



The Worker

The Worker is an official publication of the New Unity Movement

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BRACKENFELL: A TALE OF UNREFORMED REFORM

**Knowledge
is
Power**

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When the racist bullies of Brackenfell violently disrupted a peaceful protest by some twenty-odd EFF supporters on 6 November 2020, they had no idea that they would be igniting a firestorm of retaliation in the form of a mass EFF demonstration two Fridays later, when several busloads of irate EFF supporters, numbering in excess of two thousand, descended on the town.

The EFF protesters were met by a barely-tolerant police force, armed with stun grenades, water cannon, teargas, rubber bullets and hundreds of metres of barbed wire.

That the event passed without serious incident (even tragedy) is something of a minor miracle, given the belligerent mood of the EFF members and the clear intention of the police to use force.

Brackenfell could well have become a turning-point of sorts – where arrogant apartheid-style *boeremag* feels increasingly emboldened to assert

itself, and then is met head-on by a resurgent black identity politics. It seems written in the stars – or perhaps, it was written in the agreements signed at Codesa pre-1994.

That was where the bogus Rainbow Nation was born, where the ANC and its allies crafted the strategic plans for saving white racial capital for the price of expunging racist legislation

from the statute-books. In the course of the 26 years since 1994, the nation has experienced the bitterness of this sell-out. Even

before the ravages of COVID-19, we had the shameful distinction of being the most unequal society on the planet. Just one statistic alone demonstrates the harsh reality of what this means: according to Statistics SA, 62.1 percent of our children are “multi-dimensionally” poor. This means that their lives are deficient in at least three of the following seven basic needs: Health, Housing, Nutrition, Protection, Education, Information, and Water & Sanitation.



SA's racial divisions, as seen during the recent clashes outside Brackenfell High School, are worsening, the author writes. Picture: Eisa Alexander

In an article on 2 May 2019, Ingrid Woolard of Stellenbosch University said that

In 2015, the wealthiest 10% of South Africa's population owned more than 90% of the total wealth in the country while 80% owned almost no wealth ... There's a clear racial dimension to this inequality with an average African household holding less than 4% of the wealth held by an average White household.

We should not overlook the extent to which foreign companies are milking our economy. A 2016 article in *The Conversation* disclosed that “the net outflow paid to owners of foreign capital reached R174 billion (about US\$11.9 billion at current rates) in the first quarter of 2016 (measured on an annualised basis), 30% higher than the equivalent 2015 level.”

In South Africa, capitalism thrives while the vast majority of the people suffer intensifying hardship under its regime. While the apartheid laws were cleared away, nothing was done to reverse the social disparities inherited from decades of capitalist exploitation – except affirmative action for a privileged few. Critically, the ANC-regime continues to perpetuate the myth of race, according to which we have four racial groups in this country: Black, White, Indian and Coloured. And so, the dominant ruling class narrative is that our problems are problems of race. Meanwhile, our economy continues to be a rigid machine for the ongoing production of wealth for the owning classes and their hangers-on.

Race as a means of divide-and-rule is alive and well and living in South Africa. We have the scenario where one group is hell-bent on retaining what privileges it enjoys under the system, while the other is fighting for a bigger piece of the pie.

This is why race was invented: to split the working class, and distract it from the true source of its grievances: the capitalist system.

We have to fight race, but we have to fight it as part of the anti-capitalist struggle. In terms of this perspective, race is an evil on a par with patriarchy and the destruction of the global eco-system. They are all key hurdles to clear on the road to socialism.

No doubt agencies like the Human Rights Commission will be hard at work in the Brackenfell commu-

nity in coming weeks, in order to calm tempers and teach tolerance (read: “paper over the cracks.”) And no doubt, there will, in coming days, weeks, months ... be repeats of Brackenfell in other parts of the country, there will be more outbursts of the kind on social media that Penny Sparrow and Adam Catzavelos became infamous for, and there will be more suffering and material deprivation in working class communities throughout the country. In other words, it will be back to business as usual.

UNLESS ...

... Unless we break this vicious spiral.

In his book, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx*, Alex Callinicos reminds us that

Marx always conceived of the working class as the class whose own self-emancipation would also be the liberation of the rest of humanity. The socialist revolution ... can only be, at one and the same time, the emancipation of the working class and the liberation of all the oppressed and exploited sections of society.

Thus, a critical task of the socialist left is to support the building of class consciousness among the mass of working people, so that collectively we can transcend the narrow perspectives of race, and decisively shift the balance of power in favour of the working class.



EFF national leadership addressing the crowd. Secretary-General Marshall Dlamini is expected to deliver the main speech

THE ANTI-CAPITALIST STRUGGLE AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST GLOBAL WARMING AND AGAINST VIRAL PANDEMICS ARE ONE STRUGGLE

Climate activist Bill McKibben has remarked that “the war waged by fossil capital, which kills through the medium of the atmosphere, reaps its first victims among ‘those who have done the least to cause the crisis’ – poor people in the global South.” Equally, in the case of COVID-19, most of its victims will be those who have done the least to cause the crisis.

The key underlying cause of the coronavirus pandemic is the capitalist system and its relentless pursuit of growth. Seventeenth-century British philosopher John Locke was among the first to provide capitalism with a rationale for attacking the natural world when he advocated expropriation (that is, privatization) of the common land, leading to the local fencing-off of vast tracts of village lands and their conversion to private holdings. Impoverished peasants then drifted in their masses to cities and became industrial workers.

But it didn't end there. Locke's philosophy cleared the way for the assault on the rest of the world through colonisation. According to Locke, “Land that is left wholly to Nature, that hath no improvement of Pasturage, Tillage, or Planting, is called, as indeed it is, Waste; and we shall find the benefit of it amount to little more than nothing.” And so, the capitalists of Britain and Europe saw it as part of their civilising mission to raid the lands of Africa and America in order to “improve them through pasturage, tillage and planting.”

Now, in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the relentless pursuit of capitalist profit-making is leading to planetary deforestation of crisis proportions. According to Andreas Malm, “in the new millennium, it is the production of commodities that chews up tropical forests. No more than four commodities – beef, soybean, palm oil and wood products ... accounted for four tenths of the dramatically sped-up tropical deforestation between 2000 and 2011.” (From his book, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-first Century*. [2020] London: Verso).

And deforestation, in turn, is an engine not only of biodiversity-loss, but also of zoonotic spill-over (that is, where pathogens are transmitted from animals to humans). To quote Malm:

When roads are cut through tropical forests, patches cleared, outposts placed deeper in the interior, humans come in contact with all the teeming life forms hitherto left on their own.

People raid or occupy spaces where pathogens dwell in the greatest plenitude. The two parties stage their most frequent encounters along the edges of fragmented forests, where the contents of the woods can slip out and meet the extremities of the human economy; and, as it happens, generalists like mice and mosquitos, with a knack for serving as ‘bridge hosts’, tend to flourish in those zones.”

The hotspots of zoonotic spill-over are the hotspots of deforestation.

And this, in brief, provides the key insight into the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic. It also accounts for other recent viral disasters afflicting humanity, such as Ebola and MERS.

We live in times when the mass of the world's citizenry live in unsafe, precarious conditions, with limited access to healthcare, and living in overcrowded slums and refugee camps.

These conditions are a direct result of the capitalist system – of neoliberal austerity measures, which is a root cause of the vulnerability to capitalist-induced zoonotic-spill-over.



Public health interventions

For this reason, it is not enough for the Left to demand such things as an end to austerity-measures, an increased tax on the wealthy, equitable access to vaccines, and so on. These are, of course, non-negotiable. But, as biologist Rob Wallace has said, “Let's stop the outbreaks from emerging in the first place!” In other words, we must also aim at the root cause.

Not only is capitalism driving the increased immiseration of the mass of the world's population, but it is also accelerating the demise of life on this planet. Global-warming and zoonotic spill-over are among the chief issues facing us now and into the immediate future.

In South Africa, the unemployment rate has been

worsening for some time, trending consistently upward, from around 22-23% in 2008/9 to over 30 percent in Q1 2020. In Q2 2020, unemployment (according to the expanded definition) had reached 42 percent. (from Helen Kean and Wendy Armstrong, August 2020)

Households and small self-employed businesses are on the brink of disaster, with government's relief measures doing little more than maintaining the mass of the poor at starvation levels.

SA billionaires, including the Oppenheimer and Rupert families, and Patrice Motsepe, each donated R1 billion towards the fight against coronavirus in South Africa. According to an article in *Business Insider* in March 2020, Motsepe had a net worth of roughly R26.35 billion ... If he donated R1 billion, he would have a net worth of R25.35 billion. That means he would be dropping from being the fifth richest man in South Africa to the sixth position, behind media mogul Koos Bekker of Naspers.

Should we be jumping for joy with gratitude?

Motsepe's brother-in-law is none other than SA president, Cyril Ramaphosa – himself no pauper, with an estimated net worth of R6.4 billion. Another of his brothers-in-law is Jeff Radebe, SA's minister of Energy. Which raises the question of who will benefit from government's decision to unbundle Eskom ...

Let the interlocking nature of SA's super wealthy elite NEVER be in doubt. NEVER be fooled by any perceived acts of generosity on their part. South Africa is not a democracy. We are not subject to the will of the people. We are an oligarchy, ruled over by a small group of people whose sole commitment is to the status quo. They will never act to imperil the current system which enriches them. A "donation" of R1 billion is a paltry sum, and should be greeted with disdain.

If we say that the struggle against global warming and viral pandemics is the struggle against capitalism, what we are in effect saying is that the struggle against capitalism is also the struggle against the global oligarchy – the super-rich beneficiaries of the system which consigns the mass of working people across the globe into dispossessed victims.



SELLING OFF THE FAMILY JEWELS

President Ramaphosa's, economic reconstruction and recovery plan will not lead to reconstruction, nor will it lead to recovery. Strange, how the ANC tends to rehash policies dressing these up in new garb and presenting this as a new policy. In 1999 the minister of Public Enterprises, Jeff Radebe, was given the job of speeding up the privatisation of state-owned-entities to help in reducing government debt that stood at R377 billion.

Now 20 years later, this initiative is on the table again. Is this a case of old wine in new bottles? This was initially part of the ANC's Growth, Economic and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic strategy at the time. It is again being rehashed as part of the government's plan to alleviate the growing debt burden that will have escalated close to R4 trillion, or 81.8% of GDP by the end of this fiscal year.

The economy is expected to contract by 7.8% and the outlook for 2021 looks depressing. Job losses have become an everyday occurrence. Factories and local plants (Bridgestone) are closing. With the pandemic taking its toll on workers, the economic situation is becoming more like the 1930's depression.

According to Stats SA, the Gross Domestic

(GDP) fell by just over 16% between the first and second quarters of 2020, giving an annualised growth rate of -51%.

Part of the solution the ANC government proposes is to renege on the three-year agreement in the wage bill by the public sector. Unions are already gearing up for a massive fight on wage increases. As result of lay-offs and work-without pay due to the pandemic, workers are hard-pressed to make ends meet. For the government, the fiscus is all that matters – in the meanwhile, the fiscus is at the crossroads.

With the latest downgrade by Moody's and Fitch ratings agencies, the economy will be seriously impacted, with the poor coming under severe stress. Businesses will come under more strain that will culminate in more job losses.

Further, reprioritisation of the fiscus and the concomitant implementation of an austerity agenda have meant cuts in expenditure on education, health and social services.

As a result of all of the above and the neoliberal agenda, the following is on the cards;

1. The unbundling of ESKOM and the increased privatisation of electricity

2. Certain rail lines are to be privatised (PRASA)

Other state assets up for grabs are SAA (Airways), TELKOM (Telecommunications), and DENEL (Munitions)

SELLING OFF THE FAMILY JEWELS

The present SA government is not interested in liberating its people from the yoke of poverty, inequality and joblessness. Its actions are geared to maintaining the status quo, the same order that existed under apartheid. The rate of unemployment is steadily increasing and there is an inability to free particularly the youth from the quagmire of the deepening economic crisis.

SA is bent on privatising its SOE. Intermittent

utterances by the ANC-led government leaders, particularly its Ministers of Finance as well as the presidents of the country, have openly declared that privatisation of state assets is the way to alleviate the economic crisis. In 1994, Mandela appointed Stella Sigcau as Minister-in-Charge of Privatisation and later, Minister Jeff Radebe was appointed under the Mbeki government. Lately, this job has been left to the Minister of Public Enterprises, Pravin Gordhan.

Three major companies sold to private investors bear testimony fiasco created - Iscor, is a case in point – sold in 2002 to Anglo-American and the Mittal family.

The repercussions of the sale have led to massive company closures and job losses.

What has been the result of privatisation? Job losses, rising costs of produce and ser-

vices and making the majority even poorer. Privatising or what is euphemistically renamed as “Restructuring” of PRASA will, for instance, lead to increased rail tariffs and more job losses. So too, will be the Restructuring (privatising) of SAA, the unbundling of ESKOM and the restructuring of other SOEs.

Privatisation will lead to mass retrenchments, a health system severely stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the betrayal for the right to free compulsory education for the majority. The public sector wage constraints proposed by the government has entrenched the neoliberal policies of government despite proposed protests by the unions.

The private sector is in the business of increasing profits and minimising outlay. This entails cutting costs and therefore decreasing the number of available jobs.

What does the economy need? SA needs a transition to a socialist economy – not a profit-driven economy but an economy driven by the people for peoples power.

