

REPORT BACK

PEOPLE'S HEALTH SUMMIT (TAC) EAST LONDON 2-4 JULY 2004

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CAPE TOWN DEPARTURE: On arrival at the Cape Town International Airport I was sitting in the departures lounge and witnessed a group of about 20 people coming towards the gate for departure on the flight to East London. All were clad in White T-Shirts with the slogan 'Viva Anti Retroviral Treatment'. They were all in a frenzied state, while signing what I first thought were freedom songs once used against the apartheid government, however as they came closer to me, I noticed these were new pharmaceuticalized evangelistic tunes, plagiarized from real struggle songs, calling for immediate drug treatment and the removal of the Minister of Health and the President from power. At this point I knew that I was to enter the evil heartland on the TAC and have to ready myself for the grueling two days of mass hysteria and carefully orchestrated propaganda.

ARRIVAL IN EAST LONDON:

On arrival at the airport after a one and a half hour flight of peace and quiet, the group on the plane were greeted by hoards of TAC welcome party members. For a moment I thought that I may be at a Utah Baptist Evangelical Conference, with much hugging, loud chanting and singing filling the entire airport, much to the disgust of all other passengers and airport staff. I then found out that the city only has one airport shuttle service and I proceeded to climb into a sardine-can-packed mini bus full of TAC members and one member of the USA Consulate from Cape Town, who apparently was not attending the meeting. I noticed that all the people from the TAC had their flights, airport transfers and accommodation paid by generous funders of the TAC, as nobody had to pay for anything throughout the weekend. We then proceeded to our respective hotels, where all delegates were booked into. Herewith a list.

- Regent Hotel
- Esplanade Hotel
- Dorchester Hotel
- Kennaway Hotel

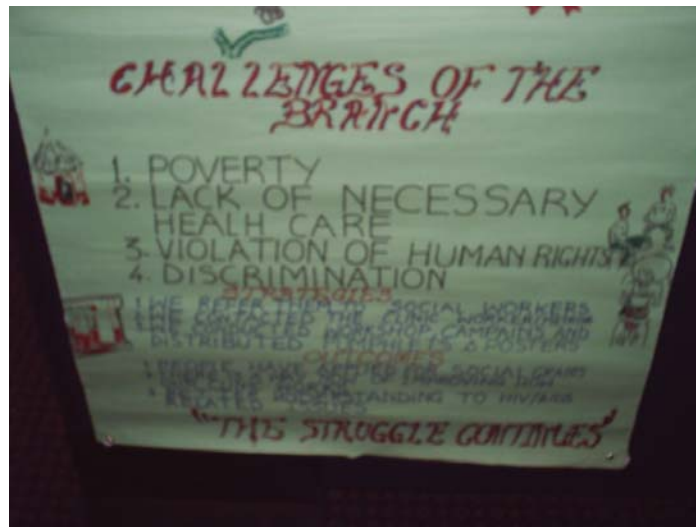
ARRIVAL AT THE REGENT HOTEL (GROUND ZERO)

As I did not wish for the TAC to get wind of who I was or whom I was allied to, I purposefully did not place myself of their delegate list prior to the meeting, knowing that if I was uncovered through any suspicion, I would not stand a chance of attending. Already, a denial of attendance was issued personally to me by the coordinator of the meeting by phone three days prior to the meeting. On arrival at the registration desk, I stated that I was an interested health professional who had traveled at huge personal expense from Cape Town, who wished to find out more about the TAC with a possibility of joining their campaign. After much hushed discussion behind a closed door, the registrar came back five minutes later and told me that I could attend merely as an observer, while not allowing access to the hand-out materials and delegate pack provided.

Not wishing to rock the boat, I agreed by the terms and entered a huge conference room bursting with loud singing and praising, as witnessed prior at the airport. Once I stepped into the stuffy room without air-conditioning of even an open window, I was struck by the sheer numbers of people in attendance. There were 550 seats, all greedily taken and guarded, plus about 100 people sitting in the isles and at the back of the room. I must admit that I felt quite intimidated once I began to wade through the crowds towards the back of the room, as the attendees began to toy-toy in a frenzy of mass hysteria.

I eventually got to the back of the hall, only to be offered a chair by a young white guy in a TAC T-Shirt. At this point the delegates sat after their song and I noticed the magnitude of following present. All around the hall were children's posters with pictures of dying people and scribbles calling for anti retroviral drugs from each contact point of the TAC in rural South Africa.

On inspecting the hand drawn posters closer I noticed that all they all had words on them that were clearly NOT inspired or derived by children, but by words used by the TAC propaganda personalities and even long patent and generic names for aids drugs. This cheap stunt is obviously used as a tool at schools to ensnare kids into the TAC's insane and immoral struggle.



One would expect that the TAC was merely another struggling grass-roots NGO (Non governmental Organization), however crunching the numbers in my own head came up with huge expenses that they obviously had to cover. For instance, most people were flown or bussed in to the meeting at the expense of the TAC. All were accommodated and fed by the organization for the duration of their stay. The TAC spared no expenses in having their own TAC News Crew with state of the art audio-visual equipment rolling (TV cameras X 5 , data projectors X 6, etc). They even paid for a 600 person marquee to be erected outside the hotel on the lawn, with 5 star catering for all.



I was also aware that the TAC had people present from **Boehringer Ingelheim**, the drug company enlisted by the government to supply. I did not note any **Galxo Welcome** people, however I am sure they were present as everyone had a name badge with some or other confusing acronym stated as their constituency.

I also noted that the meeting was lightly salted with a few white faces, who mainly comprised of young people who were part of a group called the **Student Partnership**. These people were obviously appointed as sentries at the doors and were strategically placed to monitor the crowd. At all times, I was constantly aware of being monitored as I caught their beady eyes scanning me suspiciously as I had no name tag.

I also noticed them getting together at some points and discussing me. I was then told by one of them that I was not allowed to take photographs when I took a photograph, as only accredited press members and the TAC News Crew were allowed to take photos. I did manage to sneak a few photos contained in this report without a flash, hence the bad picture quality.

Each presenter came up onto the stage, preceded by chanting and yet another nauseating TAC song, defiling and disgracing the true originators of the calls for true freedom in South Africa. Each 20 minute lecture was basically the same, following closely to the TAC line of propaganda and slinging of insults to the Minister of Health and the President. After each speech, they called upon any member of the Government or the Department of Health to identify themselves and make a speech on the government's position regarding the slow rollout of aids drugs. Each time their calls were met with disappointment when nobody appeared. Members of the government who were invited were:

The National minister of Health
The Deputy Minister of Health
The Eastern Cape minister of Health
The Chairman of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Health
The Acting Director-General of the Department of Health

Apparently none of the invitees from government acknowledged their invitations or declined the invite, except the Deputy Minister of Health, **Ms. Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge**, who apparently wrote a letter apologizing for not attending, as she does support the efforts of the TAC and wishes them luck in their weekend summit.



It appears that there was an ANC Summit for the Executive Committee of the ANC in Durban over the same weekend.

The main players in the forefront of the TAC have now become more visible, as Zackie Achmat takes a back seat in the proceedings. Zackie Achmat got up on stage twice briefly, trying hard to mask his neuropathy caused by the devastating side effects of ARV's, while spewing his acidic hatred for the government. However, all during the two days he remained seated most of the time, with glassy eyes and a pale complexion, an effigy of a puppet hero put on stage for all to pay neo-religious homage.

In his speech, titled 'Our Struggle For Health' I could not escape experiencing the irony in all his statements, as his own health is struggling due to the very deadly drugs he is pimping on the uneducated, unsuspecting public. On monitoring him carefully throughout the two days, it was clear that his health has deteriorated, witnessed by his strained expressions and false smiles, while wiggling his legs and feet to try ease the apparent pain.

In my opinion the TAC no longer has a leg to stand on, as Zackie loses his footing day by day. It is in this desperate hour that the TAC has suddenly reorganized itself from an activist group to a newly claimed 'political party', foisting its resources into the womb of the ANC governments homeland, the Eastern Cape.

The TAC has forged a strong alliance with COSATU, South Africa's largest trade union, and in the words of the **Joe Nkosi**, the current Director-General "COSATU will back the TAC though all the good times and bad times every day, everywhere". This new alliance is set to attack the very heart of the South African government by mass mobilization and threatened strikes. One attendee in the audience had the courage to air a very damning question to the COSATU member, by asking how COSATU can genuinely call for the nationalization of pharmaceutical companies and the end of government privatization, when they have bought shares in **Netcare PTY** (Ltd), South Africa's largest private medical firm. If we remember, the recent statement of our **President Thabo Mbeki**, two weeks ago, he stated "When a company like Netcare takes on the government in a legal challenge on the pricing of medicines, then we have to ask what is going on?"

All the speakers at the Summit have shifted their main arguments to appealing to the desperate needs of the people in one of the poorest regions in South Africa. In each case, the TAC has managed to crank up its propaganda machine to make promises of old rhetorical political parties of the past, by telling the people that the TAC will be fighting for housing, proper health care, employment, etc. All things very close to the heart of the people present. It seems that this new political tact has been motivated by the TAC's new mission to undermine the will of top ANC personalities who refuse to budge to their pressure. By holding this Summit in East London it serves to undermine the heartland of the ANC and to create dissatisfaction among the people of the region who by far elected the current government.

The core of the motivation for acceptance in the region by the Xhosa people stems from a revered secret pilot study project of the TAC, where members have hijacked the St. Elizabeth hospital in the most rural part of the province in Lusikisiki.



At this project a German doctor, who has been given a tribal name of **Themba** runs the show in cohort with **Mandla Majola** of the TAC. This project is being sponsored by **Medecins Sans Frontieres**, and is obviously where the German doctor fits in.

It is my opinion that natural health alternatives to ARV's be first initiated in the surrounds of Lusikisiki to isolate them from spreading their destruction further.

A nurse from the Lusikisiki project took the stage and loudly announced "We do not need nutritional assistance or other therapies, we need drugs now, as they are available NAOW!" This stirred the audience of attendees and was followed by the slogan "Amandla ARV's", (Long Live ARV's) followed the the cordial "Awetho!" and then a song against the government.

At this point I literally felt sick that so many people could be so brainwashed into accepting this minimalist line. She also described the fact that the TAC is facing a crisis at some contact points when people take the drugs, and in the first four days they get violently ill, vomit and can no longer eat. She calls upon the TAC to reinforce its policy of making people 'comply with taking their medicines for life'. However, we all know that this 'life' will be very short lived on such a regimen.

It was quite obvious that the side effects were played down at all costs, as nowhere in the program were these highlighted or discussed. Rather, there was an almost religious conviction that ARV's are the light and the way ahead to make all troubles disappear. Even Zackie Achmat stated that two weeks prior he was in Bloemfontein where he was attending a sociology conference on aids and he was attacked by the sociologists for hiding the truth about his own devastating no-reversible side effects of aids drugs. He appealed the audience by making the statement "I told them if it was not for me taking these drugs I would not be alive here today to help my comrades to get the drugs they deserve today".

I sincerely believe that the deliberate underplay of the scientific facts of the safety, quality and efficacy of these ARV's is the single biggest flaw in the design of the TAC operational plan and PR campaign, as well as their open statements damning nutritional supplements.

On acquainting myself with some of the delegates during tea times, I found out that one of the sponsors of the TAC is a group called **Atlantic Philanthropies** (<http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org>) After doing a bit of research, it is clear that this group is heavily propped up by the **Rockefeller Foundation**. This is no surprise. Another group is Aid for Aids (<http://www.aidforaids.org>), who are apparently illegally importing used aids drugs into South Africa for TAC projects.

It is interesting to note that the TAC have 5 Treatment Coordinators who teach 30 Treatment consultants in each province. These 30 Treatment Consultants then have a mandate to teach another 10 more. This is how

the TAC is managing to rollout it's work exponentially in South Africa. They plan is to have a TAC treatment desk in each hospital by the end of year 2005. These desks are run by lay-councilors who have no medical qualifications and are there to bridge the gap between the medical personal and the TAC.

The TAC member from one of these hospitals have complained that they are not accepted well by the medical personal, as they see the TAC people as threats to their organizations. It was also noted that the TAC is very concerned that these councilors may be prosecuted for diagnosing and prescribing without medical licenses. This may be a good weak point to highlight in a campaign to stop the TAC.

They also acknowledge that there is widespread fear of modern medicines in rural communities, thanks to their adherence to traditional medicines, and that the fear of reported side-effects and resistance to the drugs are becoming a larger issue, making the consultants work more difficult. The cowardly upper echelons of the TAC did not even attempt to address these concerns at all when asked for assistance in solving these issues at the meeting, but preferred to change the subject each time.

HEALTH LITERACY CAMPAIGN

At the meeting titled 'Mobilizing Communities for Antiretroviral Treatment' held of the second day, I was amazed to note that the TAC have used the Dr. Rath Health Foundation's slogan of Health Literacy in a new campaign called Health Literacy Campaign.

This new campaign which is to be launched soon will have the following objectives:

1. Explain the Science of the human body and viruses.
2. Explain the ARV treatment protocols.
3. Encourage surveys on treatment adherence and CD4 progress of patients.
4. Create awareness of the failures of other forms of treatment.
5. Create social change by mobilizing communities further through schools, clinics, workplaces, and youth programmes.

I shall be getting copy of this policy document very soon.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDICINES CONTROL COUNCIL (MCC)

The only person present from the government was **Precious Mtsoo**, Registrar of Medicines who arrived on the last day in the evening, after stating that she was first unable to come to the meeting.

She openly stated that the MCC had just had an extra ordinary meeting the day before to 'fast track' applications for ARV's for all AIDS related protocols. She also stated that the MCC have granted 2 generic licenses for drugs produced by **Glaxo Welcome** and 2 licenses for producing generics by **Boehringer Ingelheim**. This is very bad news, considering the letter sent by Adv. Anthony Brink to the MCC two weeks ago. It is apparent that they sought to do this exactly within the 2 weeks grace period the MC had to respond before legal challenge to subvert efforts of the newly formed Treatment Information Group, headed by Adv. Brink and **Prof. Mhlongo**.

NEWS FROM THE U.S.A CONSULATE

I met up with the person I met on the Friday from the U.S.A Consulate in Cape Town. Making small talk over breakfast, I asked the secretary (name withheld) of the Ambassador if she had heard of the TAC, knowing full well that the TAC has over the last year had protests outside the U.S. Consulate in the city. She stated that they know Zackie Achmat very well, as he used to be assisted by the U.S.A and that the consulate used to source funding from donors in the U.S. for the TAC. However, once Zackie begun slating George bush we was no longer supported. He met the new U.S.A Ambassador one day and was told to leave the meeting after only two minutes of the meeting. My source said "Too bad he bit the hand that feeds him". Now I wonder why he has changed the tac of the TAC to become a political party.