

## *A glimpse inside the injustice system*

The legal system upholds the injustices of a society ruled for the rich. In Sun City we saw every colour, age and size of person, from a tiny baby to an old white woman who looked like a small-town librarian – but no rich people.

The rich grease the bars with money to squeeze through. If you cannot pay a lawyer you may sit for ages. A young man ahead of my bail hearing had been in jail since New Year's eve. He disappeared up the steps to the court, nervously hopeful of being reunited with his girlfriend, only to reappear 10 minutes later, deflated. He was remanded to Sun City again until his next court appearance in June. Before his guilt or innocence was ever tested he would already have served half a year.

The jails are overflowing with the results of unemployment and poverty. The women's section, meant for 500, held 850 before we added 30. For most of the day we were confined to our cell because the lone warder could not supervise hundreds of women. For the same reason there are only two meals a day, breakfast at 10 and lunch at noon.

These conditions do not rehabilitate anyone and never touch the roots of crime. This whole machinery of police and jails ticks over from day to day containing some of the human wreckage caused by a system that will not provide for everyone. That keeps the machine oiled in case it is needed for its other function, to use against any organised challenge to the rule of the rich.

# Masondo, somy Masondo we'll shake you a favourite song in

*When a busload of demonstrators were arrested outside Amos Masondo's house in April, the mayor surely hoped that ten days in the cells would break the growing*

**W**hen 50 of us were transferred to Sun City on Monday 29 April 2002, we were hurtled along the highway with sirens wailing, as if these vans were crammed with public enemy number one. The accused were not thugs, but a cross-section of working class people aged between 16 and 80. They included a nurse, a factory worker, several students and many unemployed. There were slightly more women than men. More than half were of working age though most have no jobs. About one-third were pensioners while several live in shacks.

These ordinary men and women, organised in the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), are an embarrassment to Masondo and his council because our demonstrations remind the world of his broken promises to the working class.

### **What were we doing 'invading Masondo's privacy' at home?**

When Masondo and the council wanted our votes they kissed our babies and shook our hands in the streets and

promised a better life. Strangely, Masondo is nowhere to be seen now when we try to tell him that cut-offs of electricity and water and evictions are not improving our lives. We were trying to deliver the same memorandum for the fourth time to Masondo. Last year – to coincide with human rights day – an attempt was made to present Masondo a memorandum. But to no avail. Instead a group cut his water to show him what it felt like – though we knew his house would be reconnected in hours, unlike ours. This human rights day, Masondo ignored our march again.

During the intervening period, there have been rises in unemployment and prices, which are placing additional burdens on the poor. But those who fall into arrears are coldly cut off. Reconnection fees eat up 90% of a state pension. Debt repayment arrangements seemed to put a human face on things for a while, but usually end with another cut-off because they do not solve the poverty at the root of non-payment.

Eskom and the council believe this strategy will improve cost recovery. But a better bottom line for Eskom's future

# agazisa malele

while you sleep –  
our cell

*resistance to cut-offs. Claire Seruti gives a personal account of what transpired and the origins of the demonstrations.*



shareholders produces much unnecessary human discomfort. In houses where electricity has been cut, nearly half the children suffer from breathing problems, according to a Municipal Services Project Survey.

We now call Masondo the mayor of Sandton, because it seems he represents only the rich. We went to his house to cut off his water and to fire him from his job because he failed to deliver what his party promised. This was not a criminal act: we were standing up for our rights. Electricity, water and a place to stay are basic human rights and should be free.

Officials who now base themselves on the power of big business must remember the power that brought apartheid to its knees. What really frightens Masondo and his class is that we are not the only ones angered by government unaccountability. The APF hears more and more reports of outbursts against lack of delivery from places like Durban, Ermelo, Ikageng and Itsoeng. These outbursts are by landless people, evicted people, people whose services have been cut, retrenched workers and

even disgruntled soldiers.

Masondo and the government set themselves on a collision course with this layer of society when they chose to govern capitalism. Our needs, the needs of the majority, cannot be met by a system that says we must buy a better life but retrenches millions.

Our movement is still a minority but it can grow. When people burned their ANC cards outside court they were only giving a voice to ANC members' mute mass desertion. Masondo sat silent for five hours during a Cosatu Mayday rally where APF members were present because he could not be sure that workers would support him in a confrontation.

In this situation Masondo's class fears any organised call for delivery or accountability. Therefore we start to get scenes in the new South Africa that remind us of the old: mass arrests in Kensington and Ermelo and constant police harassment of community organisations in the Northwest.

But repression does not automatically win. Our arrest built support instead of squashing the movement's spirit. It thrust into the

public eye a sentiment that more and more people are feeling – that government has failed us. And it said something could be done about it: we can begin to take our future into our own hands if we organise ourselves from the ground.

The APF and the SECC have grown into a mini-mass movement. If the SECC was about a self-interested person misleading pensioners, as some claim, then why did the protestors delay the arrest for hours arguing that police had to arrest all or none? Who organised the impressive defence campaign while the SECC organiser and many of its leading activists were in jail?

The arrests show this is a new movement, not a cult. Its strength is that it has built the confidence and activity of working class people such as those arrested. It has sprung up in response to the unfinished business of the old movement: eradicating poverty. **LB**

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