

## **With the easing of the lockdown the ANC government is gambling with lives!**

By John Appolis

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The South African state imposed a brutal lockdown without putting in place any effective social security and food protection for the masses. Obviously in this context the masses were going to starve and resist this starvation, and have resisted. Using the genuine frustration and anger of the masses as a pretext we now see the state easing the lockdown in order to hide its incompetency and complete submission to market forces.

With this brutality of deliberate starving of the masses, the state is pushing people to go back to the exploitative, low-paying and oppressive factories. Understandably some of section of workers are sighing a relief and are wanting to go back to work. In the absence of any income, with no real support from the state, with massive poverty and hunger everywhere workers are opting for the lesser of the two evils. It is either back to work or starvation!!

However the ANC government is gambling with people's lives!!

We must ask President Ramaphosa what happened to the science of the pandemic. The state is throwing away the science in order to protect the fabulous wealth of capital. On the day when the country registered the highest number of daily infections (318), Ramaphosa announces the easing of the lockdown.

This begs the question, what happened to Professor Karim's presentation. Page 24 of his presentation states that the lockdown in its present form must continue if the average daily cases from 10-16 April is 90 plus. The lockdown, according to the professor, can be eased if the average daily cases are 45-89.

*Where does the average daily cases stand at 23 April?*

The average daily infection cases for the week of 10-16 April is 96 and that of the week of 17-23 April is 193. Both daily averages are above the professor's scientific calculation. More striking is that the average daily cases of the week of 17-23 April is double that of the previous week!

Yet President Ramaphosa pronounced the easing of the lockdown as from 1 May. This begs the question: Were the scientific calculations and advice of Professor Karim wrong?

Citizens deserve an answer. But I am afraid we will wait in vain for an answer. About two weeks ago one medical expert said that by the end of April 2020 the country must at least have tested 1% of the population, taking the example from South Korea. 1% is approximately 600 000 people. At the time the medical expert made this calculation, 17 000 to 20 000 tests per day were required to reach this target of 1%. Currently the average daily tests for the week of 17-23 April is 6931, way behind the medical expert's calculation. The ANC government finally jettisoned the pretense of any scientific approach to the combating of COVID-19.

This conduct on the ANC government is not surprising. Oupa Lehulere in his two articles dealt at length with the state's servility to market forces in dealing with the pandemic. What has always guided and informed the state's response to the pandemic is the protection of the interests of capital. When sections of capital pressurised the state to allow them to open for business,

unsurprisingly the state succumbed. The first concession was given to the wine growers and exporters, but due to exposure and pressure this was reversed. Then it was the turn of the mining industry and the state relented and allowed 50% of mining operations to open. Huge numbers of workers are concentrated in mines. The Benchmarks Foundation at length demonstrated the potential health implications of mines opening even at 50% operation.

It is not that the South African state is not fully conscious of the social, economic and human costs of this pandemic. It knows that the country is only at the beginning stage of the pandemic and that thousands of people are potentially going to be exposed and infected, and many are still going to die. Only a massive health, social and economic intervention can defeat the virus and prevent thousands from perishing. But the state is extremely reluctant to marshal the resources and wealth that do exist but in the hands of capital (i.e. the private sector). Even some doctors are calling for the integration of the private health and public health sector, meaning that the state must commandeer the private health sector in the interest of the public effort to fight the virus. But this is not heeded.

But some will say but did Ramaphosa not announced a R500 billion economic stimulus to tackle the health, social and economic impact of the virus? After the hype around this so-called stimulus has now calm down, it emerged that this is no real stimulus. In terms of bourgeois economic theory, a stimulus is where the state pumps in billions/trillions of Rands of new money into the economy. Most of the R500 billion are not new money but rather will come from existing allocated monies – R130 billion will come from the reprioritisation of the 2020 Budget, meaning certain areas are going to be cut; R100 billion from the UIF; R200 billion are in the form of loan guarantees (which is not a stimulus measure) and of which the banks are going to be the main beneficiaries.

What the R200 billion entails, which constitutes the biggest share (40%) of the 'stimulus', is that the South Africa state is going to be the principal guarantor for loans to companies made by the banks. If companies fail to pay back the loans to the banks, then the South African state will carry the costs. R20 billion is allocated to the health provisions but this comes on the back of consistent cuts in the health budget and the cutting of the public sector wages. Yes, the improvements in social security may bring some relief but in the context of the massive overall decline of income and jobs, poverty and starvation is going to escalate. The R350 per month for the unemployed amounts to R12 per day, barely enough to buy one loaf of bread per day. The 'stimulus', as some commentators have said, is but "smoke and mirrors". The real beneficiaries of this so-called 'stimulus' is capital and more specifically the bankers, with the masses getting the crumbs.

What is becoming clear is that the ANC government is using the genuine concerns of people of starvation to run away from its responsibility of providing an effective social and economic plan. No one needs to tell us that the social and human consequences of easing the lockdown at a time when the country is experiencing the highest average daily cases are going to be catastrophic. Exposure to the virus and infections are going to sky-rocket. And who is going to be blamed? The masses!! The state and its surrogates are going to turn around and blame the masses for the aggravation of the pandemic. They are going to blame the lack of social distancing and other unavoidable social frustrations, anger and resistance as the cause for the worsening of the pandemic.

This explains the deployment of 73 000 additional soldiers. The army is not on a humanitarian mission. How can they be on a humanitarian mission when the frontline workers, the nurses, doctors and community healthcare workers are complaining of inadequate PPE. What then will the soldiers bring to the townships? Taking our cue from the results of their deployment thus far we know that

their mission is one of controlling the masses, and if necessary, suppressing them.

How should we then respond?

In order to respond effectively we need to ask ourselves: why is it possible for the ANC government to first impose a brutal lockdown causing massive hunger and frustrations? Why is it possible for the ANC government to now without any resistance ease the lockdown and gamble with the lives of people? These actions of the ANC government – the brutal lockdown, the effective support for capital, the ineffectual protection of the masses, the easing of the lockdown – are choices that are deliberately made.

We know that the government is completely embedded in capitalism and is deeply committed to further capitalist interests. But between its capitalist essence and implementation of capitalist policies the South African state has to reckon with the reality of class struggle. And the class struggle is about balance of power. Presently the balance of power is in favour of capital. As a result of this favourable balance of power the ANC government is able to make choices in support of capital without hindrance or resistance.

We have not overcome our political, ideological and organisational weaknesses. We entered the pandemic fragmented and organisationally weak. It is this lack of political and organisational strength that allows the state to realise its capitalist essence without real opposition. It is only when the working class is organised, united, and acts as an ideologically compact army that the state can be shifted and inroads made into capitalist interests. Without this political and organisational power, we are reduced to mere individuals, mere victims, dependent on charity and philanthropy for survival.

To turn the situation in our favour we must organise in the communities, set up local neighbourhood assemblies through which we can take control over the provision and distribution of food and other basic necessities. It is through these assemblies that we can impose our agenda on the state and prevent corruption and patronage.

Only through organisation can we stop starvation, poverty and advance!!

*This Features and Analysis article was written on 26 April 2020 by John Appolis, who is the General Secretary of the General Industries Workers of South Africa.*

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