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AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Interests Of The Workers And Landless Peasants Shall Be Paramount

AFTER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Are we to get more of the same or are the conditions of the workers and peasants at local, community level going to improve? APDUSA, in its programme of transitional demands states that *"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."* These are demands according to which we must measure past, present and future representation of their class interests. It has however recently become crystal-clear that, notwithstanding the ANC getting huge electoral support from workers and peasants, that the solution of their fundamental problems is hardly the intention of the ANC government. The pre-election developments in Khutsong, the dogfights in the Eastern Cape around nominations for mayoral positions etc. reflect an organisation at war with itself; an organisation which is an historical anachronism and is totally incapable of leading society forward. It is an organisation representing interests that are opposed to the interests of the working class and peasantry.

The ANC produced an oath that all its public representatives have to abide by. These are statements of intent and phrased in such general terms that any councillor can be assured that wrongdoing will not result in job losses. Past performance of councillors (mostly negative) is the one indicator for future performance that cannot just be wished away. The councillors and their political seniors have created suspicions and antagonisms in communities that will be hard to turn around. The loss of credibility of the ruling party can develop further into loss of legitimacy. Corruption, graft and other misdeeds have become and will remain the norm according to which the system operates. It cannot be otherwise since the individualism the capitalist system extols and the oppression of the working class and peasantry that it pre-supposes, will continue to breed discontent and rebellion.

Another step the ministry of local government intends taking is to raise the salaries of councillors.

The argument is that "if you pay peanuts, you only get monkeys". How different will the new salary scales be from what is considered a living wage in South Africa? Do those who are paid huge salaries not make themselves guilty of corrupt practices? Local growth and development summits, as proposed by national government are meant to be held by the beginning of June. This will be to generate regular interaction between local authorities and the members of the community to implement ANC neo-liberal policies. This will amount to nothing but the discredited GEAR policy being sold and operationalised in local communities. Local representatives will be accountable to national government, not the local inhabitants. All the trappings of democracy, yes, but what is the political substance of the policies that are being implemented? Khutsong is one case to learn from.

Another popular way the government assures and demonstrates to the population that it is performing its job of governance as mandated, is the use of "intervention" to address critical and terminal conditions in the education, health, housing, municipal utilities and other fields. This amounts to crisis management of the affairs of the poor majority in the country whose increased suffering is continually being spoken about but hardly reduced. It is nothing but ad hoc government.

The adoption of stopgap measures, of deploying experts to attend to collapsing infrastructure has become common currency at local and provincial level. It remains to be seen how the new batch of councillors will perform. In the mean time communities have realised the need for them to become self reliant. A number of communities across the country put up their own independent candidates in the recent elections and overall, independent candidates gained a significant number of votes. At the same time there is evidence that the Social Movement Indaba, which aims to unite their struggles on a national level is now gaining real organisational strength. The development of independent democratic structures of the masses with a clear political direction can lay the basis for a real people's democracy. ●

ADDRESSING SOUTH AFRICA'S UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

The latest official figures put South Africa's labour force at 16,8 million people and reinforce a popular claim that the 'era of jobless growth' is now over. In the year until September 2005, more than 650,000 jobs have been created according to the official statistical agency's Labour Force Survey (LFS). Government and business say that this positive jobs report is due to the country's booming economy - peaking at a growth rate of 4,5% in 2005. At a deeper level, officials confidently say, this robust economy and jobs growth are in turn outcomes of the efficacy of the country's sound market-friendly macroeconomic policies. If this is true, then these 'macroeconomic rules' need to be kept in place or selectively reinforced to reach the 6% growth target set to halve unemployment and poverty from 2014 onwards.

State officials are upbeat about this silver lining that suggests, after a decade, South Africa's macroeconomic economic strategies are beginning to translate into jobs. However, they agree that the battle against unemployment is far from over, partly due to the risk of an economic slump. Current worries arise from the fact that the broad measure of unemployment, which includes so-called discouraged workers, is to the order of 45% of the labour force. By any standard this is an enormous figure - an unemployment crisis. Thus the need for extraordinary measures captured in the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGI) as a new engine to slash unemployment and poverty by 50% within 9 years. Trade unions and big business support the main thrust of ASGI, with COSATU vowing that it will bring more pressure to bear on government and capital to end unemployment and poverty. Given this urgency to address SA's unemployment crisis, it is important to check if the touted 'desperate interventions' will create sustainable jobs at living wages.

Flexible Labour Markets

Since 1994, the main electoral slogan of the governing party has been 'jobs and a better life for all'. But the hollowness of this promise became evident when job shedding gathered pace as a result of the state's neo-liberal economic policies. Labour market flexibility, a major component of this package, simply meant more insecure and low-paying jobs and jobless economic growth. Today, these same policies are credited for the turnaround in which the economy is generating 30,000 jobs per month, leading government to assert that it is on track to reach the United Nations' 2015 Millennium Development Goals.

Critiques have pointed out that these are mainly

part-time jobs in construction and retail trade and estimates include survivalist small business that are hardly sustainable and easy to count. Moreover, risks of recession have increased and workers in these insecure and low-paying economic activities are usually the first to be sacked. Now the state started pinning all its confidence on its new job creation plan, ASGI, with its emphasis on public works programmes and private public partnerships. ASGI basically copies the existing expanded public works, offering the jobless six-monthly contracts for a maximum of 2 years at an average wage of R60 per day that do not lift a family above the poverty line. It combines flexible labour markets with state investment for the prosperity of the private sector and markets without sustainable jobs at living wages.

'End Job Losses And Poverty'

A jobless crisis at the South African scale poses a direct threat to trade unions, although casual workers are the first to be sacked. Casual workers, the neo-liberal norm, are usually barred from joining trade unions and have virtually zero legal protection. Moreover, it is rare for a sacked worker to retain union membership and no independent union of the unemployed has developed as yet in South Africa. What is to be expected then is for job losses to erode the membership and related financial base of trade unions and thus compel unions to react.

Energetic interventions on the part of the trade unions have largely been ineffective to make any significant dent in unemployment to date. While unions have successfully fought for a Jobs Summit in 1998, subsequently renamed the Growth and Development Summit (GDS), this has degenerated into an annual talk shop. Out of these summits emerged the Job Creation Fund (JCF)- financed from a day's wages that every union member donated- which has provided work to merely 15,000 unemployed in 7 years. Compare this figure to at least 30,000 jobs that may be axed, according to the unions, as the state drives ahead the further privatisation of transport and electricity utilities. Using trade union investment companies to promote 'social entrepreneurship' or broad based black economic empowerment (BBBEE) also failed to address job losses. COSATU's 'end jobs losses and poverty' campaign that has gained momentum as the country swung into the 2006 local government elections mode, has fizzled out after sparking political tensions within the tripartite alliance.

Clearly, trade unions can more effectively fight against unemployment if they pay attention to how they struggle and the nature of their demands. ➡

➔ For example, in its 'jobs and poverty campaign', COSATU strikingly exposed the links between unemployment and other social afflictions hitting working people- such as homelessness and exclusion from privatised social services - making it possible to forge a genuine united front with other social movements and political organisations. A crucial short-term demand absent from current campaigns is

a reduction in the working day without a loss in pay to allow employment for more workers. Furthermore, public works must guarantee the unemployed a living wage, include them fully in its management and pave the way for democratic workers control and self-management in a planned economy. ●

THE BOGUS EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAM

In his state of the nation address on 3 February this year, President Mbeki promised special attention to the government's expanded public works program (EPWP) as a means to deal with poverty alleviation and to tackle unemployment. The problem is that the government is committed to the ideology of a public private partnership (PPP) to execute its economic program to deal with the inequalities in our society.

What is the meaning of this PPP or public private partnership? Firstly, the word "public" refers to the government as the supposed representative of the public and the word "private" refers to privately owned business enterprises. What it tells us is that the government follows a policy according to which its responsibilities to the public must be carried out by making deals with private business enterprises. Accordingly, the expanded public works program does not mean that the department of public works will employ more workers to carry out a program of economic development. What it means is that the department will enter into contracts with private profit making business to do its work. How does this help employment? Contracted companies will naturally have to employ workers to complete their contracts. The problem is that these are short-term contracts and under the special conditions accepted by both the government and the contracting businesses workers are offered very short-term job contracts at extremely low wages.

Government, big business and the media strenuously advocate this PPP programme as a means of creating jobs, of introducing potential quality service and efficiency, cost saving, access to private sector experience etc. In reality these elaborate programmes amount to reduced control over public assets by local government. The PPP policy undermines the belief of people, who in huge numbers voted for this government that the state itself must serve as the main source of employment.

We get a clearer picture of what this EPWP means in practice from information given in a speech delivered in November last year by the former minister of public works, Stella Sigcau (recently

deceased). In her speech, the late Ms Sigcau, one-time ruler of the repressive Transkei Bantustan created by the old Afrikaner nationalist regime to repress and oppress the peoples of the Eastern Cape, boasted that the EPWP had created at least 59 200 net work opportunities (jobs) by the end of the first quarter of 2005/06. For these jobs the department paid wages amounting to R98.6m. The trouble is that these were all temporary, short term or casual jobs, as the minister herself admitted. And if we do a quick calculation we will see that the average wage paid for each of these 3 month jobs was R1666. In other words the casual workers were paid an average of R555 per month! This meaning of the EPWP was confirmed in a recent newspaper article by the well-known TV personality, Dennis Beckett. He expressed amazement that workers on an EPWP road building project were more concerned about the fact that they were only being employed on a casual, short term basis rather than their miserable R700 per month wage.

Ms Stella Sigcau did not say give any information on how much profit the department's private enterprise partners made and she probably did not know. But that is in accordance with the government's policy of Black economic empowerment (BEE). This policy has come under strong criticism from various quarters that it only benefits a few. To counter this criticism they now call it *broad based* Black economic empowerment (BBBEE). But when has private business ever been broad based? Private business owners and operators have always been and will always be a small minority and BBBEE can and never will benefit the majority.

The unemployed are becoming sick of these glorified programs with their fancy names such as BBBEE. They should also reject the government's neo-liberal PPP and EPWP in the same way. Instead of this bogus EPWP we demand a progressive, non-privatised public works program that creates permanent jobs that pay a living wage, with the full representation of the unemployed in its management. ●

ANTI WAR PROTEST

21 MARCH 2006

APDUSA SOLIDARITY STATEMENT

The Anti-War Coalition (Cape Town) joined the international day of protest against imperialist wars and the suppression of the right of peoples to self determination, with a well supported event on 21 March 2006. Below is the statement of solidarity presented by Apdusa at this meeting.

The APDUSA salutes the Anti-War Coalition and we declare our full solidarity with you and your protest action on the third anniversary of the imperialist invasion of Iraq. The American/British imperialist invasion and occupation of Iraq, with their cheap propaganda of defending democracy has been exposed as nothing but an act of the worst kind of gangsterism. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have been butchered while American corporations such as Halliburton makes super profits out of fake reconstruction projects in Iraq, paid for by money and resources extracted from the Iraqi nation at gunpoint. Today, even Allawi, the Former American-approved leader of Iraq's parliament is forced to say that conditions for the people of Iraq are far worse than they were under the former Baath party regime led by Saddam Hussein and that the country is in a state of civil war. The fraud of the capitalist bosses of America and Britain as the defenders of freedom and democracy has been fully exposed.

The fact that the leaders of the capitalist world have to resort to acts of blatant, armed thuggery and robbery, justified by cheap lies, shows how bankrupt the system that they seek to defend has become. We should be encouraged by the brave resistance of the people of Iraq and Afghanistan in defence of their right to independence from foreign exploitation and to determine their own future. This, with the global mobilisation against imperialist aggression, of which the AWC is a part, has prevented these gangster-invaders from reaching their full objectives and as a result, they have had to suffer heavy and humiliating costs and setbacks. In the face of all their military might, we are not helpless.

While support for the anti-war movement here in South Africa has been sporadic and not always as powerful as in many other countries, there are many important lessons that the exploited labouring masses here must learn. Imperialist America has military bases all over the world and it forces all its junior partners to support its policies. It is also reported that security personnel employed by business "reconstruction" contractors in Iraq frequently fire on and kill any Iraqi civilians, just in case they pose some kind of threat. They are not American or British troops but armed mercenaries looking for a quick buck, who have flocked to Iraq

from all over the world, including South Africa. None of them have been prosecuted for their blatant acts of murder. Our government has made some noise about putting a stop to such South African mercenaries in Iraq but we have yet to see concrete acts against this social scum.

In all of this we see a serious threat to working class struggle across the world against oppression and exploitation. Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan we have new American threats against Iran as well as plots with the Colombian rightwing regime and its paramilitary dogs of war against the new Venezuelan regime. We cannot say that our own struggle here in South Africa is free of any such threats, now or in the future.

This demands that we must continue with the task of exposing the labouring masses of our country to the truth behind imperialist military invasions. Our struggle is part of the international struggle against poverty, labour exploitation and human degradation. We must make a united stand on this fundamental platform.

STRENGTH TO THE ANTI-WAR COALITION AGAINST CAPITALIST VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

MBEKI'S ECONOMIC ADVISORS

A media briefing by the State presidency on 28 march announced the first meeting of v Mr Mbeki with his new panel of economic advisers. They are Dr Iraj Abedian, Dr Haroon Borhat, Dr Reuel Khoza, Mr JP Landman, Ms Viv McMenamim, Mr Lumkile Mondli, Ms Gloria Serobe and Dr Rejoice Simelane.

It is notable that there is not a single person on this panel who could possibly be thought to be representing the interests of the millions of lowly paid or unemployed workers of our country and much less so, the interests of the poverty stricken landless peasantry. Five of them (Dr Reuel Khoza, Dr Iraj Abedian, Dr Rejoice Simelane, Ms Viv McMenamim, Ms Gloria Serobe) hold or have held senior positions in large business corporations. Of the other three, Dr Haroon Borhat is an academic economist at UCT with highly conservative views, Mr Lumkile Mondli, formerly of the international accounting company, Deloitte and Touche, is Chief Economist and Vice-President of the Industrial Development Corporation, while Mr JP Landman, we are told, is an independent and self-employed political-economic analyst and consultant who regularly addresses business and audiences on current and future trends in South Africa.

This shows clearly that President Mbeki chooses to be guided by the economic interests of the rich business class while proclaiming that the ANC government is pro-poor. Deeds speak louder than words. ●



From Around the World

LEFT FORUM MEETS IN NEW YORK CITY

The Left Forum (LF), previously known as the Socialist Scholars Conference, is arguably the most politically diverse yearly gathering of radical activists in the USA. While leftist academics are main sponsors and organisers of the LF, a mix of socialist tendencies usually participate in the discussions and debates. As in previous years, a few socialists from Europe, Canada and Latin America formed part of this meeting.

This year's LF, held in downtown New York on the weekend of 10-12 March, had as its major theme "*Dangerous Times: Global Resistance and the Decline of Empire*" which aptly sums up the state of our world at this moment. At the opening plenary, speakers placed the global anti-capitalist movement under the microscope, especially the role of the World Social Forum. This then set the tone for the rest of the event and the closing plenary where one of the organisers, Stanley Aronowitz, in powerful oratory style inspired a crowd of 200-300 activists with the need to construct a broad left party in the USA.

Over the two days, there were 74 panel sessions, each structured to maximise audience participation rather than leaving all talking to experts on the panel. Most sessions zoomed in on contemporary practical and theoretical issues facing the left, but did so from different angles and that is why many session-titles overlapped. It is therefore possible to group these together under 3 sub-themes, without losing the essential political content of the LF.

Firstly, the encouraging leftward surge in the political climate in Latin America gained enormous attention and solidarity. But assessments of Chavez's 'Bolivarian Project' in Venezuela and the region, as well as the victory of Evo Morales in Bolivia maintained a careful balance. For threats from rightwing political groups in both countries, often with support from US imperialism, can destabilise and reverse some of the gains of the mass movements in these countries. On the negative side of this balance sheet was the ongoing US intervention in the region through its 'war on drugs' and the sharp neo-liberal turn of the Lula administration in Brazil, a government rocked by corruption scandals and facing angry protests of the

MST, the militant landless peasant movement.

Secondly, a few sessions shed the spotlight on the political situation in the Middle East and occupation of Iraq. How the electoral victory of Hamas in the occupied territories in Palestine will influence the political balance of forces and landscape in that region was a major talking point. Speakers highlighted how imperialism, in cahoots with the reshaped political right in Israel, will put the squeeze on the Hamas government. The message on the occupation in Iraq was clear: *All Troops Out Now!* At the LF anti-war activists also mobilised for anti-war protests across the United States the following weekend to mark the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

Thirdly, what rounded out the LF 2006 was an assessment of the state of capitalist globalisation today with special attention to China's role. The scope of analyses covered the political economy of global capitalism as well as how this system is endangering the ecology of our planet. In the three metropolises of global capitalism (Europe, Japan and US), deep imbalances remain and synchronised growth is not on the horizon. Some speakers considered this set-up as evidence of the proposition that the irreversible decline of the US empire will shift world power to China which has been growing faster than any other economy for more than a decade. What intensified this controversial debate was a *New York Times* report on 10 March starkly showing rising levels of misery in China as well as large scale and more frequent protests in cities and rural areas against unemployment and poverty.

At any forum where sessions run concurrently it is hard to paint an accurate picture of the numbers in attendance. Regular participants in the LF, drawing on experiences of two decades of the Socialist Scholars Conference generally agreed that while attendance was down for a variety of reasons, participation seem to have shifted to the youth. This is a small sign that a new generation of youth in the US has drawn to the anti-capitalist movement that naturally bodes well for the future of the movement in America. ●

THE 2006 POLYCENTRIC WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

Bamako Mali

From 19 to 23 January the World Social Forum (WSF) met in Bamako, Mali. This was one of three centres, the others being in Venezuela and Pakistan, that hosted WSF meetings this year, and it was the first time the forum met in Africa. With this it brought the hope that it would do for Africa what previous forums did for Latin America and Asia – it would provide progressive movements against neo-liberalism and capitalism with an opportunity to meet, express views, share experiences, build unity and become bigger and stronger in the process.

It did indeed do that. Activists clearly could draw inspiration and strength from many aspects and activities of the forum as connections were made, lessons were learnt, banners were flown and good times were had. Unfortunately this was not what stood out about this forum. The main impression it left was how relatively little of the good aspects of the WSF process, and how relatively much of its bad aspects, was in evidence. It leaves activists – especially African activists – with many challenges to overcome if we want the WSF in Kenya next year to be a better experience. Some of the challenges are:

- **Low attendance.** At the first WSF there were 16000 people. Last year almost ten times that number attended. The organisers of the Bamako forum claimed an attendance of 15000. A more realistic and still generous estimation would be 5000 people. Both figures testify of a low attendance. Much work needs to be done to get people to Kenya next year. A large part of the vibrancy, inspiration and value of the WSF comes from the sheer number of people it brings together in one place.
- **NGO domination.** Professionalised non-government organisations can sometimes play a valuable role in the struggle for progressive social change. But it can never replace mass orientated movements of the oppressed and exploited. In fact NGOs only play a valuable role insofar as they support these social movements. But as independent entities they are too much structured along the same lines as the social systems that oppress and exploit the masses to play a leading role in the struggle against these systems. Some of these structures include top down hierarchies,

dependency on state and corporate donor funds, and the reproduction of domination based on class, race and sex. The WSF in Mali to a too large extent reproduced all of these problems because it was dominated and controlled by these types of NGOs.

- **Single language dominance.** French was the dominant language at the WSF in Mali. There was some translation into English, none into Portuguese and very little into indigenous African languages. This excluded many people, especially from among the rural poor.
- **No clear revolutionary presence.** The absence of revolutionary inputs from the panels and the general participants was either because revolutionary organisations in Africa are weak or because they were excluded from participating by reformist NGOs or both.
- **European dominance.** The one country with the most participants was France, which also was the country with the most speakers on the panels. To be fair the French comrades did try to raise the problems and struggles of Africa to prominence. But they could not do so from an African perspective. Of course no one is arguing for restrictions on European participation. The task is rather to raise the numbers and levels of participation by Africans.
- **Absence of mass movements.** The problem was not so much that mass movements were dominated by NGOs. The problem was that they were absent. This reflected both the fact that mass movements are relatively weak in Africa and the fact that the forum was not organised in a country like Nigeria that has a history of recent mass mobilisations. It's this last factor that made the forums in Brazil, India and Venezuela so vibrant.
- **Logistics.** There were many logistical problems. Venues were very far from one another, there were no central information points, many events were cancelled and programmes were only in French and English with the English one only becoming available when the forum was well on its way.
- **Low levels of youth participation.** The majority of people in Africa are young but the youth was a minority at the forum and the youth camp showed none of the vibrant militancy for which youth camps at the WSF are known. ●