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Beyond “Zuma must fall”, beyond choosing between elites

Warren McGregor

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A constant fixation on the machinations of elite power manoeuvring, and persistent, recurring calls for either new leadership, or new political parties, are evidence of a very conservative and authoritarian political culture. These stories may well be important. Indeed, this is the nature of current socio-economic organisation (capitalism and the state). These human-created forms of control always operate to centralise power up the hierarchy, thus investing tremendous power in the hands of very few. This few – race, gender, rhetoric regardless – the ruling class, are those who control the means of production, administration and coercion. Our pre-occupations are drawn to such elite individuals and groups as many of us have chosen to hand over our political power and future to these. Now this political culture usually results in the general and often vain belief and hope that through hierarchical, fundamentally undemocratic organisation, leaders invested with this incredible power are somehow to create the foundations for a more

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equal society and world. Also important to consider is that all political parties, no matter the colour of its beret, whether in control of the state or seeking to attain this control, centralise the power of decision-making upwards, and are thus fundamentally authoritarian and anti-democratic.

What seems less important to me are these internecine squabbles of the elite, each section and sub-section vying for greater access to centralised authority, and the awful political culture of patronage and violence that these create here and elsewhere. Also what seems worthless are elections to such authority – choosing a particular section of the elite (or an aspiring elite) and their parties – if one seeks substantial transformation and freedom.

More vital are the practical, everyday developments of directly democratic working class power demanding of and in opposition to the state and capital. Class counterpower – unions and community structures, based on the empowerment of the working class and poor through direct action and critical education – as the only elixir to the destitution wrought by capitalism and its accompanying political manifestation, the state. Rather than waiting for the new Moses, his political party, whose writs are developed up some mountain away from the eyes of those he seeks to order, and another few decades of desert-wandering, it is time for the working class and poor to reassert its own politics upon nations demanding deliverance.

Representatives of the working class have entered the halls of elite power on countless occasions – via elections or revolutions – only to leave their constituency behind as new members of the ruling elite. A new politics is needed – outside these halls and in spaces occupied and dominated by our class; a politics that aims at federated self-management, re-developing a working class consciousness that aims at developing a sense of human dignity and self-respect, for so long suffocated by the religion of hierarchical dogmatism.

Creating a better world is limited by our ability to imagine one.