



THE FREEDOM CHARTER

A CHARTER FOR BETRAYAL

This year is the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter. This has focussed the attention of many on the continued relevance and critical importance of political programmes and the role these play in the lives of the labouring classes in society. Heated debate as to the political and historical significance of the document has been current over the last few months. The ANC government has unearthed it to rally people around the struggle for what it calls continuous 'transformation' in all spheres of South African life, including gearing them to continue believing in the promises the charter and ANC election manifestoes hold. A poor community such as the one in Kliptown, where the charter was adopted, has instead demonstrated in support of their demands for basic municipal services and decent houses.

In all of these activities the media and political organisations have been treating the Freedom Charter as the only political programmatic document of the masses in South Africa. Recognition of the Ten Point Programme of the Non European Unity Movement, coupled with the policy of non-collaboration with the ruling class, is still being sidelined - either by design or simply out of dangerous ignorance and indifference to the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa.

The range of arguments advanced by defenders of the

charter and by implication and extension, the political programme of the ANC, varies depending on what is being referred to and who is doing the defending. It is said that the charter embodies the demands and aspirations of the people; that the provisions of the charter cannot be interpreted in a literal manner. It is argued that changes in the national and international situations militate against such a literal interpretation. Also, that the multi-tendency composition of the ANC meant that the provisions of the charter contained ideals that are contradictory and divergent. And so on, and so forth. But the Freedom Charter really represented the ANC political strategy of a willingness to compromise the fundamental interests of the labouring masses. This was the only reason why it was raised in opposition to the minimum demands of the 10 Point Programme of the Unity Movement, raised more than a decade earlier. And let no one ignore the blatant pandering to racialism contained in its notorious 2nd clause.

Today, as with election promises made by bourgeois parties such as the ANC and the Democratic Alliance, the Freedom Charter contains a range of promises. This is inherent political dishonesty. The task of a progressive political leadership, basing itself on objective analyses of economic and political conditions, is to draft a political programme of demands on and

around which the oppressed and exploited masses can unite to conduct their freedom struggles in pursuit of their own interests. Nothing is guaranteed. Nothing is promised. Instead it is one task of leadership to insist that there should be no compromise on the demands raised. The objectives of struggle achieved and the demands realised would be as a result of the struggles of the people guided by their political programme.

In immediate conditions the demands of a progressive political programme may at once be used in practical and creative ways by the masses in advancing their cause. In the process of struggle the unwillingness or inability of the oppressive ruling class to accede to these demands should become clear. In this context then the collective, organised might of the people, united by a progressive political programme becomes the basis for the construction of a new economic and political society. This scenario implies the unity and self-organisation of the people, which is dynamically linked to the demands contained in their political programme. It simultaneously provides the basis for a political leadership to be held to account by the membership of people's organisations.

The political settlement that emerged marked a turning point in the fortunes of the oppressed and exploited in the country. While the political power of

➡ Afrikaner nationalists was broken, the emerging dispensation was always going to be fraught with dangers for the working class and landless peasantry. It brought with it a new alignment of forces: of the ANC government in tandem with big business and its external allies, aligned against the workers and peasants with their organisations having to take up their struggles anew, based on their own independent demands. It is imperative that the hard lessons that struggles are teaching us are taken to heart and that the political programmes of organisations be interrogated and

analysed with the necessary vigour and critical perspectives.

Will the Freedom Charter yet again fade from the collective memory of people in years to come? Or will it still be a useful means of rallying people to vote for the ANC in the forthcoming local government elections? Next year the 30th commemoration of June 1976 will probably be characterised by similar heated discussions - this time on the future of the youth in the country. Such an ad hoc, piecemeal approach to struggle that still characterises liberation politics can be superseded by a greater

focus on a struggle for the attainment of transitional demands as contained in the programme of the APDUSA. Our tasks are to make logical sense of the liberation struggle in South Africa and chart a course forward based on the essential political demands of the poor majority. Simply conducting sterile debates with a liberal dose of historical distortions on one political document of the freedom struggle in South Africa is not going to allow us to move forward with the necessary political clarity and purposefulness. ●

STRUGGLES AROUND NON-DELIVERY OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES CONTINUE

A recent report of the Department of Local and Provincial Government put the number of South Africans classified as being indigent at 29 million out of a population of 46 million. By 'indigent' the department means 'lacking the necessities of life': those who do not have access to sufficient water, basic sanitation, refuse removal, environmental health, basic energy, healthcare, housing, food and clothing. This provides some background to the ongoing struggles of communities for decent living conditions.

These protests have been met by state responses that range from sedition charges being brought against protestors to the deployment of teams of 'service delivery facilitators' i.e. public and private sector specialists to municipalities that are experiencing severe problems of service delivery. This is to be done over a two year period as part of "Project Consolidate". The minister for provincial and local government has even reminded municipal officials to be cognisant of the anger of the people, as a way to compel them to start doing their work properly.

The ruling ANC government blames opportunists in the right-wing formal opposition Democratic Alliance for exploiting legitimate grievances. There has even been talk of the National Intelligence Agency being requested to investigate the causes of these protests. This has subsequently been denied. At public meetings with affected communities, government officials have on a number of occasions been forced to beat hasty retreats out of the townships after delivering unconvincing and oft-repeated messages meant to pacify and deceive residents. Protests around demands for proper housing have also not abated in intensity. The

government has therefore been forced to respond to developments that hold the potential of moving beyond its scope of control.

What are the possibilities of success of the measures the state offer as solutions to the problems of lack of housing, municipal services and jobs? Government presents its programme as one to which there is no alternative. This myth needs to be destroyed. The solutions it offers the people will invariably be premised on its destructive GEAR policies. Even the free water and electricity services on offer have not alleviated the dire situation of millions.

Other solutions to be introduced are meant merely at plugging the holes, speedily executing high profile short term plans, aimed at pacifying a growing restless and agitated working class and its supporters. The land reform process is one case in point. People are however saying 'enough is enough', implying that they have had enough of false promises and destroyed livelihoods. Government officials at all levels are being held to promises made and are being sharply reminded of their commitments should they not keep to these promises. Community protests have made it more difficult for them to hide away.

Communities have also realised the need for them to learn from the experiences of others and to start co-ordinating their efforts at fighting the oppressive policies of the government. The need to strengthen co-ordinated local, regional and national campaigns on the part of all progressive organisations (such as the SMI initiative), thus becomes even more important. The demands and aspirations of the workers and landless peasants must be paramount. ●

A 'NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN' FOR SOUTH AFRICA?

Of all discussion papers released ahead of the ANC's mid-term National General Council (NGC) meeting, none has stimulated more public debate than the so-called economics paper. This document, entitled "Development and Underdevelopment" and purportedly drafted by the deputy Minister of Finance, lays out the ruling party's plans to 'reconstruct South Africa's economy'. It essentially describes South Africa as having 'two economies' and argues for a 'developmental state' to bridge the 'structural divide between our second and first economies'. President Thabo Mbeki echoed similar themes in at least the last three of his state of the nation addresses.

South African big business praised it as a 'pragmatic economics statement'. Critical voices in the tripartite alliance, especially those in COSATU and the SACP, have articulated their disagreements with aspects of it. Does 'development and underdevelopment' offer a new vision for this country or is it the latest stunt of what the radical political economist Patrick Bond calls "talking left and walking right"? If it is indeed another conservative economic statement, what are the chances that the 'left inside the alliance' will be able to drag the ANC leftward from its neo-liberal trajectory?

Since World War II, these mechanical and narrow readings of history claim that there have been three successful examples of developmental states that South Africa can learn from. The Marshall Plan, conceived in conjunction with America for post-war European reconstruction, is extensively discussed. As a second case study it looks at the 'Asian development model', also funded by American capital. America supported these 'developmental states' at that time to block the influence of communism and the Chinese revolution from invading these territories. This version of history ignores the depth of communist ideas that permeated the ranks of the militant workers movements inside these countries. It is silent on the heavy price working people have paid in each case in the forms of, among other things, greater inequality and economic crises (recall Asia 1997-1999). Whatever kind of 'developmental state' that may have existed several decades ago is now long dead.

A third development model praised in this paper is the current European Union project. While the NGC economics paper paints this experience as positive, it is clearly out of step with reality. A few weeks ago French and Dutch voters, especially the

working class and the left, overwhelmingly rejected the EU Constitution because the economic model it wants to impose is anti-development and neo-liberal.

The developmental state is apparently different from the so-called Washington Consensus. This partially flows from the mythical differences between 'the market' and 'the state' leaping out of the imagination of liberal and social democratic thinkers. However, any honest examination of the Washington Consensus, which is another name for neo-liberalism, will show that states are in the forefront of foisting 'free market fundamentalism' on the poor. GEAR, for instance, is a typical 'free market fundamentalist plan' imposed on us by the post-apartheid state. In fact there is enough evidence to show that capitalism favoured 'developmental states' decades ago to arrest the radicalisation of workers' movements, if not crush them to give their system a longer lease on life.

Furthermore, the development state will require bolstering the 'capacity of the state'. Will this mean more bureaucracy, criminalizing poverty and stepped-up police crackdowns on social movements and other civil society protests?

Nevertheless, this 'developmental state' (or capitalist-state partnership) is intended to bridge the divide between South Africa's 'two economies'. On the one hand, recognizing that two economies exist is an incontrovertible admission that 'economic apartheid' persists one decade after ending brutal racial oppression. On the other hand, however, it is wrong to argue, as the NGC paper does, that political and socio-economic policies (GEAR) implemented over the last decade have not deepened this divide. For it is in the nature of how capitalism operates, including in third world countries like South Africa, to constantly reproduce the 'second economy' of cheap labour to generate riches for those in the 'first economy'. Here the capitalist tendencies of combined and uneven development are nakedly grinding away. Not even the veil of black economic empowerment will give it any respectability. Try to convince striking workers at black empowerment companies (from mineworkers or airline baggage handlers) of the humane attributes of 'black capitalism'.

Although 'development and underdevelopment' is a logical consequence of GEAR, it has been offered for public debate and not made non-negotiable from the start. This chance for debating the document, a handful of left-leaning alliance partners reason, will help them to challenge the 'pro-capitalist conservatives'. However, given that ➡

➔no coherent counter to this document is forthcoming from within the alliance, coupled with President Mbeki's lashing out at 'protestors for housing and better service delivery', the crux of this document is set to become ANC policy. This 'pragmatic economics statement' exposes that the

ANC has become a capitalist party with a social democratic cover. It raises the urgent task for South Africa's militant left to construct a political alternative to the ANC based on a clear set of anti-capitalist transitional demands. ●

SETAS IN PERSPECTIVE

The Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998 was promulgated to facilitate the development of the skills of the South African workforce, both employed and unemployed, to increase the level of investment in education and training in the labour market and to improve the return on the investment. Further, to encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment, and to provide opportunities for more people who enter the labour market to gain work experience. The other objective is to employ people who find it difficult to be employed. The government aims to achieve this through the National Skills Fund Authority, National Skills Fund, Skills Development Levy Act and through Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

Let us examine the past five years of this plan in order to determine if these SETAs have fulfilled their obligations to the South African population. In a study commissioned by the Department of Labour through the National Skills Survey in 2003 to determine the impacts of skills training the following were revealed by Minister Mdladlana at the National Skills Conference (March 2005).

- The pattern of grant claims among were extremely variable, ranging between 78% and 20% with the latter by the Public Sector.
- Unions had also only played a limited role in training although some were very proactive.
- Some employers used the learners who entered this learnership as a source of cheap labour in their organisations/factories.

- A third of the unemployed learners/workers with work related experience did not receive adequate workplace exposure or on-the-job training.
- Learners did not receive post-learnership support by the lead employers or training providers after completion of learnership.
- Small to medium enterprises do not claim back the grants due to the complexity of the system and due to the bureaucratisation of these organisations.
- It seems that the public sector is the main culprit in obstructing this Skills Development program in its limited usage of the 1% payroll training budget.
- Poor governance is another factor that was highlighted by the survey and this prompted the Minister to amalgamate those guilty SETAs to ensure better skills development practices.

These conclusions lead us to the fact that the SETAs, who are supposed to be the guardians of quality assurance, failed to meet the objectives of the government policies to tackle unemployment, skills development and to address the past imbalances. The current situation where people are put into a learnership program and end up on the street again after completion does not bode well for skills development. A situation has developed where a pool of skilled unemployed workers show the true colours of capitalism. While poor governance, unemployment and unscrupulous bosses use Skills Development to enrich themselves the population will be further marginalized. ●

STUMBLING BLOCKS IN THE PATH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT

In these early years of the 21st century, in the wake of the collapse of Stalinist, bureaucratic pseudo-socialism, a new concept - that of a social movement has arisen. It expresses the struggles of people against the worst effects of capitalism but without the identification of a logical and realistic alternative. The tentative convergence in the World Social Forum of the strongest of these social movements that have arisen across the globe is nonetheless an extremely significant development.

Here in South Africa, new struggles have emerged in the face of the realities of the betrayal of the liberatory struggle by the ANC and its cohorts who, in the 1992 negotiated political settlement, asked the suffering masses to accept the proverbial

half a loaf as better than no bread. These struggles stem from the effects of the ANC-led government's neo-liberal economic policies, its shallow land reform program and its attention to the interests of the existing and aspirant bourgeoisie at the expense of the majority.

In these many struggles it appears that the lessons of the past are hardly being applied. There is a crying need for unity in the different struggles for housing, against joblessness, for service delivery and decent health and education. Such unity can only be built on the basis of a common political program and this is how the struggle progressed in the past before the negotiated settlement.

Blame for the failure to move towards such ➔

➔unity must rest squarely on the shoulders of petit-bourgeois sycophants who consider it their bounden duty to “defend the masses” against the idea of political demands that do not rise spontaneously from within their own ranks. Whether they argue this case as anarchists or autonomists or simply liberal reformists it amounts to nothing less than an obstruction to the development of the revolutionary consciousness of the working masses.

They claim that they are defending the struggles of the masses against its pollution by inevitably treacherous political parties. Thus we see the efforts to establish national unity in the Social Movement Indaba stumbling on efforts to build it on the basis of intermittent protests on specific issues rather than a common political programme. The falling apart of the Concerned Citizen’s Forum in KZN and the Anti-Eviction Campaign in Cape Town is no accident. It stems directly from efforts to keep the struggles of various communities focussed on only one aspect of their oppression. This is done on the basis of the myth that communities involved in particular struggle will spontaneously develop a broad socialist consciousness.

The arguments limiting the participation of political organisations in the current phase of struggle are themselves an expression of a political ideology. Whether it is anarchism, radical reformism or spontaneity it amounts to the same thing. Those who claim they are defending the masses against political deceit and potential betrayal of political organisations are themselves guilty of that very crime

We have heard some calls for a workers’ party which carries some merit. But the crying need of the present is the adoption of a revolutionary political programme that can guide the struggles of the masses both in their immediate demands and those long term objectives that can alone bring an end to their oppression and exploitation, once and for all.

We say that there is a need to identify the basis of political unity for those struggling for houses, those struggling against the privatisation and commercialisation of essential social services and of those struggling for jobs, land, health and education. This cannot be substituted by ill-defined and vague, emotional calls for socialism. The road to socialism must not be debased by cheap populism. ●

ALIE FATAAR

We salute the life’s contribution of political stalwart, Alie Fataar, who passed away on 9 June at the age of 88 years. He was a selfless person who dedicated his entire adult life to the struggle for the total emancipation of the labouring masses of South Africa from oppression and exploitation.

Alie Fataar joined the liberatory struggle at a young age. He became a member of the New Era Fellowship in Cape Town and it was as an English teacher at Livingstone High School that he also joined the Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA). Many will say that one need not go any further than recognising that as an outstanding teacher he deserves the greatest respect for his contribution to the advancement of our society. The legacy of his devotion to progressive education, alongside that of his fellow TLSA colleagues lives on at Livingstone High School to this day. But Alie Fataar was first and foremost a politician and a revolutionary fighter. He soon became a prominent member of the leadership of the TLSA and was thus at the forefront in the formation Anti-CAD in 1943 and indeed, in the establishment of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) in December of the same year.

When the Anti-CAD was withdrawn from unity with the All African Convention in 1957 Alie Fataar stood firm in his loyalty to the principles and policies of the Unity Movement, retaining his membership via the Society of Young Africa. A few years later he was a founding member of the APDUSA.

During the forties and fifties Alie Fataar became known as the general secretary in the TLSA without parallel. This distinctive ability was to be utilised further in the sixties in his election to joint secretaryship of the Unity Movement and as the General Secretary of the APDUSA. In this role he not only recorded history but helped to shape its course.

Alie Fataar’s work in the liberatory struggle was certainly not ignored by the ruling class and he was one of the first person to be served with a 5 year banning order. He defied his banning order, working underground in the early sixties until he went to join members of the leadership in exile in December 1964.

It is our regret that Alie Fataar left the fold of the APDUSA while in exile. But we acknowledge that in his own way he thereafter always remained true to the founding principles and policies of the UMSA.

As soon as it was possible Alie returned to South Africa from exile where after he continued his efforts to contribute to the unfinished struggle for liberation of the masses of our country. He sought an organisational base in the New Unity Movement and as a political commentator in Radio 786. But he never relinquished his personal relationships with those comrades he had worked with in the past, nor did he jettison his adherence to the main ideological tenets of the UMSA and APDUSA. While he had left APDUSA organisationally he never considered his membership or association with its programme as an error.

In his own way Alie Fataar strove for a non-sectarian approach to revolutionary struggle. History will judge to what extent he succeeded in that truly noble objective. We salute the contribution of a comrade and a true fighter for liberation.



From Around the World

THE ZIMBABWE ELECTIONS

We were fed a lot of media hype around the recent Zimbabwean parliamentary election. The underlying tone of this media coverage was that parliamentary democracy is the be all and end all of freedom. All the media agreed that the disastrous state of the Zimbabwean economy and the widespread abuse of civil rights suffered by ordinary citizens was all due to the corruptness of Robert Mugabe and the ZanuPF ruling party.

We were being asked to believe that if the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was elected to power then Zimbabwe would immediately be placed on the road to solving its grievous problems. But this is very far from the truth. In the first place the problems of Zimbabwe are not solely of ZanuPF's making although there is no doubt that it has had a big hand in bringing about the critical situation there. The seeds of Zimbabwe's present-day crisis were planted by its former British colonialist rulers at the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement that was forced upon the national liberatory movement. Political independence was conceded at the price that there could be no democratic and just solution to the agrarian problem in Zimbabwe and that land reform could only take place on the basis of "willing buyers" and "willing sellers". In the event, the colonial white farmers were hardly willing to sell up their rich farms and Britain reneged on its agreement of financial assistance for land reform.

Through the years the large peasant population of Zimbabwe became more and more disillusioned and impatient with the lack access to the land for which they had fought and sacrificed so much. In the first years of independence very few peasants were resettled on land by ZanuPF while, like the Black Economic Empowerment process here in South Africa, a few blacks acquired some lucrative farms. The peasants, via their own organisations, eventually took things into their own hands with a series of land occupations. This was at first violently resisted by the ZanuPF regime but later it found it politically useful to sanction and legalise these acts.

But the real problems of Zimbabwe came as a result the Economic Structural Adjustment Program shoved onto the country by the World Bank and the IMF. After spending borrowed money, amongst other things, on radical and positive reforms in health and education, the government found the country in serious debt which it could not afford to pay. The World Bank and IMF refused further financial aid, pointing to corruption in ZanuPF.

However true the corruptness of ZanuPF, the more important reason was that it was refusing to behave as the good little boys and servants of imperialism. Mugabe forsook all pretensions of a belief in socialism many years ago but he still wants to be seen as a revolutionary liberator. His criticisms of the machinations of imperialism are mostly quite accurate even though his main aim is to deflect attention from his own party's corrupt policies which are designed to enrich and benefit a small black elite at the expense of the majority.

Imperialism would like a more respectful servant in the seat of power in Zimbabwe. Hence its support for the MDC which, even though it was formed largely at the behest of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) it was soon flooded and virtually taken over by White farmers and the white bourgeoisie who are certainly not driven by the interests of the workers and poor peasants of Zimbabwe.

President Mbeki was pressurised to take a stand against Mugabe. He refuses to do so as both are Africanists believing in black economic empowerment. Mugabe is the hero of corrupt leaders in Africa. He gives them cover by attacking imperialism at its weakest ideological point. Their failures are branded as imperialism's failures. Without their support Mbeki's grand scheme of an African renaissance and Nepad would lie in tatters.

The real solution to the crisis in Zimbabwe lies on the road of struggle for a different society that is organised according to the needs of the workers and poor peasants and not the white farmers, financial magnates and industrialists and their new Black sidekicks. It is a struggle for socialism and not western parliamentary democracy. ●

FROM THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM IN LONDON TO ATHENS

The ESF has a central role in the mobilisation of the anticapitalist globalisation movement in Europe. While the 25,000 taking part in the ESF in London (October 2004) were smaller in number than the 50,000 registered in Paris (2003) and Florence (2002), the depth of the debates that took place were a measure of the ideological growth of the movement. The participants came from 70 countries and at the end of the proceedings a huge

demonstration and rally of 100,000 people against the occupation of Iraq took place in central London.

While there was less involvement of rank and file trade unionists in the London ESF than in Florence and Paris, there was increased participation by minority black and Asian communities. This probably reflects the fact that the trade union struggle in Britain against neo-liberalism is weaker than in France and Italy while, because of ➡

➡ the involvement of British troops in Iraq, the anti-war movement in Britain has succeeded in mobilising the minority communities and is among the strongest in Europe.

It was an enriching and at times overwhelming experience to be among the large audiences in London listening intently to and participating in the debates on the imperialist war against Iraq, the struggle of the Palestinian people against Israel and the fight against the neo-liberal policies being implemented by governments worldwide.

With referenda on the European Constitution in progress in the countries of the European Union (EU), the appeal by trade unionists against it and the mobilisations against the meetings of the EU heads of state, reinforces the resistance to neo-liberal attacks through the EU.

An important debate on how best to build a counter-force to neo-liberalism in Europe on the level of the EU is taking place amongst the left in the EU and within the wider circles of the ESF. This debate recognises that while it is possible to resist neo-liberal attacks at the national level and stop some of them, it is necessary to confront these attacks such as the Bolkestein directive on the liberalisation and deregulation of services across the EU by building up an EU wide opposition to them.

The ESF encompasses numerous organisations and NGOs covering nearly every aspect of social life. Political parties are not allowed as in the WSF but it is political. There are a spectrum of political views from the reformist to the revolutionary. Organisations like Attac, founded in France, campaign for the regulation of financial markets. Then there are the autonomists, who reject alternative forms of state and any form of political party. On the left are the radical parties, who in the

fight for socialism are committed to building the anti-capitalist movement. Holding this movement together is difficult under any circumstances. At the ESF in London, autonomists were opposed to mass involvement in the Social Forums and therefore to the participation of the unions and the NGOs. Fortunately, the viewpoint of the autonomists did not prevail at the ESF but the experience there highlights the necessity for the presence of the radical left in confronting these issues.

Among the issues that did arise at the ESF was a perception among many of those taking part that there was over centralised organisation of events with sharp confrontations in plenary sessions between set positions rather than an exchange of views. This was linked to the issue of those providing the funds for the ESF exercising an undue influence on the organisation of the events taking place.

The next ESF will be in Athens in the spring of 2006. Holding together a social forum as radical and diverse as the ESF is not going to be easy as the London ESF has shown but if the lessons are learned from this event, Athens will be another step forward in the growth of the ESF. Alex Callinicos, a prominent leader in the British SWP, in a recent article pointed out that there were four powerful forces that needed to be brought into the Athens ESF. These were the Greek Social Forum, the Genoa2001 Campaign, the Greek Communist Party and the trade unions, whose leadership tends to be linked to PASOK (a Greek social democratic political party). Only the first two have been involved in the ESF process, and all four have a history of mutual conflict. The task is to bring them together in the building of the Athens ESF. ●

THE BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2005

The mainstream political parties, New Labour, Tories and Liberal Democrats, each committed to a neo-liberal agenda with more privatisation and deregulation, focused their campaigns on marginal differences in their policies on taxation and public services. On the central question of Britain's involvement with the US in the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the Tory opposition enthusiastically backed the government. While it maintains its support for the war and occupation, for electoral gain it sought to exploit the exposure of Blair's lies on the war such as Iraq's supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction. The Liberal Democrats, while voting against attacking Iraq, supported "our troops" once the invasion had begun and the occupation of the country.

The mainstream parties failed to arouse any enthusiasm in the electorate for their policies. There has been a decline in the turnout of voters at elections for some time. In 1997, when Tony Blair

was elected to office, 71% of those entitled to vote, cast their ballots, a new post-war low. In 2001, when Blair was re-elected the turnout was 59%, the lowest since 1918, which was before women were given the vote. In this election, the turnout was 61%, not much better. The Electoral Commission set up to oversee the elections in 2001 said that voter abstention was the key challenge facing Britain's political system and leaders. Voter turnout was lower among younger people and the ethnic minorities and in areas of high unemployment.

The large number of the electorate who refuse to vote is a symptom of the malaise in the body politic as is the focus on 'populist' issues such as immigration, asylum seekers, Gypsies, abortion and drugs. Michael Howard, the Tory leader told the country that New Labour's immigration policy was out of control and that if he came to power, he would reduce the number of immigrants and withdraw from the 1951 Geneva Convention on the rights of ➡

➔ refugees. He imported from Australia his campaign manager, Lynton Crosby, who employed the same tactics for the Tories that he used in Australia in the 2001 election campaign that helped the right wing prime minister there, John Howard, retain power. When the Australian authorities refused permission for a shipload of 438 refugees to land in the country, Howard's election campaign team led by Crosby claimed that the refugees threw their own children overboard in an attempt to force the authorities to allow them to land! In Britain, the former New Labour Home Office minister, David Blunkett said that asylum seekers were flooding the country. In this atmosphere, where the New Labour government and the Tory opposition competed with another to demonise immigrants and asylum seekers and fan the flame of racism, the fascist BNP were able to recruit many more members. They were able to field over 100 candidates in this election, their largest number ever.

With New Labour determined to continue its attacks on the public services, privatising the national health service via the backdoor, planning massive retrenchments in the civil service, remaining in occupation of Iraq as the US's most trusted ally and pre-emptive strikes on countries such as Iran envisaged, what alternative is there for the voter in Britain? In England, Respect, which emerged from the anti-war movement that was formed against the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, is a coalition that opposes the neo-liberal policies of the mainstream political parties and the imperialist wars in which the New Labour government has engaged. It was formed at the beginning of last year. It participated in the European elections as well as the Greater London Assembly elections and its first councillor was elected in a local council by-election in a ward in the

East End of London in July last year. It has succeeded in the short period of its existence in establishing bases in the inner big cities such as London, Birmingham and in North West England, where there is a presence of a significant immigrant working class population.

After the Sept 11th destruction of the twin towers in New York, there was a wave of Islamophobia in Britain, aided by New Labour government and the Tories. Large numbers of Muslims joined the anti-war coalition and many joined Respect when it was formed. The railway union, the RMT, which was one of the unions which had been responsible for the formation of the Labour Party, disaffiliated from New Labour in protest against its anti-working class policies and its branches in Scotland have affiliated to the Scottish Socialist Party (the sister party of Respect in Scotland) and to some branches of Respect in England.

During the election campaign the Iraq war plagued Blair. One young woman when he tried to greet her at a walkabout screamed at him "I don't shake the hand of a killer". In the last stages of the campaign the war dominated the headlines. Damaging leaks revealing the Attorney General's doubts about the legality of the war and the whole issue of the war played a big part in significantly reducing Labour's majority and the victory of George Galloway as a Respect MP, representing the East London constituency of Bow and Bethnal Green. Although he has a comfortable majority of 66 seats, Blair has had his wings clipped and the feeling is that he is so discredited that he will give way to Gordon Brown, his arch rival within a year or two into his term of office. There is a big question mark as to where the New Labour project is going. For Respect, the election of George Galloway is a breakthrough but it has a very long way to go if it is to make its mark on the political life of the country. ●

ECUADOR AND BOLIVIA **REVOLTS AND THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS**

The overthrow of President Carlos Mesa of Bolivia and President Lucio Gutierrez of Ecuador in the first few months of 2005 is the latest evidence of an intense class war in Latin America. Through different methods of mass struggle workers and peasants mobilised themselves in various organisations to get rid of these discredited presidents. Both presidents were kicked out of power because they failed to break from the political, social and economic policies of their predecessors.

However, the subsequent swearing in of presidents from the old political establishment (Alfredo Palacio in Ecuador and Hormando Vaca Diez in Bolivia) 'restored political calm' without any genuine change. This setback calls into question the ability of the militant movements in these countries to seize political power and implement a plan that can fundamentally transform these

countries. What are the barriers in the way to a full-scale social revolution in these countries?

To be able to understand the main obstacles in this process it is necessary to investigate the methods of struggle, strategic demands and forms of organisation adopted in these countries. Similar patterns of mass revolts have been unfolding elsewhere in Latin America (Argentina, Uruguay and Peru for instance) and hold critical lessons for the international anti-capitalist movement. To what extent can the lack of revolutionary leadership account for this relapse?

For a Constituent Assembly and Ending Neo-Liberalism

These social explosions usually erupt as a result of the politics of exclusion, the imposition of 'savage free-market policies' and failure to tackle the socio-economic difficulties workers and ➔

➡ peasants must face daily. At the political level, the demand for a Constituent Assembly is put forward to draft a constitution that includes the programme of radical grassroots movements. Although the government in Ecuador convened a Constituent Assembly (CA) in 1998, after a spontaneous mass revolt had toppled Abdala Bucaram, this body sidelined the demands of the mass formations.

The demand for a CA in Bolivia is being counterposed to a proposed 'office of transitional initiative (OTI)', sponsored by the US and the World Bank. The OTI has been opposed because it is a forum for so-called legal experts that will further marginalise those without political voice. While the left support the call for the CA in Bolivia, open mass assemblies (*cabildo abierto*) have now appeared as 'democratic spaces' in which large numbers of people directly participate to deliberate ways to realise their demands. What these experiences show is that the CA is a key transitional demand. Despite this, the CA is not a neutral body. It will write a constitution in the interests of workers and peasants only if these classes control their own organizations and political leadership.

Demands on the economic front call for an end to privatisation, flexible labour markets and the standard neo-liberal packages imposed globally. These 'savage free-market packages' have generated wealth for the rich at the expense of the working class and peasants, thus the determined mass resistance. While Lucio Gutierrez won the 2002 elections on promises of social spending, he subsequently cutback on social spending, and instead accelerated the repayment of Ecuador's foreign debt. This shift in his policies rallied people against him and his allies.

Each time in recent memory that there has been an announcement to sell-off Bolivia's water and sanitation, gas, electricity or oil to multinationals it has triggered nationwide revolts. In 2000 Bolivians scored a resounding victory in the 'Cochabamba water war'. The latest uprising against the privatisation of natural gas and water and sanitation services had its epicentre in El Alto and ultimately caused the fall of Carlos Mesa. A small moderate section of the protest movement wanted to settle for a 50-50 split of royalties from the proposed privatisation deal with the multinational corporations. The overwhelming majority, however, want Bolivia's natural resources to be nationalised, coupled with more state investment so that every poor Bolivian benefits from these essential services.

Political Actions and Social Movements

Protest actions involved huge numbers of people and were quite diverse, ranging from mass strikes to street demonstrations (roadblocks) to electoral

interventions. In some cases there have been local seizures of power and setting up of forms of local rule along the lines of the 'participatory budget movement' in Porto Alegre and other Brazilian cities.

In these struggles trade unions have often displayed remarkable militant potential, challenging assertions that the 'traditional organisation of the working class' is finished. Trade unions have fought alongside many new mass social formations. The Bolivian Workers' Federation (COB) remains a crucial force in the mass mobilisation against the privatisation of natural gas and water and sanitation. Mineworkers and public school teachers have joined these protests as well as landless peasant groups. Regional workers unions (COR) and Federations of Neighbourhood Juntas (FEJUVE), soviet-like councils first appearing in El Alto, have cemented the unity of the resistance movement and made the ouster of Carlos Mesa more certain.

Out of Bolivia's militant movements and protests evolved the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), a mass leftwing political party headed by Evo Morales, with a membership among workers and peasants. However, tensions and divisions over issues such as the nationalisation of natural resources threaten to undermine the cohesiveness and dynamism of the MAS.

In Ecuador a peasant social movement, CONAIE, spearheaded anti-capitalist resistance and was the instrumental force behind Gutierrez's overthrow. CONAIE provided the support base for Pachakutik, the political party that brought Gutierrez to power. However, when it became clear in 2003 that there was no way to divert Gutierrez from his neo-liberal path, CONAIE withdrew from its alliance with Pachakutik, speeding up the fall of Gutierrez. At its second national congress in late 2004, CONAIE resolved to become a political party with a reorientation on political actions outside the framework of bourgeois parliament. It further elected a new leader (Luis Macas) committed to this political shift and effectively discarded its historical leader (Antonio Vargas), still serving in an imploding cabinet. This is evidence of the recognition of the limitations of grassroots social movements. In order to make headway it is necessary to build and strengthen independent political parties based on the interests of the working poor.

Nationwide spontaneous uprisings have toppled politically bankrupt presidents in Ecuador and Bolivia. Events, however, seem trapped in the cycle that lifted a 'false ally of the poor' by the name of Nestor Kirchner to power in Argentina not too long ago. These experiences as well as projects driven by the United States of America, ranging from the war on drugs in the Andean region and the Free Trade Area of the America's, create a compelling need ➡

➔ for the left to forge a strategy to seize and hold on to power; to resolve the crisis of political leadership. Through the South American movements connected to the World Social Forum (WSF) a continental platform for an alternative can take

shape. Having next year's decentralized WSF in Venezuela's capital city (Caracas), may give fresh impetus to tackle the political leadership crisis in the region and end the isolation of Chavez's 'Bolivarian revolution' next door to 'US-imperialism'.●

APDUSA

APDUSA was established in 1961 by the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) to raise the interests of the working class and landless peasantry as paramount in the national liberatory struggle. Despite the gain of political rights for all, the compromise of 1992 has not fulfilled the national 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. We have therefore adopted a programme of transitional demands for the completion of the unfinished tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in an uninterrupted struggle for socialism.

APDUSA calls for the self-organisation and united independent struggle of the labouring masses. We further 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

We 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.
 - 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.

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

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