

The Climate Justice Coalition

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The Climate Justice Coalition (CJC) is made up of trade unions, community-based and non-profit organisations building a transformative climate justice movement. The CJC together with the Cry of the Xcluded (CoX) held a mass meeting on 22 April 2023 at the Wits University's West Campus. The meeting started at 10:45 am.

The theme of the meeting was systems change instead of climate change. It emphasised the fact that loadshedding is a part of the problems South Africans face and so a part of a bigger systematic problem. This system favours the rich and works against the poor.

One speaker, Andile Zulu, gave a brief history of the origins of loadshedding and recommended the '1998 Eskom White Paper' for further reading. Andile gave some key points and facts about Eskom's energy policy which were news to many of the people in attendance. He mentioned that the government wants to privatise Eskom. Records show that Eskom requested support from the government predicting that in the coming years, they will struggle to effectively supply electricity as more people are connected to the grid. The government did not agree to support Eskom at the time.

Eskom now focuses on making profits rather than providing a service to the people. Zulu argued that Eskom sells electricity to a population that struggles to buy it. The government did not agree to support Eskom as a public utility and instead implemented austerity leading to hard economic conditions meant to bring down public expenditure. Less funds go to the public sector for example less money being spent on health care, police stations, and education. In closing, Zulu said that there are ways to tackle the situation. He said communities must reclaim Eskom by having public audits about how the funds are used. Secondly, he told the delegates that taxing the rich people is one source of funds and finally, to fight for the rebuilding of Eskom and for free basic electricity.

Asked what his take on loadshedding was, Bhtie from Sisonke Revolutionary Movement said that someone deliberately controls it, and it should not be considered as a problem but rather a deliberate problem. "During the shutdown we did not have loadshedding for 5 days does that mean Eskom had solved its financial issue? no but it means the rightful beneficiaries of Eskom were considerate for 5 seconds," he said.

"I have realised that when we experience loadshedding Eskom still deducts units even though we did not use the electricity, this is an issue that continues to get bigger and bigger how are we expected to survive? Firms are closed, [the] unemployment rate is increasing, we are hungry, and the struggle is getting worse and worse," he said.

Matthews Hlabane from the Southern Africa Green Revolutionary Council outlined ways in which the challenges of the working class can be overcome. He said working class communities are deprived of access to basic services, they are uprooted and forced into dependency. Therefore, the working class must go to the same companies to beg for survival. People suffering from energy poverty cannot produce from land because it is contaminated. The working class should come up with strategies that will inflict wounds, fewer discussions and more action. He also noted that no political party fully represents the working class.

The working class can overcome many issues through understanding the importance of organising and understanding that the base of lack of electricity is birthed from the lack of organising.

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