

Editorial



Protests against the global economic crisis brought about by neo-liberal economic policies have become a daily occurrence worldwide. Trevor Ngwane argues that class analysis is necessary for understanding the economic crisis as other approaches divide the working class into the poor, hungry, jobless, homeless, landless, waterless, illiterate and sick. However, class analysis enables one to deal with problems of capitalist profit-making. For example, South Africa's service delivery protests needs class analysis. That way, the importance of solidarity between classes and civil society is highlighted.

Bhabhali Ka Maphikela Nhlapo argues that the market fundamentalist argument that South Africa was shielded from the global economic crisis by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) strategy is wishful thinking. Comparing South Africa (a developing country) to Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain (developed countries) is unworkable because of different contexts.

It is strange that market fundamentalists ignore the crisis already facing the country as seen in high inequality, poverty and unemployment. He concludes on the necessity of more state control in addressing the crisis like in China and Germany.

State surrendering to market forces is not always taken by the working class and civil society with hands down, as seen in recent strikes in Nigeria. Yusha'u Muttaqa and Tahir Hashim trace the origins of the petrol subsidy in the West African nation since its inception, surprisingly by a military junta, and the attempted withdrawal under a civilian government. However, the alliance between labour and civil society rejects the withdrawal. They argue that government is corrupt and public servants earn obscene salaries. So why take away the little that citizens are enjoying.

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) met in Johannesburg with support from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, Police, Prisons and Civil Rights Union and Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union. The four unions called on Cosatu and other affiliates to join the confederation, which is committed to a 'revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.'

South Africa's call centres promise a pie in the sky to many new entrants on the job market. But the moment they start working the young workers realise that they were promised hot air. The job contract is not there; there are targets to be met; then there is open stealing of sales; and if

you want to complain you are told the door is open. This is the experience that is shared by a Johannesburg call centre worker, Zimkhita Mbhele.

Local government call centres are meant to create jobs for young workers and assist in the efficient running of municipalities like the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality. However, they are also places where frustrations run high, writes Babalwa Magoqwana. Created under government's people first policy, the centres are more 'managers of illusion' than customer/citizen satisfaction. The poor management of municipalities, such as the bungling of bills at Johannesburg Metro angered the city's residents who then vented their fury in telephone calls they made to the call centres. This wore down the workers to the extent that they simply had no energy to go to work the following day. So they reported sick. To add to this, few of the workers get promoted and leave for better opportunities.

Fracking in the Karoo is more likely to destroy the environment and farming than bring benefits to the local communities, writes David Fig. Once the extraction of the gas is done and the companies move to other areas, the damage to the environment cannot be reversed. The beneficiaries are multinational companies that will make money from the extracted gas. As the process uses lots of water it is a puzzle where this will come from. What about contamination of water sources by fracking? The government should do a cost-benefit analysis before awarding licenses or simply ban fracking, as has happened in other countries.

Although the green economy can create much needed jobs, are biofuels really green and will they benefit economies of poor provinces like the Eastern Cape? Michelle Pressend writes that a policy debate is needed on the issue and that trade unions should be involved so that the jobs created by biofuel projects are decent jobs.

COP17 was dubbed by activists as the 'conference of polluters', as the developed countries dilly-dallied on a new agreement after the expiry of the Kyoto Protocol, writes Patrick Bond. By so doing no commitments were made at the Durban conference in 2011. Civil society was a small crowd and local communities were largely not involved. The trade unions were interested, but their commitment to the climate change cause, doubtful. This is a missed opportunity not only to call for climate change, but for a transition from capitalism to socialism.

Elijah Chiwota, Editor

The South African Labour Bulletin's mission is to:

- provide information and stimulate critical analysis and debate on issues and challenges that confront workers, their organisations and their communities; and
- communicate this in an accessible and engaging manner.

In so doing the SALB hopes to advance progressive politics, promote social justice and the interests of the working class.

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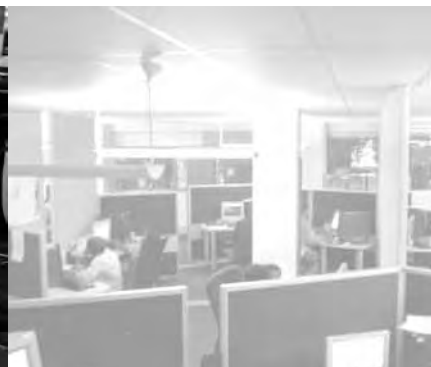
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Industrial policy, labour and jobs: Wither biofuels?

Green economy is a new buzzword, but can the term be used to describe biofuels?

Michelle Pressend writes on whether industrial biofuels can lead to the development of South Africa and how trade unions and workers are involved.

The Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) promotes a number of 'green' and energy saving industries. The New Growth Path framework, released in 2010 by the Department of Economic Development, also strongly supports the 'green economy' as an opportunity to seize the potential of new economies. The 'green economy' is touted to have the potential to create 300,000 additional direct jobs by 2020. While the economic and job creation potential may sound astounding an important question to ask is how green is green in terms of environmental integrity, social equity and sustainable decent jobs?

Biofuels also known as agro-fuels, include ethanol produced from sugar cane, sugar beet, maize, sorghum, and other crops, or biodiesel produced from oil-bearing seeds such as jatropha, palm, rapeseed (canola), sunflower, and soya. They can also be produced by second-generation plant inedible material where the useful sugars are tapped from tough lignin and cellulose.

In 2007 the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) released the draft biofuels strategy that proposed that by 2013 at least 4.5% of South Africa's fuel should be supplied by biofuels. The main justification for supporting agro-fuels

development is job creation and the need for diverse and renewable energy sources. Furthermore, the draft strategy emphasised the use of 'under-utilised' land for biofuel production, particularly in the former 'homelands' of Transkei and Ciskei.

To date, the development of the biofuels industry has been slow because of the lack of a regulatory environment to facilitate mandatory blending. The DME released the 'draft regulations regarding the mandatory blending of biofuels with petrol and diesel' in 2011 under the Petroleum Products Act of 1977 for public comment. Proposed regulations for mandatory blending, which entails 5% for biodiesel and 2% for bioethanol may provide the incentive needed to implement the various biofuels initiatives.

Since job creation and rural development are key pillars of the development of the biofuels sector, labour also plays an important role. Key issues to respond to are labour conditions, production models, the feasibility of developing large-scale agro-fuels industries, and issues related to rural development.

In terms of industrial development, the biofuels sector has most of the ingredients for infant industry support. For example, feedstocks should be supplied by local producers and

imports are excluded unless under certain conditions. There are also exemptions of the fuel levy – 50% for biodiesel and 100% for ethanol, financial support mechanisms for a 'break-even price' if the price oil goes below US\$45 per barrel and mandatory blending of biofuels with petrol and diesel. Government agencies including Transnet, Eskom and the Department of Defence who are large consumers of fuel are expected to support the initiatives.

The strategy further stresses that 'Government agencies should be urged to invest in projects that facilitate the development of this infant industry, particularly linked to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) participation and for higher risk projects supporting development of new crops on currently underutilised arable land.'

The strategy promotes financial support only to previously disadvantaged persons from former homelands. It also says that biofuel producers licenses will only be granted if a commitment is made in writing that feedstock will be sourced from emerging farmers on underutilised land.

In addition the IPAP underscores that the economic impact of accelerated development in the biofuels sector is 'expected to lead to the creation of between 100,000 and 150,000 direct jobs over the

next decade. Moreover, investment of approximately R5-billion can be expected over the decade. This will mean that 10,000 to 15,000 jobs are created a year in the biofuels sector.

The IPAP admits that as a relatively new sector there were complex regulatory barriers, which need to be finalised. The global economic crisis and the fall in oil prices have reduced the commercial viability of some investments and, more generally, has negatively affected investor sentiment. The IPAP expresses that national debates have tended to focus on the food versus fuel arguments while ignoring the dynamic nature of agriculture, and the potential to create biofuels from current crop surpluses.

Despite these challenges the IPAP points out that 'South Africa has significant potential to develop a commercially viable biofuels sector notwithstanding its water-poor status.' The industrial policy

emphasises the biofuels sector's strong linkages to agriculture, manufacturing and distribution and the potential to create labour-intensive agricultural jobs. In addition, second-generation biofuel technology will also contribute to meeting renewable energy targets in a sustainable manner.

At present the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and Central Energy Fund (CEF) are the main investors in the sector. The projects in which the CEF and/or the IDC are involved in are:

1. Hoedspruit in Mpumalanga growing sugar cane and sweet sorghum.
2. Cradock in the Eastern Cape growing sugar beet.
3. Makhathini in KwaZulu-Natal growing sugar cane and cassava.
4. The IDC is also involved in projects in Pondoland (stretching across the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal

provincial borders) together with J&J Energy driving these.

5. The CEF were involved in a joint project with Sasol and Siyanda Biodiesel to produce biodiesel from soya, but the project is on hold.

BIOFUELS IN EC

The Eastern Cape (EC), which is the poorest province in South Africa, is targeted as the 'hot-spot' for biofuel initiatives. The province is underdeveloped, with high levels of unemployment and underemployment and a huge labour surplus. The total population in the EC is 6.65-million, of which about four million are of working age but in the first quarter of 2010 only 1.24-million people were employed. The EC is also common for mass out-migration. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the people employed in the EC.

Table 1: Employment by sector in the Eastern Cape, 2009 – 2010

Sector	2009 (Thousands)	2010 (Thousands)
Agriculture	82	61
Manufacturing	195	137
Mining and Utilities	7	4
Construction	88	106
Trade	315	298
Transport	67	73
Finance	107	113
Community and Social Services	304	328
Private Households	147	124
Total	1 312	1 244

Adapted from Edwards 2011 (Original Source: Stats SA (2010a: 4-9))

Edwards' expresses: 'The province's commercial agriculture (ostrich, sheep and fruit) is mostly white ownership and is located mostly in the western interior (mainly Cacadu District). The 61,000 people who receive some payment for work in agriculture are small in comparison to the 473,000 people engaged in subsistence farming. However,

subsistence farming is weak.'

At the Eastern Cape Job Summit in 2006, a commitment was made to agro-processing, forestry and biofuels projects, which had been set out in the Provincial Growth and Development Plan (PGDP) of 2004 and in the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) of 2006.

Given the high levels of subsistence farming in the province and the skewed land ownership, the EC is the ideal target for biofuels initiatives. While in principle government is committed to supporting emerging farmers it needs to assess the province's extension services, microcredit, assistance with sourcing inputs,

assistance with finding markets for excess produce, irrigation schemes, and securing safe non-genetically modified organisms (GMO) seed.

If the Massive Food Production Programme (MFPP) in the EC is anything to go by then the support may head for disaster. The MFPP provided genetically modified seeds to small-scale farmers, but most of the farmers ended up in debt and low production.

The Cradock Bio-Ethanol Production Facility is the IDC's and the CEF's flagship project for ethanol production. This is a joint project with the Agrarian Research and Development Agency (ARDA) to establish a R2-billion bio-ethanol plant in Cradock from sugar beet and grain sorghum. ARDA is a public entity owned by the Eastern Cape Rural Finance Corporation (ECRFC). According to ARDA, as part of the project, a Core Estate (6,000 ha of irrigation and 35,000 ha of veldt) is being established in the Great Fish River Valley with the support of the national Department of Rural Development and Land Reform.

According to ARDA 1,500 temporary jobs will be created in the construction phase. A further 170 permanent jobs are expected in the factory during the operational phase, and 1,200 jobs in transport, harvesting and ancillary industries. Then there are also downstream job opportunities.

Employment opportunities in agriculture involve sorghum production, possibly in the former Transkei and Ciskei. ARDA points out that initially, up to 81 000 tonnes of sorghum will be needed for the plant, providing an important market to local producers. For production in the Core Estate, existing jobs will be retained and introducing new labour-intensive crops and linked agro-industries has the potential of creating more jobs.

If 6,000 hectares of irrigation can be acquired in a three-year period, 2,000 ha in each year respectively,

this core estate will be able to provide 30% of the total feedstock needed for the plant. The other 70% will then be sourced from black and white commercial farmers already farming in the valley, where there is 32,000ha of irrigated farming. However, ARDA has to prove that it will be financially beneficial as the farmer's decision to provide feedstock is an economic one.

Besides obtaining land to produce feedstock, other challenges faced are developing partnerships with farmers and obtaining a permit for 1.25-million cubic metres of water from the Department of Water Affairs. The department also wants to charge the project industrial water tariffs instead of agricultural water tariffs because a non-food product is being produced.

UNION RESPONSES

Given the expectations of the biofuels industry from a job creation and rural development perspective some of the key trade union sectors that relate to biofuels, such as transport, energy, chemicals, food, manufacturing and construction, were interviewed to obtain the level of trade union engagement in the sector. Three unions were identified, and these were Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu), the Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers Union (Ceppwawu), and the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (Satawu).

Although trade unions have engaged in the industrial policy debates, they have not developed a position on biofuels as yet with the exception of Ceppwawu. Numsa is engaging on renewable energy at national level and held a workshop in February. Numsa has also established an economic commission at the regional level and an economic task team at the national level, which focuses on industrial policy.

The unions interviewed did not appear to be familiar with Cosatu's response to the Draft Biofuels

Strategy submitted by Cosatu's Parliamentary Office in 2007 to the DME. The response questions the assumptions about job creations, raised serious concerns that industry and investors are favoured as well as the concerns about resource implications of contesting land, water and utilising food products for exclusive industrial use.

In fact, Cosatu proposed 'A moratorium on further work on this strategy document, subject to a review of the process thus far and the inclusion of necessary stakeholders, including labour, Nedlac and the Department of Land Affairs and Provincial and Local Government...'

The unions said they have not been involved in biofuels discussions in the EC and would find value in setting up a forum for those involved in the supply chain. The IDC and the Eastern Cape Development Council (ECDC) did not invite unions to their meetings.

A major concern raised was the diversion of existing agriculture commodities to fuel crops. For example, Satawu pointed out that Cradock is known for ostrich farming and farmers may divert to fuel crops if it is deemed more profitable. Ceppwawu had similar doubts.

The trade unions said that the EC is already experiencing a situation where land is being taken away from crops to game farming. They pointed out that the game farms brought little direct benefit to local communities.

Concern was also raised about the growing shack dwellers due to migration from rural to urban areas due to low food production and unemployment. The notion of farm villages with schools, clinics, and libraries is no longer prominent. It was stressed that farms need to be productive in growing food to supply the country and the project should not undermine food production.

It was also pointed out that there appears to be a trend towards more casual and seasonal labour especially for farm workers. However, a project of this nature should focus on improving working conditions of farm workers. Satawu called for fair treatment of workers and more permanent jobs.

Gerry Motloheloa from the Cradock Advice Office said farm workers were extremely marginalised. In Middleburg the Southern Cape Land Committee (SCLC) facilitated farm worker committees, but there were no farmer committees in Cradock. There were problems in mobilising and organising farm workers who only sought help when their contracts were terminated.

Klerck and Naidoo's study on the minimum farm wages in the Marana, Nlambe and Sundays River municipalities in the western part of the province (within the Cacadu District Municipality), where most commercial agriculture in the EC is concentrated, revealed that EC farm workers, like most farm workers in the country, were highly exploited. Non-compliance with labour laws, authoritarian management, unpaid overtime, offensive language and threats of violence were common.

It was suggested that stronger engagement is required to obtain a deeper understanding on the disadvantages and what can be gained from the biofuels initiatives.

Government needed to see that current jobs were improved and sustainable. Agricultural development and beneficiation also required government support.

Based on the Cradock Project, 170 permanent jobs will be created at the factory level. These include jobs for skilled and unskilled workers. Furthermore, about 1,200 jobs will be created in transport, labour-intensive agriculture and other ancillary areas. These jobs require 20,000 hectares of cultivated land and huge amounts of water. If green development is



Government proposes that biofuels should supply 4.5% of country's needs.

meant to ensure environmental integrity, improve social equity and provide sustainable and decent jobs based on this study then industrial biofuels development in South Africa hardly seems to fit the criteria.

Therefore, the role and interventions of trade unions are vital in these developments and unions need to express what they feel about the introduction of biofuels. The critical comments by Cosatu on the biofuels strategy need to be revisited so that the position can be debated. Does Cosatu still have the same concerns? It also seems that trade

unions need to play a greater part in researching biofuels, or commissioning such research. Furthermore, the role of Cosatu-affiliated unions in organising farm workers and/or small subsistence farmers needs to be explored. **LB**

Michelle Pressend is an independent researcher and analyst on the political economy of trade, natural resources and climate change. This article is based on the research she did for the Labour Research Service. The research was supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung South Africa office.

Working at call centres:

Of lies and deceptions

Although working at call centres is a very attractive option for first-time job seekers from poor families, exploitation is also rife, writes **Zimkhita Mbhele**. She explains the precarious conditions of call centre workers from her working experience.

To young South Africans interested in getting a job after a week's training, call centres are the place to be. Highly recognised for creating jobs in our society, and a training ground for those interested in becoming call centre workers, this career path is seen as a cheaper option for those who cannot afford to continue with their studies after completing high school or matric. The recruiting agents for the call centres raise expectations by promising more than what the students ever imagined – the elusive first job.

GOINGS-ON WITH AGENTS

You read an advert saying '10 call centre workers are needed with or without experience'. Since South Africa has a high rate of unemployment, a lot of desperate young and old unemployed people, respond to the advert by calling the advertiser. To them this is an opportunity to financially help their families. But to their disappointment, the job seekers are told that they must be trained first before they can start work.

The training is not free and the agents for the call centres will charge different fees for the courses. The lowest fee is around R1,500. A job hunter has no money to throw

around the agents but is forced to pay because she is tired of being part of the furniture at home. Some even go to the loan shark for the money.

When you start and finish the course you are clueless on what you are learning. Although you grasp only the basics, they tell you that you are ready for a job placement. By then, you have no experience in handling calls and dealing with clients, using a computer. So you are surprised when the certificate is printed detailing that you learned call handling in-bound and out-bound, computer literacy, Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and data capturing. Yet you have never used a computer in your life!

If you ask questions, the agent tells you that what you are curious about is not important. You are reminded that your priority is on getting a job with a basic salary of R3,000 plus commission. Yes, this is true, for most of us desperate souls all we want is a job. So we are excited and can't wait to go home and break the good news. At home everybody is delighted by what the agent says, as it makes a lot of sense.

However, a big surprise awaits you when you get a job placement. The agent advises you not to start work before signing a contract, as you must know where you stand first with

your employer before starting on the job.

The employer brings you down to earth: there is no basic salary, you only get a commission. On top of that you are told that there is no contract before making sales and you have to prove that you can sell by reaching set targets. It is at that point that you will realise that you have just been fooled by the agent who played around with your desperation for a job.

Nevertheless, that does not demotivate you. Instead you want to give it a try. No one you know has died from trying. Isn't life all about trying? So you comfort yourself. This is also an opportunity to get that experience as employers are not interested in workers who are fresh from school.

You also motivate yourself: 'I can do this. I just need to be focused and put my mind and soul together. After all it's not that difficult to get two clients per day.'

On looking for clients, I discover how things have changed in South Africa. Everybody now has a mobile phone and some people spend most of their time in holiday resorts. Gone are the days when black people never went on holiday. When you start thinking of your target market you realise how the world has changed.

THE WORKPLACE

You are excited when you start work hoping to make many sales per day and telling yourself that you will beat the target. You make your first calls with this excitement and that is when you discover the different attitudes the customers have towards you. Some respect you while others do not want to talk to you the moment they hear that you are selling a product. 'Don't waste my time and yours' is the message you get. But you are not discouraged. You want to reach your daily target.

As you reach your weekly target of 10 customers you smile as you see your name going up the notice board. It means you have earned R1,000 as you get R100 per customer. You are further motivated to get more customers as it means more money. You make more calls and sell more products.

Month-end comes and your team leader calls for a meeting. You are smiling as you have made 45 sales. But the team leader tells you otherwise; you made only 18 sales. When you ask what happened to the 27 sales you are told you miscounted. A fellow worker advises you to check back with customers. When you call back, all the 45 customers confirm receipt of the product and tell you they are satisfied with it. You then inform the team leader about the customer responses. He then tells you that you have just broken company policy by confirming with the customers. In fact you could be fired and you receive a verbal warning never to do it again.

You sit down and add one and one together and you realise that your sales have just been stolen, right in front of your eyes and there is nothing you can do about it. Yet you still want the experience so you trek on. So for the love of experience you are being exploited hoping that probably in the future you will land a decent job that will give you a salary. You are at the call centre to get experience even if you use your own money for transport to get there. It is time to comfort yourself yet again as in life sometimes you have to start from somewhere; even below the ladder and go up step by step. Maybe it is also one of the ways to learn how to deal with problems you will face later in your work life.

CONCLUSION

Although the working conditions are bad and come as a shock to young workers, I still have huge expectations for my working day as I wake up every morning. But I have also learnt that sometimes what you expect is not what happens. In that case it means I have had to deal with disappointments as well. The realities at the call centres sometimes dampen the spirit of young workers who end up going to work not because they like the job but simply because the economic environment gives them no choice. **LB**

Zimkbita Mbhele works at a call centre in Johannesburg.

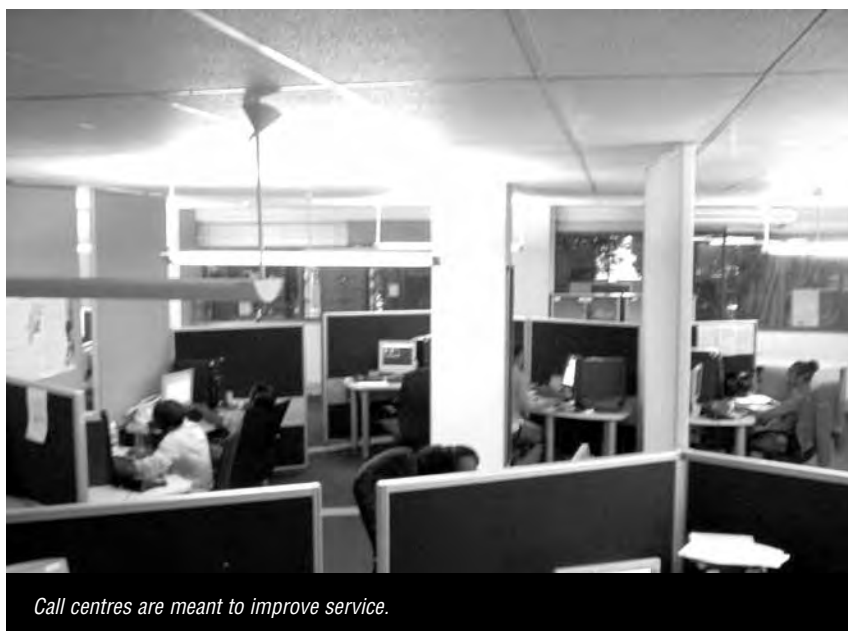
Local government call centres:

People first or managing illusions?

Who benefits from the services of the local government call centres? Is it the citizen/customer or municipal managers who want a public relations outfit to give a brave face to their bungling? There are no easy answers to these questions as there are many factors at play, writes **Babalwa Magoqwana**.

When South Africa shifted from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (Gear) from 1996 onwards, it adopted a market-oriented and lean state development agenda. This meant importing private sector business techniques supposedly to make the public sector efficient.

Influenced by the new public management (NPM) reforms, the South African government adopted a white paper in 1997 to restructure the public service. The white paper introduced a



Call centres are meant to improve service.

Batho Pele (people first) policy in which the government shifted its service delivery thinking in public administration to give more priority to citizens.

NPM reforms that have been adopted are characterised by a shift in emphasis from policy-making to management skills. This shift from public administration to public management has meant the introduction of private sector business principles, such as competition in the public services.

Though deemed as an illusion, the citizen was now a 'sovereign customer' entitled to 'consultation on service standards, courtesy, value for money and access to information'. These reforms meant restructuring of government departments into 'agencies' which operated like private companies. For example, the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality has 15 private companies that include Johannesburg Water, City Power, Pikitup, Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department, Johannesburg Zoo, City Parks, and so forth. These semi-autonomous agencies provide basic services to the customer/citizen and came out of a highly criticised neo-liberal strategy called Igoli 2002, which sort to 'rescue' the

Metro from its financial crisis in the mid-1990s.

Performance management systems and auditing culture became a must for municipalities so as to improve organisational and individual performance to enhance service delivery. However, NPM reforms have been criticised for 'customising the citizen' who struggles to get basic services.

Neo-liberal 'sovereignty' is enjoyed only by customers with money. This is why Philip Wenzel says 'there are simply too many poor and unemployed households with too limited purchasing power to make markets work for them'. Therefore the citizens are segregated between those with money and those without.

Furthermore, NPM reforms are motivated by the neo-liberal agenda to cut government spending without taking into account the citizen who is caught up in the illusion of being a customer. These reforms have introduced the customer-centred workplaces within the public sector, namely call centres where the customer complains through a call centre number that will log in the query and also give feedback on unsatisfactory 'service'.

The call centres are designed to open up access to the geographically disadvantaged. Through working in the secured white-collar environment, call centres are generally perceived as a low status, standardised and routine job. Although call centres in the private sector have been criticised as the 'sweatshops of the digital era, white collar factories and assembly lines' this is not the same in the public sector where the centres are small and designed for customer satisfaction, rather than cost reduction.

The advantages of the call centres are that they reduce large volumes of enquiries so that front-line staff can concentrate on delivering services. They also reduce travelling costs for citizens and save time for customers as they do not have to queue or spend time in face-to-face interaction. It is also easy to monitor both quality and quantity of contact with service users and to better control the nature of the advice given to customers. Although call centres are characterised by precarious work conditions, South Africa's unemployment levels make it a 'privilege' to work at the call centre.

In Johannesburg where 57% of the call centres are concentrated they serve the banking and telecommunication industry. In the municipalities, call centres are more visible in the metropolitans such as City of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, Johannesburg Metro, eThekweni, Ekurhuleni Metro, Buffalo City and Mangaung Metro.

JOBURG CONNECT

The Johannesburg City Call centre, Joburg Connect (Revenue Section), which was established in 2001, is the biggest local government call centre in the country. It operates every day around the clock including public holidays and weekends. Equipped with a headset and a computer in open plan blue cubicles the call centre has more

than 100 work stations. Call centre operators answer calls from the city's community enquiring about accounts, water and electricity, street lights, refuse collection, bus services, etc. Joburg Connect's main purpose is to bring services together so as to improve access for customers and to make telephone communication easier through customers dialling fewer numbers for assistance.

Call centre operators, mostly young black women, take up to 200 calls per agent per shift. Each call is about three minutes. The calls are queued by software called the Interactive Voice Response and transferred to the next available agent by yet another software called the Automatic Caller Distribution. This software can also serve as a monitoring tool for the managers, as it records the number of calls and time spent on each call.

In 2007, the call centre employed more than 100 workers, but by 2011 the figure had dropped to 70. Like most public call centres this centre started as a helpdesk with operators from each department. However, Joburg Connect operators do not deal with queries, but refer them to the relevant department or back office.

Call centre operators are employed on a standard municipal contract with no individual performance rewards. Recruited with a minimum of a matric certificate, good communication skills and customer orientation, some call centre operators have post-matric diplomas or certificates. Most receive two-week customer service training and are also expected to learn on the job.

However, under the Programme Phakama's 'one city, one number, one vision' which aims to integrate city's services under one roof, the revenue call centres are moving to the city centre. This means further training for operators so that they are able to deal with calls for different agencies.

COMMUNICATION DISCORD

Recently the call centre and the municipal council attracted media attention due to the billing woes that hit the Johannesburg Metro. Technological lapses under the Phakama Programme inflated water and electricity bills. As citizens/customers could not afford to pay the high bills, this led to service cut offs thus causing an outcry. To make matters worse the poor technological system did not connect the call centres to the back offices leading to a communication breakdown.

Suffering from the illusion of 'sovereignty' status the customer then intimidated and lashed out at the call centre operator who was also clueless about the billing situation. As call volumes increased operators, unable to deal with the anger and having 'run out of lies', resorted to absconding from work. This meant a shortage of staff and thus, 'the operators at work were outnumbered by those absent'. As a result more than 66,000 calls went unanswered between January and June 2011.

Poor communication became common as the communications department made public statements without informing the call centre. Hence the customer became the source of information for the call centre operators. 'You will hear something from the customer, and pretend that you knew about it, and when you run to the supervisor he knows nothing as well', said Kholiswa, an operator.

A call centre manager agreed. 'It is hard to conduct meetings with call centre operators because of the nature of the job, they have to take calls otherwise one will experience high call abandon rate' (the percentage of calls not answered by the operators, which measures the performance of the call centre). However, some managers who talked to the *Mail & Guardian* last year said there was no crisis. 'It is not really accurate to say we have

a billing crisis, but rather to say we have a customer-service challenge... If you say billing crisis, you get the impression we have cash-flow problems, and that was never so... until we re-establish our credibility with customers, that will remain a problem'.

According to Thobela, another manager, the software problems put the municipality in a mess. 'The whole municipality is in a mess, they ordered this software and the client designed exactly what they wanted but now, they discover that it does not have what they wanted... The billing is not the problem here... the whole customer value chain is the problem'.

In an attempt to connect the 'unconnecting', the operators avoided the calls or became 'creative' as they 'didn't know what to tell the customers anymore'. The billing crisis put the operators in a difficult position. 'I know that we are supposed to be the face of the municipality... for us to take the bullets, we need to be provided with information which is our bullet-proof vest so that we can do our job', said Ronda, another manager. The problems stem from the isolated nature of the call centre from the departments they serve, which can be resolved by housing the back office and the call centre under one roof.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Joburg Metro puts city customers into three groups: citizens (non-billable customers), billable customers (paying for the services) and third parties (i.e. developers and conveyers). Serving mostly those who cannot 'afford' to queue (by phone or walk-in centres) the call centre is designed for customer convenience. Poor communication, including the technological system and leadership of the municipality, has led to doubts about the sovereignty of the customer within local government. 'Citizens are not customers... we provide the basic

services here... and sometimes the customer is just used as a pawn, we harass her and cut her off if she does not pay for water or electricity', added Thobela.

Batho Pele seems to raise customer expectations through a faceless service provided by call centre operators. While the customer is frustrated by the long queues to get through the call centre line, the operators are also stressed by their working environment. Not surprising that insults are traded. Operators are accused of lack of knowledge, which is a 'normal insult' from the customers and in return they call the customers 'uninformed'.

Operators also suffer from 'racialised' insults of incompetency and are often blamed for unmet expectations. 'Customers are always angry. They have told me that I am a bush monkey. Some even asked me if I know when the Dutch colonialist Jan Van Riebeeck arrived in South Africa', added Kholiswa.

Both operators and customers were frustrated. However, they dealt with their stress in different ways. For operators the most common strategy was to put the angry customer on hold or work-to-rule. Others resisted the insults simply by sharing what the customers were saying amongst themselves. This is what Merek Korczynski termed 'communities of coping'. Despite the resistance operators expressed the shame of being associated with the incompetent call centre system. As put by Karabelo, an operator: 'Even when I see a billboard advertising Joburg Connect's numbers I feel like hiding'.

Operators' low morale also came from lack of career development, which is a common feature of this kind of workplace. 'After two years you hit the ceiling and you want to leave', said Amandla, a supervisor. Some explained the low morale and lack of career upward mobility as the lack of ambition. 'Some of the people in the call centre are over qualified... but some are suffering from an

entitlement attitude'. They feel they have worked for a long time and so they deserve to be promoted', said a former manager who added that new staff often performed better than experienced staff and this is why they got promoted faster.

Although stress led to ill-discipline of some operators this did not dampen their fighting spirit as discovered by a manager. 'When I tried to discipline the operators I was taken to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration by the union, it ended up being such an expensive exercise'.

When asked about their relationship with the unions, managers accused the latter of being part of the call centre problem. 'Labour intervention is ridiculous in local government. It's like unions are trained to fight against management all the time, but the unions are supposed to be my eye and shop stewards are supposed to be assisting me. I think unions don't understand their role. For example, when I hired temps last year they were so productive, and performed well because they understood the no-work-no-pay rule, and were paid according to their productivity', said Amandla.

South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) defended themselves saying that as the representatives of the workers the union is obliged to represent the needs of its members. They accused the poor training received by workers and software hiccups for the woes of the call centre. 'Those people have not been trained properly in this new system,' said a Samwu official, Denson.

This worsened a culture of work relations known for low morale and lack of trust as the operators felt 'not trusted' by the managers. This was not the only complaint by the managers, as they also blamed political interference and low levels of trust within the call centres. At the end of the day, poor communication and workplace

relations badly undermines the Batho Pele policy.

CONCLUSION

NPM reforms have forced restructuring of work practices in local government with new managerial practices, customer culture and elevated customer expectations. This created new public sector customer-centred workplaces similar to those of the private sector. However, call centres in local government are created for customer satisfaction and not for profit.

The chaos at the Johannesburg City call centre, which has been criticised by the media for its inefficiency and poor customer service, were caused by bad communication, slack technology and poor working conditions for operators. The motive for customer satisfaction has been questioned: 'is it simply a means to an end, not an end in itself'. Maybe customer satisfaction is also just a means to promote revenue collection and thus promote Gear's cost recovery rather than citizen/customer satisfaction within the South African municipal arena.

The myth of customer sovereignty continues to reign in the local government structures, who have 'defaced' their services through these call centres. The call centre operators on the other hand will continue to suffer a silent death as the media bash them for inefficiency without making efforts to understand how the call centres work. It is important to know that call centres, created under the banner of 'People First' and customer satisfaction are merely designed to 'manage the illusion' of customer sovereignty as they are poorly 'equipped' to put people first. ¹⁸

Babakwa Magoqwana is a PhD candidate at Rhodes University, this article is part of an on-going PhD research on local government call centre labour processes with a special focus on Joburg Connect.

Life after retrenchments:

Clothing and textile women workers struggle

The late entry of the South African economy to global competition led to the closure of clothing, textile and footwear factories in Doornfontein, as the local manufacturers could not compete with established countries like China. Most of the job losers were women, writes **Elizabeth Mathebe**.

The Metropolitan City of Johannesburg, where Doornfontein is located, is one of the economic hubs of the Gauteng Province in South Africa. The clothing, textiles and footwear manufacturing firms that historically attracted the working class to the area declined because of intense competition on the global market. The companies, that for many years employed women, closed down, liquidated or relocated.

Former factories became warehouses for imported clothes and shoes or were converted into brothels and vehicle repair shops. The few firms that remained cut down production due to free market competition. In the downsizing that followed thousands of workers lost employment.

Manufacturing was replaced by retail. In Johannesburg streets such as Troy, Mooi and others where historical clothing, textiles and footwear factories were located, formal and informal Chinese and foreign traders took over pitting foreign goods against local. The retailers were mostly men who employed a small number of women.

Most retail stores hired two or three male tailors to work from their backrooms making various items for the outlets. What then happened to the thousands of retrenched female workers? It seems the retrenched women workers, who still had the energy to walk around, were reduced to wandering in Johannesburg streets searching for jobs.

Although they had years of industry experience, women workers lacked formal education and skills that could find them jobs in other sectors. It is because of this that they continue to look for jobs in their sector.

According to the Department of Provincial and Local Government, Gauteng is geographically the smallest province in South Africa but the commercial, financial and industrial heart of the country, Southern Africa and the rest of Africa. Gauteng has more than nine-million people and is 97% urbanised. This is why most foreign nationals who come to South Africa are attracted by Gauteng's vibrant economic activities. This also helps to explain why foreign influence is visible.

Foreign nationals, whose countries' economies are also struggling on the global market, have affected employment patterns. The competition for jobs in the few companies that remain operational in Doornfontein is high. Although the working class see the province as an area where jobs are easily found, tonnes of goods that are traded in many parts of Doornfontein are manufactured in China and other countries.

Therefore there is a lot of competition for jobs in Gauteng and this disadvantages women as some employers prefer a male workforce. However, the labour market competition benefits capital by providing cheap labour.

WOMEN WORKERS' EXPERIENCES

The free market economically frustrated women workers. 'We had so many jobs. When your employer retrenched or dismissed you at 11am, by 2pm the same day, you found another job at the firm next door. You were only unemployed for a few hours or a day. We did not bother the trade union that much with retrenchment or dismissal cases. Neither did we



Clothing and textile factories previously employed more women.

worry ourselves with understanding the Southern African Clothing and Textiles Workers Union (Sactwu) policies and strategies on retrenchments or dismissals. Only a few of the workers knew about the policies, most of us did not understand or know them. If one wished to work there were always jobs.

'But now we spend days or years without jobs. Some retrenched women have even given up the job search. Transport is expensive. Sometimes we go home with nothing when our families need food. Permanent jobs have disappeared and we now look for casual work, just for the daily survival of our children. Retrenched women have joined masses of the unemployed who are also looking for work.

'We compete for fewer jobs with people from outside South Africa. Young people cannot find jobs the way "we" did before the Chinese came to the country.'

Fewer employers engage workers with no experience. Although

most job seekers have more than 15 years' experience, what frustrates them are workers from neighbouring countries, especially desperate illegal immigrants. These workers live; sleep and cook in factories and accept low pay. Sometimes they are forced to work double day and night shifts. This forces South African workers to accept lower wages.

Contemporary capitalism has moved from individual market competition within countries to competition amongst countries. Capital's move to global competition has made developing countries' economies suffer. When capital in one country competes for the market there are fewer job losses. But with the global market thousands lose jobs. The global market favours countries with advanced technology and a skilled workforce that meets consumers' needs. In some countries women have left their families to look for work across borders sometimes to overcrowded job markets like South Africa.

South Africa embraced the global market ideology in the 1990s. This late entry meant that the country was behind other countries such as China. However, local technology and skills are also miles away for the country to compete globally.

Most women workers are getting old and training aged workers is seen as a problem for the labour market and for capital. Training young workers will make the sector competitive; but South Africa will not recover immediately as more time is needed. This means that factories in Doornfontein might not be able to create decent jobs early enough for the retrenched workers.

While all workers have been hard hit by the collapse of the clothing, textiles and footwear industries women feel more pressure. Most of the working-age women's lives have been changed for the worse as they have either no jobs or have been retrenched. The sector is also creating fewer new jobs for women. This has frustrated the women workers who depend on factory jobs for their income.

Historically, the development of manufacturing industries in South Africa created jobs for thousands of women with little education and less skills. Women at child-bearing age had a chance to mother their babies and go back to work. Retrenched or dismissed women would go in and out of the labour market at will and still secure jobs as the industries were protected from the global market through the legal quota systems and other protective measures.

Because of loss of jobs in manufacturing industries the cultural and apartheid legacy has become more clear among women on the labour market.

The global market pressures become huge on women as they were the last group to be absorbed on the South African labour market. Many women entered the paid labour market in South Africa with little formal education and few skills or none due to the fact that they were always viewed as home-makers, wives, mothers and caregivers, not as workers.

In some sections of South African society women were seen as child-bearers or caregivers and their children would become labourers. This view was the reason why some men preferred to marry many wives so that they could have many children in which turn would mean abundant labour and income.

The women's motherhood traits in societies and families made them to be considered last in many issues including at the workplace. The women's hindrances that relate to gender in societies, families and workplace stopped them from getting skills. Even today most women have fewer skills and little formal education when compared to their male counterparts.

The problems that women face in Doornfontein show that female-headed families face poverty. The government's public works programme creates jobs mostly in construction. Thus even if women

are considered, only a small number can secure jobs because of either the nature of the work or that they do not have relevant skills. The sector is believed to be mainly a 'men's arena'. This raises the issue of gender equality in job creation.

ENDLESS JOURNEYS

The macro-economic restructuring in South Africa has turned areas such as Doornfontein into a dumping site for the Chinese and other Asian countries' low-cost clothing and textiles products. As many Doornfontein clothing and textiles factories have been closed, liquidated or relocated hundreds of the retrenched workers are wondering in Johannesburg streets searching for jobs.

Most women workers move from one factory to another, seeking jobs in the clothing and textile firms. In the morning, they start their day by job searching at Doornfontein and then walk to Booysens or vice versa.

At the corner of End and Prichard streets, near or outside Sactwu offices, they sit on the pavement and have their lunch and continue searching. On some days they find a day's work or a short contract. This is not enough as the women must pay school fees for their children and also meet their other financial commitments. Besides, they also need money for transport when looking for work.

In some factories women job seekers are required or asked by employers to work for a few days or for a week without pay so that they can be given casual or contract jobs later. Although some agree to this exploitation others reject it.

In some instances the women have limited choices and are pressurised by their families conditions: 'Families expect us to bring a loaf of bread when we come back from work in the evenings, thus it becomes difficult to provide free labour.' The major problem for women in case of retrenchments is that they lose jobs and benefits

and this condemns them to a life of poverty. Therefore, whatever they secure for the day is what they have for their livelihood.

The female-headed and single-parent families are the most affected. Sarah Mosoetsa, in her study, has shown that in most families women have taken the responsibility of providing for families as men too, have lost jobs. According to Mosoetsa women who are able to take the financial responsibility of looking after their families are those who have access to social grants. This means that if a woman does not have a child or is not old or physically challenged they live without an income.

PROTECTING WORKERS

One of the main reasons why workers seek trade union membership is to protect their jobs. However, none of the workers interviewed claimed to have hung onto Sactwu membership because the organisation would provide job security. For some women workers Sactwu membership provided them with a platform for socialisation at the workplace and in the townships. The union membership also helped women to form funeral schemes or stokvels.

Some of the women workers were still members because their co-workers were Sactwu members and therefore they did not want to be excluded from workplace activities. The following summarises some of the responses from women concerning trade unionism.

'The trade union is no longer the same as it no longer helps us. We lost our jobs when we were Sactwu members but Sactwu even failed to negotiate on our behalf for decent retrenchment benefits or packages. Haa! It was lunch time when we were told to leave the factory premises with immediate effect because our factory was being liquidated. There was no time to ask questions or to discuss amongst ourselves as workers. Because we

got out of the factory in a hurry we left our belongings such as handbags, shoes and other valuables behind.

'Sactwu did not investigate the matter to find out what happened. When we made follow-ups at the office about our case we received little help. Then we got tired of running after the trade unionists as no one knew what was going on. After three months, some were called for jobs by nine small companies. This meant that one big firm (the one that we worked for and was claimed to have been liquidated) was fragmented into nine small clothing and textiles units.

'Most of the retrenched workers from the big factory were not called for jobs. The machines in those new factories were the same machines that we used in the previously liquidated big factory. Every worker who was called for a job went back to her previous machine. We knew that those were our old machines because the machines were still bearing our names, even management computers were the same. The only changes were that we were employed by a newly created company under new a name and we started to work under a new management in a new environment.

'The other eight new factories were not able to survive the Chinese competition and we were retrenched again. Thus, we consider ourselves lucky and we no longer speak about our history or try to speak to Sactwu about previous matters. Sactwu too, does not say anything about our past problems.'

The 37 workers interviewed were retrenched at one stage of their employment history. Not one of them had an idea about Sactwu's retrenchment policy or strategies at the shop floor. The women's responses revealed that there was weak or no proper collective bargaining structures

in their factory. Issues such as retrenchment and others were decided in management offices.

The shop stewards were informed about the management's decisions. Thus, as workers they were excluded from many issues that affected them at plant level. Lack of adequate collective bargaining structures weakened the shop stewards' power. Because the shop stewards are also employees, they feared to negotiate retrenchment or make inputs on issues as that could annoy management and cost them jobs.

The trade union organisers weakened plant level structures such as shop stewards, said the women workers. The organisers did not show up at workplaces

even when they were called in for serious matters such as dismissals or retrenchments or any other problem of concern to members. The workers' claims could indicate that Sactwu is strong at national level, but had lost power at the plant level.

The women workers' views show that Sactwu did not explain to its members what the union could do and not do. Therefore, the women felt that there was no reason to pay an affiliation fee to a struggling organisation that offered them no protection. ^{LB}

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William Matlala

Unlocking labour laws

What maternity protection exists for workers?

Decent work and women's health are related issues. This is why maternity protection is necessary for economic and social empowerment. This protection also allows women to combine their reproductive and productive roles successfully and to prevent inequality at the workplace.

According to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Cosatu) maternity protection is the first entry point for the decent work agenda and gender equality. It is also a collective responsibility that benefits all. The provision of maternity protection in the workplace enables women to balance reproductive and productive work, minimises the health risk of mother and child, contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction.

Maternity protection includes maternity leave, cash and medical benefits, health protection, breastfeeding-breaks, employment security and non-discrimination. It also means providing a healthy and safe environment for mother and child as well as allowing women to freely choose motherhood.

Providing access to decent work and life is empowering as most women cherish raising a family. Yet pregnancy and maternity puts them in a vulnerable position. This is why expectant and nursing mothers need special protection to prevent harm to their infants' health, and adequate time to give birth, recover and nurse their children. They also need guarantees that they will get their job back after maternity leave. As loss of income after giving birth exposes families to poverty.

Maternity leave is important for women because it gives them enough time to rest before and after giving birth. The period also allows women's bodies to recover after birth. The mothers will also get enough time to bond with the baby and breast milk is guaranteed to the child therefore ensuring growth.

Which laws provide for maternity protection?

The South African Constitution has provisions for maternity protection. 'Everyone has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.' Everyone also has the right of equal access to social security.

Discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy is also prohibited. 'The state may not unfairly discriminate against anyone on one or more grounds, including gender, sex or pregnancy.'

The Constitution is supported by other laws that provide for maternity protection to workers. Unfortunately, the law ignores women who work in the defence force and secret service, are self-employed, or work in the informal economy.

Although domestic and farm workers qualify for maternity leave for four months, this is unpaid. Maternity protection can also be said to exist on paper only as there are gaps to the enjoyment of the rights. For example, there is no single law on maternity protection and the protection comes from different laws such as Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA 2002), Employment Equity Act (1998), Labour Relations Act (1995), Unemployment Insurance Act (2002), and the Code of Good Practice on the Protection of

Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child.

The BCEA states that maternity protection covers all employed women in the private and public sector, but excludes members of the National Defence Force, National Intelligence Agency and Secret Service, independent contractors, women working as unpaid volunteers and those working on vessels at sea.

The act also says that an employee is entitled to at least four consecutive months of maternity leave and spells out the requirements for the leave. According to the law during maternity leave women are paid from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

The *Code of Good Practice on the Protection of Employees during Pregnancy and after the Birth of a Child* require employers to do the following:

- encourage women employees to inform the employer of their pregnancy as soon as possible to ensure that the employer can assess risks and deal with them;
- evaluate the situation of each employee who has informed the employer that she is pregnant;
- assess the risks to the health and safety of pregnant or breastfeeding employees;
- supply pregnant or breastfeeding employees with information and training regarding the risks to their health and safety and measures for eliminating and minimising such risks;
- maintain a list of jobs not involving risk to which a pregnant or breastfeeding employee could be transferred.

The employment insurance fund offers short-term financial assistance to workers when they become unemployed or are unable to work because they are sick, on maternity or adoption leave. The fund also assists dependants of a deceased worker who made contributions.

However, the country's health-care system faces many challenges that impact on maternal health care and put more women and their children at risk. For example, government figures show that South Africa's maternal mortality

protection, but this only becomes effective when ratified by the member states of the United Nations. The Maternity Protection Convention 183 of 2000 proposes the following:

- protection to all women including workers who are dependent on their employers, such as domestic workers;
- health-care benefits;
- compulsory maternity leave of 14 weeks;
- protection from dismissal from work before maternity leave or for pregnancy-related reasons;

of living. For this reason the women's earnings should be at least two-thirds of salaries.

The convention also requires ratifying states to take measures to ensure that a pregnant woman or nursing mother is not obliged to perform work which has been determined to be harmful to her health and that of her child. Further, it provides for protection from discrimination based on maternity leave, or during a period following her return to work except on grounds unrelated to nursing.

Job retention is also guaranteed after maternity leave in accordance with the convention and the mother returns to the same position and salary. The instrument provides women the right to one or more daily breaks or daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed her child. Equality of women workforces, especially their health needs, is catered for making the instrument progressive in terms of economic and social development.

Conclusion

South African laws as enshrined in the Constitution, Labour Relations Act and BCEA create an opportunity to begin lobbying for the adoption of Convention 183. Current practices that treat maternity as a disability or the leave as a period of unemployment or being sick can be considered as discrimination. UIF benefits are not enough especially when one becomes unemployed. Therefore there is need to separate UIF from maternity.

South Africa has not yet ratified the Convention on Maternity Protection and this means that what the instrument says cannot be included in domestic law. Full adoption of the convention will bring many benefits to women and society. ¹⁸

Information in this article is taken from a maternity protection booklet by the Cosatu Gender Unit.

William Matlala



Mother and child need time to bond.

ratio increased from 150 deaths per 100, 000 live births in 1998 to 625 in 2007.

South African laws also guarantee protection to pregnant workers and new mothers from discrimination on the job. The Civil Rights Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act clearly spell out that no employee shall be discriminated against because of pregnancy.

What is happening to maternity protection at international level?

At a global level there is an International Labour Organization Convention on maternity

- protection against discrimination for job seekers;
- cash benefits during leave of at least two-thirds of earnings;
- paid breaks to breastfeeding mothers;
- additional leave for illness related to pregnancy;
- health and safety.

The Convention provides for 14 weeks of maternity leave to women to whom the instrument applies. Women who are absent from work and on maternity leave shall be entitled to a cash benefit, which ensures that they can look after themselves and their child in proper health and a good standard

Progressive and dynamic

NUM always improving service to members

In a previous *Labour Bulletin* Thabang Sefalafala argued that disgruntled members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) were joining a private legal aid scheme. The members felt they were getting poor service from the union and this created a 'crisis of representation'. Far from it, replies **Eddie Majadibodu**, who argues that NUM has been improving services to its members all along.

The article mentions studies conducted by Sakhela Buhlungu and Eddie Webster; and we confirm that the studies were commissioned by NUM as part of our programme to understand members' concerns and to improve our service to them.

We have never attempted to conceal any findings from the studies in the past. In fact, we made them public and even invited some unions to attend the presentations of the report by the researchers.

I know no organisation worldwide that claims to satisfy all its members equally. Interestingly, the article acknowledges other studies by Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout which discovered that workers at Driefontein East, as well as other mines like Karee and Kleinsie like LegalWise and Scorpion. This is a true reflection of how mineworkers have used what I would term 'a double job security' cover with the belief that this would increase their chances of avoiding dismissals, retrenchments and victimisation.

Thus the use of legal firms is neither limited nor confined to reasons of poor service from unions. I worked on the mines for 21 years and was an NUM shop steward for 12 years, so I have known this 'double cover' by union members for many years, even during the times that many would argue were characterised by crazy militant unionism and respected leadership. This was when members would generally and blindly follow their leaders, but they still joined these legal firms.

Perhaps what the writer did not know is that mineworkers have been prone to unscrupulous fly-by-night greedy cheaters who have acted as unions, but never represented a single worker on work-related problems. For example, I recall when I was a steward at Greenside Colliery in Witbank between 1993 and 1998, I was called by a LegalWise lawyer who wanted to use my services to assist him on how to advise a worker who was a member of the union. What this meant is that the poor worker did not know that the lawyer had no expertise to represent him despite the fact

that he was paying a fee to the scheme. Lack of education on the mines, associated with the apartheid system, has exposed workers to this day-light robbery.

The NUM's aims and objectives are to protect mineworkers from greedy and selfish exploiters. After commissioning the five-yearly surveys since 2000, the last being conducted by the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP) between January and September 2010, we have formulated a number of responses to the findings. Therefore, we advise the writer to engage the NUM to source more information regarding our responses to matters of service delivery to members. For example, we have introduced a performance management system for union officials so as to improve service delivery to members.

As the writer puts it, 'Despite the NUM's record a large section of its members at Driefontein East believe the union has changed and lost some of the power that drew workers to it.' I suppose he means the record of service delivery and caring for members as we believe that we are a caring



NUM and Pawusa marches at COP 17.

union for members more than any other union in the sectors that we organise.

It could be true, though, that perhaps the NUM has not moved at the same pace with its members. The union has moved from the pure tendencies of an extremist militant workplace unionism to a mixture of being concerned with workplace issues. It is now casting a broader perspective that covers strategic socio-economic issues for the long-term benefit of its members.

For example, when we took resolutions to drive campaigns on skills development, Employee Ownership Plans (ESOPs) and the broader Mining Charter some quarters accused us of drifting

away from bread and butter issues. In fact the Kumba Iron Ore ESOPs pay-out has created a headache for the NUM as those who were initially opposed to the idea feel we have moved very slowly to include them in these schemes. In more areas than few, we are proud that we have taken such strategic resolutions that we believe have long-term benefits to our members and their families.

The NUM is the only union in the mining industry to have initiated strategic and progressive policies for mineworkers. In addition to the Mining Charter, we are the industry principal and founding champions of the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA), which

gives communities a stake in the business of companies that are mining on their land. The Mining Charter captures all important elements of transformation including the employment of women, procurement of goods and services from local suppliers, etc.

Above all, the NUM has never abandoned its traditional way of engaging employers robustly on workers, immediate benefits, such as salary increases, medical aid, sick and maternity leave and all sorts of allowances incidental to income enhancement. We have called legal strikes where we believed such actions as warranted and engaged companies on mechanisms and initiatives to save jobs.

When the country, including the mining industry, faced challenges of the global economic meltdown in 2008, it was the NUM which approached the Department of Mineral Resources with proposals to finding solutions. We are very proud that this initiative led to the formation of a high-level structure named the Mining Industry Growth and Development Task Team (MIGDETT). The discussions and hard negotiations that came from this team saved many jobs. Initial projections for job losses in the mining industry were put at more than 100,000 during that year but only about 40,000 jobs were lost.

We have won many cases for our members over the years. It is undisputed that you just can't satisfy everybody. However, the fact that the NUM has grown to over 300,000 members currently is testimony to the fact that the majority of workers prefer the NUM over other unions put together in the mining, energy and construction sectors.

Had the writer taken time to read in full the surveys he mentioned in the article, he would have discovered that the workers had no plans of leaving the NUM in the future. This is what came from the NUM members themselves.

We acknowledge and accept that due to its size, the NUM may not have communicated effectively the achievements it scored over the 30 years of its existence. In fact, a recent survey by SWOP discovered that due to benefits negotiated by the NUM such as housing and living out allowances, the number of members living outside hostels has increased dramatically. This means that we need to formulate more effective communication strategies to reach an increasing number of members who can no longer be reached by mass meetings at compounds.

The NUM will never deny that

there are challenges facing trade unions in South Africa today. Some of these challenges include the easiness by which individuals can form a trade union and recruit vulnerable workers as a means to generate income. With the levels of unemployment in the country, forming trade unions is increasingly being regarded as a prudent business rather than a call to serve the exploited workers who may move from one union to another depending on their economic and social condition at that time.

Also with the increased competition and struggles for leadership positions within unions, the NUM is not immune to power struggles. There are instances where losers in a leadership contest move on to form a rival union. Sometimes such leaders create false reasons why workers were leaving the union.

In some areas, we have evidence of unions being formed with the assistance of management so as to strip the powers of NUM. For example, in one of the coal mines in Witbank a union was formed in July 2001 by a former NUM branch shop steward with the backing of management. This was the case because management wanted to engage a weak NUM when the company consulted on retrenchments.

In the late 1990s a union called The Workers Mouthpiece was formed in Rustenburg and it recruited workers by lying to members that they would get a death benefit when the company changed ownership. Workers who were dismissed discovered after many years that lies were fabricated to create reasons for forming another union. These workers eventually returned to the NUM.

Therefore, we don't regard some movements of workers to

legal aid schemes or to other unions as a permanent feature in the sectors we are organising. Our philosophy is that genuine and honest engagement coupled with an ever-improving service to our members will sustain the union. We believe that despite all these challenges, the NUM will continue to represent the interests of its members as it has been doing throughout the years and will engage on long-term and short-term issues for its members.

We have continued to introduce the best systems to assist us improve the provision of service to members where we felt we were ineffective. These improvements include organisational review and design including change management processes in terms of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) resolutions. We continue to recruit new and young members on a monthly basis. The 2010 SWOP research had shown that about 54% of NUM members are under the age of 50 years and the numbers of younger members keep on increasing, hence the establishment of a youth desk following the report from this survey.

In conclusion, the NUM values with respect all the constructive criticism labelled against the union but will also respond where we believe the findings fall short of establishing factual presentations from those the researcher interviewed. More so, when a conclusion is drawn to mean that the reason why members were joining legal aid schemes was simply dissatisfaction of service. **LB**

Eddie Majadibodu is the head of the production pillar responsible for recruitment, help desk, education, youth development, health & safety and campaigns at NUM.

Unions on farms:

Why Sikhula Sonke is succeeding where others have failed

Fiona White is correct in her analysis of Sikhula Sonke as a social movement union that has succeeded where other bigger, traditional unions have failed ('Women-led social movement union: Sikhula Sonke challenging inequality', SALB Vol 35.1). Most important is that White highlights a number of strategic approaches employed by Sikhula Sonke to organise workers in farms, undoubtedly one of the most difficult sectors to deal with in the South African labour market.

At just over 3%, union density in the farming sector is the second lowest after private households where less than 1% of domestic workers are unionised. Yet like private households, farms remain the 'exclusive' domain of farm owners. Farmers exercise complete control over farms as well as over the lives of those who live on them.

There are a host of complex and interlocking factors which underpin the low levels of union density in the farming sector. They include the history and politics of land ownership in South Africa, the spatial distribution of farms, dependency, and the psychological sense of fear among farm workers.

Farm workers are vulnerable both individually and collectively, they earn very low wages and they often have low levels of literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, the huge economic power imbalance between farmers and farm workers means that farm workers are unable to challenge unfair labour practices and poor working conditions.

There is a long history of a close-knit but highly exploitative relationship between farmers and their farm workers. White correctly describes this relationship as one

of 'paternalism', or as other writers have termed it, a relationship between a master and a servant. It is a relationship hinged on the fallacious notion pointed out by White that farmers and their workers 'share a common interest'. Nothing however, could be further from the truth. Farm workers are overwhelmingly dependent on farm owners for survival, their world is the world of the farm, most have lived on farms for generations, their identity is tied to the farm and their very being is defined by the farm. They are trapped in an environment of dependency and oppression, and because they would not want to unsettle the relationship between themselves and the farmers, they see unions as intruders; most importantly, as a threat to their security of livelihood.

For unions, their biggest challenge is how to come up with practical strategies to organise in this hostile terrain. Many like the Food and Allied Workers Union (Fawu) rely on the 'access model', which means trying to reach workers inside the farms. However, access into farms has been severely limited by farmers making it impossible for unions to reach workers. Consequently, the number of unionised farm workers has plummeted.

With insufficient representivity, unions cannot demand the right to be recognised as bargaining agents and are unable to claim other organisational rights such as the right to have stop-order facilities and for farm workers to elect their own shop stewards. Lack of union representivity means unions in the sector are unable to service some of the most basic needs of their members. It is a zero sum game; unions cannot represent the workers because they do not have

sufficient members for purposes of recognition, while workers do not want to join the unions because they see no benefit in doing so.

In her article White does not explore the theme of access, but it remains central to a proper understanding of why union organising in the farming sector is so fraught with difficulties. It is also important in the sense that social movement unions like Sikhula Sonke have an organisational model that largely eschews access as the primary method of recruiting farm workers. Sikhula Sonke's embrace of a servicing, rather than a purely recruiting model has made it more relevant to many of the needs of farm workers.

As White indicates, Sikhula Sonke addresses a range of non-labour issues such as evictions, gender inequality, identity documents, social grants and alcoholism, which means that there is more to the lives of farm workers than merely a conflict ridden, highly exploitative employment relationship. It is now evident that the organising model used by the overwhelming majority of unions in the farming sector is basically ineffective. Unions have to address both the labour and social needs of farm workers. Sikhula Sonke is making some important progress in this respect, but it is just the beginning. ^{LB}

Kimani Ndungu is a senior researcher at the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (Naledi) in Johannesburg. This commentary is based on a study conducted by Naledi between August 2010 and December 2011 for the Department of Labour. The study examined obstacles to union organising in the farming sector.

ANC and working class:

A shared history

In a statement at centenary celebrations **Sdumo Dlamini** spoke about the strong historic links that exist between the ANC and the working class.

On behalf of the over two million members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and all its structures, I bring congratulations and best wishes to the African National Congress (ANC) as it reaches this historic milestone – its centenary.

Cosatu is extremely proud to be in alliance with Africa's oldest liberation movement, the fountain of hope to millions of the oppressed and exploited masses of our people, a giant whose track record in the struggle is unparalleled anywhere in the world.

We are celebrating not just the institution called the ANC, but the struggle whose collective experience it embodies. We are celebrating the unity of the African people, which extended to all the oppressed including white democrats who hate oppression and love freedom. We owe the cohesion and unity we currently enjoy to the principles and struggles of the ANC.

The history of the working class and the history of the ANC are intertwined. As the working class grew from strength to strength, so did the ANC. It is one of very few liberation movements that evolved towards a class perspective, understanding that black people's

oppression was not only based on their colour, but on the inherent exploitative nature of the colonial capitalist system. The ANC's policies and actions reinforced it as a pro-working class and pro-poor anti-imperialist liberation movement.

When we sing 'Hamba nathi mkhululi wethu' (go with us our liberator) we mean this literally. The ANC promised to liberate us. It may have taken longer than most African countries; it may have been more costly, with far too many casualties, but, as the ANC promised, it brought the political freedom in our lifetime. The 27 April 1994 breakthrough will always be remembered fondly, not only by South Africans, but also by the peoples of the world, whose own contributions to our freedom should never be underestimated.

Under the leadership of the ANC we have made tremendous strides in building a better life for all South Africans. We are celebrating the protection of workers' rights in the Constitution and a range of progressive labour laws that have helped us to address some of the three interrelated antagonistic contradictions – poverty, class oppression and exploitation.

We are celebrating improved health-care, with the progressive introduction of the National Health Insurance. We are particularly



pleased that 1.4-million people are taking part in the government's antiretroviral drugs programme and 15-million will be tested for HIV by June this year.

We are also celebrating improved access to education, and the improvement in this year's matric (high school) pass rate. We shall be celebrating the fact that 15-million South Africans have a roof above their heads, and that millions receive support in the form of grants without which they would simply die of starvation.

Our task is to consolidate and multiply these advances. The biggest challenges we face are unemployment, poverty and inequality. With 36% or 7,504,000 people still unemployed, South Africa's rate of unemployment is higher than any other middle-income country.

Between 40% and 50% of the population live in poverty. We have become the most unequal society in the world, with 50% of the South African population living on 8% of the national income.

Cosatu agrees with the ANC that we can only overcome these economic challenges if we restructure the economy inherited from our ugly past and end its domination by mining, finance and heavy chemicals. We must end ownership and control of strategic sectors of our economy by a handful of people, be they black, white, foreign or domestic.

We must prioritise the expansion of the manufacturing industry so that we benefit our own resources, using them to add value by turning them into manufactured goods and begin to reach the government's goal of creating five-million decent jobs in the next 10 years.

In addition, we must return to our time-tested values and principles of selflessness, and promote integrity and honesty, particularly among leaders of the

Alliance, who must be beyond reproach! One of the biggest challenges of our time is the cancer of greed and selfishness within our ranks, which is eating away the heart of our democracy, and is driven by the capitalist culture of 'me first' and 'get as rich as possible, as fast as possible'.

Together we must reverse the spread of crass materialism, fraud and corruption and defeat the ill-discipline, political arrogance and ideological backwardness that is compromising our revolutionary movement. We must draw a line in the sand on revolutionary morality that no one will cross.

Our task is to defend the space we created for ourselves in the historic 52nd national conference of the ANC. We must continue to campaign for full implementation of the conference resolutions. We must defend the current

leadership collective from those who would want to put it on the back foot, undermine its authority and create divisions.

Notwithstanding all these and other challenges, we salute a movement that has led so gallantly for over 100 years. Happy birthday to the people's movement – may you grow stronger and last for another century! Long live the ANC! Long live Nelson Mandela and all our stalwarts! Long live the memory of all our heroes and heroines! Long live Oliver Tambo and all soldiers of our glorious army Umkhonto we Sizwe. The ANC lives – The ANC leads! ^{LB}

Sdumo Dlamini is the president of Cosatu and gave this address at the Centenary Gala in Mangaung, Bloemfontein where the ANC was formed in 1912.



ANC supporters at Women's day celebrations, 2011 in Pretoria.

William Matlala

Fracking — what, who and where?

The costs and benefits of fracking to South Africa's development should be debated using scientific evidence, writes **David Fig.**

Within the last decade, technology has emerged for the extraction of shale gas, or methane, from deep under the earth. Although research and exploration remains to be done, estimates have been made that South Africa could be a rich source of shale gas. However, its extraction requires drilling deep into the earth for between four and six kilometres, and through underground freshwater supplies. When the drilling reaches the level where the gas is

found, it changes direction from vertical to horizontal. Enormous quantities of water, combined with sand and a cocktail of toxic chemicals, are pumped at high pressure into the rocks. The injection of sand particles causes the rocks to fracture and release the gas which is captured and piped back to the surface by the same equipment. This process is known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

Several companies have lined up to explore shale gas locally,

and have been granted permission by the Petroleum Agency of South Africa, which is the regulator, to undertake preliminary technical studies in the country. Four bids cover a total area of 228,000 km², almost a quarter of South African territory. Three bids are for parts of the Karoo, while the fourth covers an enormous area including most of the Free State, northern parts of the Eastern Cape, and a strip of KwaZulu-Natal adjacent to the Drakensberg mountains.

Applicants for exclusive exploration rights for shale gas in South Africa, 2011

Company	Nationality	Area of exploration	Surface area granted (km ²)
Royal Dutch Shell	UK/Netherlands	Karoo (W & E Cape)	90 000
Bundu	Australia	Karoo (E Cape)	3 100
Falcon	US	Karoo (E Cape)	30 350
Sasol – Statoil – Chesapeake*	SA – Norway – US	Free State, E Cape & KZN	105 000

Sources: Petroleum Agency of South Africa, Falcon, Challenger, and Sasol

According to the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002, the regulator first allocates a technical cooperation permit. This gives the applicant a year to conduct feasibility studies on extracting the shale gas, and an exclusive right to apply for an exploration right. If successful, the applicant can undertake exploration for three years, renewable for another six. During that time, if the deposits of gas are found to be economically viable, the company can apply for an exclusive production right lasting 30 years, but which is also renewable.

The regulator does not hold open hearings in granting these rights. The only way in which the public can intervene is when the company applies for an exploration right. To do so, the company must hire consultants to produce an Environmental Management Report (EMR). It needs to release the EMR to those registered as interested and affected parties, hold public meetings, and allow time for comments on the report. Since the exploration rights are often, in South African practice, converted almost automatically to production rights, this is one of the very few occasions in which the public has any voice in the process.

Fracking is a controversial new technology, for which almost no research has been done in South Africa. In order for companies to find out how large the resource is, and whether it is worth exploiting, fracking has to be undertaken during the exploration phase. Therefore by giving permission to explore means that government would be allowing fracking to take place immediately. It is unlikely that the effects of fracking would ever be reversed once it has started.

For example, large questions on water contamination, waste management, climate change, employment and social impacts were not even discussed. Government did not create a space for a transparent public policy

discussion and appropriateness to South Africa's development needs. Instead everything was left to obscure administrative processes which excluded the public.

The oil companies argue that the technology is safe, proven and reliable and that the shale gas is plentiful. Unconfirmed estimates put the gas at 485-trillion cubic feet. The companies also claim that the energy from shale oil is more climate-friendly than coal, and that its production would make a contribution to reducing carbon emissions. Shell, in particular, has offered assurances that the huge amount of water needed for fracking would not be drawn from the Karoo. It has also undertaken to consult communities and to reveal in confidence the list of toxic chemicals it will be using to a small committee of selected interested parties. The companies say shale gas will be a 'game changer' in South Africa becoming more energy self-sufficient.

The government sees the mining of shale gas as substitution for imported fuels thus providing increased energy security. Although the recent policy process, the Integrated Resource Plan 2010 (IRP2010) does not take shale gas into account, it nevertheless allows for combined-cycle natural gas turbines to play a part in the country's future energy mix, at 2.6% by 2030.

As opposition pressure built up, Mineral Resources minister Susan Shabangu suspended the granting of exploration licences, and renewal will depend on whether the task team established by the minister has had time to investigate fracking properly in order to report back. According to a *Business Report* article Water and Environment Affairs minister Edna Molewa has stated in parliament that the water legislation needs to be made more robust in order to 'ensure adequate control' to prevent contamination from fracking.

The National Planning Commission (NPC)'s *National Development Plan: Vision for 2030* report says 'shale gas has the potential to contribute a very large proportion of South Africa's energy needs... South Africa will seek to develop these resources provided the overall environmental costs and benefits will outweigh the costs and benefits associated with South Africa's dependence on coal [and] nuclear.' This enthusiasm is not the product of any intense debate on fracking within the NPC, and pre-empts any scientific examination of the issue. In examining the costs and benefits of fracking, a number of dangers and challenges have come to light.

WATER

In most fracking areas of the United States, such as the Marcellus Shale area of Pennsylvania, water is plentiful. Not so in the shale fields of the Karoo, one of South Africa's most arid areas. Life in the Karoo depends on underground aquifers or chambers containing fresh water which are refilled by infrequent rains. The Karoo is known by its extensive sheep, ostrich and, increasingly, game farming, with steel wind pumps drawing up the groundwater for use by animals and humans. Surface dams provide the rest of the area's water requirements, but can be unreliable. For example, in recent years the dams in the Beaufort West area dried up, causing a water crisis in the town to the extent that travellers passing through were asked to donate bottled water.

About 98% of South Africa's surface fresh water has already been allocated to existing users. Where then will the fracking industry get the 20 to 25-million litres it needs to frack a single well? At least 1,667 trucks will be needed to transport water per well. Possibly the building of expensive pipelines and salt removal plants will be done. Shell has, however, promised not to use Karoo water, but some hydrologists have recommended

that it be sourced from the already overstretched Gariep (formerly Orange) catchment.

Around 30% of the water used in the process will be unrecoverable and will remain underground. This subtracts it from the water that might be recycled.

The use of toxic chemicals in the drilling process has also raised questions about contaminating underground fresh-water sources in the case of accidents. Although uncommon there are records of at least eight instances of large-scale pollution resulting from drilling and fracking.

Waste management

Although forming only 1% of the mix, the toxic chemicals used vary between wells depending on their geology. Most of the fracking liquid returns to the surface after use, and is disposed of without causing harm to the environment. On site there need to be lined ponds or tanks to receive the toxic sludge initially. Questions arise about how this is handled and what arrangements are made for the final disposal of the wastes. According to Daniel Vermeulen, in the US, home to about a million wells, 25% of wells ignore the rules of safe management, and enforcing is not easy for regulatory agencies.

In South Africa hazardous waste management falls under provincial jurisdiction. The Eastern Cape is likely to be the site of most of the fracking, and remains the 'poorest, least resourced and most administratively weak' province, writes Greg Ruiters. Capacity to deal with the extensive management of hazardous waste from fracking does not yet exist, and will have to be funded and planned. The province's municipalities do not have enough money or workers even for ordinary household and industrial waste. Aside from liquid and solid waste, there will be enormous dust pollution arising from the large-scale transportation of water, sand and chemicals on mostly gravel roads.

Climate

Shale gas is a fossil fuel and its burning contributes to global warming. Although carbon dioxide emissions are less than coal or conventional gas, methane is also a greenhouse gas far more deadly for our climate than carbon dioxide. Recent research from Cornell University by RW Howarth shows that shale gas has a larger greenhouse gas footprint than coal, 20% more, rising to 40% over 20 years. Other studies in the US have shown that fracking releases up to 8% of methane into the atmosphere.

The oil industry nevertheless claims that fracking is less harmful to the environment than coal mining. It advocates that although fossil, shale gas is a sensible 'transition' fuel. What it does not calculate is the requirement for the government to invest in infrastructure for the industry (improved roads, waste disposal, and regulatory functions) which will take investment away from supporting the emerging renewable energy industry.

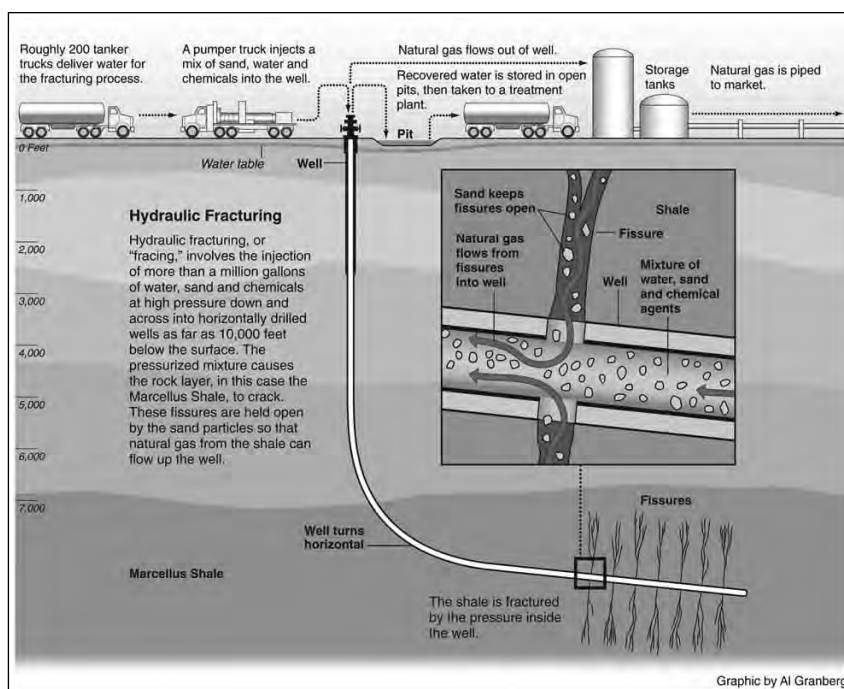
South Africa recently hosted the 17th annual UN climate conference in Durban, making commitments to a plan to lower greenhouse

emissions and to develop a greener economy. Support for a shale gas industry would compromise such commitments.

LIVELIHOODS

If the industry is introduced, will this not lead to an expansion of employment and of the local economy? During the exploration phase, which would last up to nine years, very few jobs (about 100) will be created on site. Running the wells and drilling requires a small number of very skilled workers. The oil companies admit that they will outsource to experienced subcontractors possibly foreign companies, which will use their own labour, and not draw from unskilled Karoo residents. Figures from the US indicate that over 400 wells can be managed by 66 employees.

Jobs will expand in such areas as truck driving, security, road construction, and service provision. However each well can only be fracked around 18 times, and the drilling will move from place to place as wells are closed. This means that there is a cycle of local 'boom and bust' as the fracking moves to new areas.



Credit Al Granberg on Flickr

With the increased risks of water contamination and severe air pollution, the fate of local agriculture is at stake. In the Eastern Cape, agriculture provides over 70,000 jobs in the commercial sector, and livelihoods for many thousands of emerging farmers. Julianne du Toit, a Karoo-based journalist, feels that farming and fracking do not get along. In her view, farming will stop because of air and water contamination. The Karoo would lose its reputation for clean air, soil and farm produce. Those trying to sell up will experience difficulty in finding willing buyers, and property prices would drop. Many farm workers would be displaced, adding to the widespread unemployment.

Furthermore, niche industries like astronomy, palaeontology and ecotourism will also be adversely affected and South Africa's bid to host the Square Kilometre Array of new-generation telescopes might be compromised.

OPPOSITION BUILDS

Propelled by the applications for exploration rights, a new opposition movement quickly arose during 2011. It includes a number of campaigns such as the Treasure the Karoo Action Group (TKAG), which has placed resources in public outreach, research, and legal interventions. TKAG has gained an extensive following through the use of traditional and social media, and its membership consists of residents of the Karoo and large cities. It has made links with other sympathetic campaigns and non-governmental organisations, but remains the main civil society organisation speaking out against fracking.

Public meetings have attracted a great deal of interest, and have seen interventions opposing fracking from personalities such as the entrepreneur Johann Rupert and swimmer Lewis Pugh. Marches in Cape Town have been well

attended, and the movement has generated many posters, t-shirts, leaflets and considerable media attention.

TKAG has a back-up team of legal and communications professionals. The legal team was able to put together a comprehensive response document to the EMR issued by Shell and to challenge Shell's newspaper adverts, which were described by the Advertising Standards Authority as making 'unsubstantiated and misleading' claims.


The legal team also took legal action under the Promotion of Access to Information Act to challenge Mineral Resources minister Shabangu, who had failed to reveal information on the government task team to fracking research. The minister had appointed officials from the Petroleum Agency and departments of Trade and Industry, Mineral Resources, Science and Technology and Energy to serve on the team. However, she did not include representatives of Water, Environment and Agriculture. There was no transparency in the team's consultations, what research it was reviewing or even its terms of reference.

Opposition has also developed within commercial agriculture. Dougie Stern's farm is in the Murraysburg district, where Shell plans to frack. Along with fellow-farmer Lukie Strydom, Dougie was sponsored by BKB (a former farmers' co-operative which markets wool and livestock) to investigate fracking in the United States. The two of them returned as convinced opponents, and have been mobilising other farmers. Stern is an office bearer of Agri-Eastern Cape and has been organising anti-fracking resolutions at local and Agri-SA conferences. Stern rejects the claim that shale gas could be a bridging fuel and feels that instead government should speed up its support for renewables.

FINAL QUESTIONS

How do we as South Africans decide on these questions? We have not created democratic spaces for decision-making on the adoption of new, controversial technologies. We do not have robust regulatory or administrative institutions that could guarantee both the public interest and our rights to clean energy, a safe and healthy environment, and decent livelihoods. The fracking controversy has shown up this deficit in our democracy. Will we be able to resolve these issues through administrative procedures and litigation? Instead we need a broad, lively, transparent national debate that is independent of vested corporate interests.

Meanwhile, the question of trust looms large. Will citizens rely on government to defend the public interest? This seems unlikely, when government is making decisions to favour the technology in the absence of real scientific enquiry. Can we trust the multinational oil companies like Shell, whose record in Nigeria has been complicity with the violation of human rights and who have already been caught out transgressing our advertising standards? If we are serious about the creation of 'green' jobs in a low-carbon economy, why is there such a strong continued interest in inviting large new investment in fossil fuels?

Will the minister take a leaf out of the books of France, Quebec, British Columbia, New York State, New Jersey and New South Wales, which have refused to allow fracking for the present? While the scientific jury remains out, will we take serious risks with the Karoo? 

David Fig is an environmental sociologist, political economist and activist.

WFTU comes to town

In February the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)'s presidential council met in Johannesburg, South Africa. **Elijah Chiwota** writes about the importance of the meeting and its significance to trade unions who feel that a more militant approach is required to effectively confront capitalism

Militant unionists believe that there is political space for a left socialist workers' international. This space can be found in the WFTU. For this reason some Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) affiliates are members of the WFTU. These are the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu), Police, Prisons and Civil Rights Union (Popcru) and Chemical Energy Paper Printing Wood and Allied Workers Union (Ceppwawu).

'Our four unions are informed by our ideological posture and a shared vision of a socialist South Africa and world order that see an end to the crisis of capitalism and the global misery it unleashes on the poor. We are convinced that the solution is the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Our immediate priority is to unite the international working class regardless of colour, religion or sex,' read a statement from the quartet.

Later in the year the unions will persuade other affiliates during

the Cosatu Congress to join the WFTU as part of 'forging unity and close links with other like-minded, class orientated and revolutionary trade unions.' Such African and world trade unions 'need to rally and join WFTU, as the only reliable and trusted global federation of workers to reverse the barbarity and decay of the capitalist system.'

The opening ceremony was addressed by Cosatu president Sdumo Dlamini and WFTU general secretary George Mavrikos. Dlamini said Cosatu shared similar 'ideological perspectives' with WFTU and that 'socialism is the answer'. He saw unity between the WFTU and International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) as important for international trade unionism.

Mavrikos outlined some of the harsh effects of the capitalist crisis. 'Within the very difficult conditions of a capitalist economic crisis, we have to combat the imperialist barbarism, the anti-communism which is strengthened, the widespread elimination of working rights, the increased unemployment, particularly among young people and women, the persecution and murders of trade unionists, the racism and the xenophobia.'

William Matlala



Reviving the WFTU: George Mavrikos.



High-powered delegates: Presidents of Popcru, Ceppwawu, Cosatu and Nehawu at WFTU conference.

As jobs disappeared the crisis also promoted casual work. 'The most acute labour problems that are raised by the capitalist crisis are unemployment, poverty, privatisation, intra-capitalistic rivalries and imperialist aggression. In these conditions of deep economic crisis the capitalists are trying to divide a working place to two or three part-time workers.'

The number of unemployed people was also increasing. 'According to the latest International Labour Organization data, the unemployed and poor workers are more than one-billion. 900-million workers have to live with an "income" below two Euros per day. In Spain, the unemployed are 5.3-million, in France three-million, and in Greece one-million. In the European Union, unemployment now exceeds 23-million; mainly young men and women,' added Mavrikos.

The presidential council, taking place in Africa for the first time since the formation of the WFTU, was held under the theme 'Capitalist barbarism, crisis and imperialist wars or socialism'. Trade union leaders from the Global North and South attended.

LIBERATION STRUGGLE

The WFTU and South Africa's liberation struggle share a common

history. 'The WFTU enjoys a special relationship and honour amongst the trade union movement in South Africa developed over many years during the struggle for national liberation, freedom and struggle for a socialist South Africa. It was the WFTU owing to its close relations with the then South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) that the liberation movement led by the African National Congress (ANC) was able to establish contacts or receive material support from the left-leaning countries such as the Soviet Union, Vietnam, China, Cuba and other countries,' added the statement.

Historically, the WFTU played a critical role in the struggle against capitalism, colonialism and imperialism. During the early days of the WFTU heroes of South Africa's liberation struggle, such as Moses Kotane, Moses Mabhida, Michael Harmel, John Nkadimeng and Eric 'Stalin' Mtshali, took part in its activities. Mark Shope worked as a resident representative at the WFTU headquarters in Prague, Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia).

The meeting coincided with the ANC's centenary celebrations. 'This coincidence is not a sheer accident of history, but informed

by the organic role played by the trade union movement in South Africa and the world in radicalising the ANC, which became rooted amongst the masses!'

GLOBAL CAPITALIST CRISIS

The meeting was also taking place at the time of the global economic crisis and popular protests against the neo-liberal economic system. 'The capitalist system is inherently a crisis-ridden system. It is blatantly obvious for millions of workers around the world that the crisis is not caused by faults in the system, but that the system itself is defective,' said Mavrikos.

This called for a need to strengthen the struggle against multinational companies and global capitalist restructuring which eroded social and labour rights. 'Around the world we are witnessing the obliteration of productive forces, plundering of resources, mass dismissals, factory closures, and the comprehensive attack on workers and trade union rights. The erosion of civil liberties and the attack on countries' sovereignty is increasing at an alarming speed globally,' continued the WFTU general secretary.

The United States was a heavily indebted country and European countries were the same. These countries were on the brink of

collapse because of the misuse of tax payers' money to bail out the rich.

'The resurgence of popular and radical activism or mass rooted movements, such as Occupy Wall Street movements, strike actions in Athens, London and around the world by working-class conscious youth are a direct affirmation of the crisis of capitalism,' added Mavrikos.

Unfortunately, the popular protests have been met with violence. 'All these uprisings by a different range of class forces compelled the imperialist ruling class to explore aggressive ways of maintaining control like waging imperialist wars to secure resources, and demanding definite trade relations. The imperialist sponsored war in Libya and the dastardly execution of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, and the threats by Israel and the US to attack Iran are clear indications of the preparedness of imperialist powers to use military power to rescue capitalism,' concluded the general secretary.

WORKING CLASS AND TRADE UNION UNITY

The attack on the working class needed more organisation and solidarity. 'The current global barbarity and decay as permeated by the global crises of capitalism presents a mammoth task or opportunity for the working-class and the poor of Africa and the world to deepen working-class internationalism and solidarity. Never before has working-class internationalism, universalism, been more important than now. This is in fact made possible by the very expansion of capitalism all over the globe!' added the quartet.

The WFTU has been on the scene for some time. Formed in 1945 in Paris, France after the Second World War, its first congress took place against the background of a united military front victory against

Hitler-led fascist forces. The united military front was between the West led by the United States and the East led by the Soviet Union. There were also broad-based alliances in many countries, even at an international level, between progressive organisations that were against fascism.

'Hence, this world-wide spirit of united action for justice found expression in the trade union movement when the WFTU was formed, bringing together unions from the West and East led by the Congress of Industrial Organisations of the United States and All Union Central Council of Trade Unions of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Other major union centres were the Chinese Federation of Labour and Trade Union Congress of Britain. The delegates represented 55 countries and 20 international organisations, at a time when some countries were still under colonial oppression.'

At present the WFTU has 82-million members in 120 countries and has headquarters in Athens, Greece since January 2006, where it is hosted by the All Militant Workers' Front. There are regional offices in each continent and recently a new office for Africa was opened in South Africa.

In 2011, under the banner of a 'Class-oriented, Uniting, Democratic, Modern and Independent' trade union movement, the WFTU held its 16th World Trade Union Congress in Athens, which was attended by 828 delegates from 101 countries. South Africa was represented by 13 delegates from Nehawu, Numsa and Ceppwawu and Cosatu sent a representative.

The other roles are that it challenges the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) in international forums. Workers' rights are promoted together with recognition of

women and young workers by international conventions and national legislation. Public education, health, social and economic rights for all the people of the world and fighting against the plundering of natural resources by transnational monopolies in the Global South are some of the issues on its agenda.

WFTU documents list the following principles:

- Internal democracy – elections for all bodies at all levels.
- Internationalist working-class solidarity.
- To struggle for peace and friendship between people and against imperialist wars.
- To defend the right of every people and every working class to decide for themselves about their present and future.
- To fight against privatisation and neo-liberalism in general.
- To promote the unity of the working class – with the poor peasants, the landless and progressive intellectuals as its closest allies.
- To involve young people, women and migrant workers in life, activities and administration of trade unions.
- To give priority to the health and safety issues for workers and the improvement of the quality of life and the environment in general.

ITUC NOT RADICAL

The WFTU is seen as being close to the ground than ITUC. Militant unionists argue that by design, ITUC is a representative body of national federations from developed and developing countries' but does not really address issues that concern individual unions. Therefore, it is an all-embracing organisation that needs to find a middle road for the federations.

Those who are blunter describe it as 'capitalist-oriented' as it is seen as sympathetic to the IMF, the

World Bank and the WTO or even to Zionist capital. One of ITUC's affiliates Histadrut is known for identifying with apartheid policies of the Israeli government towards Palestinian workers.

This criticism of ITUC is not new. According to Eddie Webster and Rob Lambert (*SALB* 17.3) there were huge debates about whether Cosatu should affiliate to the predecessor of ITUC, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Amongst its sins, the ICFTU had not only supported white racist unions during the apartheid era, but dictatorships in Asia as well.

It seems though that little has changed. As a result of this Peter Waterman says the ITUC has been so ineffective against the neo-liberal class war to an extent that one of its former leaders called it a 'jester'. However, Cosatu joined ITUC in 1995 because of the uncertainty caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc. Although it criticises ITUC from time to time, it still remains a member but has

always been sympathetic to the WFTU.

Referring to criticism of ITUC by Cosatu, Waterman says: 'Such affiliations have, however, had no visible impact on ITUC's social-liberalism and Eurocentrism. Indeed, ITUC does not even bother to publicly respond to Cosatu's public criticism. And Cosatu's Leftist and Southern union friends remain silently within it, suggesting continued dependence on what remains, admittedly, by far the largest international union body.'

It still remains to be seen how the two international unions can work together as suggested by Dlamini. The other issue will also be to see how they continue to be relevant in an environment where the working class is shrinking due to job losses under the neo-liberal economic system.

CONCLUSION

Waterman argues that the interest of South African trade unions in WFTU is ideological and based on anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric as well as a social reformist

strategy. The reformist strategy is known by such slogans as 'social security for all, collective bargaining - collective agreements, trade union and democratic freedoms, working week of seven hours a day, five days a week, 35 hours per week, better salaries, solidarity with the Palestinian people, freedom to the five Cubans, etc.'

He describes the WFTU's current efforts as a 'second coming', after making what he considers self-inflicted wounds like supporting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The global union also failed to take advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union by reinventing itself as a trade union international of the Global South. Its support of undemocratic regimes also tarnished its name. Peter Hall-Jones says that for now what is important is for the WFTU to form partnerships with unions, build representation, workers' voice and democracy at the workplace. How it will move its agenda into the future without shooting itself in the foot, as happened in the past, is critical. ^{LB}

William Matlala



Numsa delegates sing at WFTU conference.

COP 17 and labour

The aftermath of the Durban COP 17 is a dilemma. Capitalism is not interested in making commitments on climate change, while government has surrendered to capital. With lukewarm interest but no commitment, labour shows signs of apathy, while workers pay more for energy, writes **Patrick Bond**.

The most critical problem facing humankind was amplified at the Durban International Convention Centre in December, as world elites continued their do-nothing tradition on climate change. For the African continent and future generations everywhere, the stakes could not be higher. According to a study promoted by former United Nations (UN) leader Kofi Annan, there are already more than 300,000 deaths per year due to climate change. Temperature increases of more than 4° Celsius on average will translate to 7° in the interior of our continent, including the Northern Cape, making it unlivable.

Africa will be 'cooked', says leading climate justice activist, Nnimmo Bassey of the Niger Delta Environmental Rights Action. According to UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change director RK Pachauri, 'crop net revenues could fall by as much as 90% by 2100'.

Climate damage to Africa will include much more rapid desertification, more floods and droughts, worse water shortages, increased starvation, droves of climate refugees jamming shantypacked cities, and the spread of

malaria and other diseases. The danger is imminent, for eight of the 20 countries the Center for Global Development expects to be most adversely affected by extreme weather events by 2015 are African: Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The many extreme weather events of 2011 included a Durban storm that killed eight people on the eve of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties 17 – dubbed COP17 for short and then redubbed the 'Conference of Polluters'.

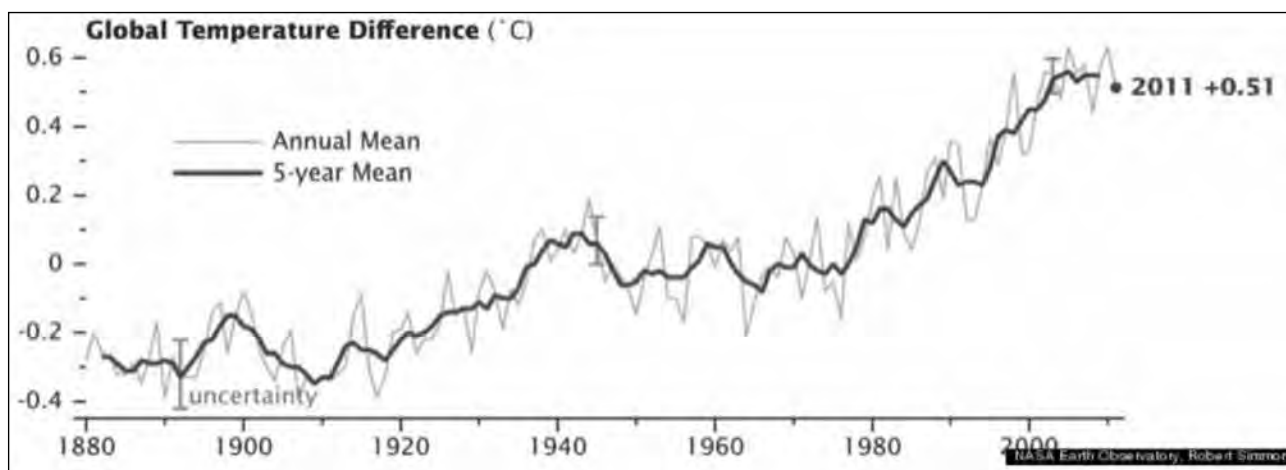
Labour showed interest in this crisis – but frankly, not yet genuine commitment. Worker participation in union-organised 'People's Space' seminars at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) was impressive. Yet somehow in spite of early endorsements, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) failed to take adequate leadership in the C17 coalition of oppositional civil society, to bring out its numbers to the big march on 3 December (aside from providing marshals) and to deliver the promised concert at the end of the march. Nor was there substantive Cosatu support for the 4 December

conference on a Million Climate Jobs at the People's Space. This was a huge missed opportunity, in view of the disastrous neo-liberal process inside the COP17.

GENOCIDE AND ECOCIDE

For future generations, the inability of these COPs to cut back on the primary cause of global warming – greenhouse gas emissions from capitalist energy, transport, agriculture, consumption and disposal – will be seen as genocide-by-omission. Carbon and methane are the main greenhouse gases which in the last 30 years have caused more than a 0.5° increase. The COP17 paralysis ensured that if nothing is done in future years, in this century our descendants will witness at least a 4° average increase. There may, as a result, be more than 150-million additional deaths in Africa.

In order to stop the genocide and ecocide we need nothing short of a new 'mode of production' to replace the current for-profit system run by unaccountable corporations which draw surplus value from workers (and women who reproduce them). The corporations trash the planet, the commons, communities and the very soul of humanity by reducing



Source: National Aeronautical and Space Administration, Washington

all factors to commodities. We need, instead, an eco-socialist system which gives people decent lives, conditions that Latin American Leftists call 'good living' (*buen vivir*), and much greater harmony with nature.

In the short term that will require state regulation of emissions. This is the same as in 1987 when the world elites agreed (in the UN's Montreal Protocol) to phase out chlorofluorocarbons (mixture of carbon, chlorine and fluorine) that produced the dangerous gases methane and ethane that were destroying the ozone protective layer. This will also involve state-owned renewable energy initiatives and shifts in state subsidies away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, public transport (and rail replacing road freight), organic agriculture without pesticides and fertilizer and many other changes.

In the medium term we need full control of the extraction, production, distribution, consumption, disposal and financing circuits to shift from capital to democratic states. Over the long term as communism is achieved, a 'withering away' of centralised states into socially controlled, humane and eco-conscious systems.

The South African government has many opportunities to make shifts in policy, immediately:

- Halt the R250-billion plus worth of coal-fired electricity generators being built by Eskom at Medupi and Kusile and instead redirect the electricity wasted by the single biggest consumer, BHP Billiton, which receives the world's cheapest power thanks to apartheid-era deals.
- Shut the world's single largest CO₂ emissions source, Sasol's Secunda plant which makes oil from coal.
- Reverse the R80-billion heavy oil refinery authorised for construction at Coega, north of Port Elizabeth.
- Deny approval to 40 proposed new coal mines in Mpumalanga, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal allegedly needed to supply the plants and export markets in coming years on grounds that these will cause permanent contamination of rivers and water tables, increased mercury residues and global warming. This is just as the case at the Cradle of Humankind northwest of Johannesburg, which is suffering threats of serious acid mine drainage.
- Open state-owned renewable energy facilities where the private sector is failing, as called for by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa).
- Offer a Just Transition package to all affected workers, transforming their thousands of lost jobs in fossil fuel industries into employment in renewables, public transport, building refurbishment, appropriate production and disposal, reformed agriculture, healthcare and education, as demanded by labour, environmentalists and communities in the Million Climate Jobs campaign.

Aside from adverse power relations, something stands in the way: the so-called 'false solutions' to climate change promoted by financiers and their allies must be defeated. Led by South African planning minister Trevor Manuel, the Durban COP17 advanced these approaches, at the expense of a genuine strategy.

PRIVATISING THE AIR

The main capitalist technique to address climate change is called 'carbon trading' or 'cap and trade'. After a cap is placed on total emissions, the idea is that high-polluting corporations and governments can buy ever more costly carbon permits from those which don't need so many, or from those willing to part with the permits for a higher price than the profits they make in production or energy-generating or transport activities.

Advocates say that this will more efficiently direct funds into rewarding advanced companies that cut their emissions fastest. As a result of Al Gore's lobbying when he was US Vice President in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol put carbon trade at the heart of the emissions reduction strategy. (In exchange for this, Gore said the US would support Kyoto – yet back in the US in 1998, the Senate vote on signing the protocol was 95-0 against.)

Carbon trading has not worked as promised. With Europe as the base, world emissions trade grew to around \$140-billion in 2008 but markets then went flat due to economic meltdown, increasing corruption, fraud, oversupply and despondency following the failed Copenhagen COP15. Although the trade in air pollution was at one point projected to expand to \$3-trillion/year by 2020 if the US were to sign on (and a spin-offs market could have boosted the figure

by a factor of five or more), the market subsequently crashed.

From a high of more than €30/tonne of carbon in 2006, the market's price in Europe has fallen to around €7 today, and a leading Swiss UBS bank analyst predicted a €3/tonne price in coming months, because the EU Emissions Trading Scheme 'isn't working' and carbon prices are 'already too low to have any significant environmental impact.'

Reuters news service's PointCarbon concluded, 'Carbon markets are still on life support after the COP17 put off some big decisions until next year and failed to deliver any hope for a needed boost in carbon permit demand.' The French bank Societe Generale projects, 'European carbon permits may fall close to zero should regulators fail to set tight enough limits in the market after 2020' – and without much prospect of that, the bank lowered its 2012 forecasts by 28%.

These prices are far too low for transformation and innovation to begin. At least €50/tonne is needed to achieve a solid post-carbon foothold. By all scientific accounts, by 2020 it is vital to wean the industrialised world economy from dependence upon more than half the currently-consumed fossil fuels, so as to avert catastrophic climate change. But there are still backers of carbon trading, notwithstanding its failures to date.

South African National Business Initiative chief executive officer Joanne Yawitch – a member of Pretoria's negotiations team and formerly the second-ranking climate bureaucrat – remarked that 'the most important' of Durban's outcomes is securing Kyoto's 'second commitment period and the carbon market.' Yet all the evidence suggests that the capitalist strategy is not working.

The only real winners in



Marching for climate justice: Activists in Durban during COP17.

William Mattala



emissions markets are speculators, financiers, consultants including from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and energy sector hucksters who make billions of dollars in profits on the sale of notional emissions reduction credits. As the air becomes privatised and commodified, poor communities across the world suffer, and resources and energy are diverted away from real solutions.

FINGERPRINTS ON CORPSES

Of course it is tempting to ignore the stench of failure and declare Durban 'an outstanding success,' as did South African environment minister Edna Molewa. 'We have significantly strengthened the international adaptation agenda,' she explained about the near-empty Green Climate Fund. 'The design of the fund includes innovative mechanisms for bringing private sector and market mechanisms into play to increase the potential flow of funding into climate change responses.'

The back-slapping continued. In his February 9 State of the Nation address, Zuma declared 'the conference a huge success. The final outcome of COP17 was historic and precedent setting, ranking with the 1997 conference

where the Kyoto Protocol was adopted.' But according to the New York Times, at the recent World Economic Forum in Switzerland, a top aide to chief US State Department negotiator Todd Stern remarked that 'the Durban platform was promising because of what it did not say.' After all, revealed Trevor Houser, 'There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.' Zuma's 'huge success' was in reality a sell-out of the UN's tradition of differentiated responsibility between rich and poor countries.

Bolivia's former UN ambassador Pablo Solon scolded the hosts for turning Kyoto into a 'Zombie, a soulless undead'. The 1997 treaty's soul was a commitment that emissions cuts would be binding, but several of the richest polluting countries – the US, Canada, Japan, Russia, Australia and New Zealand – won't sign on the second commitment period.

To sabotage Kyoto, Washington continues its voluntary 'pledge and review' policy joke. Kyoto's original brain contained a species

survival mechanism: a pledge to keep the earth's temperature at a livable level. Now, the Durban Platform contains 'less than half of the necessary cuts to keep the temperature increase below 2°C,' says Solon.

The hosts can be blamed for the genocide because the COP17 chairperson, foreign minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, acted without giving too much thought at best or with the interests of capitalists at worst. Those who argue her failure was based on whimsy point out that less than four months before the COP17, she revealed her commitment to the planet by hiring a R240,000 executive jet to take her from Norway to Bulgaria when she refused to board a commercial flight that required her handbag be whisked through the Oslo airport metal-detector, as for all such dignitaries.

Such lack of seriousness appeared again when Nkoana-Mashabane ignored applications for the Dalai Lama's visa, as far back as June 2011, so he could have attended the October celebration of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 80th birthday party – reminding us of the same situation 30 months earlier when Beijing proudly announced that Pretoria was under its thumb.

The COP17 host's self-interest is to protect the crony-capitalist 'minerals-energy complex', in which Zuma's family has been dabbling, in the process exhibiting extreme environmental irresponsibility as witnessed by a nephew's and legal advisor's destruction of the Aurora mines, its workers' wage claims and the surrounding environs. This was most explicitly revealed in the blatantly corrupt African National Congress (ANC) deal with Hitachi to supply boilers to the Medupi and Kusile power plants, a multimillion rand bonsola approved by former environment minister, Eskom chair and ANC

finance committee member Valli Moosa.

As both victim and villain, South Africa is a poster-child for elite mismanagement of the climate threat. A good measure of our economic elites' addiction to fossil fuels is *carbon intensity per capita unit of output*, and we have amongst the world's highest, about *20 times higher* than even that great climate Satan, the US.

An insignificant contribution to the energy grid – less than 4% in 2010 – comes from South Africa's incredible renewable potential in solar, tidal and wind sources. Instead, electricity produced by burning filthy coal is cross-subsidised so it is the cheapest available anywhere in the world for the world's largest mining and metals corporations, BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation. Their smelters pay less than R0.15/kilowatt-hour (KWH) thanks to 'Special Pricing Agreements'.

The NGO Earthlife Africa squeezed that data from Eskom via the Access to Information Act, now surely impossible thanks to parliament's secrecy bill. Other large corporations received electricity in 2009 at R0.40/kWh, still the world's lowest price – and although rates have soared dramatically, to more than R1/kWh for many small pre-paid meter household consumers, the lowest increases were imposed on the biggest firms. Still, to the extent that some metals manufacturers are suffering electricity price hikes to build Kusile and Medupi, it will be workers' wages that come under first and fiercest pressure.

Worse, these are not SA companies reinvesting in our economy, for the main metals/mining firms' export their profits through illegal transfer pricing. According to a recent study by the University of the Witwatersrand this general practice cost us a fifth of the gross domestic product

(GDP) in 2007. The companies also transfer money through dividends to shareholders in London (Anglo) and Melbourne (BHP Billiton), given the relocation of so many mega firms' financial headquarters out of South Africa a decade ago. Furthermore, internal consumption of metals is constrained by notorious local over-pricing.

Meanwhile, millions of poor people are regularly disconnected or denied access to the grid due to extreme poverty, affecting nearly half the country's families. Warfare is underway against municipalities and Eskom in the form of ubiquitous 'service delivery protests' whose recent root causes in high-priced electricity can be traced to climate change via the bill for Medupi/Kusile construction, controversially financed by the World Bank's largest-ever loan.

The bank claims Medupi will help the poor, once again standing reality on its head. Moreover, because of backsliding from clean electricity to dirty household energy like coal, wood or paraffin, the passage from HIV-positive to full-blown AIDS status is rapid via respiratory-related opportunistic infections, including the raging TB epidemic, especially affecting women exposed to soot when cooking over biomass.

LABOUR'S CHALLENGES

Civil society must tell no lies and claim no easy victories. Community activists and environmentalists did not do a very good job in mobilising local citizens to stand up in fury at the tragedy unfolding in the convention centre. A small 'Occupy COP17' presence – mainly arranged by international visitors – could not convey the class and race-biased oppression that climate change imposes. As for labour, Durban offered two crucial challenges:

- Would Cosatu unions ally with environmentalists and communities, taking the leadership gap through mass action and ensuring class analysis is added to environmentalism so as to promote climate justice?
- Would the unions most exposed to carbon and changing climate policy – especially in the mining, metals and transport sectors – lead the search for a transformative vision of a post-carbon economy?

In partial ways, optimists could answer affirmatively. In spite of Cosatu leadership's discomfort with independent-left forces fighting climate change, such as the Democratic Left Front which brought out several hundred activists, there were at least thoughts to bring unity to progressive civil society. Unions in the metals, transport and paper industries made strides to go post-carbon, even if they have not yet sold their ideas to all their members and the broader society on this burning agenda. They are also making these efforts when some unions like the mineworkers still promote more coal-digging out of short-sighted desperation.

Still, there is no way for organised labour to ignore climate challenges, since jobs and the broader arrangement of society are going to be renegotiated by necessity in coming years. The big questions remain: will labour activists be at the forefront and use the climate crisis to also question the capitalist mode of production and its profit accumulation agenda? As now appears likely, will a divided union movement be used against its logical allies who are critical of elite climate policy? **LB**

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World economic crisis:

Warning bells for sub-Saharan Africa

There is no point for South African market fundamentalists to call for protection against the economic crisis that has hit the United States and Europe because the country is already in the belly of a crisis. There are high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality, writes **Bhabhali Ka Maphikela Nhlapo**.

There has been so much talk on the causes of the 2008 economic crisis. What is more puzzling in the discussions is that most South African-based market fundamentalists are using the crisis to attack the Left. They argue that the country was saved from the crisis by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) Strategy that was adopted in 1996. As a result we were not forced to take austerity measures as in the case of the PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and Spain) countries.

This is indeed cheap talk that trade unions and the working class must reject. However, such conversation should be based on evidence rather than the sentiments and emotions of capital. Therefore, it is important to trace the causes of the crisis and understand how the PIIGS and the rest of Europe got affected.

CREDIT SPREE

The economic crisis started with major banks in the United States (US) experiencing a crisis because of poor lending practices. For a long time the banks, including those in

South Africa, went on a credit spree giving huge loans and credit to the poor. In the last 10 years it became fashionable for clothing and even food stores to give consumers credit facilities such as shopping and credit cards. In some bizarre and extreme instances, credit was even given to unemployed people.

With the way things worked at that time, consumers bought first and worried about paying later. In the US easy credit was made available on a big scale. Many consumers were encouraged to borrow and live beyond their means. The banks moved away from financing firms that produced goods and products to providing money for consumption. This happened simply because banks made more profits without ever thinking of the negative consequences for industries, job creation and society in general. This is largely due to capitalism's never-ending lust for profits, no matter the costs.

The other area of the crisis was the housing sector. The banks saw this sector as another cash cow. They also influenced the borrowing of money by those who already had houses leading to refinancing of

properties to the benefit of capital. Therefore some consumers were forced to re-finance their most valuable assets.

The housing sector then started to experience a boom where everyone needed to invest. The prices of houses shot up making them unaffordable to many. With the increase in the cost of living, most debtors defaulted on their bonds.

Rising house values and the failure of the borrowers to repay their loans led to the bursting of the housing market bubble and the fall of the stock markets. The crisis began. The banks were then bailed out by the International Banking Society using public and not private funds. The US government was quick to address the situation, even though capitalists never agreed that they created the problem in the first place. Therefore, no public money was needed to finance big business.

However, as the crisis has spread to the PIIGS the fear is that soon workers in South Africa will be affected. There is so much talk, even by government officials and our leaders, of protecting our countries from the crisis. It is so unfortunate

that a country like South Africa, that is already in the middle of its own crisis, can talk of any insulation. How can these officials even justify their views when such high levels of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and inequality exist?

We need to agree that the crises in our country and the sub-continent, are way ahead of the Eurozone and the Americas, as shown by our poor economic indicators. These officials and leaders are attempting to convince us that South Africa will not be immediately affected because of the effectiveness of Gear.

EUROZONE DIFFERENT FROM SA

The PIIGS countries' situation therefore comes about due to a variety of factors that we do not have as a developing country or region. For example, the US dollar is trading lower than the Euro. This suggests that all Eurozone countries have stronger economies to that of the US. However, this is not necessarily the case as only Germany, Britain, and France and to some extent Switzerland's economies are somewhat comparable to the US.

The other Eurozone countries came screaming for Euro integration clearly aware that they had low financial reserves. Others like Britain and Switzerland have until today not bought into the Eurozone concept. The PIIGS countries, being the poor cousins, have therefore not adjusted to the Euro integration because they had inadequate reserves to support their former currencies. The other reason of the sudden problem of the PIIGS countries has been the US crisis itself. When the US banks realised that their economy was in recession they withdrew their capital from markets like the PIIGS and invested it in the US so as to salvage their homeland. This was then the first real taste of the crisis for the PIIGS.

It is puzzling that market fundamentalists do not agree with

these points. They doubt whether huge withdrawals took place but do not discuss why developing countries were not as affected as the PIIGS. What they fail to appreciate is that world trade statistics suggest that developed countries enjoy about 70% of trade exchanges, whilst the developing countries only enjoy 30%.

Interestingly, 20% of the 30% of world trade goes to China and India leaving only 10% for developing countries. This means that most world trade happens between developed countries themselves. Therefore, if the withdrawals happened only developed countries like the PIIGS would be adversely affected rather than the developing countries with less capital inflows from the US.

The other reason for the PIIGS problem is high indebtedness to the French and German banks and, admittedly, the problem of poor productivity in their economies, which was rewarded with high salaries over the years. This has co-existed against the comparatively low salaries versus high productivity levels in largely the northern states of the Eurozone such as France and Germany.

Furthermore, the PIIGS borrowings over the years were meant to sustain the failures of the states to fund the public sector services and the salaries of their workers. Unfortunately, the market fundamentalists use this argument to attack South African labour. They argue that had South Africa not adopted austerity measures in 1996 through Gear, we could have also landed in the same boat.

These arguments are false, for even with Gear the socio-economic problems of the country have not changed and have in fact strengthened white monopoly capital through the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) buffers and worsened the lot of the working class. This unfortunate comparison of the PIIGS countries

to a developing country fails to take into consideration basic economic fundamentals of the two situations. For instance, before the crisis South Africa had an unemployment rate of 25-35%. In comparison, countries like Ireland and Spain were moving (before the crisis) from figures like 4.6 and 8.3% to 11.9 and 18%.

The problems of the European Union dictatorship of choosing political leadership for their governments and even the policy choices should be viewed for what they are, a simple failure of the liberal system of democracy, which is the daily worldwide 'feedstock' of market fundamentalist policies. They can't be seen as a result of the market, but rather the power of the Euro financiers over those of their elected governments and the fact that since the advent of the European Union their governments now exist only on paper.

These governments failed to dictate to Germany earlier on its expansionary fiscal programmes that increased government spending in order to increase demand and stimulate the economy. Therefore, this means that while the world had economic and financial crises only those countries with strong state control over capital flows, economic policy choices and the markets like Germany, US and China remained stable.

It should also be noted that in the beginning of the crisis when France proposed joint European expansionary policies it was criticised by Germany amongst others. This was truly an act of ensuring that the rescue operation that Germany had undertaken need not help others. If it did so there would be no markets for German banks to lend out to in the Eurozone or its exploitation of the circumstances of the PIIGS countries.

There are two reasons why the PIIGS countries situation and the Gear choices for South Africa



Fetching firewood by rural women in SA exposes the crisis.

are different. For instance, our choices were not forced upon us. As a country we made wrong policy choices that led to high unemployment, massive poverty and one of the world's greatest inequality levels.

The PIIGS countries, on the other hand, do not have the same problems as we do and are part of the developed world as they play in that league. We are also at times duped by our representation in the G20 and the Security Council membership to think that we are in the big leagues. Unfortunately our economic fundamentals suggest the opposite.

To highlight the differences between South Africa and the developed world it is necessary to review the International Labour Organisation Global Employment Trends for 2011. There are three critical factors mentioned in the report's analysis of the impact of the global crisis on sub-Saharan Africa.

'The impact of the economic crisis has generally been less severe in low income economies mainly due to their limited trade and financial linkages with the global economy', reads the report. This shows that some announcements made at high levels of government do not recognise the situation on the ground.

Also singing from the same hymn book are Treasury officials who say we were shielded from the crisis by proper controls in the banking system. However, this is not true since the banking system is even more vicious when compared to its European counterparts.

For instance, it has been repeatedly reported that the costs of banking in our country higher when compared to all our trading partners. We also know that the housing asset price bubble and even the credit crunch in our country are similar to those of the developed world. The only cushion has only been our limited exposure

to the international markets and the lower volumes of trade especially in the short term that has made us a bit 'better'. However, if we compare our economy to that of Europe we have always been in a crisis.

'Accelerating the progress on the achievement of decent work in sub-Saharan Africa requires more resources and better economic and social policies', continues the report. Now here is a tripartite institution clearly arguing that fiscal austerity and less government intervention is a myth and is not a solution to the problem of our countries.

Social safety nets are also needed. 'Another imperative that was underlined during the economic crisis is the need for social protection and safety net measures, not only to function as automatic stabilisers, which help mitigate the impact of volatile economic growth, but also to support the large number of employed and unemployed living below the poverty line.'

Finally, the market fundamentalists' argument for the deregulation of the labour market has no evidence and even support. The International Labour organization (ILO) recently concluded a study in more than 40 countries to examine this notion of labour market flexibility that Treasury officials, Minister Pravin Gordhan, labour brokers and even the opposition always rally around. It came to a conclusion that there is lack of evidence of any relationship between the labour market flexibility and higher levels of employment creation at all, let alone protecting those in current employment and even unemployed young people.

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) in its 11 September 2010 Growth Path document clearly argued that for economic transformation to happen we need

to create full employment based on the principles of decent work. To achieve this it argued for public works programmes employing mostly the disabled, young people, and women and households that have no income.

Cosatu further argued for the redistribution of income and power through collective and public forms of ownership to balance against colonial land dispossession and the few black enrichment programmes. State support for local industrial development is also needed.

The meeting of basic needs of employment, health, housing and education and training was important. Additionally, environmental sustainability was important in minimising the disruption of natural processes and degradation. The fulfilment of international obligations to foster economic and cultural integration through the development of Southern Africa was critical. Cosatu argues that this will also help to stop the high migration levels that are caused by extreme poverty in the region.

The Left and organised labour therefore cannot leave capital's claims unchallenged. We must continue to argue for strong state control over the economy and say no to capital controls, free markets, social spending austerity and financial integration to capitalist markets. These policies have proven to be strong pillars against market fundamentalism, which is a route to the misery of the greater majority of the peoples of the world.

The developments between the EU and Greece should be a warning lesson that countries with large economies can erode the political power of countries with smaller economies through economic muscle. This has been demonstrated by Germany's support of the proposal for Greece to surrender her budgetary control powers to the EU. This would have then allowed Greece to meet the fiscal

targets set out by international lenders who are the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank and the European Commission.

This support should be seen for what it really is, the protection of German interests since the country is one of the prime funders to the three institutions. This is the risk that the crisis poses on the rest of the PIIGS countries.

Developing countries have always been dictated to in terms of economic policies since colonialism. The crisis therefore is another opportunity for the developed countries to find means of controlling macro-economic policies of developing countries. Therefore labour unions must work tirelessly to strengthen their governments in pursuing real developmental agendas as a strategy against the crisis as opposed to being dictated to by the developed world.

We also can't afford to listen to the banks for solutions as they were responsible for the crisis in the first place. We should rather strengthen the states so that they are able to strictly regulate the banks not to cause other problems because of their greed.

We should learn from the experiences of the developed world where banks soon forgot that the state had saved it and started their speculative attacks on the same states. This is also another major reason why developing countries now suffer from poor international financial ratings and further crises. As Frank Hoffer of the ILO has noted, this has been made easy by the insufficient financial market regulations that led to capital flight and massive tax evasions and then led to the speculative attacks on the currencies. ¹⁸

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Protests must draw class line

Service delivery protests in South Africa and international protests against the capitalist crisis must be understood using class analysis of the working class versus the capitalist class. Any other approach gives a distorted view, writes **Trevor Ngwane**.

South Africa is a capitalist society and capitalism is 'a mad and dreadful system ruled by inhumane, hypocritical parasites', writes Sandra Bloodworth, an Australian socialist. It is a system that breeds resistance and struggle. This observation is the starting point for my analysis of the increase in 'service delivery protests' in the country, and other protest actions in the world.

The South African working class's victory over apartheid has largely benefitted capital and sections of the middle class. Unemployment is high and so is poverty and inequality. This is why the struggle against oppression and exploitation continues.

Most people agree that the militant and sometimes violent protests waged by working-class communities in the country are a result of these harsh realities in the 'new, democratic and free' South Africa. But there is not enough emphasis on the class nature of these protests and the role they play in the unfolding class struggle.

Service delivery protests are an expression of the working class's struggle against the capitalist class. Bourgeois ideology hides this fact. Sometimes even Left analysts and activists fall into this trap largely

because they seem to have lost hope and confidence in the power of the working class to successfully challenge capitalism and replace it with a socialist system based on caring and sharing.

In the December/January issue of *Time* magazine it is suggested that the 'protester' is the 2011 Person of the Year because of the protests that took place in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, Israel, Russia, Spain, Greece, England, the United States (US), Malawi, Nigeria, Swaziland, and other countries. The protests in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya successfully overthrew governments.

But for editors of *Time* magazine, and most middle-class political commentators, the protests are judged on a moral rather than a political plane. For them it is a struggle between good and evil, reason versus unreason, peacemakers versus warmongers. When the analysis is couched in political terms it is democracy versus dictatorship, good governance versus corruption, and the haves' against the have not's. Yet, none of all this is seen as expressing a class struggle.

In other words, it is assumed that capitalist rule will continue no matter what the protesters say or demand, and no matter the scale of

their struggle. There might be some improvements or changes in boss-worker relations, in the relationship of rulers to the ruled and in the unequal power relations that this implies, but in essence all this will continue.

Time notes that 'the protest vanguard... [is] disproportionately young, middle class and educated'. This is a clue to why the two-billion working-class people, the largest social group in the world and producers of social wealth, are written out of the historical equation. The middle class thinks and appears to be important but it is not a principal class under capitalism. Alone it cannot lead society in major historical change or provide an alternative way of running society, as it neither produces nor owns the means of production.

The future of society depends on the capitalist, the working class, and the struggle between them. During times of great class struggle the middle class always sides with one or the other of these two classes: the private owners of the wealth and those who produce it.

The capitalists rely on workers to work for them and on the middle class to spread their ideas about how society should be run in a way



Marching for free service delivery in Soweto.

that protects and promotes capital. The middle class are required to teach workers the core values of capitalism, namely, respect for private ownership of wealth and competitive individualism. The middle class are rewarded with more pay and a higher status in society.

Today the capitalist system is in great crisis, which began in 2008 when big banks went bankrupt in Europe and the US. Millions of people lost their savings, houses and jobs. We can call this a rolling global capitalist crisis. It is unstoppable, continues during periods of economic decline and growth, and moves from place to place. However, it changes its form, content and intensity as it spreads and capitalists have no solution but can only try to manage the crisis.

Capitalists force workers to pay for their crises through retrenchments and reducing wages. But this time the bosses cannot just do what they like. They are not strong enough to solve their crisis. Their attacks on the living standards of workers provoke resistance. In most countries the attempt to cut social spending through reducing health and welfare benefits and getting rid of the welfare state in Europe has led to more resistance.

In South Africa, there have been thousands of service delivery protests because of lack of services and the practice of forcing working class communities to pay for basic services such as water, electricity, housing and education. We can expect big general strikes in the near future as employed workers mobilise in response to the capitalist crisis.

Why is it the youth and the unemployed rather than organised workers in trade unions that are protesting in South Africa? Why is the middle class leading protests in other parts of the world?

To answer these questions we must not stray from consistently applying a working-class perspective. Firstly, specific conditions in each country and region shape how class struggles unfold. In South Africa, less than 20 years have passed since the fall of apartheid. Also, the Alliance between the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) formed during the struggle against apartheid continues to exist despite problems. The Alliance helps in calming the frustration of unionised workers.

In countries such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia we find dictatorial Islamic regimes that benefit from the sale of oil. In Europe, decades of bourgeois democracy and economic development subsidised by imperialism allowed significant political and economic gains by the working class and an increase of the middle class.

Secondly, the working class has failed to provide a solution to the capitalist crisis. There are protests but no decisive challenge to overthrowing capitalist rule. The capitalists also have no solution. It is a kind of stalemate because none of the classes is leading society out of the crisis.

Rosa Luxemburg famously said that humanity must choose

between socialism or barbarism. The future of capitalist society depends on how the class struggle plays itself out. In the hands of the bosses, the future is more crisis and barbarism. In the hands of workers, the future is a fundamentally different socialist society with no alienation, exploitation and oppression.

Meanwhile, the capitalists rely on middle class agents to safeguard their system. The absence of an immediate working-class alternative allows the middle-class to become more important than it is. It begins to demand more improvements in material situation and social status. The bosses have no choice but to meet these demands because they need the middle class to protect their threatened system.

The global economic crisis means that middle-class expansion is funded by increasing worker exploitation through job cuts, denial of benefits, outsourcing, casualisation, longer hours, and privatisation. Conditions of living are allowed to worsen in the form of an increase in shacks, urban slums, and the inadequate provision of services.

The middle-class demands cheap consumer goods, cars, and other commodities. This requires restructuring the production and use of resources. The demand for protein, more meat, can mean less production of staple foods needed by the working-class majority.

The middle class is not a secure class. None are secure given the anarchy of the capitalist system. Company bankruptcies mean an abrupt end to carefully built careers and bank collapses wipe out life savings. Crime, strikes, riots, protests and social turmoil makes it more anxious. Its fear and hatred of the mob extends to trade unions – the organised mob. It demands more police, law and order, jails, discipline and the intensification of exploitation of the working class in order to ensure social stability and



Soweto women lead a march.

to safeguard a way of life based on middle-class 'values' and 'hard work'.

Another section of the middle class prefers a form of social stability cemented by human rights, dignity, social justice and the rule of law. These are noble aims, but for middle-class social democrats it means they are the main actors, custodians and missionaries handing out these gifts to the 'poor' and 'unenlightened' masses, which puts them above the working class. They try to hide the class perspective by claiming that their approach is non-political, is not politics and does not serve the interests of any particular class, but benefits all in society. That is why they deny the existence of class struggle.

The working class is not recognised as a class but rather as individuals who need middle-class help and guidance. Some on the Left fall into this trap when they theoretically cut up the working class and reconstruct it as the poor,

homeless, jobless, landless, waterless, illiterate, hungry, and the sick. The agency of the working class and its organic capacity to change history that was first identified by Karl Marx is distorted, substituted, surrendered and denied. This is the significance of the idea of the 'protester' as the Person of the Year. The protester becomes the new revolutionary subject – not the working class.

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

A different view of service delivery protests is that, just like strikes at the workplace, they are waged by the youth and members of the working class pushed to struggle by the barbarism of capitalism. And just like the strikes, they are made possible by working-class solidarity in the struggle. Without solidarity there would be no strike or collective protest. Solidarity fights against the alienation and competitive individualism of

capitalism. Solidarity is caring, sharing and looking after each other in order to build the strength to defend and advance against capital.

Solidarity is grounded in how the working class survives under capitalism. It is found in grannies sharing their pensions with grandchildren; uncles helping nephews; and neighbours helping each other. It is then taken forward in mobilising for collective struggles. It is about sympathy, support and unity.

Above all, it is about strengthening the working class in its struggle for needs. No worker or group of workers can win the fight alone. Each struggle has to find strength in others. Striking workers need the solidarity of other employed workers, but in particular, of unemployed workers who have the power of refusing to scab and take the job of the workers on strike.

Similarly, the unemployed worker

and the youth fighting for essential services in the township cannot win alone. They need the solidarity of employed workers. The latter have more social weight because they are central in the production process and can shut the capitalist system by stopping production. During the struggle against apartheid the militant youth in the Vaal went to their employed parents to find the additional strength they needed to win against the regime. That was how the powerful 1984 stay-away happened.

Recently the people of Thembelihle, a shack settlement in Lenasia, south of Johannesburg, protested for a week but in the end called off their action as they realised that they needed solidarity – extra strength – from other members of the working class in order to win their demands. Their protest was militant, heroic and well-organised, but like the Vaal youth they realised that they could not win or struggle alone.

Many communities fighting for service delivery must learn this lesson because there is too much fragmentation and isolation of the struggles. Solidarity with other communities and with the trade unions must be organised. Bosses do not fight alone but they support each other. They have their state, money, the media and other social institutions that they can use to crush working class resistance. When you fight alone you can begin to think that the bosses are stronger and the working class is weak. Solidarity has been a central aspect of the vision of mobilised workers throughout history. It is also the condition for a working-class victory.

Workers face the challenge of learning or re-learning how to define their class enemy. The ANC was brought in directly from being banned, with some leaders straight from jail, to manage the capitalist state. This reflects both the power of the national liberation movement,

but also points to the tactics capitalists can use when defending their system. It can be argued that in a class war the ANC will and does stand on the other side of the class line. But many workers are still loyal to it and some will not let go of the hope that it stands on their side.

Moving forward means that this problem must be addressed head on. The protests and strikes open the door for workers to reconsider their loyalty to the ANC given its central role in maintaining the capitalist system. Active involvement in struggle and reflecting on their experience allows ordinary workers to know more about who they are, understand their capacity, class strength, what they are fighting for and who their class enemy is. But this process is not automatic and must contend with the interference of the capitalist class and the state.

In South Africa, Malawi, Egypt, India, Brazil, Italy, and all countries of the world, workers and radical sections of the middle class willing to learn from and be led by workers, will realise in the course of heightened struggle that there can be no real solution unless capitalist power is replaced by working-class power. Each worker will then see themselves as part of a class fighting a class war against

capitalism. Each struggle will be seen as aiming to build a new and different kind of society.

The capitalist system is an international system and can only be defeated by the solidarity of striking and protesting workers uniting across towns, villages, national borders and the seas. This is not an impossible prospect because solidarity is grounded in the truth of working-class life under capitalism. It has happened before when workers from all over the world supported the international anti-apartheid movement. There was a realisation that without worldwide solidarity there could be no real solution in South Africa. Today, in the context of a rolling global capitalist crisis, the protests can become a process of stirring up millions of ordinary working-class people to become agents of the change necessary to create a world without alienation, exploitation and oppression.

That is the only way the victory against apartheid can be rescued and turned into a meaningful success – again. ¹⁸

Trevor Ngwane is a member of the Socialist Group and used its documents and positions in writing this article.



Labour, civil society and the state:

Protests against fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria

Petrol price increases do not just happen in Nigeria, as the working class, civil society and citizens will not allow government to remove a fuel subsidy. When government tried to remove the subsidy they were met with protests and rage and had to back off, write **Yusha'u Muttaqa** and **Tahir Hashim**.

Since the return of Nigeria to civilian administration in 1999, the government is hell-bent in removing the subsidy in the petroleum industry. This has resulted in continuous price hikes of petroleum products. The Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO), an alliance formed by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) with pro-labour civil society under the banner of the Joint Action Front (JAF), are challenging the neo-liberal posture of the Nigeria state with robust campaigns and mass actions accompanied by nationwide strikes.

The idea of LASCO arose in the context of rebuilding the labour movement and the popular opposition to the continuous hikes, arising from the policy of deregulation of the so-called downstream sector of the petroleum industry. This alliance became inevitable due to the absence of a vibrant opposition in the era of state retreat from vital sectors of the economy. The political parties that were supposed to provide meaningful

opposition became part of the ruling people's Democratic Party (PDP), through unholy alliances.

Historically, the struggle of trade unions in Nigeria was done in alliances with civil society organisations and other professional bodies in the country that challenged state domination and the repression of popular forces. For instance, the struggle against the imposition of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in the 1980s and the quest for democratic governance in the 1990s was unprecedented.

Several policy documents and position papers were issued by the popular forces in the wake of the crisis. Such position papers included *Nigeria not for sale* issued in the 1980s, *Workers charter of demand* and *Towards economic recovery*. These position papers were issued as alternatives to Nigeria's neo-liberal policy paradigm that sought to sell the country to market forces, under the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

In the era of globalisation,

the democratisation process is endangered as decision-making excludes citizens. As analysed by Altavater: 'Politically globalisation and concomitant deregulation also means that privatised decision-making is also de-politicised; it no longer needs citizen legitimating, not only political decision but economic decision.'

In recent times, the subsidy on petroleum products has been the most controversial issue in the country. While some people especially those in government and their friends are so passionate about the removal of the subsidy, Nigerian masses including trade unions and civil society groups are against the withdrawal.

Those supporting the withdrawal see it as the magic wand that the government needs to provide social services to Nigerians and for booting the economy. But, to those opposed to its withdrawal, the subsidy does not exist in the first place. To this group, what exists is government's inefficient management of petroleum

products administration, supply and distribution which has created a cabal. This group has hijacked the purchase, supply and distribution of the products.

Although government subsidises petroleum products it inflates the amount it is spending argues the second group. This group also believes that this is not the best time for the withdrawal of the subsidy as four refineries are not producing to their maximum capacity and that Nigeria should rely on its own fuel for local consumption instead of importing from other countries.

A subsidy is not a new development. Thomas Wolsey, an advisor to King Henry VIII, in collaboration with the Treasurer of Chamber John Heron devised a new tax system of getting people to pay according to their financial strength. The money so realised was used in running the administration by the king. In other words, a subsidy is a financial measure put in place especially by governments or individuals or organisations to remove some type of burden and it is considered to be in the public interest.

SUBSIDY FOR THE PEOPLE

In 1973, the military government of General Yakubu Gowon set up the Petroleum Equalisation Fund (PEF), the objective of which was to bring stability and uniformity in the prices of petroleum products that were consumed in the country. The fund was to bridge the gap in prices since the products were not taken to a single destination. This fund, which was the then subsidy, was meant to ensure that Nigerians buy the petroleum products at the same prices irrespective of where they bought the products.

The money that was added by government to those involved in the transportation and distribution of the petroleum products

became so attractive that, all those involved in the business became so powerful as to form a cabal that is now holding Nigeria ransom. Over the years, this became a form of business where quick money could be made. This cabal made sure that every attempt by successive governments to rehabilitate the railway for the purpose of transporting the petroleum products across the country was frustrated so that they would continue to enjoy profits.

All this happened during the era of the oil boom when the country made huge amounts of money from petroleum. This was when the subsidy was introduced. What the Gowon regime did was to offer some form of intervention to protect the Nigerian masses from the negative impact of the free-market system as the cost of transportation is included in pricing.

The inability of the government and its agencies responsible for the management of petroleum revenue has created many fortresses of corruption within the oil industry. This creates the impression that a subsidy is retrogressive and therefore moves the wheel of social and economic development backward. Subsidy is not a new development and not restricted to Nigeria as developed countries in Europe and America subsidise their agricultural sector and also give relief to the poor.

The global financial crises forced the United States and other developed countries to provide financial support to their capital market in order to save their economies from collapsing. This is evidence that subsidies are not bad after all. So, it is never a bad thing for the market and government to co-exist for the benefit of citizens. The problem is not the subsidy, but the inability of the government to effectively manage it for the benefit of Nigerians.

Government's inefficiency created economic problems and bred corruption in the oil industry. Not knowing what to do, the government, decided to pass the buck to the poor.

The idea behind having a small government came with the global recession of the 1980s and led to the introduction of economic policies in Europe and America where it was advocated for minimal government intervention in the management of the economy. It was believed that government intervention in economic issues breeds corruption and inefficiencies as well as distorting the market system's rewarding of resourcefulness and enterprise.

This school of thought, which advocates for a total free-market economy, never anticipated that a global financial crisis similar to the one that gripped the US and Europe would happen. Therefore, they did not take into account the recent government interventions that we saw in the developed world.

In 1987, the military government of General Babangida, brainwashed with the idea that little government intervention created efficiency, competition in economic activities, higher productivity and economic growth, embraced the SAP. This, however, created economic woes and hardship for ordinary people.

The genesis of the recent hype on petroleum subsidy removal which generated so much anger and social discontent began in 1987 when government introduced taxes in the name of either subsidy removal or deregulation of the downstream sector of petroleum products. These were taxes that took away means of livelihood from the poor masses in order to sustain the luxury and comfort of the downstream sector.



HISTORY OF PRICE HIKES

The history of fuel price increases or subsidy removal or deregulation of the downstream sector is a very long one. Between January 1966 and 30 September, 1978, the price of a litre of petrol had remained at eight kobo. The increase in prices of the products began in 1973 when the Gowon-led military government increased the price of petrol from 8 kobo to 8.40 kobo per litre.

Given the small increase then, the resistance was not much. However, on 1 October, 1978, the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo increased the price from 8.40 kobo to 15.37 kobo. In January 1982, the civilian government of Shehu Shagari raised the price again to 20 kobo.

The most memorable period for price increases was on 31 March 1986 when the military

government of General Ibrahim Babangida increased the price of petrol to 39.50, 42 kobo per litre on 10 April 1988 and 60 kobo for private cars on 1 January 1989. On 6 March 1991, the price of petrol was again increased from 60 to 70 kobo per litre.

The military junta of General Sani Abacha raised the price of petrol to N5.00 on 8 November 1993 but was reduced to N3.25 on 22 November 1993. The price of petrol went up on 2 October 1994; the junta increased the price again to N15.00 per litre but reduced it to N11.0 on 20 December 1998. The price was increased to N25 reduced to N20.00 on 6 January 1999. The increase in the price of especially the petrol had always drawn rage, protests and strike action on each occasion. (*A Naira is 100 kobo and exchanges at 0,0062 to the US dollar and 0,048 to the South African rand*)

When Obasanjo became president for the second time, he continued with the increases. On 1 June 2000 the price of petrol went up to N30 per litre later to be reduced to N27. In 2003 it went up to N40 and to N70 per litre on the eve of Obasanjo's disengagement from government in May 2007.

Obasanjo's successor, Shehu Musa Yar'adua reduced the price of petrol to N65 per litre. The price however has been stable ever since until January 2012, when President Goodluck Jonathan prodded by the West totally withdrew the so-called subsidy.

The current federal government's policy of fuel subsidy removal is aimed at implementing the European Development Fund [EDF], IMF and World Bank agenda. The government's argument for petrol

subsidy withdrawal is hinged on the belief that it distorts the market and that government subsidises heavily to sustain prices at N65 per litre. If subsidies are good for developed countries competitive markets, are they also not good for developing markets like Nigeria's, which are not competitive? There is no generally convincing economic argument for subsidy removal in a developing economy.

Lipsey and Lancaster said 'in an economy characterised by market imperfections, there is no guarantee that the removal of any one such imperfection will improve social welfare.' So, Nigeria's economy, which has imperfections such as corruption, inefficiency and lack of social amenities, should be addressed before talking of competition. Then only after that can economic adjustment like subsidy removal of a very important God-given product like petroleum be contemplated.

The Nigerian working class and the masses feel short-changed in a democracy that has promised all sorts of dividends. Therefore, they are angered and resort to rage as seen in protests and strike actions each time there are petrol price increases in the name of subsidy removal. The working class and the masses know that, the only dividend of democracy is the fuel subsidy, that is if it exists and if taken away, they don't have anything to hold on to in a country where the politicians and administrators pay themselves huge salaries and allowances.

Nigeria's economy is about 90% dependent on oil exports and therefore is very sensitive to any internal and external changes in the oil industry. If there is a rise in the cost of fuel especially at domestic level, it has uncontrolled effects on the economy which results in price increases of food,

housing, health, and education.

The informal sector of the economy, mainly made up of small-scale entrepreneurs, are hard hit as they lose their businesses due to higher overhead costs. The loss of these family businesses exposes many to poverty. So, the removal of subsidy on petroleum products is a direct attack on the first Millennium Development Goal on reducing the poverty level of the people by half by 2015.

The federal government claimed it subsidised petroleum products to the tune of N1.34-trillion in 2011 and that the economy cannot sustain that, hence the new year gift of total subsidy removal, which pushed up the price of petrol to N141 per litre. However, this government action drew the anger and rage of the working classes, civil society groups and the masses that embarked on street protests and strike actions between 9 and 16 January 2012. The strike was called off by the NLC and the TUC after a series of negotiations with the government, which led to President Goodluck Jonathan unilaterally fix the price of petrol at N97 per litre.

SURE PROGRAMME

Reacting to the protests and strike actions across the country, the federal government set up what it called 'Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment (SURE) programme, which is targeting the utilisation of the federal government share of the subsidy re-investible fund of N478.49-billion out of a total of N1.134-trillion.

The SURE programme, according to the federal government, aims to use its share of the fund to provide social safety net programmes, maternal and child-health services, road construction and rehabilitation,

youth employment, urban mass transit schemes and railway construction. Given the number of projects listed by the government, it is clear that the government is again up for another game of deceit. This is because even if the government is handed all the money accruing to SURE, it is not possible for it to carry out all the outlined programmes.

The recent anger and rage occasioned by the inhuman hike in price of petrol in the name subsidy removal of which paralysed the Nigerian economy for one week, was a clear demonstration of the people's power. The political elites and class should learn from the recent protests and strike actions and not take the people for a ride as if Nigeria is an 'animal farm' where all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.

The Nigerian people are aware that everybody cannot be governor, senator, legislator or political office holder. What the people want is good governance and the only one that they enjoy is the so-called subsidy because they don't share in any sitting, travelling, constituency and other allowances.

The recent rage is also a caution to the political elites that they cannot continue to manipulate the differences of the Nigerian people to settle their scores and to their advantage. **LB**

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Swaziland crisis: Last days of *Tinkhundla*

The crisis in Swaziland is a result of the *Tinkhundla* political economy which excludes the majority of the people. The only solution is to find an alternative system, writes **Bongani Masuku.**

At the time of Swaziland's independence in 1968, the royal minority inherited a highly skewed colonial economy. The edges of the skewed nature of the economy were further sharpened through a royal 'bourgeoisification' process, with the establishment of a 'royal fund' through the vehicles of Tibiyo and Tisuka TakaNgwane. To date, royalties from mining as well as land held by the monarchy for the Swazi nation (utilised by the major sugar and forestry estates), accrue to the royal family through these institutions, and not to the state, lesser still to the people.

This system is designed to ensure that the parasitic royal family maintains their huge, highly unproductive and unfettered share from government in the form of the Swazi National Treasury (SNT), an entity separate from central treasury. According to the Swazi Royal Emoluments and Civil List Act (enshrined in the Constitution of 2005), parliament should legislate a limit to the money going to royal institutions. However, this law has been ignored over the decades, handing the royal family 5% of the annual budget to spend as they please.

TINKUNDLA POLITICAL ECONOMY

The Swazi economy was integrated into the global capitalist economy as a minor part of it, more as a supplier of raw materials and cheap labour. It also guaranteed access to markets for goods of the developed countries in which the countries decided on the terms of trade. That is why even after the end of colonialism this role continued under the strict supervision of new royal elite that acted in the interests of international capital or as a neo-colonial satellite of global imperialism.

The *Tinkhundla* political economy is made up of economic development patterns which identify some areas as centres of concentrated development and others as zones of total neglect and underdevelopment. The economy is characterised by extreme inequalities and growth that benefits a few in the selected centres of development serviced by the labour reserves and natural resources from the underdeveloped areas. The structure is also known for its deep levels of poverty and unemployment; of whom the worst affected are women who carry the heavy burden of the crisis.

It is a monopoly type of economy that is highly concentrated and

founded on the basis of economic exploitation, political oppression and deliberate exclusion of the majority. The poor majority are knowingly excluded from economic participation by being denied support that is necessary for meaningful production to take place.

Tinkhundla development is based on an unsustainable and destructive model of growth that ruthlessly exploits the country's natural resources and degrades the environment without due regard for the needs of future generations. *Tinkhundla* economic management also lacks innovation, has built an economy that does not have productive and redistributive capacity and suffers from backwardness and technical rot, hence the massive structural inefficiencies.

Thus the dual character of the Swazi economy reproduces class inequalities, structural inefficiencies and systematic underdevelopment designed to serve a particular group or class, particularly the royal family and elements of international capital.

The post-colonial economic evolution has seen a steady process of royal 'bourgeoisification', in which the traditional aristocracy was

transformed into a bourgeois class in collaboration with international capital through Tibiyo. The royal elite positioned as economic mercenaries in the accumulation process, suffocate real possibilities for growth and development as they engage in limitless plunder and looting of the economy for their own narrow interests.

The labour market is highly fragmented, which has resulted in the further division of the working class. Informalisation, outsourcing, and casualisation are common. So are the selective provision of skills to some and the denial to the vast majority of workers who end up un-skilled. As a result, the unskilled are highly exploited and have no job security.

The crisis of *Tinkbundla* has resulted in high levels of skills-mismatch. In this case skills not needed by the economy or country's development are produced in abundance; hence the growing levels of unemployed graduates. This is made worse by an economy that is neither growing nor creating jobs.

The *Tinkbundla* system has no vision for the economic future of the country or its people. Owing to its poor leadership and management of the economy, it has run the country down into a ghost that feeds off the plight of the poor and working masses. The royal worms fed off the fruits, then the leaves and now the roots of the remains of what used to be a potentially prosperous country with rich natural resources.

PARASITIC ECONOMY

Swaziland is Southern Africa's second-smallest economy after Lesotho and is suffering from a combination of low investment, falling international opportunities, low productivity levels, decreasing trade receipts and low domestic resource capacity. This is worsened by years of poor growth levels, which have deepened

poverty and unemployment. Even worse is the alarming impact of HIV and AIDS with a prevalence rate of 32.4%.

Swaziland ranks as one of the most unequal societies in the world and two key factors contribute to this. Firstly, the deliberate designs of the *Tinkbundla* royal regime to monopolise national resources to the exclusion of the suffering majority. Secondly, the inability to translate the economic growth experienced in the 1980s and 1990s into effective development for the benefit of the majority of the people instead of pursuing a neo-liberal policy framework.

The royal family uses about 5% of the annual budget, while 70% of Swazis live below the poverty line of US\$1 per day. This reality exists despite the fact that Swaziland qualifies as a middle-income state due to a flattering per capita GDP. Swaziland is therefore not poor in strict economic terms. However, the country's glaringly skewed politics of distribution certainly are.

Neo-liberal economic policies remain a large part of the problem. Any structural adjustments would have and will still hurt the ordinary citizen while temporarily cushioning the interests of big businesses. Are these not the same policies responsible for the total collapse of the global economy?

The Swazi economy is therefore in the hands of a tiny minority with land in the hands of a few (largely members of the royal family who are unable to use it for productive purposes). The economy is largely agro-based, with semi-feudal relations frustrating its development potential. The majority produce for their landlords rather than for national or for their own benefit.

There are high and unsustainable levels of poverty, which are made worse by the loss of jobs and the absence of new

ones. As the economy is no longer expanding, excess dependence on the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) revenues has exposed leadership weaknesses and lack of foresightedness on the part of the regime, who have looted without regard for the future sustainability of the economy. The economic crisis is deep and a problem of the political system.

In 1999 Swaziland was regarded as a middle-income country with a GNP per capita of US\$1,360. This global economic ranking illustrates the weakness of the neo-liberal model of economic measurement, as it disregards the huge inequalities and resorts to an artificial or narrow, technical means of economic categories. The standard of living for the majority of Swazi nationals has been steadily and gradually declining since the royal regime's rise to power in 1968.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Swazi economy is known for its huge unequal distribution of income and living conditions. Inequalities are also found in property income and land ownership, upward mobility is uneven and favouritism rife in social opportunities. Unequal access to safe and clean water and sanitation facilities, massive rural and urban poverty and landlessness are also common.

The enormity of the current crisis is exposed by the following: life expectancy is now at 31.88 years, 30% all children are orphaned or vulnerable due to living with a critically ill parent, only 6% of the national budget is allocated to health and 2.4% to social services, 69% of the population live in extreme poverty, while 25% survive on food aid donations. Unemployment is estimated at over 40%. Meanwhile, the king has an estimated personal fortune of US\$200-million.



Swazi women march at COP17: Rural women are at the receiving end of Tinkhundla.

ECONOMY IN TROUBLE

According to a media commentary, 'It is estimated that the Swaziland government is overspending by 30-million Emalangeni a month (4.2-million US dollars) and is using its foreign currency reserves to pay bills.' There was also suspicion that 'development aid' destined for Swaziland doesn't go where it is needed, but instead is siphoned off by King Mswati to pay for his palaces, Mercedes Benz cars and his general lavish lifestyle.

'Additionally, there is little chance of selling bonds or assets or securing loans, and a potentially unsympathetic international community.'

The question is where does all this spending go, and who benefits from it?

Finance Minister Majozi Sithole said that government revenues are so low that 'non-Sacu' revenues are

not enough to pay the government wage bill. The extent of the crisis is further explained by the revelations that, 'the government needs income and it needs it quickly. It is trying all the usual tricks of economists to stay afloat, such as seeking loans, selling assets, issuing bonds'.

However, there is little, if any success from these actions. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have refused to offer Swaziland a US\$500-million loan from the African Development Bank, citing that the government was spending too much for a kingdom of its size. And more recently the government made a commitment to the IMF to cut 7,000 jobs in the public sector to help it qualify for a loan.

Given this situation, the sale of assets is a last resort. Shamefully,

the Swazi monarchy (estimated to be wealthier than the country as a whole), is unwilling to release its resources (ill-gotten and belonging to the people anyway) to better the situation. Notwithstanding that the real source of the problem is the *Tinkhundla* system which is a fraud.

As early as 1989 the regime began to realise what the implications of the end of apartheid in South Africa meant for Swaziland. For a long time, the royal regime openly flirted with the apartheid regime, benefitting from the sanctions against apartheid South Africa and acting as a sanctions buster by collaborating with Pretoria and other such global forces. Swaziland was seen as an alternative destination, with apartheid South Africa products being branded as originating

from Swaziland. Further, the civil war in Mozambique added to the notion of Swaziland being a rather 'peaceful and stable' investment destination.

With democracy, peace and stability descending on South Africa and Mozambique, Swaziland's competitiveness against a relatively stable Mozambique and a post-apartheid South Africa disappeared. Investors preferred the developed infrastructure in South Africa, access to the sea in both countries, population sizes, and the geo-economic spaces on offer.

The early 1990s marked a consistent decline in the Swazi economy's growth rates, though not much in the consumption rates by the ruling elite. Despite this, and in the midst of deepening poverty levels, expenditure on military and security increased.

The health and education budget for members of the royal family using expensive institutions outside the country continues to skyrocket, whilst education and health facilities in the country deteriorate and collapse. Social expenditure, national development and the interests of ordinary people suffered as royal projects such as state-of-the-art villas and clinics received priority funding. This explains the deepening inequalities in income and opportunities for the poor majority, particularly for women, and those living in rural areas.

The decline in the economic growth rate led to the ruling regime introducing neo-liberal economic reforms in the form of the so-called medium-term intervention, the Economic and Social Reform Agenda (ESRA), and a long-term scenario mitigation or planning programme called the National Development Strategy (NDS). Both these programmes have failed. There are now new emerging initiatives that seek to replace these, without an open

acknowledgement of the failures of past policies.

According to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, 'the country's manufacturing sector is hard hit, with virtually all significant manufacturing sub-sectors (cement, agricultural machinery, electronic equipment, refrigerator production, footwear, gloves, office equipment, confectionery, furniture, glass and bricks) affected by the global slowdown in trade. Further, forest fires that destroyed timber supplies impacted on the wood-pulp industry. Equally, the apparel industry was hit as it is dependent on preferential trade arrangements with the United States through the African Growth and Opportunity Act.'

TAXING THE POOR

Whilst the economy is in a free-fall, there are no credible measures being taken in the medium term to normalise the situation. Instead, the government has engaged in underhanded tactics aimed at fleecing citizens of their last penny. Examples include: a new 3% tax for low income earners, forcing the adoption of new car registration plates, aggressively dealing with traffic offenders through expensive fines or bail, new travel documents, the prime minister and finance minister's unilateral 'home grown Fiscal Adjustment Roadmap' recently presented to the IMF, World Bank, and EU, and others. While these stern measures negatively affect the ordinary taxpayer, they do nothing to tackle the big-time tax evaders.

In fact, for some time now, the Swazi regime has been involved in an exercise to expand the tax base by targeting all those things upon which the poor and working masses rely for their livelihoods; including trees, domestic animals and other such basics.

Budget estimates point to about 68% of the budget being allocated to security services. This bears testament to the priorities of the Swazi regime, which is essentially about protecting the privileged few and keeping the rest in conditions of starvation.

The government seems unfazed by the gravity of the situation, with unwarranted expenditure continuing. For example, plans for a 25th anniversary for King Mswati III are going ahead. Wasteful and fruitless expenditure associated with the royal family and high expenditure on functions meant to buy patronage and popularity such as the annual Reed Dance continues. Furthermore, despite the crisis there are salary increments for politicians and civil servants as well as hefty handshakes for retiring top politicians and too much funding for security forces.

In essence, Swaziland's economy is suffering from a lack of a clear national development plan or growth path aimed at supporting strategic sectors. Among other things, a plan can enforce a redistributive capacity to ensure the effective and full participation of all the people in the development of the country.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the foregoing that Swaziland is suffering from a democracy deficit in its governance system. Democracy in Swaziland will ensure that credible institutions tasked with properly managing the affairs of the state are put in place. In this regard, multiparty democracy holds the only promise for the reform of the Swazi state, both to keep the monarchy in check and to ensure the establishment of credible institutions with strong checks and balances to run state affairs efficiently. ¹⁶

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ZCTU congress aftermath

Cracks deepen

Instead of strengthening the Zimbabwe labour movement the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) congress appears to have created two factions that are more interested in getting at each other's throats than fighting for working-class causes.

Nunurayi Mutyanda and **Taurai Mereki** write on the developments since the congress.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union's (ZCTU) 7th congress that was held on 19-20 August 2011 in Bulawayo has come and passed. For the first time since its inception about three decades ago, the congress will be known by its factions. The factionalism that rocked the federation before and during the congress reached new heights as the camps seemed like oil and water that cannot mix.

Recent statements by the other faction president Lovemore Matombo seem to suggest that he belongs to the Left and therefore can never reconcile with the mainstream president George Nkiwane because of ideological differences.

The run up to the congress saw the federation being torn into two warring camps, one led by secretary general Wellington Chibebe who was set to relinquish power at the congress to assume a position as deputy secretary general at the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and another led by then incumbent president Matombo. Despite these visible and threatening cracks, the congress went ahead without Matombo's blessing.

The Chibebe faction, which seemed to be in control of the majority of affiliate unions (22 of the original 33) argued that in the absence of the president for whatever reason, section 22 of the ZCTU constitution provides that the first vice president can preside over any gathering including the congress. Therefore the congress went ahead. This is the faction that presided over the congress that was held in August 2011 and recognises the election of Nkiwane as the incumbent ZCTU president.

The other competing faction led by Matombo initially comprised mainly of four unions: Communication and Allied Services Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CASWUZ), Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), Zimbabwe Energy Workers Union (ZEWU) and National Airways Union (NAWU). This faction refused to take part in the congress. The faction was also ordered by the High Court to stop from using the ZCTU name.

MEMBERSHIP FIGURES

During the run-up to the congress, the major dispute was around membership figures. There were claims by the Matombo camp that

membership figures for all railway unions had been inflated as they claimed to have 100% unionisation something not possible in the current Zimbabwean scenario. The other disputed unions included the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CWUZ), the Zimbabwe Pulp and Paper Workers Union (ZPPWU), the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) and the Federation of Food and Allied Workers Union of Zimbabwe (FFAWUZ), which were also said to have inflated membership by more than 50%.

Inflating figures was seen by the Matombo faction as a move to rig the election in favour of the Chibebe faction. It was argued that delegates were likely to vote in favour of those who brought them to the congress. The Matombo camp claimed that the team tasked to carry out checks on membership was pro-Chibebe. Hence they inflated figures in favour of that faction and Matombo refused to preside over the congress.

The Chibebe faction however, argues that Matombo had presided over the supreme governing body of the federation, the general council

meetings that set congress dates. So the claim on procedure being ignored had no substance.

Although two of Matombo's most trusted lieutenants attended the congress from CASWUZ, the union which nurtured him for the past four decades, he and other faction union delegates did not attend. One would be persuaded to think that the CASWUZ delegates were sent to spy on the processes and hence report back on the proceedings. Thus on paper and in public the president told the world that CASWUZ boycotted the congress and did not have anything to do with it, yet in reality, two senior members from the union were among the 159 delegates that attended the congress.

Attempts by the Matombo faction to stop the congress were in vain as the high court refused their urgent chamber application as the case was said not to be urgent. The congress kicked off as planned but the absence of the president was felt as the congress was delayed by almost six hours as the leaders were locked in closed doors possibly debating the issue. The congress deliberated over a number of issues as highlighted by Chinguno and Mereki in a previous issue of *SALB*.

With the blessing of the High Court and over 22 affiliates, the congress kicked off in Bulawayo. The new leadership that was elected included: president: George Nkiwane (Zimbabwe Energy Workers' Union); 1st vice president: Sithokozile Siwela (Railway Artisans Union); and 2nd vice president: Rwatipedza Chigwagwa (Zimbabwe Furniture, Timber and Allied Workers' Union).

The 3rd vice president is Lucia Matibenga (Commercial Workers' Union of Zimbabwe – Minister of Public Service as from October 2011); secretary general: Japhet Moyo (National Engineering Workers' Union); 1st deputy secretary general: Gideon Shoko (Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railway Workers' Union); 2nd deputy

secretary general: Unganayi D. Tarusenga (Federation of Food and Allied Workers' Union of Zimbabwe); treasurer general: Enock Mahari (Zimbabwe Catering and Hotel Workers' Union). The new look executive reflected deep-seated factionalism as all the leaders emerged from the Chibebe faction.

As earlier indicated, there were four ZCTU-affiliated unions that openly disassociated themselves from the congress proceedings. However, by the end of 2011, the Matombo faction claims its union membership had more than quadrupled and its number of affiliates stood at 17. The faction claims more unions from the Chibebe faction had promised they will cross the floor in 2012.

It should however, be noted that most of the Matombo faction affiliates were not previously affiliated to the mainstream ZCTU neither were they affiliated to any federation. These included a faction of the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe (CWUZ), College Lecturers Association of Zimbabwe (CoLAZ) and the Civil Service Employee's Association (CSEA).

The successful membership drive by the Matombo camp, however, is equally matched by the mainstream ZCTU, which is also adding new members to its list of affiliates. New recruits include the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) and the Zimbabwe Energy and Technical Staff Association (ZETEA) also not previously affiliated to any federation.

The Matombo faction has lived up to its billing regarding the holding of elections; when the camp refused to take part in the congress that was presided over by the Chibebe camp, the Matombo camp promised its own elections before the end of 2011. The elections kicked off in November whereupon regional office bearers were elected.

The faction held its congress from 16 to 17 December 2011. As had been predicted, the post of

president went to Matombo while PTUZ general secretary Raymond Majongwe was appointed secretary general. Other senior officials that were elected at the congress included: 1st vice president: Angeline Chitambo (Zimbabwe Energy Workers' Union); 2nd vice president: Lloyd Ndaba (Zimbabwe Leather Shoe and Allied Workers' Union); 3rd vice president: Thabitha Khumalo (MDC Member of Parliament).

Other posts were distributed as follows: 1st deputy secretary general: James Gumbi (Zimbabwe Rural District Council Workers' Union); 2nd deputy secretary general: Nobert Mudzumwe (Commercial Workers' Union of Zimbabwe); treasurer general: Emilda Rungano Mhuriro (Civil Service Employees' Association); national organiser: Elijah Chiripasi (National Airways Workers' Union); education officer: David Dzasunga (Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe); trustees: Isdore Manhando Zindoga (ZSLAWU), Clifford Nkala (CASWUZ) and Madziwo Chimhuka (ZGWU).

Interesting enough, some members in the Matombo faction claim that their leader, Matombo is obsessed with ZCTU elections while turning a blind eye on the same issue at his CASWUZ union whose congress was supposed to be held in May 2011 well before the holding of the ZCTU August 2011 congress. Critics from the mainstream ZCTU led by Nkiwane also claim that the majority of the top brass of the Matombo faction are not employed in the sectors they purport to represent, and therefore cannot hold a political post in the federation.

For example, Movement for Democratic Change member of parliament Thabitha Khumalo who was elected vice president does not belong to any union. There are further claims that some have been dismissed for one reason or the other or have ceased to have any relationship with their employers. While their claims could be true, the ZCTU constitution is not clear



with regard to issues of election of leaders who are no longer employees of the sectors they purport to represent. Regardless of such union career damaging claims, the top brass in the Matombo faction appear to be on top of the situation both at their unions and the 'rebel' federation where their leadership seems to be virtually unchallenged.

Unfortunately, this tussle for power is not sparing workers who are supposed to enjoy the protection of the federation. The effects of factionalism at ZCTU are starting to emerge as evidenced by the failure of the current administration to pay wages to its workers after the disputed congress.

One of the general council members (the supreme governing body of the federation) claimed that as a mitigatory measure, a resolution was passed by the mainstream ZCTU faction whereby all affiliates were asked to share the burden of paying wages for the full-time staff.

In actual fact, workers were paired to a particular union that was given the responsibility of meeting the wages. However, it appears as if the move to pair workers to a particular union failed.

NO PAY FOR WORKERS

As a result, the workers under the mainstream ZCTU were notified in November 2011 that they were not going to receive their salaries for three months because the union federation was broke. This has been worsened by the fact that some unions are not remitting their subscriptions to the federation, claiming that the employers were not remitting the subscriptions. There are fears that these unions in the Nkiwane-led ZCTU might be deliberately doing so. Most of these affiliates that are not remitting their subscriptions are said to be sitting on the fence and willing to cross the floor to the other camp. This may confirm the claims by the Matombo camp that there were more unions

willing to cross the floor from the Nkiwane faction this year.

The failure to pay workers might justify the claims by the opposing faction that the outgoing secretary general's administration had accrued debts over US\$500,000 which it was struggling to repay. The failure to pay its own workers may also substantiate the claim by the Matombo camp that membership figures of some unions in the mainstream ZCTU were cooked during the run-up to the congress. It is speculated that the donor community which at some point was funding the union federation might also have adopted a wait-and-see attitude pending the outcome of the struggle to control the federation.

High Court Judge Ben Hlatshwayo on 23 November 2011 recommended that the two ZCTU factions reconcile and work together to serve the interests of the workers, stating that what was happening is not trade unionism. The judge's

calls for the two warring camps to put in place an interim committee comprising equal members from both camps that would be in place while modalities of holding fresh elections were being finalised seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

The splinter federation led by Matombo claims that the Chibeb-backed camp is the one that flatly refused this suggestion insisting that the 19-20 August 2011 results stand since the congress was procedural. This refusal to hold fresh elections by a camp that won a clear majority is suspicious since the chances of winning were high if at all the 19-20 August vote was free and fair. Although there are claims of ideological differences by the Matombo camp, these wars seem to be more to do with self-fulfilment than for the struggle of the working class.

By resorting to court action, the union leadership has divorced itself from the general membership. Both factions have deliberately not consulted their members over the split. The membership is just getting the news of the goings on in the federation from the media, both print and electronic. This confirms what Michels claims was inherent in human beings: 'as organisations grew bigger there was a tendency towards oligarchy' that is rule by the minority.

The events at both camps show that no consultation was done at grassroots to seek the mandate from the workers they represent. The various meetings that were held at national level only sought the opinion of the leadership and not the constituency they represent. There seemed to be little or no reason to ask for the perception of the general union membership as their leaders seemed to know what is right for them.

Ironically, the membership is not even questioning their leaders regarding this issue. This situation shows the degree of passiveness of the labour movement in Zimbabwe.

While leadership is running the show at the federation, no one seems to care about the direction the events are taking. The problem could be inherent in the nature of worker education amongst Zimbabwean workers.

CONCLUSION

The fragmentation of the ZCTU is a sad chapter in the history of the labour movement in Zimbabwe. It is a slap in the face to all progressive forces willing to see a democratised workplace and the only hope of a unified force in the quest of achieving decent work for the poor Zimbabwean worker. It is however, clear that the factionalism is driven by self-interest and the love for power rather than the interests of the workers they purport to represent.

The other issue of major concern is the heaping of posts on the same individuals and this affects their capacity to deliver. A typical example is where one assumes a ministerial

position and still continues to serve as a trade unionist. Unlike in South Africa where the cadre has to surrender the union position, it becomes difficult for that cadre to serve two masters with conflicting interests, as government is also a big employer.

The passivity of the working class in Zimbabwe is in clear contrast to their South African counterparts who receive class lectures in Marxism, hence are conscious of the Left. Whereas Zimbabwe boasts a high literacy rate, the majority of institutions teach business subjects and workers therefore lack class consciousness. The union movement has to do more in terms of capacity building if ever there is a hope for a vibrant labour movement in Zimbabwe. ^{LB}

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Migration and new slavery in Southern Africa

Increased migration has brought with it new forms of slavery that have caught governments and law enforcement agencies flatfooted, writes **Janet Munakamwe**.

Today, the movement of people across continents has become a permanent feature facilitated by expansion in the global economy and improvements in technology. Likewise, the Southern African region is being increasingly integrated into both formal and informal transnational continental and regional trade networks. Certainly, the region's link to the global economy has unlocked corridors for movement worldwide. New global and regional employment opportunities in various sectors have contributed to migration.

In discussing global migration in Southern Africa, South Africa can be identified as the place of danger and promise. The country is rated as the strongest economy in Africa and therefore offers hope to so many people who want to further develop their careers or to simply look for better opportunities. The vibrant South African economy and stable political environment attract immigrants, while struggling economies of other regional states are push factors.

The increase in immigrants to South Africa as a result of regional migration has created a ripe environment for new forms of slavery to flourish. In its general definition, slavery can be recognised as the violation

of human dignity and freedoms through engaging in the abuse of others. Those who suffer the enslavement feel powerless and are violated at will. Slavery, according to Kevin Bales, occurs in diverse forms though the 'outcomes tend to be more similar across times and cultures'.

Enslavement forms range from subtle cases of capital accumulation through labour abuses to grave crimes of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Slavery has different forms such as oppressive labour practices, debt bondage, unpaid domestic work, human trafficking, child labour, and sexual slavery. However, there are ways of stopping it.

Labour migration is not a new phenomenon among the Southern African countries as it existed before the introduction of colonial boundaries. In fact, since the mid-nineteenth century, Southern African countries have experienced labour migration as both hosts and sending countries.

Historically, the main common countries of attraction have been Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Voluntary migrant workers, predominantly male, would move freely among countries to seek employment opportunities in mines and commercial farms. However, mine migration was the most

highly-regulated through systems of recruitment under a single agency: The Employment Bureau of Africa.

Since the turn of the 21st century, there has been an increase in intra-regional migration within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In this period, the major shift was in the make-up of immigrants. Large numbers of immigrants were women and children – the same group also considered vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Human abuse includes smuggling, trafficking in persons and contemporary forms of slavery, which are described as abusive forms of migration by the United Nations (UN).

EMERGING FORMS OF SLAVERY

'Slavery' has been given many definitions. However, in general it refers to the status or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. In modern days, 'slavery' goes beyond this simple definition to include a variety of human rights violations. In the case of children such abuses include selling them, prostitution, pornography and child labour. There is also the sexual mutilation of female children, the use of children in armed conflicts, debt bondage, trafficking of persons and the sale of human organs.

With reference to the 1926 UN Convention, slavery includes the practices and institutions of debt bondage, servile forms of marriage, and the exploitation of children and adolescents.

As transnational migration has increased, so has the movement of women across borders. Female migrants have become breadwinners for their families. Other than voluntary migration, women and girls also form part of forced migrants who emigrate due to several forms of human displacement, chief among them being domestic upheavals, strife and conflicts and general conditions of poverty. With the South African economy's failure to keep pace with the high number of immigrants and not being able to provide jobs, women and children become vulnerable. To survive they 'indulge in prostitution, forced marriages, domestic work, sweatshops and types of exploitation that constitute a contemporary form of slavery'.

Despite South Africa being the strongest economy in Southern Africa, it is still dealing with its colonial past and making efforts to transform its society and economy. Its labour laws are designed to address past injustices. Therefore, many migrants who come to the country find themselves unable to get some jobs.

The Employment Equity Act and the Black Economic Empowerment Act impose specific compliances on the employers that discourage them from employing foreigners. The above acts of parliament refer to only black South Africans as candidates for empowerment. Excluded by the law, immigrant workers are left with no option but to trade their freedoms for a livelihood.

Some employers are in schemes of short-changing foreigners through underpaying and overworking them, thereby abusing employees who have little or no

legal options. Exploitation varies from subtle unfair treatment among professionals to outright subjugation among migrants on farms and in factories.

The definition of citizenship by nation states makes a mockery of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 that says 'everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law'. In many respects, countries have looked at their internal situations and turned a blind eye on the plight of foreigners.

South Africa may have had the 'appetite' for migrant labour in the last five years due to the advent of the FIFA soccer World Cup 2010, but failed dismally to protect foreign workers before the law. If one feels less of a citizen, he may also become vulnerable and yield to enslavement if it will earn him a life. Feeling sub-human could be the worst feeling a person can endure and has the potential to impact on one's dignity and power of will.

Because of their vulnerability, most immigrants are eliminated from major national production chains and find employment in the lower echelons of the economy. In the case of domestic work, the exploitation is exacerbated by the fact that workers are employed in private homes, behind closed doors. Even law enforcement agents like labour inspectors cannot trespass private homes to inspect working conditions for domestic workers. Again, migrant domestic workers may be sexually or physically harassed and find it hard to seek justice. Instead, they are vulnerable to deportation once they report the abuse so they suffer in silence when their rights are violated, often with impunity.

DEBT BONDAGE

Debt bondage is similar to the historical serfdom and is as a result of the need for repayment of a

debt. Societal economic classes play a major role in this type of 'slavery' practice. The interrogation of debt bondage is particularly relevant within the South African context, one of the countries with the widest disparities between the rich and the poor in the region. In cases of debt bondage, the rich conspire against the poor. Debts are notorious for creating a vicious cycle, which may include surrendering one's right of free will to those to whom they owe. Debt bondage prevents the victim from leaving his job or the owner's territory until the debt has been repaid.

A modern form of debt bondage is through consumer credit. However, the government introduced the National Credit Act in an attempt to cushion citizens from losing their possessions after failing to pay debts. Those who are unable to service their debts are asked to surrender their affairs to the management of a debt agent. From then on, such individuals can only act as they are told by the debt agent.

On the other hand, many 'illegal' migrants seek shelter, food and security. Farm owners tend to take advantage and employ the labourers in exchange for accommodation and some subsistence allowance. In many cases, the farm owner runs a shop where workers buy on credit and have the amount owing taken from their wages. The worker owes the farmer both in rent and groceries all the time!

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Despite its geographic location, South Africa is a magnet for migrants from several countries. However, as reality sets in and their environment remains bare and bleak, the migrants continue to seek those areas that can offer them a reward. On the same scene are agents of human trafficking who promise a good life and



abundance. These agents prey on stranded migrants with no jobs, homes or money for food. Once a human being has become a commodity, s/he also becomes a subject with a master.

Studies reveal that human trafficking usually involves related people and to some extent Internet networks. Usually, those relatives who migrate first to neighbouring countries are involved in the trafficking of their own siblings or friends.

Positioned at store fronts and church alleys, desperate women decide on the better of two evils: living on the streets or becoming a sex slave. Some homeless mothers

at road intersections are forced to sell their babies. Such is the plight of some illegal migrants.

Brothel owners offer foreign women a place to stay in exchange for selling sex. Some women turn to prostitution after failing to get jobs. These individuals have little control over what becomes of them. In a society that regards prostitutes as social misfits, the option to seek redress is considered an occupational hazard.

According to the UN, human trafficking has become one of the largest income earners globally with an estimated annual profit of 'some seven to ten billion dollars' writes Luke Hilton. A trafficker of women to Europe, according

to Kathleen Fitzgibbon, can earn between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per victim. Another researcher, Siddhartha Kara asserts that the gross income generated through all forms of slavery in 2007 only, stood at \$91.2-billion. Indeed, worldwide, illicit criminal enterprises are generating huge amounts of income for the perpetrators.

CHILD LABOUR

Despite the fact that all Southern African countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, child labour is still common. Children are smuggled through porous borders for prostitution or exploitation on farms as domestic labourers. The Southern African region has been ravaged by HIV and AIDS leaving behind many orphans. Anecdotal evidence suggests that relatives of these orphans tend to adopt them and force them to work for no pay other than providing them with board or lodging.

Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia and South Africa have signed the associated Protocol on the Rights of the Child in Armed Conflict. Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa have all signed the associated Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. On paper, there are good laws to protect children from exploitation, and to prohibit child labour, but the problem resides in implementation and enforcement.

STOPPING SLAVERY

Laws and policies speaking to issues of human rights and against slavery have been formulated at international level and states have the obligation to ratify and translate them into regional or national laws and policies. According to the UN 'policy responses at local, national, regional and international level should take into cognisance the extra ordinary dynamism and instability of migration forms and

patterns in the region'.

The UN Convention of 1926 marked the turning point in outlawing slavery. The second instrument to be passed by the UN against slavery is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Relevant to migration is the pronouncement that 'everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.' All UN member states are signatories to this declaration, although not all have ratified it into law.

Other instruments are the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s 'Convention 29' (1930), which outlaws forced labour. The UN Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of Others of 1949 also prohibits human trafficking.

The Palermo Protocol is an international instrument dedicated to the abolition of all forms of slavery, and attempts to further build a global consensus on the abolition of slavery. This attempt will encompass three main efforts: first, making trafficking a crime; second, providing protection to the victims of trafficking; and, third, ensuring greater solidarity amongst nations in the battle against sex-related crimes.

LAWS AND POLICIES

Regional cooperation among member states is essential for harmonised migration policy and the fight against any forms of slavery. In the Southern African region, migration policies and legislation are fragmented along national lines, and sometimes do not appear to meet the objectives of contemporary regional and continental policies of the SADC, Common Market for East and Southern Africa (Comesa), or New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad). Despite the endorsement of the SADC Free Trade Protocol in 2000, regrettably the safety of migrants is not covered. In many aspects, borders

have remained closed and countries have pursued protectionist policies.

Due to a harsh economic climate in most regional countries, many have resorted to illegal means of entering and exiting borders especially those of South Africa. They are then regarded as 'undocumented' migrants, hence they live and work under threat and 'slavery-like' conditions in their host countries.

On a positive note, regional migrants can enjoy the benefits of Comesa whose founding principle advocates for the free movement of people in the region. Again, the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa has created a platform for training and policy debate on a variety of issues pertaining to migration management in the region. Nonetheless, more effort should be invested in coming up with protective laws and policies to curb human trafficking, which consequently lead to slavery in host countries.

Most states in the region, as members of the UN have ratified laws and policies at international level and have the obligation to translate them into national laws. Nonetheless, this varies from country to country with national immigration policies and legal instruments focusing essentially on enforcement, control and exclusion. Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe have made significant changes to migration laws.

However, only the immigration legislations of South Africa and Mozambique make reference to international conventions, multi- and bi-lateral accords. For instance, bi-lateral agreements and legislation allow the South African mining and agricultural sectors to employ contract migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Though this is supposed to formalise the recruitment of migrant labourers, unfortunately most workers are exposed to slave-like conditions on

farms and mines.

With regard to human trafficking legislation, other than Mozambique, none of the countries in the region have passed any laws against human trafficking or 'slavery'.

HOW TO STOP 'SLAVERY'

Strict immigration laws contribute to illegal immigration practices which will consequently lead to slave-like employment relations for migrant labourers in their host countries. 'Slavery' victims suffer through lack of support mechanisms, anti-immigration legislation, and a lack of sufficient police protection to report their cases to labour courts. Southern African states need to cooperate to curb against slave-like practices such as human trafficking, debt bondage, child labour or sexual exploitation. It would be advisable for regional countries to establish effective bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements to strengthen border controls and to facilitate extradition for traffickers.

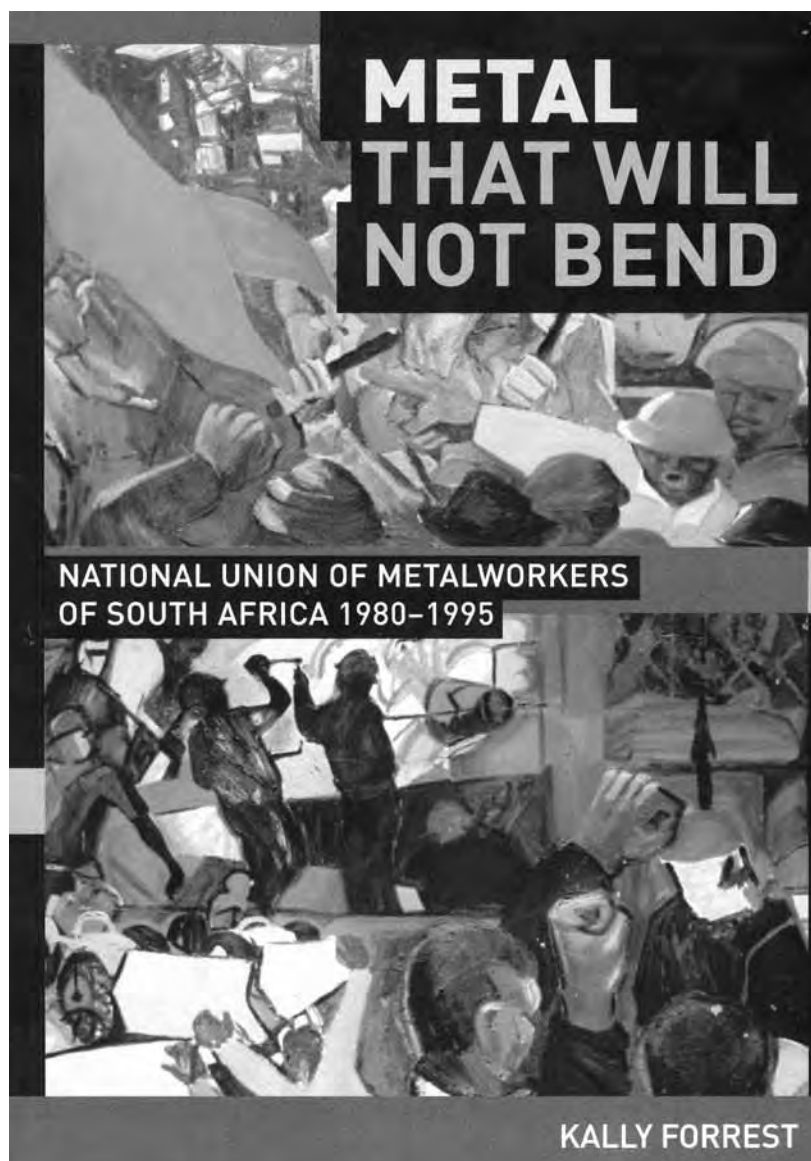
Broad and comprehensive legal frameworks including heavy penalties must be introduced to effectively deal with exploitative forms of employment. Further, there is need for implementation of policy and enforcement of laws pertaining to 'slave-like' practices. Immigration laws should be made flexible to curb trafficking of people and to further allow victims of slavery to report unjust labour practices. Finally, UN agencies, national governments, unions, civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should establish alliances to end newer forms of slavery. It is also the obligation of trade unions as worker representatives to preach and practice solidarity among workers, irrespective of borders. ¹⁸

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Asserting their metal

Building union power through numbers

At the beginning of the 1980s the new metal unions, later to merge to form the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), were small and weak. **Kally Forrest** tells how they built power through mass recruitment campaigns, and how this protected them from being smashed by the state and forced employers to grant basic worker rights.



All unions needing to change members' conditions have to address growth. In the early 1980s growth for the new metal unions, especially Mawu (Metal & Allied Workers Union), posed a dilemma.

In the 1970s as a survival strategy Mawu had built power in selected factories and concentrated its resources. The challenge now was how to grow rapidly and build power without losing organisational coherence.

As the 1980s dawned, unions faced barriers to growth as the economy entered a deep recession. Also, between 1982 and 1986 South Africa suffered a terrible drought. Up to 16 companies a day were folding and survivors' profits were slashed.

Retrenchments exposed members and shop stewards to victimisation. Commented a Mawu organiser: 'Many factories are trying to get rid of union members. They will say this guy has skills and we can't retrench him. And the workers know it is only because he is not a member of the union.'

Employers saw job loss as a market issue. One employer spoke for many: 'No negotiation at all over retrenchments. That's a purely financial matter and up to management.'

The few bosses who agreed to procedures generally did not follow



Mawu organiser Moses (Moss) Mayekiso.

them. They gave little or no notice. The TMF foundry, for example, informed workers on the morning they were laid off, and then locked them out when they protested.

Mandlenkosi Makhoba recalled the desperation, 'When you are out of a job, you realise that the boss and the government have the power to condemn you to death. If they send you back home, there's a drought, and you can't get any new job, it's a death sentence. The countryside is pushing you into the cities to stay alive; the cities are pushing you into the countryside to die. You get scared. It's a fear that you come to know after a week without food.'

Members of the metal unions were hard hit by this recession. More than 35,000 workers in auto and motor retail lost jobs as did 76,000 in engineering.

Yet in defiance of worldwide patterns, these unions entered a phase of huge growth. Black workers turned to the militant new unions out of desperation and also because they gave them a voice which apartheid denied them. For metal workers on the East Rand, many of them migrants, unions brought control over their insecure working lives and the unpredictability of white foremen.

In the 1970s migrants doing manual work in heavy engineering formed the core of Mawu's membership. Now African semi-skilled operators joined factories in large numbers and opened the way for huge growth in the unions. Such workers had a bargaining power which unskilled workers lacked.

MASS RECRUITMENT

Three Acts passed between 1979 and 1981 called the Wiehahn reforms offered an important opportunity. These laws for the first time recognised African unions and so eased the fear of joining.

The laws also allowed for registration of African unions that could now enter into recognition agreements with employers, which gave important protection against dismissal.

The unions now broke cover. No more recruiting behind bushes outside factories or in secret cells in company departments. Unions now had the right to recruit and growing numbers shielded them from state attack.

A Highveld Steel shop steward described how Mawu grew: 'After Wiehahn... it decriminalised things. I'd recruit a few then... someone was dismissed and these

guys waited to see what the union would do. We went for the appeal and won. After that stop order forms were coming in left and right.'

Growing inter-union rivalry also fuelled Mawu's recruitment drive. In the early 1980s, the openly political Eastern Cape general unions arrived in the Transvaal. They staged huge meetings in communities where people were urged to join the union to fight off apartheid and their capitalist oppressors. Thousands joined. Mawu was impressed.

Mawu focused on organising East Rand factories, the hub of the metal industry, and central to its drive was Moses (Moss) Mayekiso, a fired Toyota worker who became an organiser in 1979.

Said organiser Bernie Fanaroff: 'We decided we would out-organise the general unions using their tactics. We'll stay factory-based, but we'll now organise in the hostels. So Moss would tell workers he was coming to Katlehong hostel and then organise everyone in that factory from the hostel. Moss was one of the most powerful figures in the hostels - we really controlled the Vosloosrus, Katlehong hostels, Daveyton, Wattville.'

Hostels, designed to control workers, ironically herded together large concentrations of workers. The Vosloosrus hostel, for example, housed 15,000 men.

In this way Mawu moved from painstaking company-by-company recruitment to mass organisation.

The Mawu Transvaal branch began holding general meetings in Kwesine Hostel. Eventually up to 9,000 workers were attending Mawu rallies on the East Rand.

A further incentive to rapid recruitment was the fear that once the government lost faith in the Wiehahn reforms to control unions, it would smash them. There was safety in numbers.

Another push to organise large plants was that managements



A Mawu shop stewards meeting in the Transvaal.

would only recognise the union with majority support. 'We were going through factories of more than a thousand in a week,' organiser Alec Erwin recalls.

Because of Mawu's emphasis on shop-floor strength, it was able to retain members in a way that the general unions could not.

REGISTRATION AND GROWTH

Registration under the Wiehahn laws divided Fosatu (Federation of South African Trade Unions, to which Mawu and the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) were affiliated) from other emerging unions.

In the late 1970s, when the government threatened to exclude migrants from unions, emerging unions united in rejecting registration. This forced the government to drop the threat.

Fosatu now broke ranks. Many companies argued that they would not recognise the new unions because they were not registered. Fosatu therefore took the tactical view that registration should be measured by how much it enabled recognition agreements which would entrench workers' rights and serve as a platform for further gains.

Radical Cape unions however argued that registration meant state control and would force unions to operate bureaucratically thus weakening workers' control. Bitter controversy raged including in *SALB* (Volumes 7.1 to 7.3).

Naawu and then Mawu submitted an application to the state to register.

Such registration on top of the Wiehahn laws softened employers and brought a sharp rise in recognition agreements in Fosatu's metal affiliates. In 1980 Mawu signed its first agreement with Precision Tools and agreements with Tensile Rubber and Henred Freuhauf quickly followed. By 1984, 122 of Mawu's 180 factories were recognised.

Recognition agreements gave important rights, including shopsteward recognition; access to factories; stop orders; dismissal and grievance procedures; right to report back to membership and other important clauses such as retrenchment provisions.

These agreements policed by shop stewards advanced workplace organisation and were a significant strategy for building power. Binding contracts meant employers had to adhere to dismissal procedures.

Recognition agreements usually gave company stop order facilities with employers deducting union dues from workers' wages. This was a significant right. In 1975 Mawu's income was R1,000 per month, with little money for organisers' salaries, rent or other costs. With stop-orders, Mawu's finances improved.

By 1984, Mawu had 20,000 members on stop order. More money meant more staff to service growing membership. Mawu moved from simple to more complex organisation.

GROWTH AND ORGANISATION

The Fosatu unions were open industrial unions and so they grew rapidly in the 1980s. At the heart of this unionism were the structures and principles laid down in the 1970s – strong democratic worker structures which allowed for stable organisation and empowered members. At the centre lay the shop stewards' committee.

A Mawu booklet wrote: 'Each factory must be a school for democracy. The leaders are a voice in the factory: the workers are the union. The shop stewards are our leaders and workers through their shop stewards must control



University of the Witwatersrand academic Phil Bonner conducts a Fosatu workers' education seminar.

the union. Leadership does not stop at the factory floor. It extends to the entire organisation. Union branches are controlled by a branch executive committee of shop stewards; our union as a whole by a national committee of shop stewards.'

A key task of shop stewards was to establish a relationship with management and take up workers' day-to-day grievances.

Shop stewards sometimes struggled with this as organiser Les Kettledas recalls, 'The concept of the shop steward was still not understood... when Naawu organised at CDA the MD said: 'Shop stewards? What are shop stewards?' We said: 'No, those are people that are elected by other workers to represent them when they have problems.' He says: 'Problems? Workers with problems don't work in this factory!'

As elected representatives, stewards operated with workers' trust. This meant being fearless and having acceptable political views. Richard Ntuli, a Mawu shop steward remarked, 'I hated this thing of apartheid and workers knew this... Also I was not afraid to take things to management that workers asked me to take and

to come and report back what management said.'

Members removed stewards if they thought they were in management's pocket. Workers in a foundry in 1981, for example, struck to remove a steward because he was an 'impimpi' (spy).

Mtutuzeli Tom, a Naawu steward at Mercedes Benz, described the grievances he handled: 'The majority were about favouritism. Supervisors would upgrade guys because they were good at giving information about troublemakers. Also racism. We had right wing supervisors using words like *kaffirs*, *baboons*.

'The other common grievance was theft accusations. Sometimes things were put into workers' lockers to get rid of them because they were a problem. Also issues around damage on the production line. You fix your car and then it goes to the next station and it's scratched. The worker at the next station is accused of damage to company property.

'Dismissals because workers were under the influence was common, because of frustrations that workers were experiencing. It's not so common now. Workers were forced to work overtime. If

they refused: 'Listen here, there are thousands outside the gates, if you don't want to work take your jacket and fuck off.'

Shop stewards conveyed union policy to members and educated them on their rights. They had to 'present the ideology in simple and readable terms... linked to what they were doing practically on the factory floor', Mayekiso recalls.

Education offered workers the rare opportunity to express their ideas. Mbuyi Ngwenda, former Numsa general secretary, recalled being a new member: 'I was impressed by the way the shop stewards conducted meetings where every individual had time to express their views. Even where there were different views the chair would encourage discussions.'

Shop stewards' committees were the unions' mobilising force and by 1980 these structures were fully empowered, and on the East Rand officials no longer controlled the union.

The development of shop steward leadership gave rise to an army of recruiters and the total identification with the union made them enormously effective and

creative. A Barlows steward for example used a Mawu T-shirt to recruit because workers wanted to know what this union was, and then he explained what a truly representative union was.

GROWTH AND COUNCILS

An organisational innovation which contributed significantly to the growth of Mawu was the shop steward council or local. It was on the East Rand in the Katlehong/Germiston/Wadeville/Alrode/Alberton area that it made the deepest impression on Mawu's organising drive. These structures operated outside of factory, affiliate and Fosatu constitutions.

The Katlehong local developed in 1981 in response to a capacity problem in Mawu where only one organiser, Mayekiso, serviced the fastest growing area in the country. The council brought together stewards from Fosatu factories across industries to debate strategies and learn from each other. It met in the Fosatu offices near Katlehong in a hall called Morena Stores.

Its main aim said Fanaroff, '... was to assist the union recruit members, to build union structures in the factory, and help with basic education about unionism... We took the decision that the way to organise was to get workers out at lunchtime and organise all factories in the area and help workers on strike because Moss couldn't do everything. It started with Henred (Fruehauf) - a worker owned a car which took shop stewards to other plants to recruit during lunch hour.'

The Katlehong council was a creative response to an organisational problem. It was a revolution in union organisation - it was an organ of workers' power. For the first time, workers tasted working-class power through rapid growth in union numbers, but also by mobilising, discussing, sharing, resolving problems, formulating tactics and lending solidarity.

EDUCATION AND GROWTH

Education was hugely important in recruitment and retaining membership. Some came through formal union structures, but much of it took place organically.

At BTR Sarmcol for example the grassroots intellectual or 'imbongi' (praise poets) educated workers. They provided a bridge between the battles in the factory in the 1960s and later recognition struggles in Mawu in the 1980s. The continuity between past and present shaped younger workers' consciousness.

Such influences were not common to all workers however. Some had no previous contact with unionism, politics or activists from the past.

Experiential learning however was taking place. The assessment of tactics, evaluation of failures, finding relevant information and debating future moves was on-going.

Organisers were important as they disseminated legal, economic, strategic and technical information in discussions with workers. Such learning reached new heights in shop stewards' councils.

These experiences developed alongside more formal education provided initially by Fosatu and later by the unions themselves.

In 1980 Fosatu launched national and regional education committees. They comprised a worker and organiser from each union, who guided a full-time national education officer accountable to the education sub-committee of Fosatu's central committee.

Fosatu provided education for all affiliates through seminars and meetings. Alec Erwin, national education officer in 1983, prepared material, ran educational projects and coordinated seminars for shop stewards and organisers, sometimes using specialists from the universities of the Witwatersrand and Natal. Courses covered the history of worker

organisation, unionism and the law and organising and bargaining practices.

By mid-1980 unions influenced by free-flowing discussions in shop steward councils were conducting less formal education. The hunger for education gave rise to marathon sessions or 'siyalalas' (we sleep) where delegates continued throughout the night.

Union media also played an educational role. Publications such as *Fosatu Worker News*, *Umbiko we Mawu*, *South African Metalworker* and *Naawu News* spread information about union activities and educated workers on union policies and campaigns, labour laws and international working-class struggles.

Both Mawu and Naawu also made effective use of the press to inform the public of workers' grievances and as a tool to keep members informed during disputes.

These unions also promoted working-class culture as an educative and unifying weapon. Activities included cultural days, workers' choirs with the production of records and cassettes as well as workers' plays performed countrywide, and the publishing of workers' writing.

Education was linked to organisation and campaigns which made it hugely relevant to these unions' aims.

Educational drives hugely boosted growth. Major policy decisions crucial to growth, such as the decision to register, were always preceded by the national executive council and educational meetings. 'To exercise power,' Mawu organiser Enoch Godongwana emphasised, 'you have to understand the issues'. ¹⁸

Kally Forrest is author of 'Metal that will not bend: National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa 1980 -1995'. SALB will be running a series of extracts from this book.

Review

Bethal Trial... Where do we begin, by Templeton 'Pops' Mageza, Rodney Tsholetsane, Michael Sello Matsobane and Themba Hlatswayo

Published by Class of 76, Johannesburg

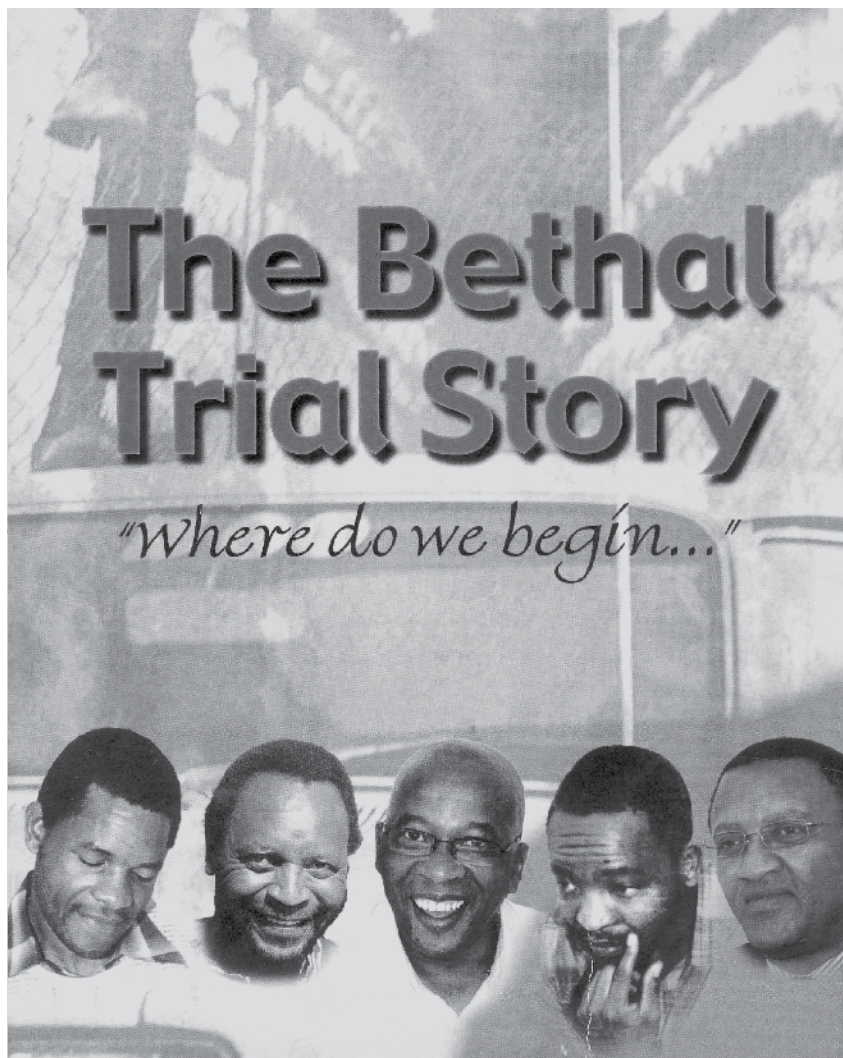
Reviewed by Ntsoaki 'Shoeshoe' Qhu

Reading this book at the time when the African National Congress (ANC) has its centenary celebrations brings into context what president Jacob Zuma said in a statement under the theme '100 years of selfless struggle', 'Our Freedom was not Free'.

The Bethal Trial... where to from here tells of a story of young people whose youthful days were lost in the struggle for liberation. The authors of the book, who were imprisoned on Robben Island, Templeton Mageza also known as 'Pops', Rodney Tsholetsane, Michael Sello Matsobane and Themba Hlatswayo give their horrific account of the secretive trial which divided students of Masupatsela High in Kagiso former Krugersdorp, which is now known as Mogale City.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part reviews the Bethal Trial and a number of other political trials of prominent South African politicians including current Human Settlement minister Tokyo Sexwale. The trials provide some understanding of the scale at which Umkhonto we Sizwe, (MK) deployed its forces throughout the country.

Unlike the much popularised incidents of the Soweto 16 June uprising, the story of Masupatsela High and the 17 June protests in Krugersdorp, which left buildings burnt down, has never been told in detail until the publication of the book.



The book, which now forms part of the Gauteng provincial government's Political Heritage Collection, tells the story of the rise of five school representative council (SRC) students and activists.

The five were recruited to join the liberation movement by Mike Matsobane, a popular activist at the time. Mike, whose biography is featured in the book, is said to have been the mastermind behind

the formation of the Young African Christian Movement, which later became the African Religious Movement. 'YACM was the product of material, political, economic, and social conditions. Our agenda was specific and focused. We wanted to resuscitate the political effort for which we were arrested in the first place, but in a way that wouldn't unduly expose the participants to harm'.

The students, having been highly politicised and influenced by the writings of Steven Bantu Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, mobilised their fellow pupils to resist the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at Masupatsela High School. They never made it to Naledi, another high school in Kagiso, as the security forces who had been informed of their march disrupted their plans.

In the aftermath of the protests, police swooped on Kagiso, Munsielville, Mohlakeng and Bekkersdaal to arrest school students, parents, teachers, business owners and priests suspected of being responsible for the revolt. Hlatshwayo, Thlale, Tsholestane, along with Mike Matsobane, were amongst those arrested and detained until January 1977. During this time a number of students fled their homes in fear of more arrests, some going to 'homelands' while others went to exile.

In the months following their release, an extensive charge sheet was compiled against the students and eight other defendants who were all grouped together to form part of the trial. The accused came from all over the country.

THE TRIAL

The Bethal Trial commenced on 17 January 1978 and was presided over by Judge DJ Curlewis. The charges were drawn up by PG Haasbroek SC who was then deputy Attorney General of the Transvaal.

The first count was the contravention of the Terrorism Act 83 of 1967. Count two had the same charges directed at the Krugersdorp group, which included Themba Hlatshwayo, Rodney Tsoletsane and Molathlegi Thlale, who are the main characters in the book.

The accused faced additional charges of public violence, which included stoning of Greyhound Buses, stores in the area and attempts to burn down the Kagiso Clinic.

The trial took place in Bethal, then falling under the Eastern Transvaal region, now known as Mpumalanga. 'Holding the trial at such a place was a continuation of the state's efforts to isolate the detainees while also keeping the case away from the media', said Matsobane in his biography.

It is this trial that divided students of Masupatsela. Some turning state witness while others risked their lives by becoming defence witnesses. The late Bonaventure Malaza, president of the subsequent SRC, was to be a casualty of this division and his fellow SRC members were to turn state witness.

During the trial period, which took 18 months, state witnesses were brought to testify against the students. These included members of the same communities the defendants were from, who were forced by the state to testify.

Rodney Tsholestane recalls the betrayal they felt when close community members testified against them.

One of these was a Mr Sejanamane, who was a local primary school principal in their home town of Kagiso. 'Actually, he was also our neighbour at home. He backed up this false allegation that I had been training people [to rebel against the state]. He said I did it. He was under duress to say this, of course, but there was a pay-off for him.'

During this time, the students reportedly endured severe torture from state police, which they mentioned during the trial.

Under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, police were allowed to get information through lengthy and extended detention in solitary confinement of state witnesses. Witnesses were tortured and forced to make false statements that fabricated and exaggerated the situation.

Judge Curlewis, a great sympathiser of the apartheid regime, exploited the judicial system to prejudice the defendants' cases. Most worrying to the accused was the judge's reputation of handing down death sentences to those who had previously faced similar charges. In the Bethal trial Curlewis ordered that it be held in-camera, and banned the public and the press from covering it.

At the end of the trial, the Kagiso group, made up of the student activists from Krugersdorp, were found guilty and served their respective sentences at various prisons across the country.

The second part of the book contains biographies of the authors and gives their personal accounts of the incidents that happened.

Although full of jargon and difficult to read, especially with all the legal terms it mentions, the book captures the way the apartheid judicial system worked to oppress those involved in the liberation struggle. The government of the day saw the fight for freedom as terrorism. It brings together the story of adversity through the eyes of the authors who were seeking justice. The book makes a contribution to South Africa's liberation history and will be useful to the general reader academics and researchers. ¹⁸

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