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South Africa

Goodyear closure demands a paradigm shift: Workers must take over factories

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The closure of Goodyear in Kariega (formerly called Uitenhage) is more than just another company shutting its doors. It is a brutal reminder of the structural crisis facing South Africa's working class. Factories, once held as pillars of stability, are now abandoned shells, as corporations chase profits across borders, discarding workers like disposable tools.

For decades, people have been told to welcome foreign investment, to plead with multinationals to stay, and to tie their futures to the whims of corporate boardrooms in Detroit, Frankfurt, or Shanghai. Yet the Goodyear closure shows again that loyalty begins and ends with the bottom line.

When profit margins shrink, workers are retrenched, factories are closed, and communities are left with despair. This cycle has played out not only in Kariega but across Gqeberha, East London, and beyond. It is a cycle of devastation, and it will not stop until workers themselves chart a new course.

The moment demands a paradigm shift. Instead of fighting for corporations to maintain their grip, workers and communities must demand control over production itself. This means reclaiming abandoned factories and putting them to use for [socially useful reindustrialisation](#).

Worker-controlled factories are not a utopian dream. They are a concrete necessity. The skills, technical knowledge, and experience are already present in the workforce. What is missing is the political will to support workers in reclaiming these spaces and repurposing them for human need rather than shareholder profit. And now there are many examples of this in [Argentina, the United States](#) itself, and elsewhere, where workers have done exactly that — 'recovered' factories and built communities around them.

A paradigm shift also means rejecting the false promise of capitalist economies of scale — the idea that bigger is always better, that centralised corporate power leads to efficiency. In reality, economies of scale concentrate wealth and decision-making into fewer and fewer hands, leaving workers disempowered. A socially useful reindustrialisation, rooted in worker control, can break this cycle by prioritising community needs over corporate returns.

This struggle cannot be separated from global politics. The rise of Trump and the return of [US mercantilism](#) signal a new era of corporate nationalism, where powerful economies seek to dominate weaker ones through aggressive trade wars, resource grabs, and financial coercion.

For South Africa, this means intensified pressure to serve as cheap labour for [US and European multinationals](#), while communities bear the costs of closures and retrenchments whenever global markets shift. The rejection of Trumpism, therefore, is not only a political question in the US. It is a material struggle here at home.

One of the most effective ways to reject US mercantilism is for South African workers to put their skills into socially useful transitions beyond the capitalist path of economies of scale. By doing so, we break dependency on foreign corporate monopolies and create industries that serve our needs directly.

This is not isolationism, but international solidarity — workers in Kariega linking arms with workers in Detroit, São Paulo or Guangzhou to demand a global economy built on cooperation and mutual survival, not competition and profit.

Transformation fund: a test for the working class

The Goodyear closure also raises pressing questions about South Africa's Transformation Fund. The newly introduced [fund](#) has been spoken of as a vehicle for transformation, but it should not be channelled into narrow empowerment deals that reproduce elite accumulation.

Now is the time to test it for what it should be: a weapon for the working class. The Transformation Fund must be redirected to support worker takeovers of factories, provide capital for cooperative reindustrialisation, and finance projects that generate socially useful production.

If it fails this test, then it will be exposed as yet another tool for elite enrichment. If it succeeds, it could become a cornerstone in building a new economy — one where abandoned factories become hubs of democratic ownership, where unemployment is fought through collective enterprise, and where the dignity of work is restored.

The Goodyear closure should not be remembered as another chapter of industrial decline. It must be remembered as the moment workers began to take back control, rejecting both local corporate plunder and global mercantilist domination, and paving the way for a future built on solidarity, justice, and worker power.

[Amandla](#)

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