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REFLECTIONS: ILRIG'S 2023 JOHANNESBURG POLITICAL SCHOOL

by Lara Reddy

20 Years of School History and Neoliberal Crisis

This year marks 2 decades since ILRIG held its first political school. Interestingly, in 2013, when it used to be called the Globalisation School and was held in Cape Town, the overall theme was similar to the one 10 years later - 'Organising in the Period of Neo-Liberalism'. That school was held soon after the Marikana massacre, which saw the gunning down of scores of striking miners by the neo-liberal state and mining bosses. 10 years later, and the conditions of life under neo-liberal capitalism have simply gotten harder, while also ushering in fresh struggles from the ground.

The 2023 Johannesburg school was held just after the deadly building fire in the inner city which resulted in the deaths of 78 people, due largely to the poor public management of buildings in the city and rampant corruption within the municipality. The tragedy was further fuelled by the mainstreaming of xenophobia that treats disasters as another means to rid the city of international migrants and score political points in the lead-up to the 2024 national elections.

The theme of the 2023 School was a reminder of the continuities of history as well as appropriate for the present - 'Organising and Movement Building in a Time of Crisis'. Indeed, the crisis of neo-liberal capitalism has only become worse, touching every aspect of our society. The extent of bad governance, structural poverty, elitist greed and political corruption has greatly intensified and so too have the possibilities of a fair, just and egalitarian society. Progressive social movements, community and worker organisations as well as individual activists are struggling under the combined and increasingly heavy weight of the ravages of this system.

A Diverse and Dynamic Gathering

The Johannesburg School was held from 14-17 September, at the BOSCO centre in Walkerville, south of Johannesburg and was centred around group-work, commissions and activist assemblies as well as creative skills sessions for activists. The list of organisations, movements and formations attending covered a wide geographical range and struggles and included: Simunye Workers Forum; National Association of Artisanal Miners, Khanya College, Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia, Thembelihle Crisis Committee, Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Centre, Soweto Sukuma Sinqobe, Abahlali bas Mjondolo (Durban, Thembisa), Abahlali baseFreedom Park, Swaziland United Democratic Front, Electricity Action Group (Pietermaritzburg) South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, the Unpaid Benefits Campaign, Pay the Grants, Hashtag Potchefstroom and Rainbow Refuge Africa.

Focusing on our Organisations, our Struggles and Ourselves

The first (half) day saw participant organisations identifying and unpacking the various issues they organise around, their methods and how decisions are taken in the

organisation as well as who their allies and enemies are. This was done to set the basis for further and grounded discussion and engagement during the School around the overall theme. The day ended with the viewing of a documentary on the Black Panther movement in the USA during the 1960s and 70s, which highlighted their divergent political, armed, social and cultural organising tactics and also drew attention to the role of women activists in the context of patriarchy within the movement and broader society.

An activist assembly got the second day underway, with a comprehensive and critical presentation on 'Understanding Neoliberalism Today' and what this means for our organisations, organising methods and overall approach to struggle in present-day South Africa. Subsequent commissions then engaged specific questions, structured around issues of direct democracy, patriarchy and the state (with ILRIG publications used as resources) and what these mean for how and why we organise and mobilise.

The afternoon was then given over to creative skills sessions on activist filmmaking and screen printing of t-shirts. These creative sessions - which continued into the third day - were facilitated by comrades external experts/practitioners. During the filmmaking sessions, activists indicated that they gained a great deal of knowledge to take back to their communities and to hopefully begin to produce their own short films for both educational and mobilisational purposes. Not surprisingly, the t-shirt screen-printing sessions were colourful and hands-on session, with participants creating their own t-shirts with political messages, using non-expensive recycled frames and material. Many beautiful t-shirts were produced and displayed the next day.

Day 2 ended with a screening of a documentary entitled - 'We the People' - which profiled the uprising of the population of a small Mexican town, Cheran, against drug gangs and local politicians and their successful implementation of self-governance for over 10 years. The documentary raised crucial issues around different and combined methods of struggle, the central role of women and feminist praxis as well as the possibilities of non-state governance and self-organising.

Day 3 began with an activist panel in which comrades from Abahlali base Mjondolo (Durban), the Simunye Workers Forum and the Swaziland United Democratic Front shared information and perspectives on their various struggles and methods used. For AbM this revolved around issues of land access and communal organising in a context of ongoing assassinations and harassment; for the SWF, how they have dealt with the increased exploitation and use of violence by bosses; and, for the SUDF, the recent and intensified repression and violence emanating from the monarchical Swazi dictatorship. Besides everyone learning a great deal, what this exchange highlighted is the importance of building solidarity amongst working class organisations, and linking our individual struggles to the broader goal of effectively confronting and pushing back a neo-liberal capitalist system whose claws are deeply embedded in every aspect of our society as well as individual and collective lives and struggles.

A second activist assembly on Day 3 focused on the Kurdish Democratic Movement in Rojava

and more especially the absolutely central role of women in both organising and leadership, cooperative structures as well as direct democracy outside of state structures. Here, participants were able to see, in practice, and critically engage the how a different political movement and structure centred on 'Democratic Confederalism' can be implemented and can effectively operate as an alternative system. The day continued with final Commissions that focused on key lessons emerging from the School, for organising and mobilising in contemporary South Africa, with the day being wrapped up by activists displaying and talking about their screen-printed t-shirts.

The last day of the School started with 3 brief but crucially important sessions related to movement building, mutual aid and solidarity that focused on the connection between the personal and the political/organisational, facilitated by comrades from allied organisations outside of ILRIG. The first session honed in on issues of self-care and mental health and how important it is for us to balance our political and personal lives and find ways to de-stress and pay more attention to each other's physical and mental health in a time of crisis. A second session - combining a historical and statistical approach - focused on the huge problems and challenges presented by the promotion and abuse of alcohol, in broader society, our communities and indeed amongst ourselves. The third session centred on the need for all-round (spiritual and physical-practical) self-defence for activists, in a context in which there is increasing violence and repression.

The School wrapped up with a summary of the key arguments, perspectives and lessons coming out of the School. The key message that participants left with was that solidarity, mutual aid, creative political and popular education as well as critical analysis and discussion/debate is needed more than ever if we are not only to survive but to take forward our common struggles for a better South Africa and world.

Addendum: The Cape Town Political School

A few days before this edition was completed, ILRIG held the 2nd leg of the School in the Western Cape from 16-19 October. This School included participants from a range of community, worker, migrant and human rights organisations scattered across the Western and Eastern Cape, as well as a couple from the Northern Cape and the Free State. The School programme was more or less the same as that followed in Johannesburg, with the addition of a group of 8 comrades from Canada representing the Steelworkers' Union and their Humanity Fund, which is a donor partner of ILRIG's. Edutainment was provided by the anarchist hip hop collective Soundz of the South which providing much needed revolutionary music. As with the Johannesburg School, there was intense engagement and discussion/debate around the core issues covered, fun and enjoyable creative skills sessions as well as positive introspection and sharing in covering the terrain of self-care, mutual aid and solidarity.

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the third and last edition of *Workers World News* for 2023. This is a SPECIAL EDITION emanating from the 20th Annual ILRIG Political School held in Johannesburg from 14-17 September. Given the theme of the School - *Organising and Movement Building in Times of Crisis* - the ILRIG collective felt it appropriate to ask activists at the Johannesburg School to write-up articles about their organisations-movements and struggles for this SPECIAL EDITION. The response to that request was incredibly positive and as a result we offer 8 articles written by activists representing various organisations-movements that attended the school.

To frame and contextualise those contributions, the cover article from ILRIG's Lara Reddy provides readers with a summary content profile as well as reflections of the school (with a brief addendum on the 2nd leg of the school which was held in the Western Cape from 16-19 October). The key message/take-away is that we must use times of all-round crises, to allow ourselves to be (positively) reflective and pro-active about how we can more effectively and creatively structure our organisations, carry out our many and varied struggles and in doing so take better care of ourselves, individually and collectively.

In the pages that follow, we hope readers enjoy the words and views from the ground that cover a wide range of issues and struggles which are being engaged and waged in South Africa and the region. In the pieces by Brian Muziringa and Henry Wackam, we are reminded of the incredible challenges and barriers faced by disabled and LGBTQ+ migrant activists and organisations alongside an amazing courage and resilience. Lucky Dlamini updates us on the recently held elections in Swaziland and the increasingly difficult and repressive terrain on which popular, democratic activists and movements have to struggle.

The #PaytheGrants media working group gives us an incisive glimpse into the hugely important and expanding work and struggles being carried out by the Campaign in the midst of record levels of poverty and inequality. Sandile Mokhuane helps to frame this and other past and ongoing socio-economic realities and struggles of the majority by linking them to the continued dominance of neo-liberal macro-economic policies. And bringing things into sharper sectoral focus, the Simunye Workers' Forum's Siza Mlambo reveals the increased necessity for casualised and precarious workers to self-organise and use all means at their disposal to fight against intensified exploitation and repression.

Two of the most vulnerable and exploited yet simultaneously strong and resilient 'sections' of our society are youth and women, who crucially make up the majority of our population. Viwe Mazwana provides us with an inspiring account of how youth in Thokoza, effectively abandoned by both the public and private sectors, are doing it for themselves, engaging in self-education as well as creative-artistic and self-care activities. In a similar vein, Manana Matima shows how a group of small-scale women farmers in the Sedibeng District have managed to come together without much outside assistance to build a growing movement that can give an effective and strong voice for change to the most marginalised. This article is also accompanied by an inspiring poem which reflects the difficult yet promising journey of the Women in Agriculture Movement (WiARM).

To close out this SPECIAL EDITION, we offer 3 poems of struggle and a beautiful pull-out poster of the design that adorned the t-shirts produced for the 2013 Political Schools, which reminds us that there are always possibilities of renewed strength and growth in times of crisis to carry our belief that another world is possible.

Pull-out poster

ON PAGE 7

ILRIG 20th Annual Political School Poster

MIGRATION by Brian Muziringa
(Disabled migrant activist from Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia – KAAX)

MIGRATION AND DISABILITY

The Southern Africa region's high levels of inequality and poverty continue to increase, especially in countries that are having governance and political challenges. Everyday across the continent people make the difficult decision to leave their homes, families, possessions and connections with their local communities and walk away to uncertain and often frightening futures in other countries.

Disabled migrants are part of those leaving their homes, and their countries. Most of us have no other choices, be it for economic reasons or being forced out by other factors such as war, political persecution, natural disasters, civil strife, poverty and impacts of climate change which is likely to push people into internal and external migration.

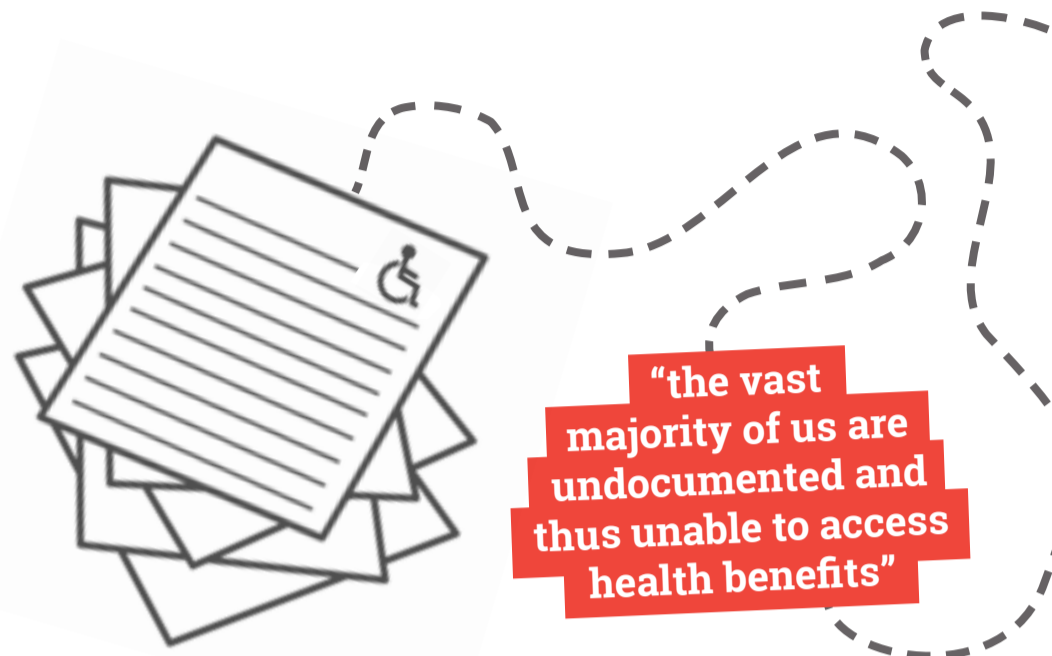
Traditionally, persons with disabilities have been either incorrectly seen as people whose lives are defined by medical and rehabilitative needs (i.e., as individuals who are recipients of social and economic support - the charity model). What we witness in general is a culture of failing to engage and consult accordingly by decision makers, who simply do not understand that persons with disabilities need and deserve

the same opportunities for poverty-reduction available to all other members of society.

In Southern Africa where life is already difficult for the majority of the population due to severe poverty, lack of development and high unemployment, people living with disabilities are the most marginalised. In South Africa, the rights of migrants living with disabilities are not given any priority by the government. As a result, the vast majority of us are undocumented and thus unable to access health benefits, study subsidies and social grants support that should be made accessible.

The South African government and its representative institutions, are failing to enact laws for disabled migrants, failing to effectively implement existing ones and failing to reform laws and policies that discriminate against migrants. Indeed, the country's Bill of Rights, which is enshrined in the Constitution, tends to be ignored or down-played when it comes to creating and implementing government policies and Laws/Acts (whether domestic or international) regarding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

For example, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are quite inclusive and disability is referenced in various parts, specifically in areas related to education, growth and empowerment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the SDGs. However, the pursuit and development of these goals is most often undermined and delayed by a wholesale lack of political will to implement the necessary



"the vast majority of us are undocumented and thus unable to access health benefits"

processes. There is a dire need for effective checks and balances as well as the decentralisation related to the numerous gaps between policy and practice when it comes to public and private organisations and institutions that represent disabled people (especially migrants) at the grassroots level.

The combined results are that disabled migrants have become political and socio-economic pawns, who not only are largely left out of the picture on

the public/state terrain but also do not enjoy basic necessities such as having access to loans nor any bargaining power when it comes to relations with financial institutions (e.g., banks) as well as service and retail companies (e.g., vehicle dealerships). The bottom line is that public institutes and commercial service providers do not understand migration policy, nor do they understand how difficult it is for disabled migrants to be officially recognised as refugees.

INCOME by PTG Media Working Group

#PAYTHEGRANTS CAMPAIGN ADVOCATING FOR WEALTH DISTRIBUTION AND EQUAL RIGHTS

The #PaytheGrants (#PTG) Campaign is a democratic, activist-driven organisation committed to championing an equitable world and for the fair distribution of wealth. Our mission is deeply rooted in the belief that wealth and grants should be accessible to all, ensuring the fulfilment of people's social, economic, political and ecological needs, allowing them to live without want and in dignity, as guaranteed by the South African Constitution.

Regrettably, South Africa stands as one of the most unequal countries globally, with wealth disparities increasing over time. In 1994, the richest 10% controlled 50% of all income, a figure that has since risen to almost 70% today. The PTG Campaign is dedicated to reshaping this narrative by advocating for collective wealth redistribution, with the aim of enhancing the quality of life for everyone. Launched in late 2021, the PTG Campaign is emerging as South Africa's pioneering post-apartheid wealth redistribution movement.

A Call for Universal Basic Income Guarantee (UBIG)

A cornerstone of the PTG Campaign is the call for a Universal Basic Income Guarantee (UBIG). UBIG entails providing a fixed monthly payment to every individual in South Africa aged 18-59, regardless of their income, employment status, or any other criteria. This financial support, allocated by the government without means testing, is inclusive and strives to ensure a basic standard of living for all citizens.

Our campaign seeks to hold the government accountable for its shortcomings in implementing the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant. We are building a record of individuals' experiences in accessing this grant, to raise awareness and mobilise support for implementing a UBIG for all. The SRD Grant serves as a stepping stone towards achieving this broader objective, guaranteeing that unemployed individuals between 18-59 years old are included in the social grant system.

UBIG is not about one's ability to earn an income; rather, it focuses on guaranteeing a basic income as a fundamental human right. The right to life and dignity for all South Africans is enshrined in the country's Constitution, and we are resolute in upholding these rights.

A Global Struggle for Economic Equality

In a global economy dominated by colossal corporations, we recognise that the fight for economic justice must transcend national borders. We can effectively challenge the dominance of the rich and powerful worldwide only by uniting across boundaries. The pursuit of UBIG is most likely to succeed as a worldwide struggle.

A universal basic income has profound implications. It can lead to improved health, education, child nutrition and the assurance of fundamental rights for all. This approach offers a beacon of hope in a world where inequalities persist more than ever.

Combating Racism, Discrimination and Oppression

The PTG Campaign vehemently opposes any actions that pit the poor of one country against those of another. We stand against all forms of repression and actively campaign for solidarity with the working class in other nations. Our support extends to the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise for their self-defence and to champion genuine national social movements. We firmly oppose xenophobia and all divisive attitudes and tendencies.

Furthermore, we take a stand against austerity measures and the elusive concept of job creation. We challenge the high cost of living and scrutinise inflation-related excuses. Our campaign is committed to achieving genuine social, political and economic equality for women and eliminating discrimination against LGBTQI+ individuals. Respecting and protecting every individual's dignity and right to life is central to our mission.

With our passionate commitment to wealth redistribution, the call for a Universal Basic Income Guarantee and the fight against discrimination and oppression, the #PAYTHEGRANTS Campaign is a captivating and essential movement. We believe that marginalised communities and workers can overcome challenges and build a fairer world for all through unity in our struggles.

As a continuously evolving organisation, we extend an invitation for anyone interested to join us in advancing the equitable distribution of grants and wealth within our nation.





AGRICULTURE

by Manana Matima (Coordinator of WiARM)

WiARM THE LAND: A PROFILE OF THE WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE RURAL MOVEMENT

Who we are and why we struggle

We are a group of women in Sedibeng District that falls under the Midvaal local municipality in Gauteng. After 1994, we were so excited that our lives and that of our children would change, so some of us decided to buy small farm plots. However, we soon realised how hard it was going to be for things to change.

We knocked on many doors to try and get help utilising our new farm land, but it felt like we were getting nowhere. We realised that the challenges that we were facing as black women in agriculture were great so we decided to organise ourselves into a movement - WiARM - where we are able to speak with one voice and fight for the rights of small-scale black (women) farmers.

We are black women, some with husbands, others widowed, all trying to make a living for our children. We are regularly approached by white farmers who try to get us to sell the land to them but we will not do that because we want to feed ourselves and our communities and to be self-reliant.

We are a new movement which is growing very fast as more small-scale women farmers are now realising that together we are strong. At present we have about 90 women farmers in our active group and 95% of our members have their own piece of land.

What we do and what we want to become

Besides meeting regularly, we conduct workshops so we can educate and arm ourselves further about the importance of agriculture, about issues of food security, about the impact of and

need to confront climate change, about food pricing, about not using GMO seeds and also about security in our areas. We also focus on those who do not have a piece of agricultural land but are engaged in backyard gardening. And last but not least, we engage in regular protest to try and get the relevant government authorities to pay attention to our needs and demands.

In very practical terms, we want to utilise our land to produce food for the areas in which we live and create greater employment for our people in and around our communities. In the longer term, we want to liberate our black women farmers to become sustainable, commercially viable farmers, while also not forgetting those that have interest in farming but don't have resources to get to where they want to be. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to having a country that is able to feed itself and where working people like ourselves will not have to pay for or buy expensive and unhealthy food.

Our key demands and plans moving forward

Our key demands are directed at government at both local, provincial and national levels. We have approached our local municipality and the mayor himself. We have also had a face-to-face meeting with the speaker of the Midvaal Metro Council and further, have approached the Department of Agriculture. However, our general experience is that our pleas and demands fall on deaf ears. At present our government is doing nothing for us but we are determined to get what is rightfully ours.

At the most basic level we demand that the government authorities recognise us and support

us just like they support the commercial (mostly white) farmers. More specifically, we demand that government provide us with more land and ensure we have access to adequate and affordable water and electricity. Further, we need access to organic seeds as well as to be assisted with security needs, since we have become victims of regular theft.

Despite the difficulties and barriers, we face, we are not going to give up on what we are doing as black women farmers. Going forward, we are planning to go to the office of the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to demand a meeting. We are also planning to bring other black farmers into WiARM, not only in the Vaal but throughout Gauteng and hopefully South Africa as a whole.

'They tried to bury us' - WiARM Poem

**They tried to bury us.
They did not realise we were seeds.
What if we had no seed to sow?
What if we didn't have land to plant our seed?
Which means we would have no trees to grow and no food to eat.**

**Our lives have so many twists and turns, and challenges are seldom few,
if not always.
Who are we?
We are women, we are WiARM.
We were thrown under the ground with no light, with no hope for decades, thinking
that we would die.
Little did they know that when they buried us, they were burying seeds.**

**We have been dreaming rain, rain. We have been dreaming change, change that can
turn and make the soil soft enough for us to germinate, to wake up and multiply as
women, as black African women in agriculture.**

**Time has come, time is now. Let us unite. Let's have one voice women farmers.
They tried to bury us. They didn't realise that we were seeds.**

Inspired from the Mexican saying, a paper-graffiti on a wall outside Museum Africa, during in solidarity with Rojava struggle, in Turkish/English by Toolshed and FoodNotBombs.Jozie



ECONOMIC POLICY

by Mzwandile Sandile Mokhuane
(Organiser with Abahlali baseFreedom Park)

THE EFFECTS OF IMF AND WB POLICY ON DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank have played a significant role in the increase in inequality since the dawn of the democratic dispensation in South Africa. Key economic policy choices that were made by the political leaders who led the negotiated settlement in the early 1990s, and which were heavily influenced by the IMF and WB, had disastrous effects on the living conditions of the majority.

Besides the sizeable IMF loan that was agreed to by the incoming ANC leadership prior to the 1994 election, it was the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy formally adopted in 1996 that submitted our country to the 'structural adjustment' conditions of the IMF and World Bank instead of responding to the democratic demands of the majority of the people of our country. Those 'conditions' included cutting down on social expenditure such as health and education and creating favourable conditions

for the multinational companies to invest such as lowering corporate tax, introducing flexible labour laws and pursuing deregulation.

Not only did GEAR undermine the overall sovereignty of our country and put significant control of our economy into the 'invisible' hand of capitalist 'free' market forces, it ensured that the new government became the 'public executive branch' of the big corporate bosses.

Over the last 25 or so years, these conditions have led to an increase in inequality, poverty and unemployment. More and more people have lost their jobs, those that are still working continuously have their real income reduced and a majority of the working class is now struggling just to survive. A lot of the early gains made as a result of the struggles of the poor and working class have been receding and freedoms are being chipped away.

The reality is that food and petrol prices (as just two examples) have constantly been on the

increase. Many people have no proper homes with millions living in shacks and back yards being made to pay exorbitant rental amounts. Those who cannot afford to pay rent are forced to live in even worse conditions of squalor where there is no sanitation, running water, electricity and where far too many people are cramped into small living spaces.

Added to this is the fact that increasing numbers of the broad working class families have been deliberately casualised and thrown into the 'reserve army of labour' (i.e. the ranks of the unemployed) with all of the predictable by-products such as forced removal, evictions and increased homelessness. As recently seen in the aftermath of the devastating building fire in Johannesburg which took over 70 lives, those who are the most vulnerable and marginalised (both South African and international migrants) are being criminalised and subject to xenophobic harassment, repression and violence.

All of this is a direct and conscious result of the general pursuit and implementation of IMF and WB policies. It is these policies - which inform much of South Africa's own domestic policies - which have also given the political and economic elites even more space to divide and rule the working class and poor and to divert attention from the real causes of increased poverty, inequality and exploitation under which the majority lives.

Despite these very negative developments, there have been consistent and ongoing opposition and working-class protests in communities, the work places and in educational/academic spaces with popular and ever-louder demands for service delivery, social inclusivity and democratic governance. This is because the poor and the working class are directly experiencing the 'fallouts' from the pursuit of the IMF's and WB's developmental agenda.

MY STRUGGLE by Siza Beswick Mlambo
(Organiser, SWF – an independent union for casualised/precarious workers)

THE SIMUNYE WORKERS FORUM: CURRENT AND ONGOING ISSUES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR CHANGE

In the Simunye Workers Forum (SWF), we are experiencing increasing and unrelentless attacks on our members from different workplaces. These attacks take different forms, the most common of which is retrenchment. Many of our members in SWF are being retrenched in workplaces where they had previously managed to secure permanent employment. These retrenchments are more like a push-back from the side of the employers in order to maintain the structure of cheap labour and also to intimidate other precarious workers from demanding permanent employment.

There are also current and pressing issues related to the payment of workers. In some cases employers are guilty of not paying full salaries, in others there are workers who are not even paid the minimum wage or overtime and also the hiring of casual workers on highly exploitative flexi contracts. Further, there are far too many employers who deduct Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) amount from worker salaries but then fail to pay this over to the fund. These are some of the key struggles that SWF members are facing.

There is also an increasing tendency from the side of employers to deny members of the SWF the benefits that are enjoyed by traditional trade union members, which amounts to discrimination. In many workplaces, SWF members consciously opted to join existing traditional trade unions on the basis that these unions represent traditional permanent workers who enjoy better benefits than they do and thinking therefore that these unions might assist to fight for better benefits.

It has been our experience, however, that SWF members who join these unions and start paying subscriptions, soon find that those unions do not take up the challenges and issues that mainly affect casualised and precarious workers. Employers choose to recognise SWF only when this benefits them. If it does not benefit them, they reject the recognition of SWF because they are aware that SWF is still waiting to be formally registered as a trade union despite them winning a recent Labour Court case directing the Registrar of Labour Relations to register the SWF.

The struggles of SWF members for positive and lasting change continues.

There are no easy victories!



COMMUNITIES by Viwe Mazwana (Co-founder of Habitat61 and works on media-communication with Khanya College)

NURTURING ACTIVISTS AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

HABITAT61 CREATIVE HUB

In a world where education extends beyond the confines of textbooks, Habitat61 Creative Hub NPO has emerged as an organisation of experiential learning for primary and high school students. This remarkable organisation not only teaches essential literary skills but also fosters a generation of young activists and promotes community integration through a range of inspiring initiatives.

Based in Thokoza (part of the Ekurhuleni Metro in the Gauteng Province), Habitat61's mission is the cultivation of activism from a tender age. Through the power of literature, reading and writing, Habitat61 empowers young minds to become agents of positive change in their communities by nurturing their critical thinking and communication skills. Habitat61 lays the foundation for a future generation of socially conscious leaders.



Habitat61 via Facebook.com

One of the standout events in Habitat61's calendar is the Africa Youth Month Festival. This festival serves as a platform for young creative talents of African descent to showcase their skills while addressing critical issues to unify the African continent. The festival brings together creative minds on one stage, fostering a sense of unity and pride. Central to the Africa Youth Month Festival is the Umoja Social Cohesion Soccer Tournament. This unique event brings together both migrant and local youth, breaking down barriers and enabling friendships among children aged 11 to 15, regardless of gender. It's a testament to Habitat61's commitment to building

bridges between diverse communities.

Beyond the festival, Habitat61 operates weekly activism and literature classes in working-class communities. Here, young learners are taught the significance of active citizenship and creativity whilst empowering young people with important skills of reading and writing. Through these programmes, the organisation conducts campaigns such as littering awareness and mental health campaigns, equipping young people with the tools to tackle societal issues heads-on. These initiatives also instil a sense of responsibility and a desire to give back to their communities from an early age.

Habitat61 envisions a future where the new

"...young learners are taught the significance of active citizenship and creativity whilst empowering young people with important skills of reading and writing"

generation of young people take the reins of positive change in the world. A dedication to nurturing activists, fostering unity and empowering youth to be active citizens lays the foundation for a brighter, more compassionate future. As it continues to inspire and educate, Habitat61 is sowing the seeds of greatness in the hearts and minds of tomorrow's leaders.

 HUMAN RIGHTS

by Henry Wackam
(Human rights defender/Rainbow Refuge Africa/Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia)

XENOPHOBIA, HOMOPHOBIA AND SCAPEGOATING IN SOUTH AFRICA THE DECLINE OF A 'RAINBOW NATION'

The Beacon of Human Rights?

South Africa, often hailed in the past as the 'Rainbow Nation' for its diverse population and progressive constitution, has long been considered a beacon of hope and human rights values on the African continent. The nation's remarkable journey from apartheid to democracy, symbolised by the leadership of Nelson Mandela, garnered worldwide admiration. However, in recent years, South Africa has grappled with a concerning rise in xenophobia, homophobia, and scapegoating. This article explores the complex dynamics at play, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for the nation to reclaim its inclusive and harmonious vision.

The Rainbow Nation's Aspirations

In 1994, South Africa emerged from the shadow of apartheid with a ground-breaking democratic constitution that promised equality and human rights for all its citizens as well as fostering safety for migrants. The term "Rainbow Nation" was coined to celebrate the country's multicultural diversity, symbolising the hope that people of all backgrounds could coexist harmoniously. It was an inspiring vision for a nation that had only previously known the horrors of institutionalised racism and discrimination.

Xenophobia: A Dark Stain

To comprehend the causes of xenophobia in present-day South Africa, it's essential to consider

the historical backdrop. The nation's history is marked by colonialism and Apartheid, which sowed seeds of division and inequality. The regime systematically dehumanised black South Africans and bred a sense of entitlement among the white population. Post-apartheid, South Africa witnessed rapid political and social change, but the legacy of Apartheid persists, creating an environment where competition for resources and opportunities is intensified.

Over the last two decades, South Africa has witnessed incidents of xenophobia (mostly) targeting African immigrants, but particularly those from Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Somalia. These attacks have resulted in violence, displacement and loss of life. The scapegoating of foreign nationals has been fuelled by rising economic disparities, with many locals blaming immigrants for unemployment and crime as well as their general living conditions. The consequences of this xenophobia are dire, not only for the victims but also for South Africa's reputation as a welcoming and inclusive nation. These incidents stand in stark contrast to the principles enshrined in the country's constitution, which promises equal rights and protection for all, regardless of nationality or origin.

Homophobia: A Continuing Struggle

Linked to the rise of xenophobia has been the rise of homophobia. While South Africa has made significant strides in recognising the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, including becoming the first

country in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage in 2006, homophobia remains a pressing issue and societal attitudes have not kept pace with legislative progress. Violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals continues to be a problem, with regular incidents of hate crimes, corrective rape, and discrimination. Additionally, the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals face significant challenges. The persistence of homophobia reflects a disheartening gap between legal progress and societal acceptance.

The Role of Scapegoating

Scapegoating is a psychological defence mechanism where one group is unfairly blamed for the problems faced by society. In South Africa, both xenophobia and homophobia are driven, in part, by scapegoating. Immigrants are scapegoated for joblessness and crime, while LGBTIQ+ individuals are blamed for moral decay. Scapegoating is often used as a political tool, diverting attention from systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and corruption to often marginalised and othered groups. This not only perpetuates discrimination but also undermines any potential progress towards becoming a truly inclusive ('Rainbow') nation.

The Impact on Human Rights

The rise of xenophobia and homophobia in South Africa poses a significant threat to human rights, both for the marginalised communities directly

affected and for the broader society. Human rights, as outlined in the country's constitution, are non-negotiable principles that should apply to all, irrespective of their national origin, sexual orientation or gender identity. Xenophobia and homophobia erode the very foundations of, and respect for our enjoyment of human rights by fostering an environment where discrimination and violence are encouraged and tolerated.

Reclaim the Rainbow Nation

South Africa's journey from apartheid to democracy was an inspiration to the world, symbolising the triumph of inclusivity over division. However, the recent rise in xenophobia, homophobia, and scapegoating threatens to tarnish this legacy. Reclaiming the 'Rainbow Nation's' vision requires a collective effort to challenge prejudice, uphold human rights, and build a society where diversity is celebrated, and discrimination is rejected. It's a challenging path, but one that is essential for South Africa to regain its status as a beacon of hope and progress on the African continent. A concerted effort is needed from government, civil society, the media and the public to promote tolerance, inclusivity and awareness about the positive contributions of immigrants. Only by addressing these underlying causes can South Africa hope to truly overcome xenophobia and live up to its now tarnished ideals as a 'Rainbow Nation'.

 ELECTIONS

by Lucky Dlamini
(Chairperson of the Swaziland United Democratic Front – SUDF)

THE SWAZILAND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2023

The Last Absolute Monarch in the World

The Tinkhundla Parliamentary elections that were held at the end of September were (and always will remain) an exercise in false hope meant to deceive the international community and our people into believing that we are like other democratically governed countries when in reality, we are not.

Tinkhundla is an electoral system that serves as a form of governance, based on traditional, administrative subdivisions controlled by traditional chiefs who are all loyal to King Mswati III (the last absolute monarch in the world). Swaziland has 55 Tinkhundlas in the country's four districts which King Mswati uses as a disguise for democracy. All political parties have been banned from partaking in elections since 1973 and thus people who vote do so on individual merit and in a context in which there is no right to freedoms such as expression, assembly, association and the media.

The environment prior to the elections were extremely volatile and violent in many ways. Many will remember that the internationally renowned Human Rights Lawyer, Thulani Maseko, was assassinated at his home in January, while popular political activist Muzi Mumema was kidnapped at home and later found killed the month before in December 2022. In the year and a half leading up to the elections, over 1000 political activists were jailed and two members of Parliament - Bacede Mabuza and Mthandeni Dube – were imprisoned for advocating for constitutional reform. During that same period, many hundreds of our brothers and sisters were maimed and over 100 murdered, simply for calling and struggling for constitutional multi-party democracy and democratic elections.

Elections are a Scam

The Tinkhundla elections remain meaningless as they serve to legitimize a powerless Parliament that has no power to hold the executive accountable and also has no legislative authority. As has always been the case now for many decades, our country remains in the hands of an absolute monarch. The general consensus at both national and international levels is that the 2023 elections represented the same scam as before, running completely contrary to the government of Swaziland's formal commitments to international bodies like the SADC, AU, Commonwealth and the United Nations Human Rights Charter.

Besides all of this, the elections are centred on voting for individuals and not collectives and their policies. This means that government policies that have fuelled the health crises, massive unemployment and increased land evictions, ensured a lack of educational scholarships and created a society in which 69% of the population lives under the poverty line while this cannot be democratically contested. Our people's voice and democratic mandate has been stolen.

What we continue to have is a Tinkhundla Parliament that is nothing more than a rubber stamp institution created to be a cover for the King's dictatorship. The Tinkhundla parliamentary elections remains meaningless for the majority of Swazi's and can do nothing to resolve the political and economic crises in our country. It is now on the shoulders of our Mass Democratic Movement to carry this nation of about 1.2 million out of this political paralysis. For his part, King Mswati shows absolutely no inclination or urgency to resolve the ever-intensifying political and socio-economic crisis.

When the people rise the dictator will fall!

The latest in a long string of flawed and discredited elections has – as before - produced disputed and discredited 'representatives' who are not rooted in our people's lives nor in their minds and hearts. To resolve the political crisis there is a need to urgently initiate an all-inclusive political dialogue that is chaired by a neutral person from SADC. The Swaziland we want is possible, when all forces of change, democracy, justice, transformation, rule of law and equality can be more resolute and real and have a sense of urgency towards creating a people's democracy from below.



"In the year and a half leading up to the elections, over 1000 political activists were jailed"

THE IMPOSSIBLE by Tawfiq Zayyad

It is much easier for you
To push an elephant through a needle's eye,
Catch fried fish in galaxy,
Blow out the sun,
Imprison the wind,
Or make a crocodile speak,
Than to destroy by persecution
The shimmering glow of a belief
Or check our march
Towards our cause
One single step

From Poetry of Resistance Sulafa Hijjaw

I Am the People, the Mob by Carl Sandburg*

I am the people - the mob - the crowd - the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world
is done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of
the world's food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history. The
Napoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They
die. And then I send forth more Napoleons and
Lincolns.
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will
stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass
over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out
and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes
to me and makes me work and give up what I
have. And I forget.
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a
few red drops for history to remember. Then - I
forget.
When I, the People, learn to remember, when
I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and
no longer forget who robbed me last year, who
played me for a fool - then there will be no
speaker in all the world say the name: "The
People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or
any far-off smile of derision.
The mob - the crowd - the mass - will arrive then.

**Carl Sandburg was born with humble working-class roots in Galesburg, Illinois (USA). An activist, poet, and author, he won two Pulitzer Prizes..*

Freedom Fighting by Amelia Blossom House

Was it yesterday I left my native land?
I'd come to taste of freedom with the exile band
Freedom to live
Freedom to learn
Freedom to speak

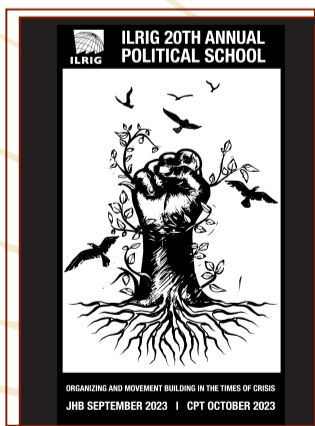
Was it yesterday I left my native land?
I'd come to taste of fighting with the exile band
Fighting for life
Fighting for truth
Fighting for speech

Was it yesterday I left my native land?
I've not tasted of freedom fighting with the exile band
Learning to live
Learning to speak
Speaking for freedom

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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ILRIG 20TH ANNUAL POLITICAL SCHOOL



ORGANIZING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS
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