date with her payments. But she had to give up many essentials. She expects she will soon fall behind as people do not have money to pay for the washing of clothes anymore.

There were others whose lives were so decrepit that there was no longer any fighting back. Ms. Happiness Shinga, also from Unit 3, had her water and lights cut off and faced eviction. She and her husband had moved from the shacklands of Umlazi to start a new life. She was raped near the Higginson Highway and was subsequently found to be HIV positive. Her husband committed suicide when she told him. She survives on handouts from the neighbors and the local church. When I met her she was lying in bed waiting to die. Her electricity had been cut and she was facing eviction. Her young children hovered in the background. The oldest, Faith, just 11, wrapped herself around a plastic shower curtain that served as a door. She faced demons of her own. She too, by a separate rape, was HIV positive. Council officials were adamant that Ms. Shinga could only stay if she paid her rent regularly and undertook to pay the outstanding amount.

Ms. Shinga’s case was dealt with in the same way as Ms. Neelawa Singh’s in 1978. Ms. Singh and her three children (one of them a nine-month-old baby) were evicted from their Road 1021 flat. She had been retrenched from her job two months earlier and her husband had not paid maintenance for ten months. She had to sleep on the stairs of the block of flats while her furniture lay on the roadside. A council spokesperson said they had stayed the eviction for a month. However, they could not stay this indefinitely. “Eviction is our last step, we do not like doing it, it is only our last resort. We are prepared to accept about R50 from Ms. Singh now, and we will let her back into the flat, on condition she pays back the outstanding amount regularly every month” (Post, September 13, 1978). Twenty years on, despite this “miracle” of democracy, one cannot but help matching these platitudes with those of Mr. Yunus Sacoor, the manager of Metro Council’s Formal Housing Division, who wrote, in February 2000, that “the Council does not look forward to evicting people, but does so only in the last resort” (Natal Mercury, February 17, 2000).

It was into this volatile situation that Professor Fatima Meer came in 1999 to share the good news of a better life for all with the people of Chatsworth. Instead, the residents asked her to listen to them. They showed her their dilapidated homes, they showed her their rent slips that contained a baffling myriad of charges, and made their own charge that their lives were steadily getting worse. The local councilors’ only relationship to the community was to encourage them to pay up or get out. As one of the CCG delegation remembers, it was also a challenge that the residents threw out. They demanded that the CCG members free themselves from the shackles of the vote, of sectarian loyalist politics, and conservative economic policies.

Abandoning the quest for votes, the CCG started to transform itself into a human rights pressure group. It acted as a catalyst for reinvigorating flat dwellers’ associations in Units 2, 3, and 10. A powerful leadership started to emerge in these areas, some relying on the grounding they had received as shop stewards in the union movement of the 1980s. Through all this the council continued to send out reams of eviction notices.

The most organized areas seemed to be targeted in an attempt to engender fear and division. Rival civic associations were sponsored among the well-to-do on the outskirts of the sub-economic units, who were told they could purchase flats once the current owners were moved out. The city council started to demonize the CCG as being anarchists and the like. These tactics were reminiscent of the apartheid period.

A series of meetings was held at which the CCG, together with residents, devised methods of staving off any new attempt at eviction. Rumors were rife of frenzied preparation by council officials to clamp
down, once and for all, on the Chatsworth civic associations. The more the protests intensified, the more the council was baited into incredible callousness. An 88-year-old granny, Begam Govindsamy, was given notice of eviction. During the apartheid era, she had twice been evicted, the first time from Fynnlnd and the second from Clairwood. The press was becoming critical. It was the likes of Vidu Vedlankan, of DHAC fame, who were the most vicious in processing these evictions in the rigid fashion of "I am just following policy."

Meanwhile the community were devising new methods of struggle. They decided to strike first before evictions happened. In August 1999, residents boarded three buses on a rainy night and protested at the houses of local councilors. One of them, the NNP's Haniff Hooseen, called the police and a tense stand off ensued. He claimed to have been slapped by someone in the crowd during the protest. Protesters left with promises to be back. Hooseen subsequently moved out of the area. The CCG coordinated the distribution of food hampers to the indigent. Gangsters who preyed particularly on women, both old and young, were "spoken to" and instructed to mend their ways and move their operations away from the flats environment. Most did. Civic associations were reformed, constitutions meticulously adopted and leaders elected. Care was also taken to have people deployed to other community organizations, particularly community policing forums, which turned out to be enormously important structures in which to have intelligent representation.

And there was time for fun. Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, was celebrated. The festival had a relevant bent. The slogan raised was "lights for all" and the Satanic villain was cast as the city council, which was disconnecting lights. Old mythologies from India were being reinterpreted in neo-liberal Africa. All religious groups and races living in the mosaic of Chatsworth participated. Indeed, about 30 percent of the area is African and strong bonds between neighbors were being forged in the context of the struggle against the city council. In this way, Diwali in South Africa was being rethought, politicized, and made accessible to all the community.

Over time the civic associations developed a common set of demands. They wanted their arrears to be wiped out, evictions to be stayed, water and electricity to be reconnected, and the flats to be upgraded. They took an important defensive initiative by taking the council to court to prevent evictions. They argued that the state's so-called Masakhane campaign was at variance with the provision in the constitution that guaranteed human dig-

nity, a right to shelter for them and their children, and access to sufficient water and nutrition. They argued that the state was prevented from ejecting people from their homes unless suitable alternative accommodation existed. As such measures did not exist, magistrate after magistrate issued interdicts stopping proposed evictions. The press cottoned onto this unusually militant and effective campaign. Council bureaucrats pulled out their hair.

The Durban Metro Council changed tack. They adopted a clever and insidious new strategy by trying to force and entice the tenants to take ownership of the houses. They used the existence of a R7,500 government subsidy to discount the price of the houses. As they became more desperate to transfer ownership, they constantly reduced the valuations of the flats until the price was, unsurprisingly, R7,500. Pamphlets were sent out. Residents could have their houses for free. There would be no more rent to pay. Before this could happen, however, each block, housing six or more families, would have to form a corporate body. What people were not told was that they had to pay their arrears in full, and would have to pay rates and levies equal to rental. And once corporate bodies were formed, constitutional fetters to evicting people would no longer apply. These would become civil matters, where the sheriff could eject people on behalf of the banks or other property owners without regard to the "human dignity" and other fundamental rights of indigent persons. As things stood—that is, if tenants did not take ownership of the houses—the council would be required to provide alternative accommodation, which it did not have. Also by getting rid of the houses that it rented out and for which it had to collect rent, the council would remove an important mobilizing subject. The historical role council played as landlord would be annulled.

In essence, by privatizing living arrangements, collective memories of struggle would be replaced by the immediacy of dealing with banks and other lending institutions as individuals. Pockets would be gentrified and the council security forces would make way for the body corporate as the disciplining agent. This fracturing of the collective feeds into making the processes of exploitation, control, and surveillance more subtle, diffused and effective.59

And so one steamy Saturday morning, in November 1999, a council entourage rolled into Westcliff. They arrived with a phalanx of bureaucrats, a photocopy machine, and pieces of paper on official letterheads. They decamped at a school in Unit 3, not to evict but to sign over houses to
tenants who in turn would sign mortgages and settle all their arrears. The
transfer of homes was to be presented as a purely technical affair. A huge
armed force of council security guarded the room with the photocopy
machine. But by now the community was alive to the implications of this
tactic. A violent confrontation ensued as 300 protesters arrived. But they
were not against the sale of houses. Famously, one of the leaders of the
march shouted, “Viva Title Deeds, Viva!” The demand was for a commit-
mment from the council to first upgrade the houses and then for their trans-
fer, irrespective of arrears.

The irony was that many of the leaders who gathered at a mass meeting
in Chatsworth in 1980 and had argued that the houses in Unit 3 did not
have a shelf life of more than 15 to 20 years, were now trying to force the
selfsame houses upon the residents. Now they were present as highly paid
council employees and councillors. After the protesters had spent two
hours encircling the room in which the photocopying machine was kept,
the process was forced to a stop. It had become clear to officials that there
were no takers for that deal.

As the Council officials retreated, a defining moment in the strug-
gle for Chatsworth occurred. One of the designer-bedecked (African)
councillors began castigating the crowd. She had once lived in a shack,
she screamed. Why were Indians resisting evictions and demanding
upgrades? Indians were just too privileged. One elderly aunty, Girli Amod,
screamed back: “We are not Indians, we are the poors.” The
refrain caught on as councillors hurried to their cars. As they were leav-
ing they would have heard the slogan mutate as Bongiwe Mablele
introduced her own good humored variant, “We are not African, we are
the poors.” Identities were being rethought in the context of struggle
and the bearers of these identities were no respecters of authority.

The particular kind of identity congealing in this moment had no
grand ideological preconditions and so could not be co-opted by govern-
ment sloganeering. It was organized around the primary realization that
resistance had to be offered against the hostilities being visited on the
poor. Attempts to head off militance by the local ANC were easily fobbed
off. The residents showed flexibility in constantly shifting the goalposts of
what it would take for them to accept the title deeds, such as the demand
for upgrading, writing off of arrears, and the forming of body “co-opera-
tives.” The ANC, hemmed in by its own economic conservatism, could not
match this flexibility.

Notwithstanding these dangers, there were many people interested in
this “deal.” Some were relatively well-off or had children who had done
well for themselves, who saw a chance to own a flat for free. However, the
allure of the discourse of private ownership was felt even in the executi-
es of the flat residents associations. Initially, the CCG tried to argue that pri-
ivate property was anathema to a sense of community and pointed out that
the council still demanded a settlement of unpayable arrears and that
rates and levies were but another kind of rent. Still, the idea of ownership,
no matter how punishing the mortgage taken to pay off arrears, was pas-
sionately received. The CCG learned quickly that resistance was not only
about sponsoring a discourse that ran counter to that of the state.
18. BUILDING A MOVEMENT?

We do not believe in Buthelezi’s Zulu nation or Mbeki’s Renaissance for Africans. We believe in free basic services for all poor people. This we need for life.

We believe in life. That is why we organize with the people of Chatsworth and show solidarity with the land appropriators of Bredell and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee.

—MANDLA GWALA, union organizer and civic leader, Mpumalanga

I THINK OF ANNELINE GANESH’S FRAGILE BODY ran over by a hundred frightened kids at the Throb nightclub in Chatsworth in March 2000. Her side ripped open and her leg hanging limp. She is a prisoner of her third floor flat. She was abandoned by her father at birth. Her mother, Sherene, toils in the clothing industry. But if the clothing industry continues its trajectory of shedding jobs, Sherene will be condemned to unemployment. Anneline does not realize that soon her family will be involved in a struggle to hold onto her little prison room.

I think about Emanuel Mhlongo who longs to bring up his family in Unit 2 in Chatsworth. I think about his quiet dignity and backbreaking work to keep his family together. I think about all those Indian “aunties” who braved live ammunition to stave off his eviction. The reporters kept asking them about the fact he was African. Most of the aunties could not relate to the question because they could only see a neighbor. But Mhlongo will find less and less work as a bush mechanic and will probably eventually lose his house.

I think about Mrs Anamuthoo at the age of 81. She survived but her son will not. He will never raise the capital to get his sewing machine back. The indefinite short-time from the footwear factory will be precisely that—indefinite—for the imports will keep flooding in.

I think about the post-apartheid trials of Thulisile Manqele whose water Judge Viven Niles-Duner has ordered to be disconnected again, mainly because she was not disciplined enough to turn her neighbors away when they came begging for a bucketful.

I think about the writings evaluating Mbeki’s presidency and the new South Africa. Such balanced appraisal, and so clever. But if he has not unleashed it, then he is presiding over economic genocide. Unemployment has spiraled and in a rampant market economy this is a death sentence. A medical specialist tells me that the annual budget for the oncology unit at the King Edward hospital is R60,000. Enough for one patient. Beds at the state hospitals are being closed down all the time. Happiness Shinga and her daughter wait to die. The AZT provided to raped tourists is too expensive for them. More prisons are being built. More youth from Chatsworth will find a bed there. Fewer houses. More evictions. The minister of finance, Trevor Manuel, does not assess the deficit to the poor when he reads his budget speech in his cute, silk polka-dot tie.

I go to a May Day rally organized by COSATU. Geraldine-Fraser Moleketi, a member of the central committee of the South African Communist Party with a distinctly Margaret Thatcher hairstyle, is guest speaker. As minister of social welfare she forgot to spend R198 million on the poor, and she slashed the child-care grant to needy parents by three-quarters. The economy of entire villages has been wiped out by this decision of hers. She is now minister of public enterprises, and has the task of holding down wages and eliminating jobs in the public service.

Images of powerful women in parliament are scarred by the memories of a meeting of women in Unit 10, Chatsworth, who had just had their child maintenance grant cutoff. Some had taken their children out of school using them instead as begging tools. Some just wept. How can women just be expected to pick up the slack when these kinds of decisions are made? I know there are women in high places, but it is difficult to see policies implemented with such callousness without suspecting misogyny. The South African Constitution provides for permanent commissions to oversee human rights and matters related to gender. But I hesitate to tell them about these commissions knowing that approaching these toothless bodies will lead to more disappointment.

I am haunted by the body bags outside the Throb and the white-gloved mortuary workers who, like the Poles in Hamlet, pick up the bodies, seemingly oblivious to the events that went before. I know that this “tragedy” is a singular event and unusual. But is this an omen of what the future holds, or perhaps a chance, graphic presentation of what is happening
already today, privately, behind the doors where the poors live?

The struggles that began in Chatsworth and spread from there reveal much about the transition to democracy in South Africa. So often they are aimed at no more than remaining in dilapidated accommodation devoid of basic social amenities, without lights and water. And yet they are seen as a threat to the state. The poor are having to fight to remain ensconced in the ghettos to which apartheid consigned them. Are these the revolutionary demands we make?

But in Chatsworth and elsewhere, communities are organizing and fighting back. They have developed networks of communication among the different units and interdependent relationships with lawyers, academics, human rights groups and journalists on the outside. Led mainly by women, many of whose biographies tell a story of abuse that once cowed them into submission, they have reemerged to take on a new bully-boy—the local government.

**TAKING ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT** is in itself no more than an interim measure, a necessary defense against forces that will renew their attacks on the poor. The forms of solidarity that enable poor people to stand together against evictions and cutoffs are not necessarily sufficient to change the system that keeps them impoverished. But it is a starting-point for building a larger movement, and these actually existing collectivities are a more concrete starting-point for building that movement than any academic analysis or abstract set of principles.

What are the principles that hold these communities together in their struggles? At a big rally in Mpumalanga during the WCAR, there was righteous anger expressed at the thought of forcing people to pay for water. “Water comes from God, it is needed for life,” was the constant refrain. After the Battle of Bayview, when Jooma was interviewed for Ben Cashdan’s SABC *Special Assignment* documentary, he kept saying, “We are not animals, we are human beings.” This is all the ideology one gets a moment after Jooma has been shot by police while trying to prevent the eviction of his neighbor, Emmanuel Mhlongo.

Both he and the crowd in Mpumalanga hold expectations of a certain level of material needs fulfillment and they expect to be treated as if they possess “human rights.” These expectations, in my experience, are rooted within the struggles and day-to-day experiences of poor people like him in all the communities we have passed through in this book. Unlike the macro-

economists—on the left and right alike—the poors are not flummoxed with talk of (no) alternatives or being realistic. It is striking that the actual demands of people are almost always within what is possible, what can be achieved. The problem is—it won’t be given or it is busy being taken away. This is the power these community movements have. They can “realistically” achieve their immediate goals but only through struggle. It is, I think, in light of these two factors—the expectation of a certain level of social good and the sense that it is being deliberately withheld or taken away—that people are willing to resist the UniCity’s demand for payment. And in so doing there is an actual and cumulative disruption of the logic of capital and not a mere dispute with it no matter how comprehensively footnoted.

Of absolutely crucial importance is that is no insistence that resistance should assume a character significantly different from the expectations that inform it. People are not being prevailed upon to involve themselves in party politics or to march against tariff barrier reductions or adopt the ideology of Black Consciousness, as valuable as any of these activities might be in the broader scheme of things. A totally new political sensibility is developing that is neither attentive to the inner workings of the World Bank nor, for that matter, intimidated by these institutions or overwhelmed by the distance between the poors and these enemies. Indeed, from the vantage point of the poors, reforms in these arenas are not possible, nor are they particularly desirable.

On the other hand, news of social struggles in Soweto, Zimbabwe, Bolivia, and Genoa communicated, for example, in workshops run by the SECC’s wonderful Virginia Setshe, shown on TV, or spoken about at meetings, are received with intense interest and joy. These struggles are somehow very near, almost local, and inspiring and winnable. This attention given to every practical possibility of struggle and the making local of certain global issues is an incredible antidote to the paralysis felt in the official left at the prospects of social change.

Because of how close the demands advanced are to “reality,” people are not willing to go to inordinate lengths to earn an income to satisfy the Council’s demand for payment. They will rather struggle to win demands that are achievable. While unemployment is incredibly high, it is notionally possible for women in Chatsworth to find a job in the myriad of backyard sweatshops that have recently sprung up, but as long as they are able to put food on the table, few bother to make the extra effort that would enable them to meet these payments. Similarly, only a tiny percentage of
those too poor to pay their water bills in Mpumalanga present themselves as sexm workers at the Truck Stops. People who have a few rands extra each month do not voluntarily hand it over to the UniCity in lieu of arrears. They would rather spend it on something they want. It is mainly people like Shoba of Chatsworth who, in order to escape some very private nightmare, submit to a sweatshop regime in order to scrape together every small bit of cash and thus some personal relief.

The majority just stay put. And this staying put is often not seen as the remarkably active event that it is. The DSF-style of politics has revealed the importance of not seeing the poors only as victims as many on the South African left tend to do. Their “consuming services” for which they do not pay has cost the UniCity dearly at a number of levels. Not only has the UniCity lost millions of dollars in revenue but their awe as an authority capable of exer ting themselves has been dented in other areas where people are not quite ready to resist— as yet. This brings home the point that resistance does not always take the highly visible form of marches. Non-payment and the refusal to perform ultra-exploitative wage labor is preeminent a form of resistance.

So is the communal cooking and sharing we have seen in Chatsworth and Mpumalanga. The meeting venues and assemblage points are invested with a power of their own. “Road 332” (Westcliff), “the deadend” (Bayview), “under the tree” (Woodhurst), “Sishi’s Store” (Mpumalanga), “The Hall” (Wentworth) are places synonymous with struggle. People’s faces are connected with brave and daring events, like Jooma’s bullet. Jane Smith’s bag of badges, and Sipho Mlaba’s sugar-beans.

Not all, but large numbers of people in the communities come into contact with each other in totally new relationships. At night people escape the loneliness and lethargy of TV or slumber to crisscross their areas bearing messages or pamphlets or gossip. After visiting Chatsworth with a comrade from Johannesburg, Franco Barchiesi, and while enjoying a meal at Durban’s best eating spot, Little Gujerat, I was struck by his comment about how “sensuous” the lived environment of the poors actually was. I had not put my own finger on what was so different about working in these areas before. This was it: the capacity to sense collective joy (and also misery) seemed heightened here in comparison to other “sites of struggle,” like the factory.

The question of the politics of the movement that is growing out of these struggles was most clearly evident in the formation of the Durban Social Forum. The formation of the DSF at the need to respond to the South African government’s hosting of the World Conference Against Racism also forced activists to discuss political questions more fully, and raised the question of whether this broader political sensibility could become a commonly held ideological position.

DSF activists working within the IMC did not try to be the mouthpiece for a left view. Although not fully or consistently emerging as such, the DSF was a space and a set of practices beyond the Left. Here people who had inhabited radical subjectivities in the past that had fragmented and left them disheartened, once again entered the mass political realm, trying new languages and ideas. They now felt that they were part of a new form of politics, but the nature of that politics was still under discussion.

I remember sitting outside the IMC suite one night during the WCAR, high up above the cricket pitch. The stadium spotlights cast a pearly glow over the tents below, between which scurried NGO workers, all carrying different colored bags slung across their shoulders. After a minute of staring, it looked like the bags were the animate objects and the human carriers the mere appendages. Some other DSF participants, resting after a stint of late night work, also occupied these best seats in the house. There was agreement that while left values were still important to us, the left project often took on forms that became an obstacle to realizing those values. This was true at least to the extent that left organizations are based on a mere philosophy of domination that confines social subjects to the role of either passive victims who, at best, are defeated spontaneists or else are card-carrying cadres of the revolutionary party. The left has been unable to recognize the teeming life in between. Life! This is not just a theoretical issue. The practice of left organization in South Africa had become so disconnected from the dreams, desires, and emotions of ourselves and the people among whom we had moved these last few years as to be completely ineffective.

It may have had its historical moment but the Left’s ways of relating to everyday life in Chatsworth, Mpumalanga, and Tafelsig, is now inadequate, I found myself thinking. If I was a traditional leftist, I would have to spend all my time first engineering the content of the life of people in these communities so that it accorded with the insights of socialism. That would be the struggle! But this is not the way things are. There is a rich, complex, imperfect, and sensuous collectivity existing in the communities I have written about. And the way certain of these needs are expressed and
stubbornly held onto as the basis for action is not frowned upon by people in the DSF as it is, even if secretly, by many socialists.

There are dangers, of course. Talk of human rights and citizenship often results in validation of the social order. It is also tempting to use the processes for adjudication of disputes precisely in this realm, like the courts, provided by the system. When one wins in these forums, it is easy to vaunt the rule of law but then what happens when you need to break it? Parochialism, too, has to be warded off and efforts made to be sensitive to the struggles of other subaltern groups. But there is no doubt for me that whatever the dangers, there would be little civic resistance at all today in South Africa if it was not for expectations of dignity, human rights and a dignified life in the terms noted above.

I tried to say some of these things to my comrades sitting next to me. Perhaps they were simply humoring me, but one or two nodded gravely when I stopped. After a while someone ventured another reason why the notion of the Left could no longer be safely employed. It was too all-embracing. This was particularly obvious when one considered the hypocrisy of the NGO "sector". It was not the content of the criticism of government policy that mattered. Anyone could say they were against racism and poverty or recite socialist principles without presenting the least bit of a challenge. Witness the SACP. Increasingly, it was the unassimilable form in which demands for change and desires for life that were put across that was important in defining who was friend or foe. From this point of view, calls to unify the Left were dangerous.

Another comrade told a story about a young man who was part of Operation Khanyisa, the illegal electricity reconnection project in Johannesburg townships. He failed to make a number of community meetings. When he returned, she asked him where he had been. In a perfectly matter-of-fact way he had said, "Oh, I’m sorry, my sister needed to go to school so I decided to try crime for a while." His opposition to neoliberalism was not evinced in carefully footnoted academic tracts but in his willingness, amongst other things, to manhandle the Eskom security guards who come into his area to effect disconnections. The former leftist the system actually encouraged, the latter it could not take. It was with people like the young man that she said she could join hands.

For many of the activists at the core of these groups, working in different spaces and having different strategies and tactics, there was one binding thread. There was unmitigated opposition to the economic policies adopted by the ANC. Again and again DSF activists spoke of how the right-wing economic policies lead to widespread and escalating unemployment, with concomitant water and electricity cutoffs, and evictions even from the "toilets in the veld" provided by the government in the place of houses. More importantly there was general agreement that this was not just a question of short-term pain for long-term gain. The ANC had become a party of neoliberalism. The strategy to win the ANC to a left project was a dead end. The ANC had to be challenged and a movement built to render its policies unworkable. It seems increasingly unlikely that open confrontation with the repressive power of the post-apartheid state can be avoided.

Events taking place as this book goes to press show that such confrontation is already beginning. On Saturday, April 6, 2002, about 100 residents of Soweto gathered at the Funda Center, and set off to protest electricity and water disconnections. Residents were particularly incensed because Johannesburg mayor Amos Masondo has failed to honor a promise to write off half the arrears of people who paid R25 a month; a sum of money many people could ill afford but had nevertheless been paying. Thirty-seven of the protestors were pensioners whose main fear was the approaching Highveld winter which would see temperatures dropping on some nights to below zero. In line with a favored tactic of the new community movements of confronting the actual politician or bureaucrat who caused their misery, the busses threaded their way through the dusty Soweto streets, over a thirty kilometer concrete highway and then disappeared beneath the canopy of trees that lined the posh Johannesburg suburb of Kensington where Mayor Amos Masondo lives.

The protest was initially peaceful. The small crowd sang songs outside Masondo’s sprawling mansion. Then suddenly Masondo’s bodyguard appeared on the roof. He pointed his firearm at those singing and let loose firing no less than 8 rounds of live ammunition into the crowd which scattered. Some of the young men among the crowd lobbed clods of earth and small stones in his direction in an effort to provide some time for the very young and old to get some cover. Two people, Aubrey Batji and Samson Khumalo were shot, luckily receiving only flesh wounds. Samson Khumalo’s circumstance mirrored that of most of the crowd. He supported his wife and five grandchildren on his R570 pension. He told the Sunday Times that “This government promised a good life, but there isn’t any” (7 April 2002).

By now a part of the crowd had regrouped and were incensed. While the
bodyguard still trained his weapon on the people below and as the first sirens of approaching police cars made themselves heard, a small posse of boys dived into Masondo’s garden and with a manhole cover expertly lifted, they disconnected the Mayor’s water supply before rushing back to their comrades outside the gates.

The police arrested all of the protesters on charges of malicious damage to property and public violence. The bodyguard was asked to report to the police station and was released immediately. The protesters were destined for a different reception at the police station. The size of the police contingent should have alerted the SECC to what was coming. It was so huge and staffed by such senior officials, that it was clear their “crimes” had been politicized. Kept in the Jeppe police station cells over the weekend, it was expected that all would be granted bail on the Monday. But the authorities clearly wanted to make an example of the SECC activists. They were helped in this by an SACP stalwart and upholder of law and order against the revolting working class. Although he had been part of the march, he now enthusiastically joined the police in identifying protesters. He pointed out a member of the SECC legal team who went to the police-station to bring blankets and food. She was promptly arrested. The police officers said they would make a point of bringing them to Court so late that even if they were released it would be too late for the pensioners among the group to receive their monthly pension payments due on the Monday. Then the police allegedly ran out of stationery with which to process those who were arrested who were therefore left standing for hours and hours in lines.

By Monday morning, the prosecuting authorities had a new trick up their sleeve. Except in the case of a few people, the senior State prosecutor brought in to try these relatively minor offences, vigorously opposed granting bail. The supposed reason for this was that it had not been possible to verify the addresses of most of those arrested. This was a ridiculous assertion. Many among the SECC were well-known people and the police hardly had to rely on an address to track down the likes of Trevor Ngwane or Rob Rees, a prominent South African Municipal Workers’ Union organizer. But the Magistrate accepted these improbable arguments and Ngwane, Rees and the rest of the SECC group were remanded in custody until April 16, 2002. They were ordered to be kept in South Africa’s equivalent of San Quentin Penitentiary, the notorious Diepkloof prison, amongst hardened criminals and the cruellest of wardens. On April 16 the detainees appeared at the Jeppe Magistrates court. The Mercury, KZN’s leading morning daily reported the unfolding events: “Hundreds of Soweto protestors made fires on the steps of the Jeppe Magistrate court and burned their ANC membership cards as part of the anti-privatization protests which gained momentum countrywide. In a show of solidarity, a picket was mounted outside the Magistrate’s Court in Durban by the Concerned Citizen’s Forum. Similar action was organized in other centers in the country” (April 17, 2002). The 50 who were arrested were released and asked to appear in court on May 10.

Clearly a clampdown on South Africa’s emerging community movement has been signaled. The only question is whether these movements will be crushed by such repression or deflected into ineffectual forms of struggle or whether this will harden their resolve and bestow upon activists the dignity of sacrifice and the glory of struggling for what is right. Will the ANC’s turning on the poor solidify the combativeness and inventiveness of the community movements as it. itself, was once strengthened by apartheid oppression?

Much Remains Undecided. But a movement is growing in South Africa, quietly encroaching upon the State prerogatives to charge for the “privilege” of living. Rooted in communities and with an ideology, if that is the right word, that springs from ideas of neighborliness, dignity, and life, these movements profere winnable demands which they pursue with considerable imagination and vigor. If the response of the South African government is anything to go by, these movements are proving fairly effective. They are wary of the ideological archaism of the ultra-left and the desperation of pure protest. They have raised, but not yet answered, the question of what organization/s will best serve the growing dissent to the right-wing ANC and facilitate more sustained outright rebellion. Perhaps there is no traditional organizational way.

These community movements seem to be finding a way through the paralysis of either getting bogged down in the damp and passionless dogmas of the hitherto existing Left or buying into class compromise in some way. Only a few years after “national liberation,” they are developing a form of class politics, but imbued with passions beyond left politics. This movement has a world-historical sense of itself but focuses on combat with local enemies and thrives on small victories. We are at that precarious point in South African history where something precious and powerful is coming into being. To report the existence of this growing movement of the poors of South Africa has been the task of this book.
WE ARE THE POORS
Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa
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