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HEALTH CARE: FROM BAD TO WORSE

The latest government proposals to decrease the health budget for Natal provincial hospitals will serve to worsen an already precarious situation. Health care in Natal has always been inferior for the vast majority of the oppressed, and has for a long time been tottering on a shoestring budget and an inadequate number of medical, paramedical and general staff.

The latest cutbacks mean that more people than at present will needlessly die due to inadequate health care.

Only a government with absolutely no interest in the welfare of its people could introduce such rulings. Recently the state accused health workers who went on strike of callous disregard for the lives of their patients; yet the same state today finds it most opportune to deprive patients of medical care. This act will directly contribute to the deaths of more patients.

This is obviously a government that has utter contempt for the health and welfare of the oppressed. It knows that the health system will not collapse but merely worsen. After all, what does it care about a further increase in the number of people dying?

Any government that places the health and welfare of its people foremost will find the resources to care for its sick. Our demand is for a free and accessible health care system for all in South Africa. The only conclusion we can reach is that this government is unfit to rule.

THE ELLIS PARK INCIDENT

On Saturday 15th August 1992. seventy thousand spectators arrogantly sang "Die Stem" - their racist "national anthem" - at the commencement of the rugby test match between South Africa and New Zealand at Ellis Park. This rendition served to directly insult the oppressed.

We hold the National Olympic and Sports Congress (NOSC) and the African National Congress (ANC) responsible. From the inception of the NOSC (which was launched with the blessing of the ANC) a sellout on the sports front took shape. The ANC, in its haste to bring about a negotiated political settlement, sacrificed the oppressed sport persons by forging bogus unity in the various sporting codes. Hence the rugby test match was staged by the South African Rugby Football Union which is ostensibly an organisation uniting the former all white rugby union and non-racial rugby body of the oppressed. After the singing of "Die Stem", false tears were shed by the former non-racial sports administrators who claimed that agreements entered into in good faith were reneged upon.

Steve Tshwete, the ANC's sports hitman, Aziz Pahad, deputy head of the ANC's international affairs, Carl Niehaus and Saki Macozoma, national

spokespersons for the ANC, were present as guests in the presidential suite at Ellis Park.

The questions we ask are:

1. When the country is gripped by violence, when daily, more widows cry and more children are orphaned, what were these "revolutionaries" doing in the presidential suite?

2 . Why did they create the impression in public that all negotiations with the ruling class had been terminated and yet cosied up to the same ruling class at such a sports function?

When the Boipatong massacre occurred, the ANC issued bellicose statements that South Africa's participation in the Olympic Games, the Cameroon Soccer tour and all future sporting tours were in jeopardy. Such statements were issued more to appease the oppressed, who were rightfully upset at the sellout that occurred on the sports front, than as a real threat.

After consultations with the white bosses and after having received certain phoney assurances, the ANC gave its blessings for all future tours.

Prior to this test match we were told that:

1. a minute's silence would be observed for the victims of violence;
2. notices would be plastered all over the stadium advertising the Peace Accord;
3. the "National Flag" would not be displayed and
4. the team would not be referred to as the Springboks.

All these conditions were completely ignored.

Despite receiving this hefty slap in the face the ANC/NOSC, having travelled so far down the slippery path of betrayal, consented to a further rugby test which was played against the Australians in Cape Town on the 21st August 1992.

The oppressed have been abused. At Ellis Park their dignity was assailed. All this was done with the co-operation and assistance of the ANC/NOSC.

We must expose as fraudulent the unity which the ANC/NOSC claim has been achieved. The only beneficiaries of this bogus unity are the white sports persons who have been guaranteed international tours. No real benefit has filtered down to the oppressed masses. Nothing has changed. The real nature of the unity between the South African Rugby Union and the South African Rugby Board stands exposed for all to see.

We must go back to basics. Only the democratic resolution of the political struggle will liberate our sportspersons. The sports' struggle cannot be isolated from our broad struggle for liberation. Our problems cannot be sorted out piecemeal. The sellout of the sports struggle is part and parcel of the sellout that is taking place on the political front.

VAT - ANOTHER GOVERNMENT BLUNDER

When VAT (Value Added Tax) was introduced last year it was met with hatred by the oppressed people. And with good reason - VAT has hit the poorest the hardest. Experience has confirmed this for every worker.

At the time that VAT was introduced, the government and its backers trumpeted VAT as a more efficient tax. Their argument was as follows: VAT was to replace GST (General Sales Tax) which was inefficient "when compared to VAT. In particular, GST allowed for tax evasion - that is, illegally avoiding payment of tax. (As the worker had no way of avoiding paying GST, the cheating had obviously to be on the part of the rich businessmen and their cohorts in the government). VAT was going to change this. The favorite government analogy was that of the dripping tap - the dripping water was GST and it represented wastage. VAT was to stop the dripping. It therefore represented a saving. The distinct impression was created that by collecting tax more efficiently ordinary people would benefit.

True to form the government bungled yet again. In August they quietly announced that from April to June 1992 they collected 21 percent less VAT than they did GST in the same period last year. This represents a loss of about NINE HUNDRED MILLION RAND. In other words VAT, the government's "more efficient tax" is less efficient than the wasteful GST system it has replaced!

But that is not the end of it. The oppressed will have to continue to endure the crime of VAT, including VAT on food. Also in view of the failure of VAT to generate adequate funds for the government there is the strong possibility that the VAT rate will be increased. This means increasing the misery of the people of South Africa.

The VAT saga proves yet again that the rulers in South Africa are totally unfit to rule this country. Together with their whole ruling edifice they need to be overthrown before we can make any progress to a better future.

MODEL C SCHOOLS - THE ONGOING CHARADE

Education is indisputably part of the solution to some of the major problems (unemployment, homelessness, poverty and crime) facing the millions of oppressed people in South Africa. Any genuine and sincere attempt towards remedying this situation by those in power would have to give priority to education for the children of the oppressed. Recent developments have proved that the ruling class has no intention of reversing the decline in education provided for the oppressed.

The government's scheme to convert the majority of "white" public schools to semi-private schools. that is, to the Model C type. is clearly a move to prevent the children of the poor from seeking admission to these schools.

The collaborators in the tri-cameral parliament are hatching up similar plans for "Indian" and "Coloured" schools.

The move to turn the white education system into one of subsidised private schools effectively means that the doors of these schools will remain closed to the children of the poorest. most disadvantaged section of the South African population. The high fees, expensive uniforms and transport costs will be affordable only by those that are presently classified "white" and a small group of "black" upper and middle class children. The formerly racially segregated schooling system is now being segregated on the basis of income, wealth and privilege. These schools will continue to be generously staffed since the Model C dispensation enables schools to retain more teachers, hence allowing for smaller class groups. The income from the exorbitant school fees will ensure that the present high standard of equipment and facilities is maintained.

The majority - the oppressed - will go on attending the overcrowded schools in the townships and rural areas and will have to contend with poor facilities, book shortages and inadequately qualified teachers.

We in Apdusa have always maintained that only fundamental political and economic changes will produce real changes in education. Our demand is contained in Point 3 of the Ten Point Programme of the New Unity Movement which states:

"Compulsory, free and uniform education for all children up to matriculation. with free meals, free books and school equipment. "

ANOTHER SACP SHOCKER

In February 1990 FW de Klerk announced to his tricameral circus the unbanning of the ANC, SACP and PAC and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. On his release Mandela in his first public statement annointed De Klerk with the now notorious title of "man of integrity".

February 1990 is significant because since then the negotiations fraud - the greatest betrayal of the oppressed people this century - between the ANC/SACP and the NATS has moved up a gear. And one of its direct consequences has been the spiralling "political" violence.

Many among the oppressed met the news of the unbanning of organisations and Mandela's release with jubilation. They reasoned. naively, that a solution to their many problems would soon be in sight. Whatever hopes were raised were soon cruelly crushed. By June 1990 forces carefully nurtured by the Nat state machinery were unleashed upon the people in the PWV area. The war of terror that had been conducted against an unarmed populace in Natal since 1985 was extended here in a more intense and just as barbaric form.

The method was brutal in the extreme: to bludgeon the oppressed with an unrelenting series of massacres. The purpose was direct: to strip the ANC bare in front of the oppressed: to show the oppressed in no uncertain terms that the ANC was the weaker of the two main negotiating partners. So

it is that since February 1990 more than SEVEN THOUSAND (7000) people have been killed in what is cynically called "political violence".

Against this background the SACP wrote in July 1992 that Hernus Kriel, the NA T Minister of Law and Order, was heard "in the corridors of CODESA " referring to this violence as "just the Sixth Kaffir War". Such sentiments from a Hernus Kriel would not surprise us. The ruling class in South Africa, of which the NA TS are a dominant part, stand dripping with the blood of the oppressed in this country. Upon the sweat, blood and tears of the oppressed they have built their life-styles of luxury and decadence. The forces of freedom can stand only in direct and irreconcilable contradiction to them.

Yet it was within the very same CODESA that the SACP met with none other than Hernus Kriel to look into "political violence and intimidation". In one such session the SACP representative Ronnie Kasrils found himself in a debate with Hernus Kriel which the SACP describes as having had "its amusing side".

Having clasped the hands of the ruling class and jumped into bed with De Klerk as its negotiating partner, the SACP stands condemned by the company it wishes to keep. To be reduced to scoring debating points, amusing or otherwise with an individual who the SACP themselves say describes the butchery of unarmed people in language reminiscent of the Nazis, shows where the betrayal politics of negotiations has led the SACP. And for the SACP, despite all this, to still declare : "We are serious about negotiations. We want negotiations to work" confirms their political bankruptcy.

ZIMBABWE, THE DROUGHT AND THE IMF/WORLD BANK

Southern Africa is in the grip of a devastating drought. North of the Limpopo. Zimbabwe is also being devastated. That the drought is severe there is no doubt. Currently South African experts are in Bulawayo. Zimbabwe's second largest city, to determine how much underground water is available. Water must be found because, as the Town Clerk of Bulawayo states. "The city must not die".

In this context the 1992 harvest has been a failure. As a consequence whole populations are under threat. Children, as is often the case, are hardest hit.

Already, by the beginning of this year, before the full devastation of the current drought was felt, there were reports of children fainting in class and dropping out of school due to hunger; malnutrition in children under five had increased to over 27% in certain areas. But the drought does not explain completely the full scale of the food shortages facing Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe has gone from a maize surplus of two million tons 2 years ago to being forced to rely on imports of over a million tons this year at a cost of one hundred million American dollars. According to Carol Thompson, writing in the Weekly Mail (24-29/4/1992), "The maize shortage in Zimbabwe, and throughout the region, is not simply due to drought, but also is the result of policies pushed by the donors." Her views are

reinforced by a briefing published in "Review of African Political Economy" (Number 53) by Colin Stoneman.

The following picture, which emerges from the information provided by these two writers, is a telling description of what happens if the IMF/World Bank gets hold of a country.

According to Colin Stoneman:

1. In the 1980's Zimbabwe pursued what he calls "left nationalist" policies that were "remarkably successful".

2. These policies:

i. had a good record in the provision of education and health care:

ii. generated an annual growth rate two to three times faster than South Africa or the African average;

iii. saw manufacturing industry grow by over one-third and develop an overseas export market

iv. scored successes in agriculture and regularly exported maize to neighbouring countries and fruit to Europe.

3. To achieve this Zimbabwe had to terminate an IMF/International Monetary Fund) programme in 1984 and pursue "go-it-alone policies".

4. Because Zimbabwe did not follow the dictates of the World Bank, in 1987 the World Bank "vetoed a loan for export promotion that it had been negotiating after the runaway success of an earlier one, and the UK and other donors began to tighten the screws and denigrate the economic record."

5. By the end of the 1980's "increasing rigidities and corruption" made economic reform urgent.

6. Buoyed by the collapse of "central planning in Eastern Europe" the right wing in the ruling bloc in Zimbabwe acted. In October 1990 they introduced a "home-grown" structural adjustment programme that has left Robert Mugabe "not deposed, but marginalised". The aim of the programme was to lock Zimbabwe into "market policies".

7. Zimbabwe's "home-grown" programme differed from IMF programmes in degree but not in purpose. It aimed for:

i. trade liberalisation - that is opening up the country to exploitation by overseas investment but

ii. without "significant conditionalities". Conditionalities refer to the terms or conditions upon which the IMF/World Bank intervenes in a country. This involves currency devaluation, cuts in welfare spending, removal of food subsidies, privatisation of state industries and reduction of real wages.

8. The World Bank ostensibly backed the programme. At a meeting in Paris in March 1991 "donors" promised 700 million US dollars in aid.

9. The result: 18 months later Zimbabwe's growth rate was zero, inflation had trebled to 25 percent, the stock market had fallen 40 percent, deindustrialization had begun and food security was lost.

10. The reasons for the failure include:

- i. incompetence in implementation and
- ii. the donors' refusal to release the funds promised in Paris in March 1991 until Zimbabwe had incurred such costs that it had no option but to proceed under (a full) IMF programme". In other words, until Zimbabwe was whipped into line.

11. By 1991 Zimbabwe's capitulation was complete. The Zimbabwean dollar was devalued by 25 percent; and the country was "transferred" from the middle-income to the lower-income category.

Thus it was under policies approved of or dictated by the IMF/World Bank and foreign "donors" Zimbabwe sacrificed its food security - that is its ability to feed its own people.

The writers mentioned outline three ways in which this was done:

1. The United States refused to buy surplus maize from Zimbabwe to provide food aid for other Southern African countries such as Mozambique. The US Department of Agriculture maintained that US food aid was intended to reduce the surplus of highly subsidised American maize. Therefore American maize was dumped in Southern Africa despite the surplus maize production in Zimbabwe.

2. The European Community's (EC) plan to build "regional grain storage silos" did not get off the ground because of the EC's insistence that it should decide who received the grain stored in such silos; and when! Without proper storage facilities storage of surplus maize production became an economic burden.

3. The US began to "pressurise" Zimbabwe to lower the price offered to its farmers for maize production in order to encourage tobacco production so as to earn "foreign exchange".

This is where the "structural adjustment programmes" played havoc with Zimbabwe's food security. In 1990/91, when they were first introduced, the price of maize was lowered and the commercial and small farmers did shift to tobacco. The result: "commercial farmers have reduced their area under maize production to 40 percent of the 250,000 acres planted five years ago". This leaves the shortfall to be made up by peasant farmers who can do so, but are vulnerable to drought.

Carol Thompson summarises this tragic result as follows:

"Even in the midst of drought, irrigated maize instead of tobacco would be feeding more people. And because the international demand for maize is high this year, inflated prices will consume the foreign exchange earned by tobacco".

For the oppressed in South Africa, Zimbabwe's tragedy sounds a grim warning. The World Bank and the IMF are busy re-establishing themselves in South Africa. They have already issued statements on housing policy.

agriculture and education. With ANC support they are undertaking a "study" of poverty in South Africa.

The IMF and the World Bank are the international banking thugs of imperialism. Their job is to ensure the slavery of a country's economy to imperialism. This means greater poverty for the workers - lower real wages, increased taxation and loss of any social security workers may enjoy. This is how the IMF has worked all over the world: they will be no different in South Africa. That the IMF/World Bank re-enters South Africa with ANC/COSATU backing is yet another disgrace heaped upon the leadership of those organisations. Such approval does not change the role of the IMF/World Bank.

Letter to the Editor:

THOR CHEMICALS TRAGEDY

Dear Sir,

Not long ago, I had the unhappy task of interviewing the mother of a worker employed by Thor Chemicals while her son was lying in hospital in a coma.

I cannot adequately convey her anguish as she related the physical and mental change that she had seen in her son in the preceding months.

The agony of workers at Thor Chemicals as a result of mercury poisoning highlights the mercilessness of capitalism-imperialism when faced with a choice between the safety of people and the maximisation of profits.

Industries in South Africa have no concern for the effect of their toxic waste on people and the environment because alternative methods of disposal would decrease their profits. The practice has been that industries aim to maximise their profits with scant regard for people and the environment.

Thor Chemicals is an example of this - a company that exposed its workers to amounts of mercury which threatened their lives and it is only when this danger was made public that the company closed down that part of the plant.

These same industries have the audacity to spend huge sums of money advertising the environment -friendly nature of their products and methods of production. It has become fashionable for all industries to advertise how they are contributing towards preserving the environment and the welfare of the people. Some companies, like SA Tioxide, (a Company which had previously been notorious for its disregard of the environment). actually changed its logo to reflect this sudden "concern" for the environment. Other companies e.g. AECI fund nature reserves in order perpetuate this facade.

This attitude of imperialism is evident in other countries as well. The Third World countries especially have been \ 'victims of these profit-seekers. Resources of these countries have been exploited by imperialist powers with little regard for the welfare of the peoples of these countries.

The dangers highlighted above are inevitable under a capitalist-imperialist economic system. This disregard for the safety of workers in surrounding areas and for the environment in general, emphasises the aim of capitalism-imperialism, i.e. to make the greatest profit possible. The welfare of people will always take second place to this.

Yours faithfully,

M.S.

DID YOU KNOW???

1. Namibia has recently been begging for alms to the tune of R22 million for drought relief. At the same time the Namibian government took delivery of a luxurious R75 million presidential jet from France. (Daily News 27/8/92)

2. After talks with Nelson Mandela, the notorious collaborator A.Rajbansi described the ANC leader as someone "he could do business with". (Sunday Tribune Herald 30/08/92)

3. In an interview" published in the Daily News (15/9/1992) Nelson Mandela says he "got frightened" about the state of the South African economy after he had received a briefing from Trevor Manuel, head of the ANC's Economic Department. And on what basis did the head of the ANC's Economic Department base his analysis that so "frightened" the ANC president') According to Mandela. Trevor Manuel had just been briefed by Derek Keys the Nat Minister of Finance!

Makes you think. doesn't it?

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