



CWAO
CASUAL WORKERS
ADVICE OFFICE

END THE WATER CRISIS NOW!!

Phantsi government, phantsi!

THE WATER PROTEST ON 1st NOVEMBER 2025.

The working class has had enough with disruptions in the supply of water and water shortages. This is why we are supporting this Water Protest.

In Johannesburg and elsewhere in the country working class communities are going without water for days and weeks. Many communities have taken to the streets to protest these water disruptions and shortages. In Gauteng, for instance, these protests forced the Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi to convene an urgent meeting of executive mayors to

convene an urgent meeting of executive mayors to respond to the demands of communities for uninterrupted supply of water.

However, the Gauteng Premier blamed the water crisis on illegal connections and more people coming to Gauteng. But we have seen that throughout the country working class communities are experiencing the same problems of water disruptions and shortages. The water crisis is not only in Johannesburg or Gauteng but everywhere in the country.

In challenging the water crisis we must have a clear understanding of what are the sources of this crisis.

We must have a clear understanding of what and who are causing the water crisis. Understanding the root causes of the water crisis will assist us in formulating our demands and assist us in identifying who our friends and enemies are in this fight.



The root causes of the water crisis

The main cause of the water crisis is the neo-liberal and austerity of the ANC government of the last 30 years. The ANC government and now the Government of National unity have starved municipalities of funds for the development and maintenance of water systems. There has not been any real investment in the expansion of waterworks, the building of new reservoirs and the maintenance of water infrastructure.

This underfunding and lack of maintenance of water infrastructure has resulted in many communities not having access to water, water pipes bursting or leaking, reservoirs leaking and millions of litres of water being lost. Wastewater treatment works have been underfunded and not maintained causing sewerage to spill into the streets and yards.

Austerity is a deliberate economic strategy on the part of the government to cut expenditure on social services that are meant for the working class. By cutting expenditure on social services the government can then lower taxes for the capitalists to enable these capitalists to make more profits.

Austerity is about the government creating the conditions for profit-making at the expense of the working class. The water crisis is an inevitable outcome of this austerity programme.

Going hand in hand with austerity is large-scale corruption. The little funds that are going for social services like water provision are stolen, mismanaged and siphoned off through corrupt tenders. We have also seen the emergence of a water mafia where water infrastructure is deliberately sabotaged so that the municipality is forced to hire water-tankers to provide water. Corruption contributes to working class communities being deprived of basic social services like water.

What are the solutions offered to the water crisis?

The ruling class (i.e. big business and the government) want to deceive the working class. Because the water crisis is affecting the business operations of the capitalists they are now very concerned about the disruptions and shortages of water. Mines, factories, farms and other business operations cannot function without water.

However, we must understand that the water crisis is a self-created crisis on the part of the ruling class through the austerity programme, especially the underfunding of municipalities and cutting of social expenditure. The outsourcing (tenderizing) of government functions, especially at local government level, opened the door to corruption. The water crisis is a crisis created by the ruling class.

Having created the water crisis, the ruling class is now saying that the solution to the crisis is that the water system must be run by the capitalists. The rallying call is that the private sector is the answer, it can run the water system better than government.

This is the same trick the ruling class played with other government entities like ESKOM and Transnet – starve these entities of funds, outsource functions and open the path to corruption - and then turn around and say that the solution is privatization and profit-making.

Already the government is speeding ahead to turn the water system into a profit-making venture. Changes to the Water Services Act are being planned where municipalities are going to be allowed to privatize their water function. **Capitalists will be allowed to make profits** out of the collection and distribution of water, the billing and collection of water revenue, and the operations and maintenance of water works including wastewater treatment.

Operation Vulindlela and the National Treasury are developing the policy framework and measures to ensure that the profits of capitalists are guaranteed once they invest in water provision.



The ruling class is not addressing the water crisis to ensure the working class has access to water, but to ensure that water becomes an area of profit-making. One strategy to ensure that water provision becomes a profitable investment area for capitalists is to charge the working class for water. To ensure that the working class pays for water, water pre-paid meters will be installed. In the iLembe District In Kwa-zulu Natal, where water collection and distribution has been privatised, all the water is supplied through prepaid meters.

A working-class approach

The water crisis must be regarded as an integral component of the broader capitalist crisis. Austerity, the inherent profit-driven nature of capitalism, and corruption have resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment, severe poverty, and the near-collapse of social services and infrastructure.

The South African economy is highly monopolized and is owned by a few families and individuals. It is this private, monopoly ownership of the economy that is allowing the accumulation of wealth for a small minority at one end, and the existence of poverty for the majority at the other end.

To effectively address the water crisis and the many other challenges faced by the working class, **the struggle must be directed against the agents of capitalism – the government and the capitalist class.**

In this anti-capitalist struggle for water, our starting point is that water is a fundamental necessity for life and, therefore, a public good. Water and its supporting infrastructure should not be commodified for profit-making purposes. Water and matters relating to it must therefore remain in the hands of the public.

Water is a public good and an essential necessity of life, a certain quantity of free water must be provided to communities. The specific amount of free water that should be provided will be determined by the masses.

No to the blurring of the class line

We have seen that the alliances formed to fight this water crisis is not putting at the centre the capitalist nature of this crisis and is not identifying the class forces that are the driving this crisis and the other crises of capitalism. We are saying that big business and its supporting props, the ANC and its supporting casts are not our friends in this water struggle.

A blurring of the class divide will lead to the co-option of organizations of the working class.

At this conjuncture in the country, the ruling class is experiencing a crisis of legitimacy and representation caused by the electoral decline of the ANC.

The decline has been particularly dramatic in Johannesburg and the ANC is desperate to restore its legitimacy. Big business and organisations like COSATU also have an interest in restoring the credibility of the ANC.

The ANC has been the key driver of neo-liberalism and austerity, the key agent of reproducing the conditions for profit-making for the capitalist class.

The tried and tested way of restoring legitimacy is through the co-option of working class organisations and activists. We have seen it in the struggle against apartheid and we have seen it in the last 30 years of democratic rule. Alliances that are not clear about the class nature of the crisis and that are confusing friend and foe, inevitably lead to the ruin of many a struggle.

The struggle for water as a public good must be an uncompromising fight against capitalism and its supporting agencies.

Amandla!! No to capitalism!! No to government austerity!!

No to water becoming a source of profit-making for the capitalists!!

No to alliances with the ANC and its allies like Cosatu!!

No to alliances with forces that are anti-working class

Yes to water as a public good!

Yes to free water for the working class according to its needs!

Yes to working class unity based on clear class principles!

Issued by the Casual Workers' Advice Office.

For more information, contact CWAOW at 082 812 1934.