

## **Introduction**

CLP has noted before that, as a result of this current push for expanding these 'extractive industries', a number of amakosi [chiefs] are asserting a resurgent and aggressive authoritarian version of 'traditional authority' that claims proprietary rights to land and is also deeply intolerant of any forms of autonomous or popular organisation or power. We even hear of cases where people connected to a Communal Property Association (CPA – the legal land-holding entity created in terms of post-apartheid Land reform processes) have been forced to flee their homesteads in the face of the threats and claims of traditional authorities who are determined to extinguish any rival claims to land and the resources beneath it! Globally, this would fit a much wider patterns of resource extraction where big mining capital buys off local chiefs and their dependent local elite (for a relative pittance compared to mining profits) in order to secure mineral rights and repress popular resistance. The political consequences for the people are clearly disastrous, as are their prospects for land access and use-rights but it's unhelpful to simplistically associate traditional authority with un-freedom and contrast that with an assumed association of freedom with representative and liberal democracy. The predatory and authoritarian form of traditional authority people describe is precisely the form emergent under conditions of representative democracy in contemporary SA – and it's a terrible distortion of any pre-capitalist or pre-conquest form of 'traditional authority'.

The environmental consequences of a resource-extraction boom in this region are likely to be disastrous as well. The litany of impacts experienced by the people of the Vaal Triangle and other pollution hotspots with intensive dirty coal mining and energy generation are probably indicative.

Aside from the air pollution impacts of coal-based energy generation, water resources will certainly be negatively impacted. Water flows that people have depended on like springs, streams, rivers and wetlands may dry up, disappear or at least become less reliable in times of water-stress. Additionally, mining invariably compromises the quality of groundwater and aquifers.

The continued and accelerated exploitation of coal for energy also reproduces the underlying political economy of South Africa's 'mineral energy complex' that is ecologically unsustainable and makes the country Africa's leading greenhouse gas polluter relative to our population. [see David Hallows, 2013. Unpacking Climate Change: Background notes to the catastrophe, Groundwork.]

Notwithstanding the predictable negative consequences, the elites and their agents pushing this new grab for resources will promote it, cynically playing on people's real frustrations and needs – usually promising jobs and development whilst painting resistance and the defence of livelihoods and lives as an anti-development agenda condemning rural people to poverty and backwardness. Furthermore, Zuma's ANC-led government clearly sees advantage in a more assertive 'traditional authority' mobilised to contain and when necessary, actively suppress, any autonomous popular politics that is potentially against elite power and economic interests of big capital and the state.