

Letter from South Africa

Xenophobia: A direct result of failed ANC economic policies

1 August 2008

The xenophobic attacks taking place in different parts of South Africa have gripped local and foreign media attention. Graphic details are portrayed in the media of “mobs” attacking immigrants, looting, raping and killing. It appears as if the intensity of the hatred for the immigrant community has caught everyone by complete surprise.

From within the ranks of the South African Communist Party (SACP) comes the criticism that the security services have been caught napping. From all quarters comes the call that we need to understand the source of all this hatred before we can attempt to address it. This contribution is an attempt to provide such an analysis.

Our African working class brothers and sisters have been working in South Africa since the 1980s. Cheap labour was imported to work in the mines. For the last 20 years, economic immigrants have been fleeing war, poverty and the consequences of structural adjustment programmes from various parts of Africa and have been taking refuge in our various townships in South Africa.

The first reported incidents started in the Western and Eastern Cape. Somali traders were forced from their homes and shops. And in certain cases, they were attacked and killed, and nothing was done by the state to address this, except for attempts to get the different parties to work together. The state has blamed criminal elements mostly for the violence. The main gripe was that Somali shopkeepers sell their goods at a cheaper price, thereby undercutting the market.

The scale of the attacks on immigrants in Gauteng has apparently caught everyone by surprise, but is this in fact the case?

The living conditions for the vast majority of the working class and the legions of unemployed that live

in vast shantytowns are appalling, mired in poverty, filth and disease. The Tripartite Alliance (African National Congress, Congress of South African Trade Unions and SACP) has been making promises of changing this reality since the 1994 election. The opposite has happened.

The ANC imposed its own version of a structural adjustment programme, and its effects have been an unmitigated disaster for the working class. The gap between rich and poor in South Africa is known to be amongst the highest in the world.

Due to the deal made between the ANC and the National Party (the governing party under Apartheid), the ANC has not even implemented its own reformist Freedom Charter, which called for the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. Instead, all that is on offer is a negligible amount of free electricity, water and a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) house that is smaller than an iron or wooden shack that people previously lived in.

Instead of its reformist Freedom Charter, it implemented a policy of Black Economic Empowerment. The result was that a handful of black people with links to the ANC became filthy rich. Every state tender is tainted by corrupt deals, where vast amounts of money pass hands to make sure that the tender goes to these very same people.

The betrayal of the ANC does not stop here. The level of corruption in government has reached pandemic proportions. They have spent billions on weapons of war; millions are being stolen from the school feeding schemes in the Eastern Cape, and members of parliament are abusing millions of rand in travel vouchers.

Within the Department of Social Development, we

have state officials who steal grant money meant for the most vulnerable. Within the Department of Home Affairs, state officials extort money from citizens and immigrants. Within the Department of Housing, state officials are renting out RDP homes meant for the poor. Untold millions are rolled over each month because government departments don't spend the money allocated for the provision of basic services.

The corruption and venality has only one goal: To get rich quickly and damn the poor.

During this violent outburst against immigrants, what have our various political leaders been doing? Mr. Ronnie Kassrils (Minister for Intelligence) has blamed a Third Force for planning these attacks. Mr. Thabo Mbeki (President) says we are all Africans and we must get along. Mr. Charles Nquakula (Minister of Safety and Security) blames the violence on criminal elements.

The horrific increases in the price of basic foodstuffs and fuel, interest rate hikes, etc., have placed an unbearable burden on the working class. Its so-called leaders in the Tripartite Alliance have betrayed it for the proverbial 30 pieces of silver.

Conglomerates have been found guilty of colluding in fixing the price of bread and medicines, and all that happens is that that they get a fine. Immediately afterward, the price of bread went up again. Do the maths—a loaf of bread cost 8 rand. For a month, this would come to 240 rand. If you are lucky enough to get a pension of 940 rand, then what the hell do you put on the bread? The fact that we are expected to exist on this amount is the real crime here. It is a violation of our right to a dignified existence! People are angry, and the outpouring of violence is directed at others who are wrongly perceived to be taking away jobs and competing for scarce jobs.

Given the nightmare existence that people face every single day, it was only a matter of time before people would strike back. The difficulty, however, is identifying who is responsible for our nightmare existence. Prior to 1994, it was easy to identify the enemy. The enemy was Apartheid and whoever collaborated with the Apartheid state. But the real enemy then was the capitalist system, and today it is still the capitalist system.

The anger of the working class needs to be directed at the failed economic policies of the ANC and not at

immigrants who are attempting to make a life in South Africa. The Director of Discovery Health last year took home a bonus payment of 35 million rand. This amount excludes his salary and perks. JSE-listed CEOs (Johannesburg Securities Exchange—the largest SA stock exchange) are nothing more than parasites that live off the blood, sweat and toil of the working class. It is time for the working class to do some serious introspection. When are going to stop allowing other class forces to speak and act on our behalf?

Every political party sitting in parliament advances the capitalist system. It is time that the working class acts in its own interest. We need to organise ourselves. We need to have our own independent political organisations. We need to come up with our own alternative to the capitalist system. That alternative is Socialism.

AM



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact