



*The Interests Of The Workers And Landless Peasants Shall Be Paramount*

## Youth Jobless Crisis and the East London Tavern Deaths

21 Young lives were destroyed on the altar of unashamed capitalist greed. A combination of a failed education system and a youth jobless crisis provided the motive forces behind this tragedy. This is not a rosy picture at all as the national unemployment figures remain sky high. Workers who have been without a job for a year or more remain central to South Africa's jobless crisis. Workers trapped in long-term unemployment made up 67% of all the unemployed (6,1 million workers) in 2017. According to the national statistical agency, in the first half 2022, workers plunged into long-term joblessness soared to 79% of the unemployed (7,9 million workers).

Youth unemployment in South Africa is also worsening. In 2017, the unemployment rate among youth (aged 15-24) stood at 53%. The latest information from Statistics South Africa shows that this figure increased to 65% in 2021. (*StatsSA, Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2008-2022*; <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?cat=31>). Six out of ten South Africans between the ages of 15 and 35 are not economically active, and nearly two million young jobseekers are discouraged, having given up hope on finding a job. More than 13.8 million South Africans live below the food poverty line of R890 per month. (*Mail & Guardian Online, 3 Aug 2022*)

In a report titled *Has the Social Profile of the Marginalised Youth Improved in the Eastern Cape?* published by the Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) in May 2022, the stark social realities for Eastern Cape young people (15 – 34 years old) are revealed. The report reveals a decrease from 2.3 to 2.0 million (10.4%) in the number of young people in the province; they tend to move to Gauteng and Western Cape provinces in search of jobs. Also, for youth aged 15-34, the province has the highest unemployment rate in the country: it grew from 41.6% in 2014 to 62.6% in 2020. In 2020 approximately 22% of households in the province were headed by young people. For the period 2014 and 2021, discouraged young jobseekers in the province increased from 7.7 to 11.7 percent.

In the Eastern Cape province and specifically East London/Buffalo City Metro, the employment situation is reflected in the following facts: (1) Population in the province = 6.56 million. In the Buffalo City Metro (BCM) it is 726 000 . (2) In Eastern Cape 33.4% of households are involved in agricultural activities (*StatsSA, General Household Survey, 2021*). (3) The percentage distribution of sources of household income for the Eastern Cape is as follows: salary – 46.2%; social grants – 63.7%; income from a business – 9.6%; remittances – 20.9% and pensions – 5.6%. (4) For BCM the distribution of income is 45.4% from salaries, 41% from social grants and 19.2% from other sources. The vulnerability and precarity revealed in these figures call for radical alternatives to be found.

Given the youth unemployment rate, many street corners in East London city sees someone selling fruit and vegetables or some other gadgets. These are the parents that are expected to provide for families by putting food on the table. Every second house is a shebeen or tavern due to this situation. The few that are employed work well over forty hours a week. They hardly spend time with their families because they leave early in the morning and arrive late in the evening, dog tired.

This is a very concerning situation given that youth of today and their needs cannot be adequately taken care of. How does one begin to parent effectively? There are people already in their thirties and above who do not know what it is to have a job. The protection of

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the interests of the rich by the government (by embracing neo-liberal policies of the World Bank and IMF) is the reason for the untold misery for the mass of the population, thus the alarming crime rate.

The government must take responsibility for all this mess and stop blaming parents; and the working class and the peasants must continue to demand:

- The right to work, which must be implemented both via the institution of a necessary adjustment to the length of the working week to provide employment for all. There must be no reduction in wages.

- The introduction of a public works programme with the full representation of the unemployed in its management.

- A single progressive tax system, the abolition of VAT and all indirect taxes that fall so heavily on the poor.

**We call for the self-organisation and united, independent struggle of the labouring masses and the unemployed**

## **Death of 21 Children at East London Tavern in Perspective**

On the 16th June 2022, the world learnt of the tragic passing of 21 children between age 13 and 21. This happened in a tavern called Enyobeni situated in Phase 1, Scenery Park in East London in the Eastern Cape.

According to the recent news, Enyobeni Tavern owners (Siyakhangelana Ndevu and his wife, Vuyokazi Ndevu) have admitted that they did sell fake alcohol which contained Methanol. (*Eastern Cape Health Department Media Briefing, Eye Witness News, 21 July 2022*). This is also called Methyl alcohol, defined as a toxic, colourless, volatile liquid alcohol, made chiefly by oxidizing methane. This toxic substance was banned in Europe as of May 2019 for use in windscreens washing or defrosting. It had been used as an antifreeze and presents a clear and extremely high risk to human health. If inhaling this toxic chemical is harmful to human health, what more will drinking it do? This was purely a criminal act by the tavern owner resulting in 21 kids dying in what is suspected to be alcohol poisoning. "One of the factors that distinguish man from animal is that man has a conscience. In South Africa you would look for in vain to discover this basic quality of man." (*Leonard Nikani, My life under white supremacy and in exile, p94*)

### **Living as Youth in Scenery Park**

This is a working-class informal settlement. However, over time some residents managed to build themselves decent houses. It is alongside a middle-class area called Highway Gardens where a mixture of workers from Mercedes Benz and civil servants lives. From Phase 1 across the Black Road is an industrial area called Wilsonia where

some of the residents get jobs and get paid a pittance.

The children who happened to gather at the tavern were school going youth. Some of them were from in and around East London and, according to their language, visited the spot to "drown examination papers". This disaster happened in the wake of another one where school children from Dale College in King William's Town died in a tragic accident in Breidbacht near King William's Town in May 2022. They were on their way back from a hockey match in East London. Two died in that accident. Dale College Students had to drive to East London, 65km from King William's Town for the games with Hudson Park High School (another Model C School) simply because their neighbouring schools from the working-class areas i.e., townships such as Zwelitsha, Litha, Phakamisa and Dimbaza have no playgrounds and there are no amenities in the townships. Sporting codes are non-existent.

In Mdantsane it is the same situation; schools have no playgrounds. The tennis court in N.U1 has been vandalised and in N.U2 it is used as a construction site. The swimming pool has been neglected for years.

How else are the children of this land expected to keep themselves busy when sport has collapsed? A healthy mind is always inseparable from a healthy body. Unfortunately, alcohol substituted all that because of neglect by the government. The State President attended the "controversial memorial" of the 21 children that died in Scenery Park. He sanctimoniously told the parents of the deceased youngsters that they must take responsibility for what happened. Him being "shocked" has become the standard

response from arrogant ANC politicians who abuse tragic events like this to sermonise to oppressed communities.

On top of these problems the many broader crises that beset the Eastern Cape have been oppressing school youth for years on end: high dropout rates for grades 10 and 11; overcrowded classrooms of 80 students plus students per class; closing of schools by the education department; no payment of teachers and building contractors; no textbooks (*Daily Maverick, GroundUp Education, 26 May 2022*). The list is endless.

Scandalous as it is, the *2021 National Education Infrastructure Management System* report states that “there are still 1473 schools in the Eastern Cape that have plain pit latrines that need to be replaced, with 944 of those schools having no sanitation facilities besides these illegal plain pit latrines.”

## **The Struggle for Socialist Democracy Continues!**

### **APDUSA 2022 CONFERENCE**

The annual conference was held in Cape Town during mid-June and attended by delegates and members from four regions of the country. After the very long interruption caused by the worldwide Covid19 pandemic, comrades were understandably enthusiastic and keen to again have personal deliberations and exchange of ideas, sentiments and updates on political and organisational matters. Papers presented dealt with the ANC’s so called renewal plans, the Southern African environmental question, the aftermath and significance of the 2021 local government elections as well as the Ukraine-Russia war.

Very fruitful and fresh ideas were debated and discussed over the two days of conference. The attempts being undertaken to ‘renew’ the African National Congress essentially amounts to doing the impossible: resurrect a corpse. One indication of the widespread disarray in the ranks of the organisation is the very different interpretations being given to this notion, by as many different factional groupings. True to form, a commission or a task team or some special internal structure was assigned to uncover how this mystical renewal is going to occur. Arguably it is only its tenuous control over and abuse of state resources that will enable the ANC to continue existing. Its dwindling electoral support is also a sign that oppressed and exploited communities urgently have to develop revolutionary organisational alternatives: not merely wishing to tell the electorate more sophisticated lies. The crises of bourgeois parties like the ANC beset the ruling elites in Southern African countries as well. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is the forum where accelerated climate change, environmental destruction and the associated pauperization of millions of Africans are conferred on year in, year out. The solutions these advocates of neo-liberal dogma offer workers and peasants have proved unworkable. This they know, yet still the policies continue. Conference discussions highlighted the need for united / coordinated struggles against deepening poverty, xenophobia and economic destitution, across countries in the region. Food insecurity coupled with steady migration to large and growing urban centres, as well as ethnic conflicts/wars in certain regions on the continent, have characterised political developments in recent years.

Conference resolved to:

1. Expose and reject the ANC renewal project because it is not a solution to the struggles of the working class and peasantry to bring about democratic ecosocialism.
- 2.1. To encourage communities to organise new systems of government based on a new constitution that is in the interests of the working class and peasantry.
- 2.2. Raise awareness amongst communities to self-organise and put forward their own candidates under their democratic control, which includes the right to recall.
- 3.1. Oppose capitalist destruction of the environment in Southern Africa and the rest of the world.
- 3.2. Support community

struggles against capitalist exploitation of natural resources 4. Oppose the Russian invasion of Ukraine and NATO expansionism. 5. Rejuvenate the organisation through strengthening the functionality of branches by the systematic implementation of ‘Organising for Freedom’.

## **Communities Self Organise Against KZN Flood Destruction**

During the period 8-12 April 2022 parts of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) experienced extraordinary high rainfall. The resulting floods destroyed vital infrastructure and devastated many neighbourhoods. A number of organisations involved with the affected communities took up the enormous task of providing emergency shelter, food and general assistance. Abahlali baseMjondolo and Gift of the Givers are some of the organisations that got involved from the outset. With the resultant water shortages, certain civic structures scrambled to ensure access to safe water to consume. These battles are ongoing. Some of these are constituted as NGOs, others as location specific organisations.

The current system of wards and local councillors has proven itself to not address and meet the interests of the communities they are meant to serve. These structures act under the aegis and control of a national system of government – mostly run by ANC officials – and operating a constitution of a bourgeois ruling class. We are compelled to demand and struggle for democratic control of municipal and disaster funding, as part of broader democratic control over the lives of communities. This means direct involvement of communities in the running of municipal governing bodies. It has become a matter of urgency to raise this demand insofar as saving lives under disaster conditions are concerned. Raising this demand must state that the affected communities must be central in the control and distribution of funds for repairs and rehabilitation projects. From bitter struggle experience we must conclude that this cannot happen without self-organisation and independent organisation linked to a progressive political programme. Let it be said again: anything else is bound to fail.

The rescue efforts undertaken in many instances were done by community members themselves. This was due to rescue teams arriving too late to save lives. It follows that it makes practical and political sense that disaster

management must have local communities at the centre of the organisation and execution of rescue attempts. This means local control, local coordination. Quick responses are essential. It means the development and existence of a much higher level of social organisation in the name and in the interests of those communities themselves. In this regard, the Cuban system of disaster management is worthwhile investigating. The entire country – from national to local level – is geared to meet disasters head-on, to save lives. In South Africa we sit with numerous government departments; the one being more ham-fisted than the other about how to efficiently handle natural and other disasters.

### **A Call for Organisation beyond NGOs**

NGOs like Abahlali base Mjondolo, Gift of the Givers and Rhiza Babuyile, amongst others, became involved in relief efforts. What does this say of disaster management in South Africa? These organisations operate as NGOs and receive millions of Rand in donor funding. The decimation of progressive civic structures under ANC neo-liberal rule and its wholesale substitution with electoral municipal structures and NGOs of all persuasions, have left a huge gap in progressive grassroots organisation across the country. Those controlling the purse strings of NGOs – no matter how progressive the actions of the NGOs might appear – despise the building of such independent, fighting organisations. The electoral system has demonstrably failed to meet the needs of millions of South Africans at municipal level- specifically the poor majority. The tasks of progressive forces and independent organisations are to expose the limitations of the electoral system while at the same time build these community, political alternatives. Two months after being displaced by the floods and temporarily housed in transit camps and community halls, residents were evicted from Durban City Hall where they took up residence. Claims were made that many buildings in Durban

are standing empty. An organisation by the name of Umsinsi WokuZimilela The Native Movement became involved in this battle for decent shelter. News reports also circulated, suggesting that ANC councillors bluntly told residents that they will only assist ANC members. Again, decisions are made for residents without them having any say in matters that affect their lives. Democratic control of and over independent people's organisations is crucial.

We must demand, with the full participation of the affected communities, a roll out plan for the creation of jobs that will contribute to safeguarding communities against the worst effects of climate or other disasters. We reject government's "plans on paper". Plans can only be meaningful if the poor majority are part of drawing them up and implementing them.

#### **BUILD PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS FOR ORGANISED COMMUNITY POWER**

## **State Failures in KwaZulu-Natal Floods**

The floods that occurred in Durban/eThekweni and surrounding areas during the 2nd week of April 2022 could have been predicted by any city planner or metro official. Extensive research findings on South Africa's coastal areas' vulnerabilities to extreme precipitation and consequent flooding exists in the public domain. In the wake of the 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2019 flooding episodes in the same region of the country, adequate measures should have been taken to prevent, or for the very least minimise the social and economic effect of these natural disasters. This was not done, with the inevitable catastrophic results that tens of thousands of residents of the region must deal with.

As with many issues related to modern day neo-liberal governance, South Africa has a *National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (NCCAS)*. In line with this strategy, a document entitled the *National Coastal Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment* has been produced. Part of this vulnerability assessment is the reality that 40% of South Africans live within 60km of the coast; 20% (approximately 10 million people) live in coastal areas. Approximately 60% of the country's economy depends on coastal natural resources and trade infrastructure such as ports. (*M. Luck-Vogel et al. 2020: National Coastal Assessment for South Africa: Situational Assessment Report.*)

What type of measures and policies, approved and implemented by affected KZN municipalities (specifically the eThekweni/Durban metro), aggravated the situation? Amongst others were the clearance of vegetation in areas/sites by property developers. Large areas were exposed to flood waters. Also, there has been poor planning relating to and

including the upgrading of ageing infrastructure. Municipalities showed disregard to the construction of shacks in areas (riverbanks) that are prone to mudslides and flooding. Poorly maintained sewerage systems and the expansion of hard surfaces leading to greater run-off completes the picture.

#### **Planning for disasters, or disaster in planning?**

In the wake of the April floods in eThekweni/Durban, the obvious question to pose is: what organised social, political undertakings and structures are required to prevent these extreme weather events from having the impact they have had? In other words, how do we organise ourselves at government and civil society level to cope with these disasters? The need to pose this question becomes abundantly clear when considering the shambolic and downright criminal under and non-performance of the state authorities at local, provincial as well as national level. These parties and individuals have for many years paved the way for calamitous events such as these floods to occur. And recur. Municipalities, provincial governments, COGTA and associated organisations like SALGA are all in one way or the other, the main actors in governance. Their continued existence and mode of operation must be questioned, given their clearly demonstrated ineptitude in the handling and resolution of disasters such as these.

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group reported (*SA Parliament, 5 March 2019*) that the KZN provincial government spent only 41% of funds as part of the Urban Settlements

Development Grant (USDG) that was available to it in that financial year. Worse still, no funds were allocated, or repairs done in the wake of the 2019 flood damage. The 2022 flood devastation has thus far affected 121 687 people, from 17 438 households and left 461 dead. (*Business Day Online*, 13 June 2022). An estimated 4000 plus homes were destroyed; 8000 homes were damaged.

News reports shed some light on the funding that would become available for immediate relief. R144 million from the provincial disaster response grant; R371 million from the municipal disaster response grant and a further R501 m in the form of provincial and municipal emergency housing grants. (*Sunday Times*, 22 May 2022). This amounts to approximately R1 billion. These funds, once used by the provincial and municipal governments are to be reimbursed by national treasury to the lower government levels; they are also expected to apply for these funds.

Applications are handled by the National Disaster Management Centre (NMDC). Two months after the disaster, the finance minister is on record as saying that no such applications have been received. An obvious question to ask is, what is the purpose of provincial government structures if funding allocations from national treasury are meant for direct use by metros or local and district municipalities? Demands for their elimination must be part of a broader campaign against the SA constitution with all its anti-poor and anti-worker provisions. An amount of R25 billion as a final cost for reparations is being thrown around by the KZN premier. With its austerity programme and the routine looting of state funds we can rightfully question the authenticity of the reparation programme.

### **FORWARD WITH DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF MUNICIPAL RESOURCES**

## **Battles for a Basic Income Grant (BIG)**

South Africa has had at least two decades of heated arguments between proponents and opponents of a basic income grant. Most recently, particularly since 2020, trade unions, social movements and non-governmental organisations have amplified renewed calls for a basic income grant to help millions struggling to make ends meet. Basic income grant campaigners hope that such a grant will bring much needed relief to the victims of the misery and disasters that this system of minority wealth accumulation, dispossession and exploitation breeds.

Advocates for a basic income grant have asked government to implement their demands. These appeals have been backed up with facts about chronic unemployment, widening inequalities and a free fall in living standards to motivate why a basic income support package must be introduced immediately. This reasoning looks flawless and convincing: if opponents of basic income assistance fail to refute these gruesome and well-known facts, then implementing this demand should be beyond dispute. They have also appealed to socioeconomic rights clauses in South Africa's constitution in the hope that the state will heed its pro-poor obligations outlined in the supreme law of the land. Section 27 of the Bill of Rights says that the state must, subject to available resources, take actions to progressively realise 'appropriate social assistance for those unable to support themselves and their dependents' (*SA Constitution, Chapter 2, Section 27(1)-(3)*).

### **Attacks on Minimum Livelihood Assistance**

The social development ministry, overseeing and delivering state-funded welfare relief and social safety nets, commissioned research into the feasibility of a basic income support package. Speaking at a webinar to launch this study in December 2021, the Minister of social development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, spoke about the need to expand social protection (<https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-lindiwe-zulu-basic-income-support-webinar-13-dec-2021-0000>). To lift a 'large number of South Africans out of poverty', Minister Zulu inspired her online audience, it is crucial to 'revolutionise our social assistance landscape'. Whilst basic income support for those aged 18-59 was put forth as an instrument in the envisioned 'social assistance revolution', the minister was silent on how this will be done in practice.

In the meanwhile, President Cyril Ramaphosa hosted a high-level briefing with NGO leaders who have been advocating for the urgent introduction of a basic income grant. Beyond the promise of a follow up meeting at an undefined date, this meeting delivered nothing new. Several months before meeting these NGOs, Ramaphosa had thorough discussions with his economic advisors about the basic income grant based on studies the president had asked them to do. Thus, through sleight of hand or a surprise attack, Ramaphosa pitted the NGOs basic income proposals against the brutal assault on the

basic income idea that his economic advisors have unleashed. This episode exposes, once again, the real function of Ramaphosa's economic advisors: they are smug apologists for capitalism to help mystify its crimes against society.

The aggressive onslaught of Ramaphosa's economic advisors on the basic income proposals has emboldened the attacks on social assistance from another stronghold of neoliberalism: national treasury (or finance ministry). Under the tutelage of imperialist financing agencies, like the World Bank and IMF, national treasury persistently recycles and recites false assumptions to sabotage campaigns for a basic income. They are at the forefront to justify and impose social spending cuts and other austerity measures that global and local neoliberal ideologues dictate.

These opponents of a basic income falsely argue that the lack of a "willingness to seek work", lies at the root of the call for a basic income. This false assumption is promoted to hide why unemployment continues to grow. In fact, unemployment is grounded in capitalist greed for profit (or the 'logic of wealth accumulation through exploitation') rather than whether workers are willing to search for jobs. Millions of the unemployment are searching for work but the economy increasingly fails to absorb them. Like labour market flexibility, a central pillar of the neoliberal orthodoxy, unemployment is a weapon that capitalists use to depress the wages and living standards of all workers. Expanding the reserve army of labour (joblessness) is intrinsic to the workings of capitalism.

They further strengthen their anti-basic income onslaught by paying lip service to reducing the economic role of the state. This recycles a worn-out and flimsy excuse that the government cannot afford to expand social assistance. Yet the bourgeois state is an active economic agent, but at the behest of the capitalists. How are the capitalists able to protect their control of economic wealth (private property), suppress workers and redistribute state budgets to themselves (through privatisation, subsidies, tax cuts and debt repayments) without a state? They tailor public budgets for the upkeep of the repressive machinery of the state and for transferring lucrative

corporate welfare handouts. State functionaries routinely mismanage public finances and looting is rife. Clearly, 'job search discouragement' and 'zero fiscal space' are very bad pretexts for their multifaceted anti-basic income crusade. The value of the proposed basic income is so low, it will not be enough to assist a family buy the food it needs for one month.

### **Beyond defensive battles**

Many in the pro-basic income movement harbour great expectations in government's promised social protection reforms. However, neither the president's 2022 State of the Nation speech nor the finance minister's budget speech indicated whether, when or how the state intends to introduce a basic income grant. This silence from the powers that be, means that the introduction of a basic income grant is neither immanent nor on government's agenda for the foreseeable future.

As an all-round cost of living crisis drives more people into the depths of extreme misery and despair, winning a basic income safety net will be an important victory. However, with the capitalists and their neoliberal henchmen determined to defeat the movement for a basic livelihood lifeline, how do progressive activists in this arena prepare for tougher battles ahead? In other words, how do we turn a defensive economic battle into an anti-capitalist revolution? Social movements and trade unions that defend the labouring majority can only ignore such questions at the peril of millions trapped in destitution. Acting on lessons from decades of anti-poverty and anti-neoliberal protests is now more urgent than ever. Relying on the neoliberal constitution which subjugates human rights to capitalist growth is bound to repeatedly run into the limits and loopholes of the constitution. For this constitution is structured against the demands and interests of the oppressed and exploited majority. As a minimum, socialising the battle for a basic income demands the highest levels of self-organisation, principled unity across progressive forces and a clear anti-capitalist political programme. •

### **BOOKS FOR SALE**

- \* ***DYNAMIC OF REVOLUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA-I. B TABATA & DORA TAYLOR***
- \* ***EDUCATION FOR BARBARISM – I.B TABATA***
- \* ***MY LIFE UNDER WHITE SUPREMACY AND IN EXILE – L NIKANI***

## Plight of Census 2022 Workers

South Africa's most recent national population census, conducted during February – March 2022 was preceded by one last held in 2011. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) the data collected is meant to be used for “planning, policy formulation and evidence-based decision making” (<http://census.statssa.gov.za>). Budget allocations across local, provincial and national government are also based on census data collected.

Early in January, thousands of prospective fieldworkers were recruited by StatsSA to collect data for this census. This caused great excitement and expectation among the unemployed youth countrywide. Unfortunately, excitement soon gave way to frustration, when the online training process was frequently interrupted by loss of network connectivity and software malfunction. “No”, was the assurance from Field Operations Officers, cum trainers, “this is merely a temporary hiccup and not a cause for concern...”

It has been reported that many candidates abandoned training before the end of the two - week crash course, leaving a diminished pool of candidates. Of these, up to thirty percent required re training. This drawback caused a staggered generation of employment contracts and appointment of fieldworkers and fieldwork supervisors. Appeals to Field Operations Officers and District Operational Centres were met with a standard response of, “...escalated to head office.” Thus, understaffed and dependent on failing software, the National Census got underway around the third/fourth of February, only to screech to halt a week later due to the collapse of the online system. It was only later learned that the technical problems were resultant from the change in network provider coupled with incompatible software applications.

The official end of the census project arrived, with precious little data retained on the servers and frustrated field staff ready to throw in the towel. When the inevitable offer to extend contracts came, there were many who declined

because of the chaos they perceived the project to be. Lured into a longer service period, workers became restless for a definite pay date, since they now had to work for a longer period. The delay in payment caused field workers countrywide to raise the outcry until StatsSA began making payments in mid-March. However, most workers were dissatisfied claiming that they were not remunerated according to the daily rate stated in the employment contract, while others were completely skipped during the March pay runs with no salary advice slips to track their earnings. Another extension was offered as consolation.

During this time, workers were recruited to be redeployed to the Western Cape, where data collection was severely hampered due to a lack of field staff. At the time, it was reported that many Western Cape respondents were unaware of the National Household Census when fieldworkers visited their homes late in April. Local Field Operations Officers shared how they battled to have fieldworkers and fieldwork supervisors appointed in the province, going as far as the national office to plead their case; to no avail. Of the few workers who were appointed, most declined the extension of contracts beyond the initial expiry date. Hence, the need to co-opt workers from other provinces. With the assistance of these co-opted workers, the Western Cape StatsSA office was at last able to record some measurable progress.

After a gruelling three-month project, it would be expected that field staff would go back home to a well-deserved rest. But not with an employer such as Statistics SA. Taking off the green cap and bib at the end of this project, workers had to don battle gear to demand all that the employer had committed to provide.

Casual workers across South Africa are involved in similar struggles daily. Linking up with trade unions or forming worker committees at workplaces can break the isolation of their struggles and contribute to raising the demands of workers on a wider scale. •





## LETTERS

[APDUSA Context: *Heathfield High School is situated in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. Students attending Heathfield high are predominantly from working class townships that surround the school. The ongoing battles between the school community and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) started during the deadly waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before vaccines became widely available, government temporarily closed schools to slow down Covid-19 infections and deaths caused by this virulent disease. Parents, students and teachers at Heathfield high, through their school governing body (SGB), decided to keep the school shut for a few more days as a health safety measure. The school's principal at that time, Mr Wesley Neumann, acted in accordance with the SGB decision to safeguard the health of students, teachers and their families. Subsequently, top WCED bureaucrats, ruled that Mr Neumann's solidarity with the Heathfield high SGB violated his employment contract. While Mr Neumann lost the disciplinary hearing based on the trumped-up charges of the WCED, his battle for social justice continues in the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC). In the letter below, an activist-educator asks how to transform solidarity in defence of Mr Neumann and Heathfield high into an offensive struggle for a new education system.*]

### **WCED in the Dock vs Wesley Neumann!**

It is time that the Heathfield High School and the Wesley Neumann narrative be rewritten and reconstructed. Up until now the main focus has been in Neumann's guilt, from the perspective of the WCED or his innocence from our perspective. But that narrative has from the beginning been set by the WCED to their benefit which means Neumann is in the dock and our focus is to defend him. So, from the get go, we have been on the defensive, forcing us to defend a delinquent. But, here you have a functioning institution, Heathfield High School rendered a dysfunctional and disaster area. Who is to blame?

The first question here is who or what is the WCED? Is it just made up of administrators who are

not working in schools but work from the departmental offices spread across the province? Or is it the collective from the highest paid political and administrative official down to the lowest paid custodial worker sweeping the school's classrooms? Our understanding is that the provincial education department is a collective of all of the employees of the state, with a constitutional mandate, in the broadest sense, to develop our youth to their fullest potential to become constructive contributors to their communities and the society at large. Our experts, academic and otherwise, would have to enlighten us here. However, what is clear is that we as educators are not employees of Brian Schreuder (retired head of department), Debbie Schafer (former Education MEC), Brent Walters (head of department appointed in 2021) or whoever else. We are employed by the state under a constitutional mandate. Their personal will and fancy counts for nothing in such a dispensation. Yet, too often they, and their superiors don't understand this.

I recalled an incident after a meeting between the executive of the then Western Cape Parent Teacher Student Forum (WCPTSF, we who organised the great education march to Parliament in June 1996) and Brian Schreuder, then education head of department in the Western Cape. After failing to come to any mutually acceptable arrangement, the meeting was aborted at the refusal of Schreuder to accept the possibility of an alternative view of doing things, other than his own way. That's the way all apartheid apparatchiks behaved, and this man was no less. When you employ an administrator from the apartheid era, that's what you get. Whether Brent Walters is an apartheid administrator or not is up to him to prove. For now, we're not convinced or impressed.

The point, comrades, is to change the narrative. Give Wesley Neumann a free pass and put the WCED in the dock. The disruptor must defend itself in terms of its Constitutional Mandate.

**Concerned Activist-educator.**

# APDUSA

## *THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES*

Despite the gain of political rights for all, the compromise of 1992 has not fulfilled the democratic aspirations of the labouring majority and they continue to suffer in conditions of abject poverty and subjugation to the will of the rich who command the economic resources of the country. In the ongoing struggle we therefore demand:

- The convening of a democratically elected **Constituent Assembly**, charged with the task of drawing up a new constitution, governed by the interests of the oppressed and exploited working class and peasantry, based on the demand for full, unfettered political rights for all with majority rule in a unitary state, the removal of all artificially created regional political boundaries, the liquidation of all special minority rights and privileges which militate against the interests of the majority. The Constituent Assembly must have full powers to discharge these duties, untrammelled by any directions and constraints designed to serve self-interested minorities.
- A resolution of the **land question** in accordance with the needs of those who work and live off the land. This means the destruction of all existing tribal and feudal relations in the rural areas and the nationalisation of the land, without compensation. A new division of the land and its management, which excludes forced collectivisation, the payment of rent and the expropriation of small peasant farmers, must be undertaken by committees that are democratically elected by and answerable to the people.
- The **expropriation** of all major industries, banks and institutions of credit and their management by the state and representatives of the workers in the interests of the population as a whole.
- The revision of labour legislation for the liquidation of all discrimination against the worker. This also means:
- The **right to work**, which must be implemented both via the institution of necessary adjustments to the length of the working week to provide employment for all, without a reduction in wages, as well as by the institution of a progressive **public works program** with the full representation of the unemployed in its management.
- The fixing of a living **minimum wage** as well as a sliding scale to compensate for any price increases.
- The unconditional right to **strike** which includes the right of occupation of the workplace.
- Free and **compulsory education** for all up to matric with free books for the needy.
- Free **health services** for the needy.
- A single, progressive **tax system**, the abolition of vat and all indirect taxes that fall so heavily on the poor.
- The elected representatives of the people, at organisational level or in the local, regional or national political institutions of state, must be fully **accountable** to those who elect them and they must be fully bound by the demands and aspirations of the working class and its allies, the landless peasantry.

APDUSA calls for the self-organisation and united independent struggle of the labouring masses. We believe that the struggle can only advance decisively via the greatest ideological and organisational unity between the workers in the urban centres and the peasants in the rural areas under the leadership of the working class.

*The democratic demands and aspirations of the oppressed workers and peasants shall be paramount.*