

# Amandla!

South Africa's progressive magazine standing for social justice.

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## COP29 FAILED HUMANITY



***THE CLIMATE CRISIS &  
THE JUST TRANSITION***

# ELECTION



# 2024

# SOUTH AFRICA

## Countdown to Coalition

**Edited by Collette Schulz-Herzenberg & Roger Southall**

South Africa's general election of 2024 saw the African National Congress losing its majority at the national level for the first time since the arrival of democracy in 1994. To maintain its rule, President Cyril Ramaphosa led his party into a Government of National Unity (GNU) centered around a hitherto unlikely coalition with the opposition Democratic Alliance. *Election 2024, South Africa: Countdown to Coalition* presents the first comprehensive analysis of this historic process. It outlines the extensive social and economic crisis that preceded the election; provides detailed analyses of the election campaigns of the political parties; highlights the dramatic rise Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto we Sizwe Party; places the GNU against the recent experiences of coalition formation at provincial and local level; offers comprehensive summaries of voter participation and both the national and provincial results; and discusses prospects for the GNU's survival and its possible long-term consequences.

*Written in a highly accessible style, Election 2024, South Africa is an indispensable resource for all those wanting to understand South Africa's contemporary politics.*

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## THE PROBLEM IS **NOT** WITH 'FOREIGNERS'

**H**ERE WE GO AGAIN. SMOKE them out. Starve them out. They're only foreigners after all...although in fact many of the informal miners ('zama zamas') are actually South Africans. But wherever they come from, they are desperate people. To spend months down an abandoned mine to eke out a living, you would have to be desperate.

And their desperation all has the same fundamental cause, whether they come from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho or Klerksdorp. Economic policies whose purpose is to serve the elite while the mass of the people suffer.

But of course there has to be a narrative that accounts for that suffering. It used to be the 'legacy of apartheid' that was supposed to be why change is so slow. Now it is illegal immigrants and our porous borders.

There are two issues that have dominated the news in the past weeks—the 'zama zamas' in Stillfontein and the deaths of children from food poisoned by pesticides. Both are tragedies entirely of the government's own making. Yet both are tarred with the same brush—'makwerekwere'...foreigners. Taking our jobs. Poisoning our children. Terrorising our communities.

### 'Zama zamas'

The real story of zama zamas is much more tragic. It is a story of impoverished people, many former mineworkers, disposed of by capital because they are no longer needed. The only way they can think of supporting their families is to sell their labour in the parallel economy of informal mining. They are workers, not criminals, any more than the mineworkers slaughtered in Marikana were criminals, whatever Cyril Ramaphosa said.

Conditions of work for these workers are far worse even than those at Anglo or Sibanye-Stillwater. They have no rights, brutally exploited by gangsters who head up criminal syndicates, ultimately scavenging for those who control the global markets.

And of course, as is so often the case, there is a solution at hand. Legalise and regulate the industry. This is scarcely a revolutionary strategy. It is already implemented in so many other African countries—Angola, Chad, Eswatini,



*Volunteer rescuers at Stillfontein mine. The real story of zama zamas is tragic. It is a story of impoverished people, many former mineworkers, disposed of by capital because they are no longer needed. The only way they can think of supporting their families is to sell their labour in the parallel economy of informal mining.*

Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda. But here, in South Africa, with the biggest, most developed mining industry on the continent, artisanal mining remains illegal. And the government's 'strategy' is to brutally punish the informal mineworkers, not deal with the cause.

Meet violence created by the state with the violence of the state. So much for national liberation.

### The children killed

Of course, Cyril Ramaphosa is rather more sophisticated than his 'smoke them out' minister Ntshavenhi. When he finally got round to speaking to 'the nation' about the poisoning of the children, he was at pains not to blame foreigners. Instead, he made use of another narrative—the narrative of false promises.

So he admits that:

*One of the reasons that people use pesticides is to deal with rat infestation. The problem of rat infestation is due in part to poor waste management in several municipalities.*

But why are these municipalities so remiss? Where is his explanation for that? Are they lazy? Are they sleeping? Are they stupid? Because without a proper analysis, you are unlikely to come up

with a real solution. Which of course he doesn't. Instead, he promises that the state will do many things that it has shown itself, time and again, incapable of doing. And it is incapable precisely because of the policies of his government and of ANC governments since 1994.

### Killed by outsourcing failure

The waste management system has almost completely broken down in most parts of South Africa. Landfill sites are closed. Waste is piling up everywhere. Back in the day, there were municipal refuse departments. No contracts for friends and family. Now of course the 'service' is outsourced.

That outsourcing bears a heavy responsibility for the deaths of the children. Creating jobs for the friends of the elite at the expense of the children of the poor and working class. That's a big price to pay to create a Black middle class.

And then there is the refusal of the government (in this liberalised world of theirs where they continually promise to 'free up' the economy) to regulate the pesticides. This problem was not unknown. In 2010, Hanna-Andrea Rother, Professor in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at UCT, published [a paper](#) in the International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health, in which she was very explicit. First the nature and cause of the problem:

*Highly-toxic pesticides, such as aldicarb...are easily available in informal markets in Cape Town's urban periphery. Demand and supply for street pesticides is driven by joblessness, poverty, and inadequate pest management strategies.*

And then the scale of the hazard:

*The aldicarb sachets sold on the streets of Cape Town ranged from 50–60 mg/kg sachets, giving these the potential of killing five to six children weighing 10 kgs or less. The inability of national and international legislation to protect children from exposure to this chemical constitutes a gross human rights violation.*

These words are eerily prophetic. 14 years have passed in which government has had the time and opportunity to regulate, and has failed.

## Killed by austerity

And then there are the government's budget cuts. Even the ANC Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Zweli Mkhize, said that the reduction of about R1.3 billion in COGTA's budget "will compromise the department's ability to support municipalities."

The vast majority of COGTA's budget goes to municipalities as grants. These grants are crucial, particularly for many of the poorest municipalities which have little or no other source of revenue.

And let's look at what the President expects these underfunded and poorly governed municipalities to do.

*Our local municipalities will be required to take urgent action to address the problem of rat infestations by cleaning cities and towns and removing waste.*

Apart from the irony of this President telling anybody else to "take urgent action", how will these dysfunctional, underfunded municipalities take urgent action? When have they ever taken urgent action? The first cholera cases in the Hammanskraal area were reported in February 2023. And the water supply is still not fixed. And of course the President spoke to us all at that time, in May 2023:

*The Department of Water and Sanitation has issued many directives to the City of Tshwane to address pollution from the Rooiwal Wastewater Treatment works. Regrettably, these directives were not acted upon.*

So, the solution this time? With the pesticide poisoning? Issue more directives, which also won't be acted upon.

What is the directive this time?

*Integrated multidisciplinary inspection teams will undertake compliance inspections of food handling facilities, manufacturers, distributors, wholesaler and retailers. This will include spaza shops and general dealers.*

## Where are the resources?

Let's look at only one aspect of this 'directive'—the health inspectors, or 'Environmental Health Practitioners', to give them their official title. South Africa has one-quarter of the number of health inspectors that the World Health Organisation says we should have.

Here we sit with 11.6 million people unemployed, and 1,712 health inspectors in the whole country. The [City of Tshwane](#) has 73 health inspectors, one for every 60,000 people. The correct ratio, [according to the minister](#), is 1 for every 10,000.

Even if their only job was to inspect spaza shops, these 73 would struggle. But in fact the job is far broader than that. It

includes:

- Food and safety hygiene in restaurants, food outlets, and food production facilities.
- Environmental health, including water and air quality and waste management.
- Workplace health and safety.
- Disease prevention and control.
- Housing and urban sanitation.
- Licencing and regulation of food vendors and businesses involved with hazardous materials.

Our honourable President expects these few health inspectors to inspect not only all spaza shops, but all food handling facilities from manufacturers to retailers. And not just once—regularly.

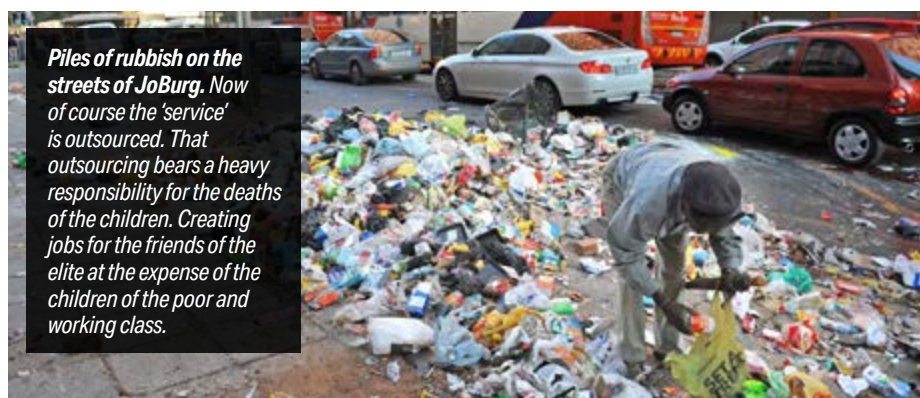
South Africans are so tired of these fantasy narratives which can only be carried out by non-existent resources. It's the same old story. Empty promises. Stories that bear no relation to reality. Remember the National Development Plan?

## Some real solutions

It is time to focus on solutions that address the root causes of these tragedies. The government must:

- **Regulate the pesticide industry:** ban all highly hazardous pesticides and enforce stringent controls on the production and sale of pesticides, holding manufacturers accountable for their distribution.
- **Strengthen food safety monitoring:** invest in health inspectors and provide resources to informal traders to comply with food safety standards, instead of shutting them down.
- **Insource all essential services:** restore municipal refuse departments.
- **End Austerity:** allocate adequate funding to municipalities to improve waste management, water provision, and pest control services.
- **Tackle unemployment:** introduce a universal basic income grant and implement a wealth tax to address the crisis of systemic poverty.
- **End trade liberalisation:** develop policies that protect local industries and create sustainable jobs, rather than flooding the market with cheap, imported goods.

The tragic deaths of the children and the suffering of informal mineworkers should unite South Africans in demanding systemic change rather than scapegoating vulnerable groups.



*Piles of rubbish on the streets of JoBurg. Now of course the 'service' is outsourced. That outsourcing bears a heavy responsibility for the deaths of the children. Creating jobs for the friends of the elite at the expense of the children of the poor and working class.*

## Presidential authorisation required for SIU investigations

How can this be? How can a presidential proclamation be required for the Special Investigating Unit to do its job? Aren't our law enforcement authorities supposed to be independent of political interference? Yet the 1996 *Special Investigating Units and Special Tribunals Act* requires the political interference of the President. And nobody blinks an eye. Nobody raises a query.

Last year, Oscar Mabusane was granted an interdict by the Bhisho High Court to stop the SIU from investigating the awarding of master's degrees at the university. His argument was that it went beyond the scope of the proclamation issued by Ramaphosa in August 2022. In the last days [we have learnt](#) that an investigation into corruption in the Gauteng Health Department had to wait 18 months for the president to approve an investigation by the SIU.

So the President is gatekeeper for SIU investigations. Given the state of corruption that the ANC has overseen over the last 30 years, is that really a good idea?

## Gaza bombardment destroys 70 years of development

More than a year has passed since the latest Zionist genocide started in Gaza. A [UN report](#) "estimates that Israel's relentless bombardment and siege of

the [Gaza Strip](#) has erased nearly seven decades of human development progress in just over a year, jeopardizing 'the future of Palestinians for generations to come'." And a horrific aspect of this genocide is that it has become almost normalised. The report describes a "graveyard for children" and a "vast wasteland of rubble and twisted steel." Palestinian people are dying of hunger. Healthcare and education facilities are destroyed—625,000 students "have no access to education"—and that's from a total population of 2 million at the beginning of the slaughter.

"Cholera, measles, polio, and meningococcal meningitis pose the greatest threats...Even if the war ended immediately, the time required to restore functioning health services would still result in thousands of excess deaths. Lack of access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities creates significant health risks for all, and can exacerbate the situation."

The world of mainstream media may have allowed the genocide to slip off the front pages. But as activists we must redouble our efforts to end it. And that means the South African government 'putting its money where its mouth is', almost literally.

Ban the sales of South African coal that fuel the genocide. Ban the sale of South African diamonds that help to fund it. Words at the International Court of Justice and the United Nations are not enough.

## The cost of wealthy tax dodges

The [Tax Justice Network](#) has recently published a [study](#) which finds that "the combined costs of cross-border tax

abuse by multinational companies and by individuals with undeclared assets offshore stands at an estimated \$492 billion." That's about R9.3 trillion. Four times the amount of the entire South African national budget. And the majority is corporate tax dodging.

Not only are these corporates dodging taxes. They are being protected by their host countries. The attempt to establish a UN tax convention is inadequate. But inadequate as it is, it is still opposed by some of the world's largest economies: the US (of course), Canada, UK, Japan, Israel (again, of course), South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. And that's not surprising. The study estimates that companies belonging in those eight countries are responsible for about half the \$492 billion.

And the future doesn't look better. Trump is pledged to reduce the US tax rate on corporations from 21% to 15%. That will almost certainly trigger a 'race to the bottom' as other economies follow suit. In effect, this is another form of privatisation. Wealth which should fund public services remains in private hands. It is clear who the governments of those eight countries rule on behalf of. And it's not the majority.

## The famous sofa is back

The arguments flew back and forth in the Constitutional Court, but one thing was clear. The Phala Phala sofa has not gone away. Justice Owen Rogers cut to the bottom line: "The first thing anyone who received R8.7 million wants to do is to make sure it goes into their money market account. I'm now speaking as a matter of common sense; you don't leave that money either in a safe or under a sofa."



*The arguments flew back and forth in the Constitutional Court, but one thing was clear. The Phala Phala sofa has not gone away.*



*Do the defections herald the end for the EFF, sunk by the commandism that has been such a feature of its structure and ideology? Might that open a path for a broad Left party to emerge?*

For someone who claims to want to clean up the ANC, the dirty laundry just won't go away.

## Heritage Day rally against xenophobia

Heritage Day has degenerated into National Braai Day. But fortunately not for everybody. Civil society activists from across Cape Town announced they were using the occasion to rally to support our common African heritage, “to acknowledge our shared history, confront the realities of the present, and envision a future rooted in African unity. Through music, art, and heritage, this gathering will serve as a rallying call to shape a new, collective solidarity against forces that seek to divide us.

“Heritage Day in South Africa is a day to honour our diversity and to celebrate what binds us in our ongoing pursuit of liberation and justice. True freedom can only be realised when we reject division and exploitation and instead come together as one people, united in resistance against the forces of oppression that dominate our world.

“We must remember that we are African. Our unity cannot be limited to fleeting moments like rugby matches or—more dangerously—xenophobic sentiments. To free the South African identity from its colonial legacy, we must proudly declare ourselves African and firmly reject the growing wave of Afrophobic rhetoric in our media and political discourse.”

Perhaps this should be the way forward for Heritage Day for all of us.

## The continued rise of finance capital

[A new book](#) looks at how asset managers are increasingly controlling “the assets that sustain human life, such as housing, energy, and transportation”. *Our Lives in Their Portfolios: How Asset Managers Own the World* explains “how this came about, what the implications are, and who the ultimate winners and losers might be”.

International pension plans invest in privatised utility companies, like Thames Water in the UK. Thames Water is infamous for borrowing huge sums to pay out dividends to its shareholders, including such pension funds. Meanwhile it has failed to invest in water infrastructure, resulting in huge levels of pollution in the waterways of South-eastern England.

Now, to add insult to injury, it is asking for massive tariff increases to do the maintenance work that it failed to do because it was paying out those dividends. And it claims it is running out of cash. Those same investors (including the pension funds, remember) are refusing to fund the company any longer. They’ve made their money. Now it’s time to look for more fertile pastures. Privatisation certainly works...for some.

## A shorter working week

During the Industrial Revolution in England, women and children worked 12 hour days, sometimes more. In 1817, social reformer Robert Owen popularised the slogan “Eight hours labour, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest” as a fair division of the day. The international commemoration of May Day as the day of workers started with a national strike in the US on May 1, 1886. The demand was a reduction in working hours.

So the number of hours workers are required to work has been an issue of class struggle throughout the history of the labour movement.

Now an agreement has been reached [in Iceland](#) between unions and employers to reduce the working week further, from 40 hours to 36 hours. This comes after a pilot study in which “workers reported higher well-being, lower stress, and better work-life balance”. And at the same time Iceland’s economy grew at 5%, the second highest rate of growth in Europe.

In addition, in a country like South Africa, with massive unemployment, a shorter working week (with no loss of pay) could be a way to make a dent in that unemployment. Of course, as history has shown, such changes only come as a result of struggle.

## Are we any nearer to a party of the Left?

We get to the end of a year that has brought about the dramatic decline of what were two of the three biggest political parties in South Africa and the flat-lining of the third. First the ANC’s massive drop in the election. Then the spate of defections from the EFF to MKP. It leaves us struggling to see the future of South Africa politics. Does it herald the end for the EFF, sunk by the commandism that has been such a feature of its structure and ideology? Might that open a path for a democratic broad Left party to emerge, or is it simply a consolidation of the Africanist authoritarianism of the MKP? One day, Cosatu leadership will be forced out of its opportunistic alliance with the ANC by its members. We can only hope that it will be soon.

# WHILE THE PLANET BURNS

## EXPOSING THE FAILURE OF THE COPs AND SEEDING GLIMMERS OF HOPE

*The devastating drought now affecting many countries in Southern Africa. Africa has seen some of the worst droughts, flooding, cyclones, and sea level rises, and this is bound to worsen as the climate deteriorates.*

By **Trusha Reddy**

**2**024 HAS SHOWN US FLAMES, literally in some parts of the world. It is turning out to be the hottest year on record, and we have already reached more than 1.5 degrees of global warming above pre-industrial levels. As we prepare to say farewell to 2024, we must pause to reflect on the state of our planet's climate emergency and our responses to it.

As we hurtle towards 3 degrees by the end of the century, we must recognise that Africa will be hardest hit. It is the continent that is heating up faster than any other. Africa has seen some of the worst droughts, flooding, cyclones, and sea level rises, and this is bound to worsen as the climate deteriorates. Some estimates put displacement and migration as a result of climate change at 86 million by 2100. Thousands are already living in a state of perpetual crisis after being bombarded with disasters, and this will surely go up to millions in a matter of years. Weak and poor governance exacerbates the problem, along with a massive debt burden and other intersecting crises such as poverty, and social and political instability. Tragically we also know that Africa has done least to cause the climate crisis yet faces the worst consequences.

Given this grim prospect in Africa alone, what are the responses to the crisis?

We immediately turn to the climate negotiations or COPs. As the official space where governments of the world come together to collectively develop solutions to climate change, this is theoretically where a unified response is developed. The science of climate change should also direct the actions taken and, given what scientists are saying, there is a need to act not just with seriousness but also with urgency. But after 29 years of COPs— with the last one concluding in Baku, Azerbaijan a couple of days ago—the agreements are severely lacking. In fact, it seems as though they are getting weaker. There appears to be less motivation than ever to rise to the challenge and deliver outcomes that are commensurate with the scale and intensity of the problem.

Let's break this down.

### Too little too late: defining key principles, and the birth of carbon trading

Firstly, the COPs started too late. Fossil fuel companies knew about climate change in the 1950s and 1960s but suppressed the information. Governments, under the United Nations, eventually came together in 1992 to form the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC), and the first COP was held in 1995. Since then,

emission reductions have been pegged at 1992 levels instead of when emissions first started escalating, from the time of the industrial revolution in the 1800s. But the important thing to mention here is that at least there was acknowledgement of climate change and some sort of collective will to deal with it.

The UNFCCC also led, at the time of its formation, with some founding principles. These were important guides on justice and equity, with a significant one to distinguish between developed and developing countries in their responsibilities for action.

These were however quickly undermined at the COP talks in Kyoto a few years later. There, targets for emission reductions were set, but the loophole of carbon trading was pushed through by the US. Described as a 'win-win' by developed countries and their corporations, carbon trading is a scheme where polluters can continue to pollute, provided that they 'offset' their emissions by developing 'green' projects in the developing world. In truth, carbon trading is the biggest racket out there. Dubious projects are often developed with no green credentials to speak of; people in the developing world have to shoulder the fallout, including getting their lands and resources grabbed for these projects; and polluters get to happily go on with business as usual.



Seeing the faulty logic and bad practice, there have been many efforts, mostly by civil society, to stymie the carbon markets from going full throttle. But years later, and at the Baku COP this year, carbon trading has been given fresh life, when new rules were put in place for it to continue. This will no doubt unleash more carbon trading and its worst ills, sabotaging effective responses to the crisis.

## The dim glow is snuffed out of climate reparations and securing a climate finance goal

The UNFCCC's guiding principles, referred to above, reflect a genuine acknowledgement that some countries (that is those in the developed world) have caused the climate crisis and are most responsible for fixing the mess. They also indicate that, in effect, climate reparations would need to be made (and paid) to developing countries for bearing the burden of the crisis. The 'payment' or financial assistance is generally referred to as climate finance, and it is to take the form of transfers to the developing countries to adapt and mitigate climate change.

In all these years there appear to have been some efforts towards providing this climate finance, by way of a variety of different funds that have been created. These include, most recently, the [Green Climate Fund](#) and the [Loss and Damage Fund](#). But developed countries are simply not coughing up the money to go into these funds. They are also pushing through dodgy governance mechanisms, like getting the World Bank and private sector to run these funds. And they are giving money as loans, which create debt, instead of as grants.

At this year's COP, dubbed the "Climate Finance COP" (which was actually anything but that), a paltry \$300 billion per year was agreed by developed countries as the goal. This was in response to the \$1.3 trillion asked for by developing countries. This has left many developing countries, and groups like the African Group of Negotiators and the Small Island Nation States, gutted by the outcome. They feel as though this was a missed opportunity to deliver real relief to their people.

## The fossil fuel elephant in the room and its dark shadow over the COP

Scientists have been clear that to bring emissions down to levels which would support human existence, we must end the long era of fossil fuels. That means

immediately stopping new projects from going ahead, and then a managed decline of existing infrastructure over the next few years. But despite this, the fossil fuel industry remains a major influence over the climate talks. Fossil fuel companies have historically been 'controlling' the information on climate change, then outright denying their culpability, and now taking over the COP space and

support transitions in developing ones. At COP26, South Africa secured one of these deals with Germany (and more broadly the EU), part of which was to produce green hydrogen which can be transported—via state-developed and -backed infrastructure—to Europe. This is but one such deal in a whole host of them, in which 'green' minerals and metals, hydrogen and gas are being



Every year sees a record number of fossil fuel lobbyists taking part in the talks, and the negotiations have been held in petrostates for the last two years.

influencing the text of the agreements. Every year sees a record number of fossil fuel lobbyists taking part in the talks, and the negotiations have been held in petrostates for the last two years. This year, the COP President gave a 'stellar' performance, denying that there is any science that backs up climate change, and language around fossil fuels was left out of the agreement. This happens at the same time as the presence of civil society and communities is reduced and their voices subdued.

## Sneaky side deals on the just transition meet injustice in Africa with the pursuit of green energy

Despite the march of the fossil fuel industry, there has been a growing global recognition that a just transition, particularly from fossil fuels, is necessary for humanity to survive the climate crisis. But the just transition has become a dimmer prospect in successive COPs. This year's COP doesn't even mention it.

What is happening, however, is that there are numerous side deals that are being brokered, called the JET-Ps or Just Energy Transition Partnerships. These are agreements between developed and developing countries which will secure resources from developed countries to

brokered. It is what has been called the new scramble for Africa.

In truth, this just mirrors the extractivism that has always been happening in Africa, but now with a distinctly greener tint. The green hydrogen projects, as with other green extractivism projects, will see people's land and resources siphoned away to make way for this new era of colonialism. And still, the transition is barely happening in the developed world. Most of the renewable energy being added to the grid is an 'add-on' rather than a switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

## Enter an African, feminist response that denounces the COPs and builds the climate justice movement

In the midst of the failure of the COPs to serve as a just, real and equitable way to deal with the climate crisis, a counter movement is emerging in Africa that denounces the COP and seeks to build the climate justice movement. The [Africa Climate Justice Collective](#) has been building for the past four years and has held four 'Counter COPs' and birthed a Women's Climate Assembly, which is into its third year this year.

At the recent [Women's Climate Assembly](#) women had this to say:

*"Through our march and this assembly, we have left our fingerprints, and it is clear what we want for our environment, our climate, our ecosystem, our livelihoods. During the COPs, we have seen how the agendas of the donor countries dominate. You cannot come and steal African resources, and at the same time help us to get climate justice. Once we see this, we can talk about false solutions. Where do false solutions come from? These are false projects put in place by countries with money from the Global North as yet another way to extract our resources to feed their companies and banks in Europe.*

*We have the Right to say NO! The Right to say NO is in the hands of women!" Khady, Senegal*

*"This is my third time attending the Women's Assembly and [at the same time] listening to what is happening at the UN Conference of Parties. The COP has failed and does not alleviate the crisis of climate change for us women in Africa. The COP MUST BE BOYCOTTED! THE COP MUST DIE!" Woman from Liberia*

*"Women did not cause the climate crisis and so the issues of the COP should be with the West. We are African women, and we can address our issues at the local level. We can hold our African COP." Woman from Senegal*

In these processes women are demanding that their voices are heard and are calling for action on a range of fronts. These are the voices of the people who are harmed by the climate crisis, yet who are silenced in the corridors of power and the official spaces. They also refuse to continue to face the brunt of so called 'climate actions' like carbon trading and the JET-Ps, which only bring them more misery and strife. They are developing real solutions from the ground up. And maybe, just maybe, this kind of action sparks a glimmer of hope that saves us all.

Trusha Reddy is Programme Manager at [WoMin African Alliance](#). She has over 20 years of experience in the fight for climate justice in Africa and the Global South.



*The Africa Climate Justice Collective has been building for the past four years and has held four 'Counter COPs' and birthed a Women's Climate Assembly, which is into its third year this year.*

*Vereeniging Power Station, completed in 1912. By the mid-20th century, state intervention was the basis for nationalisation efforts that transformed the patchwork system. Eskom, established in 1923, became a cornerstone of South Africa's industrial and economic development.*



# The coming crisis of neoliberal electricity reform in South Africa

By **Brian Kamanzi** and **Katrina Lehmann-Grube**

**C**ONTESTATION AMONG PRIVATE industry lobbies, factions within the state, university academics and some well-resourced civil society organisations dominates public discussion on South Africa's energy transition. Despite some well-meaning attempts, the tensions surrounding the Just Energy Transition (JET) have served as a smokescreen for advancing policies that restructure the electricity sector. The purpose is to enable greater participation of private capital ownership and operation of basic infrastructure. This shift appears to be framed as a move toward sustainable energy. In fact, it masks a deeper agenda: transforming electricity from a public good into a commodified, marketised system. This is an approach long championed by institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

If left unchallenged, the working class can expect painful consequences: rising electricity prices, reduced investment in basic infrastructure, and deepened socio-economic divisions. Wealthy residents, large commercial retailers, and heavy industry are already manoeuvring to insulate themselves from the fallout. This will leave low-income communities increasingly vulnerable.

## A history of reform

Electrification in South Africa initially emerged as a fragmented and localised

infrastructure. It was driven by private interests catering to industrial needs, such as mining and manufacturing in the north, as well as lighting, early telecommunications and pumped water schemes. The discovery of gold in the late 19th century and the resulting industrial boom increased demand for early electrification projects. But these efforts were limited in scope and highly unequal, favouring urban centres and white-owned enterprises.

By the mid-20th century, state intervention was the basis for nationalisation efforts that transformed this patchwork system. Eskom, established in 1923, became a cornerstone of South Africa's industrial and economic development. Operating as a state-owned monopoly, it harnessed economies of scale, streamlined operations through vertical integration, and benefited from state-backed financing mechanisms. This enabled it to deliver some of the cheapest electricity in the world. This drove industrialisation and extended grid access to previously excluded rural and urban areas. However, the expansion of electrification remained deeply racialised. This reflected broader, apartheid-era inequalities, with Black South Africans systematically excluded from its benefits.

After the end of apartheid, Eskom charted a new path. Through a massive public initiative, it was able to electrify millions of households previously excluded from the grid. This

demonstrated the potential of state-owned utilities to develop infrastructure which could make possible universal access to electricity, as a matter of public good.

The push toward liberalisation formally began with the 1998 [Energy White Paper](#). This laid the groundwork for restructuring Eskom. It called for the unbundling of generation and transmission, the increased inclusion of privately-owned generation, and the shift towards tariffs that reflected costs. At the time, Eskom was financially stable, reliably providing electricity, and spearheading electrification initiatives. Therefore, it has been acknowledged that the reforms were not driven by poor performance or financial distress. They were driven by the ideological commitment of a small group of people to align with global trends in electricity liberalisation.

By 2001, these proposals became policy. Eskom was prohibited from investing in new generation capacity (as it is now again), leaving future energy development to private players. Furthermore, the 2001 [Energy Conversion Act](#) corporatised Eskom. This transformed it from a public enterprise into a tax-paying, dividend-distributing public company. This marked a departure from Eskom's historic self-financing model, forcing it to rely on the National Treasury for funding.

The consequences of these reforms were soon evident. While privatisation efforts stalled, Eskom was left unable to build new capacity. By 2004, the utility warned of impending power shortages, which materialised as widespread load shedding by 2008. The government's eventual reversal of its prohibition on Eskom's investment in generation came too late. The Medupi and Kusile coal-fired plants were intended to address capacity deficits. But they were plagued by corruption, mismanagement, and technical failures, resulting in exorbitant costs and inefficiencies.

## The contested rise of renewable energy

The early 2010s and South Africa's hosting of COP17 (the global climate change conference) saw a wave of movement on climate change and renewable energy policy and activism.

Unions played a key role in this, leading the call for a transformative just transition. In 2011, Cosatu unveiled its flagship climate policy document. This laid out a vision for a transformative approach to climate change that prioritised equity, sustainability, and worker rights. This was followed in 2012 by a landmark resolution from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). This emphasised the critical need for social ownership within the emerging renewable energy sector. Numsa's resolution also underscored the necessity of systemic socio-economic restructuring to address the dual crises of inequality and climate change. It framed these efforts as integral to fulfilling South Africa's historical mandate of creating a just and egalitarian society.

Despite these efforts, the private route won out. In 2012, the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REI4P) was launched. This initiative introduced privately owned renewable energy projects. Eskom was to act as the single buyer, through long-term power purchase agreements. The programme was praised for the large investment and high selling prices aimed at stimulating local industry. However, it has failed to create the long-term,

decent jobs promised and effectively financialised electricity infrastructure. It has excluded local municipalities, and concentrated the benefits amongst multinational corporations, sidelining local manufacturing and labour.

In 2020, the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) in Cape Town, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) in New York, and the Transnational Institute (TNI) in Amsterdam, working closely with Numsa and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), produced a report, *Eskom Transformed*. This report challenged the liberalisation path for the sector. The report warned of a 'green Structural Adjustment Programme' where governments are encouraged to de-risk investments for private entities through public guarantees, subsidies, and partnerships. This ensures private profits, while public funds bear the risks. This approach mirrors past structural adjustment programmes implemented across the Global South since the 1980s, under the advice of the World Bank and the IMF. These have left a legacy of austerity policies, unaffordable electricity prices and a structural inability to address

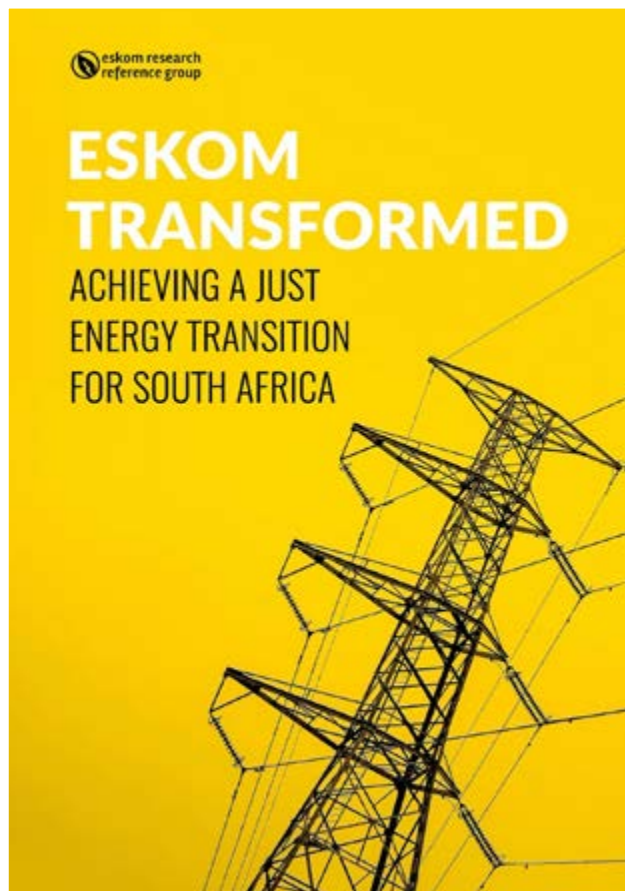
the scale of energy poverty, particularly in Africa.

As the performance of Eskom's generation fleet began to decay, most sharply from 2018-2023, the market reform process was accelerated, in the name of addressing loadshedding. Eskom was deemed incapable of driving the energy transition, while private capital was simply waiting to invest in public-private partnerships, if a stable and enabling policy environment could be established.

This period of reform has been marked by two key structural changes. First, the amendment to schedule 2 of the *Electricity Act* removed the licensing requirement for private generators. This enabled the uptake of private small-scale embedded generation projects (almost exclusively solar). This legislative change has seen a significant upscaling in investment in infrastructure by large commercial retailers and energy intensive users. The second includes the advancement of the process to unbundle Eskom into three separate divisions: generation, transmission and distribution. This process, which is fundamental to neoliberal power sector reform, is a precursor to the establishment of an electricity market. It signals a clear shift towards a strategy which expects private capital to play a driving role in new generation infrastructure investment.

From 2021, Europe and the US started to have a larger influence over the direction of our energy sector and the transition, through the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP). The JETP is a deal for \$11.6 billion in finance, largely in the form of loans. Through it, these countries have been able to select the projects they wish to see in South Africa's JETP process, and exert their own strategic interests.

Through these developments, unions and other progressive actors have tried to push for a genuine just transition process, outlining potential pathways to get there. Some recent examples include the [Cosatu Blueprint document](#), and public submissions to the Presidential Climate Commission critiquing the JET investment and implementation plans. There have also been challenges to the industrial policy debates on



*'Eskom Transformed'*, a report produced in 2020, warned of a 'green Structural Adjustment Programme' where governments are encouraged to de-risk investments for private entities through public guarantees, subsidies, and partnerships. This ensures private profits, while public funds bear the risks.

renewable energy technologies (see IEJ-Cosatu comments to the South African *Renewable Energy Master Plan*).

These initiatives represented significant milestones in aligning the labour movement with climate justice. However, they struggled to evolve into sustained, widespread campaigns driven from within their own ranks. Over time, many of their foundational ideas have been absorbed and diluted by mainstream climate policymakers. This has particularly been the case around democratic control and social ownership, and even the concept of a just transition itself. Stripped of their radical potential, these ideas have been put into bed with neoliberal, market-based reforms, acting in the name of the climate emergency.

## The challenges ahead

The energy landscape is marked by a series of interrelated challenges. These threaten the realisation of universal access to electricity as a public good, and the stability of the sector and the broader economy. Electricity tariffs are being restructured to ensure that they become more reflective of the cost of provision. This is a principle which is typically crucial to the establishment of an electricity market. This shift will push up electricity prices, disproportionately affecting low-income households, and making energy poverty worse. Simultaneously, affluent households, large commercial entities and heavy industry are increasingly turning to private solar systems. This reduces their reliance on the national grid and helps them avoid future Eskom and municipal price hikes.

This trend ultimately undermines cross-subsidisation between different income groups, placing additional

financial burdens on poorer households. It also has significant implications for municipalities which rely heavily on electricity sales for revenue. They now face a growing crisis, as grid defection by the wealthy and non-payment in low-income areas threaten their financial viability. This could push many municipalities—particularly under-resourced ones—into a spiral of debt and collapse. At the national level, Eskom itself is caught in a precarious ‘death spiral’, as it struggles to balance mounting debt with the need to invest in enabling infrastructure for private sector projects. The resulting price hikes risk alienating consumers further, while jeopardising the utility’s ability to lead a just and equitable energy transition.

South Africa’s energy transition cannot succeed without centring the needs of the working class. Labour unions and progressive organisations have proposed a range of alternatives to our current path, including:

- **Reform of Eskom:** to make it the driver of a public-led energy transition, rather than unbundling and privatising it.
- **Strategic localisation:** to promote domestic manufacturing of renewable energy components, which are essential for creating jobs and building industrial capacity.
- **Municipal funding reform:** to replace the reliance on electricity tariffs for municipal revenue with progressive taxation mechanisms, such as wealth taxes, to ensure equitable access to services.
- **Democratic ownership:** to expand public and community ownership of energy infrastructure that can ensure that the benefits of the transition are widely shared.

Yet, despite these extensive efforts to develop coherent policies and responses to the energy transition, trade unions have struggled. They have been unable to build a cohesive political platform capable of challenging the state’s market-oriented reforms. As a result, the state has largely disregarded labour’s demands and recommendations. This has further marginalised the interests of workers and low-income communities in the energy transition process. Together, these fault lines highlight the urgent need for transformative action to prevent the deepening of inequalities and the collapse of South Africa’s energy infrastructure.

## A fork in the road

South Africa’s energy system is at a crossroads. The current trajectory is playing out the liberalisation agenda of the 1990s. It risks entrenching inequalities and perpetuating exploitation under the guise of climate action. The neoliberal reforms are touted as solutions to inefficiency, but they have introduced new avenues for rent-seeking and financial speculation. These undermine the potential for a truly transformative energy transition.

A genuinely just transition requires breaking from the neoliberal paradigm. It demands not only a shift in energy sources but also a fundamental rethinking of ownership, governance, and distribution. Without this, the promises of the energy transition will remain hollow, serving only to deepen the divides within South African society. Despite this having been acknowledged by a range of progressive social forces, there remains relatively weak political action to oppose the market reform process.

The nation’s residents are on the verge of waves of price increases which are due to accompany the restructuring process. The social unrest it will produce provides a significant opportunity for community organisations and the labour movement to come together to produce an alternative vision with momentum behind it.

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*South Africa's biggest solar farm. Affluent households, large commercial entities and heavy industry are increasingly turning to private solar systems. This trend ultimately undermines cross-subsidisation between different income groups, placing additional financial burdens on poorer households.*

# Just transition requires social dialogue and protection

**Amandla!** talks to **Tebogo Lesabe**, Legislative Researcher for the NUM



*The industrial revolution in the UK. In Cosatu's blueprint for a just transition there is a view that the Global North should be financing the just transition, as the biggest emitters of carbon. And there is a growing concern with the practice of giving out loans instead of grants.*

*Trade unions in the mining sector are in a unique position when it comes to the just transition. They must protect their members as well as humanity as a whole.*

**Amandla!:** What does NUM mean by a just transition?

**Tebogo Lesabe:** The NUM believes that it has to do with a fair, inclusive shift towards a low carbon economy that prioritises workers' livelihoods, particularly in the mining and energy sector. It entails securing jobs and re-skilling opportunities and fair wages, social support and a strong community infrastructure. In a policy conference discussion paper, the NUM identified four pillars that were central to what it defines as a just transition, loosely based on the International Labour Organisation's *Decent Work Agenda*. They are social dialogue, social protection, rights at work, and employment protection and creation.

**A!:** It seems that you emphasise the fair treatment of workers more than the idea of transition. Is that fair? That for you, protecting your members is number one, and the climate crisis is number two?

**TL:** That's a difficult one. Because I think the transition affects every human being. As an organisation, we are advocates for workers, and that includes the need for a transition. However, there are social and economic issues currently in

South Africa that the organisation must balance in this particular transitioning to decarbonisation. So it's not that there is no appreciation of the environmental implications. But labour represents workers. We must acknowledge that the transition will affect workers and the community, and afford them the grace to adjust accordingly.

**A!:** Of course, some people might say that we didn't, here in Africa, create this problem. It was created in the industrial revolution in Europe and North America. So it's not our business. They keep telling us in South Africa to close down our coal mines. Meanwhile, they've got coal mines pumping out in their own countries. So is there any feeling that we're not the main culprits here? It's less our problem than theirs?

**TL:** In Cosatu's blueprint for a just transition there is a view that the Global North should be financing the just transition, as the biggest emitters of carbon. And there is a growing concern with the practice of giving out loans instead of grants. And it is a fact that, as Africa, we are one of the low emitters of carbon. But that doesn't take away the reality that we will suffer the most consequences out of every continent. So we do appreciate that we ought to also participate and partake in the direction that the world is taking.

**A!:** If we look maybe at our coal-fired power stations, which right now we depend on. Should they be closed as part of the just transition?

**TL:** The NUM just transition document speaks of net zero emissions rather than zero emissions. It holds the view that net zero emissions would be the right way to go about dealing with the transition. What that means in layman's terms is that for whatever carbon emission that is generated, there must be the same amount of carbon removed. This net zero emission offers scope to allow the sectors, including the coal sector, to continue operating to contribute to the economy. It pays attention to interventions that may be put in place to control these emissions and to balance them. It also allows for some jobs in these emitting sectors to be protected or saved. Because also, there's an issue of the pace at which we transition, compared with the capacity and the uncertainty in the paths that we are taking.

**A!:** Some people would say you can talk about 'pace', but this is an emergency. We are already long past the 1.5 degrees, which was the aim of the Paris Agreement. So how can you talk about 'pace' in an emergency?

**TL:** I think it goes back to the four pillars I highlighted, and in particular the combination of social dialogue and social protection. True to the definition of social dialogue, we're coming together and negotiating policy agreements for the best interests of all stakeholders. On the issue of financing, labour has

a problem, because there's no disclosure, there's no transparency, and this breaks the social dialogue. And the social protection aspect means the security of the workers in the face of vulnerabilities and contingencies. So it's not an issue of not appreciating the pace of the transition; it's just those nitty gritty for every stakeholder.

**AI:** It's a challenge for us. I think that if you were to do a survey in South Africa, of the things that are most important to people, climate change wouldn't be very high up on the list. Unemployment would be much higher, conditions at work, wages and so on. So there's a sense in which this hasn't really been accepted by the broad mass of people in this country as a matter of extreme urgency. Would you say that's fair and that's a challenge? And, if so, how are you, as a union of hundreds of thousands of members, managing to deal with that?

**TL:** That's definitely a fair assessment, and I think it's also rooted in some of the responses I have given up to this point. What we attempt to do is to capacitate all individuals linked to the organisation to participate in affiliate meetings, to support and advance the issue of the just transition, to share notes, to build up toolkits that ensure that, in our respective organisations, we're able to really make efforts towards our members or workers transitioning and understanding the implications of such a transition. However, we recognise that it also needs a collaborative effort from all social partners, and from both the Global North and Global South, because it's not unique to the NUM. It's a human problem.

**AI:** You said earlier "net zero", not just zero emissions. On one side we're emitting carbon into the atmosphere. So something has to balance that out if we're going to get to net zero. What do you see balancing that out? Some people would say it's technology, that there must be technology to capture carbon. Other people disagree with that. How do you see that?

**TL:** The NUM believes that research must be ongoing to really explore a technology that will enable net zero in the industries or sectors where there's carbon emission. It's on the premise that coal remains a strategic national resource for South Africa, providing a means to a living for more than 500,000 people, and it's difficult to easily just discard it.

**There's been great investment** in coal infrastructure, and there still is. There are debts involved, and livelihoods. And there isn't concrete evidence of successes in renewable energies that are sustainable, and most importantly that would allow for an ease of transition from coal, given the benefits the coal infrastructure has brought to many people. So it's difficult to suddenly say that the alternative energies will provide a sustainable, reliable baseload, when there's evidence that coal, as it stands, provides reliable baseload electricity.

**AI:** Amongst those employed in the industry, a distinction often gets drawn between direct employees of the mine and contract workers. In many mines, there are more contract workers than there are direct employees. And the employers would not want to guarantee the jobs of the contract workers. I don't know whether you think that's a fair assessment, and if so, what can be done about it?

**TL:** I think it's fair, and to some degree I believe that's where stakeholders agree on the framework of operationalising this transition. What would be fair is social protection and employment protection and creation. We should re-skill or upskill the community or workers to ensure that they are able to adjust. It's beyond permanent or contract workers - re-skilling and upskilling should apply to both.

**AI:** Next year will be 40 years of Cosatu, and it seems that the labour movement is at a historically weak moment. For example, the NUM and Cosatu were opposed to the breakup of Eskom. But it's happened, apparently without any really meaningful protest. Why was there no meaningful protest?

**TL:** I think what labour needs to do is strengthen their voice where they converge, and particularly on the issues of climate change. We need a consolidated voice. The fragmentation that has existed must cease, to ensure that we are a social partner that really is of one mind, one accord, not just in the different industries in the country, but even in the Global South. There should be continued collaboration and capacity building through our affiliates and Cosatu. So I think that would really change the trajectory of labour as a movement when it sits with business, when it sits with government, when it sits with other stakeholders.



A pilot carbon capture facility, pulling carbon from the air and using it to make synthetic fuel. The NUM believes that research must be ongoing to really explore a technology that will enable net zero in the industries or sectors where there's carbon emission.

# What happened at Komati power station?

By Andile Zulu

LESSONS FOR A PUBLIC PATHWAY TO A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

IT SHOULD NO LONGER BE DENIED that climate change is real, and an immediate danger, particularly to those who lack the economic resources to shield themselves from climate disasters. South Africa faces the tremendous challenge of initiating an energy transition that achieves two objectives. It must forge not only a low-carbon economy, but also one that cultivates a new path of sustainable economic development, social security and industrialisation, to eradicate poverty, unemployment and inequality.

As one of the country's oldest coal-fired power stations, Komati's decommissioning was firstly motivated by the plant's age and the perception from Eskom that new power capacity would be obtained from Independent Power Producers. Although finally postponed to 2022, Eskom had been in discussion with the government and organised labour regarding Komati's shutdown as far back as 2017.

## The finance

In October 2022, the final unit at Komati Power Station went offline and the coal-

fired power plant was officially retired. The following month, Eskom announced the World Bank's approval of a \$497 million concessional loan facility. It was to support not only the decommissioning of Komati but also to provide financing for the repurposing of the station with renewable energy and batteries, while creating employment opportunities for workers and communities surrounding the ageing plant.

Initially this loan was met with great enthusiasm by the presidency, and by executive leadership at Eskom. According to the World Bank, "the project could provide a blueprint for a just energy transition in South Africa and beyond". Mpho Makwana, Chair of the Eskom Board, claimed: "This is a significant development for South Africa's Just Energy Transition to renewable energy as it brings the much-needed funding to enable Eskom to train its employees and members of the host communities to empower them to continue playing a central role in the provision of clean energy for the country."

The loan financed three components of the process:

1. \$33.5 million for shutting down the power plant (which would include demolition, blasting activities and site rehabilitation).
2. \$416 million for repurposing the station with a hybrid of renewables (150 MW of solar, 70 MW of wind, and 150 MW of battery storage) alongside synchronous condensers (rotating, electrical machines that provide power to stabilise voltage and improve power quality, especially with renewable energy).
3. \$47.5 million towards mitigating and minimising the socio-economic impacts of shutdown, while creating economic opportunities for workers and communities.

90% of this funding was in traditional loans. Concessional loans (on better terms than the market) made up only 8% and grants only 2%.

## A failure

Komati's decommissioning and repurposing has failed to serve as a useful blueprint for a substantially just transition. Rather, it has proven itself to be a harsh lesson in the technological, economic and political obstacles to pursuing a transition away from coal, within a neoliberal paradigm of macroeconomic and energy policy.

A 2023 report by the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) found a lack of cohesive planning from Eskom and government departments, and poor timing and sequencing in the plant's closure. The absence of meaningful engagement with communities and workers in the decision-making process, and a narrow project scope, resulted in significant job losses and a lack of economic opportunities for communities around Komati. Beyond government reports, the experiences and insights from communities and organised labour within Komati reveal the destructive mistakes made.



*The absence of meaningful engagement with communities and workers in the decision-making process, and a narrow project scope, resulted in significant job losses and a lack of economic opportunities for communities around Komati.*



As a key component of South Africa's coal value chain, power plants like Komati stimulate and sustain economic activity and employment in host towns such as Middleburg and Bethel. According to reports and interviews from grassroots movements, such as the [Khutala Environmental Care Group](#), alongside trade unions within the energy sector, Komati has endured a severe economic downturn. There has been a sharp increase in unemployment.

Although most Eskom workers at the station were re-deployed to other stations, Komati sustained numerous forms of labour beyond those employed at Eskom. In 2023, Komati Acting General Manager, Thevan Pillay, claimed that the station was supporting 3,000 to 4,000 people with jobs or contract work when it was operating.

Pillay also informed the news agency Agence France-Presse, in November 2024, that, "We cannot construct anything. We cannot remove anything from the site". There have been challenges in securing project funding and delays in receiving regulatory approval for repowering and repurposing. These have significantly stalled job creation, re-skilling and the provision of social support. "Our jobs ending traumatised us a lot as a community," said Sizwe Shandu, 35, who had been working as a boilermaker at Komati since 2008. There are only a few minuscule green projects underway, and there have been job losses, minimal upskilling or training, and a sharp decline in economic activity.

*Some community members and power plant workers have evolved from being sceptics about renewable energy to rejecting the concept of a 'just energy transition' entirely. Attachment to the continuance of coal-fired generation has deepened.*

## Proposals for a public pathway

One fundamental error in the Komati repowering and repurposing project was the financing method. Traditional loans from foreign institutional investors have placed a tremendous burden on Eskom. They must be paid back at harsh interest rates in a currency that has been depreciating for decades. And the utility is already dealing with immense debt, narrowing streams of revenue and rising operational costs. So the cost of this foreign borrowing is likely to be passed on to the electricity end-user, who is already entangled in a general cost of living crisis.

Beyond this financial burden, the securing of funding through international institutional investors often leads to regulatory delays and bureaucratic hurdles. These have delayed the effective deployment of green technology and infrastructure at the pace and scale required for substantial job creation.

## Reverse broken private pathway

Infrastructure projects generally carry great risk for investors. The risk comes in many forms: fiduciary requirements to shareholders, thresholds of profitability, land acquisition issues, frustrating labour protections, foreign exchange volatility or inhospitable tax burdens. For institutional investors, these factors are obstacles to returns on their capital. In order to secure funds and receive regulatory approval, utilities such as Eskom and the South African government must ensure green infrastructure projects are "de-risked". In other words, the private sector must make a guaranteed profit and the state (citizens) must take the risk.

The South African state must stop relying only on foreign borrowing and private investment for a just energy transition. It must seriously pursue domestic resource mobilisation—direct public investment through reforming tax, trade and monetary policy. As argued by the Institute for Economic Justice's Gilad Isaacs, any foreign climate finance should be through transparent, multilateral processes that acknowledge the Global North's historical climate debt.

A narrow vision of job creation, local economic development and social support was another significant factor in the current failure of Komati's renewal. Part of the issue is a reliance on Independent Power Projects, which must be bankable. So they are not explicitly and primarily tailored to what is best for decarbonisation goals, environmental protection, energy security and job creation.

This was severely compounded by a lack of thorough planning, years prior to the repurposing project, and a lack of substantial public participation (not merely shallow 'stakeholder consultation'). The communities of Komati (including labour, both permanent and contract, should have been informed many years before about the station's closure, and brought into the process of conceptualising and planning. This would have enabled Eskom (alongside local, provincial and national governments) to create proposals, and eventually implement policies, that included their economic and social needs.



*Komati's decommissioning and repurposing has proven itself to be a harsh lesson in the technological, economic and political obstacles to pursuing a transition away from coal, within a neoliberal paradigm of macroeconomic and energy policy.*

Having the money and the resources is particularly important, as those who lose their employment will need to be upskilled and provided with holistic social support, as they transition to a new realm of energy labour.

Shifting away from coal-fired electricity production would require a state that has the financial, administrative and technical capacity, and energy sovereignty, to comprehensively plan and execute green industrial and infrastructure projects. Moreover, and this is crucial, a truly just energy transition will require a state that is profoundly democratic, transparent in its operations and accountable to those it is meant to serve.

The Komati repowering and repurposing project can be considered a failure—but it didn't have to be. What restrains the potential for a just energy transition in South Africa (and in numerous fossil fuel-dependent developing nations) is a corrosive dependency on private investment and private enterprise. If we expect to make renewable projects bankable, climate change will not be overcome, and sustainable, uplifting green industrialisation will remain far beyond our grasp. Now, more than ever, working class communities and energy sector workers must organise for a public pathway to climate jobs.

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

# GREEN COLONIALISM AND THE JUST TRANSITION

Hamza Hamouchene was part of a panel discussion to launch [Dismantling Green Colonialism: Energy and Climate Justice in the Arab Region](#), which he co-edited with Katie Sandwell. Amandla! has produced this edited version of his input.

**W**HAT DO WE MEAN BY GREEN colonialism? I think whenever we discuss questions of energy or climate change or land or fisheries or the economic system, we need to have an anti-systemic analysis. When we have a robust, correct analysis of how capitalism works, how it reproduces itself, the various dynamics in North and South, we can start reflecting and imagining alternatives. But this starts with analysing how capitalism works, its inner workings.

So what do we mean by green colonialism? For me, it's the extension of the colonial relations of domination, plunder, exploitation, theft of resources, as well as the dehumanisation of the other, to the period of renewable energy, conservation and sustainability. Capitalism works through externalising costs to others: to women and carers through largely unpaid social reproduction work; to rural areas; to black and brown bodies in the South; and to nature by commodifying it, by dominating it, treating it as a commodity to be traded. And that's exactly what caused the climate and ecological crisis.

Colonialism cannot, for me, be dissociated from a discussion around capitalism and imperialism. Green colonialism means that the priorities of one part of the world—the richest part of the world, the centres of empire—in terms of energy, in terms of environment, in terms of water, come at the expense of another part. That part is what we call the periphery, or the Global South.

When we talk about energy, the global transition, the green transition that the mainstream media and the ruling classes are talking about, it is not really a transition. Renewable energy is not



*The Impact solar facility in Texas, US, owned by BP. Renewable energy is not effectively or significantly displacing fossil fuels from our energy systems. What we are seeing is fossil capital and green capital running in parallel, intermeshed together. And very often, the fossil fuel companies are the ones investing in renewable energies.*

effectively or significantly displacing fossil fuels from our energy systems. What we are seeing is fossil capital and green capital running in parallel, intermeshed together. And very often, the fossil fuel companies are the ones investing in renewable energies—TotalEnergies, BP, Shell—trying to dominate the new green value chains. So it's not just a greenwashing exercise, although it serves that function — they can pretend that they are doing something for the environment. It's much more than that.

## The capitalist road

But let's suppose that there is a kind of a transition towards renewable energy. In the capitalist system there is an energy intensive production and consumption pattern (mainly in the Global North, but also in the richest pockets of the Global South). To maintain this system, we would need a lot of resources. For some rich people to be able to drive one car or two, feel good about their livelihoods, consuming green, eating organic stuff, and doing their bit for the environment,

that means a lot of extraction. What that extraction needs is the critical raw materials (copper, lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite) for the energy transition, but also for other usages—militaries and wars, high tech, AI and so forth.

The question that we need to ask ourselves is, where would these resources come from? In the majority of cases, those resources are concentrated in countries of the Global South, like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where another genocide is taking place, where children are exploited in the mines. So to maintain the same mechanism means more extractivism, more sacrifice zones, more disruptions, also in other countries in Latin America, the lithium triangle (Chile, Argentina, Bolivia), but also Indonesia, Myanmar, Zambia, and other countries who have those resources.

What we are seeing is those plans for what is called sustainability and the green transition are dictated by the richest and the most powerful, either in terms of class or in terms of nation. So in North Africa, for example, many projects are being designed to export green electricity to Europe regardless of the energy self-

sufficiency and sovereignty of the local people, regardless of who owns the land or who uses it; regardless of questions around water poverty.

And when I talk about water poverty, I think about green hydrogen. There is a lot of talk about green hydrogen. Green hydrogen requires a lot of water. For countries in North Africa that suffer acute water poverty, it doesn't make sense to produce green hydrogen for export. That's why we talked about neocolonialism and colonialism. But colonialism and neocolonialism are just expressions of imperialism, and imperialism is a dynamic expression of the capitalist expansion all over the world.

### The example of Palestine

And when we talk about green colonialism in the Arab region, I think the first example that comes to our mind is Palestine, where the settler colony of Israel is presenting itself as this environmental steward, a green champion, providing some kind of technologies in desalination, water, agro-business, renewable energy for the neighbours and other countries, while greenwashing their colonial crimes. That orientalist, colonial environmental narrative is not new. It has been used since colonial times. I believe it was developed by the French in my home country, in Algeria. It presents that kind of environment as alien, degraded, abnormal, needing some kind of intervention by the white man: the civilising mission.

And that narrative has been used by the Israelis to justify their settler colonial project. Not everything is colonial, but it

might be a useful framework to describe some of the dynamics around what we are talking about in the name of the green transition.

### So what is the just transition?

The just transition is a contested term. It began as a grassroots, militant concept and framework that came about through the convergence of three movements: the labour movement, the environmental justice movement, and the indigenous communities movement in the United States, fighting the chemical industry. These movements understood and fought the divide and rule strategies of the industrial capitalists, the polluting industries. They said, we need to unite in the face of one system, which is the capitalist extractivist system that is destroying the environment, confiscating the land from indigenous communities and exploiting the workers at the same time. So that's the origin of that concept.

Now that concept has been hijacked, has been co-opted. But it's not unique. 'Democracy' has been hijacked; 'climate justice' has been hijacked. It doesn't mean that we should abandon those terms. It means that those terms and frameworks are a terrain of struggle. They are ground that we need to claim back, to recapture those concepts and frameworks and politicise them, give them our radical meaning, our values of justice, sovereignty and liberation.

In fact, I'm not too wedded to those words. What matters is the principle behind such concepts and frameworks. Different movements, different organisations use other terms. Some people use decolonisation, some

people use liberation, some others use emancipation. What matters is the principles behind those projects. And what matters to me is that these projects come from movements like we are, rooted in struggle. So that's why we shouldn't be discarding them so easily. We should be claiming them back for us.

The just transition is a class issue, so it means we need to talk about capitalism. We need to talk about who owns the resources of society, who gets to decide how they are used. This is the question of power. It's also a gender issue. We need to centre social reproduction in this, because most of the time the victims of capitalist projects are women. We need to say that clearly.

But also the just transition is an anti-racist framework. When we talk about sacrifice zones that colonialism is talking about, why are those projects taking place in our countries? Why are they not taking place in the north? Because they need land, and they need to externalise that cost somewhere else. They cannot do it in Europe. So they come to us, at the same time exploiting our cheap labour.

Also it is about democracy. Democracy, not in a liberal bourgeois sense just of elections. It's about democratisation. It's about the involvement of communities and workers, deciding how their economies, how their food energy systems, are being designed. This is democracy. It's linked to the economic justice question. It's not just about freedoms and political rights. Those are important. But what would you do with elections if you don't have a house, you cannot eat, you don't have access to electricity, you don't have access to water?



*Evaporating cones of salt—part of the lithium mining process in Chile. To maintain the same system globally, the capitalist system, in which there is an energy intensive production and consumption pattern means more extractivism, more sacrifice zones, more disruptions in countries of the Global South.*

Then the other principle is that the just transition is not just about energy, about the climate. It's about radical transformation of the economic system, which means, again, the discussion about capitalism and imperialism. And then it's about decolonisation.

So briefly, a just transition is a revolutionary project. It's a transition from a capitalist, extractivist, predatory system that oppresses our people, that commodifies nature, that creates all those forms of crisis, to an emancipatory future. For me, it is eco-socialism. For others, it is *buen vivir*, *ubuntu*. That's what I believe in. It is a transition to something that we would like, where local communities and workers are not made the sacrificial victims again. They need to be at the centre of that, and that involves redress, that involves reparations, that involves values of justice and sovereignty.

## Resource nationalism

Resource nationalism—protecting and exploiting a nation's resources—could be a way forward, but it's not enough. Resource nationalism, without trying to industrialise and create more value in your country, without trying to break away from the dependencies or the economic and political subordination of your country in the global capitalist economy, I don't think it would be the solution. It's not just about nationalising those extractivist sectors, nationalising the renewable energies. That's the extractivist model of development that has been imposed on most countries in the Global South by imperialism. Some people call that unequal exchange 'ecological imperialism'. That's the thing that we need to get away from.

So, for example, Indonesia introduced a ban on export of raw nickel. Zambia introduced a similar ban on the export of raw copper, and others are thinking of going down the same road. I heard that the Latin American countries, the lithium triangle, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina, are considering the idea of a lithium cartel like OPEC. But it comes with challenges, because you operate within that capitalist, imperialist system where there is an ongoing domination by the North over the South, and that manifests clearly. When Indonesia introduced that ban, the European Union were not happy with them. They were furious. How dare Indonesia ban the export of cheap raw nickel? They took them to the World Trade Organisation. The case is still ongoing. It also raises the question, who are the ruling classes who are doing this? Are they really doing it for the people? So we need a class analysis.

Nevertheless. I would support such moves by Indonesia, even though it isn't perfect. There is no perfect solution, but I think resource nationalism is needed in some cases.

## Localisation and decentralisation

It's not that I don't like localisation initiatives. It's that I don't like the idea that they are going to be the only solution for our problems. I still believe in the role of the state and the role of public investments and alternatives. I believe that there is a space for decentralised initiatives, either cooperative or community owned, but given the climate emergency that we have, I feel that the state needs to play a bigger role. Maybe that's easier said than done. Because we need to democratise the state. We need to decolonise the state. Recapture the state. So really it concerns the agenda of justice and liberation.

And then we need to analyse how capitalism works. We need to analyse its dynamics, how it reproduces itself in the name of sustainability and green transition. Who owns what? Who gets what energy? For whom? Food for whom? Who loses and wins? We don't just ask these questions for the sake of asking them. We're asking them so we can understand the dynamics of the system that we are fighting, so we can have strategies to fight that system.

Strategies need to be built through building power, through organising. We need coalitions of different groupings of working people, not just the urban, industrial working class, but also the peasantry, pastoralists, precarious workers, social reproductive workers. We need to create those intersections and solidarity between them. The idea of creating that coalition of working people is to shift the balance of power. That cannot just happen on the local or



*The just transition is a class issue, so it means we need to talk about capitalism. We need to talk about who owns the resources of society, who gets to decide how they are used. This is the question of power.*

## Towards a strategy

In the context of North Africa, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, in the questions around climate, environment and energy, we need to shift the narrative, to tackle the mainstream narrative around the climate, ecological and energy crisis in the region. It's a narrative that is really disempowering. It is based on more capitalism, more austerity, more privatisation, more enclosures and more land grabbing. We need to first of all, challenge that narrative and re imagine and analyse in a different way what is happening.

national level. It needs to happen at a regional and international level. That's the idea. We need to recapture power, build power. That takes time. Revolutions take time.

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## AFRICA CAN USE GLOBAL NORTH'S UNILATERAL DEPARTURES FROM TRADE AGREEMENTS TO SUPPORT LOW CARBON INDUSTRIALISATION



*The transition to a lower carbon economy is accelerating. This is leading important powers in the Global North to depart unilaterally from some neoliberal global trade rules. These are the same rules they themselves ardently promoted just a few years ago.*

By **Rob Davies**

**T**HE TRANSITION TO A LOWER carbon economy is accelerating. This is leading important powers in the Global North to depart unilaterally from some neoliberal global trade rules. These are the same rules they themselves ardently promoted just a few years ago. The departures were justified as necessary to combat the threat of catastrophic climate change. However, some of them could impact negatively on economies of the Global South in general and of Africa in particular.

Some countries in the Global South have taken advantage of this trend to enlarge the policy space available to them to support local industrial development and raw material beneficiation. At the same time, the fossil fuel companies are threatening litigation against EU climate policies, and this is fuelling discontent in the Global North with the panoply of investment protection arrangements they themselves once enthusiastically promoted.

This is occurring within a context where the global climate agenda has been effectively reduced from the “transformational change” called for by climate activists and scientists. This included acting to transform consumption patterns, promote greater equality and curb excesses of the ‘super rich’. Instead, the focus has shifted to an

almost exclusively technological process to propel an accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy.

This transition is not surprisingly leading to intensified competition between firms to develop and produce low carbon products, technologies, and ‘solutions’ and also to demonstrate ‘green credentials’ in whatever activity they may be involved in. In a world undergoing a deeply contested transition from unipolarity to greater multipolarity, this firm-level competition is spilling over into inter-state rivalry. This is most evident in the contestation between the Global North and China, which has developed an early technological and manufacturing lead in batteries, solar energy equipment, and new energy vehicles, among others. This lag in the countries of the Global North is leading them to implement ambitious industrial policies. These are aimed both at “catching up” with Chinese technology and reducing dependence on it. This process is now defined not just as an economic policy objective but also as a matter of ‘national security’.

Two such measures stand out: the European Union’s *Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism* (CBAM) and the ‘green’ industries support sections of the United States’ *2022 Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA).

### CBAM

CBAM came into force in October 2023. It applies to all importers into the EU of an initial list of aluminium, cement, electricity, fertilisers and iron and steel. They must report in detail on the carbon emissions involved in their production. Where no acceptable information is provided, default values will be applied. After a three-year transition period (in 2026), CBAM certificates will have to be purchased at a price set in the EU’s ‘cap and trade’ system, for imports of all designated products whose carbon content exceeds the internal EU threshold. This is known as the European Trading System (ETS). The value of these certificates will be calibrated to make up the difference between the carbon emissions involved in the imported product and the EU norm, at a price set in the ETS.

CBAM is ostensibly a measure to “avoid carbon leakage” by pegging the emissions content of imported products to levels set for domestic equivalences, as part of the EU’s ‘net zero’ commitments. The CBAM will apply equally to all designated imported products, with no differentiation for products from developing or least developed countries.

While the requirement to purchase CBAM certificates is not strictly a tariff, it

will, as a levy on imports, have a similar effect. It will restrict market access and reduce the value of preferences available under various arrangements.

Its impact depends on the extent to which the carbon content of the import exceeds the norm established in the EU's carbon cap and the ETS auction price. So the exact impact cannot be predicted with any certainty at this time. Nor can the rate and pace at which the list of products affected will grow beyond the initial list—it is clearly seen as eventually covering all imports.

A study commissioned by the [African Climate Foundation](#) measured the potential impact based on different scenarios for ETS carbon price per tonne and product coverage. It found that, even in the 'lightest' scenario with the most limited impact, "Africa's economy will be negatively affected by the CBAM, with exports to the EU declining by 4% in total...Africa will be worse affected than any of the other major economies analysed... even at €40 per tonne, the CBAM will raise EU import tariff revenue substantially, but have little impact on global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions". With a higher carbon price and more extensive product coverage, Africa's exports to the EU would decrease by 5.75% "[with Africa's GDP falling](#) by 1.12% (almost twice the initial scenario of a partial CBAM and a lower carbon cost)".

## The IRA

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 is a US Federal Law dealing with several issues. It includes a section authorising \$391 billion of federal funding over several years to support climate-related measures, including incentives for manufacturers of clean energy equipment and new energy vehicles. To put that figure in context, in 2021 South Africa's GDP was valued at \$419 billion.

The IRA also provides for a \$15,000 tax credit for consumers who buy electric vehicles with batteries manufactured in the United States. This appears at face value to be incompatible with the WTO's Trade Related Investment Measures (TRIMs). TRIMs' 'illustrative list' of prohibited measures includes imposing 'local content' requirements on private sector transactions. Following a threat by the EU to mount a challenge in the WTO, the US agreed to extend the coverage to products from any country with which it has a Free Trade Agreement—a carve out which is also probably in violation of the WTO's 'most favoured nation' provisions.

## Growing discontent with the Investor-State Dispute System

Another area seeing partial departures from established systems is that of the Investor-State Dispute System (ISDS). It has been long recognised in the Global South that investment protection arrangements in bilateral investment treaties (bits), some Free Trade Agreements and other arrangements were becoming increasingly litigious. They were also allowing private investors to challenge public interest regulation in costly arbitral panel proceedings. Now discontent is emerging with the system in the Global North. Hydrocarbon companies brought this to a head by threatening to challenge EU "green" policies and regulations, using investor-state arbitral panel provisions. These existed in a variety of bilateral and treaty arrangements which the EU was at the forefront of promoting just a few years ago.

In a landmark decision, the European Parliament voted to withdraw from the *Energy Charter Treaty* (ECT), under whose provisions several of the threats of litigation were made. Members of the European Parliament who spearheaded this move are increasingly aware that it is not just the ECT that poses a challenge in this regard. The EU and its member states have more than 1,000 bilateral investment treaties with countries across the globe which include similar provisions.

## Identifying Africa's interests in the low carbon transition

First, we must understand Africa's interests, which encompass both the climate crisis and the ongoing transition to a low carbon economy.

Africa is among regions contributing least to global warming, but among those most affected by it. Temperatures will rise in Africa by more than the global average. A dedicated part of IPCC reports has identified the threats of floods, droughts, and sea rises specific to the continent's various sub-regions. These are not just future possibilities. The continent is already experiencing more frequent extreme weather events.

Africa has thus an immediate interest in rolling out ambitious 'adaptation' programmes to defend itself against already impacting 'extreme weather events' that will only get worse. This needs to involve, inter alia, massive programmes to climate-proof communities and existing infrastructure, as well as build new, more climate-resilient infrastructure. If this is not done proactively, it will have to be done after costly disasters, with loss of life. Many climate resilience projects are suitable for public employment programmes and could also create demand for locally-manufactured inputs and materials.

While adaptation is the biggest and most immediate issue facing Africa, it cannot ignore the accelerating transition to a lower carbon economy. This will be disruptive to several existing activities. There will be losers, but the transition will also bring new opportunities to the continent. Consultants from the Global North most commonly identify two such opportunities: the supply of critical minerals, which the continent has in abundance, and the use of its ample sunlight to produce 'green hydrogen', using solar power to electrolyse water.

## Africa must occupy key higher value-added niches

It is in the continent's interest to realise whatever benefits it can from its resource endowment, but it cannot do so merely by



*The fossil fuel companies are threatening litigation against EU climate policies, and this is fuelling discontent in the Global North with the panoply of investment protection arrangements they themselves once enthusiastically promoted.*

remaining a producer and exporter of raw materials. There is a long-recognised, fundamental development challenge facing the continent. It is to 'break from the apron strings' of its colonially-defined role as producer and exporter of primary products, and move to higher value-added production through industrialising. This applies equally to the continent's strategies for the transition to a lower carbon economy.

One key opportunity that stands out is the beneficiation of critical minerals. Sending out a clear message, that defined levels of beneficiation will be required before export, could become an important lever to promote African value-added production of various low carbon products.

In similar vein, Africa needs to identify its role in green hydrogen value chains as more than just using its sunlight to electrolyse water and produce fuel that is frozen and exported to the Global North; more than supplying the raw material used as catalyst in fuel cells (platinum). It needs to become a significant manufacturer of both fuel cells and products using them, including transport equipment and energy generators.

In addition, it is important to identify and seize opportunities in the immediate focus of the lower carbon transition—renewable energy. It is estimated that the roll-out of renewable energy, narrowing the continent's 'energy gap', will require a doubling of investment in electrical energy by 2030. Will this be spent merely on imported technology and equipment, or directed to boost manufacturing capacity on the continent? There is already the capacity to produce many of the components in wind and solar as well as hydro-power generation.

These opportunities will certainly not be realised 'automatically'. Industrial policy interventions—including beneficiation and local content requirements—will be essential.

## Unilateral measures, and departing from established rules and procedures

Back to the issue of responding to the Global North's 'climate justified' unilateral measures: CBAM needs to be recognised as a direct barrier to market access, with a similar effect to a tariff. Avoiding paying CBAM levies will depend on meeting the same carbon standards as those set in the EU. This will require large additional investments that would push developing country exporters and LDCs

way beyond the nationally determined contributions they have tabled at UN FCCC COPs. CBAM undermines the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities", which is supposed to underpin climate-related commitments. Moreover, research points to huge disproportionality: the gains in emissions reduction are small, compared to the loss of export earnings and incomes, in any of the scenarios.

CBAM needs to be rejected, opposed, and challenged in any way or forum possible. One possibility would be to impose a countervailing, climate-justified measure—a levy on imports from CBAM-implementing countries to fund adaptation projects on the continent. The other measures indicate a trend that needs to be understood and then responded to proactively. The unilateral partial departures from neoliberal trade policies are replete with hypocrisy. They are not presented as something that all should follow. Rather, they are seen as exceptions, justified unilaterally by national security or the climate agenda of the Global North. The Global South thus continues to be told to follow rules and measures the Global North is abandoning. This suggests that we need to learn more from what the Global North does than from what it says.

However, this does not mean necessarily acting in exactly the same way. Enforcement of WTO rules was weakened to avoid any disciplining of the Global North's restrictions on Chinese

imports, justified by 'national security'. Both Indonesia and India have taken advantage of this to implement other departures, shaped by their own industrial policy needs. Indonesia appealed to a non-functioning appellate body against a ruling that struck down its regulations on export of unprocessed nickel. This allowed it to continue with a measure that has led to significant investments in beneficiation. Similar processes enabled India to thwart a ruling against the deployment of incentives for exports from its Special Economic Zones. Analysts have concluded that "...the policy space that had previously been progressively restricted by WTO rules and procedures is now potentially being expanded through actions by developing countries".

Africa, like other parts of the Global South, urgently needs to reclaim the policy space required to advance its own low carbon industrial policies. Likewise, the discontent and weakening of the ISID system needs urgent attention. Without the development of a progressive alternative in the Global South building on initiatives that already exist, the risk is the emergence of a new system that carves out the 'concerns' of the Global North, while retaining much that is problematic in the current system.

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*Africa is among regions contributing least to global warming, but among those most affected by it.*



# GNU contestations:

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKING CLASS

By **Mazibuko Khanyiso Jara**

It is six months since the ANC and DA entered into a coalition agreement to form a government, incorrectly referred to as a Government of National Unity (GNU). It has been a chapter of managing contradictions in South Africa's political landscape. This unprecedented coalition was borne out of necessity. But it also showed us increasing ideological alignment between the Ramaphosa-led faction in the ANC and the DA. In line with what the markets required, having failed to secure a majority, the ANC turned to the DA for support in leading a multi-party coalition to form the government. These months have been a stark reminder of the nature of South Africa's political economy, characterised by the persistent failure of the ruling elite to address the profound social crises that define our time.

It is important to recall that this GNU is the culmination of long-term dynamics shaped through the agency of the ruling class. Post-apartheid South Africa has seen the consolidation of the power of a tiny white monopoly capitalist class that has subordinated an equally tiny black elite to act as its political representatives. As a result, the primary role of the state has been to defend capital

accumulation—the ability to make profit. In pursuit of this, it has been consistent in disorganising the working class through ideological co-optation, promoting and maintaining divisions, and outright repression. The state's tolerance and promotion of xenophobia is part of this arsenal. This GNU will definitely continue with this logic and strategy. It will become increasingly obvious that its macro-economic strategy is unable to make a difference to the key issues in people's lives—jobs, housing, poverty. The more obvious it becomes, the more xenophobia becomes an important weapon.

### Unfolding dynamics

At its core, the GNU represents a marriage of convenience. One partner is an ANC that has fostered and sustained neoliberal economic policy and a corrupt state, and is now struggling with internal decay. The other is a DA increasingly adept at leveraging state power to advance its liberal-conservative agenda.

The ANC was once the dominant force in South African politics. Now it is punch-drunk from its electoral decline, its ministers largely lethargic. It is burdened by corruption scandals, and lacks the dynamism required for service

delivery. Meanwhile, the DA, the clear strategic victor in this arrangement, has displayed remarkable agility. Its ministers have seized the public space. They have championed fiscal conservatism and pro-corporate solutions to solving challenges in service delivery. And they have effectively marketed their governance credentials.

For the working class, however, this dynamic signals a deepening of neoliberal policies that prioritise austerity over redistribution and social justice. The October Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) of Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana confirmed the GNU's commitment to austerity and fiscal conservatism. This was an important marker, demonstrating the consolidation of a shared ANC-DA neoliberal strategy. This will surely be followed by other economic policy measures that will deepen the squeeze on poor and working people.

The austerity budget, framed as a necessity for 'economic stability', fails to address the structural inequalities entrenched by apartheid and colonialism. Despite South Africa's constitutional mandate for transformation and historical redress, the GNU's policies



resist meaningful redistribution. For workers, the unemployed, and the marginalised, this represents a betrayal of the liberation struggle's promises.

Despite the appearance of stability, the GNU is characterised by hidden and open contradictions that could challenge its coherence. For example, the economic policies pursued by the coalition, while pleasing to the DA and its ideological allies, are ill-equipped to address the deepening social crisis. Despite what the recent Quarterly Labour Force Survey showed as a minor decline in the unemployment rate, we still have extremely high levels of unemployment. Indeed, unemployment went down—marginally. And it's not impossible that it will continue to do so—marginally—especially with the end of loadshedding. But it will not be significant or tangible. These high levels of unemployment, persistent inequality, and deteriorating public services are fuelling discontent among poor and working people as well as the middle class. They are creating conditions for unprecedented social decay and upheavals.

Palestine solidarity is also emerging as a major sticking point within the GNU. While sections of the ANC remain committed to international solidarity, the DA's pro-Israel stance is likely to exacerbate tensions within the coalition. This underscores the broader question of South Africa's role in the global struggle against imperialism and oppression.

## The 2026 municipal elections and the race to the bottom

With the 2026 local government elections looming, the GNU's dynamics are increasingly shaped by the electoral calculus of its constituent parties. The ANC, reeling from its 2024 defeat, appears rudderless. Its liberal faction is content to maintain the GNU without an effective strategy to counter the DA's growing influence. This faction, often aligned with business interests, has little appetite for the necessary radical socioeconomic transformation.

In contrast, the DA has already begun positioning itself for the next electoral contest. It has long cemented its appeal among white, Indian and Coloured voters. By opposing contentious issues like the *Basic Education Laws Amendment* (BELA) Act, and maintaining its firm

stance on fiscal discipline, the DA is now preparing to reach new sections of Black voters disillusioned with the ANC. The DA's calculated engagement in the GNU enables it to claim effective governance experience that delivers, while sidestepping accountability for what it will blame on the ANC as its failures.

## Populism, xenophobia, and Gayton McKenzie's rise

One of the most troubling developments within the GNU is the prominence of Gayton McKenzie. His appointment as Minister of Sports and Recreation has legitimised ethno-nationalism, populist politics, and xenophobia. McKenzie has skilfully used his ministerial platform to build a national profile. He has often pandered to exclusionary and divisive sentiments that resonate with large sections of the frustrated poor and working people. This strategy is politically expedient. But it deepens the alienation of migrants, and reinforces reactionary narratives that distract from systemic inequality and elite culpability.

McKenzie's rise exemplifies the broader challenges of the GNU. His party and others like it claim to champion the 'forgotten masses'. But their rhetoric and policies often scapegoat the vulnerable, rather than addressing the structural roots of poverty and unemployment. For progressive forces, combating this populism must be a priority. This must be based on a strategy that resonates with the concerns, frustrations and interests of the very poor and working people. They are now increasingly looking to the likes of McKenzie for hope.

## The MK Party's disruption: a conservative turn

The emergence of the MK Party, led by former President Jacob Zuma, has introduced another layer of complexity to the political landscape. Garnering 45% of the vote in KwaZulu-Natal and 14.5% nationally, the MK Party has positioned itself as a major force. It blends radical economic transformation rhetoric with a deeply conservative ethos. Its constitution is far from endorsing democratic socialism or progressive constitutionalism. It reveals an agenda that is both populist and authoritarian.

The MK Party's appeal lies in its ability to channel disillusionment with the ANC into a vision. This comprises unrealistic and unsustainable (but radical sounding) economic measures, authoritarian populism and cultural conservatism.

For poor and working people, however, this vision is a dead end. It co-opts the language of the struggle for radical change, while advancing a regressive agenda. In this way, the MK Party (even more than the Patriotic Alliance) is capturing the more organised sections of poor and working people for a project that ultimately undermines their interests. It also closes off space for the much-needed emergence of mass-rooted, democratic socialist politics and organisational forms. The MK Party's appeal will make it harder to build a unified working-class movement against the neoliberal status quo.

The defection of key figures from the EFF, such as Dali Mpofu and Floyd Shivambu, to the MK Party further complicates the opposition landscape. Their departure weakens the EFF's ability to present a coherent (even if not Left)

challenge to the GNU. And it bolsters the MK Party's appeal, as an alternative for those disillusioned with both the ANC and EFF.

Of course, the imminent physical decline of Jacob Zuma will be a significant challenge for the MK Party. Other than Zuma himself, no one else in the party has the authority, power and hegemony to hold it together, and to wield the extensive dictatorial powers constitutionally afforded and personally specified for him. This is why the party's strategy is to consolidate its organisational strength



*Johann Rupert and Cyril Ramaphosa. Post-apartheid South Africa has seen the consolidation of the power of a tiny white monopoly capitalist class that has subordinated an equally tiny black elite to act as its political representatives.*

by balkanising (splintering) the EFF. Interestingly, they have been unable to do what the Congress of the People did, by winning over key leaders from ANC factions. Also important is their uneven record in recent municipal by-elections. This must be worrying the party—the horizon of the 2026 municipal elections cannot be far from their gaze. The appeal of Zuma is strong and powerful enough to be a major factor in these coming municipal elections.

## The SACP's marginalisation

The South African Communist Party (SACP) finds itself in an increasingly precarious position. While some of its leaders serve in the GNU, the party has been vocal in its critiques of how the GNU was formed and of the coalition's neoliberal policies. This dual role highlights the contradictions of the SACP's alliance with the ANC. It struggles to balance its historical commitment to socialism with its participation in a government that perpetuates austerity and inequality.

The long-standing claim of the ANC-led National Democratic Revolution strategy as the most direct route to socialism has proved hollow with every passing year since the early 1990s. The SACP's consideration of a Left popular front does not overcome these contradictions.

## The National Dialogue

The National Dialogue is touted as a key moment for the GNU to advance its legitimacy. It risks being a platform to

coopt civil society, trade unions and other progressive forces into a manufactured consent that enables the ANC-DA led coalition to govern without many voices that may rock the boat. Framed as a platform for consensus-building, the dialogue is more likely to co-opt trade unions and civil society into endorsing neoliberal policies without addressing the root causes of South Africa's social crises. For poor and working people, this manufactured consensus threatens to deepen their exclusion from meaningful decision-making processes. Of course, the National Dialogue can and must be pushed in progressive directions, but it would be a tragic mistake to assume that it is the main platform to advance popular interests.

## The way forward for the working class

As the GNU navigates its contradictions, the working class must chart a path forward. That path must be to build a mass-based challenge to both the neoliberalism of the ANC-DA coalition and the reactionary populism of figures like Gayton McKenzie and Jacob Zuma. Building a united and independent working class movement is essential for challenging the GNU's austerity agenda and advancing a vision of democratic socialism from below.

Trade unions, social movements, progressive NGOs, religious bodies and intellectuals have a crucial role to play in this process. These actors should start with resistance to co-optation into a limited National Dialogue and other GNU initiatives. And they should

also maintain their independence and strengthen their capacity to organise around the immediate needs and long-term aspirations of poor and working people, and the middle class. All these forces must join together to work out alternatives that prioritise meeting basic needs, redistribution, historical redress, and social justice.

In the coming years, the stakes will only grow higher. The 2026 local elections, the deepening social crisis, and the contradictions within the GNU present both challenges and opportunities. By mobilising around a transformative agenda, the working class can seize these opportunities and begin to dismantle the structures of inequality and exploitation that have persisted since apartheid.

We should not forget the generalised power and hegemony of the white voting bloc, backed by ideological institutions such as the South African Institute of Race Relations, Solidariteit, OUTA, AfriForum, the Centre for Development and Enterprise and others. They further complicate the challenge. These forces, along with a bourgeois media and neoliberal economists, wield significant influence over public discourse, reinforcing the status quo and resisting progressive change.

The road ahead will not be easy, but history has shown that the power of organised and conscious poor and working people is capable of reshaping society.

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**Protesters in Makhado, Limpopo Province, demanding services.** High levels of unemployment, persistent inequality, and deteriorating public services are fuelling discontent among poor and working people as well as the middle class. They are creating conditions for unprecedented social decay and upheavals.

## CAPE TOWN OCCUPATION:

## FIGHTING FOR HOUSING

**Cissie Gool House**, the former Woodstock hospital, had been dormant for about 20 years when it was occupied in 2017. Now the more than 1,000 residents face eviction, many with no prospect of decent housing.

1,500 people have been living for several years in occupation of the former Woodstock hospital building in Cape Town's inner city. The residents renamed the site Cissie Gool House, named after the activist born in District Six. Amanda! spoke with Bevil Lucas, one of the leaders of the occupation and part of Reclaim the City (RTC), as they face eviction by the City of Cape Town.

**Amanda!:** Tell us how the occupation started.

**Bevil Lucas:** The old Woodstock hospital had been dormant for about 20 years. In 2017 a group of about 15 students and activists decided to occupy the empty building. There was quite a contingent of security guards on site. So the first group told them that they were students and wanted to make a movie. The city hired out the site to film companies for shooting films. And the security allowed them to enter. That allowed them to do the reconnaissance of what was possible inside. For example, they knew there were electricity and running water connections. They found where they could set themselves up on the third floor of one section of the building, and they were there for about two weeks before the security discovered. The group explained that they're not picking a fight with the security guards. The fight is not with them, but rather with the government.

**The security took the view that they are here to protect the building and they're not going to interfere with the people. If we come in, they will have to inform the city. The municipality adopted a position that**

we're not going to interfere with you guys. They never moved on getting any law enforcement to remove us. So that was the precarious position at the time. At the time of the occupation, the leadership in the DA was Patricia de Lille and Brett Heron and they were more sympathetic than the current leadership within the DA.

**AI:** So you moved in gradually in numbers over the years. How long did it take to get to where you are now?

**BL:** We did it incrementally and it probably took more than a year, because we had to navigate the spaces that we had. We had meetings with people who had made application to be part of the occupation. We went in in groups of 20 to 30 at a time. We had to negotiate with the security guards about the time arrangements. We had a strategy of when it would be, how many people it would be, who would be giving support to the people.

**AI:** So you were, at that stage, already very highly organised. How did that organisation come about?

**BL:** We had regular meetings in the occupation with the first group of occupiers, and they had to elect an intake committee. They also had to elect a leadership of the occupation. In the beginning it was probably a maximum of about 50 people, living in about 20 spaces, so we had representation of each household as part of a committee to look at what's happening in the occupation, how to build the occupation, how to manage, how to run, how to deal with discipline.

**AI:** At its peak, how many people were there, how many spaces were occupied?

**BL:** We've got more than 1,500 people, and about 350 apartments—places where people have made it possible to actually live in the former hospital wards. Some have been very creative in how they have done that. Some have made little kitchenettes. Some have made little lounge / dining room types of spaces, depending on the space and the size of the family. Others have put in showers, even, into the little spaces that they've had.

**AI:** The people who came into the occupation, were they generally speaking mainly homeless people?

**BL:** It was quite a mix. As the word spread, people who were facing difficulties with evictions from where they were living, people who could not afford the high rents in the area or from where they were coming. In the application submission to the intake committee, they had to state their economic or social circumstances: whether they had income, whether they were employed, or unemployed. So there was a whole range of factors that had to be considered. And one of the big things was whether they understood that this is an occupation. This is no guarantee of a house. They will participate in the struggle to get housing or to be able to access housing from the authorities.

**A!:** Did you effectively exclude people for any particular reason? You had a priority list, I suppose. What kind of things would bump you right down to the bottom of the priority list, where you wouldn't really stand much of a chance? What kind of things were you definitely not looking for?

**BL:** It would definitely be your economic circumstances. If people declared that, look, I do work and I do earn quite a high salary, it would make it less favorable. One challenge that we did have was when there was an attempt by a group of people who wanted to just come in and become part of the occupation without any engagement with the other occupiers at the time. They didn't want to be part of how the occupation was structured and functions. They were coming into the occupation with their own organisation. That didn't go down well, and people voted against accepting them to become part of the occupation.

**A!:** Have there been any attempts to remove you before?

**BL:** There haven't been. The authorities have been pretty cautious, knowing that Ndifuna Ukwazi was offering legal support, as our legal representative. At one point they brought an interdict to prevent us from taking in more people, because they were arguing that the city has an obligation to manage it and they are not going to allow anything more than the 750 people that have been identified on a list that we had to submit. But over time, there's been a slow, gradual expansion of that list because of the need of people. So we actually ended by almost doubling those numbers.

**What they also have done to sort** of intimidate us is to have a number of police and military raids on the site, framing it as searching for illegal guns and unlicensed weapons and illicit trading of drugs and illegal immigrants. But nobody has ever been charged. People have been arrested and detained, yes, but have been released as a result of being able to show evidence of proper documentation to be in the country.

**A!:** So why are they trying to get rid of you now?



*Some have been very creative in how they have made it possible to actually live in the former hospital wards. Some have made little kitchenettes. Some have made little lounge dining room types of spaces, depending on the space and the size of the family. (Photo Bevil Lucas).*

**BL:** They want to develop the site for social housing. To be able to do that, their argument is they need to see who qualifies for the social housing project and who does not. Those who do not qualify would be relocated. Originally, they wanted people to be displaced to a place called Blikkiesdorp which is next to Delft and another place called Wolve Rivier, about 30 kilometers out of Cape Town. But over time, they realised that it is not going to be viable, so they haven't pursued those.

**A!:** What is it that either qualifies or disqualifies you from social housing?

**BL:** Social Housing is a form of private housing for a particular category of income. At the moment, the legislation says it's from R1,500 up to R22,000. A big challenge is that it does not accommodate extended families, for example, where only one person is working. So if you are on the social security benefit, but you are a family of six, it would automatically disqualify you. And if you earn nothing because you're unemployed, you are disqualified.

**A!:** So the people most in need can't have it. And they are trying to buy off the better-off members by offering you a stake in their social housing. Then they will get rid of the others because they don't want them. What's the time frame for this?

**BL:** They've just declared their intentions, and in terms of current legislation, they have to declare their intentions and then afford people the opportunity to make representations. But the current administration has only declared its intention to develop the site. It has not declared its intention for the type of engagement that it wishes to have with the current community, and what would, in actual fact, happen to the current community that is here now.

**What we are doing now is to** explain to the community what is taking place right now and how we are going to enable people to make representations individually, but also in clusters. We've got a slogan: "development, yes; displacement, no". We are framing our submission around what may be possible in terms of development and what must be done to make provision for those who don't qualify for the social housing project.

**We're taking the stories of** people that have been waiting on the waiting list. How the occupation has provided them with accommodation. And we are hoping that would get them some recognition. We want to use it as a space to pronounce on what we think can happen, should happen, and what is possible on the site.

**In the main we are relying on a** commissioned investigation that the city has done—a report that says that it could develop the site incrementally, and that it could double the number of units that are currently there. We are wanting to make use of that in building our argument as to how this community can become part of the process to develop the site by engagement, by participation. We want what we refer

to as a “co-design process” that speaks to how the development can happen and what should be provided for those families that do not qualify in the current form of social housing.

**We are talking about Community Residential Units (CRUs).** That’s another form of housing, public housing, that the city is already managing and already exists. A combination of different types of housing must be the answer, not only social housing. But they’ve already kind of hinted that they want the site purely for social housing. So it is going to be a contentious part of the negotiations with them. Social housing is private development. It’s not the state. The state releases the land to a social housing development company, and they then manage that housing development for their own income. The CRUs are municipal developments purely for rental, for people with income zero to R3,500.

**AI:** What are your attempts to mobilise beyond your community to a broader working class community in the area and wider than that?

**BL:** A number of us are trying to set up a sort of civic movement from Observatory, Salt River and Walmer Estate. A number of civic bodies have come together to consider forming a united front around the whole question of housing and in particular around Cissie Gool house. And we’re also using other platforms

where we participate: ILRIG, Tshisimani, AIDC for example. The plan is to bring together civil society around this. And we have also been working with some of the academic institutions, and we’re hoping that we could get together a group of academics to put together a position around the occupation,

**AI:** And what about relations with other occupations? I’m thinking, for example, of Intlungu in Khayelitsha, where there are big occupations, different from you in that they are occupying land rather than buildings. How is your relationship there?

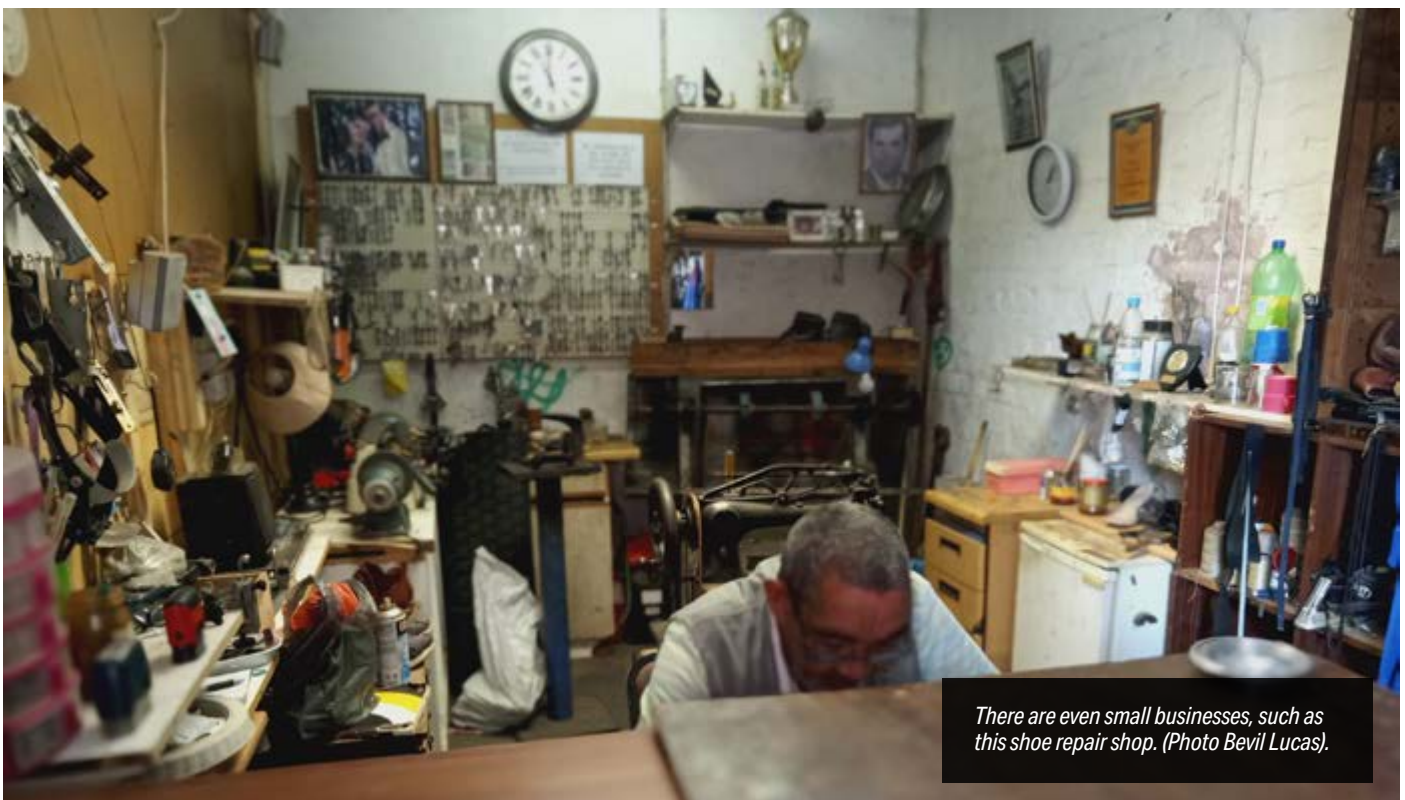
**BL:** They are all part of the solidarity network that we are participating in. That’s where we share strategies, and hopefully that will spur on the conversation about more solidarity between the occupations. At the moment, it’s not so strong: each occupation is still conducting its struggles in a silo fashion. But we are trying to build a platform that can be used to bring broader solidarity amongst the different occupations and amongst the different platforms that do exist within the city. To get legitimacy and recognition of the sites that are being occupied. Our approach is that we as the civil society and social movements must come together and create a strategy to

engage with the authorities around the land and housing crisis that we face in our city.

**AI:** How do you see things developing from here?

**BL:** There are no time frameworks. We are thinking of bringing a counter legal application against the City to force some form of engagement about the future. There’s quite a number of steps they have to follow to be able to get to the point of a decision to proceed with the development. What we are wanting to secure is what is referred to as ‘meaningful engagement’ with the community-elected representation as well as the legal representation of the community.

**We’ve been working with an architect and he’s in the process of putting to them a counter proposal, convening a technical team that can look at the proposal that we are working on, to use that as the basis of negotiation. Different spaces can be developed, and different approaches to the current legislation on social housing need to be revisited to be able to accommodate the realities.**



*There are even small businesses, such as this shoe repair shop. (Photo Bevil Lucas).*

# The new Land Court

A HOPE FOR LAND REFORM?

By Thandolwethu Nkopane



Rather than casting their ballots in the hope of electing a new government, a small but determined community in Keiskammahoek held a silent protest, calling attention to their long-standing grievances. The community's decision stemmed from deep-seated frustration over unresolved land claims dating back to the original 1998 cut-off date.

*Isizathu sethu songavoti  
lilungelo lethu esingalifumaniyo  
(Our reason for not voting is  
because of our right that has  
been denied).*

**A**S MILLIONS OF SOUTH AFRICANS across the nation exercised their democratic right to vote, a small but determined community in Keiskammahoek, located in the Amathole district of the Eastern Cape, chose a different path. Rather than casting their ballots in the hope of electing a new government, **they held a silent protest**, calling attention to their long-standing grievances. The community's decision stemmed from deep-seated frustration over unresolved land claims dating back to the original 1998 cut-off date.

For 28 years, they have navigated bureaucratic hurdles and legal processes in pursuit of compensation for the land that was taken from them. Despite their efforts and numerous national and provincial elections in which they participated, hope for justice and restitution has waned among them. The sentiment echoed throughout the community, reflecting a fear they may never see a resolution in their lifetime, mirroring the plight of their ancestors.

## Keiskammahoek land restitution protest

The Keiskammahoek community protest serves as a poignant statement on the broader issue of land restitution in South Africa. The community's plight reflects a national challenge, where countless individuals and communities await fair compensation for historical injustices. **The Commission on Restitution of Land Rights**, which is tasked with addressing such grievances, has faced criticism for delays and inefficiencies

in processing claims. The community's decision not to vote underscores a growing disillusionment with democratic processes when fundamental rights remain unaddressed.

The story of Keiskammahoek is not isolated; it resonates with many South Africans who continue to grapple with unresolved land claims, casting a shadow over the nation's democratic aspirations.

The Commission projects an additional **30 years to settle outstanding land claims**, a stark reality for communities like Keiskammahoek. Having already waited for nearly 30 years, the prospect of further delay has intensified frustrations among residents seeking justice for land dispossession. In a briefing to the then **Portfolio Committee** on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development in 2023, the Commission highlighted the critical issue of backlogs and unresolved claims within the Land Claims Court. According to their assessment, the absence of a permanent court structure and insufficient judicial capacity have been significant obstacles in the processing of land restitution cases. The sentiment aligns with the recommendations from the **Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture** in 2019 to strengthen the Land Claims Court by "appointing a permanent judge president and four permanent judges to the Land Court".

## Establishment of a permanent land court

The lack of a stable institutional framework has complicated efforts to address historical injustices. In response, in 2021 the then Minister of Justice and Correctional services, Ronald Lamola, introduced the **Land Court Act No. 06 of 2023**, establishing a **permanent Land**

**Court** to replace the Land Claims Court. The Act, passed by Parliament and signed into law in 2023, seeks to streamline processes and ensure dedicated judicial oversight in land cases. The Act places a **strong emphasis on accelerating land reform** and facilitating the settling of claims and matters in the Land Court expeditiously.

The Act institutes a permanent panel of judges appointed on the basis of their specialised training and expertise in land rights. In a bid to enhance access to justice, the Act stipulates that, while the court's principal seat is in Johannesburg, it may, in the interest of justice, convene proceedings at alternative locations.

Furthermore, the jurisdiction of the court is extended to include all issues arising from the *Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act* of 1996. This Act safeguards the land rights of rural citizens governed by customary law, including those with Permission to Occupy (PTO) certificates, and beneficiaries under **the Ingonyama Trust**. Additionally, the court is empowered to adjudicate matters concerning labour tenants and disputes arising from the *Restitution of Land Rights Act* of 1994.

## Access and budget constraints

The establishment of the Land Court in Johannesburg, mandated to oversee critical land matters affecting rural communities such as Keiskammahoek, raises significant questions about its effectiveness in delivering timely justice. Although the court can hold proceedings outside Johannesburg, potentially easing the financial burden of travel on rural citizens, uncertainties remain around the criteria and timing for deciding when such alternative locations are deemed

necessary. The phrase [‘whenever it appears to the Judge President’](#) adds ambiguity. This wording implies that rural citizens, often already financially strained, may initially be required to pursue their cases in Johannesburg until a judge determines otherwise—a process that could exacerbate hardships faced by impoverished communities seeking restitution.

The effectiveness of the Land Court is further complicated by budgetary constraints highlighted in the [Commission on Restitution of Land Rights’ 2023 report](#). The Commission argues that current funding levels are inadequate to significantly reduce the backlog of unresolved claims—a situation that the new court is expected to inherit.

Financial limitations not only hinder the resolution of claims but also impact access to legal representation. Under the draft regulations, Legal Aid South Africa is tasked with providing legal assistance, subject to specific criteria. However, the Legal Aid South Africa Act stipulates that funding for land issues is contingent upon allocations from the Commission, or if the Commission is party to the disputes.

## The Land Court Act under the GNU

The newly appointed cabinet under the Government of National Unity (GNU) has drawn criticism for its increased size, expanding from 28 ministers in the previous cabinet to 32 ministers. This move has sparked discussion about the rationale behind increasing the number of cabinet members, especially considering the decision in 2019 to reduce the cabinet from 36 to 28 ministers.

[President Ramaphosa, in his statement on the appointment](#) of cabinet, held that the decision to combine portfolios would enhance coherence coordination, revitalise the economy and overall governmental efficiency.

In 2019, the agriculture portfolio was merged with land reform and rural development, under the leadership of ANC member and former Minister, Thoko Didiza. However, in the newly formed 2024 cabinet, this merger was reversed, resulting in two separate portfolios. The appointment of the DA’s John Steenhuisen as Minister of Agriculture and PAC’s Mzwanele Nyhontsho as Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development highlights a shift towards independent governance of these sectors. Potentially, this represents contrasting ideologies on how to tackle the land question. The contrast in ideologies raises concerns about policy coherence and budget allocation to facilitate the efficiency of the Land Court.



*The appointment of the DA’s John Steenhuisen as Minister of Agriculture and PAC’s Mzwanele Nyhontsho as Minister of Land Reform and Rural Development represents contrasting ideologies and raises concerns about policy coherence and budget allocation to facilitate the efficiency of the Land Court.*

The two sectors are intricately linked, and decisions in one can impact outcomes in the other. With the PAC’s clear stance on returning land to [“its original owners—the indigenous people of Africa”](#) and the DA’s emphasis on [private ownership protection](#), divergent ideologies could hinder unified policy making.

The same goes for the division of the Justice and Correctional Services portfolio, previously unified under Minister Lamola’s leadership. Its split also raises concerns over budget allocation and efficiency, echoing similar challenges faced by the Agriculture and Land Reform portfolios. Under Lamola’s tenure, notable strides were made, including the establishment of the Land Court.

Opposition and differences in ideologies can theoretically protect the interests of the public by creating room for diverse viewpoints. However, the risk of conflicting objectives between these portfolios raises concerns about efficient governance, budget allocation and management. How will the budget, previously allocated to a single merged portfolio, now be divided between Agriculture and Land Reform? Dividing the budget could potentially limit resources for resolving land claims or providing legal aid in land court proceedings, disadvantaging vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, stretching the budget to accommodate both departments begs the question of whether economic constraints, highlighted by President Ramaphosa in 2019, have eased. This move challenges the prioritisation of revitalising the economy and prudent fiscal management, suggesting a potential strain on public finances.

In essence, while division may reflect diverse perspectives, the practical implications on governance effectiveness, budget allocation, and economic strategy remain critical considerations for the newly appointed cabinet.

With this newly elected government, attention turns to how the Ministers of Land Reform and Rural Development, Agriculture and Justice and Constitutional Development will bolster their portfolios. The success of the Land Court hinges on strategic capacitation efforts, including enhancing expertise within the Commission, to effectively manage and expedite land restitution cases.

As South Africa works towards equitable land reform, the effectiveness of the Land Court in addressing historical injustices is crucial for redress. Positive outcomes would entail justice and fair compensation for communities like Keiskammahoek. However, if the new Ministers fail to advocate for the Court and Commission’s capacitation, Keiskammahoek’s residents might endure another three decades of waiting for justice. The upcoming months will demonstrate how governmental commitments translate into real outcomes for communities seeking restitution and justice, such as Keiskammahoek. Additionally, it will be intriguing to observe how these ministries collaborate to advance real development while ensuring land justice.

**Thandolwethu Nkopane** is a research assistant with the Land and Accountability Research Centre at the University of Cape Town.

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT



By Jeff Rudin

*Finding answers to the food problem requires moving beyond food into the more general sphere of poverty. Food wouldn't be thrown away if people could afford to eat.*

*This is an expanded version of a presentation made at the 30th bi-annual two-day meeting of the Violence Prevention Forum, in Pretoria on 12th to 13th November 2024.*

**I** BEGIN WITH A REMINDER OF THE mind-concentrating [tragedy](#) of the [two mothers](#), each with three children, who last year murdered those children before committing suicide. Starvation was evidently a major reason for these otherwise unthinkable acts of violence.

How do we come to terms with this tragedy, in a country as rich as ours?

## Beyond food

One way is the long-standing proliferation of food distribution schemes all over the world. The nature of such schemes is that they focus exclusively on food. But finding answers to the food problem requires moving beyond food into the more general sphere of poverty. Food wouldn't be thrown away if people could afford to eat.

The economist Ha-Joon Chang reminds us that economics is a [political argument](#). The very definition of poverty is political. This is reflected in the

statistics about poverty. [Depending how you measure poverty](#), they range all the way from 700 million people, or 8.4% of the world's population, to 6.7 billion people, or 85% of us.

Eradicating both hunger and poverty remain central priorities for the UN. So, too, is its long standing [commitment to "Zero Hunger"](#). Zero Hunger in South Africa—or the world—by 2030? There's a nice thought!

What sense can one make of this UN call, when the UN's own [State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report](#), for 2024, finds that:

- About 733 million people faced hunger in 2023, equivalent to one in five in Africa.
- About 2.33 billion people faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2023 and among those billions, more than 864 million people were going without food for an entire day or more at times.
- Poverty prevented more than one-third of the global population—more than 2.8 billion people – from affording a healthy diet in 2022, with 71.5% of the population in less developed countries being affected.
- 15% of newborn babies suffer from low birth weight, with 22.3% of children under five being stunted.

- In South Africa, 61% of our population are unable to afford a healthy diet, and food insecurity is the lived experience of 36.6 million of us.

Exemplifying wilful blindness to the long history of global attempts to eradicate hunger, October 16th 2024 was the 45th annual World Food Day commemorating the founding of the UN Food & Agriculture Organisation in 1945. The World Food Programme—amongst those celebrating World Food Day—[received the Nobel Peace Prize](#) for 2020. It was awarded for their efforts to combat hunger, contribute to peace, and for playing a leading role in stopping the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Stopping hunger as a weapon of war? Oh, the innocence of only four years ago compared to now!

The call for Government intervention to achieve 'Zero Hunger' has as long a history of failure. [Mandela acknowledged the challenge](#) in 2022: "Child malnutrition is one of the greatest impediments to the well-being of our people and the development of our society... The fight against child poverty is, therefore, one of the priorities of this administration". Right sentiment thanks but not action.



## Profit prevails...

The question thus becomes an ever-increasingly urgent: WHY?

My answer begins with the fiction that agri-business exists to provide food for people, rather than the reality of its primary imperative: profit maximisation. Hence, our Department of Agriculture's priority of promoting food exports. The then United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, [Olivier de Schutter](#), [noted in 2011](#):

*Food moves where purchasing power is highest, not where needs are most urgent.*

Oranges provide an example of this reality. The latest report of the [US Department of Agriculture](#) reveals, for instance, that in 2020/21, the average price per metric ton of oranges in South Africa was R3,999. This compares with an export price of R9,635.

## ...and so does privilege

The second part of my answer is that most of the people involved with hunger and poverty are padlocked to privilege. They are so imprisoned in a paradigm in which inequality is taken as so natural that nothing else is conceivable. This results in the permanent realism of making the lives of the poor no better than...less unbearable. This is to say the focus is locked on addressing symptoms while avoiding causes. Thus, for instance, the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) [has urged governments](#) to stamp out childhood malnutrition via a range of simple, cheap and proven interventions for improving childhood nutrition. These include such measures as food fortification

and the provision of vitamin supplements to pregnant women. It is noteworthy that governments have ignored even these minor palliative measures.

An example of how economists legitimise the needs of the privileged is the much-used idea that to make the poor less poor, the rich must be made much richer. This is the premise of what economists call the "trickle-down" theory or the idea that a rising tide lifts all boats.

As long ago as 1982, John Galbraith, the famed US economist had this to say about the trickle-down rationalisation: "If you feed the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrows."

Governments have always favoured the rich. The present neoliberal form of doing so seeks to make that favouritism as natural as the daily rising of the sun. South Africa departs from this in one important respect: its over-riding priority since 1992 is to privilege, not the rich, but the would-be rich kept poor by apartheid. Extending Mandela's lead, Thabo Mbeki made the government the midwife to the birth of what he called the "black bourgeoisie".

While the national focus is currently on the horror of the spaza-poisoned children and the scandalously chronic shortage of food inspectors it has revealed, little attention is given to why there should be this long-known shortage. While the government now pledges itself to do what it should have been doing for decades, little if anything is said about urgently increasing the health inspectorate to enable them to do what couldn't be done before. This deafening silence is a measure of the acceptance of what is presented as being unavoidable austerity. Yet, Mbeki's

"black bourgeoisie" are exempt from the hardships of austerity. Hence, notwithstanding our government's proclaimed poverty, money is being found to employ [20,000 new inspectors](#) to enforce BEE and related 'transformation' laws.

Apart from the global favouring of the rich and the would-be rich, the burning question remains: what is it about our political economy that simultaneously creates abundant food for the few and food poverty for the many? Capitalism and food security don't mix

In 2013, India passed a National Food Security Act. It was groundbreaking in its provision of subsidised food grains to approximately two-thirds of the country's 1.4 billion people, with half of the children under five years old being chronically malnourished. The response of the Global North? Headed by the US, it accused India of "creating a massive new loophole for potentially unlimited trade-distorting subsidies. As a result, the WTO effectively put paid to this most practical of government interventions within a profit maximising economy.

What I'm suggesting is the incompatibility between capitalism and universal food security. Shortage of food is not the problem. The global problem is a shortage of money to buy (or grow) the food. The problem isn't poverty but inequality—there's no shortage of rich people. Just think of the top 10% of most countries, including South Africa.

The only solution, in my opinion, is a political economy that prioritises the meeting of people's basic needs above all others. This would remove the obscenity of 'too much' food being seen as an economic problem. A fortune is spent predicting global demand for each food item, and, hence, adjusting how much each crop is planted. Despite this, 'surplus' food remains a problem. Surplus means either lower prices—and hence lower profit—or throwing away the unmarketable food. Surplus food also disrupts the important 'futures' markets, in which investors bet on the profitability of each new season's foods. Being denominated in dollars, these capitalist gambling institutions make South African food security particularly vulnerable to dollar/rand exchange rates.

We must continue to struggle for the kind of measures that India attempted, to alleviate hunger and to take forward the struggle against capitalism and for the power that will enable such a solution to become possible.

Jeff Rudin is a member of the *Amanda!* collective.



*'Surplus' food remains a problem. Surplus means either lower prices—and hence lower profit—or throwing away the unmarketable food.*

# CHALLENGING EXCLUSION: THE FIGHT FOR FAIR SRD GRANTS

By **Siyanda Baduza**

The SRD grant was introduced in May 2020 to support people without income during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Initially set at R350, the grant aimed to mitigate the economic hardship caused by the pandemic. While similar pandemic-era income supports have been phased out in other countries, the grant remains in South Africa. This is partly due to pressure from civil society which has invoked the constitutional right to social assistance, amidst the ongoing unemployment crisis.

Various research studies have shown the grant's crucial impact; despite its meagre value, it has helped prevent millions of people from falling into food poverty, and improved the ability of people to search for work. Most recipients primarily spend it on food.

## Regulations cause reductions

At its peak in March 2022, around 11 million people relied on the grant for their survival. However, after new regulations were introduced in April 2022, the number of recipients plummeted to around 5.5 million. While there has been some recovery, recipients still fall below the peak, averaging around only 8.5 million. This precisely matches the grant's current budget cap.

The introduction of these regulations followed a substantial cut in the grant's allocation by National Treasury at the start of the 2022/23 financial year. This was part of a decade-long trend of shrinking social service provisions, as the government prioritises achieving a primary budget surplus above all else—a goal that is disconnected from the realities faced by vulnerable people.

The drastic funding reductions were not based on any rational assessment of need. Even at the grant's peak, the number of approvals still fell far below expert estimates of the eligible population. This is estimated to be around 17 to 18 million people. The Department of Social Development (DSD) was pressured to implement restrictive measures to keep beneficiary numbers below this arbitrarily low budget threshold. As a result, the department consistently underspent on the grant over the last three years. This has been used to justify further budget cuts.

This backdrop of cutbacks and restrictive regulations prompted the [Institute for Economic Justice](#) and [#PayTheGrants](#) to initiate legal action. This litigation aims to challenge the administrative systems of the SRD grant that unfairly exclude millions. We made many attempts to constructively engage with the government but the exclusionary approaches have been deliberately retained in successive versions of the regulations.

The case targets three primary issues within the administration of the SRD grant: procedural barriers that restrict access, the erosion of the grant's value and the means test threshold, and the systematic non-payment of approved grants.

## Procedural barriers

The SRD grant uses an automated income verification process. This is unlike other social grants that allow for document submission to prove income. This process, through partnerships with banks, flags all bank account inflows as income. This overly broad definition wrongly excludes many who lack regular income or financial support. For example, people have been excluded for receiving once-off emergency family assistance, child maintenance payments, and even

loans. This is detailed in 79 supporting affidavits submitted alongside our founding papers.

Payment of the grant is constrained by the budget cap which is not informed by any objective determination of the size of the eligible population.

Unlike other grants, Sassa cross-checks applicants against other government databases like UIF or NSFAS. These databases are known to be inaccurate and outdated. This leads to the wrongful exclusion of many who are listed on the databases but are not actually receiving benefits.

The appeals process is extremely narrow. It does not allow for applicants to submit any new information to contextualise wrongful exclusion. It merely repeats the same flawed database and bank verification processes.

The online application form includes questions about how applicants survive in the absence of the grant. This can potentially mislead applicants into excluding themselves.

Unlike other grants, the SRD administration is exclusively online, which poses significant barriers in a country with low internet access, smartphone ownership and digital literacy.



*The SRD grant has remained, partly due to pressure from civil society which has invoked the constitutional right to social assistance, amidst the ongoing unemployment crisis.*

## Erosion of value

The constitution mandates the progressive realisation of social assistance to all those who need it. Progressive realisation means that the state must expand and improve access to social assistance (such as grants) over time. With the SRD, however, there has been a retrogression (a walking back) in two areas:

- The means test threshold of R624 is equal to the outdated 2021 Food Poverty Line (FPL); that's the lowest amount that a person needs to meet minimum food requirements. Despite annual inflationary adjustments to the FPL, which now stands at R796, the means test threshold for the SRD remains unchanged. This means that, in real terms, people need to be poorer than before to access the assistance.
- The value of the grant remained at R350 between 2020 and 2024 and has not kept pace with inflationary adjustments seen in other grants. It received only a small R20 increase in April 2024. It buys far less than it did in the past, despite the slight increase, especially in the context of high cost-of-living increases.

## Systematic non-payment of approved grants

There is a persistent gap between the number of approved grants and actual payments; a significant number of approved beneficiaries never actually receive them. Furthermore, a new clause now allows Sassa to cancel historic pending payments. These are payments that have been approved but not yet disbursed. This further increases the risk that approved beneficiaries will not receive their entitlements.

## State's arguments

The state defends its differential treatment of the SRD grant by labelling it

as a temporary measure. It was intended only to address the unemployment spike caused by the pandemic—a condition they claim is improving. However, this



*Unlike other grants, Sassa cross-checks applicants against other government databases like UIF or NSFAS. These databases are known to be inaccurate and outdated.*

is misleading; unemployment levels were at crisis levels before the pandemic and remain so today. Furthermore, according to Sassa's own data, the majority of SRD grant applicants have never been employed. So the grant is less a temporary stopgap between periods of unemployment and in fact more a permanent basic income support for those without regular income, including carers and those precariously employed.

This sentiment has been shared publicly by high-ranking government officials, including the President in two State of the Nation addresses. They have repeatedly made clear commitments that the SRD grant would not only remain, but also that it would serve as a basis for a more comprehensive system of basic income. These commitments clash with the stance taken by the state, and especially National Treasury, in their papers and in court.

This case presents a clear-cut example of the National Treasury exceeding its constitutional mandate, and attempting to usurp the powers of other government departments, in pursuit of its austerity policy position. It purports to speak for government as a whole on social development policy matters. It is dictating social development policy (including the value of the grant) to DSD and Sassa. It is imposing retrogression in coverage and value of the grant. And it is claiming sole authority to determine the budget for the SRD grant—when that is a decision for parliament.

The government has also made bold assertions about the affordability of the

SRD grant in its founding documents. It claims that any improvement in the grant value, or fixes in the procedural barriers, would lead to a collapse in the system. Yet, under the pressure of litigation, they announced an unbudgeted R20 increase in the grant value.

The legal remedy that we seek has also been misrepresented by the state. The litigation does not aim to dictate the design of the SRD grant policy. Instead, it asks for the state to implement its own policy, in line with the constitution, rather than undermining it. We want the court to direct the government to develop a reasonable plan that provides for the grant on a long-term basis, with annual adjustments to the value and means test. These must take into account relevant cost-of-living factors and other real-world evidence of need. And we seek orders remedying the unlawful aspects of the SRD grant administration.

These are the bare minimum steps that the government can take towards fulfilling its responsibilities to the millions of adults who face daily hunger and poverty.

## Next steps

All papers in the case have been filed, and both parties have had the chance to argue before a judge at the High Court. We are now awaiting the judgement. The decision will likely influence the design of the next version of the grant. We will also be alert to the possibility that some of the exclusionary measures, such as online-only systems and the flawed bank verification, could be extended to other grants, as implied by Treasury in the recent MTBPS document. This could affect more than the 8 million currently at risk of being unfairly excluded from necessary social assistance.

**Siyanda Baduza** is a researcher in labour and social security at the Institute for Economic Justice, with a focus on universal basic income guarantee.

# Samancor and the dark side of foreign investment

By [Chloé van Biljon](#) and [Jaco Oelofsen](#)

This article is jointly published with the [Mail & Guardian](#).

**D**URING THE 2024 MEDIUM TERM budget policy statement on 30 October, the government of national unity (GNU) re-emphasised its commitment to “attracting more foreign investment”. The latest iteration of the worn-out ‘[investor-friendly](#)’ mantra is a desperate attempt to lure foreign capital into South Africa. Yet, history has shown that this strategy is a mirage, promising prosperity while delivering little.

The case of Samancor, the second-biggest chrome mining company in the world, is a stark reminder of the predatory nature of unchecked foreign investment. While ‘investor-friendly’ policies might temporarily attract foreign capital, they have not been [found](#) to result in investments that further developmental goals, create long-term economic growth and / or result in improved social equity.

The story of Samancor Chrome is a textbook case of how ‘investor-friendly’ policymaking has enabled corporate plunder, at the cost of long-term development.

Once a South African-owned industrial powerhouse, Samancor was allegedly stripped of its profits by foreign entities through a web of financial arrangements. According to an [ongoing case](#) lodged by the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu), along with the Alternative Information and Development Centre and a [whistleblower](#) ex-director, [R7.5 billion](#) was syphoned out of the country over the course of just four years. This deprived the state of vital tax revenue, workers’ and community trusts of income, and the nation of a valuable asset.

[The amount of wealth lost to profit shifting and illicit financial flows is staggering](#). Estimates suggest the total level of illicit financial flows amounts to [4% of South Africa’s GDP](#) (roughly R300 billion) every year, while every year [R100 billion](#) is lost to tax revenues alone. This is almost equivalent to the entire government budget for police

services or more than a third of the health budget.

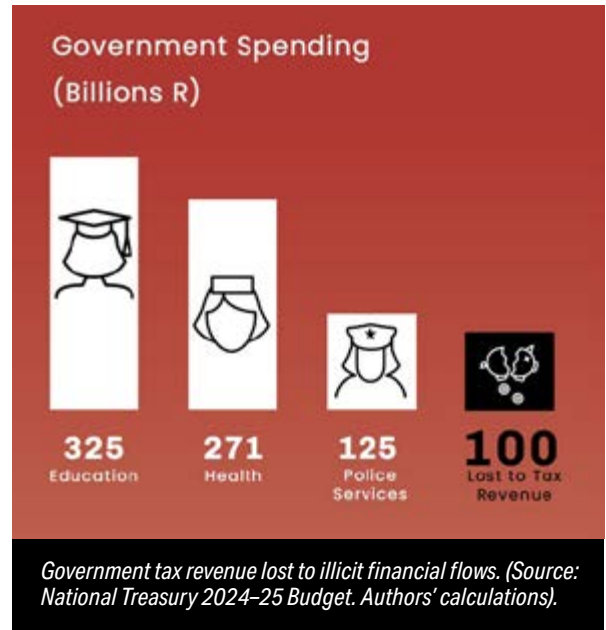
## The looting of Samancor

One of the core allegations against Samancor involves the establishment of a Malta-based subsidiary, Samchrome.

Amcu contends that Samchrome was a mere conduit for syphoning profits out of South Africa. The company allegedly generated exorbitant commissions with no value added, funnelling billions of rand to offshore entities with almost no corporate taxes, controlled by Samancor’s directors.

Another allegation involves the sale of a 50% stake in a Samancor subsidiary, Tubatse, to Sinosteel, a Chinese company. The deputy minister of foreign affairs at the time, Aziz Pahad, proudly announced that “it was confirmed that the Chinese parastatal company Sinosteel was committed to investing \$230 million (R1.7 billion) in a ferrochrome mine and smelter project with South Africa’s Samancor”.

However, Samancor’s 2008 annual report only reflects \$100 million received in the books. The remaining \$125 million



was diverted to offshore accounts controlled by Samancor’s majority shareholder, Kermas.

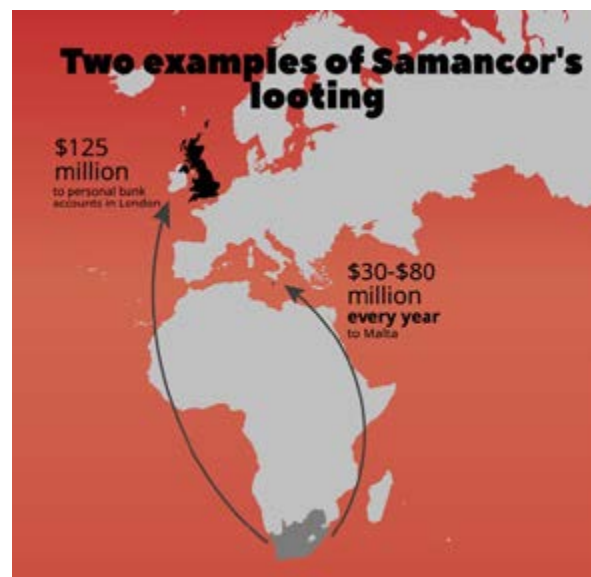
This incredible affair is corroborated in email exchanges cited in the whistleblower’s affidavit. Nedbank Capital says that they “received \$25 million and \$75 million, by order of Sinosteel”. In a later email they say that they “can also confirm that Nedbank London has received \$125 million on the account for Kermas”.

This illustrates how foreign investment often does not deliver the

promised benefits and raises the question of how such a significant discrepancy could have gone unnoticed.

Given the high-profile nature of the transaction, it’s perplexing that entities like the accountants (KPMG), the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, the South African Revenue Service, the Treasury and even Nedbank were seemingly unaware of the discrepancy between the publicised sale price and the actual amount received by Samancor.

This case underscores the importance of increased



transparency and accountability for companies, particularly large corporations. Mandating the public disclosure of financial records for companies could help prevent such instances of corporate malfeasance.

## Wage evasion not just tax loss

The effect on South Africa extends beyond lost tax revenue. The diversion of funds from Samancor deprived the company's workers of potential wage increases and undermined the company's ability to fulfil its Social Labour Plan obligations.

In a supporting affidavit to the court, AIDC called this behaviour of profit shifting and subsequent wage reduction "wage evasion". [Research](#) on Lonmin as a part of the Marikana Commission found that [profit shifting was directly linked to the illusion that the firm could not afford the wage increases](#) that the rock drill operators were requesting. This highlights the direct impact of these practices on workers' livelihoods.

The court ordered an independent assessment of the allegations against Samancor, which was conducted by BDO. Samancor has claimed that the outcomes of the report show that no action is necessary. However, they have declined to share the report with Amcu, claiming that they are not obliged to under section 165.

Amcu disputes this, arguing that because section 165 allows for further recourse if such an investigation was argued to be irrational or incomplete, this right would be meaningless if they were not able to assess the results of that investigation themselves.

A court hearing on 5 November was to determine whether Amcu can access the report. A judgment is expected in early 2025.

This case of profit shifting at Samancor could be a watershed moment in South African corporate history. It marks the first time a trade union has launched such a high-stakes legal battle against a transnational corporation, demanding [R1.5 billion](#) in restitution for workers. While unprecedented, it highlights the potential for unions to serve as corporate watchdogs. By demanding transparency around subsidiary finances and

cross-border transactions during wage negotiations, unions can play a crucial role in preventing future corporate abuses.

## Foreign investment as a threat to domestic development and sovereignty

The transformation of Samancor, from a proudly South African company to a mere vehicle for foreign interests, epitomises a [troubling trend](#)—the erosion of domestic control over what were once national assets.

Instead of thinking of illicit financial flow as resulting from the misbehaviour of a few 'bad apples', the state must look at how its larger-scale economic policy enables these flows, and make changes where necessary. This includes reversing the 1990s relaxation of exchange and capital controls and increasing reporting requirements for firms.

By prioritising the needs of its citizens over the profits of multinational corporations, South Africa can embark

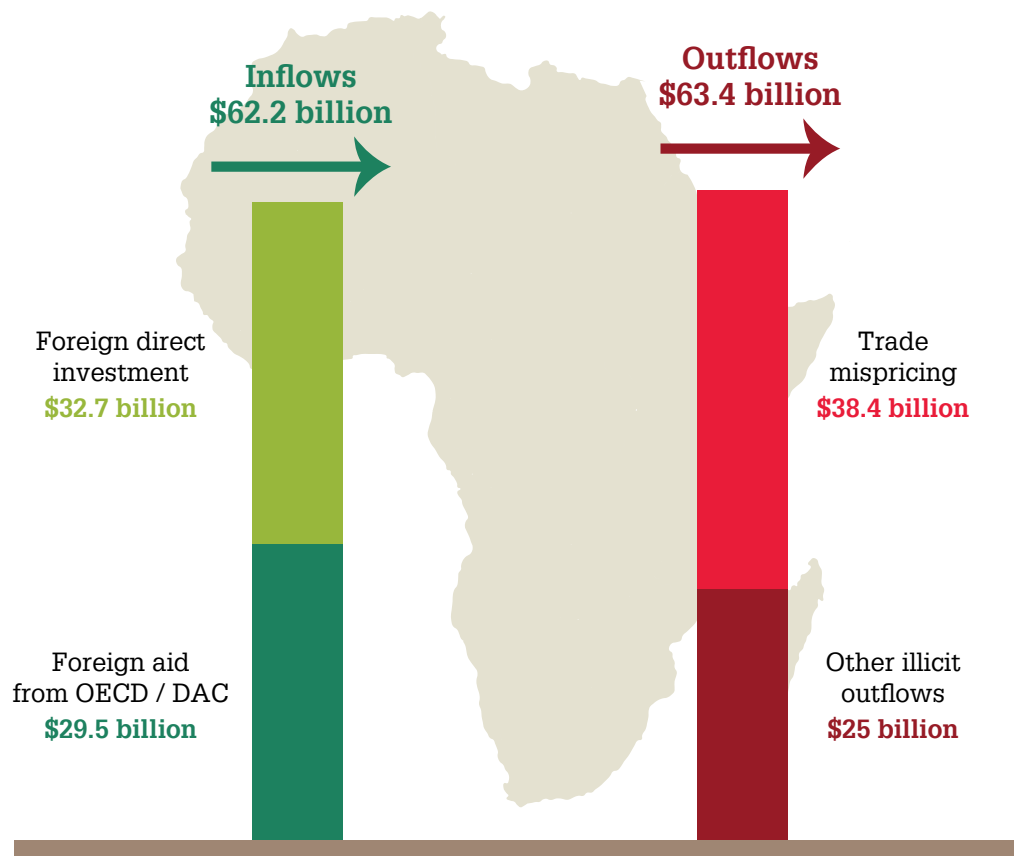
on a path towards a more equitable and prosperous future. The Samancor case is a stark reminder that the foreign investor-friendly model is a failed experiment. It is time for a radical departure from this destructive path.

The prioritisation of foreign investor-friendly policies speaks to removal of planning and controls, and the prioritisation of opportunities for profit-making. This is regardless of how they are linked or not linked to the rest of South Africa's developmental goals, such as decreasing poverty, unemployment and inequality.

We cannot continue to view our developmental goals as benefits coming from growth rather than objectives on their own.

Chloé van Biljon and Jaco Oelofsen are programme officers at the [Alternative Information and Development Centre](#).

## Africa loses more in illicit outflows than it gets in foreign aid and investment



Figures are average annual 2008–2010 for Sub-Saharan Africa

Adapted from the Africa Progress Report 2013. Sources: OECD (n.d.), OECD Stats Extracts, Global Financial Integrity (2012), Illicit Financial Flows from Developing Countries 2001–2010, World Bank (2013), Global Economic Prospectus—January 2013

# UNITED VOICES OF THE WORLD: ORGANISING PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN THE UK

Amanda! talked with **Petros Elia**, General Secretary of United Voices of the World (UVW), a union of more than 5,000 precarious workers in the UK.

**Amanda!:** Why was the union set up in the first place? You've got lots of unions in England. You've got a long tradition of unions. There are well established unions. Why did you have to set up a new one?

**Petros Elia:** A very important question. And I would add it's one that we continue to ask ourselves as we continue to assess our place and purpose in the wider trade union movement. Why and how we came into being goes back to 2014 when we became a certified trade union in the UK. The industrial and economic reasons for coming into being were simply that the trade union movement is and has been in decline for a long time. What UVW set out to do was really to look where workers were the least represented, which strongly correlates, unsurprisingly, with where pay, terms and conditions are the worst.

**One of the things which** kickstarted things for me on a personal level was actually some Colombians that my mum had met in the local church and who would regularly come back to our house to visit and hang out. Nearly all of

their family members were cleaners, and they were asking me questions about problems they were facing at work to which I didn't know the answers. So I looked around and there was an organisation which had been around for quite a few years called the Latin American Workers Association (LAWAS), which was really a kind of a community base, where Latin Americans would come together, learn English and learn a little bit about their rights as a small community. I went along to try and help out with LAWAS and some of what I saw was great. People were learning, they were sharing and they felt supported. But when it came to finding solutions to problems at work, they were generally given some advice and it was left at that, or they were being referred to other unions such as Unison or Unite, the two biggest unions in the UK. The problem was, a lot of these unions wouldn't be able to offer immediate support or advice, and in any event often wouldn't have been able to offer the kind of support that was needed.

**The second issue was that there** had been some initiatives, particularly from Unite, to try and organise cleaners at scale, predominantly in the City of London, but that was a single geographic area in a massive city and there were many cleaners naturally left underrepresented and in need of support. It was our conclusion that, given the scale of the issues facing Latin

American cleaners, the only way to tackle them was through robust, quick and creative actions that established unions didn't have the agility to do or the willingness to pursue, particularly due to the relatively high resource requirements of these struggles, which were not seen by established unions to be a good return on investment, so to speak.

**We concluded that we needed to** be an independent body, free from bureaucratic constraints and structures in order to do what was required and in order to experiment with the new tactics and strategies. We had to learn through trial and error and we continue to reflect on and review the most effective practices to this day.

**So I would say that's why. The** level of unionisation amongst cleaners at that point, and facilities workers in general as well as hospitality and care workers, was nominal only. So clearly, whatever the established unions were doing was not working. It was not recruiting workers in the sectors that were most underrepresented and that were most in need of representation and support and ultimately resources.

**The other reason we created an** independent new union is because, particularly with migrant workers, community is a really important thing. A lot of migrant workers are very atomised and excluded. They would not have been able to use established unions as a community space, a community hub. We felt that we needed independence to create those kinds of community spaces. The established unions have agreed strategies, processes, procedures, approaches to organising, to representing workers, to supporting workers, that are pretty set in stone. We believed we had to deviate from those norms and develop and learn and refine new norms and establish practices and processes.

**The union movement should be,** and isn't, prioritising the lowest paid and most precarious workers. Not only are they of huge potential strategic importance in terms of their numbers, but also they are the ones that are getting the most screwed over. That was why our mission was and remains to support low paid, precarious, migrant and otherwise marginalised workers to build power in the workplace and communities, through industrial, legal and direct action. That's what we set out to do, and that's what we continue to do.



*What UVW set out to do was really to look where workers were the least represented, which strongly correlates, unsurprisingly, with where pay, terms and conditions are the worst.*



Cleaners at exclusive department store, Harrods, fighting back against a new unfair leave policy that severely restricts their ability to take time off to visit their families abroad. Given the scale of the issues facing Latin American cleaners, the only way to tackle them was through robust, quick and creative actions.

**A!:** The experience here in South Africa is very similar. Casual workers are not being organised partly because it's too expensive. Partly there are often conflicts in companies—casual workers and permanent workers are at each other's throats because the permanent workers feel threatened by the casual workers. And the other issue is that the structures of traditional unions are built around permanence. You're elected as a shop steward for four years. Which casual worker is going to have a job for four years?

**PE:** Exactly. That phrase “built around permanence” resonates. When it comes to structures, over half our membership doesn't speak English, either at all, or only at a very basic level. From that point alone, they're not going to act as a traditional shop steward would in a workplace. They can't communicate with management or human resources. And, as you said, turnover is huge, and also a lot of lower paid workers work multiple jobs and have less investment and time in each job to build a traditional branch.

**A!:** How much do members pay? Do they pay a proportion of their wages, or a fixed, flat rate? How do you deal with subscriptions?

**PE:** The first subscription rate was £5 per month (R115 at today's exchange rate) for everybody, no matter what. Then we introduced varied rates of £6, £8 and £10. We are now at £10, £12, and £14, depending on income. We do also have discretionary subs. So if some of our members generally cannot pay that, then we have a discretionary reduced sub rate, £2 or £3, depending on individual circumstances.

**A!:** Who have you been organising? And who are you organising now? What kind of workers?

**PE:** For the first year we didn't have a bank account. So we had a stack of membership forms, but we weren't receiving any money. And we didn't have an office for the first three years. We were meeting in pubs, cafes, parks, libraries, wherever we could work. Nearly all members were Latino cleaners, at the beginning. We branched out after about four or five years. We started to attract all sorts of different types of workers, mainly

because of the reputation that we had developed through the successes that we had achieved.

**We were the first trade union in the UK to end outsourcing in higher education.** We did that in 2017 at the London School of Economics, through the biggest cleaners strike in UK history. As a result, they brought all 300 cleaners that they outsourced into university employment. We went on to become the first trade union in the UK to end outsourcing in the NHS, through industrial action and a huge campaign at St Mary's Hospital, which is part of Imperial Trust. The difference that insourcing makes for the workers is huge. Generally, public sector conditions in the UK are still very good. Sick pay is the big one: six months per year on full pay. The statutory minimum, on the other hand, gives workers nothing for the first three days you're ill, and then around £20 a day. So the difference between the conditions of outsourced and in-house workers could not be starker.

**It wasn't until 2016 that we organised our first strike.** In the early years, we were just organising protests, occupations and blockades as our primary means to achieve our aims. In the early years we didn't actually think strike action added much, largely because of the replaceability of workers on strike. If they're going to get replaced anyway,

and scab labor is going to be brought in, as it's perfectly legal to do in the UK, why bother going through all of the bureaucratic hoops and hurdles of taking strike action? Let's just organise mass demonstrations and try and be as disruptive as we can that way, and try and achieve the same thing as strike action, which is operational disruption.

**So in our early years, we were mobilising hundreds of people, blocking Oxford Street and other key areas in the course of our disputes. Targeting Sotheby's auction house was kind of a flagship campaign of ours. We would target every auction with hundreds of people. We targeted other big brand names like Topshop.**

**People saw that and thought** maybe, given its confidence and robustness, UVW could do likewise with other groups of workers. So we attracted artists, designers, workers from the legal sector, attorneys, advocates, paralegals, architects, sex workers, prostitutes, strippers, waiters, factory workers, chefs, retail workers. They all joined UVW. And then facilities workers, which include security, porters and hospitality workers,

and then random workers from hairdressers and nail technicians to construction workers, bricklayers and gardeners. We now count nearly 100 different types of jobs amongst our membership, from 110 different countries around the world.

**AI:** I imagine that a lot of the workers that you organise are vulnerable. How do you deal with that issue where people can't take action because they can just easily be fired. Or are they protected?

**PE:** The law protecting workers from dismissal for taking strike action or suffering detriments is applied to all workers regardless of length

of service or type of contract, save of course for the genuinely self-employed. So you have the right not to suffer any punishment for being a member of a union, or participating in union activities. You have the right not to be dismissed for participating in strike action, albeit only for the 12 weeks following the strike action.

**But nonetheless, the fear levels** are a lot higher for these workers, and that's the main barrier. We have to support our members to overcome it in the course of building a dispute. A lot of our members live with a huge amount of anxiety and fear over their precarity. They live hand to mouth. They've got nothing to fall back on.

**The LSE insourcing victory was a** game changer for the movement. Others followed suit - the School of Oriental African Studies, Kings University, Goldsmith College, and some other universities as well. So really, that was the domino that fell, which then led to the rest falling. That was always one of UVW's strategic roles. We recognise the constraints, obviously, that we face in terms of our size, capacity and resources, and our hope was that we would do shit that other unions wouldn't even bother to try or dare to try. And our hope was that if we succeeded, it would create this domino effect. The tail that wags the dog so to speak.

**With St Mary's, no National** Health Service Trust had ever been forced to end outsourcing before by their facilities workers. Three days into the strike, we were being ignored, as is normal, by the directors of this hospital, and so we decided to go and occupy the hospital. We effectively occupied the whole reception, and got meetings on the back of that with the head of HR and the head of nursing. They said, you will not achieve this. We



*With St Mary's, no NHS Trust had ever been forced to end outsourcing before by their facilities workers. They just agreed to in-house all 1,200 workers. This has been a vindication of our aggressive approach.*

**AI:** What are the main issues you organise around?

**PE:** Some are what we call reactive disputes - attempts to cut hours and restructure. Cutting hours is so prevalent amongst facilities workers in particular. But mainly our strikes are proactive rather than reactive. So wage increases are a major issue. When UVW started, it was the norm for cleaners to earn the minimum wage. The minimum wage became a ceiling as well as a floor. Now, it's actually not the norm. We've focused a lot on publicity, propaganda, telling workers stories, shining a light on these sectors and these industries and these workplaces, and ultimately, our members, most importantly.

can't afford it. And you can carry on striking, but you're not going to win. So we just declared an indefinite strike after that, in response. Then we occupied the board meeting. After that board meeting, something shifted. And they just agreed to in-house all 1,200 workers. And then they worked with us to actually bring about the in-housing and how to do it and the whole onboarding process. This has been a vindication of our aggressive approach.



# GENOCIDE, WAR AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

By Janet Cherry and Mulat Zinabu Assefa



**T**WO YEARS AGO, IN NOVEMBER 2022, the Pretoria Agreement was signed. This brought an end to the Tigray War, which had raged for two years, and cost between 700,000 and a million lives. Despite the agreement being signed in Pretoria, and this most brutal war of the 21st century being fought on the African continent, most people in South Africa were unaware of it. And if they heard about it on the news, they did not care. It seems so far away. Yet we should care, as we should care about what is happening in Gaza, right now; and we should hold to account those responsible, as we are trying to hold the Israeli government to account for war crimes and genocide.

At least half of the lives lost in this brutal conflict were Tigrayan civilians: hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, victims of war crimes including public massacres, systematic mass rape, and destruction of food and water sources and health facilities. There is a strong argument that there was the intention to commit genocide against the Tigrayan people. When the evidence and arguments presented to the International Court of Justice by South Africa in the case against Israel with regard to Gaza are considered, there are many similarities. The Tigrayan forces were seen as the ‘initiators’ of the conflict, as Hamas was in Gaza. But the overwhelming responsibility for war crimes lies with the Ethiopian government and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), as well as the Eritrean ‘defence’ Force (EDF).

South Africa, as host and co-facilitator of the Pretoria Agreement, should take some responsibility for it. This was a particularly one-sided agreement, which forced a capitulation onto the Tigrayan forces, and treated them as equally responsible for the violations that happened. Yet, as has been shown in conflicts the world over, there can be no lasting peace nor reconciliation in Ethiopia unless there is some form of accountability for war crimes. As the June 2024 New Lines Institute report *Genocide in Tigray* concludes:

*Without adequate acknowledgment and redress, there is unlikely to be a successful road toward sustainable peace or reconciliation.*



*Tigrayan refugees in a camp in Sudan. At least half of the lives lost in this brutal conflict were Tigrayan civilians: hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, victims of war crimes including public massacres, systematic mass rape, and destruction of food and water sources and health facilities.*

## The impact of the war two years later

In October 2024, we conducted a field trip to Tigray. We travelled through Tigray regional state, from the capital Mekelle to the historic Northern town of Aksum. In every town and village we visited, we were told about the impact of the war. We were told that 80 people were killed in Abraha Atsbeha; that over 800 were massacred in Aksum; that a young man was killed in cold blood in front of the mosque in Negash; that the ancient mosque was shelled, and the newly-equipped kitchen looted of all equipment; that the church on the hilltop next to Negash was shelled by artillery. We saw evidence of looted religious icons being sold in Addis Ababa; of the Martyr’s Museum in Mekelle being looted, desecrated and used as a torture centre. We saw stones by the side of the road marked with red paint to indicate that landmines were planted there, to warn the shepherd boys.

The impact of the war on agricultural production, the disruption of production and the loss of labour and harvests, is considerable. So is the economic and infrastructural damage considerable. The extent of trauma suffered by the whole population of Tigray is immeasurable. It seems inconceivable that, two years after the war, nobody has been held to account

for any human rights violations or war crimes.

## Tigray Genocide Commission

We had discussions with the Tigray Genocide Commission, a team of Tigrayan experts established by the regional Government of Tigray to collect information about crimes and violations. From these, we established that Ethiopia is not yet a post-conflict society. In the western and southern part of the ‘pre-war Tigray’ territories, some areas remain under the control of the belligerents involved in the war, and in the east, some remain under the control of Eritrea. In these areas no government services are yet opened. No schooling, no municipal services. There are 1.2 million internally displaced persons and many are without assistance and cannot return to their homes. The process of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) in the agreement has not yet happened, except for a process of ‘desperate demobilisation’—ex-combatants are simply sent home until they are called for the DDR process. The Pretoria agreement is “not going well”; the Tigray interim government is not stable; and reconstruction and rehabilitation are not happening. A leading Pretoria agreement

negotiator and the current interim president of Tigray, Getachew Reda, said the agreement can only be described as a success for silencing the guns.

Of great concern is that 26% of local archives were totally destroyed and 52% partially damaged in the war; this means that police records, local court records, and the justice system as a whole are in havoc.

The Commission embarked on a massive process of documentation, covering 800 000 households in Tigray, in the areas that they have had access to, to date. “People just want to tell what happened to them”, they said. They provide evidence for the commission of genocide in Tigray by both Ethiopian and Eritrean armed forces. Just two examples: the EDF forces ordered soldiers in the town of Aksum to “kill all males over the age of 7”. The ENDF forces engaged in systematic gang rape of Tigrayan women, including mutilation of the womb and genitals, with the intention to destroy women’s ability to bear children. Added to this are the deprivation of health facilities and access to food, water and electricity, as well as the destruction of the means of subsistence of a population which is dependent on subsistence farming.

One member of the commission told us that the intention of the Ethiopian government is to “eliminate the history of Tigray” and to “rewrite—a new narrative in Ethiopia”. Altogether, this can be understood to constitute the intention to kill a population, in other words, the intention to commit genocide.

In addition to the researchers of the Genocide Commission, this view was expressed by every scholar that we engaged with in Tigray. It has also been clearly outlined in the June 2024 report by the New Lines Institute, *Genocide in Tigray*.

## The Pretoria Agreement and transitional justice

The Pretoria Agreement [makes provision](#) for a process of transitional justice:

*The Government of Ethiopia shall implement a comprehensive national transitional justice policy aimed at accountability, ascertaining the truth, redress for victims, reconciliation, and healing, consistent with the Constitution of the FDRE and the African Union Transitional Justice Policy Framework. The transitional justice policy shall be developed with inputs from all stakeholders, and civil society groups through public consultations and formal national policy-making processes.*

However, this has not been implemented to date. The lack of political will to do so should be understood in the context of the Pretoria Agreement itself. This was a one-sided truce which involved the capitulation of the Tigray armed forces. Moreover, in its claimed even-handedness, it held all parties to the conflict equally responsible, and allocated responsibility for any war crimes committed to all parties equally. Many Tigrayans said that they are deeply sceptical about implementation of the process. The Ethiopian government, which they see as the chief perpetrator, is in charge of it.

A UN body, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), was established in 2021 to oversee the implementation of this resolution. Its mandate was extended until October 2023 and it was then discontinued, although it had not completed its work. At the end of its

extended mandate period, in October 2023, the ICHREE presented its final report and issued a statement:

*The level of mass killings and human rights abuses in Ethiopia over the last several years of conflict is staggering, and the international community must step up efforts to protect civilians and hold perpetrators of gross human rights abuses accountable for their crimes.*

*The continued presence and violations by the Eritrean Defence Forces in Tigray before and after the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022 and the spread of violence to near-national scale are stark reminders that without credible accountability for violations and crimes, nothing will stop impunity. There is no deterrence for future atrocity crimes.*

“The prospects of meaningful domestic accountability are extremely remote,” said Radhika Coomaraswamy, an expert of the Commission. “The demands of victims and survivors for justice and accountability are clear and unwavering, and their voices must be heard.”

## National reconciliation or accountability for war crimes?

Many scholars and civil society activists are demanding accountability. But they are sceptical about the prospects for national reconciliation and critical of what is termed the ‘instrumentalisation of transitional justice’ by those in power. One academic argued that transitional justice



**The Pretoria Agreement.** South Africa, as host and co-facilitator of the Pretoria Agreement, should take some responsibility for it.

is presented as a nation-building process, rather than a process which is focused on the Tigray war. This has the effect of 'watering down' the atrocities committed against the Tigrayan people. It excludes the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), through procedural manipulation of the transitional justice process. And ultimately it allows for consolidation of political power at the centre.

There is a view that the transitional justice process should be limited to the Tigray war and focused on holding perpetrators to account. It is necessary to have a culturally appropriate transitional justice process which is Tigray-specific. This should allow for remorse to be expressed and reconciliation to take place, using the model of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This would be a display of 'virtuous pragmatism' in the context of what is understood to be a betrayal by the African Union, said Muauz Gidey, lead researcher at the Tigray Institute of Policy Studies (TIPS) and peace and security analyst. While the AU is charged with oversight of the process as an 'African issue', it is distrusted as corrupt and compromised by Tigrayan leaders and scholars alike.

Transitional justice is not possible when the perpetrators are in power. In other words, there can be no transitional justice without a transition. In contexts of democratisation and transition from authoritarian rule, as in Latin America and in South Africa, this is appropriate. But in a post-war context, where there is a victor who holds power, it is not. Many of those we met argued that only an international tribunal is appropriate to deal with war crimes and/or the crime of genocide.

## The way forward: Truth Commission or War Crimes Tribunal or ICJ genocide case?

The June 2024 report of the New Lines Institute summarises the findings of various human rights monitoring bodies as follows:

*Several international non-governmental organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and various United Nations bodies, including in collaboration with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), as well as the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), have individually and jointly published a range of reports investigating, analysing,*



*An airstrike on Tigray's capital city, Mekelle. We saw evidence of the Martyr's Museum in Mekelle being looted, desecrated and used as a torture centre.*

*and alleging the commission of criminal acts during the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, including in the regions of Tigray, Amhara, and Afar. While each report has a different temporal and/or geographic scope, most of them conclude that war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed, by both the ENDF and allied forces (EDF, ASF and the associated Fano militia; and, to a lesser extent but no less serious, by Afar Special Forces) against Tigrayans, and by Tigrayan forces against ethnic Amhara and Afar.*

The ICHREE in its final report (October 2023) noted that:

*due to time and resource limitations, the Commission was not able to make a determination on the possible crime against humanity of extermination or genocide, and that further investigation is required to determine the full facts and legal implications.*

There is no doubt that the acts committed constitute war crimes as defined in international law. These include targeting of civilians, massacres of civilians, torture of enemy combatants, systematic and gang rape of female civilians, killing of male children, destruction and looting of religious sites and hospitals, and destruction of farmland, food and water sources.

The Genocide Commission is continuing with its systematic and scientific documentation and analysis of the crimes committed in Tigray.

## Three possibilities

In summary there are three possibilities: an international court such as the ICJ which can hold all actors to account for war crimes, crimes against humanity and/or genocide; a national transitional justice process led by the Ethiopian government and supported by the AU, according to AU guidelines and policy (which is not trusted by most Tigrayans); and a Tigrayan internal process of reconciliation and truth telling. The three are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible to imagine the first and the third proceeding together.

In April 2024, 18 months after the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, Martin Plaut wrote:

*The fate of Tigray hangs precariously in the balance, and the international community must act decisively to prevent further suffering, injustice, and impunity.*

**Note:** This article represents the views of the authors. It does not represent original research and draws on discussions with scholars from Mekelle University, researchers from the Tigray Institute of Policy Studies and the Genocide Commission, observations and conversations in many towns and villages in Tigray, as well as on secondary sources where indicated.

Mulatu Zinabu Assefa is from Tigray and a post-doc fellow at Nelson Mandela University. Janet Cherry is an ecosocialist activist and Professor of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha.

# MOZAMBIQUE ON THE BRINK:

POST-ELECTION CRISIS AND YOUTH-LED UPRISING—WHAT CHANGE LIES AHEAD?

By **Boaventura Monjane**

*Mozambique is teetering on the edge of a seismic shift in its political landscape. What began as post-election discontent has escalated into a nationwide movement demanding democratic accountability and structural reform. The 2024 general elections are far from delivering clarity or stability. Instead they have ignited a firestorm of protests led by an increasingly disillusioned and emboldened youth. At the heart of this turbulence lies a critical question: will Mozambique's political future be shaped by progressive renewal, or will it fall into deeper authoritarianism?*

## A nation in crisis

The spark for this upheaval can be traced to the brutal assassinations of Elvinos Dias and Paulo Guambe in late October 2024. Dias was the legal advisor of Venâncio Mondlane, presidential candidate for the Podemos party, and Guambe was his political aide. They were both gunned down in shocking acts of violence. More than 25 bullets were fired. These killings catalysed a series of demonstrations that Mondlane had initially called to be peaceful. However, this brazen violence transformed them into a national outcry for justice, accountability, and systemic change.

From the outset, it was Mozambique's youth who took to the streets. They were met with derision, and labelled vandals, unemployed delinquents, and even terrorists. But they exhibited a striking resilience. They endured not just physical repression but a concerted media effort to delegitimise their actions. Their self-determination refused to be dismissed.

Central to their mobilisation is Venâncio Mondlane, now viewed as a beacon of hope amid the political stagnation and corruption that have defined Mozambique's recent history. Mondlane's speeches have become rallying cries for a generation yearning for change, disillusioned by traditional politics but energised by the possibility of a new future.

## The rise of Mondlane and youth-driven resistance

Venâncio Mondlane began his political journey within Frelimo, Mozambique's ruling party, as a young member. However, he rose to prominence as a television commentator, known for his eloquent critiques of Frelimo's governance. His articulate and bold stance quickly caught the attention of opposition parties, leading to his recruitment by the Movimento Democrático de Moçambique (MDM), then the country's third-largest political force. Mondlane's political ascent was swift; he became a Member of Parliament shortly after joining MDM. His ambitions, however, extended beyond MDM. He later moved to Renamo, Mozambique's main opposition party, also serving as an MP. Within Renamo, he harboured aspirations of becoming its president and running as the party's candidate in the 2024 general elections. Yet, these ambitions were thwarted by internal divisions, with a dominant faction opposing his leadership bid.

In 2023, Mondlane's political profile soared after he claimed victory in the Maputo municipal elections, a result he

insisted had been marred by electoral fraud. His popularity, especially among young voters disillusioned with the political status quo, surged. However, this newfound prominence strained his relationship with Renamo, leading to his expulsion from the party.

Undeterred, Mondlane swiftly founded a new political party, the Coligação Aliança Democrática (CAD). Yet, CAD faced immediate challenges: both the National Electoral Commission and the Constitutional Court rejected its registration. Left politically adrift, Mondlane found an unexpected ally in Podemos, a minor, non-parliamentary party with little public recognition. Despite the lack of a shared history or social base between Mondlane and Podemos, the party backed his candidacy, positioning him as a significant contender in Mozambique's turbulent political landscape.

While Mondlane's leadership has offered direction, the youth remain the backbone of this movement. Their defiance in the face of escalating state violence has galvanised other societal groups, leading to an unprecedented cross-class alliance. Professionals, public and private sector workers, and the petty and middle bourgeoisie have increasingly joined the protests. What began as a youth-driven movement now encompasses a broader coalition, underscoring that these demands are not confined to one demographic.

This convergence of different social classes introduces a powerful dynamic. Historically, Mozambican protests have struggled to bridge class divides, but this time is different. The regime's concern is no longer limited to Mondlane as a political figure but extends to the growing societal acceptance of his movement. Even traditionally pro-government circles are starting to fracture, suggesting that Frelimo's grasp on power may not be as unassailable as once thought.

## A turning point for security forces

As the protests gain momentum, cracks are beginning to show within Mozambique's security apparatus. Police and military forces—typically deployed as instruments of state repression—are not immune to the socio-economic grievances driving the unrest. Many



*Clashes between police and protestors after the brutal assassinations of Elvinos Dias and Paulo Guambe in late October 2024. Dias was the legal advisor of Venâncio Mondlane, presidential candidate for the Podemos party, and Guambe was his political aide.*

officers share the same struggles as the protesters, living through the same economic hardship and political disillusionment. If public support from within these forces were to materialise, it would mark a watershed moment. It has the potential to shift the balance of power and directly threaten the status quo.

## The revolutionary question

Some observers have already labelled this moment as a revolution. However, revolutions are not inherently progressive; their outcomes depend on the ideologies that steer them and the forces that ultimately assume power. Mozambique is at a crossroads: this movement could pave the way for deep, structural transformation. Yet, the risk of co-optation by reactionary forces remains high if the youth fail to ground their struggle in a coherent, inclusive vision.

For Mozambique, the stakes could not be higher. The current struggle must result in more than just a change of faces—it must herald a future where the voices of the marginalised are central, where public policies prioritise social justice, equitable resource distribution, and democratic governance. The ruling establishment will undoubtedly continue its attempts to suppress and delegitimise this movement, but the resilience and organisational capacity of Mozambique's youth and their allies will be critical in determining its trajectory.

## Structural weaknesses of institutions and call for systemic reform

The fate of Mozambique now rests heavily on the Constitutional Council, which faces an unenviable decision. Three potential scenarios loom, each with significant implications for the nation's stability.

Firstly, the Council could annul the elections. This would prolong President Filipe Nyusi's tenure—a deeply unpopular prospect. Nyusi's government, mired in scandal and loss of public trust, has become a symbol of national ridicule, with protesters mockingly staging his political funeral on the streets of Maputo.

The second option involves administratively reducing Frelimo's declared majority, while increasing opposition seats in parliament. However, such a manoeuvre would likely be seen as cosmetic, failing to address core grievances and intensifying the protests.

Finally, though least likely, the Council could declare Mondlane the rightful winner. Given its historical loyalty to Frelimo, this scenario is improbable; it would represent a seismic shift in Mozambique's power dynamics.



*Venâncio Mondlane speaking at a rally in Montepuez, Cabo Delgado province. Mondlane's speeches have become rallying cries for a generation yearning for change, disillusioned by traditional politics but energised by the possibility of a new future.*

Mozambique's institutions are at breaking point, unable to continue functioning as mere extensions of elite interests. The Constitutional Council bears a historic responsibility to act decisively, impartially, and transparently. Yet, their hesitance to make a timely decision suggests a dangerous inclination towards preserving the status quo. Every moment of delay exacerbates public suffering, undermines democracy, and mortgages Mozambique's future. The challenges Mozambique faces cannot be met with superficial reforms. The political infrastructure needs a fundamental overhaul. The lack of transparency in electoral processes, the compromised independence of the National Elections Committee (CNE), and the judiciary's partisan nature are critical issues requiring urgent attention. Moreover, the ruling party's control over the police and military has created a system where power is maintained through coercion rather than consent.

## Navigating the crossroads of democracy and authoritarianism

Mozambique's democratic crisis reflects broader regional trends but offers a unique opportunity for renewal. Whether the country moves towards deeper authoritarianism or embraces genuine reform will depend on the mobilisation of grassroots forces and the articulation of a clear, inclusive political vision.

The youth's leadership has demonstrated that Mozambique is ready for change. Their resilience, courage, and

organisational capacity have inspired hope, but this is only the beginning. The movement's future will hinge on its ability to unite different social sectors and adopt a clear ideological framework, to prevent reactionary capture. The stakes are enormous, and Mozambique's destiny hangs in the balance.

As Antonio Gramsci's concept of the "interregnum" suggests, moments of crisis are characterised by the coexistence of dying regimes and nascent alternatives. Mozambique is in transition. The old order, embodied by Frelimo, is faltering, and a new regime is on the horizon. But what will this new order look like? Will it be inclusive, democratic, and just, or will it succumb to the same patterns of authoritarianism and exclusion?

The future belongs to those who can seize this opportunity to build a new hegemonic order, rooted in the aspirations of the people. Mozambique's youth, civil society, and social movements must rise to this challenge. If they succeed, they could transform the country's political landscape and chart a path towards a more democratic, inclusive future.

**Boaventura Monjane** is a Mozambican journalist and scholar-activist. He is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape and Solidarity Programme Officer for West Africa and Haiti at Grassroots International.

# STOP SOUTH AFRICAN COAL FUELLING PALESTINIAN GENOCIDE

By **Roshan Dadoo**

Since October 2023, Israel has killed more than 43,400 Palestinians in Gaza, including more than 16,000 children. According to the UN, more than 70% of those killed are women and children.

Meanwhile, transnational energy supply chains continue to contribute to Israel's ongoing violations of international law. They are feeding the genocide that it is committing in Gaza, and supporting the expansion of its illegal occupation and annexation in the rest of Palestine.

## South Africa major supplier

The export of South African coal to Israel has become a source of increasing controversy, given the role of coal in supporting the Israeli energy grid, which powers military operations and illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. South Africa has criticised Israel's actions. It has taken legal steps against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). But the country's continued coal exports to Israel call into question its commitment to the human rights and international law that its court action seems to support.

[According to the Global Energy Embargo Coalition](#), in the period since October 2023, South Africa has exported at least 496.4 kilotons of coal to Israel. That represents 15% of Israel's total coal imports. South Africa is now Israel's second biggest supplier of coal. And this is not just the private sector in South Africa. All shipments have been processed through the Richards Bay Coal Terminal, supported by state-owned Transnet Freight Rail.

South African coal is used to generate around 20% of Israel's electricity, at thermal power plants like Orot Rabin (2,590 MW) located in Hadera, and Rutenberg (2,250 MW) located in Ashkelon.

## Fuelling illegal settlements

As well as fuelling Israel's military machine, the electricity generated is used to support illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Israeli government has expanded the national power grid to include settlements that are illegal under international law. The Israel Electric Corporation, which

"generates, transmits, distributes, and supplies most of the electricity used in the Israeli economy", has incorporated these settlements into its energy supply. A recent decision in 2022 approved the connection of unauthorised settlement outposts to the grid, increasing reliance on imported energy sources like coal. This serves to further solidify their illegal presence. Yet in July this year the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories is against international law.

In effect, therefore, by allowing coal exports to Israel, South Africa is aiding and abetting a violation of international law.

## The campaign against coal to Israel

The [Boycott Divestment Sanctions](#) 'BDS' strategy was called for by the broadest-ever range of Palestinian civil society in 2005. It is modelled on the call we made to the international community to isolate apartheid South Africa in support of our liberation struggle. The South African

**Johannesburg protest.** South Africa has criticised Israel's actions. It has taken legal steps against Israel at the International Court of Justice. But the country's continued coal exports to Israel call into question its commitment to the human rights and international law that its court action seems to support.



BDS Coalition is part of the Global Energy Embargo campaign mobilising trade unions, civil society groups, environmental and indigenous rights activists and solidarity movements to address one of Israel's major vulnerabilities: fossil-energy supply. South Africa's largest trade union federation, the Congress of South African Unions, and its affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers, support a ban on coal exports to Israel. So do environmental groups and social justice movements in the country. BDS and Palestinian trade unions support unions in calling for their members to boycott coal destined for Israel.

Coal plays a significant role in powering genocide supporting various military technologies. Electricity generated in a centralised electricity grid enables the functioning of military bases, surveillance networks, and AI-driven systems used for surveillance and murder of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. These AI systems are deployed for real-time intelligence analysis, autonomous surveillance drones, and other repressive strategies used against the Palestinian people. The robust energy supply ensures the continuous operation of these systems, cementing their role in enforcing and maintaining Israel's regime of colonialism, apartheid and genocide.

This interconnection underscores the ethical and legal concerns of energy exports, as they directly fuel technologies utilised for powering colonialism, apartheid and genocide.

As a party to the ICJ ruling on genocide and apartheid in Palestine, South Africa has a legal and moral obligation to halt coal exports to Israel. The ICJ has ruled that Israel's actions in Palestine constitute apartheid, illegal annexation, and possible genocide. This ruling emphasises the duty of states to refrain from actions that aid illegal occupation and apartheid.

## SA risks abetting breach of international law

Irene Pietropaoli, senior fellow in business and human rights at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, says that, in her legal

opinion on the ICJ rulings, governments and corporations must be wary of their complicity in Israel's violations of international humanitarian law:

*Third States must consider that their military or other assistance to Israel's military operations in Gaza may put them at risk of being complicit in genocide under the Genocide Convention. Corporations and their managers, directors and other leaders could also be held directly liable for the commission of acts of genocide, as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity.*



**Richards Bay coal terminal.** South Africa is now Israel's second biggest supplier of coal. And this is not just the private sector in South Africa. All shipments have been processed through the Richards Bay Coal Terminal, supported by state-owned Transnet Freight Rail.

Colombia halted coal exports to Israel in 2023, demonstrating the political will to align trade practices with ethical stances and legal obligations under international law. Colombian President, Gustavo Petro, issued a [proclamation](#) to "suspend coal exports to Israel until the genocide is stopped." He said this was because, in the context of the ongoing genocide, coal is "an energy supply and strategic resource for the manufacturing of weapons, the mobilisation of troops, and the manufacturing of supplies for military operations". It is also a major contributor to the climate crisis. The Colombian Mining Association [vowed](#) to disobey Petro and in June-July coal shipments continued, including from Glencore's main port on June 25. But against such resistance, Petro persevered and [ruled](#) that on August 22, those shipments would end.

The President of Colombia's Cintrocarbon trade union, Heli Arregoces, said:

*We call on the world trade union movement, especially trade unions in the mining and energy sector, to stop the production of metals, minerals and fuels used in these wars, because the planet is on the verge of a new world war and it is the workers who can and have the obligation to stop this threat against human existence.*

Pietropaoli cautions that the duty to prevent genocide requires states to employ all means available to them. This obligation is one of conduct rather than result:

*It is not about whether the State achieves the result of preventing genocide, but whether it took all measures which were within its power and which might have contributed to preventing the genocide.*

The South African government has certainly not taken all measures within its power.

The Department of International Relations and Cooperation says that coal sales to Israel are a trade-related matter. The South African BDS Coalition Energy Embargo campaign

has been trying to meet the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, but with little success. A meeting was set up and then cancelled at the last minute, leaving activists frustrated.

South Africa is increasingly being seen as hypocritical, as it does not follow through with implementing the findings of the ICJ. The South African BDS Coalition Energy Embargo Campaign held a picket at Glencore's Headquarters in Johannesburg and at the offices of Glencore subsidiary, Astron, in Cape Town. These protests brought together Palestine solidarity activists, environmental justice groups, trade unions and mining affected communities. This alliance is planning more actions in the months ahead. We want South Africa to follow Colombia's example, and end energy exports to Israel.

Roshan Dadoo is the Coordinator of the South African BDS Coalition.

# TRUMP

## Dire consequences for the Middle East

*Israel's attack on Iranian embassy in Syria which hit a nearby building. While the Trump administration may negotiate some kind of peace deal for Ukraine, it may also very possibly launch with Israel a joint attack on Iran.*

By **Gilbert Achcar**

**F**IRST, I WANT TO EMPHASISE THE need to dispel the illusion that Donald Trump is a peacemaker.

Incredible as it may be, there are a number of people who voted for him with that as a key argument. Even some people of Muslim or Arab descent.

Donald Trump is not at all a President of peace. He is someone who really sticks to his key slogan, which has for a long time been the central tenet of far right ideology in the United States—America first. And that means that he does not want the United States to engage in wars that he doesn't see representing any real interest of the United States.

As a far right person, he does not belong to the pretence of Atlanticist liberalism that emerged after the Second World war and was re-emphasised after the Cold War, but never really put in practice. While it was mostly pretence, it played a role as ideological cement for US hegemony over the Atlantic Alliance and the East Asian Alliance (Japan and other countries). And since Trump does not adhere to this pretence, he sees no point in an alliance that was built on it. Hence his very dismissive attitude towards Nato. This might change though if there is more and more ideological and political convergence between Nato governments and himself, as a result of the rise of the far right in Europe.

Trump would like to turn Nato into a mere adjunct of the US military effort, and that means exerting pressure for that purpose. When he was first President, he strived to turn Nato against China. Although China is not part of the Alliance's territory, he managed to get it to implement a few steps in this direction.

### Pursuit of US interests

For the same reason he's not interested in spending money for the defence of Ukraine. He sees no material interest in that. He has greater affinity with Vladimir Putin than with Zelensky. So, he doesn't see why the United States should be spending billions of dollars for a cause that is of no interest to the United States. There is more interest for him in Russia as a major hydrocarbon producer and exporter—oil and gas—than in Ukraine.

This brings me to the issue of the Middle East. There he sees a real interest, a major interest for the United States, and even for the Trump organisation, that is for the Trump family. Because the personal interest and his understanding of the national interest are not separable with Donald Trump. As we know, this is a man for whom the boundaries between these notions are very porous indeed.

In the Middle East, he adopts a completely different attitude—a very bellicose attitude, towards Iran in particular, seen as the main threat to US hegemony and US interests in the Gulf. When Trump was President, he behaved very aggressively towards Iran. He tore apart the nuclear deal that Obama had painfully negotiated. He just got rid of it. He assassinated the very central figure of the Iranian military apparatus, in early 2020, at the beginning of his last year in office.

His attitude there was one of actually pushing towards war rather than any pretence of being antiwar.

And that's why Netanyahu is such an admirer and friend of Donald Trump's. That's why there has been such a very warm welcome for Trump's new victory in Israel, especially among the far right. They are betting on him to go even

beyond what Joe Biden has done, which is to actually embark on the first joint US-Israeli war: the genocidal war on Gaza. Trump hasn't criticised this war, unlike the one on Ukraine, except for maybe its duration. He would probably be in favour of granting even more leeway and means for Israel to finish the job. He and the people he has selected to be part of his administration are all staunch supporters of Israel, and of enabling Israel to finish the job in Gaza and in my own country, Lebanon.

So, while the Trump administration may negotiate some kind of peace deal for Ukraine, it may also very possibly launch with Israel a joint attack on Iran. This is exactly what Netanyahu is expecting Trump to do, because Israel alone doesn't have the military means to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. Therefore, unless Trump provides Israel with the qualitatively higher kind of weaponry that is required for such a goal and that until now has been the preserve of the United States, Israel would need Washington to join it in attacking Iran. That's what Netanyahu is very much contemplating. So, if Trump might mean a peace deal in Europe, he definitely means war for the Middle East.

### Anti-fascist alliances?

To conclude, what are the prospects today? Are we going to see a redistribution of cards at the global level, with the rise of some kind of entente between neo-fascist regimes? That's indeed the category in which I would classify Trump—neo-fascism. It is a 21st century version of fascism, without the paramilitary forms of 20th century fascism. It pretends to play within the rules of democracy, even though once in



power, the neo-fascists very much try to distort these rules and tweak them in order to perpetuate their own power. This is an open question. We'll see.

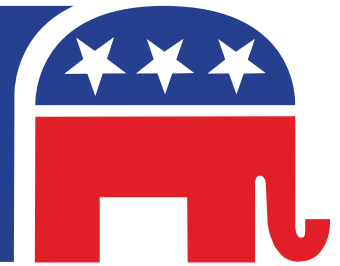
What it means for the Left is the same problem that faced the Left standing against fascism in the 20th century. How to act according to the awareness that in order to fight fascism you need a radical social programme, and at the same time not fall into sectarianism, dismissing the possibility of broad alliances on the democratic issues in particular. How to combine these two needs. It's much easier said than done. The dominant Left in the 20th century failed in that respect. The pro-Moscow Left shifted from a very sectarian ultra-left position to a very right-wing adaptationist position. Finding the correct course in this new battle against the far right is absolutely crucial.

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



*What it means for the Left is the same problem that faced the Left standing against fascism in the 20th century. How to act according to the awareness that in order to fight fascism you need a radical social programme, and at the same time not fall into sectarianism.*

# WHY DEMOCRATS LOST AND TRUMP WON



A PERSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS FROM A YOUNG, US-BASED ACTIVIST

By **Andrew Ahern**

ON NOVEMBER 5TH, 2024 DONALD Trump was re-elected the President of the United States. This comes just four years after his loss in the 2020 presidential election to Joe Biden culminated in the insurrection that he helped instigate. From the outside looking in, it is perfectly reasonable to ask how over 76 million Americans could vote for a convicted criminal, insurrectionist and proud authoritarian strongman.

Pundits have provided several explanations, including inflation, racism, and an uninspiring Democratic candidate in Kamala Harris. In terms of demographics, white men and women, who comprise roughly 71% of the US electorate in the most important states, voted **overwhelmingly** for Trump over Harris. Democrats lost the vote of those who make under \$100,000 (R1.9 million) and those without a college degree.

As we continue to learn more, it seems clear that the working class in this country voted for Donald Trump.

## People feel poorer

Arguably the strongest argument for why Trump won is a simple one: people's lives in the US did not get any better under the Biden/Harris administration. According to an exit poll, almost 50% of survey respondents said their family is in a worse financial situation today than they were four years ago. 81% of those who gave that answer voted for Trump. Nearly 70% of people said the economy is either poor or not so good. The purchasing power of the average American decreased by 2.46% in just this last year.

The American people felt angry, unrepresented and isolated from US politics. They wanted change.

Despite being the richest country in the history of the world, millions of Americans struggle day to day. **70%** of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, with monthly bills like rent or energy significantly contributing to this insecurity. Over **27 million people** don't have health insurance, and even those

who do, report poor coverage. In addition, student debt is at all-time highs, current levels of income and wealth inequality are unprecedented in modern human history, and climate change-induced disasters are displacing people in the US and elsewhere. Taking all that into consideration, it becomes understandable that distraught people would find hope in Donald Trump, or sit out the election altogether.

No matter how the **mainstream media** pundits try to portray it, Americans economically are struggling and desperate.

## Democrats have no answer

This poses a real problem for the Democratic Party. They do not have an answer to the hurt of the American people. This hurt may be even more pronounced if we look at the youth. Typically, young people are taken for granted as a strong Democratic vote. And while young people still did vote more Democrat than Republican in 2024, the

lack of enthusiasm for either candidate, especially Harris, seemed to be the driving force for the lack of a major youth turnout. Youth voter turnout dropped to its lowest levels since 2016. In [2024](#), young people gave the Democrats only a 6 point margin in their favour compared to 2020 when it was +25. Young men voted for Trump by 14 points in 2024, reflecting a more general trend of young men shifting rightward both in the US and globally. And while young women still voted for Harris by 7 points, their share of the Democratic vote decreased compared to 2020.

These gender dynamics are helpful, but they only provide a partial explanation. [Fewer](#) eligible young voters showed up in 2024 than in 2020. Harris had a significant drop, but even Trump only managed to get a 1% increase in the youth vote compared to 2020. This was not an ‘anti-woke’, ‘young people moving to the right’ election; it was a ‘we are going to sit this one out’ election.

## A youth perspective

It is helpful to examine how young people view American politics to better understand the lack of turnout. Young people are much less likely to [identify](#) with a party; they feel [unrepresented](#) by either the Democrats or Republicans. In addition, they are more issue-oriented than older generations. As [Tufts Circle](#), the leading authority on the youth vote in the United States, noted about the 2022 mid-term elections, “In this and in every election, many young people were motivated to vote because of the issues they care about.” Abortion, the economy, and climate change consistently rank

as young people’s top issues. When parties or politicians don’t speak to the issues young people care about, they do not resort to the ‘lesser of two evils’ or ‘vote Blue no matter who’ thinking of committed Democratic voters. Young people are not convinced.

According to a national [survey](#) earlier this year, “Young voters do not look at our politics and see any good guys. They see a dying empire led by bad people.” Increasingly, they think that there is no major difference between the two political parties, that no matter who wins, it won’t make a substantial difference in their lives, and they have less and less trust in our institutions. And their pessimism is perfectly warranted, given the confluence of climate crisis, inequality and unrepresentative liberal democracy.

## And now?

The election is over, so we are left with the most important question: where do we go from here? As the old saying goes, crisis and opportunity go together. For one, there is an increasing recognition that liberalism is a dying breed. For all the talk of Joe Biden representing the “[end of neoliberalism](#)”, his campaign and Harris’ did not provide any convincing path out of it. With so many Americans angry and disillusioned with the system as it is, there is a real opportunity to provide a vision and ideological framework that names an enemy, speaks to people’s discontent and provides for their material conditions. This might mean, at the very least, running campaigns with platforms and messaging closer to Bernie Sanders than Joe Biden. There are now multiple

elections where progressive policies performed better than the Democratic candidates. In this election, many ballot initiatives and Left populists won despite Harris. There is even some elite [liberal](#) recognition that “maybe Sanders had a point.”

But beyond campaign platforms or messaging, the US’s problems run deeper, and responses will have to rely on extra-electoral strategies. Historically, trade unions and vanguard parties have filled this space. The most obvious is to continue to build the labour movement that has had a recent resurgence. Young people in particular, often considered the most ‘pro-union generation’, will be vital in keeping this momentum, building militant unions in the face of authoritarianism, around societal issues that go beyond just wages and benefits.

This is not the time to get apathetic, to despair, or for America to think it is extra special. People here and abroad have had a long history of fighting fascism, authoritarianism, and apartheid, and came out in the end. We must relearn and relive this history in order to fight forthcoming fascism. As Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba remind us in their book, *Let this Radicalize You*, “organizing is the antidote to despair.” The fascists are getting organised; we must too.

**Andrew Ahern** is the Youth Climate and Organizing Program Manager for the 128 Collective: a family foundation that seeks to democratically and publicly own climate change assets in the US and internationally. You can follow him on Blue Sky at: [andrewonearth](#).



*According to a national survey earlier this year, “Young voters do not look at our politics and see any good guys. They see a dying empire led by bad people.”*

# The Reluctant President



Storyboard: Roger Etkind  
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## SOLIDARITY WITH BORIS KAGARLITSKY

AND OTHER POLITICAL PRISONERS OF THE REPRESSIVE RUSSIAN STATE

Boris Kagarlitsky is serving a five-year sentence in a Russian penal colony for “justifying terrorism”. In reality it is for his opposition to the war in Ukraine. As a Marxist theoretician, sociologist, and long-time political dissident, he has vigorously opposed the war, as well as critically analysing Russia’s neoliberal policies and their impact.

His activism began in the late 1970s when he edited the samizdat journal *Levy Povорот* (“Left Turn”). He was arrested in 1982 for “anti-Soviet” activities and released a year later. He was briefly detained again in 1993 due to his opposition to President Boris Yeltsin. So he has been consistent in opposing Russian dictators of all political stripes—and paying the price.

He recently commented on the prisoner exchanges between Russia and the US.

*Recently, discussions have intensified about another possible prisoner exchange. I have stated several times, and I repeat now, that I do not wish to participate in such exchanges...I see no purpose or benefit for myself in emigration. If I had wanted to leave the country, I would have done so myself... if it means I must sit in prison to remain here, then I will sit in prison. After all, for a left-wing politician or a social scientist in Russia, imprisonment is a normal professional risk, one that must be accepted when choosing this path—just as it is for a firefighter or emergency worker. It’s simply part of the job.*

For more information, see [freeboris.info](http://freeboris.info)