



BEYOND THE GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL LAND INDABA

The national land summit that the South African Communist Party (SACP) pushed for in its 2004 Red October campaign finally took place at the end of July 2005. Provincial land summits were also staged, ostensibly to prepare the ground for this event, just as the SACP had requested government to do. Since the SACP's intention was to 'accelerate land reform', it is natural to assess the impact of these land summits on struggles for agrarian reform. Another directly related question would be: What are the chances that the set of recommendations that the land indaba produced will be implemented?

The national and provincial departments of agriculture, actively promoting a neo-liberal large-scale farmer model, took charge of preparations for the summit. But the division within the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Affairs responsible for land reform policy and implementation, played a minimal role in the entire process. From this evidence, things did not go according to the SACP's wish to have NEDLAC - the so-called neutral forum of the government, bosses and workers - in charge of these land summits. There were also no "people's land tribunals or mass assemblies of the landless" held before or on the days of the summit.

Provincial land summits seem to have been dominated by affiliates of the big commercial farmers' associations and land reform NGO's. At several of the provincial summits groups of landless and poor, small farmers staged a variety of protests, like the 'walkout at the Western Cape land summit'. At the national land indaba, academics, a few NGO's, and high-level government officials dominated proceedings. The SACP and 15 of the NGOs participated in the land indaba under the banner of the Alliance of Land and Agrarian Reform Movements (ALARM). ALARM issued a list of common demands, but in the spirit of 'united front' action, each ALARM constituent made its own submission during the slot allocated to it on the first day of the land summit.

Debating Land Reform Models

Submissions to the land summit, including those by some big commercial farmer groups (like AgriSA), essentially reiterated and endorsed some case for land reform. This was at least significant

when seen against the background of anti-land reform research published before the summit by neo-liberal theorists from the apartheid era. These theorists basically argued that allocating ownership titles to urban housing is the best response to the "unstoppable" migration from the countryside. About the same time, reputable researchers at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) released some preliminary findings that contradicted this 'urban housing titling response to the land question'. According to the HSRC study at least 1-million households in three provinces (Limpopo, Free State and Eastern Cape) demand small plots for non-commercial farming. Indeed a survey of 'land hunger' that includes provinces with larger numbers of people living in rural areas will put land needs for small-scale farming much higher.

While almost everyone at the summit accepted the need for land reform, there was intense disagreement on the best 'model of land reform'. Those who favoured the 'market-based approach' or the willing-seller, willing-buyer model - the World Bank, the state, some tribal leaders and commercial farmers, formed the minority. In the end the main recommendation was an outright rejection of this framework and a call on the state to review its approach that has resulted in '11 years of broken promises'. It remains to be seen what actions the state will take on some recommendations, like reopening the land claims process, stopping illegal evictions of farm workers, expropriating obstructive land owners and so on.

Demands that ALARM publicised before the indaba, such as "ceilings on the size and number of privately owned farms", "a moratorium on the sale of arable land for game parks and other recreational activities" and an "end to privatisation of land natural resources", never made it into the final recommendations. However, a moderate review of the shameless expansion of land uses for the pleasures of the rich (like game parks and golf courses) seem to have won verbal support from President Thabo Mbeki, himself an avid golf player. This puts the state on the horns of a dilemma. Should land be used for government's promotion of these lucrative tourism ventures, which are ➔

➡ profitable for a few investors, at the expense of the agrarian demands of the landless poor?

The summit once again exposed the conflict between government's pro-market policies and the fundamental needs of the working class and landless peasantry.

Self-organisation of the Landless Poor

In the absence of militant and independent mass formations of the landless poor, the land summit will go down in history as just another talk-shop that paid lip service to 'pro-poor land and agrarian reform'. ALARM, at its first post-summit assessment meeting, resolved to ensure that the state implements the 'land indaba resolutions'. It now aims to organise provincial assemblies of the landless to

inform them of the outcomes of the summit and plan how to take the fight for land forward.

In the face of all this the position of Apdusa remains clear. We demand 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. ●

REFLECTING ON STRIKE ACTIONS

South Africa's working class has been subject to a range of attacks from the state and the corporate world for a number of years, as a logical outflow of the GEAR programme being implemented covertly and overtly by government and big business alike. For a short period recently, a wave of strikes followed in the wake of the inability of trade unions and employers to find agreement in wage negotiations. Prominent strikes in the mining, aviation, retail and the municipal sectors grabbed the headlines. This came against the background of companies making soaring profits on the backs of unionised and non-unionised workers. Prior to and intermittently during the times of the strikes, the long running battles for municipal services, housing and the like, continued unabated.

The employers affected by the strikes - South African Airways, South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the Chamber of Mines and the retailer Pick 'n Pay, - adopted a common stance vis-à-vis the unions' demands. They steadfastly refused to move beyond what they considered cost of living related wage increases - in the range of 4 to 7%. They set out with the intention to drive a hard bargain and force unions to back down on their initial wage demands that ranged between 6 and 15%. Apart from this the practice of fixing long-term wage agreements of up

to three years, has become the norm in many industries. These have the effect of tying unions to preset wage increases that have proved to be inadequate to cover cost of living increases in the ensuing periods covered by the agreements.

Employers such as SALGA have been accused by union leaders of undermining the bargaining process and of reducing workers' pension and medical retirement benefits. These practices hardly make the headlines but are indicative of the systematic rolling back of benefits that lowly-paid workers have fought for over many decades. At the same time, municipalities have been paying millions to consultants in their programmes of non-delivery of services.

The promises of gold mine owners to improve the miserable living conditions in worker hostels in a few years' time, appear as just another trick up the sleeves of bosses. Everything is tried to placate unions and workers. If that does not work then there is always the option of threatening the closure of companies, retrenchments and the like. A Company such as Checkers-Shoprite, which has been raking in mega-profits from both its South African and African operations, told its workers that 'excessive' wage demands would only lead to an increase in food prices or the closure of marginal stores.

Notwithstanding this array of arguments used by their class enemy, workers rejected the bosses' posturing and rightfully used the vast wage gaps that exist in South Africa as a basis for demanding wage increases in line with the cost of living. As an example, the average monthly wage for gold mine workers is R2354, those of the chief executives are 242 times this amount. Municipal managers are paid salaries ranging from one half to one million rand a month. Municipal workers are denied a minimum salary of R3 000. Some employers maintain that where huge profits have been made, they belong to the shareholders. They argue that the profits were not due to worker performance, but the result of improved market conditions.

Big business, sensing the weakening of the membership bases of some union federations as a result of retrenchments, feels a confidence that borders on arrogance. A very striking feature of these developments is the similarity in the hard line attitudes of state and big business towards workers' demands for living wages. This indicates a heightening in the degree of irreconcilability of the interests of these two opposing classes.

The wage demands of the unions assume greater importance if we consider the need for a "social wage" ➡

➔ as identified and described by some political commentators. This wage would make provision for the added expenditure that employed workers have to carry for family and relatives who have been retrenched or are dependent on the wage earner(s) in the family. The poverty indicators in the country testify to masses of people being thrown into poverty daily - more than 50% of the population, according to figures released earlier this year by the Department of Local and Provincial Government. They put the number of South Africans classified as being indigent at 29 million out of a population of 46 million.

In their confrontations with capital, traditional white unions (e.g. Solidarity in the mining

sector) made common cause with the National Union of Mineworkers. Workers. Kept divided under apartheid, and coming from different labour traditions, they are beginning to join forces against their common enemies. This signals a step forward for organised labour. In the municipal strike a similar situation emerged, with unity in action being the key rallying call. There are in fact moves afoot for Fedusa and Nactu to seek avenues for amalgamation. The Council of South African Workers Unions (Cosawu) is also reported to be part of these collaborative initiatives. In addition there have been ongoing talks between Cosatu, Nactu and Fedusa regarding future amalgamation.

Though the wage agreements in the wake of the strikes fell short

of their original demands, workers showed a strong resolve to fight for rightful wage increases. The application of the 'no work, no pay' principle meant that unions, in considering the hardships that members would face, were compelled to terminate strike action. As part of preparations to engage employers in what may turn out to be more protracted battles in future, the question of strike funds has appeared on the agenda of some unions. Indeed, future battles with employer organisations will, in addition, require closer union collaboration as well as a broadening and heightening of the range and level of organised support from progressive community and political formations. ●

W M TSOTSI

APDUSA honours the life's work and contribution of Mr Wycliffe Tsotsi, one of its longest serving veterans, who passed away on 19 September. He was 91 years of age. Known simply as Wyckie by his comrades or Oom Wyck by members of the younger generation, Tsotsi joined the political struggle of the oppressed and exploited millions of South Africa at the time of one of its most important developments, namely, the birth of the All African Convention in 1935 and he remained committed to this cause for the rest of his life.

He started his adult career as a teacher and principal of the Freemantle Boys' High School. From that base he played a major role in the organisation of the Glen Gray Teachers' Association which affiliated to the Cape African Teachers Association. In CATA itself, Tsotsi played a major role in shaping its progressive political orientation. He went further to become deeply involved in the organisation of the peasantry across the Transkei. Because of his political involvement he was forced out of the teaching profession and thereafter built himself a livelihood in the legal profession.

Wyckie Tsotsi was elected president of the AAC in 1948 and served in that capacity until 1958. Later, he became the Vice President of the Unity Movement, at that time, the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). He was entrusted with that position for many years thereafter. He went on to become a founder member of the APDUSA when it was established in 1960 and he rendered many years of service on its central executive.

In 1960 he was arrested and detained because of the AAC's association with the Pondoland uprising and after a periods of detention he was forced to seek refuge in Lesotho. There, he continued to work in support of the UMSA while, as a member of the legal profession, he also conducted the legal defence of numbers of political refugees from South Africa. Because of these activities he was deported from Lesotho in 1967 and with his wife, he made his way to Lusaka where he joined up with members and the office of the UMSA in exile.

In exile, Tsotsi continued to work in support of the UMSA's organisational program and he also underwent military training in Guinea in 1969. After the end of the reactionary regime of Leabua Jonathon in 1978 he was able to return to Lesotho where he lived and worked until he was able to return home to South Africa.

Wyckie Tsotsi was one of an historically very important section of black intellectuals who chose a life of dedication to the liberation struggle instead of a selfish search for personal economic aggrandisement. In every sense he was a son of the soil who was in the forefront in helping to arm the black oppressed with a new political outlook at a time that tribal resistance had run its historical course and a new mode of national, political struggle was emerging. He played an invaluable role in advancing a radical programme for the building of a new and united South African nation in which all its citizens could equally share the benefits of all the advances of human civilisation.

Tsotsi strove to place himself in the forefront of building the intellectual independence of the oppressed and exploited black masses. In this regard he, inter alia, authored two works – "From Chattel to Wage Slavery – a New Approach to South African History", published in 1981 in Maseru, as well as his memoirs entitled "Out of Court", which go beyond the personal, which he completed in 1974 and which remains virtually unpublished.

The 10 Point Programme of the UMSA and its policy of non-collaboration with the oppressor, adopted formally in 1943 and to which Wyckie Tsotsi committed his life, became the standard for the advance of the entire liberatory movement in South Africa. The struggle continues.

STRUGGLES FOR HOUSING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

SMI Initiative Gains Momentum

The recent wave of protests against the state's grossly ineffective housing program, as well as protests against deficient municipal service delivery has seen the birth of a number of new community resistance groups and organised bodies. In Cape Town, on 6 August, the local Anti-Privatisation Forum, in collaboration with other bodies committed to building the Social Movement Indaba (SMI) as a national front, convened a public forum to which a number of these new resistance groups were invited. The aim of this forum was to explore the building of solidarity and a broader unity in these struggles. Over 25 organisations and groups responded to this invitation and the meeting resolved that this initiative should be pursued.

Another meeting, that had already been planned beforehand, took place in Mitchell's Plain a week later. This meeting focused on the housing and service delivery crisis and was attended by almost all of the new resistance formations plus older ones aligned to the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Cape Town Anti-Privatisation Forum. This meeting endorsed support for the SMI initiative and another meeting will be convened soon, most likely to consider the task of establishing a representative local SMI Coordinating Committee.

Compared to efforts in the past this development represents a significant step forward to mobilise social movements against the Governments' neo-liberal economic policy (GEAR) and its dire effects on the labouring masses of South Africa. The signs are now that a national SMI is getting off the ground. Key to its progress will be a program of demands that can unite different resistance sectors operating around problems of land, housing, social services, employment and environmental protection.

Although it appears as a real unifying force at present, in the longer term opposition to GEAR alone will prove to be inadequate. The more fundamental problem is the commitment of the state to the free market, international trade and financial norms and requirements over which it has no control. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the new political regime is becoming manifest and is beginning to take on a political colour. With the local government elections on the horizon a new slogan that has emerged from communities fighting on the housing and service delivery front – "No Houses no Vote!" But things need to be taken further. People need to learn that it is the very constitution of South Africa, however glorified, that facilitates their oppression. It is a constitution that enshrines the private property rights of big business in industry, mining and agriculture - a new constitution attuned to the interests of the minority at the expense of the majority. We must raise the demand for a new constituent assembly that will be driven by the interest of the majority rather than the rich minority ●

A NEW CAMPAIGN AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT & POVERTY

The trade union federation, Cosatu, has emerged as a major force in a new coalition to fight unemployment and poverty. The campaign was launched at a meeting in Cape Town on 21 August and was supported, significantly, by a number of NGO's. Indeed the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) launched its own "Right to Work" campaign earlier in June this year which has now been submerged in this new coalition.

It has been stated that the aim is to unite trade unions, ngos and civil society, i.e., civic-type, community based organisations, in the coalition. But there is not any real evidence of the latter being involved to any significant extent. This is not unexpected since the national civic association SANCO, which is an alliance partner of Cosatu, hardly functions and has been largely absent in the protests for housing and service delivery. Further, Cosatu has long ago adopted a stance against those civil society organisations grouping around the Social Movement Indaba (SMI) initiative, which it has branded as ultra-leftist. For its part the AIDC, the second key mover in this new coalition, has also quietly dissociated itself from the SMI initiative. This is in line with the thesis of political activists in its ranks that "the road to socialism is through Cosatu".

This new coalition has been billed in some quarters as a new United Democratic Front (UDF). Both AIDC and Cosatu have denied the intention to create a new UDF although Cosatu spokespersons do not rule out the possibility that some such body might emerge in future.

The social movements that have been active in struggles around municipal service delivery and housing are largely cynical about this new coalition. With the local government elections looming and the widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of the ANC, questions are raised whether this is not just a means to turn attention away from the housing and service delivery crisis towards pressurising the ANC for a review of its approach to unemployment – a means to once again call for a pro ANC vote! Or is it the expression of a need by the tri-partite alliance to counter the growth of more radical resistance to the state's policies? Time will tell whether this new campaign will not simply fade away like others launched by Cosatu in the past. For some time now nothing has been heard of its "Jobs For All campaign" which was launched a couple of years ago. That campaign did not even receive a mention in the launch of this new coalition which is attempting to tackle the same problem.

This new coalition can indeed be significant if Cosatu is prepared to join hands openly and democratically with the new resistance movement that has emerged outside the ranks of the tri-partite alliance. But the prospects of this remain dim. ●

AFROCENTRIC GOBBLEDYGOOK

An advertisement feature posted by Nepad in the Independent group of newspapers on 29 July carries an article headed “Universities must embrace African world view” In this article President Mbeki speaks on the role of African universities: “... an African university cannot but be an important part of the African renaissance”. The article goes on to state : “The challenge should be viewed as a call that insists that all critical and transformative educators in Africa embrace an indigenous African world-view and root their nations’ educational paradigms in an indigenous socio-cultural and epistemological framework. Mbeki is quoted further as saying: The centuries old subjugation of Africa to foreign exploitation, ranging from slavery to the colonial system, which was singularly designed to achieve maximum extraction of raw materials, wreaked serious damage that continues to impact on contemporary Africa. To address this state of affairs we need a distinctively African knowledge system which would have as its objective, the goal of recovering the humanistic and ethical principles embedded in African philosophy”.

How an African knowledge system is to be defined is very hard to say but the very idea is a reactionary one. To demand of a university that it bases itself on a regionally bound and exclusionary knowledge system contradicts its very purpose and function, for as the name “university” well implies, it should be an institution for the exploration and development of universal knowledge without any national or regional boundaries.

An African knowledge system with all its mystical connotations is an expression of the ideology of Afrocentricity, which is promoted by a small group of academics here in Africa and otherwise by some Afro-Americans in the USA.

The rationale for Afrocentricity is as follows. Africans live in a world in which European ideology is dominant. According to this ideology the roots of modern civilisation are to be found in Europe and it is the Europeans who have been responsible for advances in science, technology and economics that have shaped the modern world. Africans contributed nothing of note to this great process of civilisation since all the while it was in progress they lived in a backward tribal world of intellectual ignorance – they are an inferior race. This is typified as Eurocentricism. By this standard any Black individual who wishes to advance his own position or to make a contribution to modern research and development finds his way obstructed by racial prejudice. His best hope is to adopt the European

outlook but this in itself is no guarantee that these obstacles will be removed from his path. The Africanist argument is that Eurocentricism represents a false, or at least, a seriously skewed view of the development of human civilisation. The answer is that Africans or persons of African origin anywhere in the world, must reject this false outlook which leaves them alienated from the process of human development and they must affirm the positive gains of African history and culture. To free themselves of the slave mentality, Africans or persons of African origin must rid themselves of European ideological dominance and they must rediscover and promote their own cultural and ideological heritage. The re-establishment of an African outlook is therefore necessary not only for the black-skinned individual but for human progress as a whole, which is presently being obstructed by lopsided, skewed and false Eurocentricism. In short, the answer to Eurocentricity is Afrocentricity. This outlook has gained some backing here in South Africa under the aegis of president Thabo Mbeki and other prominent, Africanist luminaries such as Barney Pityana, Malegapuru Makgoba, and Mathata Tshedu.. They all claim to be fighting racism but they ask us to use racism as a weapon against racism.

In attempting to look at things more fundamentally we will note that the juxtaposition of Afrocentrism to Eurocentrism is a fatally flawed ideological construct. In the first place we will see that the notion of Eurocentrism is a skewed representation of the ideology of imperialism which is propagated on all continents of the world. Thus, Africanism is no answer to this ideology as it manifests itself in India, Malaysia or Mexico, for example. Moreover, anti-black African racism in no way accounts for the slaughter in recent years of hundreds of thousands of people in what was Yugoslavia or the massacres in East Timor, the persecution of nationalists in Ireland or the Palestinians in the Middle East. We are all members of the human race and all of our peoples have contributed to the advancement of human knowledge and abilities across the world. Whether we live in Africa or not, as human beings we are the rightful heirs to the full body of human knowledge to which every country and all peoples have contributed and there is no intelligent reason why Africans should be limited and have their thinking warped by a so-called African knowledge system. The only answer to the ideology of imperialism is the ideology of working class internationalism. ●



From Around the World

EVICCTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

The brutal eviction campaign being conducted by the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe against thousands of the most vulnerable section of the population in the townships and squatter camps has earned it universal condemnation. To claim however as the BBC did recently that bulldozers were now “crashing through the homes of 500,000 people” in Harare with a total population of 1-2 million is clearly an exaggeration. For an understanding of the situation in Zimbabwe it is important to place it within the context of its more recent history and in particular to examine the role of imperialism and its agencies, the World Bank and the IMF in the life of the country.

Operation Murambatsvina or “Clean Up The Rubbish”, launched in May by the Mugabe government at the height of the winter, involved the forcible eviction on a wide scale of residents of squatter camps throughout Zimbabwe. It is reported that at least three people and as many as seven may have died during this campaign. The government figure for those who have lost their homes is 120,000 while aid agencies suggest 300,000. Not only have homes been torn down with families having to sleep in the open but markets have been razed with the consequent loss of livelihood to large numbers of traders in the informal sector. There are press

reports of 22,000 people having been arrested or had their property confiscated.

The eviction campaign was launched soon after Mugabe’s victory in the parliamentary elections earlier this year. This was at a time when the economy was in dire straits with unemployment nearing 80%, inflation at 144% and severe shortages of food and fuel. Unable to reverse the economic tide, the government turned instead to scapegoating the poverty stricken squatter camp and township residents, who had voted so heavily against it and for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the elections. The very language the government employed in launching its eviction campaign “Clean Up The Rubbish” was that of the former colonial and racist regimes. It is not the first, nor will it be the last time that Mugabe and the elite who surround him launch attacks on the oppressed masses of Zimbabwe.

Needless to say, the roots of the crisis in Zimbabwe do not spring only from the ZANU leadership but also from colonialism and imperialism. The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 imposed by British imperialism on Zimbabwe thwarted a solution to the agrarian problem. Most of the land remained under the control of a tiny minority of white farmers while the majority of the black

population, the peasants remained crowded into small areas of land. The subsequent takeover of some of the white farms by the black elite failed to meet the demands of the peasantry for land, millions of whom remained landless and were forced to flock to the squatter camps in the towns, where most are without jobs and lead a precarious existence.

After independence the government did introduce radical reforms in health and education but when it ran up debts and was forced to turn to the World Bank and the IMF for loans an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was imposed on the country in 1991. This had the usual dire consequences for the population, who were once again forced to pay for attending schools and medical treatment. An IMF sponsored study in 1998 concluded that its own policies had deleterious effects on the lives of Zimbabweans. The burden of repayment of the foreign debt became so brutal that Mugabe stopped paying it a few years ago and only recently resumed payment on a very limited scale. He is being demonised by imperialism and Zimbabwe is finding it very difficult to obtain further foreign loans. The people of Zimbabwe are having to pay a terrible price for the misdeeds of their rulers and of imperialism.

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PROTESTS AGAINST THE G8 SUMMIT

The protests by the anti-capitalist globalisation movement against the summit of the G8 leaders, held in Gleneagles, Scotland in July, took place amid a barrage of propaganda and misinformation from the bourgeois media. Scare stories circulated in the bourgeois press alleging that G8 hackers were aiming to cripple the computer systems of banks and ministries as a protest before the G8 summit! The authorities tried to discourage would-be protesters

from coming to Gleneagles by announcing that they would not be permitted to march within miles of the hotel where the summit was being held.

Broadly speaking, there were two currents present in the protest movement against the G8 summit. The radical anti-capitalist current and prime organiser of the alternative events to the summit was G8 Alternatives (G8A), an alliance of political parties, prominent among which were the ➡

➡ Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), trade unions, church groups, NGOs and individuals. The reformist current that was more concerned with depoliticising the protests was Make Poverty History (MPH). This current was a coalition mainly of NGOs such as Oxfam, charities, a few trade unions and churches. The celebrities, Bob Geldof and Bono tacked on to this coalition with the Live8 concerts held in big cities in the world timed to coincide with the MPH campaign. The MPH refused to even acknowledge the protests and other events organised by G8 Alternatives, CND and Trident Ploughshares. It twice vetoed Stop The War Coalition's (STWC's) application to join MPH on the grounds that the issues of economic justice are separate from those of war! It failed, however, to stop anti-war placards and slogans being displayed at the 250,000 strong demonstration in Edinburgh on the 2nd July.

On paper, MPH's demands such as calling for 'trade justice not free trade', which would require G8 to stop forcing through free market policies on poor countries as part of aid, trade deals and debt relief, are fairly radical. When Blair's Commission for Africa set out its own very different proposals on Africa using the same language of MPH-'trade justice' 'drop the debt' and 'more and better aid', MPH members warmly welcomed the report's recommendations.

The agreement reached at the G8 summit, committing the richest countries to write off the debt of 18 poor countries, but requiring them to pursue a raft of free market policies including allowing private companies to take over public services, will further impoverish them. The money owed by the

poor countries has been paid over many times in interest. Yet Geldof praised the summit as "a victory for the millions of people in the campaigns around the world" and Bono called it "a little piece of history". Opposition from the rank and file of the MPH to Blair and Brown's efforts to co-opt it as a front for New Labour's policies forced the leadership to distance the coalition from the government by bringing forward a report criticising UK government policy.

In contrast to the MPH, the G8 Alternatives sought to offer an alternative to reform via its own summit on July 3. This summit organised a wide range of plenary sessions and workshops attended by several thousand people including new layers from the July 2 demonstration seeking real answers to the slogan "Make Poverty History". A demonstration of more than 10,000 people against the G8 summit at Gleneagles on 6 July was the culmination of 5 days of protests against the world's rulers. It happened despite police threats to ban the march and lying that the demonstration had been cancelled for "public safety". Four SSP Members of the Parliament stood up in Parliament demanding the right to protest against the G8. Their action as well as the protests of trade unionists forced the police to allow the march. The SSP Members of Parliament were subsequently suspended from Parliament for their action. The people had won a big victory and they marched up to the fence that surrounded the hotel where the summit was held. The left played a big part in the organisation of the G8A. The anti-capitalist movement has emerged from the protest stronger, broader and more experienced. ●

G8 PUSH FOR AFRICA'S WHOLESALE PRIVATISATION

G8 leaders, at their recent summit in Scotland, made a fresh commitment to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve poverty and meeting basic needs by 2015. Since all indicators show that Africa is lagging far behind the rest of the world in meeting the MDGs, the G8 leaders granted the most indebted African countries US\$50bn in debt relief and aid.

People aware of the depth of misery in which Africa is trapped have exposed this G8 aid package as too little to lift the poorest in Africa out of poverty. It is a drop in the ocean. This is correct, if we consider that the continent's debt bill to foreign creditors already exceeds US\$300bn, and is set to increase with every rise in world interest rates. Furthermore, the value of oil

that Shell, a single oil multinational corporation, has extracted from Nigeria is far in excess of the US\$ 50bn, even before counting the environmental destruction.

While this derisory aid package is unlikely to get Africa closer to its MDGs, the continent did not get this US\$ 50bn without strings attached. African countries will qualify for this support in exchange for 'good governance and allowing the private sector to flourish' - euphemisms for laws that will safeguard the interests of capitalist investors. This idea of aid in exchange for wholesale privatisation has the full backing of those NEPAD drivers, the Davos based World Economic Forum and other neo-liberals. Tony Blair's 'Commission for Africa' report places great emphasis on

such *conditions*, little different from the structural adjustment loans that have crippled an entire continent since the 1970s.

A good point to gain a better picture of the cost of privatisation to Africa is to start from the meaning and measurement of privatisation. World Bank and other market fundamentalists usually limit the meaning of privatisation to the transfer of assets from state owned companies to private shareholders. They have used this to calculate the number and value of state owned companies sold to private investors. IMF and World Bank experts use such indicators to monitor compliance with privatisation conditions in debt contracts. Thus African countries are coerced into ➡

➔ privatisation either to borrow more or beg for debt relief.

Privatisation in terms of the standard description in Sub-Saharan Africa has accelerated since the mid-1990s. From 1988 to 1996 the value of deals amounted to US\$ 2,7bn, reaching US\$2,3bn for 1997 alone! According to available data, the total value of privatisation had climbed to US\$9bn by 2002. This figure would be equivalent to the combined gross national incomes of Uganda and Zambia at that time.

Sales of state owned enterprises are unevenly spread across the continent. For example, until 2002, Zambia had 253 deals with a total value of US\$ 828 million. South Africa, on the other hand, had only about 8 deals with a value exceeding US\$3bn!

Another important trend of privatisation in Africa has been the shift in the sectors put up for sale. In the 1980s and early 1990s, privatisation involved primarily the break-up and sale of the old state owned enterprises in mining, agriculture and 'infant secondary industries'. Since then this has swiftly branched out to public utilities such as water and sanitation services, electricity and the energy sector.

Market fundamentalists, at least in theory, repeat that a key reason for privatisation is to improve investment in better infrastructure. But in the real world this rarely happens. In Tanzania for instance, Biwater from Britain headed the multinationals that took over City Water in Dar es Salaam. After 2 years into this contract Biwater failed to invest in a better pipe water network simply because it was not profitable for them, forcing the Tanzanian government to cancel their contract. Similarly, AES, an American electricity utility that bought Cameroon's national electricity company (SONEL) failed to invest in power-generating capacity, thus power cuts persist and demonstrators are chanting "AES go home!". In Ghana, an estimated \$70 million

annual investment per company was needed for improvement in water infrastructure, yet the two favoured bidders were willing to invest only \$30 million each. There is a need for an alternative economic plan to ensure that an estimated US\$26bn annual investment occurs to improve Africa's water and sanitation and meet basic needs.

Multinationals often buy state owned corporations through secret and corrupt deals. In Africa, corporate corruption in privatisation, e.g. in Lesotho, is perhaps on par with the ENRON scandal. Corruption in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, built to supply SA industries and cities with water, forced this cash strapped government into a drawn out and costly prosecution of Canadian, German, British and French corporations.

These costs of privatisation to Africa are well known, yet largely ignored by the G8 and their neo-liberal experts. Moreover, to get a more complete picture of the cost of privatisation to society, it has to be viewed as a mechanism whereby access to every necessity of life gets subjected to market rules. In the market place everything, be it water, bread or diamonds, has a price set by big firms to recover costs and make a handsome profit. Any person without the ability to pay for (or afford) water and sanitation, electricity, healthcare or education just has to go without it.

Indeed, across Africa, privatisation of public utilities has excluded the poor from access to safe and reliable essential services. Water access through the market is now regulated through sophisticated devices that restrict access for the poor to a tiny free water quota. This scheme operates in Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa. When a household has exhausted its 'free quota', it must pay high tariffs that invariably leads to cut-offs due to the inability to pay. Diseases are re-emerging in poor regions due to lack of access to water and sanitation- such as guinea worm in Ghana and cholera and typhoid

in SA. These social costs of privatisation, compounding the impact of unemployment or displacement of peasant farmers - as in the Lesotho Highlands Project - have either been neglected or obscured in the economic models of free market fundamentalists.

On the whole, more privatisation in Africa will subvert the achievement of the mediocre targets set out in the MDGs. In contrast to this, democratically planned, efficient and sustainable public services to meet the needs of every human being, through cross-subsidisation will result in minimal charges. Under such a system the objective will be satisfying human needs and not the greed of private corporations.

Trade unions across the continent have played a crucial role in raising awareness and mobilisation against privatisation to protect their members' jobs. It is in retaliation against such attacks on their members that the General Confederation of the Workers of Burkina, The Public Utilities Workers Union (PUWU-Ghana) and South Africa Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) resist privatisation. SAMWU brought together unions from Namibia, Swaziland, Mozambique and Zambia in 2001 to forge solidarity and a common platform against privatisation.

Today, partly due to the campaigns of these trade unions, anti-privatisation social movements, that are beginning to spearhead broader anti-capitalist struggles in Africa, have emerged. Thus we have witnessed the rise of the National Coalition Against Water Privatisation in Ghana. SAMWU has increased its links with this Ghanaian movement and participates in the Anti-Privatisation Forum in South Africa. There are signs that these movements are converging with others under the banner of the African Social Forum that is part of the World Social Forum, with its rallying cry "Another World is Possible". ●