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UNDERSTANDING ESKOM'S CRISIS: THE SOLUTION IS NOT THE STATE BUT **PEOPLE'S POWER**



Photograph: REUTERS/Siphiwe Sibeko

by Lucien van der Walt (Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit)

ESKOM's ongoing crisis is a huge strain on working and poor people in South Africa. It affects everything from child-care to access to education and jobs, to safety. How we understand the crisis has deep implications for the solutions – and where the working-class movement should position itself. The blame lies in a toxic mixture of state failure, and neo-liberal measures. The solution does not lie in more state interventions, but in working-class struggles to expand popular and community control over the power sector, and to decentralise it where possible. ESKOM is now literally a national disaster. It is important to think of concrete actions that can defend the class, but also build an independent popular movement for jobs, dignity and self-management.

'What is ESKOM and who owns it?'

The operations and structure of ESKOM are not simply technical issues, but ones deeply embedded in the specific structure and history of the South African state, by its interrelations with big business, and by the larger patterns of class power in which these operated.

Simply put, ESKOM has never been the property of the public as a whole but has always been a state-owned-corporation (SOC). As such, it is a top-down organisation, controlled primarily by a small group of senior politicians, state officials and top managers. It serves this state elite's economic and political interests, and this group works with a small private elite, representing big private businesses. This state and private elite together make up the ruling class of South Africa.

ESKOM is top-down precisely in order to allow a small elite to hold the levers of power and direct its resources in ways that benefit the ruling class and its various projects; its top-down character is typical of state operations, at all levels of government, and parallels that are seen in the private sector.

The misguided belief that ESKOM is a "public" corporation is partly due to the widespread mislabelling of the state sector as the "public" sector, the state bureaucracy as the "public service," and state property as "public property." Ordinary people have in reality, no more ownership or real control over ESKOM than they do over giant local firms like Anglo, MTN, Sanlam, or of giant foreign firms like Lonmin or VW. And ESKOM is truly gigantic: in 2018 it was the 4th largest single Africa-based profit-making corporation, well ahead of Anglo and the rest. It is a multinational corporation, with operations in over 25 countries.

ESKOM is firmly in the hands of government ministers and senior state officials. These days this is through the Department of Public Enterprises and the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy; it is regulated by laws and policies that the "public" never wrote. It is obvious, after 20 years of load-shedding, that the views of the working-class and poor have no impact on it.

If it was run by the "public," why were ESKOM staff cut from 66,000 in 1984 to 30,000 in 2004?

Many commentators complain that ESKOM is bloated, but even with 17 000 jobs added by 2018, staffing remains below that of 40 years back. Despite low-wattage connections to many homes, load-shedding and cuts, prices for electricity for household use rose eight-fold from 1980 to 2005. Working-class people pay much of the taxes that bail-out ESKOM, for municipal mark-ups, and for back-ups against ESKOM's failures: candles, batteries, generators.

That does not mean that ESKOM has no benefits to the broad working-class. Obviously, workers need wages. Government and private businesses, the main employers, rely on ESKOM: it is responsible for around 95% of the country's electricity supply. Rolling blackouts disrupt the economy and cost jobs. Mass unemployment and energy poverty are not in the interest of the working-class, while a boom can strengthen workers. Electrical power is safer and cleaner than alternatives like paraffin stoves or wood, and the expansion of ESKOM's roll-out to working-class and poor households over the last 40 years is a massive victory.

However, meeting the needs of ordinary people has never been ESKOM's primary aim or activity. This is nothing new, and is not the result of ANC policies or of neo-liberalism, having started long before either. ESKOM spent years running ridiculous adverts telling people to put off their TVs and kettles, and skip washing, to help the power stay on. But ordinary people consume a small amount of ESKOM's supplies, with residential households using less than 16% of the total.

ESKOM's history as a guide to the present crisis

ESKOM was formed in 1923 as the Electricity Supply Commission (Escom), to supplement the power stations then owned by the state (mainly municipalities) and private firms (mainly the mines). Its priorities were, first, to ensure reliable power to the state, including to other SOCs, and second, to assist private industry with cheap power.

It is important to stress that ESKOM and other SOCs were never just about enabling private capitalist accumulation. They were deeply shaped by the character of the state itself, by competing political as well as economic agendas, and by what was happening in the larger (class) society.

The ruling class – private capitalists as well as those running the state – owns and controls all the key administrative, coercive and productive resources, but is internally divided, with rival projects and blocs that engage in struggles about how to rule the popular classes.

For example, from the 1920s to the 1970s, successive National Party (NP) headed governments used the state for an Afrikaner nationalist project. This promoted local industrialisation through state aid, in order to weaken the (foreign owned) mines and weaken British imperial power. SOCs were used to boost local (white, especially Afrikaner) capitalists against foreign capitalists. They were also used to engineer society by, for example, creating jobs for poor whites and were a source of income and patronage for senior politicians, key voters, favoured businesses, certain union leaders, and for propping up the homelands system.

This system broke down from the late 1970s. This was partly due to its internal contradictions, but also because South African state – segregated, fractured and riddled with patronage and cadre deployment – was unable to develop or implement a new model. The way was open for neo-liberalism, first adopted by the NP, then after 1994 by the ANC. ESKOM gutted its staff, pursued profit, ran down its infrastructure, and reconfigured its deals with the private sector. Tenders and outsourcing were then corrupted on an unprecedented scale in the Zuma period.

While neo-liberalism is clearly a big part of the ESKOM mess and has reinforced the SOC's top-down approach, ESKOM's problems cannot be reduced to neoliberalism. Neo-liberalism develops differently according to context. It was shaped by the history and fractured structure of the South African state, and its evolution into a non-racial bourgeois democracy. The old system of using SOCs for patronage and enrichment continued, the earlier Afrikanerisation replaced by rapid Africanisation as part of BEE. The ANC's nationalist project linked neo-liberal measures to BEE, and linked BEE to ANC patronage.

Continues on pg.2

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first edition of *Workers World News* for 2023. Even though this is officially the first full, 'post-COVID' year, the first three months of the year have confirmed that there are plenty of other crises afflicting our country and globe, more especially the broad working class. At the same time, such crises also present that same working class and other progressive forces with new opportunities for struggle and new spaces to effect the kind of systemic changes we all so desperately desire and need.

In South Africa it is the historic and ongoing crises centred on ESKOM that has now taken centre stage. We headline this edition with two guest articles that emerge from presentations at ILRIG's recent webinar entitled: *ESKOM Crisis – Is There Still a Place for Public Ownership?*

The lead article by Lucien van der Walt takes a critical, historical look at the ESKOM crisis. He reminds us that our understanding of the crisis informs possible solutions and accompanying working class struggle. Lucien lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of state failure and neo-liberal policies/actions and argues that solutions will not come from more state interventions, but through working class organisation and struggle.

Following on from this, Sandra van Niekerk shows us how the global neo-liberal agenda of privatisation and corporatisation of energy over the last few decades has fundamentally failed to deliver accessible and affordable energy. She argues that the only serious and sustainable answer in confronting this failure is by retaining and strengthening energy as a public good, while providing international examples from which we can learn.

Turning to another more local/regional crisis in the 'My Struggle' column, Abigail Jele shares with readers a view from the coalface of Swaziland's struggle for freedom and democracy. Paying tribute to the principled commitment of the assassinated human rights lawyer and activist, Thulani Maseko, Abigail alerts us of what is at stake for the Swazi people as well as those in the region. With passion and courage, she reminds us that it is only through the mass struggle of the majority that the long road to freedom will be completed.

In Gender News, newly arrived ILRIG research and education officer Lara Reddy sketches out the heart-rending story of the incredible loss, pain and suffering of the poorest and most marginalised communities as a result of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. She highlights the particularly devastating impacts on the repressed LGBTIQ+ community, women and Kurdish minorities and the need for feminist and internationalist solidarity.

Continuing with the fourth instalment of the educational series from last year on forging alternative paths of self-government and autonomy from the state, Shawn Hattingh shares the inspiring example of the people of Cheran in Mexico. In this we learn about how the people organised themselves to expel drug dealers and multinational corporations and implement a radical system of self-government and people's defence.

In ILRIG News, Dale McKinley provides a reflection on the very successful 2022 ILRIG Political Schools which focused on the scourge of xenophobia. The key take-away from the schools is that participatory political education and discussion/debate can not only positively develop and change consciousness but also reaffirm the core principles and values of inclusive, internationalist organisation and struggle.

Lastly, on our Cultural Page we share an incredibly powerful poem by the renowned writer and poet Alice Walker entitled *Democratic Womanism*. It is a tribute to all women in their constant and historic struggle against capitalist patriarchy, greed and the destruction of our planet and a timely reminder of why women must be at the centre of all progressive organisation and struggles for systemic change.

Onward Ever, Backward Never!

Pull-out poster

ON PAGE 7

'Climate Justice is Social Justice'
by Andy Mason

GENDER NEWS By Lara Reddy

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY IN TIMES OF NATURAL DISASTERS: A FEMINIST CALL FROM TURKEY



Photograph: Izmir Anarchy (Turkey)

'Charity, vertical, humiliates. Solidarity, horizontal, helps'
– South American writer, Eduardo Galeano

The earthquakes and aftershocks in Turkey and Syria on 6 February and another on 20 February, reveal how state control of aid is inherently corrupt, repressive and biased against the poorest and most marginalised of peoples. This is especially the case when it comes to women and LGBTQI+ individuals who were amongst the hardest hit. Humanitarian aid meant for rebuilding lives after a natural disaster was and continues to be, controlled by regimes run by proto-fascist parties like Turkey's ruling *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, (AKP), which ironically translates to 'Justice and Development Party.'

Those who actually do much of the aid work locally with minimal resources such as, labour unions, Kurdish political movements, socialist and feminist movements, non-governmental organisations and online social networks organised by people themselves are not supported. In fact, the AKP and the state police consciously prevented their efforts, even when no state aid arrived. In Syria, President Assad's brutal regime politicised aid, using the earthquakes as an opportunity to gain personal legitimation and recognition on the international stage even while the country remains in a state of civil war and thousands of Syrian refugees died in Turkey.

The central solidarity role of independent, people's organisations

In Turkey the Independent Mineworkers Union who gathered to help in the critical first 24-hour period, were prevented by state authorities from doing so for two days. Local AKP offices pocketed aid money while independent supplies were confiscated. These reactionary forces have

continued to make it difficult for grassroots organisations to deliver mutual aid, especially to women, girls and queers. On 26 February, the NGOs Foundation of Anatolian People and Peace Platform were left with no choice but to purchase over 2000 tents from the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) for 46 million Turkish liras (R43 million). Independent unions organised protests outside the Kızılay offices, and many got arrested.

In Turkey, the '6th February Mutual Aid Network Coordination' made up of many civil society groups including feminist and queer groups from Istanbul was spontaneously formed. A digital communication network of 300+ members mobilised support, solidarity activities, resources, aid and funds. According to one of their statements, "the co-ordination is politically independent of any organisation and functions on a system of self-management, mutual aid, anti-discrimination and transparent accountability." As Kurdish media (ANF NEWS) reported, one of the results was the *Heyva Sor* ('Red Moon') campaign where 17 organisations made the earthquake in Kurdistan visible and organised solidarity fundraising events and demonstrations. It was the effectiveness of these kinds of people-led solidarity groups that helped earthquake victims while aid going through the regime was characterised by ethno-nationalist politics, bureaucracy, civil war, sanctions and downright theft.

Despite all of the obstacles, independent search and rescue operations as well as the provision of emergency supplies never stopped. Volunteers from one of the many and diverse solidarity groups, Izmir Anarchy, with the help of socialist and feminist movements, departed from the city of Izmir to some of the hardest-hit areas with a mobile kitchen and provisions. In Ankara, a female medical group formed to help earthquake victims with free examinations for pregnant women arriving from earthquake zones, where 360 000 pregnant women were affected and 39 000 women were due to deliver babies in the weeks after the earthquake. Other solidarity groups tried

their best to address the lack of shelter, toilets, sanitary pads and cleaning facilities, especially for single women.

Who is to blame?

After the 1999 Marmara earthquake in Izmet, Turkey, which claimed 17 000 lives, stricter building standards were demanded by the population. However the regime, working with capital-complicit housing mafias, ignored such demands. The tragic result was the complete collapse of 173 000 buildings and a death toll of 57 000, with over 100 000 injured. To make matters worse, the oppressive othering of woman and queers makes them most vulnerable to the poverty, disease, violence and death that has intensified since the earthquake. It is the dominant capitalist, patriarchal, and ethno-fascist structures and politics that are ultimately responsible.

In her book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Naomi Klein reflects on how the same realities are part of natural disasters globally. For example, in the aftermath of the tsunami in December 2004 which devastated the south of Sri Lanka, historically antagonistic communities (Christians, Muslims and Tamils) selflessly helped each other due to international aid never reaching

them while the government appropriated the aid for vanity projects.

In the Haiti earthquake in 2010, where 316 000 people died and 1 million were made homeless, international aid arriving at the Port-au-Prince Airport got piled up in containers and was not distributed. Simultaneously, part of this same international aid began to appear in the shadow economy at astronomical prices. While the US sent in marines to guard the containers from starving people, the Red Cross received several billion US\$ for the reconstruction of destroyed homes yet only 40 dwellings were built.

Internationalist feminist solidarity more than ever

The call for global feminist solidarity, especially with the rising political and social crises after the earthquakes is a valid one. There are lessons to be learned for organising. People helped people, while the patriarchal state and capital did more to weaken and hurt people and to deflect, their own responsibility. If ever there was a sound reason why global feminist solidarity, grounded in intersectional thinking and practice, is indispensable then this is it.

HOW TO HELP – SEND A DONATION

Funds go via: **Association for the Promotion of International Solidarity, Switzerland**
See bank account details below. Please use the French name for banking.

Send your donations to:
Association pour la Promotion de la Solidarité Internationale (APSI)
Place Chauderon 5
1003 Lausanne
Switzerland
IBAN: CH84 0900 0000 1469 7613 8
SWIFT/BIC: POFICHBEXXX
Name of the Bank: PostFinance SA; Mingerstrasse 20; 3030 Bern; Switzerland
Please use the French name for bank transfers.

UNDERSTANDING ESKOM'S CRISIS CONTINUED FROM PG.1:

The astonishing mismanagement that saw the Medupi, Kusile and Ingula expansions run R400 billion over budget, and still not fully operational, cannot just be accounted for by neo-liberalism.

What is to be done?

The starting point is that, just like private corporations, SOCs are outside of popular control. The only way that ordinary people can truly exert control over them is through struggle. For example, it was due to the struggles of the 1980s and early 1990s that over 3 million (mainly black) households were added to the grid from 1990-2005.

But what should be the aims and forms of such a struggle in the present? Initially, to fight against the impacts of the ESKOM disaster such as price increases and higher taxes. The shortfall in ESKOM's budget must be funded by the recovery of money looted by both politicians and business. This is part of forcing more immediate reforms on ESKOM but can be part of a larger push to rebuild building working-class power.

ESKOM has destroyed the old myth that state ownership is a progressive alternative to capitalism and shows that state ownership is the opposite of workers' control. The project of capturing state power is a dead-end. It shows how SOCs, the state and private corporations

are structured to ensure the rule of the few over the many. The masses are disempowered, and, in the neo-liberal era, face intensifying isolation, fragmentation and social decay, while fear and anger intensify. The state, the betrayals of the main political parties, and the crisis of the statist left, are central to the weakening of working-class organisations

ESKOM and other bodies that control vast resources cannot be ignored, but the aim is not just reforms, but fundamentally shifting power by building an alternative. What we need to fight for is an emergent working-class democracy, outside of (but fighting) the powers vested in, the state, capital and the anti-democratic,

consumerist neo-liberal world order. From this perspective, it is about immersion in and with the people rather than looking to Big Men and parties. It's about starting with winnable struggles that build agency and self-management, link up neighbours, workmates and family members –rather than rehashing slogans.

Viewed in this way, everything from forcing ESKOM to be more accountable, to pushing for a return of municipal power stations, to building community-owned generation capacity are all valuable to the extent that they help build a self-managed counter power, local, inclusive, tolerant political initiatives that can anchor larger, national movements. It's a long march, but one step at a time.



SELF-GOVERNING TOWN OF

CHERAN, MEXICO



Cheran mass – El Enemigo Común

“
Eventually the community overcame the gangs, took members of the gangs captive and seized their weapons.”

In this series, we are looking at examples of movements that have built structures that are an alternative to the state, capitalism and party politics; not just as part of a revolution but as part of building towards one. As such, these movements have built organisations of self-governance as part of daily resistance so that people involved can develop the skills to collectively run society without the need for politicians and bosses.

Background of Cheran

An inspiring example of how a movement based on progressive values and practices can implement self-governance to improve people's lives as well as end state corruption and gangsterism can be found in the town of Cheran in Mexico. Cheran has a population of approximately 17 000 people and is situated in one of Mexico's most violent and corrupt provinces.

In the early 2000s, the town of Cheran had been badly impacted by the neoliberal policies that the state had implemented since the late 1980s. During this period, the state had ended the subsidies that had been provided to small-scale farmers and consequently many of Cheran's residents had become unemployed. At the same time, gangs involved in the narcotics trade had become entrenched in the town. Gradually, as their power grew the gangs started diversifying their operations and became involved in the illegal logging of the municipally owned forests surrounding the town. As part of this diversification, the gangs bribed local politicians and the police to turn a blind eye. They were also operating protection rackets targeting street traders – again working with corrupt politicians and the police.

On the lands that had been deforested, gangs along with multinational companies began planting avocado plantations. Avocado farming is highly water intensive and caused massive environmental damage, including diminishing the town's water resources. By 2011, gangs were threatening to seize the town's last water resource for their avocado farming.

The revolt of 15th April 2011

From 2005 onwards the community, led by women, began organising to try and resist the

illegal clearing of forests. Meetings were held and at times members of the gangs were confronted, which often led to activists being assassinated. When the last communal water source was threatened, however, the entire town rose in revolt. This culminated in the events of 15th April 2011.

On that day, women activists organised for the local church bells to ring as a signal to the community to come out and confront the gangs. They did so in numbers and in the process, engaged in running battles with the gangs even though the community was only armed with stones, fireworks and Molotov cocktails, while the gangs had automatic weapons. Eventually the community overcame the gangs, took members of the gangs captive and seized their weapons.

The mayor and the local politicians, who were aligned with the gangs and multinational corporations operating in the area, then ordered the police to intervene to ensure the captured gang members were released. The community, which was now armed, prevented the police from doing this and, in fact, drove the police and politicians out of the town. Barricades were then erected at all the entrances of the town and manned by an armed community militia to prevent the politicians, police and gangs from re-entering Cheran.

The decision to embark on self-governance

After the local politicians and police had been expelled from the town assemblies were held on every street to decide how the town should be run. In these, people themselves decided that street level assemblies should run the town permanently and the local government be dissolved. In doing so, the community took the courageous step of implementing permanent self-governance, through the assembly system.

In this assembly system, anyone over the age of 12

can speak and vote in the street level assemblies. It is in these assemblies that people decide how services should be provided and maintained. The local schools and healthcare facilities are also linked to the assemblies. Each assembly member has to contribute labour time and resources – if they have – to ensure services are maintained and that education and healthcare are improved.

The assemblies are arranged into 4 districts. Each district elects delegates – who are rotated every 3 years, are recallable and are paid the average wage of a worker – to a coordinating council to ensure education, health and public amenities are run properly and collectively across the town.

The people of Cheran also decided to ban all political parties. The result is that in the assemblies, people represent the community and not parties. The main reason for this move was because people felt that all the political parties were corrupt, that they divided people and were only interested in power for themselves and the salaries or business opportunities that came from being in the local state.

Self-protection

The people of Cheran, through the assemblies, also decided to establish a permanent militia directly under their control. The aim of the militia is to ensure communities are safe and that the state and gangs cannot enter Cheran. Members of the militia are elected directly by the communities, and like the delegates on the coordinating council, are paid the average wage that a worker earns in the town.

Autonomy

Since 2011 (over 12 years now), the police, gangs, corporations and state have been unable to enter into the town. The people of Cheran also decided to wage a legal battle for the town's autonomy, a battle that was won in 2018. As a result, the people of Cheran have been self-governing through the assembly-based system,

through which people have succeeded in improving their own lives on a number of fronts. Incidents of serious crimes such as murder have virtually disappeared, education and healthcare has greatly improved and basic services such as water have been made accessible to everyone.

The people of Cheran, however, don't just want to be an isolated enclave of self-governance. They see their struggle as part of an international struggle against capitalism and nation states and as such have built relations with other people involved in struggles for political and economic autonomy, including with the Rojava Revolution.

Building a communal economy

Along with building self-governance there has also been an attempt to build a communal and ecological economy. A commune of 200 people has been established to work on a reforestation programme and has succeeded in restoring about 50% of the forest around Cheran. A further 120 people work in a nursery commune to grow saplings to be used in reforestation.

Another communal enterprise, involving 200 community members, is focused on harvesting and selling resin tapped from the forest. There is also a communal run sawmill and timbering project to cut down diseased trees. In this way, the people of Cheran are attempting to build a communal economy that is not in the hands of the state, capitalists or gangs.

Conclusion

Although the experiments in Cheran are on a relatively small scale, they demonstrate that a different politics based on people's power and direct democracy can be built. Further, they demonstrate that states and politicians are in fact not needed if there is organised people's power. The people of Cheran are demonstrating, in real time, that a constructive form of politics and economy that is participatory is a viable and an achievable alternative to the mal-governance and corruption we face with the state and private sector.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS by Sandra van Niekerk (Public Services International)

ENERGY AS A PUBLIC GOOD: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

In the face of increasing energy poverty, high levels of inequality and high levels of unemployment, there is now a lot of talk about the (just) energy transition; meaning the transition away from fossil-fuel generated electricity to electricity generated by renewable energy. This transition is part of the process of decarbonisation that has been made necessary because of climate change and the massive contribution that burning coal and oil makes to the emission of greenhouse gasses.

Affordable and accessible electricity as a public good

It is within this context that now, more than ever, access to electricity should be a basic human right. It is an essential of life that allows access to heating, cooking, light, as well as facilitating access to better health care services, housing, water, and a range of other basic services. Put simply, the (just) energy transition cannot just be about moving towards renewable energy. It has to also be about ensuring that everyone has access to affordable electricity.

The only way that both these priorities can be met is by retaining and strengthening energy as a public good. In this respect, the Trade Union Programme for a public, low-carbon energy future which was developed by the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) together with a range of trade union bodies, like PSI, from across the globe, lays out the programmatic basics.

The privatisation/corporatisation of energy has failed the people

The 1990s saw a wave of privatisation, commercialisation and/or corporatisation of energy utilities across the globe as the IMF and World Bank promoted neoliberal policies. The shift towards renewable energy in many countries has generally seen the intensification of the marketisation of electricity, with IPPs (Independent Power Producers) for renewable energy generating the electricity which they then sell on to state energy utilities for transmission and distribution, with distribution sometimes done by private operators as well.

Research carried out by the European Public Service Union (see here -publication) has shown that energy liberalisation or the opening up of the energy sector to the private sector, has largely failed across the globe.

- In Europe this has resulted in more concentration of ownership rather than getting rid of market monopolies. Privatising the energy sector has led to increased competition.
- Privatisation has increased electricity prices.
- As a result of the marketisation and commercialisation of the energy sector, jobs have been lost and workers' rights have been undermined.
- The rise of renewables in Europe was possible because they were protected from the market rather, as is often argued, than being introduced through the market.

Examples of taking back energy into the public sector

There are increasing examples of states taking back energy into the public sector. A recent example of this can be seen in the case of the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Limited (UEDCL), which was privatised in 2004 to Umeme, a company specially formed for this contract, in the form of a 20-year concession. Over the years a number of IPPs have been involved in

generation, including one run by Eskom. But since 2004, there have been a litany of complaints and problems with the privatised electricity sector – including high tariffs and poor service quality.

The government has now decided to renationalise the generation and distribution through re-bundling the three separate, generation, transmission and distribution companies. In the place of these separate entities, the government will create UNECL (Uganda National Electricity Company Limited). This is part of their efforts to make electricity more affordable for people. However, UNECL will still have private elements in that the government is planning to structure it as a public-private partnership.

Given the rising costs of electricity due to privatisation and corporatisation, there are many international examples of the state, and public energy utilities taking on responsibility for renewable energy. For example, in Queensland, Australia, the government has committed to end its reliance on coal-fired power by 2035, with 80% of its electricity coming from renewables such as wind, solar and hydroelectric power. The government has also indicated that as they shift to renewable energy, the majority of power generation will be publicly owned.

As part of this shift towards public renewable energy, the Queensland government, unions and power generators signed an Energy Workers Charter which seeks to ensure a just transition for energy workers. This is in the context of a broader Energy and Jobs Plan that the government has developed in order to meet its target of 80% of energy to be renewables by 2035.

In order to allow for the full potential of renewable energy to be reached, there also needs to be significant investment in the electricity grid. The government announced, early in 2023, that a grid project developed by a private company, which will allow for the development of renewable energy in the north of Queensland, will now be controlled by the state-owned transmission company, Powerlink. In this way, the government is abiding by its commitment to retain majority public ownership of energy assets.

The need for a democratised public energy system

We need energy systems across the globe to transition away from fossil fuel generating systems that focus on meeting the needs of mining, industry and big business, to an energy system that is based on renewable energy, and that ensures access to electricity for all. This can only be done on the basis of a public energy system which is driven by democratic public participation and oversight.

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FROM THE ILRIG RESOURCE CENTRE by Dale T McKinley

REFLECTIONS: ILRIG'S 2022 POLITICAL SCHOOL

At the heart of ILRIG's ongoing political and popular education work have been our Political Schools (previously called 'Globalisation Schools') that have been running for over 15 years. A range of ILRIG's partner organisations and other allied activists and formations from around the country attend these schools, which have provided a much-needed space for reflections on the state of our organisations and struggles, discussing and debating topics/ issues relevant to the working class and engaging in creative activities to express and share our experiences and perspectives.

As a result of the growing popularity of these schools as well as the increasing number of ILRIG partner and allied organisations, over the last three years we have held two schools per year. The Johannesburg School now brings together participants from Gauteng and KZN Provinces as well as from Swaziland while the Cape Town School covers those from the Western and Eastern Cape.

One of the most disturbing and challenging realities of South Africa's post-1994 political economy has been the scourge of xenophobia. Since the early 2000s the country has seen the rise of increasingly widespread xenophobic politics alongside various waves of xenophobic violence. In turn, this has posed an ongoing, serious challenge to left, progressive and working class forces. Why? Because one of the most crucial principles/values of our politics and struggle has always been internationalism and a rejection of organisation and struggle based on narrow and reactionary racial, ethnic, national or gender ideas and practice.

This has happened despite the push-back and opposition from some social movements, community organisations, unions/workers and

other activists. When the latest round of organised violence - this time championed by the newly formed 'Operation Dudula' - surfaced in late 2021/ early 2022 ILRIG joined with other progressive forces and activists to form 'Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia' as part of a collective effort to confront and respond politically and practically.

As part of this engagement and response, ILRIG decided that the theme for the 2022 school would be - 'Unpacking Xenophobia: Causes, Contestation & Consequences'. In many ways, this was a difficult decision given the range of immediate and deep-seated political, socio-economic and organisational problems and challenges being experienced by working class forces/movements. However, we strongly felt/feel that without engaging, debating and confronting xenophobia both past and present, the ability of working class activists and collectives to build principled, effective and sustainable organisation and struggle will be fatally undermined.

Over 4 days each in Johannesburg and Cape Town, delegates from 32 different organisations gathered to engage in a range of open plenary sessions, group work and discussions, game playing, activist platforms and cultural events. Key sessions included:

- Thoughts and local experiences of xenophobia (more especially from migrants)
- Interrogating what xenophobia is and why it exists (the objective and subjective)
- The main xenophobic forces/organisations, why they have support and from where

- Countering - with facts - the various claims and myths of the xenophobes
- Working class forces and their engagement with and response to xenophobia
- Practical ways forward in the ongoing battle against xenophobia

The discussions and engagements were both lively, with serious debate and some disagreements being surfaced. This is exactly what we had expected, as a direct reflection of the contested as well as manipulated space and place in South African society when it comes to immigration and nationalism.

In what ILRIG considers a positive development and confirmation of the timeliness and usefulness of the school, some of the delegates who had come to the school either not sure of their views or with decidedly xenophobic views/ideas, departed with changed attitudes and perspectives. Crucial to this was the presence of migrants and their personal telling of xenophobic violence and harassment. Their voices were hugely important as was the ensuing discussion and solidarity shown to those activists, such as members of Abahlali Basemjondolo, who have lost their lives in the struggle.

What ILRIG's 2022 Political Schools showed was that even though there remain serious obstacles and challenges, participatory political education and discussion/debate can not only positively develop and change consciousness but also reaffirm the core principles and values of inclusive, internationalist organisation and struggle.

...one of the most crucial principles/values of our politics and struggle has always been internationalism and a rejection of organisation and struggle based on narrow and reactionary racial, ethnic, national or gender ideas and practice

MY STRUGGLE by Abigail Jele (Swaziland United Democratic Front Media Officer)

SWAZILAND UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT: JUSTICE FOR THULANI MASEKO!

The fight for freedom and democracy will not be defeated!

The core demands

As the Swaziland United Democratic Front (SUDF), we are the people of Swaziland drawn from, but not limited to, community based organisations, women's movements, youth and students, workers, political parties, faith based organisations, people with disabilities and other minority groups.

We are guided by a Charter that was launched on 6 September 2012, which is an expression of the people's aspirations and desire to be free from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and all other forms of social, political and economic deprivation.

The core demand of the SUDF has always been for a people's government. This means that there must be an end to the current repressive Tikhundla state of governance and a new People's Government drawing its legitimacy from an all-inclusive multiparty democratic state and a new and democratic constitution that guarantees equal rights and responsibilities for all.

All structures, instruments and systems perpetuating royal minority rule and inherent corruption, favouritism and nepotism must be dismantled in favour of democratic systems of governance that will serve the interest of the people. State sponsored violence and torture as well as the abuse of the security apparatus, intelligence and the judiciary for the protection of the royal minority must end, and instead serve the entire Swazi nation with equal dedication and respect for human rights.

Thulani Maseko's assassination

Unfortunately, state initiated and/or sponsored violence and killings have continued, with the latest and most high profile victim being human rights lawyer comrade Thulani Maseko. Thulani was a peaceful and humble Advocate, husband, intellectual, community and political organiser, as well as a Pan Africanist par excellence. He was assassinated for standing with the poor and majority oppressed people of Swaziland, on 21 January 2023.

Thulani's assassination came a few hours after King Mswati had publicly warned those calling for democracy that his mercenaries would deal with them (see the video here - https://fb.watch/j2yj_rt487/). His cold blooded assassination has been met with deep sadness and shock, especially since he was gunned down in the presence of his wife and young children.

As the SUDF, we will forever pay our sincere homage to his memory. We also want to use this time to reaffirm that it is our collective responsibility to intensify the liberation of our country. Never before has our country faced a political crisis of such magnitude. Those who are fighting for democracy and freedom in Swaziland continue to be shot, killed, maimed, with no one taking responsibility.

People are fighting back

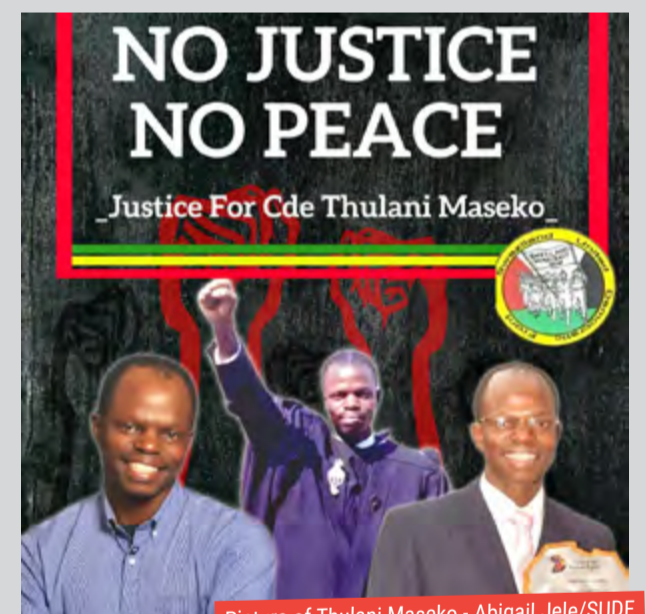
As a people we are in the fight of our lives. Thulani's tragic passing has undoubtedly given the government more time to 'breathe', to reorganise its repressive machinery and subsequently employ

tricks to disorganise the fighting forces. Despite the state downplaying his assassination as just another death, comrade Thulani was hugely respected, well-known and liked by a wide range of people and organisation across the world, including many diplomats, civil society activists and political leaders.

His prominence and international recognition sent shivers down the spine of the broken illegitimate political and economic system in Swaziland. Further, Thulani was leading a highly influential organ - the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) - that had gained much ground in bringing Swazis together to speak with one voice in the fight for freedom and democracy. What is crucial to note is that the MSF had taken a resolution in mid-2022 that was critical of participation in the Tikhundla elections. That resolution clearly and openly stated that none of the MSF's affiliates must participate in the upcoming Tikhundla elections but should lead the fight for a peaceful resolution of Swaziland's political problem through dialogue.

The timing of the assassination confirms a direct connection to the elimination of a critical voice that could have further de-legitimised the sham elections. Thulani's was a credible and well-received voice that exposed the regime beyond the borders of our country; a good example being his Lesotho trip that saw some of that country's government officials show a willingness to share experiences and help Swazis peacefully work through their problems.

While the collective pain of the Swazi people was still raw from Thulani's death, the state announced that it would proceed with its sham national elections despite global calls for dialogue.



Picture of Thulani Maseko - Abigail Jele/SUDF

The state's 'voter education' activities are being met with resistance by many communities who want dialogue; as a result, people continue to be harassed, intimidated and shot by the King's army and police. In a clear sign of the growing rejection of the regime's plans, community residents are 'firing' the voter education officers from their communities. Despite Thulani's assassination and the regime's best efforts to paint the people's resistance as the result of Swazis being misled by foreign and criminal elements, people are not buying the lies and are fighting back.

At the end of the day, truth will always pierce through a wall of lies. Swazis will be free and justice for Thulani will be secured. Just like when buffalos are under attack from lions, they may be scattered around for a while but they will eventually regroup, protect the weakest among them and fight off the predators.

It is in this spirit that the SUDF alongside the Swazi people will continue to march and fight together for a free and democratic country. This is the real story the Swazi people. Freedom will come.

#JUSTICE FOR THULANI MASEKO.

DEMOCRATIC WOMANISM

A poem by Alice Walker**

You ask me why I smile
when you tell me you intend
in the coming national elections
to hold your nose
and vote for the lesser of two evils.
There are more than two evils out there,
is one reason I smile.
Another is that our old buddy Nostradamus
comes to mind, with his fearful
400 year old prophecy: that our world
and theirs too
(our "enemies" – lots of kids included there)
will end (by nuclear nakba or holocaust)
in our lifetime. Which makes the idea of elections
and the billions of dollars wasted on them
somewhat fatuous.
A Southerner of Color,
my people held the vote
very dear
while others, for centuries,
merely appeared to play
with it.
One thing I can assure
you of is this:
I will never betray such pure hearts
by voting for evil
even if it were microscopic
which, as you can see in any newscast
no matter the slant,
it is not.
I want something else;
a different system
entirely.
One not seen
on this earth
for thousands of years. If ever.
Democratic Womanism.
Notice how this word has "man" right in the middle of
it?
That's one reason I like it. He is right there, front and
center. But he is surrounded.
I want to vote and work for a way of life
that honors the feminine;
a way that acknowledges
the theft of the wisdom
female and dark Mother leadership

might have provided our spaceship
all along.
I am not thinking
of a talking head
kind of gal:
happy to be mixing
it up
with the baddest
bad boys
on the planet
her eyes a slit
her mouth a zipper.
No, I am speaking of true
regime change.
Where women rise
to take their place
en masse
at the helm
of earth's frail and failing ship;
where each thousand years
of our silence
is examined
with regret,
and the cruel manner in which our values
of compassion and kindness
have been ridiculed
and suppressed
brought to bear on the disaster
of the present time.
The past must be examined closely, I believe, before we
can leave
it there.
I am thinking of Democratic, and, perhaps
Socialist, Womanism.
For who else knows so deeply
how to share but Mothers
and Grandmothers? Big sisters
and Aunts?
To love
and adore
both female and male?
Not to mention those in between.
To work at keeping
the entire community
fed, educated
and safe?

Democratic womanism,
Democratic Socialist
Womanism,
would have as its icons
such fierce warriors
for good as
Vandana Shiva
Aung San Suu Kyi,
Wangari Maathai
Harriet Tubman
Yoko Ono
Frida Kahlo
Angela Davis
& Barbara Lee:
With new ones always rising, wherever you look.
You are also on this list, but it is so long (Isis would
appear midway) that I must stop or be unable to
finish the poem! So just know I've stood you in a
circle that includes Marian Wright Edelman, Amy
Goodman, Sojourner Truth, Gloria Steinem and Mary
McLeod Bethune. John Brown, Frederick Douglass,
John Lennon and Howard Zinn are there. Happy to be
surrounded!
There is no system
There is no system
now in place
that can change
the disastrous course
the Earth is on.
Who can doubt this?
The male leaders
of Earth
appear to have abandoned
their very senses
though most appear
to live now
entirely
in their heads.
They murder humans and other
animals
forests and rivers and mountains
every day
they are in office
and never seem
to notice it.
They eat and drink devastation.

Women of the world,
Women of the world,
Is this devastation Us?
Would we kill whole continents for oil
(or anything else)
rather than limit
the number of consumer offspring we produce
and learn how to make our own fire?
Democratic Womanism.
Democratic Socialist Womanism.
A system of governance
we can dream and imagine and build together. One that
recognizes
at least six thousand years
of brutally enforced complicity
in the assassination
of Mother Earth, but foresees six thousand years
ahead of us when we will not submit.
What will we need? A hundred years
at least to plan: (five hundred will be handed us
gladly
when the planet is scared enough)
in which circles of women meet,
organize ourselves, and,
allied with men
brave enough to stand with women,
nurture our planet to a degree of health.
And without apology --
(impossible to make
a bigger mess than has been made already) --
devote ourselves, heedless of opposition,
to tirelessly serving and resuscitating Our Mother ship
and with gratitude
for Her care of us
worshipfully commit
to
rehabilitating it.



Alice Walker by Lydia Makepeace

** Alice Walker is an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist. In 1982, she became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, which she was awarded for her novel *The Color Purple*.

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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CLIMATE JUSTICE

IS SOCIAL JUSTICE



"JUST TRANSITION" IS NOT ONLY ABOUT MOVING FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO RENEWABLES... IT REQUIRES A **SYSTEM CHANGE** BASED ON OPEN DEMOCRACY AND A PEOPLE-LED PROCESS THAT ADDRESSES THE INEQUALITIES AND INJUSTICES FACING FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES



WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF **TIME**....



WE NEED TO GET AHEAD OF THE CURVE!

