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South Africa: A Fragile State?

Over the previous decades rapid urbanisation has led Helen Zille on occasion to refer to learners from the Eastern Cape, relocating to the Western Cape, as refugees. More than a million people have flocked to the cities and in particular to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape. Most of the people were in search of better living conditions and or adequate schooling for their children.

The government has failed to deliver adequate housing, and this has caused the proliferation of squatter camps all over the country. These shanty-towns characterised by improvised structures made of mud, wood or corrugated iron, mostly lack basic services such as piped water, sanitation and electricity. Informal settlements in South Africa stem from a combination of factors such as rapid urbanisation, unaffordable housing, unemployment, and inequality.

These areas are normally in unhealthy, bad, perilous surroundings prone to annual flooding and are a distinct fire hazard. In fact, much like Canada and Australia that have their fire seasons, so we have the fire and flooding seasons in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), normally in the areas of the poor.

With dramatic changes in climatic conditions, areas such as the Nelson Mandela Metropole and in the Eastern Cape, more broadly have been hard hit. Local government seems incapable of rendering aid and assistance. Constant and regular power outages and the infrequency of water provision are a continual problem. Recently, we have had up to three days at a time without water or electricity or both. It appears that ageing infrastructure is a cause of many of our problems. Incompetent authorities add to the

frustration of the residents.

Countless families have been displaced from their homes. The absence of suitable land for adequate housing has resulted in a quarter of South Africa's urban population living in these squatter camps. The poor have thus to live in areas that lack basic amenities including proper roads, storm water systems and sanitation. In recent times, shantytowns have developed along floodplains such as in Lapland, Kariega. After a flood in this area some years ago, the people in that area moved to higher ground. Attempts to move them back to the floodplain were made during driving rain. This was averted but eventually the people were resettled in the floodplain area.

The area of Veeplaats and Missionvale are areas that are a constantly flooded. Living within areas demarcated as flood lines can be very dangerous. More land and planned adequate housing must be provided for all the citizens of our country.

In most areas such as the Western Cape, Nelson Mandela Metro and Ethekewini lessons from previous floods have not been learnt and steps have not been taken so that the poor are merely moved to safer areas in times of crises. No forward planning is ever done and urban planning with sustainable solutions is not on the agenda of municipalities.

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Roads are in a parlous state. Most roads are pock-marked with potholes as heavy vehicles, not suited for these fragile roads, and floods cause damage to the roads. Household rubble and garbage have become a health hazard in the townships. Paper and plastic in the cities seem to be part of the vegetation. Cities have just become filthy.

The mismanagement of resources that has led to ineffective governance added to corruption and political instability has seen nine executive mayors in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropole since 2015, none of whom has completed their full term. Recently, the Executive Mayor and Deputy Mayor have swapped jobs – no reasons were given for the swap.

The former Mayor of Ethekwini and 20 others appeared in the Durban Magistrates Court for fraud and corruption. The former Buffalo City (East London) Mayor was charged with fraud and corruption. In Tshwane, administrative capital of South Africa, we have had eight mayors within the last ten years.

Gary van Niekerk, the immediate former Mayor of Gqeberha still faces allegations of fraud after he was alleged to have used council funds to employ a lawyer to defend his previously held position as a Speaker. Gqeberha also finds itself in crisis as residents become impatient with regular electricity outages, failing, and ageing infrastructure. Blocked stormwater drains that were allegedly the cause of the flooding in June and again in October occurred under the watch of these officials. The tourism industry is in crisis because of this mismanagement.

UNEMPLOYMENT IN SA

The average unemployment rate in developed countries (G7) is 4,3%. Compare this to South Africa's 32.1% in the third quarter of 2024.

The unemployment rate for the following countries are tabulated as follows (population in brackets):

Netherlands 3.7% (17.9 million), Australia 4.1% (26.6 million), United States 4.1% (334.9 million), United Kingdom 4.3% (68.3 million) New Zealand 4.8% (5.2 million), Japan 2.4% (125.1 million), China 5.1% (1.412 billion),

The total labour force in Cuba is expected to be 5.24 million people in 2024, with an employment rate of 100%.

The unemployment rate in South Africa has been above 20% since 2000. The economy is not growing fast enough to create enough jobs for young people. The population has increased from 47 million in 2000 to 64 million in 2024. Youth unemployment has increased to a whopping 60.8% for job seekers between the ages of

15 – 24.

The unemployment rate for “Blacks” is at 36.6% and the rate for “Whites” at 7.9%. This is of course, as a result of the legacy of the apartheid regime. The expanded unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2024 was at 42.6%.

The reality of the South African economy remains dire. The growth rate is far from the much-needed 6% required in order to achieve an unemployment rate of less than 5%.

The country's GDP growth rate for the second quarter of 2024 was a dismal 0.4%, far from the robust growth we need to address our deep-seated socio-economic problems.

The youth unemployment statistics are a recipe for disaster. The third quarter of 2024 results show that the total number of unemployed youth stood at 4,8 million. The slow growth rate and the high levels of inequality further exacerbate the unemployment crisis.

According to the second-quarter data for 2024, the youth unemployment rate remains astronomically high, with individuals aged 15 - 24 facing an unemployment rate of 60.8%, while those aged 25 - 34 grapple with a rate of 41.7%.

These figures underscore the severe challenges facing young people in their quest for employment, further entrenching South Africa's socioeconomic problems. Whilst the national unemployment rates are alarming, the real concern is that over half of the youth are unemployed.

As the unemployment rate among young South Africans continues to rise, the social consequences become harder to ignore. Experts warn that if no action is taken to address these issues, the country could face widespread social unrest. With over half of the youth population unable to find jobs, the sense of hopelessness is deepening. If these trends persist, South Africa may face an increasingly volatile situation where the frustrations of the unemployed boil over into societal disruption.

Failure to find and create jobs could lead to social unrest nationwide.

Municipalities are generally dysfunctional. All over the country, grass verges are overgrown, stormwater drains are inadequate, roads are not maintained, regular power outages and crises of water provision in SA abound. The National Health Insurance (NHI) cannot get off the ground, public hospitals are understaffed and under-resourced and the less said about our public schooling system the better.

Are we living in a Failed State? Given the realities as stated, the answer to this vexed question must be a resounding, YES!!!

THE ROLE OF NON-TRANSFORMATIONAL DEMANDS

In official circles, the following statistic is considered good news: the country's unemployment rate has improved in the third quarter from 33.5% to 32.1%.

To give this some context, in the same period the UK's unemployment rate *worsened* to 4.3%.

The micro improvement in our country's unemployment rate is attributed by Ed Stoddard in his Daily Maverick article on 12 November, to "cautiously rebounding business confidence under the Government of National Unity (GNU) and Eskom's vastly improved performance." (This same Eskom is busy proposing a tariff increase for 2025 of a whopping 36.1%!)

Under the current regime, the very best we could hope for is an improvement in the unemployment rate to a percentage-level in the low twenties. Revenues from mining, which is one of our country's main sources of income and employment are declining; jobs, particularly in the productive sector are everywhere on the planet being automated away, with AI expected to accelerate the trend; and sustainable economic growth has become a pipe dream.

Because capitalism covers the globe, we in SA are not unique. As part of the Global South, we all suffer the same disabilities—stagnation and poverty; entrapment in a role within the capitalist system which massively disadvantages us; and little hope of any significant improvement in the future. As the system continues to inexorably siphon off the wealth produced from below to the elite owners of capital at the top, we are seeing a rapid slide into fascism. The main reasons for this are increasing pressure from below for a more equitable deal, and concomitant repression from ruling class quarters.

In the news recently, we were horrified to witness the barbaric response of our government to the plight of several thousand zama zamas trapped underground in an abandoned mine in NW Province. Why do people become zama zamas? A simple answer is because to survive we need money—wages! Millions of people in South Africa don't have money—or at least, don't have a regular, steady source of a money-income, let alone a liveable one. And, given the structure of our economy and society, there is little-to-no prospect of this changing, certainly not under the current dispensation. So, people risking life and limb to extract bits of leftover

gold from dangerous abandoned mines are driven to do so by sheer desperation.

The challenge confronting virtually all countries with a history of (settler) colonialism is how to break free from the subordinate role of dependent suppliers of raw materials and cheap labour decreed for them by the capitalist system. Our country's history is emblematic of the trajectory of (under)development in most of the previously colonised world. In pre-colonial times, people in the Global South were self-sufficient – they didn't need money to survive. With colonialism, they were conquered, dispossessed, and subjected to exploitation (to put it in a nutshell). Independence amounted to self-rule, not self-sufficiency. Colonial domination morphed into neo-colonial domination, with capitalist predation the ongoing, underlying thread.

The so-called zama zamas are criminalised. They will be subjected to aggravated persecution for the crime of seeking to survive. No doubt, if any of them (and their families) are deemed under existing legislation to be "illegal foreigners/immigrants," then they will satisfy the lust of the fascists and reactionaries in our society to kick them out of the country.

Left wing activists across the globe need to engage in daily struggle, whether or not such struggle is transformational. To take a leaf from the book of the late socialist, Ellen Meiksins Wood (1997):

. . . [T]here is a great deal to be done short of a socialist transformation . . . there really is no reason to place limits on class struggle in pursuit of social protection and workplace advances, and they should be pursued as militantly as possible—both to achieve immediate reforms and to enhance class consciousness and organization for more long-term transformational struggles.

In other words, we need to follow a transitional programme, as described by Trotsky (1938):

It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the

socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.

To take up the point made in the Meiksins Wood quote above (that there is a great deal to be done short of a socialist transformation) there are countless examples of where this could be productively undertaken. We just highlight one example, here: that of pit toilets in schools. Shamefully, this should have been a priority issue on the agenda of the first "democratic" government in 1995. Over the years, not only have students at the affected schools had to continue to put up with the unsanitary conditions entailed, but there have even been deaths of young students. Yet, as we approach the end of 2024, pit

toilets are still a reality.

Newly-appointed minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube has boldly declared that she is "deeply committed to closing all pit toilets in our schools and ensuring that every pupil and teacher has access to safe, dignified sanitation facilities." Her deadline for the total eradication of pit toilets in our schools is 31 March 2025.

It is going to be up to progressive organisations, especially those in communities directly affected, to hold her to this commitment, and to ensure that the deadline is met. Such organisations should go further, and target areas such as all school infrastructure and safety, and should raise and drive achievement of the legitimate demands for change in our schools.

This could be done under the banner of "Let us live for our children!"

HOW CAPITALISM IS KILLING THE EARTH

A major take-away from last year's COP28 meeting was that all countries agreed to "transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems."

Now, 12 months later at COP29, there is pessimism, since, whatever action was taken in the interim period, emissions of greenhouse gases have nevertheless risen by almost 1%



**Thawing permafrost on Herschel Island, off the coast of Yukon, Canada.
(Photograph: Boris Radosavljevicig)**

The critical index to avoid climate catastrophe is 1.5°C beyond which overall global temperature must not rise. The 1.5°C target is a global average surface warming goal that countries agreed to try to stay below in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The goal is to limit the increase in global temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century.

According to experts, if this is to be achieved, then emissions need to fall by 42% by the end of this decade.

What are the chances?

Consider this:

“The US military is the world’s largest single polluter, yet it’s exempt from emissions targets. B-52s are circling the globe, burning more fuel in a mission than a driver would in a century, yet they preach climate action while ignoring the biggest carbon bombs in their backyard.” (Gidha Fakhry, X, 11/11/2024)

“It would take 8000 years for one car driver to emit the amount of carbon that the B52 fleet emits in one day of flying around in circles, and 8000 years for the human race to recover from one day of B52s dropping their nuclear payload.” (Jon Harding, X, 11/11/2024)

“Incoming president Donald Trump has pledged to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement and ‘drill, baby, drill’ for more oil and gas.” (Poynting and Rannard, 18/11/2024)

To serve US business and military needs, Andreas Malm (April, 2024) tells us, “. . . more pipelines, more rigs, more platforms and terminals and mines [are being] planned and built, and the more of them there are, the more difficult it becomes to cut emissions, the more fixed capital is sunk into the ground, the greater the imperative to maintain it and defend it against any transition away from fossil fuels.”

Malm (Ibid) also discloses that “. . . corporations and states are forging ahead with new oil and gas projects in ever-growing volumes. The country leading the expansion is, of course, the US; second on the list is Guyana, but that is only because Exxon Mobil has found its most recent treasure trove in its waters.”

According to a Google search on 20 November: “The rainy season in 2024 brought heavy rainfall to the Sahel region, leading to flooding in Sudan, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The global

mean surface air temperature from January to September 2024 was 1.54 °C above the pre-industrial average, making it on track to be the hottest year on record.”

Most recently, on 29 October 2024, we saw storms bringing over a year’s worth of rain to several areas of eastern Spain, causing more than 200 deaths and untold damage to property.

Coal is a leading source of global warming. South Africa is the continent’s leading producer of coal. It is estimated that “air pollution from Eskom’s coal power stations alone is responsible for approximately 2,200 deaths annually, as well as more than 94,000 cases of asthma symptom days in children; more than 9,500 cases of bronchitis in children and almost 2,800 cases of chronic bronchitis in adults, 2,400 hospital admissions and 1 million lost working days a year.” (Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, October 2023).

In the short term, too many jobs are reliant on the coal mining industry, including energy generation, for SA to make a decisive transition to renewable sources. Unless there is significant social pressure on the government and the coal industry, either nothing will change or the rate of change will be inadequately slow.

The question of “green socialism” needs to get high up onto the global left wing agenda with utmost urgency. The struggle against global warming has to be an inextricable part of the anti-capitalist struggle. Leaving the solution to bodies like the UN (with its COP process) and the G20 group of countries has proven ineffectual, since they largely represent (or at least, respect) capitalist class interests, and, of course, capitalism is about favouring profit over planet.

The Stilfontein Debacle

The Police Unit, Vala Umgodi, (freely translated – *Close the hole*). is supposedly leading the attack on “illegal mineworkers” at the abandoned mines at Stilfontein. These shafts, 10 and 11 are on land illegally taken from the indigenous people in what is now known as North West Province. Stilfontein is a mining town located in the Klerksdorp-Orkney-Stilfontein-Hartebeesfontein (KOSH) area, which is part of the Witwatersrand gold mining region. The town was established in 1949 as a residential centre for the Hartebeesfontein, Buffelsfontein, and Stilfontein gold mines.

There can be about 6000 abandoned or unused mines in SA. The government has taken an uncompromising stance, cutting off food, water and medical supplies from these miners.

Many argue that the government’s failure to curb the rampant unemployment has forced citizens in this position of “*illegal mining*” and is the cause of many of the ills facing the country especially in the rural areas.

People are just hungry with the official unemployment rate in the North West at 54%, people have turned to mining in these abandoned shafts. It is not as if the gold and other minerals are just readily available, a whole process of mining and refinement have to be processed. The North West province holds the distinction of having the worst economic imbalance.

The South African legislature has developed mechanisms to promote sound management of mine closure and rehabilitation by mining companies. In most cases this rehabilitation and closure certificates have not been obtained by mining companies, hence abandoned and unused mines are a source of income for the unemployed.

Police Minister, Senzo Mchunu posted on X that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has been deployed at Stilfontein. The Defence Force in addition to the police have seized control of the abandoned openings at the mine shafts.

Minister in the Presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni’s utterances that the government “will smoke out” illegal miners in Stilfontein goes against the grain. This is reminiscent of Jimmy Kruger’s “his death leaves me cold” statement on Steve Biko’s murder in detention in 1977. How insensitive can you get? Cutting off the food, water and medication and “smoking out” miners is a crime against humanity. How callous can one get?

We totally reject the concept that miners eking out a living on the abandoned mines are considered to be classified as “*illegal miners*”. It is tragic that unemployed and impoverished citizens should be classified as *such*.

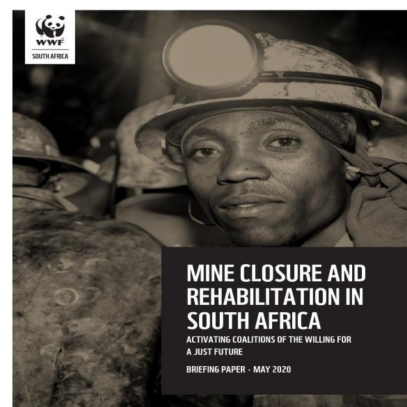
All these miners have a low level of skills. Most of the miners have done nothing else but work underground in the mines.

Strangely - the owners of the Stilfontein mines have never been disclosed.

Police say that they stand guard at the entrance of the shafts and arrest miners as they emerge from the mines - they say some of the miners are dangerous as they are often armed and are known to fight violent turf battles between rival criminal networks. Because of this the police are wary of entering the mine shafts as it may be unsafe.

Relatives and friends are anxiously waiting at the openings of mine shafts for news of their loved ones. Miners who appear healthy are arrested.

The Auditor General’s 2022 report found that the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) was not effectively managing the rehabilitation of mines. The report noted that the department’s efforts were not addressing the environmental, social, and health impacts of the mines.



We call on the authorities to address the root of the problem of the poor: unemployment and inequality.

Let the mineral wealth of the country be used to create jobs and end unemployment. Free education, healthcare, transport and housing for all close to their places of work are needed.

Should Namibians Vote?

Shaun Whittaker and Harry Boesak -

4 October 2024

The crisis of liberal democratic politics is on full display in Namibia. The political parties participating in the upcoming November national elections all appear to be centre-right organisations with insignificant differences among them. The elections are by and large going to be about the

Swapo is heavily divided and limps on. It has a dismal record of high unemployment and lack of housing. That party only managed to construct less than 22 000 houses in three decades and it is therefore difficult to believe the talk about natural resources beneficiation and youth empowerment. Maybe it is unsurprising as it never had a culture of intellectualism. Not to mention the rampant corruption and widespread nepotism. The Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) persists with centre-right policies. It is in favour of austerity measures (such as fiscal discipline) which result in social disintegration. In this context, youth entrepreneurship and home ownership are impossible. That party also erroneously suggests that short-term job opportunities are a youth employment guarantee scheme.

The Landless Peoples' Movement (LPM) refers vaguely to the state of the economy and food insecurity (no mention of food sovereignty or the agrarian question). The catchy slogan of "one constituency one factory" of the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) explains nothing and is hardly a serious solution for unemployment. Swanu has openly shifted to the right-wing with support for the death penalty and homophobia. The desperation of parliamentary politics leads to opportunism. The Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters (NEFF) and the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement likewise do not seem to have clear political identities. Symbolism without substance is meaningless. What is glaringly absent from the public discourse is a left-wing conversation about a wealth tax, a proper job guarantee program, food sovereignty, social housing, and the neoliberal pension disaster. Big business continues to make all the important decisions while those political actors clamouring for parliament are lost in tangential discussions. This version of democracy has nothing to do with power to the people.

If anything, the dominance of the capitalist market in Namibia leads to permanent social breakdown. And western imperialism ensures that our surplus value is transferred to the Global North or invested in financial speculation. That is why the goal of debt reduction is a deliberate fabrication as it enables the absorption of the surplus. The Egyptian economist, Samir Amin, writes in "The Long Revolution of the Global South" that imperialism holds the monopolies in natural resources, financial flows, new technologies, communication and weapons of mass destruction. The only option for the Global South is therefore to delink from the global system of monopoly capitalism. The latter led to lumpen-development in the periphery and the dramatic rise in survivalist activities (the so-called informal economy). The peripheries have turned into a "zone of storms" with instability and permanent rebellion. Electoral democracy became a farce and thus there must be an increase in the struggle for the real democratisation of society. The low-intensity democracy means that people can vote but it is relatively unimportant. In fact, the State in the periphery is a "bad comprador administration," not a real State. This represents the failure of capitalism in the Global South which cannot offer anything else but abandoned rural areas and overcrowded urban slums.

Instead of exporting to the core, the peripheral countries must focus on autocentric development which would prioritise domestic development. In a recent blog "Delinking and Degrowth," the Australian economist, William Mitchell, maintains that so-called free trade or global competitiveness is simply a way to channel surplus to the Global North. Nations should rather use employment guarantees to achieve full employment and take work to rural areas. The comprador administration serves the interests of foreign capital and perpetuates the dependence on the Global North. What is required

today is delinking for the Global South and degrowth for the Global North. The ultimate challenge is to overcome the logic of capitalism while keeping the mode of production going.

Despite the strategic importance of the critical minerals of our continent, we are locked into the bottom of the global value chain. The point that the Global South is caught in a deliberate structural trap is emphasised by the Tunisian intellectual, Fadhel Kaboub, in an interview “Africa is DESIGNED to stay underdeveloped by neo-colonialism.” The global system of extraction makes it certain that we cannot invest in health, education, food, energy, manufacturing, etc. We are to apparently remain a place for cheap raw material and there is therefore no transfer of new technology to us.

Needless to say, all these kinds of discussions are completely absent in the run up to our national elections. This says a great deal about the limitations of the political parties in the country. So, in the final analysis, Namibian citizens should go and vote against the unbridled corruption. However, they must also organise a general strike for a wealth tax. Only mass action will bring about fundamental change.



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Address all correspondence to the secretariat

Michael Steenveld

071 645 1590

mikesteenveld2020@gmail.com

Visit us at: www.newunitymovement.org.za