

Editorial

In search of a 'developmental state'

–By Martin Nicol

This Special Issue on Economics and Labour is divided into two sections. Contributions on current economic development are followed by three articles presented at a conference marking 50 years since the Durban Strikes of 1973.

That said, all of the authors reflect widely on history and on immediate challenges, both for South Africa and the continent at large.

Roland Ngam cites examples of colonial era companies of the North who planned the exploitation of Africa to feed their own economic prosperity. He reveals the hollowness and dishonesty of present Northern calls for Africa to reduce its emissions of harmful greenhouse gases.

The uniting theme of the articles by Alan Hirsch, John Matisonn and Douglas Scott is the role of the state in economic development. This covers the specific issue of South Africa's troubled migration policy and debates on intervention frameworks for industry and agriculture. Comparisons are drawn with other African countries (with more fortunate growth paths) and set against the extraordinary economic progress of China.

In preparing for this issue, the Institute for African Alternatives drew from its bookshelves a volume edited by our founder Ben Turok, who assembled papers under the title "Wealth Doesn't Trickle Down – The Case For a Developmental State in South Africa". The content came from a seminar hosted by a senior government minister at the time, Sydney Mufamadi, and was attended by top leaders and officials of the state, State Owned Enterprises and academic institutions. This was in October 2007, a very different time – before the global economic crisis, Zuma, state capture and Covid. Although the seminar "produced a consensus of what needs to be done to move decisively to a developmental state that serves the people," it found "little evidence of a comprehensive development strategy directing the state and all its institutions."

Ben Turok's optimistic hope was for a national mindset change and a "grand agreement" to pursue a common agenda. "While we have managed what we have inherited reasonably well," he wrote in the conclusion, "our society needs a transformational approach".

Monique Marks' reflection on "the Durban moment" is used to draw us into considering the roles of youth and labour in social and political movements – and the intense challenges we face today in urban centres without jobs. Mbuso Nkosi and Sithembiso Bhengu look at worker organising both historically and into the present.

As usual, we feature a highly selective, but wide ranging, diary of African events in the last quarter – and a review of a book of stories by the remarkable Angolan author, José Eduardo Agualusa, translated from Portuguese by Daniel Hahn.

New Agenda 92 marked an editorial team effort to use the Open Journal Systems management software. After determined struggle, and with publication deadlines approaching, we had to take the final stages of the production process offline. But we have learned valuable lessons. Three months was not long enough to work through the too generous time limits we set for peer review. We will try again for issue 93.