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FREE ISSUE

SOUTH AFRICA -

STARVING FOR JUSTICE



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STARVING FOR JUSTICE

Political detainees throughout the country are currently on a hunger strike. They are refusing all food. This the first time that this kind of protest action has been used in South Africa on a nation wide scale. Why are people prepared to starve themselves to death ?

Approximately 73 000 people (a conservative estimate) have been detained without trial since 1960. During the last 25 years there have been 67 deaths in detention, which means that almost 3 people have died in detention each year! How is it that such a situation has been able to develop unchecked?

The "security" regulations began with a shocking 90 and later 180 day detention without trial period. Considered drastic at the time, this legislation was merely a forerunner of the current laws which allows for arbitrary and indefinite detention. Now the government has seen to it that it is legally possible (and an everyday reality) for a detainee to be jailed for years and never be charged. Mkhuseh Jack, Port Elizabeth Youth Congress president and Eastern Cape U.D.F. leader, is in his 13th period of detention, which began some 3 years ago. Altogether he has spent four and a half years in detention without ever being convicted of an offence. In fact, only 2% to 4% of detainees are ever convicted. Even worse, detainees have "disappeared" while in detention.

Under section 3.1 of the emergency regulations a person can be detained in solitary confinement if it is thought (not legally proved) they are politically "subversive". Even if it is thought that the person knew of or was acquainted with other people's so-called subversive activities they may be held in solitary confinement without access to legal representation.

Unlike apartheid, detention without trial does not discriminate: black and white South Africans of all ages, women, men and children as young as 10 years old whose only crime has been to speak out against political injustices have been detained without trial.

The complete legal and political vulnerability of detainees has forced them to take drastic action. On the 23rd January detainees started a hunger strike at Diepkloof Prison in order to force the law

and order Minister Adriaan Vlok to confront their continuing predicament. By 12th February 300 detainees from other prisons had joined the Diepkloof detainees in their hunger strike. As a result of this action international and local pressure forced Vlok to make himself accountable: on 16 February he agreed to release or charge a "substantial" number of detainees before 2nd March. Yet little has changed - although some detainees were released many were served with harsh restriction orders and some have been re-detained. As well as this, some 50 new detainees have added their numbers to the staggering 600 still in detention.

The hunger strike continues as does the campaign demanding the release of all detainees. On 8th March in Cape Town central 27 people held a placard demonstration demanding the release of detainees; all of the demonstrators were arrested. On 12th March, National Detainees Day church services were held in Langa, Grassy Park and Gardens as well as in churches throughout the rest of the country. Events like these have a dual function; both conscientising people who are unaware of the detention crisis as well as being an indictment of the unjust system of detention without trial.

IF YOU WANT TO EXPRESS YOUR SOLIDARITY WITH THE DETAINEES AND THEIR FAMILIES THERE ARE SOME LEGAL PROTEST ACTIONS YOU COULD GET INVOLVED WITH:

- Pin a red ribbon to your clothes as a show of solidarity.
- Light a candle in your home between 7 and 8 pm each evening.
- Participate in one of the solidarity fasts being held (or organize your own).
- Attend services and report-back meetings; watch press for details.



CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

ROBBERS FOR RULERS!

The Nationalist Government is too expensive! Each day our money buys us less. We are the victims of runaway inflation, rising interest rates and sanctions. Millions of South Africans are saying "NO!" to the Government's mismanagement, but it will not listen. How do we prevent them bankrupting our country and leading us further down the hill to a Third World economy? Are we going to stand silent as foreigners continue to enjoy South Africa's sunshine and buy South Africa's property at giveaway prices, while our own money becomes more worthless by the day? Fraud and corruption in government continue to surface and yet the crooks seem to get rewarded with golden handshakes.

STOLEN RIGHTS!

Why do we have to travel to Harare and Gaborone to see Bruce Springsteen and UB 40? Why does Zola Budd have to renounce her South African citizenship in order to compete internationally? Why do we have to pay outrageous sums of taxpayers' money to import rebel sportspeople? Not only can we not compete in the Olympic games, but we can't even watch them on our TV screens. Do we deserve to have our right to participate as a respected nation stolen from us, as a result of the Government's policies? Why should we suffer international disgrace? Only because the Government denies the most basic human and democratic rights to the vast majority of South Africans.

The Government tries to convince us that everything's fine and the international community causes the crisis by meddling in our affairs. How can we believe them when we know that all media

(TV, press and magazines) are controlled by the Government's restrictions under the State of Emergency? Anything critical of the Government's policies is labelled "media terrorism" and silenced. How can the Government steal our right to know what is really happening in our country?

WHO ARE THE REAL CRIMINALS?

What is justice in South Africa when Oom Piet can beat his worker to death and get a suspended sentence of one year, while David Bruce and other conscientious objectors suffer sentences of six years for refusing to defend Apartheid? How can one jail a conscientious objector who rejects all violence with murderers and rapists? How can the leadership of the UDF be imprisoned indefinitely for organizing a peaceful protest, while Eugene Terreblanche walks free despite leading armed marches to the Union Buildings in Pretoria and burying arms caches on his farms? This all shows that the Government cracks down harder on progressive political opposition than on racist movements or real crime. And what justice is it if hundreds of people are imprisoned as criminals without ever being charged?

WHAT CAN I DO?

It's about time you did something! But what can you do? The way forward is to join the mass democratic movement! Gardens Youth is part of the mass democratic movement and is concerned with confronting these questions and combating these problems -- making a positive, constructive and lawful contribution towards a democratic future for South Africa. Read our insert.



JOHNNY, TOO BAD.

Johnny was a year younger than the other boys in his class. He had to register for the SADF with his Guidance Teacher. The form said:

1. Are you a South African citizen? Yes/No
2. If no, do you intend to become a South African citizen? Yes/No
3. If you do NOT intend to become a South African citizen, your parent or guardian must countersign below.

Johnny had a foreign passport, but the 'guidance teacher' said,

"One day you might want to become a South African citizen, so it's better to leave that possibility open and just put 'Yes' for Question No. 2. It won't make any difference and then we won't have to worry about you having to take it home to sign."

And Johnny was conscripted, although the other boys with foreign passports didn't have to go. They said 'no' for Question No. 2. Johnny tried to change his mind about Question No. 2, but he and his parents soon discovered that this is the only legal decision a 16 year old in South Africa can make without parental guidance. No 16 year old can legally even have an intention to commit any act whatever and cannot be held responsible for any acts they do commit -- except for Question No. 2. And even after becoming a legally capable and responsible adult, Johnny couldn't change the stated intention he had declared as a child in Question No. 2.

Johnny went to university and like many other young men he studied and studied and studied. The more he studied and the more he thought, the less he considered going to the SADF. Especially when he thought how he'd been trapped by a 'guidance teacher' who loved demonstrating guns and supervising cadets. Then new legislation was passed which meant that holders of foreign passports who had been in the country for more than five years were conscripted -- so even without the 'guidance teacher' he would have faced conscription. Finally, when he could study no further, like so many other highly-educated young men in South Africa, he decided to go to Amsterdam and claim the asylum offered to objectors.

Johnny arrived in Amsterdam two days after the refugee laws changed, in November 1987. Although the Dutch were the major protagonists of the United Nations' ruling requesting member nations to accept South African objectors as refugees, Johnny discovered that in practice the situation was very different.

The first step was to surrender himself to the police. Here, for the first time, Johnny gained an inkling into the vast, Orwellian bureaucracy that is the Dutch system. After much shoving around and many hours waiting, he was ushered into a special room with a small group of hopefuls. Here he had to write a brief essay on his reasons for requesting asylum and submit to fingerprinting and mugshots. Watching the other applicants being interviewed while he waited his turn, Johnny saw the hostility with which they were greeted and the humiliating accusations that were thrust at them. Uncomfortably, he felt a little at home.

When his turn came, he discovered that being South African was often advantageous, because in bureaucratic structures these colonists were still somehow regarded as Dutch. After

being interviewed in Dutch -- an aggressive tactic on the part of the policeman who insisted that South Africans still spoke Dutch, despite Johnny's protestations -- he surrendered his passport and airline ticket and was despatched to the Department of Social Services.

Now, like many South Africans on this side, Johnny had heard that he would receive 1 000 guilders a month (standard Dutch social security, approximately R1 000) while he waited about a year for his status to be decided. This was true until the change -- the allowance had been slashed in half. After waiting a day at Social Services (refugees never queue in bureaucratic departments, they are automatically dealt with last), he was handed a train ticket and told to report to a distant refugee camp within one day. Completely taken aback, Johnny explained that he had found a room in Amsterdam. This was a rare luck in what is possibly the most overcrowded European city. He was told that refugees were no longer allowed to live in major centres.

Feeling oppressed by something akin to a Group Areas Act, Johnny began legal proceedings to claim his right to live in a city where he at least had some basic securities such as his own room and a few friends. But he discovered that under the new regulations refugees would be confined to a refugee camp in a remote area and would receive only the reduced allowance although they had no other support structures. Nor could they work until their status had been finalised. After an undefined period of some months, they would then be removed to a small town of the Government's choice while they waited the year or two to receive their refugee status -- this being temporary residence which must be renewed annually. After the year or two of waiting, refugee status would be granted and the refugee then has his South African passport returned to him and

is allowed to leave Holland and travel wherever his South African passport can take him except South Africa. To make things even harder, the Government was employing the tactic of refusing applicants and then granting them leave to appeal -- thus appearing to stick to their principle of 'accepting' refugees while in fact hoping that by delays and the feeling of being ostracized by the small-minded communities in the small towns where refugees awaited the outcome of their applications, refugees would eventually become discouraged.

Johnny realized that he faced a difficult, frustrating and isolated existence in an unfamiliar and downright hostile environment unless his legal bid to live in Amsterdam succeeded. When his bid failed, he consulted with many exiled South Africans he had met. One thing they all had in common, he discovered, was a bitter yearning to return home. They suggested he return while he still could. After much soul searching and the thought of the SADF hanging over his head, he found himself aboard SAA wondering what he was going to do. He had a bad back and thought he might try to get out of the SADF on that basis. If that failed, he supposed he would just have to go to 'the army'...

JOHNNY'S STORY CONTINUES IN THE FOLLOWING NEWSLETTER.