



At Issue ezine

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Vol. 17 (July - December 2015)

A New Counter-Hegemonic Politics in South Africa: What Now? What Next?



Hex River Valley Strikers in 2012.
Courtesy of Socialistproject.ca/ Webb

No. 1 - July 2015

Editorial: A 'Next Liberation Struggle' in SA? The Prospects.

By John Saul The liberation struggle in South Africa, while successful in overthrowing apartheid and white minority rule, has been far less successful in sustaining an on-going process of continuing liberation and popular empowerment. This introductory article will seek further to frame such an analysis, while setting the stage for the series of articles on various dimensions of this overall pattern and the renewed resistance it is giving rise to within the country.

No. 2 - August 2015

Community resistance from below: reclaiming the past, inventing the future?

By Dale T. McKinley The article will first provide a brief explanation of the emergence, character and role of community organizations and social movements and their associated struggles covering the first 15 years of South Africa's democratic transition. This will lay the foundation for a critical analysis of more recent political, ideological and organizational shifts within them. What expressions of a 'new' radical politics can be found in the emerging spaces and struggles within the labour movement?

No. 3 - September 2015

Who's Afraid of Feminism: Gender in South African Politics.

By Shireen Hassim Women seem to be the winners in South Africa democracy, over the past twenty years. But on closer attention, it is apparent that a thin form of democracy has been implemented, in which representation has replaced the more powerful feminist demands for participation and representation. Shireen Hassim looks beneath the gloss of the 'good story' that is being told about South African democracy to consider the nature and extent of gender inequalities in economic position and social status.

No. 4 - October 2015

The Numsa moment: Fresh trade union openings.

By Edward Webster The central issue now confronting the organised working class is the form and content of their politics. Edward Webster shows how these debates on working class politics were overtaken by the struggle for national liberation and the transition to democracy. Numsa's position on politics have shifted from a qualified support for the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party, to growing disillusionment with this Alliance. This has culminated in a mandate for the Numsa leadership to forge ahead with the formation of a United Front and Movement for Socialism to advance working class struggles.

No. 5 - November 2015

Moving towards an alternative eco-socialist order in South Africa.

By Jacklyn Cock Prospects for a 'new liberation struggle' in South Africa partly depends on a vision of an alternative social order. This article argues that a transformative vision of a just transition to a low carbon economy could contain the embryo of an eco-socialist order. The anti-capitalist nature of such an alternative is related to the growing recognition that the fundamental cause of the deepening environmental crisis, which is having devastating impacts on the working class, is the expansionist logic of capitalism. This recognition is promoting new forms of organisation and alliances between both labour and environmental activists. This new solidarity contains the promise of a new kind of socialism that is ethical, ecological and democratic.

No. 6 - December 2015

Between Crisis and Renewal: Where To for South Africa's Left?

By Vishwas Satgar This article maps the ecology of left politics in post apartheid South Africa to clarify orientations, trajectories and limits. Anchoring this survey is a particular focus on the Democratic Left Front (DLF). The DLF emerged as part of the second cycle of resistance and provided a space for progressive social forces and the left to find convergence around a platform of alternatives, grass roots solidarity and a new anti-capitalist imagination. A critical analysis is provided of left politics in general with a specific assessment of a renewed left forged within the Democratic Left Front, its challenges and prospects to be an

alternative in post-apartheid South Africa.

No. 7 - December 2015

Afterword to Volume 17: A New Counter-Hegemonic Politics in South Africa: What Now? What Next?

By John Saul A look back at the final volume of the AfricaFiles Ezine which examined evolving frontiers of South African politics and grassroots movements.

A 'Next Liberation Struggle' in South Africa? The Prospects.

by John Saul

A "next liberation struggle" in South Africa? To evoke such a prospect and such a goal is to imply that the liberation struggle that culminated in 1994 and saw the emergence of a formally democratic South Africa and a population apparently liberated from oppression and, prospectively, from penury, has not been, in its essentials, so very liberatory after all.

Realities

For it is difficult to so interpret what "liberation" has actually produced – or to see such a result as having been accidental. After all – and as examined at length elsewhere (Saul and Bond, 2014) - the chosen path of the new elite (clustered, in particular, around the ANC and the SACP) has been one of extensive collaboration both with global capital and with local, chiefly white, capitalist elites. This, no doubt, helped ease the transition past the rocks of structured white racism and right-wing backlash, but it represented a substantial compromise with the existing structures of racial capitalism.

Although not every author in this symposium agrees with each of his/her fellow authors on every detail of such an analysis, all do ask a similar and entirely pertinent question: just where is the energy for action to modify, or even to radically change, what can only be seen as an anti-climactic outcome – by means of some kind of renewed liberation struggle in South Africa – to come from? True, perhaps, such a revived struggle for a more genuine liberation may be difficult to imagine. Yet it is well to remind ourselves of how very close South Africa came "last time" (during the struggle that did overthrow apartheid itself) to building a social movement that would transform South Africa even more profoundly.

"just where is the energy for action to modify, or even to radically change, what can only be seen as an anti-climactic outcome – by means of some kind of renewed liberation struggle in South Africa "

After all, it was not primarily any "liberation movement" (the ANC, for example) that brought down apartheid. Rather it was in significant measure a popular movement that produced "from below" the initial stirrings of revolt in the Durban strikes of the early seventies and the Soweto resistance of the mid-seventies.

And this, in turn, continued to fire a rebellious populace, acting through COSATU, the UDF and a wide variety of organizations on the ground that ultimately convinced capitalists and canny old-guard politicians a settlement was necessary – one best achieved by abandoning apartheid the better to rescue South Africa's future for

capitalism!

A key player in this compromise was the African National Congress, of course



Mandela casting his vote in 1994.
Where to now for democracy in South Africa?
Courtesy of Wiki CC/ Paul Weinberg, 2009.

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Memorial to Hector Pieterse, killed during the Soweto Uprisings, 1976. Courtesy of Wiki CC/ Sam Nzima, 2011.

The result? It was only very slowly that the illusion of meaningful victory showed just how thin and threadbare it was. Of course, a struggle-weary populace can perhaps be forgiven for seeing a considerable victory to lie in the overthrow of so humiliating and degrading a socio-political system as apartheid. Nonetheless, it was not long before this populace began to register the sharp contrast that had come to exist between the smug comfort of capital and its African/ANC front-men in positions of formal power on the one hand, and the broader populace's own continuing poverty and subordination on the other.

In sum, there were very tangible signs that things weren't quite working out as the ANC had promised they would and that the socio-economic and political morass into which global and local capital and their firm ally, the ANC brass, had led the the South African liberation struggle had become painfully raw...and increasingly unacceptable (see Neville Alexander, 2002; Dawson and Sinwell, 2012).



ANC's top brass. From left, Mkhize (treasurer-general), Ramaphosa (deputy president), Zuma (president), Mbete (chairperson), Mantashe (secretary-general) & Duarte (deputy secretary-general). Courtesy of ANC/ Business Day, 2012.

Resistances

To be sure, the South African population had been relatively passive in allowing such a recolonization to occur during the false dawn of hope offered by the "transition" that the "defeat" of apartheid permitted. Yet it is also true that the ANC's shell-game of "achieved liberation," at first so convincing, did not, as time went on, work quite so well in silencing the revived protests of the country's poor and (still) oppressed. Recall the old saying: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." In this kind of context, it is not surprising that resistance in South Africa to ANC hegemony began to grow.



69 protesters killed by police in 1960. Courtesy of Ian Berry/ Wikimedia Commons.

Perhaps most dramatic in this regard have been two graphic expressions of such distemper. One was the Marikana Massacre of 2012, at which state forces blatantly shot and killed 35-40 striking miners at Lonmin's platinum mine. This was said by some to be as stark a wake-up call to the true meaning of the ANC's post-apartheid rule as had been the Sharpeville Massacre (in 1960) and the Soweto Uprising (in 1976) - these twin events having themselves been so revelatory of the true meaning of apartheid itself in their time.

Second has been the marked eruption, over a number of years, of what Peter Alexander once referred to as "the rebellion of the poor," referring to the dramatic protests – South Africa would soon become the leader on the world's table of countries marked by such protests – by the dwellers, both rural and urban, in those very slums whose continuing existence has come to underscore the vast and deepening disparities alluded to above (Peter Alexander, 2014).

"the rebellion of the poor, referring to the dramatic protests by the dwellers, both rural and urban, in those very slums whose continuing existence has come to underscore the vast and deepening disparities."

Indeed, it is in this latter wave of "community resistance from below" (as Dale McKinley [McKinley, 1997] titles our second essay here) that one sees South Africa's vast precariat in action, with McKinley's account charting the emergence, character and political role of community organisations/social movements and their struggle against established power during the years of South Africa's ostensible democratic transition (see also Saul, 2014a).

In addition, and while registering (as had Alexander) a quantitative intensification of such community-initiated protests, McKinley considers the ongoing and future potential of the mounting of such a radical new politics by the precariat, asking whether this kind of resistance from below can and will continue to grow and also interact effectively with whatever emerging and novel struggles South Africa's labour movement might also produce (as discussed by Eddie Webster in essay # 4, below). A very new South African history is in the making, if so. It is no wonder, as well, that one presumptive counter-hegemonic alternative to the ANC's own project, the Democratic Left Front/DLF, consistently speaks of its potential radical base as lying, quite specifically, in "the working class and the poor"! Both precariat and proletariat, in sum: is this not the key?

Another potential source of dramatic protest to be emphasized is explored in the third essay of this collection, that by Shireen Hassim on the possible (and necessary) rebirth of the women's movement. Of course, as chronicled most effectively by Hassim herself the women's movement constituted an extremely important force in radicalizing the whole process of removing the apartheid system and also in constructing a new state apparently much more sensitive to gender concerns (Hassim, 2006).

Indeed, women seemed to be among the chief winners in the coming of a new South African democracy; a struggle seemed joined, some thought, to overcome gender inequalities in economic position and social status. Thus, over the past twenty years the number of women in parliament has actually reached parity, quotas for women have been implemented in all government policies. In addition, poor women have become the major beneficiaries of social grants and women's participation in formal politics has been virtually "normalised." And yet, Hassim now argues this "victory" actually merits a close second look; it is apparent, she says, that it is only a very thin form of democracy that has been implemented. One in which mere representation has replaced the original and powerful feminist demands for a more real and genuine participation.



Women Against Apartheid poster c. 1990s. Via Capetownbiennial.com (fair use), 2015.



Women's Rights in South Africa. Via Livingillustrated.com (fair use), 2014.

Looking beneath the gloss of the "good story" conventionally told in this regard Hassim considers the nature and extent of persisting gender inequalities in economic position, in political efficacy and in social status. Even more crucially, she asks how important women's initiatives, women's organizations and women's issues may yet be to any future building of a new political movement for a new South Africa.

But what of "the working class" per se, once so crucial a component of the overall resistance movement against apartheid but now fragmented, notably by splits between more established and organized workers on the one hand, and the vast array of "casuals," "part-time," "semi-employed," and unorganized workers that have come to define so much of South Africa on the other? Here, in the fourth essay in this series, one of South Africa's most-cited writers on the experiences of the country's workers, Eddie Webster, again surveys the

issue of “working class politics” but now on a quite different terrain than that which was once defined by the struggle for national liberation and by the transition to democracy (cf. Webster, 1985; Adler and Webster, 2000).

Indeed, in the post-apartheid context of the ANC’s apparently unqualified acceptance of the primacy of capital’s power and programme, and in the wake of such a startling event as the Marikana Massacre, Webster focuses quite specifically on the existing challenges that South Africa’s largest trade union, NUMSA, feels it necessary to confront. Drawing on surveys he has undertaken since 1991 Webster carefully analyzes NUMSA’s shifting position on politics: from a qualified support for the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party to growing disillusionment with this Alliance.



South African police guard over dead miners after the Marikana massacre. Via DispatchLive.co.za (fair use), 2012.

Such a trajectory in turn culminated, Webster underscores, in a special congress decision in December 2013 that mandated the NUMSA leadership to forge ahead with the formation of a United Front and Movement for Socialism in order to advance working class struggles and to reach out to a broader constituency. Webster then examines the implications of the different options now facing NUMSA and the possible directions that a novel working class politics might ultimately take in South Africa.

Clearly, as Jacklyn Cock argues (in our fifth essay here, as elsewhere [Cock, 2007]), prospects for a “new liberation struggle” in South Africa depend in part on a convincing vision of an alternative social order. And under present South African conditions, she suggests, the transformative vision of a just transition to a sustainable low carbon economy can provide the embryo of a new (and necessary) eco-socialist order. Moreover, this in turn would have to involve the collective, democratic control of production for social needs, rather than profit; the mass roll out of socially owned renewable energy that could mean decentralized energy with much greater potential for community control; the localisation of food production in the shift from carbon-intensive industrial agriculture to food sovereignty; and the sharing of resources in more collective social forms.

“...under present South African conditions, the transformative vision of a just transition to a sustainable low carbon economy can provide the embryo of a new (and necessary) eco-socialist order.”

Nor, emphasizes Cock, are these unrealistic goals. After all, the anti-capitalist nature of such an alternative is related to the growing recognition that the fundamental cause of South Africa’s deepening environmental crisis - one that is having devastating impacts on the working class and the precariat alike - is the expansionist logic of capitalism. And, as she carefully recounts, this recognition is promoting, in turn, new forms of organisation and new alliances between labour, community and environmental activists – a solidarity that embodies the promise of a new kind of socialism that is at once ethical, ecological and democratic.

A counter-hegemony?

Precariat, proletariat, women and environmental activists: can all these and more potential centres of organization, of protest, and of progressive demand now begin to add up to something quite new and potentially counter-hegemonic to what is being proffered by the ANC state and by recycled and reconstituted racial capitalism. Vishwas Satgar, author (Williams and Satgar, 2013) and Democratic Left Front activist in South Africa, explores, in a sixth essay, the situation as traced above – with South Africa now standing, in his phrase, somewhere between “crisis and renewal.” Moreover, this is in fact, he argues, a situation that could now permit a freshly mobilized mass constituency to find a promising, effective and sustainable political form.

Consider this, Satgar says. The resistance to neoliberalisation has already engendered numerous promising left-responses in South Africa: an impressive trade union-led street politics, the sustained building of social movements and multiple community-based protests. There has also been much lobbying by local NGOs and



A protest by Democratic Left Front activists. Courtesy of Journalist of Socialist Renewal/Activiststills.org, 2014.

popular organizations as well as a new and militant expression of independent trade unionism – with anti-neoliberal resistance outside of the ANC-led Alliance coming to the fore in the first decade of the new millennium of the 2000s, deepened by the Marikana Massacre, the “NUMSA moment” and the further unravelling of the ANC’s national liberation project itself.

Satgar’s article then further maps the terrain of left politics in post-apartheid South Africa in order to clarify orientations, trajectories and limits. Anchoring this survey is a particular focus on the Democratic Left Front/DLF) to which initiative he is himself very close – with various contenders for a

similar role ranging from Julius Malema’s rather populist and demagogic Economic Freedom Fighters to the new United Front South Africa - he identifies space for progressive social forces and those on the left to find convergence around a platform of alternative grass roots solidarity and a new anti-capitalist imaginary. His article thus provides a critical analysis of left politics in general and a specific assessment of one attempt at left renewal as forged within the Democratic Left Front, while evaluating more generally the challenges and prospects for any emergent and potentially counter-hegemonic left alternative in post-apartheid South Africa.

* * *

South Africa, for all its size and economic weight, may actually have gained a somewhat exaggerated reputation in the eyes of the rest of its continent and of the world: the positive role of the ANC, even in the liberation of South Africa, overstated and the benign role of Mandela, especially after apartheid, rather misconstrued (Saul, 2014b). For people in the region another face was soon apparent, however: South Africa as an entrepot for the sub-imperial penetration of the sub-continent by corporations that used SA as a spring-board for depredations further north (Saunders, 2008). And also as an often unwelcoming snake-pit of violence and xenophobia directed against in-coming migrant-workers from the region and beyond (Mozambicans as target providing a good case in point) - such enormities owing much to the ANC’s “lack of visionary leadership,” in Ozias Tungwarara’s potent phrase (Tungwarara, 2015, Essa, 2015).

"South Africa, for all its size and economic weight, may actually have gained a somewhat exaggerated reputation in the eyes of the rest of its continent and of the world."

In short, a “liberated” but untransformed South Africa has done little to help to free the continent as a whole; moreover, if the situation decays further it may actually do a great deal of damage (as Mugabe has already done in Zimbabwe, for example). Small wonder that Africa as a whole has sensed that it has a significant stake in what the forces we itemize in this set of essays can do to reclaim South Africa for a more progressive outcome. For such an outcome in South Africa, then, the struggle continues.

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Community resistance from below: reclaiming the past, inventing the future?

by Dale T. McKinley

Remembering the past

Amongst the most studied and celebrated aspects of the anti-apartheid struggle during the 1980s in South Africa was the breadth and impact of community resistance. (Ballard et al 2006; Buhlungu 2010)

The origins of that resistance came during the late 1970s and early 1980s when the working class, broadly conceived, was hit with a double blow. Emerging clusters of neoliberal capitalism privileged the opening up of global markets, increasing capital mobility and reorganising states to guarantee and catalyze 'free market principles' (Harvey 2005), while pushing for a flexible, insecure and informal labour regime. (Chun 2009)

Simultaneously, a large number of unions had become increasingly opposed to what they saw as the subordination of worker interests and struggles to the macro-



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national liberation politics of the ANC and its alliance partner, the SACP. (Pillay 1996) These unions wanted to forge politically independent labour organizations allied to the broader working class of communities, informal workers and students that practiced workers' control and participatory democracy. (Baskin 1991)



A call to COSATU members. From the South African History Archives. Courtesy of <http://www.saha.org.za/>, 2010.



Demonstration in Soweto led by the APF in June 2010 against massive public expenditure on the World Cup. Courtesy of Anti-Privatisation Forum/ McKinley.

This eventually resulted in the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Linking the strengthening of internal union (especially shop-floor) structures and democracy to the struggles against state repression on a more general societal level FOSATU reached out to communities and their unemployed and casual worker constituencies. (Barchiesi 2006)

On the community front, there was the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. This brought together a wide range of community and other anti-apartheid civil society organizations, many of whom were aligned to the ANC. Key to these developments, were the worsening material conditions of the black majority and their increasingly radical resistance to the devastating socio-economic impact of the apartheid-capitalist system (Naidoo 2010). After the formation of COSATU in 1985, the terrain for a genuine people's alliance that contained an equally genuine alternative to apartheid-capitalist oppression was fertile.

Negotiations and mobilization

Meanwhile, in the midst of widespread community and labour movement struggles during the late 1980s, behind-the-scenes negotiations between the ANC and the apartheid state were well-advanced. Negotiatory politics began to fast displace whatever ground working class struggles were attempting to occupy, in the process creating the conditions for top-down, centralized "power and decision-making." (Pillay 1996)

"...in the midst of widespread community and labour movement struggles during the late 1980s, behind-the-scenes negotiations between the ANC and the apartheid state were well-advanced."

By the early 1990s, the strategic locus of resistance and people's power shifted even further onto a 'negotiations' terrain. COSATU became involved in a parallel negotiating process, devoting much of its energies to institutionalizing bargaining agreements between unions, employers and the state. (McKinley 1997) Similarly, a range of community organizations entered into negotiations with local white councils about the provision of public services. With the core leadership and organizations of what had constituted the UDF now absorbed into the ANC itself, the remaining community organizations, after holding talks with the ANC, formed a new umbrella body called the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), which unofficially became the fourth member of the ANC Alliance. (Zuern 2004)

Combined, these shifts resulted in the effective curtailment of anti-capitalist mass struggle by the broad working class. Ordinary workers and community members often had little say in key political and policy decisions which became dominated by the perceived necessity of seeking common ground with capital and the apartheid state for some kind of social contract to restructure an ailing South African macro-economy.

The post-apartheid 'dividend'

With the transition to democracy and the ANC's capturing of state power after

1994, a range of new political, socio-economic and organizational constellations of power thus came to the fore. This occurred alongside the rapid adoption by the ANC of a neoliberal macro-economic policy framework that profoundly reshaped not only the political economy of South Africa but the more specific struggles of poor and working class communities. (Marais, 1998)

For the poor and working class, the impacts were devastating. Massive job losses were visited upon those who had been fortunate enough to be employed, this 'experience' being accompanied by attendant social and economic damage to already poor and vulnerable families and communities. The ANC-managed state also implemented "basic needs" policies that turned many basic services into market commodities, facilitated by a drastic decrease in national government grants/subsidies to municipalities and support for the development of financial instruments for privatized delivery. (McDonald, 2000)



Retrenched workers at SAMANCOR—a multinational heavy industry corporation in Vaal, south of Johannesburg. Courtesy of Anti-Privatisation Forum/ McKinley.

"For the poor and working class, the impacts were devastating. Massive job losses were visited upon those who had been fortunate enough to be employed, this 'experience' being accompanied by attendant social and economic damage..."

In turn, this laid the foundations for an enabling environment of patronage, corruption and factional politics as well as a huge escalation in the costs of basic services and a concomitant increase in the use of cost-recovery mechanisms such as water and electricity cut-offs. By the turn of the century, millions more poor South Africans had also experienced cut-offs and evictions as the result of the neo-liberal orgy. (McDonald and Smith, 2002) Further, the state's capitalist-friendly land policies, which ensured that apartheid land ownership patterns remained virtually intact, has meant that South Africa's long-suffering rural population continue to taste the bitter fruits of labour exploitation and landlessness.



Phalanx of police on the clock, at march against police repression and for freedom of expression during the WSSD in 2002. Courtesy of Anti-Privatisation Forum/ McKinley.

It was within this transitional context that a range of new community organizations and social movements surfaced. (Ballard et al, 2006; Naidoo and Veriava, 2003) In almost all cases, they emerged in the very spaces opened up as a result of the failure of the tactical approaches and strategic visions of the main traditional forces of the left (for example, COSATU and the SACP) and 'civic' structures like SANCO to offer any meaningful response to the changing conditions. (McKinley and Naidoo, 2004)

This 'perfect storm' of neoliberalism thus brought together all those inhabiting an extended and flexible 'community' of work and life the organizational form of which replaced the formal workplace as the epicentre of social solidarity. In response, there were some serious efforts from sections within the labour movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s, mostly from municipal workers, to forge collective solidarities and struggles. Despite this, the dominant politics and practices of the labour movement in the context of the changing composition of the broad working class and the enforced boundaries of corporatism under neoliberalism, has largely undermined the possibilities of any practical unity.

The 'new' social movements and community organizations have also been subject to a consistent state campaign of rhetorical vitriol and physical assaults. (McKinley and Veriava, 2010) Crucially, the various leaderships of the SACP, COSATU and other ANC "civil society" allies have most often given tacit support to the state's repressive actions and have consistently failed to seriously engage with, politically support, or provide

material solidarity to their struggles.

Catalysing division and conflict

While these community organizations and social movements do not represent some kind of homogeneous entity, and while there have been (and continue to be) substantive organizational differences and political and ideological debates within their ranks, they have become inextricably bound together by the levelling content and common forms of the neoliberal onslaught, both nationally and, to a lesser extent, internationally.

And yet, besides the highly fractured social and productive relations within poor communities, there is the additional challenge of engaging and overcoming a rising social conservatism among the ranks of the broad working class, driven by the growth of (right-wing) Christian evangelical churches and culturally reinforced patriarchy, as well as intensified ethnic and national chauvinism.



Picture of anti-xenophobia march in 2008 (Johannesburg). Courtesy of Anti-Privatisation Forum/ McKinley.

Much of this social conservatism (McKinley, 2010) has come to the political and social surface since the rise of the current South African president, Jacob Zuma, whose thinly disguised misogyny, homophobia, and open embrace of patriarchal 'traditional values' and religion have provided a trickle-down, socially backward 'role model' to the ANC's and the left's core constituency – the broad working class. Further reinforcement has come from the ANC-led state's consistent championing of a narrow nationalism that has framed and encouraged xenophobia as evidenced in the eruption of xenophobic violence in 2008 and again in early 2015.

All of this has evinced a double 'movement' over the last several years in respect of poor communities and their struggles. On one hand, an escalating hyper-commoditized daily existence has produced a situation in which the vast majority of those residing in poor communities are engaged in a desperate struggle for social relevancy and location. The result has been an intensification of social division, stratification and dysfunction, now more than ever driven by increased competition for limited social benefits, services and productive opportunities.

"Much of this social conservatism has come to rise with the current South African president, Jacob Zuma, whose thinly disguised misogyny, homophobia, and open embrace of patriarchal 'traditional values' and religion have provided a trickle-down, socially backward 'role model' to the broad working class."

In a Manichean twist, scarce waged labour has become the hoped-for light at the end of the tunnel, the main "prize" for social inclusion and stability as against the dark and desolate recesses of utter social marginalization. Access to state-serviced and controlled social grants, which are even then most often subject to considerations of political patronage and party electoral support now represent a barely inclusivist second 'prize'.

Simultaneously, there have been growing levels of tension and conflict that have been manifested in various forms of local, community protests and violence, most often involving the state's police forces as well as local politicians and elites. (Alexander, 2010; von Holdt, 2013) According to one, multi-year, academic study the number of community protests increased by almost 150% from the period 2005-2008 to the period from 2009-2012 when they averaged 309 per year. (Runciman, 2013)

The combined waves of protest and violence have also involved union members, mostly those occupying the lowest paying jobs in the mining sector striking over wages and working conditions. This was the case at the Marikana mine in August 2012 when 10 miners were killed in intra-union violence, followed by the massacre of 35 striking miners by police, with another 70 injured. (Alexander et al., 2012) There have also been scores of community protesters shot dead by police forces over the last several years. (The Sowetan, 24 January 2014)



A poster for the Marikana Solidarity Campaign. Courtesy of Nemeninger.no, 2014.

Cumulatively, this cocktail of constructed dysfunction, division and conflict has made the possibilities of forging common, national level political and socio-economic struggles of communities for radical change hugely difficult. Likewise, it has also vitiated much of the earlier transitional potential of meaningful anti-capitalist labour-community alliances.

New spaces, new possibilities

The good news, however, is that there are new spaces opening up. The most crucial of these spaces have been engendered by the on-going fracturing of the ANC-Alliance over the last few years which has seen a slow-but-sure loosening of

the ANC's political and ideological hegemony. This process has been catalyzed by the horrific events at Marikana. During the subsequent post-massacre strike by platinum miners, the longest in South African history, practical and solidaristic links between workers, community organizations and independent left activists were forged. This heralded possibilities both for more sustained and campaigning alliances between labour and community and an effective and principled 'United Front' of community, labour and independent left forces and struggles.

For, whether it be in South Africa or elsewhere, the very basis, historically, for the maintenance of a sustainable political alliance between unions and (ostensibly progressive) political parties that have hold of state power is the parallel maintenance of both a politically malleable union leadership and expanding benefits for a meaningful threshold of unionised workers. On both counts, the alliance of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP is looking increasingly precarious.

"The good news, however, is that there are new spaces opening up. The most crucial of these spaces have been engendered by the on-going fracturing of the ANC-Alliance over the last few years"

Now not only is the ANC itself riven with factional battles and drowning in a sea of corruption but the last two years have also seen the formation of a new political rival (ostensibly to the ANC's left) in the form of the breakaway Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) as well as the expulsion from COSATU of the largest union in the country, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Further, COSATU and many of its affiliates have become virtually paralyzed by leadership and factional battles, these catalyzed by ever growing exposés of massive financial mismanagement and fraud. (McKinley, 2014)

What is also happening is that the wage and working condition gains of all but the most highly paid unionized workers are being seriously eroded by the combined effects of the state's neoliberal policies and the displacement of the current crisis of capitalism onto workers. In respect of the 'other' part of the broad working class (i.e. poor communities), the impacts are being felt even more acutely.

This is where the incipient moves by NUMSA, supported by many community organizations and other civil society formations across the country, to forge an independent and anti-capitalist 'United Front' of the broad working class comes into the picture. For many community organizations, workers, social movements and other left activists who have been waging various struggles over the past decade and who are not part of the long-standing ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance, the significance of NUMSA's break is that it comes with a commitment to

...lead in the establishment of a new United Front [UF] that will coordinate struggles in the workplace and in communities, in a way similar to the UDF of the 1980s.



The "Anti-Eviction Office" in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. Courtesy of Anti-Privatisation Forum/McKinley.

The task of this front will be to fight for the implementation of the Freedom Charter and be an organizational weapon against neoliberal policies such as the NDP [National Development Plan]. (NUMSA, 2013)

Such initiatives could indicate that “the nearly 10-year revolt of the poor may be complemented by an industrial partner” (Gentle 2014) and see a rejuvenation of labour-community alliances centred on basic public services. (Ashman and Pons-Vignon 2014). Additionally, NUMSA has said that it will embark on a process to organize workers across value chains, including in the highly divided and volatile mining sector (NUMSA 2014), a move that could also herald the beginnings of organizational support for informal and casualized workers who, it is estimated, now constitute the majority of those employed in South Africa. (ILO, 2015)

Since the beginning of 2014, NUMSA has held a range of meetings and conferences with an array of community organizations, NGOs and independent left forces. This has led to the launch of several provincial and local structures of the ‘United Front’ and campaigns against, for example, the ANC government’s introduction of a youth wage subsidy and its neoliberal budget. Several joint protests have taken place across the country and have often been extended to other struggles initiated by community organizations and social movements.



The cry of the United Front is KWANELE, KWANELE, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, GENOEG IS GENOEG. Courtesy of International Journal of Socialist Renewal, 2014.

NUMSA’s moves to build such a ‘United Front’ remain embryonic at this stage, of course, and it must still translate stated intent into practical action when it comes to active involvement in community struggles and organizations as well as in making common cause with informal/casualized workers. Nonetheless, what NUMSA has done is to open wide the door of new possibilities not just for labour-community alliances for public services but for a broad working class-led movement to mount a serious organizational and political challenge to the ANC (alongside its so-called ‘left’ alliance partners) as well as to the state in its present form.

The key challenge now for both community organisations and the labour movement in South Africa is to occupy the new spaces that have opened and to do so independently from any political party. In order for that to begin to happen though, there must first be recognition by unions and community organizations that they are part of the same struggle: in other words, the laying of a foundation for a unity in resistance of the broad working class in opposition to neoliberal capitalism and all its associated practical impacts.

In doing so, a base can be constructed on which a parallel joint programme of basic grassroots organizing and activism can then be pursued. Such a programme needs to be grounded in a basic set of demands that speaks directly to the real living conditions and daily struggles of both poor communities and organized workers. And it must also linked to a coming together to change the face of the public sector as a means not only to deliver public services but to do so in a way that deepens and expands their democratic character and content. (Ronnie, 2013; Wainwright, 2013) In this way, the idea of a meaningful ‘United Front’ that also encompasses social forces beyond its broad working class core can begin to be translated into practice.

"a base can be constructed on which a parallel joint programme of basic grassroots organizing and activism can then be pursued. Such a programme needs to be grounded in a basic set of demands that speaks directly to the real living conditions and daily struggles of both poor communities and organized workers."

Above all, for community and worker resistance to invent the future of anti-capitalist struggle in South Africa is going to require patient political and organizational work and activism informed by a democratic spirit of humility and openness. There is no space here for vanguardist, paramount leadership, no room for the presumption of collective “working class” consciousness and no place for the defensive and divisive promotion of narrow organizational identities and terrain.

While a longer-term goal of broad working class struggle might well be to replace capitalism with an alternative system, it is only by engaging in the kind of practical, here-and-now struggle for real changes in the lives of the public, both human and institutional, that the possibilities for more radical change can be brought into being.

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Who's Afraid of Feminism: Gender in South African Politics.

by *Shireen Hassim*

Recently, the University of Cape Town (UCT) student organization RhodesMustFall, displayed a banner proclaiming: "Dear History: This revolution has women, gays, queers, and trans. Remember that." It was a profound declaration that the old politics of the left can no longer hold, and that the masculinist, male-dominated forms of oppositional politics that centred the male subject as the defining agent of transformation must be confronted.

To understand where this statement – which went viral on social media – comes from, we need to consider both the failures of the state-led democratic project and the modes of analysis and organisation on the left. An honest examination is especially timely as progressive politics is re-grouping around new formations ranging from political parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters, to student movements, to broad front civil society arrangements such as the United Front. The women's movement itself, to the extent that it ever existed in coherent form, has also seen several changes in the past two decades with the collapse of the Women's National Coalition, the ever-increasing distance between the ANC Women's League and feminists, and the emergence of a much wider range of organisations dealing with issues of violence and sexuality. Importantly, through initiatives such as the Feminist Table, connections are being forged



Banner displayed by UCT students. Courtesy of Shireen Hassim. #RhodesMustFall

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between women's organisations working at the brutal edge of the economic crisis in families, households and communities, and feminist thinkers.

But can the left itself connect in new ways? In this period of see-sawing between despair and hope, what are the possibilities for a renewed conversation on what redistribution would entail – redistribution of economic resources and assets to be sure, which remain central to projects of the left, but also the redistribution of social and political power which remain marginal? Women, gays, and queers appear to be caught between two forms of nationalism: a state-based, liberal project in which 'women' occupy a particular place in governmentalism, and a resurgent populist Africanism which for the most part privileges racial identity over all other forms. Are Zuma and the Malema merely two sides of the same patriarchal coin?

"But can the left itself connect in new ways? In this period of see-sawing between despair and hope, redistribution of economic resources and assets to be sure, but also the redistribution of social and political power which remain marginal?"

The ANC has proven that the old allies of feminism are all too unreliable. Pulled kicking and screaming behind a project of equality over the course of a century, the ANC in government found ways to blunt the concept and denude it of its particular radical content developed by women under its banner. In both Women's Charters (1954 and 1994), the concept of equality referred to substantive equality. By this was meant attention to the systemic ways in which gender power operated through both the economy and the family-household.

The drafters of the Charters – and the thousands of women involved in the Federation of South African Women and the Women's National Coalition recognized that representation in the formal institutions of the state mattered: nothing about us without us. They well understood that the law was complicit in inscribing inequality and upholding it in ways that mattered for women's everyday lives. But as even a cursory reading of the Charters will show, they were at pains to point out that formal discrimination was indelibly tied to maintaining a system of exploitation of women's labour and control of women's sexuality.



The Federation of South African Women was launched on 17 April 1954 in Johannesburg. The first attempt to set up a broad-based women's organisation. Courtesy of sahistory.org, 1954.

That legacy, rich in debate and contestation, has been abandoned by the ANC in government. Going into the democratic era, there was a political consensus that not only should women have greater voice in decision making about public resources, but that those resources should be directed towards reducing the inequalities that are rooted in economic and social structures. That consensus is embodied in the Constitution. To be sure, one part of this related to parity in representation, full legal equality for all, and a public commitment to the rights of women. But that was always understood among feminists inside and out of the ANC to be one side of the bargain; the other side was the redistribution of status and

resources.

Slowly but steadily, the last two decades have witnessed the Women's League taking up the space as official representative of women in politics, in the process dislodging claims for redistribution. Under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki, a form of liberal feminism found firm footing. Women became the face of the modernist, national project of governing. Indeed, South Africa could be an exemplar of the argument made by Nancy Fraser that feminism is a crucial ally in the restructuring of capitalism. The easy incorporation of women into the existing places of power through the use of quotas, the spiraling illusion that projects of gender equality could be disaggregated from decision-making about the economy and the celebratory discourse about women's progress in the new South Africa are all examples of this.

The Women's League of course benefitted from supporting both Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma: it gained positions for its members in Cabinet and in provincial legislatures, as well as in the Commission on Gender Equality. In 2007 it was poised to

nominate a woman for the position of president of the ANC, in line with the suggestions by Mbeki about his successor. Many hoped that successor would be Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, a longstanding leader in the Women's League and a smart and capable politician.

But Mbeki's game was up and, by the end of that year, the League joined the winning side. It supported Zuma against the views of feminists in its own party, who were concerned about the macho assertions of power, the attitudes of sexual entitlement and the homophobia displayed by Zuma during his rape trial. Standing by their man came at a price. By the 2014 elections it was so hopelessly aligned to Zuma that it could not even maintain the pretense of support for women's political power. It declared that South Africa was not ready for a woman president. This year it has made an about turn and rumours are that it will be nominating a woman for president at its elective conference this month. Truth is, no amount of spinning can conceal the fact that the Women's League has done little during the past two decades of democracy to build public support for women's rights, let alone shift gendered patterns of economic inequality.



Satirical portrait of the ANC's Women's League. Via Zapiro/ mg.co.za (fair use), 2012.

"...no amount of spinning can conceal the fact that the Women's League has done little during the past two decades of democracy to build public support for women's rights, let alone shift gendered patterns of economic inequality. "

Even by the minimal standard of formal equality, the ANC has regressed in its support for feminism and the Women's League has not been able to leverage its close relationship to the powerful faction in the party into political advantage. The women appointed to Cabinet and to parliament cannot seem to stop their party from introducing legislation that threatens the rights of women living under traditional authorities. It took a campaign led from outside the party, under the auspices of the Alliance for Rural Democracy, to halt the legislation. The Department of Women can seemingly not provide leadership in the battle to end gender-based violence, infamously tweeting in August 2015 the query 'what should we do about women who lay charges (of gender-based violence) and then withdraw them'. They were roundly criticized by gender-based violence activists for having no understanding of the complexities of navigating the justice system. Hosting Sixteen Days of Activism and Women's Month events is meaningless when government budgets for addressing violence and for supporting women affected by violence are massively cut.



International Defence and Aid Fund poster, date unknown. Courtesy of SAHA.org archive.

In place of a politics of removing inequalities, the various structures set up to represent the interests of women in policymaking – such as the Office on the Status of Women – suggest the triumph of form over substance. Once the Ministry of Women's Affairs was set up, none of the ministers that headed it could come up with the programs or the resources that would address the hard realities of life for poor women. Instead, they championed a bill that would legislate gender equality in both the public and the private sector – a cold sop to compensate for the lack of proper ideas and strategies. Now even that Ministry has been moved, this time into the Presidency –

precisely the location in which the Office on the Status of Women was sidelined. This latest shuffle seems to be a typical gesture that gives the appearance of elevated status without the power to actually do much (or be properly accountable through the structures of parliament).

In fact, it is hard to see it as anything other than a retrogressive step for the project of getting government to deal with the gendered impacts of its economic policies. Zuma

hopes that the Minister will champion women's socio-economic empowerment and rights: so would we. But does anyone really believe that Susan Shabangu, who disastrously mismanaged the aftermath of the Marikana massacre, remembers her trade union roots?

Much of the collapse of the idea of substantive equality is attributed to the shift in the leadership of the ANC away from the 'modern' ideas of Mbeki to the more 'traditionalist' ideas of Zuma. Indeed it is fair to argue that Zuma has shifted the public debate to the right on issues of gender and that crude patriarchy is far more evident under his presidency. More pertinently, the left in the tripartite alliance resolutely refused to listen to the feminists who warned that he was not the standard-bearer for progressive politics that he was portrayed to be. Of course, the association of Mbeki with the quota project and the initial support of the Women's League for the continuation of Mbeki's presidency complicated the picture. But only a little.



Mineral Resources Minister Susan Shabangu. Via Sowetan/ BDLive.co.za (fair use), 2012.

"More pertinently, the left in the tripartite alliance resolutely refused to listen to the feminists who warned that he was not the standard-bearer for progressive politics that he was portrayed to be. "

Mbeki may have incorporated women into his project of neo-liberal governance but there was never any doubt that Zuma would make things worse. It was very evident by 2009 that Zuma's personal life revealed that his support for women's and gay rights was thin. While the ANC Youth League was boosting Zuma with its 100% Zuluboy campaign, feminist activists were visibly and vocally opposed. The left in the alliance had little time for feminist arguments. The stakes were 'higher' they said: returning the party to the branches was the key consideration. Radical change was to hand. Gender was a secondary issue, they said impatiently. In effect, they made a Faustian pact and left it to history to prove the feminists right.



A march by the EFF on Mandela Day in Cape Town. Courtesy of Wikimedia/ Discott, 2014.

This raises the question of whether the Economic Freedom Fighters, the radical new kids on the political bloc, can offer any hope for beleaguered feminists. The signs are not promising. This first and obvious point to make is that the EFF is driven by the same team that brought us '100% Zuluboy.' It is a team, moreover, led by Julius Malema who was taken to the Equality Court for his comments on women and sexual consent, and who made the infamous statement that the word intersexed did not exist in the Pedi language and hence it was unAfrican. Secondly, the EFF have chosen an explicitly militarized and masculinist mode in which to make

their entry into politics. This is signaled by the language of the party: Commanders, Fighters, Central Command. It is also signaled by the gendered nature of the chosen uniforms: overalls for the men, housecoats with doeks for the women. The EFF supports substantive equality and redistribution and on paper it looks like a fair ally on the core issues.

However, their rhetoric slips dangerously into verbal abuse. When he was still leader of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema referred to the then opposition parliamentary leader Lindiwe Mazibuko as a 'teagirl'. As a more recent example and in a tussle in parliament this year, Malema referred to Minister of Small Business Development Lindiwe Zulu as a 'straatmeid' – literally a girl of the streets, figuratively a sex worker! As Siphokazi Magadla points out, such sexism is telling: it is 'a crude reminder of the sexist double-standards faced by female guerillas in the aftermath of war where they are expected to conform to dominant ideas of feminine respectability.'

"...such sexism is telling: it is 'a crude reminder of the

sexist double-standards faced by female guerillas in the aftermath of war where they are expected to conform to dominant ideas of feminine respectability.' "

The other new kid on the block, the United Front, has begun promisingly with an upfront commitment that it would not reproduce the typical patterns of civil society organisations in which women act as the backbone of the movement and men take on leadership. Some feminists suggest that the United Front's association with former COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi will taint the project. Vavi was notoriously brought down by allegations of a non-consensual affair with his secretary. It is too early to call whether this whiff of the familiar will be enough to keep feminists away from the United Front – whose anti-austerity politics has enough in other ways to bring together those who want radical change through nonviolent means.

There is no doubt that key feminist questions have only been engaged thus far at the margins of political debate: the gendered nature of power, the implications of a masculinized politics for women's sense of agency, and more particularly how we might understand the implications of masculine forms of power for women as political subjects of postcolonial democracy in its South African form.

The sphere of the 'political' continues to be constructed in terms of high politics: the formal state, associated parties and allies such as trade unions, and oppositional social movements and NGOs. Even though racism and its multifarious forms of persistence in social and economic relations are re-entering public debate, the left pays scant attention to the sphere of the social. Economic policy debates simply pay lip service to the gendered forms of production and reproduction, leaving these connections to be made by the small number of overburdened feminist activists. It is a rare event when there is attention to gender dimensions of inequality in the writings of the male left. Issues of sexual identity and gender-based violence remain a 'bit on the side' of politics. The RhodesMustFall banner references precisely the ways in which these important concerns are either ignored or counterposed to the project of radical change, and the refusal of young feminists to collude in that positioning.



A statue of Cecil John Rhodes being removed from UCT. Courtesy of Wikimedia/ Carr, 2015.

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The Numsa moment: Fresh trade union openings.

by Edward Webster

The Marikana massacre of 16th August 2012 triggered a wave of strikes across South Africa, culminating in an unprecedented uprising in the rural areas of the Western Cape. It also began a process of political realignment. The dramatic entry of the Economic Freedom Front (EEF) into parliament was to become the most spectacular. But could the historic decision of NUMSA in December 2013 to withdraw its logistical support for the ANC and its mandate to the union's leadership to form a United Front and Movement for Socialism, be of more long term significance? It certainly was the popular view on the left at the time. (Satgar, 2014) The "Numsa moment", one support group boldly proclaimed, "constitutes the beginning of the end for the ANC and its ambivalence towards neo-liberalism." (Democracy from Below, December 2013)



Julius Malema is sworn in as a member of Parliament during the first sitting of the National Assembly on May 21 2014. Courtesy of EconomicFreedomFighters.org

The expulsion of Numsa from Cosatu in November 2014, followed by the expulsion of Zwelinzima Vavi in March 2015, the long-standing general-secretary, did not initially slow down enthusiasm for the Numsa moment. But the outcome of the Cosatu Special Congress in July, where Cosatu President Sidumo Dlamini seemed to win support from the carefully chosen delegates, has led to a more reflective mood. The launch of a rival pro-ANC metal union, the Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa, Limusa, further complicates the narrative. The postponement of the national launch of the United Front and on-going differences in strategy, is leading to a more sober assessment of the Numsa moment.

On Turning Points

Is Marikana and the "Numsa moment" a turning point, the beginning of the 'next liberation struggle' or does it mark the disintegration of a once powerful labour movement? We begin our answer to this question by revisiting South Africa's turbulent labour history and the contested nature of Numsa's politics.

"Is Marikana and the "Numsa moment" a turning point, the beginning of the 'next liberation struggle' or does it mark the disintegration of a once powerful labour movement? "

In the history of South Africa, mass strikes, "trials of strength", have crucially impacted on the relationship between political parties and social classes, leading to a realignment of politics. Three strikes can be identified as turning points. Firstly, the 1922 white mine workers strike went on for three months and brought South Africa to the brink of civil war. The outcome of the strike was a class alliance between the emerging Afrikaner nationalist movement and white labour that was to lay the foundations for modern South Africa's apartheid labour regime.

Secondly, the 1946 African mine workers strike marks another turning point. The strike highlighted the growing urbanisation of African workers. Afrikaner nationalists used this "threat" to help them win the 1948 general elections, which they contested on a programme of white domination. Importantly, it also helped cement an alliance between black labour and African nationalism, and the formation of the Congress Alliance in 1955 between the African National Congress (ANC) and the recently formed South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).

Thirdly, the mass strikes of black workers in Durban in 1973 marked another turning point. It took place during the high point of apartheid, at a time when it was widely believed that strike action was not possible in South Africa. The strikes were to lay the foundations for the modern labour movement, as trade unions were established in all the major metropolitan areas of South Africa.

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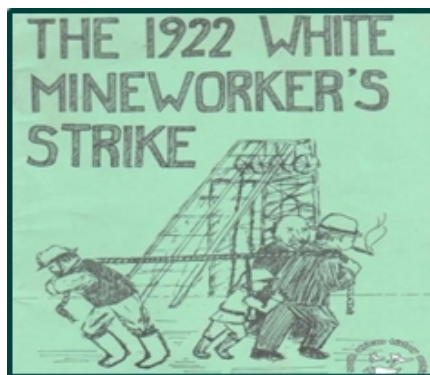
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If the 1973 strikes led to the reconfiguration of the industrial relations system and the emergence of an independent workers movement for the first time in South Africa, it was the massacre of 34 striking mine workers on 16 August 2012 at Marikana that was to call into question the sustainability of the new post-apartheid labour and political order.

A Working Class Politics?



Joe Foster (back-row, 3rd left) with Fosatu colleagues in the 1980s. Courtesy of A History of Fosatu/ Fosatu archives, 2011.



Cover page of 'The 1922 White Mineworker's Strike' booklet. Courtesy of Labour History Group/ sahistory.org.za. Date unknown.

The idea of a workers' party has deep roots in South Africa's post-1973 labour movement. It was first openly articulated by the predecessor of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu), in a speech by general secretary Joe Foster in 1982. He argued that Fosatu's task was to build a working-class organisation within the popular struggle to represent workers politically. The South African Communist Party (SACP) saw Foster's speech as an attack on its 'vanguard' role as the historic political representative of workers. It argued that Fosatu was promoting "syndicalism", and that "trade unions cannot be political parties."

In the eighties a powerful shop steward movement had emerged amongst South Africa's metal workers rooted in the idea of worker control. (Webster, 1985:231-260) They had begun, in 1981/2, to go beyond the factory floor to wider issues related to the reproduction of the workforce. These actions ranged from resistance to the demolition of shacks in Kattlehong to demands for worker control over pension funds. This was to culminate in the November 1984 mass stay-away in Gauteng led by unions, students and township residents. Unions were reaching out to those sectors outside the formal proletariat and developing forms of social movement unionism. Importantly, they were turning to political answers for their members' problems and were searching for national level political responses. But this did not entail subordination of labour organisations to the nationalist movement. "The contradictions generated by capitalist development," I concluded, "had given birth to a working class politics. The central issue now confronting the organised working class is the form and content of this politics" (Ibid, 280)

" The contradictions generated by capitalist development, had given birth to a working class politics. The central issue now confronting the organised working class is the form and content of this politics."

But this was not to be. The debate on working-class politics was overtaken in the mid-1980s by the national liberation struggle and the transition to democracy led by the African National Congress (ANC). Indeed in 1984 the South African Communist Party (SACP) shifted its hostile position towards the democratic labour movement and decided to recruit trade unionists. (Forrest, 2011:459)

In December 1985 Cosatu was launched as a 'historic compromise' between the two dominant political traditions, the national democratic tradition, mobilizing around the Freedom Charter, and the workerist tradition of Fosatu with its emphasis on building strong shop floor structures. This merging of the two political traditions led to a furious debate inside Cosatu. Those opposed to alliance politics charged that this new political direction was "misdirected," and that this "rush" to espouse "alliance politics" will result in a situation where years of painstaking organisational work will be swept aside and workers will again be without democratic unions. (Lambert and Webster, 1988:33)

Numsa Strategies

Alliance politics, and the victory of the ANC led Alliance in South Africa's first democratic elections in April 1994, was to shift the focus of COSATU from workplace

issues to a growing concentration on economic and industrial policy. Numsa leadership embraced what some have called strategic unionism, an engagement in tripartite structures such as Nedlac, a peak-level social dialogue forum, and the concept of “progressive competitiveness.” This involved labour adapting to global competition by developing new skills and a more strategic engagement with capital and the state. But, as Karl von Holdt demonstrated in his ethnographic study of Highveld Steel, “replacing ‘the culture of resistance’ with a ‘culture of productivity’ created an ‘organisational crisis’ in Numsa.” (Von Holdt, 2003:198) The strategy failed for a number of reasons: the process through which it was adopted, its complexity and lack of union capacity, doubts about its internal coherence, and the possibility that it could increase members’ workload and lead to job losses (Ibid, 196-202).



A 1986 For Freedom Peace Socialism poster (SACP). Courtesy of the Jacobin Blog.



COSATU General Secretary, Zwelizima Vavi. Courtesy of Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal, 2014.

Numsa’s new strategy had an essentially corporatist agenda for labour. It aimed at a ‘reconstruction accord’ with the new government and participation in workplace and tripartite structures. But the idea of a separate party of workers had not died. At its fourth congress in July 1993, Numsa re-asserted the need for independence from the new government and called for the working class to develop an independent programme on how to advance to socialism. This, the congress declared, could take the form of a working class party. (Forrest, 2011: 475)

The ANC’s “non-negotiable” embrace of neo-liberal economic policies in 1996 through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, led to a direct confrontation with COSATU and sections of the SACP. This began a process of increasing marginalization of the left from the ANC and growing tensions, articulated most strongly by the COSATU General Secretary, Zwelizima Vavi, accusing the ANC leadership of being a “predatory elite”. Growing disillusionment with the ANC led to the re-emergence inside NUMSA of the idea of a workers party.

To assess the extent of support for a workers party in the broader population, we conducted a survey of a large nationally representative sample of adults between February and March 2014. (Webster and Orkin, 2014) Surprisingly, a third of South African adults definitely thought that “a new political party,” a workers’ or labour party, “will assist with current problems facing SA” (the proportion answering ‘probably not’ or ‘definitely not’ were 15% and 13%).

In 2012, a sample of Cosatu shop stewards was asked a more specific question: “If Cosatu were to form a labour party and contest national elections, would you vote for such a party?” 65% said they would. In the 2014 survey, among the fully employed 69% agreed with the question (30% said “definitely” and 39% said “maybe”).

A Workers’ Party?

Numsa has approached the question of a workers’ party with caution. Following independence, trade unions in post-colonial Africa have tended initially to submit to the ruling party that drove the liberation struggle. But growing marginalization led unions in countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe into opposition and the formation of a separate political party, which, in the case of Zambia’s Movement for Multiparty Democracy, won state power in elections.

"The existence of a relatively large industrial working class, strong civil society organizations and an independent trade union movement with a political culture of shop-floor democracy makes the survival of a workers’ party more likely."

However, there has generally been a low level of political tolerance of political opposition in post-colonial Africa. Unlike established democracies, these new governments are engaged in the complex task of nation building. The result is a culture of "us" versus "them," and union-backed oppositional parties have often been quickly labeled "counter-revolutionary" and "imperialist." The union-backed Movement for Democratic Change soon became the focus of organized violence inflicted by the Zimbabwean state.

Could South Africa be a special case in post-colonial Africa? The existence of a relatively large industrial working class, strong civil society organizations and an independent trade union movement with a political culture of shop-floor democracy makes the survival of a workers' party more likely.

What would the social base of such a party be? In the 2014, nationwide adult sample, 30% of the full-time or part-time employed would definitely support a workers' party, rising to 40% of the unemployed. The highest expression of 'definite' support for the idea of a workers' party was among the black working poor; among those with household incomes of less than R8000 a month; of primary/secondary education; and in the main working age of 18-49. By contrast, the lowest expressed 'definite' support for a workers' party was among whites, Indian and coloureds alike; with household incomes of more than R8000 a month; of tertiary education; among the oldest.

This survey question indicated the size of the potential support base, and broadly identified its likely class features. But what will the form and content of a working class politics be in SA? Is it to involve a broad workers' party, along the lines of Brazil's Partido dos Trabalhadores, with links to working-class communities, academics and small farmers. Or is to be a more traditional labour party along the lines of the UK Labour Party, with close ties with organized labour? Is it to be a revitalized Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, a mirror image of the SACP; or will something distinctive emerge out of the initiative to establish a United Front (UF).



The cry of the United Front is KWANELE, KWANELE, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, GENOEG IS GENOEG. Courtesy of International Journal of Socialist Renewal, 2014.

Designed to link unions to struggles in the community, a National Working Committee of the United Front was established in December 2014. Although it still remains to be formally launched nationally it has an estimated two hundred and fifty loosely affiliated social justice and environmental justice affiliates. Of particular concern are climate change and the demand for eco-socialism. However, its political direction remains uncertain: should it be openly socialist, or a broad front similar to the United Democratic Front (UDF) of the eighties; is it a step towards a worker's party or is it an autonomous body connecting a range of community based organizations; should it engage in electoral politics or should it remain at arms-length from party politics?

Importantly, the multiple expressions of local-level militancy that emerged over the past decade is a fragmented militancy, different from the social movement unionism of the early to mid eighties. The link between the current township protests and NUMSA is tenuous. Indeed the high levels of unemployment in these communities – sometimes as high as 80% - has led to conflicts – and intensified violence – between the employed who are trying to maintain collective solidarity in a strike and those who want to go to work. This emerged most dramatically in the strikes on the platinum mines in Rustenburg. The coercive tactics used to maintain solidarity, described by Chinguno as a form of "violent solidarity," runs counter to the democratic traditions of labour. (Chinguno, 2015a and 2015b: 178)

"...the multiple expressions of local-level militancy that emerged over the past decade is a fragmented militancy, different from the social movement unionism of the early to mid eighties."

It is important to emphasize that the new initiatives, organisational forms and sources of power are emerging on the periphery of organised labour. The strikes at Marikana were not led by a union but were the product of the self-activity of labour, as Sinwell and Mbatha (2013: 32) argue:

The agency of workers, and more specifically the independent worker's committee, is arguably the key feature surrounding the event of the Marikana Massacre... The committee at Marikana is important in understanding the strike wave along the Rustenburg Platinum Belt where these independent organisations emerged. Industrial sociology more generally has been dominated by investigations into formalised unions...

Labour's Dilemma



South African miners on strike in 2014.
Via News of the South.com (fair use).

Labour's dilemma in post-colonial countries is how to express its distinct working class politics in such a way that it does not have a confrontation with the state or alienate itself from those who continue to support the dominant national narrative. Interestingly, the Ghana Trade Union Congress (TUC), has chosen the path of non-alignment with any specific political party. It prefers to develop its own political demands, lobby for these demands and advise its members to vote for the party that supports the TUC's programme. A similar approach has been adopted amongst informal worker organisations in India (Agarwala, 2013:98)

Informal worker movements, Agarwala demonstrates, are most successful when operating within electoral contexts where parties compete for mass votes from the poor. She calls this competitive populism. These informal worker organisations are not attached to a particular party nor do they espouse a specific political or economic ideology. In this way they have successfully organised informal workers. As one organiser observed:

" The informal sector is entering into the previously formal sector, and the formal sector is being cut in size.... We cannot differentiate between formal and informal workers, because politicians only care about getting most votes." (Cited in Agarwala, 2013: 98)

We are entering a new kind of politics, what some have come to call the "politics of precarity" where precariousness at work creates a crisis not just of job-quality but also of social reproduction (Lee and Kofman, 2012) There is, as Jennifer Chun argues, a "growing interest in a new political subject of labour...women, immigrants, people of color, low-paid service workers, precarious workers, groups that have been historically excluded from the moral and material boundaries of union membership." (Chun, 2012:40)

"We are entering a new kind of politics, what some have come to call the "politics of precarity" where precariousness at work creates a crisis not just of job-quality but also of social reproduction..."

Whether the left activists of the labour movement have the political imagination and energy to take advantage of this new terrain remains to be seen. What is clear is that the old labour order is no longer sustainable and building an alternative is going to require patient and long-term organisational work.

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Moving towards an alternative eco-socialist order in South Africa.

by Jacklyn Cock

Introduction

An ecological transformation is required as part of a 'new liberation struggle' in South Africa. This involves a 'just transition' from the present fossil fuel regime that is moving us towards ecological collapse and catastrophe. The article suggests that the impetus to this ecological transformation is coming strongly from two aspects of the ecological crisis: the acceleration of climate change and the spread of toxic pollution of water, air, land and food that is experienced as 'environmental racism'. The implication is that what Von Holdt and Webster (2005) have conceptualised as a triple transition to democracy (economic liberalisation, political democracy and post-colonial transformation) requires a fourth dimension: an ecological transition to a society marked by a very different relation with nature, a relation combining social justice with ecological sustainability.



GroundWork environmental poster.
Courtesy of groundWork, 2014.

This comprehensive and transformative change could contain the embryo of a post-capitalist, eco-socialist society. Such a vision is finding concrete expression in alternative social forms, new alliances and forms of power which are promoting counter narratives of solidarity through environmental justice, energy democracy, transformative feminism and food sovereignty. These could involve features such as the collective, democratic control of production for social needs, rather than profit; the mass roll out of socially owned renewable energy, suggesting decentralized energy sources with much greater potential for community control; the localisation of food production in the shift from carbon-intensive industrial agriculture to food sovereignty; new relations between men and women and the sharing of resources in more collective social forms. Support

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for such alternatives is related to the increasing recognition that the fundamental cause of the deepening ecological crisis, which is having devastating impacts on the working class, is the expansionist logic of capitalism. Quite simply, there is a growing sense that the deepening climate crisis arises precisely from the imposition just such a perverse "logic," one that is producing "a crisis arising from and perpetuated by the rule of capital, and hence incapable of resolution within the capitalist framework" (Wallis, 2010:32). Moreover, such recognition is promoting new coalitions and forms of co-operation between both labour and environmental activists - this new solidarity, in turn, bearing the promise of a new kind of socialism that is, at once, ethical, ecological and democratic.

"...the increasing recognition that the fundamental cause of the deepening ecological crisis, which is having devastating impacts on the working class, is the expansionist logic of capitalism."

The ecological crisis



Chevron Oil Refinery in Cape Town.
Courtesy of Wikimedia/ Discott, 2012.

South Africa is a microcosm of how the ecological crisis is deepening globally. Despite 21 years of international negotiations there is no binding global agreement on the reduction of carbon emissions. On the contrary, carbon emissions are rising (61% since 1990) which means climate change is intensifying and having a range of serious impacts – particularly in Africa - in the form of rising food prices, water shortages, crop failures, and dislocation by ever more extreme weather events. This is largely because the political systems of the most powerful countries are dominated by the interests of fossil fuel corporations and committed to the pursuit of economic growth at all costs (Klein, 2014). Capital's response to the climate crisis is that the system can continue to expand by creating a new 'sustainable' or 'green capitalism', bringing the efficiency of the market to bear on nature and its reproduction. The two pillars on which green capitalism rests are technological innovation and expanding markets while keeping the existing institutions of capitalism intact. Underlying all these strategies is the broad process of commodification: the transformation of nature and all social relations into economic relations, subordinated to the logic of the market and to the imperatives of profit (Cock, 2014; Satgar, 2014).

This pattern is replicated in contemporary South Africa, a country that is ostensibly committed to a 'green economy.' Yet it is one of the most energy and carbon intensive countries in the world, relying on coal as the primary energy source and with a policy of supplying cheap energy to industry. The privatised oil company Sasol's plant at Secunda is converting coal and gas into liquid petroleum and in the process creating the single greatest point-source site of CO₂ emissions on the planet (Bond, 2015:6). Overall South Africa's commitments to reducing carbon emissions are vague and insubstantial. At present over 500 tonnes of carbon a year are emitted, two new coal-fired power stations (among the largest in the world) are being built and forty new coal mines are planned, most of them in Mpumalanga and sited on some of the most fertile land in the country. Communities living close to the operative coal-fired power stations and open-pit mines (both working and abandoned) are dealing with mass removals and dispossession, loss of livelihoods, threats to food security, health problems associated with water and air pollution, corruption in the awarding of mining licences, and inadequate consultation.

In addition to coal mining, the externalisation of the costs of industrial production in the form of pollution of the air and groundwater in many communities means that a large number of South Africans are exposed to what Nixon (2011) has called 'the slow violence' of toxic pollution from a process that is insidious and largely invisible. Moreover, it is mostly Black South Africans who continue to live on the most damaged land and in the most polluted neighbourhoods (often adjoining working or abandoned mines, coal fired power stations, steel mills, incinerators and waste sites or polluting industries, and without adequate services of refuse removal, water, electricity and sanitation). In the province of Gauteng alone, for example, there are some 1.6 million African people living on mine dumps that are contaminated with uranium and toxic

heavy metals, including arsenic, aluminium, manganese and mercury. Such a pattern manifests an expression, quite clearly, of 'environmental racism.' At the same time it is estimated that 83% of rivers are damaged from sewage pollution, deforestation is increasing and the threats to biodiversity include the loss of 5,000 rhinos from poaching since 2008.



A landfill in Durban. Residents complain of environmental racism. Courtesy of Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal, 2011.



Operation Phakisa is key to South Africa's 'blue economy', despite the anticipated ecological damage to the coastal waters and seabed. Via ISSAfrica.org/Walker, 2014 (fair use).

This pattern of ecological damage is likely to increase with 'Operation Phakisa (meaning 'speed up') which involves R60 billion worth of deep sea oil and gas exploration. Government recently granted prospecting licenses for marine phosphate mining which involves extensive dredging of the seabed. Yet the fact is that "if South Africa permits seabed mining, we will become the only country in the world to allow such a destructive practice" (Roux, 2015:7)! Simply put, we are moving in this and other ways towards ecological

catastrophe because government remains wedded to the dominant interests of the mineral- energy complex. More positively, however, this is also the precise context in which new, potentially transformative social formations are emerging in contemporary South Africa.

Confronting the ecological crisis: new alliances, forms of power and organisations

The ecological crisis – as is also the case with the social crises of deepening poverty and unemployment, upheavals within the labour movement, new political groupings and growing grassroots dissatisfaction with the conventional political structures - is driving new initiatives. What is distinctive about these latter initiatives, however, is that they focus on building popular power, on developing new forms of solidarity including formal and informal alliances and coalitions and a regional focus, by using their great symbolic power and a strong normative charge in order specifically to dramatise both the causes and the consequences of the present very severe ecological crisis. Organised around concrete issues in the everyday experience of working people, especially rising food and energy prices, they are producing a 'politics of everyday life [as] the crucible where revolutionary energies might well develop.' (Harvey, 2014)



The Rural Women's Assembly of Southern Africa, demand that governments take immediate steps to address dangers posed to rural communities by the climate crisis. Courtesy of Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal, 2011.

For there is a growing emphasis on moving beyond denunciation to formulate alternative narratives of food sovereignty, energy democracy, transformative feminism and environmental justice, all of which could be building blocks for an eco-socialist order. For example, several organisations are not only mobilising opposition to fracking but also are "exploring alternatives which will foster energy sovereignty and transformative development while protecting the natural resources and people of the Karoo" (campaign statement by Black Thursday Southern Cape Land 13.7.2015). Meanwhile, other organisations are promoting concrete post-carbon alternatives such as the Earthlife's Sustainable Energy and Livelihoods Project and combining water harvesting, food sovereignty and clean energy, through installing, maintaining and training women on the use of biogas digesters and PVC solar power units.

"...there is a growing emphasis on moving beyond denunciation to formulate alternative narratives of food

**sovereignty, energy democracy, transformative feminism
and environmental justice, all of which could be building
blocks for an eco-socialist order."**



The Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park home to a vast array of wildlife, is threatened with mining at its borders. Via savourwilderness.com (fair use) 2014.

Note, too, that some of these new alliances or coalitions are between formerly antagonistic groupings, such as those concerned with conservation of threatened plants, animals and wilderness areas on the one hand and those concerned with social and human needs on the other. An example is the struggle against the proposed open cast Fuleni Coal mine slated to stretch over 3550 hectares close to Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park, one of Africa's oldest game reserves and central to rhino conservation. There local women have mobilised with the support of conservation organizations, forming the iMfolozi Community and Wilderness Alliance. (There are also powerful counter-forces involved in this struggle of course, with interests in the coal mine including "Glencore and BHB Billiton, the world's

largest commodity trader and mining house respectively" [Bond, 2015:9]). Another example of disparate groupings uniting is the Save Mapungubwe Coalition which was formed to safeguard the Mapungubwe National Park, a World Heritage Site, from an Australian-based mining company, Coal of Africa. The diverse coalition included environmental NGOs such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) as well as local people. Thus the new alliances are beginning to close the historic gap that had tended in the past to split the movement for effective environment-related initiatives along a fault line between two (sometimes antagonistic) streams: those organised around the discourse of conservation and those organised around the discourse of environmental justice; fortunately this divide is no longer as evident as it once was.

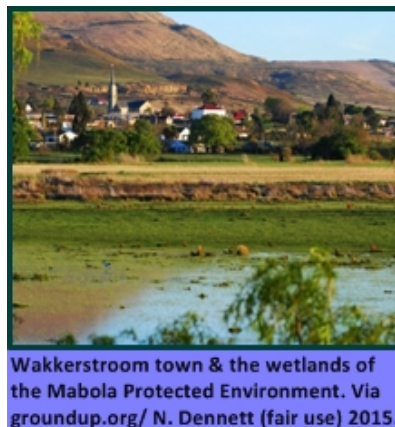
Many of these new social formations are against different forms of extractivism. For example the women struggling against threatened removals linked to the establishment of the Fulani coal mine are being assisted by WoMin (Women in Mining) which is a new regional alliance of organisations which emphasizes solidarity among women. Recently it convened a gathering of activists from some 24 different organisations in the region and called for building 'popular alliances against Big Coal' and a new form of development "that recognises and supports the work of care and reproduction". (WoMin Declaration 24.1.2015). A women's wing of the new organisation Mining Affected Communities in Action (MACUA) has also been established. Such organisations are responding to the way in which black, working class women have become the 'shock absorbers' of the climate crisis, experiencing most intensely the devastating impacts of rising food prices, water pollution and energy poverty. And they are attempting to build 'counter power' that could develop into of a new form of transformative feminism.

"...black, working class women have become the 'shock absorbers' of the climate crisis, experiencing most intensely the devastating impacts of rising food prices, water pollution and energy poverty. And they are attempting to build 'counter power' - a new form of transformative feminism. "

Conservation and community

Other coalitions that link conservation and community groups are focusing on strategic litigation in ways that are also empowering. For example a coalition of eight civil society and community organisations represented by the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER,) have instituted legal action against the Minister of Mineral Resources following his granting of a coal mining right to Atha-Africa Ventures inside the sensitive Mabola Protected Environment. CER and the older organisations such as the Legal Resources Centre and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies are thus building the capacity of communities in their demanding of their rights (and the enforcing of mining companies' obligations) in terms of the Constitution, NEMA, the National Water Act, new mining requirements, and other applicable laws" - as well as other "avenues of recourse for violations of environmental rights" (CALs, 2014:30).

Furthermore, new alliances between labour and environmental activists are emerging. Many trade unionists emphasize the links between the climate crisis and neo-liberal capitalism, for example, something that found organisational expression in two COSATU committees established in 2010 and comprised of representatives from all affiliates and from key environmental organisations. These structures have survived the turmoil in COSATU and succeeded in promoting shared research into coal mining, chemicals and poultry farming between NUM, CEPPWAWU and FAWU. Indeed, following discussions at a workshop in Durban in July 2011 on climate change, the Central Executive Committee of COSATU at a meeting on 22 – 24 August 2011 attended by national office bearers, representatives of the 20 affiliated unions and 9 provincial structures, adopted a Climate Change Policy Framework which stated its commitment to a 'just transition' and stressed that capitalist accumulation has been the underlying cause of excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore of global warming and climate change (COSATU, 2012).



Wakkerstroom town & the wetlands of the Mabola Protected Environment. Via groundup.org/ N. Dennett (fair use) 2015.

Two broad approaches to such a notion as 'a just transition' exist. There is a minimalist position, one that emphasizes shallow, reformist change laced with talk of green jobs, social protection, retraining and consultation. The emphasis here is defensive and shows a preoccupation with protecting the interests of vulnerable workers. An alternative notion views the climate crisis as a catalyzing force for massive transformative change towards socialism. Now expelled from COSATU, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) supports this latter vision by arguing for a socially owned renewable energy sector and other forms of community energy enterprises where the full rights for workers are also respected. This social ownership approach means energy being claimed as a public or common good that can take a mix of different forms such as public utilities, cooperatives or municipally-owned entities!



Numsa supporters march in Johannesburg. Courtesy of marxist.com, 2015.

Currently NUMSA is strongly promoting the notion of energy democracy as being, precisely, a building block towards socialism. 'An energy transition can only occur if there is a decisive shift in power towards workers, communities and the public – energy democracy. A transfer of resources, capital and infrastructure from private hands to a democratically controlled public sector will need to occur in order to ensure that a truly sustainable energy system is developed...Energy democracy offers perhaps the only feasible route to a new energy system that can protect workers' rights and generate decent and stable jobs, make just transition real and be responsive to the needs of communities.' (Sweeney, 2012:3). An understanding of a 'just transition' simply limited to the goal of 'a low carbon economy' could contain the embryo of a very different order, of course. But it could also mean the expansion of the present privatized renewable energy programme in which electricity becomes totally unaffordable for the mass of South Africans. As a NUMSA official pointed out, "Renewable energy at the service of capital accumulation could result in even harsher patterns of displacement and appropriation of land than those brought about by other forms of energy" (Abramsky, 2012:349). In the South African context a more expansive and progressive notion is spreading, however, one that is understood to involve resisting the agenda of the fossil fuels corporations and reclaiming the energy sector as part of 'the commons', of public resources that are outside the market, and of real democrat control. In this new context different experimental forms of social ownership of energy are beginning to emerge all over the country.

Another example of unions and environmental organisations collaborating is the Climate Jobs Campaign which has collected 100,000 signatures in support of creating jobs to address both poverty and climate change. Based on meticulous research, it has demonstrated that by challenging capitalist ownership in favour of community owned projects a target goal of three million such jobs is a possible one.

"...resisting the agenda of the fossil fuels corporations and reclaiming the energy sector as part of 'the commons'... and of real democrat control... different experimental

forms of social ownership of energy are beginning to emerge all over the country. "

Some of the activists working with the labour movement come from the 'environmental justice' movement. Thus members of organisations such as Earthlife Africa, Groundwork, the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, as well as newer anti-extractivist organisations such as MACUA and WoMin, are bridging ecological and social justice issues and formulating an alternative social order. As with 'energy democracy' their foundational concept of environmental justice could be another conceptual building block towards an eco-socialism.

In fact, the hybridized and travelling discourse of environmental justice originated in the US in opposition to practices termed there to represent 'environmental racism.' It has been further radicalised in South Africa through a rather messy, haphazard process of translation that has linked the core principles of social justice, equity, health, human rights, democratic participation, accountability and ecological sustainability. Environmental justice struggles thus involve a range of mobilising issues although the most common demands and claims relate to 'rights' and health - a demand related to the constitutional framing of the human right in the post-apartheid constitution proclaiming the right of all 'to live in an environment that is not harmful to health or wellbeing' (Section 24 of the Bill of Rights). Of course, much popular mobilisation is related to access to services such as water and energy and are localised, episodic, discontinuous and are not initially clearly framed as 'environmental' struggles. Nonetheless, the effort to so address them could provide an ideological basis for further unified collective action.

The possibility of a unified environmental movement

At present there "is no clearly identifiable, relatively unified and broadly popular environmental movement in the country". (Death, 2014:1216). However this might be changing and here, as elsewhere, a unified environmental movement could, "in alliance with others, pose a serious threat to the reproduction of capital". (Harvey, 2014:252). Clearly coal, as the main driver of the ecological crisis in the form of climate change, constitutes a particularly powerful ground for unified action. Formal alliances in opposition to coal began in 2013 in a partnership between groundWork, Earthlife Africa and the Centre for Environmental Rights to challenge Eskom and these are growing. The issues of land dispossession, health impacts through water and air pollution, loss of livelihoods, corruption in the granting of mining licenses, and inadequate consultation with frontline communities are some of the grounds for unity. The expansion of coal mining on some of the most fertile land in the country also raises the issue of increasing food insecurity.

Thus, while coal is a cause, food insecurity is acknowledged to be one of the most serious consequences of climate change. Popular mobilisation against the present food regime in South Africa is expanding. It is increasingly acknowledged that the co-existence of hunger (53% of the population officially classified as experiencing hunger either regularly or intermittently) alongside food waste (a third of all food produced!) and ecologically unstable land use (because of the continuing dependence on fossil fuels) is profoundly unjust. One of the growing initiatives resisting this current food regime is the Food Sovereignty Campaign, dedicated to mobilising grassroots communities, and engaging in activist schools and study groups, in establishing food gardens and in developing innovative strategies such as bringing together grassroots experiences and 'expert' evidence, as in the case of the 2015 People's Tribunal on Hunger, Food Prices and Landlessness. Indeed, in the South African context food sovereignty is "an anti-capitalist emancipatory practice" (Satgar, 2011:1).



An open-pit coal mine in Mpumalanga. Courtesy of Wikimedia/ Na derdingseben 2008.

The foundational concept of food sovereignty includes agro-ecology and 'the putting of the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.' (Angus, 2009:53). It involves a comprehensive attack on corporate industrialised agriculture and its social and ecological consequences since the attempt to regain social control, power and democracy in the food system is a direct challenge to

capitalist relations. It could also involve a challenge to patriarchal relations by the black working class women who, as we have seen, have heretofore been consigned to the status of 'shock absorbers' of the food crisis.

Indeed, there is congruence between the struggle for 'food sovereignty' on the one hand and the logic of eco-feminism on the other: both emphasize working with rather than against nature. Furthermore the necessary challenge to corporate power also links easily to a socialist-feminism which recognises that to free women means deep, transformative change. And embryonic forms of a transformative feminism incorporating these elements and giving them representation are indeed emerging. This implies the role of women acting in solidarity for collective empowerment rather than for individual advancement as part of a challenge to both corporate and patriarchal power...while also serving "as part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms" (Hooks, 2015:22).

"Indeed, there is congruence between the struggle for 'food sovereignty' on the one hand and the logic of eco-feminism on the other: both emphasize working with rather than against nature. "

Conclusion



This orchard is part of the Siyakhana Institute food garden in Johannesburg. Via Siyakhana.org (fair use) 2013.

Collectively, then all these initiatives that confront the ecological crisis are demonstrating an alternative paradigm, a different relationship both between human beings and also between human beings and nature: what Hilary Wainwright (2014) terms "power as transformative capacity." In fact, the ecological transformation that is essential in South Africa involves linking the principles of justice and sustainability and implies that the socialist emphases on class solidarity and collective ownership with democratic control must be connected to two other imperatives: gender justice and the creation of a new narrative of the relation between nature and society. The conceptual building blocks of eco-socialism: food sovereignty, energy democracy, transformational feminism and environmental justice are gaining momentum. New social forms emerging around these ideas embody fragments of the necessary vision of an alternative post-capitalist future.

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Between Crisis and Renewal: Where To for South Africa’s Left?

by Vishwas Satgar

Introduction

In October 2015, South Africa was rocked by over two weeks (commencing 14th October) of student protests. These protests shut down most universities, led to violent confrontations between police and students (most notably at parliament and with a march of thousands of students on the Union Buildings), and vocalized demands that President ZUMA address the call for free higher education, “insourcing” and a moratorium on fee increases for 2016. Twenty-one years into post-apartheid democracy a new generation of university student activists openly rebelled against the ANC government’s neoliberal fiscal cutbacks of public universities and reclaimed the importance of “public goods.” The use of mass mobilisation and social media, such as #FeesMustFall, led some commentators to suggest the “Arab Spring Moment” had



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arrived in South Africa. Students themselves in their assemblies and messaging also discoursed in the language of revolution. This manifestation of resistance is far from over and cannot be isolated. It has to be located in the crisis of national liberation politics and renewal of a new South African left.

After World War II, national liberation politics captured much of the left imagination. For the South African liberation movement, the 1980s were decisive years in which the internal and external movements consolidated their struggle against the apartheid state. The future seemed poised for a radical alternative. What is often not acknowledged, however, is that national liberation politics was actually exhausted by the 1980s (Armin, 1994: 105-148). The Bandung project's anti-colonial and revolutionary nationalisms came unhinged by their own internal limits and the shifting relations of imperial force. This crisis of national liberation politics existed alongside the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the neo-liberalisation of social democracy forced the left into defensive struggles to protect gains achieved under Keynesian-welfare capitalism. Since 1980 global neoliberal restructuring completely remade the ideological and political landscape. The defeats endured by the left in this conjuncture added to the confusion of left politics and identity. Coupled with earlier horrors, strategic defeats and political shortcomings this further contributed to the left's discredited 20th century inheritance. In this context, "revolutionary nationalist," "communist" and "social democrat" are all anachronistic labels and meaningless slogans to the generation of youth rewriting history through their recent protests. In this article, I look at the crisis of the South African left and explore the possibilities for its renewal.

"In this context, "revolutionary nationalist," "communist" and "social democrat" are all anachronistic labels and meaningless slogans to the generation of youth rewriting history through their recent protests."



A poster for the World Social Forum in 2013. Courtesy of Occupy.com, 2013.

For even as the 20th century variants of left alternatives to capitalism have waned, we see new manifestations of resistance struggles. Global neoliberal restructuring has given rise to a new cycle of global resistance engendering a renewed global left imagination, new practices of strategic politics, alternative forms of mass power, the rethinking of our political instruments and an articulation of transformative systemic alternatives (Harnecker, 2015; Panitch et al, 2012). This cycle is punctuated by the social movements in Latin America, the institutional left experiences from the Workers Party in Brazil to Chavistas in Venezuela to Syriza in Greece, the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street

and the transnational activism of global networks, movements and the World Social Forum. In these experiences there have also been defeats, setbacks and challenges. But most important for the left is its new acknowledgement of the complexity of transformation and the growing sophistication of its sense of the diversity of contexts, the timing and democratic coordination of multiple confrontations - this instead of the mere mimicking of some one-size-fits-all model of change as a basis of resistance. In fact, taken together all these new experiences provide important reference-points for building a vital anti-authoritarian new left in South Africa.

When South Africa secured its democratic transition in 1994, the South African national liberation left was largely shaped and influenced by the revolutionary nationalist, communist and social democratic traditions of the 20th century, which provided it with a template, identity and grammar. At the same time, the liberation movement developed and translated these influences into a South African discourse shaped by local conditions. The ANC-SACP-COSATU Alliance both expressed and further evolved this ideological orientation: the ANC championed the 'national question' and liberation for all South Africans from apartheid, the SACP evidenced a vanguardist and Sovietised imagination, and COSATU's populist worker-controlled socialism was heavily influenced by social democracy. The legacies of these conceptions of left politics continue to influence left movements in South Africa, even as many try to wrench themselves free. This challenge for contemporary left politics in South Africa is also explored in this article.

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The Crisis of the National Liberation Left in South Africa

Central to understanding the crisis of the national liberation left is the question of working-class hegemony. Many commentators and analysts work with a static conception of hegemony in which the South African political scene is reduced to the unassailable power of the ANC and a naturalized hegemony transcending all conjunctural shifts (e.g., Marais, 2011: 388-424). Linked to this is a failure to appreciate the necessary conditions for maintaining class hegemony and a tendency to read the ANC's continued electoral successes as an indicator of just such class hegemony.

In fact, contrary to this understanding working class hegemony of the post-apartheid order—organized through the ANC-led Alliance was actually a short lived affair. The ideological project of working class leadership of society through national liberation vanguardism was dead by 1996, when the ANC adopted its homegrown strategy of financialised and globalised accumulation, the Growth Employment and Redistribution macro-economic strategy (GEAR). The adoption of GEAR not only demonstrated the limits of a vanguardist politics in a world of globalising capitalism, but vitiated working class agency. For the better part of the last two decades the working class has been increasingly squeezed by the imperatives of neoliberal accumulation: stagnating low wages, precariatization, high and growing unemployment, poverty that disproportionately affects women, the Marikana massacre of mineworkers and now the destruction of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) by an ANC-SACP faction operating in the labour federation (Satgar and Southall, 2015). This is neither hegemonic working class politics nor can it be defended as left politics. Rather this is about the cooption and undermining of working class leadership of society to ensure the reproduction of a globalising capitalism and the rule of transnationalising capital through the ANC-led Alliance.



Bodies of mineworkers shot dead by police at Marikana platinum mine. Via Publicnews-hub.com (fair use), 2012.

"For the better part of the last two decades the working class has been increasingly squeezed by the imperatives of neoliberal accumulation..."



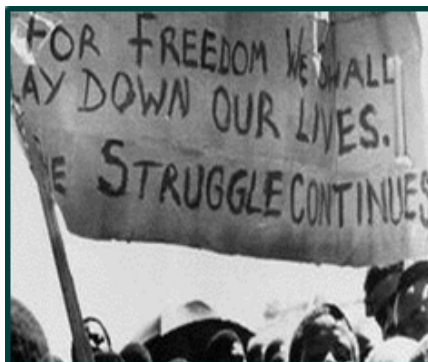
A satirical comment on the impact of the Nkandla report on the ANC and Zuma. Via Zapiro.com (fair use), 2014.

At the same time, corruption and the theft of public money by the ruling party and its "deployees" in the state have become widespread and systemic. The license for corruption emanates from the top in the ruling ANC with the sitting President of the country and the ANC, Jacob Zuma, implicated in arms deal corruption, patronage relations to promote members of his family and more recently the R240 million Nkandla scandal in which a palatial rural home was built for him with taxpayer money. Zuma is merely emblematic, the face of a deeper crisis that accompanies corruption: the parasitic creation of a bureaucratic capitalist class with immense social distance from the masses.

This disconnect is growing and expressed through violent and non-violent protest actions across civil society, including the recent student protests across the country. In short, the crisis of state and ruling party

legitimacy is deepening (Dale, 2015).

Moreover, contrary to the national liberation myth in which the ANC is synonymous with “the people,” a people’s history and understanding of South Africa’s struggle suggests that all progressive South Africans (from all race groups) achieved democracy, whether through resisting pass laws, marrying across colour lines, living defiantly together in some mixed communities and struggling against apartheid through various movements. Resistance, both formal and informal, organised and unorganised, domestic and international - all these played a part in ending apartheid. At the same time, and contrary to the ANC’s articulation of African nationalism, elements from all race groups also tried to defend and reproduce the



A banner held high amid the Soweto Uprising in 1976. Courtesy of paginavermelha.org, accessed 2015.

apartheid system. Who were the liberators and who were the oppressors under apartheid is a complex issue as Dlamini (2014) powerfully demonstrates. At the same time, the ANC’s embrace of erstwhile enemies such as the National Party, traditional leaders and former “Homeland leaders” further undermines the ANC’s proprietary claims over post-apartheid democracy and also reduces non-racialism to electoral expediency. Moreover, the ANC rules South Africa with such disregard for the complexities of how post-apartheid South Africa was made that through the hubris of power it is increasingly playing a role in weakening constitutional democracy and rolling back democratic gains that were fought for by all progressives, both South African and internationalist.



Bantustan territories in S. Africa during apartheid. Courtesy of Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009.

The ANC-led Alliance has also re-racialised and deepened patriarchal norms in South African society in hideous ways. The ANC-led Alliance’s degeneration and its maldeveloped ideological template (expressed through a claim to South African exceptionalism as the cornerstone of its “theory of colonialism of a special type”) has meant that, in its very nationalism, the ANC Alliance’s understanding of Africa in terms of the centrality of such nationalism has always contained the seeds of xenophobia. Today, in fact, the Alliance’s narrow African nationalism not only turns against ‘Pan-Africanism’ but also is increasingly about sub-national exceptionalisms linked to old ethnic identities constructed around apartheid-era “bantustans.” There is a dangerous retribalising of ethnic identity at work in the ANC’s nationalism (Jara, 2013: 272-276). This is further reinforced by increased power given to traditional authorities and through land dispossessions happening in rural communities, this mainly in favour of extractive industries. Moreover, in such a context women have had to struggle particularly strenuously to affirm their rights, power and agency as modern citizens (Claassens, 2015).

At a structural level, in short, both race and gender hierarchies have been remade but also reinforced in the context of a globalising capitalism. The racism and male domination of neoliberalism has its roots in a Eurocentric patriarchy that has been constructed over 500 years through militarist mercantilism, slavery, colonialism and imperialism. Indeed, the existence of global racism has never been part of the remit of analyses linked to the centrality of a “National Democratic Revolution,” this including “national question” debates within the ANC-led Alliance (Van Diepen, 1988). This also made it increasingly difficult for the ANC to appreciate how transnational neoliberalism has been tied into reproducing racialised patterns of global accumulation and masculinised imperial domination. It also means the historically-specific globalising of both apartheid and male domination, as brought in from the outside, have been central to “deracialising” monopoly capital in the country as part of neoliberalisation. Thus the commanding heights of South African capitalism are about transnationalising monopoly power, which, despite the freedom of post-apartheid democracy, is still white and male dominated.

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South Africa's racialised income inequality bears testimony to this as it stands at the centre of explanations about the crisis of social reproduction in South African society (Forslund and Reddy, 2015). In this regard liberal historiography, with its argument that racism was not essential for capitalism, has been wrong. For the end of apartheid has not ended racialised and male dominated accumulation; actually, with globalisation this has been deepened, both from within and from the outside. In this context, any such break with a racialising and masculinised neoliberalism has not happened despite the much vaunted expectations created by the parasitic, ethnicised and sexist "Zuma project" that now dominates the ANC-led Alliance.

Hence, it is important to ask what is "left" of national liberation politics today? From the perspective of working class hegemony, what can we identify and defend from the more than twenty years of post-apartheid democracy? Is it not farcical to talk about the agency of a national liberation-centered left given what has actually happened in South Africa? Indeed, isn't it quite possible that the ANC-led national liberation movement has reached its historical terminus and the most it can evoke is a mythical and sentimental past as a means to justify the present. Yet this now clearly means that state power is increasingly instrumentalised merely to reproduce a South African order that meets only the needs of a few, especially those of the ANC's own "heroic cadre" of leaders... and with the "national interest" now being deemed to be synonymous with the patronage machine of the ANC (Southall, 2013). And yet, as inequality and poverty have grown, this has actually become ever more morally and politically indefensible: both illegitimate from the perspective of students wanting free higher education, for example, but also contrary to working class hegemony.

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The Making of a New Left from Below

Almost three decades of neoliberalisation has enabled important resistance against racialised and gendered forms of commodification, dispossession, exploitation and ecological destruction. In the post-apartheid context this resistance has gone through two cycles. The first cycle (the late 1990s into the early 2000s) was marked by the emergence of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the Landless Peoples Movement and the Anti-Privatisation Forum, many of which are now moribund or trying to renew themselves (like the TAC). A second cycle has come to the fore, this marking the emergence of a much more discernible and variegated left. Beginning in 2007 (to the present) this has been punctuated by

struggles for 'service delivery', building solidarity economies, the Right to Know, Equal Education, social justice, defense of constitutional freedoms, food sovereignty, rural democracy and rights for women, against extractivism, climate jobs, housing, rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersexed (LGBTI), the recent student protests demanding decolonisation, free education and insourcing of universities and struggles against corruption (including a Vote No campaign during the 2014 national elections). Nor is it merely a "rebellion of the poor" (Alexander, 2010) or a "violent democracy" (Von Holdt, 2013) as suggested by some sociological perspectives. For these reductive analyses mainly focus on service delivery struggles and miss the



Treatment Action Campaign activists march on the South African parliament in 2003. Courtesy of Wikimedia/ TAC, 2003.

broader range of struggles emerging in contemporary South African civil society, and miss the polyvalent character of institutional agency and the various and diverse forms of resistance coming to the fore. In fact, while there may be different tactical repertoires and institutional bases taken by these struggles, their predominant thrust addresses systemic challenges, articulates transformative alternatives and mobilizes popular power.

Moreover, three other factors have contributed to amplifying the recent cycle of resistance. First, the rise of Jacob Zuma in the ANC, culminating at the Polokwane conference in 2008, was a deeply polarizing process inside the ANC-led Alliance and the country. Not only did the ANC experience its first split (with the break-away of many in the Mbeki faction to form the Congress of the People/COPE), but it also closed off strategic debate across all the Alliance's constituent formations. In this context, critical voices challenging the 'Zumafication' of the Alliance and society were vilified and declared dissidents (Satgar, 2009: 294-316). Thus, in the end, the closing of the ranks around Zuma served to produce deep factions inside COSATU and purges in the SACP, culminating in the factionalising of the SACP and its further weakening through its cooption and collapse into the ANC. More positively, this reconfiguration of a Zumafied ANC-led Alliance has loosened loyalties to the Alliance amongst committed cadres, opened up space to the left of the ANC, and disaffected many once sympathetic to the ANC-led Alliance - all developments that have fed directly into the deepening cycle of resistance.



Democratic Left Front members take part in the NUMSA March for Jobs in Cape Town. Courtesy of Socialistnetwork.org/ Desai, 2014.

Second, since 2008 various grassroots activists involved in movements and campaigns, and coming out of the ANC-led Alliance, part of the independent Marxist left, the labour left and the Trotskyist left, began conversations about the global crises of capitalism and the national liberation project. The significance of this convergence cannot be understated as it is the first time that such a broad range of different traditions came together to work collectively. This gave rise to the formation and launch of the Democratic Left Front (DLF) in January of 2011. The DLF was not formed as a political party but more as a space for solidarity, building capacity for resistance around transformative alternatives,

developing analyses of the contemporary crises and advancing an anti-capitalist imagination beyond neoliberalised national liberation politics (DLF, 2011). It essentially functioned as a pole of attraction as part of a process of reclaiming lost ground. While the DLF did not realize all its objectives and has become much too centered around South Africa's Trotskyist left, it has played a crucial organising role to bring South Africa's very divided left into a common political space to begin crucial conversations. It provided a political home for some, supported important resistance to xenophobic violence, campaigned against the wasteful expenditure of the World Cup, and gave support to several grassroots community struggles, including worker committees involved in the platinum belt and the Marikana Campaign for Justice, and the Climate Jobs Campaign. True, the DLF is at a crossroads as grassroots social forces are being realigned around the NUMSA-led United Front, some aligning to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and as rising anti-systemic forces build their own capacities as part of the cycle of resistance. And yet the DLF has provided valuable lessons for left convergence. And it may still have an important contribution to make to strengthening the emerging alliance between community and worker struggles, as part of building the NUMSA-led United Front.

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Third, the massacre of 36 platinum mine workers on August 16th, 2012 did not mark just another militant moment in post-apartheid industrial relations or a mere expression of the securitisation of neoliberal politics. For this brutal massacre and historical event was in fact a truly conjunctural development, one that gave rise to a

fundamental rupture in the working class support base of the national liberation bloc of forces. The realignments flowing from this have given rise to an independent union in the platinum mining sector, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), taking away significant support for the ANC-aligned National Union of Mine Workers. In addition, Marikana has had significant ramifications for COSATU itself - contributing directly, for example, to the largest union in South Africa, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa/NUMSA (with over 340 000 members), withdrawing support for the ANC in the 2014 elections, leaving the ANC-led Alliance, and exploring the process of developing a United Front and a Movement for Socialism (NUMSA, 2014). Since NUMSA resolved on this direction at its 2013 special congress it has convened a resistance assembly to learn about grassroots movements, campaigned against neoliberal policy proposals such as the Youth Wage Subsidy and the national budget, hosted an international symposium with various left movements and parties from around the world, initiated a United Front building process, convened a conference on socialism and actively championed mass mobilisation against corruption. Today NUMSA, together with eight other unions, is also poised to lead the building of a new labour federation in South Africa after it was expelled, together with the General Secretary of COSATU, Zwelinzima Vavi, from COSATU.



A boy watches as the police moves into the Marikana slum. Courtesy of GroundUp/Knoetze, August 2015.

The Horizon and Challenges for Post-National Liberation Left Counter-Hegemony



A cartoon satirizes EFF's struggle for power. Via Eye Witness News (fair use), 2013.

There is growing consensus that South Africa's national liberation project is exhausted, in part due to its profound capitulation to neoliberalisation. Put more starkly such national liberation politics is, like most national liberation projects, not a way forward for the working class and national-popular forces committed to transformation. Thus, while it was perhaps not inevitable for the national liberation project to end up where it has, it is in fact being eaten up by its own contradictions and limitations. Not that this, in itself, guarantees the emergence of a genuine left alternative. The EFF is a negative example in this regard. It is a product of the ANC and it has emerged by feeding off the ANC's weaknesses, particularly through its being anti-Zuma. In its practice, however, it is a self-styled vanguard, organised around the "cult of the personality" and a militarised internal hierarchy, and lumpen in its tactical interventions in everyday politics. The EFF gestures to the left of the ANC-led Alliance, but is afflicted with the same limits and contradictions of the ANC. While it captures headlines for its disruptive and populist politics, it has not broken the mould of national liberation politics and has not captured the imagination of most South African youth, including those involved in the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement, the students demanding free education (#FeesMustFall) and others involved in the various anti-systemic movements that are on the rise. The EFF is in its essence an electoral opposition, and would really be tested if it were ever to come to control state power even at a local government level. How different, we might well ask, would it actually be from the ANC if in power?

In short, for an effective and meaningful left to emerge as a serious contender it will have to provide an imagination and horizon of politics beyond the national liberation template and neoliberal capitalism. It will have to remake itself in fundamental ways in order to constitute a new balance of forces and a political project with broad mass appeal, while also advancing new transformative practices. It is too simplistic to believe that merely replacing one kind of vanguard with another or narrow electoral contestation will bring about a rupture with neoliberal capitalism. Similarly, evoking old formulas from the revolutionary nationalist, social democratic and soviet experience are inadequate to the new conjuncture. A globalising capitalism, grounded in transnational circuits, harnessing new technologies and constituting new space-time dynamics has remade social relations in fundamental ways. Central in this regard is the weakening of the global and domestic working class, of course. Yet South Africa's post-national liberation

left is itself in transition from crisis to renewal: still being made but with immense potential!

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In fact, there are four formidable challenges confronting South Africa's left. But, in light of the advances that are now being made, they are not impossible to address. First, South African capitalism reflects a deep set of systemic crises that were not resolved by the national liberation project and have worsened in the context of neoliberal restructuring and deep financialised globalisation. A crucial challenge in this regard is the deglobalisation of finance to reverse the economic regression and financialised chaos that has taken place over the past three decades and to which South Africa's political economy is articulated. Contrary to Picketty (2014: 515-539), who visited South Africa in 2015, this requires more than just increased taxation on capital but also the introduction of exchange controls, new investment laws, structurally diversifying the financial system, the introduction of a universal basic income grant and democratic planning. Moreover, it requires a programmatic politics unifying various anti-systemic solutions emerging from the new cycle of resistance in the country such as 'free university education', insourcing, food sovereignty, climate jobs, Right to Know proposals, equal education, and so on.



Of course, this will have to be done in a manner that is deliberative and participatory and one that, in pursuit of genuine left convergence, respects the independence of social forces. But the conditions are ripe for this. Thus, if the NUMSA-led United Front appreciates that left convergence is more than merely connecting service delivery flashpoints, it could be central in facilitating such convergence around a common programmatic platform of resistance from below. Moreover, if rising anti-systemic movements appreciate the necessity of solidarity then a new mass politics is a real possibility. In this process of democratic convergence a new class and national popular alliance of the organised working class, the precariat, the permanently unemployed, the landless, youth, students, sections of the progressive middle class and left intelligentsia could congeal. A new historical bloc and class project could potentially emerge articulating transformative alternatives for a post-neoliberal South Africa.

"In this process of democratic convergence a new class and national popular alliance of the organised working class, the precariat, the permanently unemployed, the landless, youth, students, sections of the progressive middle class and left intelligentsia could congeal."

Second, the sectarianism of some sections of South Africa's left – rooted in their belief that they have historically always had the correct analysis, the monopoly on political truth and the only understanding of what revolutionary change is - will not assist left convergence. The historical inheritance of socialism was never about one transhistorical model. Instead the historical inheritance of socialism is rich and varied. Socialism as an object of study is more than recovering blueprints and state-centric formulae but requires a deeper and more critical analysis of the Soviet experience (and its copies), of revolutionary nationalist experiences and of social democracy. Many on the South African left hold onto a romanticised understanding of the 1917 Russian Revolution or of the "golden years of social democracy" or merely crudely justify revolutionary nationalism.

More specifically, the African experience of revolutionary and transformative change does not even feature as a critical point of reference. This entire inheritance of 20th century socialism has to be engaged with critically to appreciate what were the limitations, contradictions and excesses (Saul 2013; Glaser 2013). These critical reflections, conversations and engagements need to begin in earnest and as part of ongoing attempts to ensure a broad horizon and vision for transformative change, even as transformative systemic alternatives are being advanced in the present to address the new contradictions of a globalising capitalism. Ultimately a 21st century South African socialism should be shaped by its rigorous appreciation of historical socialism's limitations and the systemic alternatives required to overcome the new contradictions of globalising capitalism.

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Third, the re-racialising dynamics of post-apartheid South Africa has affected class, gender, spatiality and ecology. Race still matters at every level of society and is important for a renewed left politics. In this regard, questions related to the non-racialism of mass politics and of the constitutional order cannot be surrendered to the ANC. Indeed, it is the ANC's own version of non-racialism that is itself in crisis, this further affirming the need to move beyond a singular conception of non-racialism as a political tradition. For it suggests instead the importance of affirming a plurality of non-racialisms: a diverse tradition of official and non-official, everyday, non-racialisms. Moreover, non-racialism as an organising principle and a fresh critique of capitalism (connecting race, class and gender) are existential resources for reflecting on blackness, whiteness and their intersections with class and gender and developing the new imaginary and programmatic referent (a real "Freedom Charter") that has to be rescued from a degenerate ANC-led Alliance.



In short, non-racialism must be re-grounded in a new political economy analysis of a globalised social formation, one that evidences dangerous ecological contradictions, must be brought into dialogue with a resurgent black consciousness movement and must be the principled basis for confronting white and black privilege. In this regard, a non-racial approach to the climate crisis and the just transition is a crucial challenge for left politics in discovering a new horizon for itself. For the mere affirmation of blackness or whiteness actually becomes meaningless in the context of a scorched country and planet and ultimately the extinction of the human race. We need to

find a renewed human solidarity to confront this challenge and to survive. In this regard a true, hard-won, non-racialism must be key to a struggle for systemic transformation as part of the just transition. But there remains much work to be done on this front.

Finally, a new left politics has to appreciate the need to build capacity for a new revolutionary politics, one more appropriately termed a new "transformative politics." This is very much the horizon of the global left and many of the social forces championing systemic alternatives as part of the new cycle of resistance in South Africa. Transformative politics is very different from the technocratic managerialism of social democracy or coercive control of Sovietised Marxism or the patronage machine politics of revolutionary nationalism. In each of these frames of politics a vanguard was featured as a self-declared advanced layer and the custodian of history and change. Transformative politics now promises to turn its back on this elite understanding of agency, power and politics.

Instead, transformative politics is about pre-figuring the future now through building systemic alternatives, evoking capacities for change from below, constituting new forms of mass power, rethinking the political instrument, extending and broadening

democracy, reclaiming a transformed, genuinely popular, sovereignty and strengthening international solidarity. It is consistently anti-authoritarian and about democratically constituting a new working class-led counter-hegemony to sustain life. In South Africa the idea of a “movement for socialism” best embodies the logic of this politics, one within which a United Front of anti-systemic movements, an independent and worker controlled trade union federation, and a mass left party are constituted. But it is not led by “the party.” Instead such a movement for socialism is grounded in collective leadership in all its structures, a democratically conceived and commonly agreed program and a political division of labour in which a party is merely a tactical device in a mass transformative strategy. There is potential for this to be realised although whether this is what will actually happen remains an open question.



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Afterword to Volume 17: A New Counter-Hegemonic Politics in South Africa: What Now? What Next?

by John Saul

Afterword

It takes more than six-months for an "issue" of AfricaFiles to be written and assembled, prepared and released as it is *seriatum* and reflecting the unavoidable lags in time as it appeared monthly.



The cry of the United Front is KWANELE, KWANELE, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, GENOEG IS GENOEG. Courtesy of International Journal of Socialist Renewal, 2014.

Of course, a lot can happen in six-months in a country as volatile as South Africa presently is and my introductory essay to this series, written more than six-months ago, reflects this fact. It was then easy to overestimate the broader organizational impact of the Numsa split from COSATU and the possible political import of its United Front – continuing to be relevant of course but, as Webster's article in this series testifies, still struggling to discover just how relevant it can actually be, and in what precise ways.

In sharp contrast we have also seen the quite recent emergence of boisterous and irreverent student fees-based protests, as alluded to in Hassim's article in this series and central to Satgar's concluding essay; indeed, the potential for such an outcome I could even glimpse for myself when I spoke at UJ earlier in the year [see my account of that talk in the recent year-end edition of **South Africa's Transformation journal**]. But I would never have predicted the scope and intensity of such protests.

Nor would I have seen quite so clearly that they would prove to be one more promising component of the ever-more vibrant and increasingly assertive civil society surveyed here by McKinley – with the assertions of that civil society now further reinforced by the novel environmental activism discussed by Cock.

For there is real promise here; indeed, as Satgar puts the point above, "the crisis of state and ruling party legitimacy is deepening." In sum – trite but true – the struggle in

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Forum Discussion:

South Africa continues...as all the contributors to this symposium have confirmed.



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