

# **PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

## **Capitalist Corruption – National and International**

In the nature of things nothing is static. Everything is in a process of change. Change may be rapid or extremely slow, appearing as stagnation, but it is not. It may be continuous or erratic, but it occurs none the less. This means that in the history of social development there is either a forward or backward movement. There is no in-between. In the long term, progress must overtake reaction, but in South Africa, in the present period, we are witness to a pronounced backward movement on the part of the ruling class, which is throwing the whole of society into a crisis. The ANC government is incapable of dealing with the fundamental problems of society and it is sliding ever more deeply into a state of reaction and corruption. To mention just a few of the indicators of this reaction, we are witness to the personal tribulations of President Jacob Zuma and his vacillation on important public issues, the disgusting behaviour of Communications minister, Simphiwe Nyanda in enriching himself at public expense, the questionable appointment of Menzi Simelane as head of Public prosecutions and his subsequent refusal to proceed with the prosecution of Fana Hlongwane in the arms deal scandal, the hopeless performance of would-be fashion queen, Minister of Defence, Lindiwe Sisulu and there is little need to elaborate on the performance and utterings of the repulsive ANC Youth League chairman, Julius Malema. The impunity with which these and many others act, shows that the rot is indeed deep. Moreover, the appointment of incompetent persons to senior positions is the hallmark of narrow minded cronyism, which opens the door to corruption at every level.

It is no accident that Jacob Zuma was appointed president of the ANC and subsequently, president of the country, and it would be vain to believe that things could be much better if it were otherwise. To hope that a change from the side of the ANC in the opposite direction is possible is simply wishful thinking. The best of the ANC cadres – the do-gooders in the classic liberal mould, who reason with their hearts and not their heads, have reached the point where they can only throw up their hands in despair, without being able to offer any alternative. In the future, some of them may leave or retire, like Kader Asmal and Pregs Govender, or others, may search vainly for an alternative in COPE. A remaining few may hang on in the hope of a positive change, but the backwards slide is relentless. I repeat, we should be fully conscious of the implications that this holds for the whole of society. Despite basically reformist efforts to the contrary, the masses will experience increasing hardship and suffering and they will rebel in unpredictable ways.

Without dealing with the state of corruption in the previous regime, this backward slide had its start in the very beginnings of the negotiated settlement, when the ANC agreed to act as the servant of large local and international capital. For agreeing to administer the requirements of the most reactionary form of capitalism to date – neoliberalism, the ANC was promised political power. In essence, it meant the power to promote personal enrichment and the power to protect corrupt and illicit dealings in the pursuit of this personal wealth.

The negotiated settlement occurred at a time when the world capitalist system has passed its zenith. Neoliberalism is the only hope for capitalism to sustain itself before it has to resort to naked fascism. It has meant the intensification of the exploitation of labouring classes across the world rather than the comfort of a Keynesian social welfare capitalist system. Moreover, the dependence on neoliberalist policies has also meant that the arch capitalists must irrationally follow a course which threatens the very environment in which we all exist. They, who embrace neoliberalism have no choice and no excuse but to be party to this system of intensified exploitation of human beings and the destruction of our physical environment with all its grievous consequences.

The reasons for the ANC's remorseless backward movement is not to be found fundamentally in criminality and corruption, but the bourgeois aspiration to a comfortable lifestyle which capitalism demands, can only be gained without a major effort, in exactly a dependence on corrupt and criminal methods. Therefore, the phenomenon is not a chance one, subject to change by a more progressive leadership. It may be slowed down by a different leadership of a more rational and sober kind, that may come to light in the ANC, as has happened in the United States, which replaced the crude reactionary, George Bush with Barack Obama. But the relief will be superficial

and rank reaction will surely reassert itself as the norm.

The latest development that we see in the face of this backslide is the equally futile attempt to establish a so-called legitimate opposition to the ANC, in the negotiations for an alliance between the DA, the UDM, the ID and COPE. In the short term this effort may reap some fruits which may hearten some people, but it is hardly an answer as the fundamental economic solutions that any of the components of this would-be alliance propose is also as surely based on neo-liberalism as on anything else.

These problems that we are experiencing are not unique to South Africa. Across the world we are witness to the irrational and reactionary behaviour of many of those who are confronted with this dilemma of capitalism in decline. Whether it is in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Thailand, Nigeria or Zimbabwe, those who wield the most influence politically in the immediate term are exactly those who fail to grapple with the fundamental problems of society. On the one side we have the capitalist forces trying to impose their neoliberalist panacea while on the other side we have those fighting for the narrow interests of a particular stratum of the society in which they exist, without any conception or concern that it is a global question, demanding a resolution for the whole human race. Thus, we have had the corruption scandal of the Halliburton corporation which won huge contracts out of the Iraq invasion under George Bush. We have similarly seen blatant corruption in Britain whereby parliamentarians have been enriching themselves at public cost through the abuse of parliamentary expenses. It is a general trend. Transparency International, a body which monitors corruption worldwide, reports that in 2009, of 180 countries surveyed, on a scale of one to ten, with the latter, ten, being relatively corrupt free, 112 had a corruption index of less than 4. Then in a 2004 survey the same body reported: "In 36 out of 62 countries surveyed, *political parties* were rated by the general public as the institution most affected by corruption. On a scale from a corrupt-free 1 to an extremely corrupt score of 5, parties ranked worst worldwide, with a score of 4.0."

Our society is thus in the throes of a profound conflict between the forces of reaction and the forces of progress. Capitalism is in decline internationally and the decline of capitalism spells the decline of bourgeois democracy. The labouring masses are thus perforce subject to increasing exploitation as well as the increased hardships of worsening social oppression that comes from corrupt governments.

In our society the masses have not been slow to respond. We have seen an ever increasing number of protests and demonstrations across the length and breadth of the country against the lack of housing, poor or non-existent service delivery and the like. Lately, these protests have had the added dimension of laying the charge of corruption against those who are supposed to tend to their basic needs. But the problem here is that there is the incipient hope that if the government members or the officials in charge were not corrupt then things could be better. As yet, people fail to see that it is the entire system that is corrupt.

Likewise, on the labour front, we see a relentless struggle against basic exploitation via a never-ending series of strikes. But the trade union leadership has hardly turned the attention of the workers to the role of the state, choosing to portray the struggle as solely between the workers and the bosses, while supposedly engaging with the ruling party on state economic policy. Again, the struggle is not clearly on a political front. Then, with regard to the peasantry, the former militancy around the demand for land seems to have been dissipated. Faced with an entrenched system of chieftainship with powers over the land and no longer so blatantly tainted by the apartheid order, the peasant youth can only perceive hopelessness in a continued existence in the countryside and they are perforce migrating to the big towns and cities searching for work and a better existence. They end up in the interminable number of squatter camps blighting our country where they perforce join the struggles for service delivery, housing and employment by any means possible.

On the side of the political left we find various bodies still locked in indecision and wishful thinking which prevents them from taking a positive movement to move forward collectively. In the last few years we saw a development in response to this growing crisis of reaction in the birth of the Radical Left Network in which Apdusa played a major role. The initial signs were encouraging, with a number of leftist groupings responding positively to an initiative to unite and prosecute the

struggle jointly on a political basis. As it appeared to us then and as it still appears today, a combination of radical leftist forces seems to be the only viable alternative to the backwards slide of society into a terrible morass. But after this promising beginning we have seen a reluctance of the left to engage on fundamental issues and an abiding desire to seek more immediate, practical solutions. Here we are confronted with various questionable ideological positions. For one, there is the feeling that the left must engage with the masses in action as a priority. This emphasis on action before anything else results in revolutionary ideology being pushed into the background. Secondly, there is a strong feeling amongst the left that they must not be seen to be acting bureaucratically, i.e., they must not be seen to be wishing to impose their ideas and political agenda upon the masses. This results in what could be a revolutionary vanguard abdicating its critical role of raising the political consciousness of the masses.

It was hoped that in the RLN, issues such as these could be thrashed out in comradely discussion. But this has proved to be premature. The initiative has now been transferred to the hands of those promoting a Conference for a Democratic Left and to a lesser extent, the Truth Conference. But both these initiatives are still marred by the ideological blockages referred to before.

We are faced with the task of having to do all in our power to combat these ideas of action without theory and the denial of the revolutionary role of the radical intelligentsia and the politically advanced members of the working class. We have to face the fact that as long as there is no decisive counter coming from the radical left, the condition of the masses will only get worse.

Yet internationally, the forces of progress have not been shackled. In Latin America we have seen the power of the labouring classes exerting itself on the political front with significant developments in Venezuela and Cuba and Bolivia, resulting in the formation of ALBA - the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, an economic alliance that is distinctly anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberalism. It counts amongst its members, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and the Caribbean islands of Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Antigua and Barbuda.

Then we have independent leftist political forces struggling to reassert themselves in a decisive way such that sectarianism is not a major obstacle to progress. We should note that the significant struggles in Europe are not economic but political struggles. Besides taking up various topical questions there has been a general attempt to establish mass workers' parties or anti-capitalist parties. We have had the struggle to establish the Communist Refoundation in Italy – Rifondazione. In France we have had the similar move to establish the force of the left via the LCR leading to the formation of the national Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA). In England we have seen the establishment of Respect, collaborating with the Scottish Socialist Party and in Germany, the formation of Die Linke (Left) Party. These exciting developments have not been without difficulty, with setbacks occurring with unhappy regularity, such as the failure of the Socialist Alliance in Britain that preceded Respect and the LCR in France. But it does spell a serious grappling with the question of how to oppose capitalism. The history of the socialist struggle in Europe is much longer than anywhere else and it is perhaps understandable that the debate around ideological positions becomes more intricate. But unlike the situation in South Africa, these are important battles directly on the political front. They are also movements which recognise the importance of lending support to the advances in Latin America, and indeed the struggles of oppressed and exploited people all over the world.

The coming into being of the World Social Forum has at least added momentum to these processes and it has raised awareness of the international character of the struggle, though it is not overtly political and therefore, one cannot look to it for leadership.

In the least developed countries and areas, which have been exploited by imperialism for their natural resources rather than the indigenous labour power, the situation is more hapless, with people resorting to hopeless acts of terrorism to preserve what they perceive to be their own. We think of places such as Afghanistan and Somalia. In these regions, imperialist forces presume to act with impunity so that it is mainly through international pressure that it can be routed out.

We are driven to the conclusion that as the crisis of decadent capitalism deepens the struggle in South Africa cannot be fought in isolation of what is happening in the rest of the world. We therefore have to connect with revolutionary struggles internationally. Ours is no longer primarily a

national struggle. This means that we have to work harder to demonstrate the similarities in the problems we face and the objectives we have to observe, drawing on the best methods that have evolved internationally. This is not easy as we are faced with the fact that the struggle in every country has its own peculiarities. But the main features of struggle in every continent are of paramount importance. For instance, in Latin America, the demand for a constituent assembly based on the needs and interests of the labouring masses has reached significant proportions in many countries. We may note that in Venezuela and Bolivia this demand only arose after an anti-capitalist regime came into power. We also realise that this is indeed a demand which we have to promote right here in South Africa at this time. But it is a demand that has not taken hold in Europe, where the main struggle is how to establish a viable anti-capitalist parties that have a truly mass base. In the present epoch we will have to examine whether the call for a constituent assembly is mostly relevant in neo-colonial countries, and this is perhaps a point to be dealt with when we discuss that question later on our agenda. The important thing is that we have to learn from the struggles in other countries, their successes and failures. Moreover, we have to learn how we, and I do not mean Apdusa alone, can contribute to the advancement of revolutionary struggles in other parts of the world.

In his presidential address to the 1982 conference of UMSA, our late president, Mr IB Tabata, stated that in the present phase, only a working class party can lead the struggle. Indeed, it is only a working class party that can link up organically with the international revolutionary struggle. But it is not for Apdusa to debate this question as if we have to forsake our own particular role. We concluded when we revised our programme in 1995 that Apdusa still has relevance and it must continue as the tasks of the national revolution are still incomplete. But at the same time we have to work with others to bring the requirement of a mass workers' or anti-capitalist party to fruition. To avoid confusion in this regard it should be noted that at present, it is not possible for a mass based party, incorporating different political tendencies to join any international organisation as all of these, such as the International Socialist Tendency and the Fourth International, are represented by distinct tendencies themselves. Fortunately, this problem is now being seriously addressed in international revolutionary circles around the call for a Fifth International and an answer may be reached as it must, sooner rather than later.

In conclusion, to return to the main theme of this address, we should have no illusions that a change of leadership in the ANC or the rule of any other coalitions can stop the degeneration of government and bring a positive change in society, with hope for everyone that we will have a better future. It is only via revolutionary struggle that this degeneration can be halted, with the eyes of the masses turning away from despair to hope and optimism in building a new world order that is most certainly possible. We, in Apdusa, have an important role to play. Our programme is clear. We must propagate it with all the power at our command.

*R. Wilcox*