An analysis of the crises of Southern Africa

> *A situation characterised by increasing burden of parasitism on the working people*

Southern Africa is in the throes of economic and political crises in **South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola**.

In South Africa there's a louder and louder clamour even from the ranks of the ANC itself for President Zuma's removal on the misleading conception of so-called State capture. Zuma's relationship with the Guptas is put forward as 'State Capture'.

(The fact is that the ANC State was always a comprador State for the ruling classes of South Africa. In this sense the State was 'captured' long before the Guptas. Police Chief Jackie Selebi's undignified relationships with organised gangsters uncovered in 2010 and the Marikana Massacre of miners in 2012 amongst general caretaking were adequate proof of the aforesaid.)

Nevertheless, the South African State is all but bankrupt and the mismanagement of central institutions such as ESKOM (the power utility), which is now under investigation for 'State Capture', and the State's endangering and intrinsic inability to develop adequate infrastructure for capitalism are undoubtedly major issues behind the demand instigated by the ruling classes.

In the midst of the South African crisis, the Zimbabwean Army for all intents and purposes deposed Robert Mugabe due to internal squabbles in the ZANU-PF seemingly on the question of succession. However, the real reason (like in the rest of the sub-region) is clearly dwindling or depleted resources and a

frenzy to be close to the last remaining State finances and to serve international capitalism under austerity, which insists on as few servants as possible.

(Unemployment is estimated in the bourgeois press at 95%. But since the 'estimate' is coupled with 'underemployment', it is actually impossible to 'estimate'. This 'statistic' was probably dreamed up in order to further revile Mugabe. What probably is true is that in one fell swoop working people have been rapidly turned into mostly temporary and seasonal contract workers. But this trend is anyway happening in the rest of the sub-region.)

Likewise, in Angola the new president Joao Lourenco, who took over from Eduardo Dos Santos in August this year, is reported to have dismissed Isabel dos Santos as chair of the state oil company Sonangol on Wednesday, 15 November. She is said to be $3,5 billion 'strong' from oil income. Given that oil is said to comprise 90% of exports and the bulk of production, that payment is in dollars, but that there is a perennial shortage of FOREX (dollars), it will probably never be known how much she and others are truly 'worth', as the dollars seem to disappear before reaching Angola. (Exports in 2015 were estimated at $37,3 billion and imports at about $22 billion. There should have been no problem with foreign valuta.)

President Lourenço had reportedly already dismissed the heads of several other state companies, including the three state-owned media companies.Bottom of Form Sonangol is reported to be a partner with some of the biggest international oil companies, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and BP.

When MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) took over in 1975, they 'nationalised' all corner shops and retail outlets, replaced them with severely under-stocked 'Peoples Shops' and set up 'black markets', without price control, which allowed government ministers and officials to make profits many times over the purchase price of the items.

These so-called black markets had hundreds of metres of shelves loaded with every conceivable item and openly operated with consumables and imported goods.

The same frenzy to loot as in the other countries of Southern Africa saw the MPLA ignore the many high-rise buildings under construction when the Portuguese had to leave in 1975. Until very recently they were left with their cranes still standing and the deteriorating infrastructure. Not even drainage was considered, let alone aesthetics.

If one considers the reports that from 2001 to 2008 Angola was one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with an estimated average of 11% growth, of which increased oil production constituted 17% of growth per year, it indicated a seriously sick situation in which the rest of the economy, especially agriculture, actually contracted by 6% per year: negative growth of 6% growth in essential economy sector. Agriculture is said to remain by-and-large subsistent.

Officially Angola has 26% unemployment, but some Angolans put it much higher, even 70%. There is no way to determine the true figure.

No doubt stirring popular anger had a say in these newest developments just as in Zimbabwe.

However, if there is any change, it will be to strengthen the grip of the IMF, World Bank, the European Union and the United States. But, given the nature of oil companies, the looting will undoubtedly continue in Angola, leading to a much harsher situation for the more than 50% of impoverished Angolans and the rest who are employed.

Namibia has seen the State go into bankruptcy due to uncontrolled looting since 1990. By 1996 they had figured out how to loot Pension Funds, in cahoots with mining companies such as Rio Tinto Zinc and the Goldfields South Africa. They further discovered how to loot State Finances through sham

building and construction projects with costs inflated by multiples.

Buildings and construction projects at absurdly inflated costs litter the entire country and the capital city, Windhoek. The most notable of these was firstly the State House. The original cost estimate was a few hundred million rand, but it was finished at the astronomical price of 19 billion rand. Besides being the residence of the President, it was designed to house cabinet offices and conference halls. These offices are now standing unoccupied.

The second most cynical project was the Neckartal Dam, which was contrived before 2011 as an irrigation scheme in the far south of the country. The Southern African Institute for Environmental Assessment (SAIEA) had submitted a report that the project was not viable as the dam would require highly specialised skills and largescale capital investments to produce high value produce for the overseas market, which was the purported object. It was further pointed out that the nearby Naute Dam's capacity was not utilised to the full. The project continued irrespective. It was initially costed at R3,02 billion, but it escalated to R5,7 billion in 2017, when the uncompleted construction ground to a halt due to State bankruptcy.

The particularly ludicrous procedures for contrived building and construction were as follows: Cabinet would decide on the project and determine the price; the consultants and quantity surveyors would work out the bill of quantities to correspond thereto; the fees of engineers, consultants and contractors would rise proportionally with the multiply-inflated initial price. The feasibility study would be made last. Members of the Cabinet and State officials would collect relatively small kickbacks. State assets worth billions would be sold for kickbacks of a few million. (The resultant bankruptcy ['illiquidity'] is thus not temporary, but permanent, as future assets such as for example State land were depleted.)

For the past year major projects like highways from Windhoek and construction generally have ground to a halt, but it is clear that the IMF, World Bank and the European Union have moved in for direct ‘State Capture’, albeit clandestinely in order to shield the Comprador State from a public perception of not only its uselessness and debilitating ineptitude, but encumbrance to true freedom.

The form and national peculiarities of each Southern African State may differ, even remarkably in some instances. For example, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique waged relatively effective guerrilla struggles, driving the colonial rulers to the negotiating tables, but nevertheless ended up as bourgeois (pseudo Stalinist) States. African National Congress (ANC) and South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) were foisted on South Africa and Namibia directly as Comprador States with parodies of armed struggles. The similarities are nevertheless much more essential than the differences. These situations could only be reached by a brutal and ruthless eradication of any local opposition: In 1977, MPLA obliterated 5000 youth in Luanda; Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) eradicated opposition by assassinating for Herbert Chitepo and working-class youth in exile, and thereafter an estimated 30-60,000 and perhaps many more civilians in Ndebele in Southern Zimbabwe. It made many disappear, and massacred farm workers during its ‘land-grab’. ANC waged a war within South Africa against the working class and its leadership, and, SWAPO and ANC waged terror against youth in exile.

But the content of the crises remains essentially similar: that is, bankrupt States seeking to be bailed out by ‘white monopoly capitalism’.

The cash-strapped South African electricity utility ESKOM and South African Airways (SAA) now openly seek private partners (‘white monopoly capital’) to overcome inefficiency and to piggy-back on what is presumed to be an effective and competent private sector and the self-regulation of the

market. The absurdity is still argued that making State enterprise attractive for private investors makes it profitable. Which begs the question: if a State enterprise is profitable, why sell it off?

Nevertheless, TELKOM's 46,000 employees are already targeted for reduction, although not the astronomical management incomes and lavish international lifestyles and obscene expenditures. A third of the employees are to be reduced.

In Namibia, the SWAPO government is appealing to the World Bank for help in getting private partners for the State Owned Enterprises.

Privatisation is demanded despite two major publications on the effects of privatisation in Eastern Europe, Africa and South America in the 1990s. UN researchers show that nowhere in the world has privatization yielded the vaunted results. Instead it has created mass unemployment, social destabilization and hardships.

The signs are clear that international financial instances have already moved into place and already demand 'austerity'. In Katima Mulilo, the CEO of the Municipality stated that 'urban land' is not for 'poor people' and bulldozed settlements in order to save money on services. In Okahandja letters have been issued to settlements giving notice of bulldozing.

In general, the comprador States are clearly putting on their nicest clothes to woo imperialism back to take over their State functions as there is little to loot anymore. But, this has set off intense proliferation of factions in the States and squabbles amongst them. (This explains the nice and friendly *coup d'état* in Zimbabwe)

Given the desperation of the working people in the deteriorating economic situation and their falling living standards, within the context of a crisis of leadership they

cling to each hope generated by demagoguery of the compradors to bring change. And yet, there are many sceptical observers amongst them.

In Zimbabwe, many notice that it is the same old edifice which proclaims new salvation.

Likewise, in South Africa and Angola, working people are observing the situation with caution.

CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Working people find it hard to respond to the looming threat. Whilst no doubt their largely amorphous stirrings are the main pressure for the compradors to feign a hope for real change, they are also in crisis, a crisis of leadership.

This crisis is historic in context.

Especially in South Africa and Namibia, the working classes have generated their own leadership in the union struggles which started in 1971/2 in Namibia and lit the veld fire of workers' struggles in South Africa since 1973.

Whilst these struggles led to real union rights by the 80's, the ANC and SWAPO have led physical attacks against the working class and its leaders since 1976. By 1984 they had succeeded in disbanding or killing the union and workers' leadership and corralling workers' organisations behind the nationalists through the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). In 1990 in Namibia and 1994 in South Africa, this union leadership abandoned the workers for an alliance with what they now call 'white monopoly capitalism'.

Since 1992 when The Labour Act which contained significant rights for workers was promulgated in 1992. Since then the SWAPO regime, together with corporate lawyers, started dismantling labour rights, first through endemic corruption in

the law courts, then using the introduction of illegal practices such as contract labour, and then by rewriting the Labour Act in 2007 to put it in line with neo-liberal requirements of a total onslaught on labour rights.

This same process was followed in South Africa with the Labour Relations Act of 1995 and its later amendments and conventions introduced illegally such as contract labour.

These developments suggest that the working people must generate a new and independent leadership both at union and political levels.

They need a union leadership which leads them in the struggle against the erosion of rights gained through three decades of bloody struggle. They still have union rights to organise and strike. But, they need a conscious and alert struggle against the facilitation of the comprador class to enable capitalist corporations to erode workplace rights by slave conventions.

There is no point living with your head in the political clouds while working people need to understand their historic tasks through fighting for concrete rights.

The meaning of fighting for political power on a mass scale can only come from the fight for the protection of past gains and rights against slave labour conditions, which the IMF, the World Bank, the EU and the US are set to further entrench through the compradors of Southern Africa.

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Notes:
The bourgeoisie of Southern Africa was a comprador class for imperialism before and after 1994. (Compradors are traders in a colony or semi-colony who facilitate their county’s pillage by imperialism.)

The Apartheid State was able to build a pseudo welfare state on the backs of the working people, who with their families comprised 90% of the South African nation.

The entrance of black governments heaped a further burden on the working people. Not allowed to dig into corporate capital and assets, they took hold of working peoples' assets and life savings.

The entrance now of direct control by the imperialists heaps the ultimate burden on the working masses of Southern Africa.

They will not be able to bear any further burdens.

Editor's Note: this is an edited version of a document that is already circulating on social media.