

# Should Tsvangirai have followed the Freedom Riders' example?

By DEREK CHARLES CATSAM

In May 1961 a mixed-race group of civil rights activists travelled deep into southern US to test a recent Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in the facilities serving interstate bus and train passengers. When the original group of Freedom Riders, as they were known, reached Alabama they met with brutal, ruthless violence, much of which was inspired by the Ku Klux Klan.

The original group, after much soul searching, decided to fly to their ultimate destination, Louisiana city of New Orleans, rather than continue their bus ride

through the rest of Alabama, through Mississippi, and into Louisiana. Although the reasons for the original Freedom Riders abandoning their trip were understandable, another group of activists, students at Fisk University, a respected all-black school in Nashville, Tennessee, saw what had happened in Alabama and came to an almost immediate decision: We have to continue the Freedom Rides. For if we do not it will send a message: We can be stopped by the use of violence.

I was reminded of this episode as I watched the withdrawal from the Zimbabwe run-off of Morgan Tsvangirai, the Movement for Democratic Change leader. Tsvangirai, who is

widely believed to have won the March 29 elections, and who would likely win the June 27 run-off, has cited the widespread violence aimed at MDC supporters as his reason.

"We in the MDC cannot ask them to cast their vote on the 27th June when that vote would cost them their lives. We will no longer participate in this violent, illegitimate sham of an election," Tsvangirai told reporters. Mugabe has, according to the MDC's leader, "declared war by saying that the bullet has replaced the ballot".

"We believe an election that reflects the will of the people is impossible."

It would represent the ultimate in

armchair coaching to criticise Tsvangirai, who has so often been a victim of the Mugabe regime's tough and ruthlessly authoritarian behaviour. He knows better than anyone the costs of standing up to Mugabe and his henchmen. But I do wish Tsvangirai could have found a way to stay in the race, for this confirms Mugabe's tactics, and validates the view of those young men and women in Nashville back in 1961 about white supremacists in the Deep South: Use enough violence and intimidation and corruption, and you will win.

Perhaps Tsvangirai's withdrawal is a gambit by which he hopes to force the hand of SADC and the

west. If so, it is a risky but potentially brilliant move. Nonetheless, if the run-off does not go on, if Tsvangirai remains out of the race, another sad chapter in Zimbabwe's sad history is being written without the prospect of a happy ending.

The members of the "Nashville Movement" went on to become Freedom Riders and were joined by hundreds of others committed to justice and equality in the US 47 years ago. They faced violence, brutality, arrest and imprisonment. And in the end they won. The US government acted, and made clear that the right to travel across state lines without worrying about state sanctioned discrimination.

Today a host of actors, ranging from the member nations of SADC to the UN to the western powers, most notably the US and Great Britain, need to show their commitment to justice and equality. They need to make sure that Tsvangirai's gambit, intended or not, does not prove fruitless. It is certain that Tsvangirai would win any free and fair run-off.

But Robert Mugabe must see himself as having the upper hand now (if he ever doubted). Even as the world does appear set to act, it may be far too late to have any significant effect on the election process. And so Mugabe might be in a better position than he has been in at any

point since the March 29 election. The use of violence may have accomplished his goals. This grim irony may well not be lost on Mugabe. It should not be lost on the rest of the world. The lesson the Freedom Riders understood so well nearly half century ago is one that the world needs to understand today.

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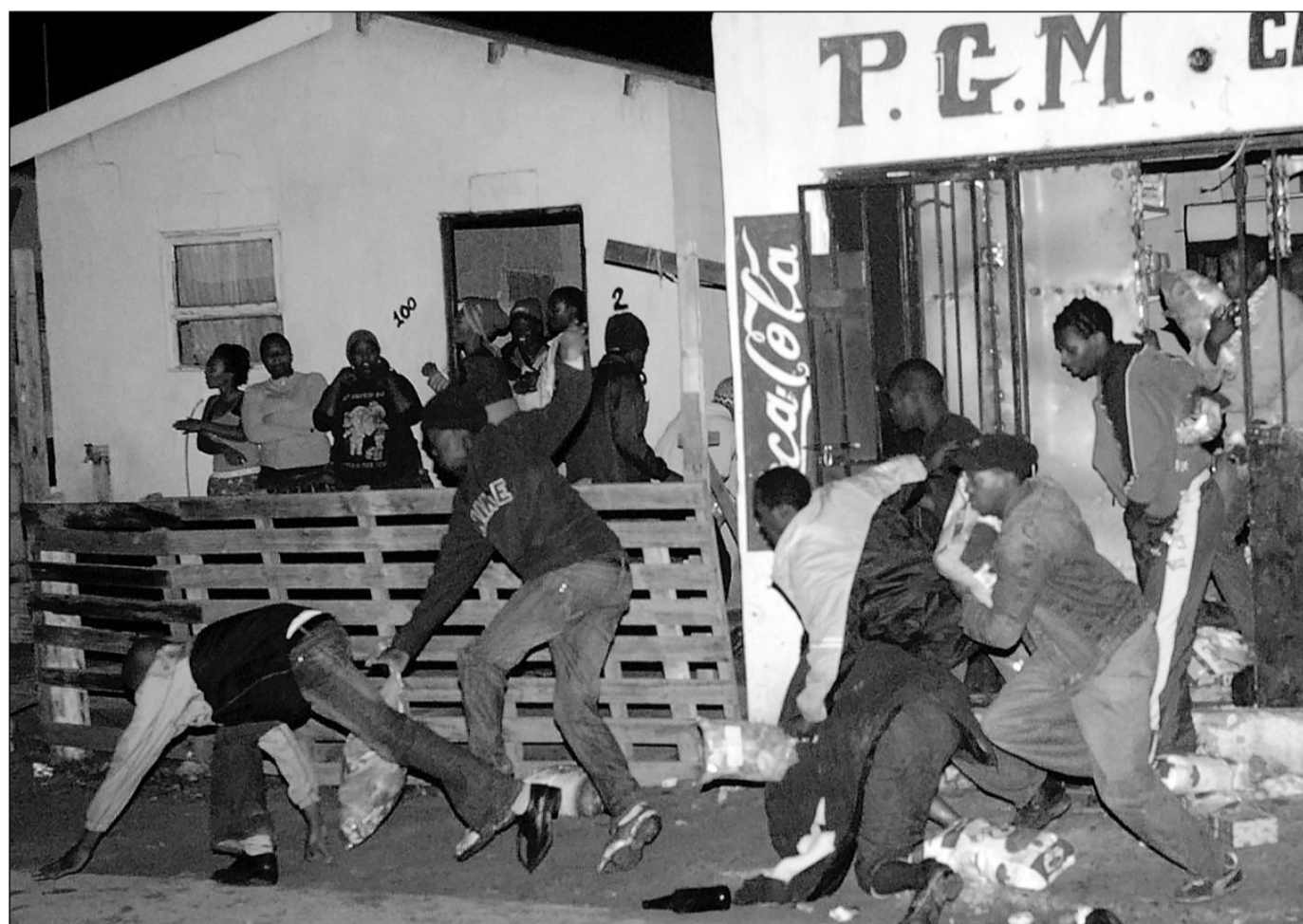
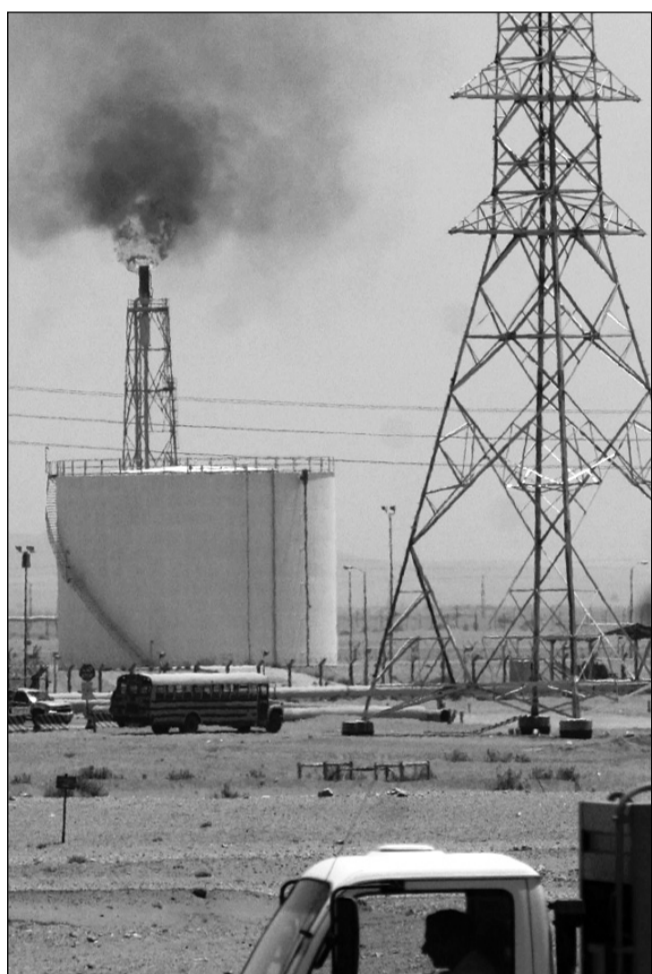
# The link between oil and xenophobia

Our country's dependence on oil exposes the fault lines in South African society, writes Simon Ratcliffe

What have oil and xenophobia got to do with each other? What is the link between the finiteness of oil and South Africans driving Zimbabweans living in South Africa out of their homes?

Much of what we are witnessing in real time on our television screens and in our newspapers seems unconnected and yet when we dig into it, we find that events taking place in one part of the world can lead to profound changes in other parts. I am reminded of a film I once saw by the great Indian director Satyajit Ray, called *Distant Thunder*. The film is set in the rural Indian province of Bengal during World War 2, and examines the effects of war taking place in other parts of the world and contributing to the Great Famine of 1943, during which more than three million people died in the villages in that area. The film shows with masterful skill how traditional village norms break down under the pressure of hunger.

So how does this relate to current events in South Africa? Over the past 100 or more years we have built a thriving global economy capable of fantastic feats and yet one that is incredibly vulnerable. It is vulnerable because of the high level of dependence we have on oil and other cheap sources of energy. Cheap, abundant oil has enabled the incredible growth we have seen. And yet it is a finite resource which we are consuming at a rate of 85 million barrels a day. The issue we are now being confronted with is that oil



**BURNING QUESTION:** The plan to increase production by Saudi Arabia, left, may not help rein in rapidly rising oil prices, which are having wide and varied effects. The writer argues that the increase in the cost of living, linked to the steep price of oil, leads to resentment and anger among South Africans, the root cause of the recent xenophobic attacks

depletion isn't a straight line, where we can use as much of it as we choose and then, suddenly, it is gone. Global oil production follows a roughly bell-shaped curve. Production starts off small, increases until it reaches a maximum point and then begins to decline until reaches zero. This is an observable and empirically verifiable fact and is well documented.

There are increasing signs that we may be close to the point of maximum global oil production. What is so significant about this point? From this point onward, there will be less oil available year on year. In other words, we will have to make do with less energy every year until we are able to replace it with alternative energy sources.

The problem is that our global

economy can't function in the way it does currently with significantly less energy. To keep on growing, it requires more and more energy. The phenomenal growth we are seeing in India and China is keeping demand high. Over the last three years production has flattened while demand has risen sharply. Prices have reached all-time highs and we haven't yet started the decline in production.

The effects of rapidly rising oil prices have been varied and widespread. Oil permeates almost every sector and every country. What defines our ability to carry on as before is our ability to pay the going price for the oil we are consuming.

Oil is embedded in some way into just about everything we take for granted in an industrialised country.

We see generalised increases in price as the price of oil rises. The rising price affects the poorest communities first, requiring behavioural change as it moves up the income ladder. People increasingly feel the pressure of higher transport costs as well as generally higher food prices. The question is: what do they do under pressure?

Around the world, we are witnessing protests, riots and other expressions of mass discontent. Last week we saw protests and blockades in Spain; earlier there were protests by fishermen in Brussels, and blockades by truck drivers in the UK. In Portugal, truck drivers go on strike; in Belgium, workers protest against the rising cost of living; protests are occurring in a number of Indian cities over the high price of fuel as

well as increasing transportation costs; and in Indonesia there are protests over the lowering of fuel subsidies. Before that we had food riots in Egypt, Haiti and in other countries, while there have been fuel riots in Nepal and other countries in recent years.

Clearly what we are seeing are people in vulnerable groups whose livelihoods are in some way affected by rising fuel and food costs and who want their voices to be heard. Rising prices put strains on the poorer groups in society. How they react depends on where the pressure is felt and on socio-cultural factors.

In South Africa, we have had constantly rising fuel costs in response to the oil price rises. This

has affected transportation costs and put pressure on people's mobility. Oil pushes up the prices of just about everything, including food. Rising prices put strains on everyone and create the conditions for social tensions and instability.

It seems that our dependence on oil has the ability to expose the cracks and fissures in our society as the price rises. In South Africa we have many fault lines, including the divide between rich and poor; between different races, between different cultural groups, between employed and unemployed and between South Africans and non-South Africans.

The issue of immigrants, refugees and economic migrants is complex. Some people have come here in search of a better life and

better prospects for themselves and their children. Some have come from Europe and some from other parts of the world. Many have come here from other countries in Africa, including neighbouring countries. There are estimated to be some 3.5 million Zimbabweans who have left their country in search of sanctuary and a better life here. Some have fled political persecution; some have seen their economic prospects disintegrate as the economy has collapsed. There could be up to five million or more foreigners from Africa in South Africa.

How are people who have fled to South Africa surviving? Some have found jobs, some have created jobs, some have borrowed, some have begged and some have turned to crime. In a context where poor communities are having their livelihoods squeezed, it is possible that South Africans might believe they are threatened, are being displaced or are losing jobs to others, and therefore become resentful. Resentment offers illusory sweet rewards, as it is then easy to regard others as less worthy than oneself and then to be able to justify doing anything to them, and feel self-righteous about it. It of course carries no reward, only huge cost. It is a quick way of losing our humanity by behaving in appalling ways towards other members of the human race.

Going forward, as we get closer to the peak in global oil production, we are likely to see greater pressures, particularly on poorer communities but constantly moving up the income scale. The intensifying pressures are likely to open new fault lines in our society. We will be faced with choices which we will be called on by circumstances to make.

While we have little, if any, control over the price of oil, the thunder in the distance, we do have control over our responses to what it presents us with. The choices will be to come closer together or to be torn further apart, to collaborate or to exacerbate divisions between us, to have compassion or to succumb to separation. Which will it be?

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There's an old saying that when life hands you a lemon, make lemonade.

Right now it seems as though life is handing out lemons on a lavish scale. Food prices are soaring, electricity and petrol prices have gone through the roof, crime is escalating and our neighbours to the north have gone mad.

It all tastes sour to some, but I'm sure there are bright people out there who are about to make a whole lot of lemonade.

Take the matter of the impossible fuel prices, for a start. Several people I know have already vowed to use their cars less than before. They are using shops closer to their homes and walking there instead of driving.

This is good lemonade. It reduces their carbon output, improves their health and brings money to the local shops. Everybody wins.

Just the fact that they are walking to the shops will probably add a few healthy years to their lives.

Consumer writer Wendy Knowler made an interesting discovery recently. She wrote in the Cape Times that the prices of many basic foods had gone up alarmingly in recent months, but the price of fruit and vegetables had remained much the same and, in some cases, had actually come down.

So, when you've walked to the shop, don't buy processed foods. They're a rip-off. Buy simple, straight-from-the-farm vegetables and you'll actually have a healthier diet added to your stronger body.

I'm a dyed-in-the-wool carnivore, brought up on mutton, venison and



## Tavern of the Seas

beef. In my family we regarded green food as valuable raw material to be turned into meat by sheep and cows.

I can't afford to be like that any more.

Now I'm discovering that strange alien plants like cabbage, pumpkin and cauliflower are actually edible. Who would have thought it? Only last week I ate a pea. Our minister of health might be on to a good thing. I must try a beetroot one day.

As far as electricity costs are concerned, I have good friends who assure me that candlelight dinners are wonderful, even if they do consist of vegetables.

They've taken to going to bed early, also by candlelight, and say they have discovered things about each other that are even more exciting than beetroot. Apparently these things don't work so well in bright light.

Other friends have rediscovered board games, instead of watching TV and playing video games. They tell me the family has never had so much fun before.

And while we are about it, let's plant a few veggies among the flowers. We will probably never raise enough to feed the family, but the occasional home-grown tomato or lettuce gives a great feeling of independence.

And for once we will be certain it hasn't been sprayed with poison, genetically modified or subjected to nuclear bombardment.

Making lemonade can be a lot of fun.

### Last Laugh

A father was watching a rugby match on TV with his six-year-old son.

The home side was doing particularly badly and eventually the man could stand it no longer.

"That stupid centre!" he shouted. "Every time the ball gets passed to him he fumbles it. Why the hell do they keep him on the team?"

The little boy thought about it for a moment and then suggested: "Maybe it's his ball."

*The Wanderer*

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## First things first to get the airport link on track

Visionary ambition or expensive folly?

Which category does the Rail Commuter Corporation's grand plan for a special rail-link between the airport and the city centre fall into?

In theory a high-speed train will run north on an elevated line from Cape Town International to a new station at Modderdam and then connect with the existing track westwards into town, stopping en route only at Mutual in Pinelands.

Again in theory, this could relieve the chaotic congestion around the terminals, take strain off the N2 and make airport commuting quicker and more predictable by avoiding the peak-hour traffic jams. And it makes sense on all the environmental scorecards.

The final bonus would be that it might force the airport taxi sharks to reduce their outrageous prices, which currently stand at R250 for a single trip to Rondebosch, which means it can cost more to get to and from the airport than it does to fly to Johannesburg!

The scheme has a R1.2 billion price tag but even if you allow for the current rate of building project budgetary blowouts and assume at least triple that amount, cost isn't the main problem here.

Expensive rail links are a key feature of most of the world's major



## Open Mike

airports and with over eight million arrivals per annum and considerable growth on that number inevitable, ours is definitely big enough to warrant such an investment, provided we could be assured that a significant number of people would actually use it.

The immediate assumptions on that score are not optimistic.

Conceivably many of those employed at the airport would willingly climb on board but ultimate success depends on the uptake from the airlines' customers. In spite of the prevalence of budget flights, most locals who travel by air are from the ranks of the relatively well-off who long ago completely

abandoned the rail system unless the train was Blue. It would take a massive step-up in service and security from Metrorail to lure them back in any numbers. And how many of those travellers are heading into the heart of the city anyway?

As for foreign arrivals, will tour operators, hosting families or major hotels happily recommend the service? Maybe it's just the current negative climate but at the moment I cannot view a train load of tourists with all their documents, cameras and bags as anything but a horrifyingly inviting target.

For the idea to have any chance of success not only does the train itself have to be safe, so do the relevant stations and their environs. There would need to be an integrated shuttle system through the inner city including all major hotels. Secure park-and-ride facilities at both Mutual and Modderdam would also be an incentive for locals provided they were far cheaper than the parking areas at the airport.

The good news is that smart minds have already been applied to these and other interlinked Cape Town public transport issues and we will get a chance to road-test some of these during the World Cup.

If we learn our lessons well from that event and successfully complete the current revamp of five

existing stations (including spending more than R400 million on the city terminus) maybe we can then consider the airport line.

And post-2010 there should be a few construction companies with time on their hands and a willingness to cut prices after their feast of stadium-building has finished.

It would also be wise to wait and see if the brutally expensive Gautrain has managed to attract a new generation of rail travellers between OR Tambo, Rosebank and Sandton City.

In any case, it should be first things first. The government has already committed to a massive investment in railway rolling stock. Metrorail need to demonstrate that they can get those trains on the track on time, on budget and keep them running efficiently.

If they can pass that test and run an effective False Bay shuttle between Muizenberg and Simon's Town for the benefit of tourists and to relieve the crush caused by the coastal roadworks, only then can we give them a whole new expensive airport train set to play with.

But none of the doubts about the scheme should stop anyone from putting such ideas forward.

Now more than ever we need to know that there is someone still thinking big and trying to envisage a better city.