

**APDUSA**



# **AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA**

*The interests of the workers and landless peasants shall be paramount*

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## **NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT** *Democracy in Reverse Gear*

The Local Government elections to be held on 5 December 2000 will bring into working a new policy for the provision of municipal services, which is being foisted on the nation by the ANC-led national government. As predicted, immediately after the election date was announced, the political parties contesting the elections started to bombard the population with promises to alleviate their miserable plight. It is important that people stop and think what the politicians have done for them since the 1995 local government elections. In most cases "these councillors of the people" were nowhere to be seen, while they sat in their chambers, working out laws to exploit their constituents. The poor who are unable to afford services charges have already been exposed to the ugly might of their local government. More and more, people who are in arrears with service charges are being handed over to debt collectors. They are evicted from their homes and their furniture is thrown out on the streets. In some areas services have already been privatised with prepaid electricity and water meters.

### **Privatisation - A Recipe For Exploitation**

The bourgeoisie parties involved in those committees planning the restructuring of local government across South Africa have voted for the introduction of privatisation of social services. The ANC and the DA only differ on the extent of the privatisation strategy. This policy means that local government councils will sell off their responsibility to provide municipal services to private companies. We all know that private companies enter business to make a profit and they expect you to pay for services rendered. The provision of essential service like water and electricity will not be treated differently. The people who are unable to pay for these services will have to stay without them. According to Government statistics the current rate of unemployment stands at 35%. No one can imagine how these workers will be able to afford these services.

In spite of all the promises of free water and electricity the poorer communities will only find their suffering increasing. The Democratic Alliance, agent of the capitalists, and self-styled fighter for all the people, opposes cross-subsidisation whereby the wealthy are taxed so that the basic needs of the poor can be met. This means that the DA is in favour of the policy of ring-fencing where every community, whether in the poor locations or in the rich suburbs, will be separated in terms of service delivery and they will only get what they can pay for. While the rich who can afford it, will get the best services, the poor communities suffering the ravages of unemployment in squatter camps and locations will get very little or virtually nothing at all. This takes us back to the old methods of Separate Development while people are now supposed to be free. So much for the new South Africa.

It has also been noted that many local councils are unable to provide basic services to the people in their area because of large cuts in financial allocations to municipal councils by the central government. They could tax the rich to make up the shortfall but that is something they are not willing to do. Their only alternative is to contract the delivery of these services to private companies. These companies will naturally want to employ their own staff and many municipal workers will find that their jobs have become redundant. This means that the official unemployment figures will rise in the near future.

This policy of privatisation is the application of the GEAR policy of the National Government which has been prescribed by those agents of capitalist imperialism - the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. With every cutback in money for social services, health and education under this Gear policy, the workers are pushed into the position where they have to pay for their own oppression.

### **Local Government without Local Representatives**

The new local government policy brings in a system of fewer councils, each covering larger areas, with fewer ward representatives and more party list councillors. This means that a ward councillor will represent many more communities than before. It is easy to see that any community in a ward will have little chance to control their ward councillor. Likewise, it is easy to see that the party councillors will be less answerable to the people and they will be more interested in serving the party that put them in place than the people they are supposed to represent.

The situation is even worse in the rural areas where so-called tribal leaders are demanding the same undemocratic powers that they enjoyed in the old apartheid bantustans. Our national government is not at all unsympathetic to their demands. These policemen can be sure that they will still act as the debt collectors of the bourgeoisie government. It takes little to picture the plight of the many peasant communities living in tribal locations far away from the town councils which are supposed to represent them and from which they are cut off by impassable roads that have not been maintained for years. They cannot even hope to see a ward representative who lives miles away and who has no interest in their plight. Instead they must go on paying tributes and working free of charge on the lands of their so-called chief and his headmen in return for the most miserable scraps.

### **Reject the Empty Promises of the Parties of the Bourgeoisie!**

As was stated earlier these bourgeoisie parties are promising the workers the world, and we know this is impossible. Let us look at some of their promises.

The Democratic Alliance is promising us over the radio that poor households will be provided with a monthly income. They also promise education for the unemployed to enable them to find work. Like the ANC, they promise free water and electricity to all people, while a lot of areas do not even have water taps. The DA and ANC have not yet told the population where the money will come from to pay for these promises. Mashakane? Lotto or Usobomvu fund? There is no real answer.

The ANC goes further and promises us that they will remove incompetent and corrupt councillors. This is merely an attempt to appease the disgruntled population. But it is also an attempt to manipulate the thinking of the people and to prevent them from embarking on independent action. They, the ANC will have the right to remove an official and not the constituency which he/she is supposed to represent. This is just another ploy to bolster up this new system of local government. Everything we see tells us that the ANC, the DA and all the parties that are co-signatories to the new local government policy, are aiming to destroy people's control over their councillors.

### **Our Response**

APDUSA says that communities must have the right to elect and appoint their own councillors from their ranks. These councillors must be accountable to their constituency, which means that the community will have the right to recall their councillor if he does not act in their interests. This will guarantee that a community will be able to have a real voice in the workings of the council. Democratic ward councillors must consistently raise the plight of the communities that they represent and they have the duty to consistently expose all corrupt and undemocratic practices of the local government councils in which they serve.

We are aware that it is easy for any one independent councillor to be swallowed up in the machinations of those parties in municipal councils who have already shown their hand in their endorsement of the new undemocratic system of local government that is being imposed on us. For this reason these independent councillors must unite around common demands and with the assistance of their constituencies take control of the resources and wealth which the people have built and to which they have the fullest right. This is not possible unless the people are organised in their own community organisations. But it is not simply a community struggle. We need the unity of all progressive organisations of the people to enable all of us to achieve our common objectives. It is only through a strong united front based on our common demands for total freedom from oppression and exploitation that we will be able to work towards people's control of local government and the state.

Our struggle will not end at the ballot box. In fact, the population will only suffer the consequences of the new local government policy after the elections. It is the task of all progressive organisations to prepare their members and organisation to meet the attack of Gear in our communities head on. The struggle against oppression and exploitation will intensify after the 5 December 2000 elections. APDUSA emphasises that it is only a system of political representatives in local, provincial and national government, who are accountable to the population and who are bound to serve the interests of the labouring masses, that can ensure that we enjoy rights that we have fought for!

**Reject the privatisation of essential services and amenities!**

**Expose and fight new local government tyranny!**

**Build independent organisations of the people, for the people!**

**The interests of the workers and landless peasants are paramount!**