



## THE TRADITIONAL COURTS BILL HIGHLIGHTS ANC'S REACTIONARY POLICIES

The Traditional Courts Bill, presently in the hands of the National Council of Provinces, has evoked a lot of criticism from various quarters. This criticism focuses correctly on its implicit negation of democracy that is supposed to be the cornerstone of our constitution. Yet more importantly, the bill should be seen in conjunction with the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003. Both seek to preserve and promote the values of tribalism. This was a vital part of the political compromise of 1992/1993, which saw the ANC bowing to the power of local and international capitalism for the privilege of becoming the nominal rulers of South Africa.

Let us face up to reality. Tribalism is an outmoded and backward system. In the minds of ANC ideologues, the rationale for keeping it alive is a mystical concept of some kind of African egalitarianism that was supposed to exist before Africa was forcibly made to submit to European colonial rule. Yet, we should be reminded that it was anything but egalitarian. In the tribal system political and legal power rested in the hands of so-called traditional leaders – kings, chiefs and headmen who exercised their powers with all the savagery that they deemed necessary. We need only recall the rule of the idealised Zulu King Shaka, who lived by warfare, brutally subjugating rival tribes and who further mercilessly killed or had slaughtered those women concubines who could not deliver him a son. Yet, the belief or rather the rationale holds. It is an idea that has grown out of a twisted view of the struggle against colonialism for national liberation. There are those who have attempted to describe it as a struggle for African Communism or Communalism. But, instead of fighting colonialism for an advance on both systems of tribalism and colonial capitalism there has been an ideological fallback to tribalism with the consequent preaching of a narrow, ill-conceived brand of Africanism. We are exhorted to find sustenance in African values and a so-called African knowledge system as an alternative to the eurocentric values that were forced upon us. But this only means that we are asked to forsake our precious heritage of a universal knowledge system to which all peoples of the world

have contributed. We are being blinded to the fact that the only answer to rampant and exploitative capitalism AND tribalism is progressive internationalism. This is the real solution to the problems of the human race which occupies our whole planet and not only Africa or South Africa.

Now the ANC believes that it is working to protect people's culture and traditions from foreign influence and even destruction! To be sure, one can and must defend and promote our historic traditions of art, writing and story-telling, dance, theatre and music. But when you attempt to defend and promote outmoded traditions of politics and law in the modern age you inevitably fall into reaction. Tribal politics and law is incompatible with modern society. For instance, it cannot deal with national organisations such as Eskom or Transnet which transcend the old tribal boundaries. How would organisations such as these contend with having to cross one tribal law and custom boundary to another, that are in most cases now totally fictitious? Much less can the processes of tribal politics and law deal with the modern day phenomena and reality, for example, of computers and the internet. Nor yet can it deal with the process of urbanisation, the birth of the working class and the exploitative bourgeois class. In short, it is incompatible with the modern concept of bourgeois democracy.

With the advent of industrialisation the tribal system would inevitably disintegrate. But the colonialists saw fit to keep it artificially alive. It was the ideal method of divide and rule. Kings, chiefs and headmen were selected under colonial authority to operate this system. There were many who became collaborators and the puppets of the oppressor. Hence they were correctly branded as ➔

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➔ policemen chiefs.

The ANC now seeks to modernise the system of traditional rule to bring it in line with the country's constitution. This, in part, entails the repeal of the reactionary laws that sanctified the rule of so-called traditional leaders in all the Bantustans that blighted the nation under the old ruling regime, together with the Black Administration Act of 1927. (Why only now? - one may well ask. That is another question, which will be addressed in our next edition.) This attempt at the modernisation of outmoded tribalism is a futile effort. Who are these so-called traditional leaders today? They are not elected and in the final analysis, they are not answerable to the people who they seek to rule. Most of them revelled in the authority that the Afrikaner Nationalist rulers vested in them through the notorious and oppressive Bantustan system. Today, under tribal custom, it still prevails that women, in particular, are subjected to primitive patriarchy which denies them their very basic human rights. More importantly, tribalism is contrary to the solution of the vital

agrarian problem in South Africa. We find that authority over land rights is still being granted to these so-called traditional leaders with all their dubious claims while the vital needs of the peasantry in the rural areas are mostly being ignored. This can only be seen as an opportunistic ploy of the ANC to win the support of these so-called traditional leaders, which includes the power that they can command over those that they rule.

For so long as the ANC and others of the ruling class believe in promoting the concept and powers of traditional leaders, for so long will the people of our land still be divided along ethnic, tribal lines. Indeed, bantustanism is not dead and we need to work for the building of true national unity if South African society is to advance out of its present impasse. Only a united South Africa can contribute to the necessity of international revolution. Only by that means can we take our place, with pride in the advancement of the human race. ●

## **NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2030: ATTACK ON POOR AND WORKING PEOPLE**

Towards the end of 2011, the National Planning Commission (NPC) released its 400-odd page National Development Plan for 2030 (NDP 2030). This fat and wordy tome spells out a 20-year vision for South Africa and actions in the pipeline for job creation, top quality education and healthcare and uplifting the living standards of every citizen. It rests on extensive background research and advice from experts. But the huge volume of behind-the-scenes research does not say what NDP 2030 means for the poor and working majority. To answer this key question NDP 2030 must pass at least two vital tests. Firstly, it is critical to know how watertight its underlying logic is. Secondly, the mindset ingrained in it must be placed under a magnifying glass and exposed.

The NDP 2030 is rooted in and recycles the old ideas and worldview entrenched in every economic policy statement published since 1994. It is a seamless and shameless continuation of neoliberal fundamentalism. It safeguards the interests of a rich minority and their socio-economic system founded on greed, exploitation and inequality. NDP 2030 is steeped in anti-working class ideology and arguments with gaping holes, but these are veiled behind layers of misleading rhetoric.

The Plan calls for drastic cuts in the cost of living in the hope that this might be sufficient to make the necessities of life affordable to poor families. Millions of families trapped in poverty, including households dependent on paltry social grants and slave wages, might be pleased with this promised relief. But it is impossible to sustain low price ceilings on goods and services in isolation of how the entire capitalist economy works. Private profit accumulation and market anarchy will always militate against every

temporary reduction in the cost of living. The poor will not benefit from this proposal because they are divorced from a broad transitional platform for democratically planned eco-socialism. Ending constant price hikes and chaos fuelled by markets requires nothing less than total systemic change rather than fiddling with short-lived reforms. For obvious reasons we neither expect nor have any illusions that the NPC will advocate genuine alternatives to capitalist barbarism.

On page 5, this 20-year vision statement glowingly declares:

*"The economy will absorb more labour - especially new work seekers - and wage moderation at all levels will contribute to rising employment."* What does so-called 'wage moderation' mean? It is a euphemism for wage cuts, with this burden falling mainly on workers in insecure temporary jobs. It means 'flexible labour markets' in which capitalists, including labour brokers, hire-and-fire workers with shrinking, worthless or zero unemployment benefits. Yet capitalists and rich state bureaucrats regularly award themselves lavish perks and bonuses which they neither deserve nor need - with only a tiny fraction of these scandals hitting media headlines. This system was founded upon and thrives on rampant corruption. It is widely known that insatiable profit accumulation widens the gap between the wealthy elite and poor majority. But even on so-called 'profit moderation', sometimes echoed by worshipers of 'capitalism-with-a-human-face', the Plan maintains a deafening silence.

Why does NDP 2030 harp on 'new wage seekers'? This is aimed at weakening the united strength of working people by smashing our class into rival groups or fragments. A fresh example of ➔

➔ this ruthless assault on workers is the so-called 'youth wage subsidy', an evil scheme designed to play young workers off against our class sisters and brothers. All working people will gain from defeating this divide-to-exploit attack. Cut-throat competition among workers is bound to further depress real wages to the benefit of wealthy capitalists. It traps workers in a 'race to ruin' and runs counter to a guaranteed right to work.

Despite its bulky and intimidating size, NDP 2030 has a core message: "Work and education will enable citizens to improve their own lives" (NPC, NDP 2030, p11). The Plan pays lip-service to a unified system of free, compulsory and quality education for all. It envisages a 'new education system' operating in line with capitalist individualism.

## THE DHET GREEN PAPER AND FET PROGRAMMES

In the foreword to the Green Paper, minister Blade Nzimande claims that "redress of the injustices of the apartheid past" underpins the interventions of his department in South Africa's post-school education and training system. These interventions are aimed at reducing unemployment and aims at "the progressive introduction of free education for the poor up to undergraduate level". The document then goes on to propose a host of measures aimed at realigning and propping up the educational component of the capitalist South African economy. The document proceeds from the false basis of merely aiming at correcting the worst aspects of apartheid educational misdeeds; as if apartheid must not be historically linked to the development of oppressive and exploitative capitalism in South Africa. In the end its elaborate policy proposals amounts to a political strategy to get poor, working class youth into educational and short term, work-related structures like learnerships, internships and artisanships. Once done, the vast majority of these youth will be left to their own devices to find jobs that don't exist, in an economy plagued by growing structural unemployment. Frequent service delivery protests usually see huge numbers of youth in the frontlines.

If the government had the educational interests of poor, working class student youth at heart, then this would have been reflected in educational policies over the past 18 years. Nothing of the sort happened. Throwing money at the problem now is unlikely to change the fundamental underlying problem of youth unemployment and growing general unemployment. In addition to this, lecturers in the college system are expected take actions to offset the educational damage done to students at school level. This assumes the form of the administration of intervention strategies and actions to increase the pass rate in college courses. The consequences of the manipulation of matric pass rates therefore spill over into the post-school sector. This knock-on effect simply transfers the problem from one level to another, without arriving at practical solutions for the majority of student youth.

Billions have been spent and set aside for the improvement of the further education and training sector. In a speech delivered by Jacob Zuma on 4 April to FET College principals, figures were presented showing how this exercise is tantamount to a mere numbers-game, one

Firstly, instead of social and human rights being guaranteed, access to education will increasingly depend on private individual investment. The Plan thus entrenches the privatisation of education which has become a benchmark post-1994. A family is held responsible for investing in the education of its own children. Clearly, in this model, children from poor families will be 'educated' in and for poverty. Secondly, the purpose of education is not for the rounded development of human beings to enable them to make a full contribution to society. On the contrary, NDP 2030 restricts education to churning out so-called skilled labour to generate profits of capitalists. This is consistent with the Plan's flawed and decayed ideological outlook. ●

of political make-belief. Thumb sucked figures like getting 4 million students into this sector by 2032 (from the current 400 000) are being flung around. The present number of FET colleges stands at 50. An increase (as proposed by the Green Paper) over 20 years, would equal an additional 3.6 million students. (This figure is approximately the same as the number of youth who are currently part of the so-called "NEETS – not in education, employment or training". This number is reported to be approximately three million youth). This translates into an increased student enrolment of 180 000 per year. Divided by 50 colleges this amounts to an average of 3600 new students per year, per college. With an average class size of 30 students this would mean 120 new classes per college per year. The college system does not have the capacity to absorb such numbers. Lecturers have to be trained and paid. Skills training is highly spoken of but mostly remains in the realm of wishful thinking. Even a reduced number of anticipated student enrolments will still present colleges with serious adjustment issues.

Through the NSFAS bursary scheme, students' expectations of a better future are raised. However, as has happened at Northlink College in the Western Cape, in the first semester of this year, the promised transport allowance from the DHET never materialised. "Bursary" students are now left high and dry, unable to get to campuses to pursue their studies. For many, four months of dedicated study might amount to nothing. This is what "intervention" means in real life for poor, working class youth.

The NC(V) programme has been a failure insofar as successful completion of courses is concerned. This the Green Paper readily admits to. The Green Paper however fails to recognise that the DHET is incapable of improving the NATED programme with all its archaic syllabi contents. In NEDLAC the government has struck agreements with businesses to assist with job placements for young workers. The numbers involved have been negligible. The youth wage subsidy scheme which government wants to smuggle in through the backdoor, is still a bone of contention with organised labour inside NEDLAC. The plans as set out in the Green Paper, based on neo-liberal capitalism – and as encapsulated in the National Development Plan – are bound to fail. ●

# TREVOR MANUAL, ANGIE MOTSHEKGA AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

As part of the SA government's program of forcing acceptance of their failed education policies, these two cabinet ministers visited communities in the Western Cape during April. Here they took time to firstly scold parents for their non-involvement in school affairs and then proceeded to divorce themselves from responsibility for the large scale failures of the system they are managing. Apart from having to attend to simmering educational troubles in the Western Cape Angie Motshekga, the minister of Basic Education has been forced to respond to legal actions brought against the national education department by the NGOs - 'Save Our Schools', 'the Catholic Institute' and 'Equal Education'.

These legal actions stemmed from the inaction of national government to perform in the interests of poor school children. The defence of the ministers to this situation was the standard response of motivating school communities to work as a "collective unit" to fight gangsterism, drug abuse and vandalism. The legal challenge is one which the minister has been forced to oppose. She will be defending the fact that 3600 schools

in South Africa has no electricity; 600 schools in KwaZulu-Natal have no toilets and thousands of millions of rand meant for education remained unspent in provinces like the Eastern Cape. These battles hardly raise the question of the value and usefulness of the education schoolchildren are receiving.

Parents, students and teachers and their school communities are hence compelled to take up the education struggle on a programmatic basis. United, organised actions by working class school communities is the only way forward. Fighting isolated battles for improvements in education runs the risk of political energies going to waste. The role of NGOs can only be a limited one. They are not geared to solve problems. They raise burning social issues and eventually have to account to no-one but their funders. The leadership of struggles should be in the hands of the labouring classes themselves.

***Forward with the building of people's organisations!***

## ***WHAT 'NEW' LAND REFORM GREEN PAPER?***

The 2011 Land Reform Green Paper falls far short of overdue interventions needed to resolve South Africa's deepening agrarian crisis. Committed to private capitalist property rights, which is firmly entrenched in the 1996 Constitution, the Green Paper pays lip-service to breaking with the failed willing-seller-willing-buyer model of land reform that the government has been implementing since 1994. In fact, chief beneficiaries of this 'new land policy' are the wealthy landowning minority, including elites that have enriched themselves through black economic empowerment and continue to do so.

A background section to the Green Paper traces its recent history to the 2007 Polokwane Conference of the ANC where a wide ranging debate on agrarian reform took place. The Polokwane conference called for a thorough rethink of post-apartheid land reform and adopted a long resolution on rural development and agrarian change. Even though the resolution's militant tone might satisfy left-leaning voices in the ANC, it fails to conceal deep-seated contradictions in the party's thinking on South Africa's unresolved land question.

The Green Paper cryptically recites a few better known reasons in support of this 'new' land policy framework. Colonial and apartheid land dispossession of the black majority, for instance, continues to be a popular and compelling rationale for the suggested reforms. Other reasons have to do with the dismally poor performance of almost two decades of land reform since 1994. The post-settlement support system for land reform beneficiaries, the document laments, has been fragmented and woefully inadequate. To date, it concedes, farmland transfers neither improved the contribution of farm production to total economic output nor reversed the unrelenting increases in rural unemployment.

Under a section on 'principles', it boldly declares: '*The long-term goal of land reform is social cohesion and development.*' (Land Reform Green Paper, page 4)

Firstly, social cohesion is a hollow slogan in a society undergoing a widening gulf between the poor majority and wealthy minority. Secondly, the Green Paper's notion of development is grounded in neoliberal economic growth ideology. It advocates the myth that human development will automatically trickle down from growth rates that allow investors to accumulate profits. Capitalist growth, including in agriculture, handsomely profits from environmental destruction thus making this system a big threat to life on our planet- a concern absent from the Green Paper.

In a nutshell, the document proposes establishing agencies to administer and manage land allocations, and it details the mundane technicalities of the powers and functions of each agency. Two of these agencies, the Land Management Commission and the Land Valuer-General, would try to bring about fairer market-dictated land prices and would aim to protect the quality and values of land. To protect the land-tenure rights of farm dwellers and workers, the Green Paper proposes another two structures: the Land Rights Management Board and Land Rights Management Committees. However, farm workers stand to benefit little, if at all, from this enlarged bureaucracy or from the other land policies that seem to be in the pipeline. Limited to minor reforms to the land management bureaucracy, the 2011 Green Paper fits within the strictures imposed by the investor-friendly Constitution and associated macroeconomic policies, making it a blueprint for uneven development.

Perhaps, in acknowledgement of its own restrictive scope, the Green Paper promises further green papers on 'rural development' and ➡

➔ 'communal land tenure' that are to be published at some unspecified future date. The single land-tenure regime that it outlines, consisting of four tiers, is not different from the existing structure of land ownership and control. Private landholding shall remain intact alongside insecure tenure in the former Bantustans. Overturning land-based inequities in the Bantustans is an essential element of a holistic solution to South Africa's agrarian problem.

The Rural Development and Land Reform Ministry boasts that revisions to the Land Reform Green Paper will be done in consultation with experts. This bureaucratic and farcical consultation model, a prominent feature of post-apartheid politics, is bound to exclude the political interests and direct voice of landless peasants and farm workers. A

National Reference Group (NAREG) is advising the Minister on major themes in the Green Paper. NAREG evidently consists of representatives from agribusiness, academics and civil society groups. What is unclear about this undemocratic clique is how many expert advisors are diehard neoliberals or progressive anti-capitalists because, in the final analysis, this will dictate the approach to and goals of land reform. Against this top-down legitimacy stunt, the poor working and living on the land must advance their own programme for agrarian change. A critical part of this task involves the self-mobilisation of workers and peasants in organisations under their independent and democratic control. ●

## **KHAYELITSHA SPEAK-OUT AGAINST LABOUR BROKERS**

Social movements active in the Democratic Left Front (DLF) in the Western Cape organized a militant speak-out against labour brokers in preparation for the one-day national strike on 7 March 2012. The speak-out attracted roughly 50 activists from Khayelitsha and neighbouring communities. This relatively small attendance partly reflects the weaknesses of social movements and underscores the need to strengthen them through varied forms of real-life protests. Nevertheless, the main goal of the speak-out was to mobilize the largest possible grassroots support to protest against labour brokers. Participants in this gathering did not see it as an end itself but a forum to expand the right to work campaign. Activists from the Progressive Youth Movement (PYM), Commercial Stevedoring Alliance & Allied Workers' Union (CSAAWU), Mandela Park Backyarders, Anti-Eviction Campaign and the University of Cape Town Workers Support Committee dominated this inspiring assembly.

Many speakers voiced firsthand experiences of abuses they had suffered while working for labour brokers: low wages far below a living wage, zero employment benefits, long working hours, no regard for worker safety, high firing-and-hiring rates and rampant verbal abuse. Deafening applause filled the Andile Nhose hall in support of the slogan 'Ban All

Labour Brokers'! The speak-out boosted the confidence of workers to rise up and fight back. Alongside vivid stories of how labour brokers profit from selling workers, activists updated the gathering on other battles. CSAAWU comrades, for example, highlighted the ongoing fight of workers at the Robertson abattoir. The PYM update focused on its campaign to get jobs for unemployed youth in Khayelitsha at the new Khayelitsha hospital. Activists from the September National Imbizo used the event to rally support for their "Demand Equality!" campaign.

Two spokespersons to represent this assembly at a media briefing (jointly with COSATU Western Cape) and the panel of speakers following the march to parliament were elected on the spot. After interrogating the credentials of these delegates, they received a written mandate on the perspective and demands of this gathering for the media briefing. Heated debate ensued throughout the meeting on building solidarity with rank-and-file comrades in COSATU while opposing the politics of its leadership. This is a complex political question and it was impossible for a speak-out against labour brokers to settle this debate. It was therefore left to a follow-up meeting. ●

## ***APDUSA HOSTS POLITICAL SCHOOL***

The APDUSA hosted its first political school from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> April 2012 in Kleinmond in the Western Cape. It has been noted on several occasions that new working class members joining Apdusa, lack knowledge and understanding of the history of the political struggle in South Africa. In order to close this gap the organisation resolved to host this political school which would explore the history of the struggle and the role of different organisations.

Introductory papers covering several historical phases in the evolution of the political struggle of

South Africa were presented as a basis for further discussion and examination. The following broad historical periods were covered:

- The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the first political formations and the ideological struggles amongst socialists during the early 1930s.
- The evolution of political thought and consciousness from 1935, as represented by the birth of the All African Convention ➔

- ➔ and the establishment of the Non-European Unity Movement in 1943.
- The struggle from 1943 till the early 1950s: ANC participation in dummy political institutions and campaigns on individual issues, as opposed to the new methods of programmatic struggle coupled with the policy of non-collaboration with the oppressor.
- The advent of a pre-revolutionary situation as a result of the intensification of the struggle and state repression from the late 1950s till the early 1960s.
- The struggle in exile during the 1960s.
- The Black Consciousness Movement, student struggles and the socio-political transformation of trade unions: the struggle during the 1970s
- Civics, trade unionism and the design of the betrayal during the 1980s and the negotiated settlement during the 1990s
- The nature of struggles that emerged post-1994 to the present

Each paper highlighted a number of themes that were further explored in intense discussions and

debates. It was resolved that this will form the basis for further political education in branches as part of the process of internalising the contents of all papers.

The school was significant in that it succeeded in strengthening the theoretical understanding and thereby raising the class consciousness of our membership. This was achieved through a better understanding of the origins of political organisations in South Africa and the roles they played in the political struggle.

The political school contributed to developing a uniform language and understanding of the programme and policies of the organisation. Our membership has thus been better armed in the principles of programmatic struggle which mean that people follow a political programme and not individual leaders.

The political school was not without shortcomings and members have proposed improvements, such as including cultural activities and documenting events of this nature on video. Despite a few technical shortcomings all participants were agreed that the political school was a huge success and that it should not be an end in itself. The process of internalising the contents of the programme should therefore become part of branch activities. ●



## *From Around the World*

### **THE REVOLUTIONARY UPRISING IN SYRIA**

The uprising in Syria, which began a year ago with demonstrations against the dictatorial regime of Bashar al- Assad, has developed into a nationwide rebellion. What sparked the protests in early March last year, was the arrest and torture of teenage boys in the city of Daraa for writing anti-regime graffiti based on slogans from the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. The regime unleashed ferocious attacks on masses of unarmed civilians, men, women and children demonstrating in their tens of thousands in cities throughout Syria. The dictator resorted to the use of heavy weaponry when tear gas and rifle fire failed to quell the rebellion. As the struggle spread and intensified, it drew in soldiers defecting from the army, who sometimes were able to bring their light weapons with them.

In spite of the posturing of the members of the Arab League, they have provided little in the way of material support for the uprising with little evidence of supplies of weaponry, without questionable motives, for the rebels to defend themselves.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in the rebellion, most of them unarmed civilians and it is estimated that at least 30,000 refugees have been created. The brave people in Syria, inspired by the uprisings in other parts of the Arab World, are having to conduct their struggle against a ruthless regime, virtually unaided.

The uprising is against a family dictatorship of over 40 years, belonging to the Alawite minority of the population and has a confessional character, putting the country's ethno-religious communities against each other. As in the other Arab uprisings, the denial of democratic rights to the population combined with the dire socio-economic situation, has fuelled the rebellion. The economic liberalisation reforms have increased poverty, with 30% of the population living below the poverty level. There has been a steep rise in the cost of living. There is mass unemployment, youth unemployment being particularly high. The youth see no future for themselves in the present setup and are in the forefront of the rebellion.

The rebellion encompasses broad layers of the population, bridging the ethnic and religious divisions. Self organisation of the people participating in the rebellion takes many forms, including local coordinating committees which have strengthened themselves by forming a federation. A general strike at the end of last year, although limited, was able to paralyse parts of the economic and military machinery of the regime. The political forces, which support the overthrow of the regime include the Muslim Brotherhood, the Democratic Peoples' Party as well as the Kurdish parties. These forces have come together to form the Syrian National ➔ ➔ Council (SNC), which has gained acceptance from a

large part of the mass movement. There are also left wing forces taking part in the rebellion.

The defection of army dissidents to the ranks of the rebels has swelled in numbers as the struggle has intensified. These defections initially occurred in an unorganised manner. Since August last year the defecting soldiers formed themselves into the Free Syrian Army. The combination of mass civil disobedience and armed resistance has transformed the struggle into a revolutionary uprising.

The regime's response to the resistance by the people of Baba Amr, a district in the city of Homs, was to employ artillery and tanks, levelling the buildings to the ground and killing or displacing its 60,000 to 70,000 inhabitants. In this situation, the call by the SNC for immediate Arab and international military intervention is dangerous. By this move, it threatens the independence of the mass struggle, paving the way for imperialism to intervene and impose its own agenda.

Imperialism's initial reaction to the rebellion was to remain silent, hoping that Assad would be able to crush it. The regime, although it channels aid to Hezbollah in

Lebanon, does not threaten imperialist interests. Imperialism was forced by the pressures from the Arab League and world opinion to condemn the Assad regime and impose sanctions against it. It is on the lookout to use the crisis to strengthen its hold on the Middle East. The call by the SNC for it to intervene in Syria provides it with this opportunity. Russia, China and Iran, pursuing their own interests, have allied themselves to the Assad regime and are providing it with military support.

The Middle East is a powder keg and any military intervention in Syria by any world or regional power could well blow it up. This would not only be a catastrophe for the Syrian people and the Middle East but would also have global repercussions. The role of left wing movements internationally is to oppose any military intervention in Syria by any outside power. The left has to give unconditional and critical support to the revolutionary uprising in Syria. It must support the call for weapons, financial and other resources to be delivered to them, to defend themselves against the barbaric Assad regime. ●

## THE ARAB SPRING - ONE YEAR ON

In December 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi, a poor young street vendor living in a remote town, Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia set himself alight when his wares were confiscated by a municipal official. Bouazizi set himself on fire because he was denied an existence which would enable him to provide a decent living for his family and himself. This act of self-immolation led to angry protests in the town, which spread regionally and soon engulfed Tunisia. Within a month, the President of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia, ending 23 years of dictatorial rule. The uprising in Tunisia sparked a wave of uprisings throughout the Arab World from Egypt to Libya, Morocco and Jordan, from Yemen to Bahrain and Syria. In Egypt, the army high command sacrificed Mubarak in order to preserve their rule. The uprisings, labelled the "Arab Spring", which led to the overthrow of the dictatorships, set in motion the process of permanent revolution.

The dramatic changes occurring in the Arab World have caught the attention of the rest of the world. The masses involved in the Middle East uprisings have shown their loss of fear as time and again they faced the armed might of entrenched dictatorial regimes. The political demands they put forward were for democratic rights. These mass revolts gained their strength from the combination of political demands and the social struggles in which they had been engaged. In countries such as Morocco, where there is a degree of political liberalism but where social questions dominate the movement, it has not acquired the breadth attained in Tunisia and Egypt (*Achcar, Arab Revolutions - One Year On, International Viewpoint Jan. 2012*) The uprisings emerged as capitalist globalisation entrenched poor development, social marginalisation and misery in the Middle East.

The Arab World has suffered among the highest rates of unemployment (including graduate

unemployment) in the world. It has the highest rate of female unemployment as well as the highest youth unemployment rates among men and women under the age of 25. The slogan of the uprisings in Sidi Bouzid was "Employment is a right, you band of thieves!" (*Achcar, Tunisia, International Viewpoint, Jan.2012*)

The gap between the rich and poor has widened. In Egypt, food price inflation rose to 18.9% in January 2011. 40% of Egyptians live on less than \$2 a day. Peasants forced off the land, dictated by the IMF's structural adjustment programme, shifting Egyptian agriculture towards export-oriented production, swelled the informal sectors of urban centres. Privatisations of public sector companies and the consequent loss of jobs expanded the numbers of informal workers in the cities, who played a critical role in the uprising. Workers' organisations, independent of state-linked trade unions carried out an important wave of strikes in 2006-8. The strikes linked up with peasant organisations resisting the loss of land, were a key element to the historical experiences underpinning the current wave of protests (*Hanieh, Egypt's uprising, Socialist Resistance, April/May 2011*)

In the subsequent uprisings, self organisation developed remarkably, bringing together the most disadvantaged sections of the population, the working class and middle class. Women have played an important part in the uprising, asserting their rights for equality with men. Many of them have been involved in promoting the struggle through the formation of social networks using the internet.

The working classes both in Egypt and Tunisia have played a key role in sweeping away the dictators. The transition to democracy in Tunisia and Egypt is being overseen by the old regimes, ➡ ➡ shorn of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt. These regimes under pressure from the masses have been forced to prosecute the most corrupt

politicians and officials. While some reforms have been instituted in Egypt and Tunisia, the situation is fragile and repression continues, particularly in Egypt with shootings and imprisonment of activists.

In the recent elections held in both Tunisia and Egypt, the religious parties emerged with the largest numbers of votes. The other winners in the elections were the right wing parties. The religious parties benefited from large sums of money from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States during the elections as well as favoured coverage on the Arab television network, Al Jazeera. The issues that dominated the elections were religion and sect, while the socio-economic issues faded into the background. The parties that now dominate the political scene are wedded to the neoliberal policies of the previous regimes. The US imperialists, whose influence has declined in the Middle East as a result of the uprisings there, will be heartened by the results of these elections as will the Arab despotic regimes.

The absence of a political voice in the elections to put forward the demands of the workers, the women, the youth and the marginalised and their lack of political representation in parliament, is a huge weakness for the working class and their allies. However, the momentum of the workers struggles has not been lost. Both in Egypt, where there is a newly formed Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions and in Tunisia where there is an older Tunisian General Labour Union, the trade union movements have increased in strength since the uprisings. But to obtain a political voice, the working class organisations have to build socialist parties. The working class has to assume the leadership in the political struggle, supported by their allies, the landless peasantry in completing the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution and moving uninterruptedly to socialism. ●

## APDUSA

### *THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES*

Despite the gain of political rights for all, the compromise of 1992 has not fulfilled the democratic aspirations of the labouring majority and they continue to suffer in conditions of abject poverty and subjugation to the will of the rich who command the economic resources of the country. In the ongoing struggle we therefore demand:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- The revision of labour legislation for the liquidation of all discrimination against the worker. This also means:
- 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.
- The fixing of a living **minimum wage** as well as a sliding scale to compensate for any price increases.
- The unconditional right to **strike** which includes the right of occupation of the workplace.
- Free and **compulsory education** for all up to matric with free books for the needy.
- Free **health services** for the needy.
- A single, progressive **tax system**, the abolition of vat and all indirect taxes that fall so heavily on the poor.
- 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.

APDUSA calls for the self-organisation and united independent struggle of the labouring masses. We believe that the struggle can only advance decisively via the greatest ideological and organisational unity between the workers in the urban centres and the peasants in the rural areas under the leadership of the working class

The democratic demands and aspirations of the oppressed workers and peasants shall be paramount.