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Now More than Ever!

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1st Quarter 2026 Issue 215

4 EDITORIAL NOTES
Inseparable struggles

6 CENTRAL COMMITTEE
The NDR must win on two fronts: working-class hegemony and anti-imperialist solidarity

15 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS
Understanding seat allocation and its implications for the 2026 local government elections
Trevor Fowler

18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT
The problem lies with party politics, not local government
Bheki Stofile

21 OCEAN ECONOMY
The Law of the Sea, imperialism and the National Democratic Revolution
Zakhele Cele

28 WOMEN IN STRUGGLE
Beyond recognition: International Working Women's Day and the struggle for economic justice
Sanelisiwe Ngubane

32 ONLINE GAMBLING
The new extraction economy and the working-class wage-drain
Sarah Mokwebo

37 SOLIDARITY WITH VENEZUELA
After the abduction of President Maduro: the plunder of oil and the new danger facing the Global South
Lefika Chetty

42 IMPERIALISM
Exposing the deception of 'joint law enforcement'—how Trumpian imperialism codifies aggression as "rules"
Li Zhuoru

52 NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY
Sovereignty as a pillar of anti-imperialist struggle: lessons from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Sibusisiwe Thobela

54 BOOKS
Colonial repression in the US empire
Mark Waller

The cover graphic by the artist César Mosquera is from the online exhibition Let Cuba Live on the website of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research https://thetricontinental.org/let-cuba-live-exhibition/.

Inseparable struggles

This edition of the *African Communist* emphasises the violent contestation of the balances of forces confronting the National Democratic Revolution and the global socialist movement. It highlights that the choices forged in struggle will determine whether the future belongs to the working class or remains in the grip of imperialist domination for generations to come. In this context, the revolution must press forward on two inseparable fronts: the reconstruction of working-class hegemony at home through mass mobilisation and material transformation, and the uncompromising intensification of anti-imperialist struggle globally.

In South Africa, the central contradiction remains stark and unresolved. The historic aspiration of our revolution, the abolition of exploitation and the transfer of power to the working class, has been systematically blunted. Political office was attained, but economic power remains firmly entrenched in the hands of monopoly capital. The commanding heights of the economy continue to reproduce the logic of accumulation rooted in colonial and apartheid dispossession, now fused with global financial capital and domestic monopoly interests operating through concentrated ownership structures in key sectors such as banking, mining and telecommunications.

This incomplete transition has produced and accentuated a deepening crisis of capitalist social reproduction. Mass unemployment, precarious labour and the commodification of basic human needs define the daily reality of the working class. The democratic state, hollowed out by corruption, patronage networks, and an ideological capitulation to neoliberal orthodoxy, has become increasingly incapable of serving as an instrument of transformation. The crisis of local government is not a failure of management but a symptom of political decay, driven by fiscal stress, procurement-based accumulation incentives, and subjective control over administrative apparatuses, in which factionalism, careerism, and accumulation have displaced revolutionary purpose.

Capital, in its relentless search for accumulation, has deepened exploitation into new and insidious terrains. The rise of online gambling is not incidental but systemic. It represents a predatory mechanism of a further extraction of surplus value from the working class at the very point of survival, intercepting wages before they can sustain life. This is accumulation without production, a parasitic deepening of exploitation that feeds on desperation enabled by digital platform capitalism and the financialisation of everyday consumption.

Confronting this reality requires more than reformist adjustment. It demands a return to the revolutionary essence of the NDR. This is not, and was never intended to be, an elite-managed project of gradual reform. It is necessarily a process of mass struggle, driven by the organised working class as the leading force.

This requires a strategic rupture with the limits of formal democracy and a turn towards material transformation. Public ownership in strategic sectors must be expanded, not negotiated away. Land and agrarian reform must be accelerated, not deferred. Key sectors of the economy, including the ocean economy, must be wrested from corporate control and placed under democratic, worker and community ownership. The wealth of the country must be socialised in practice, not merely proclaimed in rhetoric.

Equally, the revolution must strike at the hidden foundations of exploitation. The unpaid labour of social reproduction, overwhelmingly borne by working-class women, is central to the functioning of capitalism. To ignore this is to leave a core pillar of exploitation intact. A socialist trajectory demands the collectivisation of care

through expanded public provision and democratic planning, linking gender emancipation inseparably to class struggle.

Organisationally, the crisis is just as acute. Without ideological clarity rooted in historical materialism, discipline and accountability, the movement cannot advance. The degeneration of organisational life must be confronted directly. Alliance politics cannot remain symbolic while power is centralised and misused. Binding collective leadership, the right of recall and mass oversight over deployed cadres are not procedural questions. They are matters of revolutionary survival. Programmes such as the People's Red Caravan must be transformed into instruments of production, mobilisation and working-class power.

Yet the domestic struggle cannot be isolated from the global terrain. The crisis of imperialism has entered a more aggressive and dangerous phase. As US imperial dominance fractures, it has become more belligerent. Across West Asia, imperialist aggression against Lebanon and Iran forms part of a broader strategy of militarisation and destabilisation, aimed at reasserting control over strategic regions and resources. These assaults are inseparable from the ongoing genocide in Palestine and the wider projection of imperialist violence expressed through differentiated but interconnected military, financial and ideological instruments of domination.

Simultaneously, the intensification of the blockade against Cuba highlights the persistence of economic warfare as a central weapon of imperialism. The commemoration of 17 April, marking the defeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion, is a reminder that imperialism never abandons its objective of crushing revolutionary sovereignty. Cuba's endurance is a testament to socialist resilience under siege and a living rebuke to imperialist domination.

These struggles are not distant. They are integral to the global class struggle. Imperialism operates as a unified – though ridden with contradiction rivalry – system of domination, combining military force, financial coercion and ideological manipulation. Its objectives are to discipline the Global South, suppress independent development, and preserve the hegemony of capital. South Africa, by asserting an independent path, has already come under increasing pressure. This pressure will intensify.

Our response must not be hesitant or tentative. It must be militant internationalism. Solidarity with Cuba, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, and all oppressed peoples is a strategic imperative. The struggle against imperialism abroad is no different from the struggle against capitalism at home.

The present moment demands ideological firmness. Under capitalism, so-called progress deepens inequality, alienation and ecological destruction. Under socialism, progress must be redefined as the expansion of human freedom, collective wellbeing and the conscious transformation of society. This requires organisation, not spontaneity. It requires leadership, not drift. It requires a Marxist-Leninist vanguard rooted in the working class.

History does not move automatically in a progressive direction. The crisis of capitalism opens the door to either reaction or revolution. The determining factor will be the progressive altering of the balance of forces through organisation, clarity and struggle. The reconstruction of working-class power and the defeat of imperialism are indivisible. Recognising this link will enable the NDR to advance beyond its current impasse and move decisively towards socialism, re-establishing the strategic unity between domestic transformation and global anti-imperialist struggle outlined at the outset.■

The NDR must win on two fronts: working-class hegemony and anti-imperialist solidarity

The following is a shortened version of the Political Report to the SACP Central Committee delivered by the General Secretary **Solly Mapaila,** 27 March

Let us start by paying respects to our comrades who have died since our last meeting and pay tribute to comrades Leon Levy (former President of SACTU), Rev. Nyembenya, Joe Lawrence Maswanganyi, and the sister of Cde Lucky Mbuyane. Cde Madoda has lost three immediate family members within five months – we are with him and his family. We also remember Rev. Jesse Jackson, who spearheaded the anti-apartheid struggle in the US; the assassinated leaders in heroic Iran, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei; the loss of Musioua Terror Lekota; Terry Bell, the worker journalist; Solly Philander, the people's artist; and the reburial of the Khoi warriors. We also acknowledge all comrades who lost loved ones.

> *The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has come to South Africa. We shall not submit but fight with everything in our power in defence of our freedoms and our people...* – MK founding manifesto.

We have reached a similar period, albeit in the tragedy of our self-inflicted capitulation and convoluted policies that have rendered implementation of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) so vague and intractable.

Contemporary challenges facing the NDR in the current global conjecture and the original aspiration of the revolution

At its core, every genuine revolution is born from historical necessity: the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production, and the need to resolve the property question.

The original aspiration of the revolution, therefore, is not abstract idealism but a tangible material and historical project to abolish exploitation, end capitalist class domination, and place political and economic power in the hands of the working class and the oppressed – the majority in society.

The class content of the revolutionary aspiration guarantees the fair distribution of wealth to society. The revolutionary aspiration is rooted in the struggle of the colonised, the proletariat (workers), and the rural poor (peasants, originally, as in China) for the demand for land, work, dignity, and collective ownership of wealth. This is the historic struggle. It seeks to destroy colonial and capitalist structures of accumulation and replace them with socialised production and democratic control.

In its resolution of addressing the national question in the colonised territories, the Communist International placed the fight against imperialism high. In the South

African context, this aspiration found expression in the NDR: the struggle against apartheid colonialism of a special type. This defined the immediate and long-term tasks of the working class in pursuit of social emancipation.

We should always define the immediate role and tasks of the working class and mass mobilisation to drive the NDR in transition to socialism. The foundational principle of the NDR depends on mass participation ("All Power to the People") and the distinct role of the working class because, without the active working-class role and leadership, the NDR becomes elite-managed reformism. The working class remains the most crucial, strategic and main social motive force of the NDR, its principal driver and victor.

Contemporary challenges facing the NDR and tasks of the working class

The NDR faces a complex convergence of domestic structural economic and social crises amidst rapidly intensifying global geopolitical pressures. The NDR historically aimed to overcome the legacy of colonialism and apartheid by building a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society with a transformed economy from white minority control to sharing with all in society, especially the previously dispossessed African and black majority.

We should always remember that the revolution carries a moral force, but it is grounded in material struggle. For instance, it is the refusal of the oppressed to remain oppressed and the assertion of humanity against dehumanisation. The revolution is not merely about changing rulers; it is about transforming the very conditions of life. We should also guard against the danger of historical amnesia. A critical challenge in the current period is the erosion of revolutionary memory and the reduction of the revolution into administrative reform and a bureaucratic entity, on the one hand, and electoral politics, on the other. The extremes of these should be addressed first by bridging the growing gap and detachment of leadership from the material conditions of the masses, which creates ideological drift and weakens working-class hegemony.

What shapes the current conjuncture?

However, the current conjuncture is shaped by both internal contradictions in the democratic transition and renewed imperialist pressures in a rapidly changing world order, for which we are struggling to be in the centre, currently playing some role at the periphery, albeit with some important contributions.

The global system is undergoing a transition from a unilateral US-Europe-led capitalist unipolar dominance to an emerging, more inclusive and democratic multipolar order of multiple economic systems based on collaborations, with growing influence from countries such as China, Russia, and broader formations like Brics.

In this context, South Africa's independent foreign policy, particularly its participation in Brics and its diplomatic positions on Palestine and global governance reform, has placed it under increasing scrutiny and pressure from the US and allied Western powers.

This is largely informed by the increasing role and independence of Brics countries to strengthen their economic and trade relations and develop impactful policies like the

creation of the Brics banks and de-dollarisation in bilateral trade between member countries.

Internal economic structural challenges facing the NDR

a. Economic structure and the minerals energy complex

The South African economy remains dominated by a historically entrenched minerals-energy complex, characterised by high concentration of private capital and limited role of the public economy, negatively impacting structural transformation and the benefit to the majority in society. Despite democratic gains, ownership and control of the commanding heights of the economy remain highly concentrated, constraining the transformative objectives of the NDR. Key features include persistent racialised inequality and unemployment, leaving many families without income (a programmatic basis of our People's Red Caravan); continued dominance of finance capital and multinational corporations; a liberalised economy with a lesser role of the state and, therefore, public economy; and disinvestment in industrialisation, now suffering slow progress and lack of sufficient financing for industrial diversification and beneficiation.

These structural limits weaken the capacity of the democratic state to advance radical economic transformation, thereby limiting the social base of the NDR. This situation, coupled with imperialist interference, has led to a major decline in political support for the liberation forces headed by the African National Congress (ANC) in alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP), Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and South African National Civic Organisation. It is in this context that the SACP led discussions in the Alliance about the necessity to reposition the Alliance to play a more effective role to change the material reality in the country. This remains a matter of grave concern to us as we have not resolved the reconfiguration of the Alliance after over 20 years of internal discussions. The masses have now moved ahead of us. We still have a revolutionary duty to rescue our revolution in a multi-faceted way and still advance to socialism in the context of prevailing realities in South Africa.

b. State capacity and governance crisis

Another major challenge is the erosion of state capacity, including, but not limited to, bureaucratic fragmentation; corruption and patronage networks; weak implementation of developmental policies; and institutional damage from the period associated with state capture. This has undermined the ability of the democratic state to act as a developmental state capable of leading structural transformation, especially economic transformation, since we have assumed nominal political power with limited social impact while the economy remains in the hands of a white minority capitalist class still with some allegiance to colonial Europe.

c. Fragmentation of the progressive movement

The NDR historically relied on the strategic alliance of progressive forces, particularly the alliance between the ANC, SACP, and Cosatu. However, the movement faces growing ideological fragmentation on the left and a rightward consolidation; the rise of populist currents and opportunistic politics driven largely but not exclusively by corruption and poor performance in government by the liberation forces because its

cadre policy has no recall policy and even no punishment for doing wrong by the people; declining mass political activism; and weak organisational discipline. This weakens the hegemonic capacity of the revolutionary movement to mobilise the working class and poor around the strategic objectives of the NDR.

Imperialism in the era of global instability and deepening crisis of the world capitalist system

In his work on imperialism, Vladimir Lenin described imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, characterised by, among other things, concentration of capital into monopolies, fusion of industrial and financial capital, export of capital to dominate peripheral economies, and division of the world among imperialist powers. While the form of imperialism has evolved, its fundamental logic remains intact, now expressed through financial dominance, technological monopolies, sanctions regimes, military alliances, proxy conflicts and wars.

Growing geostrategic pressure on South Africa

a. Foreign policy independence: South Africa's foreign policy positions, especially its stance on Palestine and multilateral diplomacy, have increased tensions with the US. For example, South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice over the war in Gaza placed the country at the centre of global geopolitical tensions. Similarly, its continued cooperation with countries such as Iran and Cuba is viewed critically by Western powers. The bipartisan US Congress members have agreed to punish some ANC leaders in South Africa for alleged preference of working with, especially, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. They seek to punish the ANC for sending leadership delegations to attend political schools in China. They seek to restrict their movement into the US and exert punitive measures. We should reject and condemn these intimidation tactics. The President was disinvited to the G7 (not that we really benefited from it as a country), but it shows the pressure these countries are under from the US but also their own unprincipled positions.

b. Economic and diplomatic pressures and coercion: Imperialist pressures increasingly manifest through trade leverage and financial institutions; potential threats to preferential trade agreements such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act; and diplomatic pressure over South Africa's relations with China, Russia, Iran and Palestine. Such pressures attempt to discipline South Africa's foreign policy orientation and constrain its participation in alternative global economic formations, directly restraining its diplomatic independence, given the US is now not only overtly disregarding international law, multilateralism and the United Nations but also calling for allies in its defined new imperialism as tabled at the recent Munich Conference last month in February. This shocking call for recolonisation was embraced by their European counterparts in the name of preserving Western civilisation.

c. Militarisation, global instability and belligerent hegemonism as practised by the US and its European allies: The current international environment is marked by growing militarisation and consequential global instability, including conflicts such as the imperialist expansionist war in Ukraine and the Special Military Operation, drawing all of Europe and the US into the war; unprovoked aggressive

military attack on Iran, the bombing and subsequent killing of its leader Ayatollah Khamenei, thus risking escalating tensions involving Iran and the regional countries hosting US military bases from which some of the US-Israeli axis came; and the ongoing conflict in Palestine with the unilateral decision of the US and its Board of Peace unilaterally deciding on the future and reconstruction of Gaza. These conflicts are part of broader geopolitical competition over resources, trade routes, and spheres of influence. For countries of the Global South, including South Africa, this raises the risk of economic coercion and strategic pressure to align with competing blocs.

Strategic implications for the NDR

The interaction between domestic contradictions and global imperialist pressures produces several strategic tasks for the revolutionary movement today: rebuilding the mass base of the revolution by strengthening working-class organisation and rebuilding grassroots mobilisation; advancing structural economic transformation through deepening industrialisation, expanding public ownership in strategic sectors, and advancing land and agrarian reform; strengthening the developmental state and restoring institutional capacity by building a capable, ethical, and developmental state with a patriotic public service; building unity among progressive forces and rebuilding ideological clarity among left forces to defend and advance the NDR; and deepening South-South cooperation by strengthening relations with progressive states and formations within the Global South to counter imperialist domination.

The moral and historical imperative of our revolution necessitates embracing the power of progress in the new era of our revolution. The theoretical basis would be to fully define the "New Era", which is marked by, among other things, intensified imperialist rivalry and geopolitical fragmentation; rapid technological transformation (digitalisation, AI, automation); and deepening crisis of global capitalism through overt inequality, ecological destruction and financial instability. At the same time, it is also characterised by the re-emergence of alternative developmental paths, particularly from the Global South.

Progress, though, is a contested concept. Under capitalism, "progress" is distorted and becomes profit maximisation and technological advancement without social benefit to the masses, further deepening inequality and working-class alienation. From a socialist perspective, progress must be redefined as the expansion of human freedom, equality, and collective wellbeing. The Chinese even add the concept of happiness to it.

The New Era presents objective conditions for transformation: technological capacity (the ability to increase productivity, expand access to education and information, integrate rural and urban economies); state capacity (where politically directed) with strategic planning, public investment, and infrastructure development based on the immediate challenges and needs of the people, like water provisions, housing and roads; and mass organisation with renewed potential for popular mobilisation and community-driven development like the People's Red Caravan.

The dialectic of crisis and opportunity means the crisis of capitalism is not automatically revolutionary because it produces reactionary forces (nationalism, militarism, fascism) as well as progressive openings for systemic change. So, the outcome largely depends on organisation, leadership, and ideological clarity.

Reconnecting aspiration with practice

We must move from rhetoric to material transformation. The central task is to re-anchor revolutionary aspiration in lived reality by building productive economies, expanding public ownership and control, and leading overall societal delivery of material improvements in people's lives. Programmes such as the People's Red Caravan must serve as instruments of organisation and vehicles of production and development, addressing immediate needs (food, services) and long-term transformation (socialism).

We need to relook at the cadre development model and ideological work because no revolution can succeed or advance without politically conscious cadres and continuous ideological education. We need to rebuild Marxist-Leninist ideological clarity rooted in our conditions to build a coherent organisation at all levels and combat opportunism, careerism and bourgeois influence.

The strategic tasks of the new era include reasserting working-class leadership by consciously building and strengthening trade unions and community structures and building alliances with the rural poor and marginalised sectors of our society; transforming the economy from below and moving beyond extraction and financialisation towards industrialisation, cooperative production and public ownership; advancing rural transformation and integrating rural areas into the productive economy by tackling developmental challenges as in urban areas through, for instance, the building of infrastructure, agro-processing and local industries; and deepening international solidarity by strengthening South-South cooperation and building alternatives to imperialist institutions.

The power of progress: a revolutionary understanding

Progress in the new era must be understood as planned and not chaotic; collective or communal and not individualistic; and liberatory and not exploitative. For us, progress should be understood as, among other things, the power to transform productive forces into social wealth; convert technological advances into human development; and turn political power into working-class emancipation. We need to pose pertinent questions in the context of challenges facing the NDR and the impact this has on the working class.

For instance, who really holds class power in post-apartheid South Africa and has the NDR transformed it? This is the question Joe Slovo posed when he said: "Don't just transfer power, transform it." This is strategic because the NDR was historically defined as resolving class, national and gender contradictions and transferring power to the majority. The core problem is that nominal political power shifted in 1994, but economic power largely remained concentrated in monopolies and the white minority.

Persistent inequality signals incomplete transformation of class relations. The strategic answer the SACP and the Alliance must ask and clarify is: Is South Africa still structurally "colonialism of a special type" in economic form? If yes, it goes without saying that the NDR is incomplete and stagnating, and to the extent we have occupied political power for so long it has reversed some of the gains, hence the continued crisis-level capitalist social reproduction. In this context, we require a strategic shift to

move from formal political democracy to material economic transformation and put at the centre public ownership, industrial policy, and community and worker control.

Another question is whether the ANC, given the failure of Alliance reconfiguration, remains the strategic centre of power or has the Alliance become subordinated to state and elite interests. The truth is that largely the ANC dominates governance and policy decisions. Policy that gets implemented is not Alliance policy; it is ANC policy. While the SACP and Cosatu have influence, final power lies with ANC structures. This has caused structural tension, with compromise from the left of the Alliance focusing on unity while the ANC leadership continued the centralisation of state power and its abuse in the name of the Alliance and the people.

Without reconfiguration of the Alliance, it risks becoming symbolic rather than directive – in other words, ceasing to be the true strategic centre and merely becoming advisory, leading to policy incoherence in government and further weakening of working-class hegemony. The shift we require is to rebuild principled collective leadership of the Alliance, institutionalise binding Alliance policy processes, and ensure joint deployment, accountability and recall in government.

Another key question is the extent to which neoliberal macroeconomic policy derailed the NDR and what replaces it. Our call for various economic summits had sought to resolve this matter since the historical blunder of the adoption of GEAR (1996), which marked a shift to fiscal austerity, market-led growth, and "trickle-down" logic despite the critique by the SACP and Cosatu that this favoured capital over the masses – hence "the 1996 class project" that weakened industrialisation and unleashed mass unemployment and rising inequality. The NDR has been throttled and has failed to advance under neoliberal constraints. Our answer must be a strategic shift toward a fully developmental state (with class content) to lead state-led industrialisation, mobilise capital under its control, and drive strategic sectors under public control.

We must also tackle corruption head-on. How can corruption, patronage, and the "predatory state" be defeated without weakening the revolutionary state? Part of the crisis identified within the Alliance was the emergence of patronage networks driven by money and a corrupted deployment policy framework, with the emergence of "tenderpreneurs" and the advance to a "predator state". Cadre deployment intended to build a developmental state produced patronage networks and weakened state capacity. This is not just a moral crisis but class-based degeneration.

The loss of legitimacy of the NDR in the eyes of the masses and loss of trust in politics are consequences. We need a shift to rebuild ethical cadres and a cadre development programme that is not ad hoc but intense and sustainable, producing both merit and political consciousness. We should also strengthen party oversight and move towards mass oversight over deployed cadres and, ultimately, worker and community control over the state.

International solidarity and anti-imperialist resolve

We express unwavering and militant solidarity with the people of Cuba, who continue to endure an illegal and inhumane economic blockade imposed by the US – a blockade that seeks to strangle their sovereignty and reverse the historic gains of the Cuban Revolution. We stand firmly with the people of Iran, who are currently subjected to brutal military aggression by the US and Israel.

The ongoing war, widely condemned across the Global South, represents not only a violation of international law but also a continuation of regime-change wars that have historically devastated sovereign nations. We recognise the Russian Federation's Special Military Operation as part of a broader reconfiguration of global power relations. Its significance for the Global South lies in the accelerated transition toward a multipolar world order, challenging the unipolar dominance of imperialist centres. We express our strongest solidarity with the people of Venezuela, who have been subjected to direct military intervention and the forcible removal of their leadership by the US in a brazen act of regime change.

We extend our solidarity to the peoples of the African continent, particularly in Sudan, where conflict continues to devastate lives and livelihoods. We reaffirm our support for the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, whose struggle against occupation remains one of the unfinished decolonisation processes on the African continent. We stand with the people of Eswatini (Swaziland) in their struggle for democracy, social justice, and the realisation of fundamental political freedoms.

On the People's Republic of China

The SACP continues to support China's unitary efforts for the full integration of Taiwan back into the mainland. This is important because Western forces provoke China by arming Taiwan as a threat to mainland China. We understand that the DA in the GNU is seeking the formal re-evaluation of the 1997 decision on Taiwan by the South African government, effectively seeking to embarrass the liberation forces on duplicity. We appreciate the restraint shown by China, as any declaration of war against China would plunge the world into catastrophic proportions. We recently returned from a study tour of China in a joint delegation with Contralesa on the revitalisation of the rural economy and ending poverty.

The Chinese 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) shifts focus from high-speed growth to high-quality development driven by innovation and sustainability. Key pillars include New Quality Productive Forces (moving beyond normal labour and capital drivers, focusing on tech frontiers such as AI, semiconductors, quantum, and biotech, aiming for a 7% annual R&D spending increase); green transformation (targeting a 17% reduction in carbon intensity, aiming for 25-30% non-fossil fuel energy by 2030, leading global supply chains in solar, wind, and EVs); human-centred development (upgrading education, healthcare, and social security to boost domestic consumption and demographic resilience); and dual circulation (deepening reliance on the domestic market of 800 million middle-income people while maintaining high-standard openness). The plan serves as a strategic anchor for global stability, accelerates the Global South, stabilises global systems, and enhances the quality of human life.

Mobilisation, electoral consolidation, and left reconfiguration

The present conjuncture is characterised by an intensely contested electoral terrain, especially in local government, where the crisis of service delivery, fiscal austerity, and governance fragmentation has deepened mass disillusionment. The SACP expresses appreciation for recent positive by-election results in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape (above 10% for the first time and above 4%), which represent a huge improvement. These outcomes confirm that residual mass support for transformative politics remains, communities respond positively to visible grassroots organisation, and cadre activism remains decisive.

A central weakness confronting the SACP is over-reliance on external or Alliance-linked resources, which constrains political independence, weakens organisational discipline, and limits sustained grassroots work. The Party must adopt a diversified, mass-based, and transparent financial model rooted in working-class participation.

The SACP notes ongoing engagements with the ANC regarding Alliance reconfiguration. Key issues include strategic political leadership of the NDR, the balance between electoral machinery and mass democratic content, mechanisms for collective decision-making, and the fight against factionalism, state capture tendencies, and neoliberal drift. Reconfiguration must strengthen working-class influence.

The Party reiterates its support for convening a Conference of the Left to bring together socialist formations, labour movements, progressive civil society, youth and feminist organisations and to build programmatic unity against neoliberal capitalism and right-wing populism. The SACP expresses concern about the ANC's declining organisational coherence, factional battles, weakening ethical leadership, and erosion of mass connection.

Conclusion

The current moment demands clarity, unity, and decisive action. The struggles of Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, and the oppressed peoples of Africa are interconnected fronts in the global struggle against imperialism. An injury to one is an injury to all. The South African revolution is taking place at a moment when internal contradictions of the democratic transition intersect with a global crisis of imperialism. The growing belligerence of the United States toward independent Global South actors reflects a broader struggle over the emerging multipolar world order. For the NDR to advance, it must simultaneously resolve domestic structural weaknesses while consolidating international alliances that support sovereignty, development, and the broader struggle against imperialism. ■

Understanding seat allocation and its implications for the 2026 local government elections

Trevor Fowler on the need for the SACP to motivate voters at the grassroots level and to understand how votes translate into representation in local government.

This article, derived from a presentation to the SACP National Elections Workshop on 31 January – 1 February, seeks to clarify the seat allocation system in South Africa's municipal elections and to draw strategic lessons for the upcoming local government elections. The central and overriding conclusion is that in our electoral system, every single vote and every single voter matters profoundly. Our primary and most urgent task must be a mass campaign to mobilise people to register and, crucially, to vote.

Constitutional and electoral framework

The foundation of the local government electoral system is found in Section 157 of the South African Constitution. It mandates that the election of municipal council members must follow national legislation prescribing an electoral system. This system must be based on proportional representation (PR). It can take one of two forms: a pure PR system using party lists or a mixed system that combines PR with ward representation. Critically, the outcome of any chosen system must, in general, result in proportional representation across the entire council.

The current system is a mixed model. Voters cast two ballots: one for a ward candidate and one for a political party. Half of a council's seats are filled by ward councillors elected directly in single-member constituencies on a "first-past-the-post" basis, where the candidate with the most votes wins. The other half of the seats are allocated from party lists to ensure overall proportionality based on each party's share of the party vote (the second ballot). This design aims to balance local accountability through ward representatives with broad fairness through proportional outcomes.

A key feature of this system is its compensatory mechanism. A party's final seat total is made proportional to its total share of the vote (combining both ballots). If a party wins more ward seats than its total vote share would entitle it to proportionally, it receives fewer, or sometimes even no, top-up seats from the party list. The total number of seats for each party is therefore brought into line with its overall vote percentage.

Conversely, a party with a high vote share but few ward wins will receive many list seats to achieve proportionality. This ensures that the final council composition reflects the will of the electorate as a whole. However, this mechanism only works with the raw material of votes; it underscores why maximising both registration and turnout is not just a slogan but a mathematical imperative for political power.

Case study: the 2016 Tshwane municipal election

The 2016 election in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, with its 214 seats, provides a clear illustration of how this system works in practice and reveals the critical impact of voter mobilisation.

In the ward contests, the African National Congress (ANC) won a majority of wards, securing 68 out of 107 seats (64%). However, this ward victory did not stem from a majority of the ward votes. The ANC received 361,950 ward votes, or 41.02% of that ballot. The Democratic Alliance (DA), by contrast, won only 39 wards (36%) but received a slightly higher share of the ward votes at 43.2%, or 381,146 votes.

The results from the proportional representation ballot were closely aligned, with the ANC receiving 41.48% and the DA 43.1% of the party votes.

When the votes were combined and the seats allocated under the compensatory proportional system, the final result was as follows: The ANC's total vote share was 41.25%, for which it received 89 seats (41.6%). These seats comprised its 68 ward victories plus 21 top-up seats from the party list. The DA's total vote share was 43.15%, earning it 93 seats (43.15%). These comprised its 39 ward seats and a significant 54 seats from the party list to achieve proportionality.

This outcome underscores a vital point: the system is designed to deliver a proportional result in the council chamber, not necessarily in the ward component alone. The ANC's high number of ward seats was offset by a lower allocation of list seats.

Strategic implications and lessons for 2026: The primacy of mobilisation

Analysing the Tshwane data reveals that the difference between winning and losing power hinges on the fundamental tasks of registration and turnout. For the South African Communist Party, this is the cornerstone of a 2026 strategy.

Firstly, low turnout is a direct path to defeat. Wards won by the ANC in Tshwane had a significantly lower average turnout (53%) compared to wards won by the DA (68%). This 15-point deficit in participation was a decisive factor. The lesson is unequivocal: our campaigns must be voter-mobilisation machines. We must not only persuade supporters but also ensure they are registered and then physically get them to the polling stations. This requires a disciplined, ward-by-ward organisational effort, leveraging our alliance with Cosatu and other mass structures to run a permanent, targeted campaign focused on the voters 'roll and election day logistics.

Secondly, the risk of vote-splitting within the Alliance is a critical concern, making mobilisation even more urgent. A hypothetical scenario illustrates the double danger: in a three-way contest between the ANC, SACP, and DA, if the ANC and SACP each poll 30% and the DA wins the ward with 32%, the Alliance's combined 60% support is rendered futile. To avoid ceding wards to opposition parties, the SACP and ANC require sober, data-driven cooperation, including potential electoral pacts. However, the most powerful solution is to expand the pool of voters. By aggressively registering and turning out new and lapsed voters who support the left, we can overcome the arithmetic of split votes and build a larger, winning base.

Thirdly, to mobilise effectively, the SACP must forge a distinct and compelling identity that gives people a reason to register and vote. The analysis suggests many left-leaning ANC voters are disappointed and may be disengaged. Our message must therefore directly and credibly address the daily "bread and butter" issues of service delivery – water, electricity, roads and sanitation – while offering a clear socialist alternative. We must present local candidates who are trusted community figures. People will only make the effort to register and vote if they are inspired by a tangible alternative and a campaign that speaks to their immediate needs and aspirations.

Mass campaign

The electoral system mathematically translates votes into power. Therefore, our most important strategic task is to maximise our votes through an unparalleled focus on voter registration and turnout. The 2016 Tshwane result shows that wards, and thus municipalities, are won and lost not only on policy but also on the hard work of mobilisation. For the SACP, success in 2026 will be determined by our ability to run a two-pronged campaign: a grassroots, person-centred effort that registers and motivates voters, combined with a sophisticated understanding of seat allocation to efficiently convert that support into council power. We must embark now on a mass campaign whose core message is simple: register, and when the time comes, vote. Our political future depends on it. ■

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The problem lies with party politics, not local government

The struggle for capable, democratic and developmental local government is inseparable from the struggle to renew political life, writes **Bheke Stofile**

In 2026, the movement put forward the view that local government is broken and must therefore be fixed. This proposition may seem persuasive at first glance. However, any serious political analysis must go beyond appearances. We need to look past symptoms and identify the true source of a crisis. We must ask not only what is failing but why it is failing, in whose interests that failure is perpetuated, and who benefits from the concealment of the truth. It is in this spirit that we should approach the current debate on local government.

The central argument of this article is straightforward: the crisis of local government cannot be understood without reference to the crisis of politics itself. Municipalities have not collapsed in isolation; they have been shaped, constrained, weakened, and, in many cases, distorted by the political practices of those who claim to lead society. To speak of fixing local government while avoiding the confrontation with the degeneration of political leadership is to evade the truth and misdiagnose the problem.

This is why the words attributed to former Chinese President Jiang Zemin remain politically significant: to run the country well, one must first run the party well. This is not merely an organisational slogan; it is a profound political principle. When political organisations are weakened by factionalism, careerism, patronage, neoliberal accommodation, and class collaboration, the state institutions they produce will inevitably reflect the same defects. A political formation cannot preach one thing and practise another. It cannot claim a revolutionary commitment while using organisational platforms to advance bourgeois interests. It cannot proclaim leftist ideals while operating in a rightward direction. It cannot speak the language of the people while serving elite accumulation. Such behaviour is incompatible with revolutionary morality. It erodes political integrity, disorients the masses, and must be unequivocally rejected.

Thus, the first task is to achieve conceptual clarity. What is local government? Local government is not a branch office of national government. It is not a junior department of provincial government. It is not a constitutional orphan, existing solely to receive instructions, absorb blame, or bear the burden of systemic failure. The Constitution establishes local government as one of the three spheres of government, distinct yet interrelated and interdependent. This constitutional arrangement was not accidental; it was part of the democratic breakthrough of 1994 and the broader effort to transform the apartheid state into a democratic and developmental order.

The constitutional status of local government was intended to bring governance closer to the people. It aimed to create democratic institutions capable of planning, delivering services, promoting development, and involving communities directly in decisions affecting their lives. That is why Parliament enacted legislation such as the Municipal Structures Act, the Municipal Systems Act, the Municipal Demarcation Act, the Municipal Property Rates Act, and the Municipal Finance Management Act. These were not designed to produce weak municipalities; they aimed to empower municipalities to govern with accountability, public participation, and a developmental purpose.

But what has occurred in practice? What should have been a system of cooperative governance has, over time, devolved into a landscape of interference, control, manipulation, and political convenience. Municipalities are frequently denied the political space, administrative stability, and material support necessary for effective functioning. Simultaneously, the same forces that undermine municipalities are often the first to declare that local government has failed. This is a familiar ideological manoeuvre; it is easier to blame the institution than to confront the politics that have hollowed it out.

A proper understanding of a municipality further clarifies this contradiction. A municipality is not merely the mayor, the speaker, the council chamber, or the office of the municipal manager. Legally and theoretically, a municipality consists of the community, the council, and the administration. These three components are meant to function together in a dynamic democratic relationship. Public participation, therefore, is not ornamental; it is intended to be substantive. Communities are not expected merely to listen; they should shape priorities, influence planning, and help direct development through processes such as the Integrated Development Plan and municipal budgeting.

Yet it is precisely here that party politics often stifles democratic substance. Public hearings become mere rituals of compliance. Community participation is reduced to a technical exercise rather than a genuine democratic process. Council oversight is weakened by caucus discipline. Important decisions are often predetermined before reaching the council chamber. Councillors, instead of acting as representatives of the people, too often become defenders of factional lines and party-managed outcomes. In such an environment, democratic governance gives way to managed conformity. Accountability is supplanted by political loyalty. The municipality ceases to operate as an instrument of popular development and increasingly becomes an arena for party deployment and patronage.

Inseparable crises

This leads us to a difficult but unavoidable truth. In reality, it is political parties, not communities, that determine who enters local government leadership. Communities do not choose who appears on party lists. They do not decide who becomes mayor, chief whip, speaker, or councillor. These decisions are overwhelmingly shaped by internal party processes, factional balances, patronage networks, and internal settlements. Parties recruit, nominate, deploy, protect, and, when expedient, discard leaders. To then turn around and suggest that local government has failed on its own is politically disingenuous. It attempts to separate the crisis of municipalities from the crisis of political leadership that created it.

The weaknesses evident in many municipalities are thus not merely administrative failures. They are the political expression of a deeper organisational and ideological decay. Where there is poor political education, weak grounding in public ethics, disconnection from communities, prioritisation of loyalty over competence, and the replacement of public service with self-advancement, the municipality becomes a reflection of that decay. It is insufficient to state there is no capacity. We must ask who deployed incapacity, who rewarded mediocrity, who protected it, and whose interests are served by reducing public institutions to sites of dysfunction.

This issue must also be understood within the broader struggle against neoliberalism. Local government has increasingly been compelled to operate under conditions not of its own making. The commodification of basic services, fiscal austerity, underfunding, rising infrastructure costs, and the transfer of unfunded mandates all combine to undermine the developmental role of municipalities. Simultaneously, political leaders often respond not by challenging the neoliberal framework but by adapting to it, normalising it, or administering it in the language of pragmatism. This results in a dual crisis. On one hand, municipalities are structurally weakened by a broader political economy that limits their transformative capacity. On the other, they are led by political actors who frequently lack the ideological clarity and moral courage to resist that political economy.

It is therefore a grave mistake to reduce the local government crisis to a technical matter of management. It is not merely a question of audit outcomes, vacancies, or systems. It is a matter of class orientation, political morality, and organisational practice. If leadership uses political organisations as ladders for personal advancement while claiming to speak for the people, then local government will inevitably reproduce those contradictions. If bourgeois interests shape policy within organisations that profess transformation, then municipalities will be tasked with executing mandates for which they are neither politically nor financially equipped. The outcome is institutional paralysis, public frustration, and democratic disillusionment.

Duty to the people

This is why any sincere call to fix local government must begin with addressing the politics that produce local government leadership. The issue is not abstract. A healthy state cannot emerge from a diseased political culture. A developmental municipality cannot arise from factional deployment. A people-centred administration cannot emerge from anti-people politics. If the roots are rotten, the fruit will be rotten. No one should starve the roots and then condemn the fruit. No one should produce leaders through factionalism, shield them from accountability, deny municipalities the resources to function, and then act surprised when governance deteriorates. That outcome is not accidental; it is cultivated.

The lesson is clear. The struggle for capable, democratic, developmental local government is inseparable from the struggle to renew political life itself. It requires organisations rooted in principle, disciplined by ideas, accountable to the people, and committed to moral leadership. It necessitates leaders, not careerists. It requires public representatives who understand that leadership is not a platform for accumulation but a duty to the people. It demands councils that operate as sites of democratic oversight, not as rubber stamps for decisions already made elsewhere. It requires genuine public participation, not theatrical gestures. It calls for a break from the neoliberal logic that treats municipalities as implementers of austerity while blaming them for social collapse. Ultimately, local government is not broken because the constitutional idea of local government has failed. It is in crisis because politics has failed it. More precisely, it is in crisis because segments of political leadership have become disconnected from moral purpose, from the people, and from the developmental obligations of a democratic state. Until this truth is confronted honestly, every promise to renew local government will remain superficial.

The task before the movement is therefore not only to reform municipal systems. It is to wage a deeper struggle for ideological clarity, political accountability, organisational renewal, and principled leadership. Without that, discussions about fixing local government will amount to little more than slogans. However, with that commitment, genuine renewal becomes possible. ■

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The Law of the Sea, imperialism and the National Democratic Revolution

South Africa's maritime regions represent vast wealth and a vital front line in the struggle against monopoly capital, and for economic transformation that benefits the working class, writes **Zakhele Cele**

South Africa occupies one of the most strategically significant maritime positions in the world. Located at the southern gateway between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the country sits astride one of the most important global sea lanes connecting Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. For centuries, this maritime geography has shaped patterns of global trade, imperial rivalry and economic power. The sea route around the Cape of Good Hope became one of the most contested corridors of global commerce during the colonial period because control over this route meant influence over the movement of goods, resources and imperial power between continents.

In contemporary conditions the strategic significance of South Africa's maritime location remains profound. The Indian Ocean region has emerged as a central arena of geopolitical competition as global trade flows, energy transport routes and naval deployments increasingly converge in this maritime space. The east coast of South Africa, particularly the province of KwaZulu-Natal, lies directly along this strategic corridor linking Asian manufacturing centres, Middle Eastern energy exporters and European markets.

South Africa's coastline stretches for more than 3,000 kilometres from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east. Through the international legal framework established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the country exercises jurisdiction over an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of approximately 1.5 million square kilometres of ocean territory, an area larger than the country's entire land mass. These waters contain enormous economic potential, including commercial fisheries, offshore oil and gas resources, marine biotechnology, aquaculture, seabed minerals, maritime transport and shipping logistics.

The seas surrounding South Africa are also among the most biologically diverse in the world. There are approximately 10,000 marine species in these waters, forming the ecological basis for a major fisheries sector that contributes significantly to the national economy. Fish products such as hake, sardine and anchovy are exported to global markets, while coastal aquaculture and seafood processing industries support employment in a number of coastal towns.

Yet despite the vast natural wealth contained in South Africa's maritime territory, the benefits derived from the ocean economy remain highly unevenly distributed. The ownership and control of marine industries are concentrated in the hands of monopoly capital integrated into global networks of finance and trade. This concentration of economic power means that the wealth generated from South Africa's marine resources often flows outward through international commodity chains and financial markets rather than remaining within the coastal communities whose livelihoods depend most directly on the sea.

This contradiction lies at the heart of the political economy of South Africa's oceans economy. While the country possesses formal sovereignty over its maritime territory, the economic structures governing the exploitation of marine resources remain deeply embedded within global capitalism.

This article is dedicated to the working class in general and particularly to communities that live along South Africa's coastline and whose lives are directly shaped by the ocean economy. From the shores of KwaZulu-Natal, across the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, to the fishing towns and harbour communities of the Western Cape, generations of South Africans have depended on the sea for livelihood, culture and survival.

These communities include small-scale fishers, coastal rural households, maritime workers, fish processing labourers and harbour communities facing unemployment and declining access to fishing rights.

For these communities the central question is not simply whether South Africa possesses sovereignty over its oceans, but whether that sovereignty translates into democratic access to marine resources and economic participation.

It is whether such sovereignty translates to access to fishing rights; cooperative ownership of marine industries, whether it addresses community fishing quotas; whether it qualitatively opens up for worker participation in maritime industries and the transformation of the oceans economy in the interests of the working class.

Understanding the structural barriers faced by these communities requires situating South Africa's oceans economy within the broader global framework of maritime governance established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Law of the Sea was presented internationally as a progressive legal regime that would grant coastal states sovereign rights over marine resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones. For post-colonial states emerging from centuries of imperial domination, this framework appeared to promise greater control over maritime wealth and the possibility of using ocean resources for national development.

However, the Law of the Sea did not fundamentally transform the global structures of power governing access to the oceans. While sovereignty over maritime space shifted formally to national states, the economic exploitation of those spaces remained dominated by global capitalist networks.

This contradiction is particularly evident in the case of South Africa. The country exercises legal jurisdiction over a vast maritime territory, yet the economic value generated within that space is heavily integrated into global circuits of capital.

Ports such as Durban, Richards Bay, Ngqura and Cape Town are formally owned by the South African state through Transnet National Ports Authority. However, their operations are deeply embedded within global logistics systems dominated by multinational shipping corporations such as Maersk and the Mediterranean Shipping Company. These firms form part of global shipping oligopolies that control container routes, freight pricing and logistics networks across the world.

Similarly, the country's fisheries that lie entirely within South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone are dominated by a relatively small group of large corporations, including Oceana Group, Sea Harvest, Irvin & Johnson and Pioneer Fishing. These companies control substantial portions of fishing quotas and operate vertically integrated business models linking harvesting fleets, processing facilities and international export markets.

As a result, the wealth generated from South Africa is largely captured by corporate structures connected to global financial markets rather than being distributed among coastal communities.

This pattern reflects a broader structural feature of the international maritime system. While the Law of the Sea grants coastal states sovereignty over ocean territory, it does not challenge the global organisation of maritime capitalism.

The situation becomes even more pronounced beyond national exclusive economic zones in the high seas. These waters are formally designated as the "common heritage of humankind", yet in practice they are dominated by powerful states possessing advanced naval fleets, distant-water fishing vessels and highly developed maritime industries.

Foreign fishing fleets from Europe, East Asia and other industrialised regions operate extensively in international waters, harvesting migratory fish stocks that move beyond African exclusive economic zones. Many African states lack the naval capacity or industrial fishing fleets necessary to compete in these spaces, resulting in a form of structural exclusion from the global ocean economy.

The operation of this system is reinforced by technological and scientific inequalities. Effective governance of marine resources depends heavily on specialised knowledge, including fisheries stock assessments, hydrographic mapping and seabed geological surveys. These forms of scientific capacity are expensive and technologically complex, often requiring institutions and research infrastructure concentrated in advanced industrial economies.

As a result, a form of epistemic dependency emerges in which developing countries possess legal jurisdiction over marine territories but rely on knowledge systems dominated by foreign institutions and corporations to manage those resources. Ownership of the ocean space exists formally on paper, while the knowledge required to operationalise that ownership remains concentrated in global centres of capital.

International maritime dispute resolution mechanisms further reinforce these inequalities. Arbitration panels and international tribunals require specialised legal expertise and extensive financial resources. Wealthy states and multinational corporations possess the legal capacity to shape maritime jurisprudence, while many developing countries lack the institutional resources required to pursue lengthy litigation.

In this sense the contemporary Law of the Sea regime reflects a broader historical continuity between colonial and neo-colonial forms of domination. The coercive gunboat diplomacy of the colonial era has been replaced by legal and institutional mechanisms that reproduce unequal power relations within the global system.

Where colonial chartered companies once controlled trade routes and resources, multinational corporations now dominate global shipping networks, fisheries and offshore extraction industries. Strategic colonial ports have evolved into modern logistics hubs embedded within global supply chains. Direct colonial rule has given way to the discipline of global markets, where financial capital and trade networks shape the economic sovereignty of developing states.

These structural continuities demonstrate that the struggle over ocean resources cannot be understood purely as a matter of international law or maritime governance. It is fundamentally a question of political economy and class power.

For South Africa, transforming the oceans economy therefore forms an integral component of the broader National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The NDR seeks to overcome the structural legacy of colonialism and apartheid by transforming ownership patterns in the economy and placing the country's productive resources in the service of the working class and poor.

The seas surrounding South Africa represent a critical frontier in this struggle. Ensuring that the wealth generated from marine resources contributes directly to the development of coastal communities requires moving beyond formal sovereignty toward democratic control over the oceans economy.

Only through such transformation can South Africa's maritime resources become instruments of social development rather than channels through which global capital continues to extract value from the country's natural wealth.

What then are the practical strategic tasks to be undertaken?

1. Building a coordinated coastal revolutionary front

The transformation of South Africa's oceans economy cannot be achieved through isolated provincial initiatives. The maritime political economy of the country is structurally interconnected along the entire coastline stretching from the Indian Ocean through the central coast to the Atlantic seaboard. The ports, fisheries, shipping lanes and coastal communities of KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape form a single integrated maritime system. For this reason, the struggle to democratise the oceans economy must be pursued through coordinated political and organisational work across all three provinces.

KwaZulu-Natal occupies the strategic eastern gateway to the Indian Ocean trade corridor. The province hosts the Port of Durban, the busiest port in Africa, and the Richards Bay industrial complex, which anchors South Africa's bulk export economy. The Eastern Cape occupies a central position along the coastline, with ports such as Ngqura, Gqeberha and East London forming key logistics and industrial nodes linking Durban to Cape Town. The Western Cape, meanwhile, remains the historical centre of South Africa's fishing industry and controls the maritime gateway between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans through the Cape Sea route.

Together, these three provinces form the backbone of South Africa's maritime economy. Yet they also contain many of the most marginalised coastal communities whose livelihoods depend directly on marine resources.

For the South African Communist Party, this geographic and economic reality demands the development of a Coastal Revolutionary Programme linking Party structures in KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape into a coordinated political initiative capable of transforming the oceans economy in the interests of the working class.

2. Establishing a coastal working-class alliance

The first step in this process must be the creation of a coastal working-class alliance linking fisher communities, dockworkers, maritime workers and coastal rural communities across all three provinces.

This should bring together small-scale fisher organisations along the Wild Coast, the KwaZulu-Natal north and south coasts, and the fishing towns of the Western Cape. It must also include dockworker unions operating in Durban, Richards Bay, Ngqura, Gqeberha, East London and Cape Town, as well as fish processing workers employed in seafood factories across the Western Cape and Eastern Cape. Youth organisations in coastal communities facing high levels of unemployment and women involved in fish processing and coastal informal economies must also form a central part of this movement.

These groups can begin to challenge the concentration of marine resource ownership in corporate hands and assert the rights of coastal communities to participate meaningfully in the oceans economy.

Political education must accompany this organisational work. Coastal communities must develop a clear understanding of the political economy of the oceans sector, including how fishing quotas are allocated, how multinational shipping corporations dominate maritime logistics, and how global capital extracts wealth from marine resources located within South Africa's maritime territory.

These organised forces must become the social base of a mass democratic movement for the transformation of the oceans economy.

A central pillar of the programme must be a coordinated national campaign for community-based fishing rights across the three coastal provinces.

The current quota allocation system has resulted in the concentration of access to marine resources in the hands of a relatively small number of large corporations. Although some transformation has taken place since the end of apartheid, many coastal communities remain excluded from meaningful participation in the fishing economy.

The Party must therefore advocate for a new fisheries governance model based on community fishing quotas, worker-owned fishing cooperatives, public oversight of quota allocation, limits on corporate concentration of quotas and sustained support for small-scale fishing fleets and infrastructure.

Community quotas should be allocated to democratically governed coastal cooperatives rather than private corporations. These cooperatives must be supported through state financing, training programmes and improved access to markets.

Such a model would allow coastal communities to move beyond their current position as marginalised labour within the fishing industry and become active participants in the ownership and management of marine resources.

3. *Building a cooperative maritime economy*

The transformation of the oceans economy must extend beyond fisheries to encompass the broader maritime economy.

We must champion the development of a cooperative maritime economy in which workers and communities participate directly in ownership structures across multiple sectors.

This includes the establishment of worker-owned fish processing facilities, community cold storage and distribution networks, cooperative aquaculture projects, community-based marine tourism initiatives, and local boat-building and maritime maintenance industries.

Through these initiatives the value chain of the oceans economy can be progressively socialised, ensuring that more of the wealth generated from marine resources remains within coastal communities rather than flowing outward to corporate shareholders and global markets.

4. Transforming ports into developmental hubs

The major ports of Durban, Richards Bay, Ngqura, Gqeberha, and Cape Town form critical nodes within global shipping networks. Yet their economic potential for local development remains underutilised.

The Party must advocate for a developmental maritime strategy in which ports function not merely as transit points for global trade but as engines of regional industrialisation and employment creation.

This requires the expansion of ship repair and shipbuilding industries, the development of maritime manufacturing clusters, training programmes for maritime engineering and logistics, and the implementation of strong local procurement policies within port operations.

The strategic objective must be to transform port cities into centres of maritime industrial development rather than simply logistics gateways serving global capital.

5. Provincial programmes for SACP structures

The oceans economy is nationally interconnected, but concrete political programmes must be implemented within each coastal province.

KwaZulu-Natal. The Party must prioritise mobilisation among dockworkers in the Port of Durban, industrial workers in the Richards Bay complex, small-scale fishers along the north and south coasts, and youth facing unemployment in coastal towns. Provincial structures should campaign for community fishing rights for coastal villages, the development of cooperative seafood processing facilities, expanded maritime training programmes and stronger regulation of multinational shipping corporations operating through Durban. At the same time, the Party must engage critically with *Operation Phakisa* to ensure that ocean economy initiatives do not simply deepen corporate control over marine resources.

Eastern Cape. The Wild Coast contains the most economically marginalised coastal communities in the country despite possessing enormous marine resource potential. Party structures must prioritise organising small-scale fishers along the Wild Coast, establishing cooperative fishing enterprises, expanding community aquaculture projects and ensuring local participation in port-linked development around Ngqura and the Coega Industrial Development Zone. The Party must ensure that coastal communities benefit directly from the economic activity generated by the province's ports and maritime industries.

Western Cape: The Western Cape remains the centre of South Africa's industrial fishing industry. The Party must confront the high concentration of fishing quotas in large corporations and advocate for a more equitable distribution of marine resources. This includes expanding small-scale fishing rights, supporting worker cooperatives in fish processing, ensuring that fishing communities such as Hout Bay, Saldanha Bay and St Helena Bay gain greater control over local fisheries, and challenging corporate concentration in the pelagic and hake sectors. SACP structures in the province must work closely with fishing communities to build a powerful movement for the democratisation of the fisheries sector.

6. Building maritime sovereignty

The transformation of the oceans economy also requires strengthening South Africa's capacity to exercise meaningful sovereignty over its maritime territory.

This requires expanding marine scientific research capacity, strengthening fisheries monitoring and enforcement systems, developing national shipbuilding capabilities and investing in maritime technology and ocean science.

Reducing dependency on foreign expertise and technology is essential if South Africa is to exercise real control over its marine resources and ensure that the wealth generated from the oceans contributes directly to national development.

Socialise the maritime economy

South Africa's oceans represent both immense wealth and a decisive frontier in the struggle for economic transformation. Yet the benefits derived from these maritime resources remain concentrated in the hands of multinational corporations and financial capital integrated into global markets. The existing global maritime regime, structured through the Law of the Sea, has formalised national jurisdiction over ocean spaces but has not fundamentally altered the unequal political economy governing the exploitation of marine resources. For the working class and coastal communities of South Africa, the question is therefore not only one of sovereignty over maritime territory but also of democratic ownership and control over the oceans economy itself.

Advancing the NDR requires confronting these contradictions directly. Transforming the oceans economy must go simultaneously with a progressive transformation of the legal and institutional frameworks that govern global maritime resources. Strengthening maritime sovereignty, expanding community access to marine resources, and socialising key sectors of the maritime economy are essential steps toward ensuring that the seas surrounding South Africa serve the development, dignity and collective prosperity of the working class rather than the accumulation of global capital. ■

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Beyond recognition: International Working Women's Day and the struggle for economic justice

Practical work by working-class forces must be undertaken to end systemic inequality, gendered divisions of labour, and economic exploitation, writes **Sanelisiwe Ngubane**

International Women's Day, commemorated annually on 8 March, emerged from the struggles of working-class women for better wages, shorter working hours, and political rights. Today, it remains a powerful moment to reflect on the lived realities of female labourers. Under capitalism, women's material conditions are shaped by systemic inequality, gendered divisions of labour, and economic exploitation. Central to this reality are unpaid care work, unemployment, and low wages.

Women perform most of the unpaid care work globally. This includes childcare, cooking, cleaning, caring for the elderly and the sick, and maintaining households. Although this labour is essential for reproducing the workforce and sustaining society, it is not recognised or compensated in the formal economy. Under capitalism, social reproduction is largely privatised within the family. The state and employers benefit from this arrangement because the costs of raising and sustaining workers are shifted onto households, particularly women. As a result, women carry a "double burden" of paid and unpaid work. Their time for education, skills development, or rest is limited, and economic dependency and vulnerability are reinforced.

Unpaid care work sustains capitalism, yet it remains undervalued and invisible in national accounting systems. Women are disproportionately affected by unemployment and precarious employment. Structural inequality, discrimination, and limited access to opportunities confine many women to informal, part-time, or temporary work. In contexts like South Africa, high overall unemployment intersects with gender, race, and class inequalities. Black and working-class women, in particular, often face higher unemployment rates, barriers to entering male-dominated sectors, and greater exposure to informal and insecure jobs without benefits or protections. Even when employed, women are more likely to work in sectors such as domestic work, retail, care services, and hospitality industries characterised by low pay and limited job security.

Capitalism relies on wage differentiation to maximise profits. Women's labour is often undervalued, leading to persistent wage gaps between men and women. This is justified through stereotypes about women's work being "supplementary" or less skilled. Low wages have material consequences such as increased poverty among women and higher rates of single mothers living below the poverty line, as well as reduced access to housing, healthcare, and education. The feminisation of poverty reflects how gendered wage inequality is embedded in the broader economic system. Women's material conditions are not uniform. Race, class, disability, and geographic location shape experiences of exploitation. Working-class and rural women often face compounded disadvantages, including limited access to public services and social protection. Capitalism interacts with patriarchy and historical systems of oppression

to deepen inequality. Therefore, addressing women's material conditions requires confronting both economic exploitation and gender oppression.

The South African Communist Party has increasingly raised the question of social reproduction as a central issue affecting the working class. Social reproduction refers to the work and social processes required to sustain human life and reproduce the labour force. This includes childcare, household work, caring for the sick and elderly, education, healthcare, and community support. Under capitalism, much of this work is unpaid, invisible, and largely carried out by women, particularly working-class women. The SACP campaign seeks to highlight these realities and mobilise society to transform the conditions under which social reproduction takes place.

Capitalism depends on the continuous reproduction of labour power. Workers must be raised, educated, fed, cared for, and maintained so that they can participate in production. However, the capitalist system shifts the cost of this process away from the state and employers and onto households, especially women. As a result, women carry the major burden of unpaid care work; many women face unemployment or low-paid employment, and essential care work remains undervalued and unrecognised in the formal economy.

This arrangement benefits capital because it reduces the cost of maintaining the labour force while relying on unpaid labour within families. The SACP argues that social reproduction should not remain a private burden on households. Instead, society must collectively support and organise care through strong public institutions, expansion of public childcare services, strengthening of public healthcare and education, improvement of social grants and social protection, ensuring decent wages and labour rights for care workers, and development of community-based care infrastructure.

Such measures would reduce the burden on women and strengthen the well-being of working-class communities. The campaign on social reproduction highlights the connection between class struggle and gender equality. Addressing unpaid care work and improving the material conditions of women workers is essential for building a more just and equitable society and transforming the conditions of social reproduction is not only a social necessity but also a crucial part of the broader struggle for socialism and working-class emancipation.

Drawing on Marx's analysis of social production, the party emphasises that the reproduction of labour power is essential for the functioning of capitalism, yet under the current system, it is largely uncompensated and invisible. To address this, society must collectively establish and support care through strong public institutions, including expanded public childcare services, strengthened healthcare and education, improved social grants, and fair wages and labour rights for care workers.

From a Marxist perspective, such measures reflect the principles of democratic planning, whereby social production, including care work, is coordinated collectively to meet human needs rather than generate profit. Transforming the conditions of social reproduction is not only a social necessity, but it is also a crucial part of the broader struggle for socialism and working-class emancipation. By transforming the conditions of social reproduction through public provision and social recognition, the campaign not only reduces the burden on women but also demonstrates how a

socialist approach to planning labour and care can advance both gender equality and working-class emancipation.

Marx conceptualised social production as the process through which society produces the goods and services necessary for human survival and development. This includes not only material goods (like food, clothing, and tools) but also the conditions of life, such as education, healthcare, and social care. Production is inherently social because it depends on cooperation among people, and individual labour alone is insufficient; the labour of many is interconnected through society's division of labour. Marx saw social production as the foundation of all social life, structured by class and labour relations. While capitalists exploit workers for surplus value, social reproduction (both material and social) ensures the continuity of society and the labour force; something essential for any economic system.

From a feminist perspective, there is a persistent concern with the undervaluation of social reproduction, both within and beyond formal markets. By understanding markets as socially embedded practices rather than neutral mechanisms, we gain a more nuanced view of how market structures shape the recognition and value of social reproduction, particularly caregiving, when it is organised as market activity. This approach highlights that the commodification of care can obscure its social and relational significance, often reinforcing existing gender inequalities. The following section explores this relationship in greater depth and considers its implications for models of market socialism that aim to integrate care and social reproduction into equitable economic planning.

Under capitalism, market value is closely tied to material wellbeing, power, and social status. Higher incomes provide individuals with greater capacity to meet their material needs, while market recognition in the form of wages is often associated with prestige and influence. Because market valuation dominates as a mode of assigning worth, systematic undervaluation within the market has concrete effects on people's material conditions, power, and social standing. Women, particularly women of colour, are disproportionately employed in sectors dominated by social reproductive labour. As a result, the distribution of income, power, and status is closely intertwined with both gender and race. It is, however, important to differentiate the role of markets under capitalism from the role they might play under socialism. The key question is whether markets under socialism would produce similar disparities in material wellbeing, power, and status among participants. If they do, this raises a strong argument against organising social reproduction primarily through market mechanisms in a socialist framework.

On International Women's Day, it is crucial to move beyond symbolic celebration and examine the structural realities facing women workers. Unpaid care work, unemployment, and low wages are not accidental; they are systemic features of an economic order that depends on gendered inequality. The struggle for women's emancipation remains inseparable from the struggle for economic justice. Transforming women's material conditions requires policies and movements that demand recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work, provision of decent work and living wages, provision of universal social protection, and establishment of economic systems that prioritise people over profit.

International Working Women's Day is not only a day of recognition; it is also a call to collective action for dignity, equality, and social transformation. Social production

encompassing both market and non-market forms of work, including the vital labour of social reproduction, remains central to the functioning of society and the economy. Yet, under capitalism, much of this labour, particularly care work, is systematically undervalued, with profound consequences for material wellbeing, power, and status, especially for women, with women of colour being the most impacted. ■

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The new extraction economy and the working-class wage-drain

Sarah Mokwebo examines the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie through online gambling

The majority, if not all, African children grow up being told that education is the path out of poverty: go to school, work hard, graduate, get a good job and take care of yourself and your family. For Cebile, reality proved far harsher. She never imagined that her first formal job after graduating would lead her to battling a gambling addiction. Like many young African graduates, employment was meant to be a breakthrough- not only for herself, but for her entire family. Instead, delayed wages by her employer and mounting responsibilities pushed her into the hippopotamus jaws of online gambling, leaving her with debt, deep financial distress and strained family relations.

Cebile's story may be personal but it is not individual. It belongs to a class: the millions of South African workers who sell their labour to survive. They receive wages that are insufficient to cover the cost of reproducing that same labour-power, and they are then targeted by an industry that profits from the gap between their wages and the cost of supporting human life. In an economy characterised by mass unemployment, precarious work and rising living costs, employment no longer protects workers from poverty.

Online gambling platforms did not stumble into this crisis; they were drawn to it, the way all capital is drawn to concentrations of unmet need. What goes largely unspoken is that online gambling functions as a mechanism of surplus extraction, a secondary site of accumulation, one that operates after the wage has been paid, in the hours and desperation that exploitation leaves behind.

An industry built on insecurity due to insufficient wages

In September 2025, data from Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) revealed how deeply gambling has entered everyday economic life. Gambling and betting now make up more than a third of revenue in the personal services industry, making it one of the country's largest service sectors. At the household level, gambling accounts for more than half of all spending on recreation and culture, crowding out sports, books, holidays, and the small dignities that make life liveable beyond bare subsistence. Taking away the little human dignity and meaning that come with recreational spending and activities.

Even more striking is the pace of its growth. Revenue from online gambling and betting services has become the fastest-growing component of the personal services economy over the past five years. It is worth pausing and expanding on what kind of growth this is. Marx observed that capital does not care about the use-value of what it produces, only that it generates exchange value, profit, and accumulation. The gambling industry is perhaps the purest expression of this logic: it produces nothing of social value, creates almost no decent employment, builds no skills and transfers no useful knowledge. What it produces, with extraordinary efficiency, is the upward transfer of money. The growth of this industry is not a social good. It is the statistical record of extraction.

The shift from physical casinos to online betting platforms tells the structural story. Casinos once dominated South Africa's gambling landscape, commanding 84% of market share in 2009/10, while betting accounted for just 10%. During the Covid-19 pandemic – when the working class in their majority were isolated in their homes, their incomes threatened, anxious about their health and separated from their communities and loved ones – betting finally dethroned casinos to become the dominant form of gambling.

The declining relevance of physical casinos illustrates one of capital's most reliable characteristics: its ability to adapt in the face of any obstacle to accumulation. When the physical infrastructure of extraction was temporarily closed, it relocated into the phone in every working-class' pocket. The smartphone replaced the casino floor, and the industry never looked back.

The reserve army and the betting app

To understand who online gambling targets, Marx's concept of the *reserve army of labour* is indispensable. Capitalism, Marx argues, requires a pool of unemployed and underemployed workers. This reserve army disciplines those in work by keeping wages low, workers compliant and the threat of replacement ever-present. In South Africa, where unemployment sits above 40%, this reserve army is not a theoretical abstraction. It is a lived reality in every township, every informal settlement, every household where one employed person carries four or six.

It is precisely this population – the structurally unemployed, the precarious, the chronically underpaid – that online gambling platforms have identified as their core market. For someone excluded from formal economic participation, a betting app offers the seductive simulation of economic agency: the feeling of doing something, of being in the game, of having a chance. Every bet is a small wager against the conditions of one's own dispossession. The platforms have not created this desperation. They simply have learned to monetise it with remarkable precision.

Young people and the unemployed are most heavily exposed, with youth unemployment in South Africa exceeding 60% by expanded definition.

Payday betting: intercepting the wage

There is a pattern that researchers and analysts have come to recognise with grim familiarity: the payday spike. Within hours of salary deposits hitting accounts at the end of the month, betting app traffic surges. This is not coincidence but design.

Marx describes the wage as the price of labour-power, the minimum payment required to reproduce the worker's ability to work the following day, week or month. The wage, even when paid, is already a diminished thing: it represents only a fraction of the value the worker creates. What online gambling does is intercept even this reduced payment at its most vulnerable moment – the instant between receiving wages and expenditure, when the worker briefly holds more money than they will for the rest of the month.

Gambling platforms have built their entire product logic around this rhythm. Apps send push notifications timed around salary payment cycles. They offer bonuses structured to capture funds in the first days after payday. The architecture is engineered to compete directly with the landlord, household groceries, and school fees for the worker's wages, and it is designed to win.

For many people like Cebile, the first bet rarely feels like gambling in any conventional sense. It feels like strategy, a calculated attempt to close the gap between what wages

provide and what life costs. This is not anecdotal. Survey results from InfoQuest found that 53% of respondents gambled because they needed extra money or believed a big win would change their lives and those of their families. The bet, in other words, is not irrational. It is a rational response to an irrational economic condition. It is the predictable behaviour of a class the wage system has already failed, reaching for the only instrument the market has made available to them.

With food to put on the table, a sibling's school uniform to pay for, a parent's leaking roof to repair and a salary that never quite stretches, placing a bet on a football match can seem less like leisure and more like a calculated attempt to close the gap between what wages provide and what life costs. This is the ideological sleight of hand that the industry depends upon – the conversion of a structural problem (wages too low to meet living expenses) into a personal opportunity (a chance to win enough to cover the shortfall). The cause remains "invisible". The solution is online gambling.

How extraction advertises itself as liberation

Capitalism has always been skilled at concealing its own logic. Workers do not see a system that underpays them and then extracts what little remains; they see a betting app, a bonus, a jackpot, an opportunity to make a quick buck. The structural cause of their financial distress and the product marketed as its solution appear, on the same screen, as entirely unrelated things. This is not a failure of awareness. It is ideology doing its job.

The advertising saturation that surrounds online gambling in South Africa is ideological work in the most precise sense. Platforms like Hollywoodbets and Betway, which are amongst the biggest in South Africa, do not advertise their product as a mechanism for redirecting money from poor to rich, though structurally this is what it is. They advertise it as entertainment, excitement, and above all, opportunity. Their branding wraps taxi ranks, interrupts radio broadcasts, sponsors the soccer jerseys worn by children and sports teams, predominantly followed by working-class communities, and floods social media feeds with manipulated testimonials from winners. The winner is always visible. The millions who lose are statistically necessary but narratively absent.

This is the ideological function of gambling advertising: to represent a system of extraction as a system of opportunity. To make the product that harvests wages appear to be the mechanism that multiplies them. Capital has always required this kind of mystification. Online gambling has refined it to an art form, delivered directly to the screens of those it intends to extract from.

Social reproduction and household collapse

The financial consequences of problem gambling rarely stay contained to the individual gambling. They ripple outward through households and communities. In South Africa's working-class households, social reproduction – the unwaged and undervalued labour of maintaining life, raising children, caring for the elderly and sick and sustaining households overall – is already performed under conditions of extreme stress. Women carry out a disproportionate share of this labour.

When gambling losses enter the household- as they did in Cebile's case, quietly at first, then catastrophically- the burden falls on the same informal networks of care that were already stretched. Her debt became her family's debt. Her gambling problem became her household's burden to carry. The costs of her addiction became socialised- distributed across her sister, their children and the overall community, while the profits that enabled it were privatised, flowing upward to platforms and their shareholders. These are the social harms of gambling.

This is the logic of capitalist extraction made visible in miniature: risk and cost borne collectively by the poor; reward concentrated privately among the wealthy. Household budgets absorb the shock of gambling losses through reduced food spending, delayed rent, unpaid living debts, and mounting micro-debt from loan sharks. Children in gambling-affected households experience the same material deprivation as children in households suffering job loss, because at the level of the kitchen table, the financial outcome is the same. Capital extracts. The household absorbs.

Finance capital and the new extractive frontier

In this respect, online gambling belongs to a broader phenomenon that Marxist economists have identified in the post-industrial era: the rise of finance capital and rentier extraction as primary sites of accumulation. When production no longer generates sufficient returns, capital turns to extraction, to financial products, to debt, to the monetisation of precarity itself. Lenin, writing a century ago, described imperialism as the domination of finance capital over productive capital. The forms have mutated since then, but the logic is recognisable: value is not created but captured, not produced but harvested from the incomes of the already poor.

The comparison with loan sharks and micro-credit extractors is not a rhetorical flourish- it is a structural analysis. Both industries target the same class: working-class and poor households with insufficient income and inadequate access to formal credit. Both profit from the desperation that capitalism produces through low wages and unemployment. Both extract without producing. And both maintain their operations not through violence or coercion, but through the formal legitimacy that the capitalist state provides- through licensing, regulation, and the tacit endorsement of institutions that benefit from tax revenue on gambling profits.

The gambling industry has achieved something the loan shark never managed: cultural legitimacy. It sponsors the national football team. It advertises during the evening news. It is publicly listed. Gramsci describes this as *hegemony,* the domination of ideas, the consent of the dominated. The industry does not need to hide its extraction because it has convinced a significant portion of its victims that they are participants rather than targets. This manufactured consent is among its most valuable assets. It is precisely for this reason that many working-class people do not consider online gambling and betting as problematic.

The public health crisis capital does not consider

The growth figures of the online gambling industry by StatsSA and others do not capture the full cost of online gambling's expansion. Financial reports do not count the inaccessible counselling sessions, the household breakdowns, the increases in domestic violence cases, the suicides, or increased substance abuse. They only register the gambling revenue as economic activity and record nothing on the other side of the ledger – the social costs that communities, households, and public health systems must absorb.

This accounting blind spot is not an oversight. It is structural. The costs of social reproduction, including the costs of repairing the damage that exploitation and extraction are externalised onto workers, families, communities and sometimes, the state's depleted social services budget. The industry captures the profit. Society pays the bill. Gambling disorder is a recognised and serious mental health condition. It is also, in South Africa, profoundly under-resourced, with treatment infrastructure wholly inadequate to the scale of the crisis the industry's own growth has generated.

What South Africa is experiencing is not simply a growth industry finding its market. It is primitive accumulation in a new costume: the systematic transfer of income from the class that has only its labour to sell to the class that owns the platforms, the servers, the algorithms and the advertising networks. The casino floor has moved into our townships and personal devices. The extraction is just quieter now, dressed in the language of entertainment and individual choice.

Wage drain by another name

The story of online gambling in South Africa is ultimately a story about class and accumulation. When a factory worker places a bet on payday and loses, that loss does not disappear into the void. It travels from their account to that platform's revenue, from a working-class household to a corporate balance sheet, from a community to a shareholder who will never set foot in the township where that money originated. This is the *realisation* of surplus value: the moment when what has been extracted in the sphere of production (or, here, in the sphere of household income) is converted into capital.

This is what wage drain looks like in the era of digital economies: not a payslip deduction, but a subtly coercive notification; not a foreman demanding uncompensated overtime, but an algorithm calibrated to ensure that the house always wins. The mode of extraction may be new, but the class relation it serves is old.

Cebile eventually sought help. She is still dealing with the consequences. Millions of others are still mid-bet, still hoping, still losing – not because they are irrational or reckless, but because they are poor in a system that has found a new and enormously profitable way to make money from their poverty. ■

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After the abduction of President Maduro: the plunder of oil and the new danger facing the Global South

Lefika Chetty examines the context of the latest round of US aggression against Venezuela and the need for concerted action by the Global South.

The abduction of a sitting head of state and his wife by US military forces ranks among the most serious assaults on national sovereignty in recent decades. On 3 January 2026, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were forcibly removed from their own country in an operation marked by aerial bombardment, the disabling of air defences and the deployment of special forces in Caracas.

Let us be clear, this was not law enforcement; it was the use of armed force against a sovereign state, a flagrant breach of international law and, by any serious definition, an act of war.

The brazenness of that operation was conducted without United Nations authorisation and without even the pretence of multilateral consent. It resembled more the ugliest traditions of colonial diplomacy, where power alone determined the legitimacy of a country's invasion.

Within days of the abduction and raid, President Maduro and his wife were flown to New York where President Maduro appeared before a US federal court on 5 January to face trumped-up charges of narcoterrorism and drug trafficking.

Meanwhile, in Caracas, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as interim President of Venezuela, pledging to secure their return while attempting to stabilise a country reeling from the shock of invasion. At the same time, the US tightened its grip of terror by seizing multiple oil tankers linked to Venezuela, including vessels flying the Russian flag, an unmistakable attempt to assert control over maritime routes and energy flows.

These actions have provoked sharp international condemnation. Russia denounced the tanker seizures as escalatory, while the UN Secretary General António Guterres warned that the precedent being set was "dangerous".

Imperialist thinking

Donald Trump then publicly proclaimed that the US would "run Venezuela" for an undefined period when he was asked how long such an occupation might last. His answer was not framed in terms of humanitarian relief or democratic restoration. Instead, he spoke of rebuilding oil infrastructure and assured the US public that the occupation would "cost us nothing" because Venezuelan oil would pay for it. This is imperial thinking stripped of euphemism; it is a foreign territory being reduced to a balance sheet and its resources earmarked to underwrite conquest.

Washington's assumption is not merely that intervention is justified but that it is economically self-financing, as though empire were a business model rather than a

moral and legal outreach. Subsequent gestures, including the dispatch of a US delegation to Caracas to discuss "restoring" diplomatic ties, appear designed to normalise this domination under the language of cooperation.

Trump went further, promising to bring in US oil corporations to "do it right" and claiming, astonishingly, that Venezuela had "stolen our oil" as if the resources of an independent country belonged elsewhere by default.

All these calculated steps show how the mask of the US has slipped, this operation had nothing to do with narcotrafficking, democracy or human rights. It was about control over the world's largest proven oil reserves, capital accumulation and the reassertion of geopolitical dominance. In a period of energy transition and climate crisis, Venezuela's vast heavy crude reserves are not just economically valuable, they are strategically decisive. So, control over Venezuelan oil offers leverage over global markets, the ability to undercut rivals such as Russia and China and insurance against declining domestic production.

Trumps language of "stolen oil" is particularly insidious, turning over the historical reality of imperial plunder by portraying sovereign ownership as theft. Trump's threat of indefinite control over Venezuelan oil, reinforced by tanker seizures confirms the real agenda. By now we know and understand that for the US to implement its agenda of mineral resourses plundering, it has been calling in all sorts of favours to effect regime change in Venezuela. It is open knowledge today that the US used USAID, the US Endowment for Democracy for undemocratic ends by working with fifth column elements in Venezuela.

Elliot Abraham who is the point man for the US in Venezuela is a known mass murderer in the 1980s decade of US destabilisation in Latin America. He was also a major player in the Iran Contra Affair. Abraham has only one goal and that is to achieve US hegemony by any means necessary. Countries of the West think that they have the right of national sovereignty but countries from the global South can have its leaders imposed by the Empire. This intervention is not just an abnormality; it belongs to a long continuum of US power projection in Latin America and the Caribbean since the Second World War.

The track record of US imperialism spans more than a century of interventions ranging from coups and covert destabilisation to economic strangulation and targeted assassinations. The record shows us a consistent pattern. When any government has sought to control their own strategic resources, pursue alternative development paths or resist US hegemony, they are punished with regime change.

History recalls the 1954 overthrow of Guatemala's President Jacobo Árbenz after land reforms threatened United Fruit Company interests or the 1973 coup against Chile's President Salvador Allende following the nationalisation of copper. Then there was the 1989 invasion of Panama, framed as an arrest operation but neatly consolidating control over the canal.

Coerced concession

Every case of US military operation is dressed in economic motives. Meanwhile, regimes aligned with Washington, regardless of their democratic deficits, are indulged. Honduras and Colombia, with long records of human rights abuses, remained favoured partners because they conform to the US narrative. Venezuela, like others before it, is targeted for placing social welfare above corporate profit. Even recent gestures such as the release of political prisoners, presented as "goodwill", carry the stench of coerced concession under occupation.

allowed to exercise real sovereignty over resources, political systems and development choices. If a powerful state can abduct a head of state, announce administration over another, sell its oil and disregard international law, then the same logic applies elsewhere.

In sub-Saharan Africa, countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo are rich in cobalt and coltan that is vital to electric vehicles and electronics. They could face similar pressure should they demand fairer terms or deepen ties beyond the Western orbit. In the Middle East, the occupation of Iraq from 2003 stands as a grim template where oil contracts were rewritten under duress. In Southeast Asia, states with strategic minerals or sea lanes like Indonesia or the Philippines may discover that independence is conditional on geopolitical obedience. We are seeing a doctrine that is taking shape from the US where resource-rich states that step outside prescribed alignments can be disciplined by force, reducing sovereignty to a revocable privilege. The uncertainty now hanging over energy projects involving non-Western partners illustrates how such actions fracture Global South cooperation.

This assault on Venezuela also strikes at the core achievements of decolonisation. The post-1945 order, however unevenly applied, rested on principles of sovereign equality, non-intervention and self-determination, precisely to prevent a return to open imperial conquest. It was against this backdrop that the UN Charter and regional bodies were forged to entrench these norms. Yet veto power and selective enforcement have steadily hollowed them out.

The 3 January 2026 operation in Venezuela treats international law as optional. If such behaviour is normalised, the Global South is pushed back toward a world where its territories are sites of extraction and administration rather than equal partnership. That would also jeopardise the decades of struggle from the Non-Aligned Movement's insistence on economic independence to continental efforts against neocolonialism that are now at risk. Worse still, this precedent may embolden other powers to justify their own expansions citing the same logic.

The continued boarding of oil tankers in the Caribbean by the US is showing how quickly unchecked power metastasises. This military assault follows years of economic warfare. Sanctions, financial blockades and asset seizures have devastated Venezuela's economy, restricting access to medicines, food and industrial inputs. These measures did not advance democracy; they imposed collective punishment with the aim of submission to the US.

Destabilisation through sanctions

Independent UN assessments have shown how sanctions imposed by the US on Venezuela exacerbated hyperinflation, contributed to excess deaths through shortages of medical supplies and crippled the oil sector's capacity to refine and export. By freezing assets abroad, gold reserves, refineries, revenues, Washington imposed a siege on the Venezuelan economy by starving the state and then blaming it for the resulting collapse. That economic destabilisation prepared the ground for this latest military action, creating a self-fulfilling narrative in which imposed suffering is used as proof of the Venezuelan government's failure.

Alongside this, the label of "narco-state" has been deployed to cloak aggression in the language of law enforcement. Even US intelligence assessments have contradicted the notion that criminal networks are directed by the Venezuelan state, while official drug enforcement data focuses overwhelmingly on routes through Mexico and Colombia that were countries long allied to Washington, with well documented cartel penetration to the US. For the US, accusations, whether based on legal veracity or

otherwise, are enough cause for intervention, so intervention for Washington seeks a legal cover after the fact, such as "weapons of mass destruction" were invoked in Iraq or "humanitarian intervention" in Libya.

Thus, President Maduro's courtroom appearance in New York amid shifting justifications for his abduction exposes the hollowness of the narrative.

We must agree that inside Venezuela, political polarisation is real. Foreign military intervention, however, does not resolve internal conflict. It militarises it. When opposition figures invite external forces, domestic struggles are transformed into arenas of geopolitical rivalry, breeding proxy conflicts rather than reconciliation. The 2019 recognition of an "interim president" by external powers illustrated this dynamic, channelling resources and legitimacy to favoured factions while marginalising negotiated solutions. Let us never forget how external forces prolonged suffering, as seen in Syria or Yemen, where great power competition turned local grievances into endless war.

In the days since the raid, Venezuelans have expressed anger, fear and despair with protests demanding the release of their President and the first lady by denouncing foreign aggression. Official warnings urging foreign nationals to leave only confirm the instability produced by intervention. The choice before the world is stark. If this act is tolerated, other powers will assert the same right within their own spheres. Africa's mineral rich states, Middle Eastern oil producers and Asian countries controlling critical sea lanes will live under a shadow where sovereignty is conditional and defiance invites abduction. Emerging economies from lithium rich Bolivia to oil rich Guyana could face similar coercion.

The erosion of international norms invites a multipolar order defined not by cooperation but by competing imperialisms. Rising tensions among major powers underscore how easily this logic can spiral.

The actual issue that hits a US nerve is that Venezuela emerged as a symbol of resistance against neoliberal policies and imperialist manipulation of domestic affairs. Venezuela allocates a significant portion of its budget to social programmes, free healthcare, subsidised food and mass housing projects – one of the largest state-led housing programmes in the world – contributing to widespread popular support and the flourishing of communal organisations including co-operatives. On the side of the economy, significant sectors of private capital were placed under public control or ownership. All these measures have been cause for the US to persistently create grounds for regime change to destabilise Venezuela's socialist oriented government.

It should be recalled that President Chávez survived a US-backed coup in 2002 and a subsequent lockout designed to create economic chaos. When that short-lived coup failed, the rich oligarchy went on strike and the Venezuelan economy shrunk by 29%. The regime-change ambitions of the US do not care about mass annihilation or the livelihood of civilians.

It is unfortunate how President Maduro's Presidency has been marked by US hostility, including attempts to provoke civil unrest and violent opposition. But what makes Venezuela's story remarkable is not the scale of the aggression it faces, rather the resilience with which its people respond. Despite more than a thousand unilateral sanctions, Venezuela has achieved 17 consecutive quarters of economic growth. It has also conducted a series of free and transparent presidential and parliamentary elections, extending to regional and local elections, which demonstrate the vibrancy of participatory democracy in the country. This resilience is a testament to the determination of the Venezuelan people under the leadership of President Nicolás

Maduro and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. It shows that even under siege, a sovereign people can defend their right to chart an independent, socialist oriented path of development.

Interconnected solidarity

Learning from the above, the Global South must respond not with militarism but with unity and resolve to halt this regression and reclaim the hard-won architecture of a just world order. South Africans know too well what it means to be demonised, destabilised and sanctioned. During the darkest days of apartheid, global narratives often sought to delegitimise our liberation movement. Economic sabotage and external pressure were constant weapons deployed to maintain the status quo. And yet it was international solidarity combined with the steadfastness of our people that helped us to overcome. Just as Cuba, the Soviet Union and progressive forces globally stood with us, so too must we stand with Venezuela today.

Solidarity is not charity; it is mutual recognition that our struggles are interconnected. We do not consider Venezuela to be a distant ally. Our countries meet in multiple multilateral spaces, including the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77 and most recently the BRICS family. It must be understood that these platforms are not mere diplomatic clubs. They are arenas where the Global South asserts its voice against the inequalities of a world order long dominated by the North. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States has declared the region a Zone of Peace. This is a principle that should resonate with Africans, who too have suffered wars fuelled by external interference. South Africa's support for Venezuelan sovereignty is, therefore, not only a matter of principle but also an affirmation of our own history and our vision of a multipolar world.

The immediate demands are therefore clear. President Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores must be released and returned to Venezuela. Military aggression by the US must cease. Sanctions must be lifted. Above all, Venezuelans, not foreign armies, must decide their future through inclusive processes that respect electoral outcomes and human rights without external dictate.

What is certain is that history will not judge this moment by one's opinion of President Maduro. It will ask whether the Global South defended the principle that nations have the right to control their resources and chart their political course free from coercion of Western powers. We must fully understand that the stakes of the Venezuelan military aggression by the US is continental and planetary. Venezuela is not simply a country under attack; it is a warning. If this precedent stands, it will not stop at the Orinoco River, the rivers of Congo, the sands of the Sahara or the straits of Malacca. Rather, all become potential theatres in a renewed age of empire where independence is revealed as fragile unless actively defended. We must insist that the international community never again be misled into another war built on lies, as it was in Iraq. The Venezuelan struggle is not isolated. It is part of the broader fight for justice, independence and socialism in the 21st century.■

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Exposing the deception of 'joint law enforcement'—how Trumpian imperialism codifies aggression as "rules"

Li Zhuoru locates the latest wave of US transgression in Central and South America within a solidly systemic imperialist context

At the beginning of January 2026, the US, continuing along the trajectory set during the Trump era of hegemonic policy, unleashed a large-scale military assault against Venezuela and simultaneously resorted to abduction and rendition to insert the act of directly into the clothing of law enforcement and judicial procedure. Bombardments were euphemistically designated as operations, kidnappings were re-baptised as prosecutions, and the trampling of sovereignty was rephrased as the governance of crime, while Nicolás Maduro and his spouse were physically transferred to New York and placed immediately within the framework of federal criminal procedure; at the same time, the president of the US publicly mused that the US would "temporarily run" Venezuela and juxtaposed the so-called "reconstruction" with the restoration of the oil and gas sector and the admission of large energy capital. In doing so, the narration of political and economic reorganisation was deployed simultaneously with the use of force.

The spokesperson for the Secretary General of the United Nations warned that this posture constitutes a "dangerous precedent" precisely because it seeks to write the pirate logic of might into a replicable rule: what can be done to Venezuela today could tomorrow be done to any state that refuses to heed the dictates of Wall Street and of the military-industrial consortium. This danger is also embodied in a frontal collision with the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter: the threat or use of force to resolve international disputes, the replacement of collective security mechanisms by unilateral action, and the elevation of domestic law above the principle of sovereign equality—if such practices are tolerated, the result is tantamount to declaring that international law is valid only against the weak.

The Caribbean Community emphasised the principle of sovereignty and the risks to regional stability; certain European Union member states articulated concerns in the idiom of international law and political settlement; Russia and China condemned the act as "armed aggression" and as "hegemonic behaviour". Governments in Latin America displayed a marked division: among right-wing administrations some voices expressed support, whereas in left-wing governments, or governments emphasising the jurisprudence of sovereignty, some openly opposed the action.

Meanwhile, a coalition of Indian left-wing parties, the Brazilian Workers' Party, the Portuguese Communist Party, the Communist Party of Chile and other organisations of the labour movement responded rapidly, concentrating their criticism upon the institutional consequences and diffusion effects likely to be generated by unilateral resort to force and by trans-border arrests. These responses ought not to be viewed as isolated diplomatic phrases but rather as differentiated positions taken by distinct forces around the nexus of "rules — sovereignty — capital expansion"; it is precisely at the intersections of these differentiations that the character and trajectory of the event deserve to be situated at the structural level rather than remaining at the plane of declaratory positions and moral verdicts.

For the international left movement, the primary yardstick by which a crisis should be judged is not whether a particular government is agreeable or disagreeable but whether imperialism is extending its repertoire of domination. During the Trump period, US hegemonism bound together three instruments into a single rope: financial blockade and asset freezing, extraterritorial law enforcement and judicial prosecution, and military deterrence and direct strike. The combination of these instruments has but one purpose: to demote disobedient states from sovereign subjects to objects that can be placed under trusteeship, to open a channel for monopoly capital to redistribute resources anew, and to write plunder into the register of "governance". Although these three tools appear to belong respectively to finance, jurisprudence and the military, they serve only one and the same set of beneficiaries: financial oligarchs seek control over settlement, energy corporations seek contractual control, and the military-industrial complex seeks orders for war.

In numerous discussions, attention has been deliberately diverted toward controversies within Venezuela as if all problems originate with the victim of aggression. It must be made explicit that this is the familiar smokescreen of imperialism: first rewrite aggression as the failure of governance, then describe plunder as assistance to reconstruction, and finally induce the populace to forget who is deploying artillery, financial blockades and courts to rewrite the destinies of others. To pull the discussion away from disputes over personal preferences is to seize upon the genuine contradiction, namely how the imperialist state apparatus conspires with monopoly capital and uses violence in conjunction with courts to advance a redistribution of resources, thereby consigning a country's oil, finance and political keys to a small coterie of capital groups. Only from such a standpoint can the internal chain linking discourse packaging, institutional arrangement and profit orientation be elucidated, and the key facts easily obscured by emotive polemic be returned to a comparative analytic framework that restores explanatory power rather than merely expressing attitudes.

Marxist–Leninist analysis is never satisfied with reciting "what happened"; it is concerned above all with why events assume a given form and toward what institutional consequences they are directed. The US juxtaposed its military assault with law enforcement and judicial procedures; on the one hand, it sheathed the use of force in the vocabulary of criminal justice and translated external intervention into the governance of "criminal networks", thereby forcibly inserting the political contradictions of inter-state conflict into the box of "public security cases"; on the other hand, it deployed economic narratives such as "temporary trusteeship", "running the state" and "rebuilding oil and gas" so as to lay in advance a veneer of legitimacy for the political-economic arrangements that follow from violence.

It is also necessary here to identify the class beneficiaries: when "running the state" and "rebuilding oil and gas" are placed side by side, those genuinely invited into the arena are not ordinary taxpayers but rather the alliance of energy oligarchs, financial capital and the military-industrial complex. To these interests, war is not an exception but a mode of revenue; "trusteeship" is not an emergency rescue but an occasion to convert the interfaces of state operation into assets that can be priced, traded and controlled. This dual discourse structure means that the event cannot be reduced either to a traditional military action or to an instance of trans-border law enforcement; it is better characterised as a specific configuration in which the imperialist state machine under contemporary conditions advances violence, legal form and capital arrangement in concert.

Based on this judgement, the discussion will proceed first to the institutional implications of the convergence of military force with law enforcement, then to the resource logic that underlies the discourse of "trusteeship — reconstruction", and finally back to the class differentiation embodied in the international reactions and its political expression, to advance the analysis from surface controversies to structural explanation and to leave open a clear path for subsequent empirical verification.

Firearms draped in courtroom attire: imperialism's camouflage of aggression as joint law enforcement

According to publicly available US materials, the defence department described the action as a "joint military and law-enforcement mission" and stressed inter-agency cooperation and long-term preparation, while the justice system invoked charges such as "narcoterrorism conspiracy", "conspiracy to import cocaine" and "weapons-related offences" to provide a criminal-jurisdictional framework for the seizure of Maduro. In its factual configuration, this arrangement implies that it unfolds neither along the single-line logic of a battlefield engagement nor along the single-line logic of a conventional extradition process, but instead compresses military force, intelligence apparatus and the chain of criminal procedure into a single continuous process and, in its narration, moulds cross-national coercion into a "crime-fighting operation" that can supposedly be absorbed within domestic procedure.

The critical issue is not the particular label affixed to the adversary but rather that the US treats its own domestic law as though it were international law, its own courts as though they were world courts, issuing a so-called "indictment" as a "veneer of legality" for cross-border force, thereby shifting the political responsibility for aggression into a debate over procedures. In the Marxist–Leninist view, law has never been a disembodied "yardstick of justice" but is an instrument of class domination. Imperialism's binding together of military violence and juridical form is not a matter of political power subordinating itself to law but of law providing the rostrum for political violence: it is through the outward semblance of "procedural propriety" that the substance of gunfire is concealed.

Engels, when discussing the origins of the state, emphasised that the state emerges as a public power under conditions of irreconcilable class antagonism; Lenin, in *The State and Revolution*, further summarised that the state is a machine of class rule. To carry this principle into the international plane is not to equate inter-state relations straightforwardly with class relations but rather to remind us that when capitalist states closely couple military violence with juridical form, the aim is seldom to make politics obey law and generally to make law obey politics, thereby packaging external coercion as a natural extension of internal order. More precisely, the form of law here functions both as a veil and as a conduit: on the one side, it translates material coercion into an acceptable narrative of "procedural propriety" and, on the other, it pushes the questioning of the use of force itself into a subsidiary position, making it easier for domestic opinion to be drawn into debates over whether the indictment is adequate or the evidence complete, while the political character, class orientation and institutional consequences of external violence are deliberately diluted.

A glance at past records shows that this is not "an exceptional case" but a conveyor belt of hegemony repeatedly employed: first, use the names of "security" or "humanity" to justify force, then use the names of capture and trial to remove adversaries and finally invoke "reconstruction" to renegotiate contracts and rewrite the distribution of resources. The lessons of Panama, Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya long ago made clear that imperialism never "maintains order" for free; it maintains only the profit order of monopoly capital.

During Trump's first term, unilateral sanctions were normalised, extraterritorial law enforcement was weaponised and military deterrence became a performative spectacle; the three borrow strength from one another and are directed at states that refuse to obey. For example, the US launched missile strikes in Syria and carried out the targeted killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani on Iraqi soil, while in Latin America it publicly recognised Juan Guaidó and promoted the narrative of a "temporary government", exerting sustained pressure upon Venezuela's energy and financial systems. Placing these facts in the same chronological sequence reveals a stable institutional logic: military coercion, law-enforcement language and extraterritorial jurisdiction advance in parallel and, when necessary, transform into one another and lend support to each other, thereby transcribing disputes over sovereignty into "crime governance" and then transcribing "governance" into "takeover", and thus laying out in advance a manipulable channel of legitimacy for subsequent political and economic reorganisation.

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What deserves vigilance is that once this transcription is accomplished the next step is often the technical details of "institutionalised trusteeship": overseas assets are frozen to induce fiscal asphyxiation; oil-and-gas contracts are renegotiated under the name of "compliance review"; key posts in regulation and finance are replaced in the name of "anti-corruption"; the foreign presence is prolonged under the name of "public security"; debts and procurement are bound in the name of "assistance". On the surface, each step appears to be a technical measure; taken together, they amount to the dismemberment of sovereignty and the parcelling out of the state. One must also pay attention to an even more insidious signal: once US courts create "citable precedents" in relevant cases and once the Treasury and its allies render sanctions lists into long-term mechanisms, a supposedly "temporary action" becomes a legal toolkit that can be repeatedly applied.

Still more perilous is that this trick of calling war "law enforcement" launders the cost of aggression within the US: the public is directed to quarrel over whether the trial proceeds smoothly yet is compelled to ignore a fundamental question—who authorised treating another nation's capital as a theatre of operations and another nation's sovereignty as a set of components to be assembled at will? Traditionally, a military operation must confront the political costs of war authorisation, budget scrutiny, casualties and challenges under international law; once it is described as a "righteous action of law-enforcement coordination", domestic debate is easily channelled into the terrain of criminal procedure—"was the suspect apprehended", "is the indictment well founded", "does the trial proceed smoothly"—and the scrutiny of the use of force itself is marginalised. Marx, in discussing the relation of law to the state, pointed out that juridical relations serve established material relations; in the present case, once force is incorporated into judicial discourse, legal form can be mobilised as an instrument of political organisation so that the capitalist state's external coercion gains a lower-friction pass domestically and creates the appearance in public mobilisation that "the state is merely performing its duty". Precisely because this formal innovation is unfolding before the eyes of the masses, it more readily produces "fait accompli" at the international level and compels other countries to bear higher structural costs in a reactive posture.

When situated within the framework of international institutions, the matter becomes still clearer: once a great power can cross borders to seize persons and bring them to trial in the name of "law enforcement", the sovereign equality promised by the United Nations Charter is degraded to a piece of paper, and the international order is rewritten as the law of the jungle in which "those with the bigger fists are entitled to interpret". Strong states can rewrite the rules of jurisdictional boundaries in the name of "law enforcement", while weak states are left to shoulder an evidently asymmetric burden between "acceptance" and "resistance".

Moreover, this redrawing of forms does not stop at the act of arrest; it almost inevitably points toward the construction of some "post-arrest order" and pushes the crucial circuits of state operation toward external rearrangement. On this basis, the next step must turn the gaze away from procedural form toward economic substance in order to examine how the discourses of "temporary trusteeship" and "reconstruction investment" wedge capital interests into the critical interfaces of state functioning, strangle the arteries of finance, energy and settlement, and promote reallocation of resource sovereignty, thereby linking the political outcome of the event more directly to the mechanisms of capital expansion.

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The so-called "reconstruction": a neo-colonial scheme in which the keys of a state are handed to the energy oligarchy

In the Venezuelan episode, the US openly placed the notion of "temporarily running Venezuela" together with the restoration of the oil-and-gas sector and the entry of large energy capital along a single chain of discourse; this single utterance lays bare the cards: "temporarily running the state" and "the entrance of oil-and-gas capital" occupy the same sentence, demonstrating that the subject of discussion is never the lives of the Venezuelan people but rather how to redistribute resource revenues in favour of external capital. The US tethers political control tightly to resource governance so that any narrative concerning a "vision of governance" is difficult to disentangle from an arrangement of "resource reconfiguration". The mere fact that trusteeship and the entry of oil-and-gas capital have been publicly juxtaposed suffices to show that the purpose of the action cannot be compressed into the single goal of criminal jurisdiction; to put it differently, once "trusteeship" and energy capital entry become structurally bound together, the arrangement no longer appears as a temporary administrative expedient but approaches an institutional re-writing oriented by profit flows, locking in advance the direction of future distribution at the critical interfaces of state operation.

Lenin had long since revealed that the essence of imperialism lies in monopoly capital's control over the state machine and in its pursuit of surplus profit through capital export and a renewed division of the world. In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism,* he specified that the key features of the imperialist stage include the formation of monopolies, the predominance of finance capital, the deepening of capital export and the division and re-division of the world. He also emphasised the parasitism and decay inherent in imperialism, pointing out that monopoly capital, in its quest for extraordinary returns, tends to institutionalise war and plunder. Under these structural conditions, the bond between the state machine and monopoly capital becomes tighter: military oligopolies, financial oligarchs and the diplomatic-military apparatus support one another, opening avenues for capital expansion through political coercion and reducing external resistance. Today the parallel appearance of "trusteeship" and "rebuilding oil and gas" is a direct manifestation of this essence under contemporary conditions—firepower opens the door; contracts remove the wealth. It is therefore a mechanism whereby capital export obtains political guarantees rather than a value-neutral technique of governance. The so-called "reconstruction" in this context is more akin to a redesign and relocking of the rules governing the distribution of resource income than to a spontaneous concern for social well-being and certainly not to an arrangement that gives precedence to the living needs of the local working masses.

Historical parallels present a relatively clear trajectory. The reshuffling of Iranian politics in 1953 was intimately intertwined with the redistribution of oil interests; after the 2003 Iraq war, the institutional reconstruction of the oil industry, the structuring of contracting arrangements and the policy packages collectively described as the "reconstruction economy" were long subject to international criticism; in Libya, external military intervention did not generate stable state capacity but instead repeatedly tore apart the fabric of social integration as resource revenues and armed forces competed in a fragmented manner. When these experiences are set alongside the unilateral sanctions that the US has continually escalated against Venezuela in recent years, one discerns a relatively stable operational logic: first, through financial sanctions, asset freezes and trade restrictions, state capacity is weakened and fiscal and supply strains are generated; then "reconstruction" is packaged as the only viable exit; next, under the label of "investment entry", key resource sectors are pushed into contractual regimes more favourable to external capital.

Trump's first term, during which the US recognised a "temporary government" in Venezuela, imposed energy sanctions and narrowed financial channels, already presented this logic in concentrated form in Latin America; the current open talk of "temporarily running" the country pushes the same logic to a more overt and more coercive stage, moving the contest over resource sovereignty from covert operation to direct expression. When this episode is placed within a longer historical coordinate, the old logic of the Monroe Doctrine resurfaces under a new wrapping: Latin America is treated as a "backyard" and sovereignty is treated as a concession subject to tiered management. The Trump era has merely shifted this logic from concealment to openness, turning "I have the right to manage you" into "I am coming to save you".

It is also necessary to observe that sanctions are often described as "non-military means", yet their impact upon social reproduction frequently approximates chronic coercion and may, over time, form a more enduring and more easily spread structure of oppression. In reality, sanction is another form of war—it may not demolish buildings immediately, but it can over time hollow out supplies, medicines, public services and the lives of workers, converting the everyday existence of the masses into chronic suffocation. Cuba's long-term experience under blockade has already illustrated that financial restrictions and trade restrictions continuously create gaps in the supply of goods, industrial chains and public services and, at the level of daily life, accumulate structural vulnerabilities; when such vulnerabilities overlap with military intervention, "reconstruction" is more readily packaged as "rescue", whereas its actual function may become an institutional channel for the re-entry of capital. Marx, in his analysis of the history of capital formation in *Capital*, emphasised that coercive dispossession is often coordinated with juridical form; under contemporary conditions, compulsion may not manifest itself as overt plunder but is more likely to rely upon contracts, debts and financial arrangements to channel streams of revenue consistently toward core capital and to translate political submission into what appears to be voluntary "market choice". For this very reason, the discourse of "reconstruction" must be examined in conjunction with the mechanism for allocating capital interests if one is to understand why the narrative of "trusteeship" emerges so swiftly after the guns have spoken and seeks in the narrative arena to pre-emptively occupy the high ground of legitimacy.

Imperialism is also particularly fond of throwing out a moral trap: as long as one affixes labels of corruption or criminality to the adversary, cross-border violence and state takeover seem to be justified. It must be emphasised that if this logic is accepted the world would regress to a colonial era—once a mighty power declares you guilty, it may declare itself the administrator. We know, however, that Marxism–Leninism requires us to return questions to the scale of institutions: even the existence of serious criminal accusations does not automatically lead to the legitimacy of external military intervention and the assumption of state operation, for once one admits that a criminal charge suffices as grounds for cross-border aggression and the trusteeship of resource sectors, the foundations of the international order shift from sovereign equality to the discretion of might, and weaker states are placed institutionally in a position where they may be disposed of at will.

Lenin, in addressing the national question, emphasised the right of nations to self-determination and called for proletarian internationalism to oppose all forms of national oppression; to consign the future of a country to an external power to "run" it, no matter what moral story is used as packaging, is in direct conflict with this principle and reduces the fate of the nation to a variable in the machinery of an imperialist state. It is precisely in this sense that one must now examine closely the international responses and, in their differentiation, discern the class positions and interest orientations concealed behind the rule discourse, thereby pushing the discussion from moral disputation to structural explanation.

Who defends sovereignty and who opens the door for might? Class differentiations in the international reaction

From the Secretary General's spokesperson at the United Nations warning against a "dangerous precedent", to the Caribbean Community's emphasis upon sovereignty and regional stability, to certain European Union member states articulating concerns framed in terms of international law and political solution, to Russia and China's characterisation of the action as "armed aggression" and "hegemonic behaviour", respectively, as well as the division among Latin American states between support and opposition, this series of reactions does not constitute a mere collection of juxtaposed diplomatic statements. More accurately, it constitutes a spectrum of positions around the axis of "rules — sovereignty — capital expansion", reflecting the different ways in which distinct forces, confronted by the same structural contradiction, distribute the burdens of risk, the proceeds of order and the responsibilities of politics. For those who uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter to maintain international peace, such differentiation itself means that the normative foundation of the post-war order is being eroded through the repeated appearance of hegemonic actions, and that when such erosion is tolerated as normal, peaceful co-existence is compelled to give way to arbitrary discretion, pushing inter-state relations into a more brutish logic of hierarchy and converting the institutional security of weaker states into a variable in the policy toolkits of great powers.

From a Marxist perspective, the discourse of international law must be analysed dialectically. International law is not a supra-class moral code. It more often appears as a condensation of the balance of national forces at the institutional level and in the operation of the capitalist world system exhibits a pronounced selectivity: capitalist states emphasise rules when they seek to present existing arrangements as universal norms and circumvent rules when those rules impede their interests so as to portray exceptions as urgent necessities. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the 2018 unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran accompanied by the resumption of "maximum pressure" all jointly demonstrate that the powerful tend to treat rules as tools rather than as constraints. Because this historical tradition has not disappeared, the fact that certain European states stress international law does not necessarily imply that they possess an anti-imperialist stance. On the contrary, this invocation of rules often serves the stable expectation of their own capital interests rather than the right to self-determination of the oppressed. In this sense, the tension between formal law and actual interest must be laid bare rather than replaced by benevolent assumptions; otherwise, analysis will misread structural contradictions as value disagreements and misread calculations of interest as commitments to norms.

Therefore, attitudes toward international law must be combative: one must both use rules to expose the illegality and double standards of might and reveal the class roots of the instrumentalisation of rules by might. In the hands of imperialism, rules are often used like a rope—when needed they bind others, when not needed, they are cut.

Returning the gaze to Latin America, the divided reactions refract the concrete choices made by different political alliances between the "securitisation agenda" and the "sovereignty doctrine": certain right-wing governments treat the US action as an opportunity to oppose left-wing forces and to reset the regional political map, attempting to convert external coercion into a resource for domestic political mobilisation; certain left-wing governments or those emphasising principles of sovereignty view it as a direct challenge to regional autonomy and therefore stress the red line of non-intervention. Even within the same state, distinct political forces may reach opposing judgments. This is unsurprising because disagreements between states often extend backward to the modes of domestic class politics and the recombination of alliances of interest. For the working class and labouring masses, the issue is never abstract; it ultimately materialises in a series of palpable consequences: whether the space for social policy is compressed, whether resource revenues are redirected toward external capital through contracts, finance and regulatory interfaces, whether political choices are continuously contracted by might in the name of "law enforcement", and whether the reform agenda is forced into a posture of reactive response under asymmetric pressure.

Put simply, this so-called "trusteeship — reconstruction" generally translates into four outcomes borne by workers: prices and medicines become more scarce, employment becomes more precarious, public services are squeezed, and the political space of trade unions and mass organisations is narrowed under the pretext of "security". The ledger of imperialism never carries the entry "people's well-being". It carries only profit rates and return cycles.

The clearest class cues are provided by the statements of left-wing parties and labour organisations. A joint declaration by Indian leftist parties characterised unilateral force and cross-border arrests as acts of aggression and called for social mobilisation; the Brazilian Workers' Party, the Portuguese Communist Party, the Communist Party of Chile and other organisations likewise placed sovereignty, non-interference and international law at the centre of their positions, emphasising the risk to regional peace and warning that institutional precedents may be reproduced elsewhere. For the labour movement, such reactions do not constitute moral endorsements of any government but rather institutional vigilance against the interventionist mode of might, because once one allows a powerful state to rewrite disputes over sovereignty as "crime governance" and then to propel "governance" toward "takeover", the political agency of the working population is the first to be curtailed and social reform and public welfare are the first to bear the cost.

In his writings on proletarian internationalism, Lenin demanded opposition to all forms of oppression and interference in the national question and emphasised that the working class must maintain its independence and not entrust its fate to the diplomatic calculations of the bourgeoisie. From this, one derives a clear judgement: if sovereignty can be stripped away at will under the pretext of "law enforcement", the first thing to be constricted is not an abstract juridical clause but the concrete space in which labouring people decide their own path.

Against this background of international differentiation, the trajectory of the event must be projected using institutional logic rather than conjectured through emotion. On the one hand, the US stresses criminal indictment; on the other, it puts forward a governance vision of "running the state". At the very least, this implies two possible paths: one path is to compress the action into a judicialised episode, reducing military presence and controlling the cost in international law so as to lessen external resistance; the other path is to institutionalise "temporary trusteeship" gradually, to prolong the external presence for reasons of security and to reorganise the resource sector, thereby transforming short-term disposal into long-term institutional embedding. Historical experience repeatedly reminds us that once the second path commences, the so-called "short-term trusteeship" readily evolves into long-term occupation or continuous intervention, because external coercion, once it acquires institutional interfaces, often reproduces itself and shifts the conditions for withdrawal ever further back.

Iraq and Afghanistan already demonstrate that military victory does not automatically translate into political stability. On the contrary, it may accumulate new contradictions, widen social wounds and push state capacity toward greater fragility. Precisely because this risk has real comparables, left-wing forces need to divert their attention from simple alignment to the identification of structural tendencies and to convert such identification into cross-border organisational capacity so that opposition to intervention does not remain at the level of declarations but can, in institutional terms, form a sustainable countervailing force.

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Imperialism's "trusteeship" is never first written into a communiqué; it always strikes finances and settlements first, then regulation and personnel, and only subsequently places political arrangements on the table. In terms of foresight, we believe at least three indicators can be proposed: whether, under the name of "temporary administration", there is a restructuring of personnel and powers in finance, the central bank and energy regulatory agencies; whether there is a more severe freezing of overseas assets and settlement channels that forces domestic policy to turn toward "acceptance of conditions"; whether there are contractual packages and long-term procurement bindings under the name of "aid — reconstruction". As soon as any two of these emerge simultaneously, "short-term trusteeship" will in substance slide toward long-term occupation or continued intervention.

Viewed as a whole, the event reveals not merely the fate of a particular government but, once again, the reappearance, under conditions of imperialism, of the mutual configuration of the state machine and the modes of capital expansion: military strike and criminal justice are woven into a single chain of action, the boundaries of sovereignty are redrawn through force under the name of "law-enforcement cooperation", the narratives of "temporary operation" and "reconstruction investment" bind political control to the reconfiguration of resources; international reactions, though often couched in juridical language, at a deeper level present a differentiation of class positions and calculations of national interest. Regardless of how observers evaluate Venezuela's domestic politics, this structural fact should not be obscured. On the contrary, it ought to be regarded as an important entry point for assessing contemporary techniques of imperialist governance, because what is displayed here is not an accidental deviation but a template of hegemony that can be replicated: first impose blockade, then initiate indictment, then unleash bombardment, and finally, under the heading of "reconstruction", write the contracts.

Marxist–Leninist principles here have immediate contemporary significance. First, the principle that the state is an instrument of class rule reminds us that the "rule of law" discourse of powerful states does not automatically produce justice; it is quite likely only a formal renewal of state violence, using procedural narrative to lower domestic political friction and the appearance of legality to weaken the cohesion of international opposition. Second, the theory of imperialism reminds us that the combination of capital export, resource control and military force is not an accidental concatenation but a normal mechanism by which monopoly capital maintains its rate of profit and consolidates its dominant position; its mode of operation is often manifested at crisis junctures through the rewriting of distribution rules by political coercion. Third, the principles of national self-determination and proletarian internationalism remind us that opposing external forced takeover and defending the right of working peoples in each country to decide their own path is not merely an abstract moral posture but the minimum political requirement of an anti-imperialist stance and a practical prerequisite for maintaining international peace and peaceful co-existence, because once sovereign equality is replaced by the discretion of might, war will recur at ever lower cost.

Tasks of the international left and the workers' movement in defence of sovereignty

For the international left and the workers' movement, the critical task is not to allocate marks to governments at a distance but to translate the "dangerous precedent" into actionable, accumulative and accountable institutional propositions and organisational practices. On the one hand, it is necessary to work toward bringing the relevant issues before the

United Nations Security Council and other multilateral mechanisms, to use procedural agenda setting to compel hegemonic powers to bear higher political and juridical costs for unilateral action and to interrupt the inertia that seeks to downgrade international disputes to narratives of domestic law.

On the other hand, it is essential to take a clear stance against the expansion of extraterritorial jurisdiction through unilateral force, against the rewriting of resource sovereignty under the rubric of "trusteeship", and against the packaging of the reorganisation of resource sectors as a neutral technique in order to evade the core question of redistribution of benefits; at the same time, support must be extended to the countries of Latin America and of the global South to strengthen regional coordination and steadily reduce dependence upon a single financial system and a single settlement channel in order to increase the external cost of intervention by might and to narrow its policy space. In this process, trade unions, left-wing parties, social organisations and research institutions need to form stable liaison mechanisms that effectively connect fact-finding, legal argumentation, public mobilisation and humanitarian support so that international solidarity does not rest at the level of rhetorical expression but can produce visible effects at the level of rules and organisation and so that a public rationality of opposition to intervention can be built up continually on verifiable chains of fact.

It is all the more imperative to transform principles into a list of tasks for struggle: to organise transnational union and left-party investigations and verification of information so that chains of aggression can be made public and accountable; to foster anti-war and anti-sanctions mobilisation so that the truth that "sanctions are war" is converted into mass pressure; to support Latin American integration and alternative settlement arrangements to weaken the stranglehold of financial hegemony; to establish coordinated juridical and publicity mechanisms that concentrate attention on exposing the hegemonic essence of extraterritorial judiciary; and to reinforce international solidarity and assistance so that humanitarian support and anti-imperialist struggle are separately accounted for and directed toward a common end.

Under the present circumstances, any emotional instant alignment is insufficient to respond to the institutional changes underway. What is genuinely needed is a cool class analysis, a chain of facts open to tracing and the capacity for cross-national organisation. The key lies in putting an anti-hegemonic position into practice: opposing the packaging of war, opposing the rewriting of resource sovereignty, opposing the substitution of sovereign equality by the discretion of might, and, through sustained organisational practice, drawing the agenda of peace and development back onto a historical trajectory that can be contested and defended. Only when that trajectory is re-anchored at the institutional level and when the right of working peoples to self-determination is given firmer support within the coordinates of international rules will the space be narrowed in which powerful states can create exceptions through "law enforcement" and "trusteeship" and will the imperialist impulse to weave violence, juridical form and capital arrangement into a single chain be forced to confront stronger constraints. ■

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Sovereignty as a pillar of anti-imperialist struggle: lessons from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Sibusisiwe Thobela discusses the attempts by imperialism to undermine the national integrity of the DPRK

In the contemporary conjuncture of global capitalism, the principle of national sovereignty is once again under persistent attack. The imperialist centres, led by the US, continue to assume the right to unilaterally intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states. These interventions, whether militaristic, economic, political or ideological, are routinely justified in the language of "human rights", "democracy" or "security", but the reality is that they serve the material interests of monopoly capital and imperialist domination. From a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, the defence of sovereignty is inseparable from the struggle against imperialism and for genuine self-determination of peoples.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) offers a particularly instructive case. For over seven decades, the DPRK has been subjected to relentless hostility, sanctions, military threats and ideological warfare by the US and its allies. This aggression has never been about peace or stability on the Korean peninsula. It has been about punishing a state that chose a socialist path of development, outside the dictates of imperialism, and about maintaining US hegemony in East Asia.

At the centre of the DPRK's resistance to imperialism stands the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). As the leading political force of society and the state, the WPK has consistently upheld the principle that sovereignty is not an abstract legal concept but a material condition for socialist construction. Without control over its political system, economy, defence and ideology, no country can claim to be free. The WPK's leadership has therefore linked national sovereignty to the masses' right to determine their own destiny, free from external coercion.

As the WPK approaches its 9th Congress, this question of sovereignty took on renewed significance. Party congresses in socialist countries are not ceremonial events. They are critical moments of collective assessment, strategic adjustment and reaffirmation of ideological direction. The 9th Congress came at a time of intensified imperialist pressure, including tightened sanctions and increased military posturing by the US in the region. It is precisely under such conditions that the revolutionary role of the Party becomes most apparent.

It must be understood that imperialism is not merely a policy choice but a stage of capitalism characterised by the dominance of finance capital, the export of capital and the struggle for spheres of influence. Unilateral interventions by the US are therefore not aberrations but structural features of imperialism. The demonisation of the DPRK, like that of Cuba, Venezuela or Palestine, serves to punish any state that challenges imperialist norms and to warn others against pursuing independent paths of development.

The DPRK's insistence on sovereignty, including its right to self-defence, must be understood within this framework. A state under constant threat cannot be expected to disarm or subordinate its security to the goodwill of its aggressors. The WPK has argued consistently that peace is not secured through submission but through strength, unity and ideological clarity. This position directly contradicts the imperialist narrative that portrays resistance as provocation while normalising aggression by the powerful.

For progressive and communist movements globally, including in South Africa, the lessons are clear: to oppose unilateral imperialist intervention is not to endorse every policy of a targeted state but to defend a fundamental principle of international relations grounded in anti-imperialism. Sovereignty is a collective gain of humanity won through struggles against colonialism and domination. Its erosion weakens all working-class and popular struggles.

As the WPK convened its 9th Congress, coming out stronger than ever, it did so as part of a broader global confrontation between imperialism and the forces of sovereignty, socialism and national liberation. In standing firm against US unilateralism, the DPRK asserts not only its own right to exist and develop, but also the right of all peoples to choose their own social system. For Marxist-Leninists, this is not a marginal issue. It is central to the fight for a world free from exploitation, domination and imperialist violence. ■

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Colonial repression in the US empire

Mark Waller reviews *Cold War Puerto Rico: Anti-Communism in Washington's Caribbean Colony* by Steve Howell (University of Massachusetts Press, 2026,268 pp.)

The small Caribbean island and archipelago of Puerto Rico is not often considered in the context of US imperial power. But the island is of significant military importance to the US, as it serves as a strategic bridge between North and South America. This importance has become more pronounced in light of the US's escalating aggressive designs in the region. The garrison of Fort Buchanan serves as a pivotal hub for the US military, with the US having increased its military presence there and at four other locations on the territory since 2024.

Occupied by the US in 1898, Puerto Rico has a strong history of struggle for democratic rights and independence. The dark push-back against this was far from a minor affair. Steve Howell's *Cold War Puerto Rico* arrives as an important corrective to the historiography of US anti-communism, a literature that has long treated Puerto Rico as a footnote despite the island being, by any measurable index, a primary theatre of political repression.

Howell's central argument is straightforward and compelling: the juridical apparatus of the so-called "McCarthyite" period was deployed in Puerto Rico less as an extension of domestic Cold War anxieties but as an instrument of colonial management. This apparatus included FBI surveillance, the 1940 Smith Act, which made it a criminal offence to advocate the violent overthrow of the government and required the registration of all foreigners; the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC); and ultimately the FBI's covert counter-intelligence programme (COINTELPRO). The distinction is not merely academic. The US state is correctly identified for what it is: not a neutral arbiter of civil liberties that temporarily lost its bearings amidst Cold War paranoia, but a coercive apparatus in the service of capital and imperial accumulation.

The book is part political history, part family memoir, structured around Howell's American father, Brandon Howell, a radical cartoonist who lived in San Juan in the 1940s and fell under FBI surveillance for his work with the Puerto Rican left. Through Brandon's network, the book traces the lives of figures including the communist writer and organiser César Andreu Iglesias, his American wife Jane Speed, and a web of activists who were repeatedly arrested, imprisoned, and harassed across three decades. This personal scaffolding grounds what could otherwise be a somewhat routine account of state power in the lived texture of repression.

Howell demonstrates that the island's strategic value—as a naval base, a bombing range, and a linchpin of US Caribbean dominance—was the primary driver of Washington's determination to deny independence. The rhetoric of anti-communism, as Howell shows

throughout, was the ideological form taken by what was fundamentally a military-economic imperative.

"Diego's Dangerous Drawings" introduces the Puerto Rican Communist Party (PCP) and Brandon Howell's role within the island's radical milieu. Through his cartoons—produced under the pen name "Diego M"—Brandon participated in a culture of working-class visual agitation. Howell reads his father's FBI file with the eye of someone who understands that surveillance was a form of class war by bureaucratic means. The cartoons reproduced here are valuable as artefacts of a Caribbean socialist culture that US historiography has largely suppressed.

"The Making of a Red Scare" offers a critique of the term "McCarthyism" itself, arguing that it personalises and periodises what was in fact a structural feature of the American state. Howell traces the machinery of anti-communist repression to its earlier roots in Hoover's custodial detention lists of the early 1940s, the Smith Act of 1940, and the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938. This was a systemic process, the 'normal' operation of the capitalist state in a period of class threat, not an aberration produced by a rogue senator.

"A Movement Divided and 'Gagged'" and "The Not-So-Free Association," together constitute the book's most analytically rich pairing. They trace how Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico's first elected governor and architect of the "commonwealth" compact of 1952, served as Washington's local instrument of colonial stabilisation. Muñoz Marín's Gag Law (Ley de la Mordaza), modelled on the Smith Act and passed in May 1948, criminalised advocacy for independence. Howell's account implicitly maps onto Lenin's analysis of comprador politics: the native bourgeoisie, granted a measure of formal political authority, administers the colony on behalf of metropolitan capital. The "commonwealth" status was, in Ed Morales's phrase cited by Howell, "linguistic wizardry"—a colonial relation dressed in the clothes of self-determination.

Other chapters follow Brandon Howell out of Puerto Rico through California and into British exile, tracking the FBI's transnational reach. These chapters risk diluting the book's focus, but they illuminate something important: the American state's surveillance apparatus did not recognise borders when it came to managing political dissent. The international scope of Hoover's operations reveals the coercive infrastructure of US hegemony as a global, not merely domestic, phenomenon.

"Bee, Baumgardner, and the Dodgy Doctor," reproduces in full an FBI informant statement from Brandon's estranged first wife, who named thirty-three individuals, five of whom would later be indicted under the Smith Act. This chapter functions as a case study in how the state weaponises private life. Personal antagonism becomes juridical evidence; intimate betrayal becomes a tool of political police work.

Two chapters, "Enforcing the New Monroe Doctrine" and "Plan B: Enter the Smith Act", turn to the direct application of Smith Act indictments in Puerto Rico following the 1954 armed attack by Puerto Rican freedom fighters on the US Congress. Hoover used the incident as a pretext to arrest communist leaders who had no connection to it whatsoever. When a federal court eventually dropped the charges—not on political grounds, but because the US Supreme Court had narrowed the Smith Act's applicability—the episode demonstrated both the overreach and the ultimate fragility of juridical repression when facing organised legal resistance. The colonial dimension was hard to miss even for establishment lawyers: US legislation had been applied to a territory whose people had had no vote in passing it.

"HUAC Humiliated in San Juan" is one of the book's finest chapters. In November 1959, the House Un-American Activities Committee held three days of hearings in San Juan and

encountered, in the words of civil rights advocate Clark Foreman, "the most unified and absolute resistance" in the committee's history. Lawyers, politicians, and citizens across the political spectrum argued that HUAC lacked jurisdiction in Puerto Rico—an argument that, as Howell notes, inadvertently exposed the contradictions of "commonwealth" status more clearly than any independence activist could have done. The committee left the island humiliated. This chapter reads as an instructive account of successful mass resistance to state coercion, conducted not through armed insurrection but through collective political and legal defiance.

"From Contempt to COINTELPRO" covers Hoover's turn to covert action after the failure of legal instruments. Puerto Rico became, chronologically, the second target of COINTELPRO—a fact that most histories of the programme entirely omit. Hoover sought not merely to surveil or prosecute but to "disrupt the activities" of the independence movement by sowing internal division and conflict. The chapter is essential reading for anyone interested in how the state, when it cannot win in open legal or political contest, shifts to the terrain of provocation, slander, and sabotage.

Howell's book is a valuable contribution precisely because it refuses to quarantine "McCarthyism" as an episode of domestic American liberal pathology. The colonial dimension he restores to the story demands a structural rather than contingent explanation: why did the world's self-proclaimed democracy invest such sustained energy in suppressing the movement for Puerto Rican independence? The answer Howell accumulates, chapter by chapter, is material. Puerto Rico was a military fortress, a strategic asset in the arc of American imperial power from the Caribbean to the Pacific. Its independence would have threatened not merely the feelings of American exceptionalism but a concrete geopolitical and military infrastructure. Anti-communism was the ideological lubricant applied to this colonial machinery.

The book addresses Puerto Rico's current situation primarily through the Introduction and Conclusion, and the picture Howell paints is one of a colonial relationship that has changed its juridical costume without altering its fundamental structure.

Howell also identifies a persistent ideological legacy of white supremacy in the discourse around Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States. He traces this from the 1902 Supreme Court ruling—which treated Puerto Ricans as unfit for political equality because only "Anglo-Saxons" had been prepared for it—through to what he describes as a contemporary "white man's burden" narrative around federal subsidies to the island, as though 128 years of colonial value extraction, military use, and the suppression of economic alternatives count for nothing in the ledger. This framing of Puerto Rico as a dependent recipient of American generosity, rather than as a territory whose economic underdevelopment is itself a product of colonial integration, remains a live ideological obstacle to any serious reckoning with the island's status.

The question of Puerto Rico's sovereignty remains unresolved and, in Howell's view, structurally deferred. He notes that eighty-five years after the Atlantic Charter—whose third clause proclaimed the right of all peoples to choose their own form of government—Puerto Rico's fate is still decided in Washington, by a Congress in which Puerto Ricans have no voting representation. The book does not engage in detail with the contemporary independence or statehood movements, but its historical argument carries a clear implication: the options on offer have consistently been designed to preserve US control, and the repeated plebiscites on status have been conducted within a framework that forecloses genuine self-determination rather than enabling it.

Cold War Puerto Rico is a scrupulously researched, lucidly written and politically astute work that names colonialism plainly and places the Puerto Rican experience at the centre of American Cold War history where it belongs. It is indispensable reading for anyone concerned with imperialism, the repressive functions of the liberal state, or the long and unfinished history of Caribbean anti-colonialism. Washington's Caribbean colony is still waiting for its freedom. ■

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