

The Worker



Knowledge is Power

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PROTESTS AND POLICE BRUTALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES

It is an undeniable fact that the sympathy and support of the majority of South African citizens must be with those fellow South Africans who are engaged in protests against the desperate circumstances of their lives. In protesting they are expressing the finest quality of a human being: to strive to overcome conditions of extreme hardship which are slowly destroying them and their families.

The scale of the hardship and suffering that millions of our countrymen are forced to live in because of the capitalist system cannot be exaggerated. They live in the unforgiving “informal settlements”. The Reverend Skosana summed it all up recently when leading a march through the shacks of Khayelitsha: “Welcome to Hell on earth!” he said simply to his fellow marchers. Slum, squatter camp, informal settlement life is one of physical danger, filth, foul odours, pollution and disease. Crime and violence have free rein since these settlements are largely no-go areas for police and ambulance personnel.

THE ONGOING SLIDE INTO SLUMS, GHETTOS, INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

It is a fact that for most South Africans life is getting more and more devastating. The evidence is that more and more people are being forced to live in informal settlements: Food and fuel prices are constantly rising and are stretching most people’s incomes to the limit. The price of petrol has nearly doubled over the past three years. This drags many other prices higher as well. The cost of housing, whether bought or rented is constantly rising.

Tokyo Sexwale, the Minister of Home Settlements, admitted the ongoing, rapid, unrelenting growth of the deadly slums. In a recent address he said: “The number of informal settlements is growing uncontrollably. Likewise the populations inside these ghettos are increasing rapidly.”

To decent human beings forced to live in these circumstances **protest is natural**. Who would stand helplessly by while his children, his family, are being destroyed? Sexwale once again: “Growing discontent in informal settlements

manifests itself in ... service delivery protests, which are turning increasingly violent.”

WE SALUTE THE HEROIC PROTESTERS, WHO RISE AGAINST THE INJUSTICE IN SEARCH OF A BETTER LIFE FOR THEIR FAMILIES! WE CALL ON ALL THE VICTIMS OF SUCH INJUSTICE TO DO THE SAME AND WIPE IT OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

AN AFRICAN REALITY

In order to understand what is behind this endless drift into hardship and misery of so many millions of people, there is something very important that we need to take note of: **the movement of people into slums is something taking place throughout Africa.** It is a consequence of the growing impoverishment of millions. Lindiwe Sisulu (the SA minister of housing at the time) said that already 70% of the African population were living in slums. She forecast that by 2020 there would be 1,2billion inhabitants of Africa living in these appalling circumstances. She said it was a crisis waiting to explode.

We say: THE LESSON IS THAT WHEREVER CAPITALISM RULES PEOPLE’S LIVES ARE CONDEMNED TO MISERY.

THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

On the other side of the battle-front stand those who build very wealthy lives on the misery of the exploited and oppressed masses. And as the confrontation becomes increasingly desperate they are fully prepared to unleash state violence on their fellow citizens.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE IN THE “NEW” SOUTH AFRICA

The transformation of South Africa’s police force was discussed before and after 1994. The debate was about whether it should be a police “service” or a police “force”. A “service” would indicate a move away from the “kragdadige” approach of the apartheid era policing, to a policing structure that was there to protect and serve society – so the argument went. In addition, the military-sounding names for the ranks like general, brigadier, etc. would be changed to ones more suited to a “service”.

How has this idea of serving the community been changed?

Over the years we have seen a total reversal of this earlier stated vision. The first indications were the change backs to the military terms, then the “shoot to kill” statements by the police chief Bheki Cele and the Safety and Security Minister. The South African Police Service has in spite of the new name remained a “force” dealing in a forceful way with members of the community.

This situation has not been helped by the employment of thousands of new recruits who have come through a schooling system that has provided very little “education” because of the low level of teaching and learning taking place in most of the schools in the country. There was very few selection criteria used to recruit these future police officers. Basically, anyone with a Matric certificate and with no criminal record could apply. We all know how poorly records are kept in the criminal justice system and how frequently Matric certificates are forged by job seekers. Who knows how many recruits have undiscovered/destroyed criminal records and forged Matric certificates?

The few months of poor training provided to these new police recruits has further worsened this situation. We now have young policemen/women unable to take down proper statements, unable to deal with conflict situations and worse still unable to treat community members with respect.

RECORDED INSTANCES OF POLICE VIOLENCE

SABC Television and the other media tell us daily about the various incidents of police brutality in the country. Some of these are the horrible pictures of Andries Tatane being beaten to death; the daily abuse of “illegal” immigrants; the ill-treatment of raped women at police stations, the violent police reaction to service delivery protests; their violent reaction to the recent farm workers strike and most recently the dragging of a Mozambiquan taxi driver behind a vehicle resulting in his death. The list is endless.

Nobody will forget the sickening shooting of mineworkers at Marikana! And as if that was not shocking enough, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) then charges the mineworkers with the murder of their fellow workers. This legal tactic, “common purpose,” was used during the dark days of apartheid to prosecute political activists who were opposed to the apartheid government.

WHY ARE THE POLICE SO BRUTAL?

As discussed above, there are many reasons for this behaviour. However we must not forget who the police all over the world work for – the moneyed classes, the owners of big business like the mining and major manufacturing sectors – the twenty percent of the population that own eighty percent of the wealth.

Since the establishment of the first policing structures the police were there to uphold the law. Which law is that? The law/s relating mainly to property rights – the laws created to protect the property and profits of the twenty percent. Why are there only laws against breaking into houses but not against homelessness, against stealing food but not against starvation, against illegal strikes but not against payment of starvation wages, etc. etc. etc? Not too long ago in England, a

starving peasant stealing the king's game was sentenced to the prison of Australia.

Governments serve the same masters – the twenty percent who own the eighty percent. The police are employed by the government or state and have to do what they are ordered to do or they will lose their jobs. It does not matter which communities (squatter camps, townships, suburbs) the police recruits come from. Once they put on the uniform they have to toe the line or get kicked out. Remember the brutality of black police against their brothers and sisters during the apartheid era? Brainwashing and the fear of losing a job together with the false sense of power the position gives are great reasons to obey the masters instructions.

Growing police brutality is also a sign that the government authorities are running out of ideas for responding to the legitimate demands of the people, so now these authorities are turning to repressive measures to “keep the people quiet.” This is very worrying. It means that the worse peoples' conditions become and the more they protest, the more the government will clamp down by using police force.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

The only way to permanently change the situation is to change society or rather the rules and laws which control our society. The rules which allow a small minority to grow rich and the majority to get poorer, which allow some schools to operate and others to be closed, which provide services to some and not to others, which provide jobs for some and not for the majority, which protect the farmers and not the farm workers, the mine owner and not the mine worker.

WE SHOULD ERADICATE THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM AND REPLACE IT WITH SOCIALISM!

CAPITALISM MUST BE DESTROYED!

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