

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

THE IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In this past year we have been witness to some significant events which illustrate that the ideological struggle in South Africa is being propelled forward from the back stage position it has occupied since the birth of the new social dispensation in 1994. A correct understanding of what is now unfolding in this regard is of critical importance to us as it will serve to guide us on the role we have to play at this time.

To put things in perspective it will be useful to look briefly at the program adopted by the ruling party at the time of its accession to power, how it has proceeded to implement it and its effects. In the negotiated settlement the ANC committed itself to work and defend the capitalist system in South Africa, specifically guided by neo-liberal policies. Its first problem was how to rationalise the jettisoning of the lofty sentiments of the Freedom Charter such as nationalising the commanding heights of the economy, etc. Aply assisted by ideologues in the SACP, we were then told that the key task of the new government was the completion of the national democratic revolution. The implication of this was that the government had to revolutionise the state administration and the economy also had to be reconstructed with the aim of turning South Africa into a successful and rich nation in which all could benefit and the racial inequities of the past were eradicated. The way to do this would be the implementation of neo-liberal policies, including the privatisation of state assets and services, promoting freedom of capital movement in and out of the country and the development of export orientated industry based on a so-called flexible labour market. This of course required us to turn a blind eye to the reality of the very large poverty stricken sector of the population and its fundamental needs, as well as the widespread and deep levels of poverty in the rest of Africa, especially southern Africa, as if the with this approach South Africa could solve its problems in isolation of these realities.

While Mbeki, Mboweni and Trevor Manuel have received much praise for their willingness to faithfully implement the neo-liberal economic agenda, and progress has been made in reconstructing the economy for the benefit of the bourgeois class and imperialist interests, anything else has proved to be far from simple. The unemployment rate rocketed and remains stubbornly high. The housing crisis deepens as the backlog grows inexorably. Likewise, their neoliberal policies have also resulted in serious failures in health and education.

But that is not all. On the other side of things the ANC set about the task of revamping the state administration to break the influence of the old apartheid functionaries and ostensibly, to repopulate the various departments with people previously excluded on an equitable basis. This was never going to be easy, but then the aspirant black bourgeois and petit-bourgeois support base of the ANC had to be rewarded as rapidly as possible. Now in a well established capitalist state the administration is refined over a long period of time. New political parties do not tamper overmuch with the basic administrative function except to position new party hacks at the top. In many cases they are just figureheads and do not affect the basic level of efficiency of the departments they command. But when wholesale changes are made then things can easily go awry as it has indeed happened here in South Africa We may note, for example, the critical failures in the department of Home Affairs, in the justice, education and health systems, etc. We have seen that these failures have resulted in strong criticism of the government from across a broad social spectrum. But most important of all, the resultant deepening plight of the labouring masses has brought about the birth of a new resistance movement.

In response the ANC government has resorted to various tactics to defend itself. Criticism of maladministration have been rebutted with accusations of racism. On the economic and social front it now argues that the problems are not that of the government alone but the whole of society and so

it resorts to appealing for "proudly South African" volunteerism. It is further attempting to sell the suffering unemployed masses the hollow Extended Public Works Program (EPWP) and the equally doubtful Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA) program. Beyond this it is increasingly resorting to diversions such as name changing, sport and even acknowledging internal corruption and careerism as a major part of the problem, hoping the population will stand by and wait for the internal cleansing process to complete itself, which it never will. But all of these excuses are wearing rather thin and opposition from below is intensifying.

At the outset the new resistance movement of the masses emerged primarily as a response to the callous commercialisation of municipal services. We are all aware of the efforts to unite this movement under the banner of the Social Movements Indaba (SMI). But as we have observed, the development of this movement would only come to labour under the welter of the obstructive political ideas of spontaneity, radical reformism and anarchism. Those like ourselves who sought to promote a radical political program found ourselves as voices in the dark. Attempts to raise a program of common demands stumbled on idealistic, so-called democratic procedures such as those practised in SMI or APF workshops and seminars. In these, representatives were invariably called upon to separate themselves into different interest groups, each of which would present their demands to a plenary gathering and these were then supposed to be adopted collectively. This tactic only promoted insularism. In other words, single issue struggles were tacitly encouraged. Those concerned with water problems remained so, as did those concerned with other specific problems such as housing, electricity or sanitation, etc. The common program was never more than an eclectic hodgepodge as nowhere was a realistic alternative to the system being posed.

The obstructive effect of these idealistic tactics and the reactionary ideologies referred to above would in a relatively short period of time produce its own fallout. Without the stability afforded by a fundamental political program, bodies such as the Concerned Citizen's Forum in KZN, the Anti Eviction Campaign in the Western Cape and the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum fell apart. But all the while the effects of the government's socio-economic policies on the masses have been mounting. Despite the failure of their struggles to progress to a higher plane the masses could not afford to lie down and accept what they see as the failure of the ANC government. Yet their focus remains on the performance of the ANC rather than being guided by any development of the understanding that it is the system that is fundamentally the problem and not a particular political party.

All of these developments have only resulted in the growing pressure for an ideological alternative, demonstrated by the recent events I referred to at the outset and on which we can now focus our attention.

Firstly we see the growing conflict in the tripartite alliance itself with outspoken criticism of the ANC leadership and its policies of neo-liberalism by influential voices in both the SACP and Cosatu. Subject to great pressure from below, they strongly demand an alternative to neo-liberalism.

Secondly, outside the ranks of the tripartite alliance this last year has seen the emergence of the first tentative but sustained dialogue and links between political organisations on the left with the birth of the radical parties network, its need and viability emphasised by the organisation of a "Day of Marxism" in Gauteng in December last year, done jointly by the Socialist Group and Keep Left/Socialism from Below. This is significant because all ideas of building such links in the past were either rejected out of hand or considered unrealistic, or in practice, they failed very quickly. These developments have also clearly been influenced by emergence of the International Radical Parties Network and its impact is being intensified with the recent emergence of the African Radical Left Network with the direct involvement of left groupings from South Africa.

Thirdly there is profound influence of the new developments in Latin America in countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia which speak of a viable alternative to neo-liberalism being possible.

There have been other lesser events, when taken collectively, can also be considered indicators pointing in the same direction. They include a well attended seminar on the life of Leon Trotsky, held in Cape Town last year, and the now annual Rosa Luxemburg seminar, the third with the theme - "Political Power: State, Party and Popular Power", also in Cape Town in February this year. Lastly, there is one more incident I wish to cite and this the content of speakers from various communities at a recent protest demonstration organised by the W.Cape SMI. It was significant that all these speakers were linking the various problems that communities faced rather than just speaking about a particular problem as has been current in the past. Problems of housing, unemployment, service delivery and crime were all linked as a lack of development. This illustrates that the old idea of splitting people at SMI conferences into different workshops each on a specific problem, and then mechanically grouping the demands that emerge is no longer acceptable.

All of this indicates that fundamental political questions on the direction of the struggle are forcing themselves onto the agenda. It means that the different contending ideologies are being pushed into the arena of open examination, and this is where we are required to give our attention. It is perhaps ironic that this pressure has mounted in the face of the failure of the resistance movement to make clear progress in the task of building national, organised unity, which has left many cadres in the ranks of the radical left to become frustrated and even disillusioned. This has had the unwelcome result of a weakening of leftwing organisations at a time when the need for the role that they can play is greatest. This has perhaps contributed to the willingness of these groupings to look at collaboration. All in all, we are now moving into an extremely important period which we can characterise as a melting pot of political ideologies, similar to what occurred back in the 1930s. It behoves us to observe the different ideologies competing for suzerainty in the present situation.

Firstly we have the ideas of radical reformism and spontaneity - changing the world without taking power and anarchism, which we examined in our 2005 conference.

Secondly we have the fraudulent ideas referred to earlier, as put forward by the leading ideologues in the SACP and endorsed by Cosatu. This is the theory of the need to complete the national democratic revolution from which path it is said that the ANC has drifted. We are told that the ANC is a working class party whose leadership has fallen into the hands of persons serving bourgeois interests. The leadership of the party must be won back so that it can return to being driven by the lofty tenets of the Freedom Charter and more immediately the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Program. All this is supposed to entail the gradual transformation of the bourgeois state into a socialist one. At least, that is what we are expected to believe.

The falsity of this ideology is that it is based on the assumption that the Freedom Charter was revolutionary program when it was anything but. Besides being a set of lofty promises by leaders to the masses rather than guide to action for the masses, the Freedom Charter was always a program for compromise. Moreover it was a program that made serious concessions to multinationalism and racialism. It was for these reasons that the ANC could so easily enter the negotiated settlement and why it was so readily accepted into the negotiation process. Since, as it is frequently argued, the ANC is a "broad church", it means that the petit-bourgeois and bourgeois interests in the party can never be negated. Moreover, with the economic and financial muscle that they command, there is extremely little hope of their control of the leadership being defeated. In the face of this reality we have the tragi-comic promotion of Jacob Zuma as a leader who can carry forward the interests of the working class while he is very clearly the very negation of a radical revolutionary.

The shallowness of the leading proponents of this ideology is further exposed by the unwillingness to lead the trade unions and the SACP into any kind of unity with the masses struggling in the new independent social movements.

Going outside the tripartite alliance again we may firstly observe the ideological tendency of entryism and the necessity of collaborating with Cosatu as an imperative as the only political path to follow. So much so that the new non-union struggles should be ignored. The inescapable implication is that there are no political ideas of worth being raised within the organs of the SMI while there are such ideas in the SACP/Cosatu axis. The proponents of these ideas are therefore prone to pander to the ideology of the leftwing in Cosatu/SACP.

At the other extreme we have those who argue that there is no room for any kind of collaboration with Cosatu because of its commitment to the tripartite alliance.

Generally, from the active left wing groupings we have not found any keenness to proclaim a clear political program for the current struggles of the masses. One commonly accepted idea however is the need for a broad based, mass workers party. On the other hand we also have the more sectarian view that the only answer is a revolutionary vanguard party rather than a broad mass based party which it is argued, can only be reformist and reactionary.

Beyond this we have the phenomenon individual activists in the broad resistance movement who identify themselves as political autonomists, besides those who believe it is possible to play a progressive role through the medium of ngos.

In concluding this overview we observe that in the absence of a progressive political program the present resistance movement finds itself stumbling along and struggling to solidify. We can acknowledge that there has indeed been attempts to link the various struggles of the masses as a common struggle against neoliberalism. But even here the thrust has been weak. In practice we have opposition to privatisation and commercialisation of social services, etc, and its effect on labour. We also have the call for subsidisation of the needs of the poor by the rich, but that is about as far as it goes. Further, in practice, the agrarian problem is regarded as an entirely separate matter. Vague slogans calling for socialism do little if anything to improve matters no matter how frequently they are shouted. Yet all the while factional political interests bedevil the struggle of the masses as demonstrated by the conflict at the last national meeting of The Social Movements Indaba in Durban last year and the efforts to establish a rival association to the SMI instead of the promotion of broader, principled unity by interest groups on both sides.

We say over and over again that the struggle can only progress if guided by a progressive and unifying political program. This is to say that there is the need for unity on the basis of common demands and not the fallible unity based on the support for the demands of one group in return for their support for the demands of another. We cannot fight as a divided people on the basis of disunited demands. We, of Apdusa do have our own program but we need to ask the question whether it fully meets the requirements of the day.

Let us recall that soon after the first democratic elections in the country when we adopted the radical changes to our constitution and reformulated our program in 1995, we resolved to maintain our affiliation to the Umsa and its 10 Point Programme. Now we always regarded the 10 Point programme as a whole and not a collection of separate points. So even while the central demand for the full franchise had been achieved, the agrarian problem remained unresolved and the other demands of the program were still relevant. Thus Apdusa's new program was seen as an extension rather than a replacement of the 10 Point Program. But subsequently, in practice this link was lost. What this means is that if we look at what we now regard as our political program, i.e. the list of demands carried in our statement - "The Struggle for Socialist Democracy Continues", we will observe certain deficiencies. For example, there is the absence of any reference to the critical issue of compulsory and free education as demanded in the second point of the 10PP. Our program is also silent on another critical issue i.e. the question of taxation where the demand for a single progressive tax and the abolition of taxes that burden the poor, e.g. VAT today, is clearly spelt out in the 10PP.

If we accept that it would be tactically incorrect to attempt today to promote the 10PP coupled with the Apdusa program then we need to ask ourselves whether the latter as it stands serves the needs of the times in the fullest sense. In what we regard as our Apdusa program we have 6 demands. In brief:

1. The demand for a constituent assembly
2. The demand for resolution of the land question
3. The demand for the expropriation of all major industries, banks and institutions of credit
4. The revision of labour legislation for the end to all discrimination against the worker and the demand for the right to work.
5. The promotion of self organisation and unity of the labouring masses with 6 sub-demands
6. The demand for the full accountability of elected representatives of the people at all levels.

I therefore wish to argue that this program needs to be fleshed out as it ignores the present critical and immediate demands of the masses which need to be put in a political perspective. As opposed to volunteerism, privatisation and neoliberalism, we need specific demands on education, health, housing and essential social services and environmental protection. I would also argue that the 5th demand in our program on the promotion of self organisation and organised unity of the labouring masses is strictly speaking, not a political demand but a resolution on the needs of the struggle for political demands.

This does not mean that we need to change our constitution or revise our manifesto which we adopted in 1995. All it means is that if, as we must, agitate on the need for a political program for the struggles of our time then we must be able to explain what it is. This does not mean that we must dogmatically insist that ours is the only acceptable program but we need to stimulate broad discussion of this fundamental question.

Finally, while we understand that what is needed now is a transitional program it remains correct to speak as we do, of the struggle as a struggle for socialism. But for most people socialism is still a vague idea and we need to start conveying what the essence of socialism is as opposed to capitalism, starting from the fundamental contradiction in capitalism - that of social production with individual appropriation via capital and private property. By contrast, we are fighting for social production with social appropriation and social management.

R Wilcox
April 2007

Appendix:

10 Point Programme of the Unity Movement
Extract From 1995 Apdusa Manifesto

THE TEN-POINT PROGRAMME OF THE UNITY MOVEMENT

The aim of the Non-European Unity Movement is the liquidation of the National Oppression of the Non-Europeans in South Africa, that is, the removal of all the disabilities and restrictions based on the grounds of race and colour, and the acquisition by the Non-Europeans of all those rights which are at present enjoyed by the European population.

Unlike other forms of past society based on slavery and serfdom, DEMOCRACY IS THE RULE OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE. But, as long as a section of the people are enslaved there can be no democracy, and without democracy there can be no justice. We the Non-Europeans are demanding only those rights for which the Europeans were fighting more than a hundred years ago.

These DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS are contained in the following Ten Points:

1. THE FRANCHISE, i.e. the right of every man and woman over the age of 21 to elect and be elected to Parliament, Provincial Councils and all other Divisional and Municipal Councils.

This means the end of all political tutelage, of all communal or indirect representation, and the granting to the Non-Europeans of the same, universal, equal, direct and secret ballot as at present enjoyed by Europeans exclusively.

2. COMPULSORY, FREE AND UNIFORM EDUCATION for all children up to the age of sixteen, with free meals, free books and school equipment for the needy.

This means the extension of all the educational rights at present enjoyed by European children, to all Non-European children with the same access to higher education on equal terms

3. INVIOABILITY OF PERSON, OF ONE'S HOUSE AND PRIVACY.

This Is the elementary Habeas Corpus right. The present helplessness of the Non-Europeans before the police Is an outrage of the principles of democracy. No man should be molested by the police, nor should his house be entered without a writ from the magistrate. This same right to inviolability and privacy at present enjoyed by the European should apply to all Non-Europeans. All rule by regulation should be abolished.

4. FREEDOM OF SPEECH, PRESS, MEETINGS AND ASSOCIATION.

This point hardly needs explanation. It Is the abolition of the Riotous Assemblies Act, directed specifically against the Non-European. It embodies the right to combine, form and enter Trade Unions on the same basis as the Europeans.

5. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND OCCUPATION.

This means the abolition of all Pass Laws and the restriction of movement and travel within the Union, the right to live, to look for work wherever one pleases. It means the right to take up a profession or trade as enjoyed by the Europeans.

6. FULL EQUALITY OF RIGHTS FOR ALL CITIZENS without distinction of race, colour or sex.

This means the abolition of all discriminatory Colour Bar Laws.

7. REVISION OF THE LAND QUESTION in accordance with the above.

Relations of serfdom at present existing on the land must go, together with the Land Acts, together with the restrictions upon acquiring land. A new division of the land in conformity with the existing rural population, living on the land and working the land, is the first task of a democratic state and parliament.

8. REVISION OF THE CIVIL AND CRIMINAL CODE in accordance with the above.

This means the abolition of the feudal relations in the whole system of justice - police, magistrates, law courts and prisons - whereby the punishment for the same crime is not the same, but is based upon the skin colour of the offender. There must be complete equality for all citizens before the law, and the abolition of all punishment incompatible with human dignity.

9. REVISION OF THE SYSTEM OF TAXATION in accordance with the above.

This means the abolition of the Poll Tax, or any other tax applicable specifically to the Non-Europeans or discriminating between Europeans and Non-Europeans. There should be one, single, progressive tax, and all indirect taxation that falls so heavily upon the poorer classes should be abolished.

10. REVISION OF THE LABOUR LEGISLATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO MINES AND AGRICULTURE.

This means specifically the revision of the Industrial Conciliation and Wage acts, the elimination of all restrictions and distinctions between a European worker and a Non-European worker, equal pay for equal work, equal access to apprenticeship and skilled labour. This means the liquidation of indentured labour and forcible recruitment, the full application of Factory Legislation to the mines and on the land. It means the abolition of the Masters and Servants Act and the establishment of complete equality between the seller and buyer of labour. It also means the abolition of payment in kind, and the fixing of a minimum wage for all labourers without distinction of race or colour.

FROM THE APDUSA MANIFESTO - 1995

There is now no time to rest on the gains of the past, in the hope that they are enough to solve the problems of the nation. The new social, political and legal institutions which entrench and protect this unjust state of affairs are the immediate obstacles which block the path of progress towards a fundamental solution to the problems of the nation, whereby all members of our society shall be enabled to contribute freely in the creation of wealth and to equally and justly share the fruits of their labour. The removal of these obstacles is the first task confronting the people in their ongoing struggle for liberation. But the struggle to remove these obstacles must go hand in hand with the task of laying the foundations of a new and just society; a society which truly serves the interests of the labouring masses who produce the wealth of the nation with their labour; a society in which people can exercise the democratic right of control over their own destiny in every sense and not just by making a cross on a piece of paper once every five years.

In this struggle we must therefore be governed by the following objectives:

1. The convening of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly, charged with the task of drawing up a new constitution, governed by the interests of the oppressed and exploited working class and peasantry, based on the demand

for full, unfettered political rights for all with majority rule in a unitary state, the removal of all artificially created regional political boundaries, the liquidation of all special minority rights and privileges which militate against the interests of the majority. The Constituent Assembly must have full powers to discharge these duties, untrammelled by any directions and constraints designed to serve self-interested minorities.

2. A resolution of the land question in accordance with the needs of those who work and live off the land. This means the destruction of all existing tribal and feudal relations in the rural areas and the nationalisation of the land, without compensation. A new division of the land and its management, which excludes forced collectivisation, the payment of rent and the expropriation of small peasant farmers, must be undertaken by committees that are democratically elected by and answerable to the people.

3. The expropriation of all major industries, banks and institutions of credit and their management by the state and representatives of the workers in the interests of the population as a whole.

4. The revision of labour legislation for the liquidation of all discrimination against the worker. This also means:

(i) The right to work, which must be implemented both via the institution of necessary adjustments to the length of the working week to provide employment for all, without a reduction in wages, as well as by the institution of a progressive public works program with the full representation of the unemployed in its management.

(ii) The fixing of a living minimum wage as well as a sliding scale to compensate for any price increases.

(iii) The unconditional right to strike which includes the right of occupation of the workplace.

5. The promotion of the self-organisation and united independent struggle of the labouring masses who produce the wealth of the country and carry it on their backs. This means:

(i) The promotion of independent and democratic worker committees and unions which arise from the ranks of the workers themselves, whether employed or unemployed.

(ii) The removal of all forms of bureaucratic control in the trade union movement and the promotion of workers power.

(iii) The promotion of worker militias as a means of defence in industrial action against armed attacks of the police and army at the instance of the bosses.

(iv) The rebuilding of organisations of the people such as civics, parent/teacher/student associations and peasant committees.

(v) The building of unity through the creation of local unity forums which embrace and coordinate the organisations of the people.

(vi) The need to build the greatest ideological and organisational unity between the workers in the urban centres and the peasants in the rural areas. While the workers must be made aware of the problems of the landless, the peasantry must learn that it is only under the leadership of the working class that the land question can be solved.

6. The elected representatives of the people, at organisational level or in the local, regional or national political institutions of state, must be fully accountable to those who elect them and they must be fully bound by the demands and aspirations of the working class and its allies, the landless peasantry.

These are the minimum demands of the time which must guide APDUSA in all of its activities. These are the objectives which must be carried across to the people in every possible manner. In this task we must make full use of the gains of the past, which include the democratic right to enter and act in the political institutions of state, not to collaborate in the entrenchment of prevailing injustices, but to expose them with all possible vigour and to raise the fundamental demands of the people, in full recognition of the fact that there can be no progress to liberation without the organisation and unity of those millions who remain oppressed and exploited. It is our task to give flesh and body to that clause in our constitution which states:

"The democratic demands and aspirations of the oppressed workers and peasants shall be paramount in the orientation of the APDUSA in both its short term and long term objectives."

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