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WE FIGHT IDEAS WITH IDEAS

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Why Are We Poor?

Citizenry in South Africa (SA) was promised a better life for all. Now 57%, more than 30 million people are living in poverty at the national upper poverty line, while almost 14 million are experiencing food poverty. We have seen a succession of “plans” by the ANC government, none of which could concretise economic reform that affects the employment rate or poverty levels significantly!

The workers who produce the wealth of the country cannot afford the basic essentials. Food and clothing, as well as transport have become unaffordable. Beggars are seen everywhere, and millions of people are forced to live in overcrowded, unhealthy squatter camps. The squatter camps are often razed by fires and flooded by annual rains. Many beggars live on the streets of the cities, in shop doorways and under bridges. People kill each other for things like food and homes. Long queues of people, mostly children, stand patiently and wait for handouts from the benevolent. Some praise the “new government” for the R350 monthly stipend, but gradually the scales are beginning to fall off the eyes of most of the people.

The government stipulated minimum wage of R3500 p.m. is not an acceptable wage limit. What workers are demanding is a *living wage*. This is a wage that allows people to live decent lives. Minimum wages are merely meant to enable people to survive; these people earning minimum wages continue to live in poverty whilst a living wage, determined by adding the cost of bread, eggs and other food items, in addition to a little extra, is a *living wage*.

Much is being written about acts of criminality – but the South African economy is fragile and with the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become unstable. This includes rising unemployment, inequality, poor or non-existent service delivery and corruption.

With the above in mind, it is necessary to look at food security, the lack of access to sufficient quantities of food to satisfy

minimum human needs. Food security exists when all people, at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life.

We live in a country of abundance – a country rich in minerals, we produce (or can produce) enough agricultural products that can satisfy the needs of the majority. We have a well-developed industrial sector and we are even exporting goods. With all these assets, *why are we still poor?*

Statistics SA announced that the consumer price inflation (CPI), which has also contributed to the soaring repo rate, increased to 7.4% in June from 6.9% in May. According to Stats SA, the main contributors to the 7.4% annual inflation rate were food and non-alcoholic beverages, housing and utilities, transport, as well as miscellaneous goods and services.

The Reserve Bank has increased the repo (repurchase) rate by 75 basic points. This makes it more expensive for banks to lower their banking/lending activities. This reduces the money supply and then inflation should fall. This development affects only the middle class and the rich. How does this impact on the poor? Food and fuel prices rise dramatically. This means that transport costs are set to rise. It also means that farmers’ cost rise, their products rise and the workers on the farms cannot afford the produce that they produce. When we have an increase in interest rates, the poor will have less money to spend on essential foodstuffs.

Let us look at the stats provided by the Human Sciences Research Council

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Province	% of population in poverty	Province	% of population in poverty
Eastern Cape	72%	Mpumalanga	57%
Free State	68%	North West	52%
Gauteng	42%	Northern Cape	61%
KwaZulu-Natal	61%	Western Cape	32%
Limpopo	77%	South Africa	57%

Are the poverty stats the reason for the food uprising in July 2021?

What is the food situation in South Africa?

According to the South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES), just over a quarter of the population is still food insecure despite sufficient food being produced at the national level. The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) revealed that during April/May 2021, approximately 2.3 million households reported child hunger, while an Independent Polling System Of Society (Ipsos) study found that more than 40% of South Africans of all age groups were affected by hunger.

The cost of basic foodstuff is increasing by the day. Food prices from March 2021 to March 2022 hereunder depict the depressing increases in the cost of basic food. These increases were determined post Covid-19 but prior to the imperialist Russia/Ukraine conflict.

Butternut: +45%	Cremora: +16%	Margarine +12%
Cooking oil: +37%	Tripe: +16%	Apples: +11%
Chicken liver: +32%	Eggs: +15%	Beef: +11%
Beef liver: +30%	Gizzards: +15%	Frozen Chicken: +11%
Polony: +21%	Cabbage: +13%	Wors: +11%
Oranges: +20%	Samp: +13%	Chicken Feet: +10%
Onions: +17%	Bananas: +12%	Tomatoes: +10%

The cost of staple food and other essential foodstuff increased on average by as much as 14%.

Rising Cost of Essential Services

- Water, electricity and rates charges continue to increase.
- Vat on these services contribute to the increases.
- Transport costs of workers increase as fuel prices increase.
- The poor spend vast amounts of their wages on medical bills – poverty also contributing to the parlous state of health of the poor.
- Hidden taxes such as school fees further impoverish the poor.

Unemployment

The total of those unemployed increased to 14.9 million people. This constitutes to approximately 25% of the population

According to Stats SA, South Africa has over 10 million young people aged 15-24 years and, of these, only 2,5 million were in the labour force, either employed or unemployed. The largest share (7,7 million or 75,1 %) of this group of young people are those that are out of the labour force (i.e. inactive). The main reason for being inactive is discouragement, i.e. they have lost hope of finding a job that suits their skills or in the area they reside.

- The youth continues to bear the burden of unemployment in our country.
- Proper education to enable people to find a suitable job is only available to those who can afford to pay for such education.
- The vast majority survives by begging, borrowing and stealing. Many, especially in townships survive by communal living, living off grants and pensions of the aged.

Exploitation by Capitalist Bosses

Exploitation is the main cause of poverty in SA. The greedy capitalist bosses make profits for themselves and are using the labour of workers and the products that they produce. Over and above that, overseas capitalists that invested in SA do not pay any taxes on their investments. They are merely required to pay taxes on the profits that they derive from their products. This includes manufactured goods, grain products, sugar and all other products manufactured by overseas moguls, technology, arms, motor vehicles and its components goods.

Will Poverty Always Be With US?

Wolfgang Streeck, in his book, *How Will Capitalism End?* has the following to say:

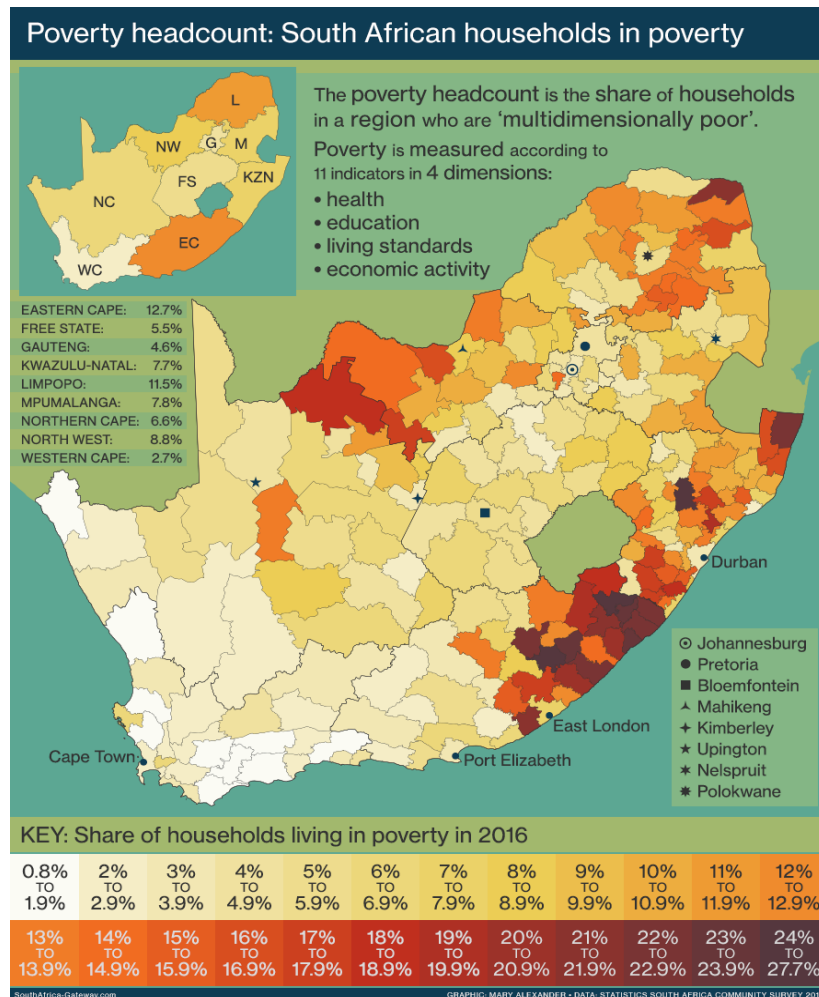
Capitalism has always been an improbable social formation, full of conflicts and contradictions, therefore permanently unstable and in flux, and highly conditional on historically contingent and precarious supportive as well as constraining events and institutions. (Verso, 2016)

Poverty can be eradicated in South Africa and indeed the world. We have the ability to produce enough food to feed the world's population. In SA, we have the potential to produce enough wealth, to provide clothing, homes, education and jobs for all.

As we know why we are poor we should now equip ourselves to solve these societal problems. That is we need to solve the economic problems created by the capitalist system. The solution does not lie in investment by overseas

countries as the ruling elite seems to think, it lies in preventing the wealth of this country being owned and controlled by capitalist bosses. It lies in the wealth of this country being fraudulently misappropriated, hidden in tax havens and leaving the country.

To solve the question of poverty, we will also have to solve the political problem: We need a government that represents the interest of the rural poor and the workers, both employed and unemployed.



The poorest municipality is Ntabankulu in the Eastern Cape, where 85% of its residents live below the poverty line.

South Africa's poorest province is the Eastern Cape. Around 880,000 of the mostly rural Eastern Cape's people live in abject poverty.

The food poverty line is now R624 per person per month, up from R585 previously (+6.7%). This refers to the amount of money that an individual needs to afford the minimum required daily energy intake. This is also commonly referred to as the "extreme" poverty line.

Young & Jobless: R350 grant exposes the extent of SA's unemployment. About 5% of the applicants for the special grant (R350) hold tertiary qualifications

SPORTSFIELDS PAINFULLY QUIET IN TOWNSHIPS

The “new democracy” that came into being in 1994 came about because of a negotiated settlement between the ANC and its Alliance partners, on the one hand and the National Party, on the other. Negotiations had started long before the Kempton Park horse deal with “talks” between Mandela and Kobie Coetsee, Minister of Justice, and other representatives of the government

In 1984, two South Africans, claiming to represent SA sport, met the ANC at their Lusaka Conference. The betrayal of non-racial sport and its use as a bargaining chip had begun. Community sport was sacrificed in 1992 when SA went to the Olympic Games in Barcelona without a flag, an anthem and without having universal suffrage.

Whatever one may think of the Olympic Games, no one can deny that seeing the thousands of athletes during the march past on an opening day is a moving sight to behold. Most athletes are unable to contain their exuberance and delight at being there with the rest of humanity. At the Olympic Games spectators are awestruck at the magnificent achievements of the athletes. At the Olympic Games, the social function of sport is emphasised.

Those that were involved in the non-racial sports struggle can be justifiably proud of the fact that they always emphasised the social function of sport. However, perhaps they were making a virtue of necessity because they were fighting a system that threatened the very humanity of the oppressed in this country. Therefore, sport became a means of fostering those human values that all of us hold dear, and to which the over-powering, dominant capitalist culture is a serious threat.

The school sports organisations, South African Primary Schools Sports Association (SAPSSA) and the South African Senior Schools Sports Association (SASSSA) played a vital role in this regard.

In the Eastern Cape we often reflect on the seventies and eighties and how the sports fields in the Northern Areas, New Brighton and Kariega would be teeming with youngsters in their soccer jerseys, the girls with their bright hockey skirts, in both school and club colours. Roan Crescent, Dan Qeqe Stadium, Gelvandale, New Brighton Oval, the Chevrolet Stadium, Rosedale, Adcock, the Dyke and the Jubilee Park Fields on Saturday mornings and Wednesday afternoons was alive with sporting activity.

Hundreds of teachers, doing voluntary duty as referees, umpires and managers of sports codes on the sports fields of Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) and Uitenhage (Kariega). Chess, Table Tennis and quiz competitions at the respective schools – senior schools catered for 16 codes and primary schools for 14 codes of sport.

What has happened to community sport in the Northern Areas and has the absence of sporting codes contributed to

the violence and vandalism in these areas?

- In the seventies and early eighties, EP Cricket in the Northern Areas (NA's) of Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage had 27 Clubs. If the club consisted of a first-team, it had to have a second team and a junior team. EP Cricket had 7 leagues.
- Rugby flourished with EP, mainly clubs in PE having more than 20 clubs, Kwazakhele Rugby Union (KWARU) 15 clubs; Bethelsdorp Rugby Union (Beboc) had 10 Clubs and Uitenhage & District, 16 clubs. Most clubs had 2 or more teams.
- In Kwa Nobuhle, the soccer union consisted of 32 clubs and Rosedale Soccer Association had 16 clubs. The EP Soccer Board and the Kwazakhele Soccer Board\ (KWASBO) could jointly have consisted of between 70 and 100 clubs.
- EP Athletic Association consisted of 8 Clubs. Golden Eagles, the athletic club in New Brighton had more than 200 athletes, and so had Falcons, the club in Uitenhage. The clubs in Port Elizabeth had more than a hundred athletes including juniors.
- The Swimming Union that held regular weekly galas flourished with Dolphins in Uitenhage at one stage having 274 swimmers.
- Strong men's and ladies' hockey unions catered for the sport in the NA's
- Badminton, Squash, Volleyball, Chess, Table Tennis, Netball, Softball, Baseball, Darts and Boxing Unions were codes that were all practised at provincial as well as national level.
- Viable tennis unions existed in PE, New Brighton and in Uitenhage that included Kwa Nobuhle.

What has happened to our sport? Roderick Jonkers of Dolphins Swimming Club achieved Olympic qualifying times in the breaststroke at the age of 16 whilst at high school in the sixties. Denver Hendricks in the backstroke, also of Dolphins, and four other national swimmers from around the country trained at Crystal Palace national swimming pool, in England in the seventies with the British Olympic champions and gave an admirable account of themselves. Many athletes on the grass and cinder tracks in South Africa ran excellent times and proved worthy athletes that

if, given the opportunity, could compete with the best in the world.

It was evident that the sportspersons had a profound influence on the social life of the communities. Fund-raising social functions abounded as clubs, unions and national organisations competed for the attention and the finances of the sporting community. Little or no sponsorship was available and funds had to be garnered from individuals. Tremendous personal sacrifices were made, both socially and financially. For instance, Peter Swartz, chairperson of Uitenhage & District Rugby Union, was detained for three years in the late seventies. Swartz was primarily a rugby player and whilst he broadly supported the liberatory movement, SACOS and SARU, he was to my knowledge, at the time not a member of any political organisation. Swartz was never questioned during his three-year stint in detention.

The SACOS dictum of “no normal sport in an abnormal society” remains true to this day. It is self-evident that the people in the squatter camps of SA cannot indulge in the luxury

of sport when they are merely eking out a living.

The housing crisis deepens by the day. Despite the government having declared in 2008/9 that South Africa will be free of shacks by 2014, it remains an illusion in every city, dorp and village. The number of shacks is increasing daily as SA’s population continues to increase. It is estimated that shacks are increasing by an average of 140 000 annually. The DA government is complicit in this as is evidenced by the increasing number of shacks along the N2 in Cape Town. There are **437** informal settlement pockets in Cape Town alone.

Are the recent annual storms that are wreaking havoc in the areas of the poor merely a continuation of spatial apartheid? The situation in Education, Health and Social Services, especially in the EC, are all causes for concern. Nearly 75% of South Africans between the ages of 20 - 29 did not vote in the 2021 local elections. Is this a normal country?

Pieter Lourens, an athletics administrator from Boland and former South African Primary Schools Sports Association (SAPSSA) official, recently wrote on his FB page that he had questioned the astronomical fees that learners have to pay to participate in representative school sport. The written reply was that his letter was declined by the ‘Administration team’ with the rider that *“this was not the forum for political discussion”*

Lourens posted this reply on FB page.

Lourens comes from a history in SAPSSA where learners did not pay for participating in representative sports. Lourens furnished the monetary contribution by individual players for the following codes on their official letterheads as the following:

Boland Schools Hockey, U18 A side, R 6500

Western Cape Schools Netball, R8230,00



Let me add that those selected have to pay a deposit, normally around R1500,00. If this is not paid at a stipulated time, the next in line that can afford to pay, is selected. School Sport being practised on a class basis?

Can the children schooling in Khayelitsha afford these astronomical fees? Whilst

inequality reigns, when socio-economic disparities are so stark that it influences the selection of teams, can we claim that the playing fields are level? I am not for one moment suggesting that those selected should not play sport. However, from this we learn that until inequality, poverty and unemployment are eradicated, there cannot be normal sport when the society is abnormal.

The fields in the Northern Areas, New Brighton and Kariega have gone quiet. Township school sport has virtually disappeared as our sports nursery. We have now all become a nation of spectators.

Can SA sport be rescued? Is it possible to compartmentalise sport, education, politics, health, education, society?



NEW UNITY MOVEMENT

TRIBUTE TO OUR COMRADE MERLE McCOMBRING-HODGES



Merle in joyous mood

Loyal friend, committed comrade, champion of the exploited, teacher, mentor, tutor and beloved family member. Your departure from us so suddenly, so unexpectedly, was a great shock. How one wishes that this did not come to pass. In your last, lonesome hours one was seized with thoughts of why the destructive passage of this thief, this abductor of your precious life, was not discovered sooner; soon enough to allow the health professionals and your indomitable spirit to arrest its fatal course.

The **New Unity Movement** extends its sincerest condolences to the family of our late comrade Merle. We grieve with you for the loss of a sister, aunt and cousin. We mourn also the loss of a comrade in our ongoing struggle for the emancipation of the wretched of the earth from poverty and hardship caused by the greed and avarice of others.

Comrade Merle was a member of the Kraaifontein Cultural Society and later the Northern Suburbs Cultural Society based in Elsies River and Kuils River. Here she assisted in organising public debates focussed on informing the op-

pressed why we were poor and how we should organise to break our bonds of subjection. Merle was instrumental in the establishment of the Kraaifontein Youth Organisation and was also an executive member of the Kraaifontein Civic Association, where she stood side by side with her comrades, demanding proper health amenities, housing and education facilities.

Merle's fight for the civil rights of a people denied, and her brave endeavours in the face of a vicious ruling class, were born from a deep sense of justice nurtured by organisations such as the African People's Democratic Union of South Africa (APDUSA), the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA) and the South African Council of Sport (SACOS), where stalwarts such as Hazel Gelant, Frank Anthony, Abe Fortuin, Maureen Adriaan and Frank van der Horst played edifying and instructive roles.

Comrade Merle's membership of the Northern Suburbs Branch of the **New Unity Movement** was of particular significance because, at the time when the NEUM was driven underground by bannings, house arrests, incarcerations and exile, it was at her house on a smallholding in Kuils River, that, in their quest to sustain the liberatory programme of the NEUM, the comrades met and planned the inaugural meeting of what became known as the **New Unity Movement**. Comrade Merle remained a committed member of the Movement in the Northern Suburbs Branch until she died. We shall remember her for her critical thinking skills and insightful contributions to our debates. To honour her memory, we shall do no less than to continue the struggle for a more humane society based on non-racialism, anti-imperialism, non-collaboration in our own oppression and socialism.

Mickey Titus

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