

## **LACK OF SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

All of us are aware of the ongoing protests in the Free State, Northwest Province, Gauteng and now Limpopo. These struggles have been brewing since last year now. The protests that initially started in Harrismith have been dubbed the “September Revolution”. These struggles and protests all revolve around the lack of service delivery. Last week, the TV program “Special Assignment” looked at three areas plagued by protests. Those areas mentioned in the media are probably only the tip of the iceberg. Clearly, the unhappiness evinced is not only to be found there but is probably the state of affairs throughout the country. Service delivery by Local Government (municipalities) has broken down. In fact, it is questionable whether it ever existed in the first place.

President Mbeki, commented on the issue of social unrest in an address to the National Council of Provinces, in November last year: “A ... recent government audit of municipalities ... had found that 126 of 284 municipalities had ‘little or no capacity’ to serve their communities” (Sun. Independent. 7/11/04). He also attributed the lack of service delivery to a breakdown of communication between councillors and communities. (Ibid). It begs a number of questions. How is it possible for councillors working in a particular community not to be able to see the problems? Are they blind? Why is it necessary for communities to inform councillors of their problems? Clearly these people are not doing the jobs they were elected for. He further warned that people involved in social unrest would feel the full brunt of the law. He instructed the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) to investigate the “unsatisfactory communication between councillors and communities.”(Ibid)

On 1 March, at a local government summit, he complained that metro mayors were remunerating Metro police at better levels than SAPS and therefore he was losing police officers. He also berated the mayor of Greater Johannesburg, Amos Masondo for not giving the population the free basic services they’re entitled to. He sees the problem as merely being an administrative one. The billing system needs to be jacked up then the problem could be resolved. (Cape Times 2/03/05). The Business Day (02/03/05), reporting on the same meeting, quoted the president as saying that there was a lack of finance as well as a shortage of skills to run municipalities. Are these really the solutions to the problem?

He raised some other concerns at this March meeting. This is really the crux of the matter. Municipalities, according to him, need to raise their levels of service, in order to attract local and foreign investors. This would ostensibly assist the government in their goal to create “sustainable job creation”. Government would invest in municipalities in order to improve their services and capabilities so they can provide infrastructure that will encourage businesses. Here is the heart of the matter. In November he threatened poor communities with the law if *they* complain about lack of delivery. In March he calls upon municipalities to jack up services so that business can benefit. Clearly, there are different approaches adopted by the president on the same issue. Why? At this March meeting he mentioned that FOSAD (Forum of South African Directors-General) will be undertaking a review which would “assess the kinds of levels of capacity and skills required across the public sector to respond to the imperatives of a developmental state, ...”. President Mbeki often states in his public addresses that there are two economies at work in SA.

Tony Ehrenreich, COSATU WC regional secretary casts more light on the President’s views. He disagrees with President Mbeki’s characterisation that SA has two economies - a first world (rich and developed) economy and a second (poor and underdeveloped) economy. He says there is only one economy and that this economy is working. He said that “the main objective of (the SA economy) was to advance the interests of the poor.” Mr Mbeki would disagree with him. More

about this later. Ehrenreich also said that municipal councillors who had underspent their funding while people suffered should be dealt with harshly. This was part of an address to 300 unions in November 2004. (Cape Argus !8/11/04).

The premier of the Western Cape, Ebrahim Rasool, defended Mbeki and said that the president “is drawing our attention to the survivalist economy, which needs help.” Is that really what is happening? If that is so then the president is saying that considering the overwhelming majority of the population live in a survivalist economy then they only need rudimentary services. They are not entitled to a first world service. Ebrahim Rasool also refers to a third economy operational in the W.Cape, namely the criminal economy which enriches the crime syndicates. Is this then the reason why corruption is so rife in SA? Who are the criminals denying basic services to the population of our country? Are they to be found in government? Has Mr Rasool inadvertently let the cat out of the bag? Clearly what is happening through lack of delivery is criminal.

Corruption is endemic, municipal and town managers ensure that their astronomical salaries are paid before any attention is paid to the needs of the town. They excuse themselves by saying that the bulk of income goes towards salaries which then leaves little for the provision of services. They sell municipal vehicles at a loss then lease them back from the buyers at exorbitant prices. President Mbeki supplies the answer to this as well. At the same local government summit referred to above, Mr Mbeki says that they made a mistake ‘... of portraying national government as very important, the provinces as important, and local government as just existing.’ He referred to the “gravy train concept” that people used in 1994. He said, “Now we realise that it does not matter what policies people in the first and second coaches of the gravy train produce, if the group in the last coach have no capacity to implement.” Mr Mbeki misses the point. The concept of the gravy train was to describe how those in power help themselves at the trough while leaving the scraps to everybody else. Alternatively, he understands the “concept” and is telling local government councillors to help themselves while they can.. Mr Mbeki ends off that address by saying, “If local government did not get help, all the good things for which the world had praised SA would amount to nothing.”

Poverty, unemployment, landlessness, homelessness, lack of essential services; such as water, energy (electricity), access to health services, the AIDS epidemic, social services, the care of the aged, education, illiteracy, environment degradation etc, etc, are a few of the problems that beset the SA population . The list is endless! These problems are particularly felt by the working class and landless peasantry in both the urban and rural areas of our country. Poverty is the root cause of the problems that beset the majority.

This paper is supposed to address the govt’s inability to provide services to all. Along the way I’ll be touching on some other issues that are also worrying. During discussion comrades will probably raise other troubling issues. All of us are aware of the problems faced by the vast majority of the population of our country. The population’s right to life, their humanity is under constant threat by a government that doesn’t seem to care. The members of government, elected into power by the people, seems only to look after their own interests. They seem to rule for their benefit alone. All the fine sounding phrases (i.e. that these problems will be addressed) mouthed by the powerful from the rostrums of parliament and via the media, e.g. TV and the press remain just that: phrases, lip service, rhetoric!

What role does this government play? Who benefits? We, in APDUSA, have always argued that the economic policy of the government, GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) - part and parcel of the ‘neo-liberal’ agenda, is to blame. Most of the problems stem from the imposition of this policy. This needs to be repeated. We often tend to lose sight of this fact. The government works according to a plan. Every level of government, from the cabinet, through every national department, provincial department and down to local government is hard at work implementing this plan, this policy. We need to plan as well and have our own policies, too. There is evidence of this

planning happening already. But it is still uncoordinated. We have the Anti Privatisation Forum, Concerned Citizens Forum, Evaton West Community. Crisis Committee. Inimba, Anti-Eviction Campaign, Social Movement Indaba, Landless Peoples' Movement and the various organisation being established all over the country to fight for the interests of the suffering masses. These struggles are largely uncoordinated but have the potential to become a potent force for change.

The government's argument has been that if business can be strengthened, there will be a 'trickle-down effect'. So, laws are made to assist business. The only effect this has had, has been to assist business to make larger profits for their shareholders. If anything trickles down then it is the retrenchment of thousands of workers. Open any newspaper, you'll see this happening. The gold mines are running at a loss; so get rid of workers. The textile industry cannot compete with China; close down your factories. The European Union doesn't import fruit and wine from SA as much as before, so sell your farms. The result is rampant unemployment.

Everything is for sale. The government goes into business with private partners. This is called a Public Private Partnership (PPP). The government provides the infrastructure, the capital, the buildings, the resources, everything. The private partners take a hefty share of the profits without really contributing anything. So essential services is a saleable commodity. Everything is up for grabs. Water, electricity, housing, roads, transport, medical services, education, communication (Telkom), etc. All those assets that the previous government built up at taxpayers expense, supposedly for the benefit of everyone, are now available to the highest bidder.

The supply of water and electricity, essential services that people cannot do without is in the process of being privatised. What does this mean? Already at Orange Farm and Phiri communities have come out in protest at this privatisation. The authorities have attempted to install prepaid water meters. In Evaton West, a suburb in Gauteng, prepaid meters will be installed in the near future. In East London, if you don't pay your water bill, your electricity is also cut and vice versa. Electricity meters have been with us for some time. Our Gauteng comrades can explain the methods township residents have used to reconnect both water and electricity supplies.

Authorities are now busy with a new scheme. Regional Electricity Distributors of which 6 are envisioned for the entire country is on the cards. Local Government wants to get rid of the necessity to supply electricity. They are in the process of setting up a PPP to supply electricity. RED 1 – the pilot project for this distribution is supposed to come on line by June, this year. This company will be responsible for supplying electricity for the whole of the Western Cape as well as the Northern Cape up to the Orange River. There's a saying, "If it doesn't itch don't scratch." Why is Local Government scratching here?

There is money to be made at taxpayers' expense. How? Previously ESKOM supplied electricity either directly or via municipalities to consumers. Now recently, independent vendors supply electricity from garages and supermarkets. The infrastructure was supplied by Eskom. Along comes RED 1, another middle man. Electricity supply is going to be consolidated. No longer will it be fragmented along different supply lines. It sounds perfectly rational if one believes that efficiency is necessary to provide everybody with an adequate supply of electricity. But I have my doubts. The track record of Local Government thus far doesn't inspire confidence.

Poverty is clearly discernible in the urban areas when it comes to the issue of housing. The lack of opportunities, whether it be access to land or jobs in the rural areas drive people to the cities. This is a survival mechanism that has its own attendant problems. The peripheries of our cities have had a mushrooming of squatter camps (informal settlements) since the 70's. The National Party government used every means at their disposal in order to get rid of what they saw as a problem via their laws, influx control, etc. In the new SA this development has grown. With the collapse of the migrant labour system we now have families joining their men folk in the cities.

The same problems affect people in the countryside as well as in the cities. Scarce resources, lack of jobs, etc. Now communities are turning on each other, accusations of racism are being bandied about. Political parties use these accusations as divide-and-rule tactics. People, most times don't realise that in line with GEAR, Government doesn't see itself as primarily responsible for providing housing. That is the role of banks and business. This is government's real intentions when it comes to housing

There are two different approaches on how South Africa is run. Government sees its role as being a facilitator for business. The working class and peasantry hoped that this government would look after their interests. They are, I think, in the process of shedding those illusions.

Local Government Elections are due soon. What are the slogans we're going to adopt? Every time elections come around, people's organisations adopt different attitudes. Why? During apartheid elections were boycotted as a matter of course. But one victory we've had is to participate in elections and vote. The reason, I think, is that people have lost faith in political parties and politicians. We tend to forget that change in this country was brought about by the struggle of millions of people fighting for an idea. The oppressed sacrificed in countless ways to bring about that change. If we succumb to the idea that politics should only be left to the politicians then we give up struggling and subjugate our interests to those interests that the ruling class represent; the interest of big business and continued exploitation. We must participate. People think politically at such a time. We can use the platforms made available to raise our own demands.

Thank you

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