

Welcome from the Khanya College Coordinator

Dear Comrades

Welcome to Khanya College and the 25th Annual Winter School 2024. This is a small but important milestone for Khanya College and the social justice movement in South Africa. The Winter School was a particular response to the South African government's neoliberal Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy that was implemented in 1996. Already there was an international experience of neoliberalism's impact on the working class to draw on for example, Margaret Thatcher's Britain. Khanya's role was critical in educating shopstewards and the labour movement, that neoliberalism would be disastrous for the working class. By 1999 we began to see the impact of GEAR on work restructuring, retrenchments, rising unemployment and the privatisation of basic services such as water and ambulance, amongst others.

This is therefore an opportunity to reflect on movement building and its many lessons; and to deepen an assessment of the "democracy" and why 30 years later, working people have become poorer and South Africa is still the most unequal country in the world.

Over the years the Winter School became a space of hope for movements and activists; and has made an important contribution to maintaining the memory of the working class over the past 25 years.

The Winter School has aimed to empower activists to analyse the world, the sources of their oppression and exploitation and how to resolve this and to develop strategies and networks to organise and strengthen organisations. Khanya firmly believes in the need for the working class to liberate itself and Khanya's role is catalytic to assist working class formation through skills, awareness raising and solidarity. Over these past 25 years, more than 7000 activists have participated in the school, from over 700 organisations, from all the countries in the Southern African Development region, east Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), and Sweden, Australia and India. All sectors of society have been represented. While we embarked on a particular approach to ensure youth and women participation, it began on a 50/50 basis, now women and youth make up 65% of the school. This is consistent with the composition of the social movements.

A more detailed study of the 25 years of the Khanya Winter School is needed, to wholistically reveal the victories, lessons, methodologies and theoretical perspectives that influenced many unions, community organisations and movements. The history of the school is a very rich one, and contributed to the development of theoretical generalisations, organising experience, research and publications. This period included a steep rise (2001-2006) and decline (2006-2010) in the new social movements, the fascinating struggles by the Treatment Action Campaign, the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless People's Movement and the Debt movement and the environmental movement amongst others. Together with the Social Movements Indaba, Khanya led a delegation of 300 activists to the World Social Forum in Kenya in 2007. The Karibu newspaper is a legacy of the Anti-Xenophobia Coalition which Khanya College initiated in 2008 and united social movements and organisations of African nationals to combat xenophobia. In 2009

the first edition of Khanya's Jozi Book Fair was born to deepen a culture of reading, writing and citizenship, to counter neoliberalism's impact working people's cognitive and generic skills.

The Marikana Massacre (2012) of 34 mineworkers signalled an historic moment for the social justice movement that the crisis in South Africa is organic, thorough-going, and that colour and class in SA's capitalism have not been deracialised. Capitalist profits are still based on cheap black labour, an indictment of this country's democracy. This has informed Khanya's analysis that a new cycle of struggle is opening, and a new cadre and a new generation is needed in the struggle for liberation, notwithstanding the need to build on the struggles of the past and the importance of memory and continuity.

Although neoliberalism is still deeply entrenched in the South African formation, the history and memory of the movements (including Khanya's, amongst others) will indicate that there has been resistance and alternatives; and that the SA government and the ruling classes always made choices in opposition to movements and the working people. Although the movements are weak, they have not been defeated, we still believe that another world is possible! We have not accepted neoliberal inequities and the many injustices that accompany them. COVID-19 illustrated the depths of the capitalist ecological crisis and illustrated to all of us how little we need to live in harmony with nature.

This milestone also reflects the special embedded relationship that Khanya has had with communities and movements. Since its formation in 1986, Khanya has always been in solidarity with movements and has not been limited to the role of 'an NGO'. A history of Khanya is needed to engage the college's work more broadly and to also document the high turnover of communities, movements and activists that have participated in movement building. That of its staff and leadership.

It was therefore no surprise when in 2010 the communities and movements offered to host the Winter School and provide community accommodation. Communities rescued the school. The 2010 currency fluctuations jeopardised the Winter School. The SA Rand strengthened, and Khanya lost more than R1 million. That year, the college decided to cut all salaries by 30% and avoided retrenchments. Communities expressed the need for the School, for activists, and committed to making accommodation available for the School.

This was an intensive process to mobilise accommodation within local townships, using backyard rooms, RDP houses, and council houses. Together with the communities, Khanya embarked on an intensive organising initiative that took place every year until 2017. No payment was made to communities; and every year Khanya monitored venues to ensure they were clean, safe and warm for activists; mobilised blankets, mattresses, kettles, heaters and food. Khanya also provided breakfast foods for the family household and contributed to water and electricity. The communities' timely intervention saved the School and ensured that there was no disruption community organisations themselves fell into decline. This helped to keep Khanya and activists grounded, and in touch with communities.

This year the theme of the Winter school is 'Solidarity and mutual aid' and focuses on the daily difficulties of living under neoliberalism in South Africa, and the need to organize and build movements to defend the working class. This school takes place just after the national elections for the 7th administration in May 2024. Despite a low voter turnout, it produced an upset with the ANC only receiving 40%, thus enforcing coalitions. Despite various choices, a coalition of the ANC and DA (and smaller parties) have formed a Government of National Unity, (GNU), led by the ANC. None of these parties represent working class interests. In fact, ANC rule has deepened neoliberalism, and the new coalition includes rightwing parties such as the ANC. This election was significant in its appeal to ethnicity, colour, class, loyalty, but over 30 years have not dealt with the legacy of apartheid. Neoliberalism has deepened social inequalities. Government presides over inequality in a wealthy country.

In celebrating and remembering the struggles of the Winter School over 25 years, we remember the work and tireless contribution of cde Oupa Lehulere for the working class in SA and beyond. Cde Oupa was the driving spirit of Khanya College, including the winter school. He would be the first to acknowledge that he worked as part of a collective, but cde Oupa had special talents, a gift of the working class to the working class. Brilliant, he always subjected himself to the collective. He understood the need for working class unity, to weave together movements, to always find ways to unite and strengthen the working class and its formations. No section of the working class can bring about liberation on its own. Neoliberalism has also clarified the importance of social reproduction, and the importance of women's role in society, in relation to the workplace, children, the church, cultural spaces – where the working class is reproduced daily. Hence Khanya's strength has always been to bring together all sectors, all movements. We draw inspiration and strength from cde Oupa, and we will never ever forget his work and his commitment to the working class.

We invite you to enjoy this 25th annual winter school. It's a space for engagement, a space of tolerance to debate and discuss, to exercise your creativity and to make friendships and strengthen your commitment to social change.

We encourage participants to be mindful that this is winter, and that there have been very bad bouts of flu going around. We therefore encourage all participants to ensure vigilance, and complete observance of all Covid 19 protocols.

With best wishes

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