governance”, is of utmost importance for the Left’s political work in the unfolding period. This would, amongst other things, help dispel the illusions in Putin, Russia and military vanguardism of any sort.

Most important in these days of protest is the soil it has ploughed for the seeds of a storm, which is likely to come quite soon.

As the protest organisers pointed out when the state was finding people to hold responsible as mobilisers for the protest, the key mobilisers are hunger and generalised hardship in the land. And there is no sign that any of these are going away soon.

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The only consistent form of violence, across virtually all states, was that unleashed by the state and its sponsored agents.

in the North, also put curfews in place. Organisers of the protests were arrested in their homes over the weekend, and police launched house-to-house searches to recover “looted properties”.

In the North East and North Central states affected, protesters defied the curfews, after a few days of compliance. On 3 August, protesters took to the streets again in Kano, the second largest city after Lagos. One of the protesters is reported to have said “we rather die of bullets than to die of hunger; we cannot stay at home and die of hunger”. Interestingly, several protesters in Kano marched with the Russian flag raised high. A similar situation played itself out in Katsina two days later, even though Russia has dissociated itself from this. Protesters were not only waving the Russian flag in these states, they were also calling for a military takeover to save the poor masses. This is what they assumed is the situation in the Sahelian states, particularly Niger, with which they share history, culture and even kith and kin.

Violence in the southern states was largely one-sided; from the police and thugs. But this was not wholly so. In Delta state, a policeman shot and injured a protester on 2 August. The hitherto peaceful protest became violent. Youths and market women sought to lynch the local government chair, who luckily escaped unhurt.

In Lagos, the epicentre was around the Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park at Ojota, a major entry point into the state, with thousands of protesters coming from different parts of the state each day. It was designated as the place for the protest by the state, with a catch; protesters were to go into the gated park. They resisted, and the police were forced to concede. There were other rallying points such as in front of the Lagos State House of Assembly at Alausa. But none drew the kind of crowd that was at Ojota.

The enthusiasm of protesters there was palpable. On Friday, the barricade coordinators suggested a weekend break; there was a loud shout of no, in response. The following day, there were up to 5,000 people at the rally ground. It was, however, agreed to have it low-key on Sunday. In the wake of President Tinubu’s speech on Sunday, fifth columnists tried to use the opportunity of the planned low turnout, and the absence of most of the comrades who had provided leadership there, to demobilise, claiming the protest had been called off. This deception, coupled with a much more massive anti-riot presence, resulted in declining numbers of protesters there on Monday. There were less than a thousand people, the least since the protest started.

The Reluctant President



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SOLIDARITY WITH THE WOMEN OF GAZA

As feminists and human rights defenders, we stand in solidarity with Palestinians—critically, with Palestinian women—who are on the front lines of the humanitarian response, resisting occupation, and tirelessly advocating for peace and justice. We call on feminists everywhere to join us in demanding a permanent ceasefire, an end to the occupation and for justice, freedom, and dignity for all Palestinian people.

Women and children are disproportionately affected by genocide, war and conflict. They face not only the direct impacts of violence, but also the compounded effects of patriarchal oppression. Their voices are often silenced, their suffering overlooked, and their rights systematically denied.

Our feminism is inclusive and intersectional. It demands an end to all forms of oppression and recognises that the struggle for Palestinian liberation is intrinsically linked to the global fight for human rights and equality everywhere. We are currently witnessing an erosion and undermining of international humanitarian law and human rights...

...At a time of such injustice, inaction is not an option. We will not be silent or stand idly by. We must amplify the voices of women's rights organisations, feminist activists and feminist-led organisations working in these communities to support their resistance, expertise and work protecting the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people. This action is critical in order to bring about a future where justice, freedom, rights and peace prevail for all. Ending genocide and atrocities is a feminist issue.

Feminist Humanitarian Network