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MAPPING THE WORLD OF CASUALISED WORK AND STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Dale T. McKinley

This article provides a summary of the contextual framing and content of an ILRIG booklet by the same name (and author) which will be launched and distributed in early 2021. It is hoped that the booklet, the first of its kind to be researched and written in South Africa, will provide workers, their organisations and associated allies with useful figures and analysis which can contribute to more informed and effective engagement, organising, mobilising, education and overall struggle.



Photograph: Mujahid Safodien / AFP

One of the most fundamental political, economic and social developments over the last half-century is the radical and ongoing restructuring of the broad working class, both globally and within South Africa. A central part of that repositioning has, over the last 2-3 decades in particular, consisted of a major shift from a mainly permanent and largely industrial working class base to one where a majority of workers in the private sector, and a growing portion of those in the public sector, are now casualised.

These structural changes, which apply in South Africa as well as across the world, and are part of the package of neoliberal capitalism, are best captured as constituting a 'flexible labour market'. The labour market has been separated into multiple layers which in turn, have increased insecurity and multiplied the spaces and opportunities for enforcing a cheap labour regime, characterised by expanding zones of exploitation and marginalisation.

61% of all workers across the globe are informally employed

The main components of this flexible labour market are: employment insecurity; wage flexibility; numerical and working time flexibility; health & safety concerns/problems; gender discrimination/inequality; labour market and economic insecurity; problems related to the comprehensiveness and enforceability of labour laws; and low or lack of social protection. In overall terms, these are the new realities of the world of casualised work and struggle, and no more so than in South Africa.

In order to better understand the often contested term 'casualised', there are at least four distinct 'types' or categories of casual workers which it encompasses. While these categories are certainly not fixed, and noting that in some cases there can be overlaps amongst them, it is useful to break them down as follows:

- fixed-term/part-time/seasonal contract workers which are a mix of primary and outsourced workers;
- labour broker workers (which includes sub-contracted workers);
- day labourers, whose work is largely unregulated;
- popular economy (or informal sector) workers, whether as an employee or self-employed.

In South Africa, non-permanent work increased by 371% between 2000-2017

Another crucial part of the changes that now define the majority of the working world, particularly in South Africa, has been the gradual but systematic co-optation, weakening and in many cases demise of dominant industry/sector specific trade unions. Not only have the ranks of casualised workers been swelled with ex-union members, there are now a large majority of workers who have no political, organisational or workplace connection to such trade unions. In turn, this has foundationally shifted the life, work, struggle and organising/mobilising realities and experiences of these workers.

For the better part of the 25+ years of South Africa's democratic transition, casualised workers have been seen and treated not only as 2nd class workers by most unions and associated federations as well as the state, but as 3rd class human beings by the bosses

Yet, this has not been accompanied by a complementary shift in the core content and character of labour/worker research and analysis or, in the approach to organising, mobilisation and education. The reality is that on both of these fronts, the focus largely remains (again especially in South Africa) centred on unionised, permanent, mostly factory-based and larger-scale manufacturing and extractive sector workers.

As such there is not much research and analysis, and more particularly from left/progressive researchers-writers and activists in South Africa, on what the present 'world of casualised work' looks like in hard facts and numbers. Things are made even more difficult by the general lack of relevant and accurate information and statistics related to casualised work and workers. Two crucial reasons for this are: that Stats SA (the country's official public statistical agency) has a very limited and crude approach to measuring the full range of what constitutes casualised work; and, that there has been a rapid change in the number and types of casualised work which makes it extremely difficult for the figures/data to keep up with the reality.

**47.6% of informal sector workers are women
96% of domestic workers are women**

Additionally, there is the need for more work and thought to be given to what this changed 'map' means - in strategic and tactical terms - for worker-specific organisation, mobilisation and education. Also, to what it means for broader left/progressive linkages, support and solidarity amongst casualised workers as well as between casualised and permanent workers. As the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO), one of the few outfits that has tried to engage these questions and challenges points out, it is important to have a fuller picture of the numbers and different types of casual worker precisely because there are different possibilities (the who and how) of organising.

The labour movement needs to be reimagined and rebuilt, so that it is within and alongside the world of casualised work (where the majority of workers are).

The harsh reality is that South Africa's overall world of work and indeed its entire political economy, is in a systemic crisis. While one way of looking at this reality is to conclude that the systemic battle has been lost, another view is to see the current and coming period as a different kind of transition; one of possibilities. More concretely, there is the possibility of a transition in which much of the old ideological and organisational baggage can be off-loaded, in which new spaces for critical thinking and debate can be created, in which progressive and personal as well as collective social and moral values/principles can be committed to, and in which the basics of inclusive and grounded organisation and struggle can take centre stage. At the heart of those possibilities are the lives and struggles of the majority of the working class: casualised workers.

Pull-out poster

ON PAGE 8

Artwork by
Lambi Chibambo

EDITORIAL

In this final issue of Workers World News for 2020, we take stock of the many spheres of repression that have intensified this year due to COVID-19 and the present crisis of capitalism, while at the same time reflecting on important moments of resistance and lessons for organising.

The lead article by Dale T. McKinley focuses on the casualisation of labour in South Africa and summarises key points from a forthcoming ILRIG booklet on the same topic. The increasing precarity faced by workers through casualisation, as shown in this research, is important to reflect upon and mobilise against. Indeed, these workers have been amongst the hardest hit during South Africa's COVID-19 lockdown. This issue's pull-out poster, designed by Lambi Chibambo, complements the lead article as it echoes the call to 'stop casualisation!'

The guest article by John Appolis of the General Industries Workers' Union of South Africa (GIWUSA) also focuses on worker struggles, and looks at the recent GIWUSA strike action at Nature's Garden. This action and the demands laid out by the workers makes clear the severe impact that the pandemic as well as the response by government and employers have had on workers and their working conditions. Despite the harsh retaliation by the company and SAPS to the strike, this was an important moment of building worker organisation, unity and solidarity, in a year of intense worker repression.

Turning to community organising, this issue's My Struggle article is written by Lehlohonolo Makhele of the Gauteng Housing Crisis Committee (GHCC) and offers an overview of demands made by housing activists from the perspective of a movement attempting the necessary work of coordinating community struggles across Gauteng. Makhele reflects on the history of the GHCC, the difficulty of organising as communities under COVID-19 lockdown, and the way forward in terms of the organisation's objectives and demands.

In Gender News, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja explains the #ShutItAllDown movement as a necessary response to Patriarchal nationalism, sexual violence and femicide in Namibia, all of which had been rising under COVID-19 lockdown. Led by people of marginalised genders, including women and non-binary people, these protests confront the root of this violence, calling out legacies of colonialism and apartheid, and draw on African histories of feminist resistance to disrupt and dismantle these structures.

Shawn Hattingh continues our Educational Series on the Rojava Revolution, focusing on Democratic Confederalism and explaining its lessons for building sustainable communities and worker organisations in South Africa. COVID-19 has made clear that in many ways, working-class organisations are on their own and cannot rely on the South African state, especially in times of crisis. The examples of organising from the Kurdish struggle, which centres women's liberation, education and building democratic people's power, are therefore critical for our movements, despite the differing context.

GENDER NEWS by Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja

BETWEEN TRADITION AND TRANSGRESSION: DISRUPTING NAMIBIAN PATRIARCHAL NATIONALIST CULTURE

October 2020 was a turning point in Namibian protest culture, as we saw women and the youth in Namibia taking to the street in the #ShutItAllDownNamibia movement.

We had just learned about the discovery of Shannon 'Darlikie' Wasserfall's human remains in a shallow grave in the Namib dunes of Walvis Bay. Shannon had been missing since April, and a social media campaign #BringShannonHome had been running with the determination to find her. Although many of us had suspected human trafficking, we soon learned that this was a Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) case. Shannon's case is one in countless cases over the years in which many women and children have been raped, abused and murdered at the hands of a patriarchal culture. There is a collective recognition that there is a femicide and SGBV crisis in Namibia, and urgent action is needed. Hence, 8 October 2020 was the birth of #ShutItAllDown, a countrywide, grassroots, and spontaneous movement which resulted in multiple ongoing protest actions. This is a revolution that was sparked on NamTwitter and it positions itself as leader-less, face-less and citizen-led.

As much as the #ShutItAllDown movement has been groundbreaking, it has also been a traumatic experience for many activists on the ground. On 10 October 2020 while in protest action moving towards disrupting the Wernhil mall, the protesters were met with teargas and rubber bullets by Namibian police forces. Some protesters were beaten. Approximately 27 activists and journalists were arrested and released after more than 10 hours in detention. These charges were eventually dropped two days later by Prosecutor General Martha Imalwa. These events have enabled engagements with the Presidency as well as other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security, including both the Namibian Police Force and Correctional Services. We expect these engagements to lead to multiple interventions as stipulated in our petition. As protesters, we are committed to convincing President Hage Geingob to declare a state of emergency. We are also pushing for the resignation of the Minister of Gender Doreen Sioka, whom we see as unfit for this position. We will not stop until our demands are met.

#ShutItAllDown is reminding us that Namibia is no longer that conservative country hiding behind its historic walls of silence. In fact, this revolutionary moment is teaching us that we have been more than a nation of traditionalising (as in westernising and 'ethnicising'), we have also been transgressive and subversive in the smallest and biggest ways. Namibia is once again a heightened toyi-toyi nation. Protest and resistance culture are once again at the centre of national discourse and we will not miss the opportunity for radical imagination. The #ShutItAllDownNamibia movement is one of a kind that we have not seen since Namibia gained its independence from apartheid South Africa in 1990. As protesters, we shout #OnsIsMoeg (we are tired), expressing collective exhaustion, fear and unresolved trauma of experiencing or witnessing violence culture which is rooted in the DNA of Namibian nationalism.

One cannot think about this violence without thinking about apartheid or German colonialism. In fact, it is rooted in these histories of systemic displacement and dispossession. We are tired of the Namibian government's complacency and perpetuation of SGBV through this heritage of hetero-patriarchal nationalist agenda. We are frustrated at the excessive heteronormative thinking and the normalisation of the ways in which Namibian nationalism endorses women, children, queer, poor, differently-abled and black bodies

disposable and value-less.

Hence, we turn to feminist teachings of transgression, calling in disruption and the dismantling of structures because they enable femicide and SGBV. We will continue shutting down the 'business as usual' culture because leaders refuse to listen and engage in dialogic action. Thanks to women and young people, at least now we know we can shut it down any time we feel the need to. Transgression is an ancient way of knowing. The motherland that we have come to know and love as Namibia gained its independence through radical acts of transgressing multiple colonial projects.

We play *WAP* at the protest, a controversial and explicit song by popular American pop artists, Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion. This song overtly expresses sexual playfulness, joy and pleasure, which patriarchal nationalism denies of women and gender-diverse persons. Dancing and singing to this song is a practice of freedom and bodily autonomy. This is not far-fetched, because African feminist histories teach us that the body is also a weapon. It is common on the African continent for women to strip naked or bare their breasts in protest, as a way of amplifying their voices. Feminist women such as the late Prof. Wangari Maathai (Kenya) and Pauline Opango Lumumba (DRC) have performed similar protests against neo-colonialism and colonial oppression respectively. The Nigerian women fighting against colonial oppression also used similar modes of protest in what is known as the Women's War in Southeastern Nigeria that began in 1929. Queer Feminist scholar Dr. Stella Nyanzi also protested bare breasted at Makerere university and Ugandan court in her fight against patriarchal nationalism in 2016 and 2019 respectively. This is African feminist embodied knowledges, the theory we are speaking from in pursuit of freedom for the oppressed.

We are disruptive and that does not mean we are violent. Protest is a third space. We only have our voices, painted bodies, signage, speakers, music, whistles, middle fingers and fists raised in the air, sage and dances to drive the message home. We are unarmed in the military sense. We are committed to dismantling patriarchal violence and calling out its neo/colonial roots. How can there be peace if there is no justice? We are not subscribing to respectability politics because they have done very little to eliminate SGBV in our communities. We stand in pan-African solidarity with other movements on the continent happening in the same moment. This includes #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, #AnglophoneCrisis in Cameroon, #EndSARS (against police brutality in Nigeria) and #CongoBleeding (against genocide happening in Congo).

#ShutItAllDownNamibia is a continuity of people-led protest action we have been witnessing and performing in the last decade. Hashtags such as #LegalizeAbortion, #SilentProtest, #SlutShameMovement, #MeTooNamibia #StruggleKids, #BoycottShoprite, #NoToNewParliament, #VarsityLockdown, #GallowsMustFall, #NotAtAlteFeste, #Keetmanshoop14 are all about holding the Namibian government, private sector and academia accountable for their poor services delivery, delayed decoloniality and false transformation.

Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja is a #ShutItAllDownNamibia protester. He is also a PhD artist in performance studies at the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of Cape Town.

The motherland that we have come to know and love as Namibia gained its independence through radical acts of transgressing multiple colonial projects.



Photograph: Vivian !Nou-Gawaseb

EDITORIAL continued.

If the South African left can learn from the radical experiment taking place in Rojava, we can build truly democratic and lasting counter-power so that we can both strengthen our resistance to repression by the state and capital, while also crafting a new world.

In the midst of the social, economic and environmental upheaval of 2020 and the fact of the United States of America's global hegemony and imperialism, many in South Africa and the world have had their eyes on the US elections. In International News, Dale T. McKinley offers an analysis of the Biden-Trump election and its many predictabilities, urging us to look deeper at the underlying structural realities, highlighting the need for vigilance and continued resistance.

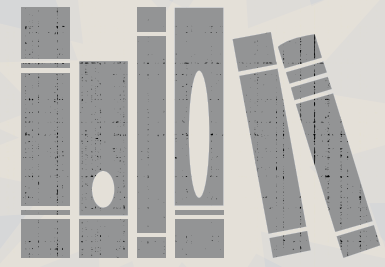
Finally, 2020 has shown that in moments of crisis we often turn to cultural workers to

interpret and make sense of the time that we are in. On this issue's Cultural Page, Kim M. Reynolds provides a review of the latest single *For Power* by hip-hop group Soundz of the South, and of the accompanying music video. *For Power* expounds the failures of capitalism and the ways in which COVID-19 and lockdown have exacerbated these. Both the song and music video, notes Reynolds, point us to 'the urgency of punching upwards at the larger system(s) and doing so collectively'.

At the same time as the articles in this issue show the intensified repression of the working class by the state and capital in 2020, they also underscore the ongoing and unwavering resistance by the oppressed- from workers and communities, to feminists and artists. We must continue to learn from and be in solidarity with these struggles!

EDUCATIONAL SERIES: PART 6 | by Shawn Hattingh

LESSONS OF DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM FOR SOUTH AFRICA



In the previous articles of this educational series we examined the principles, values, practices and ways of organising that are central to Democratic Confederation. We also looked at how these have been implemented in North Eastern Syria since 2012 as part of the Rojava Revolution. In this article we look at what lessons we can draw for South Africa from Democratic Confederation.



Internationalist Commune's 'Make Rojava Green Again' campaign. Photograph: Internationalist Commune

Building a new People's Power

Perhaps the most important lesson is that it is possible to build organisations of People's Power that are participatory and based on direct democracy. We do have experience with such structures of People's Power in the form of street committees, or what are called communes in Democratic Confederation, that existed in working-class areas in the 1980s in South Africa.

We need to once again begin to organise extensively at a street-level through mass meetings and street-based structures like assemblies/committees/communes if we are going to build a new movement to bring about liberation. This means energy must be focused on building structures at a street-level as opposed to a situation where many activists spend time trying to build centralised organisations, and only once these exist attempt to recruit people.

A further lesson is that building a new movement based once again on street committees, assemblies or communes, as Democratic Confederation shows, has to be based on progressive principles and practices such as accountability, direct democracy, and communalism. Democratic Confederation shows that once street-level structures – street assemblies/communes – and community movements have been built, they also have to be confederated and linked via recallable mandated delegates in structures like township-wide councils, city-level councils, provincial councils, a national council, and perhaps even an international council.

What Democratic Confederation therefore shows is that we need a collective power, but one where people at the grassroots hold and exercise this power. People should not be representatives who are given power to make decisions if they are sent from the street assemblies to township-wide councils for example. Rather, they must be

delegates who carry mandates from below and must be accountable to the people that have given them their mandate.

Democratic Confederation also shows we need to build a movement where people feel they belong and that gives people a sense of community and having a home. We need to also use the movement to heal the damages that capitalism, the state, patriarchy and racism have done to us all. This is important as it uses the energy of anger, but transforms it into a positive energy to build caring movements that can not only just resist, but change society for the better.

The need for mass revolutionary education

Democratic Confederation shows that mass political education has to be central to movement building based on developing a coherent and truly progressive ideology. It is only through education, reflection, and debates that a clear ideology that guides struggles can be developed for the context of South Africa. Another important lesson is that there also needs to be spaces of reflection at every level, as without reflection mistakes are often repeated, strategy never effectively develops, and appropriate tactics are not deployed.

The centrality of women's liberation

We can also draw lessons from Democratic Confederation about the need for women's liberation to be central. Patriarchy was and is also the basis on which working-class men became oppressed by an elite – first women were oppressed and then poorer men. So to free everyone, women's liberation is central. This does

not mean that we forget about fighting other issues such as class and racism – all hierarchies, oppressions and exploitation must be actively fought. Far too often however, structures, trade unions and political parties replicate patriarchy, and this must change.

Workers and Democratic Confederation

One major difference between South Africa and Rojava is that the development of capital in South Africa has been extensive. While in South Africa workers should be part of street assemblies/communes, this in our context will not be enough.

If we are to defeat capitalism and the state system – and capitalism's accompanying racism – in South Africa there is a need for workers to also organise at their workplaces. For workers, however, to organise today we need new forms of organisation. The traditional trade unions today have proven not to be the most effective organisations – indeed they have repeatedly failed to organise the majority of workers who are precarious.

Importantly, new forms of worker organising and organisation have started to emerge in South Africa and in these are the seeds of liberation. These have mainly been formed by precarious workers who built worker committees and forums. In 2012/13 there were the farm and mineworker committees, and today there are worker forums amongst precarious workers in Gauteng, and farm workers in the Eastern Cape

In reality, why worker forums and committees are so important is that they were and are effective – through these, farm workers and miners won huge gains. They potentially carry the seeds of change within them. There, therefore, needs to be a focus on building more committees and

forums based on principles and practices of direct democracy and accountability. It would be important too, once many worker committees and forums have been established, to begin to confederate them through delegate systems and structures, which could be industrial area-wide councils and city-wide councils etc.

Like the street assemblies/communes, workers' forums and committees would need to focus on the day to day struggles on the workplace floor, but also need to be influenced by a vision or ideology that takes us beyond capitalism and prepares the structures we are building today to become structures to take over the economy in the future, to socialise the means of production and to run the economy democratically to meet the needs of all.

The worker and community forums/assemblies and councils should also be confederated to one another – to ensure unity in struggle and to prepare the basis for the working class to one day run society. Through this, direct links can be created between street assemblies/communes and workers' forums/committees, so that they can become one movement. For too long we have copied hierarchical ways of organising, like political parties and today's trade unions, that have divided worker and community struggles.

Conclusion

Democratic Confederation and Rojava show the above ways of organising through direct democracy and confederating various structures is not impossible – it has been done and it is possible. Within these lessons lies the hope of self-organising to build a counter-power and to eventually build a truly socialist future based on direct democracy. As a famous revolutionary once said: We have a world to win.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS by Dale T. McKinley

TRUMP, THE 2020 ELECTIONS AND US DEMOCRACY: THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

This article was first published in the Daily Maverick on 5 November 2020.



Photograph: Carlos Barria | Reuters

No matter the final outcome of a highly unpredictable presidential election in the US – leaving aside the simultaneous elections for the House of Representatives and Senate – there are certain factors about the process and context that are patently predictable.

First, Donald Trump is once again making false claims that the “other side” (i.e. anyone who does not support/agree with him) is committing electoral fraud and trying to steal the election. He has gone further by making the absurd “demand” that the counting of votes must stop (which would ironically mean victory for Joe Biden). America’s little “Il Duce” and his Republican Party have begun filing legal challenges and have indicated they will go to the Supreme Court (which of course they have now stacked with a friendly majority).

Second, due to the continuation of the implicitly undemocratic electoral college system, the election is yet again coming down to a handful of “swing states” (in this case, Arizona, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Georgia). This is despite the fact that Biden is already a clear victor in respect of the overall popular vote – by almost 4 million out of more than 140 million votes cast by the latest count.

Third, the electoral numbers reaffirm the now almost century-long dominance of a two-party system; the US’s electoral choices at the national level remain razor thin. And, even though tens of millions of eligible voters did not participate and there has been some crossover voting, this election reaffirms that the US is a nation seriously divided along racial, class, gender and sociocultural lines.

Fourth, the response so far of US and other “markets”, which have seen modest surges in futures and stocks/share prices, yet again reveals that US/multinational corporate capital will always desire predictability above all else, as long as it remains within systemic (capitalist) ideological boundaries.

What is more foundational though, is that these predictabilities represent much deeper structural realities that underlie not only the present elections, but the entire democratic edifice in the US. What Trump and the 2020 elections (which have really been going on for the past two years at least) have done is to bring those realities even more clearly and prominently to the surface, where (most of) the people in both the US and the world can now see them.

So, what are these realities?

That the US has always been, as the neo-conservative/religious right intellectual guru Paul Weyrich openly and approvingly argued in the 1980s, a country ruled and governed by a minority. This is because the institutional foundations

of the political system in the US – such as the electoral college and the Senate – are designed to ensure an over-representation of those from mostly rural, lightly populated, predominately white and conservative states.

As long as this remains the case, so too will elections functionally reflect this reality.

The unrelenting (and largely successful) efforts by the Republican Party and Trump to do everything possible to corral and suppress the right to vote for all, has further institutionalised and greatly strengthened an historicised hierarchy of citizenship.

When added to the similarly successful and unprecedented efforts to pack the judiciary with yes-men and women, the cumulative result will be a long-lasting reinforcement of the power of the (racial and class) minority.

Despite some of the more progressive demographic and social changes in the US, especially over the past two to three decades, a sizeable section of the population remains socially, culturally and politically conservative (including among African-American and Hispanic populations, as well as among more recent immigrant communities).

Combined with the US’s historic and dominant embracing of a populist and narrowly identitarian nationalism and imperialism (and Trump’s fuel-on-the-fire approach to both), this reality will remain crucial to the outcome of all electoral politics in the US and engagement with the rest of the world for some time to come.

Regardless of whether Trump or Biden gets into the White House – and whatever the results of the Senate and House elections – US corporate capital and the

ultra-wealthy will continue to rule the economic and developmental roost.

What this will mean is greater inequality, continued destruction of the natural environment and a burgeoning of the ranks of vulnerable workers and the poor (particularly those of colour).

It is the unfortunate and magnified inheritance of our time that what happens in the domestic realm of the US reverberates across the globe, with both direct and indirect, short- and long-term, consequences.

As we watch what unfolds in this more immediate phase, we would be wise to pay close attention to the underlying structural realities that are now so clear to see – lest we too follow in the footsteps of associated predictability.

The reality is that regardless of whether Donald Trump or Joe Biden gets into the White House, and whatever the results of the Senate and House elections, US corporate capital and the ultrawealthy will continue to rule the economic and developmental roost.

GUEST ARTICLE by John Appolis (GIWUSA)

THE NATURE'S GARDEN STRIKE

Nature's Garden is a food processing company producing frozen vegetables and fries. Close to 300 members of the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA) embarked upon a seven-week long wage strike action at Nature's Garden from 9 August to 27 September 2020.

The bosses of Nature's Garden unilaterally imposed a wage freeze and refused to enter into any form of wage negotiations with GIWUSA. They maintained this wage freeze stance throughout the CCMA dispute process. Only in the fourth week of the strike did the company shift from this position. This arrogant stance of the bosses came despite the company working throughout the lockdown period.

It is this arrogant stance of the bosses that forced workers into strike action to defend their buying power and living standards. The strike involved demands of two disputes with the company. The one set of demands related to working conditions and wages, including an 18% wage increase, a minimum wage of R10 000, and improvements in other conditions of employment. Workers also demanded that all labour broker workers under Phakisa must be permanently employed by Nature's Garden. The other set of demands related to the retrenchment of workers. The company retrenched 44 workers before the strike commenced and was planning to retrench a further 8 workers. Part of the retrenchment demands were the demands of job security, preferential re-employment of the retrenched workers, and better severance pay.

The strike took place under conditions that were quite unfavourable to workers and the union. The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the high

levels of unemployment and the massive levels of retrenchments in all sectors of the economy made strike action generally very difficult. The strike also came at a time when the ruling class was shifting the burden of COVID-19 pandemic onto workers through the imposition of wage freezes. The South African government is, in fact, leading the attack on wage-levels, and employers are following suit. These attacks are taking place because the working-class movement as a whole is fragmented and generally weak.

Despite these odds the workers were resolute and determined to go on strike. To navigate the unfavourable terrain of struggle, workers discussed the form of strike action to be undertaken. One form of strike action that was considered was the 'grasshopper' strike, where workers go out on short-duration strikes. In other words, workers would strike for two or three days at a time, return to work, and then strike for a few days again. The tactical considerations of the 'grasshopper' strike were to periodically disrupt the operations of the company, to make it difficult for the employment of scab labour (*'amagundwane'*) and to limit the financial impact on workers. Workers were not in agreement with this form of strike and instead chose to undertake an indefinite form of strike action.

The other tactical issue considered was the timing of the strike action. National Women's Day, Sunday 9 August 2020, was chosen as the commencement day of the strike. Sunday was chosen as the day of strike in order to prevent the company from requesting workers to work overtime on the Sunday and Monday, which was the public holiday.

Part of the challenges faced by workers and the Union were the legal constraints. As a result of the amendments to the law on strikes, it is obligatory to have in place picketing rules before a protected strike can commence. As part of the picketing rules, three picketing sites were identified and agreed upon. One was on the company premises where no more than 50 workers could picket. The

other two were outside the company, one near the gates of the company and the other across the road. When identifying these sites, one of the entrances of the company was overlooked. This entrance was almost never used by the company and it was completely forgotten by shop stewards. The company exploited this oversight and used the entrance to bring in *amagundwane*. Private security was permanently stationed at this entrance, and at one stage strikers were shot with rubber bullets for going near it.

Despite the agreed picketing rules, the South African Police Services (SAPS) took it upon themselves to actively attempt to destroy the picket and the strike. Using the Declaration of the Covid-19 National Disaster and the ban on gatherings, SAPS officers on numerous occasions dispersed the pickets, even the one on the company premises. For many weeks, workers could not picket at the company. Many days were spent negotiating with the SAPS Officers to allow the picket, and at one time the Union considered going to court to interdict SAPS to prevent them from destroying the strike and picket.

The actions of the SAPS officers emboldened the bosses of Nature's Garden, who issued a lock-out notice and put as a condition of returning to work the unconditional acceptance of the wage freeze. They also inserted a new demand that workers must accept a three-year wage deal.

As part of the strike action, solidarity support was organized. A national boycott of the products of Nature's Garden was organised. Stickers, pamphlets and banners were printed and distributed. Organisations and activists supported the boycott and went to retail shops to encourage consumers not to buy the products of the company, by putting boycott stickers on the products and by stacking them in trolleys. Though there was support for the boycott, it was limited and never gained national traction.

Despite the limited support for the boycott and the actions in the retail shops, the bosses of Nature's Garden attempted to gag GIWUSA

and undermine our freedom of expression. They alleged that GIWUSA is defaming the company and harming its reputation in the eyes of the public. They applied to the High Court for an interdict but the court kicked out their application.

Four weeks into the strike action, workers received a major impetus to their struggle in the form of financial solidarity. Three organisations – CWAO, DEMAWUSA and Oxfam – made a total financial contribution of R17 000. With this money, food parcels were organised for the striking workers. This financial assistance came at a time when the strike was exacting severe economic impact on workers and their families. It enabled workers to continue their struggle for another three weeks.

The strike ended with the workers accepting the terms of the bosses – i.e. a R350 monthly allowance, a three-year agreement, the preferential employment of retrenched workers, and final warnings for workers who allegedly committed misconduct during the strike. The latter issue of disciplinary action became a major obstacle to the resolution of the strike. The company was insisting on taking disciplinary action against workers who breached the picketing rules and against those who were arrested by SAPS. In fact, the company presented a list of 28 employees, including two shop stewards, whom they were intending to suspend and charge for alleged misconduct. The workers demanded that no worker must be charged. The impasse on this issue caused the strike to continue for a week longer.

Though materially the workers and the Union only secured a R350 monthly allowance, organisationally the Union remained intact and the workers returned to work united and organised. However, the struggle at Natures Garden has not ended. The bosses are exacting revenge by finding other reasons to dismiss workers.

Aluta Continua!

MY STRUGGLE by Lehlohonolo Makhele (GHCC)

THE GHCC AND THE STRUGGLE FOR HOUSING BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19

The Gauteng Housing Crisis Committee (GHCC) was formed in 2016, at that time consisting mainly of communities in the South of Johannesburg who recognised the need to co-ordinate struggles and build solidarity. This was out of the realisation that working-class communities experience the same challenges, and that fighting in isolation simplifies the job of the state security apparatus in dealing with individual communities each time they act, as opposed to when communities fight in unity. The GHCC has since grown to cover more than 30 communities in Gauteng, including communities in the East and West of Johannesburg.

The GHCC is involved in the struggle for land, decent housing and decent jobs. In 2016, the GHCC led a series of actions which resulted in protests erupting in communities in the South of Joburg, including Ennerdale, Eldorado park, and Freedom Park. This resulted in the minister of Human

Settlements Lindiwe Sisulu convening a press conference at the University of Johannesburg's Soweto Campus, where it was announced that subsequent meetings would be held with community leaders. The meetings and responses from government took long to come, and again the GHCC decided to go back to the streets demanding that the government "rapidly release the land".

This led to the provincial government leadership of Premier David Makhura, then-MEC of Human Settlements Uhuru Moiloa, then-MMC of Housing Mzobanzi Ntuli, and MEC of Education Panyaza Lesufi, coming to the Eldorado Park stadium in 2017 to announce the Rapid Land Release Program. This was a provincial government program which adopted the demand of our communities to "rapidly release the land!". The Rapid Land Release Program meant that there were pockets of land identified by government to be developed for housing

in Gauteng. This includes the Southern Farms project, which is vast amount of land earmarked to provide 38 000 stands for people – a futuristic development where people will be able to live and work. This was a victory for the GHCC, and to date our organisation is still fighting and pushing for this development to begin.

Our demands are not only that this development happens, but also that our communities have meaningful involvement in this project. We are against the norm of white-owned companies being appointed without consultation with the community to do work that residents are capable of doing, while extracting cheap labour, making profits and then leaving without improving the conditions of the people living there. We plan to undertake a skills audit where we can identify those in the community who are electricians, plumbers, in construction etc. so that we can create co-operatives that result in wealth coming back into the community, as opposed to one person winning a tender.

The GHCC recognises that the failure of government for the last 26 years to change the

lives of people lies in the fact that, since 1994, the government has been serving the interests of capital at the expense of the majority. The apartheid power relations left intact in 1994 has ensured the continued suffering of historically oppressed groups.

Despite the harsh reality of COVID-19 lockdown which meant that we could not meet in person or take to the streets, and had to rely on limited access to data and social media to organise, we have connected with and expanded to a number of new communities who were struggling against evictions and defending land occupations under lockdown. The way forward for the GHCC is to organise even more communities in Gauteng, as our objective is grow and ensure that we have a strong organisation that is able to represent our communities in the fight for land, decent housing and decent jobs, and defend against state repression. In an attempt to demand accountability of the state, we have instituted a legal process against the city of Johannesburg to speed the implementation of the Rapid Land Release Program so that housing can be delivered to the poor.

"We are against the norm of white-owned companies being appointed without consultation with the community..."

SOUNDZ OF THE SOUTH:

Hip-hop and resistance during COVID-19 and the failures of capitalism in South Africa

BY KIM M. REYNOLDS

*For power,
control,
hate,
they will drag us down
'cause it's all for the profits*

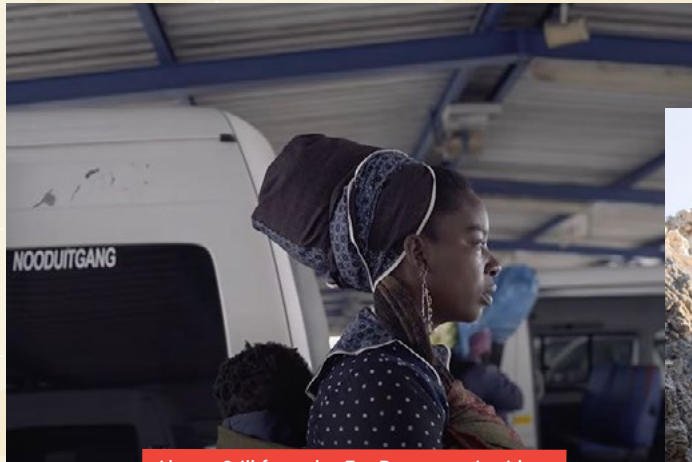
In Soundz of the South's latest single, *For Power*, the anti-capitalist hip-hop group based out of Cape Town, South Africa, reflect on the various pitfalls within the nation state, connecting dots between South Africa's past, the 1994 moment, and the country's increasingly neo-colonial and neoliberal trajectory. *For Power* addresses the precarity COVID-19 has exacerbated for those of us already in precarious existences, indicting capitalism as a system that will never be able to address humanity and the lives of the working-class majority because the system itself creates, polices, and maintains poverty and depersonalisation.

For Power's music video has a conversation with the lyrics of the song; as each verse unfolds, we see the ways in which SOS's political critique is visible on the body, on the landscape, in the labour people have to do each day, at the taxi rank, and at the protests for another victim of gender-based violence.

The structure of *For Power's* visual is a kind of 'day in the life', where the main character moves through various parts of Khayelitsha in a day of finding work, transport, and so on. As the day starts and we are taken through the taxi rank, we pass people loading stock into large trucks, and many others queuing to go to different parts of the city. It is here where Anela Jamena sings,

neoliberal policies privatise healthcare services for rich minorities and neglected public facilities for the working class-majority and truth be told, millions will die from this pandemic, and all they care about is capitalist interests.

The video then continues, out of the taxi rank and onto the side of the road, where alternative transport and a job might be possible. Karl



Above: Still from the *For Power* music video.
Right: Soundz of the South



Myx's verse is then introduced, where he critiques the major corporate bailouts that have taken place over this past year in South Africa, including but not limited to the mishandling of 5 billion rand that was intended as relief funding, but resulted in overspending on contractors who charged double for necessary pandemic-related supplies such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The in-plain-sight disregard for human life coupled with the depletion of life-saving sanitation facilities and access to running water make clear the impossibility of capitalist structures which offer liberation or a society that is imaginative, caring, lush or even survivable. Under capitalism, the gap of wealth grows deeper and deeper, and so does apathy towards a system that continues to, in many ways, overdetermine many of our lives and make collateral damage out of Black life too often.

SOS makes the point in this critique to note that while the persistent effort to bury Black people is attended to everyday by ruling classes as well as Black communities, there is the possibility of multiplying and amassing consciousness and a sense of one's own dignity, in whatever expression that is. Soundz of the South in *For Power* emphasizes the need to look around: to look at one's surroundings,

to look around corners, to look in-between the lines of the news and government promises, and importantly, to look things in the eye. In this practice of looking, Soundz points out the urgency of punching upwards at the larger system(s) and doing so collectively, rather than punching down or sideways to perpetuate systems of domination that already demobilise and depersonalise Black people, Black queers, Black women, in the first place.

In June Jordan's Poem *About My Rights*, the closing stanza reads:

*I am not wrong: Wrong is not my name
My name is my own my own my own
and I can't tell you who the hell set things up like this
but I can tell you that from now on my resistance
my simple and daily and nightly self-determination
may very well cost you your life*

For Power encourages this resistance so that it may end the life of colonial domination in all its forms.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Are you involved in progressive struggles or grassroots workplace/community organising that needs solidarity or that you think more activists should be made aware of? Do you have an analysis of or insights into a struggle or social/political/economic issue or development – whether local, regional or international – that is of interest or relevance to progressive/working class activists and struggles in South Africa that you would like to share? Do you have questions/comments about or disagreements with something published in *Workers' World News*?

Send us your article (max. 600 words) by email or Facebook private message and we will consider publishing it in a future issue.



CALLING ALL CULTURAL ACTIVISTS

We would love to feature your artwork advocating for alternatives to capitalism, fascism and patriarchy. Please help us make this an inspiring publication by sending us your poetry & songs, photography & graphic design, paintings & drawings, reports & manifestos of cultural activist interventions etc.

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**STOP
CASUALIZATION**