



The Cry of the Xcluded call for a People’s Budget: reverse deadly budget cuts and privatisation, and instead tax the rich to create jobs and provide quality public services to all.

We are a coalition of trade unions, social and civic movements, and unemployed peoples’ movements with thousands of members from across the country. Today, we have come to Cape Town to tell the Treasury that their austerity is killing us.

We are facing a deep social crisis. There's no jobs, we don't have any services, and many of us still don't have proper toilets. We are experiencing high levels of depression, desperation and hopelessness. We see that this government has turned its back on the people. Our basic services are being privatized and turned into luxury commodities for the rich, rather than meeting the needs of the people. These are the consequences of the government following the policies put forward by the economic elite - big business and the financiers.

We have recently been horrified by the news of mothers who have experienced such a level of poverty and desperation that they have taken their own lives and the lives of their children. While tragic, this news did not shock us. We know that our communities are experiencing extreme levels of hunger and desperation, as work is nowhere to be found, as clinics shut down and schools fall into disrepair, and as the price of food goes up by 10% but the R350 grant remains R350. In South Africa, austerity is a murderous policy.

The rich pay for private healthcare, while the poor are made to sit and wait for hours on hospital floors. Now, the same is happening with water and electricity. At the same time, our municipalities are collapsing - not just from corruption, but because they are heavily underfunded. This comes from the unrealistic and anti-poor assumption that municipalities can generate their own revenue by selling services to the majority of poor and unemployed South Africans.

More budget cuts and privatisation makes the situation much worse. Already there are more than 200 000 posts in the public sector empty, including teachers and nurses. These are not only jobs that could be filled by the 40% of South Africans that are unemployed, but they are also jobs that serve our communities, educate our children, and take care of us when we are sick. This places an extra burden on the majority of us who rely on these services, especially women. Instead, we must spend more of our own resources on caring for our basic needs - some have said that women have become the “shock absorbers of austerity” because they often carry this burden that the state has left behind.

This is not a burden that we are willing to carry any more. We cannot be the sacrifice for this government’s own failure to stop corruption. We need more public services, not less.

We know that the problems of debt cannot be ignored, but austerity is not the solution. There are other sources of money to invest in jobs and grow the economy. South Africa is an unequal country, but it is not a poor country.

We know that austerity is a choice, because the government has chosen to lower the tax on corporations and cut income taxes paid even by the middle and elite classes. These can be easily reversed. Big corporations and wealthy individuals continue to get away with billions of Rand in tax evasion, while SARS is not given the resources it

needs and so chases after Davids instead of Goliaths. To implement austerity while handing out tax cuts is to take from the poor to give to the rich!

We know that South Africa is not poor, because there are 40 000 dollar millionaires in this country, and the wealthiest 3500 own as much as the bottom 50% of South Africans combined. It has been shown time and time again that even a moderate wealth tax of between 3% - 7% could raise billions of rand that can be used as a foundation for a Basic Income Grant of R1500 per month, allowing the poor and unemployed the means to buy basic necessities. We reject the kind of 'means-testing' that was implemented with the R350 SRD grant, where unemployed people living in poverty were denied the grant merely because they put R50 in their account in order to pay for their funeral cover.

We know that South Africa is not going bankrupt, because there are trillions of Rand sitting in the hands of public funds. These are being used to enrich the already wealthy rather than investing in the future of the country. Instead of rewarding the shareholders of JSE-listed companies while the rest of the country crumbles, why can these funds not be used to fund a public works programme to fix our waterways, clean up pollution and mining damage, build infrastructure, and provide decent jobs.

When we demand a national right to work, we are not referring to precarious work such as the EPWP programmes where there is no security and no career prospects. The impact of precarious work on workers is significant. It leaves workers vulnerable to exploitation, and it makes it difficult for them to plan for their future and make ends meet. We demand decent work, where workers have security, stability, and dignity. This can only come through the end of the "procurement state", the insourcing of basic services, and an end to the broken and corrupt tender system. To work as a civil servant should be a career choice that young South Africans can take pride in, in which they can work for the betterment of the country while building their own skills and experience.

Clearly, we need more than just the reversal of austerity. South Africa needs a new kind of people-centered development. Austerity must be ended so that we can build a diverse economy, focused on job-creating manufacturing, small businesses, and sustainable agro-ecology - all built on the backbone of a strong public sector which provides quality services that are provided even to those who cannot afford to pay. We need an education system that teaches the next generation initiative, creativity, political consciousness and essential skills, rather than leaving them with no option other than the hopelessness of endless job searching with the other 70% of unemployed youth. This is how we will finally begin to deal with the unfinished business of Apartheid inequality.

The land question remains unresolved. The majority of the land remains in the hands of the few. Land is not only somewhere to live, but it is also a way for the people to create their own wealth and become their own providers. Land provides dignity. Without the redistribution of land, the majority of South Africans will remain stuck in a state of poverty and dependence. We do not even need to wait for a constitutional amendment to begin this process - we can begin with the hundreds of thousands of hectares of vacant land owned by the state. Land is also worthless if it is so polluted with toxic runoff from mining that nothing can be planted. A new approach to mining is needed, that gives communities the right to say no, and is undertaken for the benefit of all rather than for the pursuit of profit.

As we say this, we are under no illusions to the fact that the current public sector has become a means for a connected few to enrich themselves at the expense of the majority. We understand that many municipalities are even returning their money to the government, unspent, despite the critical need for basic services. However, this should not justify austerity. Instead, austerity and corruption must be dealt with hand in hand to unlock the resources of South Africa for the betterment of all. This calls for transparency and oversight by the public, and strong enforcement and prosecutions. If there should be budget cuts, let the first ones to be cut be the ministers and the heads of departments who live lavish lifestyles with salaries in the millions of Rand per year.

Finally, we must acknowledge that as we put forward this statement, a genocide is currently taking place in Gaza. The Palestinian people are under siege by the fascist apartheid state of Israel, which is supported by imperialist warmongers in the United States of America and Western Europe. The struggle for political and economic freedom in South Africa cannot be severed from the struggle for liberation in Palestine.

Let us not forget that the support and solidarity of the millions of ordinary people, from all walks of life, was critical to bringing the South African apartheid state to its knees. That kind of intervention is needed now. Therefore we call for the halting of all economic ties, a severing of cultural support and diplomatic relations with the state of Israel. *Israeli assets in South Africa must be expropriated, Israeli investments withdrawn and its diplomats must leave.* Until Palestine is free - from the river to the sea - South Africa must stand firm in its support of the Palestinian liberation struggle.

In summary, we demand:

- **An end to budget cuts and the murderous policy of austerity**
- **Change the R350 SRD to a Basic Income Grant of R1500 per month**
- **The Right to Work; decent jobs for the millions of unemployed South Africans, created through rebuilding public services and a climate jobs program**
- **An end to the privatization and commodification of our basic services; we need free basic services for all**
- **Additional funding especially for healthcare and education, and especially in rural areas, as a step towards gender-responsive budgeting and securing the futures of women and children**
- **An end to regressive tax policies and unsustainable interest rate hikes which punish the poor and working class**
- **Taxing the rich to end austerity, including a Wealth Tax on the wealthiest South Africans, and a reversal of tax breaks given to corporations and high-earners**

- **Long-term public investment towards low-carbon industrialisation, building a diverse economy that creates good jobs and economic growth**
- **To resolve the land question through redistribution, beginning with vacant state land**
- **Prosecution for corrupt officials and cuts to the exorbitant salaries of the highest-earners in government**

We call on the government to meet these demands and move this country forward. If it is neither willing nor able, then we say that this government must step down and make way for one that is willing and able. We call on ordinary South Africans to join us, to fight austerity and build a better future for this country.

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