



**ZABALAZA
FOR SOCIALISM**

The political crisis in South Africa and the crisis of politics

For Discussion, Dec 2023

Introduction

We are at a point where a deep rethinking of left perspectives and strategy is necessary in order to provoke a substantial **reorganisation of the left in SA**. We are on the eve of the 30-year anniversary since the end of Apartheid, at the brink of the climate catastrophe, in the most unequal country in the world. Colliding economic, environmental and social crises amplify the intensity of each other. This means that we cannot approach politics with complacency. The intersection of racial, gender and class oppressions in post-Apartheid South Africa, further complicates understanding the essential nature of the system we are dealing with. It makes the task of elaborating a comprehensive emancipatory programme and strategy for power a difficult one.

The nature of capitalism is changing through its financialisation and globalisation. These provoke contradictions with nature and at a geo-political level as well as influencing the changing nature of imperialism, including the role of globalised TNC-controlled value chains, and new rivalries, particularly between the waning power of the USA and the rising power of China. This situation will test old formulas and require new tools of analysis.

As one of the stronger states on the African continent, we also have a responsibility for rethinking and reimagining a Pan-African consciousness, especially in the light of growing xenophobia, as part of a renewal of international solidarity. This is particularly important in the context of Southern Africa and the necessary task of developing a revolutionary perspective towards regional integration given the role of many South African corporations and banks and the SA National Defence Force in defence of these interests.

The disastrous showing of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party in the 2019 elections has had consequences for the entire left. It signals the demise of what was referred to as the 'NUMSA moment' in 2013 – an opportunity for the renewal of independent left politics rooted in mass popular movements. It

reinforces the mistaken idea that it is difficult to build democratic, radical, mass based political processes, which can successfully contest elections, outside the framework of the Congress tradition. It reinforces the view that electoral politics is not where the left should intervene. Equally, the drift by the EFF towards crude nationalistic politics and its evolution towards becoming just a radical version of the ANC, will stand as a blockage to the renewal of a militant left politics.

Taken together, these will tend to generate further disillusionment and further erode an already tiny anti-capitalist cadre.

The long march to building a mass left alternative to nationalist politics will face difficult strategic and tactical decisions, particularly in the face of the decline of working class social movements, including the weakening and fragmenting of the labour movement.

We are a small and isolated socialist left in a deeply patriarchal society, polarised and divided by racial inequality with all the muck that flows; a society in which class antagonisms are masked and refracted by so-called 'race'. Becoming a mass force in this situation will require exceptional depth of analysis and political acumen. The left in South Africa will have to be rebuilt and renewed afresh if we are going to overcome the crisis of politics. We have to organise ourselves to play a role in this long process. Crucial to this renewal will be the integration of new young intellectuals experimenting with new ideas and theories, and young militants prepared to take risks and map out new paths. It is precisely this journey we are embarking on, which has brought us to launch our movement for anti-capitalist resistance and socialist renewal.

Our starting point

The French revolutionary socialist, Daniel Bensaid remarked when assessing revolutionary strategy at the turn of the 21st century, "What are we coming from? From a historic defeat. We do best to admit it and gauge its scope. The neoliberal offensive of the last quarter century is both the cause of this defeat, its consequence, and its culmination. Something was accomplished at the turn of the century, between the fall of the Berlin Wall and September 11. But what was it? The end of the 'short twentieth century' and its cycle of wars and revolutions? Or the end of modernity? The end of a cycle, a period of time, or an epoch?"

Clearly the left in SA has suffered the same consequences of the shift in power towards globalised and financialised capital. Even so, this historic defeat of the left in SA is more specific. Indeed, it comes in the wake, of and as a consequence of the collapse of the socialist distortion, which was the USSR and its

satellite states. This had a profound impact in making the negotiated end of Apartheid possible and shifting the balance of forces internationally in favour of the US and its allies. The ANC in power became compliant to the new international power balance and implemented a set of neoliberal policies to appease international and domestic capital; its top leadership willingly so.

Vishwas Satgar correctly explained: “Two decades of ANC-led neoliberalisation, which has surrendered democracy, development and state formation to capital, consolidated the strategic defeat of the left and working class in South Africa. The “National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) moment” and process, led by South Africa’s largest (more than 330 000 members) and most militant trade union, is all about confronting this strategic defeat. It is about a battle to determine the future of South Africa and reclaim the strategic initiative for the country’s working class.”

Yet, it is the collapse of what Satgar calls the ‘NUMSA moment’ which makes the situation for the left that much more difficult and complex. It is like having to rebuild from scratch. The Marikana massacre in 2012, the mass strikes of mineworkers, the farmworkers uprising in the Western Cape, the break with the ANC Youth League and the forming of the EFF, NUMSA’s break with the Alliance and the Rhodes Must Fall / Fees Must Fall student rebellions in 2015, created new openings for the left. It was as if an anti-capitalist moment was maturing in which the ANC was losing its legitimacy and heightened social struggles and class antagonisms were creating a new conjuncture for a new left to emerge.

This moment occurred just as the Arab Spring was erupting and mass struggles in Europe gave rise to new anti-neoliberal and left populist formations which were making electoral breakthroughs. It was the time of Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the emergence of Corbynism in Britain, and even mass support for a left social democracy, in the form of the Bernie Sanders movement, in the US.

Leaving aside what happened to this moment internationally, in South Africa it dissipated and the opportunity for renewing a left politics waned. It is as Stuart Hall, the British Marxist, points out, “when a conjuncture unrolls, there is no 'going back'. History shifts gears. The terrain changes. You are in a new moment. You have to attend, 'violently', with all the 'pessimism of the intellect' at your command, to the 'discipline of the conjuncture'.”

Why did the anti-capitalist left in South Africa fail to put its stamp on this moment and bring about a convergence of the possibilities that the different eruptions of social struggle presented? This question is critical and will require much more introspection and analysis than is possible in this paper. Suffice to say,

the dominance of old-style Marxist Leninist dogma, with its in-built authoritarianism and its hold over significant bureaucratic machines such as the SACP, COSATU and NUMSA killed off the green shoots of a more open, democratic and pluralist emancipatory politics. Amongst the protagonists behind the formation of the EFF and NUMSA's SRWP, there may have been a break with the ANC / SACP but not with Congress / Stalinist politics and practices. This is particularly true in relation to the regurgitation of the notions of 'national democratic revolution,' the stagist theory of revolutionary change underpinned by an alliance with the patriotic bourgeoisie on behalf of the working class. The young activists and cadres thrown up by the worker, community and student struggles were absorbed by these bureaucracies as they searched for a stable income and personal security.

Acknowledging the defeat we have suffered is not to demoralize. Rather it is worth recalling the words of Rosa Luxemburg when she noted, "The road to socialism is paved with defeats... from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism."

Michael Lowy similarly reminds us that "for two centuries, the history of socialism has been a constellation of tragic, and often bloody, defeats." He cites Daniel Bensaid's approach to pessimism as "absorbing a failure without capitulating before the enemy, knowing that a new beginning could take unprecedented forms."

And it is towards this new beginning we dedicate ourselves, basing our endeavours and taking inspiration from the struggles and movements we are active in.

Capitalism's multi-dimensional crisis

The deep crisis in South Africa play out in the broader multi-dimensional crisis of global capitalism, the main characteristics of which are:

- ❖ The enduring nature of capitalism's over-accumulation crisis;
- ❖ An accelerating climate crisis where damage from increasingly violent weather events is further exacerbating tendencies towards economic and financial crisis;
- ❖ Tendencies towards financialisation and the marginalization of investment in the real economy;
- ❖ The dominant role of financial and high-tech conglomerates;

- ❖ The spiraling debt of countries and corporations, even non-financial companies;
- ❖ Extreme levels of inequality between and within countries;
- ❖ The stubborn hold of neoliberal policies matching the needs of particularly, but not only speculative finance capital, and
- ❖ A modified role of the state as crisis manager of last resort, through corporate bailouts, increased control and authoritarianism via new forms of surveillance.

The Covid 19 pandemic originated in the inroads capitalist agriculture makes into the wilds. It has brought to the fore the pressing and deepening ecological and climate crises, which intersect with and intensify the economic, social and political crises we are currently confronted with. Even with economic activity greatly constrained for most of 2020, greenhouse gas emissions declined by just 8% in the first half of 2020. This demonstrates that it will be almost impossible to keep global temperatures below the 1,5 degree to 2-degree target set by the Paris Agreement, without a massive restructuring of the global economy. Ineffectual climate policy, manifested in the successive failures of the COP climate summits to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, will no doubt reinforce what has been screamed from many demonstrations around the world “it’s system change not climate change” that is necessary.

The COVID-19 crisis, just as the financial crisis of 2008 did before, has laid bare the depth of the social, economic, ecological and political crises facing South Africa:

- No country or state can sustain a society where almost 50% of the work force is unemployed and where 55% of the population has an income below the upper bound poverty level of R1410.
- Nor is it possible to talk of a united single nation where the wealthiest 10% of the population own 90% of the wealth.
- And no society can develop where a woman is raped, on average, every 25 seconds or is killed every 8 hours on average by an intimate partner.

It is the failure to combat the oppression of women characterised by the extreme levels of gender-based violence, which, more than anything else, marks the failure of the Post Apartheid transition, on the eve of its 30th anniversary. The impoverishment of women, especially rural women can be located in the reinforcement of women’s role in unpaid social reproduction work in the face of failed land redistribution, agrarian reform, the collapse of employment in the mines and commercial agriculture, the rise of the

HIV/AIDS and Covid 19 pandemics. The drying up of remittances from a restructured migrant labour system now based on dual households – one in the informal settlements, the other in the countryside – has exacerbated extreme levels of rural poverty and accounts for the fact that more than half of South Africa's children grow-up in single women headed households.

The levels of inequality, poverty, unemployment, corruption, crime etc. have reached such proportions that the country can be plunged into another civil war and strife if nothing is done. We risk losing another generation of youth to drugs and vicious cycles of crime. The Children's Institute at UCT reports in 2023 that 8 million children are undernourished and hungry. Our schools, hospitals, public transport, in particular rail, the justice system, correctional services centres have become dysfunctional. Government is collapsing, overrun by cronyism, corruption and neglect. Almost every state owned enterprises is facing a death spiral or financial collapse: Eskom, SAA, Autopax, PRASA are all on their knees with more workers' jobs and services to the poor on the line. As if this is not enough, our country is being battered by a wave of ecological crises that creates absolute havoc. Heavy storms have left the poor more vulnerable with greater parts of the country engulfed in long spells of drought that further threaten livelihoods and food security and sovereignty. There is a strong intention by key officials to sell the family jewels to their friends at the expense of the poor for whom these state assets are vital. Every day that passes these crises get worse and the suffering of the working classes intensifies.

This is the real essence of the political crisis in South Africa, and not the machinations of different factions of the ANC and their struggle for the crumbs of accumulation falling from the ruling class's table.

Post Apartheid Political Economy

Corruption and cronyism, which dominate the discussion of SA's political crisis, must be understood as the result of the project to create a black bourgeoisie, without the redistribution of wealth in the form of capital as real assets.

Similarly, the political crisis in South Africa is part of a much bigger systemic crisis of the post-Apartheid capitalist system.

The roots of the crisis lie in the failure of the ruling class to renew a system-wide accumulation strategy, capable of sustained economic growth and increased rates of profit for capital. Instead, the post-Apartheid government has attempted to reproduce the mineral energy complex accumulation growth model, while at the same time engineering greater black ownership of the economy. This has been a dismal failure. And it has been the source of class conflict between an emerging black capitalist class,

hungry to secure ownership of the heights of the economy, and the traditional bourgeoisie, desperate to restore profitability in the face of global competition.

In the era of globalisation and liberalisation of trade and finance as well as the subjecting of strategic industrial sectors (energy, transport, telecommunications, etc.) to privatisation have resulted in the hollowing out of the state. With the so-called 'predatory elite' dependent on the state for accumulation, the state has further been made dysfunctional, as its institutions have increasingly been used to serve the interests of this layer. Dysfunctionality is not an outcome but an intention: for the big bourgeoisie it justifies liberalisation and privatisation; for the aspirant petty bourgeoisie it provides accumulation opportunities, which they stridently push for.

It is important to note that the class struggle waged in SA is not just between capital and labour but also entails inter-capitalist rivalries. For the moment, these are much more significant in shaping the current political situation. The attempt of aspirant black capital to utilise the state to grab a bigger share of the South African economy, (not just through corruption but policy) is bitterly opposed by monopoly capital.

The roots of this struggle lie in processes beyond SA. They lie in the process of the internationalisation of the capitalist class under the globalising of the world economy, and the related, simultaneous switch to the financialisation of capital. The merger of finance and industrial capital over the last period has encouraged the development, on a greater scale, of a global capitalist class disconnected from its original nation state. This is captured well by the Marxist economist Michel Husson:

“[T]oday the map of states and that of capitals no longer coincide. We must therefore abandon the representation of an asymmetrical face-to-face between imperialist countries and dependent countries and replace it with a concept of global economy structured according to a logic of unequal and combined development carried out by transnational corporations. The taking of distance between states and capital comes from the fact that large companies have the world market as a horizon and that one of the sources of their profitability lies in the possibility of organising production on a global scale in order to minimise their costs and locate their profits in tax havens. From the moment when the map of states and that of capital are more and more disjointed: we must think differently about the relations they have with each other. Certainly, the privileged links between this or that multinational and its state have obviously not disappeared and the state will seek to defend the interests of its national industries.

They have no constraints forcing them to resort to domestic employment, and their outlets are largely disconnected from the domestic situation of their home port. This means that the weak growth of a country's domestic market is bearable for companies in that country, as long as they have alternative outlets in the global market. The task of the states, and this is particularly true in Europe, is no longer so much to defend their "national champions" but to do everything to attract foreign investment onto their territory. This organisation of world production has been made possible and constructed by political decisions aimed at overturning all obstacles to the free flow of capital throughout the world. They have been implemented through international institutions and treaties, and often imposed on dependent countries in the form of structural adjustment plans."

This is more or less what has transpired with big capital in South Africa over the last 25 years. Monopoly capital has globalised and become less dependent on its operations in South Africa for accumulation and profit making. As Seeraj Mohammed has pointed out, "South Africa's large conglomerates responded to domestic political change and global corporate restructuring by deconglomerating, restructuring and internationalizing much of their operations. In the process, they redivided the economy amongst themselves and with a few new entrants they concentrated market power. Financialization and internationalization of these corporations was associated with a disconnect between equity and financial markets and the real economy. ... There have also been high levels of capital flights from the economy. The outcome has been deindustrialization, decreased diversity of productive sectors and increased reliance on extractive industries."

This is well illustrated by the declining share of the South African economy held by the big corporations that traditionally controlled it. Post-Apartheid, several major corporations (Anglo American, DeBeers, Old Mutual, Investec, South African Breweries, Didata, Mondi and others,) unbundled and moved their financial headquarters and primary stock market listings to London, New York and other major capitals. In 1990, just three conglomerates – Anglo American, Sanlam and Old Mutual – controlled 75% of the total capitalisation of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). Some analysts estimated Anglo-American's share, at its height, to be as much as 60% of the SA economy. By 2016, Anglo-American's share of market capitalisation on the JSE had shrunk to as low as 15% and has subsequently declined to less than 5%. Several South African TNCs are now much less dependent on their operations in South Africa than their international operations as is the case with South African Breweries (now part of Anheuser-Busch InBev,) Gencor (now part of BHP Billiton) and several other mining companies – to mention just a few.

Having globalised, they no longer required the scaffolding of Apartheid and protectionist trade and industrial policies. On the contrary, they need policies that open and externalise the South African economy. What they require in SA and wherever they locate their operations, is a state that guarantees their investments (low inflation, macro-economic stability, rule of law, etc) and allows them to transfer their profits to their preferred destination (normally via some tax haven). The outflow of capital from SA by the major conglomerates is a defining feature of the post-Apartheid political economy. For example,

Quite differently, the new and emerging black bourgeoisie are the victims of a low capital base, having not had the opportunity to accumulate over many decades. They are birthed weak and dependent on the state and monopoly capital. Consequently, they are pre-disposed to the very same practices as capital in its early days, graphically described by Marx, in his most poetic prose: "If money ... comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek, capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt". This is what Marx referred to as the primitive accumulation of capital, and how Karl Von Holt refers to the process of black economic empowerment in his study *The Political Economy of Corruption*. He uses a study by Mushtaq Khan on Bangladesh as a reference point. Khan argues that in those postcolonial societies characterised by the absence or weakness of indigenous economic elites at the time of independence, a process of primitive accumulation takes place. Incipient elites plunder state institutions and private corporations - particularly where the latter are held by minorities or non-indigenous owners - in an insatiable struggle to amass wealth.

This is what is unfolding in South Africa, and it has set the scene for multiple struggles between different fractions of capital. A predatory elite has increasingly taken control of the ANC and used it as a platform to influence state tender and procurement processes. This has not been done from outside of the state but within government departments, state owned enterprises, local government and other critical institutions. Hence the currency of the term "state capture".

What distinguishes state capture from ordinary corruption is the capacity of a private interest to intrude in state affairs to the point of directly determining state policy. This is not the same as lobbying or bribing officials to obtain contracts for work that is both needed and properly decided upon. The private actor is enabled to directly determine policy such that 'captured' members of the executive champion projects and steer budgetary allocations towards these private actors. The state does not simply get ripped off, it is controlled.

But rather than illustrate the linkages between capital and the state - a broad social process linked to class formation - the mainstream use of the term state capture has been to obscure and to cultivate the notion of a bad ANC faction against a good one. This is not something exclusive to the Zuptas. It stretches from

CEOs of state owned corporations and Director Generals to chiefs, headmen and ward councillors, even trade union officials, all desperate to accumulate in order to escape their Apartheid defined circumstances.

The key vehicle for the growth of a new black capitalist class has been Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation and the ANC's control of the state to enforce it. The first phase in this programme was undertaken by white business, ready to unbundle assets and co-opt as junior partners aspirant black business people close to the ANC. Nthato Motlana and Cyril Ramaphosa were the early beneficiaries of this process. The financial model of these early BEE deals, which were based on loans paid through future dividends proved problematic, especially when earnings were not enough to cover interest repayments. Blackening the civil service and private corporations would prove more effective in boosting a black middle class than the first phase of BEE. Employment equity needs to be understood as a key component of the process of creating a black capitalist class.

However, as was the case in many independent African countries, this was just the launching pad for accumulation and set the tone for the second phase of BEE. This phase was marked by the key role of the state in ensuring ownership transfers. A key moment in this process was the setting up in 1999 of the BEE Commission under the chairpersonship of Ramaphosa. This resulted in BEE legislation and the adoption of industrial charters with targets for transfer of black ownership. Access to state procurement would be used as a carrot and stick to enforce adherence to the BEE targets. Rather than Zuma, Mbeki must be credited with the more radical approach to creating a black capitalist class Consider [Mbeki's address to the Black Management Forum](#) in November 1999:

“I would like to urge, very strongly, that we abandon our embarrassment about the possibility of the emergence of successful and therefore prosperous black owners of productive property and think and act in a manner consistent with a realistic response to the real world.

As part of our continuing struggle to wipe out the legacy of racism, we must work to ensure that there emerges a black bourgeoisie, whose presence within our economy and society will be part of the process of the deracialisation of the economy and society.

Accordingly, indeed, the government must come to the aid of those among the black people who might require such aid in order to become entrepreneurs.

This principle has already been established and is in practice already being acted upon. I refer here to the fact of the new tender and procurement policies the government is following, the establishment of the National Empowerment Fund as well as Ntsika and Khula. And yet the

question is still being raised that the government should come in to help the black entrepreneur.”

Most of the deals following the BEE Commission Report focused on SA's larger sectors - minerals, telecommunications and finance - as these offered quick profits. They were also sectors the state had greater influence over, through issuing of licenses, concessions and contracts.

A key focus for all components of the aspirant black capitalist class is the state procurement budget, which is worth +/- R900 bn per year and rising, not least because of the World Bank supported policy to expand Private Public Partnership (PPPs) to all sectors. It is to this procurement budget, and in particular the budgets of state-owned enterprises that the organised network of predatory capital turned to and with Broederbond precision placed their people to facilitate access to the contracting process.

Even within the new black capitalist elite there are divisions between sections more dependent on the state for accumulation and other fractions more dependent on transnational capital. This, for example, characterises the political differences between a Jimmy Manyi on the one hand, and a Siphosiso Pityana or Ramaphosa himself, on the other. Ramaphosa's clean-up campaign against corruption, is convenient in dealing with his political opponents in the ANC, while it is riddled with contradictions, and not only because of his own Phala Phala scandal. Some of his closest allies are deeply embroiled in corruption scandals. One only has to consider the accusations facing David Mabuza, his former Deputy President, or his close ally in the Eastern Cape, Oscar Mabuza, or the lifestyle stories broiling around the new Deputy President, Paul Mashatile. Not to mention, of course, Gwede Mantashe (pointed to by the Zondo Commission), Pule Mabe and many others.

The post-Apartheid state

No other definition suits the character of the post-Apartheid state better than the designation 'dysfunctional', and this is different from calling it 'non-functional'. 27 years of neoliberalism and cronyism have not just hollowed out the state; they have rendered it ineffective in delivering basic services such as water and electricity. Even poorer African countries were more effective in securing and distributing COVID-19 vaccines than SA.

Clearly three decades of neoliberalism accounts for key aspects of the state's delivery crises and of course, accumulation through "state capture" has contributed to the state's worsening fiscal problems. However, some of the crises of the state are associated with the integration of former Bantustan elites, which have

greased the potential frictions between neoliberal macro-economic policies, on the one hand and state funded elite formation on the other hand.

Transformation of the public service had two main objectives: firstly to reduce the number of white officials in senior positions, and secondly to Africanise the institutions. After its unbanning, the ANC quickly moved to recruit and integrate professionals and state officials from the former Bantustans. They were thought to be key to electoral success in former homeland areas.

Over time, they came to play a more prominent role in both the ANC and the state, as former liberation leaders retired or died. Precisely because there was a very limited capital base in the Bantustans, accumulation and elite formation were dependent on the limited possibilities provided by procurement and the provision of services on behalf of the Homeland governments.

This is a point which [Ivor Chipkin](#) has made in a well-researched study on state capture submitted to the Zondo Commission of Inquiry:

“In reality, after 1994 the ANC became a movement largely composed of former homeland officials, nurses and teachers, increasingly where power lies in ANC-homeland networks in Mpumalanga, North West and the Free State.”

“The change of attitude to homeland leaders also followed a gradual shift in regard to the institution of chieftainship too. Once considered as, at best, an atavistic survival from the past, if not an instrument of colonial rule, by the 1990s the ‘progressive’ chiefs were being celebrated as anti-colonial heroes. The formation of the Congress of Traditional Leaders (Contralesa) in 1987 and its support for the ANC played an important role in this change of heart... What may have started off as tactical support for Bantustan leaders, however, turned out to have long lasting effects.

Chipkin relying on the work of Laura Phillips points out that in Limpopo chiefs from the former Lebowa Bantustan were able to accumulate even more power than they had had in the past. (Making Sense of State Capture in South Africa, Ivor Chipkin.)

Indeed, essentially the phenomenon of ‘State Capture’ and the emergence of a ‘predatory elite’ embedded in the institutions of the state has its origins in the Bantustans and the system of chieftainship and the opportunities offered by late Apartheid. Black Economic Empowerment provides the continuity and the legal framework for this form of cronyism or clientalism to intensify.

In terms of what class interests the South African state serves we need to be clear, in the final analysis we are dealing with a capitalist state, which needs to ensure the reproduction of capital. However, the state is acted upon by a range of counterposing interests, not least the aspirant or predatory black bourgeoisie. Their dependence on the state to accumulate, which is enabled by BEE and employment equity legislation, gives the state its clientelist character. And it is from within the political elite and state bureaucracy that the black capitalist class gets birthed, positioning themselves and family members towards state contracts, tenders and business opportunities, which their departments or institutions issue. In an April 2020 briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration it was reported that there were up to 1539 public service employees who were regarded as conducting business with the state. Of those, 1111 were from the provincial departments, and 428 from national departments. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands of public servants are involved in business or relationships with corporations from which they profit.

Using the state for accumulation has consequences. Provision of water and other services are subordinated to the involvement of private companies, whether they have the expertise to provide the service or not. Outsourcing and sub-contracting, a major means of delivery of services and infrastructure development, require over-pricing and the cutting of corners to be profitable. And even more debilitating neglect reaches the point of sabotage, as the destruction of infrastructure create opportunities for outsourcing, from which state officials can benefit. The collapse of PRASA and the rail system is just one example of how neglect and sabotage have created opportunities for looting.

Of course, it is not just poor communities that suffer from the resulting collapse of infrastructure and the collapse of services. The middle classes suffer and big business, which relies on the state for creating an enabling environment for doing business and accumulation, is also affected. In fact, the collapse of municipal services, especially the supply of water and electricity is threatening the operations of several companies, forcing some to take government and the Treasury to court for its failure to intervene, while exacerbating capital's investment strike.

Take for example Astral Foods, SA's largest poultry company, listed on the JSE, with a market capitalization of R6,6 bn. It took government and Treasury to court for their failure to intervene to arrest the municipality's incapacity to provide a reliable supply of electricity and water to its Standerton operation. Or as the CEO of Sibanye Stillwater, Neil Froneman says:

“It’s one of the reasons why foreign companies don’t want to come here, because they can see they’ll have to do what the government is supposed to do but isn’t doing. They’ll end up tarnished with social issues that they haven’t caused.”

However, and especially since the 2018 election of Ramaphosa, the prevailing and dominant character of the state is a pro-market neoliberal state, based on Central Bank independence, and economic policies of stringent anti-inflation monetary policy, austerity, liberalization and privatization. These are directed by an ideologically bound neoliberal Treasury, which acts with autonomy towards any more progressive policy, which might emanate from an ANC Congress or Alliance Summit. The Ramaphosa government has tilted away from the pro-predatory bourgeoisie orientation of the Zuma regime, captured in the slogan radical economic transformation. Government has tried to heal divisions with big business by providing a greater role in policy making. In June 2023 government and CEOs from major corporations agreed to collaborate and set up a number of joint workstreams to reform dysfunctional sectors of the economy. such as transport, energy logistics and the criminal justice system.

Deeper austerity, accelerated liberalisation of key sectors of the economy, especially through public private partnerships, which will result in a much smaller role for state owned enterprises like Eskom and Transnet are some of the policies by which Ramaphosa’s government is trying to draw closer to big capital.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize a further and contradictory aspect of the state: in spite of its declining significance, in the face of the ANC’s bourgeoisification, and that is the residual social democratic corporatism favoured by Cosatu and the SACP and which is epitomized by institutions like the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) and given expression in parts of labour and social welfare legislation and policy. This was more pronounced in the earlier years of ANC rule. Debates in COSATU and the SACP are centred around to what extent they can use the Tripartite Alliance to preserve and grow state corporatism in ways that give labour a bigger stake. However, this strategy has been in crisis, for more than a decade. The only gains labour might be able to point to is the introduction of the minimum wage and the Covid 19 related Temporary Social Relief of Distress Grant.

It is perhaps in the light of these counterposed pressures and forces, that like Mbeki before him, Ramaphosa has centralised power around himself and his inner circle, within an enlarged Presidency, which now includes functions that exist in parallel to a number of government departments. This allows Ramaphosa to bracket his regime off from contending class forces in his own organisation and the state. It

is this phenomenon, which gives the state a Bonapartist character, together with its clientelist and neoliberal dimensions.

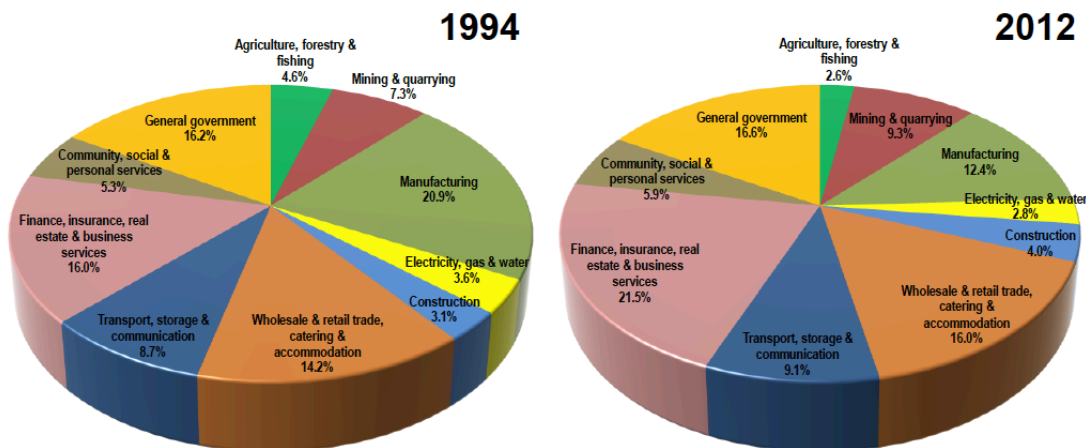
Crisis of politics

There is another dimension of the political crisis, which must occupy our attention and that is the crisis of politics, manifest in the deep existential crisis of the labour movement and the left more generally. That is: the crisis of working class leadership, organisation and ideology that has created a political vacuum to the left of the ANC. Underpinning the crisis of the workers' movement, is the impact neoliberalism has had in impoverishing the working class and segmenting it. Deep sociological differences exist between the dispossessed layers; between the unemployed, the informally employed, part-time workers and full-time permanently employed workers and the divisions are further exacerbated by racial and ethnic identities.

All of these processes have contributed to eroding the social fabric in working class communities and undermining working class solidarity and unity. Not since the extreme repression of the Apartheid state at the time of the Sharpeville massacre has working class consciousness and organisation been at such a low ebb. This is illustrated in the growth of ethnonationalism, that is the phenomena of organizing and mobilizing around so-called ethnic divisions so as to advance the interests of ethnic, colour or even tribal groups. We see in the rise of political parties seeking to exploit resentments of communities, who either believe they are discriminated against because of how they identify ethnically, for example as Coloured or because they believe they can gain greater accesses to resources by organising on an ethnic basis. This is what lies behind the emergence of the Patriotic Alliance and the Cape Coloured Congress. Of course, the Inkatha Freedom Party has been exploiting Zulu nationalism to stay politically relevant for a long period of time. Inside the ANC, factions have been formed closely aligned to advancing regional or even tribal interests. The same phenomena is at play in relation to exploiting anti-foreigner sentiments, especially in relation to people coming from different African countries either as migrants or refugees. The point is to acknowledge the rise within the working class of how solidarity and the drive for national unity has been eroded, replaced by reactionary ideologies and sentiments.

Several factors constitute the crisis of politics (collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting crisis in credibility of socialism, the triumph of globalised capitalism and the universalising of neoliberalism, the rightward shift of the ANC in power, etc.). But the decline of the industrial proletariat must be seen as a critical issue in the decline of proletarian consciousness in South Africa. At the end of 1994, manufacturing employment constituted 28% of total employment. Today, manufacturing employment constitutes just 12% of formal non-agricultural employment and just 10,5% of total employment. Consider that in 1994 the

manufacturing sector constituted the biggest component of the economy, representing close to 21% of GDP at current prices (see Figure 1 below). By 2012, however, the sector was only the fourth largest in the economy, with a 12.4 per cent share of overall GDP.



Source: IDC, compiled from SARB data

As South Africa deindustrialises and as neoliberalism becomes the norm, we have to reckon with the industrial proletariat becoming quite a small part of the population. As of 2019, total employment in the manufacturing sector amounted to 1,1 million workers, down from 1,44 million in 2005. Sociologically the working class is going to be increasingly characterised by the predominance of a more stratified working class made up of an extremely pauperised unemployed mass (already numbering over 12 million,) a growing layer of precarious and informalised workers, a significant number active in the informal sectors of the economy. In these circumstances, it is going to be increasingly difficult to rely on a heightening of a common working class identity.

And yet, unity of the oppressed and exploited layers of our society are going to be crucial in staving off the onslaught being inflicted on the working class and popular forces.

Towards a new left

What about the workers movement and the left? If the return to pre-covid normal is intolerable, are we also prepared to acknowledge we cannot continue to think and function in the old way? The labour movement is in decline. Social movements, where they exist, have been reduced to single issue campaigns and the political left has become largely irrelevant.

First, we will have to abandon the notion of a hierarchy of struggles, such as the primacy of workers at the point of production. More so in a country where almost 50% of the labour force is without work and 18

million people live in rural areas most of them on land they don't own or control and with their meagre subsistence under constant threat from extractivist land grab. Covid-19 has brought home the centrality of care work and particularly the role of women in the so-called care economy. Much of this work is invisibilised and unpaid, especially, but not only, the work performed in the home. The struggle around social reproduction (creating the conditions for life) cannot be considered secondary. In this context, recognising the "vanguard" role of women - working class women, may just go some way towards recognising the centrality of the fight against patriarchy and all forms of oppression against women, not least gender based violence, as key to renewing left and anti-capitalist struggle.

Secondly, a more intersectional approach needs to be adopted by the left towards the continuity of various forms of oppression, such as class, colour, gender and sexuality. Recognition must be given to how these oppressions simultaneously exist in their own right but also intersect, mutually reinforce and reproduce existing power relations. Within this context, the struggle against racism and for the building of a non-racial society needs to go beyond the social and the cultural. It must incorporate the radical redistribution from rich to poor of wealth of all kinds to hold off the re-balkanisation and the tendency towards creating neo-Apartheid. Learning each other's languages, attending the same crèches and schools, living in integrated communities are all important in breaking down division. But without reconfiguring the economy to root out inequality such interventions will be unsustainable and meaningless.

As much as race might be a social construct, racism and racialized inequality are a deadly reality and have to be fought against tooth and nail. This is what has given the Economic Freedom Fighters both their potency and their short comings. The SACP rides the bandwagon of African nationalism, for its relevance and loses its class politics. Similarly the EFF rides the bandwagon of radical nationalism and in doing so fails to locate racial oppression and inequality within the working of the capitalist system, not to mention capitalist patriarchy.

A new left for SA has to weave the fine line between class and race essentialism and construct an intersectional programme as summed up by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clarke in *The Expropriation of Nature*. (Monthly Review, March 2018)

Twenty-first-century monopoly-finance capitalism constitutes what Karl Marx once called an "age of dissolution." All that is solid in the current mode of production is melting into air. Hence, it is no longer realistic to treat—even by way of abstraction—the crucial political-economic struggles of our day as if they were confined primarily to the exploitation of labor within production. Instead, social conflicts are increasingly being fought over capitalism's

expropriation and spoliation of its wider social and natural environment. This historical shift and the deepening fissures that it has produced can be seen in the growth of what David Harvey has termed “anti-value politics,” directed at the boundaries of the system and visible in such forms as the ecological movement, growing conflicts over social reproduction in the household/family and gender/sexuality, and global resistance to the expansion of imperialism/racism. To understand these rapidly changing conditions, it is necessary to dig much deeper than before into capital’s external logic of expropriation, as it was first delineated in Marx’s writings during the Industrial Revolution. Most important, because at the root of the problem, is the extreme expropriation of the earth itself and the consequent transformation in social relations.

A left that is in denial when it comes to the climate crisis and the broader ecological crisis will be irrelevant and will have ignored a principal element of the crisis of capitalism and a central aspect of any freedom charter of the 21st century. Climate change, it should be remembered, is only one of the major planetary boundaries now being crossed. Others include loss of biological diversity (the Sixth Extinction), ocean acidification, deforestation, disruption of the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, growing shortages of freshwater, and the toxic contamination of the environment. As Michael Roberts puts it: “All of this, of course, has a common denominator in the rapacious drive for profits by capitalist companies in fossil fuel exploration, timber logging, mining and urban expansion without regard for nature.”

Equally important, an intersectional approach to the multiple crises we face, may by necessity rather than design, contribute to overcoming the sectarianism and intolerance within different sections of the left. An intersectional approach would require an openness to and engagement with different movements and struggles, without forcing them into pre-conceived schemas.

The marginalization of the left and the weakness of the workers movement are the most immediate issues that progressive forces must respond to. It is entirely possible, that the ruling class assault of austerity, public sector wage cuts and restructuring of state-owned enterprises, will occur without an organised response and fight back, exemplified by mine worker union NUM’s desperate support for privatising Transnet to save rail transport of minerals. Such a situation would constitute a decisive defeat of the working class, which would take decades to recover from.

A major aspect of the crisis of the left is the crisis of cadres. In the last period, the waning of popular struggles has contributed to the development of new activists with a class consciousness able to make the links between local deprivations and the functioning of the capitalist system. There is a crisis of the presence of cadres rooted in struggle. Although we define ourselves as activists, we are mindful of the

need to be intellectuals, in the sense of needing to interpret the world, so as to change it. This is a collaborative task not undertaken from outside of the class struggle, nor by an elite layer of thinkers undertaken on behalf of the doers. More fundamentally, this touches on an extremely critical aspect of our politics, namely the unity of 'theory and practice'. It is in revolutionary practice, in collective emancipatory action, that the historical subject – the oppressed classes - transforms simultaneously both material circumstances and their own consciousness. Or as Marx so succinctly puts it, "this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."

It is only through their own experience in the course of their own revolutionary praxis that the exploited and oppressed masses can overcome both the external circumstances that chain them (capital, the state) and their previous mystified consciousness.

In other words, the only genuine form of emancipation is self-emancipation. As Marx would later write in the founding declaration of the First International: "the emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves". The revolution has to be self-liberation. It is defined at one and the same time by radical changes in economic, political and social structures and the achieving of consciousness by the labouring masses about their real interests, their discovery of new, radical and emancipatory aspirations, values and ideas.

The doctrine which substitutes the party for the working class and imposes its "leading role" from on high, as well as the ideology of the infallible leader, omniscient and benevolent, are a complete rupture with the most profound elements of the philosophy and revolutionary theory of Marx. In the light of the commandism and militarism of the EFF, and the bureaucratic inertia and indifference that characterizes the labour movement, we highlight this aspect of the crisis of politics we currently face. It is also necessary to remind ourselves of the centrality of democracy and workers control as against substitutionism, in the light of the crisis of the experience of 'socialism', not just in Eastern Europe but in Latin America and Africa.

The tragedy of parties ruling in the name of workers, and socialism faced with rebellions from below, epitomizes the challenge of renewing a socialism which means freedom.