

GNU = Government of National Oppression How We Got Here, How to Fight Back



GCIS



Spartacist/South Africa

Left: Inauguration of ANC/DA coalition government, 14 June, Cape Town; right: united-front protest in defence of EFF militant Xolani Khoza, 2 September, Mbombela.

The outcome of the May elections is clear: a victory for the imperialists and Randlords and a defeat for the fight for black liberation. Having spectacularly squandered the ANC's electoral majority, the Ramaphosa clique cooked up the "Government of National Unity" (GNU) as a branding ploy for a right-wing coalition with the white-dominated DA. They've already started cracking the austerity whip, planning to slash thousands of public teaching positions and other social services.

With the GNU stocked with white supremacists and open champions of imperialism and Zionism, this is just the beginning of the neoliberal onslaught. World bankers are smacking their lips, and the rand has strengthened since the elections on speculative trading. But it will not be smooth sailing for white monopoly capital and its black agents. Pressure from global financial markets, combined with neoliberal attacks, is a recipe for shocks and social unrest. Just look at the mass protests and government crisis in Kenya, which have inspired others in Nigeria and elsewhere.

While South Africa's rulers are not as strained as Ruto in Kenya or Tinubu in Nigeria, the world economic situation is going to squeeze them ever tighter as US hegemony continues to break down. The global and domestic pressures promise to further fracture the black elites, eroding the ANC's ability to contain discontent.

There is every reason to expect major government crises which could collapse the GNU before the next elections. How these crises get resolved will be determined by struggle. To stop the GNU onslaught and advance the needs of the people, the mainly black proletariat must take a revolutionary class-struggle road to resolve the chaos and misery created by imperialism and national oppression. It must fight to lead the masses, on the basis of its own programme and methods, in a hard confrontation with the white capitalist rulers.

The task *right now*, when the masses are still disoriented from the GNU shock and working-class struggles are on the back foot, is to wage defensive struggles and use them to prepare the proletariat and the masses for the crises ahead. There are many attacks posing the urgent need for united-

front defence. A prime example is the case of Xolani Khoza, an EFF activist who is being targeted for state repression after playing a militant role in a SACCAWU strike at Spar and calling for mass struggle against the GNU (see back page). Mobilising united-front defence of Khoza is the kind of action which can begin to shift the balance of forces in favour of the proletariat.

But a look around shows that this is not the course being followed by the leaders of the workers movement and the left. Although these leaders, including even the spineless SACP tops, all *say* that we must fight the GNU, they have no intention of actually *doing* anything to organise the mass struggle needed to exert real pressure on the rulers. Indeed, these left leaders are the main force ensuring that no such struggle has taken place. The SACP and COSATU heads, despite their denunciations, help prop up the GNU by chaining workers to the ANC-led Alliance. The EFF and NUMSA tops oppose the GNU and Tripartite Alliance but do nothing to mobilise to fight them.

Why is this? After all, their own organisations and positions in different ways face a dire threat from the GNU, and the left-wing leaders' political prestige would only gain from appealing to the widespread hatred and fear of this government. Recognising this, people like SACP general secretary Solly Mapaila have lately begun to loudly condemn the ANC for selling out by partnering with the racist DA (while of course staying silent about the SACP's own ministers in the GNU!). But his aim is *not* to channel the anger against the ANC's betrayal into preparing the masses for a struggle. No, he wants to warn the black elites about the danger of the masses becoming unruly and use this threat as leverage for cabinet reshuffles and other maneuvers at the top.

That gets to the heart of the parliamentarist, class-collaborationist strategy which we must confront in order to make any progress in fighting back against the GNU. From Mapaila to Irvin Jim, Julius Malema and Floyd Shivambu, their answers to the GNU all rest on binding the masses to a wing of the black elites and convincing their liberation

movement “relatives” to return to the fold. This bankrupt strategy is what has led us to the current impasse in the first place, with the left and workers movement weaker and more fractured than they have been since the early 1980s. From CODESA and GEAR to the Marikana massacre and the May elections, the programme of unity behind the elites has at every stage served to paralyse and sabotage the fight against imperialism and white domination.

This explains why the main threat to the government’s stability currently comes from the *right*, from the arrogant obstinacy of Zille and Co. With class struggle now at an ebb, the black elites do not see the discontent of the masses as the main immediate concern. The threat that looms largest to them is the economic “doomsday” which imperialist finance capital would unleash against populist measures. That is why the decisive layers of the black elites have enthusiastically embraced the GNU course, while the rest have done little more than whine.

As we have been saying since June, *you can’t fight the DA and imperialists together with the butchers of Marikana!* To go forward in building a fighting opposition to the GNU, the central strategic task is to break the black masses politically from the nationalist elites. *This* is the main lesson which must be drawn from the current impasse, including by EFF militants looking for answers to the crisis which has engulfed their party following the May elections. To illustrate how this must be done, and uncover the roots of this crisis, we must start by examining the contradiction that defined the EFF’s election campaign.

Which Way for EFF Militants?

We called for a critical vote to the EFF on 29 May, because this offered the best way to strike a blow against imperialism and white domination. The fundamental choice posed in these elections was: “Will there be more of the neo-apartheid, neoliberal onslaught, or do we put a stop to the disastrous course of the past 30 years?” (“The Road to Land and Jobs”, 27 April). The imperialists and Randlords drew *their* class line, declaring that they would make the economy scream if a coalition government based on the EFF’s policies came into office.

The white rulers’ election policy just shows that making any progress toward the EFF’s Cardinal Pillars—especially the vital calls to expropriate the land and nationalise the mines—will take a sharp confrontation with the bourgeoisie. But the EFF’s own leadership and strategy are themselves the main obstacles standing in the way of such a struggle. As we explained in “The Road to Land and Jobs”:

“The EFF draws support from all sections of the black masses by appealing to the thirst for black liberation with radical measures that are completely unacceptable to white monopoly capital. But it promises a middle-class road to liberation, one acceptable to the black elites—who themselves are both oppressed by and tied to the white rulers.”

Our agitation for votes for the EFF was aimed at exposing and sharpening this contradiction, putting the choice clearly before every pro-EFF militant: the road of class struggle for the Cardinal Pillars, or the road of parliamentary class collaboration, betrayal and capitulation. We sought in this way to cohere a revolutionary class-struggle pole to contend with the EFF for leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle.

The same contradiction ran through the EFF’s entire electoral campaign. For example, Mbuyiseni Ndlozi would declare to the SABC that they will never abandon their

Cardinal Pillars for a coalition with the ANC: “You don’t need a coalition government. You need an economic freedom government.” At the same time, Julius Malema and others would trample all over these Pillars to reassure the capitalists they had nothing to fear. When pressed about the backlash over nationalising the banks, Malema promised that the EFF was not planning to go after private banks but only to set up a state bank to peacefully coexist with them.

Throughout the campaign, the more the imperialists increased the pressure, the more EFF leaders retreated from their progressive demands. This was a major factor in the EFF’s loss of electoral support. Much of its voting base opted for the populist MK, seeing its leader Jacob Zuma as more skilled at maneuvering with monopoly capital. Immediately after the EFF’s disappointing election result came in, Malema made clear that their Pillars were negotiable after all. To stop a coalition with the DA, he appealed to sections of the ANC leadership and black businessmen to stick with the tested option of a coalition of their “relatives”. All this was to no avail. Whatever fear those black elites had of inviting the DA into government, this was nothing compared to the punishment they knew would come from global financial markets if they teamed up with MK and the EFF.

EFF members told us that many people who wanted to support the party were deterred by the threats of “economic doomsday” if the EFF came into power: Look at what happened to the economy in Zimbabwe after the US and Britain turned the screws in retaliation for land seizures. This is an astute observation. What EFF militants must understand is that the EFF’s *own strategy* disarms the masses and leaves them helpless in the face of this blackmail, which the imperialists use time and again to keep their subjects in line. If EFF leaders are not prepared to stick to their own demands, what confidence can workers and the poor have that they would fight imperialist sabotage in order to implement them? None at all.

Why did Malema and Co capitulate in the face of the imperialist blackmail? Because the alternative course—standing up to the threats and insisting on the demands needed for national liberation and socio-economic development—required preparing the masses for a serious confrontation with imperialism. This is totally incompatible with the EFF tops’ parliamentarist strategy of wooing the black elites who, despite being suffocated by white capital, are bound to those same monopolists. Any wish that aspiring black capitalists have of pushing back against imperialism is overwhelmed by their fear of black workers fighting the imperialists with class-struggle methods, which would threaten their own privileged position.

The EFF is now in crisis, with Floyd Shivambu and others decamping to MK. The elections showed a real growth in popularity for MK. This is not good news for the black masses. Alongside progressive demands like nationalising the land, Zuma’s party pushes anti-immigrant, anti-woman chauvinism, tribalism and other reactionary appeals. In so doing, MK divides the working class, weakening its ability to fight white monopoly capital.

In fact, an ANC-MK-EFF coalition would have come *at the expense* of the black masses. It would have been brokered by betraying the EFF’s core demands and repackaging the ruling Alliance whose policies have proven so disastrous over the past 30 years, epitomised by the massacre of Marikana mineworkers when Zuma was president. Contrary to Floyd Shivambu’s claim that his move to MK will help unite the progressive forces, Zuma and Co are fundamentally incapable of uniting the masses against imperialism because they are bound hand and foot to capital.

EFF leftists who reject that course must draw the correct lessons. It’s time to break with the strategy of unity with black elites and to chart a completely different course, one

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that joins the cause of national liberation with the class struggle. That requires the *political independence* of the proletariat from the nationalists and all bourgeois forces. This can only be accomplished through breaking workers from the trade-union bureaucrats and all opportunists in the workers movement, who each in their own ways leave the nationalists at the head of the liberation struggle.

NUMSA's Betrayal

At the moment, class struggle is at an ebb. Workers are hesitant to go on strike, worried about risking their jobs as the unemployment rate, already the world's second highest, continues to rise. And now they face a neoliberal barrage from the GNU. The real guilty party in this crime scene are trade-union leaders, including the "Communists" who head NUMSA.

Responding to Mapaila's lambasting the ANC for allying with the DA, NUMSA president Andrew Chirwa wrote that this confirmed the correctness of NUMSA's decision after Marikana "to stop voting and campaigning for the ANC because we knew it would fail to transform the lives of the majority of people" (*Sunday Times*, 8 September). Very well. But this just begs the question: What have they been *doing* to actually build a working-class pole to lead the struggle for the Freedom Charter and other demands betrayed by the ANC? Surely, if the leaders of one of the largest and most powerful unions on the continent had been seriously struggling for this correct perspective, we wouldn't be in this mess today.

Far from fighting for a working-class political pole, in this year's elections the NUMSA tops did not even oppose voting for the ANC! And when it came time to form a government, their response was the same as Malema's: an ANC-MK-EFF coalition. One NUMSA spokesperson even applauds Shivambu's move to MK, promoting the lie that uniting under Zuma's political umbrella is the way to fight imperialism.

While the NUMSA tops can denounce the nationalist elites in the abstract, their actual policy is totally *counterposed* to fighting for a political break with them. This is why the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party launched by NUMSA in 2019 was stillborn. The NUMSA leadership could not explain even to pro-communist workers why they should support a much smaller and less influential party when its demands, strategy and proposed course of action were basically no different from the EFF's. Instead, their main response to the EFF's growing political influence among workers is crass sectarianism, like refusing to join the EFF's March 2023 national shutdown against load shedding. Such idiocies only reinforce the nationalists' political hegemony, while fueling hostility to the unions among the unemployed masses.

The NUMSA leaders have shown in practice that they do not counterpose a revolutionary proletarian programme to the petty-bourgeois nationalists. The task for NUMSA militants is to build a revolutionary opposition that fights for a different leadership and a different course for the union: one of competing with the nationalists for proletarian leadership of the liberation struggle.

The Fight for Revolutionary Leadership

The same goes for the COSATU unions, whose leaders prop up the GNU, and the SAFTU federation under Vavi, who strikes a pose of working-class independence. Vavi's "independence" is that of the workerist trend in the 1980s, which *counterposed* class struggle to the fight for national liberation. Like the NUMSA tops, Vavi and his followers leave the freedom struggle in the hands of nationalists who inevitably undermine and sabotage it. The real difference between the two is that Vavi doesn't pose as a communist. He and his SAFTU cohorts showed their true colours when they announced after Ramaphosa's speech opening parliament that they "welcome the three strategic priorities

of the Government of National Unity"!

Left groups like Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) and Marxist Workers Party (MWP) will of course criticise and complain about it when Vavi's clique capitulates so crassly. But they reject the necessary step from left-criticism to revolutionary action: fighting to replace the existing bureaucracy with a class-struggle leadership in order to change SAFTU's course. Indeed, they function as one of the main props of Vavi and his allies, promoting them as more "progressive" and "left" than the NUMSA tops.

At bottom, the reason for this rotten course is also the reason why these groups stood on the sidelines in the elections, simply ignoring or denouncing the EFF's campaign. It's the reason why they can't deal with the illusions that workers and youth have in the EFF's left nationalist programme, instead dismissing these illusions. It's because they see the struggle against national oppression and imperialism as a *diversion* from the class struggle, and not as pivotal for workers revolution. As a result, they are utterly incapable of conducting a genuine fight for working-class political independence, which requires fighting for communist leadership of the liberation movement in order to fuse the national and class struggles.

This has left them disoriented and unable to chart a course to confront the obstacles to class struggle against the GNU. In the aftermath of the elections, they crowed that the massive setback for the ANC and EFF means that the nationalists have been discredited and the way is open for class struggle. All that revolutionaries had to do to unite the different struggles of the oppressed was simply denounce the nationalists' past betrayals while preaching the need for an independent workers party and socialist revolution. A few months on, this campaign is going nowhere, and they are back to the perennial waiting game of hoping Vavi will give the go-ahead to launch a workers party.

The whole history of the anti-apartheid movement shows that if Marxists do not actively compete with the nationalists for leadership of the liberation struggle, the nationalists' hegemony will be strengthened when the masses rise up (see "For National Liberation and Black Proletarian Power!", *ABA* No. 1, October 2023). Yet that refusal precisely defines the WASP and MWP campaigns for a "mass workers party".

Enough! Instead of *repeating* the mistakes that have led to the left's current hapless state, it is time to *learn from* them and *change course*. This requires open and thorough political debate, including confronting the reasons why the Marxist left proved bankrupt to fight liberal triumphalism in the decades after counterrevolution in the Soviet Union. In South Africa, this meant being unable to advance a revolutionary course of struggle against GEAR and other neoliberal attacks, which conditioned the inability after Marikana to answer the EFF and build a class-struggle pole.

We know from our own experience that this is not easy (see "Why the ICL Collapsed & How We Reforged It", *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023; or "Spartacist/South Africa Refounded!", *ABA* No. 1). But those who take this road can play a crucial role in the struggles to come. In a polemic addressing the current crisis in International Socialist Alternative (which WASP is a section of), our comrades in the Spartacist League/U.S. stressed that this is not an isolated incident but a symptom of the political crisis shaking the entire international Marxist left. It is possible to emerge stronger. For those who want to fight, we propose opening a frank and comradely discussion over revolutionary perspectives in the current period:

"Only patient and principled debates between tendencies can put a stop to constant disintegration of revolutionary forces and lead to advances in reforging a true World Party of Socialist Revolution."

—"The Roots of the ISA Crisis", *Workers Vanguard*
No. 1182 (September 2024) ■

Defend Xolani Khoza!

19 SEPTEMBER—*Everyone* in the cross-hairs of the neoliberal ANC-DA government has an urgent interest in mobilising to defend EFF militant Xolani Gregory Khoza. Khoza is facing charges of incitement to commit terrorism, public violence and intimidation. His “crime”? Posting a TikTok video calling for a shutdown to protest the so-called Government of National Unity. Xolani was targeted by the state after he played a leading role in a SACCAWU strike in Mbombela in May.

Trade unionists, land rights activists, civic organisations, radical nationalists, socialists: This is an attack on all of us. Xolani’s persecution is a blatant assault on freedom of speech which threatens to brand any who would resist the attacks of the GNU as “terrorists”. We must not let our political differences stand in the way of uniting to fight this! On 2 September, Spartacist/South Africa and EFF Ward 29, Enhlanzeni, brought out dozens for a united-front protest outside the Mbombela courthouse where Xolani appeared for trial. Now we must build on this to pull together far broader forces to defend him when he is due in court again on 27



September. ***Drop all charges now!***

To see how this pro-imperialist government is going to crack down on dissent, just look at the killing of EFF councillor Moshe Mphahlele by cops and security guards repressing a service delivery protest on 4 August in Alex. Don’t let them silence Xolani, or they will come for all of us next!

Xolani was charged under the apartheid-era Riotous Assemblies Act of 1965 and the Cybercrimes Act of 2020. While he was released on bail, the conditions include muzzling him with a social media ban. This shows that despite the bourgeois media hype, the white rulers know very well that neo-apartheid South Africa is a tinderbox and the guise of “national unity” is extremely fragile. ***End the social media ban and state surveillance!***

What the ruling class really fears is that mass struggle, particularly by the black proletariat, can challenge the GNU’s pro-imperialist agenda. That makes defending Xolani a necessary first step in organising the trade unions, black masses and all the oppressed to ***fight back!***

Fighting for Black Freedom Is Not Terrorism!

UNITED FRONT PROTEST

**DROP THE CHARGES!
END THE SOCIAL
MEDIA BAN AND
STATE SURVEILLANCE!**

**8:00 AM, FRIDAY,
27 SEPTEMBER 2024
BESTER STREET NEAR THE
MUNICIPAL COURTHOUSE
(BETWEEN HENSHALL AND
BROWN STREETS)
MBOMBELA CENTRAL
MPUMALANGA**

Initiated by the Committee to Defend Xolani Khoza

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