One Nation?
The politics of race and class

South Africa’s new progressive magazine standing for social justice.

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Nationalism & patriotism, opium of the masses/ Gender-based violence: alternatives to incarceration /Poems / Book Reviews
SOCIAL SCIENTIST ARCHIE MAFEJE, who was born in the Eastern Cape but lived most of his scholarly life in exile, was one of Africa’s most prominent intellectuals. This groundbreaking book is the first to consider the entire body of Mafeje’s oeuvre and offers much needed engagement with his ideas.

The most inclusive and critical treatment to date of Mafeje as a thinker and researcher, it does not aim to be a biography, but rather offers an analysis of his overall scholarship and his role as a theoretician of liberation and revolution in Africa. Bongani Nyoka argues that Mafeje’s superb scholarship developed out of both his experience as an oppressed black person and his early political education. These, merged with his university training, turned him into a formidable cutting-edge intellectual force.

Nyoka begins with an evaluation of Mafeje’s critique of the social sciences; his focus then shifts to Mafeje’s work on land and agrarian issues in sub-Saharan Africa, before finally dealing with his work on revolutionary theory and politics. By bringing Mafeje’s work to the fore, Nyoka engages in an act of knowledge decolonisation, thus making a unique contribution to South studies in sociology, history and politics.

About the Author Bongani Nyoka is a lecturer in the Department of Political and International Studies, Rhodes University and a senior Research fellow at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study, University of Johannesburg.

This is a brilliant and systematic exposition of the scholarly works of Archibald Monwabisi Mafeje. As far as I can tell, this is the first book-length effort to drill deep and unpack Mafeje’s scholarly works. At a time when ‘decolonisation’ of knowledge is stranded at the level of protest scholarship, Nyoka’s scholarly interrogation of Mafeje’s oeuvre is a welcome departure. We are introduced in a rich, in-depth, and critical way to the abundant resources that one of Africa’s most creative social scientists produced. Nyoka’s book deserves to be read; it should occupy a space on the shelf of every library.

—Jimi O. Adesina PhD MASSAf, Professor of Sociology and DSI/NRF SARChI Chair in Social Policy

The importance of this book lies in its comprehensive use of archival and source material, and how it is used to show the evolution of Mafeje’s ideas. Through a discussion of his critique of the social sciences, land and agrarian issues and revolutionary theory and politics, Nyoka also shows how Mafeje’s work is not only significant for anthropology, sociology and African studies in South Africa, but also raises questions that are relevant in the global North. Mafeje’s scholarship deserves a much broader readership than it has had to this point and this book makes an outstanding contribution to his becoming better known as an exceptional South African intellectual.

—Professor Crain Soudien, Chief Executive Officer of the Human Sciences Research Council
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# EndSARS: rebellion, repression and resistance in Nigeria

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What do we mean by race?
We will not return to normal, because normal was the problem

But is abnormal possible?
Covid 19, the associated lockdowns, wearing of masks and social distancing have disrupted society. On the one hand, there is the obvious desire for things to return to normal. But there is also much talk of the “new normal”, in the knowledge that these conditions are going to be with us for some while. And ironically, the second wave of infections, spreading fear and anxiety in many parts of the world, is the result of the premature return to normality. There are signs, as we go to press, that in the Eastern and Western Cape a second wave has begun – just on the eve of the festive and tourist season.

Lives and livelihoods
As provincial and national governments discuss ways to contain the spread, the debate on where the balance lies between lives and livelihoods will return. Firstly, we must acknowledge that unequal South Africa, under “normal” circumstances, cannot guarantee either lives or livelihoods. Having said that, there is no doubt that the hard lockdown which we endured between March and August flattened the curve and saved lives. But it is equally true that the lockdown’s destruction of livelihoods led to an accelerated loss of lives. And that’s without taking into account the lives lost from gender-based violence, exacerbated by the lockdown.

Probably the truest picture of lives lost in this time is the measure known as “excess deaths”. This is the difference between the total number of people who died, on the one hand, and the number of deaths that would be expected in the period, according to historical patterns. These are not only deaths directly from Covid-19. They are also deaths from collateral damage such as the disruption of normal healthcare, including HIV programmes. The number of excess deaths from natural causes (i.e. not homicide, suicide, or accident) for the period between 6th May and 13th October 2020 stands at just under 47,000.

Inequality kills
Even before the arrival of Covid-19, South Africa faced a national health crisis. Some of the most important features of this crisis are the very high burden of disease, enormous disparities in health and its social determinants, deep inequities between public and private sectors, a crisis in human resources for health, and weak mechanisms for popular participation in health.

The death of the Amadiba Crisis Committee’s (ACC) chairperson, Sibusiso Mqadi illustrates death in unequal South Africa. He woke up in the middle of the night with extreme abdominal pains. He was in his rondavel in the isolated village of Mtenu, on the Pondoland coast. No ambulance service is available and he had no cell phone reception. He had to wait for daylight and the Kia van, the only form of taxi that can manage the treacherous water-logged gravel roads.

The 65 km journey to Port Edward took over 2 hours. On arrival in Port Edward, the private doctor (which he only could afford because of the support of the ACC) referred him to the hospital in Port Shepstone. As his situation worsened he was put on a ventilator, which damaged his wind pipe to such an extent he was transferred to Albert Luthuli public hospital in Durban for an emergency intervention. In the process, attention was diverted from the underlying problem and when that worsened, the emergency operation to drain litres of pus from his abdomen, which was not detected at the Port Shepstone hospital because the CT scanner wasn’t working, sent his body into shock. And the militant Chairperson of the Amadiba Crisis Committee died.

Millions of South Africans can recount similar stories, very far from the experience of a medical aid member in the suburbs.

Pre-Covid normal
The scale of the social and economic crisis that has accompanied the coronavirus pandemic has made us forget how deep the crisis was before Covid-19 came to South Africa. The Cry
of the Xcluded, an alliance of social and labour movements, set out the real state of the nation in their launch statement in February, a month before Covid hit:

South Africa finds itself on a precipice. The economic malaise currently being experienced places the nation at a point of no return. The levels of poverty, unemployment (in particular amongst our youth and women), inequalities, corruption, crime etc. have reached such proportions that the country can be plunged into another civil war and strife if nothing is done. Our schools, hospitals, public transport, in particular rail, the justice system, correctional services centres have become dysfunctional. As if this is not enough, our country is being battered by a wave of ecological crises that creates absolute havoc through heavy storms that have left the poor more vulnerable with greater parts of the country engulfed in long spells of drought that further threaten livelihoods and food security and sovereignty.

We risk losing another generation of youth to drugs and vicious cycles of crime. Women, including the aged, live in fear in their homes and streets. Government is collapsing, overrun by cronyism, corruption and neglect. Almost every state owned enterprise is facing a death spiral or financial collapse. Eskom, SAA, Autopax, PRASA are all on their knees with more workers’ jobs and services to the poor on the line.

There is a strong intention by key officials to sell the family jewels to their friends at the expense of the poor for whom these state assets are vital. Every day that passes these crises get worse and the suffering of our people intensifies.

So going back to normal for black working class people, and for women enduring such high levels of violence, is intolerable.

The elite new normal
The ruling class is not slow to exploit this situation. They too don’t want to go back to normal. They are looking for ways to advance their interests by defining a new normal in their image. So, they are using the current financial and economic crisis to pile the pressure on the state to impose structural reforms. These structural reforms are about creating conditions for sustained and enhanced profit accumulation. They are demanding the privatisation of most state owned enterprises, greater tax breaks, free movement of capital, deregulation of the labour market and the right to hire and fire at will. And they want even deeper austerity and a harsher assault on public sector wages – no doubt so they can follow suit in their own enterprises.

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If the return to pre-Covid normal is intolerable, are we also prepared to acknowledge we cannot continue to think and function in the old way? The labour movement is in decline. Social movements, where they exist, have been reduced to single issue campaigns. And the political left has become largely irrelevant. We too must change.

Traditionally, the Left has assumed a hierarchy of struggles – at the top are workers at the point of production. We will even have to abandon such sacred cows as that. This is even more necessary in a country where almost 50% of workers have no work. They are not at any point of production.

And it is the elites who are winning. Government has promised the liberalisation and privatisation of parts of the electricity and transport sectors. Austerity is deepening. The ANC government is even prepared to alienate Cosatu and its public sector affiliates by reneging on the existing wage agreement and imposing a further three year wage freeze. And if that is not bad enough, they will retrench thousands of public sector workers in order to placate the demand of big business to reduce the public sector wage bill. This is a key aspect of reducing the budget deficit and government debt – which the moneyminded classes see as an anathema.

Our new normal
What about the workers movement and the Left? If the return to pre-Covid normal is intolerable, are we also prepared to acknowledge we cannot continue to think and function in the old way? The labour movement is in decline. Social movements, where they exist, have been reduced to single issue campaigns. And the political left has become largely irrelevant. We too must change.

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Covid-19 has brought home the centrality of care work and particularly the role of women in the so-called care economy. Much of this work is made invisible. And of course it is unpaid – especially, but not only, the work performed in the home. The struggle around social reproduction (creating the conditions for life) cannot be considered secondary. We must acknowledge the “vanguard” role of women – working class women. This may just go some way towards recognising the centrality of the fight against patriarchy and all forms of oppression of women, not least gender-based violence, in renewing left and anti-capitalist struggle.

Intersectionality
Then the Left needs to adopt a more intersectional approach towards the continuity of various forms of oppression, such as class, colour, gender and sexuality. We must recognise how these oppressions each exist individually in their own right, but also how they intersect, reinforce and reproduce existing power relations.

Similarly, struggles such as that against racism and for the building of
a non-racial society, need to go beyond the social and the cultural. They must incorporate the radical redistribution of wealth. Learning each other’s languages, attending the same creches and schools, living in integrated communities are all important in breaking down division. But without reconfiguring the economy to root out inequality, such interventions will be unsustainable and meaningless.

As much as race might be a social construct, racism and racialised inequality are deadly realities and have to be fought against tooth and nail. That is what has given the Economic Freedom Fighters both their potency and their shortcomings. In this respect they are similar to the SACP. The SACP rides the bandwagon of African nationalism for its relevance, and loses its class politics. The EFF rides the bandwagon of radical nationalism, and so fails to locate racial oppression and inequality within the working of the capitalist system, not to mention the capitalist patriarchy.

A new Left for South Africa has to walk a fine line between class and race essentialism. We need to construct the kind of intersectional programme outlined by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clarke in *The Expropriation of Nature*.

Twenty-first-century monopoly–finance capitalism constitutes what Karl Marx once called an “age of dissolution.” All that is sold in the current mode of production is melting into air. Hence, it is no longer realistic to treat – even by way of abstraction – the crucial political–economic struggles of our day as if they were confined primarily to the exploitation of labor within production. Instead, social conflicts are increasingly being fought over capitalism’s expropriation and spoliation of its wider social and natural environment. This historical shift and the deepening fissures that it has produced can be seen in the growth of what David Harvey has termed “anti–value politics,” directed at the boundaries of the system and visible in such forms as the ecological movement, growing conflicts over social reproduction in the household/family and gender/sexuality, and global resistance to the expansion of imperialism/racism. To understand these rapidly changing conditions, it is necessary to dig much deeper than before into capital’s external logic of expropriation, as it was first delineated in Marx’s writings during the Industrial Revolution. Most important, because at the root of the problem, is the extreme expropriation of the earth itself and the consequent transformation in social relations.

A Left that is in denial when it comes to the climate crisis and the broader ecological crisis will be irrelevant. It will have ignored a principal element of the crisis of capitalism and a central aspect of any freedom charter of the 21st century. Climate change, it should be remembered, is only one of the major planetary boundaries now being crossed. Others include loss of biological diversity (the Sixth Extinction), ocean acidification, deforestation, disruption of the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, growing shortages of freshwater, and the toxic contamination of the environment. All of this, of course, has a common denominator in what Michael Roberts calls the “rapacious drive for profits” by capitalist companies in fossil fuel exploration, timber logging, mining and urban expansion without regard for nature.

And, as Daniel Bensaid put it in *An impatient life*, it must not be a subordinate left:

> In the last 10 years, there has still not been the political left that is needed for us to stand upright. In order for the other world that is necessary to become possible another left is equally necessary. Not a left “light”, like the fat–free butter, alcohol–free wine or decaffeinated coffee, but a left of struggle, to match the right of struggle. We can no longer be satisfied with the left resigned to the subaltern role of opposition to the Republican or liberal bourgeoisie. It is high time to break the vicious cycle of subordination.

And there may be another benefit of an intersectional approach to the multiple crises we face. Perhaps the very nature of the crisis which intersectionality responds to can contribute to overcoming the sectarianism and intolerance amongst different sections of the Left. An intersectional approach might allow material analysis to replace dogma, as we break out of the straightjacket of exhausted and outdated formulations. It would require an openness to, and engagement with, popular movements and struggles, without attempting to force them into pre–conceived schemas. It would recognise that it is no longer appropriate (if it ever was) for the Left to see itself as bringing socialist salvation to popular movements. It would have greater respect for the integrity of those movements. Perhaps in the end that is more likely to win recruits to an anti–capitalist perspective than endlessly quoting the truths of socialism.

Another left is possible, but we will have to become less “normal”.

![Healthcare workers demanding PPE in Cape Town. Covid-19 has brought home the centrality of care work and particularly the role of women in the so-called care economy.](image-url)
Profits before lives
The countries of the global North have bought up available Covid-19 vaccine, in advance, in vast amounts. The US has bought 800 million doses for $10 billion (R150 billion). The UK has bought 340 million doses. What does that mean for the global South?

Firstly, of course, South Africa doesn’t have the resources to compete on the open market. In 2008, during the H1N1 crisis, France bought up the majority of vaccine in the market. The global South just had to wait.

There are two other avenues that could be available. Firstly, there is a mechanism called Covax, a global initiative of the WHO, the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, amongst others. It has agreed to distribute vaccine to some countries in the global South. But only enough to vaccinate the most vulnerable 20% of the population. Not nearly enough for the infamous “herd immunity” to kick in. So the virus will rage on.

The other avenue is through the World Trade Organisation (WTO). South Africa and India applied to the WTO to waive its intellectual property provisions so that all information about the virus and vaccines is freely available globally. This would, amongst other things, allow countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa, which have manufacturing capability, to start manufacturing generic versions of vaccines very rapidly. At the meeting of the Trips council of the WTO, only two countries supported the application. Nine countries opposed it. They need to be known. They are: the US, Switzerland, Japan, Norway, the UK, Canada, Australia, Brazil and the European Union.

Faced with a disease that has already killed 1.5 million people worldwide, these countries would rather see the deaths continue than risk reducing the profits of their companies. So when we say that the profit motive is toxic, we are not playing with metaphors. In this case it will be lethal for very large numbers of people.

And the alternative? We are often told as socialists that we have no alternative to capitalism. But in this instance we clearly do. Any rational distribution system, untainted by the profit motive, would roll out the vaccine to the most vulnerable of the world’s population first. It’s not difficult to do. Countries such as the UK are already doing it for themselves – starting by vaccinating old people in care homes and healthcare employees. It could be done on a global scale. It would save countless lives. Unfortunately, it’s not the most profitable option.

More profit from the virus
The cost of respirators tripled. Body bags went up by 14 times. Between February and July 2020, according to the UK National Audit Office, the UK government spent £12.5 billion (R250 billion) on PPE. If they had bought those same items in 2019, they would have cost £2.5 billion. With inflation at virtually zero, that means that suppliers multiplied their prices by a factor of five during the pandemic. £10 billion of super profits while millions have lost their jobs and are living off food banks. And there are still those who think capitalism is a good idea!

Buying votes and hurting workers
For the last couple of years, around the world, there has been a battle between workers in the gig economy and their employers, Uber, Lyft, Deliveroo and the rest. Simply, the employers deny they are employers. They “provide a platform” but they don’t employ anybody. Gradually the employers have been losing cases around the world, bringing closer the moment when they have to recognise that the taxi
driver of yesterday did not stop being an employee when she or he went to work for Uber. So the employers fought back. In California, citizens are able to put “Propositions” to the vote at the time of elections. So Uber and the rest spent $200 million on “Proposition 22”. Proposition 22 says that gig economy employers can continue to treat their employees as independent contractors. No sick pay. No leave pay. “No work no pay” as a way of life. The $200 million was ten times what the opposition to the Proposition could afford. And the extra $180 million did the trick. They won the vote. And California is likely to set the trend for other dispensations around the US and even globally. A huge setback for workers in a massively growing sector. Who says “democracy” is not for sale?

Some light in the darkness

Lisbon, like many other cities around Europe, and even around the world, has been losing rented accommodation to Airbnb. Investors buy up properties that used to be available to house local people and reserve them for tourists. This has had a devastating effect on the housing market, especially for ordinary working people. In Lisbon it is estimated that one third of properties have been swallowed by Airbnb-type rentals.

Then came the pandemic. And all those investors started to regret their investments as tourism died. The Mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina spotted an opportunity: “The virus didn’t ask us for permission to come in, but we have the ability to use this time to think and to see how we can move in a direction to correct things and put them on the right track.”

So the municipality has developed a plan to convert more than 20,000 tourist flats into affordable housing. Landlords are offered up to €1,000 (R18,500) to rent their properties to the municipality for a minimum of five years. The municipality then finds the tenants and rents out the properties at a subsidised rate. This is capped at one-third of the household’s income. The rent for the landlord is less than they were getting as Airbnb. But it is long-term and stable. And the municipality is offering to pay up to three years rental in advance.

This is an example of what is highlighted in the editorial – fighting for a way out of Covid that is in the interests of the working class and the poor. Maybe it’s a model for South Africa’s tourist cities – Cape Town, Durban, time to wake up.

Cuts to the CCMA

One of the cuts that forms part of the government’s austerity programme is a cut to the budget of the CCMA. This is the only resort for millions of workers when they are treated unfairly by their employers. But the government is reducing its budget by 10% this year – that’s R100 million. The next two years will see cuts of 17% and 23%. And of course this comes at a time of huge pressure on the CCMA. Firstly, it was given an additional job at the beginning of last year to police the paltry minimum wage. But now, of course, dismissals and retrenchments are overwhelming in the face of the virus. And those workers will have nowhere to go. As usual, poor people are being required to fund the crisis.

Will the real SACP please stand up

The SACP and COSATU held a bilateral meeting at the beginning of December. In it they said that they “reiterated the shared stance—we are neither for neoliberal nor state capture networks. Ours is a developmental and caring programme of structural transformation. This is in line with our shared perspective, that of the necessity to place the national democratic revolution, our democratic transition, into a second radical phase towards the achievement of the goals of the Freedom Charter.”

This represents an extraordinary ability to regurgitate the dogma of the theoretical “National Democratic Revolution” in the face of the carnage of the actual one. But it also begs the question – is this the same SACP whose General Secretary is a senior minister in a government hellbent on pursuing a neoliberal strategy? Or was it a different SACP that met with Cosatu?

A victory in the darkness

Domestic workers scored a notable victory when the Constitutional Court ruled that the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA) is unconstitutional. Not only that. The ruling was applied retrospectively. That means that all domestic workers who got injured at work from the time COIDA came into effect can claim compensation for their injuries, in line with the provisions of COIDA. This goes back to 1993.

Poverty and Covid

Philip Alston has just left his post as the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. In his final report to the UN he said: “Even before Covid-19, we squandered a decade in the fight against poverty...Covid-19 is projected to push hundreds of millions into unemployment and poverty, while increasing the number at risk of acute hunger by more than 250 million. But the international community’s abysmal record on tackling poverty, inequality and disregard for human life far precede this pandemic. Over the past decade, the UN, world leaders and pundits have promoted a self–congratulatory message of impending victory over poverty, but almost all of these accounts rely on the World Bank’s international poverty line, which is utterly unfit for the purpose of tracking such progress.” The World Bank’s international poverty line defines those living in extreme poverty as those who live below $1.90 (R28.90) per person per day.
RACIAL CAPITALISM and justice in the era of climate crisis

By Olufemi Taiwo

We have just a few years to develop a necessary base for the coming struggles over who and what will be secured on this planet.

Why the time frame? The UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that we must pursue aggressive, planetary climate action – including halving global emissions – by 2030 simply to have coin flip odds (a 50/50 chance) of limiting climate change to 1.5°C, the level that avoids the worst impacts.

Why climate change at all? What does that have to do with racial capitalism or global justice? Simple: when crisis strikes, elites will scramble to organise the institutions they have captured, to secure themselves. What happens to the rest of us depends on our ability to challenge the aspects of our social system that secure them at our expense, and to win self-determination over the ability to secure ourselves and those around us.

The Covid-19 pandemic gives us a less than reassuring preview into what the geopolitics of a climate-burdened world will look like. Rich countries, confronted with the possibility of recession and social unrest, stepped on Third World countries to get supplies for themselves. Sometimes they used power politics as naked as literal piracy. This is despite well-worn talk about cooperation and social unrest, stepped on Third World countries to get supplies for themselves.

While many African countries were using it to describe South Africa’s economy under apartheid. They had realised something critical about the South African economy that could just as well be applied more widely: that racism was built into the total scheme of social organisation that got spread across the entire planet by European imperial conquest.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains one way to think about how racism was built into the global economic and political systems: racism both produces and exploits group-level differences in vulnerability to premature death (or, you might say, in material security). We can expect climate crisis to provoke this kind of response within countries: for example, we will see policing adapt to redistribute space and safety for elites, while natural disasters, rising sea levels, and supply chain disruption make them harder to come by for most people. Gilmore offered this definition of racism in her book Golden Gulag, which explains how overlapping political and financial crises produced the system of mass incarceration in California, the most populous state in the United States.

The political right has already offered their answer: border militarisation, walls, and the preparation for xenophobic violence of genocidal proportions. They and the global centre-left are more aligned on these questions than either admit: in the United States, deportations actually declined under President Trump relative to President Obama; the European Union is scrambling to overhaul its migration policy to speed up deportations amid challenges from the far right. Call it climate colonialism, climate apartheid, eco-fascism, or whatever you like – but what it means is perhaps best summed up by the white supremacist David Duke: “Give us liberty and give them death”.

Towards a politics of solidarity

What should our answer be? The strategy of elites has been like the system of racial capitalism that elevates them – to jealously guard private interests, even (and often especially) at the expense of others. In such contests, power is decisive: we need only look to the US hijacking Covid-19 supplies on the high seas for evidence of this. But answers based in solidarity and self-determination provide better ways forward.

At Africa is a Country, Tshiamo Malatji explains a key aspect of a better left political project: public security and self-determination over material security. Malatji links the attempts to build community kitchens and public food gardens at the University of the Free State to both the wider struggle for food sovereignty in South Africa and the climate...
Justice Charter’s (CJC) attempt to publicise control over water in South Africa. The CJC goes on to make the same connection between community ownership of renewable energy and the broader response to climate problems.

Even if we root our politics in solidarity, there still must be confrontation: the agricultural industry will not take any of this lying down any more than the police will willingly allow community control over public safety. Nor will fossil fuel companies allow climate policies that transition us away from their source of profit and social power.

But our organising against entrenched interests to win the power to self-determine can match the solidarity with which we should wield that power. Merrie Najimy and Joseph McCartin explain the long history of an approach emerging in US labor politics called “Bargaining for the Common Good”. This involves “making demands that reached beyond the narrow compass of permissible bargaining issues and tackled issues of structural racism and classism”. Oklahoma teachers demanded that their state institute a higher tax on oil, gas, and motor fuel production to fund education; St. Paul teachers demanded that their school district break financial ties with any bank that had foreclosed on students’ families that year. This was in response to the notoriously racially distributed foreclosure crisis.

Whether the crisis is climate related or not, racial capitalism establishes both who is vulnerable and who will be exploited. A politics of solidarity is the best answer.

Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University.

Nationalism and patriotism: the opium of the masses

By Zwide Ndwandwe

O SAY THAT THE REPUBLIC of South Africa has been dealing with an internal image crisis for the last decade of the “post-apartheid” years would be putting it mildly. The overwhelming national attitude has been disaffection with the political class. This class consists of an incompetent ruling government and a set of opposition parties whose own mediocrity has made the entire electoral system seem to many to be worthless.

The country is incapacitated by a longstanding failure to deal with structural and societal issues that have marred the democratic experience. The mismanagement of these issues is evident in increasing wealth inequality, racial hostilities across the country, and ongoing violence in various social contexts. This mismanagement should no longer come across as ineffectual but genuine attempts by our leaders to alleviate these problems. It is now certainly a deliberate effort to keep these conditions in place, so that they may continue to extract from them.

Does patriotism exist? The imagining of South Africa as a beacon of hope and progressiveness for the world to marvel at has dwindled under the weight of horrors stemming from neoliberal capitalism, heterosexism, anti-Black racism, queerphobia, ableism, xenophobia and other systemic forms of oppression. It goes without saying that there’s very little for us to feel patriotic about in this current moment. Yet if this description largely sums up what the country has looked like after the tyrannical apartheid regime, one must wonder if patriotism ever truly existed outside of the celebratory moments over achievements on international stages. Furthermore, it becomes more crucial to ask oneself what it means, for colonised people especially, to be patriotic in a settler colonial state.

For the most part this question, which isn’t new, has felt less complicated when coming from African descendants of slaves who live in settler colonies that aren’t their
ancestral homes. They have been impacted by the psychological phenomenon, theorised by W.E.B. Du Bois, known as "double consciousness" – “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”.

It’s not as simple to grapple with, however, when the colonised have an ostensible hegemony over the political and cultural landscape.

If structural power has not changed hands and the colonial institutions have not been entirely removed, then what exactly are we expected to be patriotic about?

Nationalism is deliberate confusion

In a previous article I wrote about the need to question the framework of South African exceptionalism. We see it sustained in the obnoxious examples of chauvinism that we’ve become used to seeing. And we also see it in the seemingly innocent state-sponsored messages implying that we should remain “proudly South African”. This prevailing nationalist discourse has had disastrous consequences not only for non-nationals but also for South Africans who don’t look South African (whatever that may mean). The aim of the article was to get more of us to recognise that this nationalist discourse is one of the outcomes of the nation building project itself.

The construction of a post democratic South Africa, in the image of upholding the nation state, has not only been dangerous for those who don’t fall within the arbitrary definitions of nationality. It has also been harmful for anyone who isn’t a part of the ruling class in this country. People of all backgrounds are misled into believing that as citizens we have equal claim to a social order that only uplifts a minority. The negative responses directed towards Enoch Mpianzi’s family over their call to close down the notorious Parktown Boys High School, led Naledi Maba to accurately point out that being South African means “having a false sense of class solidarity with white people” with the aims of protecting “the institutions they’ve built (for themselves).”

Much as how race became useful in the obfuscation of class consciousness, a national identity within a liberal democracy is utilised to accomplish the same goal.

The rainbow nation mythology wasn’t just helpful in reducing racial differences in South Africa to superficial terms; the idea presented a view within which the class interests of the previously disenfranchised and the class interests of the bourgeois elite were no longer in conflict, but coalesced into one, to legitimise the capitalist state. When Black middle class South Africans form a xenophobic movement around the desire to be prioritised over immigrants, it represents a failure to recognise that certain South Africans are already being placed first. And they will continue to be placed first so long as the policies which govern our lives exist only to serve monopoly capital.

A time of neocolonial fascism

In the book How Britain Rules Africa, George Padmore makes this assessment of South Africa: “unity of race as against class accounts for the widespread racial chauvinism which permeates all strata of the European population, and makes the Union the world’s classic Fascist State.” The Trinidadian writer wrote extensively on the mechanisms of “colonial fascism” and how it plays out specifically in settler colonial states.

Expanding on his views, it is important that we come to terms with the fact that we are now living in a time of neocolonial fascism, which not only terrorises African and South Asian communities, but targets the majority Black and poor population of this country. The countless scenes of state-sanctioned violence – on working class protestors, or against civilians as unthreatening as children, or conducted during unlawful evictions (what are lawful evictions when all property is theft?) – undercut every notion of South Africa being a democracy.

Fascism is not just limited to instances of repression, which somehow have not stopped becoming the norm after apartheid was constitutionally dismantled. As radical activist George Jackson wrote in Blood In My Eye, fascism can also be defined by “each economic reform that perpetuates ruling class hegemony” and that is intentionally “disguised as a positive gain for the upthrusting masses.” The neoliberal policies enacted by every ANC administration since 1994, have offered no material difference to the majority of those who lived under the rule of the National Party.

Unifying people across racial lines on a national basis has not just resulted in the harmful othering of non-nationals, it has placated us so that we don’t think about how our lives are completely in the service of capital. If we don’t begin to see the generally accepted modes of living – race, nation, capital – for what they truly are, we can never change the conditions they produce that keep us further away from knowing what it means to belong to a democracy.

Zwede Ndwandwe is a musician based in Cape Town, South Africa.
The basic objectives of liberation cannot be achieved without undermining the accumulated political, social, cultural and economic white privileges. The moulding of our nation will be advanced in direct proportion to the elimination of these accumulated privileges. Until the colonial status of blacks is ended the process of building one nation cannot be completed. The ‘revolutionary classes’ can best advance the struggle for the achievement of single nationhood if they recognise (and act on) the reality that we are not yet one nation.


The potholes, the creaking water pipes, the collapsing RDP houses, the dilapidated schools, the power cuts, the lack of water management, the lack of decent schools in rural areas, the lack of decent schools in urban township areas, corrupt police, bankrupt municipalities, a bankrupt national airline, a bankrupt power utility, a bankrupt public broadcaster, coupled to rampant crime, sexual violence, murder, alcoholism, drug abuse, gangsterism, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, a failing healthcare system, porous national borders, a psychotic government, coupled to a populace enraptured with the status of Rugby World Cup champions, fed by DJ’s and influencers such as Somizi and Lasizwe, leads me to conclude that this will end in tears.

Mark Fredericks, November 2020.

It seems that the majority of the people believe in and desire the notion of a South African nation. Despite all the deepening racial conflagrations and schisms, there is still quite a prevalent assumption that the South Africa we live in constitutes a nation in formation, albeit not united, functional or optimal. The Springbok World Cup victory, other sports and cultural achievements, the mobilisation in response to the Covid–19 pandemic, a national parliament and government, a unitary constitution and judicial system, a single army and police force – all of these and others reproduce this notion that there is such a nation in formation. Even our uncivil side, as often seen in the xenophobic pogroms we often visit on people whose origins lie elsewhere in Africa and Asia, demonstrates the prevalence of the assumption of an exclusive South African nation.

In other words, the idea of South African nationhood seems to be a real, palpable and concrete feeling with relevance and of concern to a large number of people.

How valid is such an assumption? What does it mean for advancing the struggles of workers, the unemployed, the rural poor and other exploited strata? What are the fault–lines in this South African nation in formation? What about the exclusivist, oppressive and exploitative logics of the notion of a nation? What would nationhood mean for women and gender oppression? Or for other oppressed social strata? Which class interests and forces should shape the nation–building process? What would perspectives on nationhood look like from a Left perspective and in the long–term interests of popular forces? How should a reinvigorated working class movement approach the national question, given the largely failed nation–building experience of some two and a half decades since the formal end of the apartheid dispensation?

These are just some of the questions that arise for the Left and the broad working class movement when it comes to considering nation-building. This article merely opens up what should be an ongoing discussion, informed by practical organising work on the ground.

From colonial–imperial roots to national liberation

As with most of the colonised world, the modern South African nation–state is the deformed creation of the settler bourgeois class. It originated in the early stages of imperialism when inter–imperialist power relationships were a major factor. In many cases, this resulted in an arbitrary jumble of completely distinct socio–economic formations, language and cultural groups. Indeed, over time these colonially created entities gained life as
deformed administrative units, polities and economies.

Colonialism interrupted the internal dynamics of several nation-formation processes whose potential trajectories have now been lost forever. As Slovo put it, “In the colonial world generally, nation-formation was deliberately stilted, retarded and under-developed by imperial policy.”

The introduction of the market economy, capitalist agriculture and mining in particular laid the basis for a unitary state, if not a unified nation. It was the creation of the black working class that laid the basis for the development of the South African nation, which depended on the overcoming of apartheid.

While the unity of the oppressed in the struggle against apartheid began to generate a nascent sense of a common nationalist bond between diverse groups and cultures of the oppressed, this bond is now coming apart. We can see this in rising tensions between so-called black Africans and so-called Coloured people, in still largely negative African–Indian relations, inter-ethnic tensions, naked white racism and the still dominant power of the White bloc.

Apart from the socio-economic crises that have characterised the post-apartheid transition, a key factor in this unravelling has been the weakening of the radical working class movement. Up until the early 2000s, the urban black working class (broadly defined) was the most organised, most politically advanced social force, the most internationalist and committed to national cohesion in our society. But this is no longer the case due to a combination of objective and subjective factors.

Neoliberalism deforms nation-building

The post-apartheid South African nation-state is characterised by three fundamental processes:

- The restoration of capitalist profitability, still on the basis of cheap black labour;
- The reinserion of white owned capital into the global economy at the expense of national objectives; and
- The emergence of a junior black stratum of the capitalist class.

It is these processes that have objectively weakened the working class, thereby thwarting a progressive nation-formation process. Coupled with the history of racialised capitalism, the fundamental processes shaping the post-apartheid nation-state have unsurprisingly left white supremacy unchallenged. They have reproduced racialised property relations and identities. No matter how many Springbok victories there are, South Africa will not be a deracialised united nation as long as the fundamental features of racial capitalism remain in place.

These processes have been compounded by the role of the state in failing to challenge white supremacy and in promoting retribalisation, ethiniscisation, racialisation and xenophobia. There has been retribalisation of the former homelands through returning inordinate powers to tribal elites. There has been racialisation of reforms and transformation through narrow African chauvinism, and official xenophobia that enabled and legitimised pogroms. As long as different segments of the broad working class experience more intense and specific forms of exploitation, the class cannot act as a whole for itself.

Combined with the lack of resolution of the national question, the socio-economic conditions facing the majority can only mean that further tensions and social conflicts may occur, which will further undermine nation building. The large numbers of unemployed youth are a fertile breeding ground for reactionary mobilisation, including the gangster militia we see in many townships. This will make life intolerable for the majority, further postponing the possibility of resolving the national question on a progressive basis.

This underlines the direct interest of the Left and the broad working class movement in the resolution of the national question. Will it be on the basis of its functionality to capitalism? Or are there possibilities for its progressive resolution along socialist lines? If so, what should the Left and the broad working class movement do about nation-building?

Nation-building as social reproduction

A central feature of nation-building is the process of identity and cultural formation. This often starts and is sustained in the household – the family, the extended family, language, food, cultural practices, neighbourhoods, etc. Then from the family the next moments of identity formation are schooling, sports clubs, music and cultural groups, youth activities, religious institutions, non-profit community groups and services, local businesses, and political activities. Through these, people move out of the household and into wider conversations and circuits.

It was this momentum and potential for social cohesion through community-based mobilisation that we witnessed in the 1980s.
This was through strong social structures that existed within townships, sustaining social life, giving direction and socio-political education. Through these spaces for identity formation, people form their world outlooks, including on how change happens. It is in these processes that politicisation takes place.

If the Left and the broad working class movement are to have any realistic chance to make an imprint on nation-building, they cannot ignore these daily activities of households, communities and society to reproduce. From a radical working class perspective, this means a strategy of democratising the processes of identity formation and social reproduction. Such democratisation would also break Popular reliance on capitalist institutions.

Important in social reproduction is the class content of culture, heritage and language. Already we have seen ANC-centric and often ethnic-based hagiography being celebrated as national heritage. Similarly, the language policy of the apartheid state has not enabled common national unity away from English and Afrikaans. Language, culture and heritage are potentially powerful tools that the broad working class can claim in finding effective expression of social, economic, cultural and political demands away from such elite hagiographies.

The emotive importance of language, culture, heritage and tradition can be effectively utilised in the progressive mobilisation of the broad working class. They are crucial in forming popular consciousness. So the democratisation of the language question, the real promotion of all recognised languages and their use in official processes, as well as compulsory learning of regionally significant languages, (for example in the Western Cape, the learning of isixhosa, Afrikaans and English) would go some way towards building social and national cohesion.

These struggles for self-organisation around social reproduction can develop a further political momentum if they can be linked to the struggle for universal access to public goods. All these combined can build and shape a significant degree of stability, internal social cohesion and thereby political power for the broad working class — such is a crucial precondition for the broad working class to contest the nation-building project.

So nation-building, for the working class, should mean unifying itself nationally as the leading class whose developing culture, aspirations and economic interests become increasingly those of the overwhelming majority of our people.

But this will only take the working class to a particular position of strength in reshaping the contours of political contestation and nation-building. The it cannot be nation-building that confines itself to the colonial borders. It has to be internationalist, integrationist and Pan-African.

The Southern African region will be important given the inter-locking linguistic, cultural, and ethnic relations and histories which have now been disrupted by the colonial borders which popular conscience seems to accept. Also important here is the long-standing regionalisation and internationalisation of the South African working class in particular. This provides some fertile ground to build working class unity in ways that can rebuild the political and struggle bonds required for the overall political fight against capitalism.

Importantly, the project of nation-building has to understand, point to, attack and defeat white supremacy. It can no longer be on the basis of kumbaya rainbowism. There has to be a much more explicit recognition of white supremacy and effective progressive, ideologically coherent, politically programmatic and mobilisational responses to it. Ultimately what is needed is a new political dispensation that can take us closer to Slovo’s vision of undoing accumulated white privileges and the colonial status of the country’s black majority. This requires a radical working class politics as the only sustainable basis for a progressive resolution of the national question.

Mazibuko Jara is a member of the Amandla Editorial Collective

Imperialism and white supremacy

Ultimately, any progressive working class-led nation-building project will always be hemmed in by, and be relative to, global capitalism. South Africa is on the periphery of global capitalism. This makes it impossible to build a nation without challenging and defeating capitalism. Short of this, nation-building will end up being a limited project at the service of destructive capitalism. It cannot be nation-building for capitalist accumulation purposes. And
The lie of 1652: race and class in South Africa

Interview with Patric Mellet

I’m from Cape Town - District 6 and Woodstock. Our most overarching identity is that we were poor working class people: bucket toilet, primus stove cooking, living in one room. A single mother, earning R5 a week, working in a laundry shop. When I went to work in my 15th year, I earned R10 for a six-day working week in a small sweat shop. On top of that, our family suffered from race classification. Our family includes poor white, coloured and Indian in terms of the classification system labels. This created havoc when it was introduced. Racial classification, and District 6 being destroyed, conscientised me in the sense of something being taken away and becoming class-conscious. Our lives were being messed with. It made me angry.

I joined a trade union when I was 16, and at that time political parties were banned. The Black Consciousness movement was just finding its feet. In 1976, I was involved in small groups of workers that I organised and initially in the Young Christian Worker Movement. I started bringing out a newspaper, *Young Voice*, which got banned. Then we called it *New Voice* but it also got banned. I kept pushing the boundaries, and then in 1978 people around me started to be taken by the security police. That’s when I crossed the border into Botswana and did my first liberation movement printing press. In 1981 I was sent to the London College of Printing to upgrade my printing skills and from 1985 worked again in the liberation press. I worked in exile for 14 years in the Department of Publicity and Information and with the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

A: A central aim of the book is to expose what you call, “the lie of 1652.” What are the key themes around which you dismantle this lie?

*PM: When we say the lie of 1652, it’s effectively the lies of 1652 - plural. The first chapter demolishes the notion of an empty land and that our history starts with Van Riebeeck’s arrival. I go back 3,000 years and move forward to the first entry of Europeans into the region to show that there is an amazing history. The peopling of South Africa was a gradual process of circular migrations that happened across the whole of southern Africa. The second chapter explains that the founding of a port (Cape Town) did not begin only in 1652. A port is a place of interaction and trade. This was happening from 1600 to 1652 in a big way - 2,000 ships if you take the outward and homebound ships, over 120,000 outsiders visiting, and people getting stranded for 4-9 months at the Cape. This interaction had huge impacts on local societies and economies. The third chapter deals with 19 wars over 227 years, that resulted in dispossession of land. So you had things like the grazing licence that allowed settlers to take their cattle into Khoe and San territories. Once there, conflict occurred over water, grazing land, and European expropriation of cattle. Then the militia would come, there would be a war, and settlers would be allowed to peg out land with the VoC (the Dutch East India Company) establishing a leasehold system by laying claim to the land as a company then leasing it to trek-Boers in the form of the “leningplaats.”

A: Explain the meaning of Camissa and its importance in your argument.

*PM: Throughout the world, societies developed around rivers. There is nothing unique about having a multi-ethnic society in a port. The uniqueness about South Africa is that the rest of Africa doesn’t call people coloured; they are Africans that are in the ports. The term Camissa is essentially the creolised version of an old Kora (Khoi) word for fresh drinking-water, (llKhamsa sa – sweet water for all), and refers to the river that flows, now underground, through Cape Town. I talk of three broad streams of South African ancestral and cultural heritage – African, Afro-European, and Asian- who came together for the first time around the Camissa River. These do not have sharp dividing lines; they blur into each other, and that blurring is where people express themselves. The port experience in Cape Town from 1600 occurred elsewhere in Africa: Luanda, Kilwa in Sofala, Pemba, Zanzibar. The Camissa embrace speaks of local indigenous people, African and Asian enslaved people and non-conformist Europeans who integrated. Together
they faced the adversity of colonialism, slavery, indentured labour, genocide, de-Africanisation and Apartheid. In the process, a creole identity emerged. This Camissa African identity is thus not a race, ethnicity, or colour.

I’m an African, I’m a southern African, we are a cousin-connected peoples across Southern Africa. The Shona have as their basis the Khoi and the San. The Tsonga, Khoi and San, the early pastoral kingdoms, had as their root the Kalanga. The Kalanga is a mix of San, Khoi and slow infusions from west, east and central Africa which multiplied over time. So, when I use the term Camissa I’m not drawing simply on a “Coloured” multi-ethnic experience. I’m drawing on this older tradition that should unite us, through our roots of coming together – around “sweet water for all” – rivers and waterways.

**Q:** How do you respond to the criticisms that Camissa is a substitute for coloured and that it does not take account of experiences outside Cape Town?

**A:** How do you respond to the criticisms that Camissa is a substitute for coloured and that it does not take account of experiences outside Cape Town?

**PM:** Answering the question, immediately means going way beyond 1911 when the term coloured becomes formalised. No African people today has singular ethnic roots. The only distinction between Camissa Africans and other African peoples is that the former’s multi-ethnic roots include African, Asian and European admixture.

There is a crisis of identity amongst coloured people. There is a need for us to assert and reclaim our African identity and not be marginalised from the broader African identity. Colonialism de-Africanised us. This is something that unites a person labelled coloured, in Durban, Johannesburg, Lusaka or Cape Town. It’s getting away from this “Cape Coloured” nonsense to a scenario in which we are African people with multi-ethnic ancestry like all other African people.

A Camissa African identity incorporates non-conformist Europeans who integrated into African-Asian societies. I also keep distinguishing between whiteism and being Afro-European. “White” is a colour and speaks of “race” while Afro-European is an ancestral-cultural heritage. There’s a very big difference having an ancestral and cultural identity that incorporates Europe with your African experience, rather than defining yourself in terms of white superiority and whiteism.

Who is an African? This gets defined in the late 1800s through the Pan-African Association, established in London by African delegates from Africa, Britain, the Caribbean and the USA. Alice Alexander from Kimberley was a prime mover of the Pan African Association and conference. An amazing woman, who in my way of thinking was a Camissa African.

There are pitfalls to this as there are white people who say, “I am now proudly African, because I can identify an indigenous African in my family tree”, which effectively de-Africanised all people who did not speak any of the Bantu family of languages or were considered “mixed”.

Within the new grouping called “coloured”, 70 per cent were people with direct roots in African societies. Through slavery you had a combination of African, Indian and Southeast Asian people being brought together in a melting pot. And these independent identities were soon lost. And what basically held the emergent creolised community together was the experience of adversity.

**A:** In the 1970s, Black Consciousness critiqued all of this from a different perspective, arguing for a need to embrace that oppressed people are all black. How does your notion of Camissa relate to the position of Black Consciousness?

**PM:** In the 1970s, Black Consciousness critiqued all of this from a different perspective, arguing for a need to embrace that oppressed people are all black. How does your notion of Camissa relate to the position of Black Consciousness?

**A:** Explain your historical review of the label coloured.

**PM:** Between 1840 and 1911, colonisers use a range of terminologies for people. The term “coloured” was initially “the British Coloured People of Southern Africa”; so it referred to all people of colour. If you were Xhosa, Sotho, San and Khoi you were coloured, as well as if you were “mixed-other”. At the end of the 1800s, a laissez faire use of the term coloured as meaning “mixed – other” is introduced and you start to get the use of the term “native” as meaning persons who are still tribally organised.

Before 1911 you had a number of African societies: Koranna, Damara, Nama, Griqua, Cape Hottentot, Zanzibari, Masbeiker, etc. Suddenly in 1911 they disappear through a forced assimilation process and a new concept was introduced lost. And what basically held the emergent creolised community together was the experience of adversity.
of an ethnic term black. We navigate a territory of communication around black as an ethnicity, peculiar to South Africa. Most have lost sight of the valuable concept of Black Consciousness, with its focus on black pride and self-reliance.

**AB:** In the past period there have been several expressions of coloured nationalism, sometimes taking root in working class communities. What advice would you give activists about how to deal with this politics?

**PM:** There are two parts. One is around Khoe identities and the other is the issue of coloured identities. They are diametrically opposed to each other and both are rooted in communities. Whether or not they represent any substantial majorities in any communities is questionable.

The Khoe movement is highly fractured and has an element that is linked with far-right white groups. If we extrapolate from the 1904 census, there are probably around a million people who are connected to Khoe societies forced into marginalisation. We cannot ignore that.

Just because officialdom said the Khoe no longer existed, doesn’t mean they were not there. Is it the right of those people and societies that survived to express their ancestral and cultural identity? Yes it is. There’s nothing wrong with that. Is it their right to elevate this to a nation state, to begin to have separatist demands and so on? That’s where I would differ. I fundamentally differ with those using the European and Verwoerdian concept of “nation” or the non-Khoe concept of “kingdoms” and the imported term “First” which has been subsequently tailored into a new meaning.

Then we come to those called “mixed other” and we analyse who they were. We find that 70 per cent have sub-Saharan African origins. The other 30 per cent is a mix of European, Eurasian, Southeast Asian and south and west Asian. But it cannot be separated out like that. It’s totally mixed. That beautiful history has been obliterated. The terminology “coloured” was placed on those people. I am not an advocate of saying you’ve got to ban the term coloured. If someone wants to self-identify as coloured, that is their right. What you’ve got to do is to create the environment for people to explore their way out of the dead end that they’ve been taken down. My argument is that the state must stop with the use of the term coloured because that doesn’t allow exploration, it closes the door, it’s a gatekeeper.

My advice is NOT to aggressively engage in argument and insult in this arena. It’s a long game—we need to educate and wean people from false and insulting notions of “Khoisan” (a term born out of the genocide of the San and Nama in Namibia) and “Coloured”.

**AB:** You counter the obsession with racial classification in contemporary South Africa with the need to take a class-based approach to deal with the continuation of oppression and exploitation. The Democratic Alliance has recently claimed, problematically, to be the guardians of non-racialism. What are your views on this?

**PM:** I’ve wrestled a long time with the term non-racialism and I certainly would not frame poverty as a proxy. Non-racialism is rooted in the phrase “without regard to race”. But “race” is a social construct of racism—it’s pseudo-science. My ideas are specifically anti-race, anti-racism. The DA are conflating a range of things. There is something called the black experience and the white experience. Colonialism and imperialism cannot be avoided; nor can their by-products of race superiority.

The DA uses the terms equal—“equal society” and “non-racial society”. When looked at closely their approach to equality is that it means 50/50 in terms of white and black. Our society is not 50% white to 50% black but rather 8% to 92% and it is this ratio that should define ‘equality’ and redress. The DA’s approach is to leave South Africa white dominated. It has a range of policies that are orientated around the white-dominant business community and its interests, and has created a paradigm for finding solutions within a baaskap box.

I firmly believe in affirmative or, better still, transformative action. We have inequality as a result of imperialism and colonialism, which resulted in black dispossession and white empowerment. This power relationship must be shattered. When I use the term “white” here, I am referring to white-ism, an experience of Europeans being at the top of the pile, under-developing Africa to develop themselves.

Class rather than colour is the way to deal with that. We have a real imbalance where whites control 70 to 80 per cent of the means of production, farmland, schooling, and built environment. For affirmation to happen, class and poverty
should be the yardstick and not the race-silo system. Why? The overwhelming majority of the marginalised poor are black, while the majority of the rich and powerful are white. Not all rich and powerful are white; a substantial class of rich and powerful persons of colour has emerged. They derail all transformative and empowerment opportunities aimed at the most vulnerable and marginalised. They manipulate a simple colour–based yardstick to monopolise the transformative system, thereby empowering themselves over and over again. Effectively they join forces in what has become an increasingly “non-racial” upper class. Ironically colour here gets to entrench the system of economic disenfranchisement in South Africa and a classical neo-colonial paradigm takes root.

The DA is not the only threat to the advancement of the poor black majority. I am the first one to say that the ANC has become bankrupt in terms of economic policy, in terms of the national question, in terms of the class question, in terms of the land question, in terms of corruption and ethno-nationalism. I can pile it on, my critique of the ANC.

What I’m talking about, in terms of “Class” rather than “Colour” as the means for redress should not be counterposed to the black experience as an intellectual paradigm for looking at South Africa. We are fighting a black struggle of the majority black poor. We are not fighting for “Black” as meant by PW Botha’s renamed Bantu ethnic group. The concept of black being an ethnicity of sub-Saharan Bantu language–speaking people is problematic, as problematic as is the term “Coloured”.

You cannot just wish away what happened and that people came to be called coloured. We’ve got to work on it. And what I’m doing is providing the means to talk about it with the aim of the state no longer using the black, white, coloured paradigm as a first step.

The language of engagement has to shift more from the academic to the experiential, but we are talking about the same thing. I personally have had to learn how to speak in an academic environment. As a young man my adjectives were all swear words. I couldn’t speak well; I couldn’t write well. But I trained myself to do so because it’s important to wrestle within the world of discourse of ideas if we want to change our world. But it’s as important not to alienate the world that I come from by using a language in that context that is the one that I would use in this context. It’s very important.

How to deal with transformational issues: 92 per cent of our society are people of colour; 85 per cent of them are poor. Surely poverty and class should be the measure of progress? If you were dirt poor yesterday, where are you today and, where do you want to take that community tomorrow? It’s nonsense to say that for us to be able to measure this we have to have these race silos. Measuring transformation from poverty is the most important measurement and why the hell should we be measuring degrees of poverty and vulnerability along the divisions of apartheid? So for me the whole issue of expression of cultural heritage and ancestry should not be brought into social engineering of any sort or into social redress of any sort. We should use class as the measure of progress and dealing with the dispossession of the past.

Patric Mellet is a retired pensioner after years of working in the NGO and state sectors since returning from exile in 1990. He now works as a heritage activist and does research and writing in this field.
Non-liberal lessons from liberalism’s two meanings

By Jeff Rudin

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in the Daily Maverick

IBERALISM HAS BOTH A political and an economic meaning. The DA’s ongoing civil war – a clash between these two meanings – has important lessons for those of us concerned about the poverty and inequality that seem to be a permanent feature of South African disfigurement.

Race continues to divide the DA in much the same way as it divides and shapes so much of all aspects of South African life in 2020. In this respect, apartheid flourishes, notwithstanding the Constitution’s declaration of the new South Africa being non-racial.

The DA lives with the widespread perception of being “white” and (almost, therefore) racist. Hence the profound suspicion on the Left for the DA’s new disavowal of race. Hence the profound suspicion on the Left for the DA’s new disavowal of race. And all the more so when the loudest disavowal comes from the voice of Helen Zille. Listen:

My greatest failure, by far, is that I did not fight hard enough to prevent the DA from entering the ANC/EFF’s ‘race narrative’ arena. ... It was a game we should never have engaged because it was impossible to compete, and undesirable to win. The rules of this game meant that winning would strip us of one of our primary reasons for existence – to promote genuine and inclusive non-racialism.

Yet, it is precisely this avowal of non-racialism that offends others with the DA. Some are opposed for pragmatic, party political reasons. For them, a non-racial DA is political suicide, as neither whites nor blacks would vote for it in any significant numbers. For others – mainly black members and former members – to abandon race is to condemn black South Africans to perpetual poverty, both absolutely and relatively in relation to whites.

Both groups in the DA divide are correct! This is because liberalism has two meanings.

The two meanings of liberal

The standard meaning of liberal is an expression of values: open-minded, broad-minded, tolerant of different views and behaviour. Equality among free individuals is the essence of this liberalism, measured by the absence of legal restraint on equal opportunity for all.

It was for these reasons that the South African Liberal Party, formed as early as 1953, was South Africa’s second non-racial party. The (then illegal) South African Communist Party, formed in 1921, was the first. The ANC became partially non-racial only in 1968. This is to say, the Liberal Party opposed apartheid long before it became fashionable – and safe – to do so.

To equate “liberal” with racism is thus not only a travesty but a cruelty in the South African context. The liberal dilemma

The DA has now exposed this tenuous unity between liberal’s two meanings. Neither Maimane nor Mashaba – and the wider group they represent – have been willing to return to liberalism’s core value of non-racialism. This is because, when they see poverty, they are confronted by a sea of black faces. In Mashaba’s words, “race

It was the DA’s return to its liberal roots, to its rejection of race-based policies, that principally led to the resignation of both its then leader, Mmusi Maimane and Herman Mashaba, its then Mayor of Johannesburg.

In his resignation statement, of October 2019, Mashaba explained:

I cannot reconcile myself with a group of people who believe that race is irrelevant in the discussion of inequality and poverty ... I cannot reconcile myself with people who do not see that SA is more unequal today than it was in 1994.

This statement brings us to the second of the two meanings of liberalism.

Liberal also has a more specifically economic meaning. Historically, liberalism meant the freedom to invest in whatever was expected to maximise profit, and to do so with minimal state interference in the “free market”. This was the freedom, initially, of the emerging capitalist class in 18th and 19th century Britain. “Neoliberalism” is the modern capitalist world’s return to this freedom of capital to do more or less as it pleases. This goes along with a state that knows that what is best for the free market is equally best for the (supposedly) liberated individuals at the centre of liberalism.

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Apartheid openly created and defended are now rich, some, indeed, very rich. And growing number of black people they say why – by contrast – a significant specifically black advancement. Nor do discrimination allowed is to promote poor after 26 years, when the only legal address is why most black people remain imprisoned in poverty, while a fortunate few have joined the ranks of the rich. How does supposedly systemic racism account for both realities?

A non-racial future

If capitalism, rather than race (or narrow understandings of class), connects all the dots, then at least the road to a non-racial future has an essential starting point. Rather than the paralysis of current despair, a new and invigorating challenge beckons. The secure starting point has a beacon proclaiming the much delayed, final burial of the apartheid-invented “races”; races that continue to divide us, as a contingent cost of elite black wealth. This beacon marks the end of our colour-coding of everything as we see beyond and behind the misleading appearance of our racialised poverty and inequality: our equivalent of a beacon proclaiming the much delayed, final burial of the apartheid-invented “races”; races that continue to divide us, as a contingent cost of elite black wealth. This beacon marks the end of our colour-coding of everything as we see beyond and behind the misleading appearance of our racialised poverty and inequality: our equivalent of a seemingly flat and stationary Earth.

The starting point has many additional beacons pointing in all directions, signalling that the quickest and shortest road to a non-capitalist, non-racist future has still to be mapped. Contributing to the mapping is the challenge facing all of us in our collective activities and imaginations.

Apartheid openly created and defended racialised poverty. What is now sustaining it? By the same token, why has white privilege remained unchanged?

Like the consensus that sees an automatic equation between black and poor, white and rich, the DA and its breakaway parties fail to recognise that class-structured societies, everywhere worldwide, naturally reproduce themselves and have done so ever since the first emergence of competing classes. This natural reproduction continues indefinitely unless stopped by concerted and prolonged state interventions or societal upheavals.

Locate this sociological reality in a country where the vast majority of the poor – regardless of whether they be workers or unemployed – are black (for historical reasons) and that country’s demographics alone will ensure the reproduction of a black majority among the poor; a black condition that will remain unchanged for as long as the country remains class divided.

So much for the problems confronting liberalism. Where does all this leave everyone else?

In need of repeated emphasis is that any causal link between poverty and colour different from the one I’ve outlined would need to be demonstrated. This demonstration would need to address the claimed specificity of colour causation, because poverty – and inequality – are global features of capitalism, the current form of class society.

In other words, if the only difference between all countries is their particular form and level of inequality, the black face of South African poverty needs an analysis that goes beyond the fact that most South African’s are black.

Even allowing for the reality of enduring white racism, this analysis would simultaneously need to provide cogent explanations for the persistence of mass inequality despite 26 years of a black government, committed to black advancement. Indeed, it would additionally have to confront the reality of an elite of black South Africans being the only new beneficiaries of this inequality. Most blacks remain imprisoned in poverty, while a fortunate few have joined the ranks of the rich. How does supposedly systemic racism account for both realities?

Class society reproduces itself

What neither group within the official DA, or Mashaba’s breakaway party, address is why most black people remain poor after 26 years, when the only legal discrimination allowed is to promote specifically black advancement. Nor do they say why – by contrast – a significant and growing number of black people are now rich, some, indeed, very rich. Apartheid openly created and defended

denialism is disguised as non-racialism.”

The dilemma for the explicit champions of neoliberalism – and the broader lessons for the rest of us – is that neoliberalism guarantees the perpetuation of mass poverty, regardless of colour.

Both the new DA and Mashaba’s new breakaway DA reject BEE and affirmative action: “I maintain,” Mashaba assures us, “that these policies are misguided and have done nothing to address the underlying causes of economic exclusion”. True to liberalism’s free-market principles, and consistent with what he calls my capitalist crusade, he believes that “the only way” to achieve a situation “where our success in life is determined by our own efforts and not by the circumstances of our birth is by growing the economy, increasing investor confidence and repealing legislation that undermines these objectives”.

The official DA doesn’t disagree with this, as reconfirmed by John Steenhuisen in his acceptance speech as the DA’s new leader. The split is over a contradiction that confronts both of them: their joint commitment to the economic meaning of liberalism. The DA’s return to liberalism’s non-racialism is unacceptable to those who, whether currently inside or outside the DA, are haunted by the spectacle of the black face poverty continues to wear in South Africa. For them, the official DA is spared this spectre by its race denialism.

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Re-inventing and re-instating race categories in South Africa today

By Zimitri Erasmus

Two Moments

**Moment one:** Glen Snyman is the founder of People Against Race Classification, an organisation which criticises the continued use of apartheid race categories in post-1994 South Africa. Mr Snyman, a man historically classified “Coloured”, applied for a post as school principal in 2017. His application was unsuccessful. Three years later, the Western Cape provincial education authority summoned Mr Snyman to a disciplinary hearing for alleged fraud due to his self-identification as “African” on his curriculum vitae. It has since withdrawn the charge and, at the time of writing, the South African Human Rights Commission is investigating this matter.

**Moment two:** On 6 February 2019, the South African parliament approved the Traditional Leadership and Khoi-San Bill. Communities who self-identify as “Khoi-San” struggled for nearly a decade to gain constitutional recognition as “traditional communities” and “indigenous people”. Other “traditional communities” were granted such recognition in 2003.

These two moments can easily be dismissed as “identity politics”, crudely understood as essentialist and instrumentalist political mobilisations (see the article on the Comaba River Collective in Amandla! 71/72). A more generative approach would be to ask: how are the apparently official prohibition of Mr Snyman’s self-identification as “African” on the one hand and, on the other the actually official recognition of communities who self-identify as “Khoi-San”, mediated by both pre- and post-1994 social arrangements and fields of meaning? What might we learn from these moments? What questions might they raise?

Turning “Blacks” into “Africans”?

Cognisant that all identifications change as they are mediated by history, context, power, and resistance, Mr Snyman has the right to self-identify as he wishes. Jeff Rudin reminds that because of anti-apartheid struggles, neither “African”, “Coloured” nor “Indian” appear as categories of designated groups in the Employment Equity Act. And section 1 of the Act states that “‘black people’ is a generic term that means ‘Africans, coloureds and Indians’”, He argues in the Daily Maverick that the Employment Equity Commission (EEC) transgressed the Act by “[t]urning Africans, coloureds and Indians into separate, stand-alone categories”:

> ...these extra-parliamentary categories not only ignore the unequivocal definitions provided by the EEA but are... contrary to Parliament’s... wishes expressed during the debates on the Employment Equity Bill. The ANC rejected all... attempts to retain these apartheid-invented categories, along with the racialised identities they reflected and reproduced.

Thus, the Western Cape Education Authority’s charge against Snyman was arguably invalid. Note that this charge was made in a province governed by the Democratic Alliance, a political party which claims to be “non-racial”.

The South African Human Rights Commission’s Equality Report 2017/2018 (SAHRC) confirms Rudin’s analysis. It found that “the EEA’s definition of ‘designated groups’ and South Africa’s system of data disaggregation [do] not comply [with] constitutional or international law...and [contradict] the constitutional objective of achieving substantive equality”. It recommends that the EEA be amended to include needs-based equity and that data be disaggregated to include social and economic indicators, “indigenous peoples” and disability.

Rudin and the SAHRC reveal that the EEC, in collusion with the government, reinvents and reinstates apartheid’s race categories while actively perpetuating their divisive meanings.

First, the EEC’s conception of the country’s “majority” population is limited to South Africans classified under apartheid as “Native”, then “Bantu” and later, “Black”. This turns those historically classified “Coloured” and “Indian” into “minorities” and contradicts anti-colonial and Black Consciousness conceptions that all these communities constitute the majority black population.

Second, the EEC’s discourse utilises the empirical fact that most South Africans classified “Black” under apartheid were relegated to the bottom of apartheid’s racial hierarchy, to argue that these black South Africans are more eligible for redress post-1994 because of their classification rather than their needs. The implications of this discourse, particularly its aversion to the changing articulation of “race” and class, form the backdrop to the SAHRC’s criticisms and recommendations. In support of its call for disaggregated data to include socio-economic status, the SAHRC notes that, “...given that inequality between members of the Black African population group is higher than in any other racial group, it is foreseeable that current practice might result in a job opportunity for a wealthy Black man of Zulu origin, rather than a poor Black woman from an ethnic minority”.

Third, *after* apartheid the EEC’s discourse reinvents the apartheid category...
“Black” as “African” – in Rudin’s words, an “extra-parliamentary category”. This contradicts radical Black anti-colonial activists’ conception of “African” not as a race category, but as a political identification grounded in the multiple lived experiences of, and various forms of resistance to, colonialism.

Fourth, the EEC reinstates the apartheid race categories “Coloured” and “Indian” which were statutorily removed with the repeal in 1991 of the Population Registration Act of 1950.

Turning “Coloureds” into “Khoi-San”?
Returning to moment two: most South Africans who claim “Khoi-San” identities today have family members who were historically classified “coloured”. Two contextual factors shape the recent state recognition of “Khoi-San” communities as “traditional” and “indigenous”. First, South Africa’s highly contested endorsement of “traditional” communities and leadership at the onset of its transition to democracy. And second, global, particularly United Nations (UN), discourse on indigeneity.

I argue elsewhere that most definitions assume indigenous-ness to be continuous with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies. Structures like the House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership and bodies like the UN construct “indigeneity” as a static and idealised difference that is older than all other difference, and that exceeds the banality of “race”. This field of meaning perpetuates apartheid’s “tribal” divisions and encourages a politics of minorities that is likely to hinder broad-based solidarity and struggles for social justice.

The two moments illustrate that South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past needs more “working through” lest social struggles are re-cast into rigid racialised and ethnic moulds.

**What to do?**
I do not advocate a colour-blind or “identity-less” approach. Instead, Anthony Bogues’ distinction between “political association” and “common association” is valuable here. The former – “but one human practice among others” – is about identity. The latter is something much larger: practices of substantive equality that are guided by a conception of rights which is wide enough to include social rights such as access to housing, health care, a living wage, and education. “Common association” is about solidarity.

Paula Moya and Michael Hames-García, in their edited volume, *Reclaiming Identity*, argue first that layers of history, politics and experience converge to constitute our social positioning. Second, there is a relationship between one’s social positioning and ways of making sense of the world or identifications, but this relationship is not inevitable. Instead, identifications are informed by power and counter-narratives to power. Third, counter-narratives provide important forms of negotiating life – epistemic advantage – that emerge from our social positioning. This is what Chicana feminist, Cherrie Moraga, calls “theory in the flesh” or embodied knowing. Fourth, the relationship between forms of embodied knowing and public social meaning tells us something about the social arrangements in which we are embedded by “race”. For example, the education authority would not struggle with Mr Snyman’s shifting identification were it not for these social arrangements. Fifth, both “majority” and “minority” perspectives are partial. Finally, politics is a living, fallible practice that is open to revision. And solidarity is made, not self-evident.

From this perspective on identity and solidarity, South Africans historically classified “Coloured”, “Black”, “Chinese” and “Indian” share a similar – not the same – social positioning in relation to those classified “White”. Their differential racialisation pre- and post-1994 produces variations of embodied knowing, each constitutive of the other and forged on the other side of power. How might one harness this similarity to create solidarity across racialised experiences that takes us closer to substantive equality? How might one weave together epistemic resources from these differences to create ways of knowing for the next revolution which might take us further away from habitual racialised and ethnic postures of separation? How might rights be balanced against needs? Might attention to these questions engender possibilities for neither a politics of minorities, nor a politics of the majority, but a capacious politics of solidarity in the interests of social justice? How might one ensure that such solidarity contests structural racism without making “race” a prerogative?

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Reflections on 30 years in the trade union movement

By Karl Cloete

Life’s journey for me started in 1966 on a farm where I was born, on the south west coast between Klawer and Vredendal. My exposure to the working life of farmworkers began at the age of 5 when I had to accompany my parents onto the tomato and potato fields for harvesting at 05h00 in the morning, when the dew and frost were covering the produce in white, and when kindergarten was an unknown facility for farmworkers. My parents followed a strong Christian and upright belief system and so refused payment for labour with wine. As a result, we were evicted from many a farm for refusing their apartheid slavery method of remuneration. At a young age I remember us having to move from farm to farm no less than 13 times.

The world of work

Working life for me started when I did casual work at Makro in Milnerton whilst a student in high school. As can be expected, I did not do well at school because I had to juggle school work and casual work so as to augment my mother’s domestic wages, so I left school in Standard 7.

My formal employment started at Atlantis Diesel Engines (ADE), in a town called Atlantis. Atlantis was established during the 1970s by the apartheid government as an industrial centre and a community for the coloured population of Cape Town under the Group Areas Act. ADE was created in 1979 by the apartheid State to build diesel engines for defence vehicles in the South West Africa war against SWAPO, and heavy duty vehicles for the police to use against the masses who were engaged in running battles with the apartheid regime. Having worked for just 11 months, I became the victim of a retrenchment. Joining the ranks of the unemployed at a young age was both painful and demoralising.

Influences that shaped my trade union activism

As an unemployed youngster I joined the Atlantis Residents Association (ARA) and became its Secretary, alongside a great leader, Noel Williams, who was Chairperson of ARA and who in 1986 became Deputy Provincial Chairperson of Cosatu.

Being unemployed at the time I volunteered my time to recruit and organise for the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) and the Clothing Workers Union (CLOWU). Organising in this period was extremely difficult because the security police would carry out surveillance at factories where they suspected trade union organisers were organising workers. The best way of getting into a factory then was to get hold of an overall worn by factory workers so that one could move in and out of the factory undetected. In SAAWU, Thozamile Qwqeta and Sisa Njikelana were great influences on how I began to see the necessary link between workers and community struggles in action. In CLOWU, Johnny Issel, Elizabeth Erasmus, Zubeida Jaffer and June Essau planted the kind of militancy in me which I had a deficiency of at the time.

Before joining Numsa on 7 August 1987, at Grapnel Manufacturing, I was a member and shopsteward in the Chemical Industrial Workers Union (CIWU), with Martin Jansen as my Organiser, in a factory called Gundle Plastics in Atlantis.

A few things irrevocably and permanently shaped my trade union and working class consciousness in the 80s:

- Being workshopped about the significance of the 1973 Durban strike – my takeaway from these workshops was how black workers refused to accept apartheid’s laws that disallowed African workers from joining or registering their own trade unions.
- The occupation of the Mercedes Benz plant in East London by Numsa members for R2-an-hour wage increase – this sit-in forced a serious debate in the union on centralised vs plant level bargaining. With this factory occupation, the key lesson for me was the hammering home of workers’ control.
- Listening to Oscar Mpetha explain that a worker is never wrong – the rationale in this almost questionable position of Mpetha was that the capitalist system robs workers every day of labour surplus value and creates conditions in which workers get fired for redistributing wealth (called stealing by the bosses) and for being under the influence of alcohol (because their socio economic conditions and slavery wages become too depressing.)
- Being drilled by Johnny Issel to understand and grasp Lenin’s What is to be done. This proved to be difficult reading but we were forced to read and read again until we could show that we have an understanding of what Lenin meant in this great work.
- Drinking in the invaluable lessons of democratic worker control, accountability and mandate-taking from Daniel Dube, the first Numsa President. Speaking after his election at Numsa’s founding congress in May 1987, he said, “Today we have made a mark in history. This mark seems small, this mark looks unimportant, but the metal sector, the power that is at our disposal, the power that we have in our hands is not a small power, comrades.”

So by the time I became a fulltime Numsa Official on 1 October 1991, I carried these valuable historical lessons with me as my guide to action and as a basis for how to organise workers.

The dedicated union activists of the 80s

In my humble view the breed of trade union activists of the 80s is slowly dying out. And there is no conscious, deliberate effort to
The advent of democracy and labour law reform

The Labour Relations Act (LRA) was developed by the ANC government, post the 1994 democratic breakthrough. There was a sense of appreciation that we could move away from the apartheid type “labour market” regime that made the lives of workers a living hell. But there was also a questioning of whether the newly designed labour legislation retained the balance of power firmly in the hands of the bosses, and white monopoly capital in particular.

Even today, this is a necessary debate and struggle to engage in, because since 1994, workers and the working class have contributed immensely to installing and retaining the ANC in government. So workers deserve to be the beneficiaries of a more beneficial labour regime.

Not all labour legislation is radical and inherently transformative, but it would be a blunder to deny that labour laws such as Employment Equity, Skills Development, Occupational Health and Safety, are bridgeheads for a gradual transformation in workplaces. The elephant in the room is not government or business. It is the unions who have failed, since the passing of these labour laws, to capacitate shopstewards and organisers to radically use these pieces of legislation to create an alternative and more beneficial trajectory for workers.

For example, employment equity has literally come to a standstill and workplaces remain untransformed. We only need to look at the 2019 employment equity report:

• whites are at 65% in management:
  Indians and whites remain over-represented and Africans and Coloureds remain well below.
• Men account for 76.5% in top management, with women at 23.5%.
• Unskilled by population group are:
  African — 82.9%
  Coloured — 11.4%
  Indian — 0.8%
  Whites — 1.0%

The inability of trade unions to take up this struggle in workplaces plays right into the hands of white monopolists, who want to retain the status quo.

The need for constant organisational renewal in trade unions

In Marxist terms, trade unions are embryos and shells of the capitalist system and therefore they start out as reformist in nature. Breaking out of this reformism into a radical, militant, fighting and revolutionary trajectory is a difficult but necessary task if trade unions are to become schools for socialism. This does not happen automatically just because we shout radical sounding slogans. It requires committed and devoted activists.

In this context it is critical for a trade union to consistently and frequently go through what may be termed organisational renewal to;

• Renew its revolutionary credentials,
• Ensure that the subscriptions are accounted for and well spent on campaigns, collective bargaining and other organisational programmes,
• Ensure that its administration runs like a well-oiled machine that is efficient and effective, and
• Ensure that its education program capacitates and raises levels of class consciousness of members, shopstewards, officials and office bearers.

Lenin’s What is to be done, explains trade unionism as a movement limited by the framework of today, a movement that does not pursue any general class political objectives. Lenin sharply raised the question of training revolutionary trade unions. In an article called Trade Union Neutrality published in 1908:

The class interests of the bourgeoisie inevitably produce a tendency to limit the unions to small narrow activities on the basis of the existing system, to remove them from any association with socialism……During the early development of the political and trade union movement in Europe there was ground for advocating the neutrality of the unions as a means to expand the original basis of the proletarian struggle during the era of its relative underdevelopment and the absence of
any systematic pressure against the unions on the part of the bourgeoisie. At the present time there is no place for trade union neutrality from the point of view of the international social democracy.

And again he wrote on organising agricultural workers:

…the first commandment of every trade union movement should be: Do not rely upon the state, rely upon the power of your class. The state is an organisation of the class in power. Do not rely upon promises, rely upon the power of the union and upon the consciousness of your class.

The key things that organisational renewal must have as its basis and as its foundational premise are to:

- Ensure that a labour aristocracy is not developing within the trade union whereby there is a social distance between workers and the leadership (a leadership with big houses, smart cars and expensive alcohol, etc.)
- Ensure that the trade union has an early warning detection method to forewarn the union against tendencies such as:
  - The failure to convene constitutional meetings in terms of the union’s constitution,
  - A lack of democratic management structure and democratic system of accountability. Without that, unions will simply die and will not attract workers into the ranks or make them relevant;
  - Individual leaders doing things as they see fit as individuals. This leads to the demise of collectivism and democratic management of the union and is a recipe for the emergence of an authoritarian style of leadership.

More discussion and debate

Space does not allow me to address other critical issues such as:

- Where the trade unions at this conjuncture should stand in relation to the building of a workers party for socialism.
- What constitute reform and revolution.
- The need for the socialist orientated trade union movement to be independent and not allied to any political party.

To generate more discussion and debate, I close with what became Cosatu’s political policy at its inaugural Congress in 1985:

1. This federation and the working class should play a major role in the struggle for a non-racial and democratic society and this federation will not hesitate to take political action to protect and advance the interests of its members and the wider working class.

2. This Congress asserts the economic, political and organisational independence of the federation and all its affiliates and the independent political interests, position, action and leadership of the working class in the wider political struggle.

3. We should do this by taking up political struggles through the membership and structures at local, regional and national level as well as through disciplined alliances with progressive community and political organisations whose interests are compatible with the interests of the workers and whose organisational practices further the interests of the working class.

4. The federation will strive to ensure that its members participate effectively in the progressive organisations and campaigns that conduct democratic struggles against oppression and economic exploitation in the interests of the working class and the democratic society.

5. The federation will make sure that there is full discussion of the demands and aims of workers in the struggle at all levels of the federation.

Karl Cloete was the Deputy General Secretary of Numsa from 2008 to 2020.
Let’s start with the court case. Next month the Labour Appeal Court is going to hear the case where you are trying to stop the government from reneging on the third year of the three-year deal. What do you think your prospects are?

WE ARE IN COURT MAINLY because we were dragged to the court by government. If contracts are worth anything, I think there are good chances that we might get enforcement, but you never know. The courts, the judges sometimes they may be sympathetic to government.

What difference will it make if you win or if you lose?

IF WE LOSE, THE IMPLICATIONS are dire. It would mean employers can claim poverty or act of God, whatever the circumstances are. Obligations are obligations.

But we didn’t want to put our expectations to winning in court. We actually had planned to force government this year as Nehawu, but with Covid came a different situation.

If we look forward now to the next three years, the Medium Term Budget Policy Statement requires cuts of R60 billion in 2021/22, R90 billion in 2022/23 and R150 billion in 2023/24. Besides a wage freeze, which obviously the government is pushing, do you expect a significant number of retrenchments? Is that where the government is going?

I DON’T THINK THEY WILL go as far as retrenchments. Politically, I don’t think they have the will and even capacity to do that. They simply want to cut, to rationalise entities so there are fewer, as a way of reducing the cost.

But there is a serious question about who they are targeting. According to Stats SA, there were just over 1.5 million people employed in the public service at the end of December 2019. But the public sector as a whole has about 2.5 million on the payroll of government. In other words, when government claims that the public service wage bill is too high relative to the budget, it is referring to the total public sector wage bill of the 2.5 million. They include judges, parliamentarians, university staff, traditional leaders, etc. Yet its austerity axe is narrowly focused on cutting the largely low income public servants under the PSCBC. So, clearly this is a class offensive!

One of the arguments they make is that the public service workers have done well, compared to the private sector workers. And it’s true that the average wages have been going up better than inflation. But they take the whole aggregate amount of money paid to public service workers and to the private sector. You can’t compare nurses and teachers with a petrol attendant or cleaners in the private sector. If you want to make a strong case about that, show us how did a nurse at Netcare perform financially over these years, compared to a nurse in the public hospital. Show us a teacher in the private sector. Because 70% of the public service wage bill is from nurses and teachers essentially – it’s the frontline workers.

If you look at the Zondo commission, you can just see how money is wasted. The SLAs they sign with these outsourcing companies are growing exponentially every year. That’s the channel of the wastages. And you would expect, if the government is serious about balancing the books, it would have considered that very seriously and intervened very seriously in that.

So listening to you, it sounds remarkably like absolutely classic neoliberalism. Shrink the public sector and expand the outsourced sector and the agencies and the corporatised agencies. Is that how you see it?

YES, WE ARE CLEAR ON THAT. Even the recovery plan, it is a neoliberal recovery plan. We just passed a resolution at the bargaining conference of Cosatu on that, which as Nehawu we sponsored.
There’s another question, and that is whether you can manage this on your own. Or what kind of coalition would be required to make this effective beyond Nehawu or even beyond the union movement as a whole?

SK: OUR THINKING IS THAT WE CAN’T DO it alone as Nehawu, and that other Cosatu unions are willing to be part of the mother of all battles, when it happens. But you can’t talk about the more independent ones. Even now as we speak, Nupsaw, which is also organising the community health workers, has written a statement distancing itself from our action. Which is a surprise. Yet they have expressed common demands with us in the public service health chamber. Similarly, in February when we were threatening to go on strike as Nehawu, the PSA was distancing itself. They were actually saying we are trying to embark on an illegal action.

Our experience is that in the 2007 and 2010 actions they were forced to be part of it. When we mobilised enough of our members, their members started to shift, joining the strike. Maybe unions that are in Saftu can be willing to be part of it. But PSA has no traditions of that nature and actually they are structured not to do so – language. It was a very measured statement. Are you confident that you have the support of Cosatu and the other affiliates?

SK: YES, THERE’S NO QUESTION, we do. There’s a sense that the attack on the public service, which is a big component of Cosatu, is an attack on everybody. Within Cosatu, public service unions are going to mobilise. All unions will. And we want to go beyond Cosatu.

We also want to combine it with an anti-neoliberal orientation to government. In order to win on the public service, we must broaden it to fight against the recovery plan. But we must be the backbone because we are more organised and can be consistent.

A!: One of the questions of course is who you are mobilising against. Who is the enemy? You have as Nehawu called for Tito to be fired for example, but surely Tito isn’t the problem. This is a strategy of the Ramaphosa government. You won’t get rid of the problem by getting rid of Tito Mboweni. So surely, logically, the demand would be for the government to go, not for Tito to go.
fiscal policy”. Three months after people gave the ANC that mandate, Tito waited for the president to leave the country and then he published a paper that essentially becomes the basis of the austerity project. And when we questioned it at an extended ANC lekgotla, the President gave a diplomatic response, saying “I myself was frustrated but when I demanded an account, I was told that Tito felt that he was going to be late or leaked, and he went ahead to publish it”. But you must read the Cosatu Bargaining Conference resolution. It says the recovery plan, the sharp neoliberal turn, it’s the government as a whole. We made that very deliberately, that it’s not just an economic question, and the reconfigured from the way it is operating now, the question whether we would remain, will depend, on whether we see change. And that includes whether or not we would participate in the elections. There has been, on paper, reconfiguration. But it’s not implemented. So your question is very relevant. But the question will be – you can’t, in between congresses, make a change.

A: Of course Numsa did it with a special congress because it thought that this couldn’t wait for the normal cycle of congress. Things had gone too far. Is there any possibility that there might be such a development in Cosatu?

SK: IT IS UNCLEAR HOW FAR THE RANK and file can read our relationship with the ANC. The overwhelming majority is still there in the ANC camp. When you are balancing these tensions, you want to err on the side that is least destructive.

A: Of course this opens up another terrain as well; it opens up the question of the Alliance. On the one hand, here you are taking decisive action against the strategy of the government, and on the other hand, you remain, or Cosatu remains, a part of an alliance with that very same government. How do you square the circle?

SK: IN THE LAST CONGRESS OF COSATU that was up for discussion. And the consensus that eventually developed was, unless the Alliance acts like an alliance, is that it weakens the working class not to take a clear position. It seems that the existence of Saftu, after a year or so of history working itself out, has begun to show that separate federations can work together and continue working together. Numsa and the NUM carry on working together in Eskom. So if you are too far ahead of others and you remain too far ahead of others, well there’s another federation there.

A: Of course Numsa did it with a special congress because it thought that this couldn’t wait for the normal cycle of congress. Things had gone too far. Is there any possibility that there might be such a development in Cosatu?

SK: NO. NEXT YEAR THERE’S THE Cosatu Central Committee which is the mid-term much more mandatory structure. I think it will really prepare for congress to make a decision. Even at this stage, as I’m talking to you now, my sense is that other unions are ahead of others in thinking about these matters. But it’s even worse when it comes to ordinary workers. Other unions don’t really look at the global or national macro-economic and political issues, before they go straight to workplaces. We have been having the discussion leading to Nasrec already about the Alliance, the Communist Party, etc. But this is not the case in the other unions. When you move too far ahead, you weaken the working class as a whole.

A: You say that it would weaken the working class if you are too far ahead. But of course, it could also be argued that it weakens the working class not to take a clear position. It seems that the existence of Saftu, after a year or so of history working itself out, has begun to show that separate federations can work together and continue working together. Numsa and the NUM carry on working together in Eskom. So if you are too far ahead of others and you remain too far ahead of others, well there’s another federation there.

A: And who would you see being inside that broad popular left front?

SK: IT’S A BROAD COALITION OF working–class formations. It is easy to formulate such a perspective. But whether when you do that, other formations will come along and be part of it, is a different
question. The fact that Sautu has joined, and we were very keen to work with them, is a very important development, and the fact that Numsa also issues statements of support to us and we support them in whatever they are doing. But Nehawu, Cosatu and Numsa, we are not just focused on workplaces. We treat the macro-economic and political considerations with equal seriousness. There must be an agreement between these two as part of your broad, long term strategy. I think that’s where there’s an uncertainty.

But on the working class needing to unite in action, we can go as far as we can go in that sense. I’m sure even when we can include fighting against the neoliberal recovery plan, there will be consensus on that.

Through these temporary alliances, you can build a momentum and the good thing about practice is it also clarifies your thinking or your perspective, because it changes certain things in the process.

**SK:** We support that, provided there is a guarantee clause against privatisation. We are not financing an entity to be privatised. So we are not opposed to the use of the GEPF for increasing, strengthening the SOEs but it has to be based on a lot of conditionalities.

But what we also discourage is this idea of people treating workers’ deferred wages as some kind of a sovereign wealth fund. It is workers’ money and if we are going to lend it, it must have good returns for them when they are going to retire. We must add those conditionalities. Ironically, we have the privilege of dictating terms like the IMF would do, but in an opposite direction.

*Sidney Kgara* is head of Nehawu’s Policy Development Unit.

**A:** Just one last question. Of course, if such a coalition is going to be built and ultimately if the government’s current strategic orientation is going to be defeated, there would need to be a broad alternative strategy on the table. One of the elements of that which we have published articles about in Amandla is that instead of borrowing large amounts of money from the money and bond markets, there is a huge amount of money in the Government Employee Pension Fund (GEPF) which could be turned to, for example, reviving Eskom at a much cheaper rate.

That would then, amongst other things release public funds to pay the wages of Nehawu members. What is your view on this kind of idea?

**SK:** There is no time to spare, that’s true. But if you have the more organised component of the working class already in motion from the beginning of next year, you have a better chance to give confidence and to signal to other formations that we are raising more than just the wages.

**A:** You have as Nehawu called for Tito to be fired for example, but surely Tito isn’t the problem. This is a strategy of the Ramaphosa government programme, the Ramaphosa government programme, if carried out, will be incredibly destructive of the South African economy and of South African society.

You have as Nehawu called for Tito to be fired for example, but surely Tito isn’t the problem. This is a strategy of the Ramaphosa government
DEFEND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

By Dick Forslund

A 10% cut in basic education in real terms over three years; that’s R27 billion less funding in 2022/23 compared to today. A 7.6% cut in funding of FET colleges and universities; that’s R10.1 billion in real terms. A 4.5% cut in public health over three years; that’s R10 billion at today’s prices. A 7.3% cut in social grants; that’s R14.1 billion in real terms over three years. And so on and so forth. And all the while the population is growing by one percent every year, meaning more school children, more students and more people needing health care.

The plan was set out in the Mid Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) in October. The next time we can challenge this disaster will be in February next year when the 2021/22 national budget is presented to Parliament.

Public sector wages and jobs

The thrust of the plan is directed against both public sector wages and public sector employment.

First, the Treasury refuses to fund the third year of the 2018 wage agreement, costing R37.8 billion in the February budget, and revised to R36.5 billion in October. If the Treasury wins in the Labour Appeal Court, it will of course send all future public sector wage bargaining into crisis.

But the MTBPS also sets out to “freeze” public sector wages over the next three years, “saving” R83.8 billion in the coming year, R16 billion in 2022/23 and R74.8 billion in 2023/24 – a total cut of R74.7 billion over three years. The bulk of this is directed against public health (R63.7 billion) – an interesting choice in the middle of a pandemic – and Education (R10.2 billion).

Wages or jobs?

How much of the R74.7 billion cut corresponds to a cut in public service employment? It is not a pleasant question, so on this point the Treasury and its corporate supporters are put on mute. The bench mark we have is that, if the Treasury win in court, a pure wage freeze reduces the wage bill by about R36.5 billion this year. It is time to realise that cuts way above that amount every year for three years must affect public service employment. R36.5 billion per year for three years, plus 5% per year for CPI, only amounts to R124.1 billion.

This leaves R50.6 billion to be cut to reach the R74.7 billion target.

The MTBPS says that one average public service position costs R15,000. Divide the R50.6 billion by R15,000. This gives us an answer: 122,000 public sector jobs have to go through normal or early retirement or, if that is not enough, through retrenchments.

This is only a first step. Some 80 percent of the staff in health and education every year get small wage increases via career progression. This is not part of the wage freeze. This means that the work force reduction must be more than 122,000, to reach the three-year goal of R74.7 billion. A Nehawu negotiator told Amandla! that wage progression amounted to an additional cost of about R10 billion simply shifting income from salaries to income from profits.

In 2017, the Treasury also hoped to gain another R21.1 billion from the middle class by not adjusting tax brackets upwards at the same rate as inflation. The policy since 2002 has been the opposite. In 2005 inflation stood at 4% but the top tax bracket was increased from R300,000 to R400,000 – that’s 33%. That revolution suddenly reduced the tax paid to the government by billions of rand.

If personal income taxation had remained structured in the same way since 2000/2001, with no increased allowances for the high paid, SARS revenue from personal income tax in 2018 alone would have been R155–160 billion more.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>2021/22</th>
<th>2022/23</th>
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<td>-2,190</td>
<td>-3,065</td>
<td>-2,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>-36,515</strong></td>
<td><strong>-83,187</strong></td>
<td><strong>-116,071</strong></td>
<td><strong>-74,811</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 4.3 from the MTBPS showing planned cuts to “compensation to employees”. The numbers are millions of rands.

This example suggests the possibilities of a completely different economic policy. Between 2000 and 2015, we could have been slowly but steadily building the capacity of public services instead of reducing them with unnecessary tax cuts; and without now finally hitting the public sector with a sledgehammer and going for privatisation.

“Hand it over to the private sector”

Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Patricia de Lille, revealed how far gone the privatisation plans are at a press conference on 10th November. This is not only about breaking up Eskom.

De Lille spoke about the R1 trillion investment plans. She “let it slip” (as Daily Maverick had it) that “on public–private partnerships, we are also looking at a new methodology of “build, operate and transfer” – the methodology in fact of
“Transfer” was the key word. The state will be financing infrastructure projects together with the private sector and then handing them over to business when they are ready to exploit. This will affect projects such as:

- Drilling for gas and oil in the sea
- Development of Durban harbor for petrochemical expansion (costed at R250 billion)
- Expansion of mining to take 18 billion tons of coal from Waterberg via Richards Bay to burn in South Asia
- Taking water from Zimbabwe to support the Special Economic Zone in northern Limpopo, the mega project for which Chinese capital is invited.

On the other hand, almost by definition, corporations will not be a part of mega projects like getting rid of over 2,500 pit toilets in the schools of Limpopo. The Limpopo department of education has had its budget slashed by R2.5 billion (and R2 billion from the health budget). Social infrastructure does not give a 10–30% short term return on investment like private investments.

**Public service remains the basis for “Human Rights budgeting”**

Civil society organisations have discussed taking the Treasury to the Constitutional Court for its austerity policy. Interestingly, the Treasury argues in court that it would be “unconstitutional” to follow the public sector wage agreement. They say that the only way to pay for it would be to take the money from the poor (because, of course, only one economic policy exists - the policy of the Treasury).

What can one say about this conundrum? Perhaps we should interrogate the deeper aim of the Treasury’s version of austerity: this ultra-austerity isn’t only about public debt. It is a part of the “structural reform” programme that aims to reduce the role and size of the public sector in the South African economy for decades to come.

This aim can indeed be considered as unconstitutional.

**Defend the public sector**

All the socio-economic and human rights won by the working class and the poor for the last hundred years have been built on the expansion of public sector services. They can be made free or affordable for the majority through taxation of the rich, whether it be wealth taxes, income taxes or taxes on profits. This can only come from cutting into corporate power and pushing back the market, whose ethos is the selling of goods and services to the highest bidder.

The defence of the public sector, and the fight for expanding it, must take place at a time when the ANC is grappling with an internal social movement that puts private capital accumulation before anything else; comrades are exercising the right to become rich, a “civil right” under capitalism that was denied the Black majority under apartheid.

Unlike the Free Higher Education movement, the ANC’s internal social movement can however not be “broad based”. It is a minority class project and it is inevitably destroying the ANC, not least because it paves its way through exploitation of the state. The majority of cadres are not Ramaphosas and Motsesepes. They have no connections to old apartheid era capital or multinational corporations, called “White Monopoly Capital”. So we have seen them turn to the Gupta outsiders for help, with the resultant destruction of tax collection and the looting of Eskom and other SOEs.

This is where we are now. But privatisation will not make the public sector less corrupt. It will only make it smaller and even more incapacitated. Whether progressive civil society organisations like it or not, resistance to austerity, now and before the 2021 budget, has to focus on the grand “structural reform” of the Treasury.

Dick Forslund is an economist and Researcher at AIDC.
Health in South Africa beyond Covid-19

By Louis Reynolds

The COVID-19 pandemic compounds a long-standing health crisis in South Africa rooted in the history of colonialism and apartheid. The adoption of the neoliberal “Growth, Employment and Redistribution” (Gear) macroeconomic policy in 1996, and the continuing legacy of the HIV epidemic, made a bad situation worse. Large-scale privatisation of the health services, coupled with public sector austerity, entrenched the inequalities in health care inherited from apartheid. Even before Covid-19 arrived, the nation’s health was worse than that of most other upper-middle-income countries.

Diagram 1 shows trends in life expectancy for South Africa and other countries from 1960 to 2016. Life expectancy is a key indicator of the health of a population:

- people in rich countries live longer than those in poor countries,
- both rich and poor countries have improved over the years (world average from 52 years in 1960 to 70 years in 2016), and
- inequality between rich and poor countries persists.

South Africa before Covid

South Africa’s trend is different. Initially this was because of apartheid. More recently it was a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and our response to it, as well as growing socio-economic inequality under Gear.

Our average life expectancy in 1960 was equal to the world average at 52 years, and above the average for upper-middle-income countries (UMICs). By the mid-1960s, under apartheid, it had fallen below UMICs, and in 1970 it dropped below middle-income countries (MICs).

The early 1990s saw a further rapid deterioration due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which arrived coincidentally with the defeat of apartheid. The refusal of the first democratically elected government to implement anti-retroviral (ARV) programmes led to more than 32 million unnecessary early deaths. Life expectancy dropped below that of lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) in 1995, below low-income countries (LICs) in 2002, and bottomed-out at 52.6 years in 2006.

Over the decade that followed, life expectancy increased dramatically — to 62.7 years in 2016. Relentless pressure from the Treatment Action Campaign led to reversal of the government’s Aids denialism, and contributed substantially to the success of what became the world’s biggest anti-retroviral (ARV) programme. This resulted in a dramatic decrease in mother-to-child transmission of the Aids virus and an improvement in child survival. Young child mortality has a strong influence on life expectancy.

Despite this success, our national health indicators were worse than those of all MICs and many LMICs before Covid-19 arrived. There are two main reasons for this:

1. We have an enormous burden of disease and ill-health. This is because the majority of people lack sufficient access to adequate housing, clean water and sanitation, education, safe environmental conditions, food security, or a basic income. These are known as the social determinants of health (SDH).
2. Our inequitable and fragmented health services couldn’t cope with the existing burden of disease.

This was the situation when Covid-19 arrived in the country in March 2020.

The pandemic

Almost a year later, Covid-19 remains out of control in parts of the country and lockdown fatigue is growing. At the time of writing, the health crisis in the Eastern Cape has escalated to the point where hospitals in the Nelson Mandela metro appear to be in meltdown. Patient numbers are overwhelming the system’s capacity to provide care for them. Overworked staff members contract the virus or become demotivated, and beds, oxygen, and ventilator supplies run critically short.

Meanwhile, important health programmes, like those dealing with HIV and TB, routine immunisation, women’s and children’s health, have moved to the background. As a member of the C9 Crisis Coalition Health Working Group reported: “My neighbour has an infant and they were told not to bring their babies to health facilities for immunisation due to Covid 19”.

Meanwhile, the unfolding global ecological crisis makes further pandemics inevitable. Climate change and global heating exacerbate extreme weather events, food insecurity increases, and climate migrations increase, with growing numbers of refugees.

All this will add to the pressure on health systems, society and the state. Unless we catch up and get ahead of the curve, history will overwhelm us. This is urgent. There is no time to waste. There can be no return to the old pre-Covid-19 normal.

Act local, think global

While we act locally, we must think globally. Three issues are immediate and critical.

1. To negate the effect of the unfair global economic regime on health, it is essential to campaign for a new international economic order that promotes equality and is ecologically sound. This implies rejecting the free-market, fundamentalist, neoliberal
model of perpetual growth, extraction of planetary resources, exploitation of people, austerity, and privatisation of public goods.

2. Reducing the burden of disease and improving the nation’s health requires rapid improvement in access to the social determinants of health (SDH). This can only be done through collaborative action by all state departments; it lies beyond the ambit of the health sector. Recent research found that 10 LMICs (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lao PDR, Nepal, Peru, Rwanda, and Vietnam) reduced child mortality faster than other similar countries over the 20 years after 1990. Only half the reduction in child mortality resulted from health sector investments; the other half came from action to address the SDH by sectors outside health departments.

3. We must use the national health insurance (NHI) process to harness available healthcare resources into an equitable, people-centred national health service that provides everyone with quality health care according to need rather than means. It must be resilient enough to withstand new shocks to the system, without losing the capacity to stay on top of existing health problems and programmes.

A note on Universal Health Coverage

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that:
• All people and communities have equitable access to the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need;
• The services are of good quality (effective); and
• Using these services does not expose them to financial hardship.

Evidence shows that to achieve equity, moving to UHC must, from the start, address the needs of the entire population and the whole health system. It needs cross-subsidisation from the rich to the poor as well as from low-risk groups (e.g. the young) to high-risk populations (e.g. the elderly). Inevitably, equity implies major redistribution of resources, and groups with vested interests will resist. UHC requires collecting money through progressive taxation into a single pool to pay for health care. However, advocates of private for-profit health care argue for voluntary, membership-based, prepayment insurance models (medical schemes). Such models discriminate against the poor and the sick. Inevitably, privileged groups who benefit from such arrangements will resist attempts to move towards a unified system. We must not allow this to happen under the NHI.

Primary Health Care is essential … but what is it?

UHC can only succeed within the broader Primary Health Care (PHC) approach (Diagram 2).

PHC is a broad, intersectoral, developmental approach to health. It incorporates primary medical care with seamless referral to the secondary and tertiary levels. However, PHC goes beyond this. It includes action in all domains, from prevention to treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care. Furthermore, it involves behavioural, institutional, and social change.

In its People’s Charter for Health, the People’s Health Movement (PHM) supports the need for a new international economic order and calls for “transformation of the World Trade Organisation and the global trading system so that it ceases to violate social, environmental, economic and health rights of people and begins to discriminate positively in favour of countries of the South”. This is critical for the fair distribution of the benefits of new technology, including the Covid–19 vaccine.

Community participation vital

The foundations of PHC are collaborative, intersectoral action to address the SDH, and meaningful community participation in all matters related to health. Popular mobilisation is an essential aspect of comprehensive primary health care and essential to addressing the social determinants of health.

Popular mobilisation for health flourished during the Covid–19 lockdown. For example, Community Action Networks (CANS) brought together local people with widely different backgrounds and experiences — seasoned community organisers; privileged people with no organisational backgrounds; women who provide care in their neighbourhood; men in community security structures; the technologically disadvantaged elderly, and so on — in virtual spaces. CANS “spread social solidarity faster than the virus”.

The C–19 People’s Coalition set up a range of working groups to address aspects of the crisis, including a health working group with 25 member organisations involved in different health struggles. Such groups and coalitions could continue in various forms beyond Covid–19 and strengthen the struggle for Health for All.

Louis Reynolds is a member of the steering committee of the People’s Health Movement.
Gender-based violence: alternatives to incarceration

By Sohela Surajpal

LAST YEAR, SOUTH AFRICANS took to the streets after the tragic rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana, a University of Cape Town student murdered by a postal worker. Mrwetyana became the latest brutal instance of gender-based violence to make headlines. Thousands marched on university campuses, the World Economic Forum on Africa in Cape Town and the South African Parliament asking #AmINext?

These protests were neither the first nor the last against gender-based violence in South Africa, a country in which seven women and three children are killed every day and which ranks fourth in the world for our rates of femicide. It is understandable, in this horrifying context, that South Africans are angry and that many of the demands and solutions put forward have centered around retribution, policing, and incarceration.

Lock them up
Addressing protestors in September 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa declared that, “Men that kill and rape must stay in jail for life. The law must change that once you have raped and killed you get life, no bail.” His statement was a response to various calls to deny bail to those accused of gender-based violence, establish more police stations and special courts, impose mandatory life sentences and improved policing and imprisonment.

These demands and Ramaphosa’s statement are in line with what is known as “carceral feminism.”

Carceral feminism views increased and improved policing and imprisonment as the primary solution to violence against women. It has been much criticised by black, queer and leftist feminists but has unfortunately been embraced by an increasingly desperate South African population. In the South African marketplace of ideas, carceral feminism has established a monopoly.

Part of carceral feminism’s allure is in how it presents itself as a logical and ideologically neutral approach. Sure, we must do more to end violence against women, it tells us, but our starting point must always be prison. Imprisoning dangerous rapists is objectively necessary, objectively good. It is easy to buy into this view, especially when reading yet another headline about yet another brutal murder. However, an analysis of the reality of prisons and policing reveals that they are at best unhelpful and at worst actively harmful to victims and the cause.

Reporting GBV
Most victims do not report abuse or violence. A 2017 study in Gauteng province revealed that only about 1 in 23 women who had experienced sexual abuse reported it to the police. This unwillingness to report is due to a variety of factors, including that most people experience abuse or sexual violence at the hands of someone they know and potentially care about, most often their partner. Many victims want the abuse to stop but do not necessarily want a family member, friend or partner to spend years in prison. An unfortunate reality in South Africa is that many victims also depend on their abuser for financial support.

Additionally, many victims are acutely aware that when attempting to report, they will be met by misogynistic, homophobic or transphobic police officers. Numerous studies have reported that police officers have an inadequate understanding of the law, engage in victim blaming and view domestic violence as a private family matter rather than a crime. Social media abounds with stories of victims who have been dismissed and told by police officials to go home to their abusers. Carceral feminism, while recognising these problems, generally argues that they are easily fixed.

As a result, we have seen activists advocate for equipping police officers with better resources and sensitivity training in the hope that this will create a more welcoming environment for victims. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Sensitivity training has been proven to be largely ineffective. In The End of

Policing, American sociologist Alex Vitale shows that most police officers view sensitivity training as a political exercise that has no bearing on the reality of their jobs. Additional training and resources simply pour more into a failing system. If the South African Police Service is able to effectively quash protests and illegally evict people from their homes with its budget, we must consider that its failure to respond to GBV is a matter of will not of resources.

The problems of criminal trial
But even if the system worked perfectly, if police took their jobs seriously, if courts were not groaning under the burden of extreme caseloads – there is still the nature of a criminal trial. The stakes are high – it might end with someone sentenced to years in prison. That demands
that the onus must be on the state to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt. This means that victims must rehash their abuse for an audience, endure harsh cross-examination and have their story picked apart in front of them. Often, prosecutors choose not to let victims testify, for fear that their emotional testimony will damage the case. But even where they do testify, victims are at best mere witnesses in trials about their own experiences. It is ultimately the state and not the victim that is a party to the case and that makes decisions such as whether to prosecute, whether to accept certain plea deals, what evidence to raise, which witnesses to call, and what sentence to ask for.

Additionally, the entire process is adversarial – a hostile form of legal combat rather than a truth-seeking exercise. The trial process, even when working perfectly, is one that strips victims of control and relegates them to the sidelines. It is often conducted in a language that they barely understand. It is an inherently violent process – and it is generally an unsuccessful one too. Few prosecutions result in convictions. The nature of abuse means that there are often very few witnesses, and very little evidence beyond the claims of those involved. And the burden of proof is always in favor of the accused, who is often a victim themselves, failed by a society rife with abuse and inequality. We banish this person to prison, which is itself a site of massive levels of extreme violence, sexual assault, and rape.

South Africa’s prisons are grossly overcrowded, haunted by reports of torture and plagued by disease including HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis. Prison makes no difference

Many would argue that this is no more than what abusers deserve. While this response is understandable, it ignores a wide range of literature that has proven that many sexual offenders in prisons in South Africa have histories of dysfunctional families and abuse, childhood trauma, addiction, disorders and low socio-economic status. The average offender is not a serial rapist and murderer, but someone who knows their victim and is often a victim themselves, failed by a society rife with abuse and inequality. We banish this person to prison, which is itself a site of massive levels of extreme violence, sexual assault, and rape.

South Africa’s prisons are grossly overcrowded, haunted by reports of torture rather than a truth-seeking exercise. The trial process, even when working perfectly, is one that strips victims of control and relegates them to the sidelines. It is often conducted in a language that they barely understand. It is an inherently violent process – and it is generally an unsuccessful one too. Few prosecutions result in convictions. The nature of abuse means that there are often very few witnesses, and very little evidence beyond the claims of those involved. And the burden of proof is always in favor of the accused, who is often a victim themselves, failed by a society rife with abuse and inequality. We banish this person to prison, which is itself a site of massive levels of extreme violence, sexual assault, and rape.

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Given the sheer magnitude of evidence pointing to the failure of the criminal justice system to prevent gender-based violence, we must ask ourselves why we continue to put our faith in this system. Most likely it is because it is easier to lock individuals in cages and call it justice than it is to truly challenge the structures that cause gender-based violence.

Fight all oppression

The Santa Cruz Women Against Rape argue that rape cannot end within the present capitalist, racist, and sexist structure of our society. A fight against rape must thus be a fight against all forms of oppression. Prisons that have functioned as tools of colonialism, apartheid and capitalism for centuries have been incapable of furthering this fight.

Prisons arrived in South Africa with the Dutch and proliferated under the British, when the abolition of slavery forced colonials to find new, cheap sources of labour. Prisons and police were used to secure much of the cheap labour that built colonial infrastructure and kept private industry running. Simultaneously, they were used to enforce racist laws as well as to suppress the fight against colonisation and later apartheid.

Little has changed in democratic South Africa. While most South Africans bemoan their inefficiency in combating crime, the police are violently efficient when evicting the poor and suppressing protests, poor people’s movements, student movements and workers’ strikes. Prisons too are filled with the poor. It is clear that these institutions function primarily to protect landowners, capital and the interests of elites. By positioning them as necessary to combat violence against women, carceral feminism assumes that women’s safety and the
interests of the poor and racialised communities are fundamentally opposed. Progressives and leftists must refuse this framing. The vast majority of women in South Africa are also poor, working class, black and brown. Genuinely ensuring the safety of women thus requires us to dismantle structures of poverty, racism and the violent agents of the state that uphold these systems.

So a solution to gender-based violence that does not include prisons must tackle a range of oppressions and must include a network of alternatives working in tandem to crowd out prisons. If we know that many sexual offenders in South Africa struggle with trauma, addiction and poverty, then our solutions should tackle those root causes.

**Alternatives**

Immigrant and refugee women in Canada have implemented a strategy that shows on a small scale the success of these interventions in empowering victims to leave abusive situations. They created an informal support group, offering one another emotional support and childcare assistance. They formed a cooperative catering business to allow them financial independence and used the profits to offer housing assistance that enabled women to leave abusive relationships.

There are a range of social movements in South Africa similarly advocating for access to quality education, housing, healthcare, economic justice, and social welfare. These organisations may not consider themselves abolitionist, or even feminist, but the services they fight for have the potential to prevent violence and abuse.

Anti-rape groups in the US have also been successfully exploring a range of alternatives, including community block watching, organising at workplaces to prevent sexual harassment, starting self-defense classes, training people to respond to a call for help, and orchestrating confrontations that allow women to confront their abusers with the support of their families and friends.

South Africa has the potential to embrace these strategies. Some are even mentioned in the *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide*. Encouragingly, it establishes changing social norms, providing support to victims and economic empowerment as key pillars of its strategy.

South Africa has also acknowledged the central role of restorative justice in our legal system. Restorative justice is victim-centric, reconciliatory and reparative rather than retributive. It involves families and communities in addressing and preventing harm and has proven its merits. Studies by criminologists from around the world have shown that restorative justice significantly reduced repeat offending, victim’s post-traumatic stress symptoms and desires for revenge and reduced costs, thus allowing more offenders to be brought to justice. Both victims and offenders reported more satisfaction with restorative justice than with the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, neither restorative justice nor the progressive solutions put forward by the National Strategic Plan have been widely implemented.

We have before us a plethora of alternatives, many of which have proven to be more effective than the status quo. Divesting from carceral feminism will require more than minor reforms and budgetary allowances by the state. It will require the state, as well each of us, to invest in structures of community care and accountability. It will require a complete restructuring of the way we think about justice. But it is vital if we are to build a South African feminist movement that is truly dedicated to equality and liberation. Perhaps there is no perfect alternative, but there must be something better than what we have settled for. Putting people in cages is not liberation and prisons are not feminist.

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Covid-19 provides a frightening glimpse of an uncertain future.

It is not just out of control, but on a global rampage. There have now been 52 million cases and 1.3m deaths world-wide. Another million deaths have gone unrecorded, and another million have died because of hospital failure under the pressure. The vast majority of European countries are into a second wave of the pandemic and are declaring more cases each day now than they were during the first wave earlier in the year.

The euphoria that has greeted the announcement by Pfizer, along with the German biotechnology company BioNTech, that they are on the brink of producing an effective vaccine should be treated with extreme caution. Premature predictions can be cruel and counter-productive.

In any case safety trials have not yet been completed, and no one yet knows how long immunity from the vaccines will last or whether it will give protection to all demographics – or indeed any demographics. We will have to face a very dangerous period ahead, particularly in the global North at the start of winter, even with the best scenario with this vaccine.

The Danish mutation

Nor should we forget that viruses can circumvent vaccines by mutation – coronavirus in particular. This is why we should take seriously the mutation of Covid-19 discovered in Danish mink farms, that has already spilled over into the human population.

A Danish research centre in infectious diseases has warned of serious consequences for the development of vaccines if these mutations are allowed to spread. Tests have identified over 200 people with mutations linked to mink farms since June, but concern centres on a dozen cases in North Jutland of people who fell ill in September with a unique variant of the virus. This variant has four separate mutations in the so-called spike protein that the virus uses to enter cells, and on which most vaccines are based.

These mutations are being played down in some scientific quarters. A member of the British government’s New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group said the mutations “may be nothing more than the virus evolving to spread in mink”, but added that it was sensible to shut down the spread “as a matter of caution” until scientists had more evidence.

Britain has nevertheless placed a ban on non-UK citizens arriving from Denmark.

More spillovers

Even an effective vaccine only provides limited protection, and even if we get control of this virus there are plenty more where this one came from. Corona viruses, we should also never forget, are a result of zoonotic spillovers from other species, when their hosts are thrown into close and unnatural proximity under highly stressed conditions. They exist in the wild in host species – often bats or various rodent species – that have immune systems powerful enough to tolerate them.

The danger of such spillovers is greater today than at any previous time in human history. As a consequence of ever-increasing human pressure on nature, we could be facing as many as five or six zoonotic spillovers a year, any one of which could be as dangerous as, or more dangerous than, Covid-19.

This reflects human impact on the rest of nature, which is itself much greater today. In reality today’s model of human society, with its densely packed and impoverished mega city populations and globalised trade and transport systems, creates the best conditions for such spillovers to take place. And it creates the best conditions for such pathogens to spread rapidly amongst the human population afterwards.

An integral part of the ecological crisis

In fact, today’s model of human society, with its highly destructive relationship with nature, is placing our own continued existence directly at risk. Andreas Malm, in his recent book Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency, makes the following point:

Corona and Climate share one structural quality that invites comparison: the amount of death is a function of the amount of action or inaction on the part of the states. Left untreated, both afflictions become self-
In October 2018, the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its Special Report on Global Warming, officially supported the 1.5°C target from Paris. It concluded that “limiting warming to 1.5°C is indeed possible within the laws of chemistry and physics but would require unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society.” It also warned that we have just 12 years to do something about it, since a 1.5°C increase could be reached as soon as 2030.

We should therefore demand zero carbon by 2030 to keep the global average surface temperature below the crucial 1.5°C – or “1.5 to stay alive” as the slogan has it. Meanwhile another major crime is taking place. Demands have rightly been made throughout the pandemic not to return to the status quo if and when the pandemic comes to an end. The opportunity is being squandered wholesale.

The opportunity to decarbonise the global economy is being squandered as we speak. Trillions of dollars are set to be spent by governments to rebuild from the Covid crisis. The opportunity is there to start to build a sustainable low-carbon future, with a new relationship with nature. Instead, this money is being used (scandalously) to replicate the same disastrous paradigm, with growth as the central objective. As the global economy grows – assuming it survives Covid 19 – so does global warming and environmental destruction. Natural resources are over-exploited to the point of exhaustion. More waste is being dumped into the biosphere than it can absorb, leading to dysfunction and collapse.

Prioritise a sustainable planet

The increasing danger of zoonotic pathogens is the result of the trashing of nature by both Western industrialised agricultural practices and Asian wet markets and the bushmeat trade. It is driven in particular by deforestation and intensified meat production. These factors are compounded by poverty and rising population density – particularly urban density – which is increasing at twice the global rate.

Such pandemics can only be prevented, ultimately, by a completely different relationship between human beings and nature than exists at the present time. Whilst the current relationship continues (or anything like it) there will be no solution.

It means putting a sustainable planet at the heart of everything we do. It means a new relationship with nature and a new model of society that does not result in ever bigger cities and ever more pollution. It means jungling the throwaway society and replacing it with one that is based on production for use rather than profit.

It means a revolution in the infrastructure, how we live; the size of cities, how we travel, and what we eat. The task is gigantic but there is no alternative if we are to forge a sustainable future for the planet which resolves the contradiction between ourselves as modern humans and a myriad other non-human species we live alongside.

It also means rejecting economic growth and productivism and demanding the abolition of the debt in the dependent countries. The current rate of growth globally of 3 per cent per year (the average for the past 60 years) would grow the world economy by a factor of sixteen in the course of a century and by a factor of 250 over the course of this century and the next. Such growth rates are completely unsustainable.

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of the oceans, the mass extinction of species, and fresh water depletion. In fact the Covid–19 crisis has taken the ecological crisis to a new and more dangerous level.

The Glasgow COP

There is another connection as well. They are both totally relevant to the Glasgow COP at the end of next year. Unless the environmental crisis is resolved, with its massive anthropological impact on nature, the problem of zoonotic pandemics will simply accelerate.

To say that Glasgow is crucial understates the issue. The governmental pledges made in Paris would lead to disaster by mid-century. The movement must mobilise around Glasgow as strongly as possible in order to demand that the revised pledges due to be made address the urgency of the situation a lot better than Paris.

amplifying – the more people infected, the more will be infected: the hotter the planet, the more feed back mechanisms heat it up further – and once underway, the sole way to terminate such sporeling burns is to cut the fuse. States in the global North have now offered proof that this is possible.

He is right. I would suggest, however, that climate and virus share at least two other structural qualities.

First, they are primarily an ecological issue: the Covid–19 pandemic is an integral part of the global ecological crisis. It doesn’t just occur at the same time or exist in parallel. Second, they both represent a direct threat to the future of life on the planet – human life in particular – on a par with the other threats such as the pollution of the oceans, the mass extinction of species, and fresh water depletion. In fact the Covid–19 crisis has taken the ecological crisis to a new and more dangerous level.
I recently tuned in to a radio show discussing the progress of transformation in South African rugby. After introducing the topic and exchanging some views, the hosts called on the public to participate. The first caller was irate: “Why do you use the term ‘players of colour’?” he asked. “That is a foreign term, an American term. Why don’t you just call them black players?” The first host responded that he was merely using the official terminology provided by the rugby administration. The caller was unmoved: “But surely that is problematic. I am not asking you what the officials say, I am asking you to admit that this is problematic.”

After another similar exchange, the second host chimed in: “I actually agree with the caller. We should say that there are X number of black players, Y number of coloured players, Z number of Indian players and V number of white players in any rugby side. That measures transformation accurately. Why are we uncomfortable about this?”

It did not occur to the second host that what the caller meant by black included coloured and Indian players. This caused even more confusion for the audience and a deeper irritation in the caller’s retort. Finally, the first host called an increasingly volatile conversation to a close.

What is race anyway?
People in South Africa today clearly think differently about what race means and how racial classification should work. This would not be the case if race were an obvious fact about human beings. Everyone nowadays agrees that race does not signify inherent biological and/or character difference. Race is a social construction. That is to say that human beings have created races and societies of racial hierarchy. What race means and how it has impacted on people’s lives is determined, ultimately, by what human beings choose to make of race, if we choose to make use of it at all. Let me try to trace a tentative general history of race to illustrate this.

Management of capitalism. This is related to the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and colonial and imperial conquest. The social making of race (its social construction) must be seen in terms of a progressive unfolding of this history. It is a product of a complex intersection of theological, scientific, and social discourses with changing political and economic interests and realities.

From the civilising mission to inherent difference
The word “race” has obscure origins, but the Spanish term raza presents a compelling case to be considered as the prototype. Raza is a word that stems from the period in which the Moors and Jews were expelled from Spain in the 15th century. The Spanish monarch and aristocracy needed a unifying national myth to suppress potential internal threats to their political authority. After the expulsion, Raza was used to mark the difference between converts to Christianity and those with “pure blood”. This was an attempt to denote belonging and exclusion in terms of a combination of biology (blood), culture and religion (Catholicism) and nationhood (being Spanish). It may reasonably be said to be a prototype of the discourse of European racism and nationalism that we are used to today.

By Michael Nassen Smith

What do we mean by RACE?

By Michael Nassen Smith

Human beings have found various ways of dividing themselves into groups of insiders and outsiders. These means have included differences in geography, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and gender. “Othering” has been a tendency found in nearly all human communities.

But “othering” is not necessarily racial. The use of “race” to divide and order a human population is a modern phenomenon. It is tied to historical developments in European and North American social thought and their connection to the emergence and from the period in which the Moors and Jews were expelled from Spain in the 15th century. The Spanish monarch and aristocracy needed a unifying national myth to suppress potential internal threats to their political authority. After the expulsion, Raza was used to mark the difference between converts to Christianity and those with “pure blood”. This was an attempt to denote belonging and exclusion in terms of a combination of biology (blood), culture and religion (Catholicism) and nationhood (being Spanish). It may reasonably be said to be a prototype of the discourse of European racism and nationalism that we are used to today.

History of race

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However, the story of a formal process of racial classification – the attempt at a systematic ordering of human populations into groups – begins within Judeo-Christian theology and philosophy in the 18th century. For these theologians and philosophers, human beings were products of a common source, the will of God. Visible differences in skin tone or physical appearance, which can be associated with certain cultural characteristics, and allegedly varied moral capacities, were a product of environment and the consequent uneven development of social institutions. Race was a category used to demarcate these differences in lineage.

So, there was not yet a notion that human difference was essential, and that difference indicated a permanent grading scale of inferior and superior races.

This way of thinking about race had something to do with the notion of the “civilizing mission”. For as theologians and philosophers were working out how to speak about human difference, the slave trade and colonial enterprise were already in motion. One must, in other words, appreciate the political and historical circumstances in which the development of theological racial theory occurred.

Moreover, at this stage internal European racism persisted alongside external colonial racism. It was widely held that the Irish, the Slavs, the Southern Europeans were not as civilised as their neighbours. Neither was any labourer or peasant in the same category of civilisation as the upper classes, regardless of their national origin.

**Inherent inferiority and biological racism**

The paternalistic form of theological racism justified colonial violence and dispossession, as well as helping to justify the unequal class relations internal to European societies. But it would also find a home among liberal and Christian abolitionists and those opposed to colonial genocides. And it was embraced by certain members of the racially oppressed. They attempted to prove that their race was already “civilized” or close to “civilisation” and thus deserving of independence, or simply better treatment. The racism of the civilising mission was racism for sure, but it was not the same way of racial thinking. Two historical social forces help explain this fact. First, there was the need for Southern slave owners to hold onto their slaves and increase the rate of exploitation on their plantations. This was due to the pressures exerted on the cotton market by the development of the global capitalist economy in the 19th century. Second, was the increasing anxiety of Southern white workers to cement their status as a labour aristocracy in face of the threat of abolition.

These combined interests coalesced and formed the material basis of the racial ideology of the Confederate states in the American Civil War. Subsequent developments can trace their origins to this history: American eugenics (which was so influential to Nazi racial thinking); the rise of the Klu Klux Klan; and the persistence of particularly virulent racism beyond abolition and into the Jim Crow (racial segregation) era and to the present-day.

**New racial thinking**

The process whereby race came to signify inherent characteristics was uneven and bumpy. Outside the American South there were several important social developments which helped give weight to the new trend. One of them was the rise of an ideology in the late 19th century which would reshape European and global history in the 20th century – nationalism. The idea that an essential difference existed between peoples chimed with the view that a nation could be defined as a single, homogenous cultural identity.

This identity flattened social differences between local national elites, their labourers and the poor. This flattening of difference aided in suppressing internal class conflict. But in doing so it created the problem of the immigrant and outsider. These were now conceived of in racial terms and as the source of all social ills and moral degradation of the nation. This new nationalist ideology also had the benefit of bringing together two conceptions of race: race as lineage and origin, and race as inherent characteristic. People were said to share a common origin and a common essence.

In sum, within a period of a few hundred years race had come to be associated with physical characteristics, religious belief, lineage, national origin.
and inherent and flexible cultural traits and moral dispositions. These markers of difference were packaged together in various ways to make out a provisionally stable concept of race, only before that combination gave way to another way of defining what “race” means based on new associations and combinations of human difference. Official racial classifications changed along with the scientific and ordinary meanings of the word “race”. Race was (and indeed is) a concept in motion, bound up with shifting economic and political interests, contests and struggles.

Race-making from below
Race is made from above and below, by oppressors and the oppressed. The history of anti-racist struggle has indeed seen the racially oppressed adopt different approaches to the question of race and racial classification. The victims of racial oppression may all agree that racism matters. But they need not agree how or if at all race matters. We can distinguish, crudely, between three broad approaches in the history of anti-racist politics.

First, there are those who believe that race or racial identity signifies something substantial and significant. Some of these accept that race may not be rooted in biology or even in a common descent. But race accurately demarcates a shared social experience within a society defined by racial hierarchies. It is thus essential that racial identity be preserved in some form to do justice to a felt sense of racial belonging that is itself a product of the history of racism.

Second, there are some who may be ambivalent about whether race is meaningful but believe that it is necessary to keep racial categories alive to track the pace of anti-racist transformation. The idea here is that we cannot know how a society has fought racism unless we keep race categories alive. This may have nothing to do with whether racial categories are meaningful in some deeper sense. This is said to be a practical and pragmatic stance.

Finally, there is a tradition which insists that there is nothing so significant and substantial about race that it would legitimate the continued use of racial categories, no matter how they are redefined. In this view, part of the problem of racism is the fact that racial categories and categorisation persist. The view that racial belonging can be rooted in a common shared experience says something less about race and more about that specific experience of racism. It is a social identity, perhaps, but not a racial one. To persist in calling this shared experience a ground for a race category causes confusion and ambiguity. It would be best to remove “race” speak entirely or, if necessary, move towards new and creative categories that would meet the need to mark progress with redistribution. One could, for example, prefix racial categories with “racialised as” X, instead of “race is” X.

In South Africa, political traditions of anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle have coalesced over the approaches outlined above. The ANC and SACP, for example, promoted the view that racial groups in South Africa could be nations. In this way, they accepted the equivalence drawn between nationalism and race in 19th century social thought. They did not consider this to be contrary to the needs of the national liberation struggle in the country.

They had their detractors, however. The BC, PAC and Unity Movement traditions criticised the ANC’s approach in various ways.

Today, the ANC government continues to reproduce in legislation the apartheid racial categories inherited from the past. The language of races as nations has however subsided. The most popular justification for this practice today is that it is pragmatic – to track the pace of transformation. This choice continues to be controversial among victims of the apartheid legacy who are eager to challenge apartheid race categories and the meanings that they foist upon the public imagination.

Agency and creation
Given these contrasting views and opinions, and the complicated social construction and reconstruction of race through history I have outlined – what, in fact, is race after all? Or should the question be rephrased, what should race be? Or, alternatively, should race be?

In my view, if race is a social construction then race is a product of human agency. If race has a future, it will be a result of political choices made in the present.

To return to the beginning, the call for a stand against racial officialdom, refuse to rely on bureaucratic meanings and be clear about his own position on the matter. This is the essence of politics – a conscious reclaiming of our own social products. We need more of that as we debate what to do with race and racism in South Africa today.

Michael Nassen
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The US election, Covid and the climate crisis

Trump signs the Cares package. Faced with the panic over unemployment surging to apocalyptic levels in the spring, the US political class proved that the US could have a welfare state if they wanted it.

An interview with Adam Tooze

Amandla: Biden is now officially declared the winner of the elections, although not officially sworn in as the President yet. But it would still seem that the Republicans will make up the majority of the Senate. What do you think are the possibilities for the Biden presidency in dealing with the climate crisis, now that the US has left the Paris Agreement?

Amandla: A remarkable thing has happened, and it’s a great tribute to the left-wing of the Democratic Party. It’s the mobilisation around the Sunrise Movement that was set in motion by the Green New Deal mobilisation in 2018/19. As a result, Biden’s position on climate has radicalised considerably. In other words, from someone amongst the Democratic candidates least committed to climate change, the package that they’re now proposing in the order of R2 trillion dollars is of the right magnitude. This is the direction that the US needs to go in.

Unfortunately, I still think it is a reasonable assessment that the Democrats will fail to carry the Senate. It is conceivable that there will be two more votes from Georgia, but we can pessimistically assume that they won’t have control of the Senate.

So that big investment package is not realistic politics at this point. It won’t pass. Nor will any proposals which are, as it were, the neoliberal, market-driven alternative to large investment. That would be some sort of comprehensive carbon pricing model which, if pursued aggressively rather than in the somewhat lukewarm form that it has taken to date, could be a powerful incentive for shifting. It has major redistributional impact because it tends to hit people on lower incomes worst because they spend more of their budgets on energy. But you can offset those effects.

In any case, either of those two channels, either through big spending or through carbon pricing, is probably blocked.

However, there are things that the Biden administration can do on climate which are regulatory. You use the apparatus of the state machine, not by way of legislation, but by tweaking the regulation for instance of emissions from power plants. You change the standards for motor vehicles, and you try and get inside the existing apparatus of the state.

Now that obviously has opposition. The forces that then come into play, notably big business itself, will push back if they think that this is not in their interest.

But one of the most interesting things that has happened in the US is that a powerful coalition of capital is increasingly aligning itself with the green transformations. Look at the big asset managers, the famous asset managers like Blackrock. They increasingly understand that to have a long horizon for capital accumulation they need to avoid the more catastrophic climate outcomes. They also need to avoid the more catastrophic political scenarios that could unfold in an unstable world. So for both of these reasons they’ve positioned themselves now as climate activists.

This is a route that you could go down for a centrist, business-orientated energy transformation policy, which I think is the path of least resistance for the Biden administration. The main enemy that you will face down that route is the courts. The American judiciary all the way back to the 19th century has been one of the anchors of the business friendly, light regulation, political economy of the US. The American legal profession has gone through a complex history. There have
been moments when American lawyers have been campaigning liberals, on issues of race for instance. But since the 1970s, on issues of economic regulation, one of neoliberalism’s most important ideological avenues along with journalism and economics, has been the law. And so the American law schools have become engines of anti-regulation, pro-business legal thinking. The Trump administration, the George W. Bush administration before that, and to some extent Obama as well, packed the courts with pro-business lawyers. So there is a major obstacle there also.

If however the legal profession, and the American elite more generally, undergoes the sort of change of mind that we are beginning to see amongst asset managers, you can see a route forward there. This would not be a “just transition”; it is not the Green New Deal vision. But it might rapidly address some of the major technological obstacles that we face in undertaking decarbonisation.

Then there is a question of class politics; there is a question of the politics of expertise; there is a question of the partisan obstacles in the Senate; and the choice of tools – do you use administrative regulation, pricing, or spending as the main drivers for decarbonisation? It is in any case not the unified, coherent, massively politically backed steamroller of transformation that the Green New Deal Campaign fantasised about.

**A:** As you would know, we’ve spent a considerable amount of money investing in two major coal-fired power stations, Medupi and Kusile, which are not only going to massively impact on the climate but which are also tainted with corruption and other issues. But broader than Eskom and the investments in Eskom, Medupi and Kusile, lots of investors have invested heavily in extractivist industries, even until now. And to shift to renewable energy, or to shift away from a fossil fuel economy, would mean that a lot of these assets would be left stranded. Is that something that you think that these asset managers, investors and so on would be willing to do?

**AT:** IT’S AN ABSOLUTELY KEY QUESTION. One shouldn’t after all be naïve about what it means when someone like Blackrock says that it wants to go green. It doesn’t just abandon the old fossil assets; it sells them to somebody. And we’ve seen this with all of the big fossil players, all of the big extractive sectors. They’re playing a kind of game of pass the parcel, where the aim of the game is not to be left with the dirty asset. Everyone wants to be left with the cleanest balance sheet. But you can only exit when you can find a buyer. So there is a search on for dirty buyers – people who are willing to take these risks. And that of course is the risk that faces an emerging market, extractive industry-dominated economy. South Africa is of course historically crucially linked to extractive capitalism, although by now it is a much more complex and diversified economy.

So then the question is how you deal with that residual element of fossil capitalism. And there is a good reason of course to think then of the public sector, of the state balance sheet. But rather than falling into the kind of naïve liberal trap which says “well that’s the solution then”, you of course immediately have to ask yourself, in whose interest is the state acting, who ultimately ends up carrying the can for this? How do you ensure that, in the process of winding down these stranded assets, you address distributional concerns and also power political struggles? In other words, who has voice in this, and how do you ensure that this is not a tragedy for some of the communities, some of the trade union interests, which are entrenched precisely in those extractive industries?

**A:** You talk about how the International Energy Agency (IEA) is referring to renewable energy as the cheapest source of energy.

**AT:** THE SORT OF MEASUREMENT the IEA does predumes an electricity grid and then says, “OK, if we’re going to feed this grid with power from a generator, coal, oil, gas, wind, solar, which is the cheapest of those?”. It does include the capital cost of the entire package but it doesn’t include the grid. Obviously if you don’t have a grid then the cheapest option may be localised diesel generators, which we know entire economies like Nigeria run on. But it’s hugely inefficient in a broader sense, and massively polluting. Not just the CO2, but actually immediately to people in its environment. The fumes kill people.

**A:** But when we take into consideration not just the economic cost, but looking at cost in a much broader sense – societal costs, costs in relation to jobs, environment etc - then it’s not necessarily the cheapest. And then the big problem is that, besides the transition not being a just one, there is actually no transition happening from what we see. Do you think the market is an inhibitor or an enabler for a transition to a low carbon economy?

**A:** Ever, in history.
scarce. But we’ve learned that that is not within the time frame that we are talking about. So the only way that the market does become a real driver of decarbonisation is the IEA fantasy, a technological breakthrough which gives renewables a dominant competitive advantage. If it’s true that electricity from renewables is the cheapest electricity ever, then that is an argument to take your hands off. It’s an argument for complacency, for saying, “well then it’s fine, it will happen”. And it may indeed.

This is like saying, “is globalisation primarily driven by trade politics or is it primarily driven by containers?”. Containers were a far more important force than “free trade” treaties. Big metal boxes were the technology that really drove the process of globalisation. One fix, one big idea. This is a very compelling and simplistic narrative – the big technological fix drives social reality.

Centrist reformists like the IEA would love it to be true that renewable energy electricity by itself is the answer. I think you can hear from my tone of voice that, though that may be true over a long time horizon, it is far, far, too slow for it to be viable. We need climate stabilisation, we need stabilisation now, we needed it yesterday and any prospect of a liveable envelope depends on stabilisation in the next generation. And it has to be comprehensive.

**A:** The pandemic has also shown us around the world the capacity of states in many ways - in the way lockdowns were implemented. Do you think that this gives us a sense of what states can do and should be doing to address the climate crisis?

**AT:** ON THE ONE HAND, I THINK THE collective response to Covid is indeed demonstrative of our capacity to act. And the support programmes that were put in in the aftermath of it are a powerful example of what we are able to do. It’s probably true, through to maybe six weeks ago, that there were fewer poor people in the US in the summer of 2020 than there were in the summer of 2019, because the Cares package of March was so generous that they accidentally raised the income of the poorest Americans.

Faced with the panic over unemployment surging to apocalyptic levels in the spring, the US political class proved that the US could have a welfare state if they wanted it. And this is not even to get into monetary policy and fiscal policy and all the technicalities. You can do large-scale income support. Middle income and lower income countries have done amazing interventions. All of them can be critiqued in detail, all of them are shot through with elements of inequality, but no-one imagined the fiscal mobilisation that’s taken place in Indonesia and Malaysia, for example. Haiti had a support package this year; that’s extraordinary.

So yes, it is an example of what we can do. But it also begs the question: why have we not mobilised in a similar fashion around climate? Are the interests that oppose an energy transition more deeply entrenched? More powerful? Is the threat different? What we do know, is that the penalty for acting too late with regard to climate will stretch out for centuries and produce vastly more extensive damage than the penalty for acting too slowly in response to a moderately lethal pandemic. This is the challenge – bridging that gap.

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At the time of writing, three weeks after the US presidential election, Donald Trump refuses to concede to Joe Biden. This is consistent with Trump’s behavior throughout his presidency and, indeed, his entire life: demand attention 24/7. Lie, cheat, race-bait, name-call, bully – do anything to win.

An enraged Trump has alternated between tantrums and golf. But there’s method to his madness. He’s playing to his base, raising funds, mobilising supporters, and strengthening his hold on the Republican Party. Republican governors and Congressional representatives won’t break with him, for fear he’ll encourage opponents to run against them in the next round of Republican primaries. Trump may succeed in provoking violent actions from hard core supporters (he will blame “antifa”). But in the end, he’s going to go.

The vast majority of the US ruling class has made it clear that they want Trump out. Wall Street and Silicon Valley donated far more to Biden’s campaign than to Trump’s. The biggest industry lobbying groups – the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers – issued statements telling Trump that it’s time to go. The Wall Street Journal advised Trump to throw in the towel. Trump’s attempt to overturn the results in battleground states has gone nowhere.

Why Trump Polled So Well
Look past Trump’s three-ring circus. Biden received over 79 million votes, the most ever in a US election. Trump received the second most (more than 73 million). Two questions leap out:

1. Why did so many vote for Biden, faded good ol’ boy of a candidate, long time representative of US imperialism, devoid of policies? He ditched Medicare for All and the Green New Deal, and announced that he would continue to support fracking (“except on public land”).

2. Why did so many vote for the narcissistic, racist, would-be autocrat Trump, the guy who called Mexicans rapists, called Muslims terrorists, bragged about sexually assaulting women, withdrew from the Paris climate accords, the Iran nuclear arms treaty, the World Health Organization? A president who failed to confront the epic challenge of the pandemic – in place of a strategy, he preened, boasted, bullied, lied, and threatened to withhold protective equipment from states that didn’t support him.

The answer to the first question is clear: people voted for Biden to get rid of Trump. But how did Trump manage to get over 70 million votes? Why do 70% of Republican voters – 50 million people – believe that there was massive vote fraud and follow him blindly?

The answer has a few parts. First, many people were in despair before the pandemic struck. Alienated and demoralized, jobs, homes and futures wrecked by deindustrialization, austerity, and privatization, they blame their problems on the system and the politicians who ran it... Many of these folks are susceptible to the siren call of reaction, the core of Trump’s appeal.

Many of these folks are susceptible to the siren call of reaction, the core of Trump’s appeal. He conjures images of glory days (“Make America Great Again”) and says he’ll bring them back. He bashes climate science and promises to restore coal mining jobs to Appalachia and expand oil industry employment in South Texas. He scapegoats immigrants and promises to return the jobs he says they’re stealing. He bashes China and pretends that his protectionist measures will bring back the good old days. He demeans black people. Too many rural and working class people credited Trump with creating a strong economy and swallowed his line that Democratic governors and mayors wrecked the economy through lockdowns.

The revival of reaction isn’t confined to the US. After the evident failure of neoliberal globalization, millions in Europe turned to nationalist and anti-immigrant parties. Over 20 percent voted for Marine Le Pen in France and for Matteo Salvini in Italy. The extent of this turn partly explains Trump’s huge following.

Exploitation of racism
But we can’t fully explain the appeal of reaction in the US without taking racism into account. The US was born as a settler state. 40 million Native Americans lived here in 1500. Nearly all were exterminated. Millions of Africans were ripped out of their homes to become property of the “masters”. The US ruling class has repeatedly used racist divide and conquer to crush popular upsurges, rural and urban – Jim Crow in the South, de facto segregation in the North. Trump plays this card, mixed with anti-immigrant and
protectionist rhetoric. The Republican Party is no longer a center right party, it’s a reactionary party. And because of the historic role of racism, the percentage of seemingly crazed Trump true believers here is even greater than those for LePen and Salvini in their respective countries. Still, not all Trump voters are hopeless racists and reactionaries, and even some of the hard core may be won over by an alternative that fights for their needs and against the system, while taking on racism and imperialism.

No hope in Biden

Three days after election day, when the TV networks confirmed Biden’s electoral vote victory, thousands danced in the streets. The celebrants included old liberals, radicals and socialists. But where will Biden go? Look at his transition team. He’s expected to pick the ultra-hawkish Michelle Flournoy for Secretary of Defense; the former State Department deputy Anthony Blinken for Secretary of State; the former Federal Reserve Bank head Janet Yellen for Secretary of the Treasury; the austerity hawk and teacher union basher Rahm Emmanuel for Secretary of Transportation; former Secretary of State John Kerry and former DuPont Chemical executive Michael McCabe as the core of his environmental and climate team; etc.

We can expect a return to the domestic austerity and global imperialist policies of the Bush I, Clinton, Bush II, and Obama years. In the absence of an alternative, if these policies are indeed reimposed, we should expect no better under Biden than under his predecessors. And in that case, more urban and rural working people may look to the far right, out of desperation.

Leading establishment Democrats are targeting the social Democrats on their left wing – Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez et al – blaming them for the party’s disappointing results in Congressional races. Rather than stand for real needs, the gang that controls Biden blames those that do. This doesn’t portend well for the Democrats in the 2022 Congressional elections, nor the 2024 presidential elections, when Trump and other Republicans will mock their resumption of the same old same old. Their solution is no solution at all for the desperate conditions of urban and rural working people. If they are the only alternative to Trumpism, then Trumpism will have a stronger appeal (perhaps with another name and a different leader)

Build a movement

In recent years, most mass movements in the US have been extra-parliamentary. Occupy (2011–12), the red state teacher strikes (2018), the California March 4 movement against attacks on public education (2009–10), the Wisconsin capitol occupation (2013). We are seeing this elsewhere (the Yellow Vests in France). We should look towards resumption of such struggle, independent of both capitalist parties.

And here’s a counterpoint on US racism: less than six months ago a reported two-thirds of the population supported the massive protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd. That was a huge movement against police violence and racism and against the historic exploitation and oppression and harassment and abuse of black people.

Throughout US history, racist and anti-racist sentiments have existed side by side, often in the same individuals. Racial solidarity has risen numerous times in American history: abolitionism; Civil War and Reconstruction; the grass roots movements of rural and urban workers in the latter part of the 19th century; the explosive strike wave and mass movement of labor in the 1930s; the civil rights movement. But scapegoating has weakened, divided, and often broken these movements.

Just as the anti-racism of last spring has been weakened and obscured by the electoral campaign, it can reemerge in demonstrations, marches and strikes against what will surely be at best inadequate and at worst hostile policies of the Biden administration. A movement can rise as rapidly as Occupy did nine years ago, and it can build on that experience to address concrete demands for the desperate needs of the present, while holding out hope for the future.

Indeed, we should look to building a movement around the despair and anger at the devastating effects of the very policies that Biden and his team will almost surely restore. But unlike Trump, we must put forward real programs to address the desperate needs: universal health care, decent jobs and housing for all, rebuilding infrastructure while addressing climate change. These, merged with the mass movement against racism and police violence and immigrants’ rights, can provide a real foundation for moving forward.

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SCORES OF THOUSANDS OF YOUNG people took over dozens of cities and towns in Nigeria for two weeks. This rebellion, with the slogan and hashtag #EndSARS, was sparked by the reported killing of a young man by the special anti-robbery squad (SARS), in Ughelli, a town in the Niger delta region on 3rd October.

With each passing day, the supposedly “leaderless” movement waxed stronger. And while #EndSARS remained the primary and binding demand, calls for more radical measures to #EndInjustice increasingly gained support within the ranks of protesters. The regime’s efforts to break the movement with guile and attacks by its hired hands failed. In desperation, it called in the troops on 20th October to smash the major demonstrations in Lagos, the commercial capital.

According to Amnesty International “at least 12 peaceful protesters” were killed in the two major protests that day alone. The figures are probably much higher. According to protesters, soldiers carted away dozens of bodies. The immediate response of the army and top government officials was to describe the massacre as “fake news”. Forced by evidence to recant, they continue with attempts at cover-up on the one hand and repression on the other.

According to Amnesty International, these extra-judicial SARS killings drew public condemnation several times over the last four years. But, as Amnesty International points out, SARS operatives have not been convicted for most of the murders. And where they have been convicted, no penalty was implemented. There have been anti-SARS protests every year since 2016 in response to killings by SARS. They were localised and had low turnouts, except for one which was held simultaneously in three states. But the public outcry was enough to make the federal government announce reforms of SARS and banning of its stop and search operations thrice in this period. This did not reflect in SARS’ activities.

Background of the rebellion
The special anti-robbery squad personified the bestiality of the police. From 1984, local police commands had anti-robbery squads. But in 1992 these were condensed into one elite federal squad. This was ostensibly due to increased crime rates. The structural adjustment programme which commenced in 1986 had brought about a steep climb in youth unemployment and disillusionment.

Online scams, better known as “419” in Nigerian parlance, became more pronounced in the 2000s with internet penetration. And with this, SARS turned its attention more to this form of crime rather than armed robbery. But that was just half of the story. SARS itself became a scam. Young people would be arrested on “suspicion” of being online scammers just because they were driving flashy cars or had a recent iPhone model. SARS also indulged in the crassest of profiling - wearing dreadlocks or having tattoos was supposed to designate a deviant who was most likely a criminal. But they were more interested in getting substantial amounts of money from the “suspects”. If those arrested or their family members could not cough these out, “confessions” would be extracted with torture. Many died in SARS custody before bribes could be paid by their families to secure their release. Many were also killed on the streets.

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Demonstrations against police brutality in general were also organised by the Coalition for Revolution (Core) in six cities in the period leading to and during the #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd global mass movement, earlier in the year. They had on average barely a hundred protesters.

Deeper roots
We need to look beyond the real resentment of police brutality to understand why the protest was more explosive in October. The pervasive use of social media for mobilisation, which many point to, might also not be enough to explain this, because these were used in earlier less successful anti-SARS protests.

Social inequality is at its peak in the country’s history. Nigeria overtook India
as the country with the largest number of extremely poor people in 2018, despite the country’s oil wealth. 105 million of its population of 214 million people live in abject poverty. But the three richest billionaires have as much wealth as half of the population. And the wealth of the five richest people is enough to totally wipe out poverty in the country, according to Oxfam.

Unemployment figures have steadily increased, worsened by tens of thousands of job losses in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Young people are worst hit, with about half of working age youths being jobless. And for those with jobs, precarious employment (particularly in the informal economy which employs two thirds of the labour force) is the norm. The take home pay of workers, including graduates, can hardly take them home. Meanwhile, what Aliko Dangote (the richest African) “earns” in a day is 8,000 times what an average worker earns in a year.

The combustible mixture of rage at the news of yet another young person killed by SARS and increasing economic hardships was a recipe for the October #EndSARS rebellion.

Anatomy of the revolt
Youths in Delta state where the triggering incident took place hit the streets on 6th October. Two days later, thousands also took to the streets in Lagos and Abuja. And within days, the protests swept like wildfire through more than 20 of the 36 states of the federation.

A great deal of the mobilisation was done through social media, particularly twitter. All sections of the left, except those associated with Core, were caught off-guard. It would be well after the first week of the rebellion before most even so much as issued press statements. Core was the only Left formation with a nationwide spread. It had also organised a series of “RevolutionNow” protests across the country since last year.

As the #EndSARS movement unfolded, Core activists involved across the country stressed the systemic connections between the police brutality and elite rule. They pushed for the inclusion of demands such as cuts in elected officials’ salaries and regime change. The liberal wing of the movement, which was dominant on twitter and in fund raising, attacked this position with the argument that #EndSARS was a “non-political” movement. They also claimed that Core, being associated with African Action Congress, a revolutionary-democratic party which ran in the 2019 elections, was trying to use the mass movement for its own partisan aims.

Core activists on the ground took a non-sectarian stand. Without foregoing their more class-based analysis, they stood firmly with the popular #EndSARS battle cry which grew more trenchant.

In a bid to nip growing mass movement around this slogan in the bud, the federal government announced the ban of SARS on 11th October and called for cessation of the demonstrations. But being thrice bitten, protesters refused to leave the barricades. On 12th October, a coordinated wave of repression commenced. Security forces dispersed protesters in Abuja and some other states with tear gas, water cannons and live ammunition. Several of them were also arrested. At the end of the day, Amnesty International stated that at least 10 people had been killed by the police since the protests began.

Despite the state’s bloody reaction, defiant protesters regrouped in all the locations, in even greater numbers. Hoodlums, some of whom were ferried in police and secret police vehicles, attacked them in the first of what would be a constant feature till the rebellion was crushed. But they were generally repulsed by the mass. Several days later, they took their pound of flesh in Abuja. Since they could not break the mass phalanx of demonstration, they burnt dozens of protesters cars.

Realising that repression could not work, a presidential panel on police reforms was hurriedly set up and it summoned a “multi-stakeholders forum” on 13th October. The bulk of “civil society” invited were NGOs and philanthro-capitalist bodies like the MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundation and Amnesty International. The liberal wing of the supposedly “leaderless” EndSARS movement was also represented by leaders of some NGOs and Folarin “Falz” Falana, a celebrity musician. They presented a five point set of demands of the movement.
dubbed “5for5”, which they had come up with two days earlier.

These demands were for:
- immediate release of all arrested protesters;
- justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and compensation for their families;
- an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct;
- psychological evaluation and retraining of all disbanded SARS officers before their redeployment; and
- increase in police salary.

The Inspector General of Police who presided over the meeting accepted the five demands. A few hours later, he announced the replacement of SARS with a Special Weapons and Tactical (SWAT) unit. This was like adding fuel to the fires of mass anger, as the protesters saw this as simply SARS in new clothes.

The more radical demands pushed without much success by Core in the first week of the revolt now became dominant. And beyond the central theatres of peaceful demonstrations, on 19th October angry streetwise youths attacked one of the most hated police stations in Lagos. Likeminded youths also broke into two prisons in the mid-western Benin city, releasing prisoners.

Repression and emergent resistance

On 20th October, the regime drowned the #EndSARS movement in blood. Lagos state was the centre of the massacre which drew the curtains on this first dramatic act of rebellion. First, Mr Babajide Sanwo-Olu, the state governor, declared a 24-hour curfew.

There were two major occupied sites of the revolt in Lagos. One was in front of the state house of assembly in Alausa. The other was at the main toll gate plaza in the middle-class suburb of Lekki. Core activists held the fort at Alausa, organising congresses.

The bulk of protesters there were working-class youth. Activities in Alausa were grossly underreported by the mainstream media. But the experience of revolutionary activists contributed to the reduced intensity of the massacre there. By 4:30pm, the first contingent of combined security forces came to Alausa. Their vehicles were mobbed, albeit in quite a peaceful manner. Realising the endgame the state might be about to deal, Core activists took on the task of an orderly dispersal of about a thousand people still left in the occupied space. Many more had left after the curfew was declared. Core activists also spotted snipers taking up positions in the tall state secretariat buildings close to the House of Assembly and redoubled an organised retreat. Despite this, at least two people were killed in Alausa by the snipers when the killings started just before 7:00pm. Two others were critically wounded.

The Lekki Toll Gate Plaza massacre started at about the same time. But first, the CCTV cameras in the area were disabled. The floodlights in the plaza which had been on throughout the protest were also switched off. Soldiers, who were part of Operation Mesa (a shadowy joint security outfit), then lit fires in the two possible exit points from the Plaza. And then they started shooting into thousands of protesters singing the national anthem and several of them holding the national flag.

We may never know the total number of people killed at Lekki Toll Gate on that Red Tuesday. The soldiers took many bodies away in their vehicles. Calls for help, including medical services for the wounded, were made through social media. Paramedics who responded to these were forced to go back by the soldiers. Protesters resorted to helping each other remove bullets from bullet wounds.

The immediate response of the army and top government officials was to describe any involvement of soldiers as “fake news”. A week later, Mr Abubakar Malami, Attorney-General of the...
Federation, still claimed that if there was any shooting in the first place, it must have been by hoodlums wearing military fatigues and not soldiers.

But things became clearer, to some extent at least, after the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry and Restitution for SARS-related abuses & Lekki Toll Gate Incident commenced sitting at the beginning of November. Without batting an eyelid, the army now agreed that it was on the scene but only used rubber bullets. It also debunked the claim of the governor that he knew nothing about the army going to the tollgate. The army, we now know, were there on the invitation of the governor.

But before the Lagos judicial panel was set up, (and several other states also set up judicial panels), all hell was let loose in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. Violent confrontation with the state and against private property took the place of the peaceful protests that had been snuffed out, in defiance of curfews. At least 205 police stations were burned down, and 22 police officers killed. There were also attempted prison breaks in at least three prisons as prisoners revolted in the spirit of the orgy of violent rebellion that had seized the streets.

Malls were also looted. But the main ire of the streetwise youths was directed against ruling class figures deemed to have been against the mass movement. The television station and newspaper publishing house of Alhaji Bola Tinubu were torched. Tinubu is a former governor of Lagos State and a leader of the ruling All Progressives Congress. Hours before the massacre he had issued a terse warning to the protesters. The palace of the Paramount King of Lagos was also vandalised, and his staff of office taken away.

When President Muhammadu Buhari eventually made a nationwide broadcast on 22nd October, he condemned such attacks on royalty and general looting and issued a stern warning to crack down on hoodlums. But he did not say a word about the massacre two days earlier.

Increased repression

And despite concessions such as the judicial panels and allocation of funds for youth employment, the main response of the regime has been repression. The bank accounts of twenty persons and entities were frozen. These were volunteers who had provided free medical and legal services to protesters and also supported the families of some of those killed with monies raised through crowdfunding.

Identified #EndSARS volunteers and organisers have been barred from traveling out of the country. Thousands of “hoodlums” have been arrested. But the majority of these were found not guilty of looting private property.

As lumpen youths launched a violent ffightback immediately after the massacre, tens of thousands of people had marched on government warehouses where grains, beans, noodles, and other food items were kept. These were Covid-19 palliatives which were not shared to the poor during the lockdown.

Some state governments claimed that they were keeping these for a second wave of the pandemic, even though some of the foodstuffs were already getting spoiled. And during the initial confinement, for those that received food rations at all, these were as absurdly inadequate as providing a loaf of bread and less than a kilogram of rice for residents of 240 houses to share! In several states, house-to-house searches were conducted to retrieve these expropriated foodstuffs. And those caught with them were amongst those lined up as “looters” and “hoodlums”. The blending of the “food revolt” into the #EndSARS rebellion provides an inkling of things to come.

There were efforts to reignite the #EndSARS movement by Core in November. But these were crushed by the police. Six Core activists in Abuja were arrested and granted bail almost a week after. Another, Eromosele Anene, was arrested for having his phone number on a flyer calling for protests, even before the demonstration was dispersed by force. He was released on bail after three weeks.

Revelations of the extent of SARS callousness continue to pour in at the judicial panels of inquiry. It is not impossible that this could spark another wave of anti-police brutality protest, especially if the continued law and order onslaught results in yet another killing. The shape of things to come, emerging from ongoing resistance, could however be more complex and thoroughgoing.

Organised workers

Health workers, as well as workers in the education and aviation sectors have been on strike in several parts of the country and nationally, in response to hardships and lack of workplace safety during the pandemic. Increases in fuel price and electricity tariffs led the two trade union centres to issue a 28th September general strike notice.

They called this off at the last minute without any tangible concession from the state. The General Secretaries of both federations later expressed the fears of the trade union bureaucracy that the strike would have been “hijacked” by more revolutionary forces. Fuel pump price has been increased yet again in November, the third time this year. This is part of the conditionalities of a recent $3.4bn IMF loan.

Entry of organised labour into the, for now muted, popular struggle would deal a devastating blow to the regime. How long the bureaucracy can hold back rank and file workers is yet to be seen. But it is instructive to note that the health sector strikes and protests started as rank and file action in defiance of the sectoral unions’ officialdom.

The 2012 general strike in response to a sharp hike in fuel pump price deepened spontaneous mass protests into an uprising. But calling off the strike as the uprising moved towards more revolutionary demands also took the wind from the sails of the movement. With the experience and inspiration of the #EndSARS movement it will be difficult if not impossible to force back the genie of revolution into its bottle when rank and file pressure forces the trade union leadership to enter the fray of resistance in the unfolding period.

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Ecosocialism and/or degrowth? Should the ecological left aim to reduce all consumption, or to radically transform the prevalent type of consumption?

By Michael Löwy

This article is a slightly edited version of an article originally published in the Autumn issue of Rupture, a new ecosocialist quarterly published by the Irish group RISE.

Ecosocialism and/or degrowth? movement are among the most important currents of the ecological left. Ecosocialists agree that a significant measure of degrowth in production and consumption is necessary in order to avoid ecological collapse. But they have a critical assessment of degrowth theories, because the concept of “degrowth”:

1. is insufficient to define an alternative programme;
2. does not make clear if degrowth can be achieved in the framework of capitalism or not;
3. does not distinguish between activities that need to be reduced and those that need to be developed.

However, the degrowth current, which is particularly influential in France, is not homogeneous: inspired by critics of the consumer society (Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard) and of the “technical system” (Jacques Ellul), it contains different political outlooks.

Many degrowth theoreticians seem to believe that the only alternative to productivism is to stop growth altogether, or to replace it with negative growth. This would mean to drastically reduce the excessively high level of consumption of the population by cutting by half energy expenditure. This would be done by renouncing individual houses, central heating, washing machines etc. Since these and similar measures of draconian austerity risk being quite unpopular, some of the advocates play with the idea of a sort of “ecological dictatorship.”

Against such pessimistic views, socialist optimists believe that technical progress, and the use of renewable sources of energy, will permit an unlimited growth and abundance, so that each can receive “according to their needs.”

It seems to me that these two schools share a purely quantitative conception of “growth”, whether positive or negative, or of the development of productive forces. There is a third position, which seems to me more appropriate: a qualitative transformation of development. This means putting an end to the monstrous waste of resources by capitalism, based on the production, on a large scale, of useless and/or harmful products. The armaments industry is a good example. But a great part of the “goods” produced in capitalism, with their inbuilt obsolescence, have no other usefulness than to generate profit for the big corporations.

The issue is not “excessive consumption” in the abstract. It is the prevalent type of consumption, based as it is on conspicuous acquisition, massive waste, mercantile alienation, obsessive accumulation of goods, and the compulsive purchase of pseudo-novelties imposed by “fashion”. A new society would orient production towards the satisfaction of authentic needs, beginning with those which could be described as “biblical” — water, food, clothing, housing — but including also basic services: health, education, transport, culture.

How to distinguish the authentic from the artificial, factitious (artificially created) and makeshift needs? The latter are induced by mental manipulation, i.e. advertisement. The advertising system has invaded all spheres of human life in modern capitalist societies. It has invaded our streets, mail boxes, TV screens, newspapers, landscapes, in a permanent, aggressive and insidious way, and it decisively contributes to habits of conspicuous and compulsive consumption. Moreover, it wastes an astronomical amount of oil, electricity, labour time, paper, chemicals, and other raw materials — all paid by the consumers — in a branch of “production” which is not only useless, from a human viewpoint, but directly in contradiction with real social needs.

While advertising is an indispensable dimension of the capitalist market economy, it would have no place in a society in transition to socialism. It would be replaced by information on goods and services provided by consumer associations. The criterion for distinguishing an authentic from an artificial need is its persistence after the suppression of advertisement (Coca Cola!). Of course, for some years, old habits of consumption would persist. And nobody has the right to tell the people what their needs are. The change in consumption patterns is a historical process, as well as an educational challenge.

Some commodities, such as the individual car, raise more complex problems. Private cars are a public nuisance. They kill and maim hundreds of thousands of people every year on a world scale. They pollute the air in the big cities, with dire consequences for the health of children and older people. And they significantly contribute to climate change. However, they correspond to a
real need, by transporting people to their work, home or leisure. Local experiences in some European towns with ecologically minded administrations show that it is possible, and approved by the majority of the population, to progressively limit the role of the individual car in traffic, to the advantage of buses and trams.

In a process of transition to ecosocialism, in which public transportation, above ground or underground, would be vastly extended and free of charge for the users, and in which pedestrians and cyclists will have protected lanes, the private car would have a much smaller role.

In bourgeois society it has become a fetishised commodity, promoted by insistent and aggressive advertising, a status symbol, a sign of identity. In the US, a driving license is the recognized ID — and the car is a centre of personal, social and erotic life.

It will be much easier, in the transition to a new society, to drastically reduce the transportation of goods by trucks. They are responsible for terrible accidents, and high levels of pollution. They would be replaced by trains. Only the role of the individual car in traffic, to the advantage of buses and trams. This does not mean that there will not be conflicts, particularly during the transitional process — conflicts between the requirements of environmental protection and social needs; between ecological imperatives and the development of basic infrastructure, particularly in poor countries; between popular consumer habits and the scarcity of resources. Such contradictions are inevitable. It will be the task of democratic planning, in an ecosocialist perspective, liberated from the imperatives of capital and profit-making, to solve them, through a pluralist and open discussion, leading to decision-making by society itself. Such a grassroots, participative democracy is the only way.

Some commodities, such as the individual car, raise more complex problems. Private cars are a public nuisance. However, they correspond to a real need. predilection of free time for personal accomplishment through cultural, sporting, playful, scientific, erotic, artistic and political activities, rather than the desire for an infinite possession of products.

Compulsive acquisitiveness is induced by the commodity fetishism inherent in the capitalist system, by the dominant ideology and by advertising. There is no proof that this is part of an “eternal human nature,” as the reactionary discourse wants us to believe.

As Belgian Marxist leader, Ernest Mandel, emphasised:

The continual accumulation of more and more goods (with declining “marginal utility”) is by no means a universal and even predominant feature of human behaviour. The development of talents and inclinations for their own sake; the protection of health and life; care for children; the development of rich social relations ... all these become major motivations once basic material needs have been satisfied.

This does not mean that there will not be conflicts, particularly during the transitional process — conflicts between the requirements of environmental protection and social needs; between ecological imperatives and the development of basic infrastructure, particularly in poor countries; between popular consumer habits and the scarcity of resources. Such contradictions are inevitable. It will be the task of democratic planning, in an ecosocialist perspective, liberated from the imperatives of capital and profit-making, to solve them, through a pluralist and open discussion, leading to decision-making by society itself. Such a grassroots, participative democracy is the only way.

What could the relationship be between ecosocialists and the degrowth movement? In spite of the disagreements, can there be an active alliance around common objectives? In La décroissance est-elle souhaitable? (Is degrowth desirable?), French ecologist Stéphane Lavignotte proposed such an alliance. He acknowledges that there are many controversial issues between the viewpoints. Should one emphasise social class relations and the struggle against inequalities or the denunciation of the unlimited growth of the productive forces? What is more important, individual initiatives, local experiences, voluntary simplicity, or changing the productive apparatus and the capitalist “megamachine”? Lavignotte refuses to choose. The challenge, he argues, is to combine the struggle for the ecological class interest of the majority (i.e. the non-owners of capital) with the politics of active minorities for a radical cultural transformation. In other words, to achieve, without hiding the inevitable disagreements, a “political composition”. It would include all those who have understood that the survival of life on the planet, and of humanity in particular, is contradictory to capitalism and productivism. They are therefore looking for the way out of this destructive and inhumane system.

As an ecosocialist, and as a member of the Fourth International, I share this viewpoint. The coming together of all varieties of anti-capitalist ecology is an important step towards the urgent and necessary task of stopping the suicidal course of the present civilisation — before it is too late.

Michael Löwy is the author of Ecosocialism: A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe (Haymarket 2015), and emeritus research director in social sciences at the CNRS (National Center of Scientific Research) in Paris.
**Black Spartacus** by Sudhir Hazareesingh

Reviewed by Rajith Perera

This review was first published in Socialist Review

This is a gripping biographical account of Toussaint Louverture (1743–1804), the greatest black revolutionary leader emerging within the age of bourgeois revolutions, who “took from the Enlightenment, what the Enlightenment never dreamt of”. Hazareesingh, an Oxford scholar, has succeeded in enriching the epic story of the self-emancipation of enslaved Africans from a revolt in 1791 into a revolutionary struggle. It abolished slavery on the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue, declaring independence as Haiti in 1804. This was the only successful slave revolution in history, achieved against all odds, and facing the formidable might of three European empires. Hazareesingh succeeds in rescuing the myriad of Toussaint’s seemingly contradictory actions, and the many turns taken during the course of the revolution, from accounts that have attempted to cast doubt on his commitment to the ideals of revolutionary France.

Some claim him to be a conservative and aspiring landowner, a tyrannical authoritarian who betrayed his race. Others, astonishingly, argue he was a “royalist agent”. He writes: “Toussaint embodied the many facets of Saint-Domingue’s revolution by confronting the dominant forces of his age — slavery, settler colonialism, imperial domination, racial hierarchy and European cultural supremacy — and bending them to his will.” New research reveals Toussaint was briefly employed in two hospitals for services as a doctor.

Documents attributed to him in this role suggest he was far more involved in the initial planning of the revolt than previously thought. Freed in 1776, he owned at least one slave. There are new poignant revelations about Toussaint’s family, highlighting the personal tragedy inflicted by slavery. The geopolitical fault lines created by British, French and Spanish imperialist rivalry were navigated with Machiavellian cunning, gall and flair, Toussaint’s only compass being the total abolition of slavery. With this aim, he wove together all the disparate elements to construct an army of Africans, forged together with the ideals of “unity and fraternity”. He declared “equality cannot exist without liberty and for liberty to exist we need unity”.

A plantation labourer described the behaviour of its multi-racial leadership of black, coloured and white officers as if “all were born from the same mother”. His attempts to revive the plantation economy, in a world that deemed black people incapable of independent political thought, was also the means to show that a black state could exist and function under a new, multiracial moral force and authority established and created by black agency.

Black Spartacus is an account of how slavery was smashed and how an “intuitive genius... shook the Enlightenment’s belief in the inherent superiority of all things European”.

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**The Return of Nature**

Socialism and Ecology by John Bellamy Foster

Reviewed by Peter Critchley

This is a selection from a longer review published on the website Climate&Capitalism.

In an age in which the call for system change is being heard more and more, in increasing recognition of the socio-economic causes of climate crisis, a book establishing the connection between socialism and ecology could not be more timely. In tracing the evolution of that connection, John Bellamy Foster’s *The Return of Nature* identifies the conditions for an effective ecosocialism.

The book is a work of recovery in several related senses: of Marx and Engels and those they inspired as pioneer social ecologists; of nature as necessarily ingrained in social analysis; of dialectics as a critical-practical method; of materialism as field of immanence and emergence; of socialism as the systemic mediation of the social-natural relation; and, importantly, of politics as the practical engagement with the world, rendering knowledge and reason socially effective.

Though neither Marx nor Engels used the word “ecology,” both displayed a critical systematic interest in the environmental questions arising from the metabolic interchange between human society and nature. Having established the foundations of Marx’s socio-ecological critique of capitalist society in Marx’s Ecology (MR Press, 2000), Foster traces its further development in *The Return of Nature* in the work of an impressive range of socialist scientists and thinkers. Taking up the story from the deaths of Darwin and Marx in 1882 and 1883, with a primary focus upon Britain, Foster shows that from its inception, ecology was “deeply intertwined” with “struggles for human equality and the revolt against capitalist society.”

The final line in the book states its lesson concisely:

What we must dethrone today is the idol of capital itself, the concentrated power of class-based avarice, which now imperils the ecology of the Earth. It is this that constitutes the entire meaning of “freedom as necessity” and the return of nature in our time.

Foster’s work of intellectual restoration demonstrates that the line of critical metabolic thinking leading from Marx and Engels to an integrated social-natural ecology remains the most cogent, intellectually satisfying, and practically relevant theory of liberation in the world today.
A PEOPLE’S GUIDE TO CAPITALISM
An Introduction to Marxist Economics by Hadas Thier

Reviewed by Michael Roberts

It is not easy explaining relatively complex ideas in a simple and clear manner. Ask any teacher. It’s a skill lacking in many. Hadas Thier has brilliantly succeeded in that challenge with her book introducing Marxist economics. She has delivered a clear, straightforward and entertaining explanation of all Marx’s basic theoretical insights into the nature and development of capitalism.

And she has done so using modern examples that help the reader to understand why Marxist political economy is so clinical in its analysis of the reality of modern capitalist economies. I would say nobody has done it better – and I ought to know because I have tried to do such in the past, but with nowhere near Thier’s success.

I think part of the reason for Thier’s achievement is that she is an activist in the labour movement and not an academic economist. In my experience, academic Marxist economists are usually lacking in ability to explain clearly Marxist political economic ideas to others. Thier refers to her own experience:

When I first picked up a book on economics, I made it about two pages in before I broke down in tears, feeling hopeless that I could ever understand economics. The capitalist system in general, and economics in particular, are purposefully mystified. Analysing how capitalism works is left to “the experts,” and if things look a little askew to you, well, that must be because you don’t know any better. This is doubly and triply so for working-class people, women, people of colour, and other oppressed constituencies who are daily barraged with the message that we cannot hope to comprehend complex systems and ideas, let alone hope to impact.

Thier has written an excellent introduction to Marx’s analysis of capitalism and one that can be regularly turned to in order to understand the waste, destruction and misery caused by the modern capitalist system of exploitation.

The Pink Line: The World’s Queer Frontiers by Mark Gevisser

Reviewed by Laura Miles

In The Pink Line South African journalist and filmmaker Mark Gevisser presents a perceptive and comprehensive picture of the international fight for LGBT+ rights in the twenty first century. Gevisser meticulously and sympathetically charts the harsh realities of life for many LGBT+ people as he follows their struggles with families, police and public hostility. His research took him to 21 countries, striking up relationships over a number of years with a range of activists. Chapters alternate between the stories of particular LGBT+ people, their struggles, crises, friends, lovers and families, interspersed with commentaries on what Gevisser refers to as the current culture wars over sexuality and gender in a context of growing authoritarianism in many parts of the world.

The global Covid-19 pandemic and looming world recession will inevitably drive ruling classes to focus hostility on LGBT+ people and other vulnerable groups in order to deflect resistance and divide opposition to their obscene wealth and power. The Pink Line is certainly a great read and paints a compelling picture of LGBT rights around the world. Gevisser ends the book on a cautiously optimistic note for the future. If that is to be fulfilled we need more than just hope. The task of socialists must be to offer real solidarity to LGBT+ people fighting back in hostile conditions, and to build the biggest possible fightbacks against attacks on workers in general in the coming crises.
Our Citizens

There are citizens who get by and those who can buy.
They sleep belly full yet still growl, sleep easy yet wake up to nightmares.
They can afford but they owe attention too much. They speak of change but walk backward, have enough but ask for more, fat but eat some more.
All brain never gets it all if any at all it’s true.
Ask the guy on that street corner playing a flute for coins, food for thought and even for the tummy, a fruit they never drop these citizens.
Walking on top of the world, top of the food chain with heavy chains dragging their hearts, less than kind smiles plastered across their faces yet they speak of reverence, inside screaming fuck benevolence.
They are planting trees that bear thorns, eating peas with a fork.

But you should see these kids that dig through garbage for at least that smell of KFC to trick the mind or at least that taste of ANC to feast on.
I blame the ‘wise guys’ that buy us with small change for no change.
Feeding us vocabes we don’t get, calling us fools behind our backs.
These success keys are hidden in the machines, it’s apparent, rape is a mission made possible by pistols and ‘piss tools’ yet peace we still seek.
The youth is still sick, falling victim to life’s ills.
Miss, treating AIDS, but still dies. School kids skip school for booze, ‘cool kids’.
We have swallowed silence for way too long, it’s time to regurgitate.
Let’s educate each other and meditate on the truth.

Some of these citizens have a nerve to tell us to shape up or ship out.
We were never shipped if anything, we shaped this place to what it is.
Slavery eradicated? Really?
Bullshit! In the bundus we still use it to polish our floors.
Our flaws are bare for the world to see and mock us, used for mock-ups to present overseas yet none of us oversee these slide shows.
This shows how much we need to modify here, unify peers.
Yes, here, pressure mounts and covers us.
Blowing up our starved tummies, teen mommies of babies never born and it’s a trend.
Yes, here we abort kids, to hell with innocence, kid, we are from the struggle, we form the puzzle, reformed this jungle.
We hunt the hunters dry, bar tenders squeeze guitar strings to identify what we need to quench our savanna thirst.
Obsessed with the idea of being told ‘you are free BEEs’, yes, BEEs you are free, like swarms.
Slums are buzzing like pests annoying the hell out of government wanting to crush us citizens.
They are feeding us poisonous isms with the aim of killing us in our sleep.
Eyes wide shut we keep sipping. Skipping on fine lies, we’ll forever seek and never find because here there are no spoons, here there are no platters and silver is only found on the clouds.

Wake up! You’ve been dreaming for far too long.

Thando Fuze is a Durban-based poet who was a member of the collective, “A Sonnet of Poets”, is a hypnotic performer who transmits the message: “Life is beauty and uncertainty”. 
At the centre
of the margins
a voice
in the heart
of the storm
voice of a woman
and a camera frame
this voice of a woman
and the echo of hands and hammers
bringing her down
sundering her shelter
her shack cast open
cut
do
down
hammer nailing orders
banning her space
voice of a woman
voice of a woman
of the storm

utter fucking madness
hammering down
her life
this voice
wanting ears to cry
love
rage
you!

Allan Kolski Horwitz devotes his art-making and political-raking to keeping alive some few embers of the fire that was the South African Struggle.
If Madiba were a hot air balloon

vangile gantsho

If Madiba were a hot air balloon
all the air would be guilt. And
it would be white. And
it would be the biggest balloon you've ever seen,
floating far above in the sky,
up beyond the stars. And
we would all get to ride in it.
All of us.
Everyone.
Except those whose tears it takes
to keep the air from coming out.

vangile gantsho is Tshwane-based; a graduate of the Makhanda University Creative Writing MA course. She has plumbed the depths of being a "Black South African Woman Human".

Mpho Khosi

Ek bedoel nie om te kla nie,
Maar, julle begin nou om julle-self soos kafirs te dra.
Dit is soos ons voorheen gesê het.
All you good for,
Is to drink, dance and make lots of noise,
Marry many wives, have sex & make lots of kids.
Just look at yourselves,
You have brought to life our prophecy;
Ons het mos gesê,
You cannot rule yourselves,
You are a symbol of poverty,
The bottom feeders of humanity,
Creatures of opportunity,
Like the rats that run riot in your townships,
You would rather step over each other to get to what you want,
Than work with each other to build towards what you need.
You are a disgrace of a race,
Lazy, mentally inferior peoples.
Truth is;
Allowing you to rule,
Is like letting the monkeys run the zoo,
But you are even worse than animals,
Ruthless, you rape your own young,
And abuse your own women.
Just look at what you have done to our once beautiful Johannesburg,
You have prostituted with her,
And now she stands as a squatter camp,
A refuge to pimps, drug lords and net my here weet.
She has become a waist land,
Even the faeces on her streets bear witness to that.
Then you wonder why we didn't want you to procreate,
Your offspring are monsters like the seeds from which they fell,
Constantly high,
Just to try & forget that their mothers were prostitutes,
And their fathers drunkards.
You see,
You are only tools to be used like a spade,
Useless without your master's guiding hand.
But your leaders,
Julle luiers was studente van ons,
They have learnt well from the masters,
And now they themselves have become monsters,
The art of instilling fear they have mastered,
Having seen what we did in Sophia-town,
They send in "Red Ants" to come & tear your homes down,
And with these so-called "Maberete"
They seem to slowly be implementing a curfew now.
Then to soften you up,
They throw food parcels at your doors.
And also remind you how they won freedom for you.
Places to educate; they will never build.
But shebeens & churches pop up at every street & every neighbourhood.
All they would rather do is indoctrinate you & keep you drunk,
Unbeknown to them,
They simply carry on our legacy.
Why should they create a breed of "clever blacks",
While you serve them well as their puppets.
Black pride my foot.
I am being sincere in saying,
This is no complaint,
Maar julle begin nou om julle selfs soos kafirs te dra.

Mpho Khosi was born in 1982 in Wattville, Gauteng; edited an anthology of poetry "Portraits of Propaganda" with Frank Lekwana; was a key poet in Word N Sound sessions in Jozi between 2011 and 2016.
Maradona’s death added another sadness to a year marked by the pandemic. Argentina mourned the loss of an idol of the masses. The great footballer spread happiness in a country overwhelmed by authoritarianism, frustration and impoverishment. It does not matter what he did with his life. What matters is how he transformed the lives of his compatriots.

Maradona was a living myth which crossed international borders. He was the main figure identified with Argentina anywhere on the planet. That immeasurable fame was the nightmare of his career, torn apart by scandals, fortunes, drugs, and stormy families.

This genius of the ball dealt with presidents, billionaires and mafia bosses without ever abandoning his poor origins. He always knew where he came from. He was an athlete committed to the oppressed who supported popular causes with his magical bond with the ball.

Diego had a tattoo of Che Guevara to convey a message critical of injustices and inequalities. He maintained a close relationship with Fidel and underwent a long detoxification treatment in Cuba. He fervently claimed his Latin American identity and proudly displayed his ties with Chávez and Evo. He played a leading role in the memorable 4th Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata that rejected the Free Trade Association of the Americas.

In the suffocating climate generated by the conservative return to power, he denounced the coup in Bolivia and defended Venezuela against imperial conspiracies. He spent time with the Mothers and Grandmothers, participating in their campaigns to find the children of the disappeared. In his last message in support of the wealth tax, he unleashed furious criticism of Macri.

The powerful never forgave him that rebellion and attacked his countless contradictions and weaknesses. They did not forget his denunciations of the football business and his questions about the insensitivity of the Vatican. In Argentina they identified him with all the downtrodden of the country. Those tensions surfaced in a chaotic wake, which did not dilute the last goodbye to such a beloved figure.

From a longer tribute by Claudio Katz.
Saftu has called for a total shutdown of the economy on the day that the Minister of Finance will be presenting his anti-poor and anti-development budget speech on 24th February 2021. Waves of job losses, deep cuts in the budget, attacks on public sector wages, the collapse of basic services and the lack of support for our health workers, amount to a systematic assault on workers and poor communities. Let us unite regardless of organisational affiliation and political differences and fight the cuts. Support local demonstrations in your area and send a powerful message to government: we will rise!
A warrior, a true revolutionary, a straight talker with the biggest heart.

“We were faced with the choice between money and the soil. Our people chose the land. The money will come and go but the land is forever. We said No to being bought by money. That is where the Right to say No was started. Not yesterday but many years ago with the Pondo Revolt - in the defense of our land and way of life.”

Sibusiso Mqadi Amadiba Crisis Committee
(14 August 1985 - 7 November 2020)