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October 2004

The newsletter of IndyMedia Cape Town

Making the poor pay in Mosselbay

by Jonathan Mzolisa and Peter van Heusden

The poor of Mosselbay are suffering under two burdens imposed through the pre-paid system. In some townships of this south-coast town, poor families are forced to buy water through a pre-paid water system. This means that if they have no money, they simply cannot get water – not even the little water used to wash their hands or flush a toilet. In addition to this, after the initial 6 kilolitres of free water, water is charged at R 3.42 per kilolitre – a much higher rate than for non-prepaid users. These pre-paid water meters are only used in poor areas, so this means that the poor pay more for water than the rich.

Even in the parts of Mosselbay where they don't use pre-paid water meters, the pre-paid electricity system is used against the poor. If you owe more than R500 to the council, more than half of the money you pay for electricity is taken by the council to pay your debt. This means that if you, for instance, buy R20 electricity, you only get R8 of power – the rest of your money goes to debts and taxes!

In Mosselbay, everyone must pay a flat-fee of R70 for water, even before they use a single drop. They must also pay nearly R50 for rubbish collection. This means even the unemployed must pay R120 a month to the council.

According to a council spokesperson, there is an indigent policy that allows a discount for people earning less than R1000 a month, but this policy is not advertised

and no one knows how to apply for it. The result is that most poor Mosselbay residents are sinking further and further into debt.

Maybe the council in Mosselbay thought it could get away with this pre-paid system because no one pays attention to what happens in

that town.

In Soweto attempts to install pre-paid meters have led to battles in the streets.

Read more about these struggles and the plans to install pre-paid water meters in Cape Town in our next newsletter!



The Cape Town City Council is targetting the owners of this property in Muizenberg for installing an "illegal sign" advertising IndyMedia, but in terms of their own bylaw, non-profit organisations may erect signs without permission from council... so what's the problem?? Is Cape Town City Council against free speech?

Darfur peace talks collapse, UN silent

The collapse of peace talks between the Sudanese government and rebels from the western region of Darfur leaves little hope that the disaster unfolding in that area will stop soon. The United Nations estimates that between 30 and 50 000 people have died since rebellion broke out in February 2003, and more than 1 million people have been displaced to refugee camps both within Darfur and in neighbouring Chad. Continued violence and inadequate aid means that some 49% of those displaced are without food, 67% lack water, 88% lack shelter and 93% lack sanitation. As many as 300 000 might die from famine in the coming months if they do not get access to food aid.

Peace talks between the Sudanese government and rebels from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) broke down after the rebels said they had "strong differences" with the Khartoum regime over issues of security and disarmament that centre on the role of the "Janjaweed" militias.

The Janjaweed are often labelled in the mainstream media as "Arab militias", but labelling the Darfur conflict as "Arabs militias" and "African rebels" is misleading. These ethnic identities have been manipulated over the years, with the Sudanese regime using racist Arabist ideology as a way to inflame tensions in Darfur and direct attention away from the way the Khartoum government has neglected the western region over the decades.

According to the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, which recently organised protests in Johannesburg against the Sudanese government, reports show that the Sudanese government is directly involved in the major humanitarian catastrophe happening in Darfur. The civil war follows a pattern where the Sudanese government practices repression at home and lulls the international community with propaganda. As a result, the genocide in Darfur has only provided weak condemnation from the United Nations, leaving the Sudanese government a free hand to continue its murderous policies.

about indymedia

IndyMedia Cape Town is one of 120 global collectives that form the IndyMedia network. We are a group of volunteers committed to breaking the silence about social justice in Cape Town.

You can send stories to our website: sa.indymedia.org or join the Cape Town collective by attending our bimonthly meetings, held at Bush Radio, Main Road, Salt River. The next meetings are on 17 & 31 October 2004 at 11.30am.

Cape Town IndyMedia can also be contact via phone on: 084 687 5864

Ambulance service... what service?

By Soraya Hendricks

The Cape Town ambulance service has always used unpaid, uninsured volunteers to provide backup when paid ambulance workers are not able to work. But what does the voluntary ambulance service mean to the volunteers who sacrifice their time, energy and family responsibilities for the ambulance service?

Volunteers have accepted that they are not paid and or insured for their work, because they want to provide a community service and receive the free training that the ambulance service used to provide.

Now the free training has also been stopped and volunteers are expected to pay for training, even though most of the volunteers are unemployed and do not have money for training.

The volunteers have also been told that they are not needed anymore, but no proper explanation has been provided for this. The members of the ambulance service told the volunteers this at a meeting, and when

questioned said they would speak to their heads of department and return to the volunteers with answers. This still has not happened.

Since then no volunteers with Level 3 training have been working on the ambulances, and only those with Level 5 training work on the ambulances when needed. However, previously volunteers could put their names down for shifts when they were free to work and when it was convenient, now they are only called at short notice when it suits the ambulance service.

At the same meeting where they told us that they no longer needed volunteers, they asked Level 5 volunteers to work in the Northern Division as they only had four ambulances on the road in that division that night.

At the next regular, once-a-month Wednesday night meeting the volunteers were told that they would be able to work at the trauma unit and receive training for that in August. Volunteers put their names down for that training, but at the September meeting, only the head of the Northern Division came to the meeting to tell the volunteers there would be no meeting.

They knew the volunteers would like to know when the trauma unit training would take place, but it seems they just want to keep our mouths quiet and us to give up and resign ourselves to their decision. But it seems like they have something to hide, since there is already a shortage of public service ambulances in Cape Town and ambulance services are being privatised.

Workers news in brief...

Workers retrenched by the South African Manganese Corporation (Samancor) protested against the inaction of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) at 7th national congress in Midrand on 19 September. Union officials feathers were ruffled, but General Secretary, Silumko Nondwangu, was conciliatory and leaders of the Samancor Retrenched Workers' Crisis Committee (SRWCC) accepted his pledge to address the issues raised. However, no representative from the SRWCC was invited to attend the congress and NUMSA marshals worked with the police to keep the protestors outside the gate. At least 98 Samancor workers have died since their retrenchment.

Contract workers at the University of Cape Town are fighting to force management to adopt a Workers Charter guaranteeing their rights to fair and equitable working conditions in a way that ensures participation by workers. In response to the Workers Charter developed by the UCT Workers Forum, UCT bosses are drafting a Code of Fair Practices. A recent meeting of the university's Institutional Forum has rejected this code and proposed that a task team of students, bosses and the workers themselves investigate the question of a Code of Conduct together. The UCT Workers Forum has vowed to continue mobilising workers to ensure that workers demands are met. - Shereen Essof

The public servants' strike that took off after a deadlock in wage and benefit negotiations between their unions and government was reached, saw between 700-800 000 workers on the streets all over the country, according to newspaper reports. The strike forced government to increase its 6% wage offer to a 6.2% , with an extra 1% for "satisfactory work". Two unions, however, refused to sign the deal, with police union SAPU calling it a "slavery agreement" - Linn Hjort

Last laugh?

By Dave Lewis

In a recent judgement, the Court of Appeals upheld the judgement that beer giant SAB-Miller obtained in the Cape High Court against T-Shirt company Laugh-It-Off. Laugh-It-Off, a small company owned by satirist Justin Nurse, had produced a T-Shirt with the Black Label beer label changed to read "Black Labour, White Guilt". SAB-Miller claimed that this violated their trademark, and the courts agreed.

What makes this judgement almost comical is that the court decided that Laugh-It-Off's T-shirt was detrimental to the value of the trademark, and that it was illegal for Nurse's company to make money out of the "detrimental exploitation" of the trademark. Yet this "detrimental exploitation" is exactly what satire is about – when a well-known image is mocked in order to make a point.

So the courts seem to want to make it impossible for cartoonists to caricature beer labels and then sell their products and services for money. Nearly every newspaper in the country would go out of business if this ruling was applied equally, and the courts have effectively turned social comment and fair use into some form of forbidden activity.

By Anna Lebaka

One of my neighbours, Nomonde, died recently. The ambulance we called for her arrived too late and she was already dead.

Her husband, Themba, first called the ambulance at 5am on Friday morning. When no-one arrived, he came to me and I called again at 5.45am. They promised the ambulance was on its way.

Just before 7am the ambulance had still not arrived, so we asked a local shebeen owner who had a car to take Nomonde to the hospital. He was nervous because she looked very weak, but he eventually agreed to take her in his car. Just as they were leaving Vrygrond, they met the ambulance which was arriving on Prince George's Drive. That was 7am, but Nomonde was already dead.



More than 200 people were turned away from a free screening and discussion of Fahrenheit 9/11 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal after the university gave into pressure from the local distributor, United International Pictures and the South African Federation Against Copyright. The Centre for Civil Society, who were hosting the event, were outraged by the university's last minute cancellation. The screening was meant to reach members of community organisations and social movements organising in Durban's poor communities who would otherwise be unable to see a film that reveals important aspects of the global power structure.