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AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Interests Of The Workers And Landless Peasants Shall Be Paramount

THE ROCKY PATH TO A SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL FORUM

In a Harold Wolpe memorial lecture at the University of KZN in February this year, Congress Alliance struggle veteran, Fatima Meer raised a strong argument for the formation of a South African Social Forum. Questions may be raised why such a body has not already been established. Since the birth of the WSF representatives from the South African resistance movement have participated in its meetings in increasing numbers. Indeed, the trade union federation, Cosatu has been a member of the WSF coordinating committee from the outset. While there have been criticisms of the WSF, at the extreme it being labelled as an NGO talk shop, it is nevertheless widely accepted here that it provides a useful point of meeting for the international anti-neoliberal globalisation movement. But even at this time, with the 2008 WSF again being planned as a polycentric event, there are as yet, no signs of preparatory organisation here in South Africa. Indeed, little can be expected except a hasty, last minute cobbling-together of some kind of South African support for and participation in the 2008 WSF. It may be observed as peculiar that while South African resistance organisations are being looked to by their counterparts in neighbouring states to play a stronger role in the established African Social Forum and while these same South African organisations press for the radicalisation of the African Social Forum, there is as yet, no such thing as a South African Social Forum.

A critical issue bedevilling the SA resistance movement is the continued attachment of COSATU and the SACP to the tripartite alliance with the ANC, despite their growing criticism of the policy and performance of the ANC-led government, This and their objective of "winning back the leadership of the ANC by the working class", does not find resonance with the broad stream of resistance which has developed outside of the ranks of their alliance. Nor does the outright condemnation of the ANC and its policies by the new social movements find approval by the leadership of Cosatu and the

SACP, who have branded the new resistance coalitions such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum and the Social Movements Indaba as idealistic, ultra leftists. Against this background the expected and logical unity of trade union and civil society working class organisations has failed to materialise.

While this mistrust prevails it is difficult to see Fatima Meer's call finding concrete support in the near future. Yet, there is every reason for support of her call as a South African Social Forum can be a useful arena for conflicting ideas in the resistance movement to be publically aired and contested, allowing the masses to come closer to dealing with the fundamental problems lying at the base of their daily struggles. Equally important is the role that a SASF can play in raising the consciousness of the labouring masses in South Africa of the necessity of their link to the international anti-capitalist movement. As eloquently as Fatima Meer argues for the South African masses to be aligned with an international movement, even if only in her very general terms, she does her case little good when she attempts to give purely nationalistic and indeed, reformist prescriptions for the objectives of a SASF such as: "It is the ANC that is letting us down and we need a people's organisation to keep them on their toes" - and - "We need a broad movement that will help the ANC pull up its socks" (quotes ex Sunday Argus 29/04/07 - "UN official gives support to idea of 'new UDF'"). But clearly, if a SASF is to unite the broad resistance movement in the country on a minimal basis it cannot require participating organisations, their membership and support base, to be bound by the objective of accepting the political leadership of a reformed ANC, guided by the nationalistic and innately petit-bourgeois Freedom Charter. Moreover, even the progressive sounding, lofty sentiments of this charter were readily jettisoned, without any real opposition from the SACP or Cosatu, at the time of the 1992 compromise with the capitalist bourgeois class.

This is not the first initiative to establish a ➡

➡ broad resistance front. Last year Cosatu launched its "Jobs and Poverty Campaign" in the Western Cape with the idea of uniting a wide range of community based organisations, trade unions and ngos. This effort petered out precisely because the perception soon emerged that Cosatu was attempting to keep both organisational and ideological leadership of the campaign under its prime control. Cosatu and the SACP in Cape Town launched a new initiative earlier this year for a "People's Programme of Action for a Democratic and Non-Racial Cape Town". This attempt is bound to suffer the same fate unless it is made demonstrably clear by its initiators that it is not just a disguised campaign for the ANC to win back political control of the Cape Town municipality which it lost to the conservative, "liberal" Democratic Alliance last year.

There is some significance in the fact that elements within the leadership of Cosatu and the SACP are now willing to invite those previously branded and rejected as idealistic, ultra leftists as partners in a broad resistance front. But it will be difficult for them to eliminate the perception of an ulterior motive as long as they persist with their mantra that the essential objective of the suffering labouring masses today is to "win back the leadership of the ANC for the completion of the national democratic revolution (NDR)". At best, this SACP thesis can be typified as a call for the

establishment of a social democratic welfare state in South Africa (at a time when social democracy has been cast aside by the leading powers of capital as an outmoded resort) as part of a two stage revolutionary theory, but with little reason even if it is remotely attainable, for any advance thereafter towards socialism.

From the other side of the divide, the idea that no collaboration with the trade unions of Cosatu and so implicitly its membership is possible, unless it breaks with the tripartite alliance, is equally problematical. Today, pressure from below is driving the leadership of Cosatu and the SACP to take an increasingly strong stand against the clearly bourgeois orientation of the ANC. A broad front of resistance under the banner of a SASF to imperialist driven neoliberalism, with its hollow cry that there is no alternative (TINA) now being seriously challenged, does not require any relinquishment of revolutionary political program or principle. Clearly, greater pressure from the masses below is yet needed to push aside the ideological sectarianism that obstructs the formation of a dynamic SASF. It would be an important step in developing and uniting the struggles of the labouring masses in South Africa and raising the consciousness that it is part of an international class struggle of labour against capitalism, for socialism.

WORKERS AND THE ANC LEADERSHIP BATTLE

The African National Congress (ANC) will have its national congress in December where the party is set to elect a new leadership. Many expert commentators and the media have caricatured this as a race involving several heavyweight leaders prominent in the party or big business. However, none of these contenders in this 'succession race' has put forward a policy and programme that radically breaks from government's conservative market-based socio-economic policies. Access to every necessity of life, from healthcare and education to water and a roof over your head, depends on whether you can afford to pay for it. At the same time, those lucky to find any job in the 'labour market' find the bosses pegging wages far below the real cost of living. And all the pundits agree that no leftward shift in ANC policy is on the cards, an opinion the 'left in the tripartite alliance' (SACP and COSATU?) will obviously contest.

But what concrete alternatives, aside from mumbling about a 'pro-poor ANC leadership' and threatening to split from the alliance, are these so-called leftists promoting? What are the genuine programmatic differences in the 'centres of power' dispute and how will its resolution influence the

economic and political interests of workers? These decisive questions for the workers movement remain unanswered; they do not feature in the succession drama raging in the governing party.

Where Do The Working Class And Peasants Fit In?

Leaders in COSATU and SACP usually say that the 'ANC belongs to working people'. At every election from 1994 onwards this has been translated into the slogan "Vote ANC". In this way the so-called left in the tripartite alliance rallies the working class and peasants behind the political programme of the ANC. While the ANC is said to be a party for the working class, to repeat their cliché, the organization is not fighting for socialism. Yet at the same time they say there is space for workers and peasants in the ANC because it is a 'broad church'; a multi-class party carefully balancing the interests of working people, the middle class and capitalists. But in reality, in concrete social struggles, where do the working class and peasants fit into the political orientation of the ANC? This is the critical test militant workers need to apply as the ANC ➡

➡ debates its policies in the run up to its December congress.

The governing party has explained its approach to the role of the working class in a 20-page paper circulated for debate at the party's June policy congress. From its title, "*Role of the Working Class and Organised Labour in Advancing the National Democratic Revolution*", one gets the impression that mobilizing and organizing working people for radical change is a fundamental part of the governing party's perspectives. But the content of this paper completely side-stepped this crucial issue. Instead, this revolutionary verbiage has been adopted as a deceptive ploy- an old tactic of opportunists in the workers' movement.

What Democratic Rights Do Workers Have?

Let us decipher this document to get to its core message. Unsurprisingly, the promise of "work and security for all" culled from the Freedom Charter gets repeated as ritual typically dictates. 'The state shall *recognize the right* and duty of all to work', the document glowingly elaborates. But this is far from the *state guaranteeing* a decent job at a living wage for every worker in a socio-economic set-up where 'permanent joblessness' is the rule rather than the exception.

In a tongue-in-cheek and convoluted fashion, the 'working class and organised labour' paper tries to answer the following fundamental question: Are the working masses better-off today than under apartheid? The paper splits its answer to this question into two parts, the broad legal framework and the labour market. The post-apartheid Constitution and labour laws, the document briefly states, fully protect the democratic rights of workers, which is a compromise every democratic capitalist country in the world is forced to pay lip service to when faced with a militant workers movement. Anyway, this paper says nothing about how those with real economic power, safeguarded by the Constitution and macroeconomic policies, subvert the so-called democratic rights of workers.

On paper, workers have the right to form 'sweet-heart unions'. But in a world where more and more workers are reduced to the status of a casuals (flexible temporary workers), who can be hired and fired at any moment, even this right is worth less than the paper it is written on. A flexible labour market automatically erodes the size of trade unions as a way to kill its militant might. This is embedded in the economic system and its foundation, capitalist private property, which is the main premise of the 1996 Constitution. On paper, every worker has the right to strike. However, striking public workers can testify to the barrage of threats and blatant intimidation they have suffered at the hands of arrogant ruling party (ANC) ministers and politicians. This is done to whip workers into docility. It is on par with the scale of attacks that private sector workers are subjected to as we experienced in recent security guards and mineworkers strikes.

Do Capitalist Labour Markets Benefit Workers?

The second part of this policy statement, comprising more than three-quarters of its length,, tries to show how well the post-1994 labour market has served the working class. A glaring feature of this section of the paper is its exclusive reliance on and uncritical acceptance of obfuscating background research of neo-liberal academics, especially one economic apologist from the ASGISA (the government's "accelerated and shared growth" initiative); advisors. It is true that casual work is the norm today and informal sector employment (street trade, etc) is growing faster than 'formal sector' jobs. But despite all the factual evidence at its disposal, this superficial policy paper fails to demonstrate that modern capitalism is unable to operate without expanding armies of unemployed, casual and informal labour. This multifold increase in exploitation is necessary to sustain capitalist profit rates. And government's neo-liberal policies (GEAR and ASGISA) are machinery to squeeze even more out of workers who live just to sell their labour power.

Since 1994, the document asserts, the state has pursued 'redistributive labour market reforms'. Have workers or capitalists been the beneficiaries of this 'redistribution'? Any labour market is governed by the laws of exploitation, robbery and inequality. It thrives on inequality and can only mean 'redistribution' from the worker to the capitalist. The ambiguities lacing this paper are typical of bourgeois parties seeking credibility under the veil of social liberalism. The liberal bourgeois orientation of the ANC is also clear from other fraudulent phrases- such as 'regulated flexibility', 'social partnership' and 'export-led manufacturing growth' - scattered throughout this paper. Calls for 'worker participation and engagement in the workplace' and a '40 hour working week' have been sneaked in at the end of this misleading document to appease discontented 'leftists' in its ranks.

The South African workers' movement is confronted with a crisis of political leadership. But this crisis will not be resolved by taking sides in the succession battle in the ANC. This is because the political and economic aspirations of workers are diametrically opposed to what the ANC stands for. The latest policy documents of the ANC show that it is a pro-capitalist political party. The elite participating in the party's leadership succession contest are a group of vain individuals smoothly revolving between business and government, neither controlled by nor representing working people. Today and in the foreseeable future, any radical change that advances the interests of the workers and peasants must be anti-capitalist in its orientation. ●

[This discussion will be continued in the next edition of the APDUSAN]

"THE POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY – CURRENT SOCIAL STRUGGLES AND POLITICAL PROGRAMMES"

Report on a public discussion organised by the Radical Left Network in Cape Town on 2 June

The Radical Left Network (RLN) was formalised as collaboration between left organizations in 2006. It was itself an outflow of an initiative taken by left parties and groups participating in the 2005 World Social Forum gathering in Porto Alegre. In a separate meeting these groups agreed to the establishment of what has become known as the International Radical Parties Network.

In 2006 the RLN launched a series of public discussions on more serious political topics. These included discussions on the Russian Revolution and the left turn in Latin America. All organizations that are part of the network participated in these discussions – as panellists introducing an aspect on the topic and as audience participants. The organizations, apart from APDUSA that are part of the network are the Socialist Group, the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), the Workers' Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), the New Unity Movement (NUM) and Comrades for a Workers' Government- Labour Left Collective (CWG-LLC). These organizations agreed on a minimum basis for collaboration and there are ongoing efforts to draw other left groups into the network.

At the latest discussion the panellists covered a range of topics that were broadly divided into the following categories: political programmes from the past i.e. before 1994; the view held by some of changing the world without taking power i.e. alternatives to a political programme including 'spontaneity' as a political construct; the last section dealing with the need for a political programme today.

In the context of capitalist globalisation the enemy to many is not always visible and clear-cut. Governments as representatives of the bourgeois ruling class appear as the ones who represent the real enemy. When conducting struggles the working class is however, compelled to look beyond governments, to those in whose interests they are making laws and governing the lives of the citizens of countries. The connection between the two is always hidden. In their struggles the labouring masses are therefore compelled to see the government enemy as acting in partnership with the bosses against them. The resources of the country are indeed controlled by these two parts of the ruling class. Their ability to do so is partly due to them being able to fool people into believing that the government and the bosses act on behalf of all society – including the workers and landless peasants.

This is a starting point for placing struggles on a proper footing. To argue that workers are incapable of grasping this political fact is to bind them to unending suffering and deprivation. Workers today find that a gain in one sphere of their existence is almost immediately cancelled out by another attack by the ruling class. Workers are forced into an unending cycle of having to craft survival strategies. To not raise the issue of political power is to indefinitely postpone the day of self-emancipation of the working class. This represents political dishonesty of the worst order.

The importance of political programmes in the South African liberation struggle was seen in the existence of the Ten Point Programme, the Freedom Charter as well as the Azanian Manifesto. These programmes were forged as a vision of what its proponents fought for as a new political dispensation. They served as a rallying point for the movement and those they sought to influence and draw along with them in pursuance of the realisation of their political objectives. Today, on an international level, the leadership of various social movements are basically guilty of attempting to substitute the struggle for political power with one which takes people around in circles. The role of most non-governmental organisations in this political deception stems from them implementing the agendas of funders, who in many instances are body corporates or government agencies. The opposition to oppressive and exploitative policies they do muster are by definition institutional – meaning that that solutions they offer aim at softening the harshness of the capitalist system, without posing critical questions as to the nature of a political and economic alternative.

The bourgeoisie has a political programme which it is implementing on a consistent basis. In order to overcome this programme it has to be countered with a political programme of the oppressed and exploited classes. Such a programme can emerge from efforts of working class and people's organisations putting forward their own political demands. A practical outflow of such an initiative can find expression in the demand for the convening of a Constituent Assembly. This idea was one that the audience found stimulating. Other contributions from the floor were linked to the public sector strike that commenced one day earlier. Strong support was expressed for those out on strike. Ways of assisting those comrades out on strike were also considered.

The next discussion of the network is scheduled for August and will deal with an analysis of strikes that occurred over the recent past. ●

PRESIDENCY REVIEW OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SA

The Policy Coordination and Advisory Services (PCAS) in the offices of the state president recently issued a review of socio-economic development in South Africa covering the period from 1993 to 2006. It is stated that 72 economic indicators were used to compile the report. Of note in this review is the indication that poverty has been reduced, i.e. the percentage of the population living in poverty decreased from 50.1% in 1993 to 43.2% in 2006.

Superficially, this reflects very well on the achievements of the ANC-led government in making South Africa a better place for all to live in. Coverage of this report by the main-stream media hardly suggests anything to the contrary. But a closer look at what this report really indicates must lead any reasonable person to doubt very strongly that the ANC has any right to claim any glory. In the report poverty is defined in terms of a person living (or attempting to survive) on an income of not more than R3000 per year, based on the buying power of the rand in the year 2000. Using inflation figures given in the same report, this equates to an amount of about R4000 in 2006. In other words, a person in poverty is one who lives on less than R11 per day.

Now the internationally recognised standard of poverty is an income of a maximum of US\$2 per day and *extreme* poverty is defined by a maximum income of US\$1 per day. Clearly, if one takes a conservative conversion rate of R7 to the US dollar then we will see that after 13 years of ANC rule about 20 million people are still living somewhere in the region of poverty and extreme poverty. But, clearly a lot more can be classified as living in

poverty although not extreme poverty, i.e. on a maximum spending power per person of R14 (US\$2) per day. We leave it to our readers to decide how far R11 per day can go to satisfy the needs of an individual in terms of food, clothing, shelter, fuel, cleanliness and health, to say nothing of education and transport costs, etc, etc. In this light we see absolutely nothing that our government can be proud of.

Unfortunately, for those who would praise the ANC for its accomplishments, this report, unavoidably goes further to show that the gap between the living standards of the rich and the poor is growing bigger. The Gini coefficient, which is the internationally recognised standard of the measure of inequality is given as .68 for South Africa which ranks it as a country amongst those ugly few with the highest rate of inequality in the world.

The ANC has been quick to say that it cannot be expected to reverse the consequences of 350 years of colonial rule and apartheid in a mere 13 years. But it appears to have succeeded very well in achieving this for a minority of about 2 million so-called black diamonds. While the ANC likes to claim that it is a "broad church" representing all interests in society, we see that on the contrary, it is a party very much dedicated to the interests of a minority, as opposed to the interests of the poverty stricken working class and landless peasantry who constitute the majority. The lesson is that real democratic rule and the advancement of society as a whole firstly requires the activation of the organised power of labouring masses on a political basis. ●



From Around the World

The 2007 French Presidential Elections

The choice of Nicholas Sarkozy as the candidate of the right wing party, the UMP, in the recent French presidential elections signalled the determination of the French ruling class to have someone at the helm who will more vigorously promote the neo-liberal agenda. In his election campaign, Nicholas Sarkozy focused on getting rid of the 35 hour working week and "liquidating the legacy of May 1968". He has reached out unrepentantly to win over the fascist, LePen's supporters, hammering home "law and order" and promising a "ministry of immigration and national identity". His election victory on an 85% turnout of voters of whom approximately 53% voted for him portends stormy times ahead on the

French political scene.

Bourgeois economists like to portray France as the "sick man of Europe", which has lost its competitiveness in overseas markets because of "labour market rigidities and stronger wage growth than in Germany". The MEDEF, the French employer's organisation is counting on the new president and his administration to remedy this situation. He has promised a "reformist crash programme", which includes getting agreement from the unions before the autumn on a unified more "flexible work contract". There is a division in the French labour market between workers, who have permanent contracts and shorter working hours and those either jobless or working on short term "flexible" contracts. Sarkozy proposes to get rid of the 35 hour working week by imposing a 25% premium on overtime hours worked. He has also promised to make the exercise of the right to strike as difficult as it is in Britain. He used plenty of ➡

➡ populist demagoguery in his campaign, vowing to “respect those who want to work” and deprecating unemployment benefits because “widespread handouts reek of moral surrender”. He has promised companies reductions in company tax.

In late 2005, in a suburb of Paris, when two teenagers from the minority communities died accidentally trying to hide from the police in a power substation, youth of African and Arab origin in the area revolted. The revolt spread and Sarkozy, the minister of the interior at the time contemptuously dismissed the grievances of the ethnic minorities and inflamed the situation by referring to disaffected youth as the “scum of the suburbs”. Sarkozy decimated the Le Pen vote in the elections by playing the race card. Le Pen had fared much better in the 2002 elections, winning through to the second round. Ethnic minorities and immigrants can expect further attacks on their rights by the new government.

The socialist candidate, Segolene Royal, who was Sarkozy’s challenger in the second round, presented herself as the candidate of “justice” as opposed to Sarkozy’s “brutality”. But she was careful not to reject his neo-liberal agenda . Many electors did not see her as any real alternative to Sarkozy and therefore did not vote for her. The radical left, which consisted of the Communist Party, Jose Bove, the anti-globalisation leader and three Trotskyist candidates, failed to agree on fielding a unity candidate for the first round of the elections.

The most important disagreement between the candidates was whether to enter a government

headed by the socialists if Segolene Royal was successful in the election. The failed policy of the revolutionary left in Brazil and Italy participating in coalition governments pursuing neo-liberal policies was fresh in the minds of the Trotskyist group, the LCR, when it laid down as a condition for unity that the radical left candidate undertake not to enter a government formed by the Socialist Party. The Communist Party refused to give such an undertaking. The LCR candidate, Olivier Besancenot, conducted a campaign in the first round of the elections, characterised by large enthusiastic rallies. He declared that he stood “for a left which thinks it is still possible to change society”. He outlined his proposals for banning job cuts and redundancies, increasing the minimum wage and building a million council homes. His campaign, was the most successful of the radical left candidates, obtaining one and a half million votes - more than 4% of those cast. The radical left in the election lost ground, polling less than 9% of the vote compared to the 2002 elections when it won 13.5% of the vote.

The radical left is assessing the situation following the Sarkozy victory. The best elements of the radical left are committed to building a united front of all social and democratic forces against Sarkozy’s policies. To accomplish this they have to get agreement on a programme, which is a real alternative to neo-liberalism and to minimise sectarianism. The outcome of the class struggles in France will not only affect the French people but will have repercussions in Europe and internationally. ●

VENEZUELA’S ALTERNATIVE: SOCIALISM OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Political and economic changes in Venezuela are taking place at a breathtaking pace and moving towards a definitive goal. Through its Bolivarian revolution, Venezuela is in the process of constructing socialism of the 21st century. This development has now placed socialism on the agenda of the international anti-capitalist movement more than a decade after the high priests of neo-liberalism had decreed socialism dead and buried. Socialism of the 21st century is positively transcending anti-capitalist slogans and is giving new meaning to “Another World is Possible”.

President Hugo Chavez won a landslide victory in the December 2006 national elections. To be sure, this was a vote from Venezuela’s masses in favour of and for the acceleration of the Bolivarian revolution’s anti-capitalist trajectory. Since that success, Chavez and the newly-formed United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) have been the driving forces behind the movement for socialism. Social movements, trade unions and “communal

councils”, virtually the whole society, are debating what socialism means and how to translate it into a living reality.

Radical socio-economic interventions to better the lives of working people are set to continue. Increasing sectors of the economy, notably oil and land, have been and are being earmarked for nationalisation. Worker takeovers and management of productive establishments are spreading with the full backing of the government and Constitutional amendments. The state has cut working hours from 44 hours per week to get to its 2010 target of 36 hours. At the same time, a 20% salary rise for public workers on May Day has raised the minimum monthly salary to US\$500 (R3,600) and this new target is filtering through to private sector workers as well. (In South Africa, the working week is 45 hours and the minimum wage is about R2,000.) Poor people in Venezuela have free access to healthcare, housing, education and other social services. ➡

➡ Socialism means that the whole socio-economic system falls under the democratic control of the working class and peasants. This implies, at the level of state power, a radical overhaul in the meaning and practice of democracy. Workers and peasant councils (soviets) formed the socialist state in the Russian Revolution of October 1917- before a rapacious bureaucracy had seized power and destroyed socialist democracy. In Venezuela 'communal councils' constitute the foundations of socialist democracy. A local assembly, consisting of 200-400 families, forms a communal council and decides on how to spend its 'special budget' on social infrastructure projects, like medical clinics, schools, etc. There are now 18,000 such councils in urban and rural areas, increasing to 30,000 in the near future. Although the 'communal councils' have much in common with soviets, it is unclear how these relate to the "Bolivarian Circles".

Venezuela's foreign policy has a strong anti-imperialist and progressive internationalist basis and orientation. The country is no longer a member of either IMF or the World Bank. It no longer holds its foreign currency reserves in American dollars and has built a special development fund from its reserves which now stands at US\$13bn. Through the regional economic grouping, ALBA or the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America, it has placed economic relations among countries on a non-capitalist basis. Member and 'associate' countries have formed joint companies to produce and distribute products that satisfy the needs of

people in participating nations. Health and education missions, providing these services free to all poor Venezuelans, have been extended to all ALBA member states. Countries are also investing in the ALBA Development Bank to undertake regional development projects. ALBA counters the myth of "socialism in one country" and serves as a counterweight to Washington's blueprint to dominate the region through its Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Without a doubt the transition to socialism of any underdeveloped capitalist country is a daunting task beset with formidable obstacles. That is what we have learned from well known historical experiences and a careful study of contemporary social forces and actual patterns of economic development in Venezuela and beyond.

Venezuela's economy has been growing at an average rate of 12% per year over the last 3 years, much faster than either China or India. However, the main engines propelling its economy are still heavily concentrated in the private sector and are overwhelmingly dependent on its oil industry. While the recent battle for control over mass media in Venezuela has reduced private capitalist control of the mass media from over 55% to 15%, it has left their powerful propaganda machine largely intact. It is this weapon that Venezuela's rightwing, with the backing of American big business and politicians, uses to relentlessly attack the movement for socialism of the 21st century. ***A luta continua!*** ●

ZIMBABWE AT THE CROSSROADS

The dire situation in Zimbabwe was highlighted by the brutal crushing by the police of a meeting called in Highfield, Harare in March by the opposition movement to the government. An opposition activist, Gift Tandare was killed and Morgan Tsvangirai, a leader of one of the factions of the MDC was badly beaten up. The meeting was called by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign (SZC), a coalition of churches, opposition parties, including the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), trade unions, non-governmental organisations and student bodies.

Tension has been mounting in Zimbabwe for the past two months marked by protests and running battles with the police as shortages of food, fuel, electricity and medicine due to the economic crisis, bite deep. Police attacks against the people have led to a spirit of defiance. In response to tear gas attacks on them, Highfield residents stormed a police station and shut it down for a couple of hours.

The governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Gideon Gono has given a parliamentary committee graphic details of the parlous the state of the economy. He told the committee that the government was unable to provide adequate food supplies or maintain many basic services. He said he received desperate calls daily from state food and petrol distributors, the national airline and the state railway and power utility all demanding hard currency for imports. Tobacco exports, which were the nation's main hard currency earners, are forecast at one-fifth the level of production of 1999 and food output is

down to one-third. Zimbabwe's inflation is the world's highest at 1,600 % per year. For the relatively few who have jobs, the inflationary rise in public transport fare prices are to many of them unaffordable. The life expectancy in Zimbabwe has dropped to 34 years for women and 37 years for men. There are over 3 million Zimbabweans, who have had to leave for neighbouring countries and further afield. Their families depend on the remittances they send to them for survival.

The seriousness of the economic situation underlines the failures of the neo-liberal policies the government has been pursuing since the late 80s and its implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1990. The ESAP led to cuts in public spending, currency devaluation, the liberalisation of prices and deregulation of labour relations. These policies undid the reforms such as free schooling and health care, which the government introduced following the first democratic elections in 1980.

When the people, after 1997, rose up against the effects of the ESAP, the government partially reversed the ESAP through policies like price controls, subsidies, refusal to devalue or privatise. Land occupations, which have occurred throughout the independence period intensified following ESAP. In June 2000 about 800 farms had been occupied. Under mass pressure, the government was forced to implement compulsory land acquisition and mass redistribution. By the end of ➡

➡ 2002 it had compulsorily acquired 10 million hectares of land—approximately 90 % of white commercial land—and redistributed it to 127,000 peasant households and 8000 capitalist farmers. The black elite in the government and its supporters appropriated some of the land for itself.

The international media networks labelled the land reforms as ‘land grabs’ and a financial boycott of Zimbabwe was instituted. The MDC and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) joined in an alliance with white commercial farmers against the land reform. The US and Britain, which have imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe have demanded that before they lift these and resume aid, the government fully implement the ESAP under IMF supervision. They have been pinning their hope on Reserve Bank governor, Gono, who has been working on a framework to regularise bilateral investment protection agreements. He has removed levies on tobacco farmers and given cheap money to businesses in the so called productive sector support scheme. In the present situation he has demanded a wage freeze in the face of skyrocketing price rises, which the ZCTU promptly rejected.

Zimbabwe stands at the crossroads. Facing one direction is imperialism, which seeks with its capitalist allies in the country and in the region in the Southern African Development Community, to reimpose the

policies of neo-liberalism. It wishes to see Mr Mugabe replaced either through a putsch in the increasingly divided governing party, Zanu-PF or a power sharing transitional government, which includes members of the opposition. Zanu-PF recently refused to agree to extend Mr Mugabe’s presidency until 2010. As opposed to imperialism, the workers and peasantry are engaged in a struggle against the policies of neo-liberalism. For their struggle to be successful, the organisations that represent them need to be united, a situation, which does not prevail at the moment. The leadership of the MDC and ZCTU, by allying with the white farmers, have antagonised the peasants, who constitute by far the largest section of the population living in the rural areas. Many of the peasants, who have supported the government, because of the redistribution of the land, have failed to understand that its policies as a whole, which attack democratic and human rights and have led to the economic crisis, are a threat to their interests. It is important that the organisations of the workers and the peasantry agree a common programme for their struggle to move forward. ●

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MAY DAY PROTESTS AND RALLIES

For over 100 years workers have commemorated their struggles on May Day - the 1st of May, recognised as the International Workers’ Day. May Day began in the US, and was born of the struggle of the workers there for the eight hour day. A resolution by the Federation of Organised Trades and Labour Unions of the US and Canada, forerunner of the American Federation of Labour in 1884 called for an eight hour day by May 1st 1886. It was taken up by thousands of organised and unorganised workers. Chicago was the main centre of agitation. When police fired on striking workers at a factory in Chicago on May 3rd, 1886, killing at least one and seriously wounding five or six other workers, a mass meeting of protest was called by the anarchists for the next day. When seven police were killed at this meeting by a bomb, police fired indiscriminately into the crowd, killing and wounding many workers. There was a classical frame-up of eight anarchists accused at a trial of involvement in the throwing of the bomb and four were subsequently executed.

Rather than suppressing the labour movement, the events of 1886 spurred on the struggle. In 1889 the Second International took up the call for an eight hour day and called on workers to stop work on May 1st 1890. The following year on May 1st, workers in many parts of the world struck or organised demonstrations in support of the eight hour day. The scale of the protests were such that many European governments, but not the British, were forced to declare May Day an official holiday. There has been an unrelenting struggle by the workers movement for a shorter working day, the 35 hour working week achieved in France being a benchmark in that struggle. Millions of workers internationally on May Day raise their class demands, which embrace their short term

as well as long term goals.

Perhaps the most widespread protests on May 1st this year occurred in the US as hundreds of thousands took to the streets in dozens of cities, attending rallies, engaging in strikes and participating in consumer boycotts. For the second year in a row, May Day was the focus of a massive display of solidarity for immigrant rights in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit as well as smaller cities throughout the US. These were organised to demand a path of citizenship for illegal immigrant workers, ending brutal immigrant raids and deportations, rejecting anti-immigrant legislation and condemning the continued militarisation of the US-Mexican border. In Los Angeles, the police attacked the May Day, mainly peaceful, gathering of 25,000 in a park after pushing a few unruly anarchist youth into the crowd. They shot rubber bullets into the crowd, wounding innocent people, including journalists. The organisers of the demonstration protested at the provocative actions of the police and declared they would not be deterred from their pursuit of more humane laws and for the rights of immigrants in the country no matter how long it took.

At a May Day rally in Istanbul, Turkey, police charged into crowds of leftist demonstrators marking the 30th anniversary of a mass shooting of the 1977 May Day gathering when 34 people were killed. Turkish police used water cannon and tear gas to break up the rally, firing warning shots into the crowd and arresting 580 demonstrators. The May Day clashes occurred amid rising political tension, as the secular opposition parties organised against a government of the mildly Islamic Party, the AKP. The army presents itself as the guardian of the “secular and unitary republic”. Both the AKP government and the main opposition party have a ➡

➡ neo-liberal agenda. In this situation, one of the tasks facing the forces of the left is separating the struggle of the workers from both the secular bourgeois forces opposed to the government and the AKP .

In numerous British cities, striking workers from the Public and Commercial Service Union (PCS) were out in force on May 1st, picketing government buildings and offices, in defence of jobs, public services, pay and conditions. They also joined up with other public sector and private sector union members in May Day rallies across the country. Public sector workers, besides the PCS, including workers in the health service are in dispute with the government about pay, jobs and deteriorating public services.

The fight for the eight hour day, with which May Day is associated, involved a long battle between the capitalist and working class. The achievement of the 35 hour working week in 1999 in France by the working class is under constant attack. The threat by Sarkozy, the newly elected president of France to do away with it is but the latest assault by the representatives of capitalism. May Day gives workers the opportunity to raise their demands, not just in a particular factory or industry but as the working class as a whole. The demands of May Day for the 35 hour week, for unity against racism, against imperialist war are demands of the workers against the whole capitalist class. ●

CORRECTION

The article, ***“Why has Israel attacked Palestine and Lebanon”***, which appeared in our September 2006 edition, stated that when Palestine was partitioned by the UN in 1948 to create the state of Israel, 250, 000 Palestinians were driven out of Palestine to become refugees. The number driven out was in fact 700,000 as a reader has correctly pointed out. Attention was also drawn to an omission in this article. This was the enormous impetus given to the Zionist enterprise by the Holocaust, which was the liquidation of 6 million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe in the course of the 1939-45 Second World War. The Holocaust was of crucial importance to the UN action in 1948 in partitioning Palestine. It of course does not justify the colonisation of Palestine by Israel. Zionism used the Holocaust to press its case for creating the racist Israeli state which was accepted by the UN.



Letters

The Public Sector Strike: Two Participants Speak Out

1. THE PUBLIC WORKERS STRIKE IN MTHATHA

On the 13th of June 2007 members of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) and Cosatu generally were gathered in the streets of Mthatha, marching to the Botha Sigcau building, where they were to raise their voices in support of their demand for a 12% wage or salary increase. Few scholars were present to support the workers involved in this strike action. When they were asked about their presence they responded by saying that they were there to give support to their mothers and fathers and that they are the proletariat of tomorrow.

Only those who are working under the government were striking. The private sector was not out on strike but what surprised me was that most of the privately owned shops and stores were closed down by the striking workers. This symbolized something to me that the voice of the workers must be heard and must be heard on anything they say or what they want. As workers, they must be considered because through their labour power, they are the ones who are building the economy of our country.

As an individual, I came to notice one thing, namely, that the state and factories can be run by the capitalist class, through their lackeys, with large sums of money. However without the workers' labour power nothing can

go right and nothing can go forward. The bosses can keep their large sums of money in their pockets and do nothing with it when labour power is withdrawn.

This concern was raised by parliamentarians, as reported, in the Sunday Times of the 24th of June 2007, when in a heated exchange between the parliamentarians and the ministers Lekota and Manuel, the latter were told by parliamentarians they cannot keep quiet when the country has been crippled and is at a standstill because of the strike. The article suggested that the parliamentarians felt that the cabinet did not handle the strike properly.

I believe that each and every institution in this world should be controlled by the proletariat because of their labour efforts in the actual building of these institution. The capitalist class does not work instead it employs workers to work for it but takes to itself the lions share of the profits and give workers enough to eat for a day. These workers have to fight hard, as in the public and private sector strikes, to get a little more to feed the rest of its family.

What I saw was a good example of workers standing on their own and doing something for themselves. These strikes ought to go on until the workers come to realize that they should own the factories and shops. All these working institutions must serve their interests and not the selfish interests of the bourgeois class. There must be a way for them to understand that if they do not realize the urgency of this we will die under the rule of the capitalist class.

Student from Walter Sisulu University

2. THE TEACHERS' STRUGGLES

[A letter contributed by a teacher in Cape Town while out on strike in June]

Comrade Editor

Our present strike action is a reflection of a passionate and popular resistance to the broader social and economic crisis the working masses find themselves in. In these battles the call for unity and support – indeed a loud, clear voice of all educators, parents and students is urgently needed.

The government says that there is just not enough money to meet the demands of the workers (education, health, police, etc.) in the public sector. In order for them to meet our demands they must cut further expenditure on other essential social services such as the building of new schools and hospitals. They also argue that public sector workers only strike for a 12% salary increase. These are misleading arguments.

The industrial action of the workers is not being called only to address matters affecting the salaries of educators, nurses, etc. but to force government to deal with matters affecting the basic and urgent needs of all the people of South Africa. In some provinces the education and health systems have already deteriorated to such an extent that the industrial action will have very little effect on the quality of education and health services.

Why are we out on strike?

- since November 2006 our trade unions have been engaging government in negotiations for better salaries and working conditions for all public sector workers (the education sector, health sector, police and prison sectors)
- on various occasions government failed to put a reasonable and acceptable offer on the negotiating table
- at the beginning of May 2007 public sector unions and government reached a deadlock in negotiations
- public sector unions warned government that they will embark on indefinite national strike action on 1 June 2007 if their demands are not met.

What are our demands?

- that all vacant posts in the public sector must immediately be filled with permanent appointments.
- that the monthly subsidy for housing and medical aid be re-adjusted in line with market trends
- that the working conditions and safety of all public sector workers must be drastically improved

- that all workers in the public sector, no matter their ranking, must receive a market related minimum increase of 12% across the board

What is the role of teachers and their unions?

Teachers can only play a progressive role in the fight for better working conditions and a minimum living salary for all public sector workers if they themselves fight, in word and deed, against government's ridiculous offer. Teachers who are members of yesterday's radical unions and today's sweethearts of Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, should in the midst of the current public sector strike live up to their noble tasks, and position themselves firmly on the side of the poor communities they serve. Stop defending Fraser-Moleketi and her negotiators for the compromises they are offering against the demands of the public sector working class.

Any "boss" can only be strong if the workers have faith in him or her. Once workers develop faith in themselves, discover and build their organisational strength, the power of the "bosses" over the workers starts to crumble. It is time for teachers to stand tall and be counted by presenting a unified resistance to the antagonistic measures of the government if they wish to preserve their profession and their rights as workers.

Parents' special responsibilities

The special powers vested in parents through the South African Schools Act makes powerful parent action a definite possibility. Parents should insist on joint Parent-Teacher-Student meetings at their schools, where the crisis in the public sector must enjoy priority on the agendas. Principled, joint decision-making is imperative if we are to advance the struggles for a free, high-quality education for all the still disadvantaged youth of our country. We fought bitter struggles for all our schools – we dare not give up the struggle now.

We call on all workers / parents and students:

- to support us in our struggle against the unlawful debasement and impoverishment of education and health
- to engage in protest action which will prevent further debasement in education and health
- to support our struggle for better working conditions to serve our poor communities in our schools and hospitals

In the current period independent and permanent unity between workers/parents, students and teacher organisations remain the essential weapon to overcome our weaknesses. We need to organise and mobilise to fight for our demands!

Struggling teacher-comrade