

South African climate injustice

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One of the world's most extreme cases of climate injustice happens to be the site for the Conference of the Parties 17 climate summit in November-December 2011. According to the Pretoria government's 2010 *National Climate Change Response Green Paper*, "Should multi-lateral international action not effectively limit the average global temperature increase to below at least 2°C above pre-industrial levels, the potential impacts on South Africa in the medium- to long-term are significant and potentially catastrophic." The paper warned that under conservative assumptions, "after 2050, warming is projected to reach around 3-4°C along the coast, and 6-7°C in the interior."¹

If President Jacob Zuma's government really cared about climate and about his relatives in rural KwaZulu-Natal villages who are amongst those most adversely affected by worsening droughts and floods, then it would not only halt the \$21 billion worth of electricity generators being built by state power company Eskom: Medupi is under construction and Kusile will begin soon. Pretoria would also deny approval to the forty new mines allegedly needed to supply the plants with coal, for just as at the Cradle of Humankind and in West Virginia, these mines will cause permanent contamination of rivers and water tables, increased mercury residues and global warming.

More evidence of the Witwatersrand's degradation comes from tireless water campaigner Mariette Liefferink, who counts 270 tailings dams in a 400 square kilometer mining zone. With gold nearly depleted, as Liefferink told a Johannesburg newspaper in early 2011, uranium is an eco-social activist target: "Nowhere in the world do you see these mountains of uranium and people living in and among them. You have people living on hazardous toxic waste and of course some areas are also high in radioactivity." The toxic tailings dams are typically unlined, unvegetated and unable to contain the mines' prolific air, water and soil pollution. Other long-term anti-mining struggles continue in South African locales: against platinum in the Northwest and Limpopo provinces, against titanium on the Eastern Cape's Wild Coast, and against coal in the area bordering Zimbabwe known as Mapungubwe where relics from a priceless ancient civilization will be destroyed unless mining is halted (as even the government agrees).²

As both victim and villain, here are some reasons why South Africa is a poster-child for extremist elite mismanagement of the climate threat, instead of its solution through climate justice:

- South Africa's vast CO₂ emissions can be measured in relative terms, and if so, its carbon intensity per capita unit of GDP output is amongst the world's highest, far worse than even the US.
- The main sources of this pollution are two activities that reflect continuity, not change from apartheid: the coal-burning power plants of the parastatal Eskom and the coal/gas-to-oil conversions of Sasol, formerly a parastatal mandated to foil the apartheid-era petroleum embargo, and then privatized and listed on the New York Stock Exchange.
- Virtually no contributions to the grid (less than 4 percent in 2010) come from South Africa's incredible renewable energy potential, in solar, tidal and wind sources.
- The electricity produced by burning coal is cross-subsidised so that it is the cheapest available anywhere in the world for the world's largest mining and metals corporations, BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation, which were revealed in 2010 to be paying less than US\$0.02/kiloWatt hour of electricity for smelter consumption thanks to apartheid-era, four-decade "Special Pricing Agreement" deals (other large corporations received electricity in 2009 at US\$0.05, still below cost, and although prices rose dramatically on average, the lowest increases were imposed on the biggest firms).
- The two main metals/mining firms, plus most other major beneficiaries of cheap electricity such as Arcelor Mittal and Xstrata, export their profits both through illegal transfer pricing and through straight repatriation of dividends to shareholders in

London and Melbourne, and the downstream consumption of their metals product is minimal due to notorious local overpricing.

- Meanwhile, millions of poor people are regularly disconnected or denied access to the grid due to extreme poverty, and because of dirty household energy, the passage is often rapid from HIV-positive to full-blown AIDS status via respiratory-related opportunistic infections, including the raging TB epidemic.
- Corruption is built in to energy-intensive mining and industry, ranging from controversial ruling-party dealmaking in the sector, 'Black Economic Empowerment' shakedowns for well-connected tycoons, and corporate malfeasance in climate deals such as Sasol and Eskom attempts to secure CDM subsidies.³

But in addition to these factors, explored in more detail below, there is an even more durable way in which the African National Congress (ANC) government in Pretoria contributes to climate injustice: its stance in global climate politics. With the United States, four 'BASIC' countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – co-sponsored the Copenhagen Accord in December 2009, even though Pretoria's then environment minister Buyelwa Sonjica (ineffectual and hence relieved of duties in late 2010) officially expressed 'disappointment' at what was on offer.⁴ The Copenhagen gambit meant that the WTO's notorious divide-and-rule politics – which were controversially endorsed by South Africa (by trade minister Alec Erwin) at the 1999 Seattle, 2001 Doha and 2003 Cancún summits but vetoed by the African delegation at the first and third⁵ – would become the norm for UN climate negotiations.

Another UN process, the 'High-Level Advisory Group on Finance' which reported to Ban Ki-moon in November 2010, included South African planning minister Trevor Manuel as an active commission member. It was no surprise when extremely conservative recommendations resulted, such as up to half the North-South climate financing to be made available by 2020 packaged by carbon markets in the form of CDMs.⁶ Nor was it a surprise that Manuel became front-runner to chair the full Green Development Fund in April 2011.

Three case studies provide explicit evidence of the problems South Africans face on the front lines of climate and energy injustice: first, the Medupi coal-fired power plant financed by the World Bank in 2010 with its largest-ever project loan; second, the pilot CDM deal in Durban at Bisasar Road; and third, the struggle over access to electricity waged from below, specifically in Soweto. After introductory critiques of Pretoria's political economy and as a climate negotiator, these are each considered in turn.

A Political Ecology of South African Neoliberalism

While local and international elites made out like bandits during the transition from racial to class apartheid, most South Africans suffered from neoliberal policies imposed by the governments of Nelson Mandela (1994-99), Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008), Kgalema Motlanthe (2008-09) and Jacob Zuma (2009-presents). The results included an immediate rise in income inequality, with the Gini coefficient soaring from below 0.6 in 1994 to 0.72 by 2006 (0.8 if welfare spending is excluded).⁷ The official unemployment rate doubled from 16 percent in 1994 to around 32 percent by the early 2000s, falling to 26 percent by the late 2000s when in 2009-10 another 1.3 million jobs were lost – but by counting those who gave up looking for work, the realistic rate is closer to 40 percent.⁸ The long-term explanations for the employment massacre were increased imports in labour-intensive sectors and imported machines to exacerbate capital-intensive production techniques. Meanwhile, ecological problems became far worse, according to the government's 2006 'Environmental Outlook' research report, which noted 'a general decline in the state of the environment'.⁹

Social unrest and the rise of social movements reflect the discontent: there were 5813 protests in 2004-05, and subsequently, an average of 8,000 per year.¹⁰ Until China overtook around 2009, this was probably the highest per capita rate of social protest in the world during the late 2000s. Matters will not improve, in part because of macroeconomic trends. The most severe problem is the vulnerability that South Africa faces in hostile global financial markets, given that the current account deficit remains one of the world's highest. It is also highly likely that investment and economic activity will be deterred by ongoing electricity shortages, given that it will take a generation for sufficient capacity to be added, and that the government

confirmed its desire in early 2008 to continue offering a few large smelters and mines the cheapest electricity in the world, instead of redistributing to low-income people.

Electricity generation shortfalls during January-March 2008 led to consistent surprise 'load shedding' in which entire metropolitan areas were taken off the electricity grid. These were due partly to a lack of new capacity built by national power generator Eskom since the early 1990s (when excess capacity had risen to more than 30 percent), the running down of coal supplies, and rain damage to incoming coal. But the main reason was the increased electricity consumption of metals smelters due to the 2002-08 speculative uptick in commodity prices. Indeed, even earlier, the economy's five-fold increase in CO₂ emissions since 1950, and 20 per cent increase during the 1990s, can largely be blamed upon supply of the world's cheapest electricity by Eskom to multinational corporate mining houses and metals smelters.

South African capital's reliance upon fossil fuels for energy is scandalous. Not only are vast carbon-based profits fleeing to the mining houses' offshore financial headquarters but, despite consuming huge amounts of electricity, the smelters create very few jobs. Instead of cutting back on these sorts of projects, and turning the subsidies to renewables, the ANC government attempted to augment coal-fired generation with, first, dangerous new Pebble Bed nuclear technology (rejected by German nuclear producers in the 1990s and finally in 2010 defunded by finance minister Pravin Gordhan in frustration) and then with dangerous existing-technology nuclear reactors. Renewable sources like wind, solar, wave, tidal and biomass are the most obvious ways forward for this century's energy system, but still get only a tiny pittance of government support.

Behind the gluttonous and reckless consumption of electricity is a long history of cheap energy for big capital made possible by the availability of large amounts of poor quality coal and an incestuous relationship between the coal mines, gold industry and Eskom. A history of state intervention in securing the energy needs of the mines, agriculture and industry established the principle of keeping electricity as cheap as possible for big capital.¹¹ The ANC government did not change this arrangement, which helps explain why its posture at recent climate summits has been in defense of the world emissions *status quo*.

The new government was as coopted as the old regime by the "Minerals Energy Complex", the phrase that captures the fusion of state, mining houses and heavy industry, especially in beneficiating metallic and mineral products through smelting. As Ben Fine and Zav Rustomjee showed in their 1996 book *The Political Economy of South Africa*, throughout the twentieth century, mining, petro-chemicals, metals and related activities which historically accounted for around a quarter of GDP typically consumed 40 per cent of all electricity, at the world's cheapest rates.¹² David McDonald updated and regionalized the concept a decade onwards in his edited collection, *Electric Capitalism*, discovering an 'MEC-plus':

Mining is South Africa's largest industry in the primary economic sector and the country has the world's largest reserves of platinum-group metals (87.7 percent of world totals), manganese (80 percent), chromium (72.4 percent), gold (40.1 percent) and aluminosilicates (34.4 percent)... South Africa's appetite for electricity has created something of a 'scramble' for the continent's electricity resources, with the transmission lines of today comparable to the colonial railway lines of the late 1800s and early 1900s, physically and symbolically.¹³

Eskom fostered a debilitating dependence on the (declining) mining industry, causing a 'Dutch disease', in memory of the damage done to Holland's economic balance by its cheap North Sea oil, which in South Africa's case is cheap but very dirty coal. As a study by the Energy for Development Research Centre found, South Africa

- is 'the most vulnerable fossil fuel exporting country in the world' if the Kyoto Protocol is fully extended, according to an International Energy Agency report (because of the need to make deep cuts);
- scores extremely poorly 'on the indicators for carbon emissions per capita and energy intensity';
- has a 'heavy reliance' on energy-intensive industries;
- suffers a 'high dependence on coal for primary energy';
- offers 'low energy prices' to large corporate consumers and high-income households, which in part is responsible for 'poor energy efficiency of individual sectors'; and

- risks developing a 'competitive disadvantage' by virtue of 'continued high energy intensity' which in the event of energy price rises 'can increase the cost of production'.¹⁴

As a result, when corrected for income and population size, South Africa's emissions are higher than even the energy sector of the United States, *by a factor of twenty*.¹⁵ To deal with this legacy, the government adopted a *Long-Term Mitigation Scenario* in mid-2008, to great fanfare, calling for cuts in CO₂, but only starting after 2035. Meantime, the rollout of at least a hundred billion dollars worth of new coal-fired and nuclear plants ensued. And tellingly, the 2004 National Climate Change Response Strategy endorsed carbon trading, declaring 'up-front that CDM primarily presents a range of commercial opportunities, both big and small'.¹⁶ Finally in late 2010, an official policy document emerged.

Government's 'Green' Paper

The greenwashing language of the *National Climate Change Response Green Paper* is inadequate to distract critical readers concerned about:

- more imminent multi-billion dollar financing decisions on Eskom coal-fired mega power plants (with more price increases for the masses);
- the conclusion of the energy ministry's multi-decade resource planning exercise, which is run by a committee dominated by electricity-guzzling corporations; and
- Pretoria's contributions to four global climate debates: President Jacob Zuma's co-chairing of a UN sustainable development commission, Planning Minister Trevor Manuel's role within the UN Advisory Group on Climate Finance seeking \$100 bn/year in North-South flows, the G8-G20 meetings in France, and the COP 17 preparatory committee meetings.

Many recall from 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development prep-coms how pressure rose on negotiators to be as unambitious and nonbinding as possible. At that Johannesburg summit, climate change was completely ignored and the main host politicians – President Thabo Mbeki, Foreign Minister Nkosozana Dlamini-Zuma and Environment Minister Valli Moosa – were criticized for, as Martin Khor (now head of the South Centre) put it, "the utter lack of transparency and procedure of the political declaration process. Some delegates, familiar with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), remarked in frustration that the infamous WTO Green Room process had now crossed over to the usually open and participatory UN system."¹⁷

At the Durban COP, their successors Zuma, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and Edna Molewa would almost certainly surrender democratic principles and let secretive Green Room deal-making sites proliferate. Two authors of the *Green Paper* are environment officials Joanne Yawitch and Peter Lukey, both from struggle-era backgrounds in land and environmental NGOs, and once dedicated to far-reaching social change. But in early 2011, Yawitch moved to the National Business Initiative, following the path through the state-capital revolving door so many before her also trod. At the Copenhagen COP in December 2009, lead G77 negotiator Lumumba Di-Aping accused Yawitch of having "actively sought to disrupt the unity of the Africa bloc,"¹⁸ a charge she forced him to publicly apologise for, even though within days Zuma proved it true by signing the Africa-frying Copenhagen Accord.

Right from the *Green Paper's* initial premise – "South Africa is both a contributor to, and potential victim of, global climate change given that it has an energy-intensive, fossil-fuel powered economy and is also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and change" – this document seems to fit within an all too predictable Pretoria formula: talking left, so as to more rapidly walk right. As a result, the *Green Paper* claims, with a straight face: "South Africa, as a responsible global citizen, is committed to reducing its own greenhouse gas emissions in order to successfully facilitate the agreement and implementation of an effective and binding global agreement." More appropriate would be this reality-based rephrasing: "South Africa, as an irresponsible global citizen, is committed to rapidly increasing its own greenhouse gas emissions by building the third and fourth-largest coal-fired power plants in the world (Kusile and Medupi) mainly for the benefit of BHP Billiton and Anglo American which get the world's cheapest electricity thanks to apartheid-era, forty-year discount deals, and to successfully facilitate the agreement and implementation of an ineffective and non-binding global agreement – the Copenhagen Accord – which is receiving support from other countries only because of coercion, bullying and bribery by the US State Department, as WikiLeaks has revealed."

Consistent with Washington's irresponsible climate agenda, Pretoria's *Green Paper* suggests we "limit the average global temperature increase to at least below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" yet this target is so weak that scientists predict nine out of ten African farmers will lose their ability to grow crops by the end of the century. In contrast, the 2010 Cochabamba People's Agreement hosted by Bolivian president Evo Morales demanded no more than a 1-1.5°C rise, a vast difference when it comes to emissions cuts needed to reach back to 350 parts per million of CO2 equivalents in our atmosphere, as 'science requires.'¹⁹

Failing that, the *Green Paper* acknowledges (using even conservative assumptions), "After 2050, warming is projected to reach around 3-4°C along the coast, and 6-7°C in the interior. With these kinds of temperature increases, life as we know it will change completely." As one example, "the frequency of storm-flow events and dry spells is projected to increase over much of the country, especially in the east, over much of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, including some of the most crucial source regions of stream-flows in southern Africa such as the Lesotho highlands." In the COP17 host city itself, Durban's sea-level rise is anticipated to be nearly double as fast – close to 3 mm/year – as the SA south coast's in the immediate future, but new research models suggest several more meters of seawater height are possible by the end of the century, swamping central Durban.

Another sure hit to Durban is via the port, Africa's biggest, because of a growing "reluctance to trade in goods with a high carbon footprint," the *Green Paper* admits. "The term 'food miles' is used to refer to the distance food is transported from the point of production to the point of consumption, and is increasingly being used as a carbon emission label for food products." Further 'economic risks' include "the impacts of climate change regulation, the application of trade barriers, a shift in consumer preferences, and a shift in investor priorities." Already, Europe's "directive on aviation and moves to bring maritime emissions into an international emissions reduction regime could significantly impact" South African air freight and shipping.

"Tourism is not just a potential victim of climate change, it also contributes to the causes of climate change," the *Green Paper* observes ominously. "South Africa is a carbon intensive destination, and relies extensively on long haul flights from key international tourism markets." New air taxes to slow climate change thus create 'significant risk' to SA tourism. Yet even though they were warned of this a decade ago, Transport Ministers Jeff Radebe and Sbu Ndebele pushed through an unnecessary new \$1 billion airport 40kms north of Durban, entirely lacking public transport access, even while all relevant authorities confirmed that South Durban's airport could easily have managed the incremental expansion.

Durban's maniacal pro-growth planners still exuberantly promote massively-subsidised 'economic development' strategies based on revived beach tourism (notwithstanding loss of coveted 'Blue Flag' status); mega-sports events to fill the 2010 Moses Mabhida White Elephant stadium; a dramatic port widening/deepening and a potential new dug-out harbour at the old airport site (or maybe instead more auto manufacturing); a competing new Dube trade port next to the King Shaka Airport; new long-distance air routes; expansion of South Durban's hated petrochemical complex; and a massive new Durban-Joburg oil pipeline and hence doubled refinery capacity. The shortsighted climate denialism of Durban City Manager Mike Sutcliffe is breathtaking.

This is yet more serious because the *Green Paper* passes the buck: "Most of our climate adaptation and much of the mitigation efforts will take place at provincial and municipal levels." Durban's dubious carbon market and offset deals – such as at the controversial Bisasar Road landfill in Clare Estate – dominate municipal policy. The *Green Paper* repeatedly endorsed "market-based policy measures" including carbon trading and offsets, at a time, in early 2011, that Europe's Emissions Trading Scheme completely collapsed due to internal fraud, external hacking and an extremely volatile carbon price, and the main US carbon market in Chicago had all but died.

South Africa's *Green Paper* authors obviously weren't paying attention to the markets, in arguing, "Limited availability of international finance for large scale fossil fuel infrastructure in developing countries is emerging as a potential risk for South Africa's future plans for development of new coal fired power stations." If so then why did Pretoria borrow \$3.75 billion from the World Bank, with around \$1 billion more expected in 2011-12 from the US Ex-Im Bank

and \$1.75 billion raised from international bond markets? Indeed by March 2011, Eskom announced its \$40 billion financing portfolio was secure, because both South Africa's and the North's financiers continued to be as short-sighted about coal investments as they were about credit derivatives, real estate, dot.coms, emerging markets and the carbon markets.

The *Green Paper* is also laced with false solutions. For example, attempting to "kick start and stimulate the renewable energy industry" requires "Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects." Yet the miniscule €14/tonne currently being paid to the Durban methane-electricity conversion at three local landfills shows the futility of the CDM, not to mention the historic injustice of keeping Bisasar Road's dump (Africa's largest) open in spite of resident objections to environmental racism. Similarly dubious policy ideas include "a nuclear power station fleet with a potential of up to 10 GWh by 2035 with the first reactors being commissioned from 2022" and, just as dangerously, a convoluted waste incineration strategy that aims to "facilitate energy recovery" through "negotiation of appropriate carbon-offset funding."

Together, these kinds of commitments made South Africa an extremely dangerous threat to humanity and the planet whenever its representatives appeared in UN climate fora.

South Africa at the COPs

At the COPs in both Copenhagen and Cancún, as well as at prior meetings such as Nairobi in November 2006, South African leaders regularly let down their African colleagues as well as the global environment. Since South Africa is not listed as a country that must cut emissions in the first (1997-2012) stage of the Kyoto Protocol, the only binding global climate agreement, there was little resistance in Pretoria to signing on. When it came to the second stage, however, Pretoria has been part of the contradictory movement of large emerging economies that both want to retain Kyoto's North-South differentiation of responsibility to cut emissions, and to either gut Kyoto's binding targets or establish complicated offsets and carbon trades which would have the same effect.

The Nairobi summit helped set the tone, because Pretoria's environment minister at the time was Marthinus van Schalkwyk, formerly head of the New National Party, which from 1948-94 was the ruling party of apartheid. A new Adaptation Fund was established in Nairobi, but its resources were reliant upon CDM revenues, and Africa received only around 2 percent of these. But because of COP politicians' and CDM officials' increasing embrace of biofuels and GE timber, activists from the Gaia Foundation, Global Forest Coalition, the Global Justice Ecology Project, Large Scale Biofuels Action Group, the STOP GE Trees Campaign and World Rainforest Movement condemned the Nairobi summit.²⁰ Van Schalkwyk wrote in *Business Day* newspaper that South Africa achieved its key Nairobi objectives, including kick-starting the CDM in Africa, and welcomed UN support for more 'equitable distribution of CDM projects', concluding that this work 'sends a clear signal to carbon markets of our common resolve to secure the future of the Kyoto regime.'²¹

As if to disprove any intent on joining Kyoto's emissions cuts, just days later van Schalkwyk's Cabinet colleagues confirmed the largest industrial subsidies in African history – entailing a vast increase in coal fired electricity – for the proposed Coega smelter and export processing zone near Port Elizabeth on the Eastern Cape. Just over a year later, as electricity supplies suffered extensive load-shedding, the project ultimately failed in 2008, but the long-standing plan was for Rio Tinto to build a \$2.5 billion aluminium smelter with highly-subsidised electricity, and then to apply for CDM financing to subsidise the vast power input even further.²² As one of South Africa's leading climate scientists, Richard Fuggle expressed it in his 2006 University of Cape Town retirement lecture,

It is rather pathetic that Van Schalkwyk has expounded the virtues of South Africa's 13 small projects to garner carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol's CDM, but has not expressed dismay at Eskom selling 1360 megawatts a year of coal-derived electricity to a foreign aluminium company. We already have one of the world's highest rates of carbon emissions per dollar of GDP. Adding the carbon that will be emitted to supply power to this single factory will make us number one on this dubious league table.²³

Given this background, it is telling that van Schalkwyk became, in March 2010, a leading candidate to run the UNFCCC.²⁴ My own view, as quoted in the press, was that "The UNFCCC post must be headed by someone of integrity, and that's not a characteristic associated with Van

Schalkwyk, thanks to his chequered career as an apartheid student spy and a man who sold out his political party for a junior cabinet seat.” And “If Van Schalkwyk was a world-class climate diplomat, why did Zuma demote him by removing his environment duties last year?”²⁵

Earthlife Africa argued that as environment minister, van Schalkwyk “did not have a good record in cutting carbon emissions.”²⁶ Indeed, judging by van Schalkwyk’s silence when Eskom proposed huge new coal-fired plants and when bountiful cheap-electricity deals were offered to multinational corporations, he was demonstrably unfit to tackle the other big global polluters. It would have been an ironic, dysfunctional appointment in any case, because as tourism minister van Schalkwyk was blithely promoting more air travel to South Africa – and yet the UNFCCC will soon have to start putting carbon taxes on planes, as well as South African exports. On the last occasion he stood on the world climate stage, in 2007, van Schalkwyk enthusiastically promoted a global carbon market in Washington at the IETA meeting, which in a just world would have disqualified him from further international climate work.²⁷

Although he did not get the job in the end, as Costa Rican carbon trader Christiana Figueres leapfrogged him at the last moment in May 2010 to get the job, van Schalkwyk did have strong supporters. According to an industry analysis,

A climate official from an unspecified government said that as a candidate, van Schalkwyk “would be acceptable to most people, so he should definitely be counted as a favourite.” Greenpeace Africa was “pleased to know Minister Van Schalkwyk is being considered and would be very confident that he would be equal to the task of replacing Mr. de Boer.... By all accounts, he has an excellent standing as a negotiator, and has earned a great deal of respect for being very engaged and informed... If he is appointed, developing countries, in particular, will have better access to him because he’s coming from a developing country.”²⁸

After van Schalkwyk came Sonjica, and then in late 2010, her replacement Edna Molewa. In Cancún, Molewa slowed progress on getting binding emissions cuts, because, “We believe that it is quite important that as developing countries we also get an opportunity to allow development to happen because of poverty. We need to allow space for us to actually introduce those emissions [reductions] over time, because developed countries have gone through the processes.”²⁹ The ruse here was that South Africa’s extremely high emissions contributed to poverty-reduction, rather than the opposite.

It was also regrettable that Pretoria negotiators went to both Copenhagen and Cancún empowered by endorsements from the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace – alongside gullible climate journalists – who took at face value a vaguely-promised 34 percent emissions cut below anticipated 2020 levels. WWF called Sonjica’s Copenhagen strategy ‘very progressive’.³⁰ Michelle Ndiaye, the Africa director of Greenpeace – so effective with direct action protests involving pranks and aesthetically gripping imagery (instead of grassroots organizing) – termed SA a ‘star’ of Copenhagen.³¹ In January 2010, according to Themba Linden of Greenpeace Africa, “The BASIC countries have to lead the world in light of no leadership from developed world” – yet it was the BASIC countries which legitimized the Copenhagen Accord.³² And in November 2010, in a Cancún warm-up negotiation session in China, Greenpeace’s Melita Steele remarked that Pretoria has a “fairly progressive [position] in the negotiations... quite an ambitious emissions reduction pledge.”³³

The reality was shockingly different, however. Tristen Taylor of Earthlife Africa begged Pretoria for details about the 34 percent pledge, and after two weeks of delays, learned Yawitch’s estimates were from a ‘Growth Without Constraint’ (GWC) scenario. According to Taylor, “GWC is fantasy, essentially an academic exercise to see how much carbon South Africa would produce given unlimited resources and cheap energy prices.” Officials had already conceded GWC was “neither robust nor plausible” eighteen months ago, leading Taylor to conclude, “The SA government has pulled a public relations stunt.”³⁴ After all, emissions cuts promised in the *Long-Term Mitigation Scenario* would not prevent the 2010-20 construction of the world’s fourth and third largest coal-fired powerplants, respectively, Medupi and Kusile.

Did Zuma know what he was doing, acting in Copenhagen on behalf of major mining/metals corporations, which keep SA’s ruling party lubricated with cash, ‘black economic empowerment’ deals and jobs for cronies, and which need higher SA carbon emissions so as to continue receiving the world’s cheapest electricity, and which then export their profits to London and

Melbourne? Perhaps, but on the other hand, two other explanations – ignorance and cowardice – were, eight years earlier, Zuma’s plausible defenses for promoting AIDS denialism. He helped Mbeki during the period in which 330,000 South Africans died due to Pretoria’s refusal to supply anti-retroviral medicines (as a Harvard Public Health School study showed).³⁵

To his credit, Zuma reversed course by 2003 (late in the day) and endorsed public supply of AIDS medicines, as public pressure arose from the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and its international allies. TAC continued to condemn Zuma, however, on grounds associated with his notorious sexual politics, including misogyny during his 2006 rape trial.³⁶ But it is that sort of intensive pressure that the main local activist network, Climate Justice Now! South Africa, must repeat, or otherwise permit Zuma to remain a signatory to a far worse genocide. Unfortunately, rising activist pressure in early 2010 failed in a similar mission: to prevent financing and construction of the world’s fourth-largest coal-fired power plant, Medupi.

Medupi Coal Corruption

We learn a great deal about South African climate politics by examining a crucial campaign – unsuccessful in the short term – which entailed fighting the World Bank’s fast-growing coal portfolio. On April 8 2010, after nearly two months of strenuous lobbying against more fossil fuel credits, the Bank Board approved a \$3.75 billion loan to the South African electricity utility Eskom. Its main purpose (for which \$3.1 billion was allocated) was construction of a power station that will pump 25-30 megatonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere annually, more than the output of 115 countries. Paying for Medupi will require a 127 percent real price increase from 2007-12 for South African household electricity consumers (to nearly \$0.15/kiloWatt hour).³⁷

The loan was a last-minute request, as the 2008-09 global financial turmoil dried up Eskom’s potential private sector financing. As a result, it was only in December 2009 that South African civil society activated local and global networks against the loan, starting with a groundWork/Earthlife briefing document in December 2009. Within three months, more than 200 organisations across the world had endorsed a critique of the loan.³⁸

South Durban activists launched the local public campaign on February 16 2010 with a spirited protest at Eskom’s main local branch. South Durban was an epicentre of protest against fossil fuels, given that it hosted the largest and least responsible petro-chemical firms south of the Niger Delta. With electricity prices soaring, many more residents in South Durban were being disconnected. They often reconnect illegally and as Eskom and the municipality clamped down, the result was more social strife, in a country with what is probably the world’s highest rate of community protest.³⁹ To establish a campaign against an obscure World Bank loan so quickly, with the purpose of generating a crisis of confidence at the World Bank and in Pretoria, required clarity of message, an explicit demand (‘stop Medupi financing’) and a variety of issue-linkages to pull various constituencies into a coalition.

As always, the question is who wins and who loses? First, the source areas of the coal for Medupi are highly contaminated by mercury and acid-mine drainage, with air, land, vegetables, animals and people’s health at much greater risk. Forty new coal mines in impoverished areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces will be opened to provide inputs to Medupi and its successor, Kusile. This will create a few coal sector jobs (hence receiving endorsement from the National Union of Mineworkers), but a great many jobs in agriculture and tourism will be lost as a result of the invasive mining activity and downstream degradation. Medupi itself will be built in a water-scarce area where communities are already confronting extreme mining pollution and, even though an air-cooled model (Africa’s first) was chosen, the cost of supplying an additional water-cooling supply amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars, given the long transport and pumping costs.

Once the coal is burned and electricity generated, the winners and losers become even more divergent. Medupi’s main beneficiaries will be the world’s largest metals and mining corporations, especially BHP Billiton (Melbourne based) and various Anglo American subsidiaries (most reporting to London), which already receive the world’s cheapest electricity thanks to multi-decade deals. Anger soon grew about the huge discounts made when secret, forty-year ‘Special Pricing Agreements’ were offered by Eskom during late apartheid, when the firm had a third too much excess capacity due to the long South African economic decline. These

agreements were finally leaked in March 2010 and disclosed that BHP Billiton and Anglo were receiving the world's cheapest electricity, at less than \$0.02/kWh (whereas the overall corporate price was around \$0.05/kWh, still the world's cheapest, and the consumer price was around \$0.10/kWh). In early April, just before the Bank decision, Eskom announced that a small modification was made to BHP Billiton's contract price but it was reportedly to the firm's 'advantage'. Finally, however, the Australian based mining house was sufficiently intimidated by the glare of publicity that in October 2010 Deutsche Bank mining analysts predicted BHP would dispose of Richards Bay assets. According to *Business Day* 'The reason for selling the aluminium smelters would be the scrutiny under which BHP's electricity contracts have come amid demands for resource companies to use less power.'⁴⁰

An additional problem with BHP and Anglo as beneficiaries is the outflow of profits to Melbourne and London, at a time South Africa's current account deficit made it the world's most risky middle-income country, according to *The Economist* (25 February 2009). Moreover, South Africa had an existing \$75 billion foreign debt, which would be escalated by five percent with the Bank loan. The 1994 foreign debt was just \$25 billion, and First National Bank projected that the ratio of foreign debt to GDP would by 2011 rise to the same level as was reached in 1985, when a debt crisis compelled a default (on \$13 billion).⁴¹ That was the signal, incidentally, that business and banking were finally breaking ranks with the apartheid regime.⁴²

Another controversial aspect of the loan was the Bank's articulation of the privatization agenda. The confirmation that Eskom would offer private generating capacity to Independent Power Producers was established in loan documentation, in relation to the renewable component, advancing Eskom's desire to privatize 30 percent of generating capacity (including a 49 percent private share in Kusile, although no private interest had been expressed for Medupi). This component attracted explicit opposition from trade unions – especially the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa – and consumers.⁴³

Corruption was another feature that generated critiques of the World Bank by South African opposition political parties (especially the centre-left Independent Democrats and liberal Democratic Alliance, which subsequently merged) and the influential liberal *Business Day* newspaper.⁴⁴ These organizations opposed the loan because contrary to supposed Bank anti-corruption policies, it will directly fund African National Congress (ANC) ruling party coffers. Medupi will be built with Hitachi boilers that in turn kick back between \$10 and \$100 million (the amount is still unclear) thanks to an ANC investment in Hitachi. As the Eskom-Hitachi deal was signed, the Eskom chairperson (and former environment minister), Valli Moosa, was also a member of the ANC's finance committee. A government investigation released in March 2010 found his conduct in this conflict of interest to be 'improper'.⁴⁵ The ANC promised to sell the investment stake, but this dragged on and in late 2010 was still not complete. Ironically, in February 2010, the Bank had issued a major statement alongside its annual African Development Indicators, entitled *Quiet Corruption*, in which it blamed African teachers and healthcare workers for moonlighting (a result of Bank structural adjustment policies).⁴⁶ Were there justice in the Bank, the Medupi loan could have been a core case study.

Ironically, in December 2010, the World Bank's website headlined news about the "Corruption Hunters" conference, with Zoellick pronouncing, "Stealing is bad enough, ripping off the poor is disgusting."⁴⁷ Quite. An aside on the Bank's hunt for corruption is therefore tempting, because it was perfectly logical for Zoellick to have hired as the head of his anti-corruption unit a top political operator for South Africa's machiavellian former president Mbeki. Leonard McCarthy was involved in an apparently illegal conspiracy to undermine the subsequent president, Zuma (also apparently very corrupt), simply to play politics.⁴⁸

And in relation to the Bank in South Africa, the matter of historic racial injustice could not be ignored. The World Bank's financing of apartheid began just three years after the 1948 election of the Afrikaners' Nationalist Party, lasting through 1967, and included \$100 million for Eskom.⁴⁹ During that period, the Bank financed the supply of electricity to no black households (who only began receiving electricity in 1980), and instead empowered only white businesses and residences.

Curiously, South African Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan argued, on April 1 2010, that 'South Africa, in 16 years of democracy, never has had to take any loans from the World Bank... This is an opportunity for the World Bank to build a relationship with South Africa.'⁵⁰ Yet the

Bank's 1999 and 2008 'Country Assistance Strategy' documents show conclusively that Medupi is the 15th credit since 1994.⁵¹ As for 'building a relationship', Gordhan also neglected that the Bank coauthored the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (homegrown structural adjustment) programme, whose orthodox strategies failed and which led South Africa to overtake Brazil as the world's most unequal major country, not to mention more than a dozen other major interventions in social and economic policy.⁵²

Indeed the Bank itself regularly bragged about its 'Knowledge Bank' role in South Africa, and in 1999, for example, after Bank economist John Roome suggested to then water minister Kader Asmal that the government impose 'a credible threat of cutting service' to people who could not afford water at the supplier's cost, the Bank's Country Assistance Strategy reported that its 'market-related pricing' advice was 'instrumental in facilitating a radical revision in SA's approach'.⁵³ As a result, the cholera epidemic the following year – catalysed by water disconnections near Richards Bay – killed hundreds.⁵⁴ Predictions are easy to make, given the huge price increases faced by electricity customers, that parallel misery will follow the Bank's Medupi loan.

The Bisasar Road CDM

One of the most obvious strategic orientations of the South African government is carbon trading. To illustrate the controversies, in April 2010 the Medupi power plant was proposed by Eskom officials as a potential CDM project, in spite of the enormous eco-social resistance that arose to its financing by a World Bank loan.⁵⁵ In the same spirit, in 2009, an attempt by Sasol to claim that a gas pipeline investment was 'additional' to existing plans (hence deserving emissions reductions credits) was ridiculed by the Johannesburg activist group Earthlife Africa, and did not pass muster in the UN vetting process.⁵⁶

But the most controversial was South Africa's single largest CDM project, a methane-electricity conversion at Bisasar Road dump in Durban's Clare Estate residential neighborhood, which processes 5000 tonnes of solid waste a day and is Africa's largest formal landfill. The struggle of Sajida Khan (1952-2007), a self-taught ecologist, is instructive for any of us worried about the climate. Attempting to shut the dump that ultimately killed her, Khan dedicated half her life to a contest with international corporations, the World Bank and heartless municipal bureaucrats.⁵⁷

She was raised in what was the traditionally Indian neighbourhood within Clare Estate, astride a nature reserve that spanned a small valley. In 1980, when Khan was 28, her surroundings were suddenly destroyed by apartheid officials. The peaceful reserve became an unending, stinking heap of rubbish, which until the late 1990s also included a medical waste incinerator. Khan believed that the neighborhood's involuntary receipt of overwhelmingly wealthy white Durbanites' droppings was the root cause of her two cancer cases, the latter of which was fatal. The reason that Bisasar Road dump was not closed in the early 2000s notwithstanding a very substantial pressure campaign by Khan and 6000 residents, was a commitment by the World Bank to invest a potential \$14.4 million grant in a CDM project to convert landfill methane emissions into electricity.⁵⁸

With at least another 15 years of life left in the dump before it reached its maximum possible height, Durban officials (white men) celebrated the Bank's interest at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development by ignoring the clamour (mainly by black women) to close it. The officials aimed to draw out the methane, burn and flare it (with associated incineration hazards) so as to power turbines and link the resulting electricity back into the municipal grid. The 'win-win' strategy to capture the dump's escaping methane – a greenhouse gas at least twenty times more potent than CO₂ – would require the CDM subsidy so as to compete with South Africa's cheap coal-fired national electricity grid.

Community opposition to the Bank's CDM and demands for Bisasar Road's closure were not universal. Apartheid segregated South Africa's four main race groups into different areas. In addition to people of Indian origin like Khan, Clare Estate also hosts thousands of poor 'African' and working-class 'coloured' residents. The Khan family built their middle-class house in the 1950s on Clare Road. Some members of the family still reside in the house overlooking (to the west) the dump, directly in the path of prevailing winds which continually coat the area with light landfill dust and disease-carrying flies. As logical as the closure demand is, given the history

of environmental racism, there are nevertheless conflicting opinions about how to handle this menacing neighbor. Starting in early 2005, the Abahlali baseMjondolo shackdwellers' movement of Kennedy Road – also directly adjoining the landfill, to the north – did an extraordinary job struggling against adverse conditions and police repression (until in September 2009 many of the leaders were driven away after violent attacks). But throughout the 2000s, the Kennedy Road shackdwellers welcomed the opportunity to have several dozen of their members pick rubbish and informally recycle it while on the dump. Scores more shackdwellers once informally picked materials from the dump, until the municipality's Durban Solid Waste limited access due to safety and health dangers.

There was not unity in this community, for Kennedy Road leaders accused Khan of threatening livelihoods and sabotaging the city's offer of a handful of jobs and bursaries (in Uganda) in the event the CDM project got off the ground.⁵⁹ Khan had used the word 'informals' to describe the shack settlement residents and once advocated that they be compensated and moved to areas nearby (as she herself desired for her family), sufficiently far from the dump (she recommended a buffer for all residents of 800 meters) to be safe from the windswept dust. At the nearby clinic, health workers confirmed that Kennedy Road residents suffer severely from asthma, sinusitis, pneumonia and even tuberculosis. The toxic body load is unknown, but the Cancer Society of South Africa deemed the area a 'cancer hotspot' because of the heavy metals and other dangerous substances that penetrate the water, air and shifting soils. Khan had a profound empathy for people in the same proximity as cancer-causing and respiratory disease particulates, as she noted in an interview: 'Recently a woman was buried alive. She died on the site [picking rubbish, killed by a dump truck offloading]. I could have saved her life.'⁶⁰

In contrast, for John Parkin, deputy head of the engineering at Durban Solid Waste, 'What makes (the Bisasar Road CDM project) worthwhile is the revenue that can be earned from carbon credits', estimated at 3.1 million certified emissions reduction credits, worth about \$15 million, along with some 6-8 megaWatts of electricity over a 20 year lifespan.⁶¹ In late 2006, the French Development Agency pledged long-term loans of \$8 million to Durban's landfill gas projects (Bisasar is by far the largest of three), alongside the \$1.3 million extended by South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry.

The World Bank had backed off in 2005 when Khan's fame was at her height – e.g. the lead paragraph in the *Washington Post's* analysis of the Kyoto Protocol when it came into effect that year⁶² was about Khan's battle against CDMs – but still billed itself as a potential financier for the project. In 2008, the Bank was replaced by an investment company, Tradings Emissions, which acquired the right to purchase one million emissions reduction credits. The firm's investment advisor Simon Shaw termed Bisasar and the other two landfills 'an important project, it is operational, it has a long term future and we anticipate registration shortly. These credits will be a useful addition to our portfolio.' In March 2009, the municipality registered it on the United Nations list of CDM projects, as active through at least 2014.⁶³

The four million cubic meters of potential Bisasar Road rubbish that is today's remaining capacity – on top of 19 million cubic meters in the dump that are already exuding methane – will allow extraction of methane and damaging on-site conversion of electricity for many years to come. Khan believed that the gas should indeed be removed, but through nearby gas pipes, not burned and flared on site. Khan's goal of Bisasar Road's immediate closure with conversion of the gas for industrial use a long way from residential areas could have been achieved were there better financing systems available than the unstable carbon market.

Khan's surviving relatives are bitter about their multiple losses, and miss Khadija's energy for and love of resistance to environmental injustice. Sometimes accused of waging her battle because of a selfish interest, her family's declining property value, Khan rebutted, 'No, no. It's to do with pollution, and it transcends race and colour'.⁶⁴ Yet there were certainly class and, to some extent, race and gender power relations at play – all of which were shaped by capital accumulation at municipal, national and global scales.

For example, as Khan struggled for life, the toxic economy of Bisasar Road was being rebuilt by the Durban municipality with the global capitalist master's CDM tool. The campaign to close apartheid's dump may ultimately fail as a result of the various post-apartheid forces whose interaction now generates overlapping, interlocking, eco-social and personal tragedies. Still, if inhaling status quo pollution meant paying dearly with her health for so many years, Khan died

knowing she had been partially successful: at least temporarily preventing a major World Bank investment and raising local/global consciousness.

Most importantly, she left us with a drive to transcend the inherited conditions and mindsets into which apartheid categories have cemented infrastructures and people. But pessimistically, and realistically, without Khan's energy and talent, it was infeasible for Clare Estate residents from different and sometimes opposed race/class backgrounds to forge more effective alliances against the municipality, at least not in the short-term. It was only a matter of time before global capitalist processes rolled over citizen opposition to Bisasar Road, facilitated by the money-hungry, neoliberal municipality, joined by Pretoria and Paris.

Power to the People

The ordinary Sowetan working-class electricity consumer offers us a good case study of climate politics, because of extraordinary political mobilisations that have occurred in the Johannesburg 'South Western Townships' (Soweto), including the student rising of 1976. In the same spirit, using the same rhetoric and songs, a new movement against extreme electricity price increases arose in 2000, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. The potential for Soweto civics to address issues beyond their immediate community by tracing the production of a basic need – such as water from Lesotho dams to privatised municipal water to substandard sewage systems⁶⁵ – has been remarked upon often. But the particular conditions of electricity commodification in relation to climate have enormous potential.

Sowetans experienced high price increases due to a huge reduction in central-local state subsidies during the 1990s, 85 percent in real terms according to the Financial and Fiscal Commission.⁶⁶ As the subsidies ebbed and as Eskom followed its mandate for "cost-reflexive tariffs", an estimated ten million people were victims of electricity disconnections after apartheid, and in the early 2000s, the rate increased dramatically.⁶⁷

This process of electricity commodification was first posed in an apartheid-era (1986) *White Paper on Energy Policy* which called for the 'highest measure of freedom for the operation of market forces', the involvement of the private sector, a shift to a market-oriented system with a minimum of state control and involvement, and deregulation of pricing, marketing and production. After apartheid was replaced in 1994, similar language was found in the *Urban Development Strategy* (1995), the *Municipal Infrastructure Investment Framework* (1997 and 2001), and the *Energy White Paper* (1998). The latter called for 'cost-reflective' electricity tariffs so as to limit any potential subsidy from industry to consumers.⁶⁸

Asked why cross-subsidization of electricity prices to benefit the poor was not being considered, the state's leading infrastructure-services official explained, 'If we increase the price of electricity to users like Alusaf [a major aluminum exporter owned by BHP Billiton], their products will become uncompetitive and that will affect our balance of payments'.⁶⁹ (BHP Billiton paid approximately one tenth the price that retail consumers do, without factoring in the ecological price of cheap power at the site of production and in the coal-gathering and burning process).

Rising electricity prices across South African townships had a negative impact during the late 1990s, evident in declining use of electricity despite an increase in the number of connections. According to Statistics South Africa, households using electricity for lighting increased from 63.5 percent in 1995 to 69.8 percent in 1999. However, households using electricity for cooking declined from 55.4 percent to 53.0 percent, and households using electricity for heating dropped from 53.8 percent in 1995 to just 48.0 percent in 1999. The state agency conceded a significant link between decreasing usage and the increasing price of electricity.⁷⁰

Most poor South Africans still rely for a large part of their lighting, cooking and heating energy needs upon paraffin (with its burn-related health risks), coal (with high levels of domestic household and township-wide air pollution) and wood (with dire consequences for deforestation). The use of dirty sources of energy has negative consequences especially for women's health leading to respiratory diseases and eye problems. This is because women, are traditionally responsible for managing the home; they are more affected by the high cost of electricity, and spend greater time and resources searching for alternative energy. Ecologically-sensitive energy sources, such as solar, wind and tidal, have barely begun to be explored,

notwithstanding the enormous damage done by South Africa's addiction to fossil-fuel consumption.

Neoliberal pricing principles and the consequent policy of mass disconnections prevented the widespread redistribution required to make Eskom's mass electrification feasible. As protests began in earnest from 1997 and the African National Congress witnessed rising apathy before the 2000 municipal elections, the ruling party introduced a 'Free Basic Services' monthly package of 50 kWh of electricity per household, but Eskom delayed implementation and the amount proved far too little, and disconnections increased.⁷¹

Eskom continued to be a target of criticism, especially from environmentalists who complain that coal-burning plants lack sufficient sulfur scrubbing equipment and that alternative renewable energy investments have been negligible. Moreover, labor opposition mounted. Having fired more than 40,000 of its 85,000 employees during the early 1990s, thanks to mechanization and overcapacity, the utility tried to outsource and corporatize several key operations, resulting in periodic national anti-privatization strikes by the trade union federation.

But it was in Soweto that the resistance became world famous and internationally networked. In 2001, domestic consumers paid an average price to Eskom of US\$0.03 cents per kWh, while the manufacturing and mining sectors paid only half that amount. Two years earlier, in 1999, Soweto residents had experienced three increases – amounting to 47 percent – in a short period as Eskom brought tariffs in line with other areas.⁷² This reflected the move towards 'cost reflectivity' and away from regulated price increases, in order to reduce and eventually eliminate subsidies, so as to achieve 'market-related returns sufficient to attract new investors into the industry', said Eskom.⁷³

When prices became unaffordable and payment arrears began to mount, Eskom's first strategy was disconnection and repression. Eskom decided in 2001 to disconnect households whose arrears were more than \$800, with payment more than 120 days overdue. An anticipated 131,000 households in Soweto were to be cut off due to non-payment, according to Eskom, even though the company had only 126,000 recorded consumers in the township.⁷⁴ Johannesburg Metro authorities decided, in an act of solidarity, to cut off water and began evictions selling off residents' houses in order to recoup the debts owed, in an attempt to pressure people to pay Eskom arrears.⁷⁵ A survey of Soweto residents found that 61 percent of households had experienced electricity disconnections, of whom 45 percent had been cut off for more than one month. A random, stratified national survey conducted by the Municipal Services Project and Human Sciences Research Council found that ten million people across South Africa had experienced electricity cutoffs.⁷⁶

The impact of disconnections can be fatal. One indication of the health implications of electricity denial and of supply cuts was the upsurge in TB rates, as respiratory illnesses are carried by particulates associated with smoke from wood, coal and paraffin. Because of climate and congestion, respiratory diseases are particularly common in Soweto. In a 1998 survey, two in five Sowetans reportedly suffered from respiratory problems.⁷⁷ Survey respondents reported many fires in the neighborhood, often caused by paraffin stoves, many of which were harmful to children. Eskom's disconnection procedures often resulted in electricity cables lying loose in the streets.⁷⁸ Residents were unhappy not only about the high reconnection fees charged but the fact that Eskom used outsourced companies that earn \$10 per household disconnection. No notification was given that supply would be cut off, and residents were not given time to rectify payments problems. Eskom can disconnect entire blocks at a time by removing circuit breakers, penalizing those who do pay their bills along with those who don't.

All these grievances provided the raw material from which the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and its Operation Khanyisa emerged, a point we take up in the final chapter, along with a critical look at the way more explicit climate justice movement-building from below has worked in some of the main sites of struggle.

South Africa's interlinked climate-energy-economic travesties can only be reversed by grassroots and labor activism. At the Durban COP 17, don't expect a global deal that can save the planet, given prevailing adverse power relations. Instead of relying on paralyzed politicians and lazy bureaucrats, South Africa's environmental, community, women's, youth and labor voices will be demanding serious action to address the greatest crisis of our times:

- major investments in Green Jobs would let metalworkers weld millions of solar-powered geysers, for example, thus allowing Eskom to switch off power to BHP Billiton's aluminum smelters and to halt new powerplant construction without net job loss;
- new public transport subsidies should reconfigure apartheid-era urban design and pull us willingly from single-occupant cars;
- an employment-rich zero-waste strategy would recycle nearly everything and compost our organic waste so as to eliminate methane emissions at the remaining landfills;
- more direct-action protests against major emissions point sources – Eskom, Sasol (apartheid's wicked coal-to-oil company), the Engen refinery in South Durban and the new Durban-Joburg oil mega-pipeline, for instance – should better link micro-environmental struggles over local air, water and land quality to climate change;
- more ambitious Air Quality Act regulations would label – and then phase out – carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gas 'pollutants', as with the US Clean Air Act;
- government planning and utility board decisions would halt willy-nilly suburbanisation and ungreen 'development'; and
- instead of North-South financing via destructive carbon markets, the demand for 'climate debt' would permit the flow of strings-free, non-corrupt and effective adaptation funds.

Through urgent adoption of genuine post-carbon strategies like these, by the time of the COP 17 in November 2011, the world might have seen in Durban a state and society committed to reversing climate change. But for a variety of reasons, it was not to be.

The Durban COP

The exceptional record of climate injustice and rather ineffectual resistance left South Africa's CJ movement prospects somewhat limited in the run-up to the Durban COP 17. In January 2011 the activists considered a process of unification with Climate Action Network members whose highest-profile local members were the branch of the conservative World Wildlife Fund (a group on record favouring both the SA negotiating position and carbon trading) and the rather fluid, self-interested Greenpeace, led by Durban-born Kumi Naidoo.

Comparisons to the prior two hosts are interesting, in part because of prospects for CJ movement building that rose in Denmark in 2009 but fell back in Mexico in 2010, largely due to a politically-splintered and geographically fragmented oppositional terrain. Civil society looked forward to the South African host function because of the need to publicise and change so many local policies, practices and projects, as well as the strong cadreship of activists with summit-protest experience from 2001 in Durban and 2002 in Johannesburg.

But compared to the two prior events, there were some important differences that would shape the COP given its South African context. First, unlike in Denmark, the Pretoria government wouldn't consider giving funding to its green-red critics to set up an independent counter-summit site, but would instead attempt to funnel civilised society into an area immediately adjacent to the Durban International Convention Centre (ICC). There, delegates would face extreme, badge-based access controls to negotiations (unlike Copenhagen's Bella Centre managers, who allowed in registered civil society groups until three days before the climax, but then U-turned and rejected even Climate Action Now's presence).

Of course that ICC space would be tamed. The SA government's idea of civil society is highly-regulated civilised society, or loyalist civil society, and when protests about the environment and local socio-economic grievances emerge, the SA government regularly villifies – and sometimes represses – the critics (or just ignores them). For example, Durban municipality officials regularly reject – with banal explanations – civil society applications for mass protest marches, although to be balanced, it must be said that the SA police have never shown the capacity to kettle or break up large marches, as witnessed in Copenhagen, or successfully infiltrate leading activist groups (as has been revealed recently in the Mark Kennedy case).

As we have seen already, while perfecting the crucial narrative art of 'talk left in order to walk right' (as Frantz Fanon showed is so typical of African nationalism in *The Wretched of the Earth*), South Africa's government typically hosts major summits – the World Conference Against Racism and World Summit on Sustainable Development are the main comparative examples – in ways that amplify the world elites' most conservative power relations (e.g. lining

up pro-Zionist and anti-reparations in 2001 and pro-privatisation in 2002). Thus they are also the target of local protesters. As a result, the society's view of the UNFCCC – and the UN role in general – is far less hopeful than Denmark's was, in part because global-governance strategies (with the exception of exempting AIDS medicines from World Trade Organisation control at Doha in 2001) are generally understood to complement not contradict Western imperialism, especially in relation to Africa. But this tends to be impressionistic, not at the level of detailed anger expressed by citizenries at the Copenhagen Accord signing in December 2009. At the level of broader society, while a substantial share of Copenhagen residents, Danes and nearby Europeans, especially youth, realised what was at stake and joined the proceedings, in both South Africa and Mexico, the levels of popular participation in climate debates (and knowledge of the crisis) are much lower.

Instead, there is more desperate fury in these sites at the degeneration of state services, hence South Africa's pride of place amongst the highest protest rates in the world. Given that Pretoria has imposed an extreme local climate/energy crisis on its subjects – massive coal-fired plants generating power for large aluminium and mining firms with exploitative electricity price increases to the under-accessed poor – and makes only token efforts to develop renewable energy and practically no efforts (except an elite fast train) at improving public transport, the Durban COP would not be a friendly place. Local activists' *modus operandi* include building mass mobilisations with very radical rhetoric and substantial marches and demonstrations (albeit not as many as were gathered in Copenhagen in December 2009), as well as more surgical policy critiques. But local organisations lack either the symbolic orientation of European NGOs' banner hangs, flash mobs and other media-savvy tactics, or, on the other end of the spectrum, the black bloc of militant anarchist/autonomist groups. Because of that, the movement below is critically important in this setting, in a way it wasn't in Copenhagen or Cancún.

Paralysis above was anticipated to continue. The hyped expectations of 'Hopenhagen' were no longer a factor since no one had any sense that Durban would either extend Kyoto or give the Copenhagen Accord sufficient teeth to address the crisis properly. Even the man with most to win or lose from perceived progress in Durban, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, shifted focus to a potential 2012 deal at the Rio+20 gathering in Brazil. According to his assistant Robert Orr, "It is very evident that there will not be a single grand deal at any point in the near future."⁷⁹

At the level of Durban's fine detail, no one would justifiably expect the North to deliver a useful funding mechanism and actual binding commitments, given the reactionary character of all the key governments, plus the rising capacity of the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (an increase from IBSA days) – to foil cutback commitments. It was no secret that since the end of 2009, the elites' primary strategic vehicle for reducing emissions, the carbon market, was in the doldrums (in part because the Copenhagen Accord had no legitimacy). Although one of the crucial functions of Cancún was to re-legitimise emissions trading, and although was done in theory but not in practice (as witnessed by ongoing chaos in the European Emissions Trading Scheme), the carbon markets were still incapable of performing feats such as paying for forest conservation and transferring half the \$100 billion/year of adaptation funds to the South promised in Copenhagen by 2020.

Moreover, since 2010 the world became more acutely aware of the devastating roles of two Washington institutions – the World Bank (after the Medupi loan) and the US State Department (after WikiLeaks revelations). As for hosting responsibilities, the South African government could be expected to repeat the Danes' inept, inexperienced and ideologically confused facilitation, inadequate to the task of bridging vast political divides. As in 2001 and 2002, Pretoria would most likely kow-tow to Washington's whims and global business rhetoric. The result: further elite delegitimation and further responsibility on civil society to generate genuine solutions.

Notes

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