

Zambia: Street Vendors Clash with Police Again - Rioting is the Language of the Voiceless!!!

By Mainda Simataa | ELA General Secretary Comment in Solidarity with Displaced and Protesting Street Vendors | 16 January, 2018 | Lusaka Zambia | Those Who Condemn Rioters but Fail to Condemn those who Cause pre-conditions for Riots - namely Poverty, are nothing but Hypocrites!

Another Round of Protests!

Lusaka's Central Business District (CBD) was again the scene of chaos and pandemonium as thousands of displaced, frustrated and forgotten street vendors fought running battles with Police. Barely 48 hours have elapsed since the misruling PF (Patriotic Front) governments mindless crack-down on street vendors under the pretext of fighting a mild and seasonal outbreak of Cholera gave rise to the first fiery riot in recent times. This crack-down backfired and broke out into outright violent protests in Kanyama compound (a heavily populated slum settlement just a stone throwaway from the CBD) which left several injured, and several properties looted and damaged!

Yesterday, 15th January, the smell of teargas and blaring police sirens engulfed and characterized the entire CBD when displaced and suffering street vendors whose patience has worn thin with the misgovernance of the PF, decided to mount a daring march on State House, the official seat and homestead of the embattled, unwanted and increasingly isolated and despotic Zambian President, Edgar Lungu. But of course, they did not get far before Lungu's oppressive state apparatus kicked-into swift action in the form of the militarized Zambia Police (ZP) which encircled the protesters, and brutally dispersed them with teargas, water-canons and rubber-truncheons!

Stifling the Voice of the Oppressed - Why the Protests?

And what was the crime of the protesters; and what was the aim of their intended protest walk to state house? The only crime and cry of the thousands of protesters is that their cries have gone unheard and unheeded! They are a leaderless, poor and powerless lot - victims of a politically and economically dysfunctional regime that cares only for a few people at the top of society, and forgets about the millions of poor at the bottom; people who because of the insane levels of unemployment, inequality and poverty in Zambia, have no choice but to resort to unconventional and dehumanizing means of survival to earn their daily family bread - by street vending, or whatever means necessary!

The oppressed vendors; majority of whom are women - widows and single mothers, intended to march on state house not to overthrow the President or challenge his stolen authority, but to throw themselves at his feet, at his mercy, to beg him to give them an alternative proper place for trade. They were going to ask him not for jobs - which don't exist anyway, but for an audience to hear their cries - cries of where their next meal will come from, concerns about money for rent and school fees for their children who have just passed, and concerns about the dire effects of the ongoing trade embargo against their class.

This was a peaceful crowd of oppressed vendors with a legitimate cause, a moral cause. It was a peaceful procession of an agitated, but nonetheless peaceful crowd willing to cooperate and negotiate with a totalitarian state; just so they could afford bread and water for their families by being allocated some trading space and peace. But as they would soon learn, their pretentious humble leader, just like all dictators from time immemorial, have no heart and certainly no ears to listen to the plight of the poor! The Lungu PF regime has shown itself to be in a self-destructing mode, where all that matters for them is to please its foreign investors, the Chinese, Saudi's, Israeli's etc. and to promote its own business interests at the expense of the vast poor majority of Zambians, many of whom voted them into power; poor people who make their living from odd jobs and odd businesses on the streets and in the congested compounds!

A Tyrannical Regime focused on Eradicating Cholera instead of Poverty

The Lungu regime, as everybody blessed with common sense and a healthy brain would know, is a regime that has come to lie, destroy and to kill. And while they economically massacre the masses while they engage in double-tongued rhetoric about being a pro-poor government, their actions are purely draconian and pro-rich. The PF regime will, and has used every pretext to push people off the poverty line and into the abyss of abject poverty! In this case Cholera has been used by the PF to reverse its free street vending policy, a policy reversal which clears the way for high-end stores and shopping malls to take the business and space for vendors! But this has created an inevitable social blow-back; the people are protesting now, the masses are getting more agitated and bolder every day, and so far, two riots have broken out, and more cannot be ruled out as long as the conditions which cause people to riot, namely poverty and injustice, continue to exist!

Betrayal of the Masses by the Stupid and Arrogant Middle Class

It seems that every dictator, no matter how brutal, always has his loyal allies and lap-dogs. In Zambia, Lungu's misplaced anti-cholera rhetoric is supported and buttressed by some superfluous and stupid comments emanating from sections of the petty-bourgeoisie middle class. These miseducated folks, these financial leeches and economic parasites of the lower classes who because they live well and eat well, have a guaranteed job and income at the end of every month, and do not live in the ghettos and slum conditions where the majority of Zambians live; have branded their dictator's war on Cholera as progressive! What, a war that has devastated the economic lives of the majority poor who produce their food, carry away their trash, and clean their office and home toilets so that they can stay happy and disease-free is progressive? The treachery of the middle-class in Zambia on the poor has reached unforgivable levels, and those who support an evil and corrupt regime must, and will go down with the corrupt regime. The nation has been divided in two Zambias: one for the minority haves, and the other for the majority have-nots. It is up to the have-nots to assert the force of numbers and fight to overthrow and punish an arrogant minority!

So long as Poverty is ignored, Riots will Spring up Everywhere!

Much of the criticism on and against the poor vendors' negative attitude, and sometimes violent resistance towards authorities is but a reflection and reaction to the oppressive nature of a regime that does not care, but only for itself and its upper and middle-class. Undue and misinformed criticism has come from the rank and file of well-to-do people who have never gone a day hungry in their lives, or have forgotten what it's like to go hungry. These are people who do not

know what its like to be brilliant but denied an education opportunity for progress in life on the grounds that one has no money; these are people who have never felt the agony of a mother who's child is denied treatment on grounds that she's poor; these are people who do not know the indignity of living in a slum next to an open stinking pit latrine; these are people who do not know the humiliation of an entire family that squats in a single room without a window and with a leaking roof! They do not know the poverty of a family were mothers are either street vendors or servant-slaves and dishwashers for wealthy foreigners and an arrogant black middle class. Where fathers are bootless security guards, street hustlers, or slave workmen and gate-men for Chinese, Indians and Lebanese in a Land which our fathers are supposed to have concurred and won freedom for, 53 years ago!

The Struggle Continues!

But alas, our collective plight has worsened! The former British colonizer has returned through the backdoor, with his many foreign relatives and exploiting partners; they have come through the window, and they have made spineless corrupt servants out of our leaders; and made slaves out of the innocent, beguiled, belabored, and ultimately betrayed masses! Our freedom is nothing but the freedom to hunger, the freedom to be without land and without jobs, without decent means of survival. Only another politically and economically liberating revolution can save us from utter domination, humiliation, and the inevitable extinction of our race and black nation if we remain unconcerned, silent and indifferent!

The Struggle must continue at all costs!

*Forward with the Zambian and Socialist Revolution!

*For a Land free of Capitalist Dictators and Foreign Puppets!

*For a Land under the Control of its own People!

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