

## Disconnecting the Minerals-Energy-Climate Dots

by Patrick Bond

Sometimes a single event reveals crucial stories about our strengths and weaknesses in advancing progressive social change and ecological sanity. I sought out intersections between three simple phenomena: the predatory extractive industries now looting Africa; our energy access crises (especially here in South Africa); and climate change.

I thought that progressive civil society allies might begin to assemble their strengths in class, gender, race, generational and environmental consciousness; that they would fuse activist passion and NGO technical sophistication; and that they could draw upon lessons from Africa's many great anti-extraction struggles.

I fear I was wrong. Even with the best will, and amongst truly exceptional activists and strategists at the Cape Town Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) from February 9–12, 2015, a typical civil society “intersectionality” gap was glaringly evident.

That clunky word — “the study of intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination or discrimination” — is increasingly understood to be vital medicine to treat the NGO disease of silo-

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ization: being stuck in our little specializations with historic prejudices intact, unable to lift up our heads and use the full range of human capacities to find unity.

The AMI brought together more than 150 activists from vibrant African community organizations, another hundred or more NGO workers stretching from local to international, the hottest advocacy networks, a phalanx of public interest lawyers, a few brave trade unionists and even some curious arm-chair academics like myself. It should have offered the best conditions possible for intersectional work.

The kick-off day included a set-piece protest march to the gleaming Cape Town International Convention Centre. The target: the corporate African Mining Indaba attended by thousands of delegates from multinational and local mining houses plus a few of their side-pocket politicians.

There, former UK Labor Party prime minister Tony Blair gave a keynote speech notably hostile to “problematic, politicized” trade unions who enjoy class struggle more than class snuggle. Security was ultra-tight because Blair is, after all, regularly subject to citizen arrests because of his Iraq-related war crimes.

And money was another reason no activists could make their case inside: the entrance fee was

nearly \$2000. For a taste of some of the grievances against the big mining houses, see the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre's balanced fact sheet.

The AMI's internal critics told me they felt the march was tame and predictable. It was. Actually, the week's best moment for confrontation was a small guerrilla theatre stunt just outside the convention centre. Pretoria's Anglican Bishop Jo Seoka invited suited executives to drink the disgusting water that his grassroots allies brought from mining-affected communities. No one took the bait; and amusing video resulted.

The march helped activists let off some steam, for they were angry at the blasé mood in both Indabas. Just beforehand in the opening AMI plenary, two charismatic keynote speakers — Zimbabwean democracy advocate Brian Kagoro and Matthews Hlabane from the SA Green Revolutionary Council — were joined by militants from several communities who raged openly against petit-bourgeois NGO reformism.

Warned Kagoro, “We risk here, as the elite of civil society — civilocracy — becoming irrelevant. If you want mining to carry on, in just a bit more humane way, there will be another Alternative Mining Indaba happening in the streets.”

Indeed, if the AMI does avoid that fate, a healthier future would probably require switching the event away from trendy Cape Town suburbs and instead convening a people's assembly and set of (vernacular-translated, inter-connected) teach-ins located at various sites within the gritty mining belts sweeping from northwest to eastern or northern South Africa. Only in such venues can the masses properly hold forth.

Perhaps with this bracing threat in mind, the march was followed by three days of exceptionally rich presentations and debates. The break-out rooms were filled with campaigning tales and most carried the frisson of outright opposition to non-essential mining.

For example, asked the leading-edge critics, do we really need to drink the fizzy sugar water (Coca Cola products whose profits line SA Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's gorged pockets) from the tin cans (smelted in Richards Bay, South Africa, at a wicked cost in terms of coal-fired electricity) that we immediately toss away into the AMI hotel's (non-recycled) rubbish bin?

To slow the awesome destruction caused by senseless mining, some activists suggested UN "Free Prior and Informed Consent" language as the best way for communities to deflect prospecting. Techniques to delay Environmental Impact Assessments were shared. Tax justice narratives came in handy, given the mining houses' prolific capital flight and illicit financial flows. Still other progressive lawyers suggested routes into the jurisdiction of legal reparations. And almost everyone complained of a Resource Curse in which multinational mining capitalists corrupt African politics, economics, environments and societies.

I had a clear sense that no one believed minor Corporate Social Responsibility reforms will ever treat, much less cure, the Resource Curse. Instead, the reforms discussed were practical handles for raising concerns, getting publicity, adding a bit of pressure, and giving mining-affected communities — especially women — a sense of hope and solidarity.

Still, for me, the event also provided a sobering and somewhat depressing lesson. Much more work is needed to generate intersectionality: connecting the dots to other issues, political scales and constituencies. The disconnects were obvious regarding three issues which might become vital elements in campaigning against extractive industries, in both the short and long term: electricity access, climate change and mineral economics. Consider each in turn.

### **Short-term empowerment crisis**

Just outside the AMI, but apparently unnoticed, South African society was seething with hatred against state electricity supplier Eskom. The increasingly incompetent agency has threatened near-daily "load-shedding" (electricity black-outs for two hours at a time) for years to come.

There's not enough working power capacity (only 30,000 MegaWatts when 43,000 are technically available) to meet industrial and household demand most days. Mega-mining corporations have extraordinary access to that power, symbolized in 2014 when a former executive of the world's largest commodity firm, GlencoreXstrata, was seconded into Eskom to represent mining interests: Mike Rossouw.

Rossouw had for many years served as chair of the 31-member Energy Intensive Users' Group (EIUG), the largest corporate guzzlers which together consume 44% of the country's supply. The nickname Minerals-Energy Complex emerged 20

years ago thanks to very sweet Eskom deals that have persisted for most of the company's 85-year history. For example, two of the world's biggest mining houses, BHP Billiton and Anglo American Corporation, signed decades-long agreements supplying them at US\$0.01/kWh, a tenth as much as what low-income South Africans pay.

So South Africa's load-shedding phenomenon should be blamed on both the multinational mining corporations and the local energy industry, and their allies in Pretoria and Eskom's MegaWatt Park headquarters. This is not an unusual configuration in Resource-Cursed Africa, where vast amounts of electricity are delivered via high-

tension cables to multinational corporate mining houses for the sake of extraction and capital-intensive smelting.

Most African women meanwhile slave over fires to cook and heat households: their main energy source is a usually fragile woodlot; their transmission system is their back; and their energy consumption is often done while coughing, thanks to dense particulates in the air. Going from HIV-positive to full-blown AIDS is just an opportunistic respiratory infection away, again with gendered implications for care-giving.

Given these intense contradictions, how could the AMI anti-mining activists, strategists, funders and intellectuals not connect the dots; how could they fail to put together load-shedding due to mining

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overconsumption, with most Africans' lack of basic electricity access, and place these at or near the fore of their grievances so as to harvest so-far-untapped popular support for their program of rolling back mining and rolling forward clean household electricity?

A Cape Town-based "Million Climate Jobs" campaign already suggests how turning off the vast flow of electricity to South Africa's smelters and mines would, in turn, help redirect employment there to more constructive, post-carbon activities: jobs in renewable energy, public transport, insulation retrofitting, digging biogas digesters and many others.

As for communities, their class/race analysis of electricity access is expressed readily when they show visitors their own dirty household energy, often in the immediate vicinity of a massive mine, smelter or power plant (see the excellent mini-doccie "Clear the Air" by the NGO groundWork, for example, or the fiery tv Big Debate episode on energy).

So why can't those dots — the environment-labor-community-feminist sites of struggle — be connected at the NGO-dominated AMI? Why do the words energy and electricity not even appear in the

final AMI declaration, in spite of their extreme abuse by multinational mining capital?

### **Long-term climate crisis not on SA civil society short-term agenda**

As I mulled over this paradox in the unlikely (luxury Hilton Hotel) AMI venue, my eye was caught by a flashy red-and-white document about South African coal, containing explosive information and some of the most vivid photos I've ever seen of ecological destruction and human suffering. It is full of horrifying facts about the coal industry's wreckage: of public and household health, local environments, and the lives of workers, women, the elderly and children. (Regrettably there's no web link and I won't name the agency responsible in order to make a more general point and avoid singling out a particular example by name.)

This particular booklet doesn't hesitate to explain mining industry abuse via cooptation of African National Congress ruling-party elites via Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Cyril Ramaphosa-style BEE translates into worse misery for the many, and enrichment for a very few such as South Africa's deputy president. His billion-dollar net worth comes not only from that notorious 9% share of Lonmin and all that it entailed, but also from his Shanduka company's filthy coal operations. With men like him at the helm, South Africa certainly isn't going to kick the life-threatening Minerals-Energy Complex habit.

It's a good critique that connects many dots, and certainly the particular agency that published it is one I consider amongst the half-dozen better international NGOs. Their grantees do amazing things in many South African, other African and global contexts.

Yet the coal booklet offered only a token mention — a few words buried deep in the text — about climate change. Though coal is the major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and although there's a vibrant world campaign against coal mining in favor of renewable energy, the climate crisis was completely lost amidst scores of other eloquently-described grievances.

Drawing this to the agency's attention, I received this explanation from one staffer: "While climate change is a great middle class rallying point, it has no relevance to people living in poverty beyond their empty stomachs, dirty water and polluted air."

As we learned the hard way at the civil society counter-summit during the United Nations COP17 here in Durban, this may be a brutally frank but nevertheless true estimation of the hard work required to mobilize for climate justice. In the last comparative poll I've seen (done by Pew in 2013), only 48% of South Africans considered climate change to be a "top global threat," compared to 54% of the rest of the world.

Fortunately though, the terrain is fertile, especially in the South African provinces — Limpopo, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal — attracting the most militant and sophisticated attacks on Big Coal

anywhere in Africa. They are carried out by a myriad of militant community and environmental groups, including Mining Affected Communities United in Action, the Green Revolutionary Council, Bench Marks Foundation (a progressive church-based research/advocacy network), periodic critiques by radical NGOs groundWork and Earthlife (the latter hosts a branch of the International Coal Campaign), legal filings by the Centre for Environmental Rights and Legal Resources Centre, supportive funders like ActionAid, and women's resistance organizations (supported by Women in Mining, Womin).

Still, aside from communiqués by Womin feminists and occasional NGOs (mostly in passing), it is extremely rare that they connect the dots to climate change.

### **Greenhouse gas emissions are pollutants, too (!)**

A good example of disconnecting-the-dots emerged when South African Environment Minister Edna Molewa infuriated grassroots communities, NGO activists and progressive lawyers who fight prolific pollution by mining houses, petro-chemical plants and smelters. Molewa's job includes applying new Minimal Emissions Standards to 119 firms — including the toxic operations of Eskom, Sasol, AngloPlats, PPC cement, Shell, Chevron and Engen oil refinery — whose more than 1000 pollution point sources are subject to the Air Quality Act.

Ten years ago when the law was mooted, these firms should have begun the process of lowering emissions. They didn't, and so Molewa just let 37 of them (mostly the largest) off the hook for another five years by granting exemptions that make a mockery of the Act.

Yet notwithstanding justifiably vociferous complaints, South Africa's environmental NGOs (ENGOS) simply forgot to mention climate change. There was just one exception, Samson Mokoena, who coordinates the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance: "Not only has Eskom been granted postponements, but so has the largest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the country, Sasol."

(At its Secunda plant, Sasol squeezes coal and gas to make liquid petroleum, in the process creating the single greatest site of CO2 emissions on earth, and Eskom is Africa's largest CO2 emitter by far

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## **More than 182 million Africans are expected to die prematurely by 2100 thanks to GHGs....**

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when adding up all its plants together.)

In contrast to Mokoena, one of the world's top campaigning ENGOS ignored CO2 in predicting that Molewa's decision will "result in about 20,000 premature deaths over the remaining life of the [Eskom] power plants — including approximately 1,600 deaths of young children. The economic cost associated with the premature deaths, and the neurotoxic

effects of mercury exposure, was estimated at R230 billion.” Add climate change (that NGO didn’t, for reasons I just don’t get) and these figures would rise far higher.

The excuse for giving Molewa a pass on the climate implications of her latest polluter-massage is that the Air Quality Act was badly drafted, omitting CO2 and methane. That omission allowed one of the country’s leading journalists to report, “The three pollution baddies that can cause serious health issues are particulate matter (soot), sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides.”

Ahem, surely in such a list, GreenHouse Gas (GHG) emissions qualify as a baddy? More than 182 million Africans are expected to die prematurely by 2100 thanks to GHGs, according to Christian Aid.

But Molewa “seemed to have developed a ‘massive blind spot,’ ignoring how air pollution was transported over very long distances to damage human health in places far removed from the source of emissions,” alleged another international ENGO.

Sorry, but just as big a blind spot exists when that very ENGO simply forgot about climate change, even though GHGs are co-pollutants with all the other air-borne toxins, transported over very long distances, wreaking enormous damage.

### **Behind the disconnections lies capitalism**

In Naomi Klein’s brilliant new book and her husband Avi Lewis’ forthcoming film, *This Changes Everything*, we find crystal-clear linkages between climate (“This”) and practically all other areas of social struggle. For Klein, it is the profit motive that, universally, prevents a reasonable solution to our emissions of greenhouse gases: from energy, transport, agriculture, urbanization, production, distribution, consumption, disposal and financing.

In other words, the intersectionality possibilities and requirements of a serious climate change campaign span nearly all human activity. Through all these aspects of the world’s value chains, we are carbon addicted. In each sector, vested corporate interests prevent the necessary change for species survival.

It is only by linking together our single issues and tackling climate as the kind of all-embracing problem it is, that we can soar out of our silos and generate the critical mass needed to make a difference.

But in turn, that means that any sort of systemic analysis to save us from climate catastrophe not only permits but requires us to demand a restructured economic system in which instead of the profit motive as the driving incentive, large-scale ecologically-sound planning becomes the fundamental requirement for organizing life.

So it’s time, in civil society, that “capitalism” should be spoken about openly, even if this occurs now for the first time in many generations, especially

in those politically backward societies — e.g. North America and Europe — where since the 1950s it was practically forbidden to do so.

In much of Africa, in contrast, grievances against colonialism were so fierce that when neo-colonialism replaced it over 50 years ago, many progressive activists found courage to talk about capitalism as the overarching, durable problem (worse even than the remaining white settlers). In South Africa, anti-capitalist rhetoric can regularly be heard in every township, blue-collar (and red-collar) workplace, and university. Here, Moscow-trained presidents and even communists who were once trade union leaders have quite comfortably populated the highest levels of the neoliberal state since 1994.

Talking about capitalism is now more crucial than ever. If we don’t make this leap to address the profit motive underlying so much eco-social chaos, then our economic future is also doomed, especially in Africa. One reason for that is what is sometimes called “natural

capital” depletion: the minerals, gas and oil being torn out of the earth don’t grow back.

The next logical question is whether, given the diminishing natural wealth that results, the economic activity associated with extractive industries is a net positive or net negative. In resource-rich Norway, Australia, Canada and the US, where the headquarters of mining and petroleum companies are located, the profits recirculate. According to natural capital accounts compiled in the World Bank’s book [[url=http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ENVIRONM/ENT/Resources/ChangingWealthNations.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ENVIRONM/ENT/Resources/ChangingWealthNations.pdf)] The Changing Wealth of Nations[ur], this plus educational investment gives these countries much higher net positive returns.

Environmental damage is another matter — but on economic grounds, again, the critical question is whether the profits are being reinvested. Answer: in the Global North, yes; but in Africa, no! They’re being looted by multinational corporates and local comprador allies.

That means that one of the AMI’s other dot-disconnections was any talk of the capitalist economy, or even mention of the way mineral resources are being stripped away so fast and with so little reinvestment that the net economic effect of mining is profoundly negative for the continent’s wealth. (This fact you need not accept from me; have a look at the Changing Wealth of Nations to see Africa’s -6% annual wealth effect from natural capital outflows.)

What is the solution? Can Africans with intersectionality dot-connecting talents now more forcefully consider an eco-socialist model? If we do not recover the socialist traditions of Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Ruth First, Thomas Sankara and Chris Hani, and to these add environmentalist, feminist and other intersectional arguments, the generations living now will have quite literally kindled next-generation Africans’ scorched-earth future.

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## **...large-scale ecologically-sound planning becomes the fundamental requirement for organizing life.**

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Large-scale planning may sound terrifying, given how badly earlier attempts turned out, such as the Soviet Union's. On the other hand, Cuba has made the jump out of carbon addiction faster than any other society thanks to planning. Or just compare the well-planned and executed evacuation of Havana during Hurricane Katrina in 2005, to utter chaos in capitalist New Orleans. State-led innovations ranging from municipal water systems to the internet (a product of Pentagon R&D) are so vital to daily life that, unless denied them, we don't think twice about their public sector origins and status as public goods.

And after all, is there any other way to achieve the power shift required to overcome a climate disaster, than to build a movement for democratic state decision-making?

To do so, though, requires a somewhat longer-term perspective than the average activist and NGO strategist has scope for, in sites like the AMI.

If we do not make that leap out of the silos into which all of us have sunk, we will perish. We are so

overly specialized and often so isolated in small ghettos of researchers and advocacy networks, that I'm not surprised at the AMI's conceptual impotence. Even our finest extractives-sector activists and strategists are not being given sufficient scope to think about the full implications of, for example, where our electricity supply comes from, and why mining-smelting corporates get the lion's share; how climate change threatens us all; and how the capitalist economy makes these crises inevitable.

The solution? A critical part of it will be to think in ways that intersect, with as much commitment as we can muster to linking our class, race, gender, generational, environmental and other analyses of the oppressed. Action then follows logically.

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## Renewable Energy Isn't a Shortcut to Reversing Global Warming

by Pete Dolack

Denmark has distinguished itself as the country moving the fastest toward the eventual replacement of fossil fuels. Its goal of 100% renewable energy by 2050 is laudable, but the assumption that this path will reverse global warming while otherwise continuing business as usual is unrealistic.

At first glance, Denmark has made remarkable strides. The country's intention to totally eliminate fossil fuels by the midpoint of the 21st century appears to be realistic. Already, Denmark is the world leader in wind energy and it intends to also exclude all use of nuclear power. At the start of 2015, the country's energy agency, Energistyrelsen, said renewable energy sources account for 25% of Denmark's total energy consumption, and more than 40% of its electricity comes from renewable sources.

The Danish government acknowledges that continuing consumption patterns based on "cheap and easy access to coal, oil and natural gas" is a "road [that] is not an option." True enough. But the switch to renewable energy is promoted as cost-free. The Danish government says:

Business ... stands a great chance to move into the heavy league of successful super green companies. For instance, the energy efficiency measures a company makes are often paid back within [a] few years. Onwards, the savings on the energy bill can be unleashed to strengthen the core business of the company. Likewise, there is an enormous global market for green technology, services and systems. This market is only going to grow once more governments follow in the carbon-light footsteps of Denmark.

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**The switch to renewable energy is promoted as cost-free.**

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But of course such a strategy would come at a great cost to Danish society? The answer is a resounding no.

[T]he transition is relatively cheap, and business competitiveness not harmed. The government's estimates are a price tag of approximately 10 euro pr. household pr. month at the highest (2020), a price tag that will only slowly increase to this level. In the opinion of the Danish government this is a reasonable insurance policy against unexpected increases in fossil fuel costs and a solid investment in Denmark's future energy security.

### Enthusiasm for renewable commitment

An expected rising efficiency of renewable energy sources will ultimately lead to lower costs, more than offsetting the investments in renewable-energy infrastructure and reversing the present-day higher costs, the government says. So no change in consumption patterns after all. This enthusiasm is shared by environmental institutions that have be-