

The Surge of Far-Right and Fascist Forces, An Ominous Sign for Democracy: The Fourth Pan-Africa Newsletter (2024)



Mode Muntu, (Democratic Republic of Congo), *Les Esprits Nous Parlent* ('The Spirits are Speaking to Us'), 1976.

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental Pan-Africa**,

In 2024, the ‘election year’ – with at least 64 countries globally, representing roughly 49% of the world’s population – heading to the polls, many celebrate the growth of democracy. However, the alarming rise of far-right and fascist forces presents ominous signs for democracy. In Africa, democracies cannot be understood outside the context of post-liberation and post-colonialism, which hold significant meaning. Recent anti-imperialist developments, particularly in West Africa, have driven popular support for **military coups**. The **election** of one of Africa’s youngest-ever presidents, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, in Senegal, sees Africa’s young population looking for a break with the past. Despite the historical significance of national liberation movements and the way they inspire today’s struggles for freedom, these movements have encountered numerous challenges, including ideological and electoral decline.

This decline may be one of the key drivers behind the rise of far-right ideology. As South Africa heads to the polls on 29 May 2024, the country is experiencing an upsurge of right-wing sentiments, with progressive left and socialist forces somewhat on the retreat. A new release I was involved in, *Mzala Nxumalo, Leftist Thought, and Contemporary South Africa*, delves into these dichotomies. By critically examining Mzala Nxumalo’s intellectual legacy, the book explores contemporary issues through a leftist perspective lens.

Beyond South Africa’s well-documented socio-economic problems, the surge of ethno-nationalism constitutes a barrier to the country’s developmental aspirations. Although sporting events such as the football and rugby World Cups demonstrate the potential of national unity, Desmond Tutu’s vision of a ‘rainbow nation’, albeit itself requiring some critical examination, remains elusive. Central to this failure lies what the recently departed Professor Eddie Webster called the ‘unresolved national question’. Hence, in the book, we argue that left-leaning perspectives are crucial in unravelling South Africa’s problems. Only socialism can fundamentally address the structural inequality and counter the dominance of neoliberal views and narrow nationalism.



Pilipili Mulongoy (DRC), *Sans titre (Deux grues en vol)* ('Untitled (Two cranes in flight)'), 2007.

The tendency towards nationalism and authoritarian capitalism, embodied by leaders such as Donald Trump Jr. (US), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), and Narendra Modi (India), has been entrenching itself over the past decade. Europe has also seen the far-right's ascendancy in countries such as Italy, Finland, and even in the Nordic countries of Sweden and Norway, once famous for their social democratic governance.

South Africa is no exception. The 2021 local government elections witnessed the rise of narrowly nationalist parties such as the Inkatha Freedom Party, the Patriotic Alliance, the Freedom Front Plus, and ActionSA. These parties campaigned along nationalist and ethnic lines, employing xenophobic messaging among other tactics. Alarmingly, they gained some traction compared to parties that took a more principled, non-racial, and inclusive approach.

In Mzala's analysis of the national question, the economic structure is the central issue. He asserted that nations could not be 'divorced' from their 'essential material root', their underlying economic foundations. He therefore understood that capitalism leveraged nationalism to subordinate the interests of the working class to those of the ruling class. Consequently, resolving the national question required the victory of the working class, ultimately aiming for the 'expropriation of the bourgeoisie'. Instead of Mzala's recommendations,

attempts to transform South Africa's economic structure were made by establishing a small black corporate petty bourgeoisie, that serves its own interests and the interests of capitalism. This group's existence was also intended to placate the black majority. The marginalised, unemployed, and impoverished working class can be considered 'non-national' since they are essentially excluded from the idealised depiction of the South African nation.



Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum (Botswana), *Front Room*, 2022.

The neglect of the national question, even by progressive forces, stems from its perceived lack of relevance in the post-apartheid era. This contributes to the inability to address racial and ethnic tensions, and xenophobia. The late Malawian public intellectual Thandika Mkandawire noted some time ago that discussions surrounding the national question have been supplanted by discourses on concepts such as transnationalism,

diversity, diasporas, marginality, and even ‘rainbows’.

The fundamental and elusive question of national unity and sovereignty, alongside the associated inquiry into class dynamics, still holds paramount importance. What is the role of the black working class? How can they be better included in decision-making? Scholars like Mzala and Neville Alexander, for example, posit that this segment of society was not only oppressed as a nation but also exploited as a class. If so, how can this double oppression be done away with?

Post-apartheid, it is the working class that finds itself sacrificed on the altar of neoliberal global capitalist logic, exemplified by austerity measures and elite-favouring economic policies. Ironically, instead of reaping the benefits of liberation, the working class is now manipulated by nationalist bourgeois interests and subjected to divisive nationalist messaging perpetuated by political elites.



Jabulani Dhlamini (South Africa), *kwa-Msibi ekhaya elincane, eNkuthu, Ladysmith* ('At Msibi's small home in Nkuthu, Ladysmith'), 2021.

To halt or even reverse the slide to the right, Mzala's emphasis on the unity of the oppressed and the exploited working class is paramount. Achieving his vision of a united South Africa requires allowing the working class to lead the struggle to its logical conclusion – a socialist state characterised by economic equality and social justice across class and race groups.

Democracy with far-right forces at the helm is meaningless and the left must wake up and smell the coffee.

Warmly,

Mandla



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