

APDUSA



AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The interests of the workers and landless peasants shall be paramount

LAND HUNGER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In this modern day and age, the land question remains unresolved. Glaring rural poverty, archaic political institutions foisted upon the rural poor and many militant and bitter fights for land across the third world compelled allies and enemies of the landless to respond. Proposals to end land hunger and bring about sustainable development put forward by the UN's WSSD, governments and NGOs must fail because these are based on capitalism.

Global Land Hunger and Poverty

Land hunger, poverty and the rape of our planet flows directly from the social system dominating the world today. In a world overflowing with wealth millions have been thrown into a barbaric struggle for survival. World food output per head increased by 25% and food prices fell by 40% in real terms since the end of the Second World War. World cereal stocks increased by 18% since the mid-1990s, yet 830 million people remain underfed. Not only has the gulf between rich and poor widened on a world scale, but many more people live in poverty than ever before. Official facts and figures, using the conservative \$1-a-day poverty line, indicate that in the late 1980s and early 1990s there were 1.1 billion poor people in the world. By the late 1990s this figure had increased by another 100 million to 1.2 billion impoverished, with the majority eking out an existence in the third world countryside!

There are about 16 million peasant family units in Latin America, translating into about 75 million people. Peasants have access to only 20% of the land, with an average farm size of between 1.2 and 1.5 hectares. This land is of low agricultural potential and is located mainly along hillsides and semi-desert regions. The top 3% of Columbia's landed elite own over 70% of the arable land, while 57% of the poorest farmers subsist on under 3%. Under the cover of the war on drugs (Plan Columbia), 70,000 acres of food crops were destroyed during one month in southern Columbia! While the Mexican government is stripping Chiapas of oil and lumber, peasants lack running water, schools and health care. Land ownership is highly skewed. Six thousand rich dynasties own 3 million hectares of Chiapas, half of the land in the state. A million villagers are subsisting on the rest, of which only 41% is considered suitable for agriculture. Barely surviving peasant farmers are clinging to their tiny chunks of land alongside vast plantations also in Brazil, Ecuador and Argentina where the gospel is farming for the world market.

People who try to escape the rural squalor just flock into urban shantytowns and slums. What choices do you have when landlords and bankers, governments and armed forces, and so-called market forces of course, are all stacked against you? Ties with the countryside are nevertheless maintained for several generations, as well as the dream of returning to the land. The sacking of tens of thousands of mineworkers over the last ten years set in motion mass migrations back to the land. Hungry humans are returning to the land instead of the much-needed remittances of yesteryear.

Trickle-down lies: Sustainable development from crumbs?

When multinational sweatshops (*maquiladoras*) on Mexico's border with the United States moved elsewhere in search of cheaper labour many unemployed returned to places like Chiapas in the south. Similar migrations are occurring in Thailand and South Korea following the implosion of the "Asian economic miracle" in 1997. The fortunes from foreign direct investment and debt-service payments never lifted working people out of poverty but flowed into the pockets of investors abroad. After all, capital flows to where it can quickly rake in maximum profits. Widespread devastation resulting from the reckless pursuit of capitalist economic growth, which has become so much intensified since the UN's 1972 Summit on the environment and sustainable development, now stare humanity in the face.

In line with the neo-liberal logic, capitalism should be saved to combat the existing devastation and future threats to our planet. Those who defend this logic range from die-hard neo-liberals to believers in capitalism-with-a-human-face. They tell the poor to try harder to uplift themselves by their bootstraps and conceal the fact that capitalism is driving living standards lower. The crisis at the roots of the free-market system is so deep that capitalists mercilessly started slashing "welfare as we know it". Thus, belt-tightening became the universal slogan for the super-exploitation of the labouring classes. Recent conferences, like the Monterrey Conference in Mexico, must have hurt the feelings of those who expected crumbs from the tables of the rich. In the end, third world countries get chained to conditions worse than the structural adjustment programmes. And are we on the African continent any better-off after decades of structural adjustment? It is clearly impossible to finance sustainable development from the crumbs trickling from the tables of increasingly insatiable capitalists. Sustainable

development requires nothing less than the destruction of the capitalist system itself, which will also consign its lies about trickle-down wealth distribution to history.

GEAR-Style Land Reform in South Africa

In South Africa fifty thousand commercial farmers control agriculture and most of about 80 million hectares of highly fertile land. Casual labour at the lowest possible wage is the norm in order for these farmers to compete in world markets; they justify exploitation by hollow phrases like “ensuring the nations food security”. But this is only a fraction of about 18 million people living in our countryside. At least thirteen million people remain concentrated in remote villages of the bantustans. Remember the bantustans were designed to prevent the peasantry from earning a living from the land. In other words, to render them landless. The government knows that at least 70% of these people live in abject poverty, with the majority wanting less than 2 hectares of farmland per family. Post-1994 laws protecting outmoded forms of political rule in these areas aggravate this acute land hunger.

During the bygone days of the RDP many rosy promises on agrarian reform flowed from the lips of ruling party big shots. Currently government is promising to redistribute 30% of agricultural land over 15 years instead of over 5 years as promised in the RDP. From 1994 to 1999 the land reform programme redistributed less than 1% of agricultural land. In any case, even in Zimbabwe, where 15% of the land had been redistributed during the first 5 years, the agrarian question remains unresolved! Returning the land to the post-1913 victims of forced removals through a restitution process turned out to be a complete sham. Firstly, most of the settled claims are derisory cash payouts that cannot sustain a family for even one year. Secondly, most of the rural claims are unsettled. Thirdly, some peasants who reclaimed their land are unable to farm because they lack many other inputs. It is through the tenure reform component that the government is addressing the Bantustan agrarian problems. The landless in the villages are excluded from the winding bureaucratic process to put into law a Communal Land Rights Bill, further bolstering the control of tribal authorities over the land.

It is no longer any secret that World Bank and other free-market experts essentially crafted the new government's land reform policy. It is their GEAR-style response to the agrarian question. This land reform programme is based on the willing-buyer willing-seller principle. Where will the poor peasant get the money from to buy land from landholders whose property rights are safeguarded in the 1994 Constitution? Poor peasants must now compete with the governments' favourite candidates,

the middle-class black farmer, for limited grants and credit. Of course, before the peasant can advance to this point in the contest, they need to survive the dealings with private consultants and have their “business plans” approved. Pulling the rural poor into small-scale farming for the capitalist market is a fraud. The capitalist market is a dog-eats-dog world. Two options exist: Either fraudulent GEAR-style land reform under the enemies of the landless or full-scale agrarian revolution in alliance with the working class.

Political solution to land hunger and sustainable development

Land struggles have been internationalised and are inseparable from the fight for political power. Struggles by the landless poor in distant lands like Mexico (the *Zapatistas*) and Brazil (the *MST*) are resonating among militants here. It was only through self-organization that these rural masses raised the profile of their ongoing fight for land and political rights. Their platforms aim at building bridges with their true allies, the working class, and not appealing to governments wedded to the World Bank and imperialism. It is equally reactionary to mechanically transplant heroic struggles from other parts of the globe to South African soil. This adventurism is strikingly mixed with opportunism inside NGOs. These self-proclaimed leaders of our struggle misdirect the militant upsurge in some rural areas. Their desperate courting of their donors to bankroll the building of a movement of the landless in this country will cost ours struggle dearly. Ad hoc campaigns will totally eclipse independent struggle guided by a clear revolutionary programme. It is a method of struggle dooming the poor peasant to the slaughterhouse. As the age old saying goes, the road to hell is paved with many good intentions!

Resolution to the agrarian question and genuine sustainable development require nothing but the overthrow of capitalism and not just fiddling with its worst symptoms. A state under workers control must help the poor peasant farmers to get land, cheap credit and other farming inputs.

The APDUSA programme calls for the strongest political unity between the landless peasantry and the working class to resolve the land problem. Our programme states: “The 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 nationalization 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.”

**UNITY BETWEEN TOWN AND COUNTRY
END LAND HUNGER THROUGH SELF-ORGANIZATION
BUILD DEMOCRATIC PEASANT COMMITTEES
NATIONALIZATION WITHOUT FORCED COLLECTIVISATION**