

THE GNU: CONSOLIDATION OF NEOLIBERAL FORCES IN PARLIAMENT

Do the recent election outcomes truly represent the *will of the people*?

42 million South Africans were eligible to vote in the 2024 elections, but only 16.3 million (39%) turned out. This is in line with a pattern of declining voter interest which we have seen all the way back to 1994. It means that a whopping 61% (or, 26 million citizens) in a powerful sense *have spoken*. It means that a significant majority of our citizenry decisively rejects the electoral system.

The major partners in the Government of National Unity (GNU) are the ANC and the DA. Together, they garnered 62% of the vote. Thus, we will be ruled by a government placed in power by a mere 10.1 million out of 42 million South Africans. The state has truly been captured.

In an article in *Amandla!* (14 June) Lucien van der Walt discusses an important source of the ANC's relative domination at the polls:

. . . in terms of wealth and power, what the ANC relies on is its fusion with the state. The party operates extensive patronage networks, especially through state contracts and the appointment of loyalists to key posts in state-owned enterprises ("cadre deployment").

The state is the largest single employer . . .

In an article in the same publication, Mazibuko Jara refers to the DA's skilled social base as ". . . professionals such as architects, lawyers, engineers, and so on," in its governance of the Western Cape.

These observations suggest that the broad GNU constituency comprises largely the employer-and-employed elements in our society, and that the government's support base is not much different in its structure to that of the National Party during the apartheid era.

In a country which has suffered chronically high levels of unemployment over numerous decades (the current unemployment rate stands at 32.9%) the non-participants in these elections, it can be inferred, were thus largely from the ranks of the unemployed.

Does this mean that rising levels of employment would lead to rising levels of participation in the formal political process? The GNU seems to think so. According to its Statement of Intent, job creation is listed as a top priority.

But we know that meaningful employment creation is unachievable via the neoliberal framework to which this government is committed. The first foundational principle of the GNU's *Statement of Intent* is "respect for the constitution." And as is well-known, the constitution favours the neoliberal order of private property and market-driven profit-making over the country's social interests.

GNU policy will be a combination of ANC and DA policies, all underpinned by the neoliberal order. So, things will be little different from the past thirty years. In a nutshell, neoliberalism favours the market; the market is a site of competition among capitalists; this competition leads to ever-increasing automation; which leads to ever-increasing unemployment. With AI technology on the horizon, this pattern is set to intensify, not only in SA, but globally.

In the larger scheme of things, the election outcome means little other than business as usual. South

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Africa is a smallish cog in a large imperialist wheel. Our place in the global political economy has always been to ensure an ongoing, stable supply of cheap raw materials to the world market, and to remain an attractive, secure investment destination for surplus capital seeking (super) profit-making opportunities. The new government, as was the case with its predecessors (and continues to be for most governments in the Global South) will be expected to guarantee favourable conditions for capitalism—whether private or state-run. So, the well-worn and discredited “solution” to unemployment will continue to be capitalism. We are expected to continue believing the lie that the more profits investors can make from our economy, the more we as a country will benefit.

As mentioned above, we already have a crisis of unemployment in this country as well as across the globe, in both the so-called Global North and Global South. Capitalism will only exacerbate this problem going forward. With the ranks of the unemployed continuing to swell all over the world, there has arisen a growing need for ruling classes in the Global South to “better manage” their expanding surplus populations/unemployed masses. In our case, the percentage of unemployed has risen to a number in excess of 30%. Cut loose from their means of subsistence in the capitalist economy, many of the destitute masses have in their numbers risked life and limb to find survival opportunities in the functioning economies of the imperial centres. This consequence was graphically depicted in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1930s America. We are currently seeing the phenomenon play out as tens of thousands of people attempt the dangerous sea-crossings to America, Australia and Europe. In Africa, our country represents the continent’s “bright lights” of prosperity, so it should not be surprising that people made surplus in other parts of the continent will seek survival opportunities in this country.

Border control in the major economies has risen to prominence, with supposedly liberal governments having no scruples about employing medieval-type methods to prevent unauthorised entry to their countries. In line with market requirements, they reserve to themselves the right to be picky about who they will permit in, and who is to stay out. In our domestic political landscape, the Patriotic Alliance has suddenly emerged as an eager front-runner to

play the role of border policeman. That it finds itself a part of the GNU signals a growing turn to the right in our country’s politics. The apartheid government managed surplus populations via its Bantustan policy. The GNU will do so via a harsher national border control regime.

Since the formal ruling elite in this country was placed there by a minority of the citizenry, it will be a case of the tail wagging the dog. We should not expect meaningful opposition to GNU policy from the opposition groupings in parliament, since they are all supporters of the same neoliberal capitalist system. Any opposition will simply be disagreement about this or that particular policy move. If anything, the opposition as a whole is more conservative/right wing in its outlook than the governing coalition.

Clearly, parliament will not be the source of transformational change in this country.

As has been noted above, the majority of citizens in this country have become disillusioned with the formal political process, and no longer believe it can deliver “a better life for all.” For the non-parliamentary Left, it has become increasingly clear that the only route forward to re-building society along socialist lines would be through the self-emancipatory efforts of the working-class, and that mobilising people’s power via grassroots-level organising is on the agenda of the day.

We end this short article with a quote from “Zabalaza for Socialism” which echoes this view:

There is . . . an urgent need to act decisively but to avoid the pitfalls of sectarianism. More than ever, we need to muster our forces, stand with the workers and the poor to resist austerity and privatisation. We must fight for a meaningful Basic Income Grant to cushion the unemployed and the poor from the rising cost of living. We must stand in solidarity with workers and their unions to fight retrenchments and stand shoulder to shoulder with the women, LGBTI+ people and foreign nationals who bear the brunt of violence, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia. We must continue engaging politically, clarify our analyses of the conjuncture and develop a shared vision of political conscientisation, mass mobilisation and organisation.

THE BELA BILL: EDUCATION IN THE CROSSHAIRS

The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA) Bill has provoked a wide array of reactions, ranging from indifference and gratitude to confusion and anger. The BELA Bill aims to amend the South Africa Schools Act (1996) and the Employment of Educators Act (1998).

On October 26, 2023, the National Assembly (NA) passed the BELA Bill. Subsequently, on May 14, 2024, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) voted on the Select Committee on Education and Recreation regarding the Bill. The outcome was favourable, with eight provinces in support and only the Western Cape in opposition. Since its initial passage, the Bill has undergone amendments and will now be referred back to the NA for further consideration.

The period of public submissions and hearings was marked by highly emotional exchanges between proponents and opponents of the Bill. The Democratic Alliance (DA) remains opposed, alleging that the African National Congress (ANC) has expedited the process for electoral gain, vested excessive power in the provincial Departments of Basic Education, and failed to allocate an adequate budget for the Bill's implementation. Social media has amplified these concerns, with highly emotive responses including claims that the Bill would allow teachers to facilitate abortions for teenagers without parental consent or knowledge, and accusations of an assault on the Afrikaans language.

Amidst the polarized discourse, organizations such as Equal Education and Section 27 have provided a balanced and factual analysis of the BELA Bill. This article on the BELA Bill draws primarily from the joint submission made by Equal Education (EE) and Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) to the National Council of Provinces in January 2024 and will focus on four aspects of the BELA Bill: compulsory grade R education, possible prosecution of parents, the role of the School Governing Body (SGB), and learner pregnancies.

Broadly speaking, the EE and EELC hold the view that making grade R attendance compulsory for learners, will result in the benefit of free and

improved early learning opportunities for all, including those with disabilities. It also has the potential to improve the dismal reading and writing skills of South African learners. However, the EE and EELC recommend a phased-in approach and the inclusion of Early Childhood Development (ECD) and community-based centres. They cite a lack of classroom space, qualified teachers, especially in the mother tongue, and the incumbent expenses of an added year of schooling for those already struggling to keep their children in school.

The second aspect is the penalty for parents who fail to take their children of compulsory school-going age to school, or people who without just cause, prevent such learners from attending school. The penalty is to be increased considerably from six months to six years jail sentence. In the 2022 Bill, the six-month penalty currently contained in SASA is increased to 12 months. The EE and EELC call for the removal of the prospect of criminalization of parents, as well as the section on "...people who prevent such learners from attending..." in its entirety. They warn that it will once again be the poor, especially mothers or female guardians, who will bear the brunt of such harsh policies. They also argue that community protests could also easily be construed as "people preventing" learners from attending school.

From a New Unity Movement perspective, we can agree with the recommendations of Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre. Once again, it seems like good intentions from the education authorities, without a rigorous plan to effect it. While some universities offer a diploma or degree in foundation phase teaching, it does not seem as if a coherent enough plan was put into place before the roll-out date of compulsory grade R classes. Given the reality of South Africa's unemployment rate of 41,9%, according to the expanded definition, and increasing school drop-out rates, most poverty-stricken parents will face

jail time. Research indicates that the increasing absenteeism from schools is due to poverty, child-headed homes, lack of interest, failing a grade, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancies. In many instances, jailing a parent also means removing the last vestige of protection that the child has against criminal elements, prostitution, substance abuse, hunger, total neglect, and ending up on the streets. While it can be an immense benefit to afford all learners compulsory grade R classes, the lived socio-economic experience of most parents is aggravated by an economic system which is pro-profit and pro-power, rather than pro-poor and pro-people. Add to that rampant corruption and gross incompetence among the ruling class, and the little that is left for the people also disappears into the greedy clutches of the power-hungry. And then, the parent will be blamed and sent to jail.

Ironically, or rather typically, these insights into the plight of the poor did not feature very high on the agenda of social media warriors who vented against the implementation of the BELA Bill. Their great concerns are the centralization of power, learner pregnancies, home-schooling, and language policies.

The third aspect hones in on the centralization of power and the role of the SGB. According to EE and EELC, this section merely clarifies what is already contained in the 2022 Bill, which indicates that the provincial Head of Department has the final say. Thus, nothing has changed and the SGB still plays a crucial role in admission policies. The EE and EELC point out that the pushback from certain areas might be based on exclusionary racist attitudes.

The fourth aspect regarding teenage pregnancies also elicited highly emotive social media responses, some stating that the BELA Bill allows or even instructs teachers to assist learners with abortions without parental consent. This is false. The Section 27 advocacy group states that according to Section 61 of the South African Schools Act, the BELA Bill does not give teachers or school officials consent to participate in a learner's

decision regarding abortion. The reference to "learner pregnancy" in the BELA Bill is unrelated to abortion. Statistics show that between March 2021 to April 2022, 90,037 girls aged 10 to 19 gave birth. This is cause for grave concern and while the education authorities must have clear policies and guidelines in place and must review them regularly, these measures will not heal the underlying issues. Neither will the "push-back brigade" succeed in using such emotional outbursts and fear-mongering to camouflage more sinister motives.

Daily, the socio-economic circumstances rob most of our children of their childhood and most basic constitutional rights. State capture, illicit trading and capital flight continue unabatedly, as if they have no bearing on the poor. At a time when children have the constitutional right to food security, schooling, safety, and sanitation, they are confronted with incomprehensible challenges. Is it a wonder that they turn to sugar daddies, blessers, gang lords, and prostitution? If the parents cannot provide, who must put bread on the table?

Once again, the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) dictum of "Let us live for our children", provides a guideline. It means equality and justice for all children. It means safety, security, and sanitation for all children. Unless we create a society that is fair and just, the evils of poverty and inequality will continue to destroy our children and our future. A capitalist society cannot secure a just society. In essence, capitalism depends on inequality, racism, and exploitation. Another world is possible, but only if we are committed enough to make it happen.

TOWARDS A NEW SOCIAL ORDER – THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. Maybe many of us won’t be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.” — Arundhati Roy, War Talk

16 June 1976 ushered in the revolutionary student movement. Throughout the eighties and even of late with the Rhodes-Must-Fall and Fees-Must-Fall movements, students have taken the initiative in the struggle for freedom in our country.

In 1974 The South African Minister of Bantu Education and Development, MC Botha, issued a diktat that made the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in “Black” schools compulsory as from Std. 5 (Gr. 7) upwards. English and Afrikaans were to become the languages of instruction on a 50-50 basis. Mother Tongue instruction would only be permitted in Religious Instruction, Music and Physical Culture. Deputy Minister, Punt Janson, said: *“A Black man may be trained to work on a farm or in a factory. He may work for an employer who is either English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking and the man who has to give him instructions may be either English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking. Why should we now start quarrelling about the medium of instruction among the Black people? ... No, I have not consulted them and I am not going to consult them.”*

Shortly before 09:00 on that fateful morning of 16 June 1976, a senior student addressed a crowd of a few thousand students outside Orlando West Junior Secondary School with an appeal for calm as “police were on their way to quell the protests”.

Within minutes after the arrival of the police, a canister of teargas was flung amongst the pupils followed by gunshots critically wounding one of the protesting students, Hector Peterson who was declared dead on arrival at a nearby clinic.

This sparked the 1976 uprisings that rapidly spread throughout the country. Thousands of school children died and even more were wounded. This served as an awakening for the oppressed as nation-wide revolts spread throughout the country.

What was life like in SA in 1976?

For every R1,00 spent on the education of a “White” child, the following was spent on the

education of

- * “Indian” schoolchildren – 50c
- * “Coloured” – 30c
- * “African” – 10c

More than 600 000 children of the oppressed were involved in platoon schooling (two schools in one building – morning and afternoon). Thousands more were involved in double-shift teaching (morning/afternoon shifts) where there was not enough accommodation at a specific school. Moreover, many thousands had never seen the inside of a school.

At that time also about 400 000 families had been removed in terms of the Group Areas Act. The policies of colonial oppression and exploitation were vigorously pursued in all facets of South African life. Permits had to be obtained by the oppressed to study at the traditionally “White” universities, as well as for the use of facilities in “White” areas such as hotels, restaurants, cinemas, buses, trains, game reserves, and yes, even churches and cemeteries were segregated.

In the employment arena, we suffered under the Job Reservation Act with preferential high-paying jobs reserved for “Whites”, there were labour preference areas, wage discrimination, even discriminatory pay between salaries for “White”, “Coloured” and “Black” health professionals and teachers, and then further between males and females. Trade Unions were also segregated based on “skin colour”. Bantustans (labour reserves) completed the creation of the apartheid dream of a “White” SA.

In other words, the brutal social conditions of the period acted as the detonator that spawned the upsurge that became known as the Soweto Revolts. Some would say that 1976 was the start of the National Democratic Revolution. Others would argue that no fundamental change had occurred. SA has always been declared as the

most unequal society in the world. SA is characterised by unemployment, driving poverty, lack of decent housing (as shown by the recent floods in the Eastern Cape and KZN), outmoded sanitation infrastructure, rising crime and corruption and other social injustices.

The students who took to the streets in 1976 to face the might of the apartheid monster demanded more than a change in the education system and even more than regime change. They rebelled against the whole system that oppressed them and relegated them to lives of poverty and want.

Have the aims of the student struggles of 1976 been realised? The answer is a resounding, NO!

In the aftermath of the uprising of 1976, many students fled the country and joined political organisations in exile. Many of those who remained equipped themselves to continue the struggle inside the country. At the time, political workshops were held by the youth in church halls and in any venue big enough to accommodate a few students. During the eighties the country, particularly the youth was abuzz with the liberatory flame.

The nineties ushered in the betrayal of the struggles of the youth and particularly the working class. The Kempton Park negotiations referred to as CODESA 1 & 2, shepherded in what Phyllis Jordan described as *“The Agreement cobbled by the South African regime and the ANC at Kempton Park is one of the biggest frauds that was ever sold to a people ...”*.

After the sell-out, the radical youth at the universities and at schools became either apolitical or went into parliamentary political parties. The only flicker of resistance from the students came with the *Rhodes-Must-Fall* Movement that was immediately and quickly resolved but spilled over into the *#FeesMustFall* Movement that was motivated by the twin demand of free and decolonised education.

The revolutionary spirit rang loudly amongst the students at UCT in April 2015. The spark that triggered the *Rhodes-Must-Fall* Movement was the removal of a statue of the “White” supremacist and staunch imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes — and sought to fight institutional racism in the university. The statue at UCT was taken down within a month, but the movement continued to live on at all South

African universities and in fact also in other parts of the world.

The universities authorities reacted typically by criticising the students for being uninformed and misguided. The revolutionaries of yesteryear had become the conservatives of the present. The students even took up the struggles of the university staff by taking up the fight against the outsourcing of jobs. In most cases, students' struggles were on a non-aligned, nonracial basis.

Did the students link their struggles to the struggles of the urban and rural poor? Was this part of the reason why their successes were limited?

The struggles of the students were violently quelled by the university authorities, until the next time.

Youth unemployment, another time bomb is at present reaching astronomical levels, with over 60% of 15 - 24-year-olds struggling to find meaningful employment. This issue impacts the nation's social fabric and threatens its future stability. Some would argue that the revolutionary spirit of the youth would be enhanced by the continuation of this unpredictability.

The triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality resulting from the persistently low economic growth, is a serious and explosive challenge to South African society. The interim period of apparent calm and space allowed, is a time to reflect, to read, to envision, to seek answers to the vexing problems facing society.

We have to create an environment that is conducive to meaningful change. The students in the recent uprisings have given us a glimpse of what can be achieved through united action. Certainly, it cannot be done through the ballot box as suggested by some as presently structured — the students being the mid-wives together with activists must form bastions of united action to oppose the neo-liberal policies of the ruling elite.

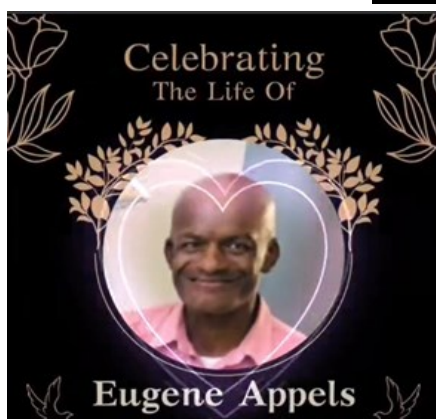
Paulo Freire avers, *“Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift.”* He states, *“It must be pursued constantly and responsibly.”* SA has just got to give birth to a new dispensation. For when the youth wake up from their slumber, they will realise that they are part of a world movement whose duty is to put out of business those that are at present maintaining the status quo.

NEW UNITY MOVEMENT



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Tribute to a Comrade (Eugene Appels)



The members of the New Unity Movement are saddened by the passing away of our comrade Eugene Appels. We bring a message of condolence to his family and hope they find comfort during this sad time.

We also wish to bring tribute to Comrade Eugene who so richly deserves praise but who would not want his praises to be sung so publicly because he was a humble, modest and unassuming person. From among all his attributes, it was his humble demeanour that stood out and drew people to him.

Eugene took to heart the poverty and hardship that existed all around him, and early in his life he made it his life's goal to change society for the better. As a young man he saw the need to get involved in the struggle for liberation during the years of Apartheid and economic oppression and thus joined an organisation called African People's Democratic Union of South Africa (APDUSA). In APDUSA, Eugene was schooled in the theories of great men like Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and IB Tabata which he used to try and make sense of the inequalities that he observed every day. In APDUSA he learnt about the contradictions in society, the politics of class and the plight of the workers.

In the community where he grew up, Eugene joined the Bellville Civic Association where he accompanied his comrades walking the streets of Bellville South, Stilvanie, USA and Glenhaven in their quest to fight for proper housing, health facilities and service delivery. As a member of the Unity Movement he attended conferences and planning sessions across South Africa and joined protests and demonstrations in the streets of Athlone, Gugulethu, Atlantis, Bellville and Mitchell's Plain. Most recently, Eugene accompanied us in the Cape Town City Centre along Darling Street and Adderley Street, proudly carrying the banner of the Unity Movement to protest against the illegal occupation of Palestine by the Apartheid Israeli State.

It was as a member of a workers' union that Eugene experienced how cruel the bosses and the owners of capital are. As a worker, Eugene was elected to be a shop steward at his place of work. He represented the interests of his fellow employees in meetings with the bosses. He campaigned for better wages, working conditions and fair treatment. And what was his reward for these most noble endeavours: Eugene was unceremoniously fired from work and ended up being unemployed.

In many ways Eugene hid his many talents under a bushel. He did what was required of him without complaint but never talked about his achievements or used it for his own gain.

On Wednesday night, at the memorial service held in Eugene's honour, two ladies spoke of his prowess as a ballroom dancer. They were both his ballroom partners; they told of him being ever the gentleman, being steady, respectful and considerate, especially to those who were not at his level of expertise. They described him as an elegant dancer who guided them gracefully across the floor.

Eugene's discipline as a dancer resonated with his approach as a political activist. He studied and understood the basics i.e. he knew the rules, the policies and principles of his organisations and then he had the intelligence and the insight to adapt his steps when the "music" or circumstances changed. Thus, in step with his dialectical materialist teachings, he innately understood the strengths and weaknesses of his dance partners on the ballroom floor and on the political terrain. He completed his tasks with the necessary grace and expertise.

Eugene executed his tasks with the resources he had at hand. When it came to rallying people for the cause of the poor and oppressed, he joined his comrades going door-to-door with pamphlets for people to read and be informed. There was no way that the owners of TV stations, radio services and newspapers would carry the messages that he wanted to convey. Those very powerful owners of the newspapers and television stations are the very ones that would have us believe that, just because we can cast a vote every five years, we have democracy in South Africa. What is democracy, Eugene would ask, if it cannot put food on the table or guarantee a job and a decent home for everyone. Eugene was clear that another world was possible, a more just and a more humane world.

Your passing away, Eugene, is a sad loss to your family, but also a loss to the Unity Movement and to the community for whose emancipation you struggled.

Mr Appels, thank you for lending Eugene to us and for allowing him to also enrich our lives. We wish you and your family warmth, comfort and peace of heart.

Thank you.

Comradely regards

**Mickey Titus
Joint Secretary**

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