



APDUSA

AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION OF SOUTHERN
AFRICA

The Interests Of The Workers And Landless Peasants Shall Be Paramount

COVID-19 And Anti-Capitalist Struggles: Towards An Emergency Platform For Working People

The COVID-19 pandemic, a virulent and lethal infection of a person's respiratory tract, is real. Globally, this pandemic has already infected more than 1300 000 people and claimed the lives of over 74,000 – statistics that are unevenly spread across countries! It is highly uncertain when the global and local new COVID-19 infections and fatalities will begin to fall and stop completely.

Around the first week of March 2020, South Africa reported fewer than 10 positive tests of travellers who had returned from Europe. Two weeks after these initial cases, the numbers of travellers entering the country from abroad who tested positive for COVID-19 multiplied six-fold. In response to this explosion of imported cases, the state hastily imposed travel bans from countries where the pandemic was spreading like a wild fire. Coupled with the travel bans from the 'high-risk countries', government also prescribed quarantine and self-isolation for people with mild symptoms or who have had close contact with COVID-19 patients. Despite these panaceas, the numbers of COVID-19 patients quickly leaped over 1600 as healthcare workers struggle to trace, test and isolate symptomatic individuals.

Accurate information about local transmissions and spinoff viral infections became difficult in the weeks preceding the 21 days lockdown, decreed two days after Human Rights Day. Tracing and testing, so crucial to block the spread of COVID-19 infections started overwhelming South Africa's broken public health system, crippled by austerity and the irrational privatisation of the healthcare industry – including health research laboratories. This neoliberal offensive is not only devastating South Africa's broken healthcare system. The global scramble for test kits, basic protective wear for healthcare workers, ventilators to keep COVID-19 sufferers in intensive care alive and the lack of a vaccine attest to the neoliberal destruction of access to health on a global scale.

COVID-19 spreads in similar ways as other respiratory infections like influenza and tuberculosis – through the invisible droplets from the cough or sneezing of an infected host. COVID-19 droplets can live on door handles and other contaminated surfaces for a few hours or several days. Touching any contaminated surface and thereafter touching your face inadvertently transfers the virus to you. According to health experts, people with some chronic illnesses and the elderly are acutely vulnerable to become COVID-19 victims. Unlike influenza and TB, COVID-19 is far more dangerous mainly because of the lack of natural antibodies to it, the nonexistence of vaccines to

immunise humans against the virus and treating severely ill patients with ventilators now confront enormous availability and affordability crises.

Confronting South Africa's 21 Day Lockdown

Ramaphosa's anti-COVID-19 lockdown follows the principles and logic of how states subservient to capitalism counter economic and other disasters. It is a template to safeguard corporate profits and capitalist domination, enforced by fully armed military and police forces. First, the state reinforces the leadership of the capitalists in the design and execution of the anti-disaster measures, bolstering corporate balance sheets with state funds and sureties. Second, they force workers to pay the costs of the COVID-19 crisis and economic slump. Government's reliance on the labour relations framework of the bosses to "protect workers' rights and compensate them for lost wages" during this crisis does the direct opposite in reality: it insidiously attacks the working class and their families.

Physical distancing and prohibitions on large gatherings make the advancement of anti-capitalist struggles in the chokehold of COVID-19 very complicated. But this physical confinement should not and does not ban prosecuting anti-capitalist struggles by other means, starting with defeating the despair and socio-political paralysis now spreading with COVID-19. This health crisis merely compels us to seek new alternative ways to build the self-confidence of anti-capitalist movements. Instead of mass rallies and face-to-face meetings which are reckless and fatalistic tactics while this health disaster rages – use costless and cheap phone networks to communicate with people outside your home. Gains of past struggles must not be given up in the battles to defeat COVID-19.

As society combats the spread of COVID-19, APDUSA fights at the forefront to uphold and defend the interests of workers and peasants to counter the impact of this viral disease on their working conditions and quality of life, including their social wellbeing. Anti-capitalist movements need an emergency platform to combat the free fall in the living standards of the labouring majority as a result of COVID-19 and the economic slump. Expose and oppose the machinations of the bosses and their state to impose the costs of fighting COVID-19 on the workers and peasants.

Defend and support workers in 'essential sectors' at the forefront of fighting COVID-19. Regulate the hours of work without wage cuts and ensure working conditions that protect the health and safety of these workers. Every worker in these sectors deserve adequate training combined with necessary protective wear to prevent COVID-19 infection. Measures to quickly upscale the production of the best quality protective wear for essential sector workers must include reorienting factories most suitable to overcome the shortages. This includes mass production of crucial health equipment to scan for fever symptoms and radically upscale reliable COVID-19 testing. Lessons from history show that the best way to do this is through the socialisation of factories, distribution outlets and essential services on the principles of democratic workers' control.

No worker combating the spread of COVID-19 by 'observing the lockdown' must sacrifice any socioeconomic benefits. Wages of workers temporarily laid off to slow the spread of this virulent disease must be fully covered by accumulated corporate profits and reserve funds rather than a worker's saved unemployment insurance or injury benefits. In fact, these workers are neither unemployed nor physically injured and must not carry the costs of this societal health crisis. Companies bankrupted by the owners must be nationalised and affected workers must be eligible for full state support until the worker finds a suitable job, including reskilling assistance.

Rapidly upscale the distribution of nutritious foods and healthcare products to needy communities without endangering people's health and lives. Stringent action against businesses that inflate prices of foods and essential health items (like sanitizing gels, etc.) must go hand-in-hand with free access to water in all working class communities. The COVID-19 crisis once again exposes the irrationality of private profit accumulation which is behind soaring prices of health equipment, medication, food, communication and transportation services during this crisis. To defeat COVID-19 these items and services should qualify for a 100% subsidy. Democratic economic planning is crucial to produce and distribute these necessities on the vast scale needed, including an inventory of idle establishments that can quickly be converted for this purpose.

Share the best available and easy-to-understand information about COVID-19 and how to combat it with everyone. Scale-up the publication and circulation of evidence about the struggles of workers in essential service sectors, neighbours in need of urgent care, any abuse by the armed forces, the best scientific evidence about COVID-19, etc. It is urgent for trade unions and social movements to wealthy telecommunications corporations to implement charge-free airwaves for frequent communication and use of social media in social solidarity struggles against COVID-19. Progressive media outlets like Workers World Media Productions and journalists in their network have a crucial role to advance this working class emergency platform against COVID-19.

COVID-19 is a societal health crisis and defeating it demands the broadest possible socio-political solidarity and struggle against it. There is now abundant evidence that private corporations and their governments cannot be entrusted to defeat COVID-19 on behalf of the labouring majority because they protect their self-interests and insatiable greed first and foremost. The economic, ecological and political dimensions of this health disaster call for united action from the broadest possible network of progressive organisations; it calls for self-organisation. Trade unions, community social movements and anti-capitalist political organisations must use resources at their disposal to socialise the anti-COVID-19 campaign. Mobilise our collective capacities to unite more progressive forces around this emergency platform to strengthen social solidarity and defend the interests of the labouring majority.

**BROADEN THE ANTI-COVID 19 CAMPAIGN IN THE INTERESTS OF THE
LABOURING MAJORITY**

FIGHT FOR DEMOCRATIC ECONOMIC PLANNING!

**THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKERS AND LANDLESS PEASANTS SHALL BE
PARAMOUNT**

Issued by APDUSA Website: www.apdusa.org.za Email Address: apdusa@mail.org April 2020