

Loadshedding Results in Loss of Life in Palm Ridge

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South Africa is currently experiencing the effects of heavy loadshedding in the middle of winter. Electricity is a basic need in this day and age as we have needs that require the use of electricity for things like charging your phone, cooking, lighting the household and keeping warm during this extremely cold weather, which is made worse by climate change.

When there is no electricity, we are pushed to make alternative plans to keep our lives going. People are forced to make do with what they have, resort to the old ways of doing things or create new ways to survive. Unfortunately for a family of 5 this ended in tragedy.

On the morning of 16 June 2022, the community of Palm Ridge (in Katlehong, on the East Rand of Gauteng) woke up to the news that one of its leaders had passed away with her two children and that one child had been admitted to the local hospital for severe smoke inhalation. It became apparent to the community that the previous night, the family was left with no power because of an issue with the power supply from the transformer on the street light. So, to keep warm, the family got a steel container to burn wood while sitting outside. At bedtime they decided to put the container inside the house to keep warm during the night while they were asleep. The night of the 15th was bitterly cold, so it's believed the mother did this to try to make sure her children were warm, and didn't get cold or fall sick.

The oldest child was lucky to have slept out at a friend's place on that particular night but what awaited him at home when he returned was nothing he expected. Two of his siblings and mother were laying lifeless in the house and another sibling was unconscious and barely hanging on by a thread. It is believed that they suffocated from smoke inhalation while asleep as they had no bruises or signs of poisoning. They looked like people who were fast asleep.

Since then, nothing has been done to assist the community, and loadshedding has gotten worse for the community of Palm Ridge even as we are in the coldest month of winter.

This is but one of the examples of how Eskom's loadshedding has affected our communities, resulting in loss of life. There are many other instances where people have lost lives, end up in hospital or suffered one way or another due to loadshedding.

While some areas in well-off areas and suburbs only get loadshed for 2-4 hours a day, many township and rural areas are being loadshed for more than 10 hours a day. In some areas there is not even a proper schedule – the power cuts happen the whole day or even two days and the authorities continue to make excuses as to why the electricity cut is taking longer than expected.

Many communities have lost hope because even though these issues are reported, it either takes long for the matter to get resolved or they have to fight and make endless calls to the municipality. Most times the municipality gives reference numbers and makes empty promises of providing the community with the opportunity of engaging with the ward councillor, which never happens.

Our communities are still not given much information about loadshedding and why it's happening. Our government has clearly showed us that they don't care about the lives of the working class and that we are but just a means for them to make more money.

Awareness needs to be raised among the working class about capitalism and the effect it has on them, like how the neoliberal policies of our government aims to privatise our resources like water, transport and electricity so that more profits can be made. Once they get a better understanding, they can be well equipped to fight for themselves because if this is not done the capitalist ruling class will continue to exploit the working class and privatise our resources till everything in the country is owned by capitalists.

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