

Press Statement

South Africa: The Rebellion of the Poor Comes to Grahamstown

Monday 14 February 2011, by [UPM](#) (Date first published: 13 February 2011).

The rebellion of the poor [1] has been spreading from town to town, from squatter camp to squatter camp, since 2004. Last week it arrived in Grahamstown [2].

There is no third force, political party or communist academic behind our struggle. It is oppression at the hands of the African National Congress that has driven us into the rebellion of the poor. We are in rebellion because we are being forced to live without dignity, safety or hope.

For more than ten months we had to live without water all over the township. When we do get water it is unfit for human consumption. Temporary teacher's contracts are not renewed and so there are 11 vacant teacher's posts at the Mary Waters School. How does SADTU allow this? The unions are leading the working class and poor people into defeat. In Thembeni, Phaphamani, Extension 6 and 7, Zolani, Tanti, and eLuxolweni people are still using the bucket system. Half of Grahamstown does not have toilets 17 years into democracy. Unemployment is at around 70%. The jobs that do exist are allocated on the basis of party political loyalty. There are no lights on our streets. There is an attack on women and girls in Grahamstown. There were around 40 cases of rape in December alone and a number of killings. One of the people that was raped and killed was Zingiswa Centwa a standard ten learner from Nombulelo High School. She was the only hope for her family as she was the only one at school. She was raped and killed in December. In January her results came. She got aggregate B.

We cannot be expected to live like this. Under these conditions it is right to rebel. It is moral to rebel. It is necessary, as a matter of survival, to rebel.

The Unemployed People's Movement and the Women's Social Forum called a march in protest at the rapes and attacks on women for Wednesday last week. We applied for permission to protest and complied with all our obligations in law to stage a legal march. But the Makana Municipality said that our march was prohibited. They never consulted with us and this unilateral decision of the Makana Municipality was an illegal banning. This is not the first time that our basic democratic rights to organise and to express ourselves have been denied [3]. Of course we could not accept a unilateral and unlawful ban on our right to protest and so we went ahead with the march in defiance of the ban [4].

We went to the Magistrate's Court to demand justice for ourselves, for our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our neighbours, our comrades. It is obvious that the violence against women is linked to the hopelessness and desperation that we are experiencing as well as the lack of street lights, safe places to go to the toilet and so on. So after marching on the court we marched on the Municipality. This was a peaceful march of around 300 people.

This was not our first march on the Municipality. We have marched many times [5] and we have never received answers to our questions from the Municipality. All we are told is that the issues that

we have raised are being addressed but they are never addressed. It has been too much for too long.

So we decided to stage a sit in at the Municipal offices. We organised our own little Tahrir Square here in Grahamstown. We occupied the Municipal offices for the whole day [6]. They closed the offices and sent the workers home. We demanded to speak to the mayor. We were eventually promised a meeting with the mayor within 48 hours but it hasn't happened.

The municipal manager, Ms. Ntombi Bart, said that she would come back to the people with answers but instead of coming back she sent the police to move the people out of the municipal offices by force. They forced people out by threatening to shoot and saying that they are entitled to use force.

This is when the anger started. People felt that they were being treated like criminals when they were having genuine demands and questions. The anger and frustration that has been building for the last 17 years came to a head at this moment.

The protest was dispersed and people then spontaneously organised road blockades in Phaphamani, Joza and Phumlani [7]. In Phaphamani people burnt tyres and dug up the new tar road. People never wanted the tar roads. They wanted houses, electricity, toilets, water and jobs. The tar road is for the officials to be able to drive in comfort. This is an indication that when services are delivered they are not delivered in the interests of the people.

The police responded with violence – with rubber bullets, dogs and pepper spray. A number of people were beaten, bitten by the dogs, pepper sprayed and shot with rubber bullets at close range.

On Thursday morning the people woke up and started where they left off. The UPM received a call from people on the road blockades and we ran there to see what was happening. When we arrived we went to ask the police why they were resorting to violence. They refused to talk to us but just put us in handcuffs and in the van. They could not even say what was the charge.

The people who were arrested were Ayanda Kota (UPM Chairperson), Xola Mali (UPM Spokesperson), Nombulelo Yame (UPM Deputy Chairperson) and Ntombentsha Budaza, an ordinary citizen. Ntombentsha was beaten by the police.

The comrades were detained for five hours without being charged and the police tried to compel them to sign statements saying that they were the leaders of the road blockades which was not the case.

We are not the leaders of the people. People lead themselves. People continued to meet and to discuss their issues and to take action even though we were locked and not part of them. Therefore it is clear that people can lead themselves.

The four comrades were detained overnight and released on Friday morning at 11:30 on R500 bail each. Their bail conditions are that:

- they can't participate in any march or demonstration and they can't address any crowd
- they must stay at least 100m from the Makana Municipality and the Magistrates Court.
- They must never be seen inciting people to protest

The Municipality has now hired private security guards to protect the councillors, the mayor and various officials. It is amazing to us that the politicians and officials feel the need to use public money to protect themselves from the same public that they are supposed to be serving. It is

amazing how quickly they can do this when they can't build a toilet in 17 years. It is amazing to us that, as S'bu Zikode has said [8], any challenge to oppression is taken as an offence. A demand for dignity is taken as criminal. It is incredible that our demand for justice is taken as violence while the way that we are supposed to live without jobs, houses or toilets or basic safety is taken as normal. Where are the private security guards for the women facing rape and even murder?

We are not struggling for service delivery. We are struggling for justice and dignity. We are struggling for land, jobs, decent schools and homes, safe streets, equality between men and women and a democracy that includes the poor and allows poor people to plan their own communities and their own future.

When the arrested comrades were in the police station they saw that someone who was on the march and encouraging people on one of the road blockades was there working in the police station. She was part of us in the whole process and then we saw her working at the police station. We are well aware of the role of the National Intelligence Agency and the Crime Intelligence unit in trying to destabilize popular movements elsewhere in the country. We know that, for instance, an officer in Crime Intelligence was present throughout the attack on Abahlali baseMjondolo in the Kennedy Road squatter camp in September 2009. The Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless People's Movement and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign have all had their own experiences with the intelligence services. Now they are doing their work here in Grahamstown too.

We know the price of struggle. We know the stories of Mandela Park, of eTwatwa, of Harrismith, of Protea South, of Pema Ridge, of Kennedy Road. But the price of obedience is joblessness, hunger, rape, disease, depression and an epidemic of hopelessness. The price of obedience is a generation that has no way forward - no jobs, no opportunity to study, nothing. Therefore we are willing to pay the price that will have to be paid in the struggle against oppression.

Around the world the road blockade is recognised as the weapon of the unemployed, of those who have no jobs at which they can strike. Those who condemn the road blockade as a tactic do not understand that our everyday lives are lived in crisis - in serious crisis. They want to deny the oppressed the right to disrupt the system that oppresses us. They want to deny us the right to demonstrate our anger. They want us to accept the paternalism of civil society. We are not blind to the fact that there is always a class element and often a racial element to the paternalism of most of civil society. We will, in solidarity with our comrades around the country, insist on our right to take our struggles forward as we think best. We have always seen people's power and not civil society as the way forward. After Tahrir Square the whole world can see the logic of this position.

We continue to take inspiration and courage from our political ancestors, from Leon Trotsky to Steven Bantu Biko. We continue to learn from our intellectual ancestors. Some of us are reading and discussing Frantz Fanon in the squatter camps and broken RDP houses [9]. But it is clear that a new politics is required. We are inspired by movements and communities in struggle around the country and around the world. We need what has been called a living politics, a politics that is rooted in the everyday lives of the people, a democratic politics, a politics of the people, for the people and by the people.

The African National Congress and their goons in the ANC Youth League are the party of the national bourgeoisie. They are not the party of the people. We cannot accept a society of sushi parties, ever bigger BEE deals for the rich and broken RDP houses, transit camps, hopelessness, joblessness, rape, prison and murder for the poor. The debates within the ANC are debates between those who think that they can get away with naked oppression - rubber bullets for some and sushi parties for others - and those who think that oppression needs to be dressed up with a little bit of misdirected top down service delivery and calls for patriotic patience. We will not be intimidated or

bought off. We insist that everyone has the right to dignity and justice.

We continue to reject the sectarianism, gutter politics and cults of personality that have done so much damage to the left in post-apartheid South Africa. We continue to support all attempts to build what Abahlali baseMjondolo [10] have called a living solidarity between all the struggles across the country. We believe that the formation of the Democratic Left Front [11] is an historic opportunity to build such a unity.

Like popular movements across South Africa and across the world we are deeply inspired by the commune in Tahrir Square. We salute the heroes of Tunis, Cairo and Algiers, We would like to see a Tahrir Square in every town in every country. Tahrir Square has reminded us that the will of the people will be realised when the people are sufficiently united and determined.

We thank everyone who stood with our movements outside the police station and the court while the four comrades were locked.

Kwanele! Kwanele!

Genoeg is genoeg!

Enough!

The Unemployed People's Movement, Grahamstown

Contact people:

Xola Mali - xola.mali yahoo.com

Ayanda Kota - ayandakota webmail.co.za

Nombulelo Yame -

P.S.

* From Amandla!, Sunday 13 February 2011:

<http://www.amandlapublishers.co.za/home-menu-item/519-unemployed-peoples-movement->

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF: [Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests - a preliminary analysis](#)

[2] <http://www.abahlali.org/taxonomy/term/1817>

[3] See on ESSF: [The Death of Reason and the Water Crisis in the Makana Greater Municipality](#)

[4] http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=z5VttNV1N3M

[5] v

[6] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvbokw9fOu0&feature=player_embedded

[7] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGIUMWiX1aQ&feature=player_embedded

[8] See on ESSF: [South Africa: The Politic of Land and Housing](#)

[9] See on ESSF [South Africa: Houses to Die For?](#)

[10] <http://www.abahlali.org/>

[11] <http://democraticleft.za.net/>