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AFRICAN PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC UNION
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Interests Of The Workers And Landless Peasants Shall Be Paramount

FOOD PRICES SKYROCKET

On Sunday, 13 April, COSATU kicked off a series of rolling mass actions against the alarming rise in food prices. Sporadic protests of other trade unions and social movements against skyrocketing food prices have also taken place in pockets of the country - mostly limited to angry speeches. The SACP issued its own memorandum declaring its solidarity with COSATU, the working class and the poor.

Parliament released an official statement on food prices a few days later. In government's view "South Africa has also been affected by the rising prices, although our food prices have not increased at the same pace as in many countries across the globe" (Cabinet statement, 16 April 2008). Before the start of the COSATU campaign ministers, focusing on economic affairs, were largely silent on rising food inflation. Both the finance minister and the trade and industry minister, for example, made speeches on poverty, inequality and consumer rights recently. But they did not even hint at the crisis in global food prices. Why the slow knee-jerk response on the part of the state to this steep upswing in the costs of food? Wrong cost of living information and government's kowtowing to 'market fundamentalism' can partly explain its lame duck response to the food price crisis.

Let us see how the state has downplayed the size and speed of food price inflation. Government relies solely on the questionable pricing figures disseminated by our official statistical agency,

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). For experts at Stats SA, prices have been climbing in recent years at a rate of around 7% - the average national inflation rate used in the 2007 wage negotiations. The Food Price Monitoring Commission, a body set up by government after an earlier surge in food prices, recorded a much faster and higher jump in food prices. According to this agency, prices have been shooting up at around 16% per year, more than double the Stats SA figures!

Prices of goods that poor families spend most of their incomes on climbed even faster: flour and rice prices increased by about 20%, cooking oil at around 25%, maize and milk around 30% and potatoes over 60%. And in rural areas, people normally pay much more for household necessities. This closer picture gives a more accurate view of the real plight and belt-tightening workers and peasants confront. It means that the 7 - 9% wage increases agreed upon in the 2007 cycle came in at less than half the increment needed for working class families to keep apace. In other words, last year, the average worker was hit by food inflation (excluding energy, transport and housing costs) of at least 15%! But almost every wage settlement in 2007 was pegged below 9%, thus effectively imposing a *minimum wage-cut of 6%* in industries where unions have relatively stronger bargaining power. Wage demands must reflect the real cost of living that workers confront. ●

THE ESKOM DEBACLE

The electricity crisis has exposed all government pretences of working in the interests of the poor labouring masses. For years the government stubbornly refused to take adequate steps to ensure that the economy had an ample electricity supply because it hoped and expected that private suppliers would enter the market to meet the developing shortfall. This did not happen and now the entire economy has been dealt a crippling blow. Not only are the mines cutting down on production, they are also threatening to cut jobs and the government has nothing to say. Further, no new

major enterprise which requires a significant amount of electricity can be started. In one stroke the hope of an economic growth rate of 6% per annum has been shattered and it is startlingly clear that the government will not be able to meet the United Nations millennium development goals of halving poverty and seriously reducing unemployment by 2015.

The electricity crisis is now being used as an excuse to drastically raise prices and force through the implementation of prepaid electricity meters, ostensibly to ration supplies. This is something ➔

➔ the government always wanted to do but it met with stiff resistance from the poor and unemployed as it was correctly seen as a measure to cut off electricity from those who could not afford to pay.

In his recent budget speech Trevor Manuel had little to say about the electricity crisis. Nothing was said about alternate sources of energy such as thin film solar power technology in which there was a radical breakthrough at the University of Johannesburg just over two years ago. Instead, the government is granting Eskom loans of R60 billion over the next period in order to boost its capacity via coal burning and nuclear power plants. The government is obviously still very much committed to privatisation. This exposes the fraud of what we were asked to believe that the government had given up on its Gear policy as it was not working and we now had a “developmental state”.

Notwithstanding the energy crisis the government took the step of increasing the levy on fuel which adds to the burden falling on the shoulders of the labouring masses. Not long ago a large fuel increase was greeted with gloomy voices spelling crippling inflation. Now, we have the greatest fuel increase ever, made worse by the fuel levy increase, but the government stays conveniently quiet on the matter.

In the mean time the new president of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, has precious little to say either except to voice his agreement with the steps taken by the ANC to address the crisis. Zuma was supposed to represent the interests of the poor but now this is already exposed as a myth and those who sought to promote him have to answer to the masses. The poverty stricken workers and peasants are facing hard times ahead. ●

HOUSING CRISIS IN CAPE TOWN DEEPENS

800 families are most likely going to spend the approaching Cape winter months sleeping in leaky tents provided by the Western Cape provincial government. These families are the victims of a housing policy that emphasises “low cost housing”, based on “integrated development” and “affordability”. After they took the step of occupying half completed homes the police and courts intervened and forced the families out of the houses. Linked to the same housing crisis, a Cape High Court order ruled that 4500 households from the Joe Slovo squatter camp be moved to Delft, to be accommodated in what is called Temporary Relocation Areas.

Low Cost Housing From The Ruling Class

Low cost housing is what gave us the RDP houses that are bound to fall apart sooner rather than later. Low cost housing means low quality housing. The change in name from RDP to BNG (Breaking New Ground) housing is now supposed to signal an improvement in housing delivery. Low cost housing means cramped space hardly sufficient for a family of four to live in. According to Thubelisha Homes (the government housing company involved in the crisis) the dimensions of “free” Breaking New Ground houses are to be 40 square metres. This 40m² is meant to be divided into two bedrooms, an open plan kitchen, a lounge and a bathroom and toilet. This total space equals 6.32 meters by 6.32 meters. The impossibility of this as decent human living conditions is clear to see.

Families whose combined income ranges between R3501 and R7000 qualify for bonded houses costing between R180k and R450k. Space-wise these respectively measure between 45m² and 90m². This translates into 6.7m x 6.7m and 9.48m x 9.48m respectively. These options can hardly be considered as affordable housing. They effectively tie low income families into debt arrangements that are virtually strangulating them given the rising costs of servicing this debt. The system that requires of

workers to fight their entire lives to obtain a house also takes this house away the moment that payments can not be continued.

Low cost housing means simply wanting to pacify the homeless and shift responsibility for repairing homes away from the authorities and the construction companies involved. In this way the new owners are saddled with a heap of problems from day one – this after struggling to obtain a house in the first place.

Low cost housing means that construction companies can reap huge profits from building inferior structures. For them the speed of construction is essential, not the quality of the product. These parasites use natural resources of the country (sand, water etc) to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor workers and the unemployed or those employed in what is called the “informal economy” of the country.

The government, with the banks and companies that are building the houses are facing a backlog which they themselves admit they will have great difficulty eradicating. Officials of the Bank Association of South Africa maintain that the banks have more than enough funds to supply housing finance but that unfortunately for them there is a shortage of houses (property stock) which they can actually finance (Business Day, 26 March 2008). For them to contribute to a reduction in the 640 000 backlog in this “affordable” housing segment is purely a matter of profits, not the welfare of people.

What is clear for all to see is that the concerns of the ruling elite are firstly for the ruling elite. The basic needs like housing of the poor and destitute receives attention only to the degree that it does not interfere with them serving their own agenda first. This agenda includes personal enrichment, greater social status, international acclaim, family economic advancement and the rest. Their disdain and disrespect for the poor majority from whose labour they build their lavish lifestyles is blatantly obvious. Reliance on them to solve the problems of the ➔

➡ workers and peasants is a misplaced belief. As far as they are concerned the poor can live like animals – they will find a way to survive.

Communities Fight Back

The homeless of Delft and Joe Slovo informal settlement have had to rely on their own organised strength in order to fight for their right to decent housing and a secure place for their families to live. In this struggle support was forthcoming from organisations that offered political, tactical and legal advice and assistance. Presently, this ongoing housing crisis created by an anti-working class government has entered a stage in which the battle lines have clearly been drawn along class lines.

The Demand For Decent Housing And Independent Organisation

The solutions sought to this particular crisis by the families raise fundamental demands of the working class. These social demands are ones that include the demand for decent housing. This means housing fit for human use, not housing which in real terms ends up being no housing at all. For this demand to become a reality the necessary struggles

we all must engage in are both immediate struggles around housing as well as a political struggle which is a long term one for political power. The people and classes who are oppressing the homeless of Delft and Joe Slovo are organised as political forces – as parties, as government, as organised business – in short the capitalist ruling class. They have their own agenda which does not include solving the housing problems of the working class. All that they are interested in is making sure they keep control over the thinking and actions of the suffering millions. It is up to the communities involved in such struggles to organise on a basis which is free from the negative influences of this ruling class.

To ensure that these demands are kept alive and not ditched through all sorts of chancers, liars, political idiots and two-faced opportunists whenever they like, communities need to ensure that whatever organisations emerge from their struggles, that these structures be protected and strengthened. It is only through the politically organised force of the working class that the problems of the working class can be properly addressed and solved. The struggle for decent housing continues. ●

WORKERS AND THE ANC LEADERSHIP BATTLE (Part 3)

This is the final article in our three-part series to broaden the debate on building a radical left political movement and leadership in this country. In parts one and two we carefully dissected the political environment within which the radical left needs to tackle this task. Part one zoomed in on the core policy statements outlining the future plans of the ANC for our country. The governing party continues to cover its shameless promotion of capitalism with diluted pro-poor verbiage, giving a populist spin to neo-liberalism. In part two we placed the spotlight on feuds within the tripartite alliance to renew its leadership. 'Leftists' inside this alliance are effectively subjugating the interests of the workers and peasants to the capitalist platform guiding the ANC. These so-called dissidents have launched an absurd campaign to use an anti-worker party apparatus to fight for the victims of neoliberal state policies. This party is in fact silencing and expelling its 'leftist critics'. Militant resistance and social movements gaining momentum outside the alliance logically creates the need for a radical left political movement reconstructed on an anti-capitalist programme.

A Radically Altered Political Landscape?

At its Polokwane Conference in December 2007 the African National Congress (ANC) elected its leadership to lead the party over the next 5 years and in the 2009 national elections. As was widely anticipated, new faces replaced old office-bearers in the ANC executive and policy making structures. Some elements from this new leadership have already been co-opted into state structures. Overall, however, the ANC Polokwane conference reinforced and consolidated its capitalist or bourgeois path rather than radically breaking from this trajectory. The newly elected president, portrayed as the candidate of the 'left' has deepened his partnerships with

local and foreign capitalists, thus renewing their conspiracy against the labouring classes.

This conference exposed the contradictions between the ANC's politics and its 'huge membership'. On paper, more than 600,000 people are card-carrying members of the ANC. But the class controlling the leadership and ideology of this party, actively champion the aspirations of the bourgeoisie (including the BEE elite). What is very well-known is that the majority party in government regularly clashes with communities who suffer as a result of its neo-liberal policies. The state machine it operates outlaws and criminalizes anti-poverty struggles.

As its organisational report admitted, it is a mass political party with an astonishingly low level of or 'non-existent' political education. And this political or ideological bankruptcy extends deep into its youth wing. This was dramatically exposed at the 2008 ANC Youth League conference in Bloemfontein, disrupted by factional strife. To whip its wayward offspring into line senior party gurus have recommended a systematic political education campaign. But this campaign leaves a large number of questions unanswered, such as: What kind of politics or ideological orientation attracted youth to the ANC after 1994? On the basis of which political programme did members join the ANC in the last two decades? Which class aspirations and interests will form the basis of this 'new ideological training' campaign? Will its youth be trained to promote the party's 'neo-liberal populist' (capitalism with a human face) political agenda?

Social Movement And Trade Union Resistance

More importantly, the Polokwane conference took place against the backdrop of a massive tide in service delivery protests and strikes. Last year, this country ➡

➡ had 6,000 - 10,000 militant protest actions, mainly against the government and outside the ideological framework and structures of the ANC. Compared to other parts of the world, this is indeed a striking upsurge in mass struggles after the end of apartheid. It is an inspiring wave of resistance which has been attracting solidarity from across the world.

Places like Delft (outside Cape Town), Kennedy Road (near Durban) and Rammolutsi (Northern Free-State) are but a few, ongoing flashpoints of angry demonstrations. In these areas communities are resisting evictions, water privatisation and electricity cut-offs. At the same time municipal workers in the South African Municipal Workers' Union (SAMWU), amongst others, have embarked on strikes to better their working conditions. In fact, working people normally participate in community-based movements and workplace battles. When a worker is attacked from all fronts, there is no luxury in giving higher importance to one form of struggle over another. Any worker knows that the privatisation of water, for example, shrinks the family budget in the same way as a cut in wages raises the cost of living. In one community, union members are expected to join their unemployed neighbours as they all face relentless threats to access to housing, electricity, health, education, etc. This makes it possible to forge stronger unity between social movements and trade unions. A major obstacle to this unity, as we pointed out in part one, is the political alignment of COSATU bureaucrats to the ANC.

Some grassroots struggles have ended in victory - stopping evictions or water and electricity cut-offs. However, most victories have been short-lived. Despite the heroism and explosive display of militancy, this resistance movement is trapped in single-issue and *ad hoc* battles; swiftly moving from street revolts into courtroom battles between lawyers. A sustainable united movement involving multiple formations in struggle is yet to emerge. Growth in the Social Movement Indaba (SMI), for instance, is highly erratic and precarious.

For A Radical Left Political Movement

To date, social movements and trade unions have not been able to go beyond this circular or treadmill method of resistance. This derives from a combination of political weaknesses. Firstly, the resistance movement has the tendency to confine itself to squeezing gains from the weak post-apartheid constitution and laws. After all, this

entire legal edifice is the outcome of a negotiated compromise and a Constitution heavily weighted in the interests of the local and imperialist bourgeoisie. Secondly, some grassroots efforts to build political unity strive only to mobilise support behind the ANC or one of its factions against another faction or opposition parties. While all these ill-conceived and opportunist campaigns have had little effect, many activists still embrace this ill-fated and demoralising politics. Thirdly, some militant movements have transformed themselves into a political organisation only to contest local or national elections. But the labouring masses need a political movement to advance its independent political demands and not merely an 'electoral machine'.

Each one of these political currents, at its base, harbours the myth that the world can be changed without seizing political power. Here in South Africa and internationally in the World Social Forum, for instance, well-financed NGOs have been in the vanguard of spreading this ideology. With the assistance of this layer of do-gooders, money from rich donors dictates the rhythm of our struggle. In practice, NGO activities crowd-out and undermine the self-organisation of the labouring classes on an anti-capitalist platform. Another breed of politically unaffiliated individuals, so-called objective academics, has risen to the head of the social movements to counter the influence of 'old-style radical leftists'. However, in the class struggle these fellows of higher-learning ought to know that the decisive test of your role in the movement for socialism is your political programme rather than your credentials to lecture. If the radical intelligentsia is to play a meaningful role in our movement today, as some of them did in the past, they need to join and build the political organizations based on the demands of the workers and peasants.

The ongoing leadership crisis in the ANC-led tripartite alliance is a symptom of a profound socio-economic crisis. It simply means that the 'elitist petit bourgeois transition' failed to resolve the widening inequalities flowing from capitalism - a system thriving on the ruthless exploitation of working people. The labouring majority, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, faces a different crisis of self-organisation and political leadership. The formation of a plural radical left movement guided by an anti-capitalist political programme can contribute to resolving the organisational and leadership crisis that workers face today. ●



From Around the World

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM AND ITS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME OF ACTION 26 JANUARY 2008

Unlike previous WSFs, which were held at a specific venue, Porto Alegre in Brazil or in three cities in different countries in 2006, the 2008 WSF was planned as a mobilisation week and Global Day of Action on 26 January, throughout the world. The International Council of the WSF had been informed

that nearly 400 events were being planned worldwide for the day of action. Events connected with the day of action were reported in 72 countries of the world. Brazil, the WSF's birthplace, recorded the largest numbers of people ➡

➔ participating in the “tens of thousands”. Only Mexico rivalled it in numbers.

The WSF emerged in 2001 from social movements in Brazil which had shaken the political establishment there. It provides open spaces for diverse movements which challenge capitalist globalisation, to meet, network and coordinate. The draft action plans at the core of the movement are arrived at democratically. “Another World is Possible, Another World is Necessary” has become a rallying cry for the organisations and networks that take part in the WSF. The WSF has not been afraid to experiment. When it held its first gathering in Porto Alegre, in January 2001 it became a counterpoint to Davos in Switzerland, where the representatives of global capitalism congregated to discuss how to maintain and tighten their grip on the oppressed and exploited people in the world.

Moving to Mumbai, India in 2004 from Porto Alegre where it had been held for the past 3 years, the WSF had many strengths not achieved previously. Firstly, it succeeded in obtaining an enormous Asian participation, which of course was one of the reasons for its being held in India. It involved more poor people rather than intellectuals and brought out more women. It made the fragmented Indian society work together and this unity is still there.

The polycentric 2006 WSF reinvigorated the WSF. There were over 200 000 participants of whom the Caracas, Venezuela component comprised 50 000 delegates. The participants in Caracas were implanted for a time in a situation, where a revolutionary process has been unfolding. This process has unleashed the energy and creativity of the masses of Venezuela, who are bitterly opposed by the elite and middle class. The WSF served to increase the solidarity between Venezuela and the rest of the world.

The 2007 WSF in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, the first on the African continent, was attended by an estimated 15 000 participants from Africa, which was way above the figures of their attendance at previous WSFs. The registration fee of US\$6 blocked scores of poor Kenyans from attending WSF events. Hundreds of them demonstrated against their exclusion and they were joined by activists from elsewhere. As a protest at the closure of the WSF to the poor, a ‘People’s Social Forum’ took place at a different venue attended by activists from the main WSF event. The formation of the ‘People’s Social Forum’ underlined the failure of the WSF to live up to its founding principle of providing

an open space for all the poor and excluded, who demonstrated their determination to make their voice heard globally.

The mobilisation week and Global Day of Action declared by the WSF this year, unlike previous WSFs involved a wave of local mobilisations throughout the world. There were no huge gatherings nor did they make headline news. Workshops and demonstrations, depicting how the lives of the poor had been blighted by capitalist globalisation, and putting together a green prototype home were some of the varied activities taking place globally. The aim of the mobilisation was to facilitate a deeper penetration of the WSF at local level and to involve many more participants. The preparations made by the US Social Forum and the events that took place during the mobilisation week and day of action appear to have achieved the object behind this year’s WSF.

There are big differences within the WSF about the role it has to play. There are those who hold the view that it simply provides an open space for debates among the organisations and networks opposed to capitalist globalisation and that it should not explicitly endorse any particular political position or struggle, though its constituent groups are free to do so. Others, such as Walden Bello, Executive Director of the Focus on Global South, who disagree, believe that the “open space” idea should be implemented in a progressive direction. Refusing to take stands on key issues like US aggression in the Middle East, Zionist oppression of the Palestinian people and the poverty-creating neoliberal paradigm is a sure way of making the WSF irrelevant. There is a fear among some circles in the WSF that by taking a political stand it will be exposed to the danger of being consumed by wrangling political parties. Bello disagrees. He believes this can be avoided by working with other institutions beside political parties that are vehicles for political transformation such as trade unions and ngos. He sees civil society as a key actor in “reinvigorating the democratic revolution”.

The WSF in its history has certainly taken decisions committing it to direct political action. Such were the call for worldwide demonstrations against the war plans of the US and Britain to invade Iraq in February 2003 and the role of the Genoa Social Forum in confronting the G8 summit. These actions served to strengthen and enrich the WSF. The debate within the WSF about initiating political action and the modalities is an ongoing one ●

POLITICAL LESSONS FROM KENYAN UPHEAVALS

Many political analyses have been attempting to make sense of the dramatic political developments in Kenya since late December 2007. What can we learn from the struggles of the Kenyan working class, peasantry and urban slum dweller? Many bourgeois commentators would want to make us believe that with a 6.3% economic growth rate estimated for 2007, the Kenyan economy can be regarded, as many similar emerging third world economies, as one which is characterised by rising incomes, rising employment rates, greater foreign direct investment and general prosperity of the general population. The reality is that at the time the pre election violence emerged in 2007, Kenya had a 40% unemployment rate and a general life expectancy at birth of 49 - 55 years. It is a country with a rural-urban population ratio of 3 to 1. This implies that that future rural – urban migration will in all likelihood lead to a substantial swelling in the number of urban slum-dwellers in pursuit of economic and personal survival. Any political or economic programme, which ignores these figures or attempts to offer and implement proven failed solutions to present and future problems of urbanisation and human survival, is indeed doomed to failure.

The abject failure of the capitalist system to solve the problem of the African working class and peasantry is clear for all to see. Any progressive system of land use, urbanisation and use of natural resources will have to be based on the political and economic participation and political leadership of the working class in the construction of a socialist system.

Estimated figures in 2005 for Kenya's occupational structure reveals that 75% of the labour force is engaged in agriculture, the balance being taken up by small-scale industry and service industries, notably tourism. Agriculture contributes 24% to GDP, with industry contributing 17% and services making up the balance. More than 50% of the population of 36 million lives below the poverty line. Clearly high economic growth rates do not translate into greater economic prosperity for the working class and its rural class allies. They tend to confirm the increasing rate at which the ruling elite can and do pilfer and siphon off the wealth and riches of the country. The scandals of the ruling elite in the period 2005-6 are well known internationally.

The above figures are in line with what many third world economies have had to align and resign themselves to as part of the three decades long neo-liberal dictates coming from the IMF, World Bank and their backers in the US, UK and other imperialist governments. The dependency of countries like Kenya on foreign aid is well documented. The Kenyan government has had an on-off relationship

with the IMF on the issue of political transparency and accountability. Presently the government is in good standing with the imperialists, given the renewed interest in raping Africa of its natural resources – notably oil and natural gas. In this quest, China has a direct interest as well, making the contest for Africa's natural resources one which in future will engulf most African countries and political formations.

The present shuttle diplomacy to broker, implement and stabilise a power sharing deal between the two main parties has involved top ranking bourgeois politicians and bureaucrats like the United States Secretary of State and the former United Nations Secretary General. Their ability to enforce their political and economic dictates on the Kenyan population, by extension on the workers and peasants, has at the time of writing not yet yielded tangible results. This has been as a result of the ongoing dogfight over the occupation of key cabinet portfolios by the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and the Party of National Unity (PNU). As a part of this fight many Kenyans sacrificed their lives in a struggle between political elites that would employ warlord tactics and the state repressive forces to pursue their political agendas. What indeed are the ideological differences between these two parties? Their imperialist linkages basically make them a variation on the theme of being domestic servants for the international bourgeoisie.

Whatever these ideological differences (if any) might be, in the end the fundamental demands of the Kenyan working class and peasantry for land, for jobs and proper housing ended up being lost or submerged in the elitist struggles of the aforementioned two main contending parties. The elitist factions can, and do easily make promises to the hungry and poor that they will make a difference to their miserable lives. Their perceived powerlessness make people buy into this since they can see nothing else on the horizon that will indeed make an immediate difference to their lives.

The demands of the working class and peasantry of Kenya are ones that are similar to demands of the working class and peasantry in other African countries – whether politically stated/articulated or unstated/non articulated. In all cases it is crucial for the advancement of the global anti-capitalist struggle that the political experiences of the labouring majority in one country, e.g. Zimbabwe or Kenya, be imparted to the struggling working class and peasantry in other countries. In this manner, through progressive political education, the anti capitalist movement can start to engage and defeat the destructive capitalist forces ranging the world at large. ●

SPLIT IN RESPECT: OVERVIEW AND THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2004 Respect, a broad based organisation to the left of the Labour Party was formed in England. It emerged out of the anti-war movement and the expulsion of George Galloway, a left wing MP from the Labour Party, for his consistent opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Respect overtook the Socialist Alliance, which had been formed in 2001 from mainly small far left groups.

The programme of Respect was anti-war, against the neoliberal policies of New Labour and for socialism. It achieved a remarkable breakthrough electorally when in the first general election it contested, George Galloway was elected as an MP in Bethnal Green and Bow, a constituency in East London. In council elections, Respect councillors were elected in wards in inner areas of big cities such as London and Birmingham, where many of the most exploited workers from the minority Muslim communities, originating from Pakistan and Bangladesh, resided. In its first year of existence, Respect attracted a membership of over 4,000.

From the outset Respect was wracked by internal strife as to the nature of the organisation. The control of the movement rested in the hands of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the strongest Marxist group in Britain and George Galloway. Each for their own reasons favoured Respect as a loose coalition, a “unity coalition” and not a political party. Respect, according to the SWP was a “united front of a special kind”. What this meant in practice was that there was unity between the various forces comprising the coalition in contesting elections. The SWP in Respect was not however interested in building strong branches, which would campaign on all the vital issues affecting the workers and oppressed minorities and which would provide a political base for a party that would challenge the other political parties. The SWP wished to function as a parallel organisation alongside Respect so that it could continue most of its campaigning in the name of the SWP itself. Hence its opposition to the publication of a newspaper by Respect, which it saw as competing with its own weekly paper. Galloway was opposed to Respect becoming a party because it would become a broader platform to debate some of his ideas, which were at odds with the majority in Respect and it would require greater accountability from him as one of its public representatives.

Those within Respect who were in favour of building it as a broad based democratic socialist party came from Socialist Resistance (SR), a Marxist group affiliated to Respect, as well as from independent socialists. They campaigned for Respect having a newspaper, and for the branches being represented on the National Council (NC),

which runs the organisation between conferences. These proposals, made with the aim of building up Respect from the grassroots and ensuring the fullest participation of its members in policy and decision making, were opposed by the SWP and George Galloway. Their criticisms of the failure of Respect to grow and make an impact politically were in the main ignored.

A turning point in the affairs of Respect came in August 2007 when Galloway wrote a letter to the Respect NC. Having previously been in denial, he now complained that Respect was not punching its weight in British politics and had not fulfilled its potential either in terms of votes, membership recruited or funds raised. He put down this failure to internal problems within Respect and criticised the lack of transparency in appointing Respect staff and selective implementation of decisions. He proposed an emergency fund-raising and membership drive to facilitate Respect participation in elections, an elections committee to oversee this and the appointment of a national organiser working together with the national secretary to revitalise Respect.

This letter, with constructive suggestions for making Respect more effective as a political force was to lead to a split in the movement. At the centre of the crisis was a breakdown of trust between some of the major participants in Respect, the SWP on the one hand and George Galloway and most of the councillors representing the wards in East London and Birmingham on the other. The SWP regarded Galloway’s criticisms as an attack on itself and John Rees in particular, who was secretary of Respect and a prominent SWP member. It saw its prime task as rallying and preserving its own membership, not trying to heal the division in Respect and strengthen it. Instead of tackling the issues Galloway raised, the SWP presented the clash as a left versus right issue in which the socialists were pitted against the “communalists”. Salma Yacoob, a Respect Birmingham councillor, who has consistently fought for unity of the African-Caribbean and Asian communities and who championed the issue of poor educational attainment of poor white working class boys, dismissed the allegation of communalism, which she pointed out had up to this point come from the enemies of Respect, not from within its ranks.

The charge by the SWP that they were being attacked because of their socialist politics by the right wing within Respect was ludicrous. No such attack was made nor would the independent socialists and members of SR, represented in the leadership of Respect as well as its membership ever have been party to such an attack. ➡

➔ Having demonstrated that they were unable to engage in open and frank discussion with those who disagreed with them, the SWP leadership in Respect proceeded to split the coalition by organising their own 'Respect conference'. To retrieve something from the wreckage of the old Respect, the NC members loyal to the organisation called a Respect Renewal conference of its supporters. It succeeded in obtaining the support of most of the members of Respect who were not members of the SWP as well as some SWP members. There is no doubt however that the loss of most of the SWP members has been

a severe blow to Respect. The task of building a pluralist democratic socialist party is an urgent necessity. Respect, with its diminished membership and smaller number of branches is in its early stage of renewal. It has to reach out to the disaffected left wing members of the Labour Party led by George McDonnell MP, the Communist Party of Britain and trade unionists fighting against the neoliberal policies of the Labour government if it is to succeed in building a party that can challenge the status quo. ●

APDUSA

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

Despite the gain of political rights for all, the compromise of 1992 has not fulfilled the 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. In the ongoing struggle we therefore 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.
- Free and **compulsory education** for all up to matric with free books for the needy.
- Free **health services** for the needy.
- A single, progressive **tax system**, the abolition of vat and all indirect taxes that fall so heavily on the poor.
- 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.

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

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