



The WORKER

New Unity Movement

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We fight Ideas with Ideas

Dangerous Shack Camps home to millions in SA

Life for the teeming millions in the shack camps of South Africa is not fit for human habitation. Most of these shack camps are vermin-infested and disease-ridden without water and sanitation. Do we ever think about the people in these squatter settlements in the cold winters and the hot summer months? Do we think about the children when they have to do their homework and prepare for examinations in badly lit, poorly ventilated one/two-roomed shacks? Above all, these shack settlements are expanding at an alarming rate.

Australia has its fire season in what is called, 'bush fires', the USA and Canada have their fire seasons in the wooded areas of California and the western Canadian states. South Africa, not to be outdone, has its fire seasons in the



Jessica Moses and Basil Blaauw taking their lives as well as that of their twin six-month-old babies. Their three other children survived because they had spent the night with their aunt and are now orphaned. A candle that had fallen over had started

the fire. At the same time, In Masinenge in KZN, more than forty shacks were razed to the ground close to the playground of the rich near Margate. This after a gas cylinder exploded causing devastation and homelessness for about forty families. All was lost for the families during this disaster – Ntuthuko Jomo Sibiyi of

dry summer months of the Western Cape or the dry winters in the rest of the country. Then, they also have floods in the Cape's wet wintry months – all in the low-lying areas of the Cape Flats – the areas of the poor.

On Easter Sunday, a fire broke out in the squatter area of Delft at the home of

Rebuilding
of Shacks
in Alex two
years ago

the KZN Human Settlements Department audaciously and with gall said that they are in the process of building homes for the shack dwellers, but in the meantime, they provided material to rebuild their shacks.

On Sunday 18 April, a 38-year old woman, Nomasamson Dlamini, lost her life in a fire in Cato Crest (Marikana) that destroyed the lives of 45 households. At the moment there are *no resources* to rebuild their homes. Promises of electrification by councillors are not honoured. A statement by Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack Dwellers Movement) reflects the growing discontent in the community as it reads, "We are only important when it is time for elections. We continue to live in the shacks of indignity".

The SA fires are mostly in the areas of the poor and vulnerable. People stay in shack settlements whilst trying to make a better life for themselves. The shacks are poor people's solution to affordable housing in the urban areas. People who stay in these shack camps are those seeking better work opportunities, education and better health care. This is the major cause of the depopulation of rural areas.

The number of shack dwellers has increased from 12,7% in 2002 to an estimated 16,4%, or approximately 9,7 million of SA's 59 million people. In Cape Town, eThekweni and Ekurhuleni the municipalities are trying to reduce the number of people living in shacks by way of unlawful and criminal mass evictions that are often accompanied by state violence. In Cape Town alone, there are 204 shack camps scattered in and around the city. In the eThekweni Metro, there are 547 squat-

ter camps. It is estimated that it will take sixty years in this district alone to eradicate these shacks. In the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, people are told that they first have to live in shacks before they are allocated a house. The number of shacks is increasing at double the rate of population growth.

Fires are a serious risk element in these shack dwellings. On average there are about ten fires a day with one person being burnt to death every second day. In 2011, it was reported that 151 people had been killed in shack fires in Cape Town, and in 2014, 2090 people had been killed in shack fires in Gauteng that swept through SA's slum settlements. On 1 October 2019, nine hundred people were left homeless when a fire destroyed 200 shacks in a blaze in Kempton Park.

The government classifies these fires as accidents; can a candle falling over in a shack or an exploding gas cylinder be classified as an accident?

Abahlali baseMjondolo has campaigned against what it considers the state's inability to address the problem of shack fires.

What are the main causes of shack fires?

- Ø Lack of land
- Ø Lack of adequate housing
- Ø Denial of access to electricity
- Ø Lack of water and sanitation
- Ø Lack of emergency services

Shack settlements are established on unused pieces of land. Municipalities or corporations usually own the land. Shack dwellers do not own the land so that they constantly live in fear of eviction. The shack dwellers cannot build their homes with bricks, as the authorities

authorities will demolish these.

Electricity is unaffordable and unavailable. Paraffin for stoves and heaters used mainly by the shack dwellers are more expensive than electricity. Illegal electricity connections in townships and shack camps are as dangerous as the paraffin stoves, primuses and candles.

The provision of water in these settlements is communal. Very few taps are available in the shack camps. It appears that municipalities have decided that one tap can service 8 thousand people. The trek to and from the communal taps from dawn to dusk is a daily and hourly occurrence.

The frequency of fires in the shack camps is exacerbated by the lack of services such as refuse removal and poor or non-existent road infrastructure that contributes to the problem of the devastation wrought by shack fires.

Refuse removal is mostly non-existent and leads to unsatisfactory health conditions.

This build-up of refuse in these areas is mainly blamed on the shack dwellers, yet refuse removal is either infrequent or non-existent.

All three tiers of government are responsible for the conditions under which the shack dwellers live. All three tiers of government, in all provinces, are complicit in the perpetuation of spatial apartheid and inequality in society. The ultimate solution to health and fire hazards is to eradicate the shack camps and the construction of decent planned housing.

What we need is a complete overhaul of the whole system of governance. We need a society free from the yoke of class oppression. A society free of poverty, discrimination and inequality, a society committed to the total liberation of its people. A complete change of the neoliberal inspired socio-economic policies being implemented by the present parliamentary political parties.



More than 500 families displaced in Cape Town shack fires since beginning of 2021

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: ARE THEY A WASTE OF TIME?

The date for this year's municipal elections has been set as 27 October 2021.

What will the turn-out be like? Who will win? Will things change – for the better, for the worse? These are questions that have surfaced with each round of elections since 1994.

Municipal elections are held every 5 years. The first was held in 1995/6, so this will be the sixth one. In each election up to 2011, the ANC increased its overall majority. In 2011, its majority was 69.4%, and this slumped to 55.6% in 2016. In 1995/6, the DA got 3.48% of the vote, and in 2016 this was 24.5%.

Voter turnout was 48.7% in 1995/6, and has grown at each election. In 2016 it was 57.9%.

If these patterns continue, then a few more percentage points are likely to be chipped off the ANC's majority and the DA is likely to see a tiny, marginal increase in its percentage. Voter numbers might reach 60%.

In other words, it's going to be "business-as-usual." Elections have made no difference in the past, and there is no reason to expect that they will make any difference this time round. South Africa continues to be one of the most unequal societies on earth. We are also regarded as the protest capital of the world. If elections worked there would be no need for protests.

The most visible outcomes of these elections are job- and income opportunities for councillors, and greater access to opportunities for corruption – tenders for family members, jobs -for-pals, and so on.

Councillors are not representatives of the people who voted them into their roles. They are employees of their parties. They need to follow the party line or face dismissal. The voting public do not have the means to recall councillors who don't perform. At the end of the day, the voting public are nothing other than voting cattle. As Karl Marx long ago observed, "The oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular repre-

sentatives of the oppressing class are to represent and repress them."

In 1994, the oppressed working class of South Africa was super-hopeful that their struggle to

end apartheid would result in a just society. Instead, a class of collaborators "stole" their hard-won democracy and turned it into a sham democracy. What we have is a system which leaves the econo-

my in the hands of the owners of the means of production, without any fear that it will be threatened or taken away – their ownership rights are guaranteed by the constitution. The "political domain" was hi-jacked by the various groupings who negotiated the arrangements at Codesa.

The road to a new South Africa will not come via elections. It will come via working class people's power. What is needed is an independent movement outside parliament that unites the true representatives of the people. These representatives must arise from the organisations of the people, across the length and breadth of the country – from civics, trade unions, religious organisations, sports bodies, and all other organisations of the working people. It is the only meaningful way we are going to be able to challenge the ruling class, and bring about real change.

**VOTE
HERE**



THE LAND QUESTION: A PROBLEM FOR THE WORKERS TO SOLVE

In a May 2019 article entitled “Evaluating Ramaphosa,” fiery political commentator Kim Heller says: “The true measure of a President’s success is whether he or she fundamentally and meaningfully alters the everyday material conditions of the most vulnerable in society – the dispossessed, marginalised, landless and labouring masses – for the better.”

In discussing his failure, she observes that, “A symbolic signal of a lapse in political leadership and ideological meander was how the motion of land expropriation without compensation was championed and carried by the EFF, not the ANC in Parliament.” She refers to a cartoon by Business Day cartoonist Brendan Reynolds declaring Malema as ‘the ANC’s head of policy’, as a cruel caricature of Ramaphosa’s leadership.”

Reynolds kindly permitted us to reproduce the cartoon here:

But parliament is all about point-scoring, and in this case, the EFF has put one over the ANC. Real land reform in this country will not happen through parliament – certainly not the parliament that now rules over us.

What will be needed is an empowered working class driving a comprehensive socialist programme of land reform – in fact, such a programme would not be a reform programme but a revolutionary programme. It would be centred on the working people and their needs. There would be no question of “willing seller and willing buyer.” As the Unity Movement declares in

its Ten Point Programme, “The land, as a vital economic resource shall be held in trust by the state on behalf of the entire population of South Africa. Individual land tenure would be considered for personal use; no exploitative labour will be permitted in such instances. Furthermore, “All landbarons, who hog ownership of land for personal profit, and multi-national companies which increasingly dominate agriculture, shall be expropriated without compensation. In addition, local food production will be encouraged to reduce dependency on imported products.”

The land question is one of principle and one of practice, and is arguably the biggest single question facing the working people of this country. This is because it is the key to our liberation. The Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 altered the course of SA’s history forever. Not only did these Acts lead to the destruction of peasant farming in this country, it also turned the indigenous population into a vast mass of ultra-exploited workers for the mining industry by forcibly expropriating the land, the imperialists ensured that the basis of livelihood would



Cartoon by Brendan Reynolds reproduced with permission

Be so undermined that the people of the country would become dependent on wage labour.

Today, this dependency still exists. As Kim Heller says, the “everyday material conditions of the most vulnerable in society – the dispossessed, marginalised, landless and labouring masses” – continues.



to ask the relevant questions. What is known is that after meeting Robin Renwick and others, the EFF changed its policy in a number of significant ways.”

One thing is certain, any solution to the land question in South Africa which is driven by the Ramaphosas and Malemas of this world will first have to be approved in London.

It is well-known that Ramaphosa is the agent of SA capitalism, and that he owes much of his personal fame and fortune to his relationship with the Oppenheimers.

But Julius Malema, too, has learned to curry favour with the imperial masters.

In 2015 Malema took a tour to London where he met amongst others, Lord Robin Renwick. According to an article on the “Black Opinion” website, “The meeting with Renwick and other representatives of imperialism happened under the secret rule called the ‘Chatham House Rule’ ... No one knows what was said between the EFF and the representatives of British colonialism. The media is also not interested

In this Orwellian world, it is difficult to tell the men from the pigs.

Author: Krupskaya (Lenin's Wife), 30 January 1924

Comrades, workers and peasants!
I have a great request to make of you: do not allow your grief for Ilyich (Lenin) to express itself in the external veneration of his person. Do not build memorials to him, palaces named after him, (do not hold) magnificent celebration in his memory, etc. All of this meant so little to him in his lifetime: he found it all so trying. Remember how much poverty and disorder we still have in our country. If we want to honour the name of Vladimir Ilyich build day-care centres, kindergarten homes, schools, etc. and, most importantly, try in all things to fulfil his legacy.

MAYDAY – International Workers Day

On May 1, workers all over the world express solidarity with each other. In some countries workers celebrate the rights they have already won. In other countries, such as South Africa, workers continue to struggle for rights they have been denied, rights that still have to be won.

135 years ago, on May 1, 1886, in America, factories were silent. A huge wave of strikes across the country forced many employers to introduce an 8-hour working day. But this victory was not without sacrifice. 6 workers were shot and killed by police in Chicago and 4 Union leaders were hanged for allegedly being part of a bomb-attack on the police. Solidarity protests at the hangings were sparked off around the world. May 1 became a day of International labour solidarity. Workers in Nicaragua, for example, celebrate May Day by joyously re-affirming victory over American imperialism. The common goal is the international solidarity of all workers around the world in a struggle for the rights of all workers regardless of so-called race, creed, sex or nationality.

MAYDAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, May Day has a history of racial division and bureaucratic union leaders. 1st May 1895 saw the first celebration, in Johannesburg. The speakers attacked capitalism and called for the working class to organise themselves politically. This particular position was influenced by events in other countries, for example, the victory of workers and peasants in Russia. But by the 1950s May Day was in decline. The Nationalist government declared war on the masses. The 1950 mass action against the Suppression on Communism Bill drew heavy police intimidation. Meetings were broken up, townships were occupied by the army. The final death toll was 18, with 30 people seriously wounded. A day of mourning was called for those who had fallen in the 1950s demonstrations. The state proceeded to destroy organisations, leaders were banned or jailed. By the 1960s the Unity Movement, ANC, PAC and SACTU were crushed. But resistance continued...

After 20 years May Day re-emerged, as the workers' movement and the different structures of the people began to organise again and has been commemorated ever since.

But alas our May Day victories have still to be won.

The struggle for a living wage and benefits for workers continues. Child labour is exploited everywhere; women are super-exploited. Service benefits are denied to the majority of workers in South Africa. The inference to the need for struggle for the rights of workers is starkly manifested by one of the most significant tragic events of our recent history. In August 2012, the South African police opened fire on a large crowd of workers who had been on strike at a mine at Marikana in the North West Province. They shot down 112 of them, killing 34. This event revived images of massacres by the state in the old apartheid era but this time around, the carnage was carried out by the current South African Police Service to protect the interest of the capitalist Lonmin mine owners. So the question needs to be asked. What has changed in the 'new' South Africa as far as the rights of workers are concerned? The answer is simple. Nothing! As long as we are in a system of a capitalist mode of production, even human life does not matter!

May Day should therefore not just be a 'celebration' in the history of struggles by workers. On this day we must make a courageous and militant challenge to the system of oppression and exploitation. May 1 must be a landmark of a life-and-death struggle by workers and the oppressed majority. This Day should be a daily inspiration to continue the struggle against the lack of employment and living standards. This Day should be a day where we all re-dedicate ourselves to fight against the evils in our society - racism, gutter education, tyranny, injustice, environmental destruction, the oppressive machinery that is reducing the majority of our population to abject poverty. And, on this Day we must restate our conviction that we must unite in the struggle against imperialism and capitalism, for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed.

The workers, whether rural or urban, organised in trade unions, unorganised or unemployed form the majority of the oppressed people in our country. The Workers' struggle form part of the struggle of all the oppressed for freedom. The struggle for full worker rights and freedom from exploitation must be carried on daily in the factories, mines, on the farms and in the community.

The Unity Movement joins with the workers and fraternal progressive organisations throughout the country on this day. The brave actions of workers and the poor, students and teachers, must inspire us tirelessly to fight on. May Day is a day on which we re-affirm our support for the DEMANDS of the exploited and oppressed majority of South Africa and reflect upon the role of workers in the political struggle.



Let us all unite in this struggle to make this a better world for all!



NEW UNITY MOVEMENT

TRIBUTE TO OUR COMRADE ERNIE LENNERT

It is with heartfelt sorrow that the New Unity Movement wishes to bring sincere condolences to Jos on the loss of her beloved Ernie, as well as to Varinia and Dimitri and the grandchildren. We deeply mourn with you and wish you comfort and consolation.

Amidst our sorrow and grief, we also celebrate the life of a fighter for justice and the life of a comrade that committed himself to do battle with those who enriched themselves at the expense of the poor and downtrodden.

The 6th of April (this past Tuesday) marks the day that one, Jan van Riebeeck, set foot on land at Cape Town in South Africa from Europe. That fateful day in the year 1652, 369 years ago almost to the day, set in motion a series of events which would impact and shape the life of our dearly departed comrade Ernie, as, of course, it affected the lives of generations of South Africans up to this day and certainly will well into the future. But, unlike in the case of many South Africans, Ernie's interaction with that fateful settlement of Europeans on South African soil would be fierce, and also programmatic and principled.

By the time Comrade Ernie became a teacher, the indigenous people of South Africa had been dispossessed of 87% of their land. The European Settlers had robbed them of their right to vote for a central government, so they had no say over how government managed or mismanaged their lives. Segregationist laws had divided South African citizens into artificial groups and the policies of the government taught that South Africans classified as "White" were superior to all other groups and should enjoy privileges and rights that would be denied to other groups.

This was the South Africa which Comrade Ernie Lennert found himself in when he proudly took up his first teaching post at a

school in the village of Witteklip in the Eastern Cape in 1951. The South African government declared that the education that each of the groups received, should prepare them for their role in the South African Society. And that role, according to the law, for Comrade Ernie and the majority of South Africans, would be to serve the *Master Race*.



Comrade Ernie was outraged by these policies and found them deeply offensive. His reaction was to oppose this enslavement of the minds of his students. He rightly called such education "gutter education". As

a member of the Teachers' League of South Africa, he believed that it was not enough to only teach the school syllabus in order that students may pass to the next grade. He made it his duty to ensure that his students understood the world around them and he gave them the tools and the desire to change that world.

This, of course, brought Comrade Ernie into direct conflict with the authorities of the time. He became an enemy of the state because he dared to teach that all people are born equal and they have the right to equal, quality education. For this he was banished to teach far from his home, deemed too dangerous to teach far from his home, deemed too dangerous to teach high school students and therefore only allowed to teach at a primary school and eventually, also, imprisoned by a vicious state. Ernie of course knew that the desired changes in education would not

happen without attaining full political rights for all people in the country. The Non-European Unity Movement, the Teachers' League of South Africa and the New Unity Movement became his home, his base from which he sought to gain those political rights to free the poor, the workers and all oppressed people from the jackboot that stood firmly on their necks.

Ernie lived for most of his life in Ravensmead in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. In his efforts to fight the injustices of an evil system, he joined the Elsies River Ratepayers' and Vigilance Society as well as the Northern Suburbs Cultural Society. Many people fondly remember Ernie addressing them at the Helpmekaar Hall in Elsies River and elsewhere where he was at great pains to make sure that people understood that their lack of proper housing, municipal services and proper health facilities was a result of the fact that they had no political rights. He wanted people to know that if they wished to free themselves from the oppression and hardships they suffer, they had to understand the process of their enslavement.

In the meetings of the Northern Suburbs Cultural Society where, for some time he served as chairperson, he invited many speakers who were experts in their fields to enlighten members of the community about the world we lived in. He made quite sure that when the people left that meeting, the knowledge that they had gained gave them an extra shield against the onslaught on their embattled lives.

He took great care to ensure that people were aware of the opportunists who wished to sell them out. He warned that if you crossed a river on the back of a crocodile, you would certainly be eaten. And there were many crocodiles on two legs among the poor and oppressed - in their sports clubs, in their churches, in their schools and universities - who played the dirty games of selling their fellow oppressed to the masters.

Ernie knew that the labour of the workers of this country were exploited to enrich the owners of the big industrial concerns. They endured low wages and miserable working conditions and a

kick under their seats when they finished their working careers. He spent time and effort to teach that their labour was being stolen and that standing together and in unity made workers stronger to withstand the bullying of the bosses.

In the run-up to the 1994 elections for a new government in South Africa, Ernie warned that there would be no freedom from the poverty and hardships people suffered. He said this because he knew that not everyone understood the process of their enslavement. He knew that this would lead to the people falling for the promises of a better life for all when that better life was not in the hands nor the interest of those who promised it.

Ernie knew and explained that if the economic base that underpinned the racist Apartheid regime was left intact, the promise of a better life for all could only be a lie. This must be so, because the wonderful new world which was beckoning after the scrapping of all the racist apartheid legislation, is accessible only to the wealthy. The new world that seemed to be dawning in 1994 still remains beyond the reach of the majority of South Africans. The government's economic policies mean that the big corporations are allowed to structure the country's economic life in a way that reaps maximum profit even if it results in mass suffering and the undermining of human dignity.

South Africa is a country not for all its people to enjoy its bountiful resources and natural splendour, but only for the rich and the greedy to exploit and destroy. We owe Comrade Ernie a huge gratitude for his efforts to give us the insights to try and understand what we witness around us and to muster the will and the courage to try and change it for the better.

Dear Jos, may you be consoled by the many happy and joyful moments that you shared with Ernie over the long and loving partnership with him. The comrades of the New Unity Movement trust that time may bring you, Varinia and Dimitri and the children and grandchildren solace and comfort.

Workers of the world unite!! You have nothing to lose but your chains!!

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