

DECAY OF CAPITALISM: PROSTITUTION

Prostitution is becoming frequent in the urban areas of South Africa. This is a result of the economic crisis prevailing. Young men and women are forced into prostitution because of economic hardships and bad living conditions.

Some people forced into prostitution spoke to Action Youth about what had led them into this situation.

Mandy

Mandy is 17 years old and lives in Riverlea. She left school in Std. 6 because her family could not afford to continue her education. She has 6 brothers and sisters, of whom only 2 work. Her parents are both unemployed and Mandy also has her own child to support. The only work that she could find was in a factory for slave wages. When Mandy was retrenched from her job, she was kicked out of her parents' home by her father because she could not pay him rent, any longer. Alone on the streets with a small baby, prostitution seemed the only way out for her.

Mandy says, "This kind of work only made me bitter, hard and unfeeling in life; alcohol and drugs makes me feel happy only for a short while, but I cannot run or hide from my shame forever."

Mercia

Another person forced into the degrading life of prostitution is Mercia, who tells us part of her life story.

I lived in a poor area just down from District Six in Cape Town. I didn't like where we stayed, so I left school in Std. 4. I didn't know how life really works, so I believed my friends' lies when they told me that prostitution was a quick way of making money. I also wanted to be able to buy a house and live comfortably.

Mercia was soon caught up in this way of life and spent three years selling her body on the Cape Town docks. She needed protection from violent sailors and asked a pimp for protection. This pimp soon controlled Mercia and her money, giving her drugs and alcohol.

She ran away to Johannesburg to discover that the streets were not lined with gold, and was forced to move into a brothel for protection.

Themba

Women are not the only victims of this dehumanising way of life.

Themba was born in Soweto and was forced to leave school in Std. 6, as there was no money to further his education. He has 10 brothers and sisters and he had to find work to help support them. His eldest brother was the only other person in the family working. Themba earned R20 per week as a delivery assistant. He was retrenched and now works at a white school in Parktown, cutting grass. He earns R30 a week.

Of this money, he gives R20 to his family to help buy food. This money, together with his brother's wages, is clearly not enough to feed, clothe and provide shelter for eleven people.

Themba sees prostitution as a necessity or else his family will suffer. He also has a wife and child to support.

capitalism

The racist - capitalist system we have in South Africa today allows for only limited employment. In this way, workers desperate for work will accept low wages. The capitalist system does not provide work for all those able to work.

The more the capitalist produces goods, the more he needs workers/consumers to buy his product. Once the consumers cannot afford to buy these extra goods, the capitalist fires workers. The bosses act in this way because they are solely motivated by the need to make profits. If the capitalist cannot make profits, the workers suffer. This suffering is worsened every day by increased taxes, the rising cost of bread, milk, bus fares etc.

In a society where the state does not provide full employment and adequate services to cater for the basic needs of all the people, where workers are oppressed and exploited from birth to death, desperate people like Themba, Mandy and Mercia will always be around.

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A settlement has been reached between SATS and the striking railway workers. It was agreed:

- that all workers would be reinstated
- that SATS would establish procedures which apply equally to all workers, and involve the recognition of democratically elected worker representatives
- that all benefits will be reinstated. No striking worker will lose pension, long service and other benefits.
- no worker will be victimised for having been on strike.