**Dare to struggle for power! Make another South Africa and World Possible!**

# Speech by Mazibuko K. Jara
# at

# The Crises and the Commons Conference

**Praxis in Durban from 4-7 November 2009**

**at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society**
**cohosted by *Amandla!* Magazine and iKwezi Institute**
**School of Development Studies, Memorial Tower Building, Howard College**

Qina mhlali wasemjondolo uzonqoba qina!
Qina msebenzi uzonqoba qina!
Qina wena wesifazane uzonqoba qina!
Amandla!

## Our country and world are in crisis

We were oppressed, hungry and hopeless. They came singing sweet words promising us jobs, jobs, jobs! Promising us all that we will have a better life! A new South Africa! In their sweet words, we believed. They also told us we must "export, export, export". They said we must be part of global markets. What they did not tell us was how we will suffer simply because the global markets serve the needs and interests of MNCs. We were not told that even though we can produce enough maize in our country but we cannot decide the price for it here. Instead, this global market we are now part of dictates world prices for maize from the casino games played out by gamblers/speculators at the Chicago Board of Trade.

We were not told that policies to attract investors meant that

government will ignore investment in service delivery. We were not told that globalisation meant that SA Breweries, Anglo American, Old Mutual, Sanlam and other big companies will leave our country with their ill-gotten profits without investing in solving our problems right here and now. We were not told that Arcelor Mittal will now come to our country and take over ISCOR, retrench workers, pollute the Vaal and make steel so expensive for our own manufacturing companies. Now with our steel Arcelor Mittal is one of the biggest and richest steel companies in the world!

We were also not told that Parmalat will come all the way from Italy and destroy thousands of jobs of farm workers in the milk farms which cannot compete with the subsidized cows of Italy. For each day of their lives, these cows gets more money from the EU government than all the money that poor people in Africa!

It is this gospel of "export, export, export" that has exposed South Africa so badly to the global economic crisis.

Internationally:

- 60 million workers are likely to lose their jobs this year
- 50 million more people in the 'Third World' are likely to be plunged into poverty
- There is no longer enough energy for a capitalist economy that just consumes and consumes and consumes!
- With climate change and the endless use of resources from nature, the very conditions of nature that are required to sustain human life are under threat , they are exhausted, Comrade Earth can no longer carry the weight of greedy capitalists, if there is no action then Comrade Nature is going to wipe us out. Global capitalism threatens our world with disaster. If it is left to plunder the natural resources of

our planet and pollute the atmosphere, the oceans and the soil, life itself will be under grave threat. The current global economic crisis represents the exhaustion of a system that is driven by profit and competition.

In South Africa:

- In spite of the break with apartheid and the establishment of political democracy, the situation for the working people and the poor gets worse.
- The high levels of corruption is about greed. But it is not only that – it is also an outcome of the failure to redistribute wealth.
- More than 500,000 jobs have been lost since the start of the recession in October 2008;
- We have become the most unequal society in the world;
- Women may have rights on paper but neo-liberalism has hit them the hardest;
- We exceed the world in violence against women and children;
- Despite building of houses, more than 2 million families lack decent housing, the same number as in 1994;
- We have one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the world.

Yet South African capitalists are laughing all the way to the bank raking in profits every day!

We cried. We were down. But we stood and fought for another day. We went to the streets. We went to Polokwane. We removed Mbeki. We got our Msholozi. But what did we get?

Now, we know that Polokwane does not signal a break with a system that has seen a rise in social inequality, social decay and a resurgent social conservatism in the form of ethnic

politics, xenophobia, attacks on women and reproductive rights, homophobia, religious fundamentalism, etc.

We are still in pain. We are kicked in the face. We are full of tears. We see our comrades of Abahlali Basemijondolo in Kennedy Road living in hiding. We see our leaders in expensive cars. But we shall not lie down anymore. Our comrades in Sakhile are showing us the way. Our comrades in Lingelihle are doing the same. Our comrades in the Treatment Action Campaign have shown us the way – we can build ourselves into a big force that can challenge both drug companies and government and still win. We do not want crises in our lives. We want decent lives with work guaranteed and available for person living in our country. We want good houses in areas where there is work and not kwampelwazwe. We want free electricity and water. We want safe communities with good public transport so that we can go wherever our heart pleases without fear. We want free education for our children. We want good public schools and good public libraries where we stay.

**Our common public goods are under attack**

Polluting ESKOM wants even more of our money to pay for poor planning, dirty electricity and huge salaries for its managers. They want the poor to pay more than big companies. They do not tell us how everyone in the country will get free electricity for life. They do not tell us about how they will invest in renewable energy. Yet they want to just agree to a huge tariff increase!

Our sweat, our aspirations, our energies now mean R1,2 million salary and another R1 million for their expensive cars each for a cabinet of 60 people

Shell, Arcelor Mittal, the mining companies, commercial farmers pollute our air, soil and waters with emissions, waste, acid water and chemicals in fertiliser

Medical schemes take billions of money away from workers to enrich the asset managers and private hospitals.

Private hospitals, drug companies make huge profits out of us falling sick.

More than R15 billion has been spent on the stadiums and yet the poor traders of Warwick Avenue are forced off the streets.

Before we forget, the arms deal is still costing us more than R60 billion and yet our small farmers do not have R1 billion in this year's budget.

Yesterday, it is Mcebisi Skwatsha attacking Ebrahim Rasool. Very recently it was Phumulo Masualle going for Mcebisi Jonas. Today it is Fikile Mbalula against Gwede Mantashe. Baxabana ngathi laba bantu!

**Reclaim our commons and use the crises to create new possibilities**

The future rests in the hands of poor and working people, the dispossessed, the unemployed, the youth, women and rural people. But only if we wrestle for power and the right to shape a new agenda rooted in the power of a big anti-capitalist movement of the people! We need strong independent and autonomous mass organisations of the people. We must struggle to give meaning to the slogan "we are our own liberators".

The big questions:

- The ANC and its government remain important and popular. The ANC is the identity and culture of millions of people. We must not make the mistake to dismiss or unnecessarily attack it. But we must be critical of, and challenge it smartly, wisely, effectively and on the basis of our organised mass strength. But how do we do this when it is not so easy?
- Social movements are weak and fragile. The left is weak, divided and ineffective. How do we change this?
- Is there a social base that can contest existing power relations, deepen democracy, challenge and transform the capitalist state we have, redistribute wealth and win transformative economic and social policies in order to sustain and nurture human life, the soil and nature?
- Can we be the organised, united, strong and fighting social force that ends crises and claims our common public and natural goods?
- Can our social movements, our community organisations and our community protests take us any further if we do not challenge capitalism and put forward a vision of democratic socialist politics in today's South Africa?

We must struggle to rekindle the mass movement of the 1980s which brought apartheid to an end. We must learn from the TAC, from Abahlali, from the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and many others. We know that we are still weak. We must unite across townships, across political lines, across differences of the past. We can eventually unite all progressive forces amongst the poor and working class not least those from COSATU and the SACP.

We must build our confidence. We must build our voice. We must build our solidarity.

Yes, we face big problems and crises. Do we just sit with these problems and get on with our lives? TAC showed us that the HIV/AIDS crisis was not the end of the world. TAC used it as an opportunity to build a mass movement, a big social voice of people who only 11 years ago were hiding in corners, living without hope, many dying silently. Yet 11 years later, every hospital administrator in Lusikisiki knows that they must get the ARV programme working properly in their local hospital. 11 years later President Denial and Dr. Beetroot are in the dustbin of history where they belong! 11 years later drug companies have been exposed as immoral! profiteers to think twice before they 11 years later we have an HIV/AIDS National Strategic Plan! 11 years later we know we must still take away the production of drugs from these private companies to the hands of worker-owned factories!

Today too, we can turn these big problems and crises around! The big problems and crises we face present us with major possibilities. This is the time to change the economy.

But as we fight to change the economy and win a better life, the bosses will put up a big fight to destroy any good policies. Take the National Health Insurance proposal for example. Its goal is to ensure that all people in the country can acces high quality health services without payment. Yet the bosses threaten government that health professionals will leave the country if the NHI is implemented. They will scare people into believing that the government will destroy the private healthcare system. They will accuse the government of being communists and that foreign investment will flee the country and the economy will collapse. These are the desperate lies they will tell to keep their privileges and profits. Some in the government and the ANC who profit from private health will

help spread these lies. Many members of COSATU, the SACP and the ANC want an NHI. It is an idea they helped formulate. But the leaders could compromise under the pressure from the private health bosses. This is why we must join the fight for the NHI! We must form or join local health committees fighting for an NHI. Only mass organisation can bring the NHI we want!

With massive resources, the bosses and their indunas are fighting an ideological battle to prevent any sensible, democratic debate opening up within our country on economic policy evaluation and change. We have been here before. In the critical 1994-1996 period, a similar battle was waged to capture the new government's economic policy agenda. This included constant threats about what "global markets" would do to us if we dared challenge anything in the neo-liberal gospel. This theme was repeated over and over.

And that is exactly what is now being repeated – except last time, we were being told there were no alternatives to the Washington consensus. Now, we are being told that the crisis of this very same economic agenda is so great, that we had better not risk changing anything.

We must know that not even Jacob Zuma is our saviour. We must not sit and wait. We must reject the silly suggestion that behind some of the community protests, we can see dirty hands of the third force. If they insult us with that label, we must wear it proudly as a badge of honour. Yes we are not the capitalist forces. Yes we are not the corrupt and bankrupt politicians. Yes, we are a third force against both capitalist and corrupt political forces. Yes, we are a third forces looking for an alternative away from both capitalism and a failing state. Yes, we are third force concerned with building the power of the people on the ground and not in boardrooms in Luthuli House

or the Union Buildings!

No, we are not passive spectators watching the politics of politicians in a kind of theatre. No, we refuse to watch the Bold and Beautiful show where today Mbalula is with the left and tomorrow Malema is attacking his friends on the left.

Our problems are structural. We have to transform the systemic features of our capitalist economy. The big economic and social problems of our country cannot be addressed without a change in economic policy. Not without a new state that works for the people and challenges capital. And not without mass struggles. This is a point we should never forget. The transformation of our economy and society critically requires popular participation, popular mobilisation and popular monitoring and evaluation.

We need four critical political conditions required to use these crises as a basis for a revolutionary transformation of our society:

- United, organised, strong and vibrant organisations of the people that are anti-capitalist, autonomous and independent;
- A principled, progressive, pluralistic, tolerant and revolutionary political force of the left untainted by corruption and trappings of a capitalist state;
- Conscious subjects of a revolutionary process who are conscious and capacitated self-agents for thorough-going transformation not beholden to any political elite;
- Ideological work and social mobilisation directed at private capital given the multi-fold global crisis facing capitalism (marked by growing prospects for a global recession, the financial crisis and the energy crisis)

## Dare to build an alternative power

South Africa is in desperate of a radical and transformative political and economic programme. Such a programme is not just about carving up the cake! Such a radical programme should be about new values that underpin wealth creation and ownership, redistribution but also transforming the power dynamics of social relations.

In this sense alone and not through insider trading, can we begin to have an organisational and political base to re-build a political and organisational base to contest power relations, deepen democracy and win transformative policies. This requires that we assert positively who and what we are and not simply whom we are against. More than anything else done to date, this is a more principled and sustainable basis for systematically dislodging the so-called 1996 class project and its legacy.

We must reject the politics of politicians. We must build the politics of the people. We must take power. But we must not only take power. We must transform it.

Our politics must be different from limited mass mobilisation that is normally used by political leaders to advance limited elite interests even under the garb of popular demands. Limited mass mobilisation leaves workers with many questions after the memorandum is delivered after every march. How are workers empowered by marching to the top of the mountain and left there to find their own way down without the requisite tools? Mobilising against something is rather easy and short-term.

We must build sustained mass empowerment. We must build the independent self-capacity and critical consciousness of

ordinary people to organise themselves, use their power and act in their own interests. We must build a mass participatory politics that empowers the people with information, political tools, self-organisation, political struggle, effective spaces for their participation in decision-making and implementation, challenging systems and building alternatives. We must rebuild the traditions and practices of popular democratic power. As we do all this we must also do something new: we must make it possible for women to organise themselves as women and as feminists. We must also make it possible to build new men who are transformed agents for gender equality.

It is time to wake up. Now is the time now to take the future of this country into the hands of ordinary people and we must keep it that way forever. Phakamani! Vukani! Makuliwe! Makuzatyalazwe!

If the people of Latin America could use the many and long crises they had in the 20th century to build powerful social movements and vote for left governments of the people, then what stops us in South Africa for daring to dream, for daring to struggle, for daring to win, for daring to win a socialist government of the workers and the poor?

The struggles of our people, of our communities, our struggles have no hope in hell to succeed if we allow the politics of politicians to win. Our demands will not see the light of day from the back of an air-conditioned BMW. They will not come on a silver platter. Not from the air-conditioned boardrooms at Luthuli House or at Union Buildings. But from the streets. From mass meetings. From political education workshops. From saying these are our demands. From marches. From sit-ins and disrupting council meetings. From exposing pollution in Durban South. From workers taking over a company that is about to

retrench them. From fighting for meeting of ARV targets in the HIV/AIDS National Strategic Plan! From standing up and fighting for pro-poor NHI! From our debates about the future. From our debates about the people not being used as voting cannon fodder. From our defence of democratic and progressive values – no to a police force that can shoot at will, no to the powers of unelected chiefs, no to xenophobia, no to hate crimes against lesbian and gay people! From our challenge to capitalists – they must pay for the crisis. Tax them. Make them pay for an NHI.

But also they must come from a deliberate socialist political agenda and project. We need a people's conference against capitalism. We need a conference to discuss the future of the struggle for socialism. We need a conference of the left. We need a process of bottom up deliberation, debate in which voices from below shape outcomes and collective action. We must organise such a conference from the ground. We must build local forums, provincial forums and a national platform. But the conference must not be an event. We must aim to create a united front around a shared programme of action while preserving the autonomy of constituent organisations. We must engage in such a process humbly and with modesty, conscious that we do not have all the answers to the complex challenges facing humanity. We must use such a conference to build a vehicle for the self-organisation of the excluded, the exploited, the discriminated and poverty-stricken majority in South Africa (including all progressive strata) with the power to radically transform South Africa along eco-socialist and participatory democratic lines. This is the only basis to end crises and reclaim our commons!

Le na le umzabalazo uyasivumela. Yonk' indawo umzabalazo uyasivumela.

Forward with the spirit of Asijiki Forward!