

The Worker



Knowledge is power

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1994 to 2010

As South Africa moves towards another round of elections, the municipal elections, we need to note very clearly that the majority of South Africans have received very little benefit from the changes in our country. We have to ask, very seriously, why this is so and why, in particular, after nearly seventeen years of election after election there has been so little change.

DEVASTATING POVERTY – SOUTH AFRICA’S UNSPEAKABLE WRONG

The vast majority of South Africans live their lives in severe poverty. Because of that poverty they suffer intensely: ill health, homelessness, crime (especially violent crime), abuse (especially of women and children), illiteracy, low levels of education and high levels of unemployment and poorly paid employment. Poverty, in turn, causes further cycles of poverty. This huge problem must be eradicated. **NOTHING CAN JUSTIFY ITS EXISTENCE.**

CAPITALISM, UNEMPLOYMENT, SLAVE WAGES AND THE RICH MINORITY

- Unemployment is the most obvious reason for the existence of poverty. The capitalist system is driven by the **greed for profits. These profits come from the abuse of labour.**
- The capitalist’s profit increases directly as he lowers wages and employs fewer and fewer workers. This is the world-wide capitalist pattern of slave labour in sweat shops.
- That is the main reason why there are huge unemployment problems mainly in the Third World countries of Asia, Africa and South America. When our “leaders” try to justify unemployment by telling us that it is a global phenomenon, they are correct, but only in the sense that **capitalism** is at present a global system.
- But capitalism and unemployment are temporary, unacceptable and changeable. Only a minority benefit and try to keep it going. **The majority can, must and will end it.**

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

Our government is to a large extent responsible for the curse of poverty. For example, the minimum wages laid down in the various forms of legislation are R1 300 per month for farm workers and R328 per week (just more than R1 300 per month) for industrial workers. Who can survive on this income? Even then, millions are paid less than this minimum wage and government does not enforce it.

THEY ARE RICH BECAUSE WE ARE POOR

- A very important point to note is that the profit of the employer **increases** to the same extent that the pay of his/her workers **decreases**. The workers are so poor because their bosses are so wealthy. Whitey Basson and the other directors and shareholders of Shoprite earn millions because their workers earn much less than living wages.

- That is why South Africa is a country of great wealth existing side by side with great poverty. In fact, SA is the country with the greatest inequality in income in the world.
- The Gini coefficient is a measure of this inequality. The bigger the number, the greater the inequality. The Gini for South Africa is at present around the 67 mark. (In comparison the Gini for China is 47.)
- South Africa's high Gini number indicates two important things:
 - one, there is a huge difference between the highest and lowest earners and,
 - two, there are **very few** high earners and **very many** low earners.

“WHITE” CAPITALISTS; “BLACK” CAPITALISTS – BIRDS OF A FEATHER

The colour of the high earners is of no importance. There are now many “black” multi-millionaires as a result of BEE. But next time you feel proud that so many of our “previously disadvantaged” countrymen are doing so very well, remember: **you are poor because they are so wealthy**. They were given batches of shares. The “white” capitalists do so in order that their companies can receive very lucrative government contracts and make a lot of money. But the workers must continue to slave away at pitiful wages. Aurora mining will only enrich Khulubuse Zuma and Zondwa Mandela if the mineworkers receive very little income.

ONLY LABOUR PRODUCES GOODS AND SERVICES, WHICH CAN BE SOLD FOR WEALTH. HUGE WEALTH FOR THE OWNERS AND SHAREHOLDERS WILL ONLY OCCUR IF THE WORKERS SLAVE AWAY FOR STARVATION WAGES.

THE NEW CLASS OF OPPRESSORS

Is it surprising that the newly-rich of the BEE scams are no longer interested in the rights of the majority? They have joined ranks with the bosses, the enemies of the workers. In exactly the same way, the hundreds of government officials who steal the funds entrusted to them for the benefit of the people also are directly responsible for the poverty of large numbers of our people. The money that should have been spent on housing, health care, education, etc, now enriches these criminals.

EDUCATION

We all know the power of education to change people's lives for the better. It was widely expected that the new government of South Africa would replace the hated system of “Bantu” education with a progressive system that would uplift the entire population. What actually happened?

The education of the millions of inhabitants of disadvantaged communities in South Africa has gone from bad to worse over the past 16 years because of bad decision-making and planning by the government.

The realities are totally unacceptable and we must urgently demand:

- More classrooms and infrastructure. Why can this not be built at the same pace as stadiums and roads were built for World Cup 2010?
- Thousands more teachers and the reopening of Teacher Training Colleges.
- Text books and libraries, and fuller curricula with cultural and physical training.
- An end to the failed Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) curriculum, that has contributed to the sharp decline in the literacy and numeracy of our learners.

- An end to massive dropout rates annually from grades R to 12, which occurs mainly because families live in abject poverty and under the most horrendous circumstances.
- An end to crime at schools. Make schools a safe, comfortable environment that is conducive to teaching and learning.

The Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, now has yet another new plan of action: “Action Plan 2014: Towards a Realisation of Schooling 2025”. It is supposed to turn around schooling by 2025. We must no longer be fooled. We cannot allow any more generations to be wasted. This is our responsibility.

HEALTH

What is the state of health of the majority of people in this country? It is also severely affected by the tremendous poverty of the population.

- The rate of disease in South Africa is exceedingly high, particularly that of HIV/Aids and Tuberculosis. Other preventable diseases also infect large numbers of our people.
- One must thus ask the question: Is health care a basic human right? Our constitution clearly states that it is. But is that the case in reality?
- How often do we read and hear that sick patients are turned away from local health care centres, like clinics and similar state facilities, due to overcrowding, understaffing, a shortage of beds and medication.
- With elections come promises that changes will take place to improve the lives of workers, the poor, the unemployed, the aged and the homeless living in squalor in people’s backyards.
- But year by year the problems continue and worsen. There are now 2 600 informal townships in South Africa, overcrowded, run-down places with little or no facilities.
- The “better life for all” has become a joke – a vicious joke by heartless politicians. They secure the peoples votes and their jobs. Then you will not see them before the next elections.
- Our people are “sick and tired” of being lied to and then having to read about the corruption and bribery that takes place amongst state officials, who continuously advise the poor that there is no money available to improve their health care centres and living conditions in the areas where they stay.

RAMPANT, VIOLENT CRIME- ESPECIALLY IN THE TOWNSHIPS

On the front page of the Cape Argus of 10 November 2010, Cape Town was rated as the city in South Africa that has the most cases of fatal stabbings. Ten days prior to this, hospital staff reported that the trauma units at most hospitals were over-run by patients who survived after being stabbed and were flooding the hospital theatres to receive treatment for their wounds. This high victim rate was attributed to abuse of alcohol and other substances.

Is the problem not the social conditions in which the poor have to live against great odds? Our government clearly has no will to resolve both the shortage of resources at our health care facilities and the social evils that put them under severe pressure?

WHAT IS MY VOTE WORTH? FALSE PROMISES: At each election, we hear promises of how our lives are going to be improved, and after each election we find our hopes dashed. So we are forced to ask the question, “What is our vote worth?”

THE RITUAL: At election after election, we turn out in our millions to cast our votes. Often, we stand in long queues for hours on end, waiting for our turn to finally come. Then, at last, our turn comes, and we cast our vote. And then we go home – back to the same conditions that we have had to endure year in and year out – in most cases, poorly-serviced townships or settlements, with high crime-rates, few if any amenities, sick, starving children, and masses of unemployed people, young and old, male and female.

STILL POOR: In the last sixteen years of so-called democracy in this country, voting has done very little if anything to improve the lives of South Africa's millions of poor people. In many ways, life in the new South Africa is worse than it was in the old South Africa. Why is this so?

THE SYSTEM: The problem is with the system. The system requires us as individual voters to come once every four or five years to vote this or that party into power. Even when we vote for ward councillors in local council elections, in the majority of cases, the ward councillors themselves are members of parties. That is, they represent their parties, not us.

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY: What we need is a system where communities can elect their own representatives directly.

- This means that all people in a local neighbourhood or township or settlement should come together as free, equal citizens and debate what the issues are that affect them as a community.
- At such meetings, which should happen on a frequent, regular basis, these communities should DEMOCRATICALLY elect their representatives, who will go into parliament or the local council to speak specifically to the issues affecting his or her community.
- These representatives should also be required to report back to their communities on a frequent and regular basis, and to receive fresh instructions.
- Representatives who don't perform to their communities' satisfaction should be subject to immediate recall, and replaced with someone more suited.
- This is the kind of system that will bring true meaning and value to our vote. It means that communities are enabled to ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE in making the decisions that affect their lives. Only when such a system is working across the length and breadth of the country will we start to see real improvement in our lives.

A CALL TO ACTION

What are we waiting for? Nobody is going to make this happen for us, least of all the current politicians and their parties. They have everything to lose, while we – the people of South Africa – have everything to gain by setting up independent, democratic community structures. We are going to have to create the forums in our communities that will drive our needs. We ourselves are going to have to create our own democracy. The longer we wait, the longer it is going to take before all of us are able to enjoy true democracy and prosperity in our own land.