

# Call For Poor To Seize Power

IT is with a great weight on my conscience that I write to your paper in an attempt to unburden myself. The actions and policy of the Windhoek City Council over the last few months have brought into serious disrepute the integrity and the humanity of the policymakers. I see the eyes of the mothers and children and I cannot help but weep with anger and sadness at the cruelty of this Council.

This same Council that has the audacity to use public funds to subsidise the water and electricity supply to massive companies like Ramatex and to grant them land for free; this same Council is leading the attack on the poor in the name of full cost-recovery. Not even the apartheid Boers in power ever imagined charging full cost for basic water services, but these our supposed leaders have the audacity to force this brutal policy onto an already impoverished people.

We have lately witnessed the escalating tendency of water and electricity cut-offs and the eviction of the poorest of the poor, of the elderly and unemployed, the ill and infected from their homes in Katutura and Khomasdal. The agents of this policy are in fact waging a silent and a secret war on the poor. It is a war that takes the form of perpetual unemployment, of daily starvation, of degradation, of the infiltration of disease and poverty and gener-

ally undermining the immunity of our communities. The greatest challenge for those who still have the power to fight back, is firstly to define our enemy and to resist them.

Up until now, these battles in the community have been fought by the elderly, on their own, with others looking on as if they are not affected by water and electricity cut-offs. But it is no longer possible to remain silent on these issues, for it is the very stuff of life and history. To do nothing and lie down at a time like this, would be a betrayal of our most vital interests.

The enemies of the poor are charging inflated prices for water and when people are unable to pay, given the economic condition of the masses, then Council cuts off our water supply. Such cruelty and naked barbarism goes unveiled in Windhoek's upper chambers. They are attempting to turn water into a commodity for profit and in so doing, they are depriving us of our most natural rights, including the right to exist. They are throwing women and children from their homes and threatening the weak and vulnerable with military might. Anything except massive social resistance at this point in time would be sheer cowardice.

Water cut-offs are uncon-

stitutional and hostile to our human rights. Using water as a source of profit is but another way to force the poor to pay for the excesses of the rich. The water and land supplied for the construction of the new State House is subsidised by Council, effectively paid for by the poorest of the poor. Council gets its main income from us, the poor and impoverished people who are made to pay twice over for the cruel and profit-oriented policy of the privatisers, the bureaucrats, the lying and stealing politicians and their agents.

The war against the poor is reaching a new peak and in this war the poor and oppressed people from town and country, who have suffered unspeakable horrors as a result of the privatisation of water and electricity services, are the greatest threat to the Council. The Municipality, in cahoots with the privatisers, began a serious attack on the poor, by forcing people - even pensioners - to pay high prices for basic services. They are attempting to squeeze blood from a rock.

The Municipal Council, in blindly ignoring the real conditions and needs of the masses of impoverished people and attacking us, has made itself into an enemy of the poor. It deserves to be called that, for that is what it is, and

now it is time for the champions of the poor to rise up, to organise.

There will be no greater justification for the downfall and overthrow of the Council and its backers, no greater stimulus to social revolution, than the current policy of Council. This policy, in essence, is to deprive the poor people of water and sanitation, of land and of the jobs to sustain ourselves. The policy of evictions, of water and electricity cut-offs is above all hostile to the needs of our innocent children, who are always the most vulnerable to these attacks from the Council. Water cut-offs are unconstitutional and a violation of basic rights and must be declared to be so.

Since Council has made a policy of depriving and silently killing the poor by depriving us of our basic rights, so too it justifies its own downfall and overthrow at the hands of the downtrodden mass of humanity - that it considers as its revenue base. They have divided the population into the can't-payers and the won't-payers and they have shown mercy for neither. We on the other hand have found ourselves born into a society divided into the oppressed and their oppressors. Clearly the Council has taken its side, and will suffer

its necessary historical fate at the hands of those they sought to crush.

As working class families, we must reject water cut-offs as threat to human life and dignity. We must fight for the scrapping of the water and electricity arrears of the elderly and unemployed. We must oppose evictions to the last man, for it is a continuation of old colonial practices. We must revitalise our forces and resist by any means necessary the attempts by this cruel Council to further degrade the innocent poor.

Government is attempting to denounce its responsibility to provide water and energy, basic services. Its new role, which it has fashioned for itself, is simply to collect taxes and to use its repressive might to hold the poor in submission. We, the poor, must prepare ourselves for a direct confrontation with and a prolonged struggle against these hostile forces in order to win and secure our rights: for a free basic water supply which is our natural right, for the scrapping of arrears, for an end to evictions. These are the demands of the multitude. We are forced to pay for our own land, twice over. We must be prepared to oppose these ongoing evictions, against the privatisation of the basic means of life. We

must oppose this degradation imposed on us by the privatisers and stop them in their tracks. The mines and the big companies should be forced to subsidise the poor, because they are using and polluting our water sources, yet, the poor are made to subsidise the rich. That is the logic of Council policy. How dreadful!

In order to win this struggle, we must fight to determine our own future, for we cannot leave the planning of it in the hands of such cruel people, as occupy the Council today. They would throw even the old and the ill out onto the streets if we have no money and would leave our children languishing in tin shacks and slaving in factories on the outskirts of town in order to make a profit for the lords of life. But their profits are made from the blood, tears and sweat of the innocent poor.

We must seize our own power. We must defend our community and form a new Council, not a bosses' Council, but a Community Council, and we must create a new policy that will consider the needs of all our people. That is the very next step towards the conquest of our own power.

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*Note: This letter has been shortened - Ed*