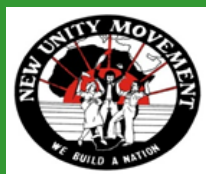


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We Fight Ideas with Ideas

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THE GEN Z UPRISINGS OF RECENT TIMES

In recent times there have been several uprisings by young people (“Gen Z”) in a number of different parts of the world. Vijay Prashad lists them as follows:

Young people . . . led protests across the world, including mass mobilisations against a gang rape in Delhi, India (2012); the March for Our Lives campaign against gun violence in the United States (2018); and the Fridays for Future campaign against the climate crisis (2018), which was initiated by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg (born in 2003 and recently tortured by the Israeli government). The Chilean uprising (of 2019) was followed by the national strike in Colombia in 2021, the *Aragalaya* (struggle) in Sri Lanka in 2022, and the upsurge in Nepal earlier this year that resulted in the resignation of the centre-right government. In each of these cases, what began as moral outrage over a singular issue snowballed into a critique of a system that has proven incapable of reproducing life for young people.

He does not include reference to the “Arab Spring” of 2011. Then the major impetus also came from generation Z of that time. That uprising was sparked by the self-immolation of an unemployed university graduate in Tunisia.

The significance of these movements “of the youth” will not be lost on us in South Africa, knowing, as we do, where a similar uprising in 1976 eventually led.

Prashad discusses the “Gen Z uprisings” in the Global South in the context of seven theses.

Thesis One

He notes that “there is a youth bulge across the Global South, where the median age is 25 years, and people in these young societies find themselves victims of harsh debt-austerity policies, climate catastrophes, and permanent wars.”

South Africa's median age is approximately 28.7 years. We are talking about a demographic which is particularly hard hit by our country's position in the neoliberal world economy. A single indicator shouts our woes out loud:

The official youth unemployment rate in South Africa was 46.1% in the first quarter of 2025, a slight increase from the previous quarter. The rate is higher for the 15–24 age group at 62.4%, while it is 40.4% for the 25–34 age group. The expanded youth unemployment rate, which includes discouraged job seekers, stands at an even higher 62.1%. (Google, 23 October 2025)

Thesis Two

The global economy offers little prospect of meaningful change or improvement.

In the October 2025 issue of *Amandla*, Brian Ashley accounts for the unemployment crisis in South Africa: “The country is confronted with crises of deindustrialisation, chronic mass unemployment, and widening inequality. The adoption of trade liberalisation, as part of South Africa's embrace of neoliberal policies, has eroded its manufacturing base, making the country increasingly dependent on raw mineral exports and services, especially financial services.” He goes on to discuss how a strategic use of tariffs could (among other things) begin to address this situation. (Amandla 99).

Thesis Three

Prashad draws attention to the compulsion for citizens of countries in the Global South to turn to migration for jobs as a means of survival.

In his article he says: “There are almost 168 million migrant workers in the world – if they were a country, they would be the ninth largest in the world, after Bangladesh (169 million) and ahead of Russia (144 million). Among them are Nepali construction workers in the Gulf states and Andean and Moroccan agricultural workers in Spain. They send remittances that sustain household consumption in their countries; in many cases, total remittances (which amounted to \$857 billion in

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2023) are greater than foreign direct investment (as with Mexico). Social dislocation, the international colour line of labour, and the mistreatment of migrants including disregard for their educational credentials make the allure of migration near zero.”

Thesis Four

In his fourth thesis, Prashad reflects on how the relentless march of capitalisation of rural production via large agribusinesses and mining companies contributes to the ousting of smallholder farmers and agricultural workers from the land.

Thesis Five

Per Prashad: “For Gen Z, the issue of climate change and environmental distress is not an abstraction but an impending cause of proletarianisation through displacement and price shocks. People in rural areas see that melting glaciers, droughts, and floods strike precisely where imperialist ‘green’ supply chains seek resources like lithium, cobalt, and hydro-power. They understand that the climate catastrophe is directly linked to their inability to build a present, let alone a future.

Thesis Six

Here again, we could do worse than quote Prashad directly: “Establishment politics are unable to address Gen Z’s frustrations. Constitutions do not reflect reality, and unaccountable judiciaries seem to live on another planet. This generation’s main interactions with the state are through tone-deaf bureaucrats and militarised police. Political parties are paralysed by Washington’s debt-austerity consensus, and non-governmental organisations narrowly fixate on individual issues rather than the entire system. The old national liberation parties have largely exhausted their agenda or had it destroyed by austerity and debt, leaving a political vacuum in the Global South.

He might have had SA in mind when penning this.

Thesis Seven

It has often been noted that protest movements in the present era are, in most instances, driven by single-issues, and dissipate either when a particular issue is resolved or when the movement exhausts itself (or is defeated). It is seldom driven in an organised, programmatic way, that is: as class struggle.

A key obstacle to this kind of organising is the nature of work in the current period. We quote from Prashad again: “The rise of informal work has created a disorganised society, with no hope of fellowship among workers or membership in mass organisations like trade unions. The uberisation of working conditions has created an informality of life itself, where the worker is

alienated from all forms of connection. . . . Social media is a communication *tool* which has enabled a diffusion of sentiments and tactics, but it is not the *condition* for these sentiments. It is also important to note that the internet is a tool for surplus extraction – platform workers, or gig workers, are disciplined by algorithms that drive them to work harder and harder for less and less pay.”

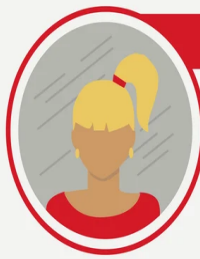
Conclusion

Prashad is well aware that these uprisings in and of themselves don’t necessarily presage social revolution, and could in fact, often be co-opted by bourgeois forces. He ends his article by remarking that

The challenge for socialist forces is to articulate Gen Z’s genuine grievances into a programme that demands a higher share of the social surplus and uses that surplus to enhance net-fixed investment and transform social relations.

If our own SA experience from 1976 is a guide, then Gen Z’s disaffection with current inequalities and injustices, and, more particularly, with the growing awareness that capitalism is leading us into irreversible dead-ends, then Gen Z revolts could be the spark for a global revolt drawing in all sections of society – workers, feminists, eco-socialists, even petit bourgeois elements. In short, it would not be unrealistic to expect that Gen Z could galvanize or unite the social forces necessary to put us unassailably on the transitional path to socialism.

(This article is largely a summary of Vijay Prashad’s article, “Seven theses on the Gen Z uprisings in the Global South” in the Forty-third Tricontinental Newsletter (October 2025))



Gen Z

Birth Years: 1997 to 2012

Current Age: 13 to 28

Size: 69 million

Media Consumption: The average Gen Zer received their first mobile phone between 10 and 13 years old. Many of them grew up playing with their parents' mobile phones or tablets. They have grown up in a hyper-connected world and the smartphone is their preferred method of communication, spending around 4 hours a day on their mobile device.

Shaping Events: Smartphones, social media, never knowing a country not at war, and seeing the financial struggles of their parents (Gen X).

Finances: Learning about personal finance. They have a strong appetite for financial education and are opening savings accounts at younger ages than prior generations.

KASASA

Birth Years 1997 - 2012 Current Age 12 - 28

WHEN AMERICA SNEEZES . . .

It is often said that “when America sneezes, the rest of the world catches cold.”

This is certainly “true” in this time of Donald Trump’s second term. He wasted no time in addressing the woes of his domestic owners of (big) capital, by going on a punitive tariff-imposition spree, in the process, causing the same kind of havoc as a bull in a china shop. It was, of course, calculated to do so. Within minutes, political leaders from all over the world (including South Africa’s) were at the White House seeking – nay, begging, concessions. Trump’s gamble paid off. America is indeed the capitalist centre of the world, and Trump had no hesitation in putting this power to work. (As an aside, it is worth noting that perhaps the key characteristic of the latest Trump rule is his unabashed recourse to the use of power. He has it, he uses it. It is his greatest asset.)

Trump’s avowed goal is to attract industrialisation back to America, to make good on his campaign promise to his voting base. However, it is not at all certain that even the mighty Donald Trump will succeed in re-industrialising America. In the first place, attaching a tariff to imported goods and services will raise their prices, which will not be good news for the American consumer. Secondly, tariffs, particularly of so punishing a level as threatened by Trump have sparked a re-think by national bourgeoisies in all countries, who are consequently seeking to take protective action, including imposing their own tariffs on America, and looking for options to build economic independence to reduce their vulnerability to American economic domination.

Trump claims that, thanks to his tariffs, “THE UNITED STATES IS WEALTHY, POWERFUL, AND NATIONALLY SECURE AGAIN, ALL BECAUSE OF TARIFFS!” Yet, the scale of the layoffs in America is “unprecedented in recent years.” The WSWS tells us

So far in 2025, there have been 946,426 job cuts as of September, “up 55 percent from the 609,242 job cuts announced through the first three quarters of last year and up 24 percent from the 2024 full year total of 761,358.” (25 October 2025)

But perhaps Trump’s real goal was not to create prosperity for America’s middle and working classes, but only the *appearance* of doing so. His real constituency is Capital in general and Big Capital in particular – the so-called “Magnificent Seven”: Amazon, Apple, Alphabet/Google, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla.

(As an aside, in an article in the October Amandla, Brian Ashley discusses how a strategic implementation of tariffs by South Africa could actually lead to positive economic and social outcomes for the country, since tariffs, in principle, are not necessarily a bad thing.)

A second major concern about the current Trump administration is its aggressive nature, including its predisposition for war, even at the slightest provocation. We see that Trump is going out of his way to “out-Biden” Sleepy Joe in attempting to show support for the genocidal psychopaths in Tel Aviv. America’s policy in the Middle East was famously enunciated by Biden in 2013: “If there were not an Israel, we would have to invent one to make sure our interests were preserved.” And as is plain for all to see, such interests

are ravenous, and include access to markets, raw materials and territory. The American military establishment is enjoying windfall profits.

From 2020 to 2024, the last five-year period for which full statistics are available, private firms have received \$2.4 trillion in contracts from the Pentagon, approximately 54% of the department’s discretionary spending of \$4.4 trillion over that period. During those five years, \$771 billion in Pentagon contracts went to just five firms: Lockheed Martin (\$313 billion), RTX (formerly Raytheon, \$145 billion), Boeing (\$115 billion), General Dynamics (\$116 billion), and Northrop Grumman (\$81 billion). By comparison, the total diplomacy, development, and humanitarian aid budget, excluding military aid, was \$356 billion. In other words, the U.S. government invested over twice as much money in five weapons companies as in diplomacy and international assistance. (from “Profits of War: Top Beneficiaries of Pentagon Spending, 2020 – 2024” by William D. Hartung and Stephen Semler, July 8, 2025)

A third concern would be the rise of fascism at home in America, but not only in America – in Europe and the UK as well, where right-wingers like Trump are stirring up reactionary passions against those targeted as “immigrants,” and brutally suppressing progressive initiatives of all kinds. One thinks of the persecution of American universities for daring to allow anti-Israel demonstrations on their campuses, and of the more brutal ICE crack-downs on anyone regarded as an “illegal immigrant.” Indeed, ICE forces have increasingly been reinforced by federal boots on the ground in major US cities. And their recourse to naked violence against ordinary citizens is shocking to behold. That images of their brutality are freely circulating on social media screens throughout the world is no deterrent.

The world today is looking a lot like the world of the 1930s. Aided and abetted by American arms suppliers (and pretty much the majority of ruling classes in the West), the Zionists are out of control in Palestine; Germany is rearming; Japan has just installed an “ultra

-conservative" prime minister, and the world can't get away from the brink of economic disaster. In the absence of a strong socialist movement, ordinary workers are being wooed by fascist fanatics, and we are seeing an alarming, unprecedented rise in the incidence of racism in Western countries.

The world is indeed a sick place right now, and maybe it's more than just a cold we're suffering from. One is inclined to invoke Yeats's famous lines:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and every-
where
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

There is no question but that the global Left has to be animated by Marx's injunction when he says, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it"

How do we fulfil our historic mission? Time is not on our side. Apart from the alarming rise in fascism, settler-colonial violence, and the assault on what liberal democracy still exists, there is the disregard for planetary health as expressed in capitalism's accelerated burning of fossil fuels. The progressive forces of the world must unite. This must become more than a mere slogan.



The South African Reserve Bank (SARB) has warned that the ongoing US tariffs on local exports and the end of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) will eat away at already low growth and cost thousands of jobs



**Disaster for South Africa
with 40,000 more jobs on
the line**

FAKE ELECTIONS IN THE REAL WORLD

The inhabitants of South Africa will go through an election procedure in 2026 to fill positions on the local councils. Casting a vote in the elections is not the pathway to a better life. Many of those spokespersons who are trying to create this impression – on radio, TV, in the newspapers, at public meetings – are driven by self-serving motives of privilege and material gain.

We plan to keep a close scrutiny on the fraudulent promises and undertakings that were made and keep track of how far the reality falls short of the promises. Similar promises were made since 1994. We do this in the hope that the South African people will finally come to their senses. It is time for us to absolutely reject the political hucksters and to get on with the urgent task of taking real steps to build a better future for all the citizens of South Africa. Until then the majority of the population will continue to live in the most dreadful misery.

Even a brief look at the actual lives of South Africans today raises grave doubts whether the word democracy is applicable to the reality of South Africa. There are certain fundamental qualities (or features) that must exist before a country can be called a democracy. It goes much further than making a cross every few years. One of those fundamental requirements is equality. Another is the enjoyment by all citizens of certain basic rights: employment, education, housing, access to food and healthcare, safety of one's person, etc. Without these benefits, democracy is hollow. On all these counts South Africa falls far short of being a democracy.

AN UNEQUAL SOCIETY: THE MAJORITY ARE EXCLUDED

There is a minority section of the population that is extremely privileged. They live in luxury. The other section of the population - the vast majority – is almost totally excluded from the benefits of South African citizenship. Their vote is powerless to change this situation.

- They are fundamentally excluded by the fact that they have little or no income.
- This is the position of more than 40% of the working-age population of the country.
- Approximately 40.1% of the population, which equates to 25.4 million individuals, depend on social grants.
- Over 50% of all households in the country receive a social grant,
- The paying of grants to about 25.4 million people is an absolute necessity – not only to enable them to keep body and soul together but also for the government to avoid a political meltdown.
- The grants fail totally to keep the recipients from

living below the poverty line;

- The grant system is unsustainable. It takes away a large portion of the national revenue, which is received from a small tax base of just more than 5 million taxpayers. The result is a shortage of tax expenditure that is urgently needed to maintain the country's water, electricity, sewage, health, education, roads, etc. systems.
- As a result, these systems are suffering huge, potentially terminal, neglect.
- The poor suffer the greatest hardship as these systems fail.
- Then there is a large section of the employed population that are paid well below a living wage. They have no protection against this abuse. The country's much-lauded constitution lays down a minimum monthly wage of **R4332.89** (R1007.65 per week). Very many employers pay below these minimum wages and are allowed to get away with it.
- Clearly, people who have this level of income can afford only the most basic needs – food, clothing and some very basic form of shelter (a shack). They are:
 - ◇ excluded from the benefits of education for their children;
 - ◇ excluded from adequate healthcare;
 - ◇ excluded from adequate housing with modern conveniences;
 - ◇ excluded from safety and security provisions;
 - ◇ excluded from personal comfort and contentment, dignity and self-respect;
 - ◇ excluded from the main sources of human happiness: a happy family life, satisfactory relationships, a pleasant old age retirement.

Surely, a country in which the vast majority of the population is excluded from the most common benefits that all citizens should have cannot be a democracy.

HOUSING EXCLUSION: THE ONE SINGLE GLARING REASON WHY SA IS NOT A DEMOCRACY

Many aspects of national life can be concealed or brushed under the carpet. But there is one disaster of an unequal system that cannot ever be hidden. It is like the festering sores that expose the leper. It breaks

open the deception and reveals the infection. This is the case with many countries that lay claim to being democracies. Their lies break down inexorably under the spotlight that reveals the preponderance of slums.

In South Africa today, the most glaring and most shocking defect is the existence of 4075 “informal settlements”. This has increased from 2700 in May 2011. In other words, the problem is getting worse by the day.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS: HORROR AND CRUELTY: THE FESTERING SORES THAT EXPOSE THE FAKE DEMOCRACY

Slum, squatter camps, informal settlement life is one of physical danger, filth, foul odours, disease, crime and violence. Welcome to “Hell on earth” an activist exclaimed when visiting a township in Cape Town! We list a few aspects of this living hell.

- ◇ Squatter Camp life is subject to the constant danger of fires. In South Africa, more than 2860 informal structures were destroyed by fires between September 2024 and February 2025, with the majority occurring in the Western Cape.
- ◇ There are no toilets in MOST places; in others the unhealthy bucket system is widely used.
- ◇ Refuse is not collected and children playing in the dirt and on rubbish dumps contract diseases.
- ◇ Because there are no drains, rain water collects in and around shacks causing serious health hazard.”
- ◇ There is no clean running water and millions still depend on rivers, streams and dams for their water supply.

These settlements are largely no-go areas for police and ambulance personnel, because of the inherent dangers and mainly because there is no access in any case. Which human rights are safeguarded in these god-forsaken wood and corrugated zinc jungles? If there was a true democratic dispensation in South Africa, would these settlements be allowed to exist? Would any people’s government countenance this scourge?

THE ONGOING SLIDE INTO SLUMS

More and more people are being driven into living in slums (“informal settlements”) by the worsening conditions of their lives:

- the unrelenting, rising cost of food and fuel that is stretching most people’s incomes to the limit.
- the rising cost of housing, whether bought or rented.
- since food and fuel are more basic and urgent than a roof over one’s head very many people are being driven to make more money available for food by giving up their homes.

HEALTH EXCLUSION: THE TOLL ON THE LIVES OF THE POOR OF A CRUMBLING HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

All indicators of the social and environmental conditions in the country and the disastrous condition of its



TOILETS IN RURAL AREAS IN LIMPOPO

healthcare services are damning. The burden of illness and death is highest among the poorest sector of our country.

EDUCATION EXCLUSION – THE MOST VICIOUS BLOW A DESTRUCTIVE SYSTEM: HERE ARE THE FACTS!! THE EVIDENCE!!

Approximately 40% of learners who start Grade 1 in South Africa drop out before completing Grade 12 (matric). Key reasons for dropping out include poverty, poor academic performance, and social issues like teenage pregnancy and family responsibilities. The issue is particularly acute in marginalized communities.

THE TRUTH IS THAT NO PARTY CAN DELIVER.

The grinding poverty that afflicts so many of us, a huge problem that is constantly getting worse, is beyond the control of all the political parties. None of the parties can free the South African people from this scourge. In fact, all the parties have a vested interest in something to be gained from that poverty.

WHY ARE WE, THE VAST MAJORITY OF SOUTH AFRICANS, SO DESPERATELY POOR IN OUR OWN LAND?

The answers on the surface are pretty obvious: unemployment; failure of the education system; the disadvantages of coming from a poor home; the disadvantages of coming from poorly educated families; etc. But these causes in turn derive from prior afflictions, which lie below and generate them.

- We have been dispossessed of our land. Our land (more than 90% of it) is largely in the hands of a small class of descendants of European settlers.
- We are the source of cheap labour to the owners of mines, farms, commercial businesses and factories. These increasingly wealthy owners of (and shareholders in) these businesses also are largely the descendants of the European settlers.
- They have been joined by a small number of the indigenous peoples under the BEE dispensation.
- The “new democratic” government has also bought into the very economic system impoverishing its electorate. These are the trusting citizens who so faithfully cast their votes. The ANC-led government adopted the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) policy of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1996 and faithfully implemented its clauses, which required the cutting of government expenditure on education and other social services (health, welfare, etc).

VICTIMS OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM

South Africa is a victim of an economic system, local as well as international, that operates throughout the African continent and, indeed, throughout the world.

Under the capitalist system, the owners of capital, that is, the owners of factories, farms, mines, etc. and the armies of shareholders in these businesses, extract the wealth produced by South Africans, the labouring masses of the world, and take this wealth into their personal possession.



SLUMS ON THE CAPE FLATS - CAPE TOWN

WHAT TO DO?

PROTEST IS NOT ENOUGH

We have to face the facts. There is no short cut to real freedom.

1. We have to act to change the system. This is something which millions of people all over the world are already working to achieve right now. We must become a part of this worldwide, mass movement. The minority who benefit from the capitalist system cannot stand up to the power of the majority.
2. Join the real struggle to make an end to poverty, injustice, war and crime.
3. Join the real struggle for full and equal rights for all: employment, education, healthcare, housing, safety.
4. Join and work in people's organizations: trade unions, school governing bodies, civic associations, etc.
5. Strive to unite these organisations in powerful social movements.

The trajectory may differ but the path travelled is going to determine our future state. The path to genuine human progress lies along the path of non-collaboration, anti-imperialism the struggle for a socialist system.

“The task before us is an extremely hard one; the road is arduous and the obstacles are great. We can never reach our goal by each one travelling in a different path. There is no short cut to liberation. We must bend all our efforts in a united, concerted struggle.”

IB Tabata – A Call to Rally. 1956 AAC Conference.

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