

The 10111 call centre workers are calling for help

The government expects the masses to telephone the emergency call centre number 10111 if a crime is being committed such as reporting a place where drugs are being sold from or when someone is being raped or when a worker is being robbed of his pay packet. However when you call in to 10111 most times you are put on hold for a long time, or when you do get through and report the crime, the police either do not come or when they do come, they come hours later, long after the deed.

On the other hand when workers are on strike and the boss calls the police, they come immediately. When a big business such as Pick 'n Pay catches an unemployed worker who has taken some food to feed his children, the police come immediately. The prisons are full of the unemployed, many who have 'stolen' food to feed their families. In Tunisia many of the unemployed, some who are graduates, sell fruit by the road side. When one of them had his fruit confiscated by the police for the umpteenth time, he set himself alight because he would rather die straight away than die a slow painful death from hunger. These conditions, where the rich have everything, where they put up food and petrol prices out of greed to make more profits, even though there is enough food to feed the entire world's population. The big companies like Du Pont and Monsanto control 95% of the seed in the grain market in South Africa. These are the companies that buy up the world's food stocks to create an artificial shortage so they can make super profits. It is this system of violence that the police prop up.

Capitalist governments like the SA governments try to cover up the real role of the police. One of the steps they have taken is to create the 10111 call centre, to give the illusion that the government is for all people and not only for the rich.

The structure of the 10111 call centre reflects the violent role of the police against the working class

The administrative staff of the 10111 call centres are workers, not police. They take the calls and dispatch them to the emergency units, including the police. The call centre workers are brutalised and exploited by the management of the police. The militarization of the police shows that the capitalists require a more brutal arm to keep the working class down. This increased brutality is part of a world phenomenon where the capitalists know that the working class is starting to resist the higher levels of forced starvation caused by the capitalists. The capitalists know they cannot depend on their lackey governments to control the masses as the working class is starting to see through them. This greater violence against the workers is also reflected in the harsh conditions that the 10111 workers have to face:

Understaffing: Each call centre has about 25 telephones but at any one time there are only 10-11 staff on a shift. The long waiting time before calls are answered is due in part to the queue often being much more than 100.

Old Equipment: The computers are old and often freeze;

No time to call back: If a worker calls with an emergency and does not have enough airtime, the call centre worker has to log out and call the complainant back in his/her own time. If the operator makes too many calls back to workers this time is deducted from his wages.

Pregnant workers are forced to work night shift

Anti-worker shift system: Workers work 8 hour shifts. On days when there is a shift change workers go virtually without sleep: if a worker works 6am to 14h00 and has a change of shift on the same day then he is forced to come back on the same day to

work the 22h00 to 6am shift. Workers spend 2 hours or more getting home and are then picked up at 20h00 and then spend another 2 hours getting to work (the transport goes across the peninsula to pick up the staff for a shift. Thus the worker spends on that day less than 4 hours to do family tasks and rest. The workers are sleep deprived and prone to mental illnesses (people who are sleep deprived are more prone to commit suicide). Workers are always tired all the time.

Respond to big bosses but slow response to the working class: When workers called in to report thugs attacking immigrant workers, the police were slow to respond and often did not go. The police know where the drug merchants are but most are not arrested; call centre operators often have to repeatedly follow up on police over calls from working class areas as the police either do not go or delay to go by several hours. Sometimes workers call back reporting that no police arrived and the person being attacked has already died. The police respond quickly to big business.

No psychological counselling: Workers listen day in and day out to traumatic calls and details yet there is no provision at work for psychological counselling. Many of the call centre workers suffer mental illness.

When workers are sick they must still go to work: When a worker has a certificate to be off sick for a day, the management forces them to be back at work by midnight (if they are late shift).

Divide and rule: Management plays workers off against one another: workers who were employed recently are placed in higher grades, with higher wages than those who started years before them. Some of the workers recently employed are the first to be offered promotion. Several of the workers with longer service are still paid at lower wages and in lower categories than what they are supposed to be.

Police militarization being forced on to the workers: Call centre workers are forced into military-type parades at shift changes and are subjected to police discipline even though their wages are much lower than the minimum of the police (they are employed as public sector workers and are graded as such in terms of salary). The police discipline is used against the workers who are often humiliated by the police management.

The trade unions are reluctant to take up the struggles of the 10111 workers as they are tied to the state in one way or another.

Conclusions and the way forward

The real aim of the police is to suppress the working class, keeping us in a permanent state of hunger so that the capitalists can get richer and richer. The details of the struggles of the 10111 workers was given to the Independent Newspapers group but they did not regard it as important to publicize.

- As we cannot trust the police, the working class needs to set up street committees to organise self-defence.
- The broader working class needs to take up the cause of the 10 111 workers for better conditions and a shift system that considers their family life and which gives them adequate rest between shifts.
- It should be raised within the workers movement for the right to psychological counselling;
- Trade unions should be independent of the state; It follows that collaborators with the state should be expelled from leadership positions in the workers' movement;
- Equal pay for equal work
- Share all the work among all those who can work, without loss of pay.
- We call on the working class and the 10111 workers to work together in a programme of protest and mass action against their inhumane conditions.

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