



## **LOCAL SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS ON THE RISE**

There have been more than 5000 service delivery protests around South Africa since September 2006. This is information exchanged in the parliament of the Republic of South Africa, being cited by an opposition spokesperson in a discussion on the violent nature these protests have come to assume of late. Communities have been blockading highways into major cities in attempts to force attention to their demands for decent housing and service provision. As an example, conflicts have arisen about who should be given houses that have been constructed. During protest actions newly constructed dwellings have been damaged as acts of defiance against an increasingly repressive and stubborn government.

Cabinet level investigations into the underlying causes of the protests have a familiar ring. In 2005 Minister R. Kasrils was assigned the job of investigating the causes of the revolts that occurred then. In 2007 minister S. Mufamadi has been assigned to do the same work. The involvement of the Human Rights Commission is meant to add weight to the urgency of this undertaking.

Communities such as the Joe Slovo residents in Cape Town have resorted to court action to prevent them being forced to move to an area (Delft) where they will effectively be denied opportunities to earn a livelihood and for their children to continue their education. Councillors have been forced to flee townships since people have grown tired of the lies and deceit these political representatives have been dishing up for a very long time.

The concerns of the ruling elite stem from the failure of the neo-liberal policies of the government to address and fundamentally solve the housing and unemployment problems of the workers and landless peasants. To hide this failure government spokespersons and its mainstream capitalist media companions have been resorting to explanations that are themselves beginning to wear thin. A standard one from the office of the presidency is that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid cannot be undone in a mere 13 years. In 1994 the then president Mr Nelson Mandela assured the poor masses that it would take at least 5 years for any tangible benefits to become evident. Double that

time has elapsed and the accelerated downward spiral of people into the morass of being social outcasts is evident for all to see. Repeated assurances that policies are in order but that proper implementation is lacking is the stock in trade argument advanced by government. If implementation and not policy is the problem then all kinds of convenient arguments can be advanced as excuses for failure.

The logic of the argument that the time the government has had is too short is that people who've been on a housing list for 20 years might as well wait another 20 years since they've managed to survive all those years regardless. Despite high profile programmes such as the pilot N2 Gateway housing project in Cape Town (which is throwing up more problems than it is solving) the housing need is growing and the impatience of people grows apace. The programme of the government to upgrade informal settlements (as part of the national housing department's "Breaking New Ground" strategy) is part of grandiose plans to create "sustainable human settlements". Informal shanty settlements are targeted for elimination by 2014.

A second excuse is that skills development of those in charge of municipalities is in need of upgrading and that this in itself takes time. This spurious argument neglects to add that thousands of unemployed graduates and many thousands having been made redundant through GEAR-inspired rationalisation practices, could be fruitfully employed to assist in municipal systems development.

The ANC's talk of defending democracy sounds hollow if this means denying people the opportunities to participate actively in decisions on how their communities should be run. Instead the views of bureaucrats and consultants are what count. Instead of grassroots participation in the running of their lives people are beaten up and arrested for expressing their opinions through direct protest actions.

Government is also quick to point out that those involved in protest actions are advancing 'narrow individual interests' and represent the views of a minority. This is not borne out by realities. The ➡

➔ case of the Khutsong crisis (on the incorporation issue) demonstrates that the grip on political power the ruling party has is not as secure as many would think. In the light of these revolts an unending propaganda stream of proposed accelerated implementation of policies on land reform, skills training, housing construction and the like has been forthcoming. The question however, still remains: is the capitalist GEAR policy capable of succeeding in solving problems of homelessness and unemployment? Definitely not. Will changes in political personnel in government ranks make a difference? It can only amount to a variation on the theme of destructive capitalism, not a radical departure in fundamental policies.

These widespread local struggles of communities are happening at a time when struggles against

GEAR policies and capitalist enterprises are assuming greater prominence and visibility. The number of cases where there have been attacks on councillors and their properties represents a direct indictment of the policies and practices – not just of local municipalities but of the entire government.

In view of their localised nature these revolts tend to flare up and die down again. Nevertheless, there has been the emergence of new organisations in the form of civic bodies and ad hoc groupings. Alongside the service delivery struggles, strike actions in the country have advanced from being low keyed and short in duration, to being massive and highly emotive. An urgent and immediate task for all involved is for these struggles to be dynamically linked and placed on a political programmatic basis.

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## WORKERS STRIKE BACK

The dynamics of strike actions over the past year has revealed a willingness on the part of the organized working class to make serious sacrifices in defence of their livelihoods. In cases such as the public sector strike the willingness to defend demands to the end is indeed salutary and commendable. The media histrionics about work days and wages lost due to the strike action has become a regular battle cry of the bourgeoisie. As if they are indeed concerned about the financial well-being of workers. They simply articulate the psychological stranglehold that the bourgeoisie wishes to strengthen over their class enemy.

In more cases than not media coverage has made a point of arguing the unreasonableness of the strike action. They hardly condemn police action aimed at breaking up worker protest actions. They hardly criticize the obscene profits made by big business and the opulence that the new black middle class is wallowing in.

Union leaders have almost as a rule been making radical utterances, showing the seriousness of the workers' intent in embarking on strike action. But little if any effort has been consistently shown by the unions to actively draw closer to community struggles and tackle these and their own struggles as

a united organized mass. The tendency to want to 'go it alone' is beginning to make less and less sense as the attacks from the ruling class increases in number and intensity.

A trend has also emerged where once a settlement of a wage dispute nears its end it more often than not tends to be closer to the offer of the employer than to the initial demands of the striking workers. The public and private sector employers appear to have made common cause in agreeing to an absolute maximum of around about 8-9% salary increases – irrespective of the demonstrable legitimacy of demands of workers for much higher increases, given the immediate, erosive power of inflation. These increases are wiped out in monetary terms by the ever escalating cost of living increases within a very short space of time. On the other hand negotiations for higher wages and salaries have to follow an arduous and long-winded road of bargaining and other horse-trading and dealing.

The immediate and devastating impact on working class families of price rises, combined with ever looming job insecurity and in most cases, poor municipal service delivery, add up to a life of frustration and resentment for a system in which the worker does not have one

moment in which struggle does not stare him or her in the face.

The rising cost of living is revealed in the following figures released by the National Agricultural Marketing Council. Food prices rose by 9.5% in the year to June 2007. It states that rural dwellers are feeling the effects of these price rises much more than people in urban areas. The price of yellow maize, sunflower, oilseed and soya beans rose by 35.6%, 48% and 30.6% respectively in inland areas in the year to July 2007. [Business Times, 26/8/2007, p10]. The same source puts the rise in global dairy products at 46 % since November 2006. And lastly, of ALL the food items monitored by the NAMC, prices rose by 13.7 % in the year to June 2007. The article advances the occurrence of drought, the demands of the bio-fuels industry and low domestic production of grain crops as reasons why these price rises are as substantial as they are. The international trade regime is presented as a given.

On the employment front it is widely understood that those workers who are employed need to subsidise the 35 – 40% of the workforce who are unemployed. This is over and above those who are direct economic dependents such as children. In August a Western Cape provincial government report on the province's economic ➔

➔ status revealed the following (which is basically indicative and reflective of the rest of the country): the province's working age (or economically active) population was 3 177 000 of which 1 726 000 were employed. This translates into a percentage of 45.6% who are unemployed. The report adds that a gigantic 40.83% of unemployed people in

the Western Cape have never worked.

The present situation is therefore one in which we are witnessing a systematic fragmentation of the working class (through casualisation, retrenchments, contracting, etc) and the growing size of what is referred to as the 'informal economy'. This holds implications for the struggles that are ongoing

and becoming more intense. Community struggles for better housing and health services and trade union struggles for higher wages are essentially aimed against a common class enemy. Identifying, exposing and directing attacks against all ruling class elements in a united fashion thus becomes the rallying call for all progressives. ●

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## "BROAD BASED" BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

### *Who benefits?*

The government continues to make a big issue of what it calls broad based black economic empowerment lay as a way to "redress the inequalities of the past". Hence, a lot of publicity was given to the announcement on 4 September by the mining giant, Anglo Platinum (Angloplats) of its new black economic empowerment deals worth R7.6 billion, chief beneficiaries are Tokyo Sexwale's Mvelaphanda Holdings and Afriparm Resources headed by Lazarus Zim, who would be sold interests in some of Angloplats subsidiaries at a discount of R3.2 billion. At the same time Angloplats announced that it would transfer shares worth R1.5 billion into an employee share holding scheme that it says, will benefit over 43 000 employees.

We expect that it will be the most highly paid employees who will benefit most by this employee share holding scheme, with the bottom-end workers, who are the majority, benefiting by very little. Also,

no similar provision is being made for the more than 36 000 contract workers employed by Angloplats.

Ironically, on the same day of this announcement over 1500 workers employed at Angloplats Waterval Smelters refinery in Rustenburg, went on strike. Their grievance was that Angloplats was reneging on a wage agreement whereby workers would receive a 10% increase, with Angloplats now wanting to downscale it to 9.5%. Evidently, refusing 1500 workers 0.5%, which is probably less than R20 per worker per month, is more important than the R3.2 billion gift to Mvelaphanda and Afriparm. We have not heard a word about this from the promoters of BEE.

No matter how the government may try to promote black economic empowerment as "broad based" it is clear that it is nothing more than Big Black Bourgeois Economic Empowerment ●

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## *A NEW PLAN TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT?*

The Department of Trade and Industry has come up with a proposal for a new economic program for the country - the National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF). In the policy statement there is the observation that traditionally, South African international trade has been underpinned by mining and agriculture. But it is precisely in these economic sectors that there has been a growing loss of employment. The conclusion is that export alternatives to mining and agriculture must be found and these alternatives must also be able to create job opportunities that mining and agriculture can no longer do. In short, this "new" policy framework says that the South African economy must be driven by the production of internationally competitive exportable products and services, which at the same time will create jobs and significantly reduce unemployment. But this is nothing new at all. It is in keeping with the government's neoliberal economic agenda as expressed by GEAR. This says that the only role of an economically undeveloped or underdeveloped country is to provide cheap goods and services for the major economic powers of this

world. Simply put, the imperialist powers want to exploit the labour power of the 3rd world at the cheapest rates and this is the idea that our government accepted with its GEAR policy. It means the exploitation of South African labour for the benefit of the western economic powers.

The question is: can this new programme create jobs to alleviate the terrible plight of the masses? A central component of the plan is the provision of massive tax incentives to foreign capitalists to invest in local production and service industries here. But, media commentators have observed that a similar approach failed miserably in the past:

"Scrapped two years ago for not addressing the country's high unemployment rate, the Strategic Investment Programme (SIP), which gave tax deductions to capital investments worth more than R50 million, is set to make a return to attract large investments – this time around, job-creating investments instead of capital-intensive ones .... Despite attracting more than R30 billion in new investments between 2001 and 2005, SIP was terminated by the National Treasury after it created a paltry 7 000 direct jobs, in spite of the fact that the department had ➔

➡ sacrificed R10 billion in forgone tax revenue." . (City Press Business 11/08/07).

A review of the NIPF in The Financial Mail (10/08/2007) also noted that there seemed to be no link between it and the policy of the national treasury which appeared to be quite opposed to the idea of these generous tax incentives to foreign investors.

While the NIPF proposes that South Africa must

look at the production and supply of cheap goods and services for export, using cheap labour, nothing is said about the prime importance of the South African economy to be able to produce food, clothing and shelter for the poverty-stricken masses of the country. According to our government, the needs and demands of the imperialist powers come first! ●

## WORKERS AND THE ANC LEADERSHIP BATTLE (Part 2)

*In the previous article in this three-part series, we placed the spotlight on the ANC policy documents to see what place the working class and peasantry have in the programmatic orientation of the governing party. (APDUSAN Vol 13, 2) It showed that the political and economic aspirations of the working masses do not fit into the programme of the ANC. The two programmes are diametrically opposed and irreconcilable. While working people may vote for the ANC, partly due to lack of a clear left alternative, it is in reality a bourgeois party controlled by an elite revolving between the corporate world and the state bureaucracy. In this second article we shift the spotlight to how leftist currents in the tripartite alliance defend their 'strategic perspectives and tactics' as part of their fight to implant a pro-worker leadership in the alliance.*

It is now impossible for the officialdom in the governing African National Congress (ANC) to deny or conceal the factional strife raging inside the tripartite alliance. In the context of the leadership race overshadowing the run-up to the ANC December Conference in Limpopo, people speak openly of distinct 'right and left camps'. When he closed their recent policy conference President Thabo Mbeki, for instance, has acknowledged this split by bluntly telling the South African Communist Party not to try to impose a socialist programme on the ANC.

To begin with, it is necessary to sketch a rough outline of *who are the rightwing and leftwing inside the alliance?* The right generally refers to those in the inner circles of the ANC-in-government (or narrowly, the presidency) who defend the party's neo-liberal policies. The left, meaning COSATU and SACP members at large, covers a fairly broad constituency. Some of these leftists openly attack the 'ANC-in-government' for clinging to GEAR and its failure to transform our society to the benefit of the working poor. Other leftists are locked in a battle for the renewal of the SACP. This group wants the party to forge links with militant social movements outside the alliance and pursue its 'socialist project' independent of the ANC. Both "leftist factions" however, retain their ANC membership because for them this is where the masses belong and it is the best way to defend the victory of the national liberation movement over apartheid.

### **Renew and Revitalize the ANC?**

Officials in the top hierarchy of the SACP, including its outspoken members in parliament, are clearly at the head of one group of leftists - occasionally clashing with their adversaries in the corridors of parliament. They are self-proclaimed 'hard-line communists' who combine

their defence of the official party line with some scathing critiques of the rightward drift in the ANC leadership. For them, careerists, corrupt politicians and business interests (BEE-types) have captured key positions in the ANC and need to be ousted from its leadership. As long as these elite forces direct the orientation of the governing party, delivery of a better life for all will just be a pipedream and no genuine pro-poor social transformation in South Africa will take place. This power hungry clique must ultimately bear the blame for 'the signs of alienation and disenchantment' in shrinking grassroots branches of the governing party. Another consequence of this widespread obsession with self-enrichment while abandoning 'social delivery' has been the rise of new social movements. These formations have mobilized mass struggles for housing, water, electricity, education, health care and other social services outside the framework of the tripartite alliance. This development has deepened the organizational crisis of ANC local branches.

To counter this degeneration in the ANC-led alliance, this official left in the SACP, is arguing for the ANC to be renewed and revitalized. This means striving to revive the 'traditions of the Freedom Charter and the National Democratic Revolution'. Today, in practice, it amounts to fighting for 'revolutionary reforms' but without the need to 'make a whole new revolution' (*Umsebenzi*, March 2007, p12). But this effectively ditches the 'second or socialist stage' spelled out in the two stage theory of revolution adhered to by old-style Stalinism. In fact, the betrayal of our struggle, which they so half-heartedly expose, is a logical outcome of them foisting the hollow Freedom Charter and NDR on the liberation movement.

To keep up with what is fashionable, however, they now articulate their perspectives in the reactionary and exhausted politics of the developmental state and social democracy. They claim credit for popularising and injecting this Keynesian-style capitalism (a larger bourgeois state investing in the economy) into the politics of the alliance. While they oppose the so-called BEE-type leadership, neither a clear alternative leadership nor socialist (anti-capitalist) programme are openly debated among the workers and landless peasants in protest movements. True to their typical tail-ending and ad hoc stance, they instead rally behind individuals critical of the ANC-in-government (there is no alternative!). In this process the SACP has abandoned its responsibility as an indefatigable agitator and fighter for an independent programme for socialist democracy. No genuine socialist party can subjugate its revolutionary programme to a set of bourgeois demands for "humane" capitalism. ➡

### *A Dissident Left for SACP Renewal?*

A number of militants inside the alliance have spotted some of these contradictions in the theory and actions of the official-SACP line. In fact these dissidents find the strategies and tactics of the existing party leadership outdated and are rebelling against it. What they want the party to do is to sink deep roots in the new social movements (like the APF and SMI) and field its own candidates in local and national elections (breaking from the ANC). If the SACP does not reinvent and renew itself, if it does not discard its 'worn out left politics', according to the dissidents, party structures on the ground will continue to diminish and disappear. The forward march of anti-capitalist resistance globally, which is an inspiration and comrade-in-arms to local social movements, is threatening to dump the party into the dustbin of history. For not towing the official party line, this 'dissident left' has been punished with ostracism and suspension - victims of the bureaucratic regime inside the party. In some instances, sidelined and expelled activists have seized local structures and operate these as 'enclaves liberated from the official party hierarchy'.



## *From Around the World*

### **FRANCE'S ANTI-STRIKE LAW OF 2<sup>nd</sup> AUGUST**

France's parliament passed a law on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August on the running of minimal services for the French public transport system in the event of strikes. This partially fulfilled a key electoral campaign promise by the president, Nicholas Sarkozy. The law requires public transport providers to inform passengers which buses and trains are to run during a strike and to reimburse them if they fail to adhere to the promised schedule. It also makes it obligatory for those planning strikes to give 48 hours notice of their intention to do so and for strikers to be consulted by secret ballot as to further action after eight days. During his campaign, Sarkozy, who took up office in May, pledged to guarantee at least three hours of public transport in the morning and evening rush hours during strikes. The law was hotly opposed by union leaders, who rightly see it as a threat to workers' right to strike and they have pledged to engage in retaliatory walkouts in the autumn.

Despite the best efforts of those who framed the August 2<sup>nd</sup> law, it does not immediately guarantee minimum services on France's public transport system. A minimal service would imply a guaranteed service and the law is silent about how this can be achieved. It however requires local authorities and public transport providers to define the exact meaning of "minimum service".

At face value, it is easy to agree with some of the criticisms of the dissident left against the official SACP-line, and by extension, their critique of the ANC. But if their viewpoint is more carefully analysed, illusions and fundamental flaws in their reasoning become crystal clear. Firstly, their illusions partly derive from some glorified role the Communist Party played in the national liberation movement before 1994. This is of course an utter distortion of the history of our freedom struggle which they need to educate themselves about. Secondly, why drag the masses back into the ANC-led alliance if they are in the transition of building new organizations to fight for their demands? Revolutionary militants must learn from the methods and forms of past struggles, but it is wrong to reverse the march of history. Where outmoded methods of resistance and organizations have been resuscitated, it represents a setback with huge costs to the workers movement. Finally, there is no evidence in history that isolated dissidents can take over a bureaucratic monster like the SACP and use it for progressive purposes. ●

Negotiations are to be completed by next January.

As the government and the unions gear up for a fight, bourgeois spokesmen are not slow to nail their colours to the mast. Professor of law, Jaques Le Goff, had this to say: "in France, conflict has always been deeply anchored in our social conscience. Strikes are considered a means of assessing identity in a balance of power that is not guaranteed by trade unions. This is contrary to other countries where trade unions don't need to resort to such intimidation. Hence France's particularity: we start by stopping work, which is equivalent to slamming your fist down on the table, and only then do we start negotiating, whereas striking is the result of a blockage between bosses and unions in the United Kingdom or in Germany. Foreseeing strikes is part of the new law's logic. This is moving us closer to our neighbours".

The professor is concerned that the French trade unions have imbibed the traditions of past struggles in France and are too confrontational in industrial disputes. He spells out the real aims of the government, about which the law is not so explicit. It is designed to weaken the unions wielding the strike weapon. Its purpose therefore is to strengthen the employer and the government in their confrontations with the workers. It is also aimed at boosting the competitiveness of French industry vis-à-vis its German rivals. France's industrialists constantly complain that the "labour market rigidities" and higher wages in France put them at a disadvantage when faced with their competitors abroad.

With Sarkozy now in power, his right wing ➡

➡ backers are counting on the sharpening of class conflicts leading to defeats of the working class. Like Thatcher in the 1980's, who used anti-strike legislation as one of the measures to weaken the power of the unions, the French right wing is hoping that their government will be able to inflict the same damage on the French unions as she did in Britain with the unions there. This law is the first step in the attack on the unions. What the ruling class cannot be certain of is the degree of combativity of the unions. There is a marked resistance to neo-liberalism in the country among the social movements as well as the trade unions and if these forces unite when faced with the attacks of government and employers, they

could defeat this offensive launched against them.

The workers and the social movements must be prepared to face the neo-liberal onslaught the Sarkozy government is launching on all fronts - attempts to lengthen the 35 hour week and cuts in public and social services. But above all, the workers must be prepared to fight the political fight. As long as a capitalist party is in power, the working class are in danger of losing the gains they have made over many years, with further erosion of their rights and living standards. They have to fight for their programme, the socialist programme and defend it against all forms of social liberalism and reformism. ●

## **“DIE LINKE” - A NEW LEFT PARTY IN GERMANY**

In June this year, after two years of preparation, a new Left Party, “Die Linke” was formed in Germany. Two parties, the Linkspartei.PDS, based in the east of the country, above all on the former ruling East German Communist party, with 60,000 members, merged with the Electoral Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG) with 11,500 members, operating mainly in the west of the country. The WASG had been formed on the initiative among others, of trade union functionaries who were appalled at the neo-liberal attacks of the SPD (“social democratic”) coalition government directed against the workers. The two parties had formed an alliance in the 2005 federal elections. This followed regional elections in North Rhine Westphalia when the newly formed WASG obtained more than double the votes of the PDS and it became clear to the leaders of the PDS it could no longer break through in the west.

Before the fusion congress, the members of the two parties had been asked to vote on it. While in the Linkspartei.PDS the majority voted for fusion, in the WASG, only a minority favoured fusion. This reflects the fact that the ranks of the WASG no longer have any enthusiasm for the new party and many of them will not join it. They fear that the larger Linkspartei.PDS with its bureaucratic apparatus and its parliamentary orientated personnel will engulf the new party.

In the federal elections in 2005, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the big bourgeois party, overtook the Social Democrats (SPD) although both lost votes. The Linkspartei.PDS, in alliance with the WASG was the big winner with 8.7% of the votes, which was more than double the vote (4%) obtained by the PDS in 2002. Following the elections, the CDU and SPD formed a coalition government with the CDU as the senior partner. In regional elections in Bremen in May of this year, both the CDU and SDP lost votes while Die Linke, the common candidacy of the Linkspartei.PDS and WASG, rose from 6.7% to 8.4%. The result in Bremen is also significant for “Die Linke” based on its opposition to the regional government, whereas the Linkspartei.PDS, which co-governs with the SPD in Berlin, lost nearly half of its electorate in Berlin in the

elections but has continued to govern.

The new party's programme has a Keynesian perspective. But criticisms of capitalism and talk of “democratic socialism”, without providing an alternative to capitalism, are no substitute for a socialist programme. The revolutionary left are split as regards working within the new party. Those against working within its ranks argue that the development of the extra-parliamentary movement is the only way to modify the relationship of forces between classes and stop the neo-liberal offensive. They believe a set of transitional demands to challenge capitalism could be put forward in the extra-parliamentary movement unlike in “Die Linke”. They look to organisations such as the German Social Forum to play a part in developing this movement.

Those in the revolutionary left, who argue for participating in the new party, anticipate that there will be an influx of new members, mainly of social democratic origin into the new party. Some of these new members will be attracted to the party, hoping for an advancement of their careers including in the parliamentary sphere. However, others having moved to the left by joining the new party can be influenced by the anti-capitalist left tendency within the party.

One of the problems facing the new party is the participation of the Linkspartei.PDS in coalition with the SPD in running regional government in Berlin. In the recent regional election, which took place there, a rebel WASG opposed the PDS against the wishes of the majority of the national leadership. What has to be resolved in the new party is freeing itself from co-responsibility for the neo-liberal policies of social democracy.

Those in favour of participation in the new party recognise it will require a big ideological shift to move from its present programme to one which goes beyond capitalism and challenges private ownership of the means of production. Such a shift will entail abandoning nationalist protectionism (against cheap labour coming from Eastern Europe), embracing internationalism, beginning with the pan-European struggle for a minimum social income ➡

➡ and the reduction of working hours without loss of wages and also opposing Germany's military intervention in Afghanistan and other parts of the world. It must establish contact with all the forces in Europe that are to the left of social democracy. It has to oppose the substitutionism of party apparatuses, the abandoning of emancipatory objectives and adapting to the consensus of

bourgeois politics. This can only be surmounted by focusing on promoting the self-activity and self-organisation of the masses.

Those on the revolutionary left who have chosen to work within the new party face an uphill task. It remains an open question whether they can win the ideological battle within the new party. ●

## ZIMBABWE

### *A LUTA CONTINUA!*

Zimbabweans will go to the polls in March 2008 to elect a new parliament and president. In fact, large numbers of people came out to register for the 2008 elections in August this year. What this basically means is that the working class, peasantry and the radicalised middle class see this election as a political arena to fight for their socio-economic and political demands. In a country in the grip of a depressed economy, social crises, political repression (such as the arrest, imprisonment and torture of trade union leaders on the eve of the recent national strike) and allegations of the disenfranchisement of younger urban voters, claimed to be supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), this widespread support for electoral politics carries enormous political weight.

Most people predict that the 2008 elections will drastically and visibly alter the political landscape of Zimbabwe. The MDC, the fractured opposition to the ruling ZANU-PF, is expected to win a larger number of seats in parliament but not enough to eclipse the powerful ZANU-PF. While the MDC may emerge as a stronger force to push for change and challenge ZANU-PF in parliament, it remains deeply divided and is unlikely to capture the presidency. But it is also expected that a successor to President Robert Mugabe will emerge from the coming 'harmonised elections'. At the December 2006 ZANU-PF congress, factions in the party openly contested this ongoing succession battle. An extraordinary congress of the congress of the party has been called for December 2007 where a successor to President Mugabe is likely to be anointed. In the meanwhile, the president has identified an array of successors from the faithful in the top hierarchy of the party.

Compelling reasons exist to doubt that the 2008 elections will bring about genuine and fundamental political and socio-economic change in Zimbabwe. In other words a radical systemic overturn that can result in concrete improvements in the lives of the poverty stricken masses in rural and urban areas will not materialise from these elections. This is clear from the political compromises hatched in the negotiations between the ZANU-PF and the MDC leaders. It can also be seen from a crippled

resistance movement, sabotaged by the ongoing socio-economic crisis and the virtual absence of an anti-capitalist political axis to pull together working people who are fed-up with the rule of the elite.

The constitutional amendment (Amendment Bill No. 18) agreed upon between the MDC and ZANU-PF leaders in September is essentially an elitist-pact without real benefits for the poorest Zimbabweans. President Thabo Mbeki, SADC-appointed mediator overseeing these talks, and other neo-liberal commentators hailed this deal as a critical step to restore peace and prosperity to this crisis-ridden African country. Such praise they craft especially for release on the global stage because they see it as their duty to market the continent to imperialist investors. As it stands, this Bill No. 18 paves the way for harmonised elections, enlarges the state bureaucracy and their lucrative perks in a country sliding into deeper economic chaos. Members of parliament will increase from 150 to 210 and the Senate will expand from 66 to 93, allowing enough space to co-opt more MDC bureaucrats into the state apparatus and share in looting the country. The amendment does not deal with the demand for a Constituent Assembly that would give top priority to the democratic demands and aspirations of Zimbabwe's peasants and workers - a demand forged in the mass resistance of the 1990s and today boldly displayed on the banners of social movements and trade unions. On the contrary, what this 'Constitutional compromise' manifests is a closer alignment between ZANU-PF and the MDC rightwing elite. It further entrenches capitalist rule under the stewardship of a petit bourgeois elite.

Moreover, this elite is sticking to its neo-liberal economic path, albeit under a thin veil of populism and African nationalist rhetoric. Sections of the black petit bourgeois and bourgeoisie form important bases of the both the MDC and ZANU-PF. And these classes find their interests protected in the property rights clauses of the Lancaster Constitution which is now being tightened in their favour by the new Indigenisation and Empowerment Bill. This law betrays the general orientation of the state. It is driven by business associations and other lobbies demanding more state intervention to accelerate the growth of a so-called patriotic bourgeois class, especially in mining and farming.

A critical need exists for large-scale public investment in water, electricity and other social ➡



➡ infrastructure. A Zimbabwean engineer has recently pointed out that the dilapidated infrastructure in cities like Bulawayo, in part an outcome of years of neglected investment, is adding to water shortages with access rationed to one day per week.

The state seems to have declared an all out war on protests against poverty. Workers face a constant threat of wage freezes in the context of hyperinflation, which in turn, is driven by the luxury consumption of the wealthy classes, foreign debt and stock market speculation. The regime is pushing ahead with the privatisation of education, healthcare and other essential services. A large number of victims of the military-style eviction of urban squatters in 2005, operation Murambatsvina, are still living under plastic shelters in an open field on the outskirts of Harare. Through intimidation and the

jailing of trade union activists on the eve of the recent national strike, which forced the ZCTU leadership to go underground, the state managed to sabotage this planned mass action.

In the context of such a strong convergence of the elite, pursuing neo-liberalism under nationalist populism, it is necessary to unite and radicalise the many disparate struggles for change. For these movements will find their demands and aspirations frustrated by the government that will arise from the 2008 elections. This has evidently been the experience of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and other militant social movements who are aligned to the MDC. To date, their campaigns have been ineffective to counter the rightwing slide of the MDC and restructure it on an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist platform. ●

## APDUSA

APDUSA was established in 1961 by the Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) to raise the interests of the working class and landless peasantry as paramount in the national liberatory struggle. Despite the gain of political rights for all, the compromise of 1992 has not fulfilled the national democratic aspirations of the labouring majority and they continue to suffer in conditions of abject poverty and subjugation to the will of the rich who command the economic resources of the country. We have therefore adopted a programme of transitional demands for the completion of the unfinished tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in an uninterrupted struggle for socialism.

APDUSA calls for the self-organisation and united independent struggle of the labouring masses. We further believe that the struggle can only advance decisively via the greatest ideological and organisational unity between the workers in the urban centres and the peasants in the rural areas under the leadership of the working class

We demand:

- The convening of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly, charged with the task of drawing up a new constitution, governed by the interests of the oppressed and exploited working class and peasantry, based on the demand for full, unfettered political rights for all with majority rule in a unitary state, the removal of all artificially created regional political boundaries, the liquidation of all special minority rights and privileges which militate against the interests of the majority. The Constituent Assembly must have full powers to discharge these duties, untrammelled by any directions and constraints designed to serve self-interested minorities.
- A resolution of the land question in accordance with the needs of those who work and live off the land. This means the destruction of all existing tribal and feudal relations in the rural areas and the nationalisation of the land, without compensation. A new division of the land and its management, which excludes forced collectivisation, the payment of rent and the expropriation of small peasant farmers, must be undertaken by committees that are democratically elected by and answerable to the people.
- The expropriation of all major industries, banks and institutions of credit and their management by the state and representatives of the workers in the interests of the population as a whole.
- The revision of labour legislation for the liquidation of all discrimination against the worker. This also means:
- The right to work, which must be implemented both via the institution of necessary adjustments to the length of the working week to provide employment for all, without a reduction in wages, as well as by the institution of a progressive public works program with the full representation of the unemployed in its management.
- The fixing of a living minimum wage as well as a sliding scale to compensate for any price increases.
- The unconditional right to strike which includes the right of occupation of the workplace.
- The elected representatives of the people, at organisational level or in the local, regional or national political institutions of state, must be fully accountable to those who elect them and they must be fully bound by the demands and aspirations of the working class and its allies, the landless peasantry.

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

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