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Editorial

The Way Forward for the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign: A message from the Board Chairperson of the Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC)

Vishwas Satgar

Dear Comrades,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Board Chairperson of the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) to express our appreciation of the solidarity, comradeship and privilege of working with all of you to place Food Sovereignty on the national agenda in the country over the past three years of activism.

I am also using this opportunity to communicate that, as discussed at our last NCC meeting, we are no longer the permanent secretariat of the SAFSC. However, we will continue being a committed alliance partner and will facilitate national coordination engagements in different ways, when we can, through our food sovereignty activities. We will facilitate in an ad hoc basis.

As we have made clear over the years, COPAC has never monopolized this role and we have always been open to others stepping up to play a secretariat role.

Last week Thursday was an important culmination of our national activism for 2017. We rocked government in Tshwane! Our visits to 6 government Ministries/departments to present the Peoples Food Sovereignty Act gained attention in the Daily Maverick, 702, SAFM, Algoa Radio. As usual, television did not respond to our press release but we created our news through social media. Government was also generally responsive.

Since 2014 and the Right to Food Conference, SAFSC has grown in strength, in rootedness and identity. We have brought together forces from the agrarian, climate justice, food justice, solidarity economy and community spaces since the Food Sovereignty Assembly at the beginning of 2015. We walked on two legs: attacking the existing corporate controlled food system and building food sovereignty platforms/forums from below. Together we achieved the following:

- A public presence through the Hunger Tribunal (2015), two national Food Sovereignty Festivals (2015 & 2016), a droughtspeak out, a national bread march (2016), a Peoples Parliament (2016) to adopt a Peoples Food Sovereignty Act and several engagements on this Act on different platforms;
- The creation of national food sovereignty platform that is driven through campaigning commitments by each partner organisation. These common commitments now add up to a national campaign program. The program for 2018 will be distributed shortly for others to add to;
- A loose network of alliance partners, driven from below and through radical non-racial and non-sexist solidarity;



- A knowledge commons of tools, experiences (learning exchanges, etc) and practices;
- We have a common social media platform from webpages, online newsletters, Facebook, twitter, etc.
- The development of activist tools around solidarity economy, food sovereignty, worker cooperatives, seedbanking and water sovereignty. We have had numerous activist schools to ensure these tools are utilized at the grassroots;
- We have momentum to build local food sovereignty alliances, forums and pathways, some more advanced than others.

In this context I would like to make special mention of the COPAC team that have contributed to SAFSC building. A special thank you to Andrew Bennie and Athish Kirun for their efforts in 2014-2015. Jane Cherry and Nomaswazi Mthombeni (2016) who built on previous efforts. Jane Cherry and numerous student volunteers who have taken this further this year. Jane Cherry as a young woman, organizer and full time employee has been outstanding in her selfless commitment and hard work. We need many more women leaders like her and the others mentioned. The future belongs to this generation.

All these achievements, however, have been secured through us also avoiding the pitfalls of movements that have come before. We have learned from the Landless Peoples Movement, the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the TAC and Environmental Justice Network. Institutionalising movements from above and being driven by finance has not worked. We have also engaged with FMF and MACUA and learned about the limits of not building institutional structures. As

a loose network and a national platform we have something that has worked so far. We will deepen this together.

We have also experienced numerous challenges. Resources have been a challenge, as have the unevenness of activism on the ground, the lack of reporting on activism and failures to replicate common learning. Larger political dynamics have also impacted on SAFSC such as rampant authoritarian populism, male chauvinism and the general toxicity in our body politic. However, we have survived and worked around and beyond these challenges. In this context COPAC reserves its right to work with those who are committed to genuine unity, building from below, respectful of democratic processes, supporting the contributions each partner is making, radical non-racialism and non-sexism.

We are not at the end of the road! Coming out of the recent NCC we have opened up an exciting discussion about a new phase of SAFSC building. See attached document. We also had great inputs on food garden mapping in Johannesburg, roof top aquaponics farming in the inner city of Johannesburg and Food Sovereignty in Detroit involving about 1 500 gardens. These inputs will be made available through the next SAFSC newsletter to continue reflection, debate and stimulate activism. We are calling for moving beyond symbolic activism and a shift to build food sovereignty pathways in communities, villages, towns and cities. We must end hunger in these spaces through pavement gardens, food sovereignty commoning, water sovereignty and more! We must build local alliances and forums to ensure we can endure the next drought and a world driven by climate shocks. We must build local leadership, capacity and transformative activism!

COPAC will be working with Inala at Wits to end



hunger and then move into the inner city with GreenHouse Project and others. Moreover, we will be hosting activist schools on water sovereignty, a process to secure a Peoples Water Charter, taking the Peoples Food Sovereignty Act to parliament, keeping our social media platform going and more. As mentioned, others in the campaign also have important campaigning contributions to make for 2018 to build from below. The campaigning priorities document for 2018 will be released soon for further input.

Lets deepen genuine solidarity and build food sovereignty pathways from below. We have a loose network, a national platform and grassroots activism, with momentum.

Lets root SAFSC where we live and work! It's a collective project! Its a 21st century movement in the making! Let's support each other through collective solidarity and inspiring initiatives!

Your feedback on this communication is welcome.

Thank you comrades
Solidarity and Amandla!
Vish



International News

New York's Pathway to Worker Cooperatives

By Leigh Brown and Anh-Thu Nguyen

Across New York City, worker-owned home care and child care providers, landscaping and construction companies, caterers, and bookkeepers are developing and thriving. There are security guards, dog walkers, and tutors—all who own and direct their work. They are part of a diverse network of worker cooperatives, organized through a local chapter of the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, and financed and assisted at all stages of development by business service and social justice organizations funded through an unprecedented municipal initiative: the NYC Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI).

Three years since the New York City Council launched the WCBDI, its initial commitment of \$1.2 million has increased steadily, now exceeding \$8 million to date. Through the Initiative, 12 non-governmental organizations and one City university offer technical and educational services. While longstanding cooperatives such as Cooperative Home Care Associates and organizations like Green Worker Cooperatives have established and raised the profile of worker cooperatives for decades, NYC's commitment to funding worker cooperative development has inspired other U.S. cities to adopt similar strategies. In addition, numerous pieces of worker cooperative-friendly legislation have passed or been introduced since WCBDI's launch to support employee ownership. At the New York state level, Assembly Bill 5191 establishes an advisory panel specifically to counsel on ways to best support and promote new and existing employee-owned enterprises. Senate Bill 6794 amends employer-specific skill training grant programs to include support and expansion of employee-owned businesses. At the federal level, legislation

sponsored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand would improve on the Small Business Administration's (SBAs) employee ownership loan program.

As the largest municipal funded initiative for worker cooperatives in the country, the WCBDI has made considerable progress. The NYC Department of Small Business Services, which administrates the initiative, confirms that 48 new worker cooperatives and 305 new worker-owners have been created in the past two years directly due to this initiative. Hundreds of legal, financial, business planning, and other services have been provided and thousands of people have attended educational events. About 75 worker cooperatives now exist in the whole city, with 2,300 employees across those businesses—a threefold increase in the size of the ecosystem over three years.

With a 5.1% unemployment rate and more underemployment, creating and retaining dignified jobs with ownership and control in New York's low-income communities makes an enormous impact. Notably, immigrant women of colour, who make up the majority of the city's worker cooperative members, are determining their working conditions in some of the most exploitative industries. This aligns with WCBDI's start in the friendly political environment under the leadership of NYC Mayor Bill De Blasio, who in his first electoral campaign evoked a "tale of two cities", of income and wealth inequality. Recognizing the Initiative's accomplishments, the City Council's Progressive Caucus included worker cooperatives in its policy platform for 2018, "Resistance & Progress," as a mechanism for building a more equitable economy.



The support network continues to build deeper and broader capacity for cooperative development and support by expanding to new members, prioritizing worker-owner voices, and leveraging successes. New projects are arising, and new groups of people are convening around them. The groups are iterating on different approaches to development, developing sectoral strategies, and working with cooperative members to build power.

DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES Green Worker Cooperatives' Co-op Academy continues to graduate teams of aspiring entrepreneurs forming worker-owned businesses in the Bronx, using a combination of training, coaching, and technical services. The Center for Family Life's replication model aims to streamline preparing a group to launch their business in that each cooperative belongs to a centralized hub of businesses sharing one common brand. A number of organizations including The Working World and The ICA Group are working with the wave of retiring business owners seeking succession planning options, helping to transfer ownership to workers through conversions.

SECTORAL STRATEGIES As a response to NYC's child care crisis, the Democracy at Work Institute and FPWA are exploring how cooperatives can both improve the lives of child care providers in NYC and result in better, more affordable child care services for families. The Democracy at Work Institute is also working with worker and consumer cooperatives in NYC and North Carolina to develop a cooperative-led value chain in the textile industry. The Cooperative Economics Alliance of NYC (CEANYC) is strengthening community-controlled initiatives, bringing worker, financial, housing, and consumer cooperatives as well as land trusts and gardens under one, cross-sector umbrella.

Local partners are working to protect the rights of

immigrant worker-owners and their families in a hostile political environment, and creating leadership programs so worker-owners can provide more peer-to-peer training and take the lead on advocacy. There is also great interest and progress in engaging labour unions to ally with worker cooperatives in order to save and create jobs, build worker power, and grow together to create a broader and more powerful labour movement. Finally, we see new online marketplaces and platform cooperatives, countering the poor labour practices that mark the ever more dominant gig economy.

Even with political support and media attention, and more collaboration and iteration on what has worked, there are still challenges ahead. Many want to see more institutional support and procurement from worker cooperatives. Critically, the tripled number of worker cooperatives in NYC require a great deal of continued support as they grow.

Ultimately, the worker cooperative community is creating living wage jobs and addressing an absence of workplace democracy and self-determination. In doing so, New Yorkers are creating real, lasting community economic development by keeping profits in their communities, facilitating wealth building, and empowering workers facing barriers to ownership.



Pathways to a Cooperative Market Economy: Workshop in Padua, Italy



The fourth research workshop in The Pathways to a Cooperative Economy took place in July 2017 in Padua, Italy. At each of these workshops, people involved in the pathways project meet intensively with researchers of cooperatives in the region, where the workshop is held. These workshops involve a combination of discussions of specific case studies of cooperatives, focusing especially on the trajectories of their development and the dilemmas they face, and more general theoretical discussions of cooperative enterprises in capitalist economies. The ultimate objective is to develop a framework for mapping the diverse pathways through which cooperatives are incubated, developed and sustained.

The workshop started with a brief overview of the Italian cooperative movement: In recent decades, outsourcing practices have led to a degradation of the cooperative principles and a serious degradation of working conditions within cooperatives. Historically, cooperatives had both an emancipatory left current and a more conservative current supported by liberal elites. The Fascists first destroyed many cooperatives, then tried to control them, hoping to use cooperatives to provide a basis for unity of workers and employers in the fascist

corporatist ideology. Since the 1980s cooperatives have adopted a more business-like approach. As cooperatives have become large, their complex organisational and financial structure transformed them into cooperative groups that function much like conventional capitalist firms. The speaker concluded, that when the labour movement is strong, cooperatives can be true to their values. Now that they are weak, the cooperatives can be manipulated for capitalist purposes.

Francesco Garibaldi went on to talk about his fieldwork in Reggio Emilia and Imola on working conditions in the stronghold of the cooperative sectors. A common theme is the deterioration of cooperative principles towards that of a capitalist company. Garibaldi states two such models: The fake cooperative, where an entrepreneur creates a cooperative because of strategic advantages, and the corporatist solution, where the wealthy members of a cooperative control the cooperative

On day two, a number of inputs were given on recovered factories, where recoveries are mostly worker-buy-outs rather than takeovers, political consumerism and mutualism and migrant workers in southern Italy. The basic strategy in the latter was to form an alliance of small producers with migrant labourers who could work with SPGs (Solidarity Purchase Groups) to provide higher income for farmers and better work and pay for workers.

International presentations included, among others, four case studies in Venezuela, Basque, Italy and Canada on different solutions to the problem of providing finance to cooperatives. In Venezuela, only 15% of the 300 000 coops survived due to fraud, private firms pretending to be coops and



overall chaotic financing. At Mondragon, Basque, there was a strong financing for new cooperatives, with lots of support and feasibility plans connected to loans. The Italian context is unique because cooperatives are enshrined in the constitution and in Canada, social impact bonds are a basis to self-financing cooperatives as a method of capitalising cooperatives through members or communities.

Finally, Erik Olin Wright elaborated the idea of a “cooperative market economy” as one element in the broader agenda of forging a democratic economy, and the even broader agenda of creating a democratic society by democratising the economy, the state and civil society. Wright goes on to present thirteen pathways to worker cooperatives:

Autonomous startups

1. Worker-cooperative startups in which a group of people come together to form a cooperative from scratch, getting loans from banks or through social networks.
2. Messy survival strategies of people in desperate conditions who form improvised quasi-cooperatives without a long-term model. Sometimes these adaptations consolidate into cooperatives; sometimes not.
3. Cooperatives develop in a regional economy out of artisanal production and gradually develop networks and other institutions to sustain cooperative firms over time.

Incubated startups

4. Cooperatives are incubated (and perhaps subsidized) by the state or NGOs
5. Labor union incubation of cooperatives: the incipient “union-CO-OP model” in the United States

Coops breeding coops

6. An existing cooperative or group of cooperatives incubates a new cooperative
7. An existing cooperative splits into two distinct cooperatives

Conversions

8. Conversion of partnerships or small private firms into cooperatives
9. Conversions of privately-owned firms into worker cooperatives in the context of worker-buyouts when the owners retire (ownership succession conversions).
10. The gradual increase in employee ownership through an ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan) and then, eventually, the introduction of democratic governance and conversion to a more cooperative form.
11. The seizure of bankrupt firms by workers – *empresas recuperadas* – and running them as de facto cooperatives with potential route to legalization.
12. Worker takeover of bankrupt firm leading to state ownership + leasing to worker self-managed cooperative.
13. Worker buyouts of bankrupt firms with state subsidizes for transitional conversion to worker-owned cooperative.

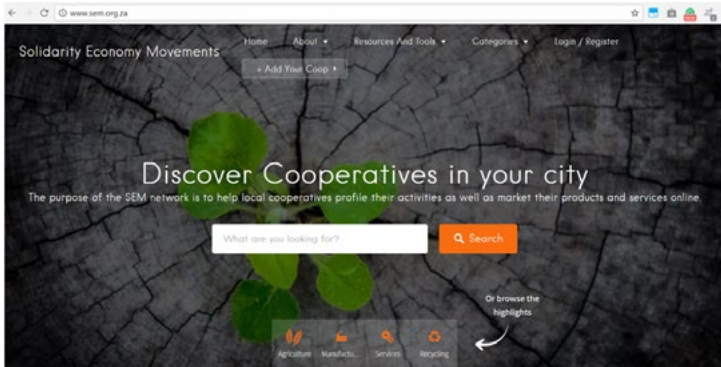
Adapted from Report from the workshop by Erik Olin Wright available at:

<https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Cooperative-Pathways/Padua%20meeting%20Report.pdf>



National News

Call to Cooperatives: Solidarity Economy Movements Website Launch



The Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre has launched a Solidarity Economy Movements website that will serve as a marketing platform for co-operatives in South Africa. The website is a useful tool for anyone as they can register and create a profile of their cooperative. It will serve as a platform for cooperatives to profile their activities and market their products and services online at no charge. Over time, the website could have the potential of being an interactive media platform where coops can post some of their projects and initiatives. The aim of this website is to promote the Solidarity Economy by providing citizens who want to support cooperatives with a portal that allows them to search for cooperatives near them.

We invite all cooperatives to register on the website by following these simple steps:

1. Type the following address into your internet browser: www.sem.org.za
2. Click on the block in the top right corner '+ add your coop'
3. You will then be asked to register so type in your email address and choose a password

4. Fill out all your coop details and press 'submit'

Share this link with co-operatives you know so that we can strengthen this platform for building the solidarity economy in South Africa.

Celebrating 200 years of Karl Marx: Democratic Marxism Seminars Programme for 2018 Wits University

The Sociology and International Relations departments of Wits University are organising a series of theory seminars and public lectures during 2018, under the rubric of Democratic Marxism: Celebrating 200 years of Karl Marx. The intention is to critically engage with various aspects of the Marxist intellectual tradition, in relation to contemporary issues and debates that have emerged in South Africa, and globally. As the programme below indicates, leading Marxist scholars and activists will facilitate discussions around their work.

All are welcome to attend. For more information, email: janecherrytree@gmail.com

1. Theory Seminar and Public Lecture: Reading Capital in the 21st Century
Speakers: Alfredo Saad Filho
Dates: 14 – 16 February
2. Theory Seminars and Book Launch: Democratic Marxism Vol. 3: The Climate Crisis – South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives
Speaker: Vishwas Satgar, Jacklyn Cock, Devan Pillay, Patrick Bond and other book contributors
Date: 15 March



3. Theory Seminar and Public Lecture: Climate Change, Transnational Class Analysis and Fossil Fuel Capitalism

Speakers: William Carroll and JP Sapin
Date: 10-12 April

4. Theory Seminar and Panel Discussion: Karl Marx and South African Marxism - Is it over? What future for the Left?

Speakers: Panel of invited speakers
Date: 27 July

5. Theory Seminar and Public Lecture: Fanon and Indigenous Resistance against Capitalism.

Speakers: Glen Coulthard
Date: 27-29 August

6. Theory Seminar: Marxist theories of the State: Old and New

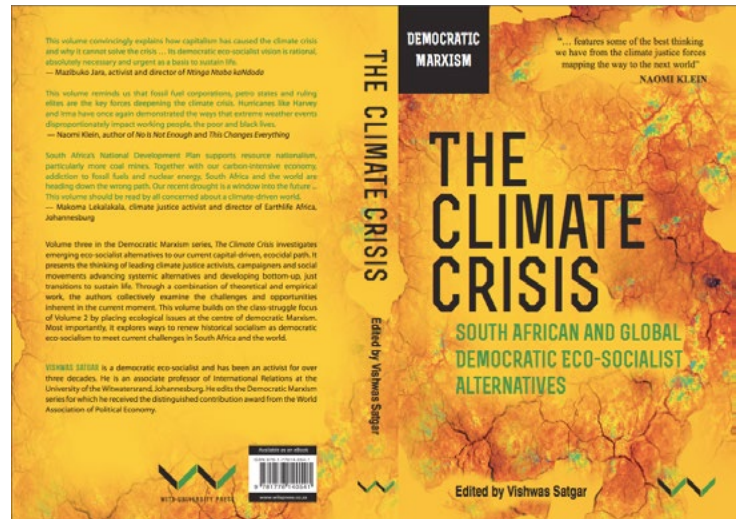
Speakers: Michelle Williams, Devan Pillay and activists
Date: 19 September

7. Theory Seminar and Book Launch: Democratic Marxism Vol.4: Racisms After Apartheid: Challenges to Marxism and Anti-racism

Speakers: Vishwas Satgar and book contributors
Date: 3 October

**The Third Volume in the Democratic Marxism series:
The Climate Crisis – South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives**

South Africa was hit by several climate catastrophes in the last year. The Western Cape is experiencing the most devastating drought in history and has been declared a disaster area in May. The agricultural sector has been affected most and



increasing unemployment is just one of the many socio-economic consequences.

Durban has been seriously flooded in October as a result of a “super-cell thunderstorm”, leaving behind death and destruction. Homes were flooded, buildings crashed, trees blocked the roads and cars were swept off the streets.

Johannesburg too has been hit by a storm in early October, causing floods and fires. Rooftops collapsed or were blown off, cars overturned and a massive fire left entire areas without power.

Climate change is real and its getting worse. All of the above can be expected to become normality if we don't seek alternatives immediately. The 3rd volume in the Democratic Marxism series focuses on the climate crisis and investigates emerging eco-socialist alternatives to our current capital-driven, ecocidal path. It presents the thinking of leading climate justice activists, campaigners and social movements advancing systemic alternatives from below and developing bottom-up, just transitions to sustain life. This volume explores ways to renew historical socialism as democratic eco-socialism to meet current challenges in South Africa and the world.

Article source:
<http://ewn.co.za/Topic/Western-Cape-drought;>



<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-11-kzn-storm-tragedy-displays-of-bravery-and-acts-of-compassion-when-floods-hit/>;

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-09-live--hail-floods-and-fire-as-severe-storm-strikes-gauteng/>





The Food Sovereignty Campaign

A Food Sovereignty Victory:

The Food Sovereignty Centre at Wits University

Due to challenges of the indignity faced by hungry students over the years, including the handing over of memorandum by INALA/COPAC and SAFSC in 2016, as part of the bread march WITS management committed to handing over the Sanctuary Building to ensure hungry students had a place of dignity. Moreover, WITS agreed to work towards a zero hunger, zero carbon and zero waste university. In this context the Sanctuary Building and the space around it becomes important for constructing a new eco-centric pathway for WITS.

In cooperation with the Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach (WCCO) and the Inala forum for food sovereignty and climate justice at Wits, COPAC will be establishing a Food Sovereignty Research Centre at the Wits. We are excited to announce that Wits management recently allocated the Sanctuary building and the area surrounding it to the project. Plans are now under way to get the space working.

The vision for the centre is to promote food sovereignty at Wits and beyond. The centre will comprise of three spaces, namely a Wits community engagement and eco-demonstration space, a dignity space for students and a food sovereignty support space.

The 'Sanctuary building' will provide students with an ideal space to raise awareness and advance learning about climate justice and agro-ecology. The building will be renovated to be an example of eco-centric living: making use of water harvesting, renewable energy, insulation, a bio gas digester, waste recycling and sustainable architectural design and building materials. There will also be



fruit orchards and agro-ecology gardens around the building.

The food sovereignty centre will also provide an alternative space of dignity, which will be controlled by students through a communal kitchen. The students will revive indigenous knowledge about food, local recipes and slow food, establishing a cultural space used for talks, workshops and research on local food cultures. The food for the communal kitchen will come from the agro-ecology gardens on campus and small-scale farmers in the City and there will also be a communal eating space. An additional building will be constructed to serve as a link with the broader challenge of advancing food sovereignty in society. The building will house the research facilities and agendas for the community-based seed bank network, which includes research on indigenous knowledge systems. The building will also include a training space for agro-ecology. Here the South African science and economics of agro-ecology will be developed.

Over the next year the communal kitchen will be piloted, more food gardens will be established, and



we aim to open the food Sovereignty Research Centre within the next three years.

Urban farming in Zurich, Switzerland: Quartierhof Wynegg

By Sunanda Mathis



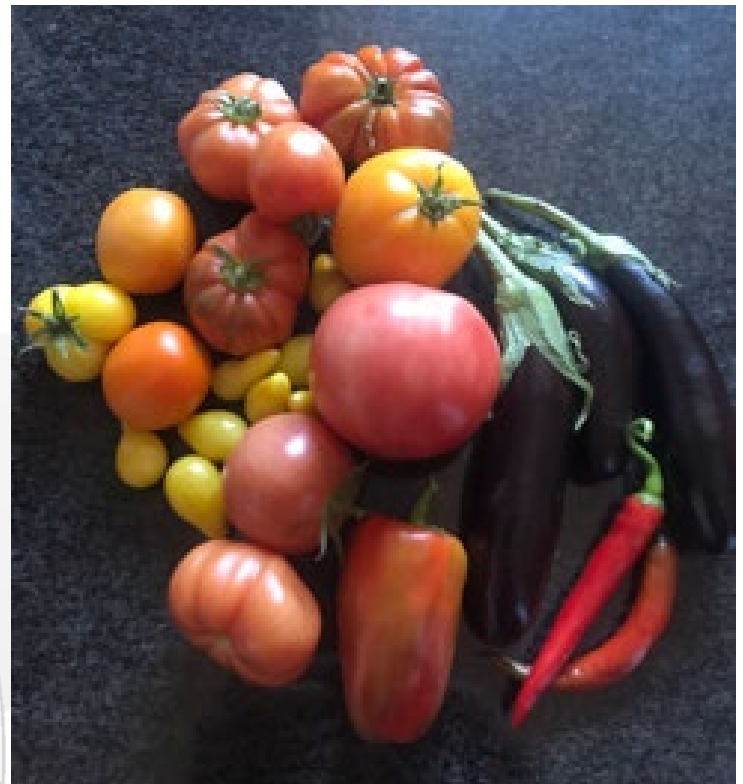
Strolling through the lush, green gardens of the Quartierhof Wynegg, it is hard to imagine you are in the middle of the city of Zurich, in district 8 to be exact. Built in 1931, the farm has evolved into a bustling community hub with more than 300 active members from its surrounding area.



The Wynegg, as we call it, harbours chickens, rabbits, woolly pigs, horses, mules, sheep, bees and is home to a variety of fruit trees, vegetable gardens and a vineyard. The farm – along with all its non-human members – is organised into 12 autonomous working-groups: The “pig group” for example, takes care of the woolly pigs, the members of the “apple-

juice group” make delicious juice and schnapps out of the freshly-picked apples and the “garden group” grows a plethora of organic vegetables.

The farm is founded on a spirit of cooperation. The governing board, for example, comprises 10 representatives – one from each working-group. Rather than interfere with the activities of the groups, the board focuses on allocating funding or managing public relations.



The highlight for all at the Quartierhof Wynegg is the annual harvest festival, which happens at the end of October and is open to the public. All members collaborate to organise the event and each working-group contributes something particular to their group: The horse group offers horse-rides for kids, while garden group members sell parts of their harvest and the members of the apple-juice group demonstrate fresh apple-juice production with a traditional cider press. One part of the money raised by the festival goes directly into the farm’s account, which is managed by the board, the rest goes into the respective working-group’s account.



Since 2015, we have also cultivated a communal vegetable garden. On 350 square metres, we plant a large variety of vegetables, herbs and berries using agro-ecological farming techniques. We started educating ourselves on what it means to have an organic, agro-ecological garden and found that crop rotation, succession planting and intercropping are three important elements for a successful and sustainable garden.



We started planting potatoes: they are an excellent ameliorant to the soil, making it crumbly and providing the perfect conditions for the next crop. We also incorporated a “bee’s paradise” into the garden – a crop of colourful flowers to attract wild bees and support a healthy ecosystem.

We save as many seeds as we can for the next season. An example of this is Nüsslisalat, an indigenous lettuce variety. Once it withers, we cut it off, let it dry and shake out the seeds. When the time comes, the seeds serve as catch crops for kale, onions or leeks. To salvage the seeds of tomatoes, cucumbers and courgettes, we simply put aside a few of the vegetables at harvest, pick out the seeds and let them dry. That way, we successfully established a small seed bank for future gardening seasons.

We are able to produce a vast amount of food,

ranging from juicy tomatoes to large heads of cauliflower and fat, healthy pumpkins. A significant portion of these vegetables are consumed by the gardeners themselves and the rest is sold in our little “farm shop”. This year, we were able to sell produce worth 3000 Francs, which is equivalent to about R43 000 (Swiss prices: 1kg of potatoes is sold for R65).

The Quartierhof Wynegg is a refuge in the city-centre, where people of all ages come to relax and admire the abundance of plants and life. Thanks to the communal vegetable garden, we are able to produce local, organic food for the neighbourhood and take a confident step towards being a food-sovereign community.

Keep Growing Detroit

By Sunanda Mathis



Source: dailydetroit.com

Detroit is the largest city in Michigan and has faced multiple economic challenges over the last decades, resulting in demographic decline and urban decay. When its automobile industry closed down, thousands of citizens were forced to leave the city due to unemployment. What followed was, among other things, abandoned houses and vacant land, which significantly destabilised the remaining



communities.

Keep Growing Detroit (KGD) aims to ameliorate these conditions through urban agriculture, cultivating the vacant land in collaboration with local communities to make fresh, organic produce available to them. KGD is a gardening, economic development and educational organisation running various established programmes, such as the Green Garden Resource Program or Grown in Detroit. The organisation's goal is to "cultivate a food sovereign Detroit where the majority of fruits and vegetables consumed by Detroiters are grown within the city limits". One of the core principles of KGD is to advance healthy relationships to food and encourage local communities to start their own vegetable gardens, providing them with the necessary equipment. Nearly 20 000 residents have chosen to cultivate a farm or garden. In cooperation with the Green Garden Resource Program, which functions as KGD's seed bank, they provide over 1 400 family, school and community gardens with organic seeds and vegetable transplants.

Another central concern of the organisation is to change the value of food. Because most Detroiters don't have access to fresh and affordable produce, KGD operates the Grown in Detroit Program, which is made up of more than 70 local growers who sell their locally grown produce at farmers markets and outlets throughout the city. The annual gross income of 75 000 dollars demonstrates the potential of urban agriculture.

Keep Growing Detroit recognises that in order to feed its 700 000 residents, they need more production-focused farms. To achieve that, urban farmers need education, skills and training in intensive food production methods. KGD has successfully implemented the Detroit Urban Garden Education Series, which is hosted in schools, churches and

community centres across the city. Classes provide content on, for instance, basic gardening, water catchment, farm planning, cooking and season extension. Not only that: KGD also operates the Plum Street Market Garden, where sustainable farming practices are demonstrated and growers are given advanced training and technical assistance ranging from land assessment to business development.

Finally, KGD sees the powerful interconnections between gardeners and community-based organisations, and how their work is ultimately strong enough to localise the food system. Fostering these connections is therefore a big part of KGD's work. During shared workdays, community meetings, tours and social events they make sure to encourage all participants to cultivate relationships to build a network of alliances.

"This farm [Plum Street Market Garden] to Detroiters is like a breath of fresh air, a really nice place to come and relax", says one member of the KGD community. For Keep Growing Detroit, cultivating urban farms on the vacant lands across the city is a necessary action to overcome the unemployment and discontent that prevails among communities in Detroit.

Article source: <http://detroitagriculture.net/about/>



The Worker Cooperative Campaign

Cooperatives in South Africa Mobilise to Develop a Vibrant Local Sector

By Felix Donkor



Since the inception of the first cooperative in 1844 by the Rochdale pioneers of England, the cooperatives have spread across the world to improve workers livelihoods and interests. Moreover, with the increasing palpable effects of neoliberal market policies on the world's peasants, small scale farmers continue to mobilise and explore alternative pathways of securing their livelihoods. For example La Vía Campesina has become the largest global coalition of farm based organisations promoting sustainable agriculture for food sovereignty to enhance social justice and dignity whilst opposing corporate driven agriculture that destroys social relations and nature.

However the effectiveness of such global grassroots alliances is a function of the strength of the individual members and their impact on their respect terrains. It is in this regard that a two-day symposium was recently held for local cooperatives



under the auspices of Oxfam at the Parktonian Hotel, in Johannesburg. The event under the theme Cooperative Development: Foundations for Economic Inclusion through Solidarity brought together more than 100 cooperatives involved in diverse shades of businesses, academia, government officials, representative of NGO's and civic groups inter alia.

Ms Sharda Naidoo a senior economic development specialist and facilitator of the event surmised, that a successful cooperative needs cooperation as an active verb but not simply in name; to address the real challenges on the ground. She added that, unemployment goes beyond not just having a job, as more people are less likely to be employed. Society now needs to look at building livelihoods which is more than just having a regular income but includes developing people's capabilities, assets and activities. These remarks ushered the event in to the second phase which were themed panel discussions.

A solidarity economy represents an alternative economic model that largely employs nonprofit methods to address inequality and transform labour relations. The economy in the 21st century



is largely disconnected from social relations, and it is necessary to integrate social relations into mainstream economics. Moreover, there are spaces within and outside capitalism which necessitate a systemic alternative that is values based to meet needs and build peoples power. Such power can manifest in a myriad of institutional forms: worker cooperatives, barter clubs, cooperative banks, communal land associations, community trusts, rotating savings clubs amongst others. These were some of the arguments by Michelle Williams (Wits Associate Professor). A key thrust of her debate was the solidarity economy where entrepreneurs and cooperatives think beyond capitalism by engaging social relations. Moreover the solidarity economy advances capital in service of labour rather than labour in service of capital.

Such narratives feed into the notion of food sovereignty. This model enables communities to exercise control over the production, trade and consumption of food. This helps produce a food system that benefits communities and their environment instead of multinational corporations. The enormity of the challenge is such that it requires collaboration amongst different organizations to address it. The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) and the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) have been pioneering work in this regard rallying grassroots organizations to realize these ideals. As testament of its commitment to the cooperative movement -Professor Vishwas Satgar, from Wits University who doubles as board chairperson of COPAC, suggested it championed post-apartheid cooperative development with milestones such as the Cooperatives conferences of 2001 & 2006, Cooperative Act of 2005, Cooperative Banking, research and methodologies for cooperatives. COPAC has rolled out some alternative approaches from below such as the Eco-village in Ivory Park, Peoples Housing, Sustainable

Local Manufacturing, and enhanced knowledge on the structural importance of cooperative banking. He encouraged participants to help create a Solidarity Economy tailored to South African conditions.

The forum also served as a platform for self-reflection for stakeholders. Some of the common challenges which run through the presentations include; business literacy, skills training, conflict management, advocacy, funding, market access, procurement processes. Such challenges need to be dealt with to help cooperatives fulfil their socio-economic roles as envisaged in The National Development Plan (NDP) of helping create 24 million jobs by 2030 to complement government efforts. Furthermore, there were representatives of cooperatives from neighboring countries who also shared their experiences and best practices with the participants and forged networks.

As the majority of presentations were solidarity economy-esque and food sovereignty-esque; a key highlight of the forum was participants' resolution to create a cooperative movement that will champion solidarity economy and food sovereignty ideals whilst providing a voice and defending their interests. In line with this objective, participants committed themselves to build a cooperative academy that will develop a community of practice premised on cooperative ideals. Ultimately participants were of the consensus there is the need for more dialogue between government and cooperatives to address the mounting grievances and facilitate their role as



Activist Resources to Advance the Solidarity Economy From Below

Why Can't I Vote for My Boss? The Need for Economic Democracy

Every society is held together by a common core of shared ideas. These are the things that simply go without saying, the taken-for-granted which form the glue of our institutions and the coherence of our daily practices. From time to time it happens that various individuals, sometimes a lot of them, as in the 60's, come to doubt one or other of the core pillars of their culture. A rupture from conventionality is usually experienced not so much as a moving slightly left or right on the political spectrum, but more like falling off your chair, arms flailing about wildly, disorienting and confusing.

One version of this disorientation from the mainstream – and not a particularly unusual one – happened to me as a young graduate student. My sense of the rationality of society was overthrown, not by any traumatic or transcendental experience, but almost by accident. It started when I was sitting in a tedious lecture on political democracy in grad school, yawning over some journal article that was so dry that it could practically be used as kindling, when the professor asked, half-jokingly, why it was that we were entitled to elect our politicians but not our bosses? My eyes popped open as if a bucket of water had been splashed on my face.

I knew the textbook answer of course. The state was part of the public sphere – its concerns affected us all, so we all had a right to a say, hence political democracy. The economy by contrast was the “private sphere.” Individuals owned their property and labour and traded it with others on a voluntary basis. Democracy had no place in the factory or

office for the same reason that it had no place in the bedroom: what happened there was the concern of the Private Individual and no one else.

Yet such an answer felt as satisfying as being served a peanut at a feast. It made sense that the state was a public concern, but the economy private? Really? Maybe 200 years ago, when 90% of workers in North America were small farmers, and the economy did more closely resemble the textbook image of private individuals engaging in personal transactions. But what possible relevance could that have now, in an economy where 90% of the labour force works not as lone individuals but in associations – in large social units like corporations and public bureaucracies? Not as individuals, but in groups in social relations with others. Our economy is composed of nodes of power that ripple outward affecting large groups of people. We have gigantic corporations – Wal-Mart is bigger than Pakistan, Exxon is bigger than New Zealand – which employ tens of thousands of people. We live in a world where CEOs can fire a thousand people before breakfast if they choose; where a manager can make a mistake (oops!) and approve deep-sea oil extraction leading to predictable ocean spills; where money managers can remove a billion dollars from a country with the push of a button causing all kinds of havoc with its currency; where bankers can sell mortgages and then repackage them as complex debt instruments to sell again and again and again, creating an enormous bubble whose fallout when burst would be measured in trillions of dollars, millions of jobs lost, and countless lives ruined. Yet, we're supposed to believe that such decisions are private? That is ludicrous.

But if the “private sphere” explanation was wrong, then what was the answer? Why can't citizens in a democratic country vote for their boss? There had to be an explanation. But the more I read the less I



understood.

And then I discovered Mondragon.

In the 1950s, five workers in the Basque country in northern Spain, under the guidance of catholic priest, bought a small bankrupt factory and went into business producing paraffin stoves. What was remarkable about the workers was their realistic utopianism: they wanted to succeed as a business but were just as determined to incorporate their views of social justice into the structures of their business. They organized as a worker cooperative so that the workers would also be the owners, meaning that the governance of the firm would be democratically accountable to all the members.

On hearing this in the abstract, most of us would probably scoff that such business was impossible. We'd likely think, "nice but naïve." Yet Mondragon is very real. It is now a network involving 110 worker cooperatives employing a total of 80,000 people, with assets of a staggering €35billion.

For one example, Irizar is a bus manufacturing co-op of Mondragon. Like all co-ops it has a Board elected once per year to manage the firm, so the firm is a mini representative democracy. But beyond this, the firm fosters "self-management" by encouraging participation at the shop-floor level. To this end Irizar has developed a flat organizational structure based on work teams, with no bosses but with "shared leadership". Not only is this participation good from a democratic perspective, it has also proven to be important from an economic perspective as it increases innovation, the transfer of ideas, and overall productivity. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Irizar is "probably now the most efficient coach builder in the world."

Discovering Mondragon was the straw that broke

the camel's back and produced a paradigm shift in my brain. I started to see society differently as the classic defences of undemocratic work, which seemed feeble at the best of times, totally collapsed under comparison with a real, actual alternative. Mondragon showed that another world was indeed possible.

Flash-forward several years and my dissertation on economic democracy is complete. My studies revealed a wealth of empirical research describing real-world functioning of worker cooperatives, and most of it was surprisingly positive. Here are a snapshot of the main findings:

- While co-ops are rare in North America, they are not rare everywhere. Europe has more, and in particular, Northern Italy has a very significant concentration of co-ops (about 13% of the economy of Emilia Romagna is generated from worker-co-ops). Such examples suggest that it may be entirely feasible to have an economy based largely on co-ops..
- Perhaps the most important finding is that co-ops are just as efficient as comparable capitalist firms. This result is robust, being found wherever scientific comparative studies have been performed: in the US, Uruguay, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, and the UK.
- Co-ops have far more wage equality. In conventional firms, the average American CEO makes roughly 300-times the average workers; in continental Europe it's about 20-times more. In co-ops, the highest paid tend to make about 3-times the lowest paid.
- Another robust finding is that co-ops have significantly higher job security than



conventional firms. Lay-offs happen rarely and only as a last resort. This has been referred to as “economic rationality with a human face”. To give one example, during the Basque recession from the mid-1970s to 1984, the region saw the loss of 100,000 jobs and a 20% unemployment rate, yet, remarkably, not a single Mondragon member lost her job (though some temporary non-member workers did).

- Ironically, one of the not-so-bright spots in the empirical evidence is Mondragon itself, which has successfully maintained the health of the co-ops “at home” but has been forced by pressures from globalization to open up conventional (non-co-op) subsidiary firms in Spain and overseas. This has provoked major soul-searching at Mondragon, and there is now a commitment to re-democratize.
- Yet not all is sun and roses. The evidence shows that not every co-op does a good job of creating a genuinely democratic workplace where workers feel empowered. Creating effective democratic structures – particularly participatory ones at the shop floor – is no easy task, and requires constant learning and experimentation.

Those of us who have grown up in North America tend to just assume, as natural and obvious, that capitalism – our economic system of private firms, banks, and stock markets – is the backbone of democracy, that the two go hand-in-hand. I now think this is a lie. While there are many things, both good and bad, that one could say about capitalism, it seems to me that the most important point, and the most fundamental critique, is that it is inherently undemocratic. Workplace decisions are not accountable to workers; investment decisions of firms are not made with any participation of the

citizenry; financial decisions of banks and money markets are not accountable to the communities that are deeply affected by them. This means that the major institutions and structures of economic power in our society are not accountable to those affected by them. That makes them fundamentally undemocratic.

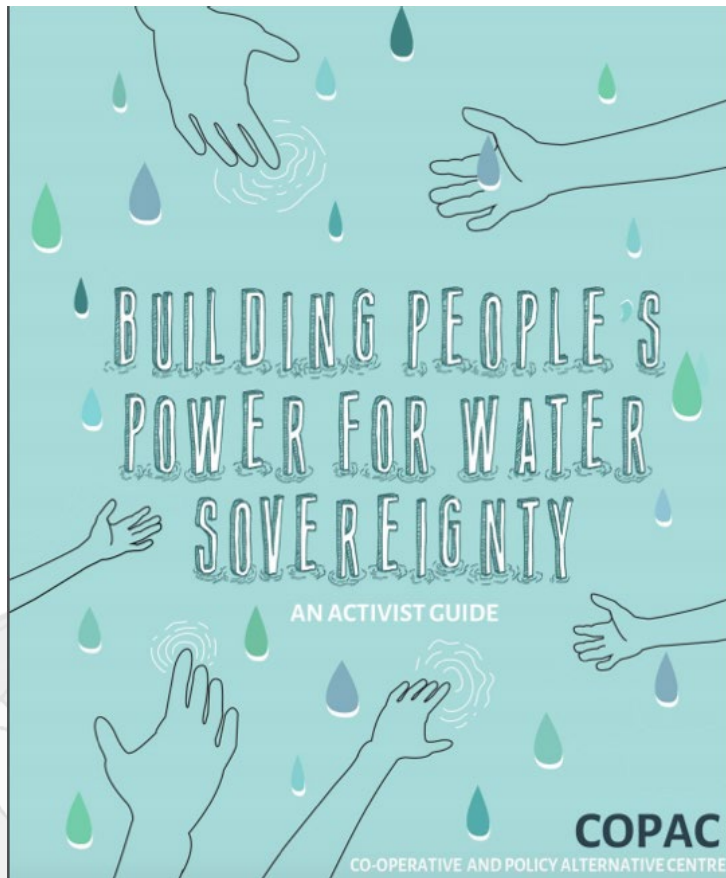
Since capitalism is not democracy, we are forced at the end of the day to choose a side: do we want to live in an actually democratic society (i.e. one with both political and economic democracy), or do we want capitalism? We cannot have both.

That’s a serious question. I won’t presume to answer it for anyone else. But if you’ve read this far and can allow yourself the open-mindedness to actually see it as a real question, one that doesn’t have a simple, facile answer. Well, be careful, because you’re perilously close to becoming a radical yourself.

Tom Malleson is Assistant Professor at King's University College at Western University Canada, and the author of After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century, published by Oxford University Press.



Building People's Power for Water Sovereignty: An Activist Guide



Call to the citizens of Cape Town and other communities in water-stressed parts of South Africa Advance water sovereignty and build people's power:

Let's work towards a people's water charter for South Africa

The Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC), an alliance partner of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC), has developed a citizens activist tool to democratise water resources in South Africa. We understand that the drought facing the city of Cape Town is the result of corporate induced climate change and carbon criminal states, like South Africa, which are addicted to fossil fuels.

This is going to be our new normal and the ruling

classes expect poorer communities to carry the cost of this climate shock.

We are already witnessing water stress in various poor communities in South Africa on a daily basis.

We note the following:

- South Africa is a water stressed country, almost 98% of our water is already allocated, which means that we only have 2% available for emergencies or future allocations;
- Industrial agriculture uses 62% of the country's water;
- 54% of South Africans do not have access to clean water through a tap in their home;
- Of the 223 river ecosystem types, 60% are threatened with 25% of these critically endangered due to pollution;
- There are 5 000 private dams on farms and this water isn't being shared with affected communities in different parts of the country;
- It is estimated that 37% of South Africa's clean, potable water is being lost and wasted through poor infrastructure such as leaking pipes;

Gauteng is experiencing ongoing acid mine drainage within the West and East Rand of Johannesburg as well as serious pollution of the Hartebeespoort Dam and the Vaal river barrage through sewerage and multiple other pollutants.

As COPAC and SAFSC we are saying that we have to ensure peoples power prevails over water resources. In this regard, we have designed a water sovereignty activist tool available on our website: www.safsc.org.za



Let's work together to claim our rights, advance people's science, agroecology and water sovereignty.

Use our water sovereignty tool to learn more about these people's solutions and engage your community. Let's take this conversation to a national process in 2018 to put together a People's Water Charter for South Africa to advance water sovereignty.

For more information, contact:

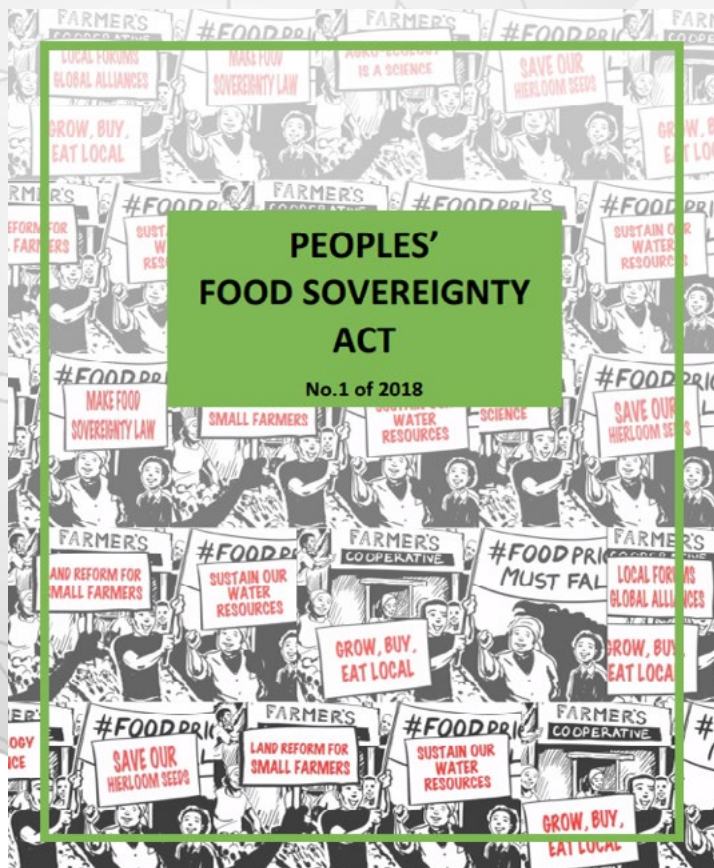
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The People's Food Sovereignty Act – Revised



Solutions to the hunger crisis in South Africa have failed us, particularly those emanating from the market or the government. It is for this reason that the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) seeks to unify struggles on the ground with progressive social forces to ensure that food sovereignty is placed on the national agenda and is an alternative way forward for our food system. We are not calling for technical solutions for households to access food, but rather we are calling for the deep transformation of our food system by breaking the control of food corporations and repositioning the state to realise the Constitutional right to food, and ensure the creation of conditions and space for the emergence of food sovereignty alternatives from below.

This Act, which was launched at a People's parliament on 12 November 2016, is one way in which we seek to do this. It is a citizen driven act to ensure that people's power drives and implements the Act. It expresses our emancipatory desire for transformation of the food system.

We have now revised the Act based on the many useful comments by different people and communities.

The revised version of this Act and the research that informed it can be accessed on the SAFSC website at this link: <http://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FS-Act-no.1-of-2018.pdf>



Nongoloza mentality governs Azania
Whoosh

Pardon – A Poem

By Prince Shapiro

Wonderkop?

Well...

People tell a tale
Some yell hell and spell
Whereas backbenchers glow
Delighted over their 26-prison gang vow
Cash-oath
Coinage that turned legislators into butchers
A gruesome 28-prison gang

They loomed out of penitentiary
Recidivist' school of gangsterism
Then deployed in parliament
The main banqueting gallery of vermin

Mine workers stood no chance
It wasn't a miracle dance
Wonderkop frolicked no tricks

All over
Over and over
Bullets were hovering and people dwindling

Azania...Azania...Azania...
What an erroneous booboo

A share in capitalism natives won
Anti-human activities natives adopted
Now with land lost who cares
Death to common sense declared
Gone is distinctiveness
Our uniqueness

O what a shame
People at the mercy of convicts



contact us

We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter by writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

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All back issues of the Solidarity Economy News are available on our website.