

# Tik, merts and gangs

## Declaration of war!

The use of the drug tik is growing amongst young people across Western Cape poor communities. But as **Tony Ehrenreich** points out they are simply victims of ruthless gangs and salesmen whose only interest is profit. He calls for a united front against a scourge that is seriously destroying communities.

**O**n Wednesday 29 July the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) convened an anti-drug bosberaad in the Cape Town City Hall to consider the development of detailed plans to confront drug abuse. The meeting was attended by 67 organisations from across the Western Cape including community organisations, police, government and social services.

To ensure good participation Cosatu organised for free trains on the day to transport people to the event.

The meeting resolved to work together to develop an approach to tackling drug abuse. It also agreed to give government an opportunity to develop a draft strategy, and then to engage further to produce a coherent plan. At present it is a campaign that includes building street committees, but it will be greatly enhanced when all participants that attended the meeting begin to collaborate.

### TIK DESTROYS COMMUNITIES

The scourge of tik is a reality of the

lives of so many of our people – you either have a problem yourself or you have a family member who wreaks havoc in your life because of addiction. We hear from every community that they are terrorised by the problems that flow from drug abuse and addiction.

We need to come together to solve the problem, as it is only our collective effort that will address it. We need to solve this problem ourselves. Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the change that we seek.

We need to reach down deep into ourselves and find a new way of dealing with our problems, a way that promotes cooperation within the society and forces a new sense of urgency. Everyday delayed is paid for with another child's life.

In the majority of crimes that happen within families or in communities people know the perpetrators as people crazed with drugs. We must unite to stop the criminals, but also stop the drug sales and sense of powerlessness in many sections of our communities.

We need a war plan that specifies the role of everyone in this campaign, from the auntie on the corner to the police officer and the minister. We have to provide leadership that brings committed people together and this includes Pagad (People Against Gansterism and Drugs). All the political parties must come together to develop a programme that is not just empty political promises.

To our children, we say “see the damage that drugs are doing, don't experiment with it. *Stay away from it.*” To the parents, “hold your kids to account. You are not their friends. If they don't take your guidance kick them out of the house for a few days, under your roof is under your rules.”

To the *merts* (drug seller belonging to a gang), “stop this shit, or know that we are going to kick you out of communities and put you in jail. We are going to hold you to account for poisoning our children, you are going to pay. Julle gaan kak!”

### DECLARING WAR ON DRUG GANGS

A newly developed plan will ensure that we support each other as communities and bring together all levels of government and police when we plan an action on *merts* and tik houses that refuse to close down and stop selling this poison. We will take the slogan of ‘an injury to one is an injury to all’ into our battle. One tik lolly is one tik lolly too many.

This is the age of working families and we have many challenges to overcome, like getting all our children into decent schools, defending the jobs we have and creating more employment

opportunities. We have to improve health care and housing and public transport, we can't be distracted by *merts* trying to tear apart the fabric of our society.

The gang-members who are the main salesmen of this poison have declared war against our people and the bodies of casualties are strewn amongst us. The first casualties were the many lives destroyed by drugs and the fabric of our communities torn apart by gangs.

As our communities try to defend themselves, the gangs behave much like the apartheid state did, by killing the champions of our people.

The Mitchell's Plain Street Committee chairperson, Mervyn Jacobs, was one of these champions. He was that rare breed of person who risked danger in the interest of building a better world. We salute him as a hero of a struggle to build an environment where kids can flourish and be at their best. To his family we say, thank you for sharing him with the community.

His funeral brought together hundreds of people across Mitchells

Plain and surrounding communities, showing solidarity. People also came to pick up the spear that Mervyn had laid down and to commit themselves to continue the fight against drugs and its sponsors. This is a war with battles being fought in the streets and in homes. We must stand on the side of justice, of innocent people against the brutality of drug salesmen and gangs who peddle this poison.

That people can be killed with impunity by gangsters is a sign that if we are not careful we will lose the fight. The boldness of the murders are designed to scare and break down feelings of hope for a community without gangs and drugs. It is a war fought at one level with guns and violence and at another with the intent to psychologically breakdown resistance to criminal conduct.

There are many great initiatives taking place to help communities, including the police action in Mitchell's Plain. But we are not doing well enough yet, because people are still vulnerable. We have

to find a way to unite all agencies and community organisations to confront this enemy, together. We cannot be everywhere all the time, we have to coordinate our efforts better.

All good people must come together and tell politicians to set aside their political differences in the interest of our people. The police capability of national, provincial and local governments must unite and cooperate. The army must be deployed in this war and we must meet gun fire with superior fire power.

The communities and their organisations have a role to play, both in providing intelligence, but also in supporting each other through solidarity action across communities. This war will only be won if the fight is non partisan where party political differences are set aside and people put first. We can do it, if we do it together as working families. LB

*Tony Ebreneich is Cosatu's Western Cape regional secretary.*

## Tik, tik, tik - substance abuse increases at an alarming rate

The alarming rate at which substance abuse, and specifically the use of Methamphetamine (Tik), is growing in South Africa is of major concern, but even more so is the fact that the users are becoming younger and younger...

Tik banishes all insecurities in the subconscious. It provides adolescents, including those immersed in a profound poverty subculture, with what they don't have: power, feeling on top of the world, confidence and heightened sensation-levels.

Says Prof Denise White, Chairperson of the South African Medical Association: "We as health professionals are very concerned about the rapid addiction-rate associated with this drug, and the devastating effects it has on the user. Tik amongst other effects, induces psychotic symptoms such as delusions

and hallucinations, and often causes the user to be extremely violent. Physical symptoms of Tik abuse include insomnia, restlessness, irritability, tremors, rapid respiration, pulmonary edema, pulmonary hypertension and decreased lung capacity to name but a few."

People who use Tik over a longer period will also display other physical effects, e.g severe dermatological problems, higher risk of seizures and severe weight loss.

"It is our duty to empower our children with the opportunities to make the right choices, by raising awareness and spreading information about Tik and its devastation effects.

With the majority of Tik users from poorer communities, we call on the government to ensure that all public

hospitals establish methamphetamine treatment protocols, and have specialised care facilities available," says Prof White.

Look out for these warning signs in children:

- aggression
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- dilated pupils
- rapid speech
- anxiety
- psychotic symptoms, eg. hallucinations and delusions
- insomnia
- over-confidence
- headaches
- drug paraphernalia: light bulbs and glass straws

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